

Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill

Initial comment from Daycare Trust

Daycare Trust is the national childcare charity, campaigning for quality affordable childcare for all and raising the voices of children, parents and carers. We will only comment on those aspects of the Bill that are immediately in our remit; ie the provision of children's centres and free of charge early education.

Daycare Trust welcomes the legislation for children's centres. We welcome the move to ensure children's centres are a consistent element of early years provision rather than just a series of initiatives.

Paragraph 186, 5A, Arrangements for provision of children's centres

While we agree that, in line with paragraph 186 Clause 5A(4c) which states that a children's centre is '*a place or group of places at which activities for young children are provided, whether by way of early years provision or otherwise*', we would advise that early years provision needs to be the primary focus of a children's centre. Wider family support should still be provided, and indeed may help encourage use of early years provision. Evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study showed that early years provision that provided health services or had links with Sure Start Local Programmes was actually of lower quality. While we fully support the integrated nature of children's centres, local authorities need to be aware of the dangers of diluting an already limited budget. Early years provision is shown to improve outcomes for children and this excellent work should not be put at risk by other priorities. We believe that local authorities should seek partnership and funding from health agencies and others in order to make their children's centres fully integrated and effective.

Paragraph 186, 5C, Children's centres advisory boards

We welcome the provision of children's centres advisory boards and particularly the inclusion of parents or prospective parents on the boards.

However, where 5C (5a) states that it should include persons representing the interests of '*parents or prospective parents in the responsible authority's area*' we believe that the clause should be more specific and require inclusion of parents or prospective parents from each individual children's centre area. Children's centres are established to serve a very local area, which may have different characteristics to the wider local authority area. This is particularly

important where children's centres are serving deprived areas – it is essential that the local population are able to input to the advisory board and ensure that local parents are able to use its facilities. If it is not possible to have parents from the children's centre area on the advisory board, then there should at least be people representing the interests of those parents local to the individual children's centre.

Paragraph 187, Inspection of children's centres

We would welcome clarification on which aspects of a children's centre will be inspected. Only a proportion of children's centres provide childcare, so this would not be an appropriate inspection for all children's centres. Many provide other services to families such as stay and play sessions, midwife and health visitors clinics and toy libraries, but do not provide childcare or early education. It is likely that inspection of children's centres would be a new undertaking for many Ofsted inspectors and would require substantial training and clear criteria for assessment.

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