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# Letters: UK Border Agency treats children well

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The Observer, Sunday 25 October 2009

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While Henry's Porter's inflammatory statements in "[We are shockingly complacent about locking up 2,000 children a year](#)" (Comment) were no doubt intended to shock, it is a shame that many held little basis in fact, no doubt because he chose not to speak to us before writing his article.

Treating children with care and compassion is a priority for the [UK Border Agency](#). Our children's policy has enshrined in law a commitment to keep youngsters safe from harm. We take this responsibility extremely seriously and thoroughly investigate any accusation of neglect or harm by any employee. I wholly reject Mr Porter's spurious accusations of neglect and disregard for human rights. Our family removal centre at Yarl's Wood has been praised for its children's facilities. We now have full-time, independent social workers and a range of experts to monitor welfare 24 hours a day.

We would much rather keep children out of detention. However, when the courts say families have no right to be here, yet they refuse to go home voluntarily, detention will often be necessary to ensure their return home.

## **David Wood**

strategic director, Criminality and Detention Group

UK Border Agency

■ Child abuse in any other circumstance would be on the front page of all newspapers. That it is state abuse by the UK Border Agency doesn't count. Only the agencies and voluntary groups that fight for the human rights denied asylum seekers (and a few enlightened journalists) know and care for children traumatised by their time in detention centres. Britain should be unable to sleep at night.

## **Dr Graham Ullathorne,**

Chesterfield, Derbyshire

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## **Do pay attention, Barbara**

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As one of the authors of the [Cambridge Primary Review](#) which Barbara Ellen ("[Pack children off to school as soon as you can](#)", Opinion) wrongly mocked, I would like to reassure her that I am not insane. Of course the Review does not propose that children

stay at home until they are six. Rather, it suggests that they do not embark on a formal curriculum until six. This does not equate, as Barbara insists, to the insanity of two to three years less schooling. It simply means changing the schooling so that children benefit from an extra year of structured, play-based learning.

Barbara also implies that the Review is out of touch with a modern world in which both parents need to work. Once again, she is wrong. I cannot afford to juggle motherhood simply with apple pie, especially not in the 1950s pinny that Barbara suggests we envisage women wearing. My 20 years in education journalism qualified me to work on the Review and I did so in between hanging out the washing, rebooting the Wii and picking the kids up from school. The Review backs the expansion of good-quality early learning provision. It creates positive attitudes to learning and lays firm foundations on which to develop future study skills.

### **Stephanie Northen**

Cambridge Primary Review

University of Cambridge

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## **Don't blame prison officers**

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The local branch committee of the Prison Officers' Association welcomes the chief inspector's report into Wandsworth prison ("Crisis over claim that jails 'duped' inspectors by moving inmates"), (News) and appreciates that the good effort made by the vast majority of staff has been recognised. Sadly, we are appalled that the last four years of our hard work appear to have been sabotaged by the actions of those who are, or were, in charge.

We condemn the inhumane treatment of prisoners to manipulate an inspector's report. The prison service decency agenda has been seriously damaged.

Wandsworth prison management applied a disciplinary procedure that saw the dismissal of more than 30 of our members. A senior prison official informed me that the managers concerned were not suspended and that it was the decision to transfer that would be the issue at any disciplinary hearing. I was informed not to lose sight of all the good work these managers had put into the prison. I won't, but I wished the members who lost their jobs would have been given the same level playing field. This same official addressed the staff and didn't appear too critical of the managers under investigation. POA members here know they are not to blame for this mess.

### **Stewart McLaughlin**

branch secretary

Prison Officers' Association

London SW18

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## **Every child is different**

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It is unhelpful when research findings on working mothers and child development are seized upon to support ideological positions ("Working mothers 'don't harm their children's development', major study reveals", News). Research like this is immensely complex and the necessary averaging that occurs hides more than it reveals. Thus, that on average, young children of working mothers will do no worse developmentally does not prove that in all individual cases, no harm will be done. Surely every family should make its own decision about the extent to which their child may be harmed or otherwise by an interruption of the early parental attachment experience, rather than taking the lazy way out of relying on aggregate research findings to make the decision for them.

**Dr Richard House**

Research Centre for Therapeutic Education

Roehampton University, London SW15

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## **Don't get pious over Parliament**

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Before we get too carried away with pious platitudes about the right to report what goes on in Parliament, we should note that our weekday newspapers daily insult the memory of those who fought for it by refusing to report parliamentary proceedings. So Peter Preston might rephrase his contention that "the right and need of the public to be informed" is the "essence of media freedom" ("Bloggers and print are allies in the battle for freedom". The essence of today's media freedom is profit. And editors whose newspapers have no shareholders should bow their heads in shame that while wittering on about rights and the decline in political involvement, they do not report Parliament.

**Tony Millett**

Marlborough

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## **Victoria's stamp of greatness**

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I used to think that I was in love with Victoria Coren because of her wit, intelligence, hair and gorgeous figure. Little did I suspect that she was almost the only journalist in the country who had any understanding of what has been going on at Royal Mail over the last seven years ("Ah, the Royal Mail. It's enough to make anyone go postal", 7 Days). May I suggest that she be appointed as your industrial correspondent forthwith and sent to brief that sententious, self-regarding, know-nothing, Mandelson on what is happening in the real world?

Your humble, public, servant and non-foot fetishist postman

**Jonathan Hodgkiss**

Tywardreath, Cornwall