

PRESS RELEASE

GLOUCESTERSHIRE CHILD ABUSE CASE

Following reports in the local and national media Education Otherwise, the largest organisation representing home educating families, issued the following statement:

Parents throughout the country have been horrified to learn of the serious and prolonged abuse of children revealed in the case of foster carer Eunice Spry.

It is clear that many people: teachers, members of the family's church, health workers and neighbours, raised concerns over many years.

In a press interview ¹ Ms Jo Davidson, Group Director of Children and Young People's Services at Gloucestershire County Council admitted that “agencies and individuals failed to pass on vital information to each other.... nobody had a consistent overview of what was happening.”

This is another case of social services provision failing to protect children's welfare. The Children Act came into force at the end of 2004 and brought with it integrated Children's Services and multi-agency co-operation, plus the establishment of local Safeguarding Children Boards. In addition, more stringent requirements were introduced for foster carers. We understand that the abuse in Gloucestershire took place before the law was changed.

However, Ms Davidson does not appear to recognise that the local council already has measures in place which are designed to protect vulnerable children in the future and has instead used the case to demand stronger safeguards for children who are home educated.

This call is being made at a time when home educating families are awaiting the launch of a full public consultation into home education.

Education Otherwise deplore the way in which the regulation of home education is being used as a smoke screen to draw attention away from the historical failings of the local authorities in this case.

Child welfare legislation applies equally to all children irrespective of their educational setting.

Home education cannot be made the scapegoat for this tragedy.

Education Otherwise Government Policy Group

¹ <http://www.thisisgloucestershire.co.uk/new/util/content.jsp?id=16923208>

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