

Pushy parents are the best parents and we need more of them

They're demanding and manipulative and they provide the best possible upbringing, so stop whingeing
The Telegraph By James Kirkup 14/05/15

OK, there are people in the world more deserving of pity, but spare a thought for middle-class parents. They just can't win. Sir Michael Wilshaw, the head of Ofsted, is the latest to take aim at people who commit the twin offences of having a bit of money and trying to do the best by their kids. By sending their toddlers to state-run preschool nurseries (and paying to do so, note), **middle-class parents are "colonising" nurseries**, crowding out the children of poorer homes who would benefit more from a place, he says.

But there's a serious issue here too, about how and why some kids get ahead in life, and some don't. There's an unresolved academic debate about the role parental aspiration plays in a child's prospects and social mobility. The Department for Education leans towards researchers like Steve Strand at Oxford University, who argue that the ambitions parents have for their children help determine how those children get on in life. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, a charity, argues that the big difference is not in ambition but belief: middle-class parents instill in their kids the confidence that they can achieve their goals if they try hard enough.

Others, such as Becky Francis at King's College London, focus less on aspiration than on "social capital," arguing that working class parents want their children to get on in life at least as much as their posher peers but just don't have the same range of tools to help make that happen. People with degrees and professional jobs are well-placed to absorb and assess catchment areas, Ofsted dashboard data and admissions codes, then to navigate (and manipulate) the systems and individuals that determine access to the best services and facilities. Parents whose own education ended in their teens and who don't feel comfortable pushing back against officialdom are less likely to elbow their way in when the door appears closed.

After too long, social mobility is slowly rising up the political agenda, but the debate is still constrained by politicians' caution. They're happy to talk about the (genuine) need to improve the quality of education poorer kids get in state schools, but few will talk about the quality of parenting they get at home. Here, Sir Michael deserves credit for being willing to say what most people outside Westminster know already: where parents are supportive and demanding, a child is much more likely to succeed.

Yes, there's a problem with pushy parents who are ready, willing and able to work the system to get the best for their kids. There still aren't enough of them.

Vocab:

Catchment area: the region that decides where you go to school¹

Peers: social/age group

To instil : to introduce, implant

To whinge: complain (negative)