

RoSLA – and the pre-school child

In 1973, a great political bungle will take place, and the people most directly involved are impotent to do anything about it. I refer of course to the raising of the school leaving age from 15 to 16 years of age. More than 50% of this age group stay on voluntarily at school to take exams as it is. The remainder can't wait to get out of school and start earning.

As a conservative estimate, I know perhaps 100 teachers. Not one of them has a favourable word to say for RoSLA. The bungle has been perpetrated by educational bureaucrats who know nothing about education as it affects the schools. It's even more irresponsible when viewed alongside the findings of recent educational research into the under-fives. Findings which are so aptly summed up in the title of the BBC programme on 12th October last year: *If at first you don't succeed ... you don't succeed*. And in other equally pointed quotations –

The first four or five years are more critical for intelligence than for height. ¹

However financially secure, enlightened and socially aware the parents, however affluent the neighbourhood, the home environment for the pre-school child is inadequate, if measured in absolute terms, against the child's potential, social and intellectual development during this period. ²

With children under five, a poor diet would seem to have quite marked effects upon their physical development, but also upon their mental growth. ³

No investment that the state cares to make in a child's education between 10 and 15, can hope to equal in effectiveness a similar investment before the age of five. ⁴

Yet deliberately flying in the face of the facts, vast millions of pounds are being spent on RoSLA, and nothing at all on the under-fives, who could benefit beyond measure. It is a disturbing fact, that whilst we have free education in this Country, thousands of parents who accept the facts about the under-fives, have to pay to send their children to pre-school play groups.

I pay tribute to the foresight and tenacity of the Pre-school Playgroups Association, for providing one of the most important services in the Country today.

^{1 2 3} *The Pre-School Years* van der Eyken

⁴ *The Provision of Education in England and Wales* JP Parry