



Send your letters  
or emails to  
[paddy.odea@  
continyou.org.uk](mailto:paddy.odea@continyou.org.uk).

## Adding up

Dear *Schools ETC*

The latest DCSF figures on schooling costs make disappointing reading at a time when many families face unprecedented financial pressure. Key findings show: 65 per cent of families on the lowest incomes struggle to meet their children's education costs; one third of children eligible for free school meals don't claim them; more than a quarter (27 per cent) of families on incomes less than £15,000 spend more than 20 per cent of their incomes on school costs. This, despite a School Admissions Code introduced last year, stating that schools should strive to keep costs low and ensure children are not excluded or dissuaded from taking a full part in school activities.

This research supports Citizens Advice Bureau evidence which indicates that too many schools flout government guidance by insisting on expensive uniforms and other items available only from specialist stockists. This is deeply disappointing because surveys and local partnership work by CAB in England and Wales demonstrate that many schools do their utmost to assist families with well-considered and creative policies. Keeping essential costs low on uniform, kit and trips, for example, frees up cash for other services and activities that enhance school life.

Schools can help parents in many ways: keeping uniforms simple and available from high street stores; offering the option of sew-on badges; or recycling uniforms. One school offers parents a knitting pattern! Discreet and sensitive handling of free school meal provision can improve take up, as can sliding scales on some charges.

Through its Adding Up campaign, Citizens Advice wants to work with schools, parents and admission authorities towards a more inclusive approach. I hope more schools review their policies and that government will, by regulating the schools admission code more effectively, ensure all schools follow the practice of the best.

**Adrian Galvin**  
Social Policy Campaigns Officer  
Citizens Advice  
[Adrian.galvin@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:Adrian.galvin@citizensadvice.org.uk)

## Exploring ICT

Dear *Schools ETC*

Ofsted's recent report, *The importance of ICT: ICT in primary and secondary schools 2005/2008*, pointing out deficiencies in the provision of ICT learning, has prompted me to write to you.

## Nurture curiosity in our children

Dear *Schools ETC*

If children have positive attitudes towards themselves and others, I'm convinced they will learn the skills they need to become positive, lifelong learners. Educator David Holt said 'curiosity grows by what it feeds on', and this belief has been at the heart of my work during 28 years of teaching and associated educational work.

England's proposed primary curriculum is much more child-centred; there's a shift in focus to the process of learning that will develop the skills and attitudes that curious, successful learners need, learners who are confident individuals and responsible citizens. Ed Balls wants the curriculum to make this the 'best place in the world for our children and young people to grow up' – and it is central to achieving the outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda. The Children's Plan endorses this.

The proposed curriculum has clear implications for the future of extended services: they will continue to be the means of ensuring that all individuals receive a broad and balanced, personalised learning experience, where barriers to learning are removed, and children and young people respect and understand their communities. To be responsible citizens, our children deserve the opportunities to develop that respect and to be respected. Extended services will definitely give them these opportunities and community access to schools will promote learning as a lifelong activity and will help build community cohesion, which we now need more than ever. The curriculum is less prescriptive and more flexible and will be able to respond to many learning styles, varied abilities and interests. I believe it will encourage the personal learning journey that each child must embark on.

The government is consulting on its proposals for the Primary Curriculum between May and July 2009. Don't forget to have your say at [www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_15561.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_15561.aspx).

**Vivien Janes**

Regional Development Manager (London), Extended Services, ContinYou

Benjamin Franklin once said, 'Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn'. I recognised the huge potential for teaching children to use ICT in exciting ways that stimulate their creativity, and I launched ComputerXplorers in the UK, which does just that.

ICT is part of how we lead our lives, so it's vital that young people develop ICT skills to succeed. But teaching ICT should be relevant and challenging, and sometimes schools lack resources and know-how to do that; and children are often ahead of teachers around new media and technology. We know children learn best when they're having fun. However, while they're surrounded by technology – digital cameras, Sky Plus and Wii – they still use computers for the basics: the internet, playing games or chatting with friends.

By working with small groups of children, ComputerXplorers teaches ICT skills in ways that link literacy, maths, science, music and art to exciting, new computer-based subjects. While absorbed in satisfying activities – creating films or animated slideshows, designing video games, producing comics, and even Crime Scene Investigation – children start understanding ICT's full potential. And, problem-solving, critical thinking and team-working skills are useful by-products of participation.

ComputerXplorer after-school clubs let parents know their children are safe, learning, having fun and making new friends; the clubs have the right software and equipment; and the trainers are already CRB-checked, which takes the headache out

of offering a welcome addition to a school's wider menu of extended activities. With exciting, structured activities, ICT holiday camps for children are popular with working parents, or those at home during long holidays. They're also suitable for nurseries, pre-school settings, primary schools and summer camps. The programme can also help schools extend their ICT facilities to the wider community.

**Nigel Toplis, Managing Director,  
ComputerXplorers UK**



## Mr Jargon Buster

### Extended Services Disadvantage Subsidy

A DCSF funding stream, being rolled out by the TDA. Schools can use it to enable children in care and children and young people who are disadvantaged by economic circumstances to access extended services provided by or through their schools. Having been trialled in eighteen local authorities in 2008–09, all local authorities in England will have access to the funds during 2009–2010. New guidelines, with good practice, will be released in June 2009. Visit [www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools/subsidy](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools/subsidy).