References

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Comment

Children’s doctors and children’s teachers share a common cause

The relationship between paediatricians and teachers might be described as cordial but not close, but there are those who think it should be closer. (A similar gap exists between their salaries with a secondary school head of department earning about half of a NHS consultant on the top incremental points). Doctors who are wearied by the three health service reorganisations in the past decade might consider themselves fortunate after reading a book1 by Dr Harry Judge of the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Oxford. In a partly autobiographical tale he describes the upheavals secondary education has faced since the end of the war; teachers have had to deal with secular changes, such as the variation in pupil numbers with the postwar bulge, on a much greater scale than paediatricians. Teachers are fair game for the armchair critic who always knows how (and what) they should teach, a belief perhaps shared by education ministers whose decisions have sometimes owed more to political whim rather than sober planning and strategy. How would doctors tolerate such interference?

Education, health, and a secure family life are the most important influences that a civilised society can offer children. (One might argue that such a society would be better judged by the quality of education offered to its less able members rather than to their more intelligent peers). A recent article2 in The Times suggested that society was not meeting these responsibilities—particularly because of changes (and some would say deterioration) in the pattern of family life and personal relationships. It concluded that ‘over the last 10 years the position for all children has got worse. Children simply count for less in British Society than they did’. Paediatricians have traditionally allied with parents to press for the best in health services for children; it is hoped that consultant paediatricians, especially those working in community child health, will develop similar links with teachers in the sphere of educational medicine. And is it not now time that the professional associations of paediatricians and teachers joined forces to campaign for the best in health and education for our children?