

What a wise parent would wish for their children

Roy Blatchford

November 2025

Everyone involved professionally with children should read *The Children Act* by Ian McEwan. No spoiler here, but a judge has to make a decision as to whether to turn off a life-support machine keeping alive a young person. She reflects deeply.

'She listed some relevant ingredients, goals towards which a child might grow. Economic and moral freedom, virtue, compassion and altruism, satisfying work through engagement with demanding tasks, a flourishing network of personal relationships, earning the esteem of others, pursuing larger meanings to one's existence - and having at the centre of one's life one or a small number of significant relations defined above all by love.'

There can be few better descriptions of what it is to be human than in those fifty or so words. Find a school prospectus which says more powerfully what the school aims to produce by way of vibrant young citizens.

What *are* the goals towards which a child might grow? With this thought in mind my eye was caught by an advert for a London-based international tutor to support the growth of a young child in a multi-lingual family. The advert begins:

The child, who is just one, is in an important stage of early development. Like any 1-year-old, the child enjoys sensory play, music, and activities that involve imitating speech. He is already curious about his world and experimenting with proto-speech. He is a typical boy for his age – into everything and already learning at an astonishing rate.

And continues:

At this age, music is often a key part of a child's education, and the Tutor must be comfortable incorporating regular musical activities that enhance the child's growth and expose him to classical music from Western composers.

And further:

Museums, art galleries and theatre visits could all be incorporated into his education, making learning a by-product of a day's rich activities starting points for learning colours, numbers, letters, stories, flavours and music.

It was the economic historian R.H.Tawney who said: 'What a wise parent would wish for their children, so the state must wish for all its children.'

If one thinks for a moment about current political ambitions to give every child the best start in life, can the portrait painted in this advertisement be realised – at least in part - for all children?

Early years settings I visit in the UK and in international schools certainly pride themselves on providing rich and stimulating environments, indoors and outdoors; fascinating artefacts, materials and games surround children; trips out and visitors in enrich cultural experiences; settings are filled with colour, joy, music, language.

And staff seize every moment of the everyday to ensure that the three Ss of early years are promoted: **S**inging, **S**kipping, **S**haring. Explicit bi- and tri-lingualism splendidly underpin many settings in international contexts, though rarely in British state schools.

The pedagogical and cultural gauntlet set down in the advert is both inspiring and breathtaking. That one child could enjoy so much!

Ideals inspire. Let this ideal inspire us to make real for every child in the country what this one-year old is about to receive.

The new Ofsted Toolkit sets a high bar. For early years to be judged as meeting a *strong* standard, the final bullet point reads: 'Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of learning'.

We need some of our best teachers embedded in the early years of schooling. They need to be innovative and boundary-pushing, ably supported by knowledgeable leaders and a fair wind of resources. What is fit for a privately tutored one-year old must be matched by what the state wishes for *all* its children.

Roy Blatchford's latest book is [*The A – Z of Good Governance*](#)