

Letters

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Safety first

As a social worker with nearly 20 years' experience in the child protection field, I am heartened by Marian Brandon's faith in social work practice ("Everyone is to blame", 24 November). However, I would question the notion that "when failings happen they are caused by human error". This seems rather complacent.

The evidence so far available from the Baby P case suggests that the social workers involved acted conscientiously, and highlighted the need for legal intervention to protect the child on a number of occasions. However, they were overruled by senior managers and solicitors.

We need urgently to move from a system where social workers with legitimate concerns about

child safety are prevented from acting by managers with one eye on the budget, or by solicitors who are not experts in the field of child protection.

Dan Taylor
Reading

Home truths

Your commentators stress the dangers of deflation ("Catastrophe averted?", 24 November), but the economic situation calls for bold action which accords with progressive economic, social and environmental goals.

Retrofitting the existing housing stock and bringing back into use 700,000 empty homes would boost employment in the building sector, reduce the current 25 per cent of CO₂ emissions from residential property, tackle fuel poverty in 4.8 million households, and increase the supply of affordable homes. Social landlords could also be enabled to offer shared ownership and renting options to those threatened with repossession. Allocation of public

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Help the helpers

Marian Brandon puts her finger on it: "What's it like to be a child in this household?" ("Everyone is to blame", 24 November). That is the crucial question. To contemplate the actual experience of an abused child is extremely hard to do. It is easier to fill in forms, however tiresome. Ms Brandon rightly says that poor support paralyses workers into inactivity. Better support is possible if staff meet regularly for confidential discussion of each other's work. While supporting a colleague presenting a difficult case, workers also feel freer to express fleeting thoughts about clients which may be significant. Such practices might be dismissed by senior managers as a luxury but that is because they fear staff finding their own voices and questioning the prevailing ethos.

Dr Sebastian Kraemer
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London N19

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funds for this purpose would allow the government to promise that no one will lose their home.

Kevin Gulliver
Human Research Institute
Birmingham

I read with interest the article about Sats. It can be summed up in an age-old cliché: "You don't fatten pigs by weighing them."

Bryan Hall
Liverton, Devon

Sack the Sats

Francis Gilbert's heartfelt article ("How my life became one long, sad Sats test", 24 November) about the pervasive influence of testing regimes identifies the nub of the problem. Teachers faced with pressures to improve results in examinations will focus on developing the narrow means to do so, even where – and our research in Scotland suggests that this is the case – they deeply resent neglecting the education of the young people in their care. Students deemed to be likely failures, who might be detrimental to league table performance, are excluded from exam classes and channelled into non-academic courses.

The British teaching system has been distorted into a sad parody of education, and the result is intellectually impoverished schools.

Dr Mark Priestley
Senior lecturer in education
University of Stirling

No, he won't

As a black, middle-class person, I wish John Pilger and I were wrong (Letters, 24 November), but there is nothing that Barack Obama has done or said that makes me believe he will be any different from Bill Clinton or Jimmy Carter, or any of the other so-called liberal

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