

Dear Commission,

I am a principal of an Independent School. I work closely with my staff and get to personally oversee our students' wellbeing. In my 23 years here (12 as principal) I have watched the changing landscape of education. I have witnessed the trend of interference by the psychiatric industry into our sphere of expertise, where we have been told that childhood is a disorder, study issues are disorders, that teachers are all overwhelmed and they can't cope. I also note that there have been changes in the teaching/training of teachers in this time that also reflect the above, with psych 101 a basic mandatory element in every course. This inculcation (persistent instruction) from the psychiatric industry into universities, into government agencies, into the medical profession, spread by media's love of saying to the point of exaggeration how 'bad' it all is, is something to be seriously looked at. My older generation of teachers know how to teach, know what normal childhood behaviour is, know where to adjust their teaching to engage their students at their interest levels.

We don't go in for the fad of labelling our students.

The idea that 0-3 year olds should be screened is absolutely outrageous. Behaviours that are being looked for are normal behaviours and if allowed to go ahead will create a new pool of children to be labelled and a percentage of these will end up on psychiatric mind altering drugs that are already black box labelled. What are we thinking? That it is ok to risk our most at risk sector of our population? To allow this would actually qualify as child abuse and these children have rights to an education – and it's no education if you are labelled and drugged and therefore instantly discriminated against by the fact that you are treated differently.

Watching the children in our early learning centre I note with pleasure all of the milestones that they reach. I work with my staff in planning the rooms so we plan for each child, looking at their strengths and their weaknesses. We know what actions to take to allow each child to develop at their own pace. We do not need to screen our children against a false, non-medically tested set of behavioural questions to see if we have signs of mental disorder developing. All this emphasis on disorder in my well-considered opinion only LEADS to disorder being developed, as what you put your attention on you tend to get. Let's focus instead on achievement of well documented milestones of actions and awareness's that a child exhibits. Plan to strengthen abilities and don't stress when a child has a tantrum – it's only natural when they are working out their communication systems. Teach a parent and a teacher to observe and act calmly around a child who is upset and not to add to the upset. Check basics like enough and good food, sleep and teething (look to the parent also that they are getting enough sleep and food) Common sense is the guide. We are being treated by the psychiatric industry as if we can't make sound judgements. What is right has over the decades been turned into what is wrong and we are no longer observing our environments and taking the view of conquering each challenge but rather being told to look inwards and constantly self-evaluate as to what and why we think certain ways. This only leads to an isolated view of oneself and breeds the negative issues society is now faced with.

I do not agree with the proposal to screen 0-3 year olds.

Yours sincerely,

Christel Duffy