

Educators call for improvements in Catalonia's pre-school system

Education for Catalonia's pre-school age children leaves much to be desired, a report reveals

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Representatives of Catalonia's educational community have drafted a report — called the Prou (Stop) manifesto — on behalf of children from 0 to three years old, and which criticises aspects of pre-school teaching such as the progressive increase in class size and the contractual instability of many kindergarten teachers and staff who work in these institutions.

The education organization Xarxa Territorial d'Escoles Infantils de Catalunya submitted a manifesto on Monday which had been signed by over 20,000 people involved in children's education (including parents, teachers, primary and secondary schools), and which was highly critical of the state of Catalonia's kindergartens.

The manifesto condemns the "seriously degraded state" of many kindergartens, and demands that the government — and specifically the education ministry — should establish before September a series of "minimum conditions" which will guarantee that all children between the age of 0 and 3 receive quality education.

Catalonia has over 160,000 children of this age, of whom little more than 50,000 have a place at a kindergarten. Fifty percent of these places are at public institutions, while the rest are private. The Parliament recently passed a bill which will force the government to create at least 30,000 new public places for pre-



The manifesto complains that not enough of Catalonia's pre-school age children have access to kindergartens / EDUARD VALLES

school-age children during the period 2004-2008. This proposal was well-received by the Xarxa Territorial d'Escoles Infantils de Catalunya, though they demanded that this increase in the number of places should be legally regulated, and that there should be greater government spending so as to guarantee a quality education service to all children in Catalonia.

Xarxa spokeswoman speaks out

Irene Balaguer, the spokeswoman for the Xarxa Territorial d'Escoles Infantils de Catalunya, emphasised the importance of the manifesto given the alarming situation in which Catalonia's pre-school education currently found itself. She said that the main

problems in such institutions were the number of "potentially dangerous objects within the children's reach", the fact that the number of children per class was increasing and the contractual instability of kindergarten teachers and staff.

Government announces new law on children's safety in cars to be enforced on 24 July

Sales of car seats for babies and young children have increased sharply in recent months, partly as a result of the fact that new law will come into force on 24 July which will modify the general regulations regarding children in cars, and which requires that children under three years old must always use a standardized seating and fastening system when they ride in a car.

However, a study carried out by a Catalan traffic service and a firm that manufactures children's car-seats has recently revealed that 59.7 percent of children under 12 do not wear safety belts in car trips around town, while 55.3 percent do not wear them on long journeys. Be-

tween 1999 and 2003, seventy-one children died on Catalonia's roadways.

The new law on systems for securing children in cars has led to sales of car seats rising considerably, and shops selling these items have reported that parents interested in purchasing these seats have been inquiring into the safest option for their children.

Meanwhile, the Catalan traffic department has said that it will not carry out any specific campaign to catch people not using child's car-seats, though when the Catalan police stop a vehicle for any reason, they will duly fine any drivers not meeting the requirements.



Firms selling children's car seats are currently enjoying a boom / ALBERT MERCADER

MINING ACCIDENT

Over 30 miners dead in blast

The Ukrainian minister for emergency situations announced yesterday that at least 31 miners have died and another 5 have disappeared following a gas explosion in the Krasnolimánkaya coal mine. The explosion took place on Monday night at a depth of 545 m when 48 miners were at work in the ground, 12 of whom managed to reach the surface after the accident. The Krasnolimánkaya is one of the most prosperous mines in the Donetsk region in the southeast of Ukraine, and extracts up to 10,000 tons of coal every day. Monday night's accident at this mine was not the first to claim miners' lives. Nine miners died in January 2001 as a result of a similar gas explosion. According to official statistics, over 100 miners have died this year in Ukraine in mining accidents.

UNITED KINGDOM

Detainee death sparks riot

The death of a detainee at an immigrant detention centre on Monday night led to "serious incidents" resulting in widespread damage and necessitating intervention by the police, the Home Office informed the press yesterday. The riot took place at the Harmondsworth detention centre near London's Heathrow airport where, and around 7:00 in evening, a detainee was discovered hanged in his cell, presumed to have committed suicide. On hearing this, other detainees started small fires and caused damage to the installations, which led to dozens of police, a helicopter and a fire engine being called. The BBC reported that nobody was injured in the riots.

POLITICS

Botella "no documents at home"

Ana Botella, the wife of ex-president Jose Maria Aznar and social welfare councillor in the Madrid City Council, said that she had not seen any secret documents at her current home. Botella was speaking at El Escorial where she was taking part in the summer courses of Madrid's Universidad Complutense. When questioned over the controversy which has arisen since her husband publicly claimed that he possessed intelligence reports from the CNI (the government intelligence centre) because of his position, his wife answered "everybody must know that the CNI keeps the president of the government informed at all times." However, she added, "all I can say is that I have not seen any such documents around the house".

MOONSHOT ANNIVERSARY

35th anniversary of moon walk

35 years ago yesterday, the American Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon, which he called his "great leap for mankind", an event watched by millions of people around the world.