

Jones, Ray (2019) Boarding schools are likely to be overwhelming for most children in care. *Children & Young People Now*, p. 11.

So amongst the big cuts the government is imposing on poor children and families and on local authorities, with help such as children's centres and youth services being decimated, the government has found some money, miniscule in comparison to the money being taken away from children's social services, to support a very small number of the 75,000 children in care to go to private boarding schools. It has made a big news splash.

But why am I cynical about yet another government spin announcement that it is spending more on children when it is actually making less money available? Firstly, there is nothing new in what the government wants to promote. As a social worker in the 1970s I had a boy in care – whose mother had recently died and his father was in prison - for whom I arranged a private boarding school placement, funded by a seaman's charity, which was near his sister and her family with whom he lived during holidays. The placement kept the kinship care arrangement sustainable for everyone concerned and the boy blossomed, as did Lord Adonis, the former Labour minister, when he was in care and with him now being a strong advocate for private boarding school placements.

For the great majority of children in care, however, a placement in a private boarding school is likely to be overwhelming and threatening, placed amongst children who are financially very privileged and, if the current high profile Eton-educated politicians are at all representative of private boarding schools, somewhat arrogant and dismissive of those from more modest backgrounds. I grew up on a council estate within a working class community. I would not have coped – and could not have kept up - amongst the culture and affluence of private boarding schools. For lots of children in care this is likely to be their experience and reality as well.

There is a second reason why I am cynical and concerned about the government finding the money for children in care to be placed in private boarding schools. This is what was said by the children's minister in August: "If the independent sector becomes embedded in the infrastructure that delivers the best outcome to these kids there is no better way than them making the argument for their charitable status, for their VAT exemptions. And Mr Corbyn would never be able to abolish them." <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-45104327> Oh no, please no. What an awful thought that placing a few children in care in private boarding schools is presented as a means for these schools to be able to argue that they should retain their privileged charitable status whilst providing a segregated education for the children of the rich.