

I thank the Corporate Director for clarifying in an email after the last Children & Lifelong Learning Scrutiny that no child at Chase School has been refused a Christmas Meal because a parent's decision to opt out of use of biometric technology.

Because I'm sure no member of this council no matter what side of fence that they sit on regarding civil liberties would endorse any schools policy of give us your finger print or starve.

I personally feel the collection of biometric or DNA is morally wrong whatever its purpose and I am totally opposed to the National ID card, the storing of innocent people's DNA by the police and the use of biometric data in our schools for meals and library book purposes.

I actually find it weird that any school head or governing body would want to collect children's biometrics. I have not been able to find a single piece of published research which suggests that the use of biometrics in schools promotes healthy eating or improves reading skills amongst children.

It seems absolutely absurd that in the US an adult can buy a gun and live ammunition without being fingerprinted. Yet in this town some children are fingerprinted in the school library just so they can take out a book of nursery rhymes.

It is also worth noting that no other country in Europe routinely fingerprints children and even communist China has abandoned plans for fingerprinting school pupils because it breaches human rights.

There are also concerns about the safety of these expensive devices. In a quick internet search, moulding plastic, jelly, milk and tea were all the ingredients needed to get past one biometric security device on sale for schools.

One child that I know in a Southend School which uses biometric data for meals said to me that he hates meal times now as the severe eczema that he has on his hands means that the reader machine fails to read his thumb print on a daily basis

Surely the £20,000 pounds it costs at lease for such devices would be better spent on a teacher salary or school equipment.

I welcome the fact that parents have been given the choice to opt out of using biometric data in the Southend schools which use such technology but have to question the information that parents have been given for them to make that informed choice.

Do we know if parents are told who can have access to the data, how long is the data stored for, is it destroyed and removed once the child has left the school and can any parent opt out after originally giving consent?

I thing I can almost guarantee is that no parent has been informed that the police can simply help themselves to the children's fingerprints if they are trying to solve a crime as confirmed by the Minister for Schools and Learning, Jim Knight, in the summer of 2007.

A whole generation of children in this town not involved with any criminal behaviour may be growing up thinking fingerprinting is just a 'normal' way of being identified, and innocuous phrases like school 'kiddy-printing' only further minimises what is going on.

It is a slippery slope. At best pupils in this town and some 2 million in over 3,500 schools nationwide are being softened up and led to believe that giving their personal biometric data to the authorities is normal behaviour.

At worst children are being inducted into the world of the 'surveillance society' without really knowing what it means.

We should be concerned that the impression children are going to get of what it is to live in a free country and what it is to be British if, in order to get the right school meals or library books, they can have fingerprints taken? It seems to me completely astonishing.

As a parent, I just want my children to have the chance grow up free, as free as we did.