

Office of the Children's Commissioner

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Sir Christopher Meyer KCMG
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31 August 2005



RE: The negative portrayal of Children and Young People in the media

As you may know, I was appointed to be the first Children's Commissioner on 1st March 2005, taking up my full-time responsibilities on 1st July. My primary responsibility is to promote the needs, views, interests and rights of children and young people across England, being given the power to hold an inquiry or research into any issue which I feel relates to the best interest of children and young people.

Already, concern has been expressed to me by children and young people themselves and children's organisations over the continuing negative portrayal of children and young people in the media generally, and in newspapers in particular. Evidence to support this concern comes from the research carried out by 'Young People Now' and published in November last year, which highlighted the very high percentage of media stories that demonise, if not vilify, the existence of children and young people in our society.

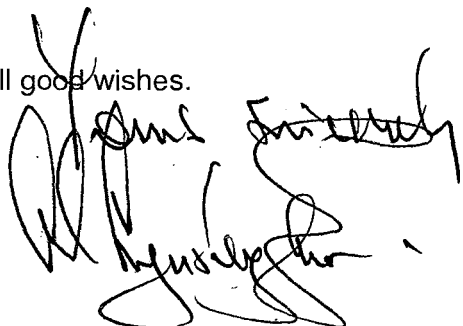
I have already explicitly stated that one of my functions as Children's Commissioner is to raise serious debate about the value given to children and childhood in contemporary society. Their standing with respect to the portrayal in the media is particularly important since it so influences the perception of them in society generally.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the details of your policy relating to the portrayal

of children and young people with you and your senior staff, and to consider the ethics and the effects of this policy on the lives and wellbeing of children and young people. I would also be interested to know how you define how your guidelines are interpreted and implemented by the agencies you are responsible for.

I would value your response to this letter, and receive your advice as to how we might progress the dialogue. Alongside members of the UK Youth Parliament, I am due to meet members of Ofcom and the Press Complaints Commission on 15th September to discuss the portrayal of children and young people in the media. I am happy to discuss the contents of this letter at that meeting but would equally welcome a separate meeting with you directly if you think it would be productive.

With all good wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Al Aynsley-Green', written over a faint, illegible printed name.

PROFESSOR AL AYNSLEY-GREEN