



EDUCATION & FAMILY

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Child X-rays 'cause for concern', says Michael Gove

By Katherine Sellgren

BBC News education and family reporter

Education Secretary Michael Gove says there are "causes for concern" about children being X-rayed by the UK Border Agency to establish their age.

The practice of X-raying young asylum seekers was reintroduced in March 2012 by the UKBA, and is controversial as it exposes young people to radiation.

It has been condemned by the former Children's Commissioner for England, Sir Al Aynsley-Green, as "scandalous."

Addressing a committee of MPs, Mr Gove said he understood the concerns.

The issue was raised by Labour MP and committee member Lisa Nandy, who said the X-rays were being used to determine whether asylum seekers were adults or children.

Ms Nandy asked what questions the Department for Education had asked of the UKBA.

'Vigour'

Mr Gove said: "We need to be clear that this is a proportionate, wise intervention in order to ensure that we can keep our borders safe.

"I am concerned obviously to ensure that we do not have people exploiting the generosity of this country, but I'm also clear that we should ensure that the dignity of individuals and in particular the rights of children are respected too."

Mr Gove said he had raised some concerns with the Home Office and the UKBA, but had not yet had a response.

He said there had been "no lack of urgency" on the part of his department in trying to get to the bottom of the matter.

He would not be drawn on whether he, personally, thought the practice was unethical.

School meals

Mr Gove also faced questions from MPs over the standards of food in academy schools.

The matter was raised at the weekend by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, who accused Mr Gove of endangering pupils' nutrition by not controlling what food academy schools provided.

Oliver said he was "totally mystified" that academies were allowed to determine what food should be on offer, while state schools followed strict rules.

When MPs picked up on the comments, Mr Gove said he loved the celebrity chef, whose campaigns had addressed a "bad" situation.

But on academies, he said: "I haven't seen, but I'd be interested in, any evidence that any academy has introduced, as a results of their freedoms, lower-quality foods.

"All the evidence seems to me to point in the other direction - schools that have academy status have improved the quality of food that their offer children."

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