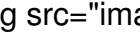



<div id="eblog-wrapper" class="eblog-simplistic eblog-site"> <h1>Schools out over names - or in?</h1> <p class="meta-bottom"> Posted on Jun 14, Posted by Juliette KempCategory Journalism </p> <p>Does the act of naming a child in a newspaper picture caption expose the youngster to paedophiles?
A simple question but an answer that engenders a big debate.</p> <p>It♦s been going on for years and resurfaced again last month. Industry website Hold The Front Page, reported the story that Northern Echo editor Peter Barron had gone head to head with primary schools in its area after being told there was a policy not to give the names of children to newspapers.♦In return, he announced in a blog that his paper would no longer cover primary school events in the borough until there was further discussion on the issue at least.</p> <p>Wrote Peter:♦ ♦The internet can be a scary place and I understand the concerns which lie behind the decision. I also fully appreciate that it is a decision taken because it is genuinely thought to be in the interests of child safety.♦But I also consider it to be a move which is disproportionate, ill-judged and very sad.♦There is no evidence that paedophiles are using newspapers and their associated websites to groom children. The danger has to be kept in perspective.♦The positives of reporting children♦s names in the context of their achievements hugely outweigh the negatives. Publicity gives young people confidence, is a source of pride, and inspires them to aim higher.</p> <p>It certainly seems an extreme action on the schools' part. Not once, in my entire career, have I come across an instance of a child being targeted by a paedophile, simply because he or she was named in a photograph which appeared in print. Political correctness gone mad again, surely.</p> <p>Being 'mentioned in the paper' is a source of pride for proud relations. There are many, many doting mums, dads, uncles, aunts, grannies etc, etc who hang on to cuttings featuring a family member. Captions clarify who's who, clearing up any potential confusion and feeding that most basic desire in us of wanting to put names to faces or to answer the 'who's that?' question. It also, as Peter says, gives young people confidence and pride in seeing their achievements recognised publically.</p> <p>But should papers be

judge and jury on this? Are the names only important to those who know who they are anyway? There could also be instances where names shouldn't appear. What of those who are trying to escape a violent ex-partner or family member? Could they be traced through captions posted on the internet? ♦

Such a possibility must make schools' nervousness understandable for this reason alone, for there is no evidence of paedophiles finding youngsters via innocuous online newspaper stories and photos. Sadly, they find plenty of social media sites with which to do that.  

Surely, perspective, common sense and dialogue must be the way forward. Many schools do operate an opt-out policy: they gain written consent from parents who are happy for their child to be identified and don't put forward those whose parents are not. Names could be used in print and not online - it's the work of seconds to amend a caption. ♦

When a paper refuses to cover school stories after a paranoid school quotes safety (usually paedophile) concerns for refusing to release names for the most innocuous of tales - then the only ones losing out are the ones with the achievements that are worth celebrating. ♦ The pupils.

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