

How can anyone possibly justify gambling lessons in schools?

By MELANIE PHILLIPS

The recommendation that children as young as 12 should be taught 'responsible betting' in school will strike many people as some kind of bad joke.

GamCare, the support body for gambling addicts, has told a government review of personal, social and health education that pupils should be taught that studying the form of race horses, dogs and sports teams can improve chances of winning a bet.

It also said schoolchildren should learn about fruit machines and how to calculate betting odds.

Such a recommendation is almost beyond belief. How can betting ever be anything other than irresponsible? And what possible justification can there be for teaching this to children in school?

The Labour Party has welcomed GamCare's grotesque proposal (of course) on the basis that it would help prepare children for the adult world. Whatever next — teaching children the responsible use of prostitution to help prepare them for the adult world?

Surely any responsible preparation must mean learning there is certain behaviour that is off-limits because it

is intrinsically dangerous and harmful. Alas, GamCare's proposal is not some aberrant rush of blood to the head, but part of a more general pattern.

Some of the most profound coarsening of our culture has come about through a kind of ratchet effect.

First the law is liberalised. Then people get worried about the damage that's being done as a result.

But then, rather than undoing the liberal attitudes which are causing the problem, people try to pretend this damage can be corrected by picking up the pieces once it has been done.

We have watched this ratchet effect time and again with sexual behaviour. First the taboo on sex outside marriage was broken, and sex was redefined as having scant more significance than a recreational sport. Then concerns grew about the ballooning rate of teenage pregnancies.

But instead of guiding children away from precocious sexual activity, sex education focused on how to have sex without getting pregnant. The result: more and more children at ever younger ages are having sex.

Well, what a surprise!

Explain the way the writer uses language for effect (16 marks)