

Eye spy

As the number of day nurseries installing CCTV and webcam systems increases, we look at the issues around this growth industry and hear from companies, nurseries and other involved parties



Out of sight no longer means out of mind when it comes to parents leaving their young children at day nurseries, if the growth in the number of day nurseries that have installed security systems and webcams over the past few years is anything to go by.

The use of webcams by day nurseries in the United States first started about a decade ago and by 2000 they had been installed in about one per cent of America's 102,000 nurseries. As ever, what happens first over there soon appears on this side of the Atlantic too as the number of day nurseries in the UK with CCTV security systems and webcams has grown over the past few years and is continuing to rise.

Just as in more and more homes, the days of videotape are over. For thanks to the arrival of hi-tech digital technology in the past five years, the security industry market has changed considerably, especially in the quality of images recorded and the ease and simplicity with which equipment can now be installed. An estimated 8,000 security companies in the UK supply the technology and equipment that protect all types and sizes of businesses, schools, and families in their homes.

In the past three years an increasing number of day nurseries have had digital CCTV and webcam security systems installed as a means of demonstrating to parents that they are serious about protecting the children in their care. These systems, combined with more powerful PCs and faster broadband Internet access, mean that parents can now log on to a webcam at the nursery while they work to see their children happily at play.

But what does the reliance on nursery webcams say about the parents who log on to watch their children? Research by Danish psychologist Vibeke Jorgensen on the use of webcams in nurseries in Denmark published last year found that they 'function as a tool giving the parent the feeling of protecting the child'. Some parents told him webcams gave them the feeling that they were taking part in nursery activities with their children, even though they were miles apart.

Jorgensen, an independent researcher who is neither pro- nor