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Written evidence submitted by [name]

## **HOME EDUCATION – AN ESSENTIAL INTERVENTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE THAT DO NOT THRIVE IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION.**

The aim of this document is to give my voice to the important home education enquiry that is taking place, speaking both as a parent but qualified professional working with young people as a Counsellor, Coach and Wellbeing Adviser. I will set out firstly what led to me home educate my son, the steps I took to ensure he continued education and the help or lack of help I received in order for him to achieve recognised qualifications. He sat his exams in [year], before the pandemic.

### **Why did we choose to home educate?**

In our case, I wouldn't say it was a choice. My son was diagnosed with [personal information] at age [age]. Despite a 2 year battle to gain an EHCP, we did not get one. In his assessment reports, all provided by experts in the field, all predicted that without one to one support, my son would struggle in mainstream and be unlikely to achieve qualifications, but with the right support he was averagely capable. The secondary school he went to, showed little understanding of his conditions, and without the support he needed, he switched off his desire to learn, was placed in lower ability groups with children that didn't want to learn and became oppositional to teachers. The rigidity of the school quite simply didn't fit with my son, whose [diagnosis] meant his executive functions were lacking. Executive function deficits affect planning, working memory, emotional and motivational self-regulation and problem solving (Barkley, 2015). So my son, would get detentions, isolations and exclusions for being late to class, not starting or completing his work in line with others and for not staying on task, which disrupted others in the class.

Furthermore, the lack of understanding and prejudice [personal information][diagnosis], means we were positioned as middle-class parents, excusing bad behaviour by placing a label on our son. Instead of choosing to raise this as a disability discrimination case, I decided to focus my energy on providing my son with what he needed to progress his own pathway. This meant his right to an education was not provided by the state – one of his fundamental rights, but by our-selves, so that he gained what he needed to progress.

By the autumn term of year [school year], it was becoming clear that if we didn't do something, he would not gain any GCSE's, despite having the ability to do so if we left him in the mainstream system. Everything the experts predicted was happening. Nobody, and I mean nobody, was listening. [personal information] and we were left with no support. The decision to home school was hugely anxiety provoking for us as parents, lonely and isolating and once we had de-registered him, we were totally on our own, but instinctively I knew it was the right thing to do.

### **What education did we provide?**

Our first step was to agree with our son a minimum path of GCSE's/IGCSE's. We agreed, [subjects].

As a parent I studied the syllabuses, making sure that the [subject] for instance didn't have a practical assessment element. This is where IGCSE offers an alternative component for that part of the practical. There was no help from the Local Authority on this. I gained knowledge from an excellent home education group on Facebook. The teaching of the content was by private tutors on a one to one basis and scaffolding by myself. Again finding the right, suitably qualified teaching who had experience of teaching SEN was challenging and expensive. All the time, I kept wondering about families that couldn't afford to pay like this or have the ability to access everything they needed. How on earth would they navigate this? At times, I found it overwhelming and time consuming and eventually had to reduce the hours I worked to support my son, which had financial implications, but there was **no alternative. To have had an approved regulated list of DBS checked teachers from the LA would have saved hours of searching and potential exposing of risk to unqualified, unchecked tutors.**

I then had to find an exam centre which took private candidates and accepted the exam boards I had chosen. All this had to be booked well in advance of the exams. Responses were mixed. **There are few that agree to help or more importantly are experienced in doing so.** I then had an added problem of getting access arrangements such as extra time or use of a laptop, essential for my son. This was done by providing examples of timed worked he completed under exam conditions at home, as well as his diagnosis reports and evidence of CAMHS appointments for his [diagnosis]. Luckily, I found a local provider in a sixth form college who were excellent and well experienced. Sadly, my understanding is that since the start of the pandemic, fewer and fewer schools are offering places for private candidates and parents are struggling to finalise sittings or in some cases have had to drop out of sitting GCSE's all together. **This is a fundamental barrier for children wishing to take qualifications if they are home schooled. They are unable to get teacher assessments, unless they have qualified teachers who tutor them, meaning they are going to fail to get qualifications at all, during this time of pandemic.**

The providers I used in the end were excellent to good. One was an on-line provider who covered the content well and prepared my son well for his exams. Again however, the cost in total for 4 GCSE's for tutoring was roughly £600 a month and this came from our savings. I did receive some money from the LA towards exams fees, but this was only by pure chance as I happened to be included in a parent facebook thread. I had to be pro-activate to apply for this. This was approximately £300 but it cost me in total an additional £800 just for him to sit the exams. **Again, I stress, that accessing help is like looking for a needle in a haystack.**

### **What did we achieve by home-schooling?**

My son passed all [number of] GCSE's/IGCSE's and is now in a local sixth form college studying for [qualification], but the biggest achievement is that he now believes he is worth something, that he is not stupid and with the right help he can have access to opportunities. My strong belief is that if we had not have taken him out of school he would have spiralled. There is much research to show that the brain of a person with [diagnosis] is different to a person without [diagnosis]. These differences have impacts on cognitive processing, planning, controlling emotions and impulsivity. If my son had been in a car accident and his brain affected in the same way, I feel sure the school system would have accepted his disability and provided what he needed. It is easy to see how other young people with [diagnosis] who have failed experiences with education, biological changes through adolescence, reflections that label you as lazy, naughty, and rude and in some cases broken family structures, can be at risk of entering the youth criminal justice system. Failed by the education system, failed by the SEND system and failed by society. There are an estimated 25% of the prison population in the UK that have [diagnosis] (Young et al, 2015). Education is a key protective factor in reducing these statistics, but many with [diagnosis] are falling through the net.

### **Rising numbers of requests for de-registration from school**

The numbers of parents requesting de-registration so they can home school continues to rise by as much as 20 per cent per annum (Government Consultation, 2019)

In my work as a [professional], I meet many families whose children are struggling with the school environment particularly those with autism. They want to home educate because the mainstream environment is not working and they feel their only choice to save the mental health of their children is to educate them at home. Lack of flexibility in mainstream schools, means mental health issues of this group are exacerbated too and many become school refusers in secondary school. In essence, these families feel they have no choice too if they are to the protect their childrens' mental health. Instead of the right support, they are fined instead for low attendance.

Parents do decide to home educate for other reasons, but I have met many who choose this route, because they have run out of options with the current state system. Home educating takes grit and is not for the faint hearted. Any form of monitoring by authorities fails to see the point. A register is all well and good but what does it add to the child's pathway? There will be a very small minority that keep their children out of school to hide physical/sexual abuse perhaps? In my work, I am not naïve to think abusive parents don't exist. However, for the vast majority the choice to homeschool is because their child's differences cannot be accommodated in an under- funded one, size fits all approach in the mainstream system. Government departments should be thinking, what are my responsibilities to this child to

help them contribute to society in the long run, rather than over administrating home education with a tick box mentality. Ask the question – how can we help these families and children? Can you provide a list of specialist teachers? Can you provide resources?, Can you secure examination venues with access arrangements?, Can you contribute towards costs?. Can we ensure that home schooled children are not stigmatised and suspicions raised about the family just because they are home schooling? Can we empathise with this family's unique struggle to support their child, because they don't thrive in a class of 35 children? There is good and bad in both ways of educating, but can we simply stop 'a them and us' attitude, and that parents don't know what they are doing. If they don't know what they are doing, then offer them support, not threats. Recognise, that in many cases the parents' intervention to home school is an attempt to stop this young person developing serious mental health difficulties, or becoming a young person with the label NEET. This saves society financial cost. However, there is no recognition of this, no financial allowance for what the child would have been given from the state had they remained in the school system.

### **Co-operation on both sides**

For us, our interaction with the LA was limited whilst we home schooled. We submitted the portfolio and my education plan to the LA [place] and they were happy to leave us to continue. Perhaps, it may have been the age of our son, but what I do know is that if I had interference on a regular basis, I would probably have become hostile. You must realise, that by the time a parent has got to the point that they decide to home school, they are worn down, distrustful and utterly let down by the mainstream system. **A state cannot on the one hand fail to provide an adequate education and then micro- manage the education of that child once they are home schooled.** I badgered teachers, I raised concerns long before anyone took me seriously, I contacted SENDIASS, I got expert diagnosis, I fought for an EHCP because I knew my child, I knew what he needed and I got nothing. The people responsible knew what he needed but he got nothing. So why would I engage with the LA once I have taken sole responsibility for his education and why would I welcome representatives into my home? At worst a lack of co-operation is seen as wanting to hide something, maybe the child is at risk? Hostility from parents is more likely to be because the relationship between LA and parent is completely broken. **Any involvement with statutory bodies in relation to home schooling and parent contact needs to have relationship building at the core of it, and an acknowledgement that these parents have been in all probability badly let down.**

### **An alternative choice to Home Education**

If I had an alternative, Home Education would not have been my first choice. Stigma I have experienced in relation to home schooling my son, is that I simply can't bear to let him develop and grow away from me, and this is part of fulfilling my own attachment needs by keeping him at home. I've met amateur psychologists within the education field who actually suggested this as a way of undermining me, because I was bold enough to question the school's approach to [diagnosis] in general. I've also met people who don't believe [diagnosis] is a real condition and that [diagnosis] is due to no discipline or bad parenting, or eating too many artificial additives. Can we simply not have a proper debate about the

needs of young people with [diagnosis] within an education setting without blaming the parents? I call on the government to revisit the evidence on the causes of [diagnosis]. In 2014 Dr Bruce Perry was seen as the leading neuroscientist in the field advising government, believing that [diagnosis] is caused by trauma only. This has led many in the education system to become judgemental and ill-informed about parents supporting young people with [diagnosis], which has increased the cycle of stigma. Since then many studies refuted this stance and have identified both structural brain differences and network connectivity differences in the [diagnosis] brain, such as Sripada et al. 2014, Hoogman et al., 2017, Rubia, 2018, and Boedhoe et al, 2020. Gene variation also show that those with [diagnosis], have a significant increase in the copy of number variants as well as an excess of chromosomes (Williams et al. 2010)

It seems no one in government is having a debate about [diagnosis] and how education is failing to meet these childrens' needs. The Timpson Review of School Exclusion, 2019 notably states autistic spectrum disorder in its analysis of SEN exclusions, but there is no specific mention of [diagnosis] in relation to exclusions. Mind blowingly, 5-7% of children worldwide have [diagnosis], that's 1-2 children in every classroom, (Barkley, 2015), un yet autism affects only 1 in a 100 people (Autism Society). So why is it that many parents with children who have [diagnosis] are being ignored, passed from one school to another, rather than anyone acknowledging that alternative provision needs to be made and that the current system is not fit for purpose? **Autism is more widely socially accepted and we now see schools displaying autism friendly logos, but why not [diagnosis] friendly schools?** My view is that [diagnosis] carries a stigma because even in 2020 it is widely misunderstood and at government level the evidence Dr Perry is outdated. [diagnosis] is about so much more than impulsive and challenging behaviour and today research has shown that there are brain differences clearly in evidence.

My son really needed an in between type of education, one that perhaps offered mornings or afternoons only with smaller groups, specially trained staff and one to one help, not necessarily a PRU. If an alternative such as flexi schooling had been available, I would not have needed to home school in the first place. It was swiftly and categorically refused, I suspect because it would play havoc with the school's attendance figures. **Consider flexi-schooling as a real option for those children that can't cope with a full -time timetable in school. Even better, open the debate about [diagnosis] and education, obtain data to see if there is a statistical link to [diagnosis] and home schooling and address whether a one size fits all is in the best interests of this cohort. If not, what could work better and possibly save young adults entering young offender institutes?**

In summary, our journey with home schooling saved my son's mental health, his self esteem and his opportunity to gain a successful future. Our intervention stopped him from becoming a NEET statistic with no opportunity in front of him. If you want to improve the chances for home schooled children or to avoid home schooling in the first place:

- **Design a flexi schooling approach for students with [diagnosis] or autism, maybe understanding that 7-10 GCSE's in one go is simply too much**
- **Educate teachers and train new teachers about [diagnosis] in every school and how to work with both the family and the child – school placements will be less**

likely to break down with adequately trained staff and particularly trained Head Teachers

- Conduct detailed analysis on the number of children with a diagnosis of [diagnosis] and the correlation between home schooling
- Support children and families by assisting local settings that provide external candidate exam sittings
- Guide and help families with access arrangements
- Communicate financial support of any kind to all parents that home school – perhaps this is where a register may be more widely accepted – ie if you register, you get help with exam costs
- Provide lists of regulated DBS checked tutors who can be privately accessed to assist safeguarding issues
- Train all staff who liaise with parents who choose to home education on empathy, communication skills and relationship building and put a stop to the stigma associated with the reasons that parents choose to home school. Crucially, recognise that [diagnosis], like Autism, is not always or solely the result of early life trauma and is a complex mental health disability

I urge you, to discuss the issue of home schooling with honesty and integrity. Accept that the failings in relation to SEND and education in mainstream schools are a key reason for families choosing to home educate. Ultimately, any intervention should **not** raise the question, how does this help me tick the box on my paperwork?, but how does this help this young person to have an equal opportunity to succeed?

[name]

[qualifications]

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