

## Written evidence submitted by a [member of the public]

**[Note: This evidence has been redacted by the Committee. Text in square brackets has been inserted where text has been redacted.]**

### Introduction

I am a home-educating mother of three boys aged [ages] years old. They have never been to school, albeit this was not our intention at the beginning of their education. My eldest did not enjoy nursery and we have since discovered our children have [personal information]. They have chosen to visit schools but have decided that home education (HE) fits their needs better at this time, and we agree. I am submitting evidence because I am passionate about our right to provide a learning environment and education that suits their learning requirements and allows them the freedom to be children.

### The duties of local authorities with regards to home education, including safeguarding and assuring the quality of home education

I think the role of the LEA is to support home educated families to provide a home education that best fits the needs of their children. Support is useful when it is offered and not imposed, trusted, knowledgeable and genuine. I think LEAs need to revise their approach to the HE community to be able to provide useful support and accept that not all home educators need it. If resources, enquiries and visits from EHE officers were welcoming and without fear of judgement I think more of us would utilise them and a more open and sharing relationship could be formed to the benefit of all. Families that are struggling to provide a suitable education may then feel they could approach the EHE team for help instead of fearing the consequences.

It is every child's right to have a good quality education. The components and delivery of a good quality education may need to differ greatly, however, depending on the attributes and needs of an individual child or group of children. Approaches in home education are often well placed to meet these differing needs, yet the enquiry forms received from local authorities, despite many years of lobbying by the HE community, still place emphasis on school-based objectives or structure. A tick box exercise for evaluation will not work where there is no standardised curriculum. An individualised approach to education needs an individualised and open-minded approach to enquiry and evaluation. Certainly, progress is paramount, however, it cannot be measured against school-based norms. The school curriculum requires reading and writing and meeting of certain targets at an earlier stage because of its means of delivery, whereas, many HE children come to reading and writing later because they are allowed and encouraged to go at their own pace, to explore their world and play about with concepts. This allows for the observation of learning styles and difficulties to be recognised without the loss of self-esteem that many young children with learning difficulties experience in a school setting. There is no need for special lessons, no being taken out of the classroom and no sense that the pace they require is anything but their own learning journey. This has certainly been the case for my children who have [personal information]. I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to provide my

children with the freedom to learn in ways that work for them, so they are able to experience appealing learning and wonder in the world that can so easily be lost when the methods of engagement are unbecoming.

I find myself in a dilemma when it comes to safeguarding in HE. On the one hand I think it entirely right to assume that the majority of parents who choose to home educate their children do so from an informed place of care, thought, passion and hard work. Just as it is entirely right and extremely important that we view parenting from this perspective also. Of course, there will be exceptions to this where tragically some children do not get what they need either educationally or emotionally/physically. It is tempting to give merit to the argument that 'at least schooled children have a teacher to look out for them', however, the reality is that abuse, radicalisation and neglect are very often not well identified or acted upon within the schooled population and we cannot conclude that home educated children fair any worse than school children in any of these regards unless we have evidence to show this. I think confounding home education with these safeguarding issues is a big part of the problem with how HE is viewed by the wider population. The issue is neglect not educational approach, therefore, over-hauling home education will not necessarily tackle the problem and indeed will cause many more problems for children for whom HE is working excellently just as it is.

My dilemma comes because it is probably easier for a child who is not registered at a school to not been seen by any professionals if the abuser wishes to hide them. I wonder if it would be appropriate to flag if a child hasn't seen a G.P. for a specified period and at that point to make enquiries with the family to check the circumstances? I realise this has its pitfalls as well but at least it would not penalise the masses in HE for the presumably small number of neglectful families.

#### Whether a statutory register of home-educated children is required

I think more home educators would be willing to register their children as home educated if there wasn't the sense that registration was a slippery slope to monitoring and if we felt that our input was valued and listened to. Equally if it were recognised that the majority of families who home educate do so at great personal cost to themselves (often leaving careers), with great effort and time because they love their children and want them to have the best educational experience they can. Instead HE children are often viewed as 'vulnerable' by professionals, including councils, GPs and hospitals. Home education is a legal and a valid alternative to schooled education and their needs to be a culture shift where home educated children are viewed and treated in the same manner as schooled children.

Perhaps registration would help to form a more positive view of HE as a valid choice, however, there is also the possibility that it will continue to be viewed as suspicious and portrayed as such in the media. Alternatively and potentially more successfully, a positive view of HE could be better sought through educating professionals and society at large. I do not think a register provides any more information than we have already: by default a child who is not registered in school is educated otherwise. Unless the register is to provide the government with a means to investigate educational provision further, then how is it of

use? If further investigation is the reason for a register, then that should be transparent and we should be being asked to comment on that.

The benefits children gain from home education, and the potential disadvantages they may face.

The benefits I see for my children from being home educated are:

- a) Freedom to learn at their own pace and without pressure
- b) Not being in constant comparison to class peers
- c) Being able to take the best from different curriculums and resources.
- d) Preservation of self-esteem and love of learning despite SEN
- e) Very inclusive HE community where neurotypical and neurodiverse children intermingle easily
- f) Bespoke education that works for the individual
- g) Numerous social opportunities across a wider age-range than is possible in school.
- h) Learning through life experiences as well as formal learning experiences
- i) Time to discuss, delve deeper and choose to expand a topic without time pressures.
- j) Ability to work across subject areas more organically than is possible within a set curriculum
- k) More quality family time
- l) Self-confidence built at a young age because they are within a secure environment.
- m) Less peer pressure
- n) Time to be a child

My children say:

- a) ([personal information] "I have to do work for a shorter time so it's easier for me and I can focus more." "I don't have to be away from home all the time so I can play with my brothers and toys more."
- b) ([personal information]) "We get more family time, more time outdoors and we aren't under so much pressure."

The negative aspects of home education that I can see are:

- a) The stigma and misunderstanding of HE.
- b) The constant threat of intervention burdens the parents so time is spent documenting things that would normally be a natural part of their learning journey e.g. discussion or educational games we play.
- c) There are lots of social activities and opportunities available, however, it can take a while to make consistent friendships due to travelling distances and the more transient nature of the community.
- d) It is expensive to pay for all of the support our children need, be that psychological, educational or extra-curricular. I am aware we have to make choices within our funds. I am also aware that there are funding restraints within schools, particularly

for children with SEN, so overall I feel that the focus on their individual needs will benefit them in the long run.

My children both say:

“We can’t think of anything that is bad about Home Education.”

The quality and accessibility of support (including financial support) available for home educators and their children, including those with special educational needs, disabilities, mental health issues, or caring responsibilities, and those making the transition to further and higher education.

- Most colleges either do not seem aware of the funding for 14 year old home educated children or do not support the provision. Part-time college provision that schooled children have access to at 14 is unavailable to HE children.
- EHCPs are exceedingly difficult to get and of limited use in HE in their current format.
- Vaccinations are not available from many G.P.s for HE children.
- Private exam centres are hard to come by and all but impossible for children with SEN.
- We pay for everything including exams.
- When we go to professionals for [personal information] we are often lectured about how our children are disadvantaged being home educated and should be in school. There seems to be a policy/culture within some of the large children’s hospitals such as [hospital] to approach HE with suspicion and to view it as sub-standard. We are constantly being threatened with regulation instead of being supported to do the best job we can.
- Many people do not want to make themselves known to their Elective Home Education (EHE) team for fear of intrusion on their family life (which when dealing with anxious children or those that have been traumatised by school is very delicate.) Though it would often be very useful to be able to ask for advice it comes with the potential for being met with having to justify your educational approach, show evidence and being evaluated by EHE officers who have a school background. If the received advice was guaranteed to come from a supportive and understanding place then I think more home educators would seek it!

Whether the current regulatory framework is sufficient to ensure that the wellbeing and academic achievement of home educated children is safeguarded, including where they may attend unregistered schools, have been formally excluded from school, or have been subject to ‘off-rolling’

It is the very fact that parents have the freedom to create a bespoke education and the children have the freedom to respond to that education without pressure and needing to hit targets that provides the opportunity for wellbeing and academic achievement in HE. Over-regulating and adding pressure to those families takes away their ability to do that as successfully and happily.

There will be some home educators that do not provide a suitable education for their children, much as is the case of some teachers and schools. Within schools Ofsted provides some level of protection against inadequate education, however, still many children come out of school illiterate and innumerate. The reasons for these failings are probably numerous – truancy, lack of family support, socio-demographic and economic differences, undetected learning disabilities, EAL and so forth. Just as a blanket approach does not work to regulate schools, neither would it work within HE. Understanding the causes of the failings requires an understanding of the individual needs of the family and individuals within that family. I think if Home Educators felt that LEA requests for visits or evidence of education came from a place of concern and willingness to support rather than with the constant threat of a School Attendance Order then they would feel more willing to participate in the process. Some children who are home educated have never been to school, many that have had bad experiences and are relieved to be able to learn again safely or without constant anxiety. It is traumatising to both child and parent to feel that monitoring or evaluation could end up in their child being taken out of home education. There needs to be trust between the parties for any sort of useful and constructive way forward to be found. Unfortunately, Home Educators have been answering these calls for evidence for a long time, yet we always find ourselves having to defend our position rather than feeling that we are a valued and celebrated resource of alternative educational provision.

The best form of ‘regulation’ is through building relationships and trust so that people who are having trouble can come forward for help rather than setting up further barriers.

#### The role that inspection should play in future regulation of home education

The idea of inspection runs contrary to the environment most home educators are trying to create for their children both educationally and within their own home and family environments. With the varying educational approaches used in HE it is an impossible task which would not provide useful or representative outcomes. I do not think inspection has a place in home education, whereas building relationships with the HE community and supporting us does.

#### The impact COVID-19 has had on home educated children, and what additional measures might need to be taken in order to mitigate any negative impacts.

In our case my children have been less affected educationally by Covid-19 than my children’s schooled friends. This is because we could keep their education going throughout, albeit we missed our educational trips. We did not need to get used to online resources because we already utilise them as well as more traditional resources. We also have numerous online HE forums that quickly reverted from advertising face-to-face events to highlighting a lot of the online resources and events that we could take advantage of.

Socially of course my children have missed out during Covid-19, as all children have. Outside of lockdown we have been able to meet other children under the rule of six, however, in HE it is normal for whole families to meet others (or at least one parent from each family to be present), so with a family of three children we could only meet families

who had one child, which was problematic. Government guidelines gave brief instructions for home education (which was welcome as we are often forgotten!) they did not, however, address the social needs of home educated children. Many home educated children meet their friends at social HE groups and do forest play together, or park meetups, a lot like children at school do in the playground. Taking your children to do a field study under the rule of 15 for educational activities does not allow for the free play that they need and crave together. Certainly, the lack of social time affected my children during the lockdown in terms of increased [personal information]. Thankfully, we already have psychological support in place for them privately if we were to need it, however, other HE families may not have this available.

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