

Written evidence submitted by Williams

Call for evidence

Home Education Consultation 2020

MY RESPONSE

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

LA's behave differently and have different policies depending on where you live. I've lived in both Hampshire and Portsmouth. Portsmouth staff showed themselves to be ignorant of the law and about home education and aggressive towards home educators in general. They are known to escalate situations based on no evidence and without communicating their concerns to the parents. My own experience with them was very unpleasant and stressful. They ignored repeated requests for information. They sent badly edited copy-and-paste letters and had no genuine interest in my actual children as far as I could tell. It seemed to be a box-ticking exercise.

Hampshire have not caused me any concerns at all. I can't comment on how supportive they might be - my experience with Portsmouth has made me wary.

- **whether a statutory register of home-educated children is required;**

I am unsure. Depends on the purpose of a register. If local authorities continue to conflate safeguarding with home education and want a register for that reason, then I believe they are wrong and need educating about the law.

It's the responsibility of all parents to ensure a suitable education is taking place. They can, should they choose to, register their child at a school and handover the task of educating their child to the staff employed there. Sadly this doesn't guarantee a suitable education will be provided.

If a register could give home educators access to resources and support then maybe that could be of some benefit but I think it'll take some time to convince parents to trust LA's like Portsmouth who seem to want to set traps for home educators.

- **the benefits children gain from home education, and the potential disadvantages they may face;**

BENEFITS:

Can be catered to the child's skills, learning styles and interests rather than a rigid curriculum one-size-fits-all model.

Individual needs much more efficiently met.

Socialising is more natural - a mix of ages from babies to the elderly with a glorious range of experiences, skills and interests rather than a class of 30 same-age peers all wearing the same clothes and doing the same work with little scope for choice making and problem solving or following passions and interests.

Not subject to stressed and overworked teachers.

Not subject to box ticking exercises.

Much less risk of bullying and peer pressure and sexualisation. Issues can be dealt with directly and children are taught about consent, and maintaining/respecting boundaries.

More likelihood of developing an accepting and less stereotypical view of people due to the diversity of the community and freedom this lifestyle allows.

POTENTIAL DISADVANTAGES:

Harassment/hostility from LA and possible discrimination from health professionals and from the general public due to ignorance, misinformation and negative media representation

Parents needing to finance everything themselves with no access to social funds that other children are entitled to. Lower family income due to parent not being able to work full time.

Possible problems in accessing exams and the cost of these

Problems accessing resources that school children have access to such as SEN support and gateways to further/higher 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;**

Is there such support?

The home education community offers enormous amounts of mutual support within its membership including scaffolding for parents being harassed by the LA (Portsmouth). Community members readily share information and skills, set up and run learning groups and social events, offer parenting support and create a sense of the village. There is a

general sense of acceptance for the children from the adults and other children alike. Individual styles, interests and talents are encouraged and supported more often than not.

- 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';

Electively home educated children are in a category distinct from those that have been excluded, off-rolled, or attend unregistered schools. Those that have been excluded or off-rolled will certainly need support as it has not been their choice to be home educated.

Electively home educated children are having their education facilitated by their parents as per their responsibility.

- the role that inspection should play in future regulation of home education;

No role.

Home educated children learn different things at different rates. There could be no benchmark for such inspection. It would cause families undue stress as they tried to fit the mould in order to pass inspection. Some children acquire certain skills much later than if they were at school because they do it at their own pace and without the pressure put on them to perform at the same time as everyone else.

If there were specific concerns then genuine support offered without harassment would be beneficial.

However, my experience (and that of many of my fellow home edders) with Portsmouth City Council EHE department is that they issue blanket letters insisting that a sufficient education is not taking place but they cannot state why they believe that. They don't explain what they believe is lacking. They don't answer emails or specific questions. They don't offer support or even give a hint of what is lacking or why they suspect it is lacking. They give an arbitrary number of days to "satisfy" under threat of a school attendance order. This scares parents into frantic report writing, causing undue stress and taking their attention away from the education of their children. I understand that lately they have escalated their demands and no longer accept even comprehensive and detailed reports as sufficient evidence. They are accusatory and threatening. If they were given even more power in the form of inspections then they would surely abuse this power too.

- what improvements have been made to support home educators since the 2010-15 Education Committee published their report on [‘Support for Home Education’](#) in 2012; and

What support?

- 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.’

Many of our groups have needed to stop because of the lack of venues. For example, a local provision was made for group activities including problem solving, initiative skills, archery, assault course, etc. This is an important part of their education but because the venue is considered a leisure facility it will be forced to close and the group cannot run under the new lockdown regulations. (Nov 20)

The police are generally misinformed about the legalities of home education and try to disperse small education groups in the mistaken belief that they are not legally entitled to gather due to COVID restrictions.

The media portrayal of home education during this time has been erroneous and potentially damaging. This is not how we normally do things! When the first lockdown happened, we were all stuck at home much of the time and our usual activities were all stopped - just like everyone else.

In some ways though, the lockdown had a positive effect for us mainly in the abundance of online provision we suddenly had access to.

Home educators are used to being flexible and adaptive with regards to their children and their needs. The restrictions allowed us to flex our creative muscles and come up with new ways to ensure our children continued to be stimulated and had distanced society.

Additional measures needed:

Educating LA's and other authorities and professionals as to the legal status of elective home education.

Making the guidelines clearer in respect to elective home education so that managers of venues can feel confident that they are not flouting the rules by letting us have our education groups there.

Other children are able to socialise at school - our children need to socialise too.

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