

Written evidence submitted by Leicester City Council

Call for Evidence – Home Education

I am submitting this information on behalf of Leicester City Council. (My details are at the bottom of the document.) The reason for our interest in the matter is that the LA has responsibilities in this area.

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

Local Authorities have duties and powers in respect of children in their area who are Children Missing Education (CME). Children who are receiving a suitable Elective Home Education (EHE) are not CME; our experience is that the majority of families provide a full time education, suitable to age ability and aptitude and any special educational needs. Our experience is also that some often vulnerable children who are considered to be EHE by their parents are not receiving a suitable education. The time out of education is extended due to there being no clear requirement in law for parents to provide the LA with evidence of suitable EHE from the outset. This position can create confusion and or reluctance on the parent's part and lead to delay in reaching the point where LAs are able to address cases under the CME regulations.

One of the most helpful ways for parents to demonstrate to the LA that the education is suitable is by supplying photographs of a child's work; there is significant reluctance to doing this on the part of some parents. It would be helpful if the guidance could state that where requested by the LA, this is reasonable request.

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

This would help us to ensure that no child falls through the net and it would support LA's wider safeguarding work.

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

Benefits can include: small groups, a curriculum designed to tailor to the children's strengths.

Potential disadvantages:

Parents may not be well placed to ensure their children receive a suitable education.

- We have experience of parents who have been educated in other countries who do not speak English and they use text books in their first language. Whilst not a disadvantage in itself, a child would be disadvantaged when they came to take a GCSE paper or wanted to move into the world of work if it was out of their immediate surroundings.

Preparing for GCSEs is a major undertaking in both time and money for home educating families. They have to find an Exam Centre, navigate the difficulties of the different Exam Boards, ensure they have the correct text books for the Exam they want their child to sit,

possibly pay for a DBS checked tutor and eventually pay for the Exam itself. The worst case scenario is that the family also has to pay for an overnight stay to ensure the child arrives at the exam centre on time.

Since the parents do not have to tell the LA if the child is taking an exam, and do not have to report on the outcome, there is no way to tell if the assertion that EHE is a more efficient form of education with better outcomes is valid (an assertion that is frequently made by home educating families).

In some cases, social isolation and missing out on the wide variety of opportunities school brings are issues.

• 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;

If guidance is worded in a clearer way would be helpful eg regarding SEN, it is not clear what LAs must do; although the recent DfE blog refers to support being at the discretion of the LA. In parallel with this, it would be helpful if the guidance made it clearer what home educators' responsibilities are; if the LA doesn't provide SEN support, and the parent can't provide it, should the child return to school? The uncertainty can create a level of mistrust.

• 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';

The DfE guidance issued in 2019 is still becoming embedded. It presupposes that home educating families will undertake an annual review, so parents should, or will come to, expect this. The number of Home Educated Children has risen markedly due to the current pandemic and there are pressures on LA services. The outcomes for children would be better supported if it was clear to parents that they should engage with the LA from the outset (rather than only be compelled to engage once a School Attendance Order has been issued. Much time is wasted spent in ongoing attempts to engage with families who do not feel they should have to engage about their children's education.

It is rather difficult to tell if the academic achievement is safeguarded since the parents do not have to inform anyone at the LA of their success or failure of the child/children. It is also difficult to be sure of the wellbeing of all home educated children due to there being no power or duty for LAs to see children who are EHE. There is a link between EHE and permanent exclusion with some families opting to EHE when they are unable to obtain a place at one of the preferred schools. It is not uncommon for these children to subsequently be identified as CME.

There has been a historical issue whereby providers of education for EHE children present to families as schools and we have to explain the position to them ie no inspection, no guarantee of appropriate safeguarding etc. Parents who are aware of their status may be attracted by the fact that they do not have to provide the education themselves, and

sometimes by the religious aspect. The LA is proactive in liaison with Ofsted about any concerns.

Off rolling is not a significant issue for us; schools (with support from the LA) work to ensure that parents understand the requirements of EHE, that no tutor is provided etc, before parents withdraw their children for the reason of EHE.

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

The guidance would serve children better if parents were required to meet the LA's representative either in the family home or at another venue when requested; requests would not be made of all families but rather, where there was a reason to ask for this. (Inspection may be too strong a word.)

DfE may like to consider a particular curriculum for parents to follow.

• 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;

Parents can seek assessments of learning (which parents have to pay for) - objective teacher led assessments.

The LA seeks to send a termly newsletter to parents highlighting opportunities for home educating children.

• 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.'

COVID 19 has caused a significant problem for EHE children who were preparing for GCSEs; those who did not have teachers were unable to have teacher assessments of their work.

An independent school that had in the past acted as an Exam Centre in the area closed. Closure of this (and previously of other independent schools) has increased the number of home educated children as some parents prefer to home educate rather than send children to state maintained schools.

**Ellen Collier
Service Manager
Education Welfare Service
Social Care and Education
Leicester City Council**

3rd November 2020

November 2020