

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

Written evidence submitted by [member of the public]

Call for Evidence – House of Commons Education Committee

I am a Home Educating parent of [number] children, and would like to respond to your call for evidence.

As I read the points that you invite submissions about, the biggest question it raises in me is whether you are willing to take English law seriously regarding the matter of education being the responsibility of the parents, not the state. Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 says: “The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education... either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.” It makes me tremble to think that parents would have to ask for permission to educate their child(ren) in the way they think is best for that individual(s). Clearly, education is best when directed specifically to that individual and decisions are made for their good by someone who knows and loves them, rather than forcing them into a certain mould or having decisions made by someone unknown to them. Ask any teacher, my husband included, and this would be obvious. A school teacher is always aiming to personalise their teaching to the individuals in front of them, is often pained that they are unable to do it as personally as they would like, and is working in partnership with the parents to educate the child. The teachers do not educate on behalf of the state, but on behalf of the parents. Introducing a mandatory register, requiring inspection of home educating families and increasing the duties of LAs regarding home educating families looks strongly like State interference in family life. How can it be thought that someone who does not know the child, who does not understand the wider family and community in which the child lives and who is not necessarily equipped or trained in education is better able to make decisions regarding a child’s education than the child’s own parents? When mothers give birth, we are strongly encouraged to lean on our own instincts in how we assess our child’s health and development, since we know our child best. This is written in much of the literature that we are given and it the advice given by midwives. Why does this suddenly change when the children reach a certain age? A parent’s knowledge of their child has only increased since birth, not decreased.

To respond specifically to some of your points:

I have experienced a large number of home educating families. Nothing that I have seen gives any suggestion that the current regulatory framework needs to change. Parents are able, in the communities and families in which they live, to be able to make wise and informed decisions about and on behalf of their children and their education. Those who choose to abuse the system, their children, and their role as parents will either already be known to

Social Services or will continue to evade the system. In fact, I am very relieved that my children are not being put in positions of potential harm from abuse and harassment that have occurred in schools. Elective Home Education is not the same as illegal schools or similar, or with exclusion from schools. These are separate matters which should be discussed by themselves and not mixed up with elective home education.

Elective home education gives us as parents the huge benefits of being involved with our children and their education. We can educate throughout the whole day and pick up threads of topics and discussions all the time that relate to what we have been learning. The children benefit from being in a safe, loving environment which is suited to their individual needs. This is very obvious when there are medical issues for a child or children. Home educating my son means that he does not miss out on any school when we have hospital appointments, nor does he face any peer pressure or anxiety during the times that he cannot participate in sports or other activities due to his [personal information]. We can adapt our education timetable to fit around his illness. This also benefits his siblings as they learn about his medical problems and learn compassion as they live alongside him. The children have the outstanding opportunity to socialise with children and adults of all ages and stages of life, giving them a wide view of the world and also providing them with good role models to follow as they grow older. It means that they are not surrounded by people only of the same age, which does little to broaden their minds and horizons. Children learn the discipline of self-directed study from an early age, which equips them for later life and instils a desire to learn and work hard. We can also offer them a more well-rounded education as we can work in different places and have many more experiences than is possible in the classroom. The children are protected from the bullying that exists in all schools, and the negative views and comments from other students or even staff.

Home educating during the Covid-19 pandemic has been a challenge as the children have missed the rich friendships that they normally enjoy and the home educating mothers and missed out on a vital part of their support networks. This could be helped in the future by making allowances for home educating families to continue to meet, and the recognition that education is a broad term that includes socialising and that therefore parents should be given the discretion to make wise choices based on what is best for the child(ren) whilst being safe and careful for the sake of others and the nation.

Local authorities already have powers regarding safeguarding, should that be an issue for home educating families, as with any other family. Creating more requirements for families will not stop abuse from happening in families where sadly that is common. These families will not comply with registration or anything else that LAs attempt to do. Increasing the LAs duties and authority will only create more work for both the LAs (already over-stretched) and the conscientious parents (also already very hard-working).

There is no evidence that a mandatory register will make things any better. As stated above, this does nothing to find abusive parents, but merely adds to the workload of others. A register also gives the clear impression that the state has more power over the children than their own parents. It is the first step to further intrusion and requirements.

Inspection is clearly not something which should happen for home educating families. Ofsted inspections are not perfect, and since they themselves can change the values by which they are inspecting (for example:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/feb/04/outstanding-primary-schools-fail-ofsted-inspections-under-sudden-rule-switch>), it seems clear that they should not be the ultimate source of what constitutes a “good education”. As I said earlier, education is highly specific to the individual child and what might be a good education for one child may not be the best for another. How can an inspector, who doesn’t know the child(ren) and may not be trained in the educational theory (of which there are many) that the family are following, be able to make a valid judgment on whether the education is adequate or not? This is beside the issue that children put on the spot by a stranger are unlikely to “perform” well or even act as normal when someone is watching them. Schools and exams are clear examples that there is no “one size fits all” in terms of education. In the school system there are always winners and losers. Home education gives parents the opportunity to make all of their children “winners” in their education. This means that they must not be held to account to someone else’s rules and regulations about what is the best way to educate those specific children. A parent’s aim is to educate the child in the way best for them and which will best prepare them for adult life. This may or may not be in the same way as the schools educate. Therefore it must be left for the parents to decide what is the best way forward for each child, not for an inspector to make that decision.

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