

## Written evidence submitted by Gateshead Council

### Call for evidence - Elective Home Education

With the increasing number of children being home education across the country it is vital that safeguards are put in place to ensure children receive both an appropriate education and are protected from harm.

Although the 2019 Guidance for Local Authorities does clarify some aspect of home education it does not address some of the key issues.

- How can parents, who are not providing a good education, be challenged in a swift and meaningful way to ensure their child returns to a school roll within the shortest time scale possible? The SAO process takes too much time; it is usually the culmination of many months of trying to gather evidence regarding education and even once the Order has been served it does not guarantee that a child will return to school.
- Should parents who are within the Child Protection threshold be allowed to home educate?
- Would statutory registration support better outcomes for children? There will be a number of parents within the Local Authority who home educate but are unknown to the education services and other agencies. Although many of these families may be providing a good level of education, there may be others who do not. The Local Authority is unable to challenge families, if they are not aware of them. A statutory register would address this issue.
- The legislation does not currently support the requirement for the child to be seen or for a home visit. Gathering the child's view regarding home education is important. A home visit is useful in a number of ways. It allows you to see the environment in which the child will be learning; you can see first hand the access to resources and equipment that will support the child, you can often pick up on any safeguarding concerns such as poor housing conditions, unsafe dogs and children who appear frightened etc.
- Parents do educate their children well using a range of philosophies and approaches, but there should be a minimum standard set, to ensure that the core skills that children will need in later life are a substantial part of the provision.
- Many children flourish when home educated where parents have a reasonable level of education themselves, have the finances, the time and interest to support their child. Local authorities do not have the resources to support this ever-growing group of children. For many Local Authorities home educating families can be a significant loss to budgets but an increasing number of local authority staff are required to support in this area. There is no financial support for parents either and they often struggle to access opportunities.
- Information sharing between services should be mandatory, especially where there are concerns.
- Covid 19 has increased the numbers of children being removed from school to home educate. This has been due to concerns regarding Covid but also parents feeling that their children were happier and more focused when learning at home. The concerns of parents due to Covid, balanced against the possibility of being fined for non-attendance has put parent and schools in a difficult situation. A more flexible approach may have prevented a number of parents removing their children.

- Access to GCSEs can be complicated and expensive. The majority of home educated children in this LA do not get GCSE or A level qualifications within the year that school aged students gain these qualifications. Their futures are narrowed often by lack of qualifications.

November 2020