

The UK Unschooling Network's Response to the Education Committee's Inquiry into Home Education - October 2020

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Introduction to Unschooling

This response is written on behalf of members of the [UK Unschooling Network. \(UKUN\)](https://www.facebook.com/groups/254085341320035/),¹ a Facebook group of nearly ten thousand home educators who are interested in unschooling.

Unschooling, [the principles of which are described here](https://theukunblog.blogspot.com/),² is a form of home education which is similar to autonomous education and self-directed learning, both of which are sanctioned

¹ "UK Unschooling Network - Facebook." <https://www.facebook.com/groups/254085341320035/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

² "The UK Unschooling Network Blog." <https://theukunblog.blogspot.com/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

as legitimate forms of home education in the [2019 Government Guidance on Home Education](#).³ (section 2.4).

As the principles outline, unschooling involves working closely with a young person to facilitate their interests. Unschoolers find that when a young person is curious about a subject, it is very easy for them to learn deeply and well, an experience that is [borne](#)⁴ out by [extensive research](#).⁵ See also Daniel Pink on [autonomy, mastery and purpose](#).⁶

Unschooling is the furthest possible remove from parental neglect with which local authorities sometimes confuse it, involving as it does, considerable parental investment. Unschooling is a respectful, life enhancing model for which many [thousands⁷ could](#)⁸ provide [testimony](#)⁹. See [here](#)¹⁰ for evidence from members of the UK Unschooling Network.

Unschooling and Unique Learning Needs

Whilst for many families, unschooling is a philosophical choice, many others find their way to unschooling as a way to recover from the trauma of schooling. Since unschooling involves matching the educational provision to unique interest and need, it draws to it a large number of young people with unusual learning requirements that cannot be met in the more rigid confines of schooling provision. Families often find that unschooling causes school-related stigma of learning difference and other related problems, such as depression, anxiety, self harm etc, to dissipate and be replaced by a new zest for life and learning.

It is also worth noting in this regard, that unschooling families save the state a significant amount of money as young people with different learning needs would have required funding and specialist help in the form of an [EHC Plan](#)¹¹ had they been in school.

The Growth of the Unschooling Community

Unschooling is the home education method of choice for a large and quickly growing

³ "Elective home education: departmental guidance for ... - Gov.uk." https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791527/Elective_home_education_guidance_for_LAv2.0.pdf. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁴ "Council Post: Why Curiosity Is The Next Movement ... - Forbes." 20 Dec. 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2019/12/20/why-curiosity-is-the-next-movement-to-enhance-human-performance/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁵ "The UK Unschooling Network Blog." <https://theukunblog.blogspot.com/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁶ "Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us: Amazon" <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Drive-Daniel-H-Pink/dp/184767769X>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁷ "Teenage Unschooler Discusses 11 Best Aspects of ... - YouTube." 21 May. 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvU9Fr2SIYg>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁸ "Learning through unschooling | Callie... - TEDx Cambridge" <https://www.facebook.com/TedxCambridgeUni/posts/learning-through-unschooling-callie-van-dewiele-tedxcambridgeuniversityunschooled/1907746519451312/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁹ "Hackschooling Makes Me Happy: A 13 Year-Old's Uncommon" <https://www.teachthought.com/the-future-of-learning/hackschooling-makes-me-happy/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

¹⁰ "The UK Unschooling Network Blog." <https://theukunblog.blogspot.com/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

¹¹ "Children with special educational needs and ... - Gov.uk." <https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

community of home educators. We surmise that the unschooling community is currently growing very rapidly because a large number of parents are withdrawing their children from schools as a result of finding that [they enjoyed the experience of home educating during lockdown and after seeing that their children were thriving with it](#)¹², and also because home educating families often find that unschooling works very well for them.

Unschooling v. Schooling

Sadly, unschooling is often regarded negatively by schooling proponents. They often view the term “unschooling” as a direct attack on the schooling model and to a degree they would be right. For example, unschoolers recognise that teaching often [limits exploratory learning, discovery and motivation](#)¹³. Unschooling parents on the other hand, [facilitate the interests](#)¹⁴ of the young person, a process which often involves co-operative discovery rather than teaching, and which flows easily as a result of the fact that the learner is [intrinsically motivated](#)¹⁵.

Unschoolers also recognise that school often [correlates with low mood in young people](#)¹⁶. Low mood is not only extremely sad in its own right, but is, as research suggests, [inimical to learning](#)¹⁷. Unschoolers on the other hand, set out to create a joyful approach to learning, through respect, connection, support and love.

Unschoolers recognise that the incessant testing, grading and ranking of children that takes place in schools results [in reduced motivation](#)¹⁸ and leaves many feeling anxious and ashamed. It also promotes competitiveness in a world of climate change and pandemics, where more than ever we need to avoid a tragedy of the commons. This will only happen if people learn to work co-operatively which happens naturally in unschooling groups. (For more on this, see below).

Unschoolers also recognise that schools are places where many young people are unable to enact their [human rights](#)¹⁹ to liberty, freedom of association, expression and privacy. Unschoolers, on the other hand, work in a respectful partnership where the interests and method of learning are freely chosen by the learner.

¹² "Kids Continued to Cope Well Two Months After Schools Closed." 18 Aug. 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/freedom-learn/202008/kids-continued-cope-well-two-months-after-schools-closed>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

¹³ "The double-edged sword of pedagogy: Instruction limits" <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0010027710002258>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

¹⁴ "Being obsessed with dinosaurs enhances kids' intelligence" <https://suitable-education.uk/being-obsessed-with-dinosaurs-enhances-kids-intelligence-psychology-spot/>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2020.

¹⁵ "Love of learning more important than IQ - What is a Suitable" <https://suitable-education.uk/love-of-learning-more-important-than-iq/>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2020.

¹⁶ "Happiness in Everyday Life: The Uses of Experience Sampling." <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1024409732742>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

¹⁷ "Adolescents with Depressive Symptoms and their ... - NCBI." 6 Jul. 2010, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3686103/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

¹⁸ "(PDF) Testing and Motivation for Learning - ResearchGate." 15 Oct. 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233191251_Testing_and_Motivation_for_Learning. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

¹⁹ "The Human Rights Act | Equality and Human Rights" 15 Nov. 2018, <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights/human-rights-act>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

Unschoolers also see that schools are an authoritarian system where young people are not able to develop skills of personal responsibility and self-direction. After the age of 18, we expect our young people to live in a democracy when it is highly likely they have next to no experience of it in their young lives. Is this really a good way to [prepare a child for life within the community of which he is a member, as case law requires?](#)²⁰

The Voice of the Child

Despite unschooling criticisms of the school system, we are clear in the UK Unschooling Network that if a young person wants to go to school, unschooling parents should respect that choice. This is of course, congruent with their philosophy of not only [listening to the voice of the child](#)²¹ but also genuinely respecting and enabling the choices of young people.

In contrast, unschoolers regard the government's insistence that ["the voices of children and young people be heard when decisions are made that affect them"](#)²² as disingenuous since a young person's voice in many contexts will be duly heard but then totally ignored. There is actually very little point having a voice when it counts for nothing. In fact this lip-service to respect for young people is if anything deeply confusing for a young person. Do they have rights to self-determination or not?

It would be interesting, if in all likelihood extremely sobering, to know just how many young people, given genuine options, would express their desire not to attend school, and yet how often these voices would be ignored.

Further on the voice of the child, we [gather](#)²³ that the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, has recently asserted that a register for home educators has already been agreed with the DfE. Given that Anne Longfield's remit is to promote ["the rights, views and interests of children in policies or decisions affecting their lives"](#)²⁴, and given that a large number of home educated children would prefer to have nothing to do with LA officials, we wonder whether the current Commissioner can be said to be fulfilling her brief.

Further, if the Commissioner imagines that she only represents the most vulnerable young people, she needs to know that huge numbers of schooled young people are exactly that.

²⁰ "Regina v Secretary of State for Education ex parte Talmud" 9 Jul. 2015, <https://swarb.co.uk/regina-v-secretary-of-state-for-education-ex-parte-talmud-torah-machzikei-hadass-12-apr-1985-2/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

²¹ "Voice of the Child: children to be more clearly heard ... - Gov.uk." 19 Feb. 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/voice-of-the-child-children-to-be-more-clearly-heard-in-decisions-about-their-future>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

²² "Voice of the Child: children to be more clearly heard ... - Gov.uk." 19 Feb. 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/voice-of-the-child-children-to-be-more-clearly-heard-in-decisions-about-their-future>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2020.

²³ "Anne Longfield informs MPs that a compulsory ... - The HE Byte." 20 Oct. 2020, <https://he-byte.uk/england/anne-longfield-informs-mps-that-a-compulsory-ehe-register-has-been-agreed/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

²⁴ "Office of the Children's Commissioner - GOV.UK." <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-of-the-children-s-commissioner>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

This may be a result [of bullying](#)²⁵ or through lack of a [genuinely appropriate education](#)²⁶ which leaves young people feeling incompetent, depressed, disengaged and [suicidal](#)²⁷.

From a teacher:

"I taught two primary school kids who subsequently went on to commit suicide in secondary school because of their learning difficulties and bullying. They were friends and both were extremely dyslexic. I look back with huge regret that I didn't suggest that the parents remove these children from school as it just couldn't suit them whatever we did. They would have been much better off home educating, but of course, you can't say that nowadays without getting into trouble."

Where were the [Serious Case Reviews](#)²⁸ (now Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews) of these cases? Why are these deaths normalised and ignored? These children suffered at the hands of adults and institutions and this sorely needs reviewing.

The Children's Commissioner needs to fully acknowledge that home education saves such young people's lives and should be tackling the issue of school damage as we believe that this would have a far greater impact on the well-being of far more young people than enforcing a registration scheme on home educators which would be damaging for law-abiding families and would not catch genuine abusers. (See more on this below).

The Philosophy and Practice of Unschooling

Whilst unschooling theory does in part help people to unpick assumptions inherited from schooling norms, it is also, as explained above, an extremely positive educational philosophy which is underpinned by a [rigorous epistemology which evolves](#)²⁹ for better ideas and which recognises that learning happens best when young people are able to apply themselves to that which interests them and that the parent should create a nurturing, respectful, responsive, enriched environment replete with learning opportunities.

We see that unschooled young people are strongly motivated to learn, develop self-direction and a sense of purpose. Prior to lockdown, they would often get together in large groups of other similar home educators, where people of all ages mixed with no hierarchical structures and no-one made distinctions between folk on the basis of age or ability. Young people were listened to and respected just as much as the adults. It was clear that these young

²⁵ "Bullying in England: April 2013 to March 2018 - GOV.UK." 12 Nov. 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bullying-in-england-april-2013-to-march-2018>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

²⁶ "Adult Illiteracy in the UK | TeacherBoards Community." <https://www.teacherboards.co.uk/community/adult-illiteracy-in-the-uk/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

²⁷ "Bullying and suicide - Family Lives - Bullying UK." <https://www.bullying.co.uk/advice-for-young-people/bullying-and-suicide/>. Accessed 4 Nov. 2020.

²⁸ "Learning from Serious Case Reviews for education | SCIE." <https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/children/education/serious-case-reviews>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

²⁹ "The UK Unschooling Network Blog." <https://theukunblog.blogspot.com/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

people develop great skills in working cooperatively, even in large groups. The young learned from older folk through example and conversation, and the older people learned about nurturing younger folk.

It is also noticeable that when unschoolers grow up, they frequently continue to live these values of co-operation, mutual support and meaningful connection. The absence of toxic masculinity in these young men is particularly obvious, and one is left wondering as to the damage that schooling with its competitive ethos does to schooled young men, and what a shame that the unschooling model is not more widely followed so that women would not still be forced to stand up for simple rights to respect and fair treatment.

Unschooling - An Education for the Future

In a world that is changing faster than ever before, [with knowledge currently doubling every day](#)³⁰, together with the confluence of ever increasingly powerful info- and biotech and other pressing existential challenges, humans of all ages will increasingly need to be able to adapt quickly, to be learning new information at the drop of a hat. Where the school curriculum labours slowly and unresponsively under the authoritarian hand of centrist control, unschoolers and other home educators are able to switch to learning new information at the press of a button. Further, unschoolers, being free to explore the world through intrinsic motivation, thereby developing skills in self determination with a resulting sense of meaningful purpose in life, may well find that they are well adapted to a world of job-appropriating algorithms.

Unschooling and the Home Education Guidance

It may be for the perceived attack on schooling, that unschooling is not mentioned in the [Home Education Guidance](#).³¹ We ask the Committee to recognise that unschooling is a positive, responsible and life-enhancing model for education, and to recommend that the term “unschooling” be included in the Guidance. This would help a great deal as currently many unschoolers are worried about using the term in their reports to Local Authorities as they are concerned that the LAs sometimes will take a dim view of it. This can put the liaison between LAs and unschoolers on a poor footing.

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Response to the Inquiry:

³⁰ "Op-Ed: Knowledge doubles almost every day, and it's set to" 23 Nov. 2018, <http://www.digitaljournal.com/tech-and-science/science/op-ed-knowledge-doubles-almost-every-day-and-it-s-set-to-increase/article/537543>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

³¹ "Elective home education - GOV.UK." 1 Nov. 2007, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

Quality of Support for Home Education since the 2012 Report

With regard to the Select Committee's areas of inquiry, we wish to address the penultimate bullet point:

- What improvements have been made to support home educators since the 2010-15 Education Committee published their report on ["Support for Home Education"](#)³² in 2012:

The conclusions and recommendations of the 2012 report (p22), were predominantly about relationships between home educators and local authorities. The report highlighted, for example, problems with the post code lottery, ie: that some LAs were much better than others in their treatment of home educators.

From inquiries in the UK Unschooling Network in October 2020, we gather that the issue of the post code lottery still persists. For example, we hear that Portsmouth LA does not understand unschooling. Portsmouth LA -

"demand to see "dated, age appropriate work" and will accept nothing else, are resistant to group efforts to educate them, and are generally very hostile to home educators."

Committee members may be wondering why the demand to see "dated, age appropriate work?" is problematic for unschoolers. One of the reasons is that in respecting and facilitating the interests of the young person, unschooling parents will not force a young person to learn according to schooling norms. The following very typical story illustrates the problem:

"My eldest son, now a successful, hard working, extremely bright and highly literate adult, did not show any interest in learning to read until he was ten years of age. I have to admit to having been very worried about it, but unschoolers and autonomous educators who had gone before reassured me that I needn't worry. As long as I was an involved parent, facilitating his interests, which consisted of anything from dinosaurs, through to the solar system, to Pokemon cards, Runescape, computer skills, learning various musical instruments and composing music, to trampolining, climbing, playing various sports and meeting with his friends, I had no need to worry. He would be building pre-literacy skills in his own time, and he would get there.

And sure enough, aged 10, he went from just about reading "Sam I Am" to advanced adult levels of literacy in the space of about three months. He subsequently went on to win prizes in GCSE and A level subjects, achieving amongst other things 100% in his GCSE English assessed work, when he went to college at 16. He is now working in the field of higher education himself.

However, had the LA knocked on our door when he was nine years old and demanded to

³² "House of Commons Education Committee Support for Home" 18 Mar. 2013, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/1013/1013.pdf>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

see evidence of his own written “age appropriate” work, we would have had nothing to show for it, and our delicate balance of not panicking, finding other ways than through literacy to promote his learning, well, we would have been knocked right back, our confidence shattered, and our hopes and dreams destroyed.”

Unschoolers know that when young people are not routinely humiliated by being forced to learn skills they are not ready for, they acquire those skills in their own time and thrive. Schools, on the other hand, by constantly pressing young people to learn, for example, to read before they are ready and by hanging so much on literacy skills, are condemning so many young people to an early sense of failure, with a whole bundle of negative outcomes, such as poor self esteem, poor concentration, depression, self harm, anger, disengagement and delinquency.

Whilst the incidence of severe difficulty with reading in this country is between [5 to 15% of the population](#)³³, up to about [60% of the prison population](#)³⁴ fits this diagnosis. Schools are not getting this right. We need home education and unschooling to be able to help our young people thrive in ways they never could if they were forced to conform to schooling norms, and LAs need to understand the damage they inflict when they insist on various forms of evidence which unschoolers cannot honestly provide.

Unschoolers not only object to having to present evidence of an education that fits schooling norms because it risks damaging their provision, they also object to having to force their child to submit to coercive forces which spring from unexamined [childism](#)³⁵ in our society. We wouldn't, for example, dream of forcing an adult to submit what that adult may see as very private work to the scrutiny of others without their freely given consent. Since unschooling is in large part about maximising the autonomy of a young person through taking their consent and rights to privacy seriously, the intrusive demands of the LA frequently destroy the very nature of unschooling.

And sadly, it isn't just Portsmouth. Other LAs were reported as behaving in an unreasonable fashion towards unschoolers. Re: Leicestershire who:

“..sent a threatening letter asking you to fill out their form or send a report. The things they wanted to know are very school-based, eg: how many hours study, where do you study and what subjects. I found my report was not enough to satisfy them, even though they stated it was very detailed and interesting. They seem to have no understanding of anything other style than school. They are demanding, intimidating and caused our family unnecessary stress. Not a good relationship, even though they have stated that they think they do and insisting that they are right.”

³³ "Simone: dyslexic user - GOV.UK."
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-disabilities-and-impairments-user-profiles/simone-dyslexic-user>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

³⁴ "Dyslexia (Prisons) - Hansard."
[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2012-11-21/debates/1211216800001/Dyslexia\(Prisons\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2012-11-21/debates/1211216800001/Dyslexia(Prisons)). Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

³⁵ "Understanding Childism: Are We Prejudiced Against Children" 13 Jan. 2012,
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/child-in-mind/201201/understanding-childism-are-we-prejudiced-against-children>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

Unschoolers are, however, often very happy to provide evidence of learning when it fits with their agenda and when they have good reason to believe that LAs will take it seriously.

Sadly many home educators feel that relations with their LA have deteriorated since the 2012 Report. From Hertfordshire:

My LA (Hertfordshire) which has in the past had a reputation for understanding approaches such as unschooling, created a new form for making inquiries of home educators in 2019. Their inquiries went from being open to different approaches, to very much focused on short term aims, teaching, school hours, and formal English and Maths. So even in well regarded LAs, we are seeing a deterioration in support for home educators.

Unschoolers are often asked to describe what they will be learning for the coming term/year in their reports.. This makes absolutely no sense as learning often happens as a result of proximal context, in a completely unpredictable fashion. Local authorities might as well ask what informal conversation you plan on having with your family in six months time.

Aside from the issue of evidence of written work, unschoolers often feel completely invaded by the monitoring activities of LA officials. The reason for this is again to do with the learning theory of unschooling. Unschoolers make no distinction between learning and life. Their intimate family lives are the very stuff and substance of the way young people learn, so for example, a sibling spat will provide the basis for all manner of learning opportunities, from learning about how one's own mind works, and how to manage one's thinking in a more constructive way, to how to be able to see things from the point of view of another, to learning about empathy, non-coercion, the principles of self defence and issues around violence, about conflict resolution, about being creative in seeking win/win solutions, to more broadly about morality, ethics, philosophy, politics, sociology, the history of human conflict, etc, and all this from an intimate family moment of who wants the next turn on the swing. Yet in order to provide evidence of an education to the LA, this is what unschoolers would need to be talking about. This often feels like a huge invasion of privacy. We have to lay out our intimate family lives to an agent of the state and have to accept that these will be on record in the LA files. We thereby must completely sacrifice any hope of a Right to Privacy as inscribed in [Article 8 of the UK Human Rights Act 1998](#).³⁶

The behavior of Local Authority officials is seemingly justified on the basis that the LA have a duty to listen to the voice of the child, and yet ironically, [many young people](#), often following disastrous experiences of state provided services such as school, which have left them for example, depressed, self harming and even suicidal, want nothing other than to be left alone by the state, and to get along with rebuilding their lives in a respectful and nurturing environment of the unschooling family.

Unschooling parents feel the strain too. It can be traumatic to have to deal with members of the same profession who have already significantly damaged their children. A UKUN member says:

³⁶ "Article 8: Respect for your private and family life | Equality and" 15 Nov. 2018, <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights-act/article-8-respect-your-private-and-family-life>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

“The people already failing my children cannot be the ones advising us how to do a better job. Fuming.”

Working with Local Authorities

It is often a never ending task for community-minded home educators to liaise with badly behaving local authorities in order to request that they behave according to the law, eg: to remove ultra vires information about home education from their websites and to treat home educators well.

From Dorset:

“The system has not been working for a long time. Sometimes they try to be unpleasant but they rarely follow through. More positively, they are currently updating their website with a new EHE team in place. Along with other home educators, we have monthly Zoom meetings after they made a call for our ideas on how to improve it. So far it’s been productive! Among many other things, we have asked that only having educated themselves in all possible ways of learning should they even begin to think they can have a role in contacting home educators. And only then if they arm themselves with heaps of kindness, listening skills, sensitivity and consistency. But always the kindness. Having established trust, genuine trust, they can then offer help/ideas, if asked for. Clipboards, check lists, etc to be removed. Oddly, one of them said a month later, she had changed her approach with instant positive outcomes.”

We ask that the Committee to recommend that LA officials who work with home educators be fully cognisant of the theories underpinning unschooling, that they have examined the damaging effects of childism in society and in their thinking and that they develop a method of liaison with home educators that is compatible with unschooling, eg: in their verbal and written communications, in the information on their websites and their official title and department in which they work. Home educators do not like to be bunched in with Children Missing Education departments, for example.

Further from Dorset:

“Here is another request we have put to our LA during our zoom meetings: That their education website should put EHE and school education at the top of their site, unweighted: presented on a level playing field, as an equal possible way to educate your children. It has traditionally been at the bottom, mixed in with social issues or ‘children missing from school.’ From that first touch introduction, we would want the LA to share good local and national information, ie: direct links to the [HE guidance](#), local Covid 19 instructions (eg: about meeting in groups) and contact information for local and national HE groups, blogs, Facebook groups etc, in a truly friendly manner.”

Unschoolers would rather that we did not have to spend a lot of time doing what should not have to be their job, ie: to educate LA officials. It also often feels like a Sisyphean task because they recognise that they may well have to do it all over again when the current LA

home education official retires, and is replaced by new personnel. Further from Dorset:

"We made the point to the Dorset team that there needs to be consistency with proper handovers if they have to happen. They are also including, on our request, a short biography and qualifications file for each person in the team, visible to all who visit the website, so you can know who you are dealing with and what they represent. If this had been available from the previous team it would have been, typically, 'retired school teacher/truancy officer....' grrrrrrr!!!"

If ex-teachers and truancy officers really are to be employed to inspect unschoolers, we recommend a reading list for them on combating childism and the benefits of replacing this with life-enhancing respectful parenting and learning through life, which should for example include:

["Parenting for Social Change"](#)³⁷ by Theresa Graham Brett. This concise book contains a large number of references to research which demonstrate the benefits to young people of respectful parenting:

For example:

[Children's ego-resilient and prosocial behaviours are related to parents' tolerant, non-punitive responses to emotional distress.](#)³⁸

[The benefits of a supportive approach to a child's autonomy](#)³⁹

And

[Free to Learn: Why unleashing the play instinct will make our children happier, more self-reliant and better students for life.](#) by Peter Gray (2013) ⁴⁰

Gray provides carefully researched insights into the connections between freedom, learning and play, and through describing the history of education, challenges the notions that schooling is the norm, and that *"children are incompetent, untrustworthy and in need of coercive, corrective forces of schooling to shape them into the kinds of human beings that the elites of society think they should become"*.

He also provides extensive research showing both the damaging nature of schooling, eg: how teaching can interfere with exploration:

³⁷ "Parenting for Social Change: Transform Childhood, Transform"
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Parenting-Social-Change-Transform-Childhood/dp/0982951507>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

³⁸ "(PDF) The Socialization of Emotional Expression: Relations" 15 Oct. 2020,
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228387133_The_Socialization_of_Emotional_Expression_Relations_with_Prosocial_Behaviour_and_Compotence_in_Five_Samples. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

³⁹ "Mindful parenting decreases aggression and ... - PubMed."
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17932234/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁴⁰ "Free to Learn: Amazon.co.uk: Gray, Peter: Books."
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Free-Learn-Unleashing-Instinct-Self-Reliant/dp/0465025994>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

[Instruction limits spontaneous exploration and discovery](#)⁴¹

Another book that explains unschooling:

[Unschool Yourself First: A Parent's Gateway to Self-Directed Learning](#) by Mark Beaumont⁴² (2017) which closely mirrors the ethos of the group.

Parity with School Education

As the commentator from Dorset remarks, we would request that there be a shift in attitude on the part of LAs and the DfE so to achieve genuine parity between home education and school.

We are not only fed up with being dealt with by Children Missing Education and School Inclusion departments, we are also aggrieved that home educators [are held to a higher standard of provision than the schooling system](#)⁴³. The [2009 Pisa results](#)⁴⁴ for example found that 18% of school leavers were functionally illiterate, ie: they lacked the ability to read and write to a sufficiently high standard as to be able to cope with everyday life. In this instance of failure of provision, the schooled child continues on in the schooling system, whilst home educators are penalised in the form of a [School Attendance Order](#)⁴⁵ which means that the young person must attend school.

Rather than whisking the home educated child back into school where they may already have failed, we suggest that there should be a process of mentorship for HE families who are struggling. This could be provided by the LA, along with the help of the home education community.

It is not surprising that families who are new to home education need some time to find out how best to manage it. Schooling is the norm and unschooling for example, is a new way of thinking for many. However, unschooling groups such as the [UK Unschooling Network](#)⁴⁶ do a huge amount to offer information about how to work with young people to maximise their learning opportunities and to avoid problems of educational neglect. These sorts of resources should be signposted by LAs to help families who are new to home education.

⁴¹ "The double-edged sword of pedagogy: Instruction limits"

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0010027710002258>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁴² "Unschool Yourself First: A Parent's Gateway to Self-Directed"

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Unschool-Yourself-First-Self-Directed-Learning-ebook/dp/B077PMK4GD>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁴³ "If it works don't fix it. Leave Home Education alone as it works"

<https://smlcollege.org.uk/if-it-works-dont-fix-it-leave-home-education-alone-as-it-works-sort-out-the-problems-in-schools/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁴⁴ "Are 20% of school leavers illiterate? | Local Schools Network."

<https://www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk/faq/are-20-school-leavers-illiterate>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁴⁵ "Cross Heading: School attendance orders - Legislation.gov.uk."

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/part/VI/chapter/II/crossheading/school-attendance-order.s>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁴⁶ "UK Unschooling Network - Facebook."

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/254085341320035/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

Further, [recent government advice](#)⁴⁷ following lockdown once again made home education look like the very poor cousin of school education. According to this document, parents who are thinking of deregistering are strongly recommended to meet with their LA to consider whether EHE is appropriate for the family before they decide to withdraw from the school roll. Social workers might even be involved in this meeting. Home educators again feel aggrieved at this double standard. Parents are not quizzed in this way when they sign their children up for school, and yet with such a high rate of functional illiteracy at the end of a schooling education, perhaps they should be.

Examinations

From the [2012 Report on Support for Home Education](#): ⁴⁸(page 24)

"It does not seem reasonable to us that home educators in some areas have such a struggle accessing examinations centres for their children. We recommend that the Government place a duty on every local authority to ensure access to local centres for home-educated young people to sit accredited public examinations."

Many home educators, unschoolers included, failed to access any exam centres this year as a result of covid 19 lockdown. We ask that the Select Committee recommend that home educators are provided with a back-up plan should they be unable to access an exam centre in the future. We suggest that there be a centrally funded, Ofqual approved service for home educators which is able to provide assessments upon which a grade for a public exam may be secured.

We also ask that consideration be given to widening the sorts of qualifications available to home educators. It would, for example, be helpful for unschoolers whose work is often similar to project-based work, if the [Extended Project Qualification](#)⁴⁹ could be extended to home educators. The assessment process for the EPQ could be managed remotely through the filming of work, remotely timed open book essays and a viva system [as has been managed in university exams](#)⁵⁰. The EPQ would also be an excellent qualification for the world today where knowledge is growing rapidly, given that it may allow a learner to pursue new knowledge outside of the strictures of GCSE and A level syllabuses. As with GCSE and A levels, all qualifications would be entirely voluntary but better options for examinations would increase voluntary engagement with the authorities.

⁴⁷ "All you need to know about home-schooling and elective"
<https://dfemedia.blog.gov.uk/2020/10/20/all-you-need-to-know-about-home-schooling-and-elective-home-education-ehe/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁴⁸ "Support for Home Education - Parliament (publications)." 18 Dec. 2012,
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/559/559.pdf>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁴⁹ "Level 3 Extended Project Qualification (7993) - AQA."
<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/projects/project-qualifications/EPQ-7993>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁵⁰ "How Do Tests, Exams and Assignments Work for Online" 20 May. 2020,
<https://www.distancelearningportal.com/articles/243/how-do-tests-exams-and-assignments-work-for-online-degrees.html>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

Extension of Alternative Provision eg: for those who have been off-rolled.

For those children who have been off-rolled, we believe that there should be a significant increase in Alternative Provision which may suit these families better than home education. There should be the provision of democratic schools along the lines of the [Sudbury Valley model](#)⁵¹ as described by Peter Gray in [Free to Learn](#)⁵² where young people who may not suit a coercive school system but whose parents are not able to home educate can thrive through curiosity-led learning. We gather that the [Sudbury Valley model](#)⁵³ could also be accessed by home educators too. All of these options would increase engagement. Outcomes from Sudbury Valley schools have been [shown](#)⁵⁴ to be very good.

"Gray [tells me](#)⁵⁵ his research indicated that about 75% of Sudbury graduates went on to college, and that those who didn't reported fulfilled lives."

Easy access to the National Curriculum for home educators as well as those in alternative provision would also help. [Oak Academy](#)⁵⁶ is wonderful but a data-driven e-syllabus which could provide more direct feedback would also be helpful. This should be very economical to manage. Platforms such as this already exist, eg: [Century Tech](#).⁵⁷

Whether a statutory register of home educated children is required

The proposals above, ie: exam and tutoring centres, e-platforms, EPQs etc, would increase voluntary engagement with LAs. A registration scheme, on the other hand, would result in a large amount of money and resources being wasted on the monitoring of recalcitrant but otherwise law-abiding home educators, whilst abusive families and other providers would go further underground.

Rather than establishing a registration and monitoring scheme that would further inhibit familial duties to provide a suitable education, it would be far more constructive to use that money to help families who are clearly in need and are known to services but [who are currently being neglected due to limited resources](#).⁵⁸

On the matter of limited resources, a home educator from another group reports:

⁵¹ "Sudbury Valley School: Home." <https://sudburyvalley.org/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁵² "Free to Learn: Amazon.co.uk: Gray, Peter: Books." <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Free-Learn-Unleashing-Instinct-Self-Reliant/dp/0465025994>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁵³ "A Self-Directed, Democratic Setting for Students Aged 5-18." <https://eastkentsudburyschool.org.uk/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁵⁴ "Democratic Schooling - Psychology Today." https://www.psychologytoday.com/sites/default/files/attachments/1195/democratic-schooling-aje_0.pdf. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁵⁵ "No Teachers, No Class, No Homework; Would You Send Your" 12 Dec. 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/12/no-teachers-no-class-no-homework-would-you-send-your-kids-here/265354/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁵⁶ "Oak National Academy." <https://www.thenational.academy/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁵⁷ "Century Tech." <https://www.century.tech/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁵⁸ "'I have never experienced such intense stress': Social workers" 26 Sep. 2019, <https://thebristolcable.org/2019/09/i-have-never-experienced-such-intense-stress-social-workers-on-the-strain-of-cuts/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

"It makes me very angry that I've spent a lot of time trying to keep the LA happy, but when we really did want help with my child's mental health (she was suffering from the effects of school bullying and a recent death in the family), there was no help at all. According to them, she wasn't suicidal enough. If they have all that time and money to get in my hair all the time, why can't they actually help instead?"

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';

We believe that the combination of the

[Children Missing Education legislation at s436a Education Act 1996.](#)⁵⁹
[s47 Children Act 1989.](#)⁶⁰
[s7, 8, 14 and 19 of Education Act 1996.](#)⁶¹

along with pupil registration regulations, provide LAs with a sufficient statutory framework to carry out their duties to safeguard young people. Any further legislation risks removing parental autonomy to enact a parent's duty to provide a suitable education for their children since if LAs were to become more prescriptive as to the form and content of an education, parents may well not be able to fulfil their duty at [s7 Education Act 1996.](#) It would represent a strange situation in law if the legislation were simultaneously to require people to act a certain way and yet remove the possibility of them being able to do so - analogous to requiring people to drive under the speed limit and yet sending a government official around to remove the brakes from their cars.

Summary

1. We ask that the Committee recommend that home education and unschooling are fully recognised as equally valid educational choices as schooling in LA and DfE documents, websites, by local authority personnel and in the LA departmental names.
2. We ask that unschooling be recognised as a legitimate choice in the DfE's [Home Education Guidance.](#)⁶²
3. We ask that the LA personnel act within the current regulatory framework and rather than

⁵⁹ "Children missing education - GOV.UK." 26 Nov. 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁶⁰ "Children Act 1989, Section 47 - Legislation.gov.uk." <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/47>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁶¹ "Education Act 1996 - Legislation.gov.uk." <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/id/ukpga/1996/56>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁶² "[Elective home education: guide for parents - Gov.uk.](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791528/EHE_guidance_for_parentsafterconsultationv2.2.pdf)" https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791528/EHE_guidance_for_parentsafterconsultationv2.2.pdf. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

reinterpreting the [Home Education Guidance](#)⁶³ in for example their websites, point people directly to the government guidance.

4. We ask that LA personnel be fully informed on different kinds of home education, including unschooling and also that they are conversant with the damage that childism does and how best to combat it.

5. We ask that LA personnel approach home educators in a positive fashion, regarding our choice to home educate and unschool as a legitimate and indeed admirable approach.

6. We continue to believe that a registration and more extensive monitoring of home educators would be a significant waste of public funds that will involve fruitlessly monitoring the recalcitrant but otherwise law-abiding home educators who would be prepared to register, whilst real abusers would remain undetected. We suggest instead that any spare monies be put into social service and [CYPMHS](#)⁶⁴ which are seriously underfunded and overstretched right now and are failing to cope with known high risk cases, and also that money be used to provide more reliably approachable LA services which would in turn encourage engagement.

7. We would also argue that increased monitoring will inevitably result in LA officials insisting upon certain forms of education, which may well mean that a parent will be unable to provide an education that is genuinely [suited to the age, ability and aptitude of the young person](#).⁶⁵ This will mean that parents can no longer meet their duty at [s7 Education Act 1996](#).⁶⁶ and that the state is acting in loco parentis. The state therefore becomes liable when it fails in its duty to ensure the child is in receipt of a suitable education.

8. Regarding examinations: we ask that home educators be provided with a back-up plan should they be unable to access an exam centre in the future. This could be a centrally funded, [Ofqual](#)⁶⁷ approved, assessment service for home educators which is able to provide assessments upon which a grade for a public exam can be secured.

9. For those young people who have been off-rolled, we believe that a significant increase in Alternative Provision would suit these families better than school. This could take various forms and could include curiosity-led learning, but even easier access to the NC would help. We currently have access to [Oak Academy](#)⁶⁸, which is great, but it would help to have more feedback in the form of a data-driven e-syllabus which could be made available to these

⁶³ "Elective home education: guide for parents - Gov.uk." https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791528/EHE_guidance_for_parentsafterconsultationv2.2.pdf. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁶⁴ "Children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS)." <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-services-cypmhs/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁶⁵ "Education Act 1996 (Section 7) - Legislation.gov.uk." <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/7>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁶⁶ "Education Act 1996 (Section 7) - Legislation.gov.uk." <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/7>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁶⁷ "Ofqual - GOV.UK." <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁶⁸ "Oak National Academy." <https://www.thenationalacademy/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

families in order to facilitate access to information such as [Century Tech⁶⁹](#). Where working families need further support for Alternative Provision, bubbles of DBS'd youth workers could manage small groups of young people who could access resources such as the above.

10. We ask that the range of qualifications available to home educators be broadened eg: for the [Extended Project Qualification⁷⁰](#) be made available to home educators. As with GCSE and A levels, all qualifications would be entirely voluntary.

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⁶⁹ "Century Tech." <https://www.century.tech/>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.

⁷⁰ "Level 3 Extended Project Qualification" <https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/projects/project-qualifications/EPQ-7993>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2020.