

Written evidence submitted by [member of the public]

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

[member of the public]
[address]

31st October 2020

The Education Committee
UK Parliament
1 Parliament St
Westminster
London
SW1A 2JR

Dear Sirs / Madams,

There is much at stake in this consultation regarding the role of home education in the United Kingdom today, it our intention to briefly articulate what we perceive those stakes to be - as parents who intend to home educate; and to encourage this committee and the British legislature to err on the side on liberty, and to uphold the tradition of diversity and privacy which have long been defining attributes of our national character.

The Statutory Register

The most pressing and concerning point about which the committee has called for evidence, is the creation of a statutory register of all the home educated children in this country. Such a register would tear down the crucial distinction between the private and public spheres, a distinction which, as we hope to make clear, is essential to the flourishing of civic society.

One must ask what the purpose of such a register would be, if not the first rung on a ladder whose summit is the state surveillance of home educated children. Why else would the state need such a list? If this is the intention, why does the state, after centuries of continuity in education in private and family life, suddenly feel the need to peep behind every curtain in the land? This surely reflects the growing illiberal feeling in politics, particularly among those in the higher echelons of society, that ordinary people are too thick and bigoted to be trusted with the care and nurture of their own children.

Put simply, it is not a matter for the state to police the values of its citizens. In a functioning society, the state inscribes the values of its people onto our shared institutions; the statutory register seeks to reverse this, instead inscribing the values of the state and our elite institutions onto the people. It is the difference between a culture which is generated organically and reflects the people it serves in all their diversity of belief and practice, and a culture which is generated by coercion, where unpopular opinions will be met with official sanction.

Some have argued in response that allowing people to educate their children in the privacy of their own homes is a hotbed for extremism. But what evidence is there to support this notion? It is worth the committee's investigation into what percentage of people who commit crimes motivated by extremism are home educated; normally such persons are educated in independent schools; which are already subject to state register and inspection.

Others have argued that there is no assurance of the quality of education provided by parents. This is obviously a reasonable concern with which we sympathise, but if a parent is willing to shoulder the burden of educating their children themselves, surely this speaks to a willingness to strive towards the best possible education for their children, whose needs and aptitudes are known best to them. Home education really ought to be every pedagogist's dream: small class sizes where every child is known intimately by teachers who are genuinely concerned for their welfare and future.

The Role of Inspection in Home Education

Having a state regulatory body enter citizen's private homes to inspect the nature and quality of education provided there, is obviously the next logical step from the statutory register. But this proposal, much like the statutory register, seriously misunderstands the nature of the family and its relationship to the state. Children are first and foremost the responsibility of their parents; to make citizens accountable to the state for their beliefs or educational philosophy, rather than the state accountable to its citizens, implies that children belong to the state. Children are produced, housed, fed, and loved primarily by their parents; it is therefore *their* prerogative as to how *their* children are educated.

If the Department for Education is concerned about the quality of education provided in home schools, then this can always be determined by comparisons in academic or vocational attainment between home educated and school educated children, as revealed in exam results, for example. This data could be easily collated and would immediately reveal the quality differential between state and home education. This anonymous and broad sweeping method of determining quality would be much less intrusive, it would respect the privacy of families, and wouldn't massively increase the burden on organisations like Ofsted.

Benefits of Home Education

Home education is in almost every sense advantageous over conventional schooling; we have already elucidated some of home education's myriad benefits, those being: the attention a parent can pay to each individual child, and the tailoring of education in response. In addition to these, the chances of any child slipping through the cracks, or falling behind - academically or emotionally - without anyone noticing (or caring) in a home school are vanishing.

Next, we must consider the social aspect of schools. Home education has historically been criticised principally because home educated children often grow up weird and poorly socialised, we understand what this argument is getting at. However, in recent years the state education system has started to outpace home education in terms of social dysfunction. With the ubiquity of smartphones and social media, the social landscape of the playground has toxified, through the emergence of cyberbullying, anxiety, and a generation of young people losing the ability to communicate and bond outside of a virtual context. These are things whose origins I [name] witnessed during my time in state education not too long ago. This has, unsurprisingly, led to the collapse of the mental health of a generation of children, with rates of depression and suicide in teens and young people spiralling out of control, according to ONS statistics; and no amount of inspection and bureaucracy seems capable of reversing this trend. Thankfully, these phenomena are mitigated in a home education environment, where parents can encourage positive forms of social interaction with other children.

Finally, for families living in areas where there is limited access to quality formal education, home education provides parents with the opportunity to give a quality education to their children outside of the usual school setting.

In Their Own Words

The following is the testimony of [signatory to this letter], who was homeschooled all the way through to university:

"Those of us who were homeschooled can say from experience that the flexibility of homeschool learning, the ability to have one on one learning sessions and to adapt both the curriculum and the timetable to the needs of the child are hugely beneficial to both the emotional and academic growth of the individual.

"As someone who struggled with ADHD and with maintaining focus as a child I found the personalised timetable and the mixture of classroom and activity based learning enabled me to learn at my own pace and in a manner that kept me focused on the lesson. Undoubtedly I would have struggled in a state school where such a personalised schedule is impossible."

Conclusion

It has been our task to persuade the committee that the threat posed to society by home-schooling is entirely overstated, and certainly not worth the trampling of our civil liberties through the use of ineffectual and creepy prying. We hope the committee will also understand the complex factors that apprise us in our decision to home educate and appreciate it as a serious and viable alternative to state education.

In light of these things it is our hope that the committee will conclude that home educators ought to be left to peaceably continue to no harm and much avail.

Yours faithfully,

[Signatory 1]

[Signatory 2]

[Signatory 3]

November 2020