

Written evidence submitted by Kelly

Response to the Education Committee's Inquiry into Home Education - November 2020

The inquiry will seek to understand the extent to which current arrangements provide sufficient support for home educated children to access efficient, full-time and suitable education, and establish what further measures may be necessary in order to facilitate this.

It will also explore the impact of COVID-19 on home education, and any particular needs arising from the pandemic that need to be addressed.

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Education Committee, said:

"A parent will always know what is best for their child but we want to make sure that **the right support is in place for home learning** to ensure every pupil in the country, whatever their background and wherever they are taught, can receive the education they deserve.

This inquiry provides an opportunity to examine whether local authorities and inspections can play a more active role to ensure every child is safe and not missing out on the chance to climb the educational ladder of opportunity. We have to make sure that disadvantaged children are not disadvantaged further still by the system."

I am a home educating parent and I submit evidence as such.

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

Home education is not a safeguarding issue. The most recent Elective Home Education Guidelines for Local Authorities (EHEGLA) published in April 2019, states in para 7.3

"There is no proven correlation between home education and safeguarding risk... Some parents who educate at home... are safeguarding the child from risk in the school system (e.g. through serious bullying)."

This is a sad but accurate representation of one of the main reasons that parents choose home education (school unable or unwilling to manage bullying effectively).

To assure the quality of home education is the responsibility of the parent, not a duty upon the LA. Parents are responsible for the education of their children, according to s7 of the Education Act 1996. I am in favour of this remaining a parent's responsibility.

2. whether a statutory register of home-educated children is required;

A statutory register is not required. It would be an inappropriate use of resources.

It would be more constructive to use available funds and resources to help families who are in need of them and who are known to LA services, but who are currently being neglected due to limited resources. A home educator from a UK Facebook support group reports:

“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?”

A register doesn't keep children safe. A registration scheme would not encompass abusive families, who would go further 'underground'.

No evidence suggests that HE poses a greater risk than school education.

Who would benefit from such a register? Who would have access? How would it be utilised? How does PII get added and more importantly, removed from a register?

DfE recent track record of noncompliance and lack of accountability to the GDPR
<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfе-broke-pupil-data-protection-laws-damning-ico-audit-reveals>

3. the benefits children gain from home education, and the potential disadvantages they may face;

Benefits are many and include but are not limited to:

- Delayed school starting age and longer duration for children to play.
 “Play is the highest form of research.” - Albert Einstein.
- Longer, happier, less stressful childhoods without the normalised school punishments and public shaming for not meeting arbitrary standardised academic expectations.
- Especially for children who have special educational needs (SEN), disabilities or learning difficulties, and also for those whose children are neurotypical and able bodied, committed and enthusiastic elective home educating parents can often meet the child's learning needs much better than school can.
- Personalised and individualised education vs one-size-fits-all at school

- Freedom to pursue a broad and varied and flexible, life skills and interests driven programme of learning, where learning styles can be taken into account and time spent learning topics can be as long or brief as is needed.
- Children having the freedom to express their individuality physically, personally, and aesthetically is talked about time and time again in national home education support groups as a huge positive for relieved parents who see their children flourish once they've left the conventional constraints of school uniform and personal appearance restrictions and sanctions.
- Dr. Alan Thomas, a developmental psychologist and a visiting Fellow at the Institute of Education, University of London, and Harriet Pattison, a research associate, conclude that informal learning at home is an "astonishingly efficient way to learn", as good if not better than school for many children. "The ease, naturalness and immense intellectual potential of informal learning up to the age of middle secondary school means they can learn certainly as much if not more", they say.
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/aug/19/schools.education>
- Being part of society, rather than apart from society.
- The strongest predictor of a satisfying adult life is emotional health and well-being in childhood. Exam grades have little relevance (Clark et al, 2018).

Conversely, on the topic of child mental wellness: I don't believe that school is the best environment for learning for a lot of children.

- Constant formal and informal pupil progress comparisons and competition, public shaming behaviour management, and tired, overworked, underpaid, undersupported, over-monitored teachers, large class sizes (largest in Europe <https://jakubmarian.com/average-class-size-by-country-in-europe> and in the top 8 for teacher:pupil ratio <https://jakubmarian.com/pupil-teacher-ratio-in-primary-education-by-country-in-europe>), rampant and unchallenged peer and institutional racism <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/22/racism-uk-schools-teenager>, bullying, sexual bullying https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/91/9105.htm#_id=TextAnchor011
- Girlguiding's Girls' Attitudes Survey 2017 found 64% of girls aged 13-21 had experienced sexual violence or sexual harassment at school or college in the past.
- Research studies on mental ill-health have shown that school is a major contributor to the mental health problems of schoolchildren. (Gray, 2018; Lueck et al, 2015; Plemmons et al, 2018).
- More than one in four British pupils reported being bullied "at least a few times a month", higher than the OECD average.
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/dec/03/british-schoolchildren-among-least-satisfied-with-their-lives-says-oecd-report>

- Children's & teens' suicides related to the school calendar
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/freedom-learn/201805/children-s-teens-suicides-related-the-school-calendar>
- Countless studies have shown that children experience significant mental health issues related to school examinations. This has been known as far back as 2015: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/over-focus-on-exams-causing-mental-health-problems-and-self-harm-among-pupils-study-finds-10368815.html> with 90% of teachers agreeing that SATs preparation is harming students' mental health: <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/nine-10-teachers-believe-sats-preparation-harms-childrens-mental>
- The distinguished educationist Roy Blatchford CBE coined the term 'the forgotten third' to describe the proportion of pupils who fall short of a grade 4 pass in English and maths at the end of Key Stage 4. In 2018, more than 187,000 pupils found themselves in this position. And they are 'forgotten'... because their chances of progression are diminished in further study, future careers, and, ultimately, in life. What is perhaps not widely realised by the general public is that this rate of attrition, this forgotten third, happens year in and year out because it is built into the way our exam system works. This level of collateral damage is an accepted part of the process for determining the distribution of grades." www.ascl.org.uk/Our-view/Campaigns/The-Forgotten-Third

Disadvantages include more difficult access to EHCP, CAMHS, and financial support for SEN.

4. 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;

The quality and accessibility of support (including financial support) that is available for home educators and their children is woefully inconsistent across the country, and what is available is difficult to access.

Easier access to the National Curriculum would help a lot of parents who are new to home education. Oak Academy is a good start but schools/LAs could be sharing good/best practice for lesson plans, educational resources and ideas, video tutorials exploring learning styles etc. This information should be made available to all, not as a perk for agreeing to include one's details on a register.

5. 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 current regulatory framework is already overreaching and does not need to be extended.

The well-being of home educated children is not a safeguarding issue, any more than the well-being of pre-compulsory school aged children is. Safeguarding the academic achievement of home educated children would be much more easily achieved if the DfE put a uniform duty on LAs to provide concessionary access to extracurricular learning centres (eg: swimming pools) during school hours for home educated children, and made it clear what exam funding was available to them, and trained their EHE staff appropriately and consistently across all LAs in order to offer advice in line with official central government guidance.

Unregistered schools are not home education issues, nor is off-rolling. Off-rolling prevention should be an OFSTED-LA joint initiative, and though the parents/child have been forced to home educate, really this situation has nothing to do with home education guidance, but with the monitoring of the behaviour of schools. For those young people who have been off-rolled, an increase in Alternative Provision would suit these families better than school.

6. the role that inspection should play in future regulation of home education;

Until LAs develop a nationally uniform and harmonious approach to home educators that is fully compliant with legislation and guidance, any inspection is effectively reliant on an undertrained local authority worker making judgments about home education provision based on a set of guidance that defies consistent interpretation, which renders the entire exercise futile.

LAs have no duty to monitor home education. Current law does not require home educators to be inspected, monitored or regulated.

LAs should ONLY inspect families where there are legitimate evidenced concerns. Home education is not a safeguarding concern in and of itself.

Inspection of home educating families would be a misdirection of resources.

7. 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;

The 2010-15 Education Committee report on 'Support for Home Education' in 2012 summary (pages 3-4) details the purpose of the inquiry:

"Our inquiry sought to look specifically at the support which is available to home educators, and at the relationships between home educators and local authorities."

"we heard evidence that some authorities are acting outside the law."

"we also saw evidence of inconsistency across the country, leading to a 'postcode lottery' for home educators (regarding LA practice, structures and accessibility for home educators)."

"recommend that the DfE carries out an audit of LAs' performance regarding home education. Publishing the results, showing which local authorities are performing well"

"we call on central Government to explain better how available funding might be obtained and utilised, and on LAs to utilise and claim such funding."

"We recommend that the Government places a duty on every LA to ensure access to local centres for home-educated young people to sit accredited public exams. We further recommend...that the costs of sitting public examinations be met by the State."

Many LAs still act outside the law, demand to visit homes, meet the children and see examples of work - all of which are unnecessary according to the DfE's EHEGLA 2019 and the parallel Guidance for Parents (also 2019).

LAs still do not adequately train their EHE Officers (EHEOs). Many are still ex teachers (so expect to see school-at-home), have little to no knowledge of home education pedagogy. There persists the overlap, ie: the very same people, in the role of both EHEO and Education Welfare Officer, as is the case in my city. Paragraph 28 of the Support for Home Education 2012 report states

"The (EHE) team within which local authority home education officers sit can give out an important message about that authority's view of home education. For example, it is inappropriate for such officers to be located with those working on attendance, children in care or safeguarding"

- this hasn't changed at all.

LAs could improve their relationships with home educators by ensuring officers dealing with EHE are placed in a dedicated or neutral team: locating EHE officers with those working on e.g. attendance, children in care or safeguarding puts the relationship on a poor footing from the off.

Paragraph 43 on access to exam centres:

"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."

- home educators are still having to travel across the country in order to access and sit various examinations.

Paragraph 52 on local support:

"Whilst we agree with the Minister's view that local authorities, and not central Government, must be responsible for service provision in their area, we do not consider it acceptable that home-educated young people receive such different levels and quality of support dependent purely upon their postcode. Local authorities should be expected to produce a 'local offer of support' for home educators, stating what services are available, how these differ from those for parents of schooled children, and enabling home educators to compare with practice elsewhere. Critically, local offers must be developed in consultation with home educators and their families. We recommend that the Department for Education support pilots for such a scheme, and play a role in monitoring the quality of local offers and the adherence applied to them by local authorities. "

- this is not happening at all.

In summary, little to no improvements have been made.

I urge you to compel LAs to undertake a swift review of their own material, including websites, and to ensure that their policies reflect the guidance available. In the evidence given in the Education Committee's 'Support for Home Education 2012' there was evidence of inconsistency across the country, leading to a 'postcode lottery' for home educators in terms of what we could expect if we had contact with our EHE team. At that time (2012-13) only 30/152 (20%) of LAs in England had policies or online information which were fully compliant with legislation and guidance. This is absolutely unacceptable.

The development of a more formalised professional association of, and/or annual conference for home education officers was suggested as a vehicle for sharing best practice nationally - there is no evidence to suggest that this has occurred.

8. 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.'

The main impact specific to home education has been examination grades during 2020. Home educators should 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 approved, assessment service for home educators which is able to provide assessments upon which a grade for a public exam can be secured.

Groups and social meet ups are difficult due to a variety of COVID restrictions. Smaller meetups that are run for free in each others' homes have had to stop. Due to the Rule of 6, only smaller families can meet socially with one another. Thankfully due to Zoom/FaceTime etc, my kids can still access various online groups and learning sessions, they can still video call each other, spend time with friends etc.

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