

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.]

### **Call for evidence:** **Home Education**

I am a home educating mum to 4 children. I would like to submit my experience and views in relation to this call for evidence. I feel it is vital that you get a broad range of evidence from within our home educating community.

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

Local authorities already have powers to intervene where they have reason to believe that children are not receiving an adequate education, or are at risk of abuse. The current approach strikes an appropriate balance between family privacy and child protection – local authorities have substantial powers to intervene when they have good reason to believe there is a problem. Giving already overstretched local authorities even more responsibility for safeguarding home-educated children would make authorities increasingly risk-averse. To protect themselves from criticism, they would be under pressure to interfere in the lives of law-abiding families like us, distracting them from the children most at risk.

#### ***Whether a statutory register of home educated children is required;***

A mandatory register would give the state unwarranted power over parents. Why should parents need to register with the state to teach their own children when it is our legal responsibility to educate our children in the first place? There is no evidence that a mandatory register is necessary or would be effective. Parents who are of concern are unlikely to register anyway. A mandatory register would be a worrying sign of increasing state interference in family life. Mandatory registration may be the first step towards even more intrusive regulation and monitoring. Administering a mandatory register would also be a huge waste of local authorities already very limited resources.

#### ***The benefits children gain from home education, and the potential disadvantages they may face;***

Home educators such as myself can tailor education to our children's individual needs and interests, helping to create an enjoyable and stimulating environment. We have the flexibility to vary the pace of learning for each child. Here is our personal example of the benefits home education can bring to a family:

[personal information].

Home education gives us breathing space to be family, to connect and curl up on the sofa on rainy mornings and read good quality books, we love that we can be learning about Egypt and then go to the British Museum to see their displays, or studying art and go to the national gallery to view the paintings there. We love that the children are growing to be strong, happy, confident and extremely capable children, happy to be themselves and be children for longer! They make dens, love camping adventures, have a knowledge base that astounds us! They are keen, self-directed learners, retaining information because they have been interested to discover knowledge in their own unique way. I can see they will be more than well equipped to thrive at university or in a chosen job when they are adults.

The only disadvantages I would say are that we don't have easy access to some equipment/opportunities that would be available within a school environment. We manage to overcome this by attending groups and external sports classes, but this comes at a financial cost for us as a family. But we are more than happy to live on a tight budget because we see the advantages by far out-way the disadvantages!

***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;***

Support should be entirely voluntary, available on request from parents. There must be no implication that not requesting support, or declining to follow advice offered, is a cause for concern. Some parents feel they have had to remove their children from state schools because, for example, they have special educational needs which are not being properly addressed. Support for these parents and children would come from making existing provision better.

Home educators often report being treated with unwarranted suspicion by local authorities, rather than being supported. One local authority was reprimanded by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for visiting a family based on unsubstantiated claims and not even explaining the reasons. I feel that this area could be addressed and further training for local authorities should take place in order to educate them on the legal rights and responsibilities of home educating parents.

The provision of financial assistance for exam fees or help with exam centres are areas in which home educators could be supported. By accepting our legal responsibility to educate our children and choosing not to do that through state school system, we have in turn saved the local authority a lot of money. Our oldest would have needed specialist 1-1 support throughout school. We accept the financial cost to our decision to home educate our children, because we strongly believe it is the best option for our family. It would though, be very much appreciated to know we would have help and support for our children to be able to sit any exams they choose to take when the time comes.

***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';***

Elective home education is often unhelpfully conflated with other issues. Considering them together leads to confused and ineffective policy. Elective home education is being unfairly linked with unregistered or illegal schools, with exclusion, and with off-rolling. These are completely separate matters, and dealing with them properly means focusing on them and not elective home education.

I am deeply concerned that home education gets wrongly associated with child abuse. Child abuse is a totally separate issue which authorities already have wide powers to deal with. In fact many parents home educate to protect their children from the abuse of bullying at school. Especially for those children with SEN, such as our oldest child.

Home educated children are much less likely to need state intervention to protect them than children educated in school. Research in 2015 found home educated children in England were two to three times less likely to be subject to a child protection plan than children in school, despite being twice as likely to be referred to social services. Home education protects children from the alarming levels of sexual harassment and abuse that has been widely documented in the school environment. There is no evidence of a problem with the current regulatory framework.

***The role that inspection should play in future regulation of home education.***

There is no evidence that inspection is necessary, and there is no mandate for it. Councils already have sufficient powers to address inadequate home education. Inspection is inappropriate for home education, as one home education can be very different to another. The possibility to have different approaches to suit the child is a huge strength of home education, but would make inspection totally impractical. There is no evidence that lack of inspection puts children at risk. Inspection would be an intrusion into the home and a worrying sign of increased state interference in family life.

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