

Written evidence submitted by {a 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.]

I am writing this as the parent of a home educated child, who vehemently disagrees with mandatory registration and monitoring and has serious concerns about the insistence that more “support” should be given to home educators.

As background my son went to primary school, for the first couple of years they accepted his refusal to write words and focussed on numbers, leading him to love it. The more rigid lessons became, the more he struggled. By [school year] he was sick of being told his writing wasn't good enough. I asked teachers, doctors, health visitors for advice about an array of issues, arranged counselling for him, the counsellor cancelled so many times he thought she hated him. He was beginning to get violent with me. Still everyone said he was fine.

Finally in [school year] at school A teacher told me he was Autistic, she had better results from him than anyone else and when I began to take on board her suggestions life changed overnight. However she told me I stood no chance at getting an ECHP for him or any other help, the doctor wouldn't see him, CAHMS wouldn't see him and eventually he had to move up to “big school”.

So after a year of no friends, no support, being told he would “fail all his GCSE's because he isn't writing enough”, that his note taking skills are poor and will cost him his grades etc and, on top of that, realising he's not properly comprehending what he's being told any way, I took him out.

Now I was fully aware and very prepared for the fact that we were responsible for everything from the get go. This was not a problem, at all. However, we were very fortunate, [ages and dates] we went to a local home ed youth group that's run alongside council youth workers, as there was career advice on offer.

So, when we got there it turned out that there was a group there working with [ages] in the “NEET” category who had been told to target home educated children as they are “unseen” and need to be safeguarded, and monitored. Firstly, I pointed out that my son actually didn't fall into any of those categories, (not in education, employment or training) as he was in full time education. I then explained we really just wanted career advice, we had already talked about work experience and had plans for GCSE's. The youth worker stopped me and said “you don't need to do any of that, we will take over it all”.

Now, I live in fear of being stereotyped a clingy home ed mum that won't let her teen out of her sight or let him speak for himself, and after the comments about safeguarding I thought it best I prove my son is allowed to speak for himself, so i left them alone for ten minutes (although I will add I had to withdraw gently as my lad wasn't actually all that comfortable with the situation, certainly had he been give no choice he would have clammed up completely).

When I returned the youth worker told me how he would deal with everything from there on, work experience, applications, college taster days to work out whether my lad could cope with a course.... 5 months later, at the end of february he proudly announced the paper work was finished to get my

lads funding and they could start sorting organising things, march they locked down. That was that. 1 Message to see if he was ok in the summer. Nothing else.

Similarly GCSE's, we are lucky our adult education centre offers English and Maths. The aim is to do Functional skills level 2 in year 10 and GCSE year 11. This is going great for Maths. However English tuition ended in february/march time and most of the class failed to get more than functional skills level 1. This led to this year's GCSE class being cancelled and the rest of them (mine included) put down to continue with functional skills for a second year instead. However the FS tutor is still isolating and we were finally told [date] that she isn't coming back and the course isn't being run.

Now I know everyone is suffering covid issues, we are not alone there, but there was no zoom tutoring provided during lockdown or anything like that, one project was set and never even read. Equally this academic year, there was no rush to engage a tutor in case she didn't return, nor were we warned so we could make alternative plans in september. In fact last week when I pointed out the harm this could cause when it comes to looking at colleges etc (firstly he's not on the GCSE course which we thought he was on until last week and then if the one he is on isn't running) the response I got was "there is never a guarantee with our courses, they all run subject to availability, it's all about numbers".

So in both cases, I would have been better off without the "support" actually. Left to my own devices, he may not have had work experience but would have probably had some lined up at least and would have had the experience of making those applications. Equally with english, any course we used would have been distance learning anyway so would not have been affected by covid, but it may take us two years now to get through such a course at home as I would likely have to do it start to finish with him.

Oh and of course as a private candidate it's hard to find exam centres and then no one knows if exams will actually run.

If support is going to be offered, out of genuine best interest for the children and families concerned, then those in authority need to be aware that it is only helpful if the support is consistent and if there is a duty of care, a responsibility, to fulfil this need placed on those supporting. If inadequate support is being offered as a backdoor way of getting into homes to look for concerns, then I would worry that more harm is being done than good.

With regard to monitoring and registration, what purpose does it serve? What home educated child that NO service was aware of could have legitimately been protected by what is being suggested? How does that compare to how many could be harmed? Children that have suffered abuse in school and are afraid of being made to go back. Those with SEN or Autism who don't cope with visitors to the house, those who can't communicate verbally. Children and parents with anxiety, depression, OCD.

Sadly registration, which should be completely benign, has become something less than desirable because of the actions of many local authorities. Most of what I could say would be hearsay at best, although I must admit I was aghast when I randomly received a letter letting me know about all the different agencies our EHE department will share our data with (my sons until he is 25). Apparently I

don't get to opt out of this, or have much protection under the GDPR, and they seem happy to state they will share info about both of us with other council or government departments, DWP, NHS etc. Ours has always been one of the really good LA's, however since covid hit they have begun really pushing it the boundaries with new home educators and the lines between have begun to "give the impression" we have to comply with visits/calls/reports to a much greater degree than we do.

While it is generally accepted that, where it is requested, a parent should provide a yearly report to the LA it should also be noted that home educating parents don't work 8.30 - 3.15 and then ask for over time or an afternoon off for report writing. Outside of educating 24/7, home educating parents are also being parents, partners, working, keeping house. Where demands for meetings, specific types of education or evidence begin to get stressful this becomes yet another on a parents time and energy. The law allows, in fact requires parents to tailor education to their child's needs, what a sad thought it is that there may be parent's out there who fail to do that to the best of their ability because, like schools, they keep one eye on ensuring a good end of year report can be provided to someone in a suit who neither knows that individual child nor has a clue what's best for them (much less cares).

There has become a point here where LA's and Home educators seem to clash, I can only assume we all want the best for the children but for some reason the state has decided loving, dedicated, parents are no longer the people that are in the best position to (absent any evidence of neglect/harm/abuse) make decisions for their children. Otherwise Surely it would be recognised by now that Local Authorities acting deceptively and overstepping their legal remit will not engender positive relationships with parents. We have for a long time been saying to people how great our LA is, but as soon as the first shock wave hit we started reminding others to ensure they know the Law, the guidance, exactly where they stand. You get treated with suspicion if you say "keep everything in writing", but when the Local authority sends you a letter months AFTER contact letting you know any and every thing they have on their records about you can be shared with all and sundry it is wise to ensure you know exactly what has been said by both parties and can prove it.

There is a space for more help, we need somewhere our kids can sit exams, ideally mocks as well. Look at [company name]. Somewhere in each area of the country that the kids can go to a few times as they get towards the exam, study sessions, mocks, maybe it could be used for ECHP assessments as many Home educators are told you cannot get a ECHP if you are not in school. Maybe help keep the cost reasonable for the parent, or if the format of assessments changes help us access whatever replaces the examelement. Children would be registered, seen, education suitable, safeguarding at least as available as in school. It wouldn't catch all, but many.

The fact is there are those that want help and support and volunteer to be registered to get it (many regret it). There are those like me, who would rather be left alone, but don't mind being registered as long as I can get on with doing my best. There will be some that are scared of being registered because of the hassle it may bring, especially those who autonomously educate, have a religious background or have disabilities and feel vulnerable to fault finding.

Then there are those that are doing something wrong and are going to do everything they can to conceal it and/or themselves. Mandatory registration won't get them. They either already convinced you they were perfect and got the all clear or they ran for the hills.

Finally you want to know how has covid affected home educated children? In the ways above and more. Badminton lessons at the local gym, pool twice a week at the youth club, special interest = live music, wants a career backstage, all things that have been going *really well* ever since march obviously. We've been able to supplement cookery, music production and drum lessons. Sadly the drum tutor doesn't quite have my confidence that a drum lesson for a home educated child is "education" so, despite continuing lessons in schools, my sons joyous twenty mins a week on an acoustic kit has now been downgraded to an anxious attempt to figure out how to skype call and receive tuition on the electric kit we invested in to keep him sane in Lockdown no.1.

It's amazing how much less everyone worries about seeing our kids these days.

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