

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 have been prompted to write when I was informed that the Children's Commissioner told the Education Committee that the Department of Education was committed to introduce a compulsory register of home-educated children and also was insisting that the Department should introduce termly inspections of home-educating families. Having elected to home educate our three children from [dates], after which they went to various occupations and universities, I think the above request by the Commissioner would be a real intrusion into family life and an infringement on the right of parents to be responsible for their children's education which is stated in the Education Act 1996.

Before I was married, I was a teacher in a local infant school and enjoyed my work. My firstborn daughter and second born son both started school and I never thought of choosing to home educate them at that time even though I did not feel that they were progressing as well as they should, especially my daughter who definitely struggled due to some overbearing children in her year group. When they were [ages] respectively, we moved to [place] and there they attended an independent Christian School which had a very high standard of education but even our daughter in particular had issues there with her peer group. In [date] we moved to [place] and travelled for a year to the same school which took two hours, there and back, twice a day. We looked at putting the children into schools in [place] but were actually advised by the schools not to do this as it would have been too much for them in that environment coming from [place]. I am stating this to show that the decision to educate the children at home was not made lightly and I have to say that as a former teacher who wholeheartedly believed in the school system I thought I would just 'give it a try' because at that time there seemed to be no other option. Our third child was [age] at that time and had not attended school so I started to teach him to read using the curriculum provided by Christian Education Europe, the 'ABC's,' which is a phonetic learning programme and within fifteen weeks he was able to read as had been promised by the programme. The other children were given diagnostic tests for the level they should start in each of the five core subjects (Maths, English, Social Studies, Science and Word Building) and so our home educating life began and continued for each of them until they were [age] years of age. It is a decision we have never regretted taking, and given our time again, knowing what we do now, would have elected to educate all of them from the beginning. They say the 'proof of the pudding is in the eating' and I would take that to mean that they were able to enter the work/university environment with no problem and that at least two of them have elected to home educate their own children and I believe the other family would have too if given the choice and opportunity but circumstances did not allow.

Regarding inspections of homes with regards to home education I do find it incredulous that there should be the comprehension that other persons can have the welfare of the children uppermost more than the parents and that a better environment can be provided for the children elsewhere rather than in the home. I found such a difference in my teaching career when I was teaching a class of thirty to when I was on supply teaching in a small village school with just fourteen pupils and two teachers! The children received the attention that each one needed in the smaller school. This again was a great benefit in home educating. Every child has different needs and learns in various ways and it would seem that the parent is in the best position to know and understand each child and give the help and individual attention that their own children may require at any given time. Our

children became much more confident and the lack of self-assurance, which had been taken away in the classroom, completely disappeared. They were able to perform at high levels in the music classes they took, the performances they gave, both in music and oratory, and even on the sports field. I will state here that while in [place] we were given an inspection by the education authority and two inspectors completely endorsed the curriculum and education that our children were receiving and we have that report in our keeping to this day.

As to whether a register is required for home-educated children we hear about many children that are registered in the state system of education falling through the net and so do feel it would not be a good use of the resources needed to make that work. Those who elect to educate their children at home have got the welfare of their children foremost in their mind. Not many parents that I speak to think that it is an easy task to have their children at home 24/7 and are glad to send them to school for 'someone else to look after'. The State seems to be taking this responsibility from the parents increasingly by feeding, clothing, providing entertainment in after school clubs and in every form of education and so some children lack any care from their parents in the home. There may be many unregistered or illegal schools but when parents elect to home educate their own children, they should not be unfairly linked with these. Also, those who are home-educated often get associated quite wrongly with child abuse whereas in many instances parents do take their children out of school to keep them from the abuse of bullying and sexual harassment in schools and as stated we know that our children would not have thrived in that kind of environment. Research that was made in 2015 found that home-educated children in England were two to three times less likely to need a Child Protection Plan than children in school, despite being twice as likely to be referred to social services. The regulatory framework that is already provided seems to be working and there is no evidence to suggest otherwise.

Home education is not a cheap option. Many parents, at this moment our own children included, make the sacrifice of one parent staying at home and living on one wage while the other becomes the sole provider. As stated before, choosing to home educate takes commitment, dedication and sacrifice. In our experience we do not think about what it has cost us to give our children the education that was best for them which gave them such good start in life and enabled them to thrive into adulthood and the careers that they are pursuing.

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