

## 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 as parent who has home educated now for over [time period]. It wasn't our initial choice, however has been an ongoing decision to maintain due to the advantages to our children and family as a whole.

Personally, I do not think that a register of home educated children is necessary. Children are registered at birth, via the NHS and other avenues, therefore I do not think it's a feasible expense to the taxpayer for a register to be maintained. There is no proof that children who are home educated are more at risk than children who are in schools – and I feel that in some cases the school environment may pose a higher risk than home education. On a personal note, I had a safeguarding issue when my eldest was in school – I contacted social services and they said it had to be dealt with as an internal complaint at the school via the governors and I would have to keep my child in that environment. My children are more protected by being at home.

On the subject of duties of local authorities, as I have covered above, home education in my mind is not a safeguarding issue. In a normal time our children would be attending a number of groups with their own internal safeguarding policies – so in fact are actually exposed to more individuals who are likely to report any issues than if they were solely in school. I feel that attendance at school does not guarantee that the child retains the information – otherwise all children would leave school with certain grades in all subjects. Home education means you can customise the education to the child so it doesn't always look like school, nor be centred around a curriculum. Most Local Authorities have staff who have come from a school background, therefore aren't always supportive of other ways of educating – which means they aren't necessarily qualified to assess the quality of home educating within the scope that is available.

To my children, the benefits of home education are numerous, including:

- More family time – my husband works shifts and only has one weekend off in four. If our children were in school we would have limited time to spend as a family. In addition he has prebooked holiday which doesn't always fall within school holidays. I personally think that a secure family life plays a huge factor in a child's upbringing, so I'm grateful that we get this extra time as a family.
- Opportunities to customise learning to the children – you simply can't do this in a classroom of 30 pupils. It may be a structured approach, or child led, however you can go into detail about subjects that a child enjoys and cover things that it wouldn't be feasible to cover in a school environment.
- Allowing more independence – we visit places in quieter times which means we can increase exposure to experiences in a more controlled environment. Even simple things like going to the Post Office when it's not crowded and you can have a conversation about what you are doing and allow them to undertake the transaction with the person behind the counter. Life skills like this are invaluable and are easier to facilitate when a child is home educated.
- Exposure to experiences – I feel that children absorb more when engaged. Rather than learning from a textbook we have opportunities to take our children to a museum or the like in order to visualise things and supplement their learning. This can be more frequent and at quieter times when you are home educating.
- Social interaction – our children benefit from seeing children and adults of all ages which is a contrast to the school environment when they would only see limited teachers and children

of their own year group/cohort. They will often form bonds with other children who they wouldn't normally be able to mix with in a classroom or in the playground. This means they can learn from the older children, and also help guide the younger ones. We can also facilitate social interaction more within learning activities and allow discussions of which isn't possible in the classroom where the teacher has a tight schedule.

- Less pressure – our eldest developed anxiety for written work as a result of school. She has [personal information] which she masked in the school environment, however has been diagnosed since being home educated. If she (or her sibling) feels overwhelmed we can take a break of which wouldn't happen in school. We can monitor progress however do not make direct comparisons as we feel that children all develop at their own rates.
- Altering teaching techniques – with home education, if our children do not understand the way we are teaching something, we can alter our approach until they can understand it. This doesn't happen in a classroom due to time and other constraints – of which de motivates children. Our eldest thought she was terrible at maths as a result of being at school – however we have gone through other ways of explaining things and she is progressing wonderfully. I hate to think how she would be emotionally if she would have had 5 more years of feeling she was bad at a subject just because she didn't understand the way it was taught.

The main disadvantage to home education – of which leads onto support – is exams. Although home educators have access to exams as external candidates, this year has shown the issues whereby if a child doesn't have a tutor and is learning independently they would not have had the benefit of a predicted grade. The number of centres which accept external entrants change annually – and the Local Authorities don't always have a running list either. It is very much on the head of the parents to contact centres and share information amongst ourselves. Personally, I feel that the Local Authorities should be acting more to ensure there are a number of local exam centres that would support home educators – and perhaps fund the exam sittings. If there is an increasing focus on numeracy and literacy, I would actually expect the Local Authority to fund Maths and English exams as a bare minimum – even if it's functional skills rather than GCSE/iGCSE.

Personally I think that off-rolling is an issue where children have SEN – however it's going to continue to be an issue unless there is more funding in schools to support children with SEN. It's no good trying to stop the off-rolling unless the route of the issue is solved. In the main parents are going to do what they feel is best for their children, and would rather take their children out of school than keep them in an environment that may be having an adverse affect on their mental health. I also think that Local Authorities need to keep in mind when contacting parents and looking at the “quality of home education” that a great deal of home educated children are dealing with emotional issues like anxiety from being in a school environment. I think the Local Authorities should have funding in this area to help with any trauma from school and other issues – and also take consideration that a child may be reluctant to go to social groups when they have had issues with bullying and other similar scenarios within school.

I can't comment on the additional support since 2012 as we started home educating in [year]. Personally I found the new guidelines which were introduced in 2019 to not be as clear and concise as the previous guidelines. When it comes down to help and support, I have found the main fountain of knowledge has been from the community rather than the Local Authorities due to a lack of understanding and funding.

When it comes down to COVID-19 impacts, I feel there has been a huge detriment to our community. The way that home educated groups generally work is that parents collaborate and are often in attendance at groups – the guidelines have not been clear at any point in this regard. The current guidelines state that education can continue, however it has not been clear at any point

whether a risk assessment would be required nor, if it was, what would be deemed acceptable. Home educators use a lot of organisations in the community to help build their child's education – gymnasiums, community centres, trampolining parks, games centres, zoos, museums. Most of these are now closed again. The worrying thing is, whether such facilities will survive after COVID-19 and still be available to access for our children, plus those in schools and communities as a whole. As I've said, the exposure to venues in the real world is invaluable for home education and preparing children for adulthood as a whole – if they were no longer available it has a huge affect on schooled and home educating children.

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