

## 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.]

Dear Members of The Committee:

### **RE: Home Education inquiry**

My name is [member of the public], I am a qualified teacher, currently home educating my eldest son and the founder of [website].

I have two children in primary school, and I have experience of our education system from a variety of different angles, so I thought it might be useful to contribute to this conversation. I will refer to each point that you have listed and do my best to be constructive.

- The duties of the local authorities with regard to home education, including safeguarding and assuring the quality of home education;

My reasons for currently home educating my son are directly related to his special educational needs and I know that there are many families in a similar situation, who feel that the education system is not meeting the needs of the whole child.

My son is diagnosed with [personal information] and this has impacted on his ability to maintain full time education. This is the second time that I have needed to home educate him for the sake of his mental health and well-being. As we are currently in the process of getting an EHCP, in order to find a suitable school for him, I have needed to keep him on role at his current school. This has not been without its difficulties. There has been strong argument from the school that if he is on role, he should be in school, despite him being suicidal.

Fortunately, a GP signed him off and so we have been able to satisfy the school and keep him here.

Many parents of SEN children feel that they are forced to off role their child, and then they have to take full responsibility for their child's education with no obligation on the local authority to support them. I do not feel that this is helpful for anyone. Parents then become full time carers, children lose access to suitable schooling and the local authority become the vilified for not supporting children and families in desperate need.

In an ideal world, schools would be focussed on the well being of their students above all else, happy pupils learn. Children who are stressed, anxious and mentally unwell, do not learn.

I would like to see the Local Authority provide some financial help and maybe some support groups for these families, who are feeling totally lost and abandoned and who are trying to do what is best for their children.

In terms of safeguarding, we all have a responsibility to safeguard children and vulnerable adults and I don't feel that home education is any riskier for most children, than being in school. If families are in need of safeguarding, they should already be known to social services, and in these circumstances, if home education is deemed too dangerous, a school attendance order can be put in

place. Safeguarding is a wider issue and one where, health, education and social care need to be equally responsible.

What might be helpful to parents is if each local authority had a website where they could access information about safeguarding, along side useful courses like first aid or practical teaching ideas. Local authorities need to support rather than condemn home educating families. I am aware that New Zealand, for example offer all home educators free access to their curriculum and resources and they are very inclusive of all types of learning.

In terms of assuring “quality” I think that you will struggle with this, home school is not school at home. The reason that many people choose home education rather than school is because it gives learners the freedom to pursue their own interests. Children learn in context, through practical hands on activities and that is something that cannot be measured. Maybe if you looked at each family with an open mind and let them show you what they are learning about, that might be a more productive method.

No judgement. As a home educator I am already at the receiving end of a lot of judgement, from school, from family, from random people in the street and so I am always having to defend my decision. The local authority needs to offer support and understanding, rather than judgement of home educating families. I think many families feel that the LA are out to get them and make them return their children to mainstream education and this creates an immediate barrier.

- A home education register...

What a controversial topic this is. There are two very strong arguments for and against a register for home educating families, I would say that I am in favour of a register in terms of safeguarding and support for families, provided that it is used in a positive way and not to ‘trap’ home educators and force them to conform to curriculums and testing, which is not the point of home education.

- The benefits Vs potential disadvantages:

When delivered effectively and holistically, the benefits of home education for families are immense. Children are allowed time and space to delve deep into areas of learning and become totally immersed in their interests. They learn life skills, social skills, the value of family, community, ecology, and their mental health is generally much improved. As long as children attend home education groups of some sort, or spend time in communities with other children, which most do, I don’t feel that the lack of ‘schooling’ is a disadvantage at all.

I would say that for parents, home education can be more challenging because you often feel that the weight of the world is on your shoulders. I have felt judged and unsupported and like an outsider, even though I know that I am doing what is best for my child.

Things which are particularly difficult for adults are the lack of time alone, you are on duty 24/7. Working is harder when your children are not in school and so financially this causes issues. I also speak with many parents who don’t feel confident in teaching their children, even though they are perfectly capable of doing so.

- The quality and accessibility of support available for home educators

This is an area that requires a lot of investment and work. There is no support financially or otherwise for home educators. We are told that it is our ‘choice’, even if it has been our only option.

School is also a 'choice' and yet those families have automatic access to support. This is clearly discrimination and does not consider the rights of the children in that family.

Here in [county] we have, as far as I am aware, one home education officer who visits families once and hands them some printouts with lists of websites and libraries on. That's the input from the LA.

There needs to be a much more inclusive, holistic and supportive approach across the UK where families genuinely feel listened to and valued.

- The current regulatory framework?

I was not aware that there was any regulatory framework other than the law. I believe unregistered schools are illegal. There doesn't seem to be any support for families who are off rolled, or who have had continual issues with exclusion. This needs a whole team in every county to look at the issues within the local area and to offer support to those families.

- The role of inspection

There is no role for inspection. It defeats the purpose of home education.

- The impact of Covid-19.

Covid 19 has had a significant impact on all of us and I know that the numbers of families choosing to home educate has rocketed since September for a huge variety of reasons.

Home educators are a very creative group of people and many of them have used this time as an opportunity to focus on what they can do, rather than what they can't. Many home educators are turning to outdoor curriculums and groups as well as online work. The impact of closing libraries, museums, art galleries and historic sites is obviously not ideal, and the changes to meeting in person are also making life a little more difficult, but I think long term home educators are coping.

The people who are struggling, are people like me, who have had their whole lives turned upside down by Covid and who are suddenly home educating a child who has SEN with no support from the LA or the school.

I hope that this information is helpful for your inquiry, I would be happy to help you further should you require it. I can be contacted on [contact details]

I look forward to reading your findings,

[member of the public]

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