

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 have a degree in Social Work, and I have been home educating mother to [number] children since [date]. We have had a fairly relaxed style of home educating, encouraging our children to take personal responsibility for their education, as we facilitate them. My adult children are either employed full-time, self-employed, or at University/College.

1. The duties of local authorities with regards to home education

I work with a large number of groups for home educators and can evidence that current guidance for local authorities is adequate and sufficient for LA's to determine suitability of education. The problems that exist stem from inconsistencies from one LA to the next in application of the guidance. There are LA's which abuse their authority, overstep their remit, and have unclear, misleading or unlawful policies. Problems stem from a lack of respect and trust in home educating parents, with LA's treating parents with disdain, condescension, and even contempt. LA's require better, standardised training to equip them to treat elective home educators fairly and professionally.

2. Whether a statutory register of home-educated children is required

When children are removed from school, it is a requirement that the LA are informed. Therefore the LA will already have a record of such children, and are in a position to follow up. However, there are serious concerns with how such information is being managed, as I know of cases where data has been passed on to other parties without parental consent, and without good reason. The issues once again are largely due to officials/schools not knowing the law and overstepping their remit. I think a statutory register would only serve to make LA's more aggressive in their dealings with families, which is problematic when so many of them are not supportive of home education, and lack understanding of it. I do not believe a register is required, as parents have not opted out of the school system – legally they are only required to opt in. The majority of parents who home educate are acting in the interests of their children, have a vested interest in the successful education of their children, and should be allowed to get on with it, without intrusive and unwanted interference from authorities.

3. The benefits children gain from home education, and the potential disadvantages they may face

I have home educated all [number] of my children over a period of [time] years. With the exception of my youngest who is [age] and preparing for GCSEs, my children are all either gainfully employed, or in further education. We made good use of local post-16 colleges for all our children, and interviewers always commented on how articulate, knowledgeable, and mature our children were. The only disadvantages they ever faced was in respect of needing to access exams (or assessments, i.r.o. Covid-19 restrictions) privately, and encountering (unwarranted) prejudice in respect of home education. My

children have all said that, whilst they felt confident about their home education, others made them feel like they were somehow disadvantaged because of it, even when they achieved higher grades than their peers. I have a daughter who was elected Student Representative, and another who, as of yesterday, is on a shortlist to be appointed as an ambassador at her college.

I work with large numbers of home educators, and have never encountered any who did not progress on to either university or employment. Children who are home educated have the benefit of being able to employ natural, self-directed learning – a skill which is becoming essential in our ever-changing society. They are entrepreneurial, innovative, responsible, have a good work ethic, and enjoy being productive. Three of my children have started their own businesses.

I would actually go so far as to say that children in school are at a greater disadvantage than home educated children in respect of being prepared for the world they are going to enter, as the qualities described above will be of far more importance than simple academic knowledge.

The current school system is still operating through a model that has not kept pace with technology, social change, and change in industry. I believe that the model is rapidly losing relevance to society today, and that alternative forms of education should be applauded for their benefits.

4. 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

There is very little support for home educated children and their families, and since home education is on an equal legal footing to school education, this is not acceptable.

However, many parents home educate specifically because, even in a school, support for their child with special needs of any sort was inadequate. Many of these children within the school system were neglected, abused and dismissed, leaving parents little choice but to home educate to protect them.

All children in the UK should have access to the same support if needed, regardless of where they are educated, but this should be on a voluntary basis.

It would be a huge step in the right direction if home educated children could access exams easily and affordably. The State would then fulfil its obligation to the child in respect of Children's Rights.

5. 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'

I believe that current legislation is sufficient for safeguarding wellbeing and academic achievement. It is worth noting that all cases of abuse by families allegedly home educating were already known to authorities, and that the authorities in question did not act to safeguard children when they should have. This shows that the current system works, unless the authorities themselves fail to take action.

Amongst the many families I have worked with, and heard from, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of cases of children whose wellbeing and academic achievement are not being safeguarded WITHIN the state education system, and this is precisely why they have opted to home educate. I believe that having children in schools gives a false

impression that somehow all children in schools are well and happy, which would be a misguided assumption, and entirely untrue. It is a grave mistake to imply that somehow home educated children are at greater risk than children in school, when one has simply to look back on newspaper headlines to know that this is not the case. Until the State is able to ensure that every child, in every school in the country has their needs met, is safe from physical, mental and emotional harm, and their future guaranteed, they have no business implying that these are issues in home educating families.

Unregistered schools are not home education, and fall under the remit of Ofsted. They should therefore not be addressed here.

As for formal exclusions from schools and 'off-rolling', these are simply symptoms of a system that is not working, and the Education Department needs to consider how these are addressed separately.

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

As an experienced home educator, who works with many other home educating families, I can say from first-hand experience that inspection **should have no part** in home education and would create an antagonistic relationship between families and local authorities. Home Educators have been successful in producing bright, articulate, knowledgeable, successful young people for many years in the UK, with little or no help from the State, and I believe should be left alone to continue doing so. Not only would the state have to ensure that every local authority had a thorough knowledge and understanding, not to mention experience, of home education, but officials would also need to understand different pedagogies, special educational needs, child development, as well as being personable, respectful and approachable.

Current issues with local authorities in many parts of the UK can be attributed to a misunderstanding of their legal role, an attitude of condescension or distrust, and a lack of courtesy and respect. The only way to encourage co-operation is to have an equal balance of power between parent and local authority, ensuring mutual trust and respect.

7. What improvements have been made to support home educators since the 2010-15 Education Committee published their report on 'Support for Home Education' in 2012

Home Educators continue to receive very little and limited support from the State. Those with children with special educational needs are not being directed to services which are necessary, and home educators are still having to pay for their children to access exams privately. Even for families with SEN children in schools, support is not always forthcoming, which leads to families needing to home educate in order to support their child better.

Home Educators save the State millions of pounds in educational spending. Funding exams for home educated children would be a small price to pay.

8. The impact COVID-19 has had on home educated children

COVID-19 has had a huge impact on home educating families, just as it has for all families in the UK. In terms of education, families have been able to continue much as they always have in terms of learning done at home, but the greatest impact has been on the social activities of home educators. Home educators normally have a wide variety of group activities available to them, such as sports, art, science, and social groups. However, during COVID-19 lockdown, none of these have been able to operate. The restrictions have also reduced group activities to educational activity only, which has

robbed home educated children of their usual social opportunities. The government appears to fail to recognise the importance of children gathering purely for social interaction in its restrictions, and has made some of the restrictions hard to interpret, which has made it very difficult for group organisers and venues.

In respect of local authorities, some have ludicrously questioned the lack of social interaction during the lockdown period, when it is glaringly obvious that this is not by choice!

Summary

As a qualified social worker, mum and group organiser, it is my experience that home education is a really positive choice for the vast majority of families, with children thriving, and growing up to be successful, contributing members of society. Families do extremely well with minimal interference by the State, and should be left to get on with it, unless there is valid, reasonable cause for concern. The State could consider offering support on a voluntary basis where children have special educational needs or disabilities, and most home educators would welcome affordable access to exams for their children, also on a voluntary basis.

An environment of mutual trust and respect between families and local authorities should be the aim in order to facilitate a partnership which ultimately benefits children, but this should not be done through a compulsory register or inspections, which are open to abuse.

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