

## Written evidence submitted by the Home Education and Advocacy Hub

### CALL FOR EVIDENCE: HOME EDUCATION

My non-profit organisation offers support and advice to home educating families. My own background is in Social Work, as well as successfully home educating my own children for the past 22 years. I also moderate on several Facebook groups which support home educators, and so I encounter hundreds of home educators from all over the UK. I run an annual conference for home educators which equips, empowers and enables home educating parents. I am responding to the Call for Evidence on the basis of my extensive knowledge and understanding of home education in the UK.

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

I believe that current legislation and guidance on home education in the UK is entirely adequate as it is. Home educators living in local authorities where officials abide by the law, and apply the guidance correctly, report a positive relationship with their local authorities, which is conducive to co-operation. However, there are many local authorities which misinterpret the guidance, and overstep their remit, and home educators report harassing, heavy-handed behaviour. Unprofessional and discourteous behaviours reported include:

- Communicating by text message
- Implying that parents are lying, or giving false information
- Doorstepping without an appointment, and not showing identification
- Stating an appointment time without consulting the parent
- Contacting extended family and harassing them for information

It would also often appear that in some local authorities the relevant departments foster a culture of contempt towards home educating parents amongst their staff, which encourages bullying, aggressive behaviour and parents are treated with disrespect.

I have worked with the Coventry Local Authority to improve the relationship between them and home educators, and as a consequence parents report that their communications are respectful, courteous, and supportive. This indicates that a positive relationship is entirely possible between home educators and local authorities.

The concern is that, if LA's currently overstep the law and guidance as it is, and behave in a draconian, heavy-handed manner, giving them greater powers would be likely to encourage even more abuse, and imbalance of power.

The relationship to strive for is one of mutual trust and respect, acting in partnership towards the best interests of the child.

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

Children who have already been on a school register will automatically become known to the LA, and LA's have no excuse to not follow up. A register implies that people have either done something wrong, or need to be checked up on. Since education is the legal duty of parents, it makes no sense to do any more than notify the local authority.

Parents making the choice to home educate are acting in the best interests of their children, and as the primary caregivers should not have to answer to the Local Authority.

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

I work with many home educators, and encounter a large number of children who have been home educated.

In my experience, and this has been backed up by research in the UK and abroad, home educated children have a distinct advantage over children in school in that they can learn at their own pace, pursue their interests, and take responsibility for their own learning. When these young people move on to college, university or employment, these qualities are often remarked on.

My observation has been that home educated young people are:

- Articulate
- Knowledgeable
- Confident and mature
- Able to converse with adults comfortably
- Able to take initiative and responsibility.

Most go on to be successful adults who contribute to society.

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

Despite the fact that home educators save the government thousands in education funding, there is very little support for home educated children and their families. Home education is a perfectly valid and positive educational choice, on an equal footing with education in school, and as such, there should be no difference in support offered just because a family chooses home education.

Support would be welcomed by many families, but on a voluntary basis for the following:

- Funding for professional support in the case of special educational needs or disabilities
- Support for single parents who wish to home educate
- Affordable access to exams for children

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 unregistered schools, formal exclusions and "off-rolling" should be addressed separately as they are not elective home education, and fall under the remit of Ofsted.

I believe that there is very little evidence to suggest that children who are home educated are at greater risk of emotional, mental and physical harm than if they were in school.

I deal with thousands of families who have removed their children from school in order to safeguard them from harm within the school system, and parents are rightly indignant at any suggestion that home educating might be considered a safeguarding issue.

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

I do not believe that inspection is necessary in home education, as there could be no guarantees that authorities would have the necessary, consistent knowledge and experience required to deliver a standard service. Families have been successfully home educating for hundreds of years, and parents have a vested interest in achieving success in this area.

Having seen how some local authorities behave, I shudder to think what we would have to deal with if inspections were to be enforced.

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