

5 November 2020

Education Select Committee Home Education Inquiry

Introduction

My name is Tahira. I'm a home educator and I'm Lead Coordinator of an organisation which I set up and that supports home educated families. 'The Home Education Hub' supports home educated families by providing advice, support, steering and help. We also keep families updated of their rights and responsibilities in home education. We have been supporting families from across England, although most of our families accessing our services are located within the Capital. The recipients of our services, predominantly stem from minority ethnic backgrounds and who are predominantly from a Muslim faith. Most of our activity is provided on a voluntary basis.

A distinct part of our service seeks to update and support home educators by highlighting issues relating to unfair representation and potential bias and discrimination towards 'Muslims and home education'. This can involve discussing, conveying information, meeting families, writing articles, all of which provides updates of key government information and that which impacts upon their children's education and learning.

With the rise of families choosing to home educate and those that associate themselves to the Islamic faith, our organisation seeks to be a voice, offering support and representation to these families. We provide individual family support as well as occasionally visit home educational groups to inform them of their rights and responsibilities. Families do tell us that they have benefitted substantially from our help, advice and support over the years.

We envisage expanding our services to offer advice and to influence change amongst key policy departments as well as to Local Authorities across England to better support hard to reach communities and marginalised communities that choose to electively home educate.

The duties of local authorities with regards to home education, including safeguarding and assuring the quality of home education.

Local authorities devise their own elective home education internal policy and seek guidance from the 'Department for Education Guidance for Local Authorities (2007) in the fulfilment of their role in relation to sections 436a and 437 of the Education Act 1996. In relation to their duties this primarily focuses on the provision of support. In doing so they have a legal duty to establish whether the education provided by home educators is 'suitable' and 'efficient' as defined by the Act.

There's evidence demonstrating there's an element of confusion and often misunderstanding amidst local authorities in discharging the functions of their role. Local authorities have a legal duty in carrying out their role. I feel the guidance can very much so be shaped to actually make it easier for local authorities in what their role requires of them as far as their duty is concerned. This in turn will provide clarity for both the local authority and home educators respectively. Currently we are seeing local authorities approach home educators with a somewhat heavy-handed approach, a role that leans more towards the 'monitoring' of the education rather than on the foundations of support.

It's commonplace to see 'ultra vires' demands made by local authorities to home educated families and unfortunately this is often sighted from the very outset and in the early stages of communication when local authorities liaise with home educators. Home educators find this distasteful, in turn it causes fear, anxiety, disaffection and families incline towards immediately distancing themselves, they'll oblige with the local authority in providing details of their child's educational provision, but in the most distant form and with minimum communication. I can understandably resonate with families in their decision and it comes as no surprise that families then choose to detach themselves and adopt this approach towards

local authorities. There's also evidence of local authorities overstepping their mark in what they're legally permitted to carry out. This creates distrust and widens the gap between local authorities and home educators, resulting in families becoming somewhat 'suspicious' and very much so 'cautious' of local authority intervention.

Local authorities are faced with budgetary constraints on educational support and its a somewhat shoestring budget when it relates to home education, this is an area that the Department for Education should focus upon. As consequently this is leading to a very poor service provision to home educators and results in disengagement as local authorities are simply unequipped with the capacity, funding and resources to support families. Funding is essential to supporting families, and would also assist local authorities of looking at diverse ways in closing the gap, as the freedom of extra financial input would allow for a more effective approach in engaging with home educators.

Local authorities do unfortunately display signs of failing to understand their role fully and I do feel this is as a lack of clear guidance, which in turn causes disengagement, distrust and widens the gap between families and the local authority. Clear guidance will prevent barriers that really should not have been erected in the first place. The government thus needs to help create a more consistent and clear approach to how local authorities engage with their home education families respectively.

Our families tell us that they would have no reluctance in engaging with local authorities in person but due to factors surrounding 'distrust' emanating from local authorities and examples of some families stating that there's a lack of recording of factual information and that local authorities often are judgemental in a biased way then it's more appropriate to avoid face to face meetings. This implies that the government does itself no favours in building trust, respect and confidence of families when engaging with home education families.

Local authorities should make use of voluntary home educational groups which have the potential of reaching out to home educated families in a much more practical and sensible way. For example reaching out to faith communities and ethnic minority groups, organisations like ours that represent families associated to a faith background as well, can

play a vital role in serving their communities by creating dialogue and developing community cohesion. The EHE guidance to local authorities should seek to accommodate more on inclusivity and equality amongst the growing numbers of families choosing to electively home educate particularly from marginalised communities.

There are already substantial powers which local authorities have as far as safeguarding children and young people is concerned. There's clear accessibility to key services such as the police as well as access to data where it becomes apparent that a child is at risk of 'significant' harm. We are constantly seeing key government organisations lean on safeguarding in the creation of a compulsory register. Home educators strongly oppose the foundation of this decision and in relation to safeguarding it's clear that local authorities already have substantial powers in discharging their role and promoting safety and the well being of children and young people. Safeguarding legislation applies to all children regardless of whether schools have oversight or not.

Another key factor is that elective home education families are not "hidden from local authorities or other key government departments and are in fact visible. The opposing of a compulsory register should not imply that they are avoiding safeguarding or the likes. It's parents that are legally responsible for their children and they take that responsibility very seriously. But they are with the opinion that a compulsory register won't address the governments concerns of safeguarding as was gaged from the 'call to evidence' consultation proposals submitted by home educators. This would only seek to 'track' children out of schools.

Another concerning issue, with which families regularly raise with us, is that they feel the government leans on 'safeguarding' and 'prevent' in wanting to unfairly 'monitor' home educated families through this perceived narrative of an association with 'radical islam' and this unfair conclusion results in garnering public support which warrants an intrusive level of unfair monitoring of home educated families that associate themselves to the Islamic faith. When in fact, this discrimination is based on a 'perceived narrative'. There is little evidence asserting that Muslim families decide to withdraw their children from mainstream schools in order that their children can be taught a 'solely' religious education. Furthermore there is no accurate statistical data to establish exactly how many children are in fact home educated and

further absent data determining the religious and cultural orientation of these children respectively, so the claims centre around an ‘assumption’ and ‘perceived narrative’ which is wholly unfair and discriminatory.

Parents choose to withdraw their children from schools owing to a variety of circumstances and well founded reasons, such as bullying, a broken system etc. Parents take this educational decision very seriously and place a lot of effort in helping their children to succeed.

Families often highlight their disappointment of the existence of a wide gap of disengagement between elective home education officers and home educators within their local authority and its far worse when it relates to ethnic minorities sadly, particularly if their from a Muslim background, as there’s this perceived narrative of extremism and radicalisation which has been further compounded by the media, the police, as well as the governments counter terrorism ‘prevent’ teams and notably HM Ofsted. This perceived narrative, unfairly associates elective home educators who have taken on this huge undertaking with good intention and for reasons to help their children to academically prosper and achieve, develop, flourish and integrate into society like everyone else and with the same expectations like state school children. But yet feel, that their choice of home education and that their association with their faith depicts them in the eyes of such organisations and key departments as ‘failing’ to provide a ‘suitable’ and ‘efficient’ education. Parents have a right to raise their children with the same belief and religious conviction that they associate themselves with. This does not imply or warrant the right to be unfairly and unjustifiably associated with ‘extremism’ or ‘radicalisation’.

‘The Times’ reported that homeschooling is blamed for the rise of extremist Islam. The country’s top counter terrorism officer, Mr ‘Neil Basu’, ‘Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police’ stated that home schooling is a breeding ground for extremists and future terrorists. He negatively asserts premature and unfair conclusions as though home education is not a good option. Not only does the counter terrorism officer, unfairly associate parents of home educated children as potential terrorists now and in the future, but goes on to further demean their ability and credibility to teach, nurture, cultivate and educate their children as though they they are unfit and unworthy of achieving positive outcomes. He thus

implies that home educated children would in fact be better off detached from the influences of their parents. This type of negativity, unfair rhetoric and inequality towards Muslim home educators and in particular from senior key government representatives only seeks to widen the gap between home educators and key government departments, and on a ground levels causes further distrust between home educators and local authorities.

The media negatively portrays home education and associates Muslims who choose this path as ‘extremists’. Referring to the fears of child abuse as having shifted to the fears of radicalisation now.

There has also been key organisations and government departments such as ‘Her Majesty’s Ofsted’ pandering to tabloids which has stoked up anti home education rhetoric, and there’s now this further and unfair perception and narrative that this specific section of the community, namely muslim home educators are associated to radicalisation and therefore present a threat to national security. Across the United Kingdom, home education is being portrayed as negative and hostile, and that its a form of education that is somewhat disliked and disapproved of and when carried out by families associating themselves to a ‘faith’ in particular the Islamic faith, the disapproval level increases even more so. Parents take on this undertaking of home education with a clear understanding and mind set of ensuring their children are taught and grow up exposed to community values of tolerance and respect. They know what the role entails and understand the demands of the role and they are more than capable of delivering an effective education to their children outside of state schooling.

The Department for Education in its 2019 ‘call for evidence’ consultation also demonstrated some levels of unfairness towards families choosing to home educate and that associate themselves with a faith group. This was apparent in the equalities impact assessment. Worrying concerns of home educators led them to believe that the government in its new proposals would unfairly conclude that being associated to a specific faith would result in unfair judgements of ones education being deemed as ‘unsuitable’ simply as a result of their religious belief and conviction.

All of the above is indicative of unfairness and discrimination towards home educational families with protected characteristics., in particular who associate themselves to

the Islamic faith and we hope that the Department for Education approaches its decisions and that which are likely to ensue from its 2019 call to evidence consultation with absolute fairness to all communities and backgrounds across the entire home educational cohort. It also requires the government to recognise and give value to the home educational cohort as an effective form of alternate education and that works so well for so many families. By removing the unfair fears and illicit worry it would be seen in a much more positive light.

Home education as a choice of education makes a remarkable and distinct difference by turning around the lives of children that are withdrawn due to the suffering and trauma they've possibly encountered, and that which is further compounded as a result of the disadvantages through systematic failures of government maintained schools failing to act and support these families.

Families are under no obligation to follow the national curriculum or any formal structured assessments, evaluations or learning. The very purpose of home educating is that they've detached their child from the school testing regime and measured outcomes. Thus they feel that how they approach the learning and content should be left to the parents who are the expert in the lives of their children. Parents that choose to home educate don't take this decision lightly. They are very much so committed, keen and do everything within their capability to underpin, facilitate and support their child's learning and education.

In schools there's a disparity in educational attainment between families of affluence and disadvantage. Where expectations are far higher of children from families of affluence than those of disadvantaged families. It's the schools role to close this gap. To prevent disadvantaged children from falling behind and resulting in a low educational attainment. Families play a role and schools should play an even bigger role but their limited, funding cuts, time pressures, league tables, a one fit for all system, class sizes, measured outcomes all contribute to disadvantaged children falling into further disadvantage.

Then there's other factors that often schools simply and inadequately fail to get a firm grip upon; bullying. Time and time again this comes up with our families and this is a common reason why they've felt a continuation education within mainstream schools would result in a further decline and deterioration of their child's future. But the disadvantage is

there, disadvantaged families that choose to home educate do so because they gain greater control of their child's educational needs. They encourage their children, they engage their children in a range of positive activities, that enrich their learning and experience, that develop confidence, develop social skills, raise self esteem etc. In turn this has a positive effect upon home educated young people, they have a positive outlook and believe in themselves that they are able to achieve and have the ability to prosper in their learning abilities and future. There are many examples of children flourishing and that their onward progression and educational achievements have been extremely positive.

A Statutory Register

The governments 'call for evidence' April 2019 consultation centred around the establishment of a compulsory register. Many home educated families and groups that provide support to elective home educated families responded by strongly opposing to the idea for a compulsory register. We are yet to see the analysed results on this consultation from the Department for Education.

It raises questions amongst home educators on what is largely intended from this register by the government, in relation to the type and accumulation of information. And who that information will be accessed by. There is also concerns surrounding data protection.

Families that we come into contact with express some concerns over the compilation of a mandatory register, stating that if it's the governments way of attaching support which in itself is unclear as far as the level and type of support and much to home educators surprise will only be available 'upon request'. With this lack of certainty and absence of the level and type of support and lack of clarity in particular to examination assistance and financial funding to support home educated children to undergo exams, as well as others areas of support. The government here is signalling to families that some support will be available upon request, fails to define that support and yet wants families to agree to registering their children. Most families reject a statutory register, as a register won't seek to resolve any 'worrying concerns' of which families disagree with of the government, other than for it to merely create a 'tracking' record of these children. Further concerns in relation to a statutory register focus on the frequency of information gathering, amendments to the register and

what consequences are likely to ensue if a parent failed to register etc. Some families may very well welcome a mandatory register, if it was abundantly clear what this support package may entail and that its made available consistently across all families who choose to home educate their children.

The London Government Association (LGA) following a conference on unregistered illegal schools and home education in 2018 and which I also attended, stated that it wanted the government to be able to enter homes or premises where home educated children are educated. This has a somewhat worrying concern of the level of distrust of home educational families, and just how they are viewed by local authorities. That it unfairly warrants this expected right to local authorities to enter into ones private home to ascertain the educational process and outcome of home education children. It demonstrates that the current framework by which home educators provide detailed information or meet face to face with education officers simply does not satisfy them. It does relate to a question of trust, and that home educators and their children need to be seen in person in order for an evaluation of their learning and education to be deemed 'suitable'.

The funding that will be allocated to take oversight of the process of monitoring and creation of a register also raises question amidst home educators. Particularly where there's already limited funds, overspending and cut backs nationally. There's hardly any support offered currently and it's something that home educators would welcome. The register and subsequent proposals would undoubtedly be a huge and costly process. We recently saw vulnerable children that went hungry over the half term, with the government failing to assist low income families. There's an estimated 1.3 million disadvantaged young people entitled to free school meals (FSM) where they were left unsupported.

The benefits children gain - the advantages and potential disadvantages to home education

The families that come into contact with us, in particular those families that have deregistered their child from a mainstream school, state the huge benefits of how their child's learning and development has turned around for the better since detaching from state

schools. These are predominantly families who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and who've experienced, racism, bullying, discrimination not just from peers but sadly also teachers as well. Whilst for some families schools works well, it has to be respected that it doesn't work for some families. For their children to become disengaged and to develop a dislike of school which in turn can lead to behavioural problems and mental health problems, requires families to make alternate decisions that leads to searching for alternate options such as home education.

For the entire home educational cohort including disadvantaged families, there's a strong and what is described as an 'internal network of support', mainly operating through home education groups and social media networks. In fact families benefit hugely from this ever expanding support network. There's an increase in the uptake of group sessions that offer expertise and tutoring support in an array of subjects. As well as a wealth of online learning material. Our organisation offers group trips, and external workshops and a variety of activity that brings together families so that children can benefit and enrich their learning experience. As well as offering social integration opportunities. This is hugely beneficial and advantageous to home education families.

Disadvantaged families who have a low income struggle with funding quality material and resources and funding exams, this can be a disadvantage for some families in home education, often struggling to achieve the end outcome of GCSEs in compulsory education simply because they are unable to afford to pay for individual and costly GCSEs as private candidates.

Parents do often state that home education can be a daunting place in the early stages, they can express feelings of anxiety and concern. As they take on this role. It soon develops into a more confident role, with a full on timetable. Home education itself can set back families in the variety of activity they offer, particularly where there's several children being home educated in one household, it can be costly and thus can limit opportunity particularly if the child has a specific interest or aptitude. It refers to the need for the government to look at how best to help families, with for example subsidised costs to leisure and recreational facilities, and access to use of council buildings or community centres that remain empty

during the day which families can tap into for home educational learning and to meet socially. A voucher system to support families with resources would bring about benefit to families.

The quality and accessibility of support(including financial support) available for home educators and their children, including those with sen, disabilities, mental health, caring responsibilities and those making the transition to further and higher education

The quality and accessibility of support needs to be addressed. Unfortunately it appears as though the government sees EHE as having a lower status and is unworthy of support. More needs to be done to engage with families. Outreach functions and using the help of organisations that work directly with EHE families and the services of organisations that seek to engage with marginalised, or hard to reach families, their expertise should readily be sought upon. As this has the potential to break down barriers. Currently most families receive direct support through the established network of home educators. The support from local authorities is minimal, if at all any from some local authorities, this is largely as a result of a failure from local authorities to effectively engage with their families. And where support is provided it usually comprises of signposting, and pointing to websites. For families to access financial support is almost non-existent.

Families could hugely benefit from local authority support, and it would also seek to dispel concerns and the challenges the department for education sees as challenging towards whom it describes as ‘specific communities’.

There’s is and always has been an element of distrust between families and local authorities, and quite possibly much more profound amongst families that associate themselves to a faith or ethnic minority group. The Department for Education needs to recognise the importance of breaking down these barriers, through a number of outreach functions, there has to be a strong foundation of community networking, this will benefit families, including, holding regular and informal meetings, inviting families on a collective basis in community venues, particularly within local authorities where there exists a large concentration of ethnic

minority communities. This would enable a dialogue to ensue and for families to receive help and support, it would also help identify and collate data surrounding some of the difficulties and challenges faced by ethnic minority home educators, who the government feels may fall into further disadvantage.

We are looking to produce a newsletter that would on a monthly or bi monthly basis highlight information for home educators on current news, and information around education and learning, as well as to provide ideas and pointers in utilising resources, promoting community expertise and help that families could potentially benefit directly from.

Voluntarily, I sometimes meet with home education support groups to explain their rights and responsibilities, this level of direct support results in a positive impact in connecting with local communities of home educated families and making them aware of their role. Through the use of community venues we could expand participation as well as reach out to many more families, but one of the drawbacks is the cost implications of local venue hiring. This subsequently limits our role, resulting in families missing out. There's also a potential platform in collaborative work with local authorities to present information and highlight home education through these mediums. As well as include and encourage families that might otherwise be reluctant in support. This could also lead to breaking down the mistrust and suspicion families have towards local authorities.

We are also looking at ways in organising an annual conference for home educators, that would bring together, exhibit and promote partners in particular in learning and education that provide vital services to children and young people. It would also be an opportunity to showcase the amazing skills, talent and achievements of home educated children's. A panel of key note speakers, would seek to offer insight, expertise and experience in the dissemination of useful information to home educated families.

I help facilitate a home education group that operates in South London, we have been in existence for numerous years but the pandemic has severely impacted upon the sustainability of our invaluable group and this is why there's a greater need for families to be supported financially, enabling these types of services to continue. Just as local authorities offer rounds of community funding, by setting a criteria, in which groups can show a

constitution and bank account, funds should be allocated specifically for the alternate education cohort to access such funds.

Families hugely benefit from physical sports activities that take place during the day and outside of school. Often home educated parents take on the task by devoting time and effort in bringing these initiatives together. But there's always the risk factors of them disbanding, just as families take to them and their children find benefit within them, as families are unable to meet the costs of participation due to a low income, more than one child participating, travel costs etc. These facilities charge towards the hire of a professional coach, hire of venue etc. These types of valuable initiatives should be supported or subsidised by local authorities in particular the hire of a coach and venue, parents wouldn't really object to contributing a small nominal amount.

As for children with SEN, this section of the EHE cohort unfortunately suffer the most. They are the most deserving of support and have every right to receive suitable help and support from local authorities and health services. The voluntary sector including charity and community organisations have been a good sense of support. Local authorities either make it difficult and a lengthy process to access support. Families with an existing EHCP find it a lengthy process and made difficult by local authorities in requesting ongoing information only to either receive no support or minimal support. It's an area that the government needs to focus its attention on. As well as clearly define the level of help that families have a right to expect in home education. It's unfair that these families are subjected to unfairness and a poor level of support when choosing EHE. When it's their legal right to be supported.

There is a lot of focus on the mental health of children and young people within mainstream schools. But no support or very little research or mention of EHE. People suffer from many problems, and I believe that families are left to find support themselves. During this pandemic a lot of emphasis and quiet rightly so was focused upon mental health. The children commissioner's department carried a variety of projects to understand the pandemic impact but it raises questions as to the absence of home educated children in this.

As far as transition to progress onto further and higher education there is available information which families access through their independent research, colleges and

universities have general information available through their website, and are very supportive when home educated young people tell us that they make enquiries of courses or what route to pursue.

As explained earlier, parents have good expectations of their children in home education and through this positive outlook it leads to young people developing a strong belief in their learning abilities and encourages them to pursue further and higher education. Which demonstrates the sheer commitment and seamless support and mindset of home educators to underpin the following through of further studies enabling their children to prosper in onwards education.

I do feel that there is very little input from local authorities, there are some examples of signposting, but local authorities largely offer little or no assistance in onwards progression education. It's an opportunity for the education select committee to highlight these concerns so that home educators and young people who are home educated receive the right help and advice which strengthens a stronger influence and backing from the local authority to steer young people to uptake further education and career progression.

Colleges and universities should seek opportunities to work with the EHE cohort, and in particular the local authority should arrange for advisors to reach out to communities that might otherwise be undecided in further education and that they are able to receive the right help and direction. There's very little cost implications involved here, and where there is, colleges and universities should absorb these as it's to their advantage in encouraging young people to uptake further education respectively.

Families often struggle throughout their compulsory educational years in meeting costs of education and learning, combining leisure, and recreational activity, as well as supporting specific aptitude's and interest. So when a young person reaches sixteen it proves hugely advantageous that onward education in which the young person, has the freedom of choice and can select a route that they'll thrive within, it helps knowing that its free to their age category as well as further education available bursary grants etc. Is an incentive and an opportunity for both further education providers and the local authority to support and prompt young people in this transition.

Our organisation actively encourages young people to pursue further education, and we would happily work with further education institutions and the local authority to find ways of reaching out to hard to reach families and disadvantaged families. In promoting the value of further studies. Again this refers to my earlier point of local authorities providing help and financial support to bring groups together in which we could then invite advisors along with career services and connexions to create awareness and to guide families along.

Whether the current regulatory framework is sufficient to ensure that the wellbeing and academic achievement of home educated children is safeguarded, including unregistered schools, off-rolling, exclusion.

I feel that the regulatory framework is sufficient in respect of the safeguarding and academic achievement of EHE. It does require clear definitions to local authorities in what's required of them in the carrying out of their role and duties. Currently parents do have rights that allow them the freedom to present information to their respective local authority in whatever format, be it examples of work or an educational statement, or a face to face meeting etc. Parents are satisfied that the overarching legislation in the 'Education Act' along with the guidance from the 'Department for Education' is not intrusive and infringe upon the rights of home educated families. It works amicably and families feel it doesn't compromise safeguarding rules, as local authorities already have far reaching and substantial powers in relation to acting swiftly towards families, whose child is at 'significant' risk of harm as defined by the 'Children's Act' and safeguarding legislation.

Exclusions, off rolling and unregistered schools are very much so a problem. And this largely holds the schools and proprietors accountable but home educators bear the brunt of the action and decision of the aforementioned.

The proprietors of unregistered schools operate on the premise of a full time operation, avoiding HM Ofsted regulations and DfE independent school standards. These illegal institutions operate under the guise of home education and conceal their exact number of

hours. This doesn't imply that the individuals attending are all genuinely electively home educating. As is implied by HM Ofsted. They usually have detached from an existing full time mainstream school or other, due to various reasons or circumstances to transfer to these institutions to be in a similar capacity. They may very well attend for some religious learning, whereby the child will be educated with the same beliefs and religious convictions held by the parent. But what must be clear in this is that these children that transfer from a full time state or other independent school are not electively home educated. Their parents have chosen the school as a 'full time' institution. It was and is unfair to associate genuine home educators by affiliating them to illegally operating full time unregistered schools. We have communicated with families who tell us, that they've struggled to secure a space either within a state for example voluntary aided school, or independent school providing an Islamic ethos and often these institutions help fill this gap, their costs are also usually lower. One would see this as a failure and inability on the parents part for choosing such institutions to entrust their child's care and education, however this is not the case mainly, as the proprietor will differently inform parents. Resulting in there being no reason to question the registration of such institutions. Home educators that withdraw their children from mainstream education are disinterested in full time institutions that resemble a school model. They are also disinterested in providing a solely religious education, and neither is their educational provision deemed incompatible with fundamental British values.

What genuine home educators have accessed from some institutions is part time hours, and attendance in specific subjects to supplement or enable the expert teaching or tutoring to ensue

The schools convicted and identified by HM Ofsted were operating undercover and in a full time capacity, and used the home education laws to run their unregistered operation.

The academic achievement of home educated children, that is underpinned, encouraged and supported by conscientious parents speaks volumes across the home educational cohort and illustrated in most areas of academic achievement. As parents are able to provide a more coherent, consistent and concentrated approach in the learning and

educational outcomes of their children. This is demonstrated through an early achievement and completion of GCSEs, which are often sat by home educated children much sooner than their school contemporaries who would undergo exams in Year 11. My own child is an example of this. Additional time can then be focused on specific interests and other areas of interest and learning that has potential to support a child's future learning and prospects. There are good examples of the achievements of home educated children which often outweigh the performance and achievement of mainstream children.

Off-rolling and exclusion is problematic within mainstream schools, and there has been many examples of the actions pursued by headteachers to push families out of their institution to subsequently home educate. These families are not considered as home educated, and neither do these families understand the commitment and undertaking of this role and exactly what it entails within home education. This unfairness and discriminatory practice leads to children being disadvantaged and then subsequently under achieving limiting their future prospects. Resultantly it has an affect on how genuine home educators are viewed because of these families that now fall within the cohort through no choice of their own. A lot of them are unaware of even knowing where to start, let alone take on the role as primary educator.

HM Ofsted refers to how they hear the reasons from schools of 'off rolling' but there's no way of hearing the parents view, so it's biased from the very outset and this is where the government needs to take robust action in stamping out the unfair actions of such schools, it's the schools role, along with local authorities to address the deficiencies and by working with other key departments to support these children and their families rather than tipping them off into home education, which then has a damaging consequence and a perceived narrative which leads to premature judgements and unfair conclusions associated with the entire home educational cohort.

Disadvantaged children leave mainstream education due to factors that have limited their educational opportunity and advancement. For example, Ethnic minority pupils and Gypsy, Roma and the travelling community suffer from racism, bullying and discrimination. There's been challenges in closing the educational attainment gaps. This continues to be

problematic in schools, leaving children to fall into further disadvantage. Schools need to go a long way to effectively address the problems facing disadvantaged children in all aspects.

Disadvantaged children withdrawn from mainstream school to be home educated excel in their learning and development and very few will fall into further disadvantage. Parents often see a remarkable difference within them. There are many examples to support disadvantaged children thriving in home education as well as them being happy and engaged.

There are some very good examples of practise and unfortunately there is also evidence of bad practice. Our organisation has seen examples from home educators bad practice from EHE officers. As an experienced home educator, I feel there's a need to bridge the gap between local authorities and parents of home educated children as it can have a profoundly positive impact. Thus the Department for Education in making its decisions should take this into account.

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

The existing arrangements work well reiterating my point of respecting families choice and freedom. This is an area that will meet strong opposition across the home educational cohort based on why should existing arrangements change in the future regulation of home education.

Why should this cohort be made to feel less valued or be given an inferior position that possibly contravenes the Human Rights Act as well, by treating children differently based on their choice of education. The local authority currently satisfies itself with adequate arrangements as far as the 'suitability' of a home educated child's education is concerned. Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996 and from this they can issue a school attendance order so there are reasonable grounds that local authorities can act without the need for any changes to future regulation of home education. Again I feel it goes back to the question of support, having spoken with our families, that unless there's adequate support provided to families then they would be unwilling to comply with a mandatory register.

The government needs to help create a more consistent approach to how local authorities engage with their home educational families. This approach should be equitable and provided in a transparent way. Constantly families inform us that their local authority has unfairly, or prematurely judged them. As well as hounded them unfairly for evidence despite providing an educational statement and diverse examples citing their children's learning achievements.

A major concern of families is the huge level of distrust that elective home education officers have of their families. And with the lack of consistency in the regulatory framework it's open to local authorities to apply their discretion as deem befitting. This is of concern to home educators and that concern intensifies in relation to home educators that associate themselves from a faith background, disadvantaged or ethnic minority background.

One example which I would like to cite is the actions of 'Leicester City Council, in which a family was unfairly pursued. The recommendations made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, reminded staff that what is recorded should be factual and non judgemental. The findings found no evidence of an 'unsuitable education'. This case demonstrates how inconsistencies in local authorities and operating outside of the guidance parameters leads to unfairness towards families. This unfair action leads to further detachment and a huge level of distrust between local authority and home educational families. And this isn't just isolated to Leicester. We've seen evidence of local authorities overstepping their mark and making ultra vires demands. It remains a very worrying concern to us where families associate themselves to their faith and marginalised families and then subjected to unfairness.

What improvements have been made to support home educators since the 'support for home ed 2012

Very little improvements if at all any have changed the home educational level of support. We have not seen many examples in which families feel, the levels of support have increased for the betterment of their children's educational development. Families still feel that their left unsupported, largely these families have helped themselves and got on with their

duty, and benefitted from help from within the support networks. There is little evidence and examples that suggest local authorities have increased levels of support. Despite the increase and soaring numbers in home education.

The impact covid 19 has had on home education

Covid-19 has impacted upon the families and families have expressed concerns and anxiety. However the nature of impact varies in certain aspects, in comparison to those that attend school and the elective home educational cohort. The exams have caused substantial drawback to EHE families, and I'm sure this concern will be raised by many home educators, groups, centres and organisations.

In April 2020, Ofqual gave a disappointing signal that private candidates below Year 11 would have their entry withdrawn and would subsequently have to enter a future exam series either in Autumn or deferred to Summer 2021. Thank fully this decision changed.

It also proved highly challenging and costly where students had no relation with a provider and centre due to studying totally independently and the difficulties they faced in submitting verifiable information.

Home educated young people faced disadvantage in the cancellation of the Summer 2020 exams and whom were unable to receive calculated grades. Those entering the Autumn series meant that their further plans, including studying further subjects was going to be impacted. families shared their concerns of the uncertainties and the unfairness exhibited by the cancellation towards elective home educational children. One family stated how they had planned out several GCSES for this year and some next. The special exam series meant that her daughter was going to be disadvantaged in the 2021 exams, given the lost time, and how it had disrupted progression to the next stage in the course of her studies. Many families were simply unable to receive calculated grades, due to the existence of inequalities that the home educational cohort as private candidates were subjected to.

An example of the inequalities towards home educated children was demonstrated in the case of 'Elijah Burke' from County Mayo in Ireland, who won a significant high court judgment over exclusion from calculated grades this year. Elijah was taught by his primary educator, who was his mother. The Irish Times reported he was unfairly discriminated against and that he was being punished for being home educated.

Home educated groups, often operate as social groups, and as part of the make up of these sessions they offer a range of learning activity as well as a social platform . But due to the very nature of how the groups classify themselves, it's caused disruption in opening these vital groups, as the government disallowed other groups from operating that were not fully educational in nature. EHE families consequently suffered essential contact with groups that families rely on for networking and social interaction. This was seen as wholly unfair.

EHE families, were equally affected with a loss of income like families of school children. Other household costs equally increased. The government responded swiftly in the early stages of the provision of free school meals by offering a voucher system to families, laptops and internet access. There was a complete absence in support including financial from the government towards elective home educated families. This was hugely disappointing to the home educational cohort and demonstrated the status of how elective home education is viewed by key government departments. A one billion fund was announced by the prime minister to help children in England to catch up on what they missed whilst schools were closed. With primary and secondary schools set to receive around £650m from the fund allocation, towards group or one to one tuition. At the time of this submission we were waiting for a government response as to whether some of the funds would also be allocated to home educators to catch up on the losses that have impacted them such as, the exam cancellation and students having lost time in onward study etc. Families would greatly benefit from extra tutorial or lessons to accelerate learning particularly those who are nearing the end of their compulsory school education.

The advantages of home education to families was that they were already accustomed to using their home for learning. This process made it easier for such families, although it caused far greater detriment in the closure of social activity, along with what families heavily relied upon in external group activity, visits, trips, workshops, exhibitions, museums, estuaries,

galleries etc. Which resulted in the disruption of children's learning that enriches their learning and is vital to adding diversity and opportunity to their learning.

Disadvantaged families, rely upon help and support by networking with other groups and individuals as well as by physically attending classes, sessions, workshops, meet-ups etc. and as this was disrupted. Whilst communication ensued via social media platforms. Families do usually benefit directly from these valuable opportunities. We find that whilst the closure interrupted physical activity and direct face to face social contact, it provided an increase in opportunity to engage with a range of online learning material and resources mostly free or subsidised through the generosity of organisations and learning providers, that usually charge for these services. EHE families were able to benefit from this diverse range and array of opportunity.

Unfortunately, EHE families were totally overlooked and there was no support provided during the pandemic and currently from the government and local government during this period.

End