

## 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.]

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

Home educating is a legal right of every parent. Education is the responsibility of the parent not the LAs. Equally with safeguarding, it is the responsibility of the parent. Parenting should not be delegated to LAs. Social Services exists to deal with any safeguarding concerns regardless of where or how a child is educated.

### **Whether a statutory register of home educated children is required;**

What will a register achieve? Other than additional workload for the Local Authorities. A register itself will not ensure the safety of children. There is already a system for this and child safety clearly falls within the remit of Social Services anyway.

There is no evidence that home educated children are at more risk than those that attend school. To the contrary, school provides a wealth of problems for a lot of children whether inadequate learning, stress from continual assessment, starting school too soon, being separated from their parents too soon, lack of time to just play, inability to meet their needs or bullying – all of which hinder deep learning and contribute negatively to a child's wellbeing and mental health.

The reason we home educate is because we believe (supported by evidence) that this type of child led learning is fundamentally more beneficial, and that it encourages deeper learning of subjects. A register would assume that home educated children learn like those in the formal school system, inexorably leading to impositions of formal learning. Home education is not home school nor school at home. Some home educators choose formal lesson structures, others not – but the common thread is that is how the child prefers to learn.

Therefore, what is the point of a register? To 'safeguard' or to ensure a child follows a specific curriculum? A child has a birth certificate and is registered with healthcare providers etc. What does yet another registration achieve?

We should really be questioning the suitability of school as a means to gaining a meaningful education and whether it is a healthy environment for our children. What does it mean to be educated? Is it still fit for purpose? How about working to understand home education better and learning from the successes of home educators so that all children can benefit from an environment that offers them safety, respect and choice.

## **The benefits children gain from home education, and the potential disadvantages they may face;**

### Benefits of home educating:

The benefits are numerous but here are a few...

#### 1. Time

More time to learn in a relaxed, stress free environment. More family time builds connection and attachment that has enabled our child to gain confidence and independence at a pace he is comfortable with and a space to grow and explore. We practice mutual respect offer a consent and rights based environment which makes for a happy family life which is full of learning and adventure. When children feel they have choice and a voice and can exercise their opinions, they are empowered and more confident and happy.

#### 2. Childhood

Play is at the heart of everything we do. Play is crucial to child development but is so undervalued in society. Having not been to nursery, reception or school, our child has had a childhood full of play. Whether playing with us in his early years or playing with his friends as he established meaningful relationships of his own as he grew. Whether playing in the home, down by the river, in the woods, in the garden, in games or at forest school, football, swimming, archery or at the museums with friends. So much so that he doesn't distinguish between play and learning. It's all fun. It's all play. He is learning all the time and enjoying it.

#### 3. Freedom to learn

We are not tied to a curriculum. We are not tied to a timetable. We are literally free to explore anything that comes up either in conversation or following on from something we've watched or experienced. Nothing is off limits and we certainly don't have to wait for him to reach a certain level or year group to look at a subject in detail. We are there to explore something in the moment, just at the right time for him, just when he needs to know about it, just when he is most engaged. What's more, it's one to one support.

Our child has experience so much even though he is only [age]. He attends bushcraft sessions, whittling and woodcraft sessions, gymnastics, swimming, tennis, football, writing sessions with a published author and utilised so many online resources and learning programmes like Mathswizz where he has achieved a 'maths age' of almost [age]!

We attend festivals, visit museums, spend hours in the library. He is far from 'hidden' as the community is so important for us. We walk to the village daily, he spends time learning about history with the owner of the village antiques shop, he learns cake making and decorating with the owner of the village tea room, he helped fundraise and volunteers for the community village shop, he volunteers and counts orchids for the local Wildlife Trust, he takes part in village activities like pancake races and feast week competitions. To the contrary, he is well known, appears in the village calendar and is wholly seen.

Aside from that, he has met David Attenborough, he's met a lead Lego designer, numerous authors and illustrators, been shortlisted for the BBC 500 words competition, won a national story writing competition, has reached a 'Maths age' of nearly 3 years beyond his actual age, has six Blue Peter badges, gained numerous swimming, tennis and gymnastics certificates and contributes to many citizen science projects regularly. He loves science, chemistry, coding, history, maths, problem solving, documentaries, politics, drawing, writing and lots of humour.

The opportunities are endless but we have all the time and enthusiasm for making the most of them.

#### 4. Wellbeing

Free from stress, our child is happy. So happy! This enables him to retain information better and the more he learns, the more confident he becomes. Learning is not a competition. It belongs to him. He owns it and values it and embraces every opportunity to learn more. This is invaluable.

#### 5. Socialisation

Contrary to narratives around home education about 'do they have friends? / what about socialisation?', the majority of home educated children are gregarious, make friends easily and can easily converse with adults. There are huge networks of home educator groups where children make strong, meaningful friendships. During Corona virus home educated children have thrived. They have adapted well and are well used to online learning resources. They are more confident and as their learning is intrinsically motivated, were not as affected as their schooled peers.

#### Potential disadvantages of home educating:

In contrast, the disadvantages are few...

##### 1. Financial

The nature of home educating means that often, home educating families are single earner families and there are several financial penalties for us aside from the loss of one whole earned income.

I have lost my entitlement to child benefit because my partner's income falls above the threshold. Despite our household income being far lower than that of a dual income household whose children attend school.

My tax allowance is not transferrable and I am not married so do not benefit from the married tax allowance.

The nature of home educating means we incur all costs associated with educating our child whether computer equipment, stationery, books, sports activities, tutoring, educational trips, travel costs, additional costs of being at home (heating, food etc), qualifications, exams and much more.

So, financially, we are certainly at a disadvantage and make a lot of sacrifices in order to ensure a quality education for our child. A basic income would address some of these issues.

## 2. Policy

Being excluded from policy making that affects us.

## 3. Perception in society

Home educators are constantly referred to as 'missing education' or 'hidden' or reported on in the context of 'safeguarding'.

Language is everything and the language around home education is rarely positive. The conflation of education and safeguarding is of particular concern and extremely offensive. Particularly since the desire to provide a safe secure and effective learning environment for our children is most often one of the key drivers behind a parent's decision to home educate.

The labels and language around home education put out by both Government, Local Authorities, policy makers and media is wholly unfair and agenda driven. It is also extremely damaging for our child to be exposed to this. It can lead him to consider our approach unusual, not normal, problematic, weird and not positive. Fortunately, he is well equipped to deal with it and values his own opinion and experience so it will have minimal effect on him. This may not be the case for everyone though and it is tiresome as these messages trickle through to communities and we are regularly confronted and questioned about our legitimate right to home educate.

**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;**

LAs idea of support is assessment, monitoring and registration. This is not support that is either valued or required. Real support can only really be offered when LAs have personnel that are trained and have a thorough understanding of home education. Most LAs fall way short of offering any meaningful support. Sincere and non-judgemental channels of communications must be opened up in order to improve support. Mutual respect, engagement and relationship building needs to be the goal of LAs.

**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';**

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

When it comes to home education, parents are the experts. The LAs have little to no understanding of home education so I cannot see how they can be in a position to inspect. The law makes adequate provision but the LAs rarely follow it. They interpret the guidelines differently and often are not even aware of the law. They frequently overstep their remit and can be heavy handed.

**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;**

From what I understand, there has been no improvement in support since the 2012 report was published.

**The impact COVID-19 has had on home educated children, and what additional measures might need to be taken in order to mitigate any negative impacts.'**

Whilst children have gone back to school, many of our regular sessions (particularly sports activities) have not re-started for home educating groups. As such, our child is missing out on the organised physical activities. However, we try to compensate by taking regular exercise and getting outdoors.

I believe also that access to exam centres has been and continues to be an issue for many home educating families.

November 2020