

Written evidence submitted by James Simister

Home Education, registration and monitoring

The issue of Home Schooling comes to the fore every few years, for example when Mr Balls was Education Secretary and more recently through the initiative launched by Lord Soley. Ofsted and some LEAs have also made great efforts to deal with unregistered schools

Home Schooling is again prominent in 2020 with so many children having to be educated by their parents or other carers. It seems that some parents and carers are deciding to do so permanently. I enclose a 2-page summary of research I conducted 9 years ago into:-

- (a) why parents and carers of teenagers choose to home educate
- (b) who has the most influence on this decision, parents etc or pupils
- (c) what the general outcomes are (not long-term academic attainment)

I was then Vice-Principal of a small adult education college which provided tuition in various GCSEs (particularly Maths, Science and English) and A-levels to home educated teenagers.

My research was conducted for my Education Masters dissertation at Chichester University and it was awarded a Distinction in 2012. My research was conducted in Surrey and Sussex, but the dissertation references issues associated with home schooling elsewhere in Britain.

I believe all home schooled pupils should be registered either with LEAs or centrally, and that the education being provided should be monitored regularly and in depth by officers with sufficient powers to intervene where it is inadequate or is putting the pupil(s) at risk.

I enclose an 'executive summary', and I can provide the whole dissertation (18,000 words) as required as an attachment or in hard copy. I would be glad to contribute to the work of your select committee in any way that I can, e.g. by attending meetings or giving evidence.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Why people choose to educate their teenage children at home in the UK

MA Ed. dissertation, 2012, University of Chichester, by James Simister: Conclusions

The aim of this dissertation is to draw conclusions about why families decide to home educate their children, or to continue to home educate them when they are aged 14+, and about what say or influence these young people themselves have on this decision.

First, there is a wide range of reasons for deciding to home educate, or to continue to home educate, young people aged 14+. These can be broadly grouped into three types, though they are not mutually exclusive and their interaction is explored in the Results and Analysis section of the dissertation (please see the note at the foot of the page overleaf about how to obtain a copy of the dissertation in print or soft copy):-

1. Belief in home education as superior to any form of schooling for religious or philosophical reasons, including disdain for a 'results-driven school system'
2. Lack of confidence in the schools available, usually because of low academic standards, and often because of reports of disruptive behaviour and bullying

3. Children's experiences in school, either of bullying or of a failure by school(s) to recognise and deal with their educational needs to the satisfaction of parents

Secondly, by far the most frequently indicated reason for parents choosing to home educate is that they believe they can do a better job overall than school. This view is held by almost all parents whose children have always been home educated, and by about half of those whose children have attended school.

Many respondents believe they are actually doing a better job overall than school but emphasise that it is not only they but a team which includes, especially at GCSE, other parents and tutors with the necessary specialisms. These include serving or former teachers in both state and independent sectors, some with overseas experience.

Thirdly, significant numbers of home educated children have been bullied at school, and bullying in schools is a major concern for many other home educating parents.

Fourthly, significant numbers of home educated children have SENs and many of these have attended schools which are unable or unwilling to offer the special support needed (or in some cases stipulated in an SSEN) to the satisfaction of their parents.

Fifthly, most parents are concerned about low levels of pupil behaviour in schools, and a significant minority say that general academic standards of education in schools are too low, partly as a consequence of disruption by bad behaviour in the classroom.

Sixthly, more than two in five respondents state religious or other conscientious reasons for home education; they are more concerned with the moral and cultural character of education and with low standards of behaviour and bad language.

This appears to be the most significant divide within the questionnaire responses:

1. Respondents **largely concerned with the type and quality of education**

45, or 70.3% of respondents indicated all of the following:-

learning is less constrained by National Curriculum
 learning is generally more free, flexible, spontaneous
 learning can be made more relevant, stimulating, or interesting
 learning can be tailored to the child's preferred learning style
 pace and levels of learning can be tailored to my child's needs

2. Respondents **largely concerned with bullying and standards of behaviour**

15, or 23.4% of respondents indicated all of the following:-

my child's manners are better than they would be at school
 my child's behaviour is better than it would be at school
 my child is less likely to be badly influenced by others
 my child is less likely to be bullied or made fun of
 my child uses bad language less than s/he would if at school

There is a correlation between these two main identifiable categories of respondents. Respondents who believe they can do a better job overall than school include most of those largely concerned with the type and quality of education. Within the latter group there are differences about what that 'job' is and about how quality is to be assessed. Some define quality chiefly in terms of academic attainment while others define it more broadly and regard the British education system as too results-focussed and rigid, driving out spontaneity and preventing children's discovery of the wonder of learning.

There are also many areas which the categories share such as concerns about bullying and about the difficulty of getting support in schools for children with special needs.

Finally, the issue of children's 'say' and influence in the decision to be home educated is a secondary focus of this work and the subject of question 2 of the questionnaire. This is the most sensitive of the issues where I had hoped to compare parents' views with their children's. The decision to home educate, or to continue to do so, is largely taken by parents even when the children are aged 13 or above at the approach of GCSEs or 'Key Stage 4'. These older children are however almost always involved in the decision and are occasionally the prime movers. Sometimes family circumstances make school attendance difficult - for example where there are home educated young siblings. I have not found evidence either from the questionnaires or from case study interviews that parents overstate the extent of children's participation and influence.

Responses given in three detailed interviews with parents confirmed the findings from questionnaires; but the nature and circumstances of home education inhibit students from giving views which are not influenced or filtered by those of parents or guardians.

Parents' reluctance to allow their children to be asked about the way in which the home education decision was reached or confirmed in the teenage years, and about their own experiences of home education, may be regarded as significant in itself. These older children will naturally develop strong views about their education as they do about many other subjects, and these do not always correspond to those of their parents.

It would be interesting to conduct a survey in which these views could be compared.

This reluctance by the sample of home educators' to allow their children to respond to questionnaires is paralleled by the refusal of many home educators in the UK generally to allow LEA officers any access to, or contact with, their children, and by their strongly hostile reaction to all official enquiries into home education in the UK in recent years.

Most home educated young people go on to attend Colleges of various types from the age of 16, and almost all are interested in attending Higher Education institutions from the age of 18 or 19. Some of them would prefer to make the transition from home to 'college' at an earlier age, and the option of part-time attendance at classes provides a useful bridge for some young people with opportunities to learn and socialise together.

Further research is needed on the long-term prospects of home educated young people – both those who have a highly academic education, and those whose schooling is less formal and more spontaneous. Such research should focus on three particular groups:- those with SENs, those who have been bullied, and those who are educated in relative isolation, sometimes according to a religious or cultural regime that may not in the long run give that young person a broad enough outlook to make choices in the wider world.

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