

# Home education

## *Responding to the Education Committee call for evidence*

The House of Commons Education Committee is consulting on home education.

On 6 October 2020, the Children's Commissioner told the Committee that the Department for Education (DfE) has committed to introduce a compulsory register of home-educated children. She also insisted that the DfE should introduce termly inspections of home-educating families.

**Christians must speak up against this attempt to interfere in family life.**

## BACKGROUND

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English law quite rightly reflects the biblical position by making parents responsible for a child's education. Education is compulsory, but school is not.

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 says:

*"The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education... either by regular attendance at school or otherwise."*

Home education falls under the definition of 'otherwise'. Most people do not choose it, but The Christian Institute supports the right of parents to make that choice for themselves. Many people who do not home educate can think of circumstances in which they would consider doing so temporarily, such as bullying.

## EVIDENCE ASKED FOR

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The Committee is receiving evidence relating to the "safeguarding" of home-educated children, and the introduction of an inspection regime for home education. It also requests evidence on whether a mandatory register of home-educated children should be introduced.

Parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children. Mandatory registration could lead to them effectively having to ask the state's permission before they can home educate.

**This is an issue of principle: parents who send their children to school should also be concerned and respond to this consultation.**

## RESPONDING

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**The closing date is Friday 6 November 2020.**

You will need to respond online. You can do so here:

[www.bit.ly/eherespond20](http://www.bit.ly/eherespond20)

Below you will find suggestions for responding to the call for evidence. You may find these helpful as you consider your response.

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO RESPOND IN YOUR OWN WORDS.**

For more detailed advice, see this article (and related resources) by HE Byte:

[www.bit.ly/hebyte20](http://www.bit.ly/hebyte20)

## GENERAL COMMENTS TO MAKE

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- If you home educate or have other personal experience of home education, it is important to mention this.
- If there are circumstances in which you would consider home education, even temporarily, please say so.
- Point out that parents choose to educate their children at home because they believe it is best for them.
- Say that parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children. Teachers are educating on behalf of parents, not the state.

## SPECIFIC POINTS AND RESPONSES

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

Local authorities already have powers to intervene where they have reason to believe that children are not receiving an adequate education, or are at risk of abuse.

- Say that the current approach strikes an appropriate balance between family privacy and child protection – local authorities have substantial powers to intervene when they have good reason to believe there is a problem.
- Say that giving overstretched local authorities even more responsibility for safeguarding home-educated children would make authorities increasingly risk-averse. To protect themselves from criticism, they would be under pressure to interfere in the lives of law-abiding families, distracting them from the children most at risk.<sup>1</sup>

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

- Say that a mandatory register would give the state unwarranted power over parents. Why should parents need to register with the state to teach their own children?
- Say that there is no evidence that a mandatory register is necessary or would be effective. Parents who are of concern are unlikely to register anyway.
- Say that a mandatory register would be a worrying sign of increasing state interference in family life. Mandatory registration may be the first step towards even more intrusive regulation and monitoring.
- Say that administering a mandatory register would be a waste of local authorities' already limited resources.

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

This is an opportunity to mention potential benefits of home education. It does not mean arguing that home education is superior to school education.

- Say that home education can be tailored to individual children's interests, helping to create an enjoyable and stimulating environment.
- Say that home educators have flexibility to vary their pace, allowing them to speed up for gifted children or slow down for those who struggle in certain areas.
- Say that home education is a safe and nurturing environment for children who have experienced bullying.
- Say that home education can encourage self-directed study that leaves children well-equipped for higher education.

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

- Say that there is no evidence that inspection is necessary, and there is no mandate for it. Councils already have sufficient powers to address inadequate home education.
- Say that inspection is inappropriate for home education. One home education can be very unlike another. This diversity of approaches is a strength of home education, but would make inspection impractical.
- Say that there is no evidence that lack of inspection puts children at risk.
- Say that inspection would be an intrusion into the home and a worrying sign of increased state interference in family life.

**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'**

Elective home education is often unhelpfully conflated with other issues. Considering them together leads to confused and ineffective policy.

- Say that elective home education is being unfairly linked with unregistered or illegal schools, with exclusion, and with off-rolling. These are separate matters, and dealing with them properly means focusing on them and not elective home education.
- Say you are concerned that home education gets wrongly associated with child abuse. Child abuse is a separate issue which authorities already have wide powers to deal with. In fact many parents home educate to protect their children from the abuse of bullying at school.
- Say that home-educated children are much less likely to need state intervention to protect them than children educated in school. Research in 2015 found home-educated children in England were two to three times less likely to be subject to a Child Protection Plan than children in school, despite being twice as likely to be referred to social services.<sup>2</sup>
- Say that home education protects children from the alarming levels of sexual harassment and abuse that has been documented in schools.<sup>3</sup>
- Say that there is no evidence of a problem with the current regulatory framework.

**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**

- Say that any support should be entirely voluntary, available on request from parents. There must be no implication that not requesting support, or declining to follow advice offered, is a cause for concern.
- Say that some parents feel they have to remove their children from state schools because, for example, they have special needs which are not being properly addressed. Support for these parents and children would come from making existing provision better.
- Say that home educators often report being treated with unwarranted suspicion by local authorities, rather than being supported. One local authority was reprimanded by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for visiting a family based on unsubstantiated claims and not even explaining the reasons.<sup>4</sup>
- Say that the provision of financial assistance for exam fees or help with exam centres are areas in which home educators could be supported.

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1. Charles-Warner, W, 'Home Education and the Safeguarding Myth: Analysing the Facts Behind the Rhetoric', 2015, see <http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/home-education-and-the-safeguarding-myth-signed.WCWV-1.pdf> as at 27 October 2020

2. *Loc cit*

3. *Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges: Advice for governing bodies, proprietors, headteachers, principals, senior leadership teams and designated safeguarding leads*, Department for Education, May 2018, pages 6 and 7

4. 'Be clear about visits to home-schooled children says Ombudsman', Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, 18 July 2019, see <https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/news/2019/jul/be-clear-about-visits-to-home-schooled-children-says-ombudsman> as at 27 October 2020