

Education Select Committee Inquiry into Home Education

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

A. Introduction

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 20,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. This places the Association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.
2. ASCL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

B. Response to specific points

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

3. There should be a nationally agreed format for schools to report elective home education (EHE) requests to Local Authorities (LAs). This centralised format must, as a baseline, include a listing of all school concerns, not just official safeguarding concerns.
4. There must be consistency of practice across LAs. LAs must be adequately resourced to deal with the growing number of EHE requests, especially during the current pandemic. Some LAs cover wide areas yet appear to have a handful of EHE workers in the team, many of whom are part time. EHE teams seem over-whelmed. Adequate resourcing is required to advise and re-engage families where appropriate.
5. It is imperative that LA EHE teams have a monitoring and quality assurance responsibility.

Whether a statutory register of home-educated children is required

6. ASCL believes a national register of EHE children is essential to ensure the full extent of home education is known. Parents who are home educating their children should be required to register their children with their LA. There should be a requirement for parents to inform the LA if they move away from the area and to re-register the child with their new authority. We are particularly concerned about more mobile families and the safeguarding risk of children going missing from education.

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

7. The opportunity to home educate is essential in some particular circumstances, e.g. where children may be seriously ill. EHE should remain an available educational pathway, provided this has the support of the school or LA following a risk assessment.
8. Potential disadvantages faced include a narrowing of the curriculum; fewer opportunities for children to develop alongside a range of learners; reduced access to wider safeguarding. These issues could lead to a lack of equity for some children.

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

9. Extra resource to support families is essential, particularly given the growing number of pupils with complex needs, which can be co-occurring and difficult to define. These children may be identified as SEND Support at school. If these children come off roll, they may suddenly find themselves without the specialist support they had access to within the school system.
10. ASCL recommends investment to explicitly address the reasons why families are leaving schools, rather than simply addressing the symptoms. A more effective approach to inclusion must be the goal. We know that quality teaching can make the greatest difference to the outcomes of young people. Meeting individual needs within school must be our central goal. To do this, government must strengthen inclusion and diversity funding to stop the 'bleed' of families removing children who aren't thriving in their current school setting. A well-funded baseline of effective inclusion in every school is the strongest answer to the many EHE issues.
11. The high rate of exclusions among children with protected characteristics indicates a need for improvement in inclusive teaching, policy and practice in some schools.
12. Focusing further on children with Special Educational Needs; children with complex vulnerabilities must be given high priority when looking at the suitability of EHE to ensure the effective meeting of needs. The fact that an EHE case can be 'examined' by the LA if the child is at a specialist provision, but not if the child just has an EHCP in a mainstream setting, is a particular worry. The very existence of this anomaly shows a lack of knowledge concerning the complexities of a growing cohort of children in mainstream schools. It appears that the EHE 'system' assumes that an EHCP child in a mainstream school must not have complex needs, and thus can easily be provided for at home. This is not true in every case. Such an assumption means that numbers of complex children each year are not having the suitability of their EHE provision looked into, possibly increasing the child's vulnerability. Consideration should be given to any EHCP, regardless of setting, carrying an element of LA 'corporate parenting' in terms of changes of provision.

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'

13. A nationally agreed format for schools to report EHE 'requests' must be ensured. This centralised format must act as a baseline, include a listing of 'all concerns' not just

official safeguarding concerns. It is imperative that LA EHE teams are given the authority to look into such concerns so that a child's needs are recognised.

14. LAs must be supported to deal with the number of children being home educated, particularly at the moment. As mentioned above, some LAs cover wide areas yet appear to have a handful of EHE workers in the team, many of which are part time. EHE teams seem over-whelmed and unable to do more than a basic review in the current climate. Without regard to effective funding of LA EHE services, a new area of vulnerabilities may open up for children.
15. Monitoring and tracking of pupils who are home educated is important for recognising different categories of need, such as SEN or pupil premium eligibility, and awareness of developing trends.

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

16. CQC SEND inspections should review the quality assurance of home education and the outcomes of children and young people who are home educated.
17. Ofsted inspections should include a review of pupils who have left schools to be home educated.
18. When inspecting schools with high levels of pupil movement, Ofsted should explore whether there is any link between their behaviour policies and pupils leaving the school to be home-educated. If particular behaviour policies are consistently a feature of schools with high numbers of pupils becoming home-educated, Ofsted should provide the evidence to the sector to enable schools to consider their policies.
19. School behaviour policies should acknowledge that poor behaviour may be linked to additional needs, such as SEND, and ensure that children with additional needs receive appropriate support.

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

20. The 2012 report helped clarify roles, but responsibilities were not statutory. Our concern is that the strongest LAs have actioned this guidance but in regions where the need is greatest, expectations of best practice remain unclear.

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.

21. The pandemic has led to an increase in the number of families adopting home education.
22. Greater advice and support needs to be available so that families make the best choices for their children. Knowledge will support sustainable, long term choices to be made rather than reactionary short-term options.
23. Additional measures to mitigate negative impact could include increasing the knowledge of school leaders to allow a full understanding of any child leaving the school roll. School leaders may not always be fully aware of all the legal issues associated with children not being in school. This requires effective inclusive education to be taught at every stage of teacher and leadership development. Such an education should happen at Initial

Teacher Training but also requires new and existing leaders to be trained in the need for inclusive leadership. The use of inclusively focused National Leadership Qualifications would be effective here.

24. It is essential that families' decisions to home school are treated with respect.

C. Conclusion

25. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

26. We hope that this response is of value to the process. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

Margaret Mulholland
SEND and Inclusion Specialist
Association of School and College Leaders
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