

## Replies to Janine Ainsworth

On the Big Question, May 2012, Janine Ainsworth, the chief education officer for the church of England said that home ed wasn't a good idea because we shut our children off from the real world, so they should go to school. What follows are two responses to this remark

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To Janine Ainsworth from Mike Fortune-Wood - HEUK

I was more than a little disappointed to hear of your misinformed comments regarding home education recently on The Big Question BBC1. Where you expressed the opinion that home education was a bad thing because children were isolated by their parents.

I wondered what actual experience you had of home educated children or the research that supports home educators claims that home education offers a superior form of education to school, such as the works of Paula Rothermel and Alan Thomas.

Practically all Home educated children take an active roll in their local communities. They socialise with local children and are members of local youth organisations. Many are members of local churches, as were mine when my ex-wife was vicar of her church.

It seems very unfortunate and disappointing that you should express such an off the cuff remark about home education which perpetuates an inaccurate and unsubstantiated myth that home educated children suffer socially because of their home education.

Home educated children have been shown to be highly social, balance and to mix well with other children and adults. (Paula Rothermel's work). The contrary view that home educated children are in some way deficit, appears to be largely based on a set of unfounded assumptions put out by professionals with no academic basis of any kind. Perpetuating this myth does not foster a climate of open dialogue or mutual respect.

This is the second intervention we are aware of by the CofE in the world of home education, the previous one being the scurrilous and libellous statement that home educated children were twice as likely to be on at risk registers than the normal population. We eventually received a muted apology for that error when home educators challenged this remark and asked upon what evidence it was based, but it left a very bad taste for many home educators at the time wondering if the CofE regarded us all as potential paedophiles.

I do hope that the church of England is not embarking upon the same policy of demeaning home educators that the Catholic church appears to have engaged in, in recent years in the



US, probably from a fear of rising interest in home education in the context of struggling church schools.

These negative comments by senior members of the CofE are beginning to feel like a CofE official policy to demean home education. Does the CofE really want to create the public impression that home educated children are at some disadvantage or that home education is in some way dangerous, or might you try to understand the real world of home education and arrive at a more accurate, rational and supportable position?

If you have an interest in learning more about the world of home education and how it is really undertaken I'm sure we can arrange for a meeting between yourself and some active home educators and possibly their children, who would I'm sure, be happy to enlighten yourself and your team on how home education is actually conducted.

Mike Fortune-Wood

www.home-education.org.uk

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To Janine Ainstworth From Karen Rodgers - Choice in Education

It was with some concern that I heard your claim that home-educated children are isolated.

I am a former mainstream teacher who now organises activities for local home-educating families in Cambridge so I have had ample opportunity to compare both the relative opportunities available to HE children and those in school and the effects of the availability of these opportunities on both groups.

My observation is that in school children are kept in one environment all day with children all the same age (mixing between age groups in school is rare). Children have little if any opportunity to exercise choice or initiative or to suggest and implement creative solutions to self-chosen problems. They rarely encounter adults other than teachers and the relationships they have with these are necessarily of a highly standardised nature.

By way of contrast, HE children are out and about with their parents, attending mixed age groups with a wide variety of families, meeting people from all walks of life in a variety of situations, making relationships with the many kinds of people they see regularly in different roles from residents at the local retirement home, to the local librarians, members of local choirs, the scouts, the local grocer, having to think on their feet, take decisions and follow through consequences. HE in Cambridge is especially multi-cultural with a high proportion of bi-lingual children from a wide variety of cultural and geographical backgrounds.



The result of all of this is that HE children tend to be notably very mature, outstandingly secure and confident, adept in social situations, at ease talking to strangers approriately as well as people of different ages, from small children to old people. My observations of the positive effects of HE are supported by research both by Rothermel and by others.

Please do some research before making negative off-the cuff remarks about a group of people. When they are made by someone in your position and on the national media they can have unjust and negative effects,

Karen Rodgers

MA Cantab & PGCE

www.educationchoice.org.uk