

COMMENTS ON THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT "EHE - GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITIES"

The general spirit of this document assumes that EHE parents will do a good job and have the educational well-being of their children at heart. It offers little support to LEAs working with parents where this is not the case.

Para 3.10. This point suggests that home education provision is likely to be fine unless the specific instances listed apply. It makes a point of noting that LEAs are not required to proactively investigate whether parents are complying with their duties. However a key tension for LEAs is "You don't know what you don't know!". Unless LEAs make contact with parents to investigate and seek evidence from parents of all children known to the LEA to be home educated it cannot be sure whether provision is satisfactory or not. We come across at least 20 cases each year where we feel that home education is not satisfactory yet the families do not fit the concerns list shown in this paragraph. Perhaps the wording needs to be clearer about what expectations the DfES has in this matter if there is to be any consistency of approach. Otherwise we shall continue with the current situation of varied practice across LEAs.

(As an aside, I assume that there are no plans to revise statute so that parents are required to register with LEAs that they are educating their children at home and that the LEA has a responsibility to liaise with such parents on at least an annual basis. There are some compelling educational, health and safety arguments for this. If revised statute is unlikely should the DfES be liaising more with the "Education Otherwise" organisation to try to agree protocols which, whilst not having statutory backing, provide a collective agreement about good practice. This organisation should be concerned, as we are, about a significant percentage of parents who do not take home education seriously and do not make appropriate provision for their children. In order to achieve greater consistency of practice, LEAs really need clearer guidance on what they SHOULD (not might) do to liaise with parents. However I appreciate that you may find this difficult to insist upon given the lack of statute. Like other LEAs, we have no idea how many parents in total are educating their children at home. We do know of 150 in Leeds. We are successful in arranging home visits with 98% of these parents largely because they see us as being helpful but also partly because a number of them are not aware that they need not agree to meet us! This matter is the key tension point for LEAs and one which the "Education Otherwise" organisation understandably exploits.

Para 3.11. This seems to imply that previous information is required to actively investigate. Where do LEAs obtain such information if they are not informed from agencies in the list in Para 3.10?

Para 3.14. A "proper" picture of what is being provided for at home cannot always be gained though the methods mentioned. Our experience is that information provided by many parents is limited, lacks detail and gives no evidence of progression in children's learning. We can request further detail but some of these parents know that they do not have to provide it for us. We have had cases of parents going to a solicitor to complain about the LEA harrasing them for requesting information which we consider reasonable to request.

Para 3.15. No mention is given regarding the importance of academic work. Some children being educated at home may return or commence mainstream schooling and be disadvantaged at school if the parents have not paid sufficient regard to academic work and perhaps "shadowed" the National Curriculum. Does this need to be mention in the DfES guidance to LEAs and to parents?

Para 3.18. Problem with the first sentence. Should the LEA be contacting all parents it knows of who are educating their children at home? Previously the document has suggested that they shouldn't unless they have cause to believe that parents are not making adequate provision! Should the LEA only therefore be contacting only those parents it has cause to be concerned about that have come to its attention from the list in Para 3.10? As stated previously reports from parents do not always provide sufficient evidence for the LEA to make a judgement that home education provision is satisfactory.

Para 3.19. This suggests that a home visit should only be requested if there appears to be problems despite the fact that this is the best way to gain an accurate picture of what is happening.

Para 4.7. Here the document supports home visits but might be conceived as contradicting previous advice. We strongly support home visits but know we cannot insist on them. We should like this guidance for LEAs to more strongly, and earlier in the document, support home visits being sought.

Para 4.8. Reference is made to a home tutor. Should the DfES be pointing out to parents in other guidance that they should undertake a criminal vetting procedure? This is a health and safety issue.

Para 4.9. The labels suggested sound less formal than 'officer'. Is that a good thing? Given LEAs responsibilities shouldn't their monitoring function be made clearer to parents?

Paras 5.2, 5.8, 6.1. Do you think all LEAs should be adopting these ideas? With what funding?

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