

Conference and Home Educators' Concerns:

1. Appointments with home educating families should be arranged in advance, preferably in writing.

Home educators often perceive unannounced visits as intrusive and intimidating. At best they interrupt the natural flow of learning and at worst they can cause severe stress to children who have suffered tremendously at school. Visits arranged in advance show respect for parents and children and build trust in the relationship.

Agreed. There would be no reason why home visits could not take place by arrangement.

2. Parents should be allowed time to establish home education.

Although it is reasonable to expect parents to demonstrate their commitment to providing an efficient education that is suitable for their child from the outset it is unhelpful if the LEA requests detailed information too soon after deregistration. Children who have been deregistered often need time to adjust to new schedules, new support and new friends. Parents may also need this time to discover their own role as the primary educator, and to explore different approaches to learning.

Agreed, but reasonable timescale should be agreed. Interim progress reports would also demonstrate parental commitment to UEAs.

3. Clear descriptions of LEA procedures should be provided to parents as soon as the LEA becomes aware of a home educating family.

Clear, written descriptions of how the LEA plans to proceed would be helpful, and would perhaps go a long way towards relieving the stress that families experience in not knowing what to expect in their dealings with the LEA. In particular the role of the EWO and/or inspector/advisor could be stated.

All LEAs should have access to DfES led, nationally agreed, procedures. These should include the role of the identified home visitor which ideally should be standard. Whilst the EWS has significant experience of home visiting, their role in Home Education matters needs careful consideration.

4. All information provided by LEAs and LEA officers to families should be legally accurate.

The provision of accurate information is crucial to the development of trusting relationships between families and LEAs. EWOs should make it clear to parents that they do not need permission to home educate, that there is no requirement for them to allow EWOs or inspectors into their homes, and that home education can take a variety of forms. Parents who feel that they have been misled by an LEA official often refuse to cooperate further with the LEA.

All LEA information about any aspect of education should be legally accurate) With regard to home education, all guidance for both LEA, and Home Educators should

confirm the correct legal positions with regard to permission, home visits and the forms of home education. For mutual trust to be established, it is essential that both parties fully understand their correct legal stance.

5. LEAs should not insist on home visits.

Some parents feel that home visits are an invasion of family privacy. There is no legal requirement for home visits and EWOs should make this clear to families. If a family decline the offer of a visit, other channels of communication must remain open in order that the family can show what education is taking place in the manner most suitable for them.

If there is no legal requirement for home visits, it will not be helpful for LEAs to insist on one. However, that needs to be clear understanding for both LEAs and Home Educators about further action where there is no contact from Home Educators.

6. LEAs should assume that all types of family can home educate successfully.

Parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children and the assumption should be that they are fulfilling this responsibility unless there is clear evidence to the contrary. Home educators often feel that they are being treated with suspicion by LEA officers, and that the education they are providing is regarded as second-rate. Parents on lower incomes or who may not be articulate enough to portray their activities in the language of education professionals often feel that they come under particular suspicion even when they are providing an efficient education, tailored to their child's needs.

Whilst this would seem to be a sensible statement, it will be important not to confuse the above statement with the suggestion that "all families can home educate successfully". It is likely that there is evidence that many types of family and many families home educate successfully, but there will be some circumstances which will raise LEAs concern. It would be helpful if LEAs and Home Educators could identify some examples of these, and appropriate action to be taken.

7. LEAs should be knowledgeable about home education.

Many forms sent out by LEAs ask for curricular information, or information by specific topic. This does not often tally with the experience of home education, which can be much more informal and holistic to achieve success. Representatives from LEAs are used to curricular settings, and judging educational provision by samples of work, timetables, and planned courses. There is no legal requirement for any home educator to provide these things. One of the problems that home educators have when supplying information about their educational provision is the proscriptive description of education that EWOs or inspectors may have. They may consider that home education is not taking place if they see no examples of written work. They may not believe that samples of work have been completed by the child. They may insist on carrying out a home visit, and threaten an SAO if this is not allowed. These are all examples of the discriminatory behaviour that home educators are confronted with, which illustrates a general lack of understanding of many families' experiences. Those families who choose a more structured approach, which

most resembles school education, will fare better with those LEA representatives who can easily identify the National Curriculum, but do not understand the importance of conversation and play among home educators.

This is essential. It would also be extremely helpful for LEAs to have contact with local Home Education Associations for advice on individual cases. If standardised procedures are available from DfES and LEAs expected to use them, the opportunities for misunderstanding may be reduced. Home Education organisations could assist by offering guidance to families that would promote cooperation between LEAs and Home Education.

8. Efficient education can take place without evidence of written work.

Written work is a large part of institutional education probably due to the fact that there is little other opportunity for a single teacher to establish what 20-30 individuals know. In the home educating environment, a parent will have ample opportunity for one to one discussion, to answer questions, to clarify points of fact, and to aid a child in finding our specific information. The primary role of conversation in home educators experience is discussed in Alan Thomas' book *Educating Children at Home*. This book is an excellent introduction to home education by an academic and we would recommend that those individuals dealing with home educators be familiar with Dr Thomas' research, along with other literature available from Education Otherwise here -<http://www.education-otherwise.org.uk/Publications%20Files/PubList.htm>

See above.

9. EWOs on truancy sweeps should be fully briefed as to the possibility that they may encounter home educators.

Both EWOs and Police need to be informed as to the position of home educators when conducting truancy sweeps. If an EWO on a truancy sweep encounters an individual who states that they are a home educating parent or child, they need take no further action. EWOs sometimes insist on taking names and addresses, for which there is no legal requirement. There is no requirement for a person who states that they are home educating to show identification or proof of their status, for example an EO membership card. The suspicious nature with which some home educators have been treated when encountered on truancy sweeps, does not improve relations with parents. EWOs on truancy sweeps who misrepresent the law do not help in building trusting relationships with home educators. EWOs should recognize that they represent the LEA and when they misstate the law, or act in an unpleasant or suspicious nature, they are harming any future positive relations that that family may have had with their LEA. The Home Office's guidance which accompanies the Crime and Disorder Act can be found here - <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs/guidtru.html> The sections which deal specifically with home educated children are found on the Education Otherwise web site <http://www.education-otherwise.org.uk/Legal/IndexToLegalBits.htm> and are reprinted below.

"4.20 In planning for, and operating, a truancy initiative using the new power it is important to remember that not all children aged 5-16 are registered at school. Children educated outside the school system altogether (see paragraph 4.1), for example, by home tuition, might be out and about during the daytime for wholly

legitimate reasons, for example visiting a library.

4.21 Local procedures should take account of possible contact with such home-educated children and it should be emphasised that they are not the target group for the new power. The power can only be exercised in relation to registered pupils of compulsory school age absent from school without authority; it does not apply to children who are lawfully educated at home. No further action should be taken where children indicate that they are home-educated - unless the constable has reason to doubt that this is the case."

This matter is to be discussed at DfES 27.9.04.

LEAs are expected to undertake Truancy Sweeps as part of the National/Local agenda to promote attendance and protect vulnerable children from exploitation and abuse. It is difficult to work with this framework if one sector is able to maintain a policy of non-identification.

Sec 16 applies to police and not the LEA. Police officers are entitled to ask for information when carrying out their duties. A refusal to supply may lead to further complications with the police. Information must be sought AND given in order to verify the statement "I am home-educated\educating!. It should then be accepted that once information is verified NFA should be taken -

Children Act 1989 states that children's wishes and feelings must be taken into account. There may be children who are Home Educated who would prefer to be in school. Current education legislation giving rights to parents may be in conflict with CA89.

10. LEAs should respect the trademarked name Education Otherwise and not use it to represent LEA services in any dealings with the public.

Individuals within LEAs sometimes refer to their departments dealing with educational provision outside of school as Education Otherwise, because of the reference in section 7 to education being compulsory "either by regular attendance at school or otherwise." This leads to confusion, and some home educators have thought that they were being contacted by the charity Education Otherwise, when they were in fact being contacted by an employee of the LEA. Parents contacted in this way may feel that they have been tricked, and future positive relations can be harmed. We ask that EWOs are very clear as to their identity, and that they do not use the name Education Otherwise when referring to their own departments.

This is a matter for LEAs and not EWS. It reflects the OfES decision to identify children being educated outside of school but within LEAs as 'educated otherwise'. Some clarification is certainly needed.