

Written evidence submitted by Liesje Wright to The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee (CWSB35)

Introduction

I am a dedicated home educator and mum to my 8 year old son with ADHD. While I fully support school education where it is appropriate, our four other children have all successfully navigated the school system, it simply did not work for our youngest son. Despite my family's tireless efforts over two years to collaborate with his school and find solutions to support him, he was kept on an extremely restricted timetable, often just one hour a day. I was forced to give up a job I loved and relied on to support my family, yet the school seemed more focused on maintaining this limited provision with the intention of moving him into alternative provision or a pupil referral unit, rather than prioritising his success. It wasn't until I took charge of his education, sourcing resources and strategies to re-engage him and foster his love of learning, that he began to thrive. This experience has left me deeply concerned about the potential impact this Bill could have on families facing similar challenges.

Executive Summary

In this submission I will cover the following:

- 1. Background**
- 2. Areas of Concern including recommendations** - a look at the chief areas of concern in this Bill from the perspective of a home educator. These concerns include:
 - Right to Education
 - Privacy & Data Protection
 - Potential for Misuse
 - Discrimination & Lack of Understanding
 - Lack of Clarity & Oversight
 - Failure to Address Fundamental Issues Within Schools
 - Failure to Achieve Stated Objectives
 - Wider Context & Underlying Motivations
- 3. Conclusion**

Background

As a dedicated home educator and mother of an eight year old with ADHD, I must voice my deep concerns about the provisions in the Schools Bill. While I fully support the value of school education where appropriate—our four other children have thrived within the school system—it simply did not work for my youngest son. For over two years, despite my family's considerable efforts to work with the school to find solutions, my son was restricted to a timetable of just one hour a day. The school appeared more focused on moving him into alternative provision or a pupil referral unit rather than ensuring his success in mainstream education. This resulted in him effectively being denied his right to education, protected under Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights, incorporated into UK law through the Human Rights Act 1998.

This Bill fails to address the fundamental issues within the school system that force parents into home education in the first place. Instead, it places undue suspicion and surveillance on

families who are doing everything possible to ensure their children's educational, emotional, and developmental needs are met. Below, I outline the key concerns with the Bill, its potential conflicts with current law, and suggestions for improvement.

Areas of Concern Surrounding the Bill

- Right to Education
- Privacy & Data Protection
- Potential for Misuse
- Discrimination & Lack of Understanding
- Lack of Clarity & Oversight
- Failure to Address Fundamental Issues Within Schools
- Failure to Achieve Stated Objectives
- Wider Context & Underlying Motivations

1. Right to Education

The Bill fundamentally fails to acknowledge that many parents turn to home education because the school system has failed to fulfil its obligation to provide an education that is accessible, suitable, and appropriate for their child. In my case, my son was denied this right while in school, and it was only through home education—after I left my job to support him—that he began to thrive academically and emotionally. By focusing on penalising home educators, the Bill distracts from the state's failures to uphold the right to education for children like my son.

Recommendation: The Bill must explicitly recognise the systemic failings in schools that lead to home education, ensuring these issues are addressed before introducing measures that target home educating families.

2. Privacy & Data Protection

The Bill's requirement for a mandatory national register raises serious concerns regarding the protection of sensitive personal data. This register would expose home educating families to potential misuse of their information and could be used to target or discriminate against parents. There is little detail in the Bill regarding how this data will be safeguarded, who will have access, and what oversight mechanisms will be in place to prevent abuse.

Recommendation: Any proposal for a register must include robust safeguards for privacy and data protection, with strict limitations on how information can be accessed and used. Transparency and oversight mechanisms must be built into the legislation.

3. Potential for Misuse

The vague and open ended nature of the Bill gives local authorities significant discretionary power to investigate and scrutinise home educating families. Based on my experience, this would open the door to subjective judgment, unwarranted interference, and a lack of accountability. This could result in unnecessary stress for families who are already managing significant challenges in ensuring their children receive an appropriate education.

Recommendation: The Bill must include clear and objective criteria for local authority actions, along with mechanisms for parents to challenge decisions and ensure fairness.

4. Discrimination & Lack of Understanding

The Bill appears rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of why families home educate. For parents like me, the decision is not one of convenience or evasion, but of necessity and love. This legislation perpetuates harmful stereotypes about home educators, treating them as a homogenous group driven by underhanded motives. It fails to consider the diversity of home educating families and the challenges they face. My family's experience shows that the school system is not always fit for purpose, and home education becomes the only viable option to protect a child's well being and potential.

Recommendation: Policymakers must consult with a wide range of home educating families to develop a nuanced understanding of their motivations and challenges. The Bill should reflect this understanding by focusing on support rather than punitive measures.

5. Lack of Clarity & Oversight

The Bill is alarmingly vague on key aspects, such as what constitutes a "suitable education" and how local authorities will be held accountable for their decisions. This lack of clarity risks creating inconsistencies in how the law is applied across different regions, leaving families vulnerable to arbitrary enforcement.

Recommendation: The Bill must define terms clearly and establish national standards for local authority actions, with oversight mechanisms to ensure consistency and fairness.

6. Failure to Address Fundamental Issues Within Schools

This Bill does nothing to address the root causes that drive families to home educate, such as the lack of support for children with special educational needs. My son's experience highlights how mainstream schools can fail children with ADHD and potentially autism, leaving parents with no choice but to step in. Instead of investing in improving school inclusivity and resources, the government is targeting home educators—a misallocation of focus and funding.

Recommendation: Redirect resources to addressing systemic failings in schools, including SEN support and teacher training, rather than imposing burdens on home educators.

7. Failure to Achieve Stated Objectives

The Bill's stated aims of ensuring children receive a suitable education and are not at risk of harm are undermined by its own provisions. By alienating home educators and creating adversarial relationships with local authorities, the Bill is likely to push families away from engaging with the system. This is counterproductive and will fail to achieve the Bill's objectives.

Recommendation: Focus on building trust and collaboration between local authorities and home educators, providing support rather than imposing suspicion.

8. Wider Context & Underlying Motivations

The Bill must be seen in the wider context of increasing government hostility towards home education. The tragic case of Sara Sharif has been weaponised to push this agenda, despite the fact that such cases are extremely rare and do not represent the home educating community. Furthermore, the Bill sneaks in measures such as compulsory ID numbers for children without public consultation, raising concerns about broader government overreach and erosion of parental rights.

Recommendation: Remove provisions for compulsory ID numbers and ensure all measures are subject to full public consultation. The government must stop conflating isolated tragedies with the broader home educating community and focus on addressing specific issues without undermining the rights of families.

Conclusion

This Bill is fundamentally flawed. It does not safeguard children, but instead penalises families who are already doing the hard work of meeting their needs where the system has failed. For my son, home education has been the only path to success, and the measures proposed in this Bill would have made it impossible for us to achieve the progress we have.

The government must abandon its adversarial approach to home education and focus on meaningful reform, addressing systemic issues within schools and collaborating with families to support children's education. Families like mine are not the problem, we are the solution and our voices can help this Bill to work for everyone.

January 2025