

Written evidence submitted by Amy Halls to The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee (CWSB80)

1. Summary of evidence

I am a parent of two children concerned about the negative impact the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will have on my family. The main points within my evidence can be summarised as follows:

- Home educating families are acting lawfully by choosing to educate their children at home. This in itself is not a safeguarding issue, and there is no tangible evidence to suggest that home educated children are at greater risk than their schooled peers.
 - However, this Bill is subjecting home educating families to ongoing assessment and scrutiny that no other aspect of UK family life must endure without significant evidence of real risk to children.
 - Our very real experience to date is that local authority representatives lack the skills, knowledge and experience in child development, educational pedagogy, special educational needs or child mental health to make a fair assessment of the type of alternative provision that most home educators are providing to great effect.
 - The vague wording within aspects of this Bill leaves home educating families even more vulnerable than they already are to being unfairly assessed by such unskilled representatives.
 - The vague wording within aspects of this Bill also leaves home educating families open to unreasonable and invasive requests for information regarding their provision.
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2. Clause 25, 436C Content and maintenance of registers (page 50, line 42-43)

- The statement that registers 'may also contain any other information the local authority considers appropriate' is vague and open to subjective interpretation.
- As a result, local authorities could insist on unreasonable and potentially intrusive requests for information, introducing inconsistencies across regions, and placing unnecessary pressure on home educating families.
- Home education of the highest quality is responsive to children's individual needs, and can therefore be transient in nature and hard to define. High quality home education cannot be easily mapped to arbitrary checklists or criteria, or be regularly updated each time it changes.

- There is a danger that such a vague statement could lead to local authorities requesting an unreasonable amount of detail regarding our educational provision, and in turn making unfair assessments regarding its suitability.
- This would not only pose challenges to parents trying to demonstrate the suitability of their educational provision at home, but also to local authorities attempting to ascertain its suitability.

3. Clause 25, 436C Content and maintenance of registers (page 49, line 22-36)

- The details requested in this section of the Bill are simply not feasible for any parent to supply, and to keep the local authority up to date with changes.
- Home education is responsive to children's needs and interests, and can therefore include a wide range of external providers that support children in their learning, both through formal structured sessions as well as more informal and occasional opportunities.
- Use of providers may also change quite regularly throughout any given period of time, as children take on new interests, have an appetite to try new things, or because courses and workshops naturally come to an end.
- To provide the volume of detail proposed in the Bill to the local authority, and continue to inform them of any changes, is therefore unrealistic and arguably unnecessary.

4. Clause 25, 436E Provision of information to local authorities: education providers (page 52, line 21-35)

- In relation to the above points, it would be equally unfeasible for education providers to supply the local authority with this detail of information, and to keep them informed of any changes.
- The sheer volume of providers working with home educating children, both through formal, structured sessions and more informal, less regular learning opportunities, would place a significant burden on administrative capacity within local authorities to collect and maintain such information.
- Education providers may well find this requirement too much of an administrative strain on their own capacity, risking the likelihood that many might withdraw their services to support home educating families, negatively affecting our children's learning opportunities.

5. Clause 26, 436H Preliminary notice for school attendance order (page 58, line 33-34)

- By what criteria, and with what experience, knowledge and qualifications can a local authority representative decide ‘it would be in the child’s best interests to receive education by regular attendance at school’?
- In our experience, local authority assessment of our educational provision has always held a typical school day as the ideal benchmark, with inference that our provision should reflect the school curriculum, and our children be working at a level aligned to that of their schooled peers.
- Home education simply doesn’t work like this. We shape our provision to the needs and interests of our children, and at the pace and level that they need to thrive. As a result, they do thrive.
- Through this Bill, a person unaware and untrained in educational pedagogies, special educational needs, neurodivergence etc. (and with no knowledge whatsoever of the children we know and love better than any outside agency ever could) has the power to make some very unfair assumptions about our provision being unsuitable, simply because it does not look sufficiently like a typical school day.

6. Clause 26, 436I School attendance orders (page 59, line 29-30)

- As stated above, by what criteria, and with what experience, knowledge and qualifications can a local authority representative decide ‘it is expedient that the child should attend school’?
- As stated, we already feel that we are being assessed by inexperienced local authority representatives with a very limited understanding of what a ‘suitable education’ can look like. This Bill does nothing to address that, whilst at the same time awarding greater powers to the local authority.
- What will be in place to oversee and regulate such decisions?
- What will be in place to ensure a family has the right to appeal, and get genuine support, against such a decision?

7. Clause 26, 436I School attendance orders (page 59 line 38-40)

- Given that there is so much vagueness within this Bill, the requirement that families must now also allow the local authority to visit our homes to further ascertain suitability of our provision is alarming.
- Many children would find such an inspection within their home unsettling and anxiety provoking. This reveals a concerning lack of awareness and

empathy on behalf of the government towards children with special educational needs, neurodivergent traits and anxiety.

- I can say with absolute certainty that my own children would find home inspection incredibly distressing.
- In our experience, local authority home education officers have little or no experience or understanding of home education ethos, pedagogy, special educational needs, child development and mental health, and simply gauge the suitability of our provision based on how similar it looks to a mainstream, schooled education.
- As previously stated, this already leaves home educating families vulnerable to unfair assessment. If we must now potentially open our homes to inspection, a further invasion of family life is being forced upon us simply for exercising our lawful right to educate our children according to what we, as their parents, know to be best for them.
- This feels like discrimination.

8. In summary

- UK law places a duty on families to provide a suitable education for their children. Those families who do not choose to fulfil this duty by sending their children to school are facing inspection and scrutiny that families of schooled children do not.
- No other aspect of family life in the UK can be inspected and assessed in this way without there being significant evidence of cause for concern in the first instance.
- In our very real experience, local authority home education officers lack the skills, knowledge and experience to make a fair and reasonable assessment of our educational provision.
- The vagueness within this Bill, along with the powers being awarded to the local authority to judge and potentially deny continuation of a family's home education provision, leave families such as ours vulnerable to unfair assessment by unskilled local authority representatives.
- As a home educating parent, I believe the following should therefore be removed from the Bill:
 - Clause 25, 436C Content and maintenance of registers page 50 line 42-43
 - Clause 26, 436I School attendance orders page 59 line 38-40
- The proposed volume of information required from both parents and providers about the educational provision given to home educated

children outside of the home environment is excessive and would be near impossible to supply in this kind of detail, not least be managed and maintained effectively by the local authority.

- From a purely practical point of view, the following should therefore be removed from the Bill:
 - Clause 25, 436C Content and maintenance of registers (page 49, line 22-36)
 - Clause 25, 436E Provision of information to local authorities: education providers (page 52, line 21-35)

- As a home educating parent, I believe the following aspects of the Bill leave home educating families vulnerable to unfair assessment by unskilled, inexperienced local authority representatives.
 - Clause 26, 436H Preliminary notice for school attendance order page 58 line 33-34
 - Clause 26, 436I School attendance orders page 59 line 29-30
- I believe much greater regulation of local authority home education representatives, including the requirement of suitable experience and qualifications, should be introduced.
- I also believe home educating families need access to fair and genuine support from an impartial body to protect them from unfair assessment by a local authority.

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