

Written evidence submitted by Mrs Jennifer Cornall to The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee (CWSB91)

CHILDREN'S WELLBEING & SCHOOLS BILL

We have been home educating our three children since May 2019.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this submission I will cover the following:

- Background
- Areas of Concern
 1. Data Protection and Privacy
 2. Child Employment
 3. Burden of increased reporting to LAs: Home Educators
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 5. Required Home Visits
 6. Parental Primacy in Our Children's Education
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BACKGROUND

We decided to home educate our children for many reasons. All three initially attended a local primary school and were reasonably settled at their school. We wanted to ensure that our children had the time and freedom to explore their own interests and passions. We wanted to be able to tailor their education to their individual needs, and to be able to learn at their pace. My husband runs our family business and a home educating lifestyle means that they are able to spend time with him when he is not working. We plan our formal learning time around his working hours so that we maximise our time together as a family. Home educating has been a wholly positive experience for us as a family, and our children are thriving. They have been able to achieve to a level that they would not have been able to in the mainstream school system. My eldest son has taken GCSEs early, and has achieved 8s and 9s. My middle daughter has the time and freedom to spend hours on her artwork, and is an exceptional artist for her age. When in primary school, her class rarely did art lessons (i.e. twice in one year). My youngest daughter is able to dedicate a large portion of time to her music and is way ahead of where she would be if she had to attend school.

AREAS OF CONCERN SURROUNDING THE BILL

I am extremely concerned by some aspects of this bill and the impact it will have on home educating families such as ourselves.

1. Data Protection and Privacy

Page 7 line 18. '16LB Consistent identifiers for children

The bill would significantly increase the collecting and sharing of highly personal details about our children, and us as a family. Due to the frequent documented data breaches which occur across many sectors, including Local Authorities, this raises significant concerns for us.

2. Child Employment

Page 38 line 15. **Child employment** ‘5) The provision that may be made in reliance on subsection (4)(a) includes provision. 15(a) authorising a local authority in England to request **such information as the authority considers appropriate, or to require a child to have a medical examination, for the purpose of enabling the authority to determine an application;**’

We do not believe that children should have to provide medical information in order to seek work experience. This is an invasion of privacy. Our children are at an age where we will be seeking to facilitate work experience opportunities, which will be invaluable in helping them gain experience and grow in independence, and this requirement puts up a significant deterrent and barrier.

3. Burden of increased reporting to LAs: Home Educators

Page 39 line 14 ‘436C Content and maintenance of registers (1) (d) **the amount of time that the child spends receiving education from each parent of the child, (e) if the child receives education from a person other than their parent—**
(i) **the names and addresses of any individuals and organisations involved in providing that education, (ii) a description of the type of each provider named under sub-paragraph (i), (iii) the postal address of each place where that education is provided (where different from the address in sub-paragraph (iv) the total amount of time that the child spends receiving that education and the amount of time the child spends receiving that education without any parent of the child being actively involved in the tuition or supervision of the child.**’

Page 50 line 42 ‘(3) A register under section 436B may also contain any other information the local authority considers appropriate.’

Page 51 line 19 ‘436D Provision of information to local authorities: parents

(1) A parent of a child who is eligible to be registered by a local authority in England under section 436B must (b) **inform the authority of a change, of which the parent is aware, to any of the information required to be included in the register under section 436C(1).**’ (the time period for informing the local authority is 15 days).’

As the education we provide is a lifestyle where learning takes place at all times, the above requirements would place a hugely onerous burden on us as home educators. The home education we provide is semi-structured; we do have set times where we sit down as a family and do more formal learning activities, but this is only a part of their learning journey. As part of their education, our children also use online resources and workshops, family expertise in different subjects, documentaries, group lessons, private specialist lessons, and many other varied resources. These resources are accessed at many different times and places, they are not limited to a specific time frame within each day. To have to fulfil the above requirements would place an overwhelming and intrusive burden on us as educators, and detract from the education provision itself that we are able to provide.

4. Burden of increased reporting to LAs: Education Providers

Page 53 line 3 '436E Provision of information to local authorities (by education providers)

Following on from the previous point; this requirement will place a burden on providers which could lead to disruption or even withdrawal of services to home educating families. Providers may have to increase costs to cover the extra time it takes to provide this information, which puts a further burden on us as a home educating family.

For example, my 12 year old daughter is studying for her Grade 7 piano. However, her music education is multi-faceted. In any given week, she spends hours playing the piano and violin. She has weekly lessons with a piano teacher, fortnightly violin lessons, and fortnightly composition & music production lessons with another music teacher. She accesses music theory lessons online (she recently passed Grade 5 theory with distinction). She talks to my father about music she is enjoying and they share piano pieces together. She attends rehearsals and concerts as part of Young Singers, a children's choir. As part of our learning at home, we listen to music daily, access many videos online, and read biographies of composers. We attend regular music concerts in Shrewsbury. The burden of recording every aspect of this one part of her education would be incredibly demanding and excessive, both for us as home educators, and her tutors. This is only one subject of one child's education; obviously this would be replicated for each subject, and then for each child. We provide a rich and varied educational experience, but to have to document every aspect of it would be intrusive and burdensome.

5. Required Home Visits

Page 59 line 37 '(c) may request the child's parent on whom the preliminary notice has been served under section 436H to allow the local authority to visit the child inside any of the homes in which the child lives. (3) If a request under subsection (2)(c) is refused by the person to whom it is made, the local authority must consider that to be a relevant factor in deciding whether the child's parent has failed to satisfy the local authority as mentioned in subsection'

This concerns us deeply. It is framed as a request, but in the context of the bill could very easily become a mandatory requirement. As a family, we have a right to the privacy of our home, and this removes our right to this privacy.

6. Parental Primacy in Our Children's Education

We take our parental responsibilities seriously, and we have made the choice to home educate based on what we consider is in our children's best interests. This bill repeatedly undermines the premiss of parental primacy, and seeks to place this responsibility with the state. We will do everything within our power to retain our responsibility to choose and provide an education which we believe is in the best interests of our individual children.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AMENDMENTS AND FURTHER ACTION

1. Remove the burdensome and extensive requirements for data and information from both home educators and education providers.
2. Remove the requirement for mandatory home visits in any situation, specifically in relation to home education.
3. Maintain the parental primacy in education; parents should be able to make decisions about their children's education based on what they consider to be in their children's best interests without state interference.
4. Provide clarity for the detail of how the bill will be implemented; much of the detail of the bill is hidden in secondary legislation which can be altered without proper oversight. Clarity is needed.
5. Facilitate a consultation with the home educating community, and consult experts in home education before releasing the next draft of the bill.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are many ways in which this bill, in its present form, is fundamentally detrimental to home educators and their children. Home educators, in virtually all cases, make significant sacrifices to provide an education lifestyle tailored to their own children's needs. There are existing systems in place already to cater for those situations where this is not the case. Assuming that all home educators need to prove themselves to this extent is counter-productive and undermines parental responsibility. This bill will create enormous challenges, which are unnecessary and burdensome, and I sincerely hope that we see significant changes before it is implemented in full.

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