

# **Written evidence submitted by a person who wishes to remain anonymous, to The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee (CWSB229).**

I am a mother home educating two children and therefore this bill is likely to affect our lives and has caught my attention.

## **Executive summary**

- Background- I will begin with a short background of our families home education journey
- Areas of concern - here I will outline the areas of the bill that concern me and why, including: The register and lack of understanding of the home education community ,safeguarding, missing the issue that mainstream schools need reform, wider context and underlying motivations
- Recommendations- I will complete this evidence with my recommendations for amendments and further action.

## **Background**

I personally, began with a background in early childhood. After studying a degree in the area and beginning work placements in various settings I was surprised to find many issues that led me to be wary and disappointed in child care/education in general. Therefore, once I had my own children I was reluctant to use any childcare settings, preferring instead to spend as much time as I could with them. I was interested in Scandinavian countries choice to not begin formal education until 7 years old (instead focusing on play) and then those children outperforming ones in the uk within years ( <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/sep/20/grammar-schools-play-europe-top-education-system-finland-daycare> ). These factors led me to look into home education for the beginning years for my children. Once we started it was clear that they thrived and that my eldest in particular would have struggled in a mainstream school environment. Not all children are suited to sitting long periods, writing at desks and learning through rote. My children learn exceptionally well when moving, through play, outdoors and when they have a real interest in the subject.

## **Areas of concern**

### **The register and lack of understanding of the home educating community**

There are two main issues with the register; the first is implementing a register in the first place. The only official register of this kind I know of is that of sexual offenders, it seems very unjust to treat home educating families in the same way as such criminals. The vast majority of home educated children will have attended a school or setting at some point and therefore their removal would be flagged to the local authority for them to work through the current process of checking children are receiving an appropriate education. The only other children are those who never went to a school settings however they were

registered at birth so easily could be found by local authorities if desired. So there seems little need for any register at all, if the information is already out there. This leaves us with questions as to what information the bill is really looking to obtain.

Not to mention the bill does not detail how the information will be used or kept safe. In this day and age we know data breaches and mistakes are far too frequent (an example link to name a few [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_UK\\_government\\_data\\_losses](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_UK_government_data_losses) ) and it remains uncertain that home educating family's details would be safe.

The second issue is the information the bill is asking for alongside and within the register. The bill wants to know when, how, where and who is delivering education. But home education is very often not like school at home, because that style of learning usually has already not worked for the child. Learning is often all hours of the day, ranging from conversations with parents, wider families, the general public, the shop store clerk, a zoom lesson, a home education meet up, a board game, a TV show, searching the internet, a library book. The ways in which a child can obtain information are too many to list. But it is clear this is not understood by anyone involved in creating the bill and the home education community as a whole had been misunderstood and not a single realistic attempt has been made to understand.

It would not be possible to ask all of the people above for their private details (not to mention it would be rude and intrusive. The right to privacy for anyone involved in a home educated child's life should be withheld) or to record the subjects, time and exact learning that took place. The levels of information that would need to be read through if home educators did have to supply all this would be a ridiculously large increase in the local authorities work load. A single home educated child's parent could easily produce a page of A4 detailing resources and people used a day or a week. It's not feasible on either end, and the potential costs to the tax payers have just not been thought through or outlined within the bill or its supporting documents.

There is the concern that asking for details from providers of any kind of group or gathering home educators attend (including reports on the child) would be very off-putting and likely lead to a lot less provision for home educated children. Restricting the access children have to a wide range of learning opportunities seems counter-intuitive to the bill's original aims and the wellbeing of these specific children.

Furthermore, the bill grants access to home educating family's homes in order to assess their education provision, with the threat that not granting access will prove their education unsuitable and SAO will be issued to send the child back to school. This is a gross invasion of privacy, even police are not entitled to enter homes without a warrant or invite, again painting home educators as criminals. There is an increased likelihood that these children will have mental health issues or extra SEND needs (as these are some of the reasons for deregistering in the first place) and it would be very distressing and anxiety inducing for these families to have their safe space of 'home' invaded by strangers with the purpose of assessing and judging them. This would also lead to a need for more staffing and training said staff to undertake these home visits, costing more money with no assurances where that will come from or if it has been budgeted at all.

Safeguarding

Upon reading the bill we are left to question if any of this is the most effective way to actually keep more children safe? Being a name on a register doesn't protect a child from anything. Spending time with a child can give clues but doesn't always, lots can be missed or misunderstood creating problems that were never there. Examples of this can be seen in cases where social services were involved with families, deemed there not to be any concerns and then still abuse and neglect went on to happen (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-59519562>).

The NSPPC states that safeguarding children and young people is everyone's responsibility (<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection/duty-of-care-and-safeguarding>) and therefore it seems focusing on creating communities who look out for each other is a much better way to keep more children safe. Home education in itself can create amazing communities such as this, we are part of some ourselves where families who are struggling might be noticed or things that don't add up might lead to reports to social services for checks.

There are further issues such as social media and mobile phone usage and SEND issues are bigger threats to children's safeguarding (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/> <https://safeguarding.network/content/safeguarding-resources/specific-risks-children-additional-needs> ) which could've and should've been addressed long before home education.

#### Missed the issue that mainstream schools need reform

Before pushing, by manipulation and force, children back into school settings it should first be asked why such large (up by 22% according to this BBC article <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cg3382380vko>) and increasing numbers of children are deregistering from mainstream schools?

Mainstream schools are currently not meeting the needs of all children. All humans are different but especially children with SEND learn and think differently to the majority. Mainstream schools currently offer a one size fits all education with an emphasis on passing exams and which doesn't really set children up for living as adults in the modern world. Therefore aiming to get children back into these mainstream school environments before addressing any of these issues (they aren't even touched up on in a bill about WELLBEING and SCHOOLS) is just not well thought through.

Not only this but mainstream schools aren't, as seems to be assumed by the bill, the safest place for all children.

Take into account bullying and the resulting mental health, self-harm and suicide of children school age (granted this can't be proven to all be related to schools but much of it will be and even if it wasn't caused by schools they aren't helping to keep children happy and safe in this aspect). It is also the case that children with SEND are more likely to fall into these categories and therefore mainstream schools might offer the biggest safety risk to those with SEND, they very group of children the bill targets in extra detail to push back into mainstream schools (<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/mental->

[health-statistics/?fbclid=IwY2xjawH-UthleHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHbCKYXWQZpBVgnqWcwhpJvnClrPNRGZhnZcBqepWFICOLWgbQgQgAaXLw\\_aem\\_fH8ln\\_QOk1OFp41ji\\_A9Og](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-64874355?fbclid=IwY2xjawH-UthleHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHbCKYXWQZpBVgnqWcwhpJvnClrPNRGZhnZcBqepWFICOLWgbQgQgAaXLw_aem_fH8ln_QOk1OFp41ji_A9Og)  
[https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-64874355?fbclid=IwY2xjawH-UvllleHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHZKSgB-98m-L2nEjaFVeQxFr-HuloOgaYPoIFOI9YZmIXBjuA4Q6dd3y1Q\\_aem\\_IlyQ2euBJYdh6ur1g9svVw](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-64874355?fbclid=IwY2xjawH-UvllleHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHZKSgB-98m-L2nEjaFVeQxFr-HuloOgaYPoIFOI9YZmIXBjuA4Q6dd3y1Q_aem_IlyQ2euBJYdh6ur1g9svVw)  
[https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/prevalence-and-impact-bullying/prevalence-bullying?fbclid=IwY2xjawH-UxdleHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHd74M0gCNI4d-0le9h4G3jnQwZGO62yzZq7qm\\_drihCEXQ9zWLhV7j6rzw\\_aem\\_ERv\\_idDd\\_stLvwO-DWa\\_QA](https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/prevalence-and-impact-bullying/prevalence-bullying?fbclid=IwY2xjawH-UxdleHRuA2FlbQlxMQABHd74M0gCNI4d-0le9h4G3jnQwZGO62yzZq7qm_drihCEXQ9zWLhV7j6rzw_aem_ERv_idDd_stLvwO-DWa_QA) )

Another safety factor is the exposure to sexual violence and harassment young girls face in school with a third of those surveyed not feeling safe in schools(<https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/campaign/abouttime/>)

Not to mention the numbers of teachers and staff who are charged with inappropriate behaviour or even abuse ( links as random example of a few cases <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c62qxy6y4d8o> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn08y6785xqo>)

While schools do pick up and safeguard children from abuse, unfortunately they do not pick up on all cases and not enough is always done to protect the children. Therefore this cannot outweigh the right to protect children from other harms (such as those they might face in a school environment) by home educating them.

#### Wider context and underlying motivations

I think it is also important to point out the way the case of Sara Sharif has been used to push this bill through and create fear/support in the public. Though the situation was truly heart-breaking none of the proposed changes in this bill would've made any difference to her outcome, she was already known to social services, only left school two months prior to her murder and school had reported concerns which were not followed up or acted upon by social services or police (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvgedlr7gg1o>). Furthermore, the awful murder took place during the school six week holidays which leaves the question do we have to check on all children during every holiday, every weekend? And those under school age should they be monitored and assessed regularly too? This would be overstepping state remit, unfeasible and frankly laughable. It seems that all trust in parents has been completely eroded.

There is also the other issue that compulsory ID numbers are included in this bill, with no public consultation to allow for proper discussion around this issue.

The government has as long as I've been aware mostly been against home education and this bill seems to be using safeguarding as just another way to prevent education that is alternate to mainstream.

#### Recommendations

Firstly I think the government need to publish risk assessments of all the potential outcomes of the proposed changes in the bill, along-side a cost to benefit comparison of the proposed implementations. Then with this information further amendments can be made.

As I have mentioned above there are many areas such as mainstream school reform, and safeguarding around social media and mobile phones which the bill could look to cover. Having said all this I think the best practice moving forward would be to consult with the home educating community and experts in the field (such as Naomi Fisher) before the next draft of this bill in order to create something that actually meets the aims of this bill and is enforceable. Understanding how home education works is key to this.

In conclusion, there are many concerns to consider when moving forward with this bill and to not at least research further could be very detrimental to the very children the bill is supposedly trying to protect.

***February 2025.***