

Home Education - registration and monitoring proposals

Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 19
October 2009

Your comments must reach us by that date.

department for
children, schools and families

THIS FORM IS NOT INTERACTIVE. If you wish to respond electronically please use the online or offline response facility available on the Department for Children, Schools and Families e-consultation website (<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations>).

The information you provide in your response will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations, which allow public access to information held by the Department. This does not necessarily mean that your response can be made available to the public as there are exemptions relating to information provided in confidence and information to which the Data Protection Act 1998 applies. You may request confidentiality by ticking the box provided, but you should note that neither this, nor an automatically-generated e-mail confidentiality statement, will necessarily exclude the public right of access.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.

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If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the Public Communications Unit on:

Telephone: 0870 000 2288

e-mail: xxxx@xxxx.xxx.xxx.xx

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the Consultation Unit on:

Telephone: 01928 794888

Fax: 01928 794 311

e-mail: xxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxxx@xxxx.xxx.xxx.xx

Please tick the box that best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/> Home educated child/young person	<input type="checkbox"/> Home educating parent	<input type="checkbox"/> Organisation representing home educating families
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local Authorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Other organisation with responsibility for children (please specify in box below)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify in box below)

This is the formal response from Suffolk County Council collated by the Senior Adviser (Social Inclusion)

Please Specify:

1 Do you agree that these proposals strike the right balance between the rights of parents to home educate and the rights of children to receive a suitable education?

X Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

We agree that a balance is needed. Therefore as a matter of urgency the DCSF needs to address the recommendation to provide LA's with an agreed definition of what constitutes a 'suitable' education. This needs to make reference to the Every Child Matters agenda, and to set a time scale to help officers fulfil their duties under the new recommendations as soon as possible.

The proposals respect the rights of parents but provide a necessary mechanism whereby the right of every home-educated child to receive a suitable education is much more likely to be safeguarded than under present arrangements.

Clarifying the above is in the best interests of children, home educating parents and the LA. A robust, transparent and clear national set of expectation regarding home education would significantly improve the current unacceptable situation. This LA works very positively with a significant number of home educating parents. However we have no way of knowing how many are actually out there.

It must also be noted that those home educating parents who are already putting rich programmes in place for their children have nothing to fear from the proposed new approach.

There is also a clear need to provide appropriate resources in order to meet the demands of the proposed changes.

2 Do you agree that a register should be kept?

X Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

A register is an essential part of the proposals. Without it the rights of home-educated children cannot be fully protected, because many children are unknown to LAs. Without a register, Local Authorities cannot satisfy themselves that all children within their care are receiving a suitable education.

Whilst this may be unpopular with home educating families our experience with many is a positive and co-operative one. A register will clearly establish the scale of the sector and allow for better communication and transparency.

We would also like to know how would the DCSF ensure that children withdrawn from the registers of independent schools for the purposes of home education would be identified?

3 Do you agree with the information to be provided for registration?

X Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

It would also be a good idea for parents to be required to give their reasons for choosing home education at this stage in order to help LA's fulfil their duties as proposed under Recommendation 3.

4 Do you agree that home educating parents should be required to keep the register up to date?

X Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

Yes this is absolutely essential, unless a register is kept up-to-date, LA's could lose track of children. All Las have clear responsibilities around children missing education. In addition Currently parents do not always inform the LA when they change address or contact details.

5 Do you agree that it should be a criminal offence to fail to register or to provide inadequate or false information?

X Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

Yes, this is the only way to ensure that registration takes place, as some home

educators do not wish to engage voluntarily with LA's. Unfortunately, some parents will not provide adequate or accurate information unless the law requires them to do so. It also conveys the message to parents that the decision to home educate is a serious decision, which carries a statutory responsibility. It is worth noting however that some home educators are very co-operative and work in partnership with the LA, unfortunately it is a minority for whom legal processes will be required.

The dimension also emphasises the important choice that parents are making when electing to home educate.

6 a) Do you agree that home educated children should stay on the roll of their former school for 20 days after parents notify that they intend to home educate?

X Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

Yes this would be in the interests of the child given that some parents elect to home educate 'by default' because they are unhappy with the education or the environment provided by schools. Sometimes, given the time for their concerns to be addressed, these can be resolved by liaison between schools, parents and LA's to the mutual satisfaction of all parties.

Essentially this will give some parents the opportunity to change their minds without losing the school place.

Will children in this position be expected to continue to attend school? If so, how will this be enforced in practice? If not, how will the DCSF ensure that this proposal is not used by some parents to secure a period, or periods, of authorised absence?

6 b) Do you agree that the school should provide the local authority with achievement and future attainment data?

X Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

Yes, any background provided by schools, educational or otherwise, is useful to local authority officers monitoring home education, as it gives them a better picture of a child's overall needs and level of ability and most importantly their potential.

Such data will also enable the LA to make a more accurate assessment of the planned provision.

7 Do you agree that DCSF should take powers to issue statutory guidance in relation to the registration and monitoring of home education?

Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

Clarity is needed for the benefit of children, home educating parents and Las. Such guidance would send a clear message to home educators and Las and provide a framework as to how all parties need to work together.

8 Do you agree that children about whom there are substantial safeguarding concerns should not be home educated?

Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

We recognise from our work that many home educating families provide safe environments for learning where children rights are respected.

But we must also recognise that in some cases children are in circumstances where safeguarding concerns have been raised. Whilst such cases are rare there needs to be clear protection for these children who may be at greater risk of harm. In such situation home education is not appropriate.

Children need to be able to learn in a safe environment which respects their rights and which allows their safety and welfare to be monitored regularly, if there are significant safeguarding concerns.

9 Do you agree that the local authority should visit the premises where home education is taking place provided 2 weeks notice is given?

X Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

A visit is always easier for the LA officer and the parents and serves the interest of the child and the family rather than the submission of a report by the parents.

Two weeks is a reasonable notice time, but I anticipate that most visits will be agreed between the parents and the LA by telephone.

In some circumstances a visit to the premises can alert LA's to safeguarding issues, such as neglect, and also to circumstances in which parents are unable to provide an efficient learning environment.

10 Do you agree that the local authority should have the power to interview the child, alone if this is judged appropriate, or if not in the presence of a trusted person who is not the parent/carer?

X Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

Yes, without this right of access to the child, parents' assurances that children are safe, well and making educational progress via suitable learning opportunities have to be taken on trust. Whilst many home educating parents have their child interest at heart we can not be sure that all children are safe, well and making good progress for this reason access to the child needs to be a fundamental plank in any new arrangements if **all** children are to be safe.

It is very important to be able to give the child a voice in all circumstances.

11 Do you agree that the local authority should visit the premises and interview the child within four weeks of home education starting, after 6 months has elapsed, at the anniversary of home education starting, and thereafter at least on an annual basis? This would not preclude more frequent monitoring if the local authority thought that was necessary.

Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

With the caveat that the six monthly interview is not a necessary statutory requirement. Local Authority officers are skilled and knowledgeable about learning and cognition and are able to judge during the initial visit if a child is safe from harm and if parents are willing to provide, and are capable of delivering, a 'suitable' and 'efficient' home education. At this point LA's can make an informed decision as to when they next need to visit, or whether an annual visit will suffice. This is in the interest of children, home educating parents and the LA.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply X

Here at the Department for Children, Schools and Families we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

Yes No

All DCSF public consultations are required to conform to the following criteria within the Government Code of Practice on Consultation:

Criterion 1: Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome.

Criterion 2: Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.

Criterion 3: Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.

Criterion 4: Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach.

Criterion 5: Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.

Criterion 6: Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.

Criterion 7: Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

If you have any comments on how DCSF consultations are conducted, please contact Donna Harrison, DCSF Consultation Co-ordinator, tel: 01928 794304 / email: xxxxx.xxxxxxxx@xxxx.xxx.xx

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 19 October 2009

Send by post to:
Consultation Unit
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CastleView House
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 2GJ

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