

Thank you for letting me know your views on my Home Education (Duty of Local Authorities) Bill. I am sending a general reply at this stage but will add further comments in due course as some of you have asked specific question. I will not be able to answer all these questions until we reach the second reading stage probably at the end of the year.

This Bill is likely to be debated in the House of Lords towards the end of this year. I hope that in the intervening period I will be able to meet with those of you who wish to discuss it further. I will also be very willing to come to any meetings that might be arranged subject to time and place.

A few points of clarification at this stage. I am not opposed to home education indeed I have always seen it as an important right and one which deserves support. It does not get much support at present.

I am also aware that many parents take their child or children out of school for home education because they feel that the school is not giving their child the education that they think is necessary. This is strongly felt by parents who had a bad experience of the SEN Service in some schools.

I am also very conscious of the rights of parents but as some of you acknowledge this should be balanced with the rights of the child. If a child does not get the basic education necessary to cope in our modern and very complex society then we are failing that child. It is important to remember that some of these children are rejected by the school because they are 'difficult' and these children also deserve better support than they currently receive.

There is also the problem of the abuse of children. There has been a rapid rise in Home Education and this has co-incided with a greater public awareness of child abuse. We know that some children have been taken out of school and subsequently suffered abuse. An abusing parent is now more aware of being caught and taking the child out of school enables them to 'hide' the child.

In recent years this has been given additional urgency as there is some evidence that children have been removed from school to work illicitly at home or in a parent's business.

The Government is also concerned about the use of Home Education to put children into situations where they receive indoctrination supporting violent

extremism. You may wish to listen to this extract from the BBC Today news programme: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08xxdh3>. This was broadcast on the 20th July but it has been a growing concern for governments in recent years. The full item starts 2hrs and 40 minutes into the programme and the part concerning the wrong use of home education starts at 2hrs 40.

These are just some of the complications of this sensitive area of policy. It is my aim to create a better situation for parents who choose to home educate while also ensuring the rights of the child are recognised. I think we can do this much better than we are at present. Parents who Home educate deserve support so my Bill will try to get this balance right and that is why I will be willing to consider changes to the Bill if they appear necessary.

Yours,

Clive Soley

Lord Soley of Hammersmith