



The home education charity
educationotherwise.org

England: why parents choose home education





EDUCATION OTHERWISE

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Executive summary

Elective Home Education (EHE) is of equal legal status to school education. It is a reasonable and legal choice to make. EHE is not a safeguarding risk. Notwithstanding, we have seen increasing calls for regulation of home education and the Schools Bill, which introduces mandatory registration of EHE children, is currently making its way through the House of Lords.

The Department for Education (DfE) and Baroness Barran, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System, who is leading the Schools Bill in the House of Lords, are forming policy and guidance for EHE. Education Otherwise believes that any policy should be based on accurate data. To that end, a survey was taken of home educating families in England to update earlier research to ascertain the reasons why parents choose to EHE their children.

- Responses were received from 3,168 parents of whom 45.63% referred to negative reasons relating to schools as their main initial reason for home educating their children. These parents frequently referred to safeguarding concerns related to school.
- This included general dissatisfaction with the school system (21.21%), the school curriculum not relevant or suitable (9.25%), the school being unable to meet the child's special needs (10.79%) and bullying at school (4.38%).
- The most cited current reason for currently choosing to EHE a child was that home education provides a better education than school, at 40.01%, rising from 21.12% citing this as their initial reason to EHE.
- Health needs, including the child's mental health were cited by 13.07% of parents as their primary initial reason for home educating the child.
- Parents who EHE would consider school in the future in 11.42% of cases, with one third of those parents stating that it would be if the child expressed a wish to do so.
- Parents will continue to choose EHE at higher rates, if schools do not become safer, more accessible to all children and excellent sources of a world class education. Schools cannot make that claim now or in the foreseeable future.
- There are many children in English schools who are deeply unhappy, being failed by the system, or both. School simply is not the best place for every child.



The background

Elective Home Education (EHE) is of equal legal status to school education, and it is a reasonable and legal choice to make. It is not a safeguarding risk. Notwithstanding, we have seen increasing calls for regulation of home education and the Schools Bill, which introduces mandatory registration of EHE children, is currently making its way through the House of Lords.

The Department for Education (DfE) and Baroness Barran (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System) who is leading the Schools Bill in the House of Lords, are forming policy and guidance for EHE. Education Otherwise believes that any policy should be based on accurate data.

There is a mismatch between evidence, need, policy and narrative used in respect to EHE. The aim should be that all children are educated in a manner that meets their individual needs and thus maximises the probability that they will reach their full potential. To this end, Education Otherwise is passionate about supporting evidence-based change in the narrative and approach to EHE in order to facilitate this. In addition, Education Otherwise also seeks to highlight and celebrate current good practice and policy where these exist.

Draft proposals for registration were brought forward for consultation¹, which consultation found approximately 75% of stakeholders raising strong objections to the proposals². Notwithstanding, the DfE decided to forge ahead with all proposals and the Schools Bill came to first reading in the House of Lords on 11th May 2022. The DfE has confirmed³ that the decision to go ahead with registration is based on feedback from local authorities, weighing decisions in favour of consultation responses made by those authorities.

Parents feel beleaguered, ignored, stigmatised and unfairly judged as a minority whose members often hold differing, strong philosophical views about their educational choices for their child. There is potential therefore for conflict when superficial or little understanding of educational philosophies that deviate from those associated with school are used to drive policy and legislation. Of course, trusting relationships cannot be based on enforced relationships, but crucially, they must be based on good communication and good quality information. Furthermore,

¹ DfE (2018) 'Home education: call for evidence and revised DfE guidance' [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/home-education-call-for-evidence-and-revised-dfe-guidance>

² DfE (2022) 'Consultation outcome: Children not in school' [Online] Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/children-not-in-school>

³ Statements made in meetings and conversation by senior DfE staff.



in light of the potential for conflict, which is not in the best interests of EHE children, it is imperative that future policy and legislation be based on accurate and complete information.

Baroness Barran has stated the view⁴ that there are three broad types of home educating parent: Those who are thriving, those who are failing their children and those who do not want to home educate at all. The implication appears to be that these are considered to be similar sized groups, but based on our 45 years of experience, Education Otherwise does not support that view. To that end, a survey was taken of home educating families in England in order to ascertain the reasons why parents choose to EHE their children.

Method

During August 2022 a survey was undertaken across a wide range of home education groups in England, in order to ascertain the main reasons why parents in England originally chose to EHE their children and why they continue to do so. These groups included local support groups, national support groups and special interest groups. Responses were received from parents in 99 separate local authority areas, providing wide reaching feedback to inform the findings.

Respondents were provided with a list of reasons why parents EHE informed by previous research, including:

- Home education provides a better education than school.
- I do not consider the school curriculum to be suitable, or relevant.
- General dissatisfaction with the school system.
- Health reasons, including the child's mental health.
- Concern that the environment of schools increases the risk of Covid 19 infection.
- A temporary measure.
- More family time.
- Greater ability to go travelling together.
- Barriers to attendance (known as school refuser, or school phobic).
- School could not meet my child's special needs.
- No school places available at preferred school.
- Bullying at school.
- Religious reasons.
- Child is a young carer.
- Child is a performer.
- Child is gifted and talented.

⁴ In debate in the House of Lords and in private meetings with EHE parents and representatives.



- School pressured me into removing the child and
- I did not choose to home educate.

The total number of responses was 3,168 all of whom provided full responses to the survey. There were 86,489 EHE children in England on 1st April 2022⁵ although numbers fluctuate, particularly seasonally, with April usually seeing higher numbers than average for the year.

Previous United Kingdom research⁶ found that numbers of EHE children could be multiplied by 0.68 to approximate numbers of parents sufficiently accurately to use for data analysis. This approximation would indicate that 86,489 children equates to 58,812 parents. As numbers of EHE parents are a finite population, the sample size obtained of 3,168 exceeds the 1786 required to provide a 99% confidence level with a $\pm 3\%$ margin of error and approaching a $\pm 2\%$ margin of error. This provides an extremely high level of confidence and low margin of error in the findings.

Presentation of results uses accessible language in order to ensure access by the widest possible audience of both stakeholders within the EHE community and those in formal roles connected to EHE.

Reasons for home education

The Elective Home Education Non-Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities⁷ cites reasons why parents elect to home educate their children, but we question some reasons included in this list, given that they have not been confirmed in previous research studies⁸. Reasons listed are:

- Ideological or philosophical views which favour home education, or wishing to provide education which has a different basis to that normally found in schools.
- Religious or cultural beliefs, and a wish to ensure that the child's education is aligned with these.
- Dissatisfaction with the school system, or the school(s) at which a place is available.

⁵ Data taken from freedom of information responses from all English local authorities.

⁶ Authors own research into School Attendance Orders (SAO) undertaken during 2021. SAOs must be served on each parent and results of freedom of information requests made indicated that the number of parents on whom SAOs were served equated to 0.68% of the number of children for whom SAOs were served

⁷ DfE (2019) 'Elective Home Education Departmental Guidance for local Authorities' [Online] Available from:

⁸ See for example: Cheasley, S (2018) 'A Comparative Analysis of Home Education in Eight Local Authorities and Nationally' [Online] <http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/2018/08/28/comparative-analysis-home-education-eight-local-authorities-nationally-preliminary-report/> and Charles-Warner, W (2020) 'Home Education Trends: The Covid Effect'. Education Otherwise [Online] available from: <https://www.educationotherwise.org/category/research/>



- Bullying of the child at school.
- Health reasons, particularly mental health of the child
- As a short-term intervention for a particular reason
- A child's unwillingness or inability to go to school, including school phobia.
- Special educational needs, or a perceived lack of suitable provision in the school system for those needs.
- Disputes with a school over the education, special needs or behaviour of the child, in some cases resulting in 'off-rolling' or exclusion.
- Familial reasons which have nothing to do with schools or education (eg using older children educated at home as carers)
- As a stopgap whilst awaiting a place at a school other than the one allocated.
- Awaiting a place in school of their choice.
- Flexibility and tailoring of approach.

Cultural reasons are cited by the Department for Education (DfE) which feeds into fears of radicalisation⁹, but no parent cited such reasons in this or previous research.

Although reasons were included in the study that have not previously been cited by parents in earlier research, the responses confirmed that 'a temporary measure', 'child is a young carer' and 'child is a performer' were cited by 5 or fewer respondents. Anecdotally, administrators of home education support groups confirm that these are reasons rarely cited by parents. In view of this, 'a temporary measure', 'child is a young carer' and 'child is a performer' have been omitted from the report.

It is concerning that 45.63% of parents referred to negative reasons relating to schools as their initial primary reason for home educating their children. This included General dissatisfaction with the school system (21.21%), the school curriculum not relevant or suitable (9.25%), the school being unable to meet the child's special needs (10.79%) and bullying at school (4.38%) (Fig:1).

'One of my children was bullied through two separate schools. She told me, if she had stayed in school, she would have been dead. My other child was sexually assaulted at school. No one did anything to help in either school'.

Health needs, including the child's mental health were cited by 13.07% and barriers to attendance (school refuser or school phobic) cited by 4.45% of parents as their initial reason for choosing to EHE the child. Some parents clarified their concerns which were primarily related to anxiety and children's mental health.

⁹ Charles-Warner, W. (2018) 'Radicalisation of Home Educated Children, Reality or Myth' CPE [Online] Available from: <https://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/2018/06/12/radicalisation-home-education-reality-myth/>

'The child's mental health was suffering as a result of oppressive and petty discipline'.

'School caused him chronic anxiety. Lockdown removed this anxiety instantly and he was a much happier child'.

'His work, mental health and overall happiness increased during lockdown. Then declined as he went back to school. It has increased again since being home schooled'.

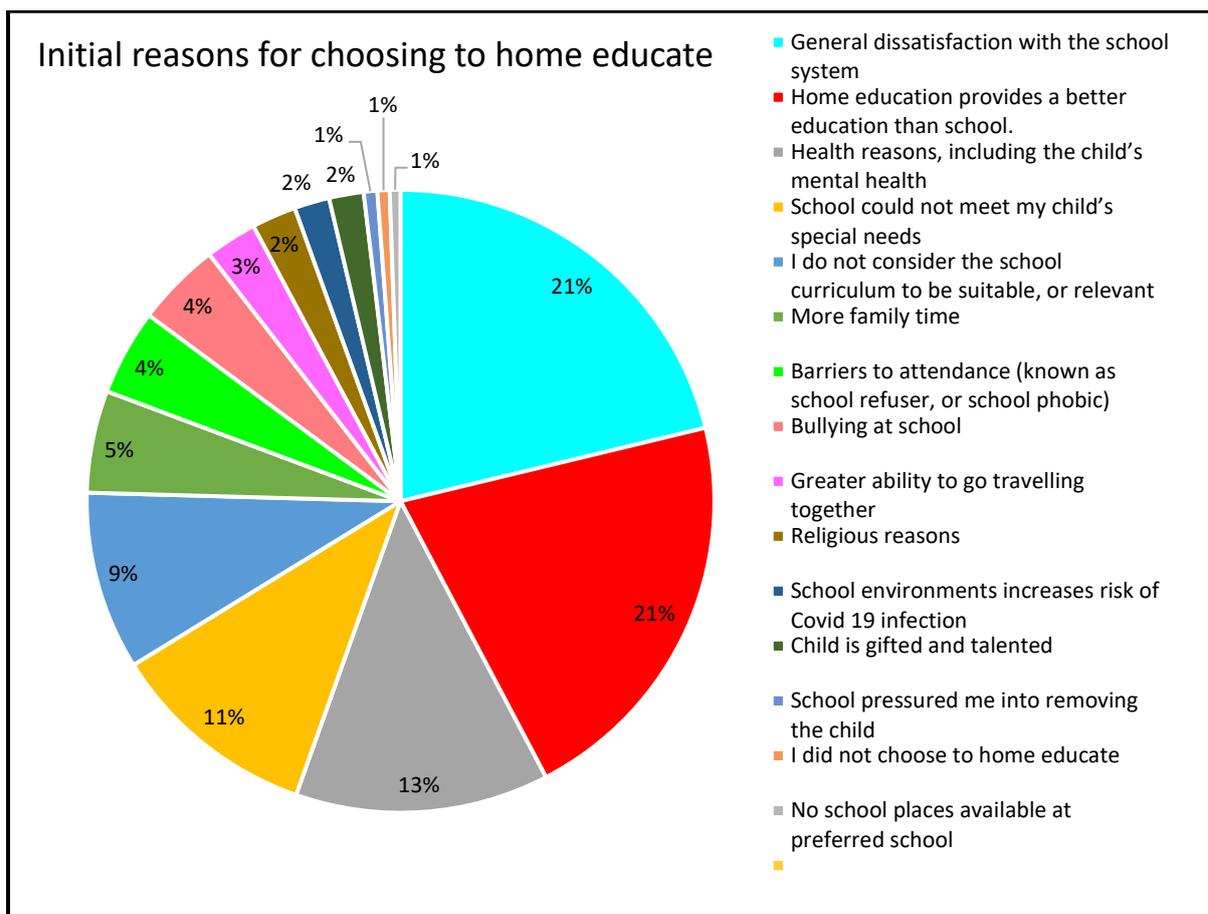


Fig: 1. Initial reason given by parents for home educating their child (percentages rounded to nearest whole number)

This confirms the findings of the Children's Society¹⁰ which compared children's well-being in the UK with other European countries and found that:

'Children's happiness with life has been in decline for most of the last decade and this year is no exception. Worries about relationships with friends, appearance and school seem to be key factors. Even before the pandemic, 15-year-olds in the UK were among the saddest and least

¹⁰ The Children's Society (2019) 'the good Childhood Report'. [Online] Available from: <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/good-childhood>



satisfied with their lives in Europe. It is time to listen to what young people need'.

Taking the 45.63% of parents who referred to negative reasons relating to schools as their main reason for home educating their children, together with this high level of concern for children's mental health, home educating families could argue that very often, their decision to home educate is based on listening to their children and safeguarding them, where Government and local authorities do not do so.

These parents frequently referred to safeguarding concerns related to school, particularly for special needs children being physically restrained, being bullied, or not having their needs met. It is this category and bullying upon which parents provided commentary most frequently.

'Staff at school physical and emotionally abused my child, who now has been diagnosed with PTSD and is under CAMHs'.

Positive reasons for initially choosing to EHE a child were cited by 30.87% of respondents, with 21.12% of respondents citing that home education provides a better education than school, 5.30% that it allows for more family time, 2.67% that it allows for greater ability to travel (including 'world schooling' and parents with careers that involve frequent relocation) and 1.78% that their child is gifted and talented. Parents who were themselves EHE referred to EHE as the obvious choice, with others comparing it favourably to school education:

'The children's father was home educated and thrived, whereas the children's mother went to school and had a mostly negative experience. For our family home education seemed to be the obvious place to start, with school as an option if it didn't work out'.

'Flexible, individualised education built around family culture. I am a second-generation elective home educator'.

'We have chosen to practice self-directed learning (because) after a lot of research and observing our children, we've come to the conclusion that it's the most natural, respectful and effective way for our children to earn about the world and to become healthy, fulfilled and functioning adults. Self-directed learning cannot happen at school'.

'We chose to home educate because we wanted our children to be collaborators in their education and be able to be involved in the decisions about what they would like to learn'.

'Home education is very vast and flexible. My child can focus on topics that he is interested in however they are not taught at school. It gives more opportunities of social interactions with children and adults of different ages and backgrounds. It teaches children about real life, not the theories'.

'There is no evidence that the National Curriculum constitutes an education, and millions of schooled children leave school without being able to read or add up. How can you possibly say that the UK has a 'world class' education system'?

Parents who provided comment in response to this question cited religious reasons for initially choosing EHE in 2.29% of cases, including reference to sex education in schools which conflicted with their beliefs. A small minority who cited other reasons, referred to compulsory school age being too young:

'The pressure on children (especially 4-7 year olds) is detrimental to their emotional development. The school environment is not conducive to building long term life skills and confidence'.

'We originally felt our children were too young. My husband and I felt that at 4, our twins wouldn't cope well with being at school all day, 5 days a week. Comparing our school system to the rest of Europe, where the average age to start school is 6, we felt delaying would be beneficial for them'.

The DfE has repeatedly referred to the rise in numbers of home educated children due to Covid 19, as a factor in the decision to introduce a mandatory register of EHE children¹¹. This is not borne out by the findings, with only 1.81% of parents citing concerns about Covid 19 as initial reason to EHE. This may reflect the period to which the DfE refers, as during the early stages of the pandemic, a significant rise in the number of EHE children was seen, which subsequently dropped¹².

Baroness Barran refers to parents not choosing to EHE¹³ as one of her three sectors of the EHE cohort. Some parents reported being in this situation with 0.70% citing the

¹¹ DfE (2022) 'Consultation outcome: Children not in school' [Online] Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/children-not-in-school>

¹² Charles-Warner, W (2020) 'Home Education Trends, Preliminary Report'. Education Otherwise [Online] available from: <https://www.educationotherwise.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Report-home-education-Trends-preliminary-report.pdf>

¹³ In debate in the House of Lords and in private meetings with EHE parents and representatives.



school having pressured them to remove the child, 0.63% stating that it was not a choice and 0.55% citing that there were no places at their preferred school. This combines with the 10.79% of parents who stated that school could not meet their child's special needs, to give 12.67% of parents overall who did not initially choose to EHE, a worrying figure, but not a third of parents as the Baroness appeared to imply.

Despite this cohort being smaller than suggested, it is an extremely worrying one given that it is indicative of some of the most vulnerable children in society, those with special needs, being failed by the school system. Parents were understandably distressed by this failure:

'School failed my special needs child...we ended up spending lots of money on assessments, won tribunal for EHCP school then continually failed to implement it child kept falling further behind ended up with anxiety'.

'SEND support/assessments took too long; he had to fail at mainstream before an EHCP could be issued. It had a huge detrimental effect upon his learning enthusiasm and crushed his self-esteem'.

'Unfortunately, the system does not monitor when LAs discriminate, refuse or do not provide home education. Parents are fined, can be given a criminal record. What happens to LAs when there are education failings? Local Government slap on the wrist. What's the impact on the child from years of missed education, the family and other government services? The system is weighted against SEN children and home education'.

This failure was highlighted earlier this year¹⁴ when Ofsted reports on local authority provision for children with special needs and the local government and social care ombudsman found that:

'Widespread failures prevented youngsters from accessing the appropriate support in a "timely fashion. Families commonly end up in crisis before their circumstances become properly assessed and understood'.

'The local government and social care ombudsman, Michael King, warned children were being robbed of their potential to thrive because councils were failing to fulfil their responsibilities properly. Last year,

¹⁴ Dickens, J (2021) 'Hanging by a Thread' Schoolsweek. [Online] Available from: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/hanging-by-a-thread-how-the-system-is-failing-send-children/>

the ombudsman upheld 89% of investigations into complaints on this issue¹⁵.

The government set out plans to overhaul the special educational needs and disabilities system in a green paper published in March, but EHE parents may well not be reassured by that as:

'This paper has been delayed three times, taken nearly 1,000 days to put together, yet it still fails to deliver the transformation in support needed to change this picture'¹⁶.

It remains to be seen if these changes will affect those choosing to EHE reluctantly.

Current reasons for home education

Reasons for the decision to EHE currently differ markedly from the initial reasons given in many cases (fig: 2).

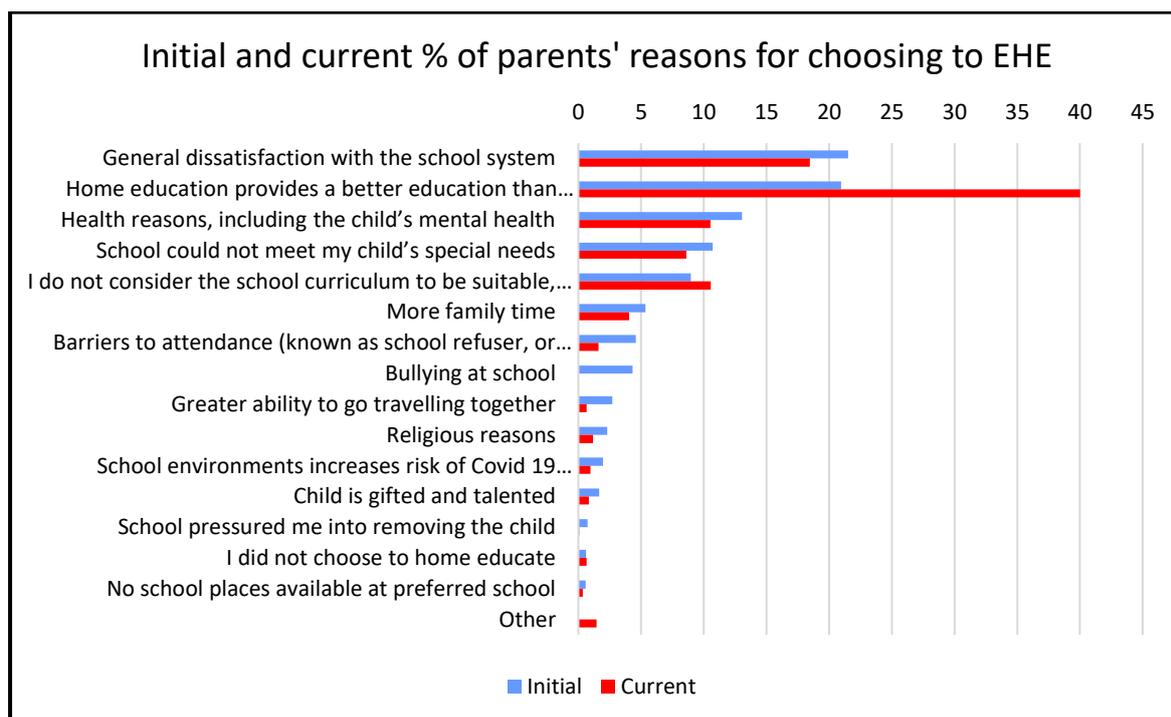


Fig 2: Initial and current reasons for choosing to EHE a child.

¹⁵ Weale, S. (2022) 'Children too anxious to attend school being failed by English councils'. Guardian. [Online] Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jul/07/children-anxiety-schools-alternative-education-ombudsman-report-english-councils>

¹⁶ Weale, S. (2022) 'Government sets out plans to overhaul special educational needs system' Guardian. [Online] Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/mar/29/government-sets-out-plans-to-overhaul-special-educational-needs-system#:~:text=The%20government%20will%20set%20out,better%20met%20in%20local%20settings.>



The most notable change is a marked increase in numbers of parents citing home education provides a better education than school as their current reason to EHE at 40.01%, a rise from 21.12% citing this reason for their initial choice to EHE.

Some parents come to EHE with an element of trepidation, often doubting their own ability and expecting to replicate school at home¹⁷. This is particularly so in cases where parents commence EHE as a response to negative reasons relating to school. Our society also treats school as the social norm, with rhetoric demonising EHE as somehow lesser¹⁸, including amongst public officials:

*'I don't really agree with home learning, some parents don't have any knowledge at all, what gives them the right to think they can home school their children, how do we know they are doing a good job?'*¹⁹

Increasing numbers of parents citing home education as providing a better education than school as their current reason to EHE, may be indicative of those parents having greater recognition of the benefits of EHE, once that position is established.

'My child has always been a school refuser, he has Tourette's and autism, he was failed by the system and then had mental health issues. No mainstream school could meet his needs, he was falling behind could not do addition or subtraction and basic English, I home educated him and within a year of 1:1 with (me) he excelled, by the end of the year he was doing algebra and reading age 14 when he was 11. Goes to show the right environment and the way we teach can make a complete difference to every child'.

Increases in parents citing EHE as providing a better education than school were accompanied by reductions in parents citing all other categories, save for those citing the school curriculum to not be suitable, or relevant, which rose from 9.25% to 10.57%. This again, may well be reflective of parents finding benefit in home education once they have experienced it for some time.

'I only homeschooled because no school met his needs. It changed him from an unhappy child to a thriving child. He even enjoys English now because he reads what he enjoys. He hated it at school.'

¹⁷ Observations taken from the Education Otherwise helpline and online advice service.

¹⁸ See for example Wollaston, S (2017) 'Feral Families review – no school and unlimited ice-cream? No wonder the kids are happy' Guardian. [Online] Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/oct/27/feral-families-review-off-grid-parenting-no-school>

¹⁹ Phillips, M. Cited in Jenkins, K. (2022) 'Increasing numbers of home schooled children in Pembrokeshire' [Online] Available from: <https://www.westerntelegraph.co.uk/news/20251058.increasing-numbers-home-schooled-children-pembrokeshire/>



Health reasons including the child's mental health were cited as current reasons to EHE by 10.53% of parents, a fall from 13.07% who initially cited this reason. Schools can and do have negative effects on children's mental health²⁰ as is borne out by reports²¹ that:

'One in three young people say their mental health and wellbeing improved during COVID-19 lockdown measures, with potential contributing factors including feeling less lonely, avoiding bullying and getting more sleep and exercise'.

Parents reported that EHE had quite literally saved their child's life in some cases:

'My child was suicidal. If I had not taken her out of school to homeschool her she would be dead by now'.

'He cut himself badly with a knife and the paediatrician advised that I take him out of school to prevent another suicide attempt'.

'My child became completely overwhelmed by the schools LGBTQ agenda and sexualisation of children. He had nightmares and said that he wanted to die. He thought that he had to become a girl'.

'My eldest attended school and his mental health deteriorated rapidly. No 7 year old should be talking about wanting die because school made him feel so low'.

There are many excellent schools and many excellent teachers, but parents are clear that school does not suit every child and not every child is safe in school.

Would EHE parents choose school?

Baroness Barran indicated a belief that there are significant numbers of 'reluctant' EHE parents who did not choose to EHE. This raises the question of whether parents would like their child to attend school at some point. A negative response to this question was given by 88.58% of parents, some expressing this choice from a professional standpoint:

²⁰ The Children's Society (2019) 'the good Childhood Report'. [Online] Available from:

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/good-childhood>

²¹ Brierley, G. (2022) 'One in three young people say they felt happier during lockdown'. University of Cambridge [Online] Available from: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/one-in-three-young-people-say-they-felt-happier-during-lockdown>

'As a children's psychotherapist I firmly believe there are times when we need to respond to individual needs. I have seen so many home educated children that are far more resilient and well-rounded as a result of a flexible education, which can meet the need at the point of need, rather than forcing young people, particularly neurodiverse young people into environments that do not suit them'.

'I made this choice as the system doesn't suit every child, despite the 'Every child matters' movement. I used to be a teacher and even then I knew the system was not fit for everyone. I want my children to grow up healthy of mind both intellectually and emotionally. They have a better chance of that being educated by someone who knows them and can more thoroughly cater to their individual needs and talents'.

'Our local schools have problems with bullying, drugs, swearing, knives, ASB and so on. Our local Home Ed families (very diverse) are lovely and there are none of these problems. For us it's an obvious choice because we value the safety and wellbeing of our children and are prepared to sacrifice income and time to preserve their right to a childhood'.

Parents indicated that they would consider school for their child in 11.42% of cases. With 3.81% stating that the choice would be that of the child:

'I do not want to ever send my child to school. The only reason that I would consider it, is if my child asked me to send him to school.'

'Should my child express an interest in school, I would like to give them that choice. However, I feel the Schools Bill makes it harder to withdraw them again should they not like it, making it less likely for us to choose that path'.

Parents were forthright in the views of schools referring to failings that could be addressed, such as lack of appropriate provision for children with additional learning needs:

'My children are bright, sociable autistic children and school totally failed them. As a teacher I like to think that there could be somewhere, but I have accepted this is unlikely and we will need to support their

education ourselves. The Schools Bill frightens me as my children have EHCPs'.



'There is no suitable school available for such complex needs. I'd love my child to be able to go somewhere but sadly others cannot meet her needs, all 5 schools could not manage'.

Schools need to be more open to adapting their offer for the individual child, in particular special needs children, and less targeted on set goals or attendance. Parents were clear that they would consider school if the child's health or special needs could be met in 75 cases. Parents also referred to lack of flexischooling provision for children, provision which could encourage parents to reconsider the school system for their child:

'I would like for my child to go to school at some point, however, with his sensory integration issues, a full day may not be a good idea. Flexi-schooling would absolutely be fantastic in the sense that he could attend 1 - 3 hours per day and we could home educate him for the rest of the day. Unfortunately, the government and local authorities have no idea to institute and regulate flexi-schooling for SEND children. We have applied at his school for flexi-schooling, but they were worried about their attendance records, so my child was being let down due to an attendance record pressure from government.'

Those parents who gave their initial reasons for EHE as no school places available at their preferred school, school pressured them into EHE, or I did not choose to EHE were a small minority of 1.88% combined. Only those parents in the last category were more likely to state that they would like their child to go to school, or the child is now in school.

Parents who initially chose EHE because school could not meet their child's special needs indicated a wish for the child to attend school, or stated that the child was now in school, in 21.63% of cases, with 78.37% stating that they would not make this choice. Of these parents, 25.58% stated that home education provides a better education than school.

Parents EHE for many reasons, including negative reasons related to school. That position will remain the case until radical changes are made to the school system. This is not, however, the full story as 220 (5.66%) parents in the survey would choose options other than EHE regardless of whether the child had requested them and some in the survey had already done so. This included those who would, or had, made the choice for A level study (37), going on to college (24), going to specialist college such as music or equestrian training (11), opting for age 14 -16 college (8), attending school for GCSEs (28), attending independent school (11) and grammar school (3).

Some parents would choose school for their child but with reluctance. These were mainly lower income parents who referred to the financial pressures of EHE and lack of ability to work when EHE. A small cohort of parents (9) referred to lack of safety in schools in respect of Covid 19:

'We were never against school-based education, and we would like our child to resume once safety is prioritised. Home ed has proved to be better for our child's academic development than a school so

our child hasn't missed out in that respect but we both have positive memories of going to school and would like the same for our child'.

Not all parents were negative about school and a small minority (14 parents) referred positively to the ability of children to enjoy social aspects of school.

Do EHE parents find their local authority supportive?

Parents were asked to indicate the degree to which they found their local authority to be supportive. Responses to this question ere received from 1,964 parents. Parents reported their local authority to be a little supportive, or very supportive in 38.62% of responses (fig: 3).

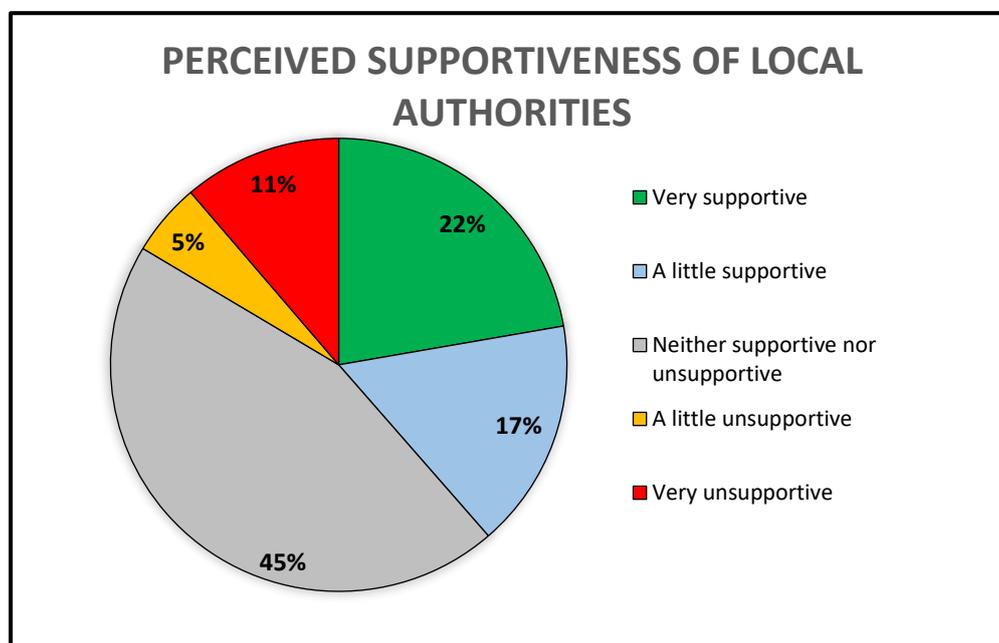


Fig: 3. Perceived supportiveness of local authorities to EHE parents.

Several local authorities were highlighted as being supportive by more than 75% of parents including: Coventry, Lancashire and Gloucestershire with 100% positive responses, Hampshire 95.74%, Devon 95.54%, Cumbria 91.67%, Birmingham 87.5%,

Cornwall 87.5% Norfolk 88.24%, Kent 86.20% and Derbyshire 76.92%. Notably, previous research²² found Kent to have a poor level of supportiveness toward EHE families. This change may be due to relatively recent changes in senior management²³, but further investigation is not within the remit of this report.

Parents reported their local authority to be a little unsupportive, or very unsupportive in 16.36% of responses. Some local authorities were highlighted as being unsupportive by 100% of parents including Portsmouth, Wokingham and Staffordshire. Plymouth was reported as unsupportive by 81.82% of parents and both Surrey and Durham by 75% of parents.

Responses in respect of Cheshire East were of particular note, with respondents being divided between very unsupportive and very supportive. The basis for this was clear from accompanying comments:

'The new staff are not like the previous man. He was brilliant'.

'I've always had a good rapport with the LA but I have not seen him for ages'.

It was evident that not only is a postcode lottery rife in respect of how supportive local authorities are toward EHE parents, but also that a change of staff can have a significant effect on how parents perceive the authority, both positively and negatively.

Cross referencing parental perceptions of local authority level of supportiveness with reasons for initially choosing EHE, did not indicate any correlation between these factors in most cases. However, parents citing health reasons for initially choosing EHE were significantly more likely to report their local authority as supportive (42.95%) than unsupportive (27.04%).

Conclusion

The contention that EHE parents fall into three main groups is not supported by the research, if the implication of that contention is that these groups are of similar size. This is borne out by the DfE's own statement²⁴.

²² Cheasley, S (2018) 'A Comparative Analysis of Home Education in Eight Local Authorities and Nationally' [Online] <http://www.personalisededucationnow.org.uk/2018/08/28/comparative-analysis-home-education-eight-local-authorities-nationally-preliminary-report/>

²³ Personal knowledge of author.

²⁴ DfE (2019) Elective Home Education Departmental Guidance for local Authorities.



'Most parents who take up the weighty responsibility of home education do a great job, and many children benefit from being educated at home.'

Most parents do a 'great job', including most of those parents who come to EHE reluctantly at first. Significant numbers of those parents build on their initial reluctant choice to report that EHE provides a better education than school education does, making clear that an initial negative, became a positive experience for them and their children with experience.

Lifestyle choices were the mainstay of EHE historically, but the situation has moved on, driven by dissatisfaction with the school system and negative perceptions of the school offer, with the most vulnerable children coming to EHE to meet their needs and poignantly, to safeguard them.

Parents often come to EHE with some reluctance, as a last resort when school has failed their child, or when they see no other option. If the DfE wants to encourage parents to return those children to the classroom, then the classroom needs to change. Parents make clear that you cannot put children into classrooms that have yet to adapt to be suitable for those children and to meet their needs.

Parents increasingly find advantages in EHE, not least that it provides a better education than school does. It supports family life and the primacy of the parent in the child's life.

Whilst many children thrive in English schools and many English schools do an excellent job, there are many children in those schools who are deeply unhappy, being failed by the system, or both. School simply is not the best place for every child. Parents will continue to choose EHE at higher rates, if schools do not become safer, more accessible to all children and excellent sources of a World class education. Schools cannot make that claim now or in the foreseeable future.

Education Otherwise would welcome a sea change in approach that truly acknowledges that EHE is of equal status to school: instead of the narrative of numbers of EHE children being a concern, coupled with an ever increasing push for deepening involvement in the lives of EHE families.

We hope to see a narrative of trusting parents to make the right choices for their children unless there is evidence to the contrary, whilst actively encouraging every parent to choose the right education for their individual child, whether that be in a school, EHE or another form of provision.

W. Charles-Warner

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