

Home Education Trends: A New Regime



Wendy Charles-Warner

Executive Summary

Surveys of home educating parents, together with DfE statistical releases, provide a picture of previous nascent improvements in relationships between local authorities and parents appearing to stall. This is driven by failures within school systems damaging trust, parliamentary and media propounding of negative narrative and parents' concerns over the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

- The rate of increase in the number of home educated children in 2025 was considerably lower than in 2023 and 2024. However, historically, most children came new to home education at transition phases, whereas 2025 saw stepped rises peaking in the final years at age 14 to 16 years.
- Philosophically based home education is now a minority reason, being cited as the primary reason for making the choice by only 11.4% of parents.
- Despite an overall fall in school age children in 2025, there were 1,450 children who came new to home education from independent schools. This is similar to 2024 when VAT on school fees was introduced, but 48% higher than in 2023.
- In 2025, 47.6% of parents coming new to home education cited schools not meeting the child's special needs, health needs or emotionally based school avoidance as their primary motivation. A further 25.4% of parents who did not cite these issues as their primary reason, did so as their secondary reason.
- Parents expressing general dissatisfaction with the school system as their primary reason for choosing to home educate has risen to 24% from 14.8% in 2020.
- Despite Baroness Smith's contention in Parliament that *"the idea that they are forced to do that because the vast majority of our schools are bad is simply wrong"*, parents and public bodies do not agree; OFSTED found 17% of inspected state schools to be inadequate or to require improvement, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman upheld 97% of complaints relating to special needs provision in 2024 to 2025, and the DfE stated that the level of support received by children *'is too often determined by how hard their families fight, or how much their families can spend.'*

It is imperative that the current regime acts to change its public narrative about home education and to recognise the value of home education to children. It must resource local authorities to facilitate development of positive relationships with home educating families and most crucially, it must take urgent steps to improve how children with special needs are supported in schools. Only then will home education be a genuine choice for parents which is given due respect by government and public alike.

Home Education Trends: A New Regime

The Background

This report examines continuing trends in parental choice to home educate their children and how changes, particularly a change in Government, have continued to affect those choices.

Nothing has changed in recent years, in terms of the status of home education; it has always been and remains a choice which is of equal legal status to school education for parents in England and Wales. However, the 2025 launch of the Government's Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (CWSB) has thrown home educating families into uncertainty and more notably, affected their decisions about why and whether they should home educate their children.

Tentative signs that what had been an ever-widening divide between home educating families and local authorities was being narrowed, have fallen by the wayside due to distrust driven by the introduction of the CWSB. For their part, local authority staff state¹ that they lack resources in the face of increasing demand, and clarity on the likely expectations of them in the future.

The party in Government has had a longstanding, ideologically driven intention to regulate home education and to reduce parents' rights to home educate². This has led to a reversal in the previously reported, more positive, media portrayal of home education. Home education post Covid 19 was starting to be seen through a lens of legitimate choice which is different to but equal to school, a choice increasingly exercised by parents who feel that the state school system is failing their children, particularly children with special needs. However, the new regime has driven an unevicenced narrative of home educated children as being at significant safeguarding risk and, tellingly, in a speech by the Prime Minister, home educating families were conflated with 'non-British values' and extremism³, whilst their parents were unfairly described as '*opting out of their responsibilities*':

'We do need to be much clearer as a society about what we expect of people and the responsibilities that come with rights. That means: Much stronger powers for the Charity Commission to shut down charities that promote extremism. It means tougher regulation of home schooling because schools are

¹ Private conversations with wide range of staff from various local authorities.

² See for example The Badman Review 2009. 'Review of Home Education' [online] available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dc69640f0b65d8b4e36db/Review_of_Elective_Home_Education_in_England.pdf

³ Gov.UK (2026) 'PM remarks in Hastings: 5 February' [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-remarks-in-hastings-5-february>

so important for integration and so we need a higher bar for people who want to opt-out of that responsibility.'

As during previous iterations of Bills, this Government has exploited the death of a child⁴ to further its aim of introducing extreme regulation of home education. Research finds no correlation between home education and increased safeguarding risk and, in no serious case review in which home education is a factor, is causality found. However, parliamentarians are no less swayed by emotive rhetoric than are others, no matter how misleading that rhetoric may be, and it is highly likely that the CWSB will gain Royal assent in early 2026.

During debate of the CWSB in the House of Lords, Baroness Barran spoke dismissively about the consequences of falling foul of the CWSB⁵:

'But let us be clear: the consequence is that a child has to go to school; the consequence is not endless involvement of a local authority in a family's life. The child goes to school – something which the vast majority of children in this country do.'

We must ask ourselves whether the consequences of the CWSB are as simple as the Lady purports or are they more far reaching? Are home educating families coming to home education because they are opting out of their responsibilities, or taking their children out of school in order to 'evade oversight'? Is it that parents are coming to home education because they are picking up the pieces of a failing school system⁶? Are political agendas driving the growth of home education and are children safe in schools?

Method

This report examines trends in home educating families in England. This series of reports has previously used freedom of information requests to each of the local authorities in England. However, the Department for Education (DfE) now collects this data from local authorities, resulting in refusal of freedom of information requests to

⁴ Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership (2025) 'Child Safeguarding Practice review Sara Sharif'.

[Online] Available from: <https://surreyscp.org.uk/documents/sara-review-final-report-november-2025/>

⁵ Hansard (2026) 'Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill' Volume 852: debated on Wednesday 28 January 2026. [Online] Available from: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2026-01-28/debates/580425E1-9C31-41D5-AAF1-881EABCF8163/Children%E2%80%99SWellbeingAndSchoolsBill>

⁶ Charles-Warner, W. (2024) 'Home Education, Picking up the Failings of Schools'. [Online] Available from: <https://www.educationotherwise.org/home-education-picking-up-the-failings-of-schools/>

individuals or other organisations. Consequently, this report uses data for numbers of children as published by the DfE⁷.

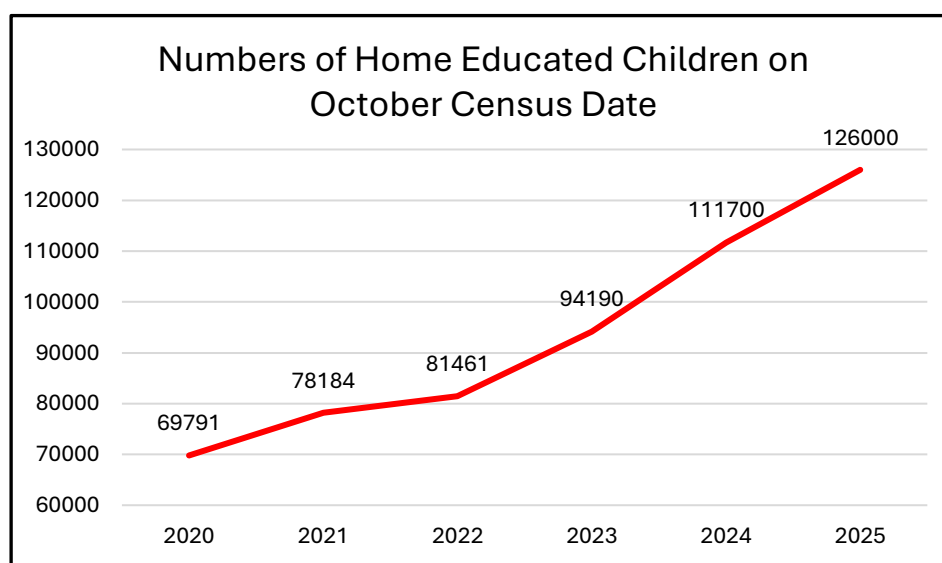
In January 2026, a survey of 387 parents coming new to home education since 1st January 2025 was undertaken through Education Otherwise member lists and on various social media groups catering for home educating families. Parents were asked to give their primary and secondary reasons for deciding to home educate their child. The survey was anonymous.

Limitations are inherent within surveying home educating families as not all use social media groups and consequently, those individuals' views are omitted from the survey.

Limitations within data provided by the DfE, in respect of parents' reasons for deciding to home educate, include the possibility that parents will not necessarily provide reasons to local authorities from whence the data is sourced. Furthermore, parents may be less open to providing reasons which they feel may be being judged negatively.

How Many Home Educated Children are There?

Numbers of home educated children have risen year on year since 2012, when the author first recorded the data. In 2023 to 2024 there was a significant rise in numbers with 111,700 home educated children being recorded on census day, a rise of 18.6%. The rise in numbers dropped below the previous trajectory at 12.8% in 2024 to 2025 with 126,000 home educated children being recorded.



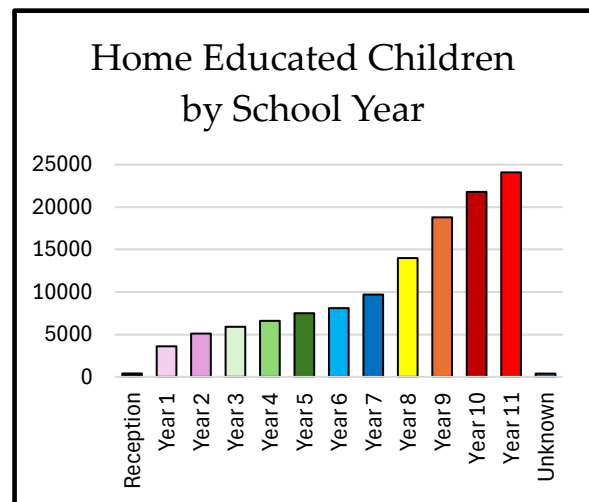
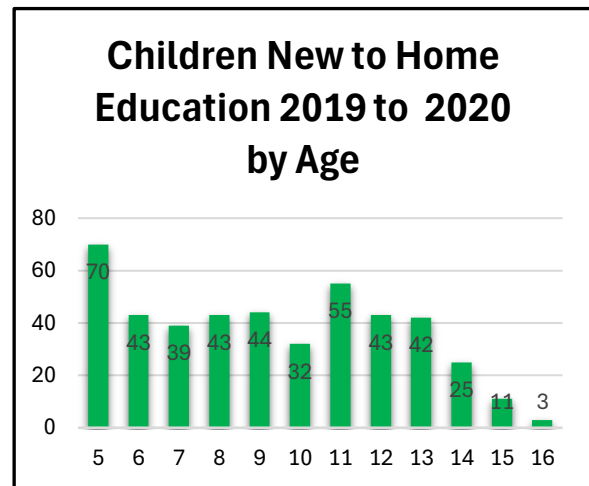
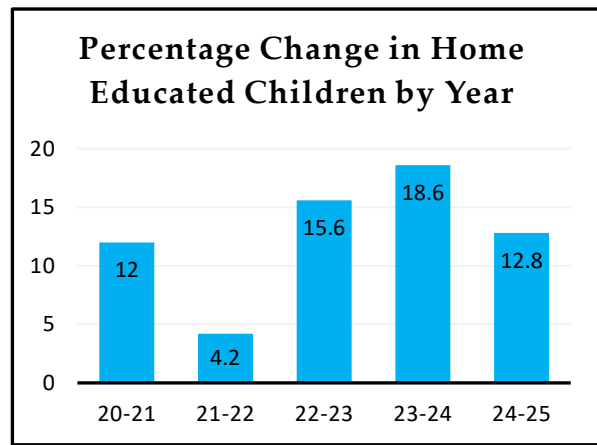
The overall rise in numbers does not tell the full story, as changes have been fuelled by factors affecting society as a whole. During Covid 19 lockdown in 2020 to 2021,

⁷ Gov.UK (2026) 'Elective Home Education'. [Online] Available from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/elective-home-education/2025-26-autumn-term>

numbers rose by 12% then, lockdown ended for school children in March 2021 and, by 2022, the rise had plateaued with many children returning to school as their parents returned to the workplace. In 2022 to 2023 numbers rose by 15.6% then, in 2023 to 2024 by 18.6%. This significant rise was driven primarily by parents coming new to home education as ‘school escapees’, not by choice, but because they reported that their child’s needs were not being met in school in 54% of cases⁸.

There is no doubt that Covid 19 lockdown has driven changes in adult work patterns, with post lockdown seeing substantially increased remote and hybrid working rates⁹. Greater numbers of parents are working from home and consequently, they are more able to be available to supervise children’s home education, making it a more viable choice. Children experienced home learning during lockdown and many with SEN struggled to return to school.

These widespread social changes are reflected in significant changes in when children first come to home education. In the year to 1st October 2020¹⁰, the long established pattern continued to endure. This consisted of a large peak at the start of compulsory school age, a modest peak at transition stage to senior school at age 10 to 11 and low numbers in the last two years of compulsory school age.



⁸ Charles-Warner, W. (2024) ‘Home Education, Picking up the Failings of Schools’. [Online] Available from: <https://www.educationotherwise.org/home-education-picking-up-the-failings-of-schools/>

⁹ Clarke, K. (2025). The impact of remote work on mobilities in the UK. *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 12(1), 472–487. [Online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2025.2502113>

¹⁰ Charles-Warner, W (2020) ‘Home Education Trends: The Covid Effect’. *Education Otherwise* [Online] available from: <https://www.educationotherwise.org/category/research/>

Survey responses and DfE data¹¹ show that the demographic started to change post lockdown and now, five years later, that change is stark. In 2025, children who came new to home education predominantly did so in the final compulsory school years, at age 14 to 16 years. Surveys find that these are often children struggling with mental health issues and feeling 'broken' by the stress of the GCSE years.

Why Do Parents Choose to Home Educate?

Data provided by the DfE contains 29% of responses stating that reasons for home education are 'unknown', this is the highest rated category in the DfE data whereas, no parent responded to the surveys without providing reasons for their decision. DfE data collation in respect of home education uses submissions provided by local authorities, which can distort findings in relation to why parents choose to home educate. This is, in part, because local authorities often do not receive information from parents in this respect and, at times, they use information provided by schools. Reasons given to schools by parents can be unreliable, particularly when there has been a breakdown in relationships between the school and the parent prior to deregistration.

Members of the public have low levels of trust in local authorities with recent research by Commonplace¹² finding that overall, only 28% of respondents trust their local authority. The current CWSB, coming after previous iterations over several years, has been experienced negatively by home educating families, leading to further breakdown of trust in public officials amongst home educating families. Furthermore, there were pre-existing, notably low levels of trust amongst some sectors of the home education cohort, with some social media groups unfairly portraying local authority staff as deceitful or otherwise behaving unacceptably. This can lead parents to be reticent about sharing information in respect of their decision making, perceiving local authority staff as likely to make adverse judgements about their decisions. Some families report feeling fearful of local authority contact, viewing it as a risk.

Surveys used in this research were undertaken by individuals who are known and generally trusted by the home education community. Consequently, parents are more likely to feel comfortable giving responses which are reflective of their genuine reasons for choosing to home educate than they would to public officials.

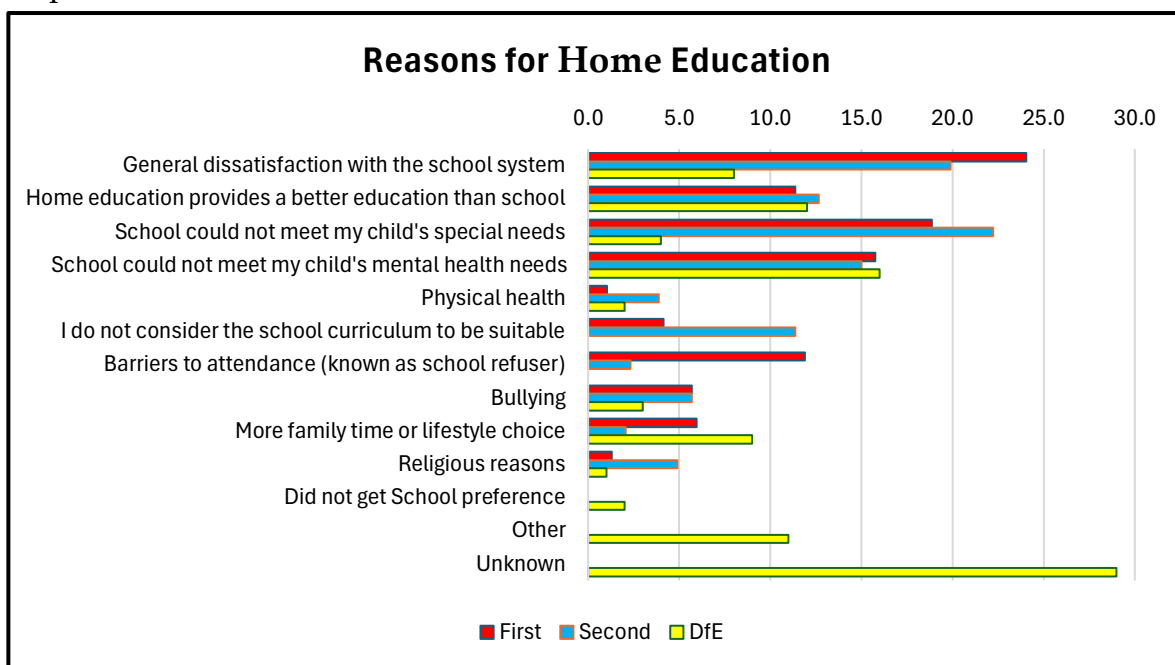
In addition to issues relating to trust, this series of surveys and reports uses consistent surveys in order to accurately compare changes in each new survey. The DfE data uses fewer categories of which some use less specific reasons. Categories in DfE data have

¹¹ Gov.UK (2026) 'Elective Home Education'. [Online] Available from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/elective-home-education/2025-26-autumn-term>

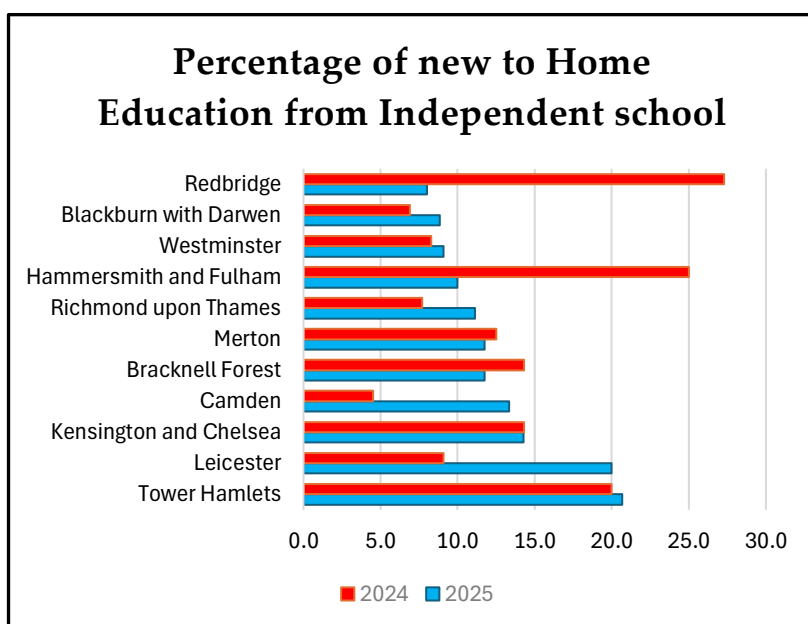
¹² Commonplace (2026) 'UK Perceptions of place Exploring why trust in councils varies across the UK'. [Online] Available from: <https://www.commonplace.is/-uk-perceptions-of-place-ebook>

been allocated to the equivalent category in the surveys. The surveys use primary reason and secondary reason selections which are shown separately on the chart.

No parent in the surveys stated that the child was not offered the preferred school place whereas 2% of DfE responses did so. DfE data finds 11% of respondents stating 'other reasons'. Survey respondents provided explanations when selecting 'other' and these were used to allocate accurate categories, leaving no responses unallocated to other categories. The DfE does not include Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) or that parents consider the curriculum to be unsuitable.



The current Government added VAT to independent school fees effective from 1st January 2025. During 2025, 70 independent schools closed, of which 22 were special schools, a rise in closures of 9% on the three years pre lockdown¹³. The survey found a small but significant number of parents stating that closure of their child's independent school had led to their decision to home educate.



¹³ Gov.Uk (2026) 'Get Information about Schools'. [Online] available from: <https://www.get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Establishments/Search?tok=0qhwEzO0>

In the year to October 2023, DfE data demonstrates that 980 children came to home education from independent schools, in 2024 this rose to 1490 and 2025 saw a further 1450 children doing so. However, whilst prior to 2025 there had been a steady rise in overall numbers of compulsory school age children¹⁴, 2025 saw a drop of 0.7% in numbers¹⁵. In localised areas such as Redbridge and Hammersmith and Fulham, DfE data reveals that up to 27.3% of those children coming new to home education during the year came from independent schools. It is of note that, an appeal brought in respect of VAT on independent school fees was refused by the High Court in February 2026, finding that *'home schooling was an option if they did not want to accept state provision'*¹⁶.

Bullying is cited as the basis of parents' choice to home educate in the DfE data in 3% of cases, whereas 5.7% of parents report that bullying at school was their primary reason and a further 5.7% cite bullying as their secondary reason in surveys. Parents point to reports of serious incidents in schools such as recent stabbings¹⁷, *"It is really scary. We send our children to school, and we expect them to be safe but that just doesn't seem to be the case anymore,"* to indicate that schools are not safe. However, it must be accepted that children can and do come to harm in a wide range of places, including schools, and that incidents such as these do not indicate schools to be unsafe, just as the death of a child does not indicate that home educated children are unsafe.

The Office for National Statistics reports that 34.9% of children aged 10 to 15 years experienced in-person bullying during 2023 and that 19.1% experienced online bullying¹⁸. Bullies select *'suitably submissive victims'*¹⁹ and Education Minister Bridget Phillipson attributes the issue to lack of 'grit', *"It's about having the grit, the resilience, the ability to cope with life's ups and downs, about the challenges that are thrown at you."*²⁰

¹⁴ Gov.Uk (2026) 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics'. [Online] Available from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2024-25>

¹⁵ UK Government (2026) 'VAT on private school fees'. [Online] Available from: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10125/>

¹⁶ Clarke, V. (2026) 'Private schools lose legal challenge over VAT changes'. BBC [Online] Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y4lj1llvjo#:~:text=Private%20schools%20lose%20legal%20challenge%20over%20VAT%20changes&text=Lawyers%20representing%20the%20families%20of,want%20to%20accept%20state%20provision.>

¹⁷ Bolton, W. and Montgomery, S. (2026) 'Counter-terror police lead investigation into school stabbing'. BBC. [Online] available from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2026/02/10/two-teenage-boys-stabbed-at-north-london-school/>

¹⁸ ONS (2024) 'Bullying and Online Experiences Among Children in England and Wales: Year Ending March 2023'. [Online] available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/16/much-needed-grit-to-be-fostered-in-englands-schoolchildren-say-ministers>
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/bullyingandonlineexperiencesamongchildreninenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023>

¹⁹ Psychology Today (2026) 'Bullying'. [Online] Available from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/basics/bullying>

²⁰ Grierson, J. (2025) "'Much-needed grit' to be fostered in England's schoolchildren, say ministers'. [Online], Available from:

Parents, however, express concern about harm caused to their children with little or no action being taken to support the child:

'A teacher bullying my child was caught on Camera. Other children witnessed it and yet the teacher still denied it, and nothing happened to him.'

'My child was bullied for 12 months, and the school did nothing about it. Her mental health suffered terribly. (Home education was the) Best decision I've ever made.'

'(There were) endless non follow-ups to enquiry, constant bullying explained away as "normal child behaviour" and that they'll "learn to manage" even though cries for help and curiosity shut down.'

'The whole school system was more interested in appeasing the child who bullied and assaulted my daughter. They offered no support and the head even told me off for going to the governors when I was dissatisfied with the way the assault was handled.'

However, this is a polarising question with some viewing suggestions that children must develop resilience as disparaging²¹ and others pointing to the rise in 'child centred parenting', a style embraced by many home educating families, as leading to 'helicopter parenting'. The reasons are far more complex, and it is clear that if similar behaviour happened in the workplace employees would not be expected to build 'resilience' to it.

Parents gave the primary reason for deciding to home educate as belief that the school curriculum is not suitable in 4.1% of cases and as their second reason in 11.4% of cases. The curriculum has not been reviewed for a decade and in her recent review²², Prof. Becky Francis found it to need 'refreshing' in order to be fit for purpose and to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world, indicating at least modest support for this view.

'My child could read at three and do fractions. The school said she would have to relearn using phonics, fit the system and learn the way needed for SATs. So they were not able or willing to adapt or provide an education suited to her age, ability and aptitude. Only that they felt that I needed to comply with national curriculum and OFSTED for SATS. My child's learning was not the priority.'

The DfE data gives only 8% of parents expressing general dissatisfaction with the school system as their reason for choosing to home educate, compared to 24% of

²¹ Triggles, N (2025) 'Child mental health crisis: Is better resilience the solution?' [Online] Available from:

²² Go.Uk (2025) 'Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report' [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-and-assessment-review-final-report>

parents citing such dissatisfaction as their primary reason and a further 19.9% giving it as their second reason. This is considerably higher than our 2020 figure of 14.82%²³. This general dissatisfaction is borne out by recent Parentkind²⁴ reports of over five million complaints being made against schools, by parents, in 2025. Tensions between parents and schools are high and parents can, at times, feel disempowered and excluded by government stress on attendance rather than children's wellbeing and happiness.

'School is not fit for purpose, and it takes children away from their families way too much. It's not designed or run in an appropriate manner at all.'

'Schools seem to be holding areas for children; no thought or care is given to the children attending and thanks to everyone being pushed to get degrees, there are now huge amounts of teachers who absolutely should not be teachers and seem to have chosen the profession as a last resort.'

'Too many children to one class room and specific learning styles not able to be adapted into the mainstream. Home ed gives boundless opportunity for one to one and a tailored education to suit their needs and curiosity. Children still learn, just not as a can of sardines stuffed together into a box.'

Parents refer to the quality of education in schools and His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education found 17% of inspected, state funded schools to be rated as either 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement'²⁵. The report also highlighted widespread delays in producing Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and that many plans which are produced are of poor quality. Children also face long waits for health services, including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) leading to particular pressures on children with special education needs or mental health needs.

DfE data cites 1% and surveys only 1.3% of parents citing religious reasons as their primary reason for deciding to home educate, a further 4.9% of parents cite this as their secondary reason. Whilst this is a small percentage of the cohort, it represents a significant rise from the 0.3% found in 2020. A small minority of parents responded to describe how school ideologies conflicted with their family's beliefs, specifically furthering '*LGBT indoctrination*':

²³ 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>

²⁴ Parentkind (2026) 'School Complaints Report 2025' [Online] Available from:

<https://www.parentkind.org.uk/research-and-policy/parent-research/school-complaints-report-2025>

²⁵ OFSTED (2025) 'The annual report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2024/25' [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202425-education-childrens-services-and-skills/the-annual-report-of-his-majestys-chief-inspector-of-education-childrens-services-and-skills-202425>

'My child was told that he could choose to be a girl or boy, he was very angry and confused by that.'

'Lifestyle choice' is given as the reason to home educate in 9% of cases in the DfE data. However, surveys do not include that as a choice, the nearest equivalent being 'More family time'; this was the primary reason given by 5.9% of parents and the secondary reason given by 2.1%. Parents referred to the ability to travel with their children and to spend more time with them. For some parents, the fact that social opportunity for home educated children is more natural than school socialisation²⁶ was the driving impetus:

'We wanted more family time and freedom to travel, not to be tied to school times.'

'I wanted to spend more time with my kids. I want to educate them on real life events and socialise them with people from all walks of life not just other school kids.'

Some parents citing more family time as their reason for home educating their child clarified their views that children start school at too young an age in the UK. Both the European and global average compulsory school ages are six years²⁷, and parents referred to consistently high PISA scores in countries such as Finland, where compulsory school age is seven²⁸ as being indicative of early school start not being necessary for children to achieve their potential:

'My 5 year old is not emotionally ready to be away from me for 30 hours per week.'

'I had fantastic education. I didn't start until seven and I don't want my daughter to.'

'I know that it's just about getting women into work as quickly as possible, it's not about kids is it? If it was we'd be like Finland and let them start later and get better outcomes.'

DfE data uses the category 'philosophical or preferential' with 12% of parents citing that as their reason for choosing to home educate. As 'philosophical or preferential'

²⁶ Medlin, R.G. (2013) 'Homeschooling and the Question of Socialization Revisited', Peabody Journal of Education, 88(3), p. 284-297. [Online] Available from:

<https://www.stetson.edu/artsci/psychology/media/medlin-socialization-2013.pdf>

²⁷ The Global Economy (2024) 'School starting age, primary school - Country rankings'. [Online] Available from: https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/Primary_school_starting_age/

²⁸ Statista (2026) 'Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) Results in Selected European Countries in 2022'. [Online] available from: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1084528/europe-pisa-results-by-category/?srsltid=AfmBOoqrP2glkX6lu5d3cLe4a2xoj8C_O2BupxwVB4ELt8_rLJ_wAQor

covers several choices, the survey uses the category ‘home education provides a better education than school’ with 11.4% of parents citing this as their primary reason for choosing home education and 12.7% as their secondary reason. This is a significant reduction from 2020²⁹ when 20.7% of parents cited this as their primary reason and indicates that fewer home educators’ decision to home educate is philosophical. However, once established in home education, initial motivation changes, and parents can become ‘philosophical’ home educators:

‘Having the nurturing 1- 2- 1 learning experience aids my young people to achieve greater outcomes’.

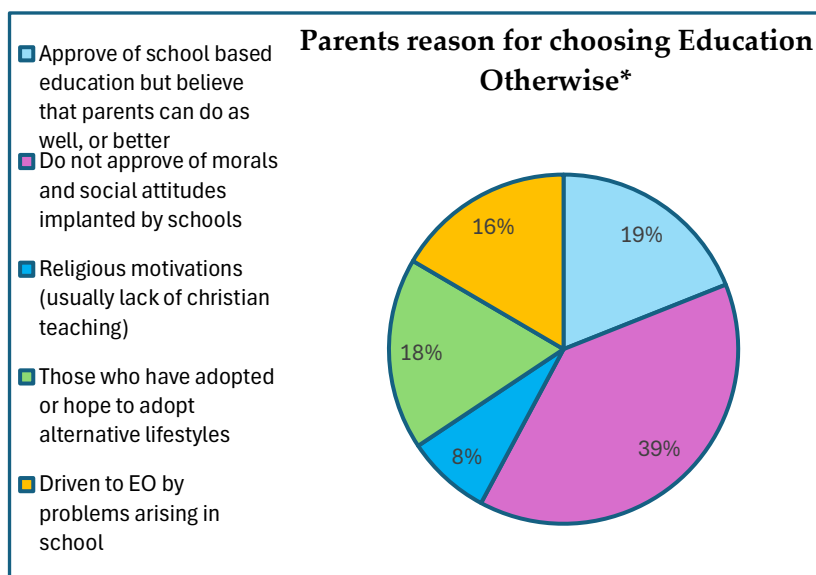
‘The school environment is just not for my child. She thrives at home and learns so much. She wants to learn as well’.

‘Home education has been the best thing for my children they are thriving now.’

‘My Child has never been to school. I used to be a school teacher so I knew from 15 months old that the school system would not support her, I didn’t want her to be suppressed by it, I wanted her to thrive, so knew that I needed to home educate her.’

Reasons for parents’ motivation to home educate changed significantly during and post Covid 19 lockdown. By 2024 the charity saw those coming to home education reluctantly (54%), outweigh those who actively chose to home educate, bringing the term ‘Elective Home Education’ (EHE) into question for many³⁰.

Historically, the situation is starkly different with the minority in Education Otherwise’s member survey³¹ of 356 parents considering home education because of



*In 1983, ‘Education Otherwise’ was used to mean ‘home education’

²⁹ 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>

³⁰ Charles-Warner, W. (2024) ‘Home Education, Picking up the Failings of Schools’. [Online] Available from: <https://www.educationotherwise.org/home-education-picking-up-the-failings-of-schools/>

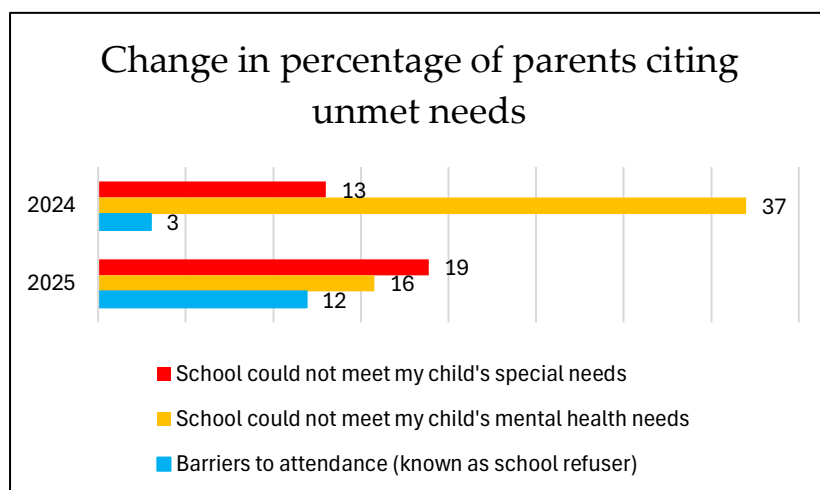
³¹ Charles-Warner, W. (2025) ‘Education Otherwise: Fifty Years of Home Education’. Published by Education Otherwise. Available from: <https://www.educationotherwise.org/>

problems arising in school. It is children whose parents feel that their needs are not met in school, which now drives increases in numbers of home educating children.

In addition to our 2024 findings that home education was 'picking up the pieces' of failing schools, a 2025 inquiry by the House of Commons Education Select Committee³² reported having:

'heard from exhausted parents fighting for basic support, teachers stretched beyond capacity and committed professionals working within services buckling under pressure. Their voices were clear and consistent: the current system is not working'.

Nevertheless, the DfE data shows only 4% of parents reporting that they chose to home educate their child because the school was not meeting the child's special needs. However, 18.9% of parents surveyed gave this as their primary reason and a further



22.2% of parents gave it as their secondary reason. This is an increase from 13% in 2024.

The DfE data reports 16% of parents stating that their child's mental health needs could not be met and 2% stating that physical health needs could not be met.

This is in line with survey

findings of 15.8% and 1% respectively. The DfE data did not have a category for Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) which is usually accepted to be a mental health issue. Parents cited EBSA as their primary reason for deciding to home educate their child in 11.9% of cases and as their secondary reason in 2.3% of cases. The decrease in numbers of parents citing schools being unable to meet their child's mental health needs, from 37% in 2024, to 16% in 2025, could be explained, in part by the 9% increase in parents citing EBSA. Taken together, schools not meeting the child's needs or EBSA, were the primary motivation for home education in 47.6% of cases. Whilst a majority of parents no longer cite schools' inability to meet their children's needs or EBSA as their primary motivating factor for home education, a further 25.4% of parents who did not cite these issues as their primary reason, did so as their secondary reason.

³² Education Committee (2025) 'Solving the SEND Crisis'. [Online] Available from: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmeduc/492/report.html#heading-0>

During debate of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, in the House of Lords on 28th January 2026³³, Baroness Smith of Malvern robustly contended that, *"the idea that they are forced to do that (home educate) because the vast majority of our schools are bad is simply wrong. The vast majority of our schools do a very good job for children"*.

Notwithstanding the vehemence of the Lady's contention, all of the evidence points to that not being the case. Parents are coming to home education because they do not believe that their children's needs were being met in school:

'We faced extreme reluctance by the LA to put any of the help they needed in place. Even in the face of tribunal.'

'The education system isn't fit for SEN children with SEMH needs. Neither her nor I wanted to home educate but we didn't have another option.'

'My daughter was not getting the support from her teachers that she needed.'

'Despite ed psych reports the school did nothing.'

'School kept treating my son's emotional difficulties as a behaviour problem instead of helping him.'

'My child went in to attempt suicide and I had to intervene.'

'If a child is struggling or dyslexic, they get left behind. The schools are overwhelmed with so many needs, that those who just need a little help get left behind, and then they become further away from expected targets.'

'Home education was not elective; there was no choice. Mental health was in crisis.'

It is not just parents who state that their children's needs are not being met in school. In addition to OFSTED finding 17% of state schools inspected to be inadequate or to require improvement³⁴, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman upheld 97% of complaints relating to special needs provision in 2024 to 2025³⁵, observing that

³³ UK Parliament (2026) 'Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill' Lords, Hansard. [Online] Available from: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3909/publications>

³⁴ OFSTED (2025) 'The annual report of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2024/25' [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202425-education-childrens-services-and-skills/the-annual-report-of-his-majestys-chief-inspector-of-education-childrens-services-and-skills-202425>

³⁵ Local Government Ombudsman cited in Ungood-Thomas, J. (2025), 'Almost every family is failed on special needs, says ombudsman'. Observer [Online] Available from: <https://observer.co.uk/news/national/article/almost-every-family-is-failed-on-special-needs-says-ombudsman>

“In nearly every complaint we investigate, we find some fault, and each of these represents a child or young person and their family who are not having their needs met.”

It is manifest that local authorities are struggling to fund a current special needs service. This leaves parents and children feeling let down and those authorities facing cumulative deficits of more than £8 billion in 2025-26, with many described as being on a financial cliff edge³⁶:

‘Despite real term increases in high needs funding of 58% between 2014-15 and 2024-25, the system is still not delivering better outcomes for children...the DfE estimates that some 43% of local authorities will have deficits exceeding or close to their reserves in March 2026.’

Parents are clear that they should not have to fight for necessary support: *‘The gov should fund alternatives without fight.’* Whilst the DfE also acknowledges³⁷ that more children are *‘moving into unregistered alternative provision or home education attributed to unmet SEND needs’* and that the level of support received by children *‘is too often determined by how hard their families fight, or how much their families can spend.’*

In February 2026, parents are expressing concern about how the current Government will address failings within the system to meet their children’s needs, as it appears that its intention is to place those special needs children into mainstream schools³⁸ in which parents are concerned that they will not thrive. This is particularly worrying for parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as those children are very often hypersensitive to external stimuli in schools such as bright lights, crowds and noise.

‘School is not the right place for auditory sensitive, autistic children. School is acoustic assault to these children every day.’

‘I have always wanted to home educate my daughter. This became more apparent when my daughter was diagnosed with autism. She thrives in a calm, well managed environment. She is happily learning at her own pace and is progressing well with her education. A school setting would be too much for her.’

³⁶ National Audit Office (2024). ‘Support for children and young people with special educational needs’. [Online] Available from: <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/support-for-children-and-young-people-with-special-educational-needs/#conclusions>

³⁷ DfE (2026) ‘Every child achieving and thriving’. [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving/every-child-achieving-and-thriving-html-version#part-1-setting-every-child-up-to-succeed-1>

³⁸ DfE: (2026) ‘SEND reform: putting children and young people first’. [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-first/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-first-html-version#executive-summary>

'My daughter lost her Dad in the back end of reception. Moved up into year 1 and all emotional support was removed...She became extremely anxious about leaving me and about going to school. Her wellbeing was suffering. She became very withdrawn. Every school day felt like I was torturing her by forcing her to go into school.'

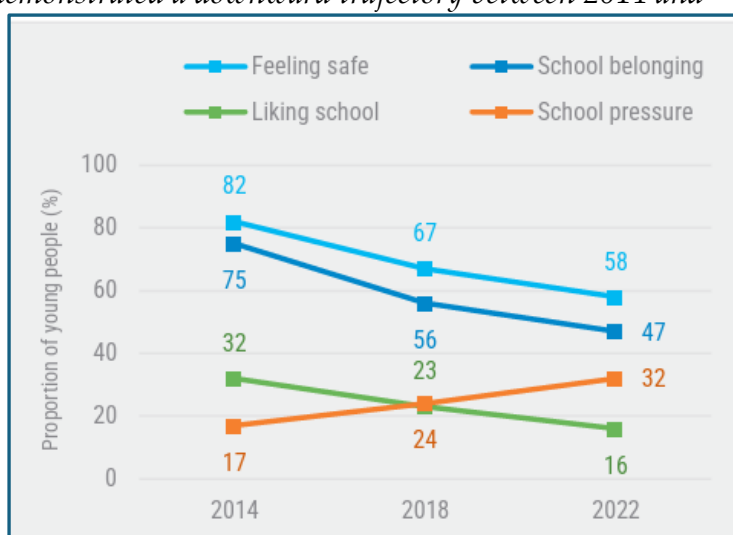
'My son's friend is only 6 years old and has already begun stating things like "I wish I was dead so that I didn't have to go to school", having severe anxiety etc ...(he) is still waiting for the teacher to put in the referral for the support team months later.'

'My children weren't struggling but they were falling behind the schools expectations. As a teacher myself we saw the knock on continuing throughout their main schooling and decided to home school to allow for illness recovery and catch up.'

This government has made much of how 'safe' schools are³⁹ and how requiring consent for some sectors of children to be removed from the school roll will safeguard those children. We know that children in the UK report the lowest levels of happiness out of 27 European countries⁴⁰ and that much of this unhappiness relates to their experience of school, but are our children safe in school?

Reports from Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) find that the *'feelings of safety, belonging and liking school a lot demonstrated a downward trajectory between 2014 and 2022, while more negative perceptions, such as feeling a lot of pressure from schoolwork, increased over time.'*⁴¹ It is clear from this report that 58% of children say that they do not feel safe in school and that fewer than half feel a sense of belonging in their school.

Parents also report that they chose to home educate as their children felt unsafe in school, particularly children with special needs.



HBSC: Young People Reporting Their Perceptions of the School Environment 2014 -2022

³⁹ See for example Clarke, V. (2024) 'Landmark bill seeks to keep children safe, says Phillipson' BBC. [Online] Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cg7r579z0x5o>

⁴⁰ Children's Society (2024) 'The Good Childhood Report 2024'. [Online] Available from: <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/good-childhood-report-2024>

⁴¹ HBSC (2023) 'England National Report Findings from the 2021-2022 HBSC study for England'. [Online] Available from: <https://hbscengland.org/>

Baroness Smiths' contention that the vast majority of schools do a good job for children is not reflected in the voices of the children who attend those schools, nor in the voices of their parents:

'School said they could not keep my child safe.'

'I had to deregister my child to safeguard her due to repeated medical mismanagement.'

'There was constant parent blaming but never any help. My child was just a tick box.'

'School told me to bring her in for registration then she could go home for a nap then back in for second registration. She could miss her education but not her registration.'

For children with special needs, the situation is even more stark as their access to services is inconsistent, parents have to fight to get their child's needs met and 'School leaders told (Ofsted and Care Quality Commission) that they lack the resources to meet the needs of many children with SEND.'⁴² Findings from the Ofsted and Care Commission report support the findings of this survey:

'Children reported having negative feelings and experiences, such as finding school scary and noisy, feeling upset, worried or stressed about school, and having experienced bullying as reasons for not attending school. Mental health, in particular anxiety, and medical needs or illness were also given as reasons.'

Children with special needs face higher levels of not only mental health concerns but also bullying in school⁴³ and these factors all feed into significant numbers of children coming new to home education because of unmet needs in school. The Government has published its White Paper⁴⁴ on special needs reform, but it is unlikely to change the trend in children coming to home education because of their needs not being met in school in the near term. In fact, it appears from comments made in the High Court⁴⁵

⁴² Gov.UK (2025) 'Beyond the Classroom: the Experiences of Children with SEND who are not in School'. [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-experiences-of-children-with-send-who-are-not-in-school-a-thematic-review/beyond-the-classroom-the-experiences-of-children-with-send-who-are-not-in-school#concluding-remarks>

⁴³ Bloomer, A. (2025) 'Young People with SEN Face More Bullying and discrimination'. [Online] available from: <https://www.learningdisabilitytoday.co.uk/news/young-people-with-sen-face-more-bullying-and-discrimination/>

⁴⁴ Gov.UK (2026) 'Every child achieving and thriving'. [Online] Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving>

⁴⁵ Clarke, V. (2026) 'Private schools lose legal challenge over VAT changes'. BBC [Online] Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y4lj1llvjo#:~:text=Private%20schools%20lose%20legal%20challeng>

that, despite long standing moral panic about rising numbers, for those children for whom state school is not suitable, that is exactly what the High Court is advising parents to do⁴⁶:

'We accept that, for a number of parents, state schooling would not be an acceptable alternative, but home schooling remains an alternative.'

In addition, whilst the survey did not seek to investigate whether the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill had directly led to parents deciding to home educate their children, anecdotal evidence⁴⁷ indicates that some parents are withdrawing their children as a result of its provisions. Parents of children with special needs have expressed concern that the provisions in the Bill empower local authorities not only to decide whether or not they can meet their child's education needs, but also to decide what is in their child's best interests.

'I don't want a stranger deciding what is in my child's best interests'.

Some parents state that they have withdrawn their child from school in order to not be restricted from doing so once the provisions in the Bill are enacted. Some surveyed parents also expressed significant concern over increased presentation by ministers, peers and MPs of home education as a safeguarding risk, particularly through exploitation of children who had been harmed:

'How can I trust the LA when I know that government think that I am abusing my son?'

'They are using (name of harmed child) to control us just because they hate home education. State control's what they want.'

'I HE (child's name) because she wasn't safe in school, but they accuse us of being the risk!'

Anecdotal evidence from local authority staff⁴⁸ confirms that they want to develop and support positive relationships with home educating families and that positive relationships support families. However, we must ask how the untrue and negative narrative, presented by the current regime in power, can possibly support such aims. It simply cannot do so.

e%20over%20VAT%20changes&text=Lawyers%20representing%20the%20families%20of,want%20to%20accept%20state%20provision.

⁴⁶ BYL & Anor, R (on the application of) v Chancellor of the Exchequer Neutral Citation Number[2026] EWCA Civ 170

⁴⁷ For example, calls to the Education Otherwise helpline and discussion on home education social media groups.

⁴⁸ Private discussions between author and local authority staff.

Conclusions

Characteristics of children coming new to home education changed significantly from late 2023 through 2024⁴⁹ with the majority not being 'elective' home educators but rather, parents feeling as if they had no choice. Historically, most children came to home education as a planned choice based on parents' philosophical beliefs but, in 2025, those parents are a minority. Parents now come to home education because they believe that schools are not meeting their children's needs, their children are unable to access school for mental health reasons, or they are dissatisfied with the school system.

Philosophically based home education is now a minority choice, being cited as their primary reason for making the choice by only 11.4% of parents. In addition, despite an overall fall in school age children in 2025, there were 1,450 children who came new to home education from independent schools, which is 48% higher than prior to the Government's addition of VAT to independent school fees.

Worryingly, children are now coming to home education increasingly in the final years of compulsory school age when they are at the cusp of moving into adulthood. This is indicative of the added stress of GCSE preparation and its effects on those already struggling with mental health issues.

Despite Baroness Smith's contention in Parliament that "*the idea that they are forced to do that because the vast majority of our schools are bad is simply wrong*", the facts do not support this contention; OFSTED found 17% of inspected state schools to be inadequate or to require improvement; the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman upheld 97% of complaints relating to special needs provision in 2024 to 2025 and the DfE states that the level of support received by children *'is too often determined by how hard their families fight, or how much their families can spend.'* Put simply, political denial does not alter the fact that provision for special needs children needs to improve significantly in order that home education returns to being a genuine choice for parents.

Feedback from home educating parents provides a picture of previously found nascent improvements in relationships between local authorities and parents as stalling. This is driven not only by failures within school systems and reduced trust in public bodies, but also by parliamentary and media propounding of negative narratives about home education and parents' concerns over the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Parents should never feel forced to home educate their children and should be able to choose high quality provision which meets their child's needs, but when that is not available, parents will continue to come to home education as a last resort. Clearly, lack of real choice is not in the best interests of children.

⁴⁹ Charles-Warner, W. (2024) 'Home Education Trends: Changing Cohorts'. [Online] available from: <https://www.educationotherwise.org/category/research/>

It is imperative that the current Government acts to Change its public narrative about home education and to recognise the value of home education to children. It must resource local authorities to be able to develop positive relationships with home



educating families and most crucially, it must take urgent steps to improve how children with special needs are supported in schools. Only then, will home education be a genuine choice for parents which is given due respect by government and public alike.

As one parent observed, 'Home education sees the whole child individually and the journey is their own with no comparison to anyone else.'

This report started with a young man racing to success. It ends with a child being given the tools to succeed; home education provides those tools. Home educated children become winners by achieving their potential. They deserve respect for their families who work so hard to give them the right tools for them as individuals.

Wendy Charles-Warner, February 2026