

Dear [Councillor's name],

We are writing to you to develop our mutual understanding of local issues currently surrounding Home Education.

The current law is very clear that a parent needs to apply for a school place if they choose to use a school placement to fulfil their responsibility to educate their child. This makes school optional and Elective Home Education the legal default for all families who choose to not apply for a school place or, choose later to deregister their child from a school.

The Local Authority has a legal duty to ensure as far as is reasonable that all children within their borough are receiving an education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude, taking into consideration any SEN. They may make informal enquiries of parents to aid them in this role. The Dfe EHE guidance regarding this states "*It is important that the authority's arrangements are proportionate and do not seek to exert more oversight than is actually needed where parents are successfully taking on this task.*" Once it has been established that a child is receiving a suitable education any further correspondence should be "very brief". If it cannot be established through informal enquiries that a suitable education is taking place then the Local Authority can step up to formal enquiries, if this concludes a child is not in receipt of a suitable education, the LA can issue an SAO (School Attendance Order).

There are no requirements for home educators to follow the National Curriculum. There are many different styles of Home Education that are all recognised as effective and suitable. Individual children, as well as adults have different learning styles, individual interests, unique skill sets, and part of the beauty of home education is that these can be accommodated and allowed to flourish to their potential. This will look different for every single child. Any attempt to assess the suitability of a child's education based on 'work' produced or how a home is presented to outsiders would be futile.

We are aware that the local situation with people's dissatisfaction with the Mossbourne Academy schools has led to many people in the area opting for Elective Home Education and this has raised some concerns over the Local Authority's oversight of Home Educators. Parents who have deregistered their children from schools have done so with their child's best interests at the forefront of their decision making, they are actively safeguarding their children from an institution they have deemed harmful. To suggest, as some have done, that parents who have sacrificed their time, careers, finances and lifestyles in order to care for and educate their children, could be abusing them is not only unfounded but deeply insulting.

Whilst parents are resorting to desperate measures to safeguard their children from the failing education system, what is being done to safeguard the children remaining in these schools? What safeguards are being put in place to ensure more children do not resort to self-harming, ideas of suicide, extreme high levels of anxiety around going to school and burn-outs when they get home from school? I can assure you that we personally know of some of these children suffering in these ways.

Safeguarding children in our communities is the responsibility of the whole community, and as such we must work together to this end, not attacking or accusing each other, but working together to build trust, establish working relationships and develop supportive communities.

Thurrock Council must be held to account for the ways in which schools are failing our children, but this must not be at the expense of home educators. We implore you to support the rights of Home Educators, trusting us to do the best we can for our children, and supporting Thurrock's EHE team within the Local Authority to uphold our rights, whilst carrying out their duties as we seek to develop our community's working relationship with our local EHE team.

We welcome opportunities to share our passion, discuss concerns, and address any inconsistencies in understanding. We look forward to hearing your thoughts regarding elective home education.

Kind regards,
Thurrock EHE Community.