

MPs call for home education register to protect children's rights

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A House of Commons committee has called for a register of home educated children in England, along with other measures long supported by the National Secular Society.

The Commons education committee has made the call in a report, [*Strengthening Home Education*](#), which was published this week.

The report highlights evidence that many unregistered schools claim their children are in elective home education (EHE). Unregistered schools are illegal and not subject to oversight.

The NSS has long raised concerns that home education can be used as a cover for illegal faith schooling. The society [backed plans for a register](#) to help to protect children's rights in response to a government consultation in 2019.

The committee's report called on the government to "seek to balance the right of families to make the best choices for themselves with the responsibility to promote good outcomes for all children and young people, whether or not they go to school".

It added: "It is not unreasonable to seek some reassurance about the suitability of the education received by children who are electively home-educated."

The Department for Education (DfE) has not published a response to the 2019 consultation, but has indicated that it will consider a register.

Unregistered schools and EHE

The committee heard evidence that one quarter of unregistered schools inspected by Ofsted claimed their pupils were in EHE.

Ofsted also raised concerns that some children are receiving almost all their education in unregistered schools, and that a lack of oversight of education or safety left children attending them at risk.

Numbers in EHE rising

The committee said the number of children in EHE is rising faster than the significant rise in remote learning.

It noted that the number of children in EHE is estimated to be over 75,000, but added that it was "simply not good enough that we are only able to make a best guess" at the number.

The DfE has found "considerable evidence" that many children may not be receiving a suitable education.

The report also said the current approach was "relatively permissive" compared to many other European countries.

NSS comment

NSS head of education Alastair Lichten called on the government to adopt the recommendations.

"This report shows that proportionate efforts to protect children's independent rights to a suitable education can be consistent with respect for the independence and autonomy of families opting for home education.

"Ensuring all pupils are registered will prevent them falling through the gaps, help to tackle the serious problem of unregistered faith schools which evade any oversight, and allow support to be targeted where necessary."

Other recommendations

- The report also recommended that local authorities should assess the progress of children who are home educated. Currently they are advised to make contact, but in many cases there is none.
- It also recommended that the DfE should commission better research on the impact of EHE and ensure pupils have fair access to exams.

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