



research briefing

Support for children who are educated at home

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With many thousands of home-educated children across the UK, the subject of support for the home-education community is widely debated. A report conducted by the NFER for the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation is based on detailed interviews with 20 home educators and presents findings on support needs.

Overall this report gives an excellent picture of our situation

Home educator

It's very interesting to read about the views of other home educators. The recommendations cover absolutely everything

Home educator

The report is a fantastic instrument and I have already started on some of the recommendations in my own LA

Representative from a Local Authority

The following summary illustrates some key findings and messages taken from the research. For a copy of the full report please complete the form overleaf or contact book sales on +44 (0)1753 637002.



Embarking on home education

Previous NFER research with local authorities showed that in local authorities where support is offered to home educators, information about the different sources of support and how this can be accessed may be provided. Authorities and schools may also support home-educating parents so they can access flexi-school arrangements, school resources, curriculum advice and exam facilities. The current research focuses on the views of home educators.

Key Findings

- The decision to home educate was considered a difficult one partly because of a predominant view that all children were expected to go to school and because of some uncertainty/confusion amongst less informed parents over the legal aspects of home education.
- In contrast to families where parents had decided to home educate their children before they started school, parents who withdrew their children as a result of negative school experiences often had no time to plan in advance for home education, suggesting that they might require greater support at this stage.
- The national home education organisations were the most frequently identified source of support in the initial stages of home education.
- Contact with other home educating families provided an important opportunity to share knowledge and experiences. They were reported to be an important source of information and ideas and the local groups were considered particularly helpful in providing access to organised activities for the children.
- There was evidence of inconsistencies amongst local authorities in their approach to home education. Whilst some local authorities were encouraging and helpful, there was a concern that many lacked sufficient knowledge about home education (particularly its legal status) and were often unsympathetic.

Sources of support for home education

The wide range of support identified included: the wider home education community/network; family and friends; local community facilities and groups; as well as local authorities, schools and other providers. Additionally the library and the internet were highlighted as key sources of support for nearly all the families interviewed.

Specific types of support

Apart from access to specific information about the National Curriculum, home educators appeared to have little difficulty accessing relevant learning materials and activities for their children or accessing help with teaching and learning strategies.

Families with children with special education needs (SEN) had accessed SEN assessments, advice about specialist input to assist their children's learning and specialist therapies. They had done so in a number of ways: privately or through the national home education organisations, charities and local authorities. However, some reported that specialist input was difficult to access.

Legal matters were raised as an area where home educators could require further support. Home educators believed that some local authorities were reluctant to acknowledge the legal right of parents to home educate for fear of promoting home education over school education.

Support for 14–19 year olds

Some home educators felt that following GCSE courses and taking examinations were inconsistent with their approach, but others wanted their children to have access to these options. There were five out of the 20 families with children undertaking GCSE courses in the sample and they were accessing these in a variety of ways including correspondence courses and by attending further education (FE) college.

Improving support for home educators

Specific areas where support was currently considered insufficient included: financial support; access to college courses; local authority support; information about structured curricula; access to science resources and examination centres.

Obstacles to accessing appropriate support included: limited finances; lack of information or accurate information; negative attitudes towards home education; transport difficulties; accessibility of information about materials and resources available and information and access to examinations.

By way of improvements, some home educators not only called for financial support (even though there was some concern that this might be at the expense of educational freedom), but also for greater access to learning opportunities for their children and general raised awareness about the legal status of home education. They also called for more local authority staff with a home education remit and improved relationships between local authorities and home educators.

The report is a fantastic instrument and I have already started on some of the recommendations in my own LA

Recommendations

A number of recommendations are detailed in the report. Above all, local authorities and the home education community need to work together collaboratively and opportunities need to be provided for meaningful dialogue at all levels (i.e. nationally, regionally and locally).





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