



Graham Stuart: Councils must stop treating home educators with suspicion

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Parents who have opted to home educate their children are often left bruised and bewildered by the attitude of their local authorities.

Educating a child at home is a parent's preferred choice in a minority of cases. Mostly, they do so because their child is struggling to thrive or cope in mainstream schooling. They want the best for their child, yet too often they are made to feel under suspicion by the local authority that should be there to support them.

Parents, not the state, have the statutory duty to educate their children, yet when parents do so directly, officials often think parents are obliged to prove to them that the child is receiving a suitable education. Worse, councils often conflate home education with a child safeguarding risk and seek to impose routine monitoring and inspections. These actions are at odds with government [guidelines](#) and can be accompanied by misrepresentation of the legal situation both on parents' doorsteps and in local authority literature.

This attitude is counterproductive. Local authorities should be the servants and not the masters in their relationships with home educators. The limited resources councils have available should be used to give educational support to parents, such as teaching materials or exam fees. This would not only be beneficial to the child, but could also foster a better relationship with home educating parents.

The confrontational attitude of some local authorities is, I hope, on the wane. Cambridgeshire CC, for example, has in the past year completely changed its home education service.

The monitoring regime was contentious with local home educators, including its insistence on annual inspections, but now, the local authority assumes parents are providing suitable education for their children unless evidence suggests they are not.

Cambridgeshire will pay a contribution towards home educated children's year 11 exam fees and is looking to purchase careers advice for home educators and information sessions from the educational psychology service. The council is also approaching local colleges to see if home educators can use science laboratories.

Regular information drop-in sessions will be set up throughout the county. Also, the home education service has briefed children's services and there will be engagement with health services to increase awareness about the law on home education.

The changes in Cambridgeshire are a model of good practice. It takes political courage to view home education as good rather than as a risk but, if councillors in Cambridgeshire can do it, others can too.

Graham Stuart (Con), MP for Beverley and Holderness, and the chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on home education

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