

Elective home education: call for evidence

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 19,000 heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of maintained and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL has members in more than 90 per cent of secondary schools and colleges of all types and in an increasing number of primary schools, responsible for the education of more than four million young people. This places the association in a unique position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of all types of schools and colleges.
2. ASCL welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence on this important subject. Given the wide-ranging nature of the consultation, we have focused our response on those aspects that are most relevant to school and college leaders – and about which our members are most knowledgeable.
3. We agree with the dual premise of the call for evidence: that it is the primary duty of parents to lead their children's education, and that the government should seek assurance that every child is receiving a good education, wherever that education takes place. We also agree that robust policies and procedures around home education are necessary in order to safeguard children.
4. We offer the following suggestions for the government to consider in the updated guidance on home education:
5. ASCL condemns unreservedly any incidents of schools pressuring parents to remove children to educate them at home. There are, we believe, measures that could be introduced to help ensure parents who are considering removing their children from school to do so in an informed, considered way. These could include a standard, government-produced letter or statement which schools would be required to give to parents considering removing their child from school. This should clarify the rights and responsibilities of parents in this situation, and should also make it clear that this decision must be theirs alone, without any pressure from the school.
6. We would strongly oppose the introduction of a financial penalty on schools if a parent withdraws their child in order to educate them at home. This is a parent's legal and moral right, and a decision to go down this route could be due to a myriad of reasons. Clarification of the rights and responsibilities of both the parent and the school in this situation, as outlined above, is a much more

appropriate way of addressing any concerns about schools pressurising parents to withdraw their child.

7. Schools cannot be expected to keep a place open indefinitely, or for a significant period of time, for children who have been withdrawn in order to home educate them. However, we believe that a 'cooling-off' period of, perhaps, four weeks could be introduced, during which time the child's place would be kept open. This would enable parents to reflect on their decision and reconsider it if necessary, without placing too great a burden on the school.
8. In circumstances in which children are 'flexi-schooled', schools require clarity around how this is treated in terms of both reporting attendance and funding.
9. I hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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Association of School and College Leaders
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