

Message to families who support home education – From Education Otherwise Local Contact in Northern Ireland

Dear friend,

I am sorry to have to write to you and tell you – (though you may already have heard this) – about the urgent need for support for families who home educate in N Ireland. You can help by giving just three minutes of your time, or you can give more if you are passionate about enabling future children and families to choose home education without interference from outside authorities.

This is the make or break moment for home education.

Here, as briefly as possible, is what has happened.

- A draft N.I. Elective Home Education Policy has been released and put out for consultation for 2 months until June 27th
- The 5 ELBs are amalgamating and are producing one procedure for use through out the North
- It remains unclear even after extensive research and enquiries just where the document has come from and who will be responsible for the decisions that are being made.
- HEdNI and EO, along with others concerned about home education, have approached MLAs, attended Focus Groups and made the issues clear to ELB officials, researched the law, and are seeking as many opinions and stories as possible to submit to the consultation process.
- We must put the wishes of all home educators and their children before the officials in order to change these proposals.

Here are the issues which need to be addressed in the policy proposals.

- The proposed policies assume home education is a welfare issue from the outset.
- The ELB is claiming powers which they do not have in law, and claiming a duty to educate the children who are at home (it is the parents' duty in law) and to monitor them for child protection reasons.
- The ELB has stated (and Mr O'Dowd has repeated the same phrases in response to questions in the Assembly) to the effect that the parents choose home education for their own reasons and that this must be 'balanced with the needs of the child'.
- The policies imply or attempt to persuade parents that ELBs can have:
 - Entry to homes
 - Access to children without parental permission
 - Power of decision over the curriculum for home education
 - Parents wait for ELB permission to home educate before their child can leave school
 - A data base which is controlled by the EWO, linked to other welfare services, and which implies reason to suspect 'abuse' in those who decline to be registered
 - Power to override parents' decisions in the name of the rights of the child.
- The policies are deficient in that they offer no means of consulting the child or any protection for the rights of the parents or the child.

Questionnaires have been set up on Survey Monkey, one for parents and one for your children. Each can take less than 3 minutes; or you can write at length in the boxes provided. Please ask your children to fill in the Young Person's questionnaire, preferably by themselves, but with your help where necessary. Additional stories and drawings will speak volumes to those in power. Every effort has been made to ensure that no one can be identified by the answers. You may wish to be careful of the detail you reveal in your longer answers. Please use the Survey Monkey if possible, as it is very easy. If you are unable to access that, Word document copies of surveys are available on request from email below.

We propose to collate the statistics as best we can, and also deliver the full scripts to the Education Committee at Stormont and the 5 ELBs.

Here are other things you can do.

- Pass this message on to others you know in N Ireland who have home educated or still do.
- Ask to speak to your own MLA.
- Make your own submission to your MLA and your regional ELB.
- Find out more on the EO web-site (<http://www.educationotherwise.net>) where you will find links to HEdNI as well
- Sign the HEdNI petition on line.
- You can also find articles on line on the subject of "Allegations of Fabricated or Induced Illnesses". You will soon see that this campaign relating to Autism is also relevant. As EO telephone helpline volunteer I can assure you that this is also happening in N Ireland and particularly to those who try to take their children out of school when the education system fails their child.
- Encourage the autism and disability charities to support this campaign, the FII campaign, and any others which impact on freedom to educate at home.
- Let us know of any organisations or persons of influence who would support the cause of home education.

Parent's survey is at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CCF2Y83>

Children's survey is at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/68FWKC9>

If requesting/returning by email document, send to

E.O. Local Contact: nisurvey@educationotherwise.org

Links to ELBs' Elective Home Education Draft Policy pages are at the bottom of the parents' questionnaire.

Last date for SURVEY is June 21st

Last date for your own submissions to your regional ELB is 27th JUNE.