

Exploring the reasons why people home educate in Hertfordshire

Full Report

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

Home education, that is providing education to children within the home setting rather than within school, is increasing nationally year on year. In England, home education is a legal choice and ongoing monitoring of children is not required if the Local Authority [LA] is satisfied that adequate arrangements for education are in place. The national rise in the number of families deciding to home educate is mirrored within Hertfordshire. When asked to complete a questionnaire on the withdrawal of their child from a school in Hertfordshire, parents/carers are asked to provide a reason for making that decision. For those parents/carers who do, the most frequently selected reason is 'dissatisfaction with the school system'. This is a broad reason that can incorporate many different factors. Indeed, the research literature identifies a myriad of reasons why parents/carers decide to home educate, including, amongst others, concerns about the school environment, special educational needs and disabilities [SEND], additional learning needs [ALN], and philosophical or ideological views. These reasons for home educating are often intertwined and complex; they may vary for each child within a family; and can change over time. While government discourse often refers to 'elective home education' (i.e. EHE), for some parents/carers, home education is not perceived as elective or a positive and desirable choice, rather something that they were compelled to do, due to a combination of different reasons.

2. Focus of the research

This study sought to explore the reasons why people home educate in Hertfordshire. The aims of the project were to understand:

- the factors contributing to parents/carers' decisions to home educate their children;
- the challenges and benefits of home educating;
- the support that home educators draw on.

The study was small scale and exploratory in nature. The research was conducted in five phases. The first was a literature review of existing research around home education. Phases two and three were focus groups (n=16 attendees) and interviews (n=15 interviewees) with home educators. These participants were recruited through calls for participation shared via online networks of home educators, and a support group for parents/carers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities [SEND], some of whom also home educate. Phase four was an online questionnaire (n=77 respondents) that was shared via the same channels indicated above, and via a link sent directly in a letter by the LA to a stratified sample of parents/carers from the LA register of home educators. The final phase involved a small focus group (n=6 attendees) with LA representatives, to bring an alternative lens of individual practitioner experiences on the subject of home education; their reflections do not necessarily represent the official position of the LA. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the University of Hertfordshire's Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority (protocol number: aEDU/SF/UH/03884(2)). The research deals with a topic that is sensitive and the narratives that parents/carers shared about their reasons for home educating were both highly personalised and very individual. To protect the participants from inadvertent identification, the decision was made to not keep these individual stories intact but rather to draw on quotes relating to themes that cut across the data more generically.

While the research was able to reach a range of home educators, the approach to sampling had limitations. The sample was self-selecting as it relied on people volunteering; the data, therefore, may not expose and reflect all the reasons why people home educate, nor the range of people who home educate. The data reported here, then, are not representative or generalisable. They are, however, valuable as they report the lived experiences of home educators faced with the challenges of navigating a different approach to education and reveal some of the complexities of finding support for and the factors which drive people to choose home education.

3. Key research outcomes

The key findings from the research are drawn from analysis of the narratives that the participants shared and are evidenced, within the full report, by the voices of home educators themselves through direct quotes. These data, along with existing research literature, are rich and provide compelling support for the following **key messages**.

In terms of the **existing research literature on home education**:

- Home education is not legal in all countries. In countries where it is legal, there are different legal requirements around who can be home educated, who home educates and the extent to which home education is monitored;
- Home education is a legal option in all countries in the UK. In contrast to some countries, ongoing monitoring of home educated children is not mandatory. Parents/carers who have never sent their children to school are not required to register their children with the LA;
- An independent review of home education in England¹ focused particularly on safeguarding issues; some home educators were critical of the report, particularly regarding recommendations relating to monitoring and registration. A recent Private Member's Bill in the House of Lords, consultation and briefing paper², which outline reform proposals have all raised the profile of home education again in the UK. Home education has also received negative press coverage, with strong responses from the home education community;

¹ Badman G. (2009) *Report to the Secretary of State on the Review of Elective Home Education in England*. Norwich: TSO (The Stationery Office) Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/328186/Review_of_Elective_Home_Education_in_England.pdf [Accessed: 13.11.18]

² Foster D. & Danechi, S. (2019) *House of Commons Library. Briefing Paper Number 5108*, 24 July, Home education in England. London: House of Commons Library. Available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05108/SN05108.pdf>. [Accessed 09.09.19]

- The use of the adjective 'elective' in government literature fails to recognise that, for many families, home education is not always a positive choice;
- The total number of children being home educated in the UK is unknown. Estimates range from 40,000-50,000 full-time home educated children in England currently. LAs report a year-on-year growth in home education nationally;
- Research shows a multitude of reasons why parents/carers home educate and many of these reasons are interlinked. Most decisions involve more than one reason, parents/carers may have different reasons for home educating their different children, and parents/carers' reasons may change over time;
- Decisions to home educate raise issues of equality in schools, particularly in relation to Traveller families, children with SEND and highly able, gifted and talented children;
- Some research suggests that parents/carers want more support and acceptance from their LA. Additional support for home education can be found through online information and local support groups.

In relation to the **reasons why parents/carers home educate in Hertfordshire**, based on empirical data:

- The inflexibility of the school system in relation to testing, monitoring, standardised curriculum, approaches to learning and school-start age, which often did not recognise individual differences, influenced decisions to home educate, particularly for parents/carers who felt their children did not fit that system or where parental views of what it means to educate were radically different to the prevailing view within the school setting. These parents/carers felt that home education could better meet their children's needs, as education could be tailored in terms of pace, interest and learning styles.
- Parents/carers who home educated often saw the school environment as not conducive to learning or wellbeing. Some parents/carers reported sustained bullying, limited or negative academic progress, enforced socialisation, lack of resources within schools, teacher attrition and high teacher turnover, and their own experiences of working within education as the reasons for withdrawing their children.
- For parents/carers of children with SEND, there was clear frustration about the lack of support made available for their children while they were in the school system. Obtaining an Education Health and Care Plan [EHCP] was perceived to be difficult, with parents/carers fighting to get the necessary assessments to support their application. Even when an EHCP was in place and requirements clearly set out, parents/carers reported that some schools either chose not to follow the recommendations, or were unable to do so. With a lack of alternative provision (e.g. either no alternatives, or no space in alternative settings), some parents/carers felt that they had no other option than to remove their child from school and home educate.

- For some children, the experience of school was having a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing, resulting in extreme physical symptoms, meltdowns and breakdowns. Budget cuts meant that access to professional support was sometimes difficult. Children's negative experiences were also impacting on parents/carers' own mental health.
- Parents/carers sometimes felt that their concerns in relation to SEND and wellbeing were not taken seriously by school staff, leaving them feeling isolated and powerless.
- Pressure to withdraw children from school was felt particularly when schools displayed little attempt to support children; pressure was more acute when families were facing fines for non-attendance, while underlying issues were not addressed. External pressures on schools (e.g. around Standard Assessment Tests [SATs] results, GCSE English and Maths, Attainment 8, attendance) meant that schools might not always be predisposed to supporting children who could impact negatively on their results.
- Some parents/carers, often those who had never sent their children to school, had a strong educational philosophy that was at odds with what was practised within schools. It was recognised that parents/carers who had actively and positively chosen home education were likely to have very different expectations and experiences of home education than those who felt forced into it.
- For a small number of families, parental work, home life, religious beliefs and financial situations meant that home education was a better fit for their lives. Parents/carers who had witnessed positive examples of home education themselves, within their families, or through their friends' experiences, and thus had access to knowledge and support cited this as a reason as to why home education appeared achievable.

And finally, regarding the **benefits, challenges and support for home education**, based on empirical data:

- The needs of the child drove the approach to learning adopted by the home-educating families participating in the research. The child's needs influenced the structure, content and mode of learning. Participants whose children had previously attended school, often reported that their children were much more confident and less anxious working, for example, at their own pace, being self-directed learners or learning in small groups, than when they were in school.
- Regardless of whether they felt they had a choice about home educating their children or not, many of the parents/carers identified flexibility as a key benefit of home educating. Flexibility was defined by participants as the opportunity for their children to access learning that was tailored to their individual needs: what, when and how they learned.
- The home education community was an important source of support for many of the home educators taking part in the research. The community supports the sharing of experiences, signposting of support and resources available, and running workshops or

social events. Social media, such as Facebook, is used extensively for organising learning/social opportunities and staying connected to other home educators.

- Parents/carers of children with SEND often reported struggling to get appropriate support when their children were in school, sometimes even when there was an EHCP in place. Some parents/carers paid for additional specialist support, others relied on being signposted to available resources by different agencies and using a trial-and-error approach to find what worked. When home educating, some parents/carers talked about the difficulties of finding the support to address the learning needs of their child. Some research participants with children with SEND spoke of feeling overwhelmed.
- The financial implications of home educating were reported by most participants as a key challenge. These included loss of income for the parent who was home educating and the cost of, for example, resources, tuition, classes, and travel. Many of the parents/carers identified a need for financial support to cover the cost of home educating.

These findings broadly align with existing research findings, yet the respondents' accounts add rich depth and evidence the many reasons that propel parents/carers to home educate, alongside the benefits and challenges of home education, and the support structures on which home educators draw. The participants responded openly and frankly about their experiences, and their stories reflect the complexity of that decision-making process, the interconnectedness of the reasons, and the layering of experiences that led to a decision to home educate. Parents/carers rarely provided a single reason for their decision; reasons were multifaceted, although the inflexibility of the school system and dissatisfaction with it, along with reported negative experiences of children with SEND and ALN in mainstream education and a lack of alternative or flexible provision, emerged as key themes.

There were parents who had made positive and considered choices to home educate and those who chose home education as a reaction to negative experiences. It was suspected that there may be a third group of parents/carers who posed safeguarding issue by intentionally removing their children from school to avoid scrutiny; such a group did not feature in our sample as it is doubtful that they would have volunteered to participate. Our findings showed that the home educators who participated in this study, whether in that position through a positive choice, or making the best of an unplanned situation, are seeking to make their children's lives better through home education. For these home educators the children's best interests were at the heart of what they do.

4. Learning points for consideration

The following sets of learning points are presented as actions that could be taken in order to recognise the differences between groups of home educators; create conducive school learning environments for all children; further analyse home education data; support parents/carers in making informed choices about home education; and provide support for home education.

Recognise different groups of home educators

This research revealed that there were distinctively different groups of home educators. There were parents/carers who had made an informed, positive and often philosophically driven choice. In contrast, other parents/carers had felt compelled to home educate due to a mismatch (for various reasons) between their child and the school environment; it was felt that this group has increased in recent years. Other (often negative) portrayals of home educators, particularly in popular press, were reflected upon by participants. These groups are likely to have different motivations, experiences and needs. The following actions should be considered:

- Recognise that different groups of home educators will have different motivations and experiences and may well require different support, guidance and oversight;
- Appreciate that some parents/carers feel compelled to home educate due to their experiences of the school system and that more flexibility in the system might reduce the numbers deciding to home educate;
- Redress the negative portrayal of home educators in public discourse and the popular press with depictions of the many home educators who prioritise the quality of their children's education.

Further recognition and understanding of the differences between home educators' motivations and experiences will enable the LA to treat them appropriately and proportionately.

Create conducive school learning environments for all children

A strong theme throughout the research was dissatisfaction with a school system – perceived to be focussed on assessment, targets, and monitoring – that often could not, or did not want to, differentiate how it educated children. Reductions in funding meant that the expertise to stretch and challenge children, or to support those children with SEND or compromised wellbeing, was frequently difficult to access. While changes to the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework³, along with the promise of further funding for SEND⁴ and increased emphasis on children's wellbeing, could alleviate some of the issues raised, the following actions should be considered:

- Ensure further continuing professional development and training is available to increase the ability of senior leaders and teachers to manage different needs within schools in a context of continued funding constraints;

³ DfE (Department for Education) (2019) 'Education Inspection Framework', Guidance 14 May, updated 2 September: Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework#history> [Accessed: 08.10.19].

⁴ DfE (Department for Education) (2018) 'New funding to support children with special educational needs', News Story 16 December: Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-funding-to-support-children-with-special-educational-needs> [Accessed: 25.09.19]

- Clearly signpost routes to additional support provision (including outside agencies) that can help children, whether with SEND or not, who are struggling within the school system in order to enable parents/carers to navigate the options available to them;
- Increase alternative provision options, so that parents/carers have other school-based choices for education;
- Provide more flexible approaches to school attendance, where appropriate (e.g. staggered school starts, flex-schooling, part-time attendance).

A more flexible system, that recognises and respects parents/carers' concerns and effectively supports differentiation, might well result in more children remaining within school rather than parents/carers removing their children.

Further analyse home education data

With the prevalence of home education increasing in Hertfordshire and in England more generally, there is a need to more fully analyse the data on home education nationally, locally and at a school-level. A better understanding of how, where and why home education is happening, will create opportunities to channel interventions, funding or support to address potential triggers. The following actions should be considered:

- At a school level: challenge Trustees and Governors to look more carefully at the incidence of children being withdrawn from schools, identify patterns and address any issues that are raised;
- At a county level: develop a more nuanced understanding of the reasons why people home educate – e.g. through the withdrawal questionnaire and follow up discussions, and with the systematic recording and analysing of that data;
- Nationally: recognise the different kinds of home educators, and the very different motivations and experiences that they have; appreciate that these differences will be influenced by geographical location, socio-economic status, and children's SEND or ALN.

A better understanding of the reasons why parents/carers home educate will indicate where system-wide issues are contributing to decisions to home educate and whether those issues can be minimised and also ensure that adequate support is put in place when parents/carers are making a decision to home educate.

Support parents/carers to make informed choices about home education

While some parents/carers do make very positive, and often philosophically driven, choices to home educate, some parents/carers do not. For them the decision is the result of an ongoing struggle within the system, pressures to withdraw put on them by others, or following misinformation about the penalties faced by staying within school, or the support that the families will be provided when they home educate. To enable parents/carers to make informed choices, the following actions should be considered:

- Provide access to timely and appropriate advice about alternative options (e.g. flex-schooling, part-time attendance) and the support available for children who, for whatever reason, do not fit easily within their current school;

- Implement 'cooling off periods', which provide parents/carers with time to think about how they respond to situations and to seek appropriate support and guidance in making their final decision to home educate;
- Enable parents/carers to see different perspectives and hear real-life experiences by accessing people who have considered home education and decided not to, those who are already home educating, those whose children have been home educated and then returned to school, and those who found alternative provision.

If parents/carers are better informed about home education, and know where they can find support, guidance, and alternatives, some parents/carers may ultimately decide not to home educate, and if they do, they will be in a better position to provide the education that their child needs.

Provide support for and guidance on home education

While government funding (directly, or indirectly through the LA) is not provided for home education, there are benefits in providing support and guidance for those who decide to home educate. Some parents/carers see home education as a temporary arrangement and intend to re-enter the school system when issues have been resolved; here support can help in the transition back to school. For those who see home education as a more long-term arrangement, signposting to sources of support can facilitate the provision of appropriate education. The following actions should be considered:

- Provide links to resources, support, sessions, clubs and networks available locally, to enable new home educators to identify what is available to help them in their new role;
- Offer ongoing access to EHE advisors, or a cascading of training and support to those parents/carers who want to develop their ability to educate their children;
- Encourage closer collaboration between the home education community and the LA to establish routes to information, guidance, support and networks; reduce mutual mistrust; and to better understand the motivations for and experiences of home education.

Signposting into the established support networks will help reduce isolation for those parents/carers who are home educating (whether temporarily or permanently). Knowledge of and access to support available will also help those who are seeking to reintegrate their children into school.

5. Final reflections

While the majority of families in Hertfordshire enter their children into the school system, where they stay for the length of their compulsory education, there is an increasing number of parents/carers who, for different reasons, are not following that route. During this research we have spoken to a some of those families and heard their reasons for home educating, the challenges they face, the benefits they gain and the support they draw upon. The report does not purport to represent all home educators and their motivations for home educating, it does feature, however, the lived experiences of families who have made this decision and raises important learning points that should be considered, and actioned, where appropriate, in order to

provide greater understanding of and support for such families as they seek to home educate their children.

Full Report

1. Introduction

Nationally, the number of families choosing to home educate their children is increasing year-on-year. Using findings from an Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) survey sent to all 152 local authorities (LAs) in England to collect data from school census day in October 2017, it could be inferred that approximately 45,500 children and young people were being home educated in England (ADCS, 2017). More than 90% of the responding LAs reported year-on-year increases in the number of children and young people involved (ADCS, 2017). This national picture is mirrored in Hertfordshire, where a similar year-on-year increase has been experienced. Within Hertfordshire, more boys than girls and more older children (KS3 and KS4) are likely to be home educated. When parents/carers decide to withdraw their children from school in Hertfordshire, they are invited to complete a questionnaire and are asked to indicate their key reason for making that decision. While not all parents/carers provide a reason for their decision to home educate, for those that do 'dissatisfaction with the school system' is the one most frequently provided. This is a broad reason that can incorporate many different factors. Hertfordshire County Council wanted to gain a more nuanced understanding of the underlying reasons why parents/carers choose home education, so that they can ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are in place to enable parents/carers to make informed choices about their children's education. With this aim in mind, Hertfordshire County Council commissioned the University of Hertfordshire to carry out a piece of research to explore the reasons why people home educate in Hertfordshire; the challenges and benefits of home education; and the support home educators draw on. This report provides an overview of the findings of this research.

2. Approach to the study

The research study was small-scale and exploratory in nature. It was conducted in five phases. The first phase drew on existing research into home education, phases two to five involved the collection of empirical data and were carried out between January and June 2019. The five phases are discussed in more detail below.

Literature review

The first phase comprised a literature review, which provided an overview of current research into home education. The findings from this review informed the subsequent data collection activities. Forty-three sources were used in the literature review.

Home educator focus groups

Phase two involved three focus groups with home educating parents/carers. The aim of these focus groups was to scope reasons why parents/carers home educate, to explore the challenges and benefits associated with home education, and the support systems that the home educators drew on. The three focus groups were all held at the University of Hertfordshire and involved a total of sixteen parents/carers and lasted two hours.

Interviews

In phase three, fifteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with parents/carers who were home educating and a small number who were considering home educating or were engaged in more flexible schooling options. Initially interviewees were asked to share their ‘founding stories’ based on the question asked by Neuman and Guterman (2017) in their research with Israeli home educators: *Tell me about the decision to begin home schooling*. Subsequent questions probed what their home education looked like, associated challenges and benefits, and the support structures drawn upon.

Questionnaire

Following preliminary analysis of the focus group and interview data, a short survey, comprising open-ended questions, was designed to enable a wider sample of home educators to share their experiences. The questionnaire comprised nineteen predominantly open-ended questions, which covered experiences of home educating, reasons for home educating, benefits and challenges of home educating and sources of support. The questionnaire was piloted with three members of the home education community. The questionnaire was administered online and n=77 responses were received. Some focus group participants and interviewees also completed the questionnaire.

Local authority focus group

A final focus group was held at Hertfordshire County Council’s County Hall. The focus group comprised LA employees and local teachers within schools and alternative provision. The aim of the focus group was to bring an alternative lens of individual practitioner experiences on the subject of home education; their reflections do not necessarily represent the official position of the LA. Six people took part in the focus group, and it lasted two hours. The focus group explored the reasons people home educate based on their professional experiences, the support that is provided to those who are considering or who are home educating, and what support is currently unavailable.

Overview of the data collection phases

Below (Table 1) is a summary of the sample sizes for each data collection phases

	Data collection activity	Sample size
Phase 1	Literature review	n=43 literature sources
Phase 2	Home educator focus groups	n=16 attendees
Phase 3	Individual interviews	n=15 interviewees
Phase 4	Online questionnaire	n=77 respondents
Phase 5	Local authority focus group	n=6 attendees

Table 1: data collection phases and sample size

Approach to sampling and overview of the participants

In relation to the LA focus group, the group consisted of LA employees and school and alternative provision teachers.

For the main part of the research, which involved home educators, we relied primarily on contacts within the home education community to establish the sample. The population of home educators in Hertfordshire is unknown. While the LA holds data on parents/carers who decide to de-register their children from school, they do not have figures for parents/carers who have never sent their children to school. There is a strong home education community in Hertfordshire, with an online presence, and we asked two members who are active within that community and who had contacted us about our research at the very beginning of the project, to share information about the research and our calls for participation through home education social networking sites. In addition, information was shared with the Herts Parents Carer Involvement network, which is targeted specifically towards parents/carers who have children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). While not all these parents/carers will home educate their children, some do.

The calls for participation in the focus groups and interviews shared through these networks asked for volunteers to contact the research team directly; we responded to those who contacted us and invited them to participate, if they met our eligibility criteria. Initially we focussed on those who were (or who had) home educated in Hertfordshire. As the research progressed, we were approached by a small number of people who were considering home education or were engaged in more flexible approaches to education; we amended our ethics application, which enabled us to speak to some of them. In the focus groups and interviews, we asked participants to share information about the project with other home educators, to stimulate snowball sampling. In relation to the invitation to complete the questionnaire, we used the same online networks to distribute a link to the questionnaire. In recognition of the limitations of the sampling strategy (see limitations section below), we also drew on support from the LA in order to share information about the questionnaire. While it was not possible to send out a letter publicising the research to all the home educating families in Hertfordshire, information was sent to a stratified sample, totalling $n=150$ (which is just over 10% of the LA figures as of March 2019). The sample was stratified based on the main reason that parents/carers cited for their decision to home educate. An overview of the sample is given in Table 2.

Reasons given for Elective Home Education	Total (March 2019)	Sample
Attendance difficulties	39	4
Bullying	75	8
Did not get school preference	19	2
Dispute with school	38	4
Dissatisfaction with school system	163	16
Educational philosophy	99	10
Health issues	57	6
Mental health issues	58	6
Religious reasons	2	1
Risk of exclusion	17	2
Traveller culture	58	6
Not recorded	852	85
TOTAL	1477	150

Table 2: sampling strategy

The dual approach to sampling was important for the questionnaire; the non-sampled group accessed via the online networks allowed us to engage with people who were not necessarily known to the LA, while the stratified sample identified through the LA enabled us to approach people who were not necessary active in the networks that were sharing information about the project.

The approach to sampling resulted in a relatively heterogenous set of respondents. In relation to the questionnaire (n=77 respondents), for example, 18% (n=14) had never sent their children to school and 78% (n=60) had (4%, n=3 did not respond); 52% (n=40) only home educate some and not all of their children, while 43% (n=33) home educated all their children (5%, n=4 did not respond); 58% (n=45) reported a diagnosed or suspected special educational need or disability, while 38% (n=29) did not (4%, n=3 did not respond). Across all data collection points, the

respondents included people who were very new to home education and those who had been home educating for more than ten years; children were withdrawn from school at both primary and secondary phases; there were a small number of parents/carers engaged in flexi-school arrangements or considering home educating.

The nature of the sample (self-selecting), the timeframe and the scale of the project meant that the sample was never going to be representative of the population. The approach, nevertheless, allowed us to hear a range of voices and hear their stories of home education.

Limitations of the data

While we have been able to engage a sizeable sample in this research, we recognise limitations in our data. These are outlined below:

- The main method of recruiting for the project was via online networks. Our invitations to participate were shared through these online networks by a small number of insiders. While online recruitment did enable us to reach some participants that other sampling strategies would not (e.g. those parents/carers who had always home educated and are therefore unknown to the LA), the approach would disadvantage those parents/carers who were not active online. Although a stratified sample was used to recruit participants for the questionnaire (alongside the online networks), an unsolicited invitation in letter form, sent via the LA, might not have been well received by all recipients. Since some categories of home educators, identified in the research literature, were not visible in this data, the approach to sample did not work for them and there is clearly space for further research in order to reach those people who are missing here.
- The sharing of information about the project via a specific SEND network might also have led to an over-representation of parents/carers with SEND children.
- The self-selecting approach to sampling requires volunteers to come forward to participate. This might overly encourage people who are either extremely satisfied or extremely dissatisfied to volunteer. Some parents/carers might be distrustful of the intent of the research (funded by the LA) and not want to participate if they feel that their participation might impact negatively on them (e.g. if they are in a dispute with LA, or going to tribunal) and some groups of home educators will simply not come forwards, particularly if one of their reasons for home educating is to keep out of view of the LA.
- Since the questionnaire was also self-selecting, there is a chance that some participants engaged with two data collection points, so there could be some overlap in terms of responses.
- The research sought to explore the reasons why people home educate; the sample is predominantly those home educating. The LA focus group, in contrast, is much smaller and although the aim of that focus group was to bring a different perception on home education in Hertfordshire, the size of the sample means that the views cannot be representative of all those in the employ of the LA and do not necessarily reflect an official LA position.

Considering the limitations discussed above, this research, then, does not claim to be representative and therefore generalisable to all home educators. The findings reflected here, however, are the stories of home educators; the experiences recollected are real and they represent individuals as they flourish, survive and navigate a different approach to education and are important in order to develop understanding of why people home educate and find ways to support them.

Ethics

This project sought approval from the University of Hertfordshire's Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority, protocol number: aEDU/SF/UH/03884(2). Potential participants were provided with a participation sheet, which outlined the aims of the research, how the data would be used and stored, and the advantages and disadvantages of taking part. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. Questions asked, by a small number of home educating participants, related to anonymity, who had access to the raw data and how the findings would be shared. Participants were then asked to consent to participate by signing consent form (for focus group participants), through a verbal consent statement (for telephone interviews), and via implied consent (for those completing the online questionnaire).

The research reported here deals with a topic that is sensitive. The stories that parents/carers and carers told about their reasons for home educating were both highly personalised and very individual. In order to protect the participants from inadvertent identification, we made the decision to not keep these individual stories intact. Instead, in the reporting of data, we have identified themes that cut across the data rather than focus on individuals and present those themes in a more generic way. We have neither numbered nor given pseudonyms to the participant as this reduces the opportunity to piece together individual stories by grouping together quotes from the same participant. In some cases, we have also de-gendered the child, referring to 'the child' (rather than 'son' or 'daughter') or using the pronoun 'they' (rather than 'he' or 'she'). We recognise that in doing this we lose some of the power of the stories that were told; however, we felt that this decision was important ethically in terms of protecting our participants who were concerned about the implications of their participation in this research.

In the next section, we present the findings from this study.

3. Presentation of findings

Review of existing literature on home education

This literature review provides an overview of current research into what is often termed 'Elective Home Education' (EHE) (e.g. Badman, 2009; D'Arcy, 2012; Department for Education (DfE), 2019a). It sets out some key findings from a search of literature on elective home education and related terms. These findings informed the subsequent data collection activities and reporting for this project, which was designed to explore the reasons why families home educate in Hertfordshire. This review also provides some background to the national and international policy in this field.

Literature search strategy

Relevant literature was identified through an online search of the University of Hertfordshire (UH) library collection. Journal articles, books, conference papers/proceedings, dissertations, theses and resources such as reports and grey literature were identified and screened. The search

included international research published in English since 1 January 2000. Each of the following three terms was entered into the UH online search facility in October 2018: “elective home education”; “home education”; and “home schooling”. If the search returned more than forty entries, the first forty or more were screened. Resources were selected for use in the review by screening the abstract or an excerpt and/or by searching the text using the terms: choice, choose, chose and ‘good practice’. Those search findings used to inform the review are listed in the reference section at the end of this document. Further resources were identified through reading the literature obtained during the structured search.

In addition, a small-scale search was carried out using Google and Google Scholar to provide context for the project in terms of national and international legislation, policy and practice in the field of home education. Some of these search findings were updated in September 2019.

Home education

Definition and overview

Harding and Farrell (2003:127) suggested that:

Home schooling or home education refers to the education of children within the home setting, independent of the formal schooling context, and usually overseen by parents or other adults, significant to the child and family.

While the DfE defines home education, in England, as:

Elective home education is a term used to describe a choice by parents to provide education for their children at home - or at home and in some other way which they choose - instead of sending them to school full-time (DfE, 2019a:6).

In 2013, Kunzman and Gaither published an extensive overview of the research on home education (home schooling), which comprised a summary of research and scholarship informed by a sample of more than 300 texts selected from more than 1,400 English-language texts on home schooling. Kunzman and Gaither (2013:4) ‘sought to answer the following questions: What primary topics or themes are addressed in the literature? How effective are the methodology and analysis performed? What does the research reveal about homeschooling, and what questions remain unanswered?’

International context

Home education or home schooling is legal in many countries. In Europe, for example, countries in which parents/carers are allowed to provide home education include Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Sweden (Blok & Karsten, 2011) and the United Kingdom (UK Government Legislation, 1996). A European Union report, which covers all countries participating in the Eurydice network, provides an overview of home education policies in Europe for primary and lower secondary education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). Countries outside Europe in which home education is permitted include Australia (Harding & Farrell, 2003), Canada and the United States (Basham et al., 2007) and New Zealand (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015). There are also examples of countries in which home education is not legal. The Netherlands is one of few within Europe where home education is not acceptable although certain exemptions do apply (Blok & Karsten, 2011), and in Germany school attendance is compulsory; children must attend a public or state-approved private school for a

minimum of nine years from the age of six or seven (Spiegler, 2003). Despite this, in 2003, Spiegler reported that home education was taking place in Germany and the number of young people being home educated was increasing.

In the United States (US), nationally representative data from the 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) conducted by the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), were used to estimate that 1.5 million students (1,508,000) were home schooled in the US in Spring 2007 (Bielick, 2008).

The decision to home educate is a significant one, which has academic, social and economic consequences for a child and their family (e.g. Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Guterman & Neuman, 2017). Parents/carers do not always home educate all of their children (Olsen, 2008).

Home education in the UK

Legislation, policy and practice

In the UK the choice to educate children at home is a legal option (UK Government Legislation, 1996). In England and Wales, Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 indicates that for children of a compulsory school age the responsibility for a child's education lies with their parents/carers but that education need not take place at school (UK Government Legislation, 1996). Education is a devolved matter within the UK. In England, the Department for Education provides guidance for local authorities: 'It is non-statutory, and has been produced to help local authorities understand their role in relation to elective home education' (DfE, 2019a:3). Guidance is also available for parents/carers, which '... is non-statutory, and has been produced to help parents understand their obligations and rights in relation to elective home education' (DfE, 2019b:3).

An independent *Review of Elective Home Education in England*, which reported in 2009, focused particularly on safeguarding issues (Badman, 2009). The House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee (2009:16) noted that whilst some had broadly welcomed the recommendations put forward in 'the Badman Report', others, including home educators had been highly critical, particularly regarding recommendations relating to registration and monitoring.

In 2018, the Department for Education consulted on *Home education: call for evidence and revised DfE guidance* (DfE, 2018a). This consultation included a call for feedback on draft versions of guidance for LAs and for parents/carers. Guidance, cited earlier, was subsequently published in April 2019 (DfE, 2019a; DfE 2019b). Among the factors leading to the publication of the consultation was the *Home Education (Duty of Local Authorities) Bill [HL] 2017-19*, a Private Member's Bill introduced by Lord Soley in June 2017 (Foster & Danechi, 2019). A House of Commons Library Briefing Paper *Home Education in England* published in July 2019 provides information on home education in England and outlines reform proposals (Foster & Danechi, 2019).

Whilst Government discourse and related literature often include the term 'elective' to describe home education in England (e.g. Badman, 2009; D'Arcy, 2012; DfE, 2019a), researchers have reported that for some parents/carers home education has been 'a last resort, and was perceived as a non-choice' (Morton, 2010:54). In his book on EHE in the UK, Webb (2011) distinguished

between parents who feel forced to educate their children at home and those who make a positive choice to home educate. This issue is noted by other researchers. For example, in her study involving interviews with eleven traveller families in one LA in England, D'Arcy (2012:1) found that 'although many Traveller families were satisfied with home-education as preferable to mainstream school, they were all compelled to take it up, rather than adopting it as a positive and desirable choice'. Nelson (2010:39) too, in a study with LA professionals (home education officers), reported that 'in many instances the reasons for EHE was a result of unforeseen circumstances, rather than a "true choice" that parents had decided upon at the outset of their child's education.' Parsons and Lewis (2010) emphasised this point in their report of research involving parents of children with special educational needs (SEN), now known as special educational needs and disability (SEND). Referring to the Government's use of the term 'elective' in association with home education they asserted: 'We have deliberately avoided using this term out of respect for our participants; "elective" implies a positive and informed choice and, whilst this may have been the case for a minority, it is clearly inappropriate for most' (Parsons & Lewis, 2010:83).

In England, home educators are very diverse in terms of their circumstances, educational experience and their reasons for engaging in home education (Ofsted, 2010), as well as their practice. Some parents use home education as a short term intervention for a particular reason (Smith & Nelson, 2015) and in their survey of parents home-educating children with SEND in the UK, Parsons and Lewis (2010) identified two parents who combined home education with occasional attendance at school to provide for educational needs they felt were not available at home.

Number of children receiving home education in the UK

The number of children receiving home education in the UK is not known. Estimates vary; in the UK, Smith and Nelson (2015) used data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey and other ONS data to estimate that the numbers of children who have been home educated full-time or part-time is likely to be approximately 170,000, or about 40,000 for those who are home educated full time (corresponding in numbers of families to approximately 100,000 and 23,400 respectively). These figures are consistent with an estimate reported by the Children's Commissioner for England (2017); in 2016/17 almost 30,000 children in 86 LAs were said to be home-educated, which might mean more than 50,000 children are home-educated in England, with the proviso that actual numbers could be higher as parents might not report their practice to the LA. Also, in 2017, the Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS), the national leadership organisation in England for directors of children's services under the provisions of the Children Act 2004 (UK Government Legislation 2004), conducted a survey on home education (ADCS, 2017). The survey, sent to all 152 LAs in England to collect data from school census day in October 2017, was designed 'to understand better the volume and characteristics of the cohort of children and young people who are known to be home schooled and the support on offer to them and their families' (ADCS:1). Using findings from 118 respondents it was estimated that approximately 45,500 children and young people were being home schooled in England (ADCS, 2017). More than 90% responding LAs

reported year-on-year increases in the number of children and young people involved (ADCS, 2017).

Reasons why parents/carers educate their children at home: views from current research

Research evidence

There are what have been described as ‘push factors’ and ‘pull factors’ relating to the uptake of home education (D’Arcy, 2012:126-7 original emphasis). Appendix 1 presents some research findings that relate to motivating factors or reasons why parents/carers home educate their child, together with a note of the country in which the research took place and the approach used to collect the data. Although several classifications are available for categorising the reasons parents/carers give for home schooling (e.g. Neuman & Guterman, 2017), these have not been used in this review because they did not reflect the wide range of reasons come through the review; instead the reasons are listed alphabetically in Appendix 1 as follows in Table 3.

Reasons why people home educate		
A: Academic accomplishment	J: Health and medical issues	S: Pressure by the school
B: Child wanting to be educated at home	K: Highly able, gifted, talented child	T: Racism, bullying and discrimination
C: Child unwilling or unable to go to school (e.g. being unhappy, depressed or stressed at school); school refusal	L: Parents’ experience of school	U: Religious or cultural beliefs
D: Concern for child’s well-being and safety	M: Parents wanting a closer relationship with their children, family time	V: Risk of exclusion or prosecution
E: Customise education for each child	N: Parents wanting the best for their child, motivating and meeting their needs	W: Social factors
F: Dissatisfaction with or concerns about the educational system or environment	O: Parents’ work situation	X: Special educational needs, additional learning needs and disabilities
G: Distance or access to a local school	P: Parents who do not get a preferred school choice place	Y: Support for home schooling
H: Family mobility	Q: Pedagogy	Z: Unplanned
I: Financial	R: Philosophical or ideological views	

Table 3: reasons why parents/carers home educate

Many of the reasons listed in Table 3 are interlinked and, in most cases, the complexity of the findings is reflected by the use of excerpts from the original article or report. The research

evidence arises mainly from studies in which parents' views were sought with a few examples from evidence that is available on the views of others including LA professionals.

Interpreting the research evidence

As a result of a meta-analysis of twelve research studies, Spiegler (2010:57) provided the following cautionary note for those using the findings of research on parents' motives for home education:

It is concluded that the diversity within the results can partly be traced back to fundamental differences in the methodological design, to the absence of detailed theoretical modelling and remarkable differences of the survey instruments and that the role of the social environment and the process of the construction of motives in a certain social context deserve more attention.

Parents/carers home educate their children for a variety of reasons and in some cases the reason given for home educating one child may not be the same as that for home educating another (Smith & Nelson, 2015). Whilst the decision to home educate can follow a particular incident (e.g. Neuman & Guterman, 2017), the decision might arise over a period of months or years (Arai, 2000). Olsen (2008:96) reflected that 'Every family had a story that was uniquely theirs of how they came to choose home schooling', reporting that the reasons parents gave for choosing home education were often quite different from those that motivated them to continue. This discrepancy is highlighted in relation to research on parents' reasons for choosing home education:

It is reasonable to assume that the reasons for choosing home schooling undergo a process of re-conceptualisation and change with the actual practice of home schooling. In this respect, the parents' current answer to the question may not accurately reflect their reasons for choosing home education. Against this background, the research conducted to date may not provide insight into the true reasons for the growing practice (Neuman & Guterman, 2017:3).

These authors subsequently suggest:

[...] in order to maintain an unconventional choice like home schooling for a period of time, one must go through a process of rationalisation and conceptualisation of the act, and in time this will cover the tracks of the initial reasons, which are [sic] might be arbitrary, but despite this, there is great importance in discovering the initial reasons that underlie the story and that led to the beginning of the change, since these reasons might explain the growth of the phenomenon better than the family's current reasons (Neuman & Guterman, 2017:12).

The challenge of collecting and interpreting research evidence relating to reasons for home schooling has been reported by other authors. For example, following a year-long study involving four families engaged in a home school organization in the US, Anthony and Burroughs (2010) reflected on the complexity of these families' motivations for home schooling. They identified three aspects in each case: i) although an instigating factor might have been a problem with the school, there were additional underlying reasons that led to families starting to home school their children; ii) their motivation for home schooling affected the way they conducted their home

schools; and iii) there were further unexpected reasons to continue home schooling (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010).

Neuman and Guterman (2017) suggest that the problem is compounded by the quantitative research approaches often used in which parents are invited to choose from a list of pre-defined reasons. These authors conducted a qualitative study in which they focussed on interviewees' original reasons for their choice, asking them to 'Tell me how you decided to start home schooling' (Neuman & Guterman, 2017:3). Thus, they invited them 'to tell a story about how home schooling began in their home'; 'focused on understanding the factors that led to the choice of home schooling: What was the original situation that led the parents to make this change and begin home schooling?' (Neuman & Guterman, 2017:4).

Equality and home education

Some of the research studies carried out to identify parents' reasons for home educating raise issues of equality in schools. These are illustrated in the following three examples:

1. Traveller families. Arising from her research with traveller families in England, D'Arcy (2012:1) reported that 'traveller communities form a distinctive and ever-growing group of home-educators...' She reflected:

Current EHE guidance cannot ensure that all home-educated children receive a suitable or equal education. Consequently, Traveller children's withdrawal from school can limit their independent and critical, intellectual development which might enable Traveller communities to challenge racist power structures in society in the future (D'Arcy, 2012:135).

Whilst home education is a legal educational option and it can be safer it is not necessarily inclusive (D'Arcy, 2014). D'Arcy (2012:135,133) reflected that whilst educating at home is seen to provide 'an educationally and emotionally 'Safe Space':

... Traveller children's withdrawal from school is not necessarily a choice but the product of racial injustice in school and society. Responses from Travellers reveal that parents are dedicated and interested in their child's education ... Studying the reasons Travellers take up EHE has raised serious questions about equality in schools.

2. Special educational needs and disability (SEND). Equality was also raised as an issue for some children with SEND. In some cases, parents acknowledged that a school was unable or unwilling to accept their child (Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Smith & Nelson, 2015). Smith and Nelson (2015:322) reported one parent who noted: '... the equality act did not exist, my daughter was wheelchair bound and school refused to accept her'.

3. Highly able, gifted, talented children. Winstanley (2009:347) reported that parents of children she described as 'highly able/gifted/talented', decided to home school for practical reasons because the complex needs of their children were not being met in mainstream schools.

Support for parents/carers who educate their children at home

During a small-scale study of home education involving LA officers and practitioners in 16 LAs, Kendall and Atkinson (2006) also interviewed four parents to gain their views of EHE and their

relationships with the LA. They presented the following policy recommendations in their report, based on the needs of the parents they interviewed:

Guidelines for what is supposed to be taught at different stages, financial support (since they regarded themselves as saving the local authority money), and advice and encouragement (that is, without dictating). There was a call for there to be a greater acceptance that parents are entitled to home educate their children and therefore that local authorities should try to work with them and not against them' (Kendall & Atkinson, 2006:12).

Organisations providing support

The following organisations provide online information and/or local support groups for parents/carers who home educate their children in the UK.

UK Home Education Resources: see

https://a2zhomeschooling.com/regional/europe_homeschooling/uk-homeschooling/uk_resources_homeschooling/

ACE Education: see <http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/>

Educational Freedom: see <http://educationalfreedom.org.uk/>

Education Otherwise: see <http://www.education-otherwise.org>

EverySchool: see <https://www.everyschool.co.uk/>

Home Education UK: see <https://www.home-education.org.uk/>

Home Education Advisory Service: see <http://www.heas.org.uk>

Young Writers' Home Education Resources: see <https://www.youngwriters.co.uk/home-education>

Key messages

- Home education is not legal in all countries. In countries where it is legal, there are different legal requirements around who can be home educated, who home educates and the extent to which home education is monitored;
- Home education is a legal option in all countries in the UK. In contrast to some countries, ongoing monitoring of home educated children is not mandatory. Parents/carers who have never sent their children to school are not required to register their children with the LA;
- An independent review of home education in England (Badman, 2009) focused particularly on safeguarding issues; some home educators were critical of the report, particularly regarding recommendations relating to monitoring and registration. A recent Private Member's Bill in the House of Lords, consultation and briefing paper (Foster & Danechi, 2019), which outline reform proposals have all raised the profile of home education again in the UK. Home education has also received negative press coverage, and strong responses from the home education community;

- The use of the adjective 'elective' in government literature fails to recognise that, for many families, home education is not a positive choice;
- The total number of children being home educated in the UK is unknown. Estimates range from 40,000-50,000 full-time home educated children in England currently. LAs report a year-on-year growth in home education nationally;
- Research shows a multitude of reasons why parents/carers home educate and many of these reasons are interlinked. Most decisions involve more than one reason, parents/carers may have different reasons for home educating their different children; and parents/carers' reasons may change over time;
- Decisions to home educate raise issues of equality in schools, particularly in relation to Traveller families, children with SEND and highly able, gifted and talented children;
- Some research suggests that parents/carers want more support and acceptance from their LA. Additional support for home education can be found through online information and local support groups.

Following this review of existing literature on home education, the report moves to consider the empirical data relating to this project, initially looking at the reasons for home educating that parents/carers shared, before going on to consider the challenges and benefits associated with home educating, and the support available for home educators.

The reasons people home educate: views of home educators

A note on terminology

As noted above, within government documentation, the term *home education* is often preceded by the adjective *elective* to emphasise that this is a decision that is actively made by parents/carers. Throughout this research and the writing of the report, we have chosen not to use this adjective. In line with the literature (Morton, 2010), we felt that not all participants would have felt that their home education was 'elective' and that we would restrict participation by suggesting that it was. Our decision to do this was validated in the data; participants emphasised that, for them, home education was not a choice, and was therefore not elective.

I didn't see I had any choice. So I actually don't like the term elective home educating, because I've realised that once you agree to that it's almost like everyone thinks that you are choosing to home educate, when myself and friends that I know, we haven't chosen it; we've absolutely had no choice.

I haven't chosen this as an option; I don't plan on it being permanent, it's purely temporary.

It's not a choice, I would say you're talking about, it's because, definitely a minority, most of us are forced into it now, I would say the majority are forced into it.

We had no choice.

During the LA focus group, participants also recognised the difficulties of terminology and while they might refer to Elective Home Education in the documentation, when they spoke or wrote to parents/carers they would rather state: 'you've taken the decision to home educate'. The LA wanted to emphasise that parents/carers had still made that decision, even if 'a number of parents don't see it in terms of a choice'.

So, here we explore the reasons why parents/carers home educate, irrespective of whether this is a choice, an informed choice or not a choice at all. We explored those reasons through our different data collection points (focus groups, interviews and questionnaire). What was striking about the stories that parents/carers told about their reasons for home educating was that they were always multiple. The stories wove together a complex mix of reasons that resulted from particular incidents, circumstances or philosophical stances, that reflected the very individualised experiences of specific families that participated in this research. These stories were powerful. In the reporting of the reasons, we have chosen not to relate stories in their entirety, for reasons of ethics given above, but instead look for the themes that cut across the data. The coding framework was built from the literature review that summarised the reasons for home education as expressed in the literature (as shown in Table 3, and Appendix 1). Data were coded based on these reasons. These codes were then organised into categories that sought to align with the reasons listed on the Hertfordshire County Council Elective Home Education questionnaire. The analysis resulted in the following categories:

- Access to school
- Additional needs, health and wellbeing
- Dissatisfaction with school system
- Family circumstance
- Philosophy, beliefs and values

These areas are discussed in more detail below and are supported by illustrative quotes. A further theme of *other* was also identified and this contained references to 'unplanned' home education. This related to the 'electiveness' of home education, and 'choice', and has been discussed above in relation to the terminology of home education. The first area for discussion is *dissatisfaction with the school system*.

Dissatisfaction with the school system

The most frequent category of reason that people shared related to their dissatisfaction with the school system. It has been possible to break down factors that contribute to that dissatisfaction. These include:

- Concerns with how the school system operates
- Racism, bullying and discrimination
- Parents/carers' experiences of school

Concerns with how the school system operates

Factors relating to concerns with how the school system operates were the most frequently cited across the data and relate to a number of sub-themes. There was a clear emphasis, in many of

these comments, on the English education system as a whole rather than on individual schools. Parents/carers raised concerns relating to the *inflexibility of the system*. This inflexibility was expressed in terms of schools being unable to cater for difference or make reasonable adjustments.

A lack of flexibility in the national curriculum was deemed restrictive by some parents/carers. The narrow focus on a limited number of subjects restricted opportunities for practical subjects, arts, humanities and social sciences to be covered. This narrow focus has implications in terms of enrichment. The fact that the curriculum is national means that alternative approaches were simply not available in other schools, and this inflexibility of the curriculum was a deciding factor in decisions to home educate, as this parent, considering home education, outlines:

If that curriculum is the curriculum across the country and therefore being interpreted in slightly different ways by schools but ultimately is being acted upon by every school, then the only way of deviating from that is to remove them from a setting that has a curriculum at all.

A concurrent focus on *testing and monitoring* was also cited as a reason why parents/carers were home educating. The emphasis on results, particularly from the SATS, was seen to make school highly pressurised, to dampen children's love of learning, and to impact on how and what teachers teach. The focus, rather than being on the child, was seen to be on external measures.

It's ultimately that everything a child seems to experience now from the minute they start school, which has got earlier over the last ten, twenty years, is about meeting an external programme and being measured on those successes.

Some parents/carers just did not want their children to be within such an inflexible and highly monitored system. Particularly when, in the minds of some participants, such a system did not lead to a quality education. Some respondents cited the *quality of the education system* as a reason why they home educated, reporting falling standards and negative comparisons with other educational systems of which they were aware. Sometimes parents/carers indicated their children were making *insufficient progress* within the school setting, that their academic work was *deteriorating* or that they were *falling behind* in relation to other children within the class. Sometimes there was little support offered by the schools to help address academic achievement, but sometimes the support offered was simply not enough.

For some parents/carers, the rigid structure of the school day was a contributing factor to their decision to home educate. One parent reported that their child would be *unable to cope* within a system where they would have to be in room with the same people five days a week and that they would be 'completely overwhelmed'. Yet there were few opportunities for alternative attendance models. A small number of parents/carers reported how they had requested staggered starts and flexi-school arrangements only to find that schools were unwilling or unable to accommodate them. Similar concerns about flexibility were expressed in relation to the *school start age*. Some parents/carers felt that their children were too young to start school at four, stating that this practice was 'utterly barbaric', 'incredibly early', and 'too much, too young'. Parents/carers often contrasted this young start age to later start ages in other educational

systems that they were aware of (e.g. Sweden and Denmark) and related that starting formal education later (around 7 years old) did not appear to impede academic development in the long run. One parent even indicated that with an older school starting age, they might not have decided to home educate at all:

Perhaps if school starting age had been like in Scandinavia, I mightn't be here [participating in research about home education].

Within the school setting itself, parents/carers related experiences where the *school's approach to learning* (e.g. formal, structured and de-personalised) did not suit their child, and again, the inflexibility of the system meant that their specific learning needs could not be catered for. Many schools' approaches to behaviour management, with its focus on *consequences*, was seen as threatening and again did not recognise individual needs. It was a lack of appreciation of a child's specific needs and the negative impact that the policy of consequences was having on their child's behaviour and that wellbeing was one of the reasons that a parent was seriously considering home education:

They aren't getting any rewards; they're only ever getting the consequences, so it's just a negative spiral.

Concerns were raised not just about the classroom environment, but also in relation to play. Some parents/carers felt that school created unhealthy and limited opportunities for *socialisation*. Parents/carers felt that schools told children who they had to play with and when. There were very few opportunities for children to socialise with children of different ages and negative playground behaviours could make school a very unpleasant place.

Indeed, the whole school environment was seen, by one parent, as a place which had real *potential to harm*.

I think school's got the potential, and I think a lot of people feel like this, to actually do harm, and it won't necessarily do harm, but it could do harm to lots of children, and do people want to take that risk?

Parents/carers reported that experiences within school had resulted in children 'scared to go', displaying school refusal and actively expressing a desire to be home educated. A small number of parents attributed the potential to harm to the behaviour of *teachers* who did not, in their view, always show respect towards their children, the work they produced or the concerns their parents/carers raised:

Headteachers as well as class teachers were arrogant and critical when I would show my disapproval in certain matters.

Yet many parents recognised that teachers were working hard in what was quite a difficult environment. Parents/carers noted that teachers themselves often did not even like working within the system, quoting statistics about *teacher attrition*. They reasoned that how could the education system be working if 'people are leaving the profession in droves', and if the system was not working, why should they put their children within it. Teacher attrition contributes to the squeeze on resources and parents/carers recognised that teachers had a difficult job in an

environment of budget cuts and facing a *lack of resources*. This meant that teachers could not always provide the kinds of education that children needed within schools – they simply did not have the time, training and resources:

Teachers can't give those things [individualised learning], they haven't got the time, they haven't got the money, they haven't got training, resources.

The system, as it is now, was not something that all parents/carers could support, yet they recognised that it was very difficult to question or challenge or indeed change the way in which the system was operating. Instead, some parents/carers recognised that they just did not align with the prevailing view that underpinned the educational system, that they had a *different view of education* and what it means to raise a child and chose instead to stand outside of it.

Discrimination, racism and bullying

A second set of key factors relating to dissatisfaction with the school system related to experiences of racism, bullying and discrimination. There was little explicit mention to *racism*, except for one questionnaire response, and a focus group discussion where a child had felt out of place in a predominantly white school.

References to bullying were, in contrast, more prevalent. The bullying manifested itself in different ways. There were instances of *children being bullied by other children*. The examples shared related to severe and often daily bullying, with frequent mention of schools failing to deal with this issue adequately, for example:

They were bullied daily [...] School knew – they interviewed kids and for each incident there were many witnesses, but still the bullying continued.

But also, children being *bullied by members of staff within the school*, in terms of their treatment in front of their peers (e.g. being singled out when unable to do something) or by comments made by staff members. Sometimes the results of the bullying had negative consequences:

Our child had a mental and emotional breakdown due to bullying by teachers.

It was not just the children that experienced bullying, one interviewee also reported experiences of *parents/carers and other professionals being bullied by the school*.

Finally, people talked about experiences of discrimination and how they contributed to their reasons to home educate. One parent felt that they were being discriminated against in relation to a child's nursery place because they were already home educating an older child. While another expressed their frustrations of not being able to get their child into school; they felt the school was being discriminatory against their child, who had specific learning needs, by 'blocking their return to school'.

Parents/carers' experiences of school

For some of the parents/carers, their *own negative experiences as a pupil* at school were factors in their decisions to home educate, for example, the impact of being a summer baby, having to choose between arts and sciences, and experiences that shook confidence. However, parents/carers were much more likely to reflect on their experiences of working within education

in various roles (e.g. teacher, parent volunteer, school governor), and how this had contributed to decisions to withdraw or not enrol their children in school. Their close involvement in the current school system gave them first-hand experiences of the 'authoritarian and controlled' environment, the constraints of the timetable, the negative impact of the curriculum, the pressures on staff, and the mental health problems and treatment of 'children that did not fit into the system'. The experiences of these educational professionals made them decide that they did not want their own children to be part of the system. Indeed, one interviewee even noted 'I've seen a lot of disillusioned schoolteachers who home educate their children, actually'.

Additional needs, health and wellbeing

The next major clustering of factors leading to decisions to home educate related to additional needs, health and wellbeing. Within this cluster, three themes emerged:

- Special educational and additional learning needs
- Concerns about wellbeing and safety
- Physical health and medical issues

Special educational and additional learning needs

This theme was the most prevalent and continued in several sub-themes. The most frequently referenced was the perceived *lack of support* for those children who have diagnosed or suspected special educational needs; additional needs; or those children who just learn differently to the children around them, including those who are highly able, gifted and talented. Parents/carers reported the lack of additional support in the classroom, insufficient support or a cutting back of support; little attempt by schools or the LA to make reasonable adjustments that children needed, even when they were clearly set out in the Education and Health Care Plan [EHCP]; a lack of appropriate challenge for highly gifted children, and a reluctance by some schools to take children with special educational needs:

Really, an early example of off-rolling in the sense that although we had the statement in place, the school was very, very focussed on SATs results and I remember the first day when I took them into school, the Teaching Assistant just came to the door and just said, you know, we're not going to do a visual timetable, we're just too free-flowing here and then kind of closed the window on me.

One reported reason for the insufficient support for children with special educational and additional needs was the *lack of awareness and training* about the particular need; one home educating parent felt strongly that teachers were just 'not trained'. The *allocation of funding* was also given as a factor as to why adequate support was not in place, with funds believed to be for SEND being used elsewhere, as this participant notes:

I remember having a meeting with the headteacher and the headteacher just made it very clear that he said, well, 'you know, the budget for Special Educational Needs is ring-fenced; I can spend the money on whatever I like, so if your child wasn't here, then my SATS would be higher'. And you know, it was slightly fluffier than that, but that was basically what they said.

The *lack of flexibility in the system*, particularly around school start age, which has been mentioned previously, was again raised in reference to children with additional needs. Adopted children, for example, might not be ready for school until they are older, yet opportunities to delay starting school were not available, and the routines of daily school life might mean that school is inaccessible for children with Autism or social anxiety. This reiterates, again, that the school system just does not work for some children.

It can be particularly challenging for parents/carers with children in school who have an *undiagnosed special educational need*. Children can struggle with school and the parents/carers not understand why. Yet, when parents/carers do start to suspect that there is an underlying issue, sometimes those *parental concerns are ignored* or are not taken seriously. This could be because the concerning behaviours are simply not seen at school (e.g. panic attacks and meltdowns happen only at home), because the teachers genuinely do not feel that there is an issue, or because of the implications of the recognition of a specific need in terms of providing reasonable adjustment and support. This lack of appreciation of parental concerns by schools can be very unsettling and isolating for parents/carers:

I didn't know whether I was going mad and making it all up and that I was crazy because there was only me who seemed to think that my children had any problems, or whether I was going to get a diagnosis.

Some parents/carers spoke of long and difficult battles to get an assessment, diagnosis or EHCP and of the particular challenges, as they saw it, of getting an EHCP in Hertfordshire. Such a lack of in-school support means that parents/carers are also being left to struggle on their own, and are sometimes advised, by other health care professionals, to pay for private assessments to move the process forwards. Yet parents/carers also reported that paying for tests privately was sometimes viewed with circumspection by schools, as though the parents/carers had somehow bought a diagnosis. But, without an official diagnosis, it was difficult to ask for a child to be moved to another, more appropriate, school meaning that parents/carers feel that they had no other option than to remove their child from school.

Concerns about wellbeing and safety

Within the data there is a strong theme about the impact of school on children's wellbeing and safety; concerns about children's mental and physical wellbeing were cited as factors associated with the reasons for home educating.

Parents/carers recounted the detrimental impact that school was having on their children's *self-esteem, confidence, the child's personality* and their *happiness*:

The main reason was because my child was really unhappy in school.

My little child went from being sort of a happy-go-lucky character to sort of quite [...] shut-down and we couldn't really communicate with them properly; they used to stay grizzly and grumpy all the time and when we were trying to sort of like guide them through their reading or writing that just turned into tantrums.

In just one term I saw my joyful, bouncy child lose their spark and become exhausted, quiet and worried.

Anxiety was reported as a major negative influence on wellbeing, as this example shows:

My child was struggling a bit with anxiety; they did everything they could to try and help with that [...] But it was a separation issue, separation anxiety issues that my child had and so they were doing their best but it ... my child wasn't learning a huge amount when they were at school because my child was kind of closed down emotionally.

Compromised mental wellbeing could manifest itself in *physical symptoms*, and in *meltdowns or breakdowns*, for example: depression, problems sleeping, crying, panic attacks, seizures, night terrors and issues with eating. In some extreme cases this resulted in self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts:

My child said they wanted to die rather than get hit one more time. My child started self-harming and would lash out at their brother.

It mentally destroyed them, they wanted to kill themselves. We took them out.

Sometimes the mental health issues were masked within the school setting, but manifested themselves when the children were at home in their own environment, leading to a similar lack of regard for parental concerns as was highlighted earlier, for example:

They'd been showing signs of quite heightened anxiety that we were being met with, they're fine in school and we were saying, okay, well it might appear that way, we don't really think they are.

My child walks out of school and is having a full meltdown, but they just didn't see it because what they saw is my child wanting to please them during the school day. They weren't seeing the other side of it; ... s/he was doing what s/he was supposed to be doing at school and so there wasn't really much they could offer, to be honest. I don't think they really believed it; I think they thought I was some sort of neurotic parent and I can totally see that.

Compromised mental wellbeing could manifest itself in *physical symptoms*, and in *meltdowns or breakdowns*, which again were often not seen at school.

My child got to a point where s/he started having panic attacks; s/he was unable to face going to school. S/he would be sick, nauseous, white, ill and basically unable to cope.

My child had been having massive, massive violent meltdowns ever since they started secondary school. Head-butting walls, beating themselves up with their fists, pummelling their arms, pummelling their legs, kicking doors, screaming about homework; the sheer overwhelm of the school, changes to routine, changes to ... anything [...] They were getting increasingly more violent. They were always to do with school.

These situations, which were particularly traumatic for the children, were also difficult for the parents/carers, with one parent recounting the impact that their child's difficulties with school had

on *parental mental health*. This parent was on anti-anxiety medication because their child's experiences were causing a lot of stress.

It was not just concern about wellbeing and mental health that led to a decision to remove children from school, but also concerns about their child's *safety* when in the school environment, in terms of injuries, safeguarding, and restricted access to food, drink and toilet facilities.

For some parents/carers, the negative impact of school on wellbeing and safety meant that they felt that they had no other option than to remove their child from school to enable them to *recover*.

They had to become emotionally stable again and it took them maybe two years to become stable and normal again, the damage that it's done, being in school.

They needed space to recover, to be nurtured, to, yeah, to recover.

Here the decision to home educate might not be what the parent initially set out to do but was seen as necessary for the wellbeing of the child.

Physical health and medical issues

Of less significance to the participants in this study were physical health and medical issues, although a small number of parents/carers did indicate how the impact of illness had had a detrimental effect on their child's experience of school. The medical issue was not the sole factor in their decisions to home educate; alongside the medical issues, participants also often reported anxiety issues and SEND, and pressures by schools to prove health issues in order to maintain attendance figures, which led to a questioning of the school's priorities.

Access to school

There was a further cluster of factors that related to the children's access to (appropriate) provision. Here there were a mix of factors that related to alternative provision, and also the active discouragement by schools or the LA for children to access the provision they had been offered. The cluster here is smaller than the previous two reported. The following categories are discussed:

- Alternative provision
- Pressure by school or LA to home educate
- Risk of exclusion, prosecution and fines

Alternative provision

For some parents/carers, whose children were facing challenges with a particular school setting, access to alternative provision was deemed a factor as to why parents/carers home educated. In some cases, this was because the *alternatives that were available were not appropriate*. Parents/carers reported exploring different kinds of provision outside of the mainstream (e.g. Montessori, Steiner, independent sector), or for children with special educational needs, different special schools within the area. Some parents/carers said that what was on offer was not appropriate for their child.

Hertfordshire's only got moderate learning difficulties schools. I've seen them all; they're all great for different reasons, but none of them are suitable for them. And they're full as well.

For some parents/carers, it was not their unsuitability; parents/carers reported more frequently that they felt there was simply *no alternative provision* within the LA. While the closure of the Steiner School in Kings Langley contributed to this lack of alternative provision, there were other reasons.

My child's private Steiner school closed down.

We are in our position because there is no alternative to mainstream school in Hertfordshire.

Lack of provision could be due to lack of space in existing special schools, limited opportunities for more specialist provision (e.g. in therapeutic schools) and no alternatives to, what were seen to be, the very large secondary schools in the County. It is, as one interviewee noted, 'that kind of small, safe environment that is what Hertfordshire lacks and that's what they should put in place'.

A small number of parents/carers also reported that they were either *not happy with the allocated local school* or that *the allocated local school was not appropriate* and, as a result, chose to home educate. In a small number of cases, there were *no spaces in the local school*, or there was *no space anywhere else*. This meant that children could not access the local school and parents/carers decided to temporarily home educate.

There were no spaces at the other local school, so we decided to home educate until a space became available.

Pressure by school or Local Authority to home educate

Parents/carers related a series of incidents, some of which are discussed elsewhere in this report, that made them feel pressurised by their school or the LA more broadly to home educate. These included the parent feeling that the *child was not wanted* within the school setting or that the school was making little attempt to *support the child*:

They said right from the very first meeting: this isn't the right environment for your child.

Being forced to deregister by secondary school as they couldn't support our child's needs.

This could result in the parent feeling *powerless* against a system that they could not change and could result in a sense of cynicism, for some parents/carers, in relation to the *Local Authority and its motives in relation to home education*:

HCC's key objective is money and so home education is a fantastic solution because they don't have to pay these people, so it's a great way to deal with, you know, all these children who can't cope with the system.

For one parent, who had experienced a long and difficult journey to get adequate support for their child, rather than the services within the LA supporting them, they felt that the LA had tried to encourage them to deregister their child. They questioned whether this was 'elective' home education at all.

Risk of exclusion / prosecution / fines

For a small number of parents/carers, it was the *threat of exclusion and prosecution*, along with a *lack of other options* that culminated in increasing the amount of home education, or home educating fully. Parents/carers feared exclusion due to behavioural issues or prosecution due to lack of attendance resulting from the child's anxiety and reluctance to go to school:

Our only options were to home educate, continue to be on school roll and face prosecution for non-attendance or transfer to another school under the ridiculous idea this would somehow solve their anxiety issues.

Philosophy, beliefs and values

A further cluster, similar in scale to that of access of school, was related to philosophy, beliefs and values. For those parents/carers who had always home educated, the philosophical drivers were important, but equally, there were parents/carers who found that when their children started school their own philosophy, beliefs and values jarred with what was offered at school. The following categories are explored below:

- Home education better meeting their children's needs
- Educational philosophy and pedagogic approach
- Religious or moral values

Home education better meeting their children's needs

In contrast (or sometimes in tandem) with discussions about why schools were failing to meet their children's needs, some parents/carers cast home education as a better alternative for their children, in relation to their specific learning, physical and emotional needs. Often these decisions resulted from the parents/carers' deep and instinctive understanding of their child and what they required. Home education allowed parents/carers to be more in control of what the children learnt, when and over what timeframe

Closely aligned to home education better meeting their children's needs, was the ability to tailor the child's education to their specific needs and to make that education more individualised. This could be in terms of *pace, needs, interest and learning styles*; for example, parents/carers reported that home education allowed them to provide the child the time 'to learn to read before moving on'; enable the child to 'follow their own interest and, being able to be creative'; and to 'tailor their educational experience around what they need'.

The resulting education could be more focussed (e.g. on core subjects) and more efficient (e.g. curriculum covered in less time), leaving more time for exciting and enriching experiences.

Educational philosophy and pedagogic approach

For some parents/carers, the individualised approach to education that was more self-directed and holistic was the basis of a strong educational philosophy, which was influenced by educators such as A.S. Neil and John Holt. For some, this meant adopting more play-led or creative pedagogic approaches to education, where children had opportunities to 'play and learn more organically in the early years'; to 'follow a personal learning journey, based on conversation, and play (in all its forms)'; and to have a 'hands-on, free approach to learning with an understanding of philosophy and self', which they felt 'wasn't provided in a school environment'.

There was a feeling, expressed that home educating parents/carers often had a better understanding of the range of pedagogical approaches available, having spent time thinking seriously about what it means to learn. Some parents/carers recognised that there might be a difference between those parents/carers who had actively chosen home education and had thought about these issues in relation to their beliefs about the nature of education, and those parents/carers who had reacted to experiences that had happened within the school system.

I think quite a lot of home educators feel like, us that choose to home educate not through something that has happened at school, you know, at an early age or from the beginning, like completely invested in being a home educator because that's what they feel philosophically or otherwise is right for their family, you perhaps look at your situation differently from someone who is actually really yeah, when it's a first choice you're obviously making things work in a way, in a different way.

These different philosophical views of education were also, in some cases, connected with different parenting philosophies, for example attachment parenting. Attachment parenting was very important for some home educators in this study; however, one participant warned, the term 'attachment' has strong connotations of being 'over protective', but that attachment has a very different meaning in home education that has evolved from research on attachment parenting:

The education system comes with a strong bias so whereas we see attachment as caring and responding to the needs of the kids, the education system, which you are reporting to, would interpret that word in an entirely different way.

Some parents/carers also wanted to emphasise the importance of family time and the development of sibling relationships that home education could foster.

Religious or moral values

Finally, of rather limited importance in this data, were factors relating to religious or moral values. One parent expressed the desire to follow a more Christian-based education, whereas another was concerned about morality in terms of the music played within the school at lunchtimes.

Family circumstances

In contrast to the other clusters, those relating to family circumstances were much less prevalent. Here two themes are discussed:

- Parents/carers' work, home and financial situation

- Support for home education from elsewhere

Parents/carers' work, home and financial situation

A small number of respondents reported that their *work patterns* meant that home education was a means by which parents/carers could spend more time with their children:

I was really not seeing the kids [...] I was missing the whole time that they were at home. I didn't like that, and they didn't like that. And so we started exploring the option of doing it differently.

I had the opportunity. I work weekends, why not spend time with my child if I can?

One parent recognised that *financially* their family was in a position to home educate (albeit for an initially planned short period). While another parent reported that an imminent *house move* meant that it was not worth destabilising the children with settling them into a new school for a short period:

We also may be moving in six months and didn't want to distress them settling into a new school.

Support for home education from elsewhere

For some parents/carers, a factor contributing to their decisions to home educate was the positive stories they had heard about home education from elsewhere. These experiences were recalled from their *own experiences*, *experiences within their families*, or *experiences of friends*, for example:

Initially we were like, what are you doing? Don't do this, this is awful and then we watched our friend's children grow and we thought, oh maybe, not so awful after all. And they seemed happy and they seemed, you know, they laughed a lot and they were pleasant and they were learning stuff so, you know, we had a positive experience there.

Access to positive experiences and knowledge that there is support around can make home education less daunting.

Key messages

- The inflexibility of the school system in relation to testing, monitoring, standardised curriculum, approaches to learning and school-start age, which often did not recognise individual differences, influenced decisions to home educate, particularly for parents/carers who felt their children did not fit that system or where parental views of what it means to educate were radically different to the prevailing view within the school setting. These parents/carers felt that home education could better meet their children's needs, as education could be tailored in terms of pace, interest and learning styles.
- Parents/carers who home educated often saw the school environment as not conducive to learning or wellbeing. Some parents/carers reported sustained bullying, limited or negative academic progress, enforced socialisation, lack of resources, teacher attrition

and high teacher turnover, and their own experiences of working within education as the reasons for withdrawing their children.

- For parents/carers of children with SEND, there was clear frustration about the lack of support made available for their children while they were in the school system. Obtaining an EHCP was perceived to be difficult, with parents/carers fighting to get the necessary assessments to support their application. Even when an EHCP was in place and requirements clearly set out, parents/carers reported that some schools often either chose not to follow the recommendations, or were unable to do so. With a lack of alternative provision (e.g. either no alternatives, or no space in alternative settings), some parents/carers felt that they had no other option than to remove their child and home educate.
- For some children, the experience of school was having a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing, resulting in extreme physical symptoms, meltdowns and breakdowns. Budget cuts meant that access to professional support was sometimes difficult. Children's negative experiences were also impacting on parents/carers' own mental health.
- Parents/carers sometimes felt that their concerns in relation to SEND and wellbeing were not taken seriously by school staff, leaving them feeling isolated and powerless.
- Pressure to withdraw children from school was felt particularly when schools displayed little attempt to support children; pressure was more acute when families were facing fines for non-attendance, while underlying issues were not addressed. External pressures on schools (e.g. Standard Assessment Tests [SATs] results, GCSE English and Maths, Attainment 8, attendance) mean that schools might not always be predisposed to supporting children who could impact negatively on their results.
- Some parents/carers, often those who had never sent their children to school, had a strong educational philosophy that was at odds with what was practised within schools. It was recognised that parents/carers who had actively and positively chosen home education were likely to have very different expectations and experiences of home education than those who felt forced into it.
- For a small number of families, parental work, home life, religious beliefs and financial situations meant that home education was a better fit for their lives. Parents/carers who had witnessed positive examples of home education themselves, within their families, or through their friends' experiences, and thus had access to knowledge and support cited this as a reason as to why home education appeared achievable.

Challenges, benefits and support

This section of the report focuses on the following themes:

- learning approaches, support accessed and available for home educators
- the benefits and challenges of home educating

It draws on data from the home educator focus groups, interviews and the online questionnaire. The questions asked of the participants related to:

- approaches to home education learning ['school' at home, 'school' on outside visits/classes, or who natural learn/un-school]
- the support available and accessed [for example, tutors; groups; classes; online forums; friends; other home schoolers; what support is missing]
- the challenges of home educating [for example, ostracism; lack of understanding; anxiety; financial worries; family acceptance; judgements; access to specialist resources, planning learning, dual roles (parent/teacher), juggling responsibilities]
- the benefits of home educating [for example, choice; confidence; control; creativity; independence; empowerment; time with child; non-conformity]

Figure 1 provides a visual overview of the coding and analysis framework, and the key themes relating to learning approaches the home educating participants use with their children, their experience of support available and the benefits and challenges of home educating are discussed further below.

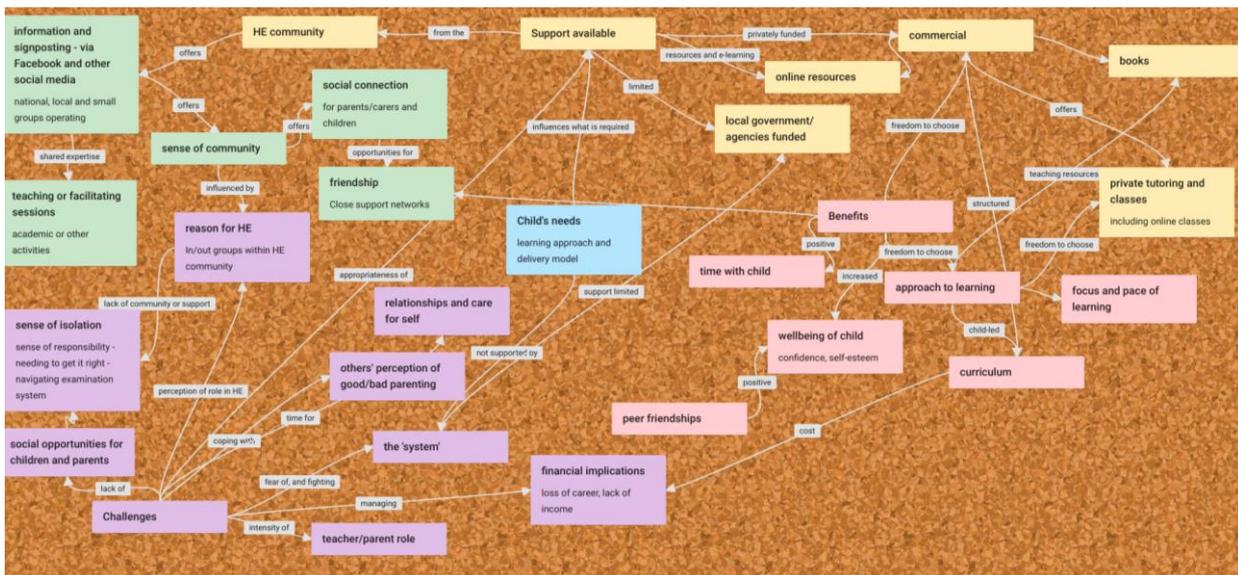


Figure 1: Coding and analysis framework

Overview of the support mechanisms home educators access

The needs of the child were central to parents/carers' approach to home education. The approach to learning and the support accessed were tailored to the individual child and underpinned by their reasons for home educating.

Figure 2 below, summarises the key sources of support identified by the questionnaire respondents (n=72). They were provided with a list of supports that had been identified during the earlier data collection activities (i.e. literature search, focus groups and interviews) and the piloting of the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to identify all sources of support accessed and had the option to select multiple sources of support, which is why the total is greater than 100%. As Figure 1 shows, the most frequently selected sources of support for home education were *books* and *online resources*, which were selected by 82.2% (n=60) of respondents. *Other home educators* (75.3% of respondents, n=55) and *online groups and forums* (72.6%, n=53) were also important to these respondents. Of less importance to this group was the support of their child's previous school (4.1% of respondents, n=3); another school or the LA's elective home education advisors (both 5.5% of respondents, n=4).

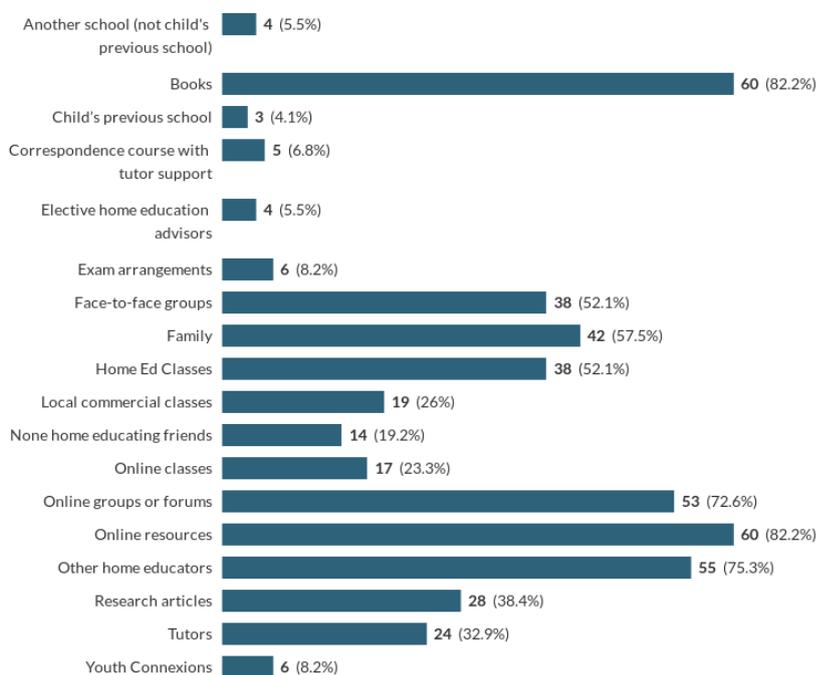


Figure 2: Support accessed by n=74 questionnaire respondents (n=3 did not respond)

Respondents were also given opportunities to indicate (in free-text boxes) what were their most important sources of support and what support they felt was missing. These responses are discussed below, together with responses from focus group and interview participants.

Accessing learning that meets the needs of the child

Regardless as to whether they felt they had a choice about home educating their children or not, many of the research participants identified flexibility as a key benefit of home educating. Flexibility was defined by participants as the opportunity for their children to access learning that is constructed to meet their individual needs: what, when and how they learned.

When asked about the benefits of home educating, many of the parents/carers spoke of being able to focus on their child's interests, managing the pace of learning and creating a calm, less pressurised environment for learning:

If something's not working, we can change, we can stop, we can go back, we can look at it again or I can just stop and say right, we're going to come back to that in a year's time.

With home education you have the ability to teach through their interests and to their interests and you also have, I think, the free time to do a lot of...things...use a lot of skills that you need for life in a less challenging way.

Apart from a couple of exceptions of classes that we go out to, if it doesn't seem to be the right time and if they're not mentally in the right place for something, we can wait until they are. And we can do that this evening instead or tomorrow morning and sometimes they might...we might be very much sort of in a learning zone of something and we can...we have the freedom then to say right, OK well we'll go off to London tomorrow and we'll go to that museum and look at that more, so I really like that aspect of it.

The networks and support mechanisms in the home-education community reflect the range of reasons for home-educating and the needs of the children. For example, there are unschooling groups, these may include families that have always home educated but also families who feel their child has been damaged by the education system and need time to rebuild, for example, their mental health, confidence or interest in learning. Some parents/carers reported needing to allow their child time and space to 'mend' before attempting any learning – formal or informal.

There are also groups of home educators who wish to follow a more structured curriculum, creating a 'home-school' environment with, for example, online resources and curriculum-focused study guides and the children regularly attending external curriculum-focused sessions.

Designing the 'curriculum'

Interview participants were asked what an 'average week' might look like for their children. For some, there was no typical week. Learning content was driven by what was of interest to the child, a topic or project, which often involved pedagogic approaches such as self-directed learning, including research or problem-solving skills. Skills, such as reading and comprehension, would be embedded within the activities. Other families would often use a 'project-style' pedagogic approach to the learning but these might be part of a structured curriculum or follow the content of the National Curriculum.

Many of the families who took part in the research have regular, timetabled activities for their children often organised around external classes. There are both freely available and commercial resources, such as e-learning courses, books and a very wide range of material available on the internet. English and maths were core subjects that were either focused on with parents/carers, often daily, and/or external classes or tutors. Several parents/carers mentioned that their children were studying a modern foreign language online.

There was a very wide range of different classes and activities listed by the home-educating research participants, such as drama clubs, science workshops, book clubs, choir, RE, sports

clubs, art and crafts. Some sessions are paid for by parents/carers and others were provided by other home-educating parents/carers and friends, taking it in turns to run sessions based on their own expertise and interests. Parents/carers reported travelling around the county and beyond on a regular basis, so their children could attend classes. Parents/carers often spoke of having time to include music, arts-based and creative activities in their children's education, including visiting art galleries and museums, to enrich their children's learning experience. Activities that they felt had often been squeezed out of the school curriculum or were too much for their children to cope with as extra-curricular activities after the school day or when venues were busy at weekends.

Opportunities to learn through play were something several participants felt was not possible in the curriculum-and-assessment focused school day. In the focus groups, parents/carers felt time for their children to spend days being a child and sharing that experience with other families and children were benefits of home education.

Life skills were also mentioned as an important part of their children's learning by many of the parents/carers participating in the research. This would include finances, shopping, cooking and social skills – parents/carers felt they had time to support their children with these skills as a natural part of their day. For some children, opportunities to learn life skills and socialise in a safe, non-judgemental environment were considered fundamental for the child's wellbeing and development.

Social networks and socialising

Many of the home educators interviewed considered themselves active members of a home-education 'community', making use of social media such as Facebook, to communicate with one another, organise meetups, events and so on. Some participants mentioned belonging to several social media groups online as these would offer different types of support networks, including sharing experiences, ideas and sometimes reassurance, or were used as a space to organise events or meeting up.

And because there's a whole community that...there's people who've come before so you can...they share the experiences and you go...OK; not reading at four, five, six, seven, eight is normal. So, you know, you have their experiences to help you.

The concept of 'normalising' and what is considered normal, was a reoccurring theme in the focus group and interview data. The lack of flexibility of the education 'system' to meet the needs of individual children, especially those with SEND, experienced by many of the parents/carers, meant that they often felt that school only offered a one-size-fits-all approach. Children's social and emotional needs and development did not, in their opinion, always fit with this inflexible approach. The opportunity for their children to learn on a one-to-one basis or in much smaller classes or groups was often seen as a benefit of home education and built the child's confidence.

Child who pretty much never sort of left my side is definitely my most confident [...]. I think that you know, we've always...in my lifetime, we've always had this opinion that you need to kind of push your children away and you need to get them doing lots of different things because that's what's going to grow their self-esteem and that the more they're

with the parents, the more likely they are to be clingy, and I think we've really mis-read that and that actually, when children have their parents, they have a safety-place that's very close by, they're more likely to go and try new things because they know they can come and run back to you and I think that that is definitely the most valuable thing that all my children have.

I think in terms of life skills, they are head and shoulders above their school peers actually, that's often commented on. I'm often told that they are so kind of confident and capable.

Some parents/carers did identify finding opportunities for their children to socialise regularly with children of their own age as a challenge. The nature of home education can sometimes mean that families do not attend the same sessions all the time, so there is less opportunity to form friendships. However, many parents/carers felt that their children get to know children across the age range, from different backgrounds and have the opportunity to build positive relationships.

My child's not socially isolated and I'm not; we get, [...] , I get...they get quality socialisation, so rather than just socialisation, so...and what I mean by that is, if they go to school, there are twenty-nine other children that are together just because of their age and where they live. And that's it.

My child's socialising with children of different ages so there are quite a few children their age that they have met which is nice for them but also like kids who are older and younger and adults so they are kind of having to communicate with lots of different people from different ages so I think that's quite good for them as well.

Managing the teacher/parent role

Participants often spoke of the learning being child-led but some also felt they needed to balance this to include some subjects and topics they felt their children needed to cover, even if they were less interested, to build their resilience.

I want to strike a balance between actually following their own interests and learning to persevere with things that they maybe don't like very much or aren't very good at.

One of the challenges identified by some parents/carers was negotiating the parent/teacher role.

Trying to negotiate their unwillingness to learn can be quite a challenge sometimes. And knowing where to ...where to be their friend and where to draw the authority line and I mean that's always true with parenting but it's kind of, it's more so and it's more often when you're home schooling.

Parents/carers taking part in the research talked of navigating the range of available support and resources to make decisions for their child's education. Many of the parents/carers, were very proactive in finding resources but it took a lot of commitment and many were anxious about 'doing the right thing' for their child.

I think...I think in terms of resources, there's a ton of resources out there and because we're not ones to just sit at home, we go out, we look for people, we look for, you know,

help and connect with people a lot and there's lots of people who are willing to help or suggest classes or, you know. I think for me, the hardest part is maybe sometimes you feel if you don't know if you're doing the right thing or self-doubt.

Downside; it is hard work, it's tiring, I'm not going to lie, you know, it takes a big commitment and I think anyone that's finding it easy is...well, I dunno. I put a lot of effort into it. I plan it a lot, we work hard to make sure she's getting a full, balanced education.

Parents/carers with more than one child often spoke of needing to juggle the needs of their children, especially where they had different interests, or when one, or more of them were not home schooled.

Being with their children 24/7 was considered both a benefit and sometimes a challenge by parents/carers. Many parents/carers felt seeing their children grow and learn and spending time as a family were benefits of home educating.

I think my relationship with my children has definitely improved as I've kind of spent more time with them and got to know them better as people. So, I think that's definitely a benefit from our family, at least.

Opportunities and time to talk with their children were seen as a benefit but equally, parents/carers sometimes considered the intensity of the relationship with their child and the lack of any time for themselves challenging.

Perceptions of home education

Many of the parents/carers who took part in the research were concerned about the recent negative media coverage of home education and felt that needing to justify home education to others, including members of their families, was unhelpful. While some of the participants felt supported by family and friends, many felt themselves judged and perceived as 'bad' parents/carers because their children are not attending school. Several spoke of feeling isolated.

Participants reported feeling misunderstood by education and healthcare professionals, and local government agencies. The home educators were generally quite irritated by the rather negative 'assumption that we're all out to abuse our children', but equally they did recognise that, just like in mainstream education, there will be children who need safeguarding:

You know we're all sitting round here and we are all...lovely, reasonable people but there will be children out there who aren't at school and who do need Safeguarding, so it's how...how do you...you reach those children...

One participant felt home educators could also play their role in supporting more vulnerable children:

There will be children and young people out there who do need support so that is why it would be really good to work with, you know, a group of parents, of Home Educators to sort of work towards how you can help those children.

But to do so would be on the understanding that there are safeguarding issues for children both in and outside school, and that it should be the safeguarding question that should be addressed rather than demonising all home educators:

The important questions like, you know, the children who need Safeguarding; what can actually be done about that, you know? Let's not mix it with what Home Education is; actually look at the problem.

Financing home education

The financial implications of home educating were reported by most of the research participants as a key challenge. This included loss of income for the parent who was home educating and the cost of, for example, resources, tuition and classes, and travel.

The cost is certainly an issue, yep. I think of it really as a sort of private education so I know that people do home educate on all kinds of budgets so you know, and there are people who do home educate on a very low budget but...I do pay for a lot of things for the children to do and a lot of classes and groups so there's definitely a cost implication.

I mean, the challenge is for me is it's financially, you know: first of all, I can't work and secondly, I have to pay for all of this, all the lessons that they do, all the things, the trips into London, the train fares, you know, that's really tough.

Many of the research participants identified a need for financial support to cover the cost of home educating and were frustrated that there was no government funding available. Fees for examinations such as GCSEs were considered expensive and must be paid for privately if children are home educated. Questionnaire respondents with children who had taken external examinations, such as GCSEs and A levels, reported using the support of examination centres. Of the 10 participants that had, 7 used school-based centres, and 3 private centres.

Support for children with special educational needs

Several parents/carers spoke of their struggle to gain the support they needed to get an EHCP they felt necessary to access additional funding and support for their child. Some reported needing to finance assessments themselves and calling on friends with the relevant expertise to identify what was required. As noted above, other parents/carers reported that the EHCP had not been helpful for gaining the support needed when their children were in school.

Some home-educating parents/carers participating in the research paid for additional specialist support themselves, while others relied on being signposted to available education resources by different agencies and using a trial-and-error approach to find what pedagogic approach worked. Research participants with children with SEND often spoke of feeling overwhelmed.

A few parents/carers taking part in the research had taken legal action to get the support needed for their child's education but as described by one parent, it was considered expensive and 'bloody' for all concerned.

Parents/carers of children with SEND, highlighted the additional support and flexibility that would be needed for a transition back into the mainstream education system at age 16.

You know, if you have a child with additional needs and they're home educated then they may want to go back into formal learning, structured further education and not necessarily when they're sixteen because I think the thing that I have learned is that you have to plan and do things gradually; you can't just go from, you know, from being home educated to then just saying, right, you're now going to go into further education, you know, when you're sixteen and that's it; you know, you need maybe one morning a week to start off with say when you're fourteen, you know, gradually build up over time and so I think a lot more thought and a lot more flexibility as to entry points back in would be really valuable.

Several families spoke of the lack of an appropriate school environment and support for children, who for various reasons could not manage within mainstream school, especially secondary school, but did not require a special school. This often included children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD] assessment, where their mainstream schools were considered by the parents/carers participating in the research to either not understand the needs of their child and/or did not feel able to put reasonable adjustments and support in place.

Summary of requests for additional support for home-educating families

This section summarises additional support needs identified by participating families. The support needs are considered under three categories:

- greater support either structurally or financially with access to existing resources, networks or classes
- access to specialist support that is currently either not available or limited, such as expertise around teaching approaches, navigating the examination system or supporting children with SEND
- support for, and within, the school 'system' to offer, for example, differentiated or flexible learning, to make reasonable adjustments and work collaboratively with parents/carers, so children can either remain in school full-time or access the curriculum on a part-time basis.

Structural and financial support to access existing resources, networks and classes

The majority of research participants identified a lack of financial support as a key challenge for home educators. Participants suggested that access to at least some of the funding schools would have received for educating their child/ren should be made available to support home educators, especially to pay for resources and external classes.

Although many participants reported being part of a number of home educator networks, some suggested they would appreciate a single, centralised support structure, signposting parents/carers to support available and to relevant information. This could include access to resources that are usually free to schools.

Access to specialist support that is currently not available or limited

Many of the research participants, including some who are qualified teachers, identified a need for specialist support. Parents/carers often reported trial-and-error approaches to find the best

way to teach their children. Several wanted support to understand whether their child/ren were making the necessary progress, navigating the examination system and assessment criteria and how to manage the transition process if their children wanted to return to school or go to college or university later. Some parents/carers who were home educating more than one child, mentioned needing guidance to identify ways to differentiate learning.

Very specific, specialist guidance and support for parents/carers of children with SEND was identified as a key support need that was often unavailable or limited unless paid for privately. Even if parents/carers could afford to pay, identifying the right specialist support for their child was often identified as an issue.

Support for, and within, the school 'system'

Many of the research participants wanted to feel that they had appropriate choices for their children within the education system.

Research participants who felt they had had no choice but to home educate their children often reported feeling failed by the education system and/or support from individual schools or teachers. A very small number of parents/carers reported that their child was able to attend school on a part-time basis. Others reported that the one-size-fits-all approach of many schools and the divisive nature of school performance measures, including attendance figures, meant that schools either felt unable or were unwilling to make any adjustments or offer a differentiated approach.

Several parents/carers reported needing to 'battle' for any support from the school or the LA and some had taken legal action to get support for their child.

Key messages

- The needs of the child drove the approach to learning adopted by the home-educating families participating in the research. The child's needs influenced the structure, content and mode of learning. Participants whose children had previously attended school, often reported that their children were much more confident and less anxious working, for example, at their own pace, being self-directed learners or learning in small groups, than when they were in school.
- Regardless of whether they felt they had a choice about home educating their children or not, many of the parents/carers identified flexibility as a key benefit of home educating. Flexibility was defined by participants as the opportunity for their children to access learning that is tailored to their individual needs: what, when and how they learned.
- The home education community is an important source of support for many of the home educators taking part in the research. The community supports the sharing of experiences, signposting of support and resources available, and running workshops or social events. Social media, such as Facebook, is used extensively for organising learning/social opportunities and staying connected to other home educators

- Parents/carers of children with SEND often reported struggling to get appropriate support when their children were in school, sometimes even when there was an EHCP in place. Some parents/carers paid for additional specialist support, others relied on being signposted to available resources by different agencies and using a trial-and-error approach to find what worked. When home educating, some parents/carers talked about the difficulties of finding the support to address the learning needs of their child. Some research participants with children with SEND spoke of feeling overwhelmed.
- The financial implications of home educating were reported by most participants as a key challenge. This included loss of income for the parent who was home educating and the cost of, for example, resources, tuition, classes, and travel. Many of the parents/carers identified a need for financial support to cover the cost of home educating.

Summary of discussions in the LA focus group

Reasons for home education: views from the LA focus group

The focus group with a small number of representatives from the local authority was designed to bring an alternative lens of individual practitioner experiences on the subject of home education to the home educators who comprised the majority of our sample; their reflections do not necessarily represent the official position of the LA. In many cases there was resonance between the two groups. Participants also recognised that some parents/carers decided to home educate because they were dissatisfied with the school system. They suggested that this was because the current school model does not suit everyone and that the system can be restrictive. This restrictiveness, participants felt, was impacting negatively on teachers' confidence to try something different and to be creative.

The LA focus group recognised the budgetary issues and quoted the removal of support that used to be more present in schools, e.g. Attendance Officers, Pastoral Workers, Family Workers. This lack of additional support was putting more pressure on teachers:

There was a lot going on that has been slowly and surely eroded away, so the only people that can deal with these sorts of issues are the teaching staff. Well, they've got so much on their hands anyway, there's often not the time to really thoroughly support these families.

The impact of transitions was discussed in relation to those who have had negative parenting experiences, or who lack stability in their home life because it is more difficult to build key relationships in secondary school. It was suggested that the building of community and a sense of belonging in secondary schools is important not just for vulnerable children, but for any child.

As with the home educator data, there was also the recognition that children's wellbeing played an increasingly important role in decisions to home educate, with one participant noting that sometimes parents/carers remove their children from school as they feel it will be less damaging in the long-term mentally, preferring to educate them in the home environment.

As already noted, some of the support for children who were struggling in school has been removed or is greatly diminished, meaning that it is hard to cope with demand. This can have knock-on effects in terms of the support put in place in relation to, for example, an EHCP. The difficulties of applying for and gaining an EHCP were also raised in the LA focus group, where it

was felt that there were often misunderstandings about the process of applying for an EHCP, which does involve the LA, but is led by the school. The short supply of Educational Psychologists means that 'schools are sort of left to struggle on their own' and might be reticent to start the EHCP process 'if they can't get advice from an Educational Psychologist' due to reduced accessibility.

One area of concern that came through more strongly in this focus group was that some parents/carers might choose to home educate avoid to *child protection procedures* and *safeguarding*; their worry was that in taking the children out of the education system, the children would potentially be put in danger. There are checks and balances within the LA when there are safeguarding concerns. When a decision is made for a child to be removed from school, there is a removal from roll form to be completed by the school. That form includes a question: 'do you have any safeguarding concerns about this child?' And if that box is ticked, there is always follow up. Based on the information that is returned to the LA, they do not see many cases like this, and if there were issues prior to the child leaving school, then the safeguarding teams continue to work with that family, 'it's not the case that they can become EHE and everything stops'. It was recognised, however, that currently there is no way of accessing those children who have never been registered and have, therefore, never been to school.

In relation to access to school, the issue of limited alternative provision was raised: 'the options for parents/carers are: it's school or it's home'. One example, raised in the focus group, was the issue of large Hertfordshire secondary schools, and it was noted that some younger people needed a smaller secondary school setting to thrive. Participants outlined a further lack of alternative provision, specifically for young people approaching their GCSEs who have perhaps not been in school for some time, having been home educated. It can be difficult to place these children, who may have missed much of their GCSE syllabus, within mainstream schools. Education Support Centres sometimes took these children, but they were not always the most appropriate settings.

Focus group participants also highlighted the spike in numbers deciding to home educate in Year Seven, when parents/carers have not been allocated their preferred choice and therefore 'don't want to accept the place they've been offered'. Some of these home educated children do come back into school after a period of time, through in-year application. Some parents/carers will also off-roll their child if they feel their child should be in a Special School. But, even with an EHCP, children might not always be placed in specialist provision if they make the decision to return their child to school.

The LA focus group recounted examples of the pressures put on families, and often those most vulnerable families, from some schools who 'are actively trying to persuade parents/carers to go EHE [elective home education]'. This pressure was often the result of external measures put on schools; one participant highlighted how attendance monitoring from Ofsted may influence how school leaders deal with frequently absent children. Parents/carers themselves might decide to home educate following ongoing attendance issues, and the resulting fines. Rather than working through solutions to attendance issues, which can take time, parents/carers might simply take the children out of school to avoid accumulating further fines.

It was noted that there were discrepancies in the numbers of children coming out of different schools and that more work could be done to understand whether there were patterns across schools with similar characteristics. One participant made a call for Trustees to look more closely at their school's data on home education:

A small bit of advice, and it's useful advice would be that we kind of put a bit of pressure on the Trustees to get their Heads to report regularly on how many [...] are EHE, and say to the Trustees, you must ask the Head every meeting, how many are EHE, and why are they EHE, so think there's a big role that Trustees could play.

Perceived pressures by the school to remove a child might result in parents/carers signing a piece of paper which will de-register their child without really understanding what they are doing, or when they have been misinformed about what they are entitled to when they deregister. In one example shared in the focus group, a participant spoke of parents/carers, in the process of applying to a different school, who had been told that their child would be permanently excluded unless they electively home educated, and that a permanent exclusion would be a black mark on a child's record. This is misinformation, the participant outlined; if a child is permanently excluded, the LA has a responsibility to educate, if a child is EHE, they do not. The LA needs to be satisfied that, if a child is EHE, adequate arrangements for education are in place, not to provide that education.

Finally, participants recognised that some parents/carers, though they felt this was a small and reducing group, actively chose to home educate due to philosophical beliefs that jarred with the school system:

There's the lifestyle choice belief in, you know, travelling around the world would be of greater educational value, or you know, small group, exploring through an interest-led sort of at your child's level.

There were, as participants noted, different groups of home educators. For one participant there were two groups, 'lifestyle group' and then:

There's the larger, I would suspect, majority of parents who have either been forced through the back door, front door, side door because it's an alternative to attendance issues and they don't know where to go.

For another participant 'there is definitely more than two camps', those who really want to do it philosophically, those who've been forced due to attendance issues, and then those where the 'child doesn't fit in a school environment'. Each group will have different expectations and experiences.

Who is missing from this data?

The participants noted that, in a self-selecting study such as this one, some parents/carers would not have volunteered to participate in the research because some people have 'intentions that are obviously not good for the child'. They may not care about their child's education nor want to educate them at all. There might also be parents/carers who remove their children to avoid child protection procedures, and that clearly has implications for safeguarding, as discussed above.

Another group that is missing from this data is children from the Traveller community, and there is a community of Traveller home educators in Hertfordshire, as the LA focus group affirmed. Many Traveller children begin to be home educated after primary school, and then sometimes seek to re-enter education to attend college. We did not reach the Traveller community through this research and their voices are missing from our data.

Finally, isolated families are also likely to be missing from this data, as these families are not engaged in support networks and their children may have had no experience outside of the home. The parents/carers may not be able to provide the educational support needed, 'because, again, these people are not teachers'.

Support

The focus group participants identified some of the kinds of support that the LA provides. They noted that teachers do play a role in helping to keep children in school. This often involves creating a sense of belonging and community within the school and having good communication channels with parents/carers. It was noted, however, that some schools did that much better than others.

The LA also play an important first port-of-call role. They can support parents/carers in making informed decisions to home educate. They offer verbal advice, as well as facts and information about home education. They provide a list of resources that people can follow up. They can also point to other services, such as Education Support for Medical Absence. They will also suggest that parents/carers who are seeking an EHCP keep their child in school, so that the school can support their application.

The LA advise on entering as an external candidate for GCSEs; however, there is currently no support with the cost of GCSEs. One participant noted that the LA could apply to the government for funds to support GCSEs, just as the colleges do. There might well be other support that could be provided (e.g. online resources or one-off workshops with specialists). If funding goes directly to home educating parents/carers, however, participants asked: 'you would want to know where that money is, you know, when money's given to schools, they're held to account how are you spending that money'. Participants felt that there was often a misconception that the money for a home educated child stays with the LA. This is not the case:

The money stays at the school. But then if another child joins and fills the place, the school need that money for that new child. But then the child is off...the next time the numbers go in for funding, obviously that money's just not claimed for, from Central Government.

The LA also, then, advise parents/carers that the LA does not hold funds for home education and that there is no financial support for it. A key aim of the LA is to correct misapprehensions about home education, ideally before the decision to withdraw the child has been fully made.

Parents/carers, however, often contact the LA too late, when they have already de-registered their child and then there is nothing the LA can do, even if the parents/carers then realised 'they've made a terrible mistake', either through the misinformation with which they have been provided, or because they realise that they are unable to home educate. If home education does not work out, then it is often hard to transition back into school and the child enters a cycle of school and home education, which can impact negatively on the child and their learning.

The focus group participants discussed the provision of a 'cooling-off' period. Some participants felt that parents/carers should be given time to consider options and better understand what the commitment entails. This approach might mean that more children would remain in school;

equally, it was noted, however, that this approach would be open to abuse with parents/carers potentially using the 'cooling-off' period for other purposes.

In terms of support when parents/carers have decided to home educate, they can meet with one of the two home education advisors in Hertfordshire. The advisors signpost to different support (e.g. websites and the national curriculum), advise on approaches to learning and teaching, and discuss children and work. Some parents/carers off-roll their children so they can work with them: 'they don't realise that they would need a work permit for that or that it can't be that they go to work for five days a week.' Advisors can discuss with parents/carers the balance between work and learning.

According to participants in the focus group, the LA would like to engage more with the home education community, but 'it's difficult to see an easy way'. Participants in the focus groups felt that there was suspicion of the LA within the home education community and that sometimes it actively encouraged parents/carers not to engage with the LA home education team and one participant wondered from where such negativity stemmed. There was a concern that, by listening to negative perceptions, parents/carers would cut themselves off from some valuable support. With greater engagement and an understanding of what the community offers, the LA could signpost new home educating parents/carers to existing support so that the parents/carers are not isolated and cascade training and information through members of the home education community to share more widely.

Changes over time

It was recognised that the home education community was changing. This was noted by those in the community who had been home educating for a long time, and also the LA representatives. In terms of the reasons why parents/carers home educate, the LA records indicate that there has been a shift from positive to negative reasons for home education. This suggests that parents/carers feel more compelled to remove their children from school rather than make a positive decision to do so. These views were also echoed in the home educator data; one home educator reflected on how home education has changed over time and noted:

It's a lot more...how can I put it, educational, you know, people getting together to do classes rather than the getting together to play and also there are an awful lot of people who have been forced into it, you know, who don't actually, who would, you know, we're sort of native Home Educators if you like and there are an awful lot of people who are not like that, who for various reasons, a lot of reasons, you know, SEN kids who, you know, haven't settled into mainstream school or it hasn't worked out so it's a very different...they're a different kind of Home Educator from us

This has the potential to change the community, so that it becomes more structured and formalised, the same participant continued:

There's all these people claiming to be doing all these workshops and all these classes and everything and a lot of people must feel very pressured that that's how you have to do it.

The home education community is growing and evolving, and that evolution is shaped by the motivations, expectations, and experiences of those who home educate.

4. Discussion

The findings reported here broadly align with findings reported in the literature, yet the respondents' accounts add rich depth and evidence the many reasons that propel parents/carers to home educate, alongside the benefits and challenges of home education, and the support structures on which home educators draw. The participants responded openly and frankly about their experiences, and their stories reflect the complexity of that decision-making process, the interconnectedness of the reasons, and the layering of experiences that led to a decision to withdraw a child from school or not send them to school at all. Parents/carers rarely provided a single reason for their decision; reasons were multifaceted. It could be, for example, that the parents/carers have been struggling to gain support and recognition for a child with SEND within a school system that, they feel, places more value on assessment results than on individual children and their needs. The child's experience of such a school environment could have a negative impact on the child and their wellbeing, and subsequently also the parents/carers' wellbeing. In the absence of a viable alternative school experience, parents/carers may decide to withdraw their child from school and home educate, either temporarily until a more appropriate setting is found, or permanently. It is the combination of experiences that fuel the decision to home educate, although a specific trigger can accelerate that decision. Through this research, we have sought to look across all the unique stories, such as this (fabricated) one, and look for threads of commonality.

One clear thread is that of the inflexibility of the school system; an inflexible system that, participants noted, struggles to deal with difference and expects all children to 'fit in'. Inflexibility was described in terms of access to school (school start age, attendance modes), curriculum, learning and teaching approaches, and the sharp focus on testing and monitoring. Dissatisfaction with the school system is not an uncommon concern. Research conducted internationally (e.g. Israel, Neuman & Guterman, 2017; USA, Bielick, 2008; Canada & Olsen, 2008), and within the UK (e.g. Hopwood et al, 2007; Arora, 2006; Kendall & Atkinson, 2006; Smith & Nelson, 2015), all report parents/carers' concerns about the school system, standards of education, classroom experiences, and curriculum. The dissatisfaction reported in this research also echoes more general concerns about the current education system in England that are widely reported in the general and professional media. Like these research participants, others have commented on the comparatively early school-starting age (Ellyatt, 2015) and the negative impact that accountability measures (including Ofsted) and the focus on high stakes assessment (Pells, 2017; Hutchings, 2015; Rogers, 2017) can have on what is taught, how children learn, and also on children and teachers' wellbeing. The participants in the research were aware of the impact of the pressures of external monitoring, but also of the problems associated with budget cuts (see, e.g. Weale & Adams, 2019) and the problems of retaining teachers in English schools (see, e.g. Worth, 2018). How schools operate within such a system was also a concern for parents/carers, with accounts of schools failing to create conducive learning environments, reports of sustained and un-dealt with bullying (by teachers and children) and a lack of support for children's

individual needs. Parents/carers, in this research, questioned why they should enter their children into a system that was clearly not working. With a lack of alternative provision, parents/carers decided to withdraw their children from school. The inflexibility of the school system was seen in sharp contrast to the flexibility that parents/carers described as being one of the key benefits of home education. Home educating parents/carers, in this study, really valued having the flexibility to cater to the needs of their children in terms of structure, content, pace and modes of learning. Parents/carers who expressed their dissatisfaction with the school system did so based on their children's negative experiences of being within the system, their own experiences as educational professionals within the school system, or their perceptions based on people around them. This dissatisfaction is not unique to the home educators in this sample, nor to home educators in Hertfordshire, but, as the evidence above suggests, reflects a national concern about the way in which the current school system operates across England.

A second strong thread in the data reported here is the experiences of parents/carers with children with special educational needs and additional learning needs. While parents/carers reflected generally on their dissatisfaction with the school system, the experiences were marked for parents/carers of children with SEND and ALN. The inflexibility of the system is more apparent when there is a child that needs reasonable adjustments to be made to be able to operate within that system. The data reports of parents/carers' long and difficult battles to get appropriate support within schools, the active resistance of some schools to provide that support and make reasonable adjustments, the challenges of applying for an EHCP, and of the inadequacy of the support available to implement it. The lack of alternative provision and of finding appropriate special schools contributed to parents/carers' feelings of isolation and powerlessness, with little option than to withdraw their children in order to support their learning. As with dissatisfaction with the school system, the specific experiences of SEND children and decisions to home educate also feature in the literature internationally (e.g. USA: Ray, 2015, Bielick, 2008; Canada: Olsen, 2008), and in the UK specifically. SEND is reported as a reason for deciding to home educate (e.g. Smith & Nelson, 2015; D'Arcy, 2012; Arora, 2006); and research findings reports on the 'negative experiences' that SEND children have in school (Maxwell et al, 2018), the impact on emotional wellbeing (Morton, 2010), and the failure of schools to accommodate needs adequately (Parsons & Lewis, 2010; Hopwood et al, 2007; Arora 2006). This sample of home educators, again, is not unique; their experiences reflect underlying issues in terms of support for SEND within the school system. There has been an increase in the numbers of children with SEND in English schools, with a 35% increase between 2014-2018 in the numbers of children with an EHCP (Parish, Bryant & Swords, 2019), without the commensurate increase in funding (Parveen, 2019). While further funding for children with complex needs and disabilities has been allocated (DfE, 2018b), there are concerns that it will not be enough. Local authorities are reporting a gap between their high needs block allocation and their high needs expenditure, which is predicted to grow even further (Parish, Bryant & Swords, 2019). Access to that funding through funding formulas, which normally require schools to contribute the first £10K for SEND from their core budgets (Perera, 2019) and attainment measures that do not support inclusion (Parish, Bryant & Swords 2019), might deter schools from accepting SEND children. The lack of funds for additional support means that it is

increasingly difficult for SEND children to thrive in the school system (Perera 2019). There are reports of SEND children being taken out of school because the school cannot support their needs (Busby, 2019) and of parents/carers involved in tribunals and appeals in order to access the provision their children need (Perera, 2019). While perhaps not explicitly pressured to off-roll, which does occur (Owen, 2019), parents/carers were nonetheless left to feel that the school system was not appropriate for their children.

The bad experiences of school caused by a 'lack of fit' with the system, either as a child with SEND or not, are perceived to have a negative impact on a child's mental health and wellbeing. In a context where the mental health of pupils is deemed to be 'at crisis point' (Weale, 2019) and a lack of access to external support system such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), parents/carers, in this study, reported removing their children from school as less damaging for the child in the long run. These decisions are made as a reaction to a negative experience; compulsion rather than choice.

Some parents/carers who felt compelled to home educate, come to embrace home education, even if it was not their original choice, when they see the positive impact it has on their child (in terms of confidence, progress, wellbeing). They engage in the supportive communities that operate online and face-to-face through local groups and classes, that appear to be strong and active in Hertfordshire and become to feel comfortable with those choices. Yet for others, the battle continues, as decisions to home educate are not permanent, with the search to find the right support, and place for children. Sometimes these parents/carers lack aptitude or the finances to home educate. The financial burden of home education is significant, irrespective of whether this was a positive or negative decision (e.g. see Williams, 2018); often requiring one parent to give up paid employment, while incurring additional costs for classes, educational trips, books, resources and tuition. Parents/carers wanted to access some the funds that they felt they were entitled to in order to educate their children. Parents/carers, for whom home education was not a choice, were often negative and resentful of the position in which they found themselves. These experiences contrast with parents/carers who have always wanted to home educate or who find home education (due to family circumstances) convenient. While these families educational and parenting philosophies might be at odds with the educational system, and they might rail against its inflexibility, their decision comes from a very different place. It is a 'lifestyle' choice, where the school system contradicts 'the lifestyle they wanted to live' (Morton, 2010). The choice here is positive and considered.

These reflect different groups here, those who see home education as a positive choice and those who chose home education as a reaction to negative experiences. This distinction has been recognised by others (e.g. Webb, 2011 distinguishes between those who choose and those who are forced). The two groups will have different routes into home education and are likely to experience home education differently too. Respondents, in this research, reflected on how the home education community had changed over time, with an increase of those home-educating as a response to negative experiences within the school system. While there will always be those who home educated for positive reasons, the rise in those home educating through compulsion was concerning and was creating a larger and more diverse community of home

educators. There is another group of home educators, who are not represented in this research, those who use home education to evade the system. The safeguarding of these children is a concern for LAs, who have a 'general duty to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children' (DfE, 2019b: 16) and specifically in relation to home education to 'identify children in their area who are not receiving a suitable education' (DfE, 2019b: 14). High profile cases of abuse of children being home educated (e.g. Hill, 2015), illegal schools (Ofsted, 2019), and concerns about 'invisible' children raised by the Children's Commissioner (Children's Commissioner, 2019), have fuelled the proposal (which went out for consultation, the results of which are being analysed) of a register for children not being educated in school, including those being home educated (DfE, 2019b). This proposal was not well received by the home education community who see it as 'unwarranted intrusion' into family life (e.g. Weale, 2019). The associated coverage, around the time of data collection, was seen, by participants in this study, to contribute to the negative perception society has of home education, which can leave home educators feeling vulnerable, stigmatised and on the fringes of society.

It is important not to conflate the different groups who home educate. While a clear limitation of the data collected for this project is that it did not reach any home educators who are looking to 'hide' their children, our findings showed that the home educators who participated in this study, whether in that position through a positive choice, or making the best of an unplanned situation, brought about by circumstances, were seeking to make their children's lives better through home education. For these home educators the children's best interests were at the heart of what they do.

The following sets of learning points are presented as actions that could be taken to recognise the different between groups of home educators; create conducive school learning environments for all children; scrutinise home education data; support parents/carers in making informed choices about home education; and provide support for home education

Learning points for consideration

Recognise different groups of home educators

This research revealed that there were distinctively different groups of home educators. These were parents/carers who had made an informed, positive and often philosophically driven choice. In contrast other parents/carers had felt compelled to home educate due to a mismatch (for various reasons) between their child and the school environment; it was felt that this group has increased in recent years. Other (often negative) portrayals of home educators, particularly in the popular press, were reflected upon by participants. These groups are likely to have different motivations, experiences and needs. The following actions should be considered:

- Recognise that different groups of home educators will have different motivations and experiences and may well require different support, guidance and oversight;
- Appreciate that some parents/carers feel compelled to home educate due to their experiences of the school system and that more flexibility in the system might reduce the numbers deciding to home educate;

- Redress the negative portrayal of home educators in public discourse and the press with depictions of the many home educators who prioritise the quality of their children's education.

Further recognition and understanding of the differences between home educators' motivations and experiences will enable the LA treat them appropriately and proportionately.

Create conducive school learning environments for all children

A strong theme throughout the research was dissatisfaction with a school system – perceived to be focussed on assessment, targets, and monitoring – that often could not, or did not want to, differentiate in how they educated children. Reductions in funding meant that the expertise to stretch and challenge children, or to support those children with SEND or compromised wellbeing was frequently difficult to access. While changes to the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (DfE 2019c), along with the promise of further funding for SEND (DfE 2018b) and increased emphasis on children's wellbeing, could alleviate some of the issues raised, the following actions should be considered:

- Ensure further continuing professional development and training is available to increase the ability of senior leaders and teachers to manage different needs within schools in a context of continued funding constraints;
- Clearly signpost routes to additional support provision (including outside agencies) that can help children, whether with SEND or not, who are struggling within the school system in order to enable parents/carers to navigate the options available to them;
- Increase alternative provision options, so that parents/carers have other school-based choices for education;
- Provision of more flexible approaches to school attendance, where appropriate (e.g. staggered schools starts, flex-schooling, part-time attendance).

A more flexible system, that recognises and respects parents/carers' concerns and effectively supports differentiation, might well result in more children remaining within school rather than parents/carers removing their children.

Further analyse home education data

With the prevalence of home education increasing in Hertfordshire and in England more generally, there is a need to more fully analyse the data on home education nationally, locally and at a school-level. A better understanding of how, where and why home education is happening, will create opportunities to channel interventions, funding or support to address potential triggers. The following actions should be considered:

- At a school level: challenge Trustees and Governors to look more carefully at the incidence of children being withdrawn from schools, identify patterns and address any issues that are raised;
- At a county level: develop a more nuanced understanding of the reasons why people home educate – e.g. through the withdrawal questionnaire and follow up discussions, with the systematic recording and analysing of that data;

- Nationally: recognise the different kinds of home educators, and the very different motivations and experiences that they have; appreciate that these differences will be influenced by geographical location, socio-economic status, and children's SEND or ALN.

A better understanding of the reasons why parents/carers home educate will indicate where system wide issues are contributing to decisions to home educate and whether those issues can be minimised and also ensure that adequate support is put in place when parents/carers are making a decision to home educate.

Support parents/carers to make informed choices about home education

While some parents/carers do make very positive, and often philosophically driven, choices to home educate, some parents/carers do not. For them the decision is the result of an ongoing struggle within the system, pressures to withdraw put on them by others, or following misinformation about the penalties faced by staying within school, or the support that the families will be provided when they home educate. To enable parents/carers to make informed choices, the following actions should be considered:

- Provide access to timely and appropriate advice about alternative options and the support available for children who, for whatever reason, do not fit easily within their current school;
- Implement 'cooling off periods', which provide parents/carers with time to think about how they respond to situations and to seek appropriate support and guidance in making their final decision to home educate;
- Enable parents/carers to see different perspectives and hear real-life experiences by accessing people who have considered home education and decided not to, those who are already home educating, those whose children have been home educated and then returned to school, and those who found alternative provision.

If parents/carers are better informed about home education, and know where they can find support, guidance, and alternatives, some parents/carers may ultimately decide not to home educate, or if they do, they will be in a better position to provide the education that their child needs.

Provide support for and guidance on home education

While government funding (directly, or indirectly through the LA) is not provided for home education, there are benefits in providing support and guidance for those who decide to home educate. Some parents/carers see home education as a temporary arrangement and intend to re-enter the school system when issues have been resolved, here support can help in the transition back to school. For those who see home education as a more long-term arrangement, signposting to sources of support can facilitate the provision of appropriate education. The following actions should be considered:

- Provide links to support, sessions, clubs and networks available locally, to enable new home educators to identify what is available to help them in their new role;

- Offer ongoing access to EHE advisors, or a cascading of training and support to those parents/carers who want to develop their ability to educate their children;
- Encourage closer collaboration between the home education community and the LA to establish routes to information, guidance, support and networks; reduce mutual mistrust; and to better understand the motivations for and experiences of home education.

Signposting into the established support networks will help reduce isolation for those parents/carers who are home educating (whether temporarily or permanently). Knowledge of and access to support available will also help those who are seeking to reintegrate their children into school.

5. Final reflections

While the majority of families in Hertfordshire enter their children into the school system, where they stay for the length of their compulsory education, there is an increasing number of parents/carers who, for different reasons, are not following that route. During this research we have spoken to a some of those families and heard their reasons for home educating, the challenges they face, the benefits they gain and the support they draw upon. While this report does not purport to represent all home educators and their motivations for home educating, it does feature the lived experiences of families who have made this decision. The findings, which are not unique to Hertfordshire, raise important learning points that should be considered, and actioned where appropriate in order to provide greater understanding of and support for such families as they seek to home educate their children.

Appendix 1: Reasons why parents educate their child at home

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
A. Academic accomplishment		
One of 6 reasons most commonly selected was: 'Accomplish more academically than in conventional schools'.	USA; survey of African American parents to identify all the reasons/motivations (from a list of 21 including other/another) why they home school their child. Total sample n=81 students – number of parent respondents not clear.	Ray (2015:83)
B. Child wanting to be educated at home		
Parents reported that they were home educating their child with SEND because of the 'child wanting to be educated at home or being able to develop or work at their own pace.'	UK; online survey; 27 respondents: parents, with 1+ child with SEND being home educated.	Parsons and Lewis (2010:77)
C. Child unwilling or unable to go to school (e.g. being unhappy, depressed or stressed at school); school refusal		
'Children are reluctant to go' was one theme identified from analysing the interviews. 'The interviewees related that their children were reluctant to go to school, sometimes as a result of unpleasant experiences there, and in the end the parents accepted the children's position and stopped sending them to school.'	Israel; 25 Israeli mothers were interviewed. They home schooled their children and had at least one primary-school age child (aged 6-12). Each mother was asked to tell their 'founding story' of home schooling: 'Tell me about the decision to begin home schooling'. Then the interviewers asked clarification questions, if needed.	Neuman and Guterman (2017:6)
'Some parents commented on the negative influences of their child's peer group, sometimes causing the child to become very unhappy and unwilling to go to school... the ordeal of getting a child out of the home to go to school is sufficient to motivate parents to choose home schooling...'	Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.	Olsen (2008:109)
'The most frequently given reasons why families decided to home educate were related to school...' One main category	UK; a national omnibus survey administered by the ONS to a randomly selected sample of households was used to collect data on home schooling experiences of	Smith and Nelson (2015:320)

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
was: 'school refusal on the part of the child.'	over 6000 households, of whom 52 had engaged in home schooling. Data are collected by face to face interview. Respondents were asked to provide the main reason why they chose to home educate their children.	
<p>'The reasons behind school refusal grouped together into five broad and interrelated categories: bullying by peers; the ways staff dealt with children; loss or lack of peer friendships; the learning environment; factors within the home.'</p> <p>'The behaviour of the children in this study, prior to being withdrawn from school, generally conformed to that found in other studies of school refusal: clinging, somatic pains, distress, anxiety, bed wetting, night terrors, resistance, depression, a sense of withdrawal, suicidal threat and two suicide attempts.'</p>	UK; participants recruited through national home education newsletters & invited to complete an online questionnaire if their child had said "no" to school. Questionnaires were sent to 35 families, 20 replied, relating to 24 children who had refused school. 5 follow up interviews were conducted with families.	Wray and Thomas (2013:68,71)
Parents reported that they were home educating their child with SEND because the "child was unhappy/stressed/depressed at school"...	UK; online survey; 27 respondents: parents, with 1+ child with SEND being home educated.	Parsons and Lewis (2010:77)
Reasons for home education: questionnaires. Concerns mentioned most frequently included: 'School refusal'. Other reasons selected included: 'Unsettled at school'.	UK; in one Local Education Authority, data obtained through questionnaires completed orally with 65 families when they first registered their children for home education (1998-2001). Also, 12 families, who had home educated for >2 years, were interviewed about their experiences. Many children involved had SEN.	Arora (2006:59)
D. Concern for child's well-being and safety		
'parents identified that issues concerning the safety of a child were a factor that motivated them to investigate other learning alternatives for their child, including home schooling.' One 'safety concern for parents was the potential for	Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed.	Olsen (2008:127, 128)

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
physical or emotional abuse by school staff and peers.'	Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.	
'Most families felt that the overall environment of schools was detrimental to their children's well-being.'	Canada; findings from qualitative interviews with 23 home-schooling families in Ontario & British Columbia. Included questions about parents' motives for home schooling & how they arrived at the decision to home school.	Arai (2000:210)
Reasons Traveller families gave included: 'concerns about their child's safety and wellbeing in an environment dominated by a different culture.'	England; interviews with 11 Traveller families and the 2 main professionals responsible for EHE in one LA.	D'Arcy (2012:117)
'Several families spoke of their children having come close to emotional breakdown prior to being removed from school, including self-harming and suicide attempts. Often this was cited as due to bullying and/or linked to a child having Special Educational Needs (SEN).'	UK; qualitative data collected in 2007, through unstructured interviews with 19 families and one LA official & through observation at home educators' meetings and annual camp. Overall, 40-45 families participated in an intensive way in the research.	Morton (2010:52)
Sample response from a parent of a child with SEND "We were frightened for her sanity and her life".	UK; online survey; 27 respondents: parents, with 1+ child with SEND being home educated.	Parsons and Lewis (2010:77)
E. Customise education for each child		
One of 6 reasons most commonly selected was: 'To customize or individualize the education of each child'.	USA; survey of African American parents to identify all the reasons/motivations (from a list of 21 including other/another) why they home school their child. Total sample n=81 students – number of parent respondents not clear.	Ray (2015:83)
F. Dissatisfaction with or concerns about the educational system or environment		
One super-theme identified from analysing the interviews 'includes stories of parents that are related to the education system. It mainly deals with dissatisfaction with the education system and with the difficulty of parents to commit their children to the education system.' Underlying themes included: <i>'Mismatch between the education</i>	Israel; 25 Israeli mothers were interviewed. They home schooled their children and had at least one primary-school age child (aged 6-12). Each mother was asked to tell their 'founding story' of home schooling: 'Tell me about the decision to begin home schooling'. Then the	Neuman and Guterman (2017:6,7)

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
<i>system and the family and child</i> , <i>'Negative influence of the education system on the child'</i> and <i>'Difficulty with parents separating from children in the context of the education system'</i> .	interviewers asked clarification questions, if needed.	
Reasons selected included: 'Concerned about the school environment, such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure'; 'Dissatisfied with the academic instruction at other schools'; 'Would prefer private school but cannot afford the tuition'.	USA; survey of African American parents to identify all the reasons/motivations (from a list of 21 including other/another) why they home school their child. Total sample n=81 students – number of parent respondents not clear.	Ray (2015:83)
Reasons selected included: 'concern about the school environment ... and dissatisfaction with the academic instruction available at other schools...'	US; 2003 & 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), parents were asked whether particular reasons for home schooling applied to them.	Bielick (2008:2)
<p>'A number of parents ... expressed concern about negative influences of their child's peer group and a desire for a greater degree of parental influence and control with their child's socialization. These parents wanted their children to learn important life lessons from them [the parents] instead of from peers on the playground.'</p> <p>Also <i>'Perceived Negative Influences</i>. The final decision to home school usually came ... after the child had been in a public school for a period of time. When certain behaviors started to change, some parents identified a strong desire to shelter their child from negative peer influences.'</p> <p>Also, 'Concern about curriculum was a motivating factor ... Some parents shared that they found some school curricular content to be extremely controversial and of concern, as it violated their religious and personal values.'</p>	Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.	Olsen (2008:114, 115,124)
Reasons given included: 'dissatisfaction with school discipline and safety', encompassing factors such as:	England; evidence was obtained through data from/consultations with 9 LAs and 6 home education	Hopwood et al. (2007:23)

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
<p>'bullying', 'school phobia' and 'dissatisfaction with standards of behaviour in school'. Also, 'dissatisfaction with the quality of education and/or the curriculum offered' some parents 'felt that standards of education had declined ... coupled with a view that the current education system is overly bureaucratic, inflexible and assessment driven...'</p>	<p>organisations; and interviews with 18 parents.</p>	
<p>Reasons for home education: questionnaires. Reasons selected included: 'Parents' views of state education'; 'Parental preference'; 'Parents want flexi-schooling'; and 'Teacher conflict'.</p>	<p>UK; in one Local Education Authority, data obtained through questionnaires completed orally with 65 families when they first registered their children for home education (1998-2001). Also, 12 families, who had home educated for >2 years, were interviewed about their experiences. Many children involved had SEN.</p>	<p>Arora (2006:59)</p>
<p>'Most families felt that the overall environment of schools was detrimental to their children's well-being. When pressed about specific aspects of this harmful environment, many parents listed a mixture of ideological and pedagogical problems. For example, several families mentioned overcrowded classrooms and a lack of individual attention as well as concerns about problems outside the classroom.' 'Concerns about ... low academic standards ... prompted some parents to take their children out of school initially...'</p> <p>'Although some parents in this study withdrew their children from school because of a conflict with a specific teacher, most parents had favourable impressions of teachers as a group.'</p>	<p>Canada; findings from qualitative interviews with 23 home-schooling families in Ontario & British Columbia. Included questions about parents' motives for home schooling & how they arrived at the decision to home school.</p>	<p>Arai (2000:210, 211,213)</p>
<p>'The most frequently given reasons why families decided to home educate were related to school...' One main category was: 'dissatisfaction with the quality of educational provision ... Dissatisfaction with the school was often linked to the</p>	<p>UK; a national omnibus survey administered by the ONS to a randomly selected sample of households was used to collect data on home schooling experiences of over 6000 households, of whom 52</p>	<p>Smith and Nelson (2015:320, 321)</p>

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
<p>child's perceived unfair treatment by teachers or the school system in general ... A particular issue was students having trouble with individual teachers or pupils, in the case of reports of bullying, which resulted in the child being withdrawn from school. Wider issues of the quality of schooling especially dissatisfaction with the state school system, were raised by a number of respondents ... schooling isn't good enough, non-qualified teachers, too big class sizes, school day too short, my children were in the middle and not progressing.'</p>	<p>had engaged in home schooling. Data are collected by face to face interview. Respondents were asked to provide the main reason why they chose to home educate their children.</p>	
<p>All the 'Traveller families felt compelled to take up home-education because of concerns about school. Seven families spoke about direct bullying experiences involving school staff or students, while other parents referred to the more subtle influences of cultural Othering and concerns about their child's safety and wellbeing in an environment dominated by a different culture.'</p>	<p>England; interviews with 11 Traveller families and the 2 main professionals responsible for EHE in one LA.</p>	<p>D'Arcy (2012:117)</p>
<p>Parents of children with SEND reported 'motivations related to dissatisfaction with school either through disappointment/ bad experience with formal education or the school failing to accommodate the child's needs.'</p>	<p>UK; online survey; 27 respondents: parents, with 1+ child with SEND being home educated.</p>	<p>Parsons and Lewis (2010:76)</p>
<p>Parents' reasons included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'experiences their children had already had • concerns about what their children might encounter, for example on transfer to secondary school • dissatisfaction with the progress their child was making • concerns that their child's particular needs were being ignored or were not being met.' 	<p>England; inspectors had discussions with 120 parents & 130 children/young people & a further 148 parents & 158 children/young people completed questionnaires</p>	<p>Ofsted (2010:10)</p>

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
G. Distance or access to a local school		
One theme identified from analysing the interviews was ' <i>Kindergarten closing</i> . The closing of the kindergarten that the child attended was an opportunity for parents to take their child out of the education system and this led to home schooling.'	Israel; 25 Israeli mothers were interviewed. They home schooled their children and had at least one primary-school age child (aged 6-12). Each mother was asked to tell their 'founding story' of home schooling: 'Tell me about the decision to begin home schooling'. Then the interviewers asked clarification questions, if needed.	Neuman and Guterman (2017:10)
Distance from the public school: 'In isolated areas, home schooling may even be a necessity. The school may be located a great distance from a child's residence, requiring the child to leave home early and arrive home late.'	Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.	Olsen, (2008:131-132)
Reasons selected included: 'travel, and distance'.	US; 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), parents were asked whether particular reasons for home schooling applied to them.	Bielick (2008:3)
Reasons for home educating 'either on a permanent or temporary basis related to logistical arrangements such as ... the remoteness of their homes within the country.'	UK; a national omnibus survey administered by the ONS to a randomly selected sample of households was used to collect data on home schooling experiences of over 6000 households, of whom 52 had engaged in home schooling. Data are collected by face to face interview. Respondents were asked to provide the main reason why they chose to home educate their children.	Smith and Nelson (2015:321)
H. Family mobility		
A theme identified from analysing the interviews was ' <i>Moving to a new home</i> . The interviewees noted that they had been planning to move a few months after the start of the school year and therefore didn't send their child to school in their old neighbourhood. When they	Israel; 25 Israeli mothers were interviewed. They home schooled their children and had at least one primary-school age child (aged 6-12). Each mother was asked to tell their 'founding story' of home schooling: 'Tell me about the decision to begin	Neuman and Guterman (2017:10)

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
moved, they kept the child at home and that led to choosing home schooling.'	home schooling'. Then the interviewers asked clarification questions, if needed.	
Reasons 'included having a father with a job that required extensive travel and extended periods of time away from home. Where the family moved around a lot, home schooling seemed to be the logical choice to enable the family to remain together.'	Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.	Olsen (2008:131)
Reasons for home educating 'either on a permanent or temporary basis related to logistical arrangements such as the family moving to or from the UK...'	UK; a national omnibus survey administered by the ONS to a randomly selected sample of households was used to collect data on home schooling experiences of over 6000 households, of whom 52 had engaged in home schooling. Data are collected by face to face interview. Respondents were asked to provide the main reason why they chose to home educate their children.	Smith and Nelson (2015:321)
Reasons for home education: questionnaires. Reasons selected included: 'Family mobility'.	UK; in one Local Education Authority, data obtained through questionnaires completed orally with 65 families when they first registered their children for home education (1998-2001). Also, 12 families, who had home educated for >2 years, were interviewed about their experiences. Many children involved had SEN.	Arora (2006:59)
I. Financial		
Reasons selected included: 'finances'.	US; 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), parents were asked whether particular reasons for home schooling applied to them.	Bielick (2008:3)
J. Health and medical issues		
Reasons included: ' <i>Medical Issues</i> ... a number of students now being home schooled were diagnosed with medical conditions that required special attention	Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from	Olsen (2008:112)

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
or some accommodation to enable them to function at school.'	schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.	
Reasons included: 'health related issues...'	UK; a national omnibus survey administered by the ONS to a randomly selected sample of households was used to collect data on home schooling experiences of over 6000 households, of whom 52 had engaged in home schooling. Data are collected by face to face interview. Respondents were asked to provide the main reason why they chose to home educate their children.	Smith and Nelson (2015:321)
'One family had come to home education because of their daughter's health needs...'	UK; qualitative data collected in 2007, through unstructured interviews with 19 families and one LA official & through observation at home educators' meetings and annual camp. Overall, 40-45 families participated in an intensive way in the research.	Morton (2010:52)
Health was the reason given 'to home educate a child who had missed substantial periods of schooling due to chronic ill health. It was felt that by ... being able to provide one-to-one tuition, the child would better be able to catch up with peers by being educated at home'.	England; evidence was obtained through data from/consultations with 9 LAs and 6 home education organisations; and interviews with 18 parents.	Hopwood et al. (2007:25)
K. Highly able, gifted, talented child		
Summary of 'the key reasons for adopting homeschooling due to the failure of mainstream schooling as: lack of challenge; socialization concerns; testing and assessment; curriculum; mismatch of values and beliefs; children's dyssynchronous development.' 'Mismatch of values and beliefs ... the parents' belief in their child's ability...' 'Children's dyssynchronous development ... High ability can be	UK; author drew on literature and her own experience of working 'with highly able children' in different practice settings over 20 years, informal interviews with parents and pupils (2008-2009). Of 189 people attending workshops over this period around 15% had some experience of homeschooling (27 children and their parents).	Winstanley (2009:352, 354,355)

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
manifested as a higher level of attainment all-round, or propensities to do well in all subjects, but it is more often the case that advanced capabilities are discernible in only a few curriculum areas or even in just one.'		
One reason given was parental concern that the needs of 'gifted and talented' child/children were not being met.	England; evidence was obtained through data from/consultations with 9 LAs and 6 home education organisations; and interviews with 18 parents.	Hopwood et al. (2007:24)
L. Parents' experience of school		
A theme identified from analysing the interviews included: ' <i>A corrective experience</i> . The interviewees noted that their own negative past experiences with the education system had led them to look for different and better things for their children, and this led them to choose home schooling.'	Israel; 25 Israeli mothers were interviewed. They home schooled their children and had at least one primary-school age child (aged 6-12). Each mother was asked to tell their 'founding story' of home schooling: 'Tell me about the decision to begin home schooling'. Then the interviewers asked clarification questions, if needed.	Neuman and Guterman (2017:8)
'five parents identified their own past negative experiences in school served as a primary motivation to initiate home schooling for their children.'	Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.	Olsen (2008:97)
'two parents specifically connected their bad personal experiences at school with their decision to home school'.	Canada; findings from qualitative interviews with 23 home-schooling families in Ontario & British Columbia. Included questions about parents' motives for home schooling & how they arrived at the decision to home school.	Arai (2000:210)
M. Parents wanting a closer relationship with their children, family time		
Two themes identified from analysing the interviews were: 1) ' <i>Difficulty with parents separating from children in the context of the</i>	Israel; 25 Israeli mothers were interviewed. They home schooled their children and had at least one primary-school age child (aged 6-12). Each	Neuman and Guterman (2017:7,8)

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
<p><i>education system.</i> School or kindergarten attendance requires the parents to separate from the children. The interviewees related that this separation was hard for them and this caused them to look into ways that they would not have to be separated from the child – such as home schooling...’</p> <p>2) <i>‘Family ideal.</i> The interviewees note that they had a family ideal that dictated a strong connection among family members and this led to the choice of home schooling.’</p>	<p>mother was asked to tell their ‘founding story’ of home schooling: ‘Tell me about the decision to begin home schooling’. Then the interviewers asked clarification questions, if needed.</p>	
<p>One of 6 reasons most commonly selected was: ‘Develop stronger family relationships between children and parents and among brothers and sisters’.</p>	<p>USA; survey of African American parents to identify all the reasons/motivations (from a list of 21 including other/another) why they home school their child. Total sample n=81 students – number of parent respondents not clear.</p>	<p>Ray (2015:83)</p>
<p>Reasons parents selected included: ‘family time’.</p>	<p>US; 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), parents were asked whether particular reasons for home schooling applied to them.</p>	<p>Bielick (2008:3)</p>
<p>‘Parents shared their perceptions that school was negatively impacting their family dynamics, and that their desire for a close knit, loving family was a sufficiently strong motivation to initiate a home schooling program...’</p>	<p>Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.</p>	<p>Olsen (2008:117)</p>
<p>N. Parents wanting the best for their child, motivating and meeting their needs</p>		
<p>‘Several [parents] home school their children primarily because they believe that they can best motivate and meet the learning styles of their own children. Two participants avoid structured curricula altogether, self-identifying as “unschoolers” who follow a child-directed approach.’</p>	<p>Probably US; interviews with 11 home schooling parents (representing 11 families & 23 students).</p>	<p>Bannier (2007:63)</p>

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Parents' motivation to home educate children with SEND included that they "wanted the best for our children".	UK; online survey; 27 respondents: parents, with 1+ child with SEND being home educated.	Parsons and Lewis (2010:77)
O. Parents' work situation		
Two themes identified from analysing the interviews were: 1) ' <i>Discomfort with work situation</i> . The interviewees describe discomfort with the work that they were doing at the time that they chose home schooling. This discomfort was seen as an opportunity to leave their jobs and start home schooling.' 2) ' <i>Getting fired</i> . The interviewees noted that getting fired from work created a situation in which they were forced to stay at home with their child. This situation continued and eventually led to home schooling.'	Israel; 25 Israeli mothers were interviewed. They home schooled their children and had at least one primary-school age child (aged 6-12). Each mother was asked to tell their 'founding story' of home schooling: 'Tell me about the decision to begin home schooling'. Then the interviewers asked clarification questions, if needed.	Neuman and Guterman (2017:9)
P. Parents who do not get a preferred school choice place		
Reasons included: 'choice of secondary school – some parents had elected to home educate because they did not feel the secondary school their child had been allocated to attend was suitable.'	England; evidence was obtained through data from/consultations with 9 LAs and 6 home education organisations; and interviews with 18 parents.	Hopwood et al. (2007:25)
Reasons for home education: questionnaires. Reasons selected included: 'Unable to get school of parent's choice'.	UK; in one Local Education Authority, data obtained through questionnaires completed orally with 65 families when they first registered their children for home education (1998-2001). Also, 12 families, who had home educated for >2 years, were interviewed about their experiences. Many children involved had SEN.	Arora (2006:59)
'Another emerging factor in EHE discovery which could be said to be non-elective, is parents who do not get a preferred school choice place and therefore decide that EHE is a better option for their children than a local authority allocated school. This	England; data were collected from 2008-2010 through 2 surveys: 29 longer interviews with individuals concerned either with EHE or DSM (democratic schooling modalities), and a street survey of shorter interactions with 90 people.	Lees (2010:45,46)

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phenomenon ... was an anecdotal feature of the research data...'		
Q. Pedagogy		
Reasons selected included: 'Use pedagogical (teaching) approaches other than those typical in institutional schools'; 'You are interested in a nontraditional approach to children's education'.	USA; survey of African American parents to identify all the reasons/motivations (from a list of 21 including other/another) why they home school their child. Total sample n=81 students – number of parent respondents not clear.	Ray (2015:83)
R. Philosophical or ideological views		
Two themes identified from analysing the interviews were: 1) ' <i>Educational philosophy</i> . The interviewees noted that they had an educational philosophy that did not match the educational philosophy of the school, and that going to school was likely to damage their children.' 2) ' <i>Inquisitiveness and critical thinking</i> . The interviewees note that the basic character traits of inquisitiveness and critical thinking led them to examine different areas of their lives and to make non-traditional decisions in those areas, including in the area of education.'	Israel; 25 Israeli mothers were interviewed. They home schooled their children and had at least one primary-school age child (aged 6-12). Each mother was asked to tell their 'founding story' of home schooling: 'Tell me about the decision to begin home schooling'. Then the interviewers asked clarification questions, if needed.	Neuman and Guterman (2017:8,9)
One of 6 reasons most commonly selected for homeschooling: 'For the parents to transmit values, beliefs, and worldview to the child'. Other reasons selected include: 'The child's parents should be his/her main teachers'; 'Give the child a more international perspective or worldview'; 'Give the child more instruction on African American/Black culture and history'.	USA; survey of African American parents to identify all the reasons/motivations (from a list of 21 including other/another) why they home school their child. Total sample n=81 students – number of parent respondents not clear.	Ray (2015:83)
'For a small group of parents it had always been their intention to educate at home for philosophical and religious reasons, so they tended to be those who had never placed their child in a school.'	England; inspectors had discussions with 120 parents & 130 children/young people & a further 148 parents & 158 children/young people completed questionnaires	Ofsted (2010:10)

Research findings: reasons for home educating	Research location and approach	Author(s)
<p>‘Several [parents] home school their children primarily because they believe that they can best motivate and meet the learning styles of their own children. Two participants avoid structured curricula altogether, self-identifying as "unschoolers" who follow a child-directed approach.’</p>	<p>Probably US; interviews with 11 home schooling parents (representing 11 families & 23 students).</p>	<p>Bannier (2007:63)</p>
<p>Among the reasons parents shared for home schooling their children were: ‘a desire to explicitly teach Christian values in the curriculum and the wish to tailor their educational program to best meet each child’s learning needs and interests. For this sample of families, home schooling was an opportunity to maintain both a Christian-focused curriculum and a child-centered pedagogy...’</p>	<p>US; interviews in 2002 with 15 individuals presently home schooling their children or who had home schooled in the past 2 years; representing 10 home school families.</p>	<p>Patterson et al. (2007:76)</p>
<p>‘Most families felt that the overall environment of schools was detrimental to their children’s well-being. When pressed about specific aspects of this harmful environment, many parents listed a mixture of ideological and pedagogical problems’.</p>	<p>Canada; findings from qualitative interviews with 23 home-schooling families in Ontario & British Columbia. Included questions about parents’ motives for home schooling & how they arrived at the decision to home school</p>	<p>Arai (2000:210)</p>
<p>For some ‘families home education was part of a conscious effort to reject conventional social structures and conformity to what they saw as a tyrannical system.’ For several other families the family was viewed ‘as the core unit of society and the place where children should be nurtured.</p> <p>‘Home education was therefore a lifestyle choice, integral to and often convenient to “natural” home educators’ philosophy of life, rather than being a choice purely related to education (although perceptions of “education” played an important role). For these families the existence of the formal school system was in itself problematic</p>	<p>UK; qualitative data collected in 2007, through unstructured interviews with 19 families and one LA official & through observation at home educators’ meetings and annual camp. Overall, 40-45 families participated in an intensive way in the research.</p>	<p>Morton (2010:47, 48, 49)</p>

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<p>as it contradicted the lifestyle that they wanted to live.'</p> <p>For some 'Home education was therefore a mechanism which allowed parents to protect their children from negative state structures and preserve their innocence.'</p> <p>Some families had 'a strong belief in the freedom of the individual and a child-led approach to education where structures were rejected as constraining and conformity was perceived negatively. Many families aspired to autonomous home education (totally informal and child-led), with parents acting as facilitators for the child's learning interests.'</p>		
<p>Reasons given included: 'philosophical or political viewpoint – several parents interviewed had a strong ideological opposition to the school system.' E.g. some 'disagreed with the compulsory starting age for school, believing that children need longer with their parents and more one-to-one attention. Others were strongly opposed to traditional forms of education and teaching believing in more informal forms of learning ... Some parents expressed concern regarding the detrimental effect of the government's policies for working families and extended schools on the time children spend with their parents.'</p>	<p>England; evidence was obtained through data from/consultations with 9 LAs and 6 home education organisations; and interviews with 18 parents.</p>	<p>Hopwood et al. (2007:24)</p>
<p>S. Pressure by the school</p>		
<p>'... both parents and professionals alluded to the existence of off-rolling, although it was unclear exactly how many parents felt forced out or encouraged to remove their children from school.'</p>	<p>UK, mainly Wales; data collection approaches included an online survey for home educators (representing 125 children); & interviews with 6 home educators & 45 stakeholders (1 responded via email).</p>	<p>Maxwell et al. (2018:12)</p>
<p>The report stated '1.8 per cent of schools have encouraged parents to take their children out of school and</p>	<p>England; evidence for the report was obtained using a range of approaches including survey/s, interviews and focus groups. Contributors included:</p>	<p>Office of the Children's Commissioner</p>

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educate them at home without recording it as an exclusion...'	teachers, school leaders, school-based professionals and parents, children and young people.	(2013:7)
T. Racism, bullying and discrimination		
Reasons selected for homeschooling included: 'Provide safety from teasing, ostracizing, bullying, and pressures toward premarital sex'; 'Desire to avoid racism in public schools'.	USA; survey of African American parents to identify all the reasons/motivations (from a list of 21 including other/another) why they home school their child. Total sample n=81 students – number of parent respondents not clear.	Ray (2015:83)
<p>19 of 24 interviewees 'attributed their decisions to home school on perceptions of, or experiences with, inequities, prejudice, discrimination, or racism in public and private schools.'</p> <p>'In addition to concern for Black boys in particular, home educators indicated concerns that schools adhered to a monocultural approach to education with no provisions for variations in Black students' learning styles, behaviors, or needs.'</p> <p>'In sum, Black families decided to home school as a means to escape the perceived tendency of traditional school structure and culture to impose negative stereotypes and images on their Black children, particularly Black males ... Black families sought home schooling in order to foster their children's thinking abilities, rather than just improving test scores. Most importantly, Black families sought home schooling as a refuge from the subtle, yet subvert messages of racism that they perceived would be directed at their children within the more traditional forms of schooling.'</p>	USA; qualitative data were collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The research involved a sample of 24 Black parents, each representing a different family.	Fields-Smith and Williams (2009:376, 377,379)
'The issue of safety, in terms of peer abuse, arose in a number of parent interviews where parents identified bullying as a concern that led them to consider home schooling their child.'	Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed.	Olsen (2008:128)

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	Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.	
'The most frequently given reasons why families decided to home educate were related to school...' One main category was: 'bullying at school ... A particular issue was students having trouble with individual teachers or pupils, in the case of reports of bullying, which resulted in the child being withdrawn from school.'	UK; a national omnibus survey administered by the ONS to a randomly selected sample of households was used to collect data on home schooling experiences of over 6000 households, of whom 52 had engaged in home schooling. Data are collected by face to face interview. Respondents were asked to provide the main reason why they chose to home educate their children.	Smith and Nelson (2015:320, 321)
The reasons behind school refusal included: 'bullying by peers'.	UK; participants recruited through national home education newsletters & invited to complete an online questionnaire if their child had said "no" to school. Questionnaires were sent out to 35 families, 20 replied, relating to 24 children who had refused school. 5 follow up interviews were conducted with families.	Wray and Thomas (2013:68)
All of the 'Traveller families felt compelled to take up home-education because of concerns about school. Seven families spoke about direct bullying experiences involving school staff or students...' 'Documenting Travellers' voices shows that racism, bullying and discrimination in school are common reasons for uptake of EHE.'	England; interviews with 11 Traveller families and the 2 main professionals responsible for EHE in one LA.	D'Arcy (2012:117, 133)
Some parents 'had withdrawn their children from school because of what they saw as the school's lack of concern about the bullying of their child.'	England; inspectors had discussions with 120 parents & 130 children/young people & a further 148 parents & 158 children/ young people completed questionnaires.	Ofsted (2010:10)
'Several families spoke of their children having come close to emotional breakdown prior to being removed from school, including self-harming and suicide attempts. Often this was cited as due to bullying and/or linked to a child having Special Educational Needs (SEN).'	UK; qualitative data collected in 2007, through unstructured interviews with 19 families and one LA official & through observation at home educators' meetings and annual camp. Overall, 40-45 families participated in an intensive way in the research.	Morton (2010:52)

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Parents reported that they were home educating their child with SEN because of bullying.	UK; online survey; 27 respondents: parents, with 1+ child with SEND being home educated.	Parsons and Lewis (2010:77)
Reasons for home education: questionnaires. Concerns mentioned most frequently included 'bullying'.	UK; in one Local Education Authority, data obtained through questionnaires completed orally with 65 families when they first registered their children for home education (1998-2001). Also, 12 families, who had home educated for >2 years, were interviewed about their experiences. Many children involved had SEN.	Arora (2006:59)
U. Religious or cultural beliefs		
Two of 6 reasons most commonly selected for home schooling: 'Prefer to teach the child at home so that you can provide religious or moral instruction'; 'Want to provide religious or moral instruction different from that taught in public schools.'	USA; survey of African American parents to identify all the reasons/motivations (from a list of 21 including other/another) why they home school their child. Total sample n=81 students – number of parent respondents not clear.	Ray (2015:83)
'For a small group of parents it had always been their intention to educate at home for philosophical and religious reasons, so they tended to be those who had never placed their child in a school.'	England; inspectors had discussions with 120 parents & 130 children/young people & a further 148 parents & 158 children/young people completed questionnaires	Ofsted (2010:10)
Most 'home school families reported that religious beliefs influenced their decisions to home school. However, parents differed in the role in which religion played in their home schooling decision.'	USA; qualitative data were collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The research involved a sample of 24 Black parents, each representing a different family.	Fields-Smith and Williams (2009:379)
Reasons parents selected included: 'to provide religious or moral instruction'.	US; 2003 & 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), parents were asked whether particular reasons for home schooling applied to them.	Bielick (2008:2)
Religion was a primary or strong motivating factor for more than half of families 'most strongly evidenced in the parents' desire to shelter their children until they were older and had a stronger	Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home	Olsen (2008:121, 123)

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<p>foundation in core family and religious values. The fear of negative influence from peers, from undesirable curriculum content and the discussion of controversial topics in class further evidenced a motivation born in participants' religious or moral values.' Three mothers identified religious motivating factors described as a 'stewardship [to teach] responsibility as the primary motivating factor that led them to make the initial decision to home school.'</p>	<p>schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.</p>	
<p>'Several of the interviewed parents home school their children primarily for religious reasons and work with religious curricula'.</p>	<p>Probably US; interviews with 11 home schooling parents (representing 11 families & 23 students).</p>	<p>Bannier (2007:63)</p>
<p>Among the reasons parents shared for home schooling their children were: 'a desire to explicitly teach Christian values in the curriculum and the wish to tailor their educational program to best meet each child's learning needs and interests. For this sample of families, home schooling was an opportunity to maintain both a Christian-focused curriculum and a child-centered pedagogy...'</p>	<p>US; interviews in 2002 with 15 individuals presently home schooling their children or who had home schooled in the past 2 years; representing 10 home school families.</p>	<p>Patterson et al. (2007:76)</p>
<p>'Concerns about ... moral and religious conflicts prompted some parents to take their children out of school initially...'</p>	<p>Canada; findings from qualitative interviews with 23 home-schooling families in Ontario & British Columbia. Included questions about parents' motives for home schooling & how they arrived at the decision to home school.</p>	<p>Arai (2000:211)</p>
<p>Reasons for home schooling included: 'Philosophical/religious reasons'.</p>	<p>UK; a national omnibus survey administered by the ONS to a randomly selected sample of households was used to collect data on home schooling experiences of over 6000 households, of whom 52 had engaged in home schooling. Data are collected by face to face interview. Respondents were asked to provide</p>	<p>Smith and Nelson (2015:321)</p>

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	the main reason why they chose to home educate their children.	
Traveller families suggested subtle cultural factors influenced their decision to home educate their children: 'parents referred to the more subtle influences of cultural Othering and concerns about their child's safety and wellbeing in an environment dominated by a different culture.'	England; interviews with 11 Traveller families and the 2 main professionals responsible for EHE in one LA.	D'Arcy (2012:117)
For some families 'their beliefs and values were central to their choice of home education over mainstream schooling ... For these families home education was linked to perceptions of parental responsibilities, they saw themselves as having ultimate responsibility for their children's upbringing, both moral and social. Parents felt that they should not relinquish the responsibility to the anonymous and morally ambivalent structure of the school system.' '... parents expressed greater concerns about the values that other people's children brought into schools and the influence those children might have upon their offspring...'	UK; qualitative data collected in 2007, through unstructured interviews with 19 families and one LA official & through observation at home educators' meetings and annual camp. Overall, 40-45 families participated in an intensive way in the research.	Morton (2010:50)
Reasons given included: 'cultural beliefs ... reasons Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents cite for home educating their children included fear of racist bullying, differences in lifestyle/educational philosophy, cultural erosion, curriculum irrelevance, concern over how sex education is taught...' Also 'religion of the family e.g. Muslim, Christian – several parents cited religious values as a major reason for home educating.'	England; evidence was obtained through data from/consultations with 9 LAs and 6 home education organisations; and interviews with 18 parents.	Hopwood et al. (2007:24)
Reasons for home education: questionnaires. Reasons selected included: 'religious'.	UK; in one Local Education Authority, data obtained through questionnaires completed orally with 65 families when they first registered their children for	Arora (2006:59)

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	home education (1998-2001). Also, 12 families, who had home educated for >2 years, were interviewed about their experiences. Many children involved had SEN.	
V. Risk of exclusion or prosecution		
LAs cited 'risk of exclusion or prosecution' ... Risk of prosecution for non-attendance and SEN...'	England; evidence was obtained through data from/consultations with 9 LAs and 6 home education organisations; and interviews with 18 parents.	Hopwood et al. (2007:25)
W. Social factors		
One reason selected was: 'Provide guided and reasoned social interactions with youthful peers and adults'.	USA; survey of African American parents to identify all the reasons/motivations (from a list of 21 including other/another) why they home school their child. Total sample n=81 students – number of parent respondents not clear.	Ray (2015:83)
Some families had issues 'with the social interactions that they associated with schools, between pupils and with teachers, and the values communicated through those interactions. For many of these families private schooling was seen as an alternative to home education, but one which was often financially impracticable.'	UK; qualitative data collected in 2007, through unstructured interviews with 19 families and one LA official & through observation at home educators' meetings and annual camp. Overall, 40-45 families participated in an intensive way in the research.	Morton (2010:50)
X. Special educational needs, additional learning needs and disabilities		
Reasons selected included: 'Child has other special needs that you feel the school can't or won't meet'.	USA; survey of African American parents to identify all the reasons/motivations (from a list of 21 including other/another) why they home school their child. Total sample n=81 students – number of parent respondents not clear.	Ray (2015:83)
Reasons parents selected included: 'child has a physical or mental health problem ... child has other special needs...'	US; 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), parents were asked whether particular reasons for home schooling were applicable to them.	Bielick (2008:3)

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Reasons for home educating included: ' <i>Special Needs of Children</i> ' including: ' <i>Learning Disabilities</i> '; ' <i>Learning Concerns</i> '.	Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.	Olsen (2008:103, 104)
'Findings revealed that just under a third of home educators had children with additional learning needs who were removed from school due to what parents reported as negative experiences. These experiences included the suitability of a school system based upon assessment and attainment for children with additional learning needs and a failure to provide adequate support.' '... the sample does suggest that some children are being off-rolled because schools are unable to meet the needs of children with ALNs.'	UK, mainly Wales; data collection approaches included an online survey for home educators (representing 125 children) and interviews with 6 home educators.	Maxwell et al. (2018:1,13)
Reasons included: 'Child had Special Educational Needs'.	UK; a national omnibus survey administered by the ONS to a randomly selected sample of households was used to collect data on home schooling experiences of over 6000 households, of whom 52 had engaged in home schooling. Data are collected by face to face interview. Respondents were asked to provide the main reason why they chose to home educate their children.	Smith and Nelson (2015:321)
'At least three other children, who were currently home-educated, had been identified as SEN and this played a part in families' decision to home-educate...'	England; interviews with 11 Traveller families and the 2 main professionals responsible for EHE in one LA.	D'Arcy (2012:118)
'Several families spoke of their children having come close to emotional breakdown prior to being removed from school, including self-harming and suicide attempts. Often this was cited as due to bullying and/or linked to a child	UK; qualitative data collected in 2007, through unstructured interviews with 19 families and one LA official & through observation at home educators' meetings and annual camp.	Morton (2010:52)

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having Special Educational Needs (SEN).’	Overall, 40-45 families participated in an intensive way in the research.	
Parents of children with SEND reported motivations that included ‘the school failing to accommodate the child’s needs.’	UK; online survey; 27 respondents: parents, with 1+ child with SEND being home educated.	Parsons and Lewis (2010:76)
Reasons included: ‘special educational needs – needs which parents considered were not being adequately met in school.’ These included dyslexia and autism.	England; evidence was obtained through data from/consultations with 9 LAs and 6 home education organisations; and interviews with 18 parents.	Hopwood et al. (2007:24)
<p>Reasons for home education: questionnaires. ‘Concerns mentioned most frequently were related to SEN not being met, bullying and school refusal. Far fewer families cited a more general preference for alternative education (e.g., ‘religious’, ‘parents’ views of state education’, ‘parental preference’). Hence, specific concerns about their children’s experiences with schooling were the most prevalent of the reasons quoted.’</p> <p>Reasons listed selected by 1+ participant: SEN not met; bullying; school refusal; religious; parents’ views of state education; unable to get school of parent’s choice; unsettled at school; family mobility; parental preference; parents want flexi-schooling; teacher conflict.</p> <p>Reasons for home education: interviews: ‘An even more striking emphasis on dissatisfaction with their children’s experiences in school was reported by the interviewed sample. Eight of the 17 young people in the interviewed sample had SEN, and schools’ inability to cater for these satisfactorily was usually put forward as the reason for their being educated at home.’</p>	UK; in one Local Education Authority, data obtained through questionnaires completed orally with 65 families when they first registered their children for home education (1998-2001). Also, 12 families, who had home educated for >2 years, were interviewed about their experiences. Many children involved had SEN.	Arora (2006:59)

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Y. Support for home schooling		
<p>Reasons included: 1) when parents 'believed that the schools may not be able or willing to address the needs of their child' and knew someone who had resolved a similar situation through home schooling; 2) 'the existence of and/or access to a support network of other home schooling families and trained facilitators...'; 3) 'association with and/or knowledge of other families who home school...'; and 4) reading a book about a particular home school philosophy.</p>	<p>Canada; 31 parents from 20 home schooling families took part in face-to-face interviews. 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs.</p>	<p>Olsen (2008:136-139)</p>
Z. Unplanned		
<p>In 8 of 25 interviews 'there was no conscious and focused decision taken at a specific time to home school the child, but rather, the interviewees continued with an initial situation and eventually found themselves home schooling.'</p>	<p>Israel; 25 Israeli mothers were interviewed. They home schooled their children and had at least one primary-school age child (aged 6-12). Each mother was asked to tell their 'founding story' of home schooling: 'Tell me about the decision to begin home schooling'. Then the interviewers asked clarification questions, if needed.</p>	<p>Neuman and Guterman (2017:11,12)</p>

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