

Home education: a choice or last resort?

Children leaving secondary school to be home-educated often have complex needs and some make the move as a last resort rather than a preferred choice, new research by Ofsted has revealed.

Ofsted carried out the study: 'Exploring moving to home education in secondary schools' across 7 local authorities in the East Midlands specifically to look at how and why children move from secondary school to home education.

Ofsted's report, published today, says that special educational needs, medical, behavioural or other well-being needs were the main reasons behind such a move for parents and their children.

Parents, local authorities and schools told Ofsted that, often, there was little or no communication about the decision between parties before the child moved, and alternative options or consideration of what was the best outcome for the child were not always discussed.

Ofsted also found that, in some cases, the process of making the move can take less than a day.

Participants reported that children are often moved to home education to resolve pressures at school. For example, parents may remove their child from school to avoid exclusion or prosecution for non-attendance. Some parents also reported that schools had applied indirect pressure to convince them to move their child to home education.

In the absence of a national framework for support, schools and local authorities have different approaches to providing support to parents.

Some schools reported that they were unsure of their responsibilities once a child moved to home education. This led to a breakdown in information-sharing with the parent that could have helped with their child's ongoing education.

Parents said that they would have benefited from information and guidance on the financial cost of home education. In addition, parents would have liked to have been told more about where their child could sit external exams.

Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, said:

Home education is a legitimate parental choice and can be a positive decision when parents are well equipped to provide a good education.

However, children should not be moved to home education simply to resolve difficulties in school. Schools, local authorities and parents need to work together before such a decision is made, to ensure that home education is genuinely in the interests of children and not just the best thing for schools or parents. It's vital that parents are fully informed about the alternatives, and that they understand all the implications and costs of home-educating their child.

Ofsted's report makes several recommendations for government, schools and local authorities, aimed at supporting the interests of children who may be moving from secondary school to home education, including:

- the DfE should consider the extent to which current legislation and guidance considers children's views during decisions to home-educate
- schools and local authorities should develop clear processes for working together once they know a parent's intention to home-educate
- local authorities and schools should be aware that when a school writes a letter to remove a child to home education on behalf of a parent, this may be evidence of off-rolling
- after a move to home education is made, it would be good practice for schools to provide parents with children's previous classwork

For its part, Ofsted will evaluate carefully the reasons for pupils leaving when pupil movement at a school is unusually high. When Ofsted finds evidence of off-rolling, it will continue to report this clearly and is likely to judge the school's leadership and management to be inadequate. Where appropriate, and where pupil movement into home education is very high, inspectors will take the views of parents who have moved their children into home education into account in their inspection evidence.