



## **Mountain Movers Education**

C/O, 31 Gough Road, Ystalyfera, Neath Port Talbot, SA9 2NB

☎ 01639 413274

✉ [contact@mountainmoverseducation.uk](mailto:contact@mountainmoverseducation.uk)

Registered Charity Number: 1176708

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Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for your email giving Mountain Movers the opportunity to respond to the Minister's recent update on the draft statutory guidance for elective home education in relation to our petition and the evidence from the Children's Commissioner's Office alongside other home education organisations.

Whilst we welcome the news that this draft guidance and the accompanying draft database regulations have been withdrawn by the education minister (which is understandable given the new pressures being faced during this pandemic), we are frustrated that this cycle of investigation and consultations looks set to continue into a new term in 2 years time.

We would refer back to the point raised in our response in January 2020:

*“As a whole, the community of home educators, are exhausted by the constant cycle of consultations into home education regulations by the Welsh Assembly. It appears that LEAS and the Children's Commissioner for Wales are continuing to push policy agendas based on their own bias and prejudices (in their misguided conviction that home education is a safeguarding risk, despite every report to the contrary) against home educators and forcing this cycle until they achieve the goal, that the state decides what constitutes an education for all children and erodes this next piece of parental authority. This is unfair and morally wrong to keep this sustained amount of pressure, investigation and discrimination upon a minority group who are simply exercising their right to educate their children in an individualized manner, in order to reach their children's full potential according to their own philosophical beliefs.”*

As echoed in the views from the other evidence submitted, the continued bias and prejudice against home educators from the view of a presumed “safeguarding” myth is set to continue. Resulting in the continuing dysfunctional relationship between local authorities and home educating families. Each time there is another consultation/review into home education regulations, relationships between local authorities and home educating families become damaged, with families increasingly opting to disengage due to the hostilities they face.

With regards to the Children's Commissioner's Office, we again ask that despite the withdrawal of the guidance, there needs to be scrutiny into the development of this draft guidance, as there is no faith or confidence within the home education community that it was developed fairly. The Commissioner's own evidence as supplied, highlights the substantial pressure she placed on the minister to meet her goals for home education which by her evidence she had been assured in 2018, they would be met in advance of the guidance. This reinforces the belief that the guidance was developed without the same weight of

consideration to the primary stakeholders views and needs as to meeting those of the Children's Commissioner.

We, along with the home education community are frustrated by the continued use of the Seabridge case as a means to view home education as a safeguarding risk to all children. As outlined in the review, the family were known to statutory services and there were **multiple** occasions for intervention that might have saved the poor boy's life. Home Education was the final destination in a long road for the Seabridge family but **not** the cause of Dylan's death.

It has been repeatedly shown in studies that home educated children are at less risk of harm but yet there is a continued and highly damaged view that parents cannot be trusted with their own children and the state knows best. This demonising and disabling of parents causes substantial damage to family and stretches into the majority of engagement between parents and professionals. This needs to be addressed and a functional relationship developed between all parties based on facts and respect. In order to safeguard the welfare of all children the funds spent appropriately on supporting social services execute their existing duties and powers.

We would urge the petitions committee to investigate the substantial costs that have been incurred by Welsh Government since the Badman Review in this continued cycle, which would rise even higher if another cycle of consultation into home education guidance and duties is set to continue. We would urge the committee to consider if this a valid and reasonable use of taxpayers funds? Mountain Movers would argue that the previous non-statutory guidance should be utilised with compliance by local authorities to this document and evidence sought, to see how they are effectively and realistically supporting and engaging with home educators to build positive and effective relationships with this community thus ending this dysfunctional and damaging cycle. Funds would then be far more effectively spent on ensuring social services are fully equipped, staffed and resourced to enable them to act in all areas of child protection rather than the current situation of prioritising limited resources to those deemed at substantial risk. This would go a long way to ensuring all children are protected from harm.

We'd like to offer our thanks to the members of the committee for all your hard work during these difficult times. If we can be of any further assistance to the committee, please feel free to contact us.

With appreciation,

Mrs Erika Lye  
Chairperson and Trustee  
On Behalf of Mountain Movers Education  
Registered Charity 1176708