

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Committee Stage Briefing

Summary

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill passed its second reading on [Wednesday 8th January](#).

This briefing outlines the problems with the bill and why MPs must oppose it.

Christian Concern is alarmed by the onerous requirements on homeschooling parents to register all education their child receives.

Rushed

Parliament has had very little time to examine the Bill. Since it was introduced on December 17th, there have been only 4 full sitting days to consider the 128-page bill.

There has been very little time for education groups to examine the bill and contact their elected representatives.

The bill is introduced alongside [other new charges](#) upon religious education, especially VAT on independent schools.

This lack of transparency and adequate scrutiny is not conducive to good democracy.

Discriminatory home-schooling register

Clause 25 requires each local authority to have information about every child not attending school. The information stored includes:

- Whether they are in school education
- Name, date of birth and home address
- Name of parents, and amount of time in education with each parent
- All education not provided by parents, including:
 - Description of provider
 - Postal address, website
 - Total amount of time child spends there, with and without parents present
- Their protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010

The register means that homeschooling parents will be required to tell the state about any private tutoring and extra-curricular education that their child receives, including sports and music clubs. It could also include religious teaching at Sunday School.

It is discriminatory to require different levels of regulations for school-attending and home-schooled children. Some sport/tuition providers may refuse home-schooled children based on additional fines and paperwork.

The scope of these requirements can be expanded by the Secretary of State or local authority should they believe it promotes the welfare of children.

Intrusive Regulations

Clause 25 requires parents to inform their local authority of any outside education within 15 days or face fines or a potential prison sentence, provided in clause 26. There need not be evidence of abuse of any kind.

This requirement could breach Article 8 of the ECHR – the right to a private family life.

Because of the history of Governments making unnecessary registers, [Jewish organisations](#) are understandably strongly opposed.

It is reminiscent of totalitarianism for the state to know what church education your child receives.

Threat to parents' rights

The bill appears to presume that parents cannot be relied upon to provide a safe educational environment for their children. In fact, home education is far safer than schools where bullying, drugs and sexualisation is rife.

- 90% of schoolgirls have received unsolicited sexual images and been subject to sexist name calling.
- 5,500 sexual offences were recorded in UK schools over a three-year period.

It is [evident](#) that children are safer at home. Therefore, the Government should promote home education, rather than impose additional barriers to it.

Instead, local authorities can deny parents the right to remove children from schools. Inspectors have the right to enter a family home so parents can justify a safe environment and 'suitable education'.

This is state overreach – parents have a far greater understanding than the Government of what a safe environment for their own children looks like. The Government, for instance, has previously promoted dangerous [new transgender](#) identities for children.

A child's best interest?

The creation of a register will lead to unnecessary wastage of precious resources. Local authorities already struggle to provide good education.

Additionally, this bill is purportedly driven by the need to ensure children's welfare and safety, yet local authorities, under-resourced as they are, struggle to protect the children already known to be in danger, [as the Sara Sharif tragedy demonstrated](#).

Instead of resourcing local authorities to ensure that they are able to protect children truly at risk of harm, this bill punishes families seeking to provide suitable education for their children, while imposing additional burdens upon struggling local authorities, further inhibiting their ability to deal with cases of abuse.

If this bill is being used to protect home-schooled children, it is a hammer to crack a nut. Hard cases, after all, make bad law.