

CYPE(6)-20-23 – Paper to note 1

Mandatory meeting with LA representative

I am not currently home educating my daughter, but her needs are such that we may need to consider it in the near future. Her anxiety regarding appointments with professionals is extremely high and my experiences talking to other parents and professionals (particularly in the worlds of mental health and trauma informed practise) demonstrate we are not alone in this situation. Apart from the other issues raised in my first email, it is a very great concern to me that, if we were to opt for EHE at some point in the near future, the requirement to meet with a member of of the LA would be a massive source of stress and anxiety for her, even with me present, but to be told she is not allowed to have me present would be even worse, very likely leading to further traumatisation. Advice from trauma specialists is to prioritise felt safety and building relationships with key people. This would not be possible in the scenario which is being proposed by the government. Furthermore, advice from chronic fatigue specialists is that stress is to be avoided where possible, as it can cause flare ups or relapses. (I can provide you with relevant sources on these issues if that would be of help.) Our GP and other adoption specialists also agree that to have multiple different professionals dipping in and out is detrimental to her well-being and her recovery process. There is no provision being made within the current proposals to address this type of problem. **If the proposals go ahead I could be forced to make a choice between safeguarding my daughter's mental health and well-being and breaking the law.**

Can you see that this is a very frightening situation to be in?

Mental health crisis and attendance policies are exacerbating the situation

I am certain I am not alone in this situation. Levels of anxiety in children are clearly rising and I hear all the time how attendance figures have dropped drastically since the pandemic. Parents are being forced to consider educational alternatives for their children when they would not otherwise have chosen. Even just in my circle of close friends and family, I know of at least 7 children from 5 families who are experiencing anxiety around school - ranging from KS1-4. None of these are families who would previously have considered EHE, but some are coming to the conclusion they may not have much choice because of the detrimental effects they observe school attendance is having on their children. If I am representative of the general population, we are looking at a problem on a massive scale. Increasing the pressure on parents to comply with a system which is not working for their child is not a compassionate or even a pragmatic way forward. Attendance "targets" and rewards/punishments only make the problem worse because they do not address the underlying causes. They put pressure on schools, which is then transferred to parents and children. Increasing pressure is unhealthy for everyone. As a teacher I can speak from personal experience at both ends.

Please understand, I am not referring to parents who are negligent or children who are truanting. These are parents who are deeply concerned for their children's health and well-being and feel stuck between a rock and a hard place. For people like this, EHE sometimes becomes their only option. We may soon be one of those families.

Can you see how this wider context exacerbates the problems posed by the legislation?

A plea for help

Please, please, please will you, as chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, listen to our pleas for a wiser and less heavy handed approach. To make visits with a “stranger” mandatory for a child who is emotionally, physically or mentally fragile is not wise or kind and may not be for those who are more resilient either. To prevent them from having their primary carer present at such a meeting could cause huge distress, even more so because there is the potential for the results of such a meeting being that their parents/carers’ provision could be judged as inadequate - and all on the basis of what they say. This is a burden that should not be placed on children. I urge you to rethink this.

These are very real concerns and I don’t think it is an exaggeration to say that they constitute safeguarding concerns. I know each case will be different, but that is exactly the reason that a blanket mandatory requirement is inappropriate and potential harmful to many children like my daughter.

Can you see the kind of risks I am describing associated with what the government is proposing?

Are you happy to expose families, such as ours, to those risks?