

GRAHAM STUART M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Joanne Roney OBE
Chief Executive
Wakefield Council
Town Hall
Wood Street
Wakefield
WF1 2HQ

13 October 2014

Dear Ms Roney,

Wakefield Council Policy on Elective Home Education

I am writing to raise concerns about the Home Education Policy of Wakefield Council. As the Chairman of the Education Select Committee and the Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Home Education, I want to highlight correspondence I have received that was sent by your Council's Education and Welfare Service to [REDACTED] concerning [REDACTED] who is home educated. A copy of this correspondence is enclosed. It states:

"Where parents choose not to accept visits [from home education officials], it is policy within Wakefield LA to seek information through a written report in order to be clear that a suitable education is in place. I note that you ask for period of time to settle in, so I will write to you in approximately three months and ask that you provide a report of the education that is in place for [REDACTED]"

"Please be aware that when parents decline visits we also have a policy to contact Social Care Direct to make them aware that a child is no longer in school and will not be seen by the Local Authority Home Education Team."

Shortly after receiving this letter, [REDACTED] had a surprise visit from social services insisting on entering her house. They told her on the doorstep this was not the result of any complaint but was the result of her decision to decline a visit from the Council's Home Education team.

Crucially, the Government's *Guidelines for Local Authorities on Elective Home Education* (a copy of which is also enclosed) explain at Paragraph 3.6:

"Some parents may welcome the opportunity to discuss the provision that they are making for the child's education during a home visit but parents are not legally required to give the local authority access to their home. They may choose to meet a local authority representative at a mutually convenient and neutral location instead, with or without the

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child being present, or choose not to meet at all. Where a parent elects not to allow access to their home or their child, this does not of itself constitute a ground for concern about the education provision being made."

By insisting on visits from social services as a matter of course when home education visits are declined, Wakefield Council's policy misrepresents the provisions of the Government Guidelines.

The conflation of home education with a child safeguarding risk amounts to a serious stigma against parents, and the threat of involving social services as a matter of course in these circumstances is obviously extremely disturbing to parents. I have not seen any credible evidence that home education is a risk factor for child welfare nor, where children have been harmed, any evidence that home education effectively hid abuse from the authorities.

The Department for Education shares my concern about the Guidelines for Home Education being represented incorrectly to parents. I am therefore copying this letter to the Minister, Sam Gyimah MP, local MP Mary Creagh and the leader of Wakefield Council, Councillor Peter Box.

Yours sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Cc: Sam Gyimah MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Education and Childcare
Mary Creagh MP, Wakefield
Councillor Peter Box CBE, Leader, Wakefield Council

Enc.