



Home Education in Northern Ireland

Some questions and answers...

What is the law?

- The duty to provide an education lies with the parents (Education and Libraries (NI) Order '86, Section 45). Parents can delegate to a school, or they can do it themselves.
- The duty and powers of the Education Authority are used in response to any concerns about a child's education. Unless a concern arises they have no power or duty to act (Education and Libraries (NI) Order '86, Schedule 13).
- Home education is not a welfare issue but a legally sanctioned educational option **equal** with school.

All parents should be able to freely choose what is best for their individual children – whether it is a school of a certain type, religion, or method; provision that can cater for their children's physical or educational needs; home education for a short time or the whole of a child's educational career.

Why do people choose to home educate?

Home educators come to the decision in many ways:

- If their child was not receiving an adequate education in school, for example because of their special educational needs or bullying
- For reasons of conviction (religious or otherwise) relating to their role as parent or the content of the curriculum
- For educational reasons; a desire to use a particular approach or curriculum, to allow a greater focus on their child's passion or promote a broad knowledge base

Or commonly a combination of a few of the above. **The advantage of home education is that it can be tailored to each individual child and need not fit a particular label.**

Do home educated children socialise? Do they take exams? Can they play sports?

Home educated children are out in the world, finding things out and making the connections which will help them to grow and learn. They play sports, join clubs, meet friends, go to libraries museums and parks, and attend some of the meets and events organised by home educators (including tours of Stormont!). Depending on the child's aims and aptitude they can study for exams from home, use distance learning, attend college or take another route to a fulfilling career. **The only thing home educated children don't do is school.**



What about research? How many home educators are there? Can we show that it works?

There is a good body of research in America, and some interesting studies in the UK including the work of A. Thomas PhD and H. Pattison PhD, and the in depth study conducted by Dr Rothermel. More recently C. Bower has conducted research in Northern Ireland. These indicate good outcomes from a variety of approaches, some of which may be quite unlike school methods. We do not know how many home educators there are currently in Northern Ireland and we do not need to know because home education is not a danger to be monitored. Sufficient safeguards are in place to address any concerns that may arise.

What is the situation in Northern Ireland?

A consultation closed in June 2014 on an unpopular policy going beyond the (then) Board's legal powers. The home educating community at that time was deeply grateful to many MLAs who listened to their concerns and questioned this policy in the Assembly. We were privileged to brief the Education Committee on the subject in 2015 and happy to hear later that the new Education Authority did not intend to progress that draft. Home educating families have since been involved in a working group with the Education Authority and others. We are hopeful that this group will produce guidance that promotes trust and a constructive relationship between the home educating community and the Education Authority.