



Treat Information About Local Education Authorities With Caution

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 21 January, 2006 - 18:58

Why you should think twice before praising a particular LEA

Adapted from a message originally posted on the UK Home Education Support List on 27th April 1997

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** (<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>)



During a discussion about whether or not UK home educators should create lists of recommended LEAs (local education authorities), and point out any good documents produced by LEAs, I was asked: Sarah – I think your own position is “less conventional” – what’s been your own experience with the LEA?

I can't really talk about that without violating my children's privacy, but what I can say, from my experience of being present when many EO families have been visited by LEA officials, is that “how sympathetic an LEA is” is no simple matter. An LEA might be deemed “good” by home educators in general, but yet the particular official who visits a particular family may be unpleasant and unsympathetic on that occasion, and may think that those children ought to be in school, or ought to be learning more of a particular subject.

An LEA may be deemed “good” by home educators and indeed all families visited, until one day, one family, for some reason, finds the inspection intrusive and unfriendly. That family's experience is not invalid just because everyone else has had a different experience. If, for example, the LEA is completely rigid and intransigent about requiring particular forms of evidence from parents (say, inspection of the children in the home), but are quite reasonable in interpreting such evidence, then parents who have no objection to providing evidence in that form will never notice that rigidity. Yet it could make the LEA quite unable to deal with a particular family, who wished to provide evidence in a form other than the expected visit. In that case, is the LEA is very *bad*, yet is perceived as “good” by most parents.

As Neil Taylor so rightly said on the UK-home-ed List on Fri, 29 Jan 1999:

A while back on list we had two people reporting, one about their ‘good’ LEA officer, and another about their ‘bad’ LEA officer. This caused some difficulty when it was realised that the officer in question was the same person. [...] What I learned from it was that it is sometimes very easy for those whose ideology or perspective on things is closer to that of the prevailing culture and authority to fail to notice the suffering of those who are more at odds with it, and even unwittingly contribute to their oppression through unawareness.

Someone praised documents produced by certain LEAs. There again, someone in the LEA may have read and used *Home Education and The Law*, resulting in a good document, but others in the LEA may not be remotely sympathetic, or even

understand the LEA's own document. Conversely, “bad” LEAs may have the odd sympathetic official, or an official who just happens to hit it off with a particular family on a particular occasion.

The point is, one's own personal experience is absolutely no guide to how the LEA will seem to a different family. Indeed, even the experience of *all families up to now* is absolutely no guide to how the LEA will seem to another family in the future.

The LEA of which I have the most experience is (or rather *was* – who knows what has happened since I last had any contact with them) about as good as LEAs get. The two officials I met on a number of occasions when I visited EO families were very sympathetic to autonomous education and appeared to me at any rate not to turn a hair when no paper evidence of work was apparent. They never tested any children, either formally or informally. They said that it was their policy not to take any action on the basis of anonymous communications, and that they would only visit families who had themselves written to inform the LEA.

I might have thanked them on leaving a family's home once, but there is no point in making a public case of this. These policies can be very ephemeral. They might be quite different with other families who happen to rub them up the wrong way. Their policy about anonymous communications might be legally dubious, and drawing attention to it might cause it to be changed – indeed so might drawing attention to *any* unusually liberal aspect of their policy. They themselves may, in these communitarian times, be reconsidering their policies and may react badly to being identified as excessively liberal.

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Comments

After the general

Submitted by [S Ong \(not verified\)](http://mp3cow.com/) on 30 December, 2007 - 11:54

After the general introduction the LEA officer gives an overall account of the application processes and why the LEA does not want additional children added to the school roll.

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