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Parents who home educate children to be forced to register

Government plans for a compulsory register of home-educated children slammed by proponents of alternative schooling.

The government will today announce plans to force every parent in the country who home educates their child to register with their local authority, in a move that has been condemned by families who opt out of traditional schooling. The schools secretary, Ed Balls, is expected to accept in full recommendations made in a review of home education for mandatory registration to ensure that families are not using home tuition as a cover for abuse.

The review by the child protection expert, Graham Badman, was commissioned to investigate whether home education is used to conceal "child abuse such as neglect, forced marriage, sexual exploitation or domestic servitude". It will be published this morning, but last night it was confirmed that it will include recommendations for the compulsory annual registration scheme, in which all parents who plan to home educate their children have to inform their local authority. Currently there are 20,000 children registered with local authorities as home-educated, but the actual number could be as high as 50,000, as parents who have never sent their child to school are not compelled to tell the authorities.

Balls told a private meeting of chiefs of local safeguarding children boards yesterday: "His [Badman's] review is based on the need to strike the right balance between two important principles: giving parents the right to decide how and where their children should be educated – because I am clear that parents bring up their children, not government – and ensuring that every child gets the education they need to help them fulfil their potential. "Gra-



The Boy and The Dolphin Sculpture on London's South Bank - a symbol of Play

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ham recommends action to address the very small number of cases where home-educated children have suffered harm because safeguarding concerns were either not picked up or addressed urgently.

"Home education is a well-established and important part of our education system. And Graham's review will – rightly, in my view – stress the importance of maintaining those principles. But he will also recommend that the home-education framework be strengthened significantly by making sure that parents register if they wish to home educate their children. This brings us into line with many European and other developed countries."

He continued: "We will also ask local authorities to provide easier access to extra support for those home-educated children who need it – particularly the relatively high proportion of home-educated children who have special educational needs and others who need or want to access services that would otherwise be provided through their school. And most importantly we will ensure all children receive the kind of high-quality education that they need to succeed, and that local authorities provide the right support to home educators."

The Badman review will be published today and Balls is expected to make a written statement to parliament indicating that there might have to be new legislation to implement it.

The Guardian first revealed the plans for compulsory registration last week. Fiona Nicholson, of support group Education Otherwise, said: "If they introduce a registration system, it would completely shift the balance of power. The state is coming into family life and trying to regulate it. It is an extraordinary invasion of the family."

The move will be welcomed by local authority child protection services who have argued that a registration system is necessary for them to meet their responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of every child in their area.

Source: We gratefully acknowledge the following - The Guardian

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