

WELB focus group May 22nd

- Three home educating parents (P)
- Pat Ward, facilitator (F)

F is the Head of Corporate Services, and described herself as an "impartial facilitator" in the consultation process.

Her job was to note "anything we disagreed with, anything that had been excluded, and anything we'd like to see included".

We went through the document one paragraph at a time, and pointed out the flaws that we saw in it. There were many more than she expected to see!

She agreed with most of our points, including the idea that parents are the experts in Home Education, not the Board and certainly not school principals.

It is not appropriate for the Board or school principals to advise on an area where they lack expertise, the best they can hope to do is to act as a signpost for parents who are interested in HE.

P explained that the experience of assessment and provisions for special needs in the school system had been miserable for their family, and said that the Board was not currently able to provide for all of the children with special needs who are under their care.

P also stated that the Board needed to carefully evaluate how they would fund all of the things described in the policy; the ten step process outlined in the flow chart, complete with database, won't be free to implement. Where, exactly, are they planning to get the money for that?

There are a number of ways that the policy acts outside the current law, and P explained those points carefully.

P has been meeting with a Board Officer once a year for the past five years in order to maintain their child's Statement of Special Needs, and they have enjoyed the help and support offered by this lady. P told F that, until now, we thought of our relationship with the Board as a positive one and had not been suspicious of them, but the draft policy implies that they are suspicious of us as a home educating family.

P said that it is unrealistic for the Board to think that they can address parental failure in regards to education through a written policy, there is no way that an education body can hope to overcome poor parenting. (This was in reference to the question of parents who claim that they are home educating and don't.)

At the end of the meeting, P explained that the Board needed to scale back what they were attempting and look for something that was more realistic given their resources and expertise. The Board lacks the ability to implement this overly ambitious policy, especially as they are not able to meet their current obligations, ie, to children with special needs.

P said adding a Home Education link to their web page might be helpful (and on par with their abilities), so that schools who would accept independent candidates for exams or who were offering after schools clubs to HE students would be able to make contact with HE families.

Overall, the tone of the meeting was one of collaboration. F did say that she was not the person who would re-write the policy, nor had she helped with writing the original, so we will have to see how those people respond. P thought it interesting that none of those responsible for it attended the meeting, it would have been a more efficient use of our time if they had.

P felt that there is genuine interest in creating something workable for HE families. P thinks something workable would be no policy at all, because they have no money and no Home Education experience, but doubts that they will understand that.