

Not Enough Safeguarding

The Badman Report on Elective Home Education is out. It says much that home educators expected and recommends much that they feared. The “expert panel” who advised on the report appeared to be composed of people with little or no personal experience of home education and has made little use of existing, relevant research. The report therefore says what the Minister of Education wanted it to say. He has endorsed it and states there is “a compelling case for immediate and urgent reforms”. Coming from an administration that wants to control everybody and to legislate on everything, it is not surprising that it now wishes to invade the last territory unoccupied by government regulation.

The pre-eminent problem in Elective Home Education over the last twenty years has been the unwarranted harassing of law abiding, conscientious families by a minority of rogue local authorities. The report fails to acknowledge this. Instead it will enable these same authorities to intrude into the privacy of a home educator’s home and hold a secret interview with their children. If they have a prejudice against home education, and past experience suggests they have, or just don’t like the ideology of the parents, they can simply say the education is unsuitable and prohibit the parents from educating their children further. Alternatively they can claim there is a safeguarding concern and send the unwilling children straight to school. This concern may simply amount to the fact that the family have chosen to home educate.

The Minister of Education states the review “describes a relationship within which mutual respect and understanding (will) enable parents and local authorities to work together in the best interests of children”. Graham Badman advocates a training programme for those officials entrusted with the inspection of home education. This may be a step in the right direction. Poorly prepared staff have created difficulties in the past but the root problem has been that the attitudes of authorities has made mutual respect impossible. Against these authorities, parents need safeguarding.