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BBC Radio 5 Live January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04vkbqf>

around 2 hours 17 minutes

Follow-up from

<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/dec/31/home-educating-parents-council-visits-westminster-london>

**Interviewer:** Westminster council wants to introduce home visits for home educating families. The council is not required by law to visit. We will hear first from Helen White, a teacher, who home educates her 2 children age 10 and 14. Helen believes this infringes on parents' civil rights.

**Interviewer:** Helen, how does it work, one of your children is 14, will they be doing GCSEs in the same way as if they were at school?

**HW:** They can do exams if that's what you choose. It depends on the family and on the child, what their interests are, what their future plans are. Some take exams early, some late. Some do whatever qualifications the child needs for the particular course the child wants to do. In some cases the children go back into school, sometimes they go straight in to colleges, sometimes they do Open University.

**Interviewer:** Why are you so against the council popping in on just one day of the year to see how you are operating?

**HW:** The Triborough are not working within the current legal framework. All of British law is based on the fact that people are presumed innocent and also that parents bring up children not the state. Education is just one of my responsibilities as a parent, I also have to feed my children, I have to look after their welfare, I have to keep them safe, if they need healthcare I have to go out & find it for them, take them to the GP or to A&E. The state's role is to support me. I can send my children to state school or private school, I can use tutors, I can pay for piano lessons or pay for sports...

If there's evidence that we're failing in some way, or abusing our children or neglecting our children, that's the point at which the state would step in.

The authorities can contact us, they can offer support, it's perfectly alright for them to get in touch and say how can we support you, would you like us to come round and visit you, would you like some advice, but the issue with the Triborough is that they are trying to force people to have a visit, they are also trying to force seeing the children and they have no legal right to do that unless there's a child protection issue

**Interviewer:** their point is that children have a right to a home education, and they would argue that not all children are getting what they might describe as a proper education, and it is their responsibility to make sure that they are being educated.

**HW:** No. The responsibility to educate the child in the first place is with the parents and the last resort is with the local authority. There needs to be evidence that you're not doing it properly. We have cases in the Triborough where parents have prepared extensive reports, they've had feedback saying this is great, and we've got no safeguarding

concerns, but we want to meet with you, and when the parent says no, the Triborough then starts bullying, it issues School Attendance Orders saying that in our opinion you are not providing an education, when the evidence is already there about the education.

**Interviewer:** Lets have a word with Andrew Christie, who is Director of Children's Services at Westminster Council. It's none of your business, as far as Helen White is concerned. How do you respond to that?

**Andrew Christie:** Well unfortunately it has to be our business in a few cases. From time to time there are cases where parents tell us they're home educating their child when in fact they're not, and our proposition is a fairly simple one which is that we just need to meet with the parents, meet with the child, and we're saying at a minimum just once a year just to establish for a fact that the parents are properly home educating their children.

**Interviewer:** But she argues that really you should have some kind of evidence in the first place, and there should be a presumption that a parent is doing right by their children unless you've got reason to believe otherwise

**AC:** Well the difficulty is we're unlikely to have any evidence unless we actually get the chance to meet the parent or parents and the child.

**Interviewer:** What would one annual visit achieve anyway? If you've got genuine concerns, what are you going to find on one day, because you'll have given prior warning, so really what would you learn?

**AC:** Well, I think that's a fair criticism and actually part of the problem with all this is that the law and the regulations are in our view inadequate, not fit for purpose, and I certainly hope that the next Government will give consideration and will address this matter. But so you are right that one visit a year is not a lot, but if we have people who know what they're doing, sufficiently skilled, they may identify on that one visit that perhaps there are some concerns and if they did have some concerns then of course we wouldn't leave it at that, we would follow it up. But in any case through one visit you can pretty reasonably satisfy yourself that the child is being properly educated, the parents are doing a good job and we'd leave them to get on with it.