

1. Huge increase in children disappearing from schools to be educated at home Children's

March 2019

The Children's Commissioner for England, has published a report, shining a light on the increasing number of children who are being educated at home. The report notes that while there are many parents who make a positive philosophical choice to educate their children at home, and do an excellent job, this is not always the case. There are tens of thousands of children in England receiving no school education. Many of them are 'off-grid', invisible to LAs. Following these investigations and research in the Commissioner's report, the Children's Commissioner is now calling for a compulsory home education register, stronger measures to tackle 'off-rolling', more support for families who home educate, a greater oversight of home schooled children and decisive action against unregistered schools. Later this year, the Children's Commissioner's Office will also collect data from all councils in England and publish it, school by school, identifying which schools have high numbers of children being withdrawn into home education which may suggest practices of off-rolling

Link: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2019/02/04/huge-increase-in-children-disappearing-from-schools-to-be-educated-at-home-childrens-commissioner-for-england-calls-for-a-compulsory-register-of-off-the-grid-children/>

2. 'Upskirting' now a specific crime as bill receives Royal Assent

'Upskirting' perpetrators face two years in prison and being placed on the sex offenders register, as a new law making the act a specific criminal offence is expected to receive Royal Assent today.

'Upskirting' typically involves offenders taking a picture under a person's clothing without them knowing, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks. The new law will ban the degrading practice to deter perpetrators, better protect victims, and bring more offenders to justice.

The Government intervened last June to bring forward measures to tackle this behaviour, after a Private Members Bill did not pass its second reading. The government-backed legislation has since successfully passed through both Houses of Parliament.

Justice Minister Lucy Frazer said:

"Those who commit such a degrading act will face prison, and victims' complaints will be dealt with seriously."

"Gina Martin and other victims, charities and MPs supporting her should be immensely proud. Her efforts show how one campaigner can work with government to change the law for everyone"

Gina Martin said:

"After 18 months of tireless work, today we've finally done it. As the Queen formally agrees to make our bill into an Act of Parliament, we should see this campaign as not only essential legislative change, but also proof that normal people and grassroots campaigning can make a real difference. It's a reminder to, instead of saying 'someone should do something about this', be that someone."

Link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/upskirting-now-a-specific-crime-after-bill-receives-royal-assent>

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3. Skipping School: Invisible Children

Many parents who make a philosophical decision to home educate put a substantial amount of thought and dedication into providing their children with a high quality education. But as this report has shown, there are many other families out there who have ended up home educating for other reasons, and are struggling to cope. There needs to be a cultural shift away from pressurised, hot-housing schools, to help stem the tide of children entering home education when it is not in the family's true interests or wishes. There is also a pressing need for more immediate measures to improve the experiences, safety and wellbeing of children who do end up being home educated. The Children's Commissioner's Office is calling for the following: A home education register Parents who are home educating their children should be required to register their children with the local authority. In a survey of local authorities in Autumn 2018, all 92 respondents agreed that a mandatory register would aid them in their work.

The register should include the child's name, date of birth and the address at which they are being educated. Parents should also be asked why they are home educating their child and whether they intend for the child to re-enter mainstream education at some point. There should be a requirement for parents to inform the local authority if they move away from the area and to re-register the child with their new local authority. Councils should put information-sharing agreements in place to further ensure that children do not disappear off-grid after moving. Strengthened measures to tackle off-rolling The Children's Commissioner's Office supports ongoing work by Ofsted to identify and tackle off-rolling, and welcomes specific mention of the practice in its new draft inspection framework. It is our hope that Ofsted will grasp this opportunity to come down hard on schools who are letting down some of the most vulnerable children, and we will provide data to Ofsted to identify which schools have high proportions of pupils moving into elective home education. School behaviour policies should acknowledge that poor behaviour may be linked to additional needs, such as SEND, and ensure that children with additional needs receive appropriate support. When inspecting schools with high levels of pupil movement, Ofsted should explore if there is any link between their behaviour policies and off-rolling. If particular behaviour policies are consistently a feature of schools found to be off-rolling, Ofsted should provide the evidence to the sector to enable schools to modify their policies. ADCS/Dispatches Home Education Survey 2018 19 Children who are withdrawn from school should be entitled to re-register with the same school without going through the usual admissions procedures. Local authorities should have the power to direct an academy school to admit a child who is being home educated and wants a school place. A financial penalty should be considered for schools that are found to be off-rolling pupils.

Link: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/cco-skipping-school-invisible-children-feb-2019.pdf>