

Helsinki 16.7.2020

To Whom It May Concern,

We want to express our concern about home education law in Netherlands.

School serves society and work life: it is a place where child can learn and have supervision through the time parents are at work. Work life and society has changed rapidly and more and more people are able to combine work and family life.

Compulsory education, according national or another acceptable curriculum, is the child's best interest. The compulsory schooling is not only way to reach good educational status for a child in modern society.

A way of living, where family members are mostly away from each other during weekdays, represent history for many families. At least in the countries where people can freely decide which lifestyle is best for them. Providing legislation, which allows people to make decisions over their lives, and how they decide to educate their children, is a democratic and tolerate society.

We are family from Helsinki, Finland. We are professionals: one parent works on Financial Services as a Portfolio Manager and other in import field, as a Purchase Manager. Our youngest child has never been at school (born 2009), older siblings are already in the University.

We have been active in home education field in our country, and we both are founding members of Homeschool Association Finland. One of us has been a Chair of the Board of Homeschool Association Finland for two years.

We have been considering moving to your country. Therefore, we want to express our concern about the home education law in Netherlands.

Compulsory Education and home education in Finland

In Finland home education is legal alternative to the school in order to fulfill the compulsory education.

The law proposal which limits home education in your country only to those, who inform the decision to homeschool well before child turns age of five, is not understandable in our point of view. In Finland families have right to unregister their children from the school anytime. Parents

need to notify the school authorities, no permission needed. Parents can do that anytime, even middle of the school year.

After informing the school about the decision to home educate, the responsibility of the children's education belongs to the parents. Some regions, example in Helsinki, there is official form for this purpose. In Helsinki parents can express their wish in this form if they want to co-operate with specific teacher.

The local school authority will then name the Inspecting Teacher for the child. The Inspecting teacher will usually meet the children (and the parents) one or two times a year. Usually this meeting takes place at school, but can also be at example library, child's home, or whatever place the parents and the Inspecting Teacher agrees.

Homeschool family can decide which learning methods and materials they use. They can choose to follow the school's curriculum or do own curriculum according the National Curriculum. They will then inform the Inspecting Teacher the curriculum they follow.

There is no strict guidelines about the supervision, it varies a lot across Finland. As a being home education activists and arranging peer group meetings for home educating families and children for nearly five years' time, we have received a comprehensive view of procedures in different parts of Finland.

Many home school families have very positive co-operation with the Inspecting Teacher.

How our home educated child is supervised by the government

We have been under two schools and worked with two inspecting teachers. With both teachers we has had almost the same procedure.

We have met the teacher once a year, end of the spring term. Usually the inspection meeting has been at the school and lasting for approximately 2 hours. This year we met the Inspecting Teacher via videocall.

Before the meeting we always write short report how our child has progress. Also, we provide access to database (not public webpage), where is pictures of the museum visits, field trips and our child's notebooks. We also include a little section about our child's social life: hobbies etc. Nothing of this is demanded: first of all, this is tool to ourselves to keep in the tract of our childs learning, and second is to assist the Inspecting Teacher on her duty.

At the meeting the Inspecting Teacher did this year short test about reading speed and understanding. Most of the time our child showed the learning projects he have made to the teacher and they talked freely. The purpose of this meeting is to follow that our child do progress. It is not for evaluation and no grades are given. After the meeting the Inspecting Teacher will write short statement, which is sent directly to Department of Education and on signed copy to us.

We feel this kind of follow by the Government is good. We believe that professional teacher can easily get a good idea about the learning and child's welfare with this kind of procedure. There is no home visit, and no mandatory level testing in Finland.

Home education is not an education at home

The common misunderstanding about home education is that it imitates the learning methods from the school.

Through the volunteer work, we have met a lot of home school parents and children. In home education, a wider range of learning environments can be utilized than in education in traditional school. Many families, who home-educate their children use various learning environments.

In our family, European history has been studied on historical sites e.g. In Rome, Crete, Aachen and Berlin. Asian history at the Terracotta Army in Xian and museums in Hong Kong. At the same time, our children have learned languages and cultural history. Museums, nature walks and libraries are also important learning environments for us. Needless to say, acting in social situations, cultural sensitivity, and good manners receive practice in these real-life situations.

Our solely home educated child attends weekly lessons in English, Geography and Economics in virtual real-time school room, where children across the world learn together. He studies Spanish and Chinese with private native teachers and lessons are conducted via video conference. Our child also learns English with Artificial Intelligence personalized learning method with the latest technology. He interacts weekly approximately 40 peer learners across the world, and with 6 professional teachers and 1 non-professional tutor. These lessons can be participated without limit of physical location, as long as Internet connection exist. He also has good friends with whom he goes out to play and several group hobbies he attends regularly.

With this kind of learning environment and arrangements our child has time and energy to deepen his knowledge on the matters he feels important to himself. He has worked on his music and he has published three releases in past year time, which are available on main music services. As we are not musically gifted parents, this all has been complete self-directed learning experience, which we parent only encourage and facilitate. This is example of benefits of home education, where a child can learn to utilize technology.

We wish Netherlands to be open and tolerate to the families to choose home educate their children.

Government is for it's citizen. It should serve diversity and freedom, no legislation or restrictions should be based on prejudice. There are a lot of prejudices associated with homeschooling that have no basis in reality or no scientific study has shown to be true.

The thread of children to be isolated, mistreated or raised with extremist views can not be reason to restrict (and at the end to prohibit) home education from everyone. Also to prohibit home education, except conducted in Dutch, does not, in our opinion, provide equality, as long as there are international schools operating in English, German or other foreign languages.

As Brexit pushes many international companies to move their operations and headquarters to new premises, tightening the restrictions now, will show closed doors to many families and make Netherlands less competitive.

There are more and more families, whose parents can work, full or part time, without being present

at workplace. Distance work is becoming new normal. This will allow families to build new life styles and parents to be more present to their children.

Trust in a family, who has decided to educate their children at home, is as important as government action to ensure the child's well-being.

Development of new technology means revolution to who owns the knowledge, as well as access to the knowledge. Encyclopedias from the teacher's room and bookshelves from the library has moved to everymans's pocket. Homeschooling is booming trend in Finland and elsewhere.

Instead of restrictions and forcing control, we hope open minds to the fact that we are now facing a new way of life. More people than ever can influence their own daily lives: they can combine family and work in a new way. It increases the well-being of families.

The restrictions due Covid-19 in recent months are, we believe, is the catalyst for inevitable change in many fields in the society. Home education and distance education solutions are booming fields in many countries. We wish your country to keep open to all families: please take step forwards toward future.

Yours Sincerely,

Mrs. Taina Huhtamo

Mr. Juha Rajakenttä

Helsinki, Finland