



**Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director –
Children's Services**

Report to:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Date:	20 November 2020
Subject:	Elective Home Education Update

Summary:

Since the full opening of schools in September following Covid-19 lockdown, there has been a considerable increase in the number of parents opting to home educate their children. This report provides data and an analysis of the situation to support the Committee's understanding of any potential risks to children's welfare and learning.

Actions Required:

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is invited to review the data for Elective Home Education and comment on the analysis provided in the report.

1. Background

Elective Home Education (EHE) is a parental choice and one chosen by parents who wish to educate their own children due to a range of reasons. During lockdown when schools were closed, notifications of EHE were very low as there was no requirement to send children to school and therefore, in theory, all parents were home educating their children. Since September 2020 when schools fully reopened, there has been a significant increase in the number of parents who have chosen to home educate. 357 Elective Home Education notifications were received over the period 1 September 2020 to 9 October 2020, compared with 62 in September 2019 and 62 for the whole month of October 2019. Part of this increase will include a catch up of those that ordinarily would have been referred between March and August. However, taking this into consideration, there were still approximately 160 more referrals for the period March to October this year, compared with last year.

Schools are being asked to support families who are anxious about sending their children to school during the pandemic and where possible, offer alternatives to parents who may be considering EHE as an option. Some parents, however, are not prepared to send their children to school and have opted to temporarily home educate. 155 schools have provided notification of 1+ children being removed from

school to be home educated since September 2020. The highest number in one school is 12, with four secondary schools reporting between 7 and 12 pupils, and six secondary schools reporting 6 pupils.

An analysis of the current data shows that there is no variation across year groups. Lincoln and Boston appear to have the biggest percentage increase since September, possibly because they are densely populated areas. Numbers of EHE children who are Child in Need (CiN), Child Protection (CP) or a Looked After Child (LAC) are low and there is not a disproportionate increase amongst the new EHE cases. There are 59 children who are home educated with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP); six of these are new EHE referrals which is a similar number to other years.

The reasons parents have to home educate their child has been analysed for 179 new referrals. 26 have specifically mentioned Covid-19. 59 have given health reasons, 26 temporary arrangements, 12 have given refusal to attend and 10 parental choice; all could possibly be interpreted as Covid-19 related. Anecdotal observations from the safeguarding and education welfare officers (SEWO) conclude that the majority of the families have chosen EHE until they feel it is safe for their children to go back to school and most children had previously performed as expected at school.

By 9 October 2020, 173 EHE Intention to Educate submissions were deemed as satisfactory allowing them to go on to the next stage of receiving an EHE provision meeting in three to four months' time. Two have been deemed as unsatisfactory. The remaining referrals will require a follow up by the Safeguarding and Education Welfare Officer (SEWO) by phone or visit if there continues to be no response. The officers have reported that the follow-up calls have been well received and are confident that more parents will respond with a plan of their intention to educate. However, there will be a proportional rise in the number of harder to reach families that will involve more officer time. If there is no response to the request for a plan to educate, the local authority will start a School Attendance Order to return the child to school.

Where the education has been deemed as satisfactory, the parent will then be invited to provide a submission of evidence or receive a call/video to discuss the education being provided in three months' time. This number will be significantly higher this year and will put pressure on the advisors who carry out the work. To manage this, the team will prioritise children with an EHCP, a child in need or a child protection case. It will also prioritise children who are identified by the schools as performing below average and those raised as a concern by the SEWO's. These children will be seen within normal timescales (three months). The remainder will be reviewed within six months of the initial visit, an extension of three months. If the Covid-19 situation improves, potentially, some of the families may return to school before the provision meeting is due.

Further data can be found in Appendix A.

2. Conclusion

Whilst it is parental choice to home educate, it is clear that there is a new cohort of parents who are making a choice that they would not have taken were they not concerned about sending their child to school during the pandemic. The notifications that have been received so far indicate that there are no significant patterns around year groups, locality or school. We are yet to determine the ability of parents to sustain an appropriate level of education at home and whether the education they are providing will allow the child to easily return to school in the future. In addition, the expectations of parents outlined in law, in relation to home education, is relatively low. We can conclude that there does not appear to be a disproportionate number of vulnerable children amongst the new EHE referrals; however we would anticipate that this period out of school is likely to impact on some of the children's learning.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

No risk and impact analysis was carried out.

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Elective Home Education Data: 1 September 2020 - 9 October 2020

5. Background Papers

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
Elective Home Education Protocol October 2020	https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/school-attendance/home-education/2?documentId=187&categoryId=20019

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