



Northumberland

County Council

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE 4TH MARCH 2021

Children who are electively home educated in Northumberland

Report of: Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services

Cabinet Member: Cllr Guy Renner-Thompson

Purpose of report

To provide information about the increase in the number of children who are electively home educated, and the multi-agency support that is in place for families.

Recommendations

1. Members note the impact of Covid 19 on the number of families choosing to electively home educate their children.
2. Members note the national recognition of the need for changes to legislation relating to elective home education.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the corporate objectives, and specifically the "Learning" and "Thriving" priorities of the Corporate Plan 2018 - 2021.

Key Issues

1. The number of children being electively home educated in Northumberland since September 2020 has increased sharply. The majority of parents state that their main reason for deciding to withdraw their children from school rolls is anxiety about the safety of school environments during the pandemic. EHE for those parents is a short term option and they intend to return their children to school rolls when they feel it is safe to do so.
2. The lack of contact of electively home educated children with professionals can, in a small number of cases, raise concerns about their safeguarding and the quality of their education. Northumberland's arrangements for supporting and monitoring EHE children were inspected by Ofsted during the ILAC inspection in February 2020 and were identified as a strength. In September 2020 implementation began

of a new multi-agency strategy to safeguard EHE children, with early indications that this is having a positive impact.

3. Members of the EHE community in Northumberland have expressed concerns to us about their children being 'invisible' during the pandemic because they are not at school. There is a sense of isolation, for example during lockdowns and with tier 3 and 4 restrictions EHE children have very limited opportunities to socialise with other children.

Background

1.0 Elective home education (EHE) refers to children of school age whose parents decide to remove them from a school roll to provide the equivalent of full time suitable education at home.

1.1 At the end of the Autumn Term 2020 there were 292 children known to be home educated in Northumberland. In recent years there has been an average of 213. Since 1st September there have been 109 new cases and 33 cases closed when children have returned to school rolls.

1.2 The profile of the 292 children who are EHE is that:

- 64% are of secondary school age
- there are even numbers of males and females
- 28% have SEND, including 23 children with EHCPs
- 10 of the SEND pupils are home tutored (using personal budgets)
- the most common age groups are 14 and 15 year olds
- 3 were permanently excluded and then home educated
- A small proportion are known to social care: 4 children in need, 1 child protection, no looked after

1.3 The majority of the parents of the new cases cite Covid 19 as the reason for deciding to EHE, but have also told us that this is a temporary measure until they are confident that it is safe for their children to return to school. 11 families decided after the first lockdown that home schooling and remote learning was a lifestyle choice which suited their families

1.4 There is no common characteristic for this group of children other than the parents' anxiety about school Covid security. The children are of all ages, from all areas of the county, from all school types.

1.5 The other most common reasons in Northumberland for parents deciding to EHE are:

- Preferred lifestyle choice
- Appealing an allocated school place and choosing to EHE during that process
- Dissatisfaction with school placement, including special school placement (or lack of)
- Child at risk of permanent exclusion from school

1.6 The DfE has not yet published any validated national figures, but we know from our regional EHE network that Northumberland has a high rate of increase compared to our local authority neighbours. This position is historical and no different to before the pandemic.

Data @ 01.11.20	Number of new EHE since Sept 20	Total number of EHE	% of pupil population registered as EHE
Darlington	68	182	
Durham	209	624	0.6%
Gateshead			0.49%
Hartlepool			
Middlesbrough			0.43%
Newcastle	87	275	0.43%
North Tyneside	52	121	0.35%
Northumberland	96	286	0.67%
Redcar	55	176	0.64%
South Tyneside	62	138	
Stockton	80	198	0.53%
Sunderland	57	196	0.51%

2.0 In Northumberland the Education Welfare team fulfils the local authority's statutory duties in relation to EHE. During the pandemic and each lockdown Education Welfare Officers have continued to contact EHE families and have held virtual meetings. Since September there have been only 6 overdue submissions of annual evidence of suitable education (a legal requirement) and this is better than usual for this time of year.

2.1 The Return to School Panel was a multi-disciplinary panel convened during lockdown 1 to co-ordinate extraordinary support for children and families who need it. Through the panel Education Welfare co-ordinated return to school meetings for EHE families who are all being contacted now to see if school places are required for when lockdown ends. The service will then provide support to the child to re-integrate successfully.

3.0 Safeguarding of children who are EHE is a priority. Our arrangements for EHE are inspected by Ofsted as part of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), and in other inspections such as the JTAI on child exploitation in June 2019. The arrangements are identified as a strength for the local authority. The Virtual School Headteacher is a member of the Northumberland Strategic Safeguarding Committee and provides regular updates to members.

3.1 There is no evidence to suggest that safeguarding concerns are higher in the home education community than for children who attend school. However, within the [current legal framework for EHE](#), children who are home educated can have little or no contact with professionals. Some children who are being educated at home could be in a position where they are at risk of harm. If they are not attending a school/academy it is more difficult to identify risks to these children. Within the limitations of the current statutory guidance, safeguarding of children who are EHE involves:

- contact from Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) with families and schools during the decision making process
- provision of [guidance](#) in meetings and on the [Virtual School webpage](#)
- risk assessment at the point of withdrawal from school and a risk assessment after the first 6 weeks of EHE
- regular contact with EWOs once EHE is in place, including face to face visits if parents agree
- use of a questionnaire to hear the child's view of EHE
- submission of annual evidence of suitable education from parents

- the issue of School Attendance Orders (SAO) when parents fail to co-operate and there are safeguarding issues relating to the child (ren)
- prosecution of parents who breach the SAO.

3.2 Any concerns regarding child protection are immediately referred to the local authority using established protocols. In September 2020 Northumberland introduced a multi-agency strategy to safeguard children who are EHE, which expands on the arrangements already in place. All agencies working with children are required to follow the process which involves co-ordinating the gathering and sharing of information through the front door to children's services.

4.0 Northumberland is actively participating in current national and/or strategic initiatives relating to EHE, seeking to influence improvements in the safeguarding of children and the quality of education they receive (as opposed to the provision of suitable education). We are contributing to:

- the DfE consultation with local authorities to research issues faced by the EHE community as an impact of Covid 19
- Ofsted's research project into EHE
- the ADCS EHE survey, published November 2020
- Northumberland is initiating a joint project through North of Tyne regarding potential gaps in achievement and pathways into education, training and employment for children who are EHE.

Implications

Policy	The DfE is expected to publish changes to current arrangements, including a different role for the local authority to support families who EHE.
Finance and value for money	Current arrangements are delivered within existing budgets.
Legal	None
Procurement	None
Human Resources	None
Property	None
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	None No formal risk assessment is required but there is expected changing national policy for families who EHE for which ongoing monitoring will be necessary.
Risk Assessment	Risk assessment of arrangements and for individual children is endemic in the multi-agency strategy EHE is included in the corporate risk register
Crime & Disorder	None
Customer Consideration	Measures are in place to capture the views of EHE children and parents are all allocated a named Education Welfare Officer
Carbon reduction	None
Health and Wellbeing	None
Wards	None

Background papers:

Report sign off

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

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