

Report on Elective Home Education

1. Executive Summary

The Education Act 1996 states it is the responsibility of parents to ensure that their children have a full time education. Where a parent decides to electively home educate their child the parent must inform the headteacher of the school the child attends.

The Education Social Welfare (ESW) service maintains a register of these children. A visit takes place within two weeks of the parent's decision to electively home educate, followed by a visit to determine the educational progress the child is making.

Numbers of children registered as Electively Home Educated continues to rise both locally and nationally. There was a 28% increase in the number of children registered as Electively Home Educated in Wirral by comparison with the previous year.

Over the last ten academic years the number of children electively home educated has increased. At the end of the academic year 2017/18 there were 207 children (108 secondary and 99 primary). The main reasons given by parents to educate their children at home were philosophical/religious reasons (68) followed by health reasons (31).

A new Elective Home Education Notification Form introduced earlier this year facilitates initial communication between schools and the ESW service when a child becomes home educated.

A private members bill is currently going through parliament seeking to address a number of issues in relation to Elective Home Education including a legal requirement for parents to register such children and Local Authorities powers and responsibilities to listen to the children's views.

2. Background:

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996, states:

"The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable -

(a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and

(b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise."

Parents have the right to arrange for their children to be educated other than by attendance at a school and some parents choose to educate them themselves.

In such cases the law requires Local Authorities to be satisfied that parents are providing a "full-time" "efficient" and "suitable" education, which takes account of "their age, ability and aptitude and any special needs that the child may have". However, the powers of Local Authorities in such circumstances are limited.

Under current legislation there is no requirement that parents register their child as being Electively Home Educated (although they are required to write to the Headteacher about their intentions if the child is registered at a school). There are currently no legal requirement for parents to allow local authority officers to speak to the child and ascertain their wishes and feelings. Resourcing for local authorities to provide services for children who are Electively Home Educated is also extremely limited and in most cases parents are expected to resource their child's education without any financial assistance. A private members bill is currently going through parliament seeking to address these issues and the Department for Education also consulted on these matters earlier this year.

Wirral's Education Social Welfare Service (ESWS) maintains a register of Electively Home Educated children who receive visits from a dedicated Education Social Worker usually within two weeks of any notification of an intention to home educate and will then have their educational progress assessed by an Elective Home Education Monitoring Officer (Teacher) within three months of the child becoming home educated. Under current legislation parents are not required to allow these officers access to their child but in most cases this is agreed. Any safeguarding concerns are reported to Childrens Social Care colleagues and if education progress is unsatisfactory consideration is given to using a School Attendance Order. There is also close liaison with a dedicated School Nurse to ensure health needs are met.

3. Increasing numbers of Children Registered as Electively Home Educated:

A comparison of the numbers of children educated at home over the last ten years is given below. The overall trend is of significantly increasing numbers of children Electively Home Educated especially over the last four years when numbers have more than doubled (since 2013/14). This trend appears to be happening both regionally and nationally. It should be noted that some children leave the register each year, for example, when they return to school, or when a place becomes available at their chosen school, or when a child is no longer of compulsory school age.

Year	Primary	Secondary	Total
2007/2008	9	26	35
2008/2009	15	27	42
2009/2010	25	30	55
2010/2011	25	36	61
2011/2012	25	42	67
2012/2013	29	39	68
2013/2014	36	43	79
2014/2015	60	53	113
2015/2016	57	62	119
2016/2017	72	90	162
2017/2018	99	108	207

4. Reasons why Parents Choose to Electively Home Educate:

Working with other local authorities in the region and nationally to try to develop a greater understanding of the reasons why parents choose to home educate their children, we agreed on nine different categories as outlined below:

- 1 Philosophical or religious reasons
- 2 Dissatisfaction with the school system
- 3 School unable to meet the needs of the child/SEN
- 4 Unable to secure placement at preferred school
- 5 Health (including mental health)
- 6 At risk of exclusion
- 7 At risk of prosecution/poor attendance
- 8 Bullying
- 9 Other

Although in many cases parents may quite legitimately give more than one reason for their choice, we agreed to select only one reason in each case so as to facilitate analysis. Analysis of the current cohort of pupils (April 2018) reveals the following:

	Pri	Sec	Total
1 Philosophical or religious reasons	45	23	68
2 Dissatisfaction with the school system	8	8	16
3 School unable to meet the needs of the child/SEN	9	17	26
4 Unable to secure placement at preferred school	5	2	7
5 Health (including mental health)	9	22	31
6 At risk of exclusion	0	5	5
7 At risk of prosecution/poor attendance	0	3	3
8 Bullying	2	8	10
9 Other	6	7	13

It is important to note that the reasons listed are parental perceptions. The main reason given by parents for choosing Elective Home Education was therefore philosophical or religious reasons (68) and this is particularly prevalent in the primary school age cohort. It should be noted that some parents choose to home educate for a period at an early age but with the intention that the child will eventually go to secondary school. Of those who remain Electively Home educated to GCSE and beyond in this cohort many achieve very well.

There are also significant numbers (26) of children with additional needs or SEN when the parents felt school was unable to meet those needs. The number is higher in secondary schools and in some cases relates to increasing academic pressures. There is also a noticeable rise in the number of pupils with health problems at secondary level and in particular social anxiety and anxiety about school (31). Other parents (16) are dissatisfied with the school system and there is often an overlap between this cohort and those who feel that their child's needs have not been met by school. Bullying was given as the reason in 10 cases.

Having reviewed the data discussed the reasons for the growth in numbers of Electively Home Educated Children both with colleagues within the LA and also colleagues within the region there appear to be a number of contributors to this including:

- **Philosophical or religious reasons.** This continues to be the highest proportion of EHE pupils. Many pupils in this cohort follow a very structured curriculum and have very good outcomes. As in all cases we would always check the reasons for choosing EHE and the plans for the child's education. We would always also make checks with Childrens Social Care and Health.
- **Dissatisfaction with the school system.** When parents are in dispute with their child's school we would always encourage them to try to resolve the matter and support them through this process. If this is not possible we would encourage them to consider other options including a transfer to another school and again support them through this process. There is sometimes an overlap with this cohort and the cohort of children with additional/SEN needs.
- **School unable to meet the needs of the child/SEN.** The number of children with EHCPs and additional needs has increased significantly since legislative changes were made regarding SEN introducing EHCPs. Parents are more aware of their choices and more are choosing EHE. In some cases funding or services may be provided by the LA. We liaise closely with the SEN Teams in such cases which are often very complex.
- **Unable to secure placement at preferred school.** There are 7 pupils registered where the family were unable to secure a place at their preferred school and in such cases parents may choose to home educate in the short-term while waiting for a place to become available or reviewing their options. In such cases we liaise with the parents and the School Admissions Team regarding the outcome.
- **Health (including mental health).** There are increased numbers of students withdrawn from school in relation to anxiety issues. This may be exacerbated by pressures on CAMHS leading to long waiting times. In such cases we would liaise with all agencies and work with the parents to explore all available options. A dedicated School Nurse also supports children who are Electively Home Educated.
- **At risk of exclusion.** Department of Education Guidance specifically advises that schools should not suggest EHE as an alternative to permanent exclusion but this does happen at times. In such cases we would firstly speak with parents and the student to check out their understanding of their choices and if appropriate we would challenge the school to accept the student back. In some cases this has meant escalating the discussion so that the Director of Children's Services writes to the Chair of Governors. Such challenges have generally been successful in resolving matters. The Director wrote to all schools regarding this issue earlier this year.
- **At risk of prosecution/poor attendance.** Parents cannot avoid prosecution through this route as they remain responsible for their child's education whilst they are on a school roll.
- **Bullying.** We would always advise parents to meet with school to try to find a way forward which ensures both the child feels safe and their parents have

confidence in schools ability to keep the child safe but this is not always possible. In such cases we would offer to support the family in obtaining a school place elsewhere.

- **Other.** These include cases where the family are due to move to another area shortly or where there has been a recent trauma within the family and EHE is seen as a short-term option.

5. Recent Developments:

- A new Elective Home Education Notification Form introduced earlier this year facilitates initial communication between schools and ESWS when a child becomes home educated.
- A private members bill is currently going through parliament seeking to address a number of issues in relation to Elective Home Education including a legal requirement for parents to register such children and Local Authorities powers and responsibilities to listen to the children's views. The Department of Education also consulted on these matters earlier this year.
- Numbers of children registered as Electively Home Educated continue to rise both locally and nationally. There was a 28% increase in the number of children registered as Electively Home Educated in Wirral by comparison with the previous year.

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