

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

11 January 2021

Subject:	Elective Home Education Scrutiny Board
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1 To receive a progress update from the Elective Home Education Scrutiny Working Group.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Children's Services and Education Board requested regular update reports relating to the work of the Elective Home Education Scrutiny Working Group.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 At previous meetings, this Board agreed the purpose and scope of the review, and received scene setting report about Elective Home Education (EHE) in Sandwell.
- 4.2 Nationally, there has been a very significant increase in the number of children being educated at home. Elective Home Education numbers over the last 5 academic years has risen in Sandwell. The review aims to gather evidence to understand the have, needs and wants for Elective Home Education in Sandwell and to raise awareness of the limitations placed on the Local Authority (LA).
- 4.3 At a meeting of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families and Directors of Children’s Services (DCS) in September 2020, off-rolling and increases in numbers of children in elective home education were discussed. Some Local Authorities (LAs) had seen an increase in EHE. It was considered that the pandemic had heightened the risk that some children may be inappropriately withdrawn from school for EHE, either because parents have reservations about sending children to school, or because they are encouraged to do so by schools. There was a general view that LAs need greater powers and that parents may not understand fully the longer-term implications of EHE.
- 4.4 In November 2020 summary analysis of the ADCS Elective Home Education Survey 2020 was published (appendix 1). The annual elective home education (EHE) survey captures the number and characteristics of children and young people who are known to be



home educated. The survey also aims to understand the reasons behind a family's decision to electively home educate, how LAs across the country are supporting these families, and how any available resources are being deployed in this area.

- 4.5 This year's survey also included a focus on the Covid-19 pandemic and how this has impacted upon the number of children and young people electively home educated. The survey findings show that the number of children withdrawn from school for elective home education had soared by 38 per cent in the past year – jumping from 54,656 to 75,668.
- 4.6 The Working Group had found that Sandwell's increase in EHE is higher than the 38% National average. As at 30th October 2020, Sandwell had received 220 new EHE referrals (including 90 citing Covid as the primary reason) representing an increase of 49% in comparison with the previous academic year.
- 4.7 The Working Group has carried out a survey aimed to learn more about EHE in Sandwell and why families were choosing it as an alternative to school. The survey was distributed on 2 November 2020 to all home educating families registered in Sandwell, which represents 561 young people. Parents and children were invited to fill in separate surveys.
- 4.8 The Working Group received analysis from 15 adult surveys and 19 children surveys, some families had included all of the children in a single survey. The low response rate was disappointing, but the feedback received was very positive about EHE support in Sandwell and provided some useful comments. Analysis and data provided will feed into the final report.
- 4.9 Since September 2020, Ofsted has been carrying out assurance visits to local authorities to consider if they are making the best decisions for children in care during the pandemic. There had been eleven satisfactory visits to Sandwell schools by mid-November.
- 4.10 A Schools Week press release in December had highlighted that Ofsted has 'rapped a council' after discovering potential off-rolling of children in care, with the number of pupils educated at home shooting up more than 20 per cent. Analysis found that nine of the ten children's services visits



conducted since September mentioned a rise in the number of children being home-educated, although, the watchdog recognised many councils had effective processes in place to track such changes. The Working Group has found that Sandwell processes are working very well.

- 4.11 At the last meeting the Chair requested an update on the Education Select Committee's Inquiry of EHE. The DfE Senior Case Lead for this area was unable to join the meeting but has since advised that the call for evidence, for the Inquiry, closed on November 6 and a further update has been requested from the parliamentary team.
- 4.12 The parliamentary policy team has indicated it would welcome Sandwell Councils EHE Working Group evidence to help inform the national picture, especially as the views of children, families, and teachers were being gathered.
- 4.13 There may be further opportunity for representatives from Sandwell to re-engage with Westminster and the All Party Parliamentary process as previously attended by the Service Manager in his capacity as a member of the Association of EHE Professionals.

5 The Current Position – Working Group

5.1 The EHE Working Group has met three times since the last update:

9 November 2020: to consider a scene setting report, case studies and to receive an update on surveys

24 November 2020: Focus Group with Parents, children and EHE advisory teachers

2 December 2020: considered analysis from EHE surveys, feedback from the Focus group with parents, children and advisory teachers, the cost of home education in Sandwell and how EHE is funded



5.2 The current estimated cost of EHE support in Sandwell is based on a team resource as detailed below:

Role	Hours	£ with on-costs
EHE Advisory Teacher	37	48,800
EHE Advisory Teacher	32.5	42,800
Outreach / EOTAS* worker	37	38,600
*Education Otherwise than at school		130,200

Please note that the above costings do not include additional resource or administrative support or any costs associated with the line management / supervision of the above posts.

5.3 The government have stated that:

- the Local Authority will be responsible for setting a local schools funding formula for 2021/22.
- that later this year they will be putting forward plans to move to a “hard” national funding formula in the future, which will determine school funding allocations directly, rather than local funding formula.

Ultimately this means that when this becomes effective there would be a need to invoice schools for those services provided by the LA via the De-delegated and education functions budgets. The government may in the future change the funding rate and what it covers.

5.4 Education Directorate funding at present is based on several funding streams including:

1. De-delegated budget / Delegated schools grants
2. Education Functions budget
3. Central School Services budget
4. Penalty Notice Income - suspended post March 2020

As there is no dedicated budget, the future funding for Elective Home Education presents a degree of uncertainty and questions remain about the sustainability of existing and future EHE services. This is most concerning given the statutory need to ensure that all children in Sandwell receive "efficient full-time education appropriate to their age, aptitude and special educational needs".



- 5.5 The Working Group agreed at the last meeting to extend the timelines for the review to June 2020 for the following reasons:
- To add a focus group with teachers and headteachers from primary, secondary and special schools, including PRU teachers, to hear evidence from a school perspective.
 - To monitor trends, increase/ return to school rates, into 2021.
 - To observe the progress of the Education Select Committee Inquiry- Home Education, to include the response of DfE re – resources and regulations for EHE.
- 5.6 The Working Group highlighted that social workers have access to homes that the Local Authority would not when dealing with children who are not on a school roll. The Working Group has invited the Group Head Front Door SCT to attend meetings to strengthen collaborative working and raise awareness of home education and safeguarding.

6 Next steps

- 6.1 From the evidence gathered to date the Working Group has identified that Sandwell EHE support is strong and that parents value the commitment and passion of the advisory teachers, there are several matters for further investigation which the Council could consider:
- Spaces where HE groups can meet to educate and socialise in their HE communities. These would be safe spaces where children sign in and could include facilities for class space with IT, exam space, sport hall/field for events, swimming bath booking, seasonal concert;
 - A Home Education resource hub available to parents/ children to donate and access books, DVD, arts/craft and other educational materials;
 - A social network for EHE children, perhaps link to Just Youth – what's on for young people in Sandwell via the youth service;
 - Negotiating competitive rates for HE groups;
 - Closer working with SCT on the Front Door to safeguard children;
 - Investigate process for assessments for EHE children in relation to SEN/ EHCP;
 - To monitor progress of the Education Select Committee Inquiry - Home Education.



6.2 The Working Group scheduled meetings:

- 27 January 2021: Focus Group with Teachers/Head teachers;
- 12 February 2021: Evidence gathering/ findings table;
- 15 March Children’s Services and Education Board – update;

Other meetings to be scheduled as necessary to consider the recommendations and draft report.

7 Consultation

7.1 The working group have conducted two surveys to consult with Parents and children who are educated at home.

8 Alternative Options

8.1 The purpose of the review is to consider current support for Elective Home Education and if it meets the needs of young people and parents, findings will inform if the Council should consider alternative options.

9 Implications

Resources:	There is no dedicated budget for EHE. There continues to be increasing demands on the EHE service due to increasing numbers of children being educated at home.
Legal and Governance:	There is a statutory requirement to ensure that all children in Sandwell receive efficient full-time education appropriate to their age, aptitude and special educational needs.
Risk:	Scrutiny will consider risk implications, including any safeguarding measures
Equality:	Scrutiny will consider implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty
Health and Wellbeing:	Good education and attainment levels increase the wellbeing of children and young people and contributes to them having the best possible start in life.



10 Appendices

Appendix 1 - summary analysis of the ADCS Elective Home Education Survey 2020

11. Background Papers

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board [20 July 2020](#)

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board [16 November 2020](#)

