

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	17 November 2021
Title of Report:	Elective Home Education
Lead Member:	Councillor David Downie (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills, Children and Young People)
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Isabelle Morgan
Contact Email:	Isabelle.morgan@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	AB.IM.20211117.3
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

The Education and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested information regarding the current position in Plymouth regarding Elective Home Education. The purpose of the report is to provide information in order to facilitate Committee discussions around this line of enquiry.

Recommendations and Reasons

The Committee is asked to note the report.

Alternative options considered and rejected

None this is a report only

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

This report supports the 'Caring for People and Communities' priority. It helps to make sure children and young people benefit from a suitable education in order to achieve; develop the necessary skills to be productive citizens who can make a sustained contribution to both the society and economy of the city. It will also help to reduce inequalities within the city.

This report supports the 'Unlocking the City's Potential' Priority. It helps to make sure children and young people benefit from a suitable education in order to achieve; develop the necessary skills to be productive citizens who can make a sustained contribution to both the society and economy of the city. It will also help to reduce inequalities within the city.

The work reflects our values of co-operation between partners and the recognition that as a society, we are responsible for each other.

Background papers:

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable)						
	If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	djn.21. 22.15 0	Leg	LS/37 596/A C/5/1 1/21	Mon Off		HR		Assets		Strat Proc	
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Ming Zhang											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 04/11/2021											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor David Downie approved by email.											
Date approved: 05/11/2021											

Elective Home Education (EHE)

The Home Education Service came back in-house on 1st September 2019. The Inclusion Attendance and Welfare Service (IAWS) has responsibility for delivering the service. To date we have seen an increase in 27.9% across the same period last year, approximately 1.75% of the statutory school aged population in Plymouth was home educated during academic year 2020/21. There is a higher rate of increase nationally according to a BBC survey.

Through the use of a rigorous monitoring framework and the work of the Inclusion Strategy Board we are moving toward a more preventative model to prevent and reduce the number of inappropriate elective home education before it takes place.

Vulnerability and risk

Having brought the Home Education Service back in-house we now understand the prevalence of statutory school aged children who are registered as home educated but who are in fact inappropriate and missing education. In academic year 2020-21 we therefore issued 38 School Attendance Orders, which is high in number and currently have 15 children for whom there is no evidence of suitable education and for whom we are following our enforcement processes. While we are moving to a preventative service model, we continue to identify children who need this level of statutory intervention.

In total 65.4% statutory school aged children were registered as home educated during academic year 2020/21, of those children 232 had been open Children's Social Care on a Child In Need Plan and 57 on a Child Protection Plan at some point across the same period. This clearly demonstrates a higher number of vulnerable children becoming EHE in Plymouth and indicates vulnerability of many children in the city who are home educated.

Partnership

In August 2021 as a result of a Rapid Review, the IAWS and Children's Social Care completed a joint analysis of vulnerability for the 299 registered home educated children in the city. As a result 5 children were identified as **RED**, 15 as **AMBER** and the remainder as **GREEN** to guide the level of service inputs. 13 actions were agreed as the result of the audit and this work was undertaken by Education Welfare Officers.

Elective Home Education Data

Numbers of statutory school aged children registered as EHE **at the end of each** academic year:

Academic Year	Number of registered EHE students*
2013/14	96
2014/15	122
2015/16	130
2016/17	164
2017/18	286
2018/19	342
2019/20	369
2020/21	375

Please note that this is locally held data. There is currently there is no requirement for data around Elective Home Education to be reported to DfE. This means that there is no ability to benchmark against national, regional or statistical neighbour averages at this time. We have contacted colleagues from the following authorities Portsmouth, Cornwall, North Somerset, Bristol, South Gloucester and Gloucestershire, from the conversation that we have had we understand that the percentage of children who are home educated in Plymouth is average when compared to the other authorities.

Academic Year end	% boys	% girls
2013/14	51%	49%
2014/15	52%	48%
2015/16	51%	49%
2016/17	52%	48%
2017/18	51%	49%
2018/19	50%	50%
2019/20	49%	51%
2020/21	50%	50%

Academic Year end	Number with statement / EHCP	% of EHE population
2013/14	11	11%
2014/15	16	13%
2015/16	12	9%
2016/17	17	10%
2017/18	29	10%
2018/19	33	9%
2019/20	38	10%
2020/21	33	8%

The figures below show the information for EHE students on 7th September 2021

Number of EHE pupils registered	277
Number of girls	135
Number of boys	142
Number of EHE registered eligible for FSM	64
Number with EHCP	19*
Number who previously had SEN support	54
Number who are Children in Need	7
Of which are on a Child Protection Plan	2

*This figure does not include post 16 children who have and EHCP and are registered as home educated. The post-16 cohort who are not in education are managed through Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) process, instead of EHE.

Registered EHE Pupils by Year Group

Year Group	Number
0	0
1	8
2	19
3	13
4	26
5	31
6	21
7	12
8	28
9	28
10	31
11	60

Registered Pupils by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Registered
OOEG - Other Ethnic Group	2
Not Known	46
MOTH - Any Oth Mixed b'ground	8
WWEU - White Western Euro'n	4
WTUR - Turkish/Turkish Cypriot	0
MWBA - White and Black African	4
APKN – Pakistani	0
MWBC - White & Black Caribbean	0
CHKC - Hong Kong Chinese	0
NOBT - Info not yet obtained	9
WEEU - White Eastern Euro'n	3
WOTW - White Other	8
WBRI - White British	164
REFU – Refused	5
WENG - White English	17
WIRI - White Irish	3
WROO - Other Gypsy/Roma	0

Registered Pupils by Ethnicity	
Ethnicity	Registered
WROM - Gypsy/Roma	3
MWAS - White and Asian	1

Reason for EHE	All registered students
Dissatisfaction with the school environment	40
Lifestyle/Philosophical/Culture*	19
Attendance/Prosecution	0
Medical – Child	1
Medical – Parent	0
School refuser/phobic	13
Bullying	6
Emotional behavioural difficulties	0
Near Exclusion	3
Other	9
Dissatisfaction with SEN provision	0
Relationship issues	0
Not preferred school	5
No reason recorded	127
Not known (at time of recording on ONE)	10
Religious Beliefs	0
COVID-19 related	33
Parent failed to engage with service	7
Parent refused to complete paperwork	4

What does the 2020/21 academic year data tell us?

The number of children home educated continued to rise in 2020/21, 573 children were registered for elective home education. There were 49 applications for children to return to primary school and 58 applications for secondary aged pupils across the same period.

Of the 573 children whose parents elected for them to be home educated, 363 were secondary school aged and 210 are primary school aged. 189 were in years 10 and 11 and 174 in years 7, 8 & 9. This reflects the concern nationally that schools might be “encouraging” families to remove their children to educate them at home. There is some evidence that a small number of schools have disproportionately high numbers of pupils leaving to be home educated.

An Education Welfare Officer (EWO) will conduct an initial home visit once a referral has been made to the IAWS regarding a parents intention to home educate. If the EWO in carrying out their duty receives information from the parents regarding off-rolling practice, the Headteacher will be challenged by the IAWS manager and advised to put the child(ren) back on roll.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

There are currently 43 children and young people who are educated at home and who have an EHCP, 19 of these pupils are statutory school aged and are considered and managed through Elective Home Education (EHE) process. This number has increased in recent years and reflects the national trend. A deep dive analysis is being conducted to fully understand this increasing trend in Plymouth and this work is being fed back into to the work of the Inclusion Strategy Board. There is a need to ensure that families are making a positive choice to educate at home, supported around the options and have access to the information needed to make this successful for the child. There is information available on the council website and the [SEND Local Offer](#) to support families.

Key messages from the deep dive analysis so far:

- The 2020/21 monthly trend of the volume of EHE can be linked to the COVID-19 pandemic government restrictions;
- The majority of EHE pupils do not have an identified special education need. Understanding the reasons behind the EHE decision requires further analysis;
- There is an even gender split across the whole EHE population but more males are EHE with special Education needs;
- Most pupils become EHE in Key Stage three; and currently most EHE pupils are in Key Stage four. This could be linked to the rise in numbers of EHE through the pandemic leading up to key transition points, highlighting that post-16 support is essential for these pupils over the next few years;
- The majority of children and young people remain EHE for approximately one year (48 weeks for all EHE and SEN Support pupils). Children and young people who previously had an EHCP remain in EHE for almost two years (100 weeks);
- 70.8% of pupils (51) who registered as home educated across the period are registered as SEN support;
- 36% (12) of pupils who registered as home educated across the period have an EHCP; the majority of reasons provided relate to the school not meeting child’s needs and school anxiety not directly COVID-19 related (although not meeting needs through the pandemic and school anxiety could indirectly be related to the pandemic);

- The primary need type of all EHCP pupils (0-25) is Communication and Interaction (all of which identify Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) as the secondary need type). Very few identify SEMH as the primary need.

The most prevalent reasons for parents electing to home educate in 2020/21 are:

- Dissatisfaction with the school environment
- Lifestyle/Philosophical/Culture
- COVID-19 related
- School refuser/phobic
- No reason recorded

Safeguarding

In order to be assured that we effectively safeguard children who are home educated we review the Child At Risk Alerts on a daily basis, they are then RAG rated for action. If we receive any evidence that the home environment is unsuitable or that there is a lack of parental supervision and control we follow this up with increased monitoring checks.

Where parents are considering home education and Children's Social Care are involved we are linking with the social worker to develop a joint plan to try prevent the parent from deregistering their child to home education.

We use the databases available to us to make checks regarding historical and current multi-agency involvement in order to ensure that cases can be RAG rated and prioritised for increased monitoring or a multi-agency approach.

We also have fortnightly home education team meetings and staff receive regular case supervision.

We have a CPOMS licence, which enables us to receive school safeguarding files when a child is registered as home educated, again this provides us with an extra level of oversight so that we can plan casework according to levels of risk.

We are working in partnership with schools to keep children on roll for a brief period of time (with the parents consent) so that Education Welfare Officers can meet with the family, seek the voice of the child and ensure that the parent is making a positive and informed choice. Where there is an opportunity for a child to return to school, the EWO will support the family with this. Where there is a suggestion of off-rolling practice this is followed up by an LAWS Manager.

Monitoring

The work is intensive and requires over and above the FTE allocated to deliver the service. Plymouth City Council monitors the suitability of home education within the first 3 months of a pupil being registered as home educated and if the education is deemed as suitable, the monitoring activity is carried out on an annual basis. Home educators submit their evidence via email or post and children are not routinely seen as a part of the monitoring process. Home visits are conducted and prioritised on a case by case basis.

School Attendance Orders

A great deal of work has been undertaken with school to increase their understanding of the monitoring work being undertaken for home education. Schools have been extremely supportive of being named on School Attendance Orders, as a result we have been able to support children to return to school quickly. In issuing school attendance orders we are actively seeking the preference of

the parent so that we can try and name a school on the Order which has space and is a school that they want. Inevitably a number of the children have had ACE named on their Order and this is because their needs are such that it is the only suitable provision available to them.

Transition

12 months pilot funding has been secured through the High Needs Block for a Transition Practitioner to provide electively home educated children with the support that they need to return to mainstream education, this pilot project will be effective from January 2022. In addition, 6 months of funding, which will come out of the EP&S school improvement budget, has been secured to employ a qualified teacher to work with families and monitor the suitability of home education.

Development Plans

On 7th September 2021 there were 277 children registered as home educated. Plymouth City Council's Rapid Improvement Board will consider how to develop policy and practice in relation to Elective Home Education, making recommendations regarding citywide arrangements and resourcing in Plymouth.