

## Elective Home Education - EHE

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### **Brief Summary**

Elective Home Education continues to be an ongoing priority within Children and Learning. Following significant development in recent years against an ever changing landscape. The recent ILAC inspection stated that:

*Robust processes and systems are in place to track and safeguard children educated at home or missing from education. There is effective & close working between officers to safeguard children when concerns are identified and to ensure that children are not lost from sight.*

The service has continued to work exceptionally hard to maintain its focus on priority cases (those who are on child protection plans, child in need plans, pupils with EHCP's and those involved within the criminal justice system) as well as annual contacts for over 450 cases. The service, comprised of 2 term time only Home Visitors, have significantly increased the number of home visits and contacts with families to support them either to ensure the education of their child/children is of satisfactory quality or to support them return to mainstream schooling.

It is a testament to their commitment that over 170 children have returned to mainstream schooling over the past 2 years, often with substantial challenges and poor life experiences. This has resulted in staff members being recognised by 'Educating Otherwise' a national charity that supports EHE families and recognises professionals where the EHE community have nominated them for their excellent practice.

Despite the proposals in the white paper to introduce a 'Register' for children not in school, this has since been shelved. This appears to still have political support, however, it is unlikely that it will be made statutory for some years. Since the white paper, the service has taken its recommendations and began implementing them out of good practice. A review of the team structure as well and changes to the information we collect has enabled us to improve our reporting capability. The implementation of a 'Children Not In School' Panel is also to be in place in the autumn term, which brings in other services from the directorate to have a broader oversight of the multiple monitoring streams.

### **Data – Numbers (As of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023)**

In Southampton we have seen an increase in the number of pupils who have gone Electively Home Educated. In the academic year 2021/2022 the percentage of the school population who were registered as EHE was 1.21%, in 2022/2023 this rose to 1.46% (Approx 490 children). The pattern of data appears to suggest that since the pandemic, where there was a spike of increased cases, we are seeing a steady increase, year on year of new cases in Southampton.

We have seen the similar patterns of data around EHE for the last few years in terms of a breakdown of needs and age groups. The secondary phase continues to be the area of highest new cases, whilst year 7 remains the year group with the largest number of cases across the academic year group. Around 22% are registered as SEND K and only 4.7% have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

It is not compulsory for parents and families to inform us of their reasons for going EHE, however, where appropriate we always try to establish these and this remains part of our monthly monitoring. The highest reason for parents choices continues to be that of mental health and wellbeing of their child/children. With the second highest reason being, waiting for a school of their choice.

### **Strengths of Council approach**

- Policies and processes remain effective and allows for the tracking and identification of priority cases. Staff are able to identify the suitability of education and can establish examples within their caseloads.
- Annual contact is managed remotely in line with guidelines and families are aware of expectations and timelines.
- Staffing is well established and relationships with the EHE community is good.
- Allocation and review of cases is good and enables a larger reach of cases per staff member.
- Relationships with schools is good and the number of cases where perceived 'off rolling' is significantly reduced. Schools are happy to work with us on cases where possible, and audits for schools with high numbers of EHE is in place if required. Schools have actively requested an internal review of their processes and remain keen to keep an open dialogue with the LA.
- Partnership working with other teams and professionals such as Early Help and Social Care.
- Through partnership with Hampshire County Council, we have established a very good working relationship and regularly meet as a service and share challenges and good practice. One aspect that has come from these meetings is a joint plan to write a Re-integration guidance for schools when they support new EHE pupils back into mainstream education.

### **Challenges**

- Pupil numbers continue to rise year on year, whilst the number of pupils returning to school remains the same.
- Caseloads remain at capacity and are largely taken up with priority cases, resulting in less available capacity for preventative work.
- The impact of the pandemic has had a huge impact on the school age population and shows significantly higher levels for some families.
- School of choice spaces in the secondary phase continue to prevent some families returning to mainstream education, but further discussions and options are always presented to families before continuing with their EHE journey.
- Due to the high numbers of priority cases, it reduces the capacity for further early intervention and pro-active work within schools.

## **Next Steps**

The focus on the service is to continue to ensure that all priority cases are allocated and that allocation is swift and as early as possible. We are currently working on the following areas to improve the service:

- Children Not In School Panel – multi-agency panel to oversee different streams of monitoring and increase visibility and accountability.
- Annual review of processes and guidance documents
- Writing a cross border guidance on reintegration of EHE pupils
- We are working hard to develop a robust legal framework around the legislation where there are cases that cannot evidence suitable education and that meet the threshold for school attendance orders.