



## Report to CYP&FS Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 25.02.2021

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**Report of:** Andrew Jones - Director Education and Skills

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**Subject:** Elective Home Education

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### **Summary:**

This report is being submitted at the request of the committee to look at the response to children who are being Electively Home Educated and the rise in children being Home Educated because of the Pandemic.

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**Type of item:** The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	/
Other	

### **The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:**

In reading the response and approach to Elective Home Education, including the introduction of policy and additional staffing we welcome the views, comments, and recommendations from the committee.

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### **Background Papers:**

- Elective Home Education Departmental Guidance for Local Authorities
- Elective Home Education Policy
- Elective Home Education Data Dashboard

**Category of Report:** OPEN

Most reports to Scrutiny Committees should be openly available to the public. If a report is deemed to be 'closed', please add: '**Not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph xx of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).**'

## **Report of the Director of Education and Skills – Elective Home Education**

### **1. Introduction/Context**

- 1.1 Sheffield has always been committed to identifying when children are Electively Home Educated and although we don't have a statutory duty to hold a register of those Home Educated, we have consistently maintained within our education management system children we know to be 'educated other than at school'
- 1.2 Through the Advisory Teacher we have continuously tried to engage with our Home Educating Community to evidence all children we know to be Home Educated are receiving a full time, efficient and sufficient education in line with S7 of the education act 1996.
- 1.3 We have followed the Department for Education (DFE) Guidance for Elective Home Education and have significantly changed our approach in the last 2 years to reflect the review of this guidance published in April 2019.
- 1.4 The Department for Education Guidance for Elective Home Education clearly articulates the Local Authorities' duties, in summary:
  - To have a policy for Elective Home Education which is clear, transparent, and readily available, in different formats when needed.
  - To set aside staffing and resource to carry out the activity of the policy and give a named, familiar person to the family for contacts who is able to discuss suitable education.
  - When children are not on school roll to enquire and ascertain how education is being provided.
  - Safeguarding duties remain the same as for children accessing a school place
  - This safeguarding duty further extends to the welfare and well-being of children
  - The duties of the Local Authority mean that Home Education needs to take a multi-agency approach and should not be managed in isolation.
  - To have an agreement of contact with families at a minimum annually, and / or when there has been a change within the family circumstances (this can include a child's birthday and change of National Curriculum Year)
  - To seek to offer guidance to families on their rights and obligations, including good practice examples and resources when requested.
  - To ensure children have access to an efficient, full time education, in line with their age, aptitude, ability and Special Educational Needs
  - Having a clear escalation route when parents are not able to satisfy the Local Authority of their child's education, including School Attendance Orders and Education Supervision Orders.
  - Although registration is not compulsory it is advisable for Local Authorities' to keep a register of Home Educating Families to ensure duties under S7 of the Education Act are carried out by parents.
- 1.5 Sheffield (as is the national theme) has seen a significant rise in the number of parents requesting de-registration from school for their children so they can Electively Home Educate, this has seen a rise in numbers from 462 – 659.

### **2. Main body of report, matters for consideration, etc**

- 2.1 **To have a policy for Elective Home Education which is clear, transparent, and readily available, in different formats when needed.**
  - In 2018 a multi-agency group was formed across Admissions, Children Missing Education (CME) Multi Agency Support Team (MAST) Attendance, Social Care, and the

Elective Home Education Advisory Teacher to bring together a policy that would cover the response to Home Education. This was agreed by our Portfolio Leads in November 2018 and began being embedded from January 2019.

- As the Department for Education released the revised guidance in April 2019 the policy was reviewed, and our approach amended to follow this new guidance.
- As the numbers of children being home educated began to significant rise from September 2020 the policy was reviewed again, and changes made to reflect the rise.

**2.2 To set aside staffing and resource to carry out the activity of the policy and give a named, familiar person to the family for contacts who can discuss suitable education.**

- Up until the policy agreement and implementation, families were contacted by the Children Missing Education Team and the Advisory Teacher only.
- From January 2019 there was resource available from The Multi Agency Support Team to complete visits to family as their children became Electively Home Educated to discuss their choice and check this was made without coercion (also responding to the issue of 'Off-rolling')
- At the review in April 2019 the policy was updated to reflect the escalation to the Attendance Legal Team when and if parents were not able to provide evidence of education – this followed the School Attendance Order process.
- After the rise in the number of children being Electively Home Educated, as a result of the Pandemic, we have expanded the support into Elective Home Education, with Business Support, Project Support and an Inclusion Specialist who alongside the advisory Teacher and the work of the Multi-Agency Support Team are all points of contacts for families.
- In January 2021 it has been agreed for a more permanent staffing structure within Elective Home Education, which will result in the employment of 2 new professionals to work with families to help support the education, safeguarding and well being of children who are Home Educated.

**2.3 When children are not on school roll to enquire and ascertain how education is being provided.**

- We are notified by our schools whenever children are being removed from school roll.
- We have agreements in development with Health Professionals, including the Children's Hospital and GP Surgeries to notify us when they are seeing children who they believe are not on school roll.
- As children arrive in the city, they are met by our Children Missing Education Team who are our first support in ascertaining how families are to educate their children.
- Our policy outlines our approach to ascertain how education is being provided when children are not on school roll. This includes phone calls, letters, meetings, home visits and the support of accessing resources and best practice examples. When needed a template document can be requested to outline educational provision.

**2.4 Safeguarding duties remain the same as for children accessing a school place**

- When we are not provided with evidence of education for children who are Home Educated, we have clear escalation routes through to the Attendance Legal Team who can issue School Attendance Orders and seek to prevent educational neglect.
- Where we are worried about children, when they haven't been seen and contacts / visits are not responded to, we escalate this appropriately to the Safeguarding Hub.

**2.5 This safeguarding duty further extends to the welfare and well-being of children**

- Support children and families who are Home Educating is made available at their request from any part of our Early Help Offer, this can include support for children's

health and well-being, parenting support, educational support or can make a request to re-enter their child into education.

**2.6 The duties of the Local Authority mean that Home Education needs to take a multi-agency approach and should not be managed in isolation.**

- As covered, we have a multi-agency approach, including Children Missing Education, Elective Home Education Advisory Teacher, Multi Agency Support Team, Social Care, Inclusion & Attendance and the Attendance Legal Team.

**2.7 To have an agreement of contact with families at a minimum annually, and / or when there has been a change within the family circumstances (this can include a child's birthday and change of National Curriculum Year)**

- All children known to be Electively Home Educated have a risk level assigned linked their circumstances and access to education, for a lot of children there is a minimum risk, meaning contact would fall annually and / or at the point of change in circumstance (usually as children enter a new National Curriculum Year)
- For those children who are deemed at risk of not receiving access to education and where concerns have been raised about other family circumstances, we would offer (alongside an appropriate support offer) to visit the family at more frequent intervals (up to weekly where needed) to support the development of a full-time educational provision.

**2.8 To seek to offer guidance to families on their rights and obligations, including good practice examples and resources when requested.**

- We have an Elective Home Education email inbox which is monitored by Business Support – this is a way in which families can easily make contact when they would like to access resources or support around their education. If age related resources can be sent by Business Support they will, but those who need further discussion, and more specialist support are passed to the Advisory Teacher.
- Our Multi Agency Support Team and Children Missing Education Team will contact families and explain their rights and obligations at the beginning of Home Educating.

**2.9 To ensure children have access to an efficient, full time education, in line with their age, aptitude, ability and Special Educational Needs**

- As outlined above we always request evidence of education from all parents who are Home Educating their children.
- When evidence is received this is checked by our Advisory Teacher to ensure the education outline is age related, full time, efficient and sufficient
- When the education is suitable a follow up phone call is made to discuss education and any needs for ongoing support.
- If education isn't suitable this too is followed with a phone call and advice on what needs to be seen to ensure the education is suitable.
- If no evidence is provided, we would follow the escalation route for School Attendance Order (at any points parent can supply their evidence and the legal process would cease)

**2.10 Having a clear escalation route when parents are not able to satisfy the Local Authority of their child's education, including School Attendance Orders and Education Supervision Orders.**

- We have a clear route into the Attendance Legal Team who are responsible for issuing the School Attendance Orders.

- We have routinely used Education Supervision Orders, however this is something we are working with our colleagues in the Multi Agency Support Team and Social Care to develop.

### **3 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?**

- 3.1 The response to Elective Home Education is important for the people of Sheffield, especially our Children and Young People to ensure we have equity in the offer of support for all children and families in need.
- 3.2 Our response offers assurance that we have a robust approach to Home Education, that is proportionate and fair.
- 3.3 As we develop our information Dashboard linked to Elective Home Education it allows us to see where we have higher numbers of children de-registered from the same schools, meaning we can approach the schools to understand better their practices and their inclusion support.
- 3.4 As we develop the post 16 offer and access to careers guidance for young people in Y11 know to Elective Home Education we should see an equity in the opportunities available.
- 3.5 We hope to bring assurance that we are supportive of all families whose children are Home Educated, being proportionate in our communications, but responsive to rising needs.

### **3.6 What does this mean for the young people of Sheffield?**

- 3.7 For our Young People, they can talk to us at the point of coming off school roll within the visits completed by the Multi-Agency Support Team, this means we can hear their voice, respond appropriately and also follow up on any concerns for themselves, their family or about the school they have left.
- 3.8 Our Young people will continue to have access to a full time, efficient and sufficient education when they are not attending school.

### **4. Recommendation**

- 4.1 We ask that the committee considers all the information provided and welcome feedback on whether the response of the Local Authority is sufficient.
- 4.2. We welcome questions regarding any of the content of this report
- 4.3 We would like to know if there are identified gaps in our approach to Elective Home Education which we will work to close for the protection of children.

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