

ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION UPDATE

Committee name	Residents, Education and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee
Officer reporting	Laura Palmer – Residents Services
Papers with report	None
Ward	All

HEADLINES

To provide the Committee with an update on elective home education of Hillingdon children.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Committee notes the information contained within the report.

What is Elective Home Education?

Elective Home Education (EHE) is the term used by the Department for Education (DfE) to describe the education provided by parents at home, rather than providing education for their children by sending them to school. This is different to home tuition provided by a Local Authority or education provided by a Local Authority other than at a school. It is recognised that parents may choose home education for a variety of reasons.

The definition within section 7 of the Education Act 1996 provides that:

“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.”

Compulsory school age begins on the next prescribed day following a child’s fifth birthday (or on their fifth birthday if it falls on a prescribed day). The prescribed days are 31 December, 31 March and 31 August each year. A child continues to be of compulsory school age until the last Friday of June in the school year that they reach the age of sixteen.

What are Hillingdon Council's responsibilities in relation to families who home educate?

What may surprise some people is that parents are under no obligation to engage with the Local Authority:

- Parents have a legal right to educate their child at home and are not required to have any qualifications or training to provide their children with a suitable education.
- If a child is on a school roll and the parents make the decision to home educate, the school will complete a referral to Hillingdon Council.
- Parents are **not** required to inform Hillingdon Council that they intend to elect or have elected to home-educate. However, they are encouraged to do so.

Parents are **not** required to seek approval from the Local Authority, unless the child has an Education Health Care Plan.

Hillingdon Council has a statutory duty, under section 436A of the Education Act 1996 to make arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible) the identities of children in their area who are not receiving a suitable education. This duty applies to all children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll and do not appear to be receiving a suitable education otherwise than being at school.

A further statutory duty exists, which requires Hillingdon Council to serve a formal notice under section 437 of the Education Act 1996, if it appears that a child of compulsory school age is not receiving a suitable education.

Safeguarding

Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 imposes a duty on the Local Authority to make arrangements for ensuring that the functions conferred on them are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children resident in Hillingdon.

Where there are concerns regarding the safeguarding of the child, the School Placement and Admissions Team will follow Hillingdon's Safeguarding Children Partnership safeguarding procedures at all times and work with relevant agencies and individuals to proactively safeguard and promote the welfare of children and, in the event of any concerns about the welfare of a home educated child, initiate and follow established procedures.

Where there is no evidence of an education being provided the case is recorded as a Child Missing Education (CME) and the CME process is initiated.

How many children are home educated in Hillingdon?

At the time of submitting this report in the academic year 2019-20 - 240 Hillingdon children are being home educated. This number will fluctuate throughout the year.

Classification: Public

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At the end of the academic year 2018-19, 218 children were registered as home educated in the London Borough of Hillingdon. This represents a decrease of 23.8% compared to the academic year 2017-2018, when there were 286 children registered.

Due to the 'revolving door' of children registered to home educate in 2018-19, 462 individual children were registered to home educate during the academic year. This is an increase of 5.2% compared to the academic year 2017-2018 where the total number of children registered at any point was 439. This increase highlights the increasing trend of home education within Hillingdon alongside the National increase which showed the number of home educated pupils rose by 27% from 2017-2018.

The following information is based on the full academic year 2018/19:

- Of the 462 children registered at any one point throughout this academic year, 242 were female, and 220 were male.
- Of the 27 Hillingdon secondary schools (including Hillingdon special schools), 21 of them had children leave to be home educated.
- There were a total of 232 children registered as home educated that were of Key stage 3 and 4 age. This equates to 50.2% of children who were registered home educated in Hillingdon. 232 includes children who have moved into Hillingdon, EHE since leaving primary school, or previously attended a special school. Therefore not all of these children left Hillingdon secondary schools to become home educated.
- Of the cohort of the children registered to home educate, 11.9% (55) were known to Social Services (current and historic) and of those 21.9% (12) are/were on Child Protection Plan's.
- Of the cohort, there were 17 children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) registered to home educate (3.7% of EHE cohort), representing an increase of 13.3% compared to academic year 2017-2018.
- 81 of the children registered to be home educated, were in receipt of SEN Support whilst previously attending school. This is a 28.6% increase since the 2017-2018 cohort.
- For 60% of children removed from school rolls to home educate, parents have not provided the Council with their reasons for this, 3.5% parents have done this as a short term intervention for a particular reason, and 25.3% is due to not being a parent or child's preferred school. This represented an increase of 26.7% compared to the academic year 2017-2018. (This % is only accurate on the information supplied and may not be a true reflection of the whole EHE cohort as not all parents give their reasons).
- During the academic year 244 children ceased being registered as elective home education with Hillingdon Council. 55.7% of cases closed were open for a year or less; this may indicate that home education has been chosen by parents as a short-term intervention.
- 26.4% of the children who left home education in the academic year, are now attending a mainstream school.

- During the year, the EHE Officer referred 50 Year 11 pupils to Hillingdon's Participation Team who were currently home educated, so that the team were able to offer support regarding Education, Employment and Training (EET).

It should be noted that there may be families who are not registered with the authority, this is because if the parent has never registered their child with a school, there is no record of the child in the education system.

The School Placement and Admissions team have continued to focus on developing positive relationships with home educating families and making sure our EHE records are up to date.

The EHE officers main job title is Senior Admissions and Access Officer who sits within the School Placement and Admissions Team. Elective Home Education is an aspect of their day to day job, however they are also responsible for Fair Access, Admission Appeals, Consultation Arrangements, Permanent Exclusions, and supporting the School Placement and Admissions Team Manager. Part of the EHE Officers role is to ensure that pupils who are not in receipt of a suitable education are identified at the earliest opportunity and a school place secured where appropriate or they are returned to their previous school through the Fair Access Panel

Further collaborative work with schools is now in place, to ensure that schools have effective communication with parents so they are fully informed of their responsibilities when they make the decision to remove their child from a school roll to home educate.

In October 2019 Hillingdon Council introduced a new procedure to schools to acknowledge the recent recommendations made by the Children's Commissioners report 'Skipping School: Invisible Children and Ofsted's research 'Moving to home education in secondary schools'.

All schools are expected to provide the Borough's Elective Home Education Officer, with the following information via a dedicated form;

- Parent's letter, or email, informing the school of their decision to home educate (if provided).
- Reason/s the school are aware of why the parent has decided to home educate.
- An up to date attendance record for the child.
- Details of the allocated social worker, if the child has one.
- List of attainment levels (useful for education advisers when they visit, or if the case is referred to the Fair Access Panel).
- Notification/information if the child has special educational needs with or without an Education, Health and Care Plan.
- Confirmation that the school have offered to provide parents with either previous classwork or a summary of the curriculum followed to date (and possibly the future curriculum plan). This will assist the parent with their planning for home education. The parent may decide to ignore this

documentation hence their reason to EHE as they may have dissatisfaction with the education system. However, this will be a useful tool for some.

The Local Authority has made it very clear to all Hillingdon schools that parents must not, under any circumstances, be encouraged, or coerced, into home educating their child.

Data is recorded and reviewed every half term where both good and poor practice is considered and relevant action taken. The new process allows the Local Authority to offer immediate tailored advice to home educating families. For schools the completion of the form also allows them to keep an audit trail of their discussions surrounding elective home education, which will assist the school to review their practices and evidence their work so there is no misunderstanding surrounding 'off-rolling'.

Further developments by the Local Authority include:

- All Safeguarding Leads in Hillingdon schools have been trained on the statutory and safeguarding requirements surrounding elective home education.
- The Local Authorities Fair Access Protocol has been agreed with all Hillingdon Head teachers to include EHE pupils returning to the school they left (where appropriate) if home education has broken down. This ensures schools have continued oversight and reduces 'off-rolling'.
- Procedure developed for schools to follow and keep pupils on roll for 5 days as a cooling off period which allows the EHE Officer to consult parents independently from the school and offer mediation where necessary.
- In April 2019 a thorough and collective Local Authority response was submitted to DfE consultation for Children not in school. This consultation covered the introduction of a statutory EHE register.
- In November 2019 a thorough and collective Local Authority response was submitted to the DfE consultation for an On-line School Accreditation Scheme. This consultation covered the introduction of regulating on-line schools.
- Improved the EHE introduction letter for parents with a supporting easy to read information document for parents.
- Updated Hillingdon's EHE Policy in-line with new statutory guidance - currently in draft format with Hillingdon Legal services prior to publication.
- Updated and circulated Professional Briefing Sheet regarding EHE for LA officers.
- Created a referral form for other boroughs to document when a pupil who is EHE moves out of Hillingdon.
- A review is underway between service areas for the process of support for pupils with an EHCP who EHE
- Created a dedicated email account for EHE to separate schools admissions for clearer communication routes.
- Created an EHE feedback form for LA officers to complete via the telephone with parents to capture data and track EHE trends in Hillingdon.

- Created weekly automated reports with Social Care's database to alert the team to any vulnerable families known to be EHE without delay.
- Created an outline plan to support parents in the beginning stages of planning their child's home education and to help the LA better understand the diversity of EHE across Hillingdon.
- Created an EHE mailing list document, where the LA can record email addresses of parents who wish to be contacted from time to time regarding useful websites, services or events.
- In the development stages of creating a termly newsletter for the Hillingdon EHE community to inform them of local services, events and health updates such as vaccinations.
- A report to be presented to Hillingdon's Safeguarding Children Partnership in order to extend training to partner agencies to raise awareness. Following this individualised training packages can be offered i.e hospital staff.

Implications on related Council policies

There are no direct implications on council policies arising from this report.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Ongoing support is being developed to support parents to eliminate potential 'off rolling' in Hillingdon schools. This work ensures that every child has access to a school place.

Financial Implications

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and confirms that there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations set out above.

Legal Implications

The Borough Solicitor is currently reviewing the London Borough of Hillingdon's Elective Home Education Policy. Legal advice will be provided whenever necessary, in particular cases, to ensure that the Council's Interests are protected.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.