

Elective Home Education Policy - Update on New Policy Implementation

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| Committee name | Families, Health and Wellbeing Select Committee |
| Officer reporting | Kathryn Angelini - Planning, Environment, Education and Community Services |
| Papers with report | None |
| Ward | All |

HEADLINES

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the Elective Home Education Policy and an update on the new policy implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee notes the update on the Elective Home Education Policy.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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.

Hillingdon's EHE policy was updated and published in February 2021, following the DfE EHE policy update in April 2019. The updated policy underwent a thorough consultation and Cabinet approval in February 2021. The updated policy reflects a more balanced approach to both safeguarding issues and the rights of parents, as well as improved methods of information sharing and communication with parents and professionals. The changes in policy help to provide continued support for electively home educated families and demonstrate a clear understanding on how the Council can ensure safeguarding for all children.

Over the last two years there has been significant fluctuation in the numbers of parents choosing to electively home educate their children.

During the last academic year (2020/21), the numbers of children recorded as EHE at any point reached 634. This is 70% increase on the previous year. There are several reasons for this, mostly attributable directly or indirectly to COVID-19, including parental anxiety about a child in a school setting, an increase in parents working from home or temporarily not working, and parents reporting an improvement in their child's mental health outside of a mainstream school setting.

These numbers are now starting to reduce to those seen pre-pandemic.

Data snapshot of EHE in the last academic year 2020/21

At the end of the academic year there were 367 children registered as EHE in Hillingdon; this represents a 53% increase on the previous year. As noted above, the total number of children registered as EHE at some point during this academic year was 634.

| 1 September 2020 – 31 August 2021 | |
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| Total EHE cases currently open at the end of the academic year | 367 |
| Total cases opened during this period | 427 |
| Total cases closed during this period | 267 |
| Total registered at any point during this period | 634 |

Of this cohort, 8.6% (55) were known to Social Care and 2.7% (17) had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

11.7% (74) of those who were registered as home educated at some point in 2020-2021 were in receipt of SEN Support whilst previously attending school. This represents a 3.9% decrease of pupils compared to the academic year 2019-2020. This decrease is expected to be due to the increase in reasons such as COVID anxieties rather than meeting SEN at home.

The reasons provided for choosing to EHE during this year were varied, with 10% of parents choosing not to state a reason. Where a reason was stated, the most common responses were:

- Short term intervention with a plan to return to mainstream education.
- Not being offered their preferred school choice.
- Mental health.
- Bullying.
- COVID related concerns

It is notable that 67% of the cases closed during this year were open for a year or less; this would indicate elective home education had been chosen by parents as a short-term intervention.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, the EHE team referred 32 Year 11 pupils to Hillingdon's Participation Team who were currently home educated. This ensured the team were able to offer support regarding Education, Employment and Training (EET) as part of their Post 16 pathway planning.

89 EHE children were also referred to the Participation Team as Children Missing Education due to insufficient evidence of suitable home education. 60 of these were effectively resolved with families:

- 24 returned to school
- 32 provided subsequent evidence of suitable elective home education
- 2 had a School Attendance Order (SAO) issued and the children started in school
- 1 had the SAO revoked as the child started school
- 1 was revoked as the child began suitable elective home education

Current picture of EHE in Hillingdon

As of 19 January 2022, there are 290 EHE cases currently open. This has increased by 10 since the return to school on 4th January and could be a sign of a pending increase due to the onset of the Omicron variant.

Service Updates following policy implementation

Since the implementation of Hillingdon's EHE policy in February 2021, the following areas have been developed or completed:

- Implementation of School Attendance Orders for families who refuse to engage where there is no evidence of suitable education. Schools have been incredibly supportive of this route and equal distribution is agreed via the Fair Access Panel.
- LA officers now attend all Social Care meetings for children who are EHE and work with Social Care to collectively review risk associated with EHE. Families have been supported to reintegrate children back into education via this partnership approach.
- Implementation of a clear procedure for children who are EHE and have an EHCP. This process has been approved as effective practise by Jake Butterworth from the EHE team at the DfE.
 - Creation of termly Newsletters:
 - Including surveys for parents and children.
 - Health updates – Covid and immunisations
 - Mental Health support
 - Links to free education resources
 - Links to free social resources such as Princes Trust and holiday schemes
 - Online safety support for parents and children.
 - Examples of effective case studies of EHE to help support education approaches/structures.
- Education Safeguarding Task and Finish group reviewed processes in 2020/21. Following which bitesize training was rolled out across partnerships including school governors and Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools. In addition, briefing sheets have been developed for key professionals who may encounter EHE children.
- Notification forms from schools have been strengthened to capture vulnerabilities more effectively. This allows officers to quickly identify broader vulnerabilities including exploitation concerns.
- Developed intelligence sharing protocols with Youth Justice colleagues including AXIS.

This ensures clarity around responsibilities for young people who are EHE amongst professionals

- Developed a suitability checker to consistently review suitable education with a balance of safeguarding. This is now being used to re-visit all open EHE cases.
- Linked in with charities and organisations to support the GRT EHE community. This has helped the GRT community build trust and access educational support and advice from within their community
- The team keep their dedicated website pages updated regularly including FAQ's and useful guidance to reduce avoidable contact by residents.
- Developed a clear pathway of support for Children Missing Education (CME) cases that cross over with children registered as EHE.
- Creation of an interface with the SEND team when a child is attending a special school that would like to be home educated, to ensure this is the most appropriate provision for the child.

Future Implications for the Service

In 2019 the DfE consulted on a register for all children and young people who are not educated in school which, if implemented, will improve greater understanding of the number of those being home educated. We do not yet know the progress of this register but it is expected that at some point in the future this will be implemented; this will result a requirement for further consultation and subsequent policy change in Hillingdon.

With the departure of the Head of Access to Education in January 2022, the oversight for EHE has transferred to the Head of Education for Vulnerable Children.

Implications on related Council policies

A role of Select Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

None at this stage, pending any findings by the Committee and any recommendations forwarded to Cabinet.

Financial Implications

None.

Legal Implications

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.