

Written evidence submitted by Hampshire County Council

Home Education: Call for Evidence 2020

The duties of local authorities with regards to home education, including safeguarding and assuring the quality of home education

Hampshire has a duty to all children whether in school or EHE; however without designated funding and changes to legislation the LA will struggle to be assured of safeguarding of families, or have access on an annual basis to judge suitability of education.

LA's can only act within lawful parameters and whilst the DFE guidance issued in 2019 was welcomed it does not go far enough to enable the LA to ensure safeguarding, particularly those unknown to the LA, nor does the guidance grant the LA any effective oversight of the quality of EHE especially those parents who are reluctant to engage.

A robust legislative structure is required to ensure a parent engages with the LA and must provide evidence of a child's learning and progress. A more detailed framework of expectation that demonstrates suitability of education is required so all LA's can work to the same criteria, meaning suitability and outcomes can be measured against benchmarked standards or assessment of progress.

To adequately perform these duties or even meet DFE expectations as recently published in October 2020 LA's need to be properly funded. If the annual AWPU was automatically given to the LA at the point of notification this would allow LA's to undertake their duty which we would be delighted to undertake. The resource would allow LA's to listen and hear pupil voice which for many EHE children is sadly unheard, although parental voice masquerading as pupil voice is frequently loud and influential.

Whether a statutory register of home-educated children is required

Currently DFE estimates of the numbers of EHE children range from 50 – 70 thousand, the fact that the DFE do not know how many children are EHE is shocking. There is nothing to be gained by NOT knowing who is EHE or knowing where the children are or who is providing the education. Every child has a right to education and to be protected by their government, since the data collected by the DFE is minimal then children can easily 'slip below the radar' as illustrated by SCR's.

EHE numbers have grown consistently over the past 10 years (see ADCS annual survey) and these figures still only represent those children we know about, predominantly children who have been pulled out of school. Those who have never attended school are, unless parents voluntarily inform the LA, unknown and this is clear evidence that voluntary registration schemes have failed.

Any national registration scheme should be recorded against a unique pupil number (UPN) and reported at the same time as the school census. This would make it easier to track education and identify those thought not to be in receipt of education.

The benefits children gain from home education, and the potential disadvantages they may face

Benefits: The flexibility and freedom to educate your child within your own philosophical and /or religion, freedom to choose subjects, timings, location and methods of teaching and learning are considerable. Many parents report improved mental health benefits for EHE children who do not need to struggle with school structures, environments, curriculum pressure, over assessment and peer group pressures. Parents who genuinely EHE are often keen to share their experience with the LA and some inspirational work is often seen.

Disadvantages: The focus of HCC is on those families who either choose or who are unable to educate their child or feel they have no choice but to EHE having been 'eased out' by schools often following attendance, behaviour, alleged bullying or SEN issues. Schools can make little effort to keep children with one eye on accountability by results. Some parents simply want to avoid what they perceive as constant conflict with the school or sadly in a minority of cases a total indifference to education. EHE then is merely a legal excuse to avoid education, thus these children are hidden from view potentially open to abuse and neglect.

The quality and accessibility of support (including financial support) available for home educators and their children, including those with special educational needs, disabilities, mental health issues, or caring responsibilities, and those making the transition to further and higher education

Where a child is removed from a school roll families have no access to funding or any external support previously provided by the school. If they are lucky, they will receive an annual visit from an LA officer to advise on education, for many this is totally insufficient. It is little wonder that some parents/children might then turn to attractive offers of support from far- right wing groups or unregistered schools. If the AWPU was transferred to the LA then the potential for meaningful, accountable support on a par with children in school would be achievable.

Children removed from a school roll often due to anxiety are unlikely to receive any extra support from CAMHS because of their EHE status as a result they can become more isolated and are unlikely to be prepared for life after school invariably more likely to be NEET.

Whether the current regulatory framework is sufficient to ensure that the wellbeing and academic achievement of home educated children is safeguarded, including where they may attend unregistered schools, have been formally excluded from school, or have been subject to 'off-rolling'

The significant increase in EHE numbers, now over 1% of total children in Hampshire, has placed a huge strain on resources and in many cases we simply do not know if a child is receiving any education let alone whether it is suitable. With

better legislation and funding LA's could more effectively support families, as currently differentiating between those who are genuinely EHE and those who are not is difficult at best and often impossible.

It would help if before a child was removed from the school roll parents must demonstrate to the school/LA that they have a plan and ability /resources to take full responsibility for their child's education in accordance with age, ability and aptitude. At the very least the parent should be literate and numerate. This would require adequate funding as described above.

HCC would suggest that any child on a CP plan or a CiN should not be allowed to automatically EHE, this would require a change of legislation. Currently a child with an EHCP and attends a special school must have LA permission so the principle is in place. In addition, a national register of tutors would support parents who could be assured that any tutor has evidence of academic qualifications, references and a current DBS before being able to have one to one access to a child.

The role that inspection should play in future regulation of home education

Consideration should be given to who should carry out any inspection and what the regulatory framework would look like. It should alongside academic achievement include child well-being, however until standards/benchmarking are established any inspection process will be difficult. For the DFE to allow LA's to carry the responsibility of decision making around suitability of education without providing a legal framework is not acceptable. With a legal framework LA's could then carry out their role with confidence and in turn Ofsted would have standards on which to judge LA's.

What improvements have been made to support home educators since the 2010-15 Education Committee published their report on 'Support for Home Education' in 2012

The short answer is very little. The 2012 report did refer to 'inconsistency across the country in the approach of LA's' – this was in part addressed by the creation of the Association of Elective Home Education professionals (AEHEP) and associated regional subgroups. The AEHEP has led on lobbying the government for change to guidance and legislation in addition to delivering a more aligned offer across the country and the sharing of good practice. However much more needs to be achieved and is limited by a lack of funding especially as over the past 10 years many LA's have had to no option but to cut back on non-statutory work such as EHE.

The impact COVID-19 has had on home educated children, and what additional measures might need to be taken in order to mitigate any negative impacts.

Notifications of EHE has risen by 200% in Hampshire since September 2020. 600 new cases have meant that a team of 2 admin and 2.6 home visitors have been overwhelmed and unable to arrange home visits. Even with emergency funding there is a time lag to appoint and train staff. It is impossible to arrange 600 home visits within acceptable timeframes in addition to those families already registered and may require more regular support and guidance. It should be noted that many families will choose not to be easily contactable and would be reluctant to engage regardless of a pandemic.

HCC are contacting families by phone and video links using zoom and teams in place of a home visit. Interestingly many families have welcomed this as an effective first contact as there is often a reluctance to allow officers into home. This is something we will continue with post Covid.

November 2020