



# **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review of: Elective Home Education in County Durham**

**April 2020**

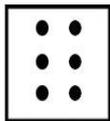
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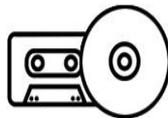
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## Chair's Foreword



All children have a right to an education and this right is formalised in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. But it is more than just a right to education; it is also about developing a child's talents and abilities to the full and encouraging the child's respect for themselves, their environment and others.

In July 2018 members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of Elective Home Education. Members were concerned at the increase in numbers of children being educated at home, were interested to understand more about the reasons for this increase, and wanted to ensure that these children were receiving an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age and ability, and that they were effectively safeguarded from harm.

The review group wanted to consider the legislative framework for home education, look at the policies and practices in place for children being educated at home in County Durham, compare local practice with the national picture and to understand how partnership working protects children who are educated at home and improves their education.

In reaching our recommendations, we have considered evidence provided directly from parents and carers, alongside a review of national and local policies and procedures and data.

The views of parents and carers have been paramount to our review and will continue to be in implementing changes to our services.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved with the review including members of the review group; officers of the council and partners and those parents who took the time to complete the questionnaire and those who met with me.

**Cllr Heather Smith**

**Chair of Children and Young People's  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

## Executive Summary

- 1 Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of Elective Home Education (EHE) at their meeting on 2 July 2018 following member concerns at the growing number of children being home educated.
- 2 At its meeting on 1 July 2019 the Committee agreed the scope of the review would follow four key lines of enquiry:
  - The level of EHE in County Durham; a data overview including location; age; gender and ethnicity analysis
  - Whether children being home educated are receiving a 'suitable' education
  - Whether children being home educated are supported, safeguarded and protected from harm
  - How the Local Authority works in partnership with other agencies
- 3 The review group gathered evidence over five meetings. Feedback from parents and carers was a key review area. One meeting was an informal focus group with a parent and grandparent who had electively home educated their children or grandchildren respectively. Additionally, parents on the elective home education database were asked to complete a short questionnaire that asked why they chose to educate their child at home.
- 4 The review group found that in England, the responsibility for the education of a child rests with their parents. Education is compulsory but going to school is not. The legislation is not a framework for regulation of elective home education it is a system for identifying children and ensuring they are receiving a 'suitable' education.
- 5 When a parent chooses to remove a child from school to home educate, they are free to do so. Parents take on full responsibility for their child's education including all financial responsibilities. Any funding allocated to a school will not be passed on to a parent or to the local authority, though there are exceptions for children who have an Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Parents are responsible for ensuring that the education provided is full time and suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude and any Special Educational Needs (SEN) they may have.

- 6 In County Durham 0.5% of the population of school aged children and young people are receiving an elective home education. This equates to 400 out of an approximate 74,000 school aged children and young people living in County Durham in 2018.
- 7 Where a child has never attended school, the service only becomes aware of a child being educated at home if their parents choose to tell the local authority or if other services inform the local authority.
- 8 There is currently no national framework in place for local authorities to work to in relation to elective home education. Some families are reluctant to engage with local authorities which makes it difficult for children's progress to be monitored. Members felt that a national framework should be developed including a national register and a requirement for parents to disclose their reasons for removing their child from the school roll. This would help schools to address issues such as bullying and provide parents with greater support.
- 9 Not all local authorities offer the same level of support to families. Durham County Council have clear policies and procedures in place to ensure that appropriate checks are made and that children are receiving a "suitable, efficient and full-time education". DCC provide training to other local authorities in the region on how they manage elective home education. There are also safeguarding arrangements in place to ensure that children who are home educated are seen by officers of DCC or partner agencies. Members felt that these safeguarding arrangements are as robust as they can be without a national regulatory and legislative framework.
- 10 Evidence indicates that in recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of children receiving an elective home education with numbers doubling since 2012. During 2018/19 there was a 5% rise in the number of children home educated in County Durham compared to the previous year. The increase nationally was 20%.
- 11 The demographic of children who are home educated is largely white British, which is in keeping with County Durham's population. Sixty-two children were known to be from Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) communities. Most of the children on the database had previously attended school and the gender split was equal. There was no specific

area in County Durham where EHE was more prevalent, but numbers tend to be in built up or urban areas.

- 12 Evidence indicates that a higher proportion of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are being electively home educated. Members were concerned that the number of children with SEND are over represented in the EHE cohort and want to ensure that schools have a high level of understanding of SEND to support mix pupils in school and that all staff receive training where appropriate.
- 13 The Council's Education at Home Group who support families who are home educating have worked with partners from Bishop Auckland College; East Durham College and East Durham Houghall College to enable young people who are home educated in year 10/11 age group to access vocational and core GCSE courses. Members felt that discussions should take place with the remaining colleges in the county to see if similar arrangements could be made with them.
- 14 Primary research carried out with parents who home educate identified issues with bullying as a key driver for EHE, opportunities for building stronger engagement between home educating parents and the need to improve SEND training for staff in schools.
- 15 Although there was a low response to the survey, with only 7% of respondents returning the questionnaire most of those returned highlighted bullying as a reason why a child was removed from a school. Members felt that schools should ask parents the reasons why they are removing their child from the school roll and this should be included in the Head Teachers report for discussion with the governing body and anti-bullying policies should be continuously reviewed.
- 16 The majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire and in face to face interviews highlighted the benefit of engaging with the service and with other parents in a similar situation. The service also states the importance for children who are home educated to be seen. Therefore, members suggested that an annual engagement event should be arranged so that parents and children can have access to officers for support and advice as well as each other and that children can interact and socialise with other children.

17 Parents also indicated that in their experience there were differing levels of Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) training within the county's schools. A school's responsible body must ensure that the school upholds its duties as set out in the Equalities Act 2010. Durham County Council provides a comprehensive workforce development offer available to all education providers. Members felt that schools should be encouraged to provide effective training for SEND including autism, to staff to ensure that children and young people with a SEND receive the same level of support.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendation One**

That Cabinet lobby regionally and nationally for a common framework to improve oversight of the quality of education and safeguarding of children and young people who are Elective Home Educated. That such a framework should include a national register of all children and young people who are home educated; and the reasons why children are home educated are recorded.

### **Recommendation Two**

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Service continue to work with the Principals of Further Education Colleges in County Durham to provide places to enable access to vocational and core GCSE courses for year 10 and 11 pupils who are electively home educated and develop capacity to ensure all children and young people who are electively home educated have the opportunity to access these courses.

### **Recommendation Three**

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services work in partnership with all County Durham's schools to promote a high understanding of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities including autism and encourage all schools to provide appropriate training to staff so that children and young people with a special educational need or disability receive the appropriate level of support whichever school they attend.

### **Recommendation Four**

That the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services develop a reporting model that will encourage all schools to include within their Head Teacher report to the Governing Body on an annual basis:

- a) Discussion of reasons given for Elective Home Education
- b) Where bullying is cited as a reason that this is discussed
- c) Ensure that anti-bullying policies are continuously reviewed.

### **Recommendation Five**

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services to hold an annual event for families who home educate their children to engage with the service, meet other families in a similar position to themselves and for the

children to have an opportunity to interact and socialise with other children who are home educated.

## **Introduction**

- 18 The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of Elective Home Education (EHE) in County Durham at its meeting on 2 July 2018 following member's concerns at the rise in the number of children being home educated. The terms of reference for the review can be found at appendix 1 of this report.
- 19 The aim of the review was to investigate Durham County Council's Elective Home Education offer and to follow four key lines of enquiry:
- a) The level of EHE in County Durham; data overview including location; age; gender and ethnicity analysis.
  - b) Children being home educated are receiving a 'suitable' education
  - c) Children being home educated are supported, safeguarded and protected from harm.
  - d) How the local authority works in partnership with other agencies
- 20 Elective home education is a term used to describe a choice by parents to provide education for their children at home or in some other way they choose instead of sending them to school.

## **Strategic Context**

### **Legislation and Research**

- 21 The Education Act 1996, section 7 states that the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable:
- a to his/her age and aptitude, and
  - b to any special education needs he/she may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.
- 22 This means that the responsibility for a child's education rests with their parents. In England, education is compulsory, but going to school is not.
- 23 There is currently no legislation that deals with home education as a specific approach, but it is a form of 'education otherwise than at school' for the purposes of section 7 of the 1996 Education Act.
- 24 The Education Act 1996, section 436A states that local authorities must make arrangements to identify children not receiving education.

Section 437 makes provision that where a child of compulsory school age is not receiving suitable education, the local authority can take action to serve notice on parents to send their child to school and ultimately obtain a school attendance order to direct or instruct the parent to send the child to school. The school attendance order will remain in force until revoked by the local authority. Failure to comply with school attendance orders is a criminal offence and may be dealt with via an application for an Education Supervision Order to the family court.

- 25 In 2017 a private members Bill was introduced to make provision for local authorities to monitor the education, physical and emotional development of children receiving elective home education. In response to the Bill the Government published a call for evidence on issues connected with home education. Alongside the call for evidence the government published two guidance documents, one intended for local authorities and the other for parents. The Bill was withdrawn in October 2018.
- 26 Local authority guidance states that when a local authority becomes aware of a child of compulsory school age is not attending a state or independent registered school full time, and it is unclear how that child's education is being provided the local authority should consider that the child is being educated at home. In such cases the local authority is tasked to find out how the child is being educated and whether that education satisfies legal requirements.
- 27 The current legal framework is not a system for regulating home education per se or forcing parents to educate their children in any particular way. Instead, it is a system for identifying and dealing with children who for any reason and in any circumstances, are not receiving an efficient, suitable, full-time education.
- 28 Ofsted published a research summary in October 2019, Exploring Moving to Home Education in Secondary Schools. The summary makes recommendations to policy makers to consider the findings of the research before making legislative changes to home education and the importance of seeking children's views during decisions to home educate. The document makes recommendations to schools and local authorities that they should work together to:

- develop a clear process once a parent's intention to home educate is known;
- when a school writes a letter to remove a child on behalf of a parent this may be evidence of off rolling; and
- that it would be good practice for schools to provide parents with children's previous classwork.

29 In April 2019, the government published updated versions of their elective home education guidance documents for parents and for local authorities. Within the guidance it clearly states that when parents choose to home educate their children, they assume full responsibility for their children's education which includes financial responsibility. This, and the time involved in educating a child properly at home, form an onerous challenge for many parents.

30 Parents who chose to home educate their child must be aware that when they assume full financial responsibility of educating their child, the school will not receive funding once the child's name is removed. Local authorities do not receive any additional funding to support families that home educate except in relation to high needs Special educational Needs (SEN) and the level and type of support will vary from one local authority to another. The Department for Education (DfE) recommends that local authorities adopt a consistent, reasonable and flexible approach in this respect. As a minimum the DfE recommends that local authorities provide written information on elective home education that is clear and accurate and sets out the legal position.

31 From April 2019 to 24 June 2019 the government held a second consultation that sought views on proposed legislation to establish:

- A duty on local authorities to maintain a register of children of compulsory school age who are not registered at a state-funded or registered independent school.
- A duty on parents to provide information to their local authority if their child is within scope of the register.
- A duty on education settings attended by children on the register to respond to enquiries from local authorities about the education provided to individual children.
- A duty on local authorities to provide support to home educated families if requested by such families.

The feedback from this consultation is still being analysed by government.

## Local Context

- 32 According to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) there were 101,040 children and young people aged 0-17 living in County Durham as at 2018. Of that 101,040, 5.1% or 27,021 were aged 0-4 and the remaining 74,019 were aged 5-17. Of these children, approximately 0.5% or 397 were registered as being home educated.
- 33 Durham County Council has in place a policy and procedures document that clearly sets out the rights and responsibilities of parents and the responsibilities of the local authority relating to elective home education that mirrors government guidance. In addition to this information Durham County Council also has a specific guide for parents and carers that provides signposting to help and support them.
- 34 When a parent informs a school that they intend to educate their child at home, the school removes the child's name from the school roll immediately and informs the local authority. This is the same procedure if the school is local authority maintained or an academy.
- 35 In order to determine if a child who is home educated is receiving a suitable education the local authority must ask parents to provide details of their child's education.
- 36 Parents can decide to educate their children at home for a variety of reasons and in engaging with parents the education at home group take these reasons and individual situations into consideration. Durham's education at home group includes specialist officers who can provide tailored information and support to families.
- 37 Furthermore, the education at home group has representation from DCC's Education Services, Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children Services, Children's Services and Health partners. There are also virtual panel members that include Durham Constabulary, MASH Education Officer, Regeneration and Local Services, and Education Psychology Service.
- 38 The Education at Home Group meets regularly. Its safeguarding procedures are well established, including a 'child not seen' rolling

programme which has built in escalations for officers from the Education at Home Group and ultimately result in police visits.

## **Elective Home Education in County Durham**

- **The service has clear policies and procedures that go beyond statutory requirements.**
- **A national framework would help local authorities carry out the checks needed to ensure that a child is receiving a 'suitable' education and is safe.**
- **The service is only aware of children who have never attended school being home educated if the parents or other services tell them.**
- **It is difficult for the service to monitor children whose parents do not engage.**
- **The service has worked with three further education colleges in County Durham to provide access to core GCSE subjects and vocational courses for children who are home educated in County Durham.**

39 Parents are not required to inform the local authority of their decision to educate their child at home. Government guidance does strongly recommend that parents do inform the local authority when they intend to educate their child at home, but some parents are reluctant to engage with the service which results in difficulties in monitoring these children. Providing this information to the local authority allows them to put in place support and to ensure that any necessary checks are carried out. There is no legislation relating to the support local authorities are required to give. This has led to different levels of support being provided by local authorities throughout England. Members felt that a review of national guidelines and a common national framework would ensure that local authorities were aware of children being educated at home in their areas and allow the monitoring of education received and safeguarding checks to be carried out.

- 40 Durham County Council have held a database of children registered as receiving elective home education for over five years and when families relocate the information is passed to their new local authority.
- 41 For children within the school settings as soon as the service is aware of a problem such as issues with bullying, the team provide advice and work together with parents and the school to try to resolve the problem before it could escalate to EHE. However, in many cases parents do not give a reason for removing their child from the school roll until after the event.
- 42 Where a child is on the roll of a special school, parents must seek the approval of the local authority prior to home education. In these cases, there remains contact with the child via an Educational Psychologist.
- 43 When a child becomes electively home educated the Education at Home Group arrange a visit either in the child's home but if that is not convenient a meeting will be held in the local community. The venue for the meeting is tailored to the needs of the child/family. The child is always invited to attend the meeting to ensure the voice of the child is recorded.
- 44 The only way for the Education at Home Group to establish that the child is receiving a 'suitable' education is to ask parents to provide details. The Education at Home Group request a proposal that outlines how and what education will be provided and request examples of the child's learning. This can be actual work the child has been undertaking or a detailed report stating the education received/receiving. Depending upon the results provided the service may need to intervene if it appears that the education provided is not suitable, fulltime or efficient.
- 45 Some children are educated in part at school and in part at home. This is known as flexi schooling. However, some schools are reluctant to encourage flexi schooling because this impacts on their performance and attendance levels because the days when a child is not in school, they are marked as absent.
- 46 DCC's Education at Home Group have worked closely with further education colleges to get better outcomes for home educated children. Further Education (FE) colleges can access funding that enables these

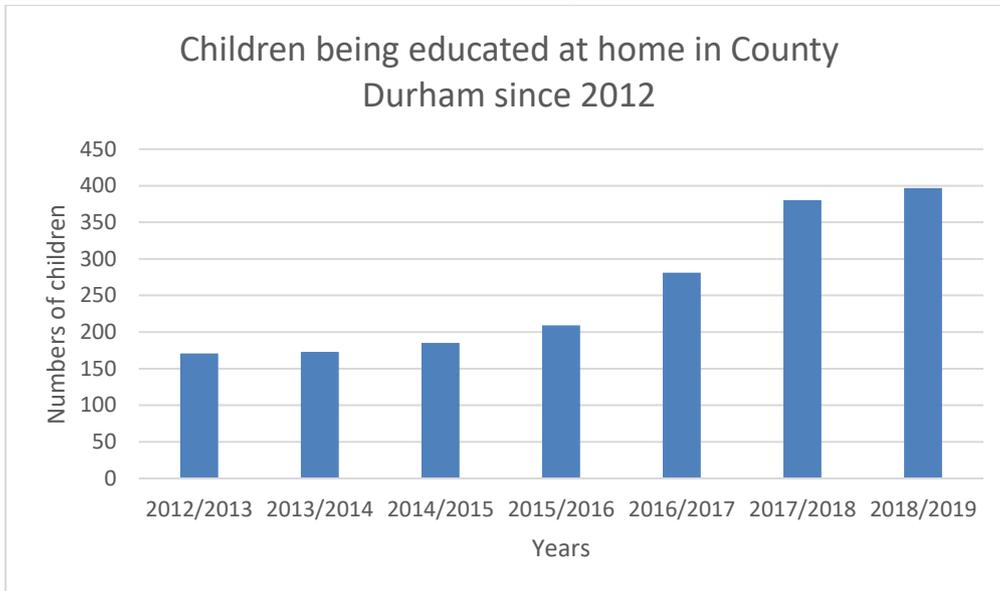
children to have access to free examinations to enhance their progression, to increase their socialisation and wellbeing. County Durham colleges are leading the way on this type of education and 40 of the year 10/11 pupils on the database are on the roll at one of three FE colleges in County Durham.

The legal system can be used in the form of School Attendance Orders if a parent does not cooperate after all reasonable attempts have failed. Durham County Council is rigorous in its procedures, during 2018/2019 52 meetings were held with parents, 36 notices of intent were delivered and from these three school attendance orders were executed. One school attendance order led to a prosecution and fine.

### Demographics of County Durham Children being Home Educated

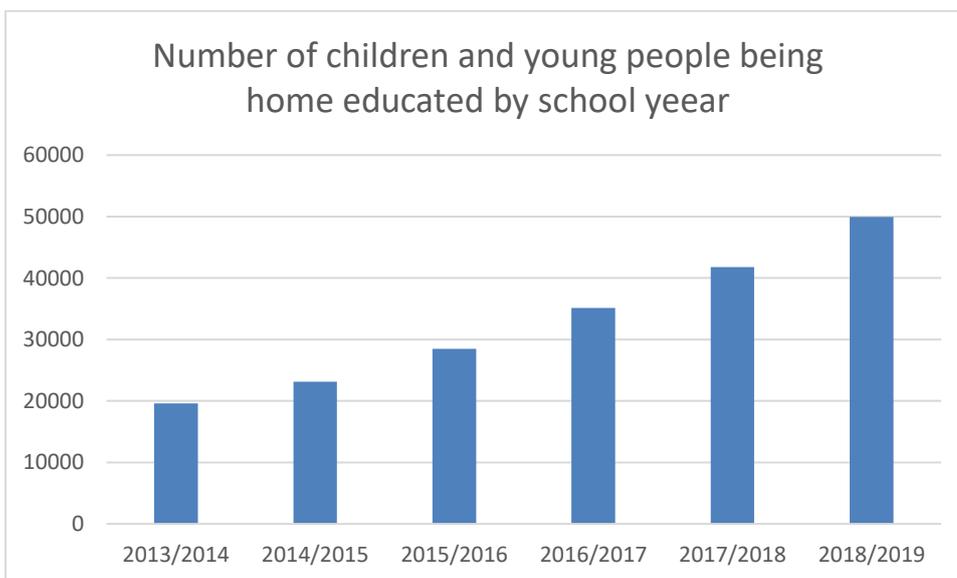
- 47 The number of children and young people in County Durham who are educated at home is rising and this mirrors the national trend. However, as a proportion of the total population of children and young people in the county those who are electively home educated remains low at 0.5%.
- 48 At the time of the review there were approximately 397 children in County Durham educated at home. Of this number, 20 had an Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP), 90 had Special Educational Needs support; 9 had school action and 12 had school action plus, the remaining 266 had no identified special educational need. School action and school action plus is old SEND terminology which is indicative of children who have been on the database for a long time
- 49 Members were concerned that the number of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities in the electively home educated cohort is overrepresented and suggested that this could be because of the pressures on schools and the high needs block. County Durham's health needs assessment states that one in seven children in the County have special educational needs. However, the evidence identifies that nearly one in three children who are home educated in County Durham have special educational needs.
- 50 Since 2012 the number of children educated at home has more than doubled. During 2012/2013, 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 the number of home educated children was under 200. During academic years

2015/2016 and 2016/2017 the number of children being educated at home continued to rise to 281 and during academic years 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 there were significant rises in EHE numbers to 380 and 397 respectively. These later rises could be attributed to changes in the GCSE framework and the increase in actions against parents who take their children out of school for holidays.



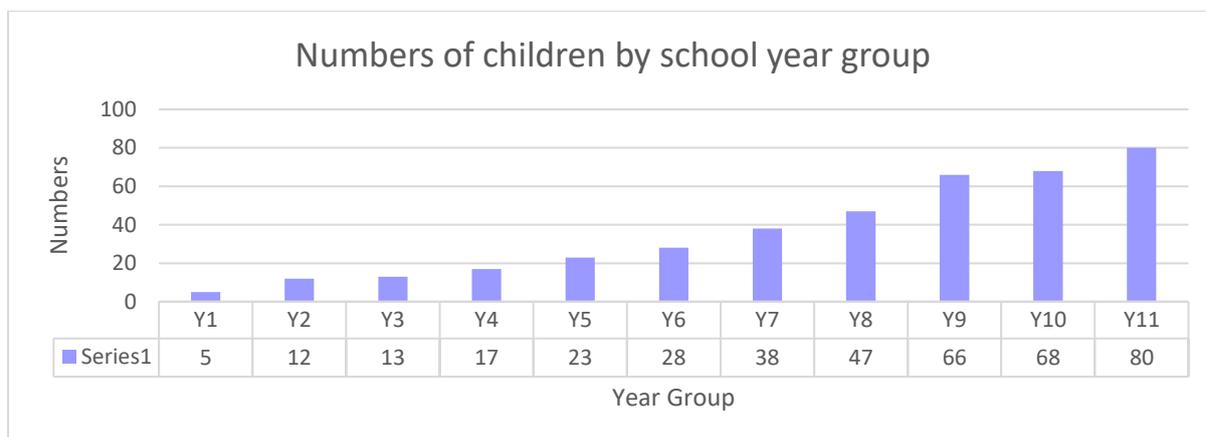
Source: Information provided to review group meeting on 11 September 2019

51 A survey by the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) carried out among local authorities to better understand the volume and characteristics of children known to be home schooled. The chart below gives an indication of their findings in relation to the national trend which gives a similar trajectory to DCC’s figures.



Source: ADCS Elective Home Education Survey 2019

52 Of the 397 children in County Durham who are registered as being home educated there is a significant rise when a child gets to secondary school age with two thirds of the total number of children being home educated in the secondary school age group with the largest proportion of them are in years 10 and 11. Forty of these year 10 and 11 aged children on the database are attending college on a part-time basis.



Source: Information given to review group meeting 11 September 2019

53 Most of the home educated children on the register describe their ethnicity as white British and while 62 of the children are known to be from Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) families only 35 stated their ethnicity as GRT.

54 The gender breakdown is even, less than 5 of the children registered as EHE are recorded as being a Child in Need or having a Child Protection Plan and 84% of those children on the EHE database have previously attended school.

55 The location of children on the EHE database is mostly in built up and urban areas across county Durham.

### Children Home Educated who have Special Educational Needs

56 The review group heard that where a child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and the parents are interested in home education, an emergency Statutory Annual Review is held. Parents will be invited to a meeting to discuss the reasons why they are interested in home education, whether any issues they have with the school can be resolved and are given information about what help and support is

available from the local authority. The local authority asks parents to provide an initial proposal outlining how they intend to meet the child's needs as set out in the EHCP. If the child has been attending a special school, these proposals must be agreed by the local authority before the school can remove them from their roll.

57 If the EHCP gives the name of a school or the type of school where the child will be educated and the parents decide to home educate, the local authority does not have to make the special educational provision set out in the plan provided it is satisfied that a parent's arrangements are suitable.

58 Children with an EHCP require a higher level of support. In County Durham approximately 5% of children registered as being educated at home have an EHCP, and a further 28% had special educational needs support. There is a large cohort of children in County Durham with special educational needs and who have access to additional resources provided in schools who may or may not have additional funding. Evidence suggests that some parents of children with SEN have perceptions of a lack of support in school.

59 Under section 61 of the Children and Families Act 2014, there is a clear distinction between elective home education where the parents of a child arrange their home education and 'education otherwise' where local authorities arrange special educational provision in a child's home.

60 Of the 27 parents who responded to the survey, many parents indicated their reasons to home educate their child was because they felt mainstream schools were not meeting the special educational needs of their child. The parents also highlighted that an outcome of home educating their children is they have more confidence

61 A school's responsible body must ensure that the school upholds its duties as set out in the Equalities Act 2010. Durham County Council delivers a comprehensive workforce development offer in relation to SEND and inclusion which is available to all education providers.

62 This is also highlighted in the Children's Commissioner report *Skipping School: Invisible Children* where the under identification of children's needs with conditions such as low-level autism, attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or other conditions may present problems in the classroom and teachers do not have the training or support to diagnose these problems.<sup>1</sup>

### **Recommendation One**

That Cabinet lobby regionally and nationally for a common framework to improve oversight of the quality of education and safeguarding of children and young people who are Elective Home Educated. That such a framework should include a national register of all children and young people who are home educated; and the reasons why children are home educated are recorded.

### **Recommendation Two**

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Service continue to work with the Principals of Further Education Colleges in County Durham to provide places to enable access to vocational and core GCSE courses for year 10 and 11 pupils who are electively home educated and develop capacity to ensure all children and young people who are electively home educated have the opportunity to access these courses.

## **Safeguarding and Information Sharing**

- **The service has safeguarding and information sharing arrangements in place with partners that are as robust as they can be without a national regulatory and legislative framework.**
- **Members of the Education at Home Group provide multi-agency screening and appoint the person best placed to be the point of contact for each case.**
- **Some young people who are home educated have low level literacy and numeracy skills**

63 An unsuitable or inadequate education can impair a child's intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development and may therefore bring child protection duties into play.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Children's Commissioner, Skipping School: Invisible Children, How children disappear from England's schools. February 2019

<sup>2</sup> Elective Home Education, Departmental guidance for local authorities, April 2019

- 64 The Children Act 2004, sections 10 and 11 give local authorities duties for promoting the wellbeing and safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in their areas. This includes children educated at home as well as school. The general duties of local authorities in relation to safeguarding are the same for all children however they are educated.
- 65 The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) briefing on Home Education<sup>3</sup> highlights concern of children becoming invisible to authorities when they are home educated and call for a formal registration process for children electively home educated.
- 66 The guidance for local authorities indicates there is no proven correlation between home education and a safeguarding risk, but a child being educated at home is not necessarily seen on a regular basis by professionals such as teachers and therefore increases the chances that any parents who set out to use home education to avoid independent oversight may be more successful in doing so.
- 67 Working Together for Children 2018 states that information sharing is essential for effective safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and that practitioners should be proactive in sharing information. Evidence received indicates that DCC's Education at Home Group does this.
- 68 DCC's Education at Home Group meets regularly and has robust arrangements in place to ensure children who are home educated are seen. Multi-agency screening identifies a single point of contact who is the person best placed to visit a family who is home educating, they see and speak to the child, provide any additional information that is not already on file. All cross checks are collated, documented and recorded. Ultimately where a nominated contact has not been able to carryout these checks police will take a leading role.
- 69 Evidence indicates that information sharing protocols and tracking systems are in place and safeguarding procedures are well established. Suitability of education is scrutinised, and children's progress is monitored. However, the Education at Home Group do not have statutory duties in relation to monitoring the quality of home education on a routine basis unless there are safeguarding concerns. All families

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<sup>3</sup> NSPCC Home Educations: Learning from Case Reviews, March 2014

known to the local authority who educate at home are contacted on an annual basis to provide evidence of a suitable education. For those families who do not engage with the local authority informal routes are taken through the Education at Home Group to ensure that the child is seen. The Education at Home Group does not have powers to enter homes or see children for the purpose of monitoring the provision of EHE, police involvement would be taken when all other routes have failed. Members felt that these arrangements are as robust as they can be without a national regulatory and legislative framework.

70 It was identified by Ofsted in their recent inspection that DCC 'takes seriously its responsibilities to children who are being electively home educated.'<sup>4</sup>

### **Gypsy Roma Traveller Education Team**

71 Liaison with Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) families is via DCC's GRT Education Team who have built excellent relationships with the families and provided support for those who are home educating their children. Evidence indicates that the GRT Education Team has engaged with GRT families and helped children to access college courses.

72 At the time of the review there were 68 children from GRT families on the register, which equates to 16% of all children on the database.

### **Specialist Progression and Learning Advisors**

73 Children in school have an opportunity to seek independent careers advice but children being home educated would not have that support in place. DCC have Specialist Progression Advisers who work with young people to reduce their chances of not being in education, employment or training (NEET). They provide advice to year 10/11 age children and work closely with the family and young person to address and work to remove barriers that may have been the cause of being home educated.

74 They discuss exams and try where possible to get the young person into college, where the college can access funding unavailable to local authorities that is used, for example, for examinations. Young people who drop out of college are monitored and followed up on by the service.

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<sup>4</sup> Ofsted Inspection of DCC Children's Social Care Services published 21/10/2019

75 Members were concerned at the levels of literacy and numeracy of some young people who are home educated and how this would affect their future employment or further training. Colleges can offer different entry levels to accommodate students of all abilities.

## Engaging with Families

- **In 2018 the service supported 68 children back into school full time.**
- **Schools should ask parents for their reasons to home educate and this should be included in the Head Teacher's report.**
- **School governing bodies should continuously review their anti-bullying policies.**
- **Views of parents indicate there is a variance in the understanding of SEND in schools.**
- **There is no evidence to suggest parents are removing their child from school to avoid exclusion.**
- **Parents have suggested an annual engagement day for families who home educate in County Durham to meet and have access to officers from the service.**

## Reasons Why Parents Choose to Home Educate their Children

76 There are many reasons why a parent may choose to educate their child at home. Parents are not obliged to advise the service of their reasons and in most cases, parents do not give a reason as to why they are removing their child from the school.

77 Parents who responded to the review group's survey did state the reasons why they had decided to home educate their child. Reasons given for home educating in the survey ranged from children being bullied, special educational needs not being met, mental health issues parental choice and expulsion. A summary of the survey responses can be found at appendix 3.

- 78 The service advised that each school is required to have a bullying policy and they would advise parents to raise concerns they have about how a school has dealt with bullying issues through the school complaints procedure. However, the service does monitor trends in schools and where there are concerns or any patterns in relation to parents removing their children from school this would be addressed via reporting mechanisms to departmental and corporate management.
- 79 Some parents indicated in the survey they removed their child from school because their child's special educational needs were not being met by the school. If a child does not have an EHCP provision is made through SEN support. Many more children receive SEN support than have ECHPs.
- 80 If parents raise concerns about their child's former school in the initial meeting with the service, these concerns are investigated by the elective home education team.
- 81 The service asks schools to alert them if they receive prior information that a parent is considering home education. However, often the first time the school is aware of the parent's intentions is when they ask for the child to be removed from the school roll.
- 82 Members felt that schools should ask parents the reasons why they are removing their child from the school roll and this should be included in the Head Teachers report for discussion with the governing body and that school governing bodies should continuously review their anti-bullying policies.

## **Exclusions**

- 83 Members raised concerns that parents may be taking their child off the school roll and educating at home if there was a risk of permanent exclusion from school. While there may be a correlation in the rise in the number of EHE and the overall rise in numbers of exclusions there is no evidence to support significant numbers of parents opting for EHE to avoid exclusions. DCC hold information on their database of one child who was excluded from school and is now being home educated.
- 84 The review group's concerns of schools "off rolling" pupils could not be substantiated as there was no evidence of this in County Durham

schools. The service advised that moves and transfers between schools were tracked and would be investigated and challenged.

## Support to Families

- 85 As soon as DCC's Education at Home Group become aware of a child being home educated they write to parents asking to meet to discuss education proposals. At that meeting further arrangements are made relating to a submission date for evidence that the child is receiving a 'suitable' education, the officer will also highlight key areas within the Council's EHE guide. The meeting is also an opportunity for parents or children to ask any questions they may have. Through this engagement and support during 2018/2019 academic year the service's successful brokerage between parents and the Education at Home Group supported 68 children back into full time school education.
- 86 Should the parents not agree to a meeting, education proposals are requested in writing and child seen checks are carried out with other agencies.
- 87 The local authority has appointed a Vulnerable Groups Education Support Officer who provides support and assistance and works collaboratively with colleagues to assist in addressing key areas of concern relating to electively home educated children and young people and to ensure they are safeguarded and protected from harm.
- 88 As previously mentioned in paragraph 18, Durham County Council receives no additional funding to support families who have chosen to home educate their children. The rough costings for supporting these families equates to £188 per child based on 400 children registered as being electively home educated.
- 89 Parents in County Durham who choose to home educate their child have access to Durham Learning Resources (DLR), which is a high-quality schools library service that provides resources to support the curriculum and to promote learning. Parents can borrow 30 items for £60 or 15 items for £35 and could group together and share the items to reduce costs.

## Views of Parents

- 90 The review group asked parents who educate their child at home to complete a short survey. The review group wanted to find out the reasons parents electively home educate their children and their views on the services to support them. The questions at appendix two were sent out to all the families known to the service. Of the 400 surveys sent out scrutiny received 28 replies.
- 91 Although there was a low response to the survey with only 7% of respondents returning the questionnaire most of those returned highlighted bullying as a reason why a child was removed from a school.
- 92 The survey is limited in that no checks that can be made to clarify the information supplied to substantiate any claims made. Where a parent is unhappy with how a school has dealt with an issue there are formal complaints procedures to be followed.
- 93 Analysis of the survey responses indicates that most of the families who responded, who home educate their children are appreciative of the support they receive from the service (13 indicated good or very good and 6 indicated bad or very bad). Although some parents indicated they could not form an opinion due to the little communication received from the local authority or because they were new to the process.
- 94 Most of the responses received were from families who had been home educating less than five years.
- 95 Some of the recipients did not return the survey but telephoned their answers into the scrutiny team. The responses that were telephoned in were supportive of the EHE team and used this form of communication to pass on information such as their child was now back in full time education.
- 96 Some of the telephone responses and survey responses indicated they would appreciate more engagement with the service and a suggestion was made of holding an engagement day where families could attend and have access to information and officers from the service. The children would be able to use it as a play date with other EHE children. This could also benefit the service as they will be able to see the children.

97 In addition to the survey, members of the review group also held a focus group with parents. However, due to unforeseen circumstances only two people attended this meeting. One was a parent who had home educated her children but who were now back in school. The other was a grandparent who was home educating her granddaughters. The parents advised that local social media groups were very negative about the service, but they had found the service to be both helpful and supportive. They highlighted that in their opinion there was little tolerance or understanding of people who were different in or out of school.

98 Parents indicated there was a variance in the understanding of autism in County Durham schools. A parent explained that she had removed her autistic son from a school because of the poor levels of support but following being home educated for a short period her son was now in another school that provided excellent levels of support. Members were concerned to hear this and felt that schools should provide training to their staff to ensure that there was a high level of support for all children and young people with a special educational need and disability including autism, They wanted to ensure that all children and young people with autism are adequately supported in school and that all county Durham schools have a similar high level of understanding of special educational needs and disabilities.

### **Recommendation Three**

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services work in partnership with all County Durham's schools to promote a high understanding of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities including autism and encourage all schools to provide appropriate training to staff so that children and young people with a special educational need or disability receive the appropriate level of support whichever school they attend.

### **Recommendation Four**

That the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services develop a reporting model that will encourage all schools to include within their Head Teacher report to the Governing Body on an annual basis:

- a) Discussion of reasons given for Elective Home Education
- b) Where bullying is cited as a reason that this is discussed
- c) Ensure that anti-bullying policies are continuously reviewed.

### **Recommendation Five**

The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services to hold an annual event for families who home educate their children to engage with the service, meet other families in a similar position to themselves and for the children to have an opportunity to interact and socialise with other children who are home educated.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix One: Terms of Reference**

- 1 The review will examine the number of children who are home educated in County Durham, whether the figures have increased/decreased and the reasons for this. It will consider legislation and DCC policies and procedures in place to ensure children being EHE are receiving a suitable education and how the authority addresses issues with schools. The review group will also consider the number of attendance orders issued and pursued and whether levels have increased or decreased.
- 2 Information in relation to children with additional needs including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); children known to children's social care and known to police who are educated at home will be considered by the review group.
- 3 The review will explore the extent of partnership working to safeguard children and finally the review will look at how the authority support children and families in relation to EHE.
- 4 The review will consider why families choose to home educate their children, what support is offered to them and what the outcomes are for children receiving education at home including funding implications.
- 5 The review will consider evidence from officers of the Council from Children & Young People's Services including representatives from education, Children's Social Care, Durham Police and children and families who home educate.

### **Objectives**

- 6 The aim of the review is to investigate Durham County Council's Elective Home Education offer and follow four key lines of enquiry:
  - a) The level of EHE in County Durham; data overview including location, age, gender and ethnicity analysis.
  - b) Whether children being home educated are receiving a 'suitable' education
  - c) Whether children being home educated are supported, safeguarded and protected from harm
  - d) How the Local Authority works in partnership with other agencies.

## Outcomes

- 7 It is expected that the following outcomes will be achieved from this review:
  - a) Greater awareness of the home education level in County Durham including how this is monitored, voluntary registration schemes and funding implications to families, schools and DCC.
  - b) An understanding of how partnership working, and data sharing improves and protects children being educated at home
  - c) An insight into the support provided to children and their families who choose home education.

Appendix Two: EHE Questionnaire

**Please complete the questions below and return it in the envelope provided.**

How long have you educated your child at home? \_\_\_\_\_

How many children do you educate at home? \_\_\_\_\_

What are your views on home schooling in County Durham? \_\_\_\_\_

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Has your child ever attended school? Yes/No (please delete as appropriate)

Why did you choose to educate your child at home?

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Do you feel the support from DCC Elective Home Education team is:

Very Good

Good

Neither Good or Bad

Bad

Very Bad

(Please tick which is applicable)

Why did you give that answer?

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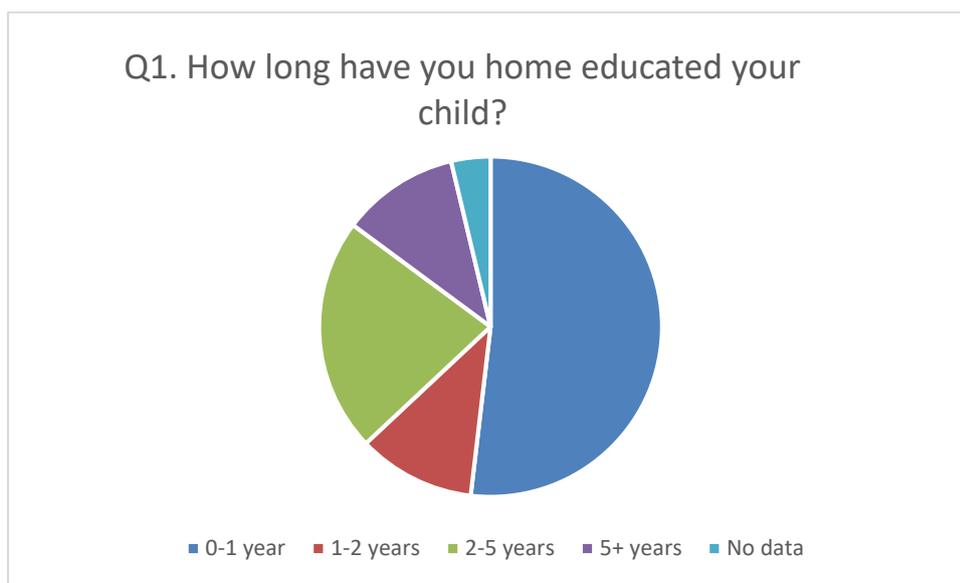
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Thank you for taking part in the short survey your views are important to us and will be fed into our review.

Please return in the envelope provided or if you would like to email your response

## Appendix Three: Analysis of EHE Questionnaire Responses

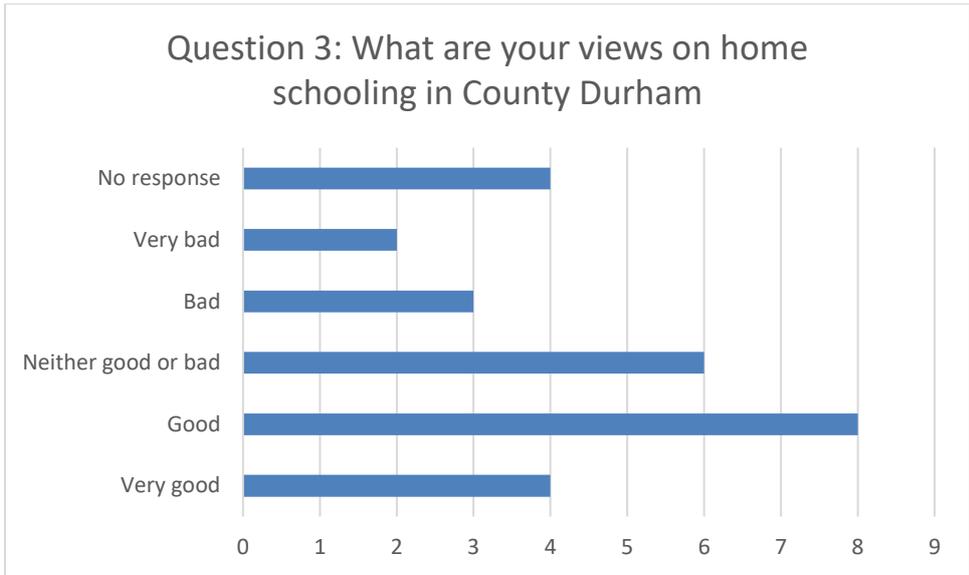
The questionnaire was sent out by the service to all of the families on their data base who educate their child at home. The number of responses to the survey received was 27. Below is a summary of their responses.



Over half of all respondents had started to educate their child at home in the last 12 months.

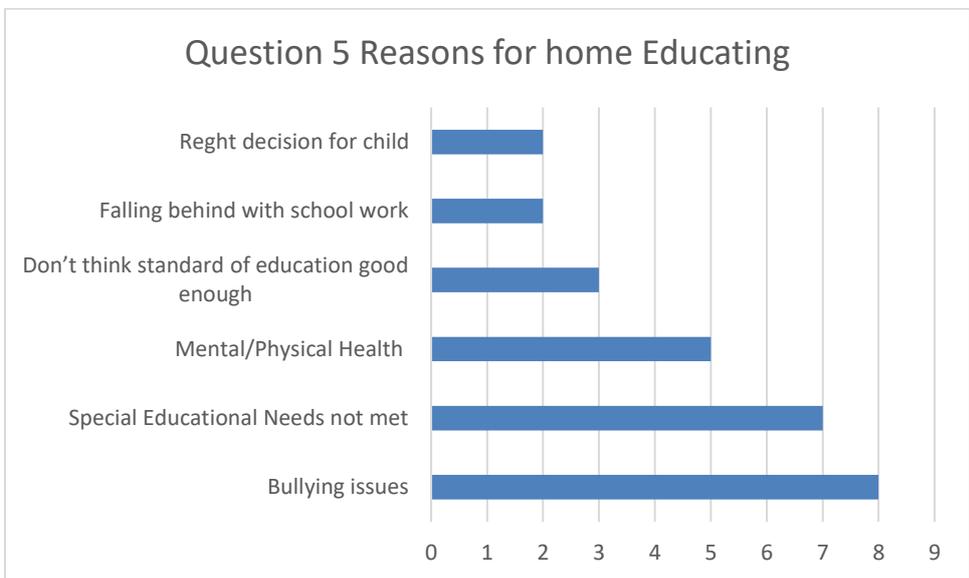
Responses to question two indicated that out of the 27 respondents 25 were educating one child at home, one was educating two children and one response supplied no data to this question.

Most parents indicated in relation to question three that their views on home schooling in County Durham was good or very good.

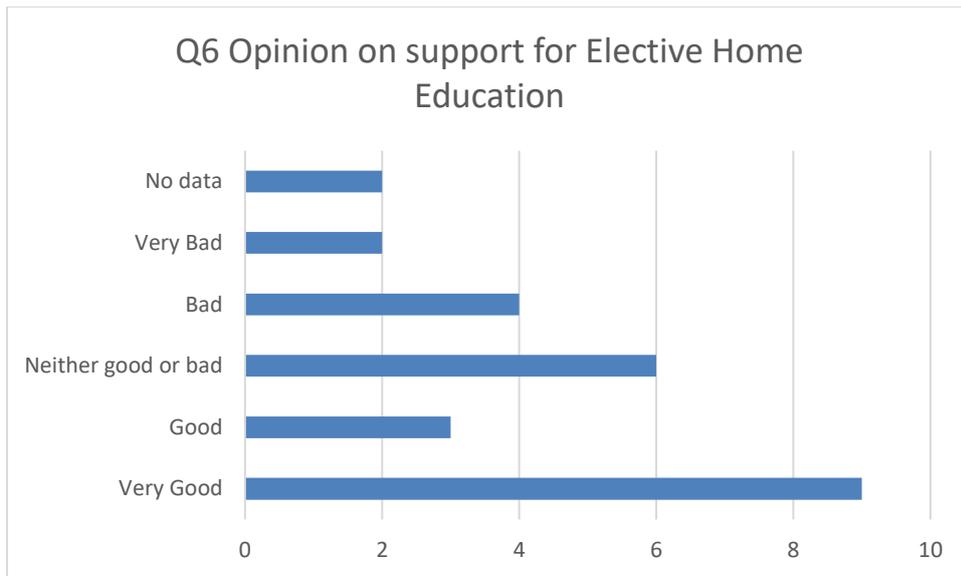


In response to question four asking if the child had ever attended school all but two of those who responded to the survey indicated that their child had attended school.

Question five asked the respondents why they chose to home educate their child at home.



Out of those parents who responded to the questionnaire bullying and special educational needs were the drivers for their decision to home educate which is in contrast with the reasons given in the ADCS Survey where philosophical or lifestyle choice was the most common reason for home educating.



Most of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that their opinion on the level of support received from Durham County Council in relation to elective home education was very good.

Those parents that indicated they found the level of support very good advised that they felt they had received good advice. The visiting officers were understanding of the issues and provided information and sign posting to further information on educational materials. Those parents who gave the opinion neither good or bad indicated they had received no support to comment on. However, when this is compared to question one in relation to how long they had been home educating their child it can be concluded that the service