

Elective Home Education – Current Position and implications following Department for Education Guidance issued in April 2019.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to:

- Update members on the Council's duties with regard to children and young people who are electively home educated.
- Present the current position with regard to the number of EHE young people within Buckinghamshire.
- Set out the current level of support to these young people.
- Highlight risks and how we aim to manage these risks

Current position in Buckinghamshire

There are currently 679 young people who are Electively Home Educated (EHE) in Buckinghamshire. The number of EHE children by National Curriculum Year group is as follows:

Year Group	Number of EHE students
0	16
1	19
2	36
3	33
4	38
5	46
6	58
7	80
8	81
9	83
10	93
11	96

Children with an ECHP make up 6% of the total cohort and their primary need can be broken down as follows.

ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder	18
HI - Hearing Impairment	1
MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulties	6
PD - Physical Difficulties	4
PMLD - Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties	1
SLCN - Speech, Language and Communication Needs	4
SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health	5
SPLD - Specific Learning Difficulties	1
VI - Visual Impairment	1

Of this cohort a number are known to Children's Services

Has an Education Health Care Plan	41
Subject to a Child Protection Plan	6
Child in Need	27

The ethnic breakdown of our EHE cohort is as follows:

WBR - White British	56%
Refused/not known	21%
WRO - Roma/Roma Gypsy	7%
MWB - White/Black Caribbean	2%
MOT - Any other Mixed Background	2%
MBA - White/Black African	1%
MWA - White/Asian	2%
APK - Pakistani	1%
AIN - Indian	2%
AAO - Any other Asian Background	1%
Other	5%

Since 2013, Buckinghamshire has seen an increase year on year with EHE numbers more than doubling from 292 in 2013 to 679 in April 2019. From the data, it is evident that children starting their GCSE studies are over represented in the EHE cohort. This is a continuing trend over time and suggests the pressures associated with taking exams for a small cohort is such that parents decide to home educate their children to alleviate some of these pressures.

The lack of any other common characteristics, national reporting criteria and nature of the EHE community makes it hard to determine exact causal factors for the increase. Parents are under no obligation to provide an explanation; however, commonly reported reasons for choosing home educating are dissatisfaction with the school system, pupils who did not get their preferred school, medical/anxiety issues, philosophical reasons, avoiding exclusion or legal action for non-attendance. Some of these reasons explain the churn through each year which adds an additional burden on the service to provide support which may increase vulnerability of some EHE students.

Due to the lack of national reporting requirements it is difficult to draw comparisons; however, the Association of Directors of Children Services published the results of its 2018 survey which said "across the 106 responding LAs, the number of known home-schooled children and young people has increased in each of the past five years, by an average of approximately 20% each year".

Support for families and associated risk

Children home educated are often consider at higher risk for safeguarding concerns due to their lack of visibility, although there is little empirical evidence to support this view. To minimise any risk, all families are offered a home visit when they first elect to home educate. This is being supported by the Family Resilience Service to engage families and offer both educational and wider family support through these visits. Children who have social care involvement or SEND are prioritised for home visits and can involve several meetings across the year. Subsequent visits are then triaged by the Educational Entitlement Team. The service is currently exploring how best to use indicators of risk to identify and support the more vulnerable children within our EHE cohort.

Outcomes for children

Currently, there is no method of measuring educational outcomes for this cohort of children, which has always contributed to the unease around our responsibilities to this cohort and their development. To mitigate this, our officers work closely with Adviza who support those young people at risk of becoming not in employment or training (NEET) to ensure support is given to those more vulnerable children who might not secure employment or training programmes without guidance. In addition, we have developed work experience opportunities for a small cohort although this is not a mandatory requirement for Local Authorities. If it is clear that a suitable education is not being received we support parents to apply for a school place to enable re-introduction to formal education settings. Ultimately a legal option can be pursued which normally elicits a positive response from parents. Currently we are undertaking this route with three families.

New Guidance and implications for Buckinghamshire

The new EHE guidance issued in April 2019 has strengthened the expectations upon Local Authorities. An annual visit will now be required for all EHE children and a judgement should be made not only on suitability of education but on the educational progress made by the child. In addition, Local Authorities will also have to evidence how they are engaging with partner agencies to proactively find children who are not receiving a suitable education. We already have close links with the NHS and other Local Authorities to support this work, but expanding this network will be necessary to fulfil this requirement by September. As a result, we have developed a communication plan to ensure that all partner agencies are aware of EHE and know how to inform us of any child where their education is uncertain.

One of the other driving factors for a change in legislation is the rise in illegal schools across the country. Buckinghamshire has not seen an issue in this area but we have been working on a policy document with partner agencies which will be signed off by September 2019 and will outline how we record concerns and respond in a timely manner.

In conjunction with the new guidance, the Government issued a consultation in April 2019 "Children not in school; proposed legislation". We expect this will have additional resource implications, although these will not be clear until the results are published. However, the direction of travel suggests LAs will be expected to offer more support which will be scrutinised closely, and respond to schools where there is evidence of inappropriately off-rolling pupils.

We are currently analysing the new guidance and our current approach to ensure we are meeting our current and plan for future statutory responsibilities by September 2019. An increase in resources is anticipated to be required in order to meet these needs duties and we are exploring how best to finance this. A further implication arising from any compulsory registration introduced following consultation could be an increase in the number of children who are EHE which will also impact on resourcing and practice.

References

1. https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_EHE_survey_analysis_2018_FINAL_web.pdf
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education>
3. https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/children-not-in-school/supporting_documents/EHE2019consultationpaperv9.5.pdf