

EDUCATION YOUTH AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 21 st October, 2021
Report Subject	Elective Home Education
Cabinet Member	Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of children who are electively home educated (EHE) is steadily rising across Wales. At the end of the academic year 2020/21, Flintshire had 173 children out of a total school population of 23,378 who were recorded as being EHE.

This report provides an overview of EHE picture across Flintshire and the role undertaken by the Council with regards to monitoring and support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Members are reassured about the Council's discharge of its duties in relation to Elective Home Education.
2	Members acknowledge the challenges faced by the Education Welfare Team in fulfilling their statutory functions with rising numbers of EHE pupils in Flintshire.
3	Members to reinforce the need for continued financial support from Welsh Government to further develop and secure the Council's services and support in relation to Elective Home Education.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION
1.01	<p>Whilst education for children aged 5 – 16 years is compulsory in Wales, access to that education at a school is not. Parents of compulsory age children have a duty under Section 7 of the Education Act (1996) to ensure that their child/ren receive an ‘efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and special needs, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise’.</p> <p>The majority of children in Wales receive their education at school, but a small number of parents exercise their right to educate their children themselves which is referred to as Elective Home Education (EHE).</p>
1.02	<p>There has been a steady rise nationally in the number of children whose parents have chosen to electively home educate across Wales over the last few years. National data included in Appendix 1, shows that the numbers in Flintshire have increased from 95 in 2018 to 157 in January 2021, in line with the Welsh median (Figure 1). This figure rose to 173 by the end of the last academic year and currently sits at 155 with the reduction due to a large number of the cohort having been Year 11 and a further 7 pupils returning to school. Figure 3 shows the rate of EHE per 1000 children; in Flintshire, the rate has risen from 4.6 in 2018 to 7.5 in 2021, which sits below the Welsh average of 9.5 children per 1000.</p>
1.03	<p>Parents may decide to home-educate their child from a very early age and so the child may not previously have been enrolled at school. They may also elect to home-educate at any other point up to the end of compulsory school age. The majority of children who became EHE in 2021 had been attending a Flintshire maintained school (92%) with the remaining 8% having previously been educated outside of the authority (Figure 6). Similar to the picture across Wales, the highest percentage of children becoming EHE takes place in September (Figure 8) and that Year 7 seems to be a pivotal point at which this decision is taken.</p>
1.04	<p>Parents are not required to register or seek approval from the LA to home-educate their children. Where a reason was provided for choosing EHE, the vast majority (50%) referenced parental choice/lifestyle. Covid-19 has been provided as a reason for 19% of EHE pupils which was either related to a level of anxiety in attending school because of the virus or the fact that the child had made good progress and was benefiting from being educated at home. A further 11% referenced pupil anxiety as the reason. Other reasons included travelling (Gypsy/Traveller community), medical needs, bullying, disputes with schools and special educational needs.</p>
1.05	<p>Councils are not responsible for the provision of EHE or under any statutory obligation to support it financially. However, under section 436A of the Education Act 1996, Councils do have a duty to make arrangements to identify children not receiving a suitable education. The duty applies in relation to children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll and who are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being in school (e.g. at home, privately or in alternative provision). A school attendance order (SAO) applies in cases when a parent of a child of</p>

	<p>compulsory school age fails to prove that the child is receiving suitable education and where the Council believes the child should attend school. The Council therefore has a monitoring role in respect of EHE to ensure that the child is receiving a suitable education. In the absence of the requirement to inform the Council that a child is being home educated, monitoring can only take place with those families from whom we have received notification.</p>
1.06	<p>The monitoring role placed on the Council is carried out by the Education Welfare Service in Flintshire. Annual visits are undertaken by the team to review the education provision being made although parents are not required to follow the national curriculum. This team are also experienced in matters of welfare and safeguarding which supports the potential identification of these issues during their visits. Parents currently have the right to refuse access to the home or for the child to be seen under the 1996 Education Act;. It is important to note that a report commissioned by the National Independent Safeguarding Board in 2017 indicated that EHE children were not necessarily more likely to suffer abuse or neglect as compared to the general population but that EHE did potentially make those who were more subject to this, more difficult to identify or protect.</p>
1.07	<p>Until 2020, councils did not receive any additional funding to support EHE in Wales but this has changed in response to the increasing numbers. Flintshire received approximately £14k in 2020/21 to provide support to parents to educate their children and this has increased to approx. £27k for this financial year. A further £50k has been received for 2021/22 to support the Council to discharge its existing duties and this has been used to fund a dedicated officer to perform this function. This has facilitated a review of current procedures and the opportunity to increase the contact and engagement with our EHE community. A questionnaire was circulated to families on the 1st October 2021 and the information received will be used to inform and guide our future actions. A further aim is to enhance our access to, and understanding of, the learner voice with regards to their provision. As yet, there is no indication whether this level of funding will be sustained in future years to continue this work.</p>
1.08	<p>WG policy on EHE has been under review for a number of years now. Flintshire has representation on the All Wales EHE forum and is actively contributing to the discussion and future development in this area.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Previously there had been no WG funding attached to EHE to support the Council to discharge its duties or support families to educate their children. The receipt of £76,386 for this financial year has been welcomed particularly in light of the increasing numbers of EHE children. It will be difficult to maintain our level of engagement with families through the positive development of a dedicated officer if this funding is not forthcoming in future years.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	Impact assessment is not required as the report is for information only.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	EHE questionnaires circulated to all EHE parents on the 1 st October 2021.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – WG EHE Data 2021.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	WG Elective Home Education Guidance

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Jeanette Rock Senior Manager Inclusion & Progression Telephone: 01352 704017 E-mail: jeanette.rock@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>Elective Home Education: when parents educate their children at home instead of sending them to a school.</p> <p>National Curriculum: a common programme of study that is designed to ensure uniformity of content and standards in education.</p> <p>School Attendance Order (SAO): applies in cases when a parent of a child of compulsory school age fails to prove that the child is receiving suitable education and where the authority believes the child should attend school. A SAO may be used to direct a parent to send their child to a specified school, and should be used when a pupil is not on roll at any school.</p>