

EDUCATION YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 1 st December, 2022
Report Subject	Elective Home Education
Cabinet Member	Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education and the Welsh Language
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of children who are Electively Home Educated (EHE) continues to rise steadily across Wales. There is a similar trend across Flintshire with the number of children recorded as being EHE seeing an increase from 95 in January 2019 to 167 in January 2022.

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 consider the data in relation to EHE across Flintshire and recognise the importance of ongoing dedicated officer time to support and monitor provision for this particular cohort of children.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION
1.01	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/children receive an ‘efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and special needs, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise’.

	<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 with a total of 4,340 being recorded as EHE in January 2022. Flintshire numbers have increased from 95 in 2019 to 167 in January 2022 and this figure is slightly above the Welsh median of 165. The rate of EHE per 1000 children in Flintshire continues to rise from 4.6 in 2019 to 8.1 in 2022, but sits below the Welsh average of 10.2 children per 1000. A total of 52 children became EHE between January 2021 and January 2022.</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 2022 had been attending a Flintshire maintained school (89%) with the remaining 11% having previously been educated outside of the authority. Similar to the picture across Wales, the highest percentage of children becoming EHE takes place in September and Year 7 seems to be a pivotal point at which this decision is taken.</p> <p>Flintshire's profile of the key stage at which a child becomes EHE follows the national picture, with 26% electing to EHE in Foundation Phase, 29% at KS2, 35% at KS3 and 9% KS4. This compares with 23%, 30%, 33% and 13% respectively across Wales.</p> <p>The current spread of children across the key stages is as follows: Foundation Phase - 8%, KS2 - 22%, KS3 - 41% and KS4 - 29% which compares with 12%, 25%, 33% and 31% across Wales. The majority of children are male (58%).</p> <p>A small number of the children are identified as having special educational needs (SEN). Where a child has a Statement of SEN, the Council's Additional Learning Needs Team work in collaboration with the Education Welfare Service who monitor provision and the suitability of the education being provided within the family.</p> <p>In the previous year, a total of 26 children returned to school-based education. From September 2022, a further 10 children have also returned.</p>
1.04	<p>Parents are not required to register or seek approval from the Local Authority (LA) to home-educate their children. Where a reason was provided for choosing EHE, 16% related this to anxiety/ concern due to Covid-19, 15% referenced lifestyle/ideological choice and 10% cited pupil anxiety/phobia. Other reasons included medical needs, bullying, awaiting school of choice and 'other'.</p>
1.05	<p>Councils are not responsible for the provision of EHE or under any statutory obligation to support it financially although the recent allocation of grant funding has facilitated councils to provide additional support to</p>

	<p>families who choose to EHE. Under section 436A of the Education Act 1996, councils 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 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 (EWS) in Flintshire. A dedicated Education Support Officer (ESO) has been appointed with a specific remit for EHE. Parents are contacted at the point of the Council being informed of their decision to choose EHE. Visits are undertaken to review the education provision being made although parents are not required to follow the National Curriculum/ Curriculum for Wales. The EWS is experienced in matters of welfare and safeguarding which supports the potential identification of these issues during home visits.</p> <p>There has been a positive response to the visits undertaken by the ESO and she is building links with the families. During the visits, educational arrangements have been discussed and reviewed. As part of the information gathering process, the child is encouraged to share their views regarding the progress they feel they have made since becoming electively home educated, along with their aspirations for the future. Some challenges have been identified including access to suitable educational facilities, e.g. Science laboratories to undertake scientific investigations and access to this across the school network is being explored. Access to appropriate ICT equipment and educational resources has also been flagged and requirements are being considered. Drop-in sessions for EHE families are in the planning process.</p> <p>Good practice is discussed at the half-termly Regional Stakeholder meetings and the EWS Manager has received an award along with colleagues across the North Wales region in recognition of their collaborative work with the EHE community.</p>
1.07	<p>Welsh Government policy on EHE has been under review for a number of years now. There are plans to implement the revised guidance next year following input from national and regional groups.</p> <p>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	The Welsh Government took the decision to allocate grant funding for EHE from 2020. Flintshire is in receipt of £76,386 for this financial year. The grant is split into funding to support the availability of staff to discharge the monitoring and support role, with additional funding to support families with regards to the additional costs of home education, e.g. textbooks and materials, software, educational trips and access to qualifications. The grant funding has been essential to enable the allocation of a dedicated officer to this area of work.

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 are circulated to all parents when they opt to electively home educate their children.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

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	Elective Home Education: when parents take on the responsibility for the education of their children rather than sending them to a school. National Curriculum: a common programme of study that is designed to ensure uniformity of content and standards in education.

Curriculum for Wales: a new curriculum which replaces the national curriculum. This is currently being implemented across primary schools and is being phased into secondary schools from September 2023.

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.