

To the Chair and Members of the

**SCHOOLS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
PANEL**

ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION UPDATE – JANUARY 2014

Introduction

This report has been produced in response to a request from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel's (OSCP) report and recommendations published in December 2011. The report is split into 2 main areas: (1) Update on service delivery and changes since September 2012 and (2) Update on the specific recommendations from the OSCP.

Since the panel Elective Home Education (EHE) Services have evolved significantly and positively. Changes in practice have resulted in an invitation from the chair of the House of Commons Education Select Committee on EHE inviting Doncaster to participate in developing a professional association from professionals working with home educators.

1. Update on Service Delivery

On 1st April 2013 EHE Services were transferred in to the Attendance and Pupil Welfare Service from the now obsolete Wider Achievement Service following a restructure. At the point of transfer we identified a number of key issues that needed addressing in collaboration with the Boroughs home educators.

All known home educators were invited to a consultation meeting in order to participate in the development of the service. Known home educators with their own websites or who were involved in home education groups shared information about the consultation event on their websites and via social media.

The 1st meeting took place in May and involved 5 home educators and 1 home educated child, there was also one representative of the Showmen Traveller community. It was very clear that home educators had a very negative view of Doncaster Council's home education policy but also that they were keen to work in partnership with Doncaster Council to improve services for their children.

There have been two subsequent meetings with the group, numbers in attendance increasing at each meeting.

Consultation also involved a questionnaire being sent to all known home educators, home visits to those interested in voicing their views, telephone contact and communication via email. There was also a home educator who offered to pass on comments from those who did not want to be identified in their communication. Additionally there was consultation with Lancashire Elective Home Education Service to share best practice with a view to incorporating this into any changes in service delivery in Doncaster.

In addition, when further developing home education services consideration has been to the House of Commons Education Committee report 'Support for Home Education' and the Government's written response to this, published on 18th March 2013.

The outcomes of the consultation were a series of actions which include:

- A revised and updated policy to reflect current working practices
- Access to additional services for EHE families and children
- Professional accreditation for staff
- Need for more rigorous challenge to schools at the point of proposed transfer to EHE to ensure families were making informed decisions and fully aware of the implications of those decisions.

1.1 Policy

The new policy was agreed in communication following the first meeting in May. All letters and communications have been amended to encourage communication with home educators. An email circulation list is in use and during visits and we are adding to it as home educators express an interest in receiving communications from Doncaster Council. There is a new website and information will be added to this as services develop. We aim to build a strong and positive working relationship with home educators. The policy is attached in appendix 1.

1.2 Access to Additional Services

Exam centres

Traditionally home educated children have difficulty accessing exam centres and have had to travel out of Doncaster. Outwood Academy, Balby Carr Academy, Mexborough School and Sir Thomas Wharton Academy will now all accept external candidates.

Doncaster College

With effect from September 2013 Further Education and sixth form colleges can admit pupils aged 14 or 15 and receive funding for them directly from the Education Funding Agency. This includes not only specific provision for groups of pupils but also individual admissions of pupils who would otherwise be home educated.

Doncaster College have agreed to accept 14-16 year old home educated young people on to their courses. The young people will receive guidance and support to access the appropriate courses that are appropriate to their age, aptitude and ability and their chosen career pathway.

Doncaster College will act as an exam centre for GCSE maths for home educated young people as external candidates. Maths and English GCSE courses are also available.

There will be links on the Doncaster Council's EHE website to the Doncaster College website. Over the next year we will be working together to offer taster sessions for their course to home educated families

Schools Library Service

Home Educators can pay an annual fee to access the school's library resources. Link to be put on Doncaster Council Website

Health Services

Children who are home educated do not have access to immunisations and services that children in schools have. We have therefore developed a partnership with the clinical lead for the healthy child program. As a result of this Doncaster Council will provide a link to the Department of Health website on the EHE pages, publicise and notify parents/carers of the immunisation sessions and school nursing services. The health child program is delivering a pilot e-clinic program which children and young people who are home educated can access.

Participation and Transition Service

Doncaster Council's Participation and Transition Service will offer access to relevant careers information, advice and careers guidance to support young people to make positive transition into learning post 16. The service will offer support to young people educated at home who are ages 14+. For those young people who have special education needs and disabilities the local authority will ensure it fulfils its statutory duties to undertake where applicable the Section 139a assessment.

1.3 Professional Association

One of the recommendations from the House of Commons Education Committee and endorsed by Government is the development of a formalised professional association of home education officers, driven by those in the profession themselves. The aim of this being to share best practice nationally and consider issues such as accreditation and improved training for local authority officers.

Doncaster Council's EHE lead has been invited to participate in the formation of this professional association. The first meeting taking place in February 2014 at the Palace of Westminster ceremonial rooms.

1.4 Challenge to Schools

We have had detailed discussions with school staff at Don Valley Academy, Balby Carr Academy, Trinity Academy, Rossington Academy and Mexborough School about the numbers of young people leaving their provision for Elective Home Education. All have been able to provide detailed information and in all but one case a meeting has been held with parents in order to discuss their reasons for opting out of school.

All schools are now asked to complete a form asking for additional information about the children who are being removed from school roll to be home educated. This includes asking whether there are concerns about the welfare of the child and whether additional services are involved.

1.5 Impact of Changes

Doncaster has higher numbers of home educated families than statistical neighbours, in some cases 50% higher. However, Doncaster has one of the largest Traveller populations in the Borough. Attached in Appendices 2, 3 & 4 are data charts providing a breakdown of the reasons families have chosen to home educate and also the numbers of children leaving each school to be home educated. The number of children leaving education to be home educated, excluding Travellers, has reduced significantly during the last year. The data shows that overall the number of home educating families known to Doncaster Council has increased. This is because fewer families are exiting EHE, there has been an increase in the number of Travellers exiting education in secondary education and in year 6 and also that young people in year 11 are now being supported to access courses and guidance via Doncaster College which means they stay on the EHE list for monitoring purposes.

Networks of home educators are established and families are proactively giving feedback to Doncaster Council about the quality of EHE services and where there could be further improvements.

1.6 Future actions/priorities

The future actions and priorities are:

- To develop relationships with children's centres
- To provide access to localised services for EHE families via the early help collaboratives.

2. Response to the Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel review of 2nd December 2011

Recommendations 1 & 2

1. Family Support – That schools be encouraged to consider a cooling off period when a family, considering EHE, approaches a school and local authority, to ensure parents are given support and are aware of their responsibilities.
2. That schools be encouraged to introduce earlier intervention in conjunction with the Local Authority to ensure children and young people continue to be educated in a school environment.

On the whole schools are offering meetings to parents who elect to home educate. Where the reason for opting for home education involves dissatisfaction with the education system schools are showing a willingness to work with parents to resolve the issues. Schools are also evidencing to the local authority that they are proactively offering support to families where this is required. The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (amended 2011,2013) state that a pupils name should be deleted from the school roll as soon as the ground for deletion is met (12(3)) therefore once parents have reached their decision and submit a letter to advise the school that they are home educating the school must remove their child from school roll

Section 4.10 of Doncaster Council's Elective Home Education Procedure states 'Schools must not seek to persuade parents to educate their children at home as a way of avoiding an exclusion, because a child has poor attendance, behaviour or is unlikely to achieve academic success. In the case of exclusion, they must follow the statutory guidance. If the pupil has a poor attendance record, the school and local authority must seek to address the issues behind the absenteeism and use the other remedies available to them.' All schools have been made aware of this via the EHE procedures document and Doncaster Council's 'School Attendance: A Best Practice Guide.'

Evidence shows that Schools are proactively working with families in order to provide family support.

Recommendation 3

That the Authority investigate the possibility of introducing temporary or permanent managed moves between schools as part of the intervention process when behavioural issues are the trigger factor for considering EHE.

Behaviour thresholds and learning centres are now established in Doncaster. The Managed Move Protocol is well established in Secondary Settings and a task group has been implemented in order to develop primary protocols. Schools are implementing these and using managed moves to support families. In addition our recently developed 'Challenge to schools' process is identifying potential inclusion issues with schools and allowing us to advocate for children and intervene to prevent removal from mainstream education.

Recommendation 5

That data sharing between all agencies be supported and continue to enable children not in mainstream education to be brought to the attention of the responsible authorities.

The Education Act 1996 section 436 states that local authorities must have arrangements in place to enable them to establish the identities of children in there are who are not receiving an education. Doncaster Council has information sharing agreements and referral processes in place to ensure this duty is fulfilled.