



Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 15/09/2022

To the Chair and Members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee Panel

Elective Home Education, Children Missing Education and Alternative Provision in Doncaster.

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Cllr Lani Mae Ball Cabinet Member, Children, Young People and Schools	All	No

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Since the start of the pandemic, the number of referrals elective home education have received has risen sharply in Doncaster and nationally. Our local policy of intervening earlier has meant that the numbers who are currently identified as home educated have increased but have done so less than in many other areas.
- 1.2 The Local authority is working more closely with schools and home educators in order to stem this rise in cases and to broaden the range of support and communication available to families. A change in the law for September 2022 means that all families must register with the council if they are to undertake home education. Home education referrals have grown significantly over the period of the last two years, in line with national trends. The Local authority has committed resources to intervening early in order to ensure that this is the best choice for children and young people. In many cases this intervention has led to young people returning to schools with support to reintegrate.
- 1.3 The number of referrals for Children Missing Education has also grown since the start of the pandemic. There are various reasons for this including increased family mobility, familial mental health problems, school attendance issues and a growth in the number of families who have left the country. Whilst the number of Children Missing Education referrals has increased by 190%, council teams have closed 692 cases this year, with a current list of 228 children at the time of writing.

- 1.4 Through the Behaviour Transformation Programme, there has been a much-needed transformation of the alternative provision landscape in Doncaster. This has been regarded as a good practice model by other authorities, by OFSTED and the Department for Education (DfE). There is a strong range of centrally commissioned provision, alongside the provision of bespoke packages to support children through our alternative provision framework. There is a strong multi-agency process for decision making in order to ensure that referrals to provision are appropriate and individually tailored to needs.
- 1.5 Providers are rigorously quality assured by the council's teams and are making a clear impact in terms of supporting children and young people to re-integrate into their educational settings. Safeguarding responsibilities are acquitted by schools and providers and monitored by the Local authority.
- 1.6 Throughout the pandemic the council worked to ensure that any young person who needed alternative provision was able to have this continuity of education and care. The numbers in alternative provision grew during 2021 but are gradually reducing in 2022.

EXEMPT REPORT

2. This is not an exempt report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. It is recommended that the Children and Young People's scrutiny committee notes:
 - The increase in demand in all three areas since the start of the pandemic.
 - The work being undertaken to ensure suitability of education for young people.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

4. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a notable impact on all citizens of Doncaster and has put added pressure on all aspects of people's lives from their health and livelihoods through to their relationships and childcare. This has impacted also on the growth in number of young people who are educated away from mainstream environments or those who are missing school. In this environment it has been, and continues to be, vitally important that partners effectively deliver services in a way that supports all its residents including its most vulnerable children and young people as effectively as possible. Continued momentum in these areas is vital in order to ensure that long-term recovery is maintained for children and families who have been unduly affected by the pandemic.

BACKGROUND

5. Elective Home Education and Children Missing Education:

5.01 Parents have the right to remove a child from schools' admission register and Electively Home Educate (EHE). This places the responsibility on parents to provide a suitable education appropriate to the child's age, ability, and aptitude. Section 436A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires all local authorities to make arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children residing in their area who are not receiving a suitable education. Whilst parents are not obliged to share information with the local authority, the authority is advised to initiate proceedings to enable a return to school where they are not satisfied that a suitable education is in place.

5.02 In January 2020, following a review of the home education policy, a focus was placed on targeting parents to ensure the education provided to children was suitable and not just satisfactory and to intervene with families rapidly upon receipt of the notification. Parents are now asked to demonstrate the child's educational progress made over the previous period, new notifications are responded to immediately and the attendance service duty hotline has successfully supported parents to make a more informed decision before opting to home educate their children. Where parents have responded to the question around why they have elected to home educate, the major causes for parents' decisions are:

- Dissatisfaction with schools' response to bullying
- Special Educational Needs not being met
- Parent and school conflict

5.03 Despite the national increase in parents choosing to home educate, Doncaster has maintained a level of 1.73% of children of compulsory school age, currently at 691 children. This is higher than the pre-pandemic figure (638), but not as significantly as in many other authorities (the Association of the Directors of Children's Services reported a 20 % year on year rise in the overall national figures since the start of 2020). There was an increase in referrals during 2021-2022 from the previous academic year, of 12 notifications (4%) giving a total of 321, with 176 returning to a school within this time frame following officer interventions. The majority of notifications are received from secondary schools at 59.2%. More girls are home educated (55.6%) more than boys (44.2%) and with this being higher in the secondary phase (60.5%).

5.04 Of the current cohort 26 (3%) are identified an Education, Health and Care Plan which is in line with the majority of local areas, whilst 22% of Local authorities are currently reporting rates between 5 and 10%. One child is supported by social care (at Child in Need level).

5.05 A child missing education is any child who is not on a school admission register or has been absent for 4 weeks or more and the local authority has not established their whereabouts. These are often children who have moved

house or have recently moved into or out of the area. When a referral is received, it is allocated to a locality officer who will undertake enquiries in order to ascertain the whereabouts of the child and to work with agencies and schools to ensure a return to suitable education. OFSTED (April 2022) commented in its report on Doncaster that 'Children missing education are monitored effectively'.

- 5.06 The number of Children Missing Education has remained constant over the last year- remaining within the 200-230 range throughout this time. Currently there are 228 children, equating to 0.57% of the pupil population, with the population changing rapidly on a day-to-day basis. However, the number of referrals received from schools and other sources (898) has increased over the past year by 598 (190.6%). During the academic year 2021-2022, the APWS has closed 692 cases.
- 5.07 The growth in the volume of referrals can be attributed to various reasons created by the pandemic and, to a lesser extent, Brexit. There have been increases in longer-term absence from school, reduced capacity within schools, increases in anxiety and illness within families, alongside increased movement into and out of the area. This includes a significant number of families who have moved out of the country and returned to home country. More referrals are received for females at approximately 55% to 45% male. 25.6% of referrals are received from other local authorities.
- 5.08 The OFSTED report on Doncaster Childrens Services 'commented that home education data 'does not accurately ensure that children in receipt of statutory or early help support and those with education, health and care plans are identified.' This comment raised a discrepancy in timing and content of some information presented to inspectors. Managers now check these lists weekly in order to ensure that there is clear communication about the most recent cases that have been identified. There is also an internal process for directorate teams to check, corroborate and collaborate around home education cases. This is overseen by Assistant Directors, who have 'line of sight' of the work through a series of accountability meetings, which study data trends and individual cases. The council also monitors patterns of home education referrals and offers challenge to schools when this is necessary.
- 5.09 From September 2022, the national guidance will change in relation to home education. This will require a formal register of those children not in school to be kept by the council, which is shared with DfE. There will be a requirement that home educators register with the council and that the council has some services that offer advice and guidance to home educators. Doncaster currently maintains a list and employs officers who offer support and guidance to home educators. In anticipation of the new approach, we are currently working with local home education groups in order to identify what further support may be required in the future. From September 2022, Local Authority welfare officers will also be based in schools and will check and challenge any new notifications before they are sent to the local authority in order to intervene earlier and support children and families where there are issues in the relationship between schools and parents.

Children in Care

- 5.10 On average, in 2021/22, 15 secondary children did not have a school placement when they entered care for various reasons including care placement moves and being an unaccompanied asylum seeker or elective home educated. Virtual School officers prioritised these children closely monitored through supervision with the Lead Officer. The speed of admissions varied owing to statutory SEND processes, complexity of needs, specialist provision capacity and availability, the absence of an EHCP, turbulence in the social care teams and allocated social workers and the instability of care placements resulting in multiple moves. The Virtual School issued intention to direct in 1 case where a school refused to admit a child and the school admitted the child within 3 days of receiving the notification.
- 5.11 In 2021/22 1 primary child did not have a school placement when they entered care and were electively home educated. Placements were identified immediately due to him being EHE, but the offer was not taken up by Mum who had parental responsibility. He left care prior to starting the school placement.

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

- 5.12 The borough-wide Behaviour Review (2018) made a set of observations and recommendations around improving behaviour systems Doncaster. Following consultation with the wider system in November 2017, the Behaviour Transformation Programme was initiated following sign off at cabinet in April 2018. This plan involved taking a systems approach in relation to the support provided to schools, meeting specific needs of individuals, and creating the necessary provisions for young people who cannot remain in a mainstream setting.
- 5.13 As part of this plan, in 2018 we began the re-shaping of our alternative provision landscape to focus on bespoke re-integration, assessment and therapeutic support, with some centrally commissioned providers and the use of the Inclusion Panel to deliver specifically commissioned placements for young people on the basis of need. This replaced some of the previous provisions, which had not aligned to the vision around ensuring quality and consistency in line with national policy. This included:
- Creating and Assessment and Reintegration centre in order to service all provision for 'Day 6' of permanent exclusion and for any other students with unknown needs coming into the borough or where emergency assessment is required. This has been delivered by St Wilfrids Academy and has supported the precision and credibility of IYFAP decisions.
 - To create and grow the Alternative Provision framework through a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), which is a procedure available for contracts for works, services, and goods commonly available on the market as a procurement tool. Doncaster's Alternative Provision within the DPS began on the 10th September 2018 and we now have over 60 providers. The Local authority use this in order to procure bespoke placements for young people, either on the basis of developing a reintegration plan to access full education or for individual therapeutic input.

- The re-purposing of the Big Picture Learning contract to supply further support for young people affected by the pandemic. Whilst these cohorts are at a lower level of need than many other provisions, they include young people who have recently come out of home education, are persistent absentees or have struggled to engage with schools. The 'Big Picture' provision is working to support children to reintegrate into school at Key Stage 3 and the 'Vega College' works with employers in order to engage young people with the workplace and to improve engagement with meaningful qualifications.
- 5.14 This new landscape of provision has enabled an agile response to the pressures of the pandemic, with the number of placements rising significantly initially but gradually reducing, despite an increase in the intensity of need. We were able to ensure that any young person who was experiencing difficulties when schools were closed were able to access a suitable education. We have also been able to provide appropriate placements to support a return to education following the closure of schools or to deliver intensive support where mental health needs have increased. Over the initial period of the pandemic the numbers in alternative provision, through the framework, grew initially but reduced from 82 in summer 2021 to 48 in Autumn 21 and then 25 in spring 2022. The overall number of placements made by panel has reduced from 162 in 2020-2021 to 135 in 2021-2022. This reflects successes in supporting schools to better meet needs within school environments, supported by some funding devolved to them through our written agreement with schools created in summer 2021.
- 5.15 All decisions regarding the placement of young people in provision are made by the inclusion panel, or where this an Education, Health and Care Plan, by the Special Educational Needs panel. The Inclusion Panel is a multi-agency panel, which sits fortnightly and assesses referrals from schools and other professionals to either advise schools on how they can improve their interventions or to commission provision from the high needs block. Where provision is agreed, the roll school maintains responsibility for overseeing attendance and safeguarding, working in partnership with the provider. Whilst we are awaiting data for the academic year 2021-2022, 98% of young people who were allocated provision during 2020-2021 were successfully reintegrated into their roll school following intervention from panel.
- 5.16 The Big Picture Learning project has also enabled those who have been isolated or struggled to engage to access mainstream provision. Since March 2021, over 80 young people have been able to return to mainstream placements as a consequence of the 12 week programmes delivered by this provision, including 22 learners who were previously home educated. Vega College opened in September 2021 and has worked with a full cohort of 24 young people, who have become disengaged from the school system. The provision focuses on workplace skills and employability, whilst also preparing young people for examinations. All of its initial cohort have now found suitable education or training for Year 12, including 4 young people who will begin apprenticeships in September 2022.
- 5.17 Where young people are permanently excluded, we use alternative provision to assess their needs and develop a plan for mainstream re-integration. Unlike many authorities, this means that nearly all young people will return to

mainstream schools with support. Our robust In Year Fair Access Panel oversees this process and 98% of young people allocated to schools have begun their new school within expected timescales. OFSTED (April 2022) also commented that 'When children return to education, they are provided with effective transition support to help them settle into school. The oversight of pupils on part-time timetables is strong.'

- 5.18 There is a clear quality assurance process for all providers commissioned by the council, which is based upon the most recent OFSTED independent schools framework. All of our quality assurance inspections, conducted annually, include a review of provision alongside a review of that the providers' safeguarding policy and procedures are reviewed, the organisation's understanding of safeguarding and how this is embedded into everyday practice is robustly assessed. We would ensure there is a clear line of accountability for safeguarding within the organisation and request evidence to show that Designated Leads receive adequate training to meet local safeguarding requirements. We also ensure that the wider staff team receive safeguarding training at least annually; also, that safeguarding leads cascade regular updates to the whole staff team, to ensure that safeguarding children is at the core of their organisation's ethos. We review all documentation to evidence valid Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks, and we would inspect how safeguarding concerns/incidents are recorded and how level of need is identified, how appropriate referrals are made, and that actions and outcomes are clearly documented. We also request evidence of how the provider links with the students' roll schools and we would ensure the partnership working is effective. Where providers are registered schools, we conduct quality assurance visits, alongside the visits conducted by OFSTED.
- 5.19 The council will continue to work with local providers, schools, and other agencies to ensure that the local market for alternative provision reflects the changing needs of Doncaster children and young people.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED






6. This section is not applicable.




REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

7. This section is not applicable.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

8.

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider – Negative overall	Neutral or No implications
 Tackling Climate Change				✓
<p>Comments This report does not directly concern this area.</p>				
 Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work	✓			
<p>This report demonstrates how children and young people are being given increasing chances to access education or training which will enhance their ability to access the workplace.</p>				
 Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs	✓			
<p>This report demonstrates how local alternative provision and increasing access to a suitable education can support young people into accessing the workplace. The alternative provision framework is building up a network of local providers, based in Doncaster, stimulating a growing area of the local economy.</p>				
 Building opportunities for healthier, happier, and longer lives for all	✓			
<p>By ensuring that young people have a suitable education, we are enabling them to access a broader experience of learning and thereby acquire the skills that will help them lead happier and more successful lives.</p>				
 Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities				✓

where everyone belongs				
This report does not directly concern this area				
 Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough	✓			
This report describes some of the work undertake under our ambition to be the 'most child friendly borough'. We have been listening to the voice of children and supporting children to attend a range of provision which will focus on their needs and aspirations.				
 Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future				✓
This report does not directly cover this area.				
 Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities	✓			
By developing the range of provision available locally, we have improved the local curriculum offer, with young people now accessing a range of placements which will support knowledge and skills in areas such as the arts, local history, and sport.				
Fair & Inclusive	✓			
This report describes a range of strategies which are aimed at ensuring stronger opportunities for disadvantaged children or those who are at risk of social exclusion in later life. We have enabled young people to gain stronger outcomes alongside those opportunities.				

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

[SRF 15.08.2022]

The Council has a range of statutory duties in relation to the education of children within its Borough. There are no specific legal implications arising out of this report, however further specific advice can be provided in relation to any issues arising from the Committee.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

[SB 17.08.2022]

There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

The Elective Home Education team (EHE) holds a budget of £94,420 and is fully funded by the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

The Attendance Team holds a budget of £610,080 funded by a combination of general fund, traded income from schools and parental fine income.

The budget for placements within Alternative Provision is £500,000 and is also fully funded by the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Any financial implications relating to specific areas will need to be included within further reports.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

[JC 12.08.2022]

There are no direct HR implications associated with this report.

12. TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

[PW 15.08.2022]

There are no specific technology implications in relation to this report. Changes to the EHE Notification Form have recently been requested by the service and are being progressed by Digital & ICT.

13. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

[CW 17.08.2022]

The links between health, wellbeing and educational attainment is well documented. The impacts of the COVID pandemic on the health and wellbeing of children and young people may not be fully realised for years to come, but evidence continues to emerge of the detrimental effects the pandemic has had on both the physical and mental health of children.

Pupils requiring specialist education provision have vulnerabilities that can often place them at a disadvantage with both educational and health outcomes. In particular those children with special educational needs and disabilities, and those who have been excluded from school. Improving standards of and accessibility to education will support the educational attainment of these children and is likely to impact positively on reducing long-term health inequalities in Doncaster.

The role of public health nursing services in supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people not in mainstream education should be noted. The new service model for public health nursing services 5-19, has clearly defined expectations in terms of service offer for children not in mainstream education and how they should link with the Local Authority and other agencies to ensure children, young people and their families are aware of services available to them.

14. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

[MO 03/08/2022]

The Council's duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 when exercising its functions to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a protected characteristic and those who do not share that protected characteristic, ensure fair access to learning and opportunities for all Doncaster's children and young people. This report sets out how the council's services will increase access to a suitable education for children and young people who may otherwise be unable to access adequate support and provision.

15. RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

15.1 The continued rise in demand for home education and children missing education referrals will place increasing tension on the attendance and welfare team. Whilst we have significantly increased capacity over the last two years by more effective use of existing resources, this remains a risk. We will aim to mitigate this by prioritizing cases and working in schools to prevent increasing cases coming to the council. We are also lobbying central government for increased resource to be committed to this area to deal with pressures on all local authorities.

15.2 There is a risk that as schools find increasing difficulties in engaging young people that there is a rise in inappropriate referrals for Children Missing Education. We are mitigating this through borough wide training, training for social workers, meetings with individual schools where there are concerns and the regular re-issuing of guidance.

The rise in demand for alternative provision has become a challenge since the start of the pandemic, with an increase in the severity of need being presented to panel. We are mitigating this through creating increasing capacity within centrally commissioned provision such as Big Picture Learning and Vega College in order to limit the impact upon high needs budgets. We are also working to consolidate and add resilience to the local mainstream offer through the actions of the Special Educational Needs strategy.

CONSULTATION

16. There has been significant consultation through conferences and engagement with key stakeholders such as home educators, schools, and settings.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

17. None

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

18.

- Elective Home Education (EHE)
- Children Missing Education (CME)
- Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

- Department for Education (DFE)
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)
- Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)

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