

Council/Committee:	Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board
Report Title	Elective Home Education Improvement Plan
Date of Meeting	Monday 8 September 2025
Report Author	Lisa Harvey – Safeguarding Team Manager
Lead Officer	Sue Moore – Assistant Director for Education Support Services
Wards Affected	All
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Choose an item. N/A
Appendices (if any)	1. Improvement Plan

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Elective Home Education (EHE) or 'Education otherwise than at school' is a term used to describe a choice by parents to provide education for their children at home or in some other way of their choosing, instead of sending them to school full-time.
- 1.2 Children who are EHE has risen exponentially over the last 5 years both locally and nationally. As at census date in autumn term 2024, Councils reported **111,700 children** in EHE, an increase from an estimated 92,000 in the previous autumn term.
- 1.3 In Sandwell there has been a 162% from 2019/20 to 2024/25. Whilst the choose to home educate is a parental right this is conditional on parents providing their child with an 'efficient' and 'suitable' education.
- 1.4 To tackle increasing numbers, encourage and support children to return to school and prevent home education for those children and young people where it is not in their best interests an improvement plan has been developed.

2. Recommendations

The Council/Committee is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Consider and comment upon the EHE improvement plan to ensure legal obligations under the relevant Education legislation are met and that all learners of statutory school age receive a suitable and fulltime education either at school or otherwise.
- 2.2 Continue to have oversight and awareness of ongoing changes to the expectations and obligations placed on the Council regarding EHE learners who may be missing their entitlement to an education via regular updates throughout the year.

3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations

3.1 Current Sandwell EHE Data:

No of EHE Children who have been EHE at some point n the current academic year 2024/25	1356
Unsupported (refusal of support)	231
Children with a EHCP	78
SEN Needs (No EHCP)	334
Children who have had safeguarding concerns (incl. Domestic abuse) in the last 12 months	195

3.2 LA comparison with statistical neighbours – EHE (DfE Autumn Census) Autumn Term 2024/2025 - Most recent published Data National Figures: 111, 700

Local Authority	EHE Children
Bradford	1100
Coventry	510
Sandwell	840
Stoke on Trent	530
Wolverhampton	580

4. Context

- 4.1 The number of children and young people who are home educated has risen significantly since the Covid pandemic in both England and Wales. The reasons given by parents both locally and nationally are varied but the pandemic introduced many families to remote learning, and some discovered that their children thrived in a home-based environment. Families discovered home education can allow for a more tailored approach to learning, where children can progress at their own pace. For those families that choose home education as a lifestyle choice it enables them to incorporate values, cultural education, or alternative teaching methods that align with their beliefs and goals.
- 4.2 There are, however, some parents who are driven by factors of dissatisfaction or frustration. Parents report being dissatisfied with the quality of education and ethos in mainstream schools with some feeling that schools are not adequately addressing their child's specific learning needs, especially for children who are neurodivergent or have special educational needs. Further concerns have been raised by parents about physical or mental health risks in school environments, including bullying, peer pressure, or exposure to illness. This data has been collected from schools and parents as part of the initial consultation with a parent /carer when they confirm they intend to home educate.
- 4.3 Parents who home educate their children and decide not to engage with support from the local authority risk compromising not only educational attainment but their child's social development and emotional resilience due to lack of peer interaction, lack of access to the personal, social, health and emotional curriculum.
- 4.4 Sandwell acknowledges that it is the right of all parents to choose to home educate their child(ren) and that they should not be unduly prevented from doing so if it is in their child's interest. However, every child has a right to receive the best possible education within a safe environment which enables them to reach their potential and thrive.
- 4.5 It is the responsibility of parents, not the Council to ensure that their child (if they are of compulsory school age) receives a suitable education. The local authority must however be assured as to whether the education being provided is suitable. Provision does not need to follow specific examples such as the national curriculum, but the education does need to be suitable for the child. In addition to the Council being assured on the suitability of education there is also a statutory duty to safeguard children where there is evidence that they may be at risk of significant harm. Both duties provide a challenge for Councils as there is no legal requirement for parents to engage with or accept any support from the Council.
- 4.6 Integral to the plan is how data will be utilised to better understand why parents are choosing to home educate so support can be targeted to help children to remain in school where it is appropriate.

- 4.7 Sandwell has a dedicated EHE team which is placed within the Children & Education Directorate and works closely with the Schools Attendance Support Service, Children Missing Education (CME), MASH Education Safeguarding Team and schools.

The EHE team consists of:

1x Safeguarding and EHE Service Manager (non-case holding)

1x Lead Elective Home Education Advisory Teacher

3 x Higher Level Teaching Assistant EHE Advisors

5. Registering and Tracking

- 5.1 Currently there is no legal requirement to hold or maintain a register of children who are electively home educated nor track the number of registrations and de-registrations. However, Sandwell does maintain a register of children who we are aware of via school off rolling or the MySandwell portal where parents can notify of us that they intend to or are home educating.

- 5.2 The Sandwell EHE team also have a robust reciprocal arrangement whereby other local authorities will alert us to home educated children moving into Sandwell and we will alert them to home educated children moving out of Sandwell. Sandwell EHE team do not release oversight of any child until confirmation is received that they have been picked up the receiving LA.

6 Monitoring and Support

- 6.1 In Sandwell every family is contacted at the point of referral for EHE and offered support. Initial consultations allow the team to establish the reasons a child may be being home educated and to begin to risk assess if home education is appropriate and subsequently discussed with parents and other professionals.
- 6.2 Each young person is risk rated (RAG - Red, Amber, Green) based on a set of criteria using previous safeguarding concerns, support declined and SEND with support aligned to the rating.
- 6.3 Support is bespoke and flexible for each family. An allocated case officer will focus on building and forming a trusting relationship with the whole family. (STAR Model). This encourages families to be more accepting of a wider offer of support in times of need.
- 6.4 There are multiple ways families can engage/interact with the EHE team
- Telephone, email, video call, home visits, and visits to locations in the community.

- The team produce a newsletter, welcome pack, placing arts and crafts resources in libraries across the six towns and book resource boxes in key venues too.
 - Community activities
 - SEND assessments, referrals and signposting which helps demonstrate to home educators we are not here simply to assess suitability but also to offer practical support.
 - Via the Portal for parents to log their intention or their current situation regarding EHE.
- 6.5 Councils are responsible for assessing the suitability of the education provided to children who are home educated, although there is no duty on families to engage so it is recognised that not all families will accept support.
- 6.6 In Sandwell formal reviews of learning are done with every family every 12 months but there is also an offer of support at any time outside of this.

7. Collaboration and Communication

- 7.1 The team collaborate and communicate with parents, education providers, professionals and services who work with families to ensure a robust strategy to ensure safeguarding oversight, appropriate education and support for families.
- 7.2 The Council needs to be assured that all children are clearly identified as EHE because under current legislation parents are not required to inform the Council that they intend to home educate their child.
- 7.3 The role of multi-agency professionals in helping to identify EHE children who may not be otherwise known to the Council is crucial in ensuring support and oversight is in place. The team currently work with a range of services who are alert to the possibility of home education but there are still some services/agencies who do not fully understand the limitations of the Council when children are home educated or may not recognise that a child is home educated. Work is already underway to raise awareness and establish stronger professional links with services to gain alerts.
- 7.4 The team are already working with schools and partners to discourage EHE where it is not appropriate. Additionally, encouraging all partners who have contact with children to exercise professional curiosity to alert us to the existence of children who are being home educated and to raise any concerns.
- 7.5 Changes to how school's manage removal from roll requests and the initial consultation with parents undertake by the EHE team will have a stronger focus on capturing the child's voice
- 7.6 Safeguarding is a key priority for the team, with each officer able and supported to take the role of lead professional, liaising with family support workers, social workers and SEN workers to assess vulnerability both initially and ongoing.

- 7.7 Changes to enable EHE children to have access to exam centres would require extra funding from the government, however, Sandwell has been able to work with a local secondary school to enable access for children to sit exams in maths and English language at a reduced cost. The team also offer advice in conjunction with Connexions on exam registration and provide revision resources.
- 7.8 Sandwell follows up on year 11 outcomes each year in partnership with Connexions service and parents to establish exam outcomes and transition pathways post 16 (this data is available), and destinations are recorded on synergy. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of these EHE children do make positive progressions into education employment and training/gain accreditations.
- 7.9 Sandwell also has a setting for post 14 study (Halesowen College) that accept home educated children where they can study for up to 2 years to gain core subjects before progressing to post 16 courses.
- 7.10 If it is assessed the education provided is not suitable or parents has no capacity to educate their child a School Attendance Orders (SAO) can be issued. This means a parent must register their child at a named school. Failure to comply with an SAO is a criminal offence. If a parent does not register the child at the named school or fails to ensure attendance, they may be prosecuted. This can result in:
- a fine of up to £1,000
 - a criminal record
 - further legal action, including Education Supervision Orders or Parenting Orders

8 Improvement Plan

- 8.1 The key aims/targets of the improvement plan are:
- To clearly identify children who are Electively Home Educated (EHE) and ensure that safeguarding partners receive regular data about the numbers, characteristics, and issues of concern about children.
 - To ensure that children's vulnerabilities and safeguarding needs are understood at the point of being removed from school rolls, including if there have been concerns about not being brought to health appointments.
 - To enable proactive action to be taken to reduce numbers of children who are EHE when it is not in their best interest and timely reintegration back into school.
 - To ensure that children's voices, needs and perspectives have been considered in the decision by the parent/carer to home educate them.
 - To ensure that roles and responsibilities in relation to EHE are understood by all agencies who have contact with children and families. This enable's a line of sight, multi-agency support and an alert mechanism to children who are home educated.
 - To ensure where and when necessary, a suitable multi-agency plan is developed and implemented to enable the child and family to receive the help and protection they may need.

- 8.2 Work has already begun to ensure multi agency partners understand roles and responsibilities in relation to EHE via a 7-minute briefing, team meetings and attendance at forums.
- 8.3 Policy, paperwork and guidance has been reviewed and developed to tackle some of the immediate issues (e.g. parents are fully informed of the implications of home education).
- 8.4 Although more work with schools is planned to strengthen expectations some progress has been made via awareness raising and call for support at a range of education provider meetings.

9 Consultation

- 9.1 The school removal roll form asks what the views of the child are with regards to their future education arrangements
- 9.2 Initial consultations are carried out with every parent/carer once the team becomes aware that they will be home educating their child. This consultation gathers the views of parents regards home education including their reasons if they are willing to share.
- 9.3 The initial consultation where the team also take to opportunity to try to gather the views of children and young people.

10 Legal and Governance Implications

- 10.1 Whilst there is no specific legislation that deals with home education, Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act states:
"The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable: (a) to his age, ability, and aptitude, and (b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise."
- The first term after a child reaches 5 years old, they must be either enrolled in school (maintained, academy, independent etc) **or home educated**. It is the choice of the child's parents or guardian on which method to use, but they must be in education by statutory school age.
 - The local authority has a duty to check by reasonable enquiries the suitability of all those being home educated and where this duty is not dispensed to decide whether formal action must be taken e.g. School Attendance Order
 - Parents do not have a duty to oblige reasonable enquiries or state why they are off rolling their child/ren from school. They do not have to engage with the local authority, allow access or accept support.
- 10.2 The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill Proposals is likely to impact on future cohorts of EHE Children and how support is provided. The proposed changes are:
- All councils must have 'children not in school' registers, with a duty to support parents on their registers. Children in scope are those not registered at a school or receiving some of their education outside of school (ie flexi-schooling and unregistered alternative provision).

Schools will have to check with councils if children being withdrawn are in these categories. Out-of-school education providers must also provide details and can be fined if not.

- Some parents will need council consent to home education their child. It will apply to those with children subject to protection orders, on a protection plan or at a special school under arrangements made by the local authority. LAs can also compel home educated children on protection orders to attend school.
- School attendance orders will be standardised nationally, with councils compelled to check whether the home learning environment for a child is suitable when making such orders. Parents would also face prosecution if they don't comply.

11 Risks

- 11.1 The key risk is that numbers continue to rise, and no mandatory registration or monitoring means all local authorities may struggle to fulfil safeguarding duties
- 11.2 A proportion of children and young people who are home educated may have compromised life choices due to lack of education and qualifications.

12 Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 12.1 There are some children who are EHE and have an education and health care plan and the team work closely with Inclusive Learning Services (ILS). This will be further strengthened via ILS vulnerable children pathway and the Lived experience Framework and strategy
- 12.2 Data will continue to be analysed to look at the correlation between EHE children who have an EHCP/SEN needs and dissatisfaction with school as a reason given for the choice.
- 12.3 Data will also be scrutinised to look at protected characteristics and the reasons parents give for home educating so this can feed into the action plan.

13 Other Relevant Implications

- 13.1 Children we care for cannot be home educated and must be in formal educational provision. There are however some children who are on child protection or child in need plans whereby parents make the decision to home educate.
- 13.2 Formal education provision does not just provide an educational curriculum but also support social skills, relationship building, personal development, citizenship, cultural awareness, preparing for adulthood, physical and mental wellbeing. Home education can present challenges around limited peer interaction, fewer group dynamics and less exposure to differing viewpoints if parents do not manage home education carefully considering all aspects of development of the child.

11. Background Documents

[Elective home education - GOV.UK](#)

[Safeguarding children in elective home education - GOV.UK](#)

[Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024: policy summary - GOV.UK](#)

[ST*R Partnership Practice Model - Sandwell CSP](#)

12. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?

12.1 Growing up in Sandwell - The EHE Team are committed to ensuring that Sandwell children benefit from the best start in life and a high-quality education. To this end the team try to work with parents and schools to reduce the number of children who are home educated when it is not in the best interests of the child. They offer advice, support and guidance to ensure children and young people make good academic progress with ambition to reach national standard. Supporting parents via regular contact, access to placements to take GCSE's and working with Connexions service to support post 16 Education, employment or training so that Children and young people have the right skills and support to take the next step in their life and are well prepared for adult life.