



Purpose: For Discussion

Committee report

Committee	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES
Date	THURSDAY, 4 MARCH 2021
Title	ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION
Report of	STEVE CROCKER, DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the elective home education report is to provide an update for the Policy and Scrutiny Committee.
2. Elective home education (EHE) continues to be high profile both locally and nationally with changes to legislation and guidance in April 2019 and possible further changes being considered.
3. The number of pupils being electively home educated on the Isle of Wight remained stable from 2017 to 2020 at a time when nationally numbers were increasing. However, there has been a 21 per cent increase in numbers during the Autumn Term 2020 compared to December 2019. At the end of December 2020 there were 464 young people registered as EHE. This compares to 384 EHE pupils at the end of December 2019 and 456 at the end of the Academic Year 2019-20.
4. 464 pupils represent 3.1 per cent of the total school age population on the Isle of Wight which is relatively high compared to other local authorities. However, EHE data collection is very reliable on the Isle of Wight and therefore is likely to be more accurate than many other local authorities and as an island, there is less opportunity for EHE children crossing local authority borders for their education. There is also a strong tradition of home education on the Isle of Wight, supported by local EHE parental groups.
5. Covid-19 restrictions have had an impact on both the numbers of parents choosing to home educate their child and the way the EHE Team has interacted with families. Most home visits have been replaced by telephone calls, email reports from parents and virtual meetings since March 2020.

6. Engagement with EHE families has been over 90 per cent for several years and reduced slightly to 89 per cent during the Autumn term 2020. This is related to Covid-19 restrictions and the increased number of EHE pupils.
7. The Isle of Wight shows similar patterns to the national picture in terms of distribution across year groups; percentage open to social care; gender split; percentage with special educational needs or disability (SEND) and reasons for parents choosing to home educate their children.
8. Close liaison continues between the Isle of Wight Council and Hampshire County Council to share good practice and to align processes and procedures.

BACKGROUND

9. The Department for Education (DfE) recommends that each local authority provides written information about elective home education that is clear, accurate and sets out the legal position, roles and responsibilities of both the local authority and parents. Local authorities should recognise that there are many approaches to educational provision, not just a school at home model. What is suitable for one child may not be for another, but all children should be involved in a learning process.
10. Local authorities have no statutory duties in relation to monitoring the quality of home education on a routine basis. However, under Section 437(1) of the Education Act 1996, local authorities shall intervene if it appears that parents are not providing a suitable education. This section states that: "If it appears to a local education authority that a child of compulsory school age in their area is not receiving suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, they shall serve a notice in writing on the parent requiring him to satisfy them within the period specified in the notice that the child is receiving such education."
11. Local authorities also have a duty under Section 175(1) of the Education Act 2002 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. However, Section 175(1) does not give local authorities powers to enter the homes of, or otherwise see, children for the purposes of monitoring the provision of elective home education.
12. The DfE updated guidance for local authorities was issued in April 2019: www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education The Isle of Wight EHE guidance for schools and parents has been updated in line with this: www.iwight.com/council/OtherServices/Educating-at-Home/Elective-Home-Education-EHE
13. The 2019 DfE guidance is clearer on what a suitable education looks like and puts the onus on parents to provide evidence of this but does not give local authorities a statutory duty to monitor home education as such.
14. In April 2019, the DfE published a consultation on the compulsory registration of EHE pupils and the outcomes of this are awaited.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

15. The Isle of Wight Council Corporate Plan 2017-20 identifies the following which are relevant to the Elective Home Education Service:

Corporate priorities:

- Keeping children safe and improving their education.

Key outcome:

- A well-educated and skilled community.

Key activities:

- Work with and challenge schools' performance to ensure that all are good or outstanding.
- Maintain focus on children's safeguarding practice to ensure a high quality of service with effective systems to protect children and keep them safe.

EHE REPORT

16. At the end of December 2020 there were 464 young people registered as EHE including 73 in Years 10 or 11 attending part-time courses at the Isle of Wight College and one attending the Hospitality Training Partnership (HTP) as part of their home education provision. This compares to 384 EHE pupils at the end of December 2019 (an increase of 21%) and 456 at the end of the Academic Year 2019-20. 464 pupils represent 3.1% of the total school age population on the Isle of Wight.

17. The increase in EHE numbers during the Autumn Term 2020 appears to have been influenced by Covid-19 and numbers may increase again when schools reopen to all pupils at some point in the Spring Term 2021. However, it is too early to tell whether numbers will decrease again in the future when parents return to work and fears regarding Covid-19 subside.

18. The EHE Team consists of a full time Lead Officer for EHE and an EHE Administrator funded for 6 hours per week. The Lead Officer was absent from work from September to the end of November 2020 and three part-time (3 days per week each) agency staff were recruited to contact parents under the strategic management of the Inclusion Manager. An additional day per week was also funded for the EHE Administrator.

19. Following the return to work of the Lead Officer for EHE and in response to Covid-19 and the increasing number of EHE pupils, one agency worker was retained for 3 days per week and the additional day for the EHE Administrator was confirmed, both until at least 30 June 2021.

20. As a result of the Covid-19 restrictions, most home visits have been replaced by telephone calls, e-mail reports from parents and virtual meetings. This has significantly changed the nature of the interaction with families, but overall, parents have engaged well with this. It has meant that the majority of EHE pupils, have not been seen by the EHE Officers. The number of virtual meetings have been increased to help to address this and parents are starting to respond positively to this development.

21. With regards to examinations, Cowes Enterprise College (CEC) has accepted external candidates in recent years which has been of great benefit to EHE students wishing to sit GCSEs. However, as a result of Covid-19 restrictions, CEC has decided not to accept external candidates currently. We are awaiting a decision from Ofqual regarding whether external candidates will be able to access any GCSEs or other qualifications at the end of this academic year. Students attending the Isle of Wight College or HTP as part of their EHE provision will be registered so will have access, but any external candidates may miss out as they did in the summer 2019 examination window.

22. The Isle of Wight undertakes the following functions in relation to children who are EHE:

- Checks are made when a young person becomes home educated and a record made of whether they are open to Social Care or the Education and Inclusion Service. Contact is then made with the relevant team;
- Termly meetings are held between the Local Authority's Service Manager for Operations (Social Care), Inclusion Manager (Education) and Lead Officer for EHE to discuss young people who are most vulnerable;
- When a young person becomes EHE, parents are sent an information pack that includes information on safeguarding including internet safety as well as information on a range of topics covered in schools e.g. how to access the Island Futures Team (careers advice), the School Nurse Team (there is a dedicated School Nurse for EHE, LAC and college students), the Family Information Zone and the Learning Zone (EHE support group);
- Any child with a special educational need or disability is given information about the Local Offer, including Short Breaks activities, during the initial visit or at the Interim EHCP Review;
- Families are offered an initial visit (within 3 months of becoming EHE), and then an annual contact;
- A triage system is used based on the needs of the child and the family identifies those who require more frequent visits.

Total number of children registered as EHE

Table 1

Academic Year	Number	% NOR*
2014/15	271	1.6%
2015/16	365	2.1%
2016/17	402	2.4%
2017/18	448	2.7%

2018/19	448	2.6%
2019/20	456	2.9%

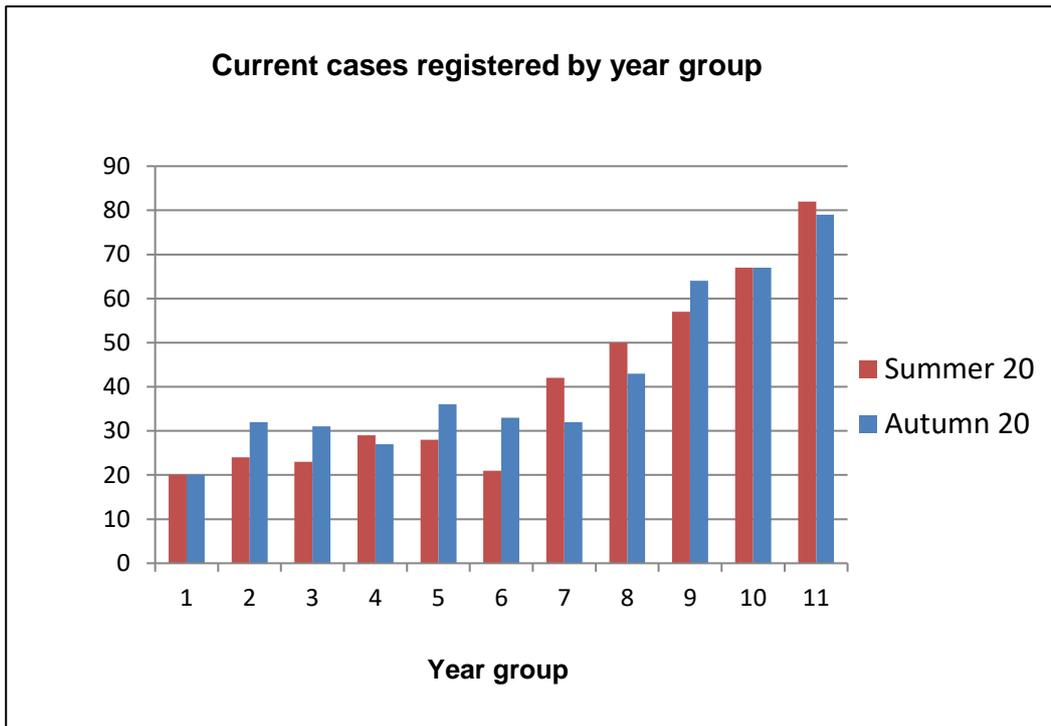
Autumn Term 2019	384	2.2%
Autumn Term 2020	464	3.1%

*% = NOR: number of EHE children expressed as a percentage of total number of school aged children in Isle of Wight schools and EHE.

Current cases registered by year group with percentage change
Table 2

Year	Autumn 2019	Summer 2020	Autumn 2020	Change
1	11	20	20	0
2	23	24	32	33.3%▲
3	25	23	31	34.7%▲
4	25	29	27	6.8%▼
5	25	28	36	28.6%▲
6	17	21	33	57.1%▲
7	33	42	32	23.8%▼
8	38	50	43	14.0%▼
9	49	57	64	12.3%▲
10	56	67	67	0
11	79	82	79	3.7%▼
Total	384	456	464	

NB: The relatively small numbers involved can lead to large percentage changes



School age population: current cases as a percentage of the NOR

Table 3

Academic Year	Primary		Secondary	
	Cases	%	Cases	%
2014/15	85	0.9%	186	2.5%
2015/16	123	1.3%	242	3.2%
2016/17	135	1.4%	267	3.5%
2017/18	159	1.7%	289	3.9%
2018/19	147	1.6%	301	4.1%
2019/20	158	1.8%	298	4.7%

Autumn Term 2019	129	1.4%	255	3.4%
Autumn Term 2020	179	2.1%	285	4.2%

Total new EHE cases registered during Autumn Term

Table 4

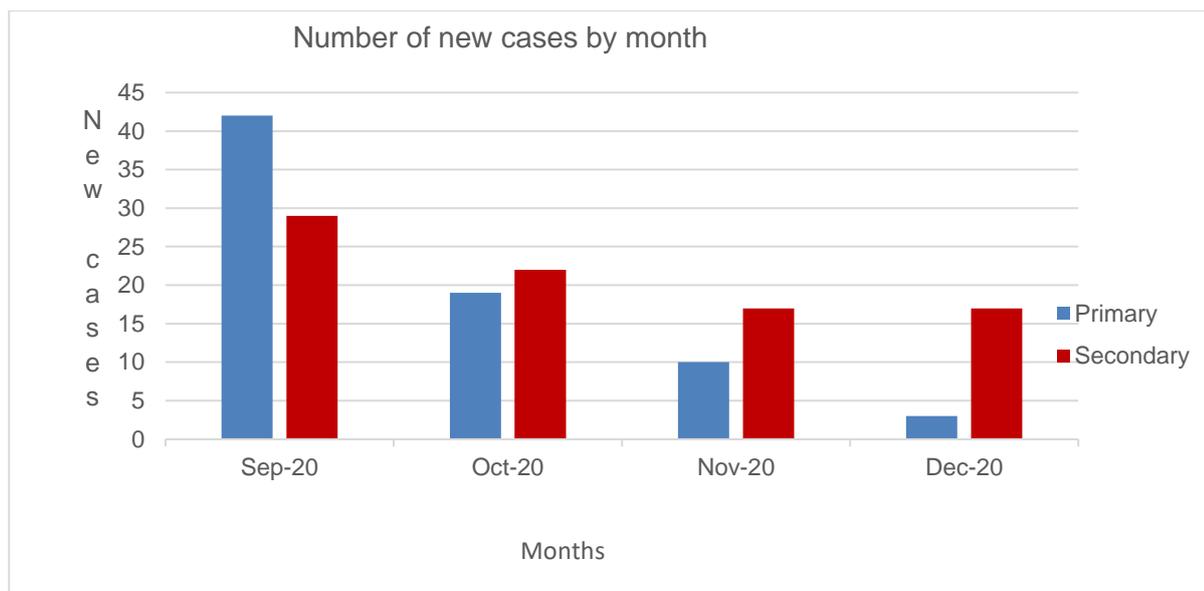
Date	Number (% change)
Autumn Term 2017	101
Autumn Term 2018	94 (7% ▼)
Autumn Term 2019	93 (1% ▼)
Autumn Term 2020	159 (71% ▲)

Total new cases shown above includes children who have subsequently ceased to be EHE.

Total new EHE cases: opened by month and year group

Table 5

Year Group	Sept 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020
1	5	4	2	0
2	9	3	3	1
3	7	3	2	0
4	7	1	1	0
5	9	2	1	2
6	5	6	1	0
Total Primary 74	42	19	10	3
7	7	4	1	4
8	6	3	1	2
9	2	8	6	7
10	6	3	8	1
11	8	4	1	3
Total Secondary 85	29	22	17	17
Total New EHE 159				



Comments

23. On the Isle of Wight, 21 children either moved into the LA area, had not previously attended school or left a private school (included in figures above) and became EHE.

24. At the end of December 2020 there were 464 young people registered as EHE including 73 in Years 10 or 11 attending part-time courses at the Isle of Wight College and one attending HTP as part of their home education provision. This compares to 384 EHE pupils at the end of December 2019 (an increase of 21%) and 456 at the end of the Academic Year 2019-20.

25. The 464 EHE students represent 3.1% of the total school age population (5-16). This represents 2.1% for the primary sector and 4.2% for the secondary sector. Whilst the number of EHE students at the end of the academic year has been stable for the last three years, this percentage of NOR has been gradually increasing. However, there has been a more significant increase in new EHE cases during the Autumn Term 2020. The 159 new cases represent an increase of 71% compared to Autumn Term 2019. It is also worth noting that whilst the overall number of EHE pupils has increased from 384 to 464 (21%▲) compared to December 2019, the biggest increase has been within the primary sector from 129 to 179 (38.8%▲). This compares to an increase in the secondary sector from 255 to 285 (11.8%▲).

26. It is too early to tell if this will have a longer-term impact on the proportion of primary and secondary EHE pupils. Of the 159 pupils who became EHE during the Autumn Term 2020, 38 parents (23.9%) cited Covid-19 related reasons for their decision (see Table 13 below). This was more common amongst parents of primary aged children (31) compared to parents of secondary pupils (7). However, 28 parents (9 primary/19 secondary) have not yet confirmed their reasons for choosing EHE.

27. When the pandemic eases, there are likely to be some parents who will apply for school places for their children and the greater proportion may be of primary age.

However, there are some families reporting that they decided to home educate due to shielding family members or anxiety about children being in school during the pandemic but have found the experience to be positive and beneficial for their child, so plan to continue.

Number of cases leaving EHE

Table 6

Outcome	Autumn Term 2019	Academic Year 2019-20	Autumn Term 2020
Return to original school	8	14	11
Joined new school	15	39	21
Joined Special School/ ILC Medical Unit	1	4	3
No outcome Entered	0	0	0
Moved away	3	12	3
Missing in Education	2	2	0
Total cases closed	29	71	38

% of EHE total cohort returning to a school	24 (6%)	57 (10.1%)	35 (7.5%)
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Length of time in EHE for children whose cases have been closed during Autumn Term

Table 7

Autumn Term 2020		
Length of EHE duration	Cases closed	%
0 - 3 months	6	15.8%
3 - 6 months	7	18.4%
6 - 9 months	6	15.8%
9 - 12 months	10	26.3%
12 months +	9	23.7%
Total	38	

Comments

28. The 38 pupils who left EHE on the Isle of Wight during the Autumn Term 2020 do not include those who were previously home educated and joined a school at the start of the Autumn Term 2020 (27 pupils).

29. Of the 38 leavers, 42% were of primary age and 58% of secondary age; 34% had been home educated for less than 6 months. 8 left a previous school and were waiting for a place at a different school and 10 had become EHE due to issues with their emotional or physical health. None had identified Covid-19 as the reason for becoming EHE but 9 had not confirmed the reason by the time they returned to school. 3 young people have transferred to the Island Learning Centre.

Current open cases known to have had multiple episodes of EHE

Table 8

Academic Year	Number
2017-18	64
2018-19	53
2019-20	60

Autumn Term 2019	60
Autumn Term 2020	77

Gender: all cases currently registered as EHE

Table 9

Gender	Autumn 2019	Summer 2020	Autumn 2020
Male	53%	52%	53%
Female	47%	48%	47%
Total	384	456	464

SEND

Table 10

Involvement

SEND Involvement	Autumn 2019	Summer 2020	Autumn 2020
SEN Support	66 (17%)	89 (19.5%)	82 (17.7%)
EHCP	28 (7%)	34 (7.5%)	27 (5.8%)
SEN Total	94 (24%)	123 (27%)	109 (23.5%)

No SEND	210 (55%)	259 (56.8%)	276 (59.5%)
Not Known	80 (21%)	90 (16.1%)	79 (17.0%)
Total EHE	384	456	464

This information is provided by schools therefore it is not updated after registration as EHE unless the family has subsequently applied for an EHCP.

Comments

30. Parents of three EHE pupils applied for an EHCP during the Autumn Term 2020 compared to eight during the Autumn Term 2019. Of these, two assessments were turned down and one agreed which led to the issuing of an EHCP. Parents are provided with advice and guidance by the EHE Officers regarding applying for an EHCP and referred to SENDIASS for additional support. Liaison between the SEND Team and the EHE Team is good. EHE pupils with EHCPs are offered an annual EHCP Review which is attended by an EHE Officer.

Social Care Involvement: current cases registered as EHE

Table11

Known to Social Care	Summer 2020	Autumn 2020
Prior 12 months	23 (5%)	15 (3%)
Social Care Involvement	Summer 2020	Autumn 2020
CP Plan	3	4
CIN Plan	11	13
Early Help/FSS	5	3
Total Social Care – current	19 (4%)	20 (4%)
Total EHE cohort	456	464

Comments

31. EHE Officers attend social care meetings where there is capacity within the EHE Team to do so. Five social care meetings were attended during the Autumn Term 2020, but reports were provided for other conferences and meetings. Communication between the EHE Team and Social Care teams is good.

Contact with EHE Officers

Table 12

IOW - Type of contact	Autumn Term 2019	Autumn Term 2020
Advisory visits	4	0
Visits by EHE Officer which are written up as reports	73	9
Written/e-mail EHE reports received	42	33
Telephone reports recorded	7	73
Virtual meetings by EHE Officer which are written up as reports	0	5
Annual EHCP reviews/ SEND meetings/ SEN Panel/ admissions meetings attended by EHE Officer	11	3 (virtual)
CIN/ EH/ CPCs/ CG meetings attended by EHE Officer	20	5 (virtual)
Joint visits with Social Worker or Education & Inclusion Officer	6	0
Total	163	128

Comments

32. The table above does not capture the additional telephone calls and emails regarding EHE dealt with by the EHE and Education & Inclusion Teams. Most calls are in depth and frequently last over 15 minutes. All callers enquiring about removing their child from school for EHE are asked about their reasons, given an opportunity to reflect on their rights and responsibilities with reference to the DfE guidance and advised to talk to the school before making a final decision. Parents are sign-posted to other support services where relevant.
33. Prior to Lockdown 1 in March 2020 due to Covid-19, 93% of families had engaged with the LA's EHE Team during the academic year. This excludes those attending college who are not routinely visited but monitored by college staff who liaise with EHE service. Of the 93% who engaged, 69 per cent received visits and 31 per cent provided reports.
34. The impact of Covid-19 restrictions meant that home visits were cancelled from 17 March 2020 and parents due a visit were asked to provide a written report. This was followed up with a telephone call if a report was not received or it was felt that the family would benefit from a discussion. Post-Lockdown 1, a small number of visits were made where it felt that the child was vulnerable and should be seen (risk

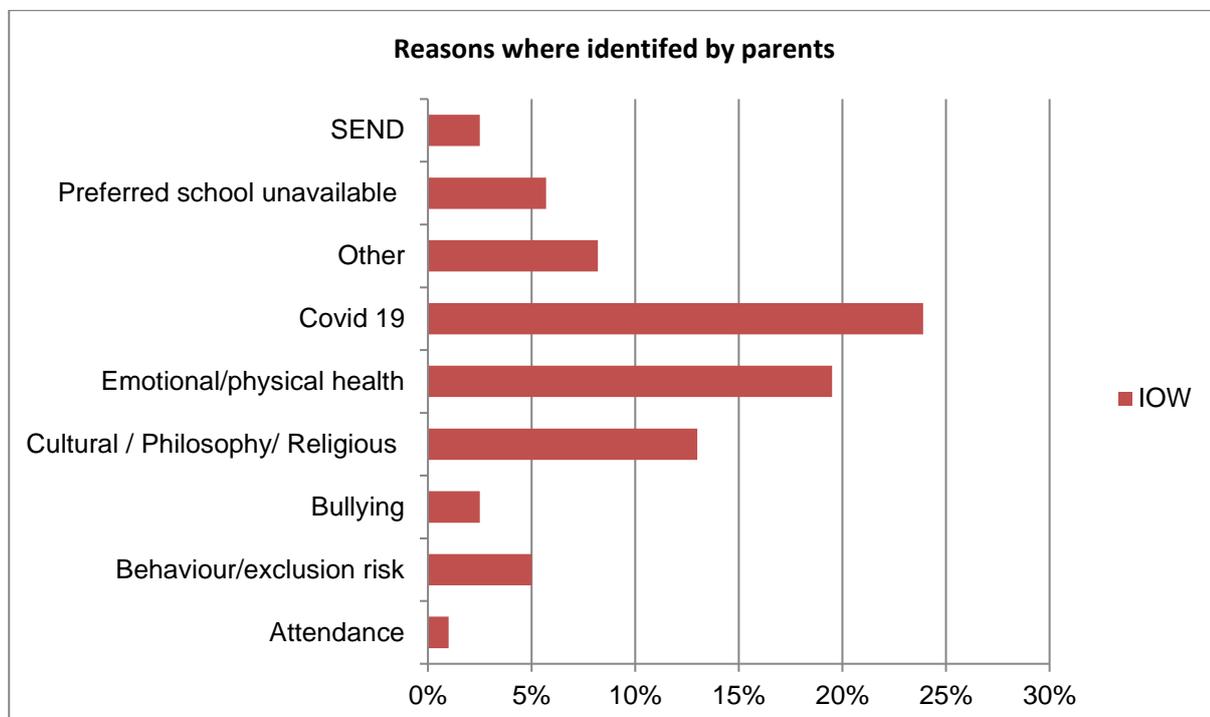
assessment in place). A small number of virtual meetings with parents were also held. By the end of the Summer Term 2020, all families due a visit or new to EHE were contacted, but not all had responded by the end of term and were followed up at the start of the Autumn Term 2020. Where families cannot be contacted, this is followed up by the Education and Inclusion Team.

35. The increased number of telephone calls, email reports and virtual meetings are likely to remain moving forward, due to the increasing number of EHE pupils. Most parents have responded positively to these, however there are risks involved in not visiting more vulnerable families.
36. During the Autumn Term 2020, 89% of families engaged with the EHE Team within timescales. Parents of all 159 pupils new to EHE were sent an information pack and were due to be contacted within 3 months and offered a telephone call, virtual visit or face to face meeting. Of these, 10 had not been contacted by the LA within 3 months and 10 were contacted by the LA but parents did not respond or could not be contacted. Of the family's due annual visits, 10 had not been contacted by the LA within timescales. A further 23 were contacted within timescales but did not respond or refused contact.
37. All of the above are being contacted in the Spring Term and address checks/Child Missing Education referrals made, as required. Parents are offered advice and guidance regarding home education, but if they are unable to provide a suitable education for their child or do not respond to informal enquiries made by the EHE Team, a notice to satisfy letter is issued which gives parents 15 days to provide evidence that a suitable education is being provided or make a school application for their child. If there is no resolution, the LA may start School Attendance Order procedures. During the Academic Year 2019-20, 19 notice to satisfy letters were sent to parents resulting in only 2 school attendance orders being served.
38. During the Autumn Term 2020, contact with 26 families revealed that the home education being provided was not suitable. These have been followed up with more evidence requested, additional advice and guidance provided and follow up checks made. 7 families with vulnerable children have been supported to make school applications (including the Island Learning Centre, if appropriate).

Reasons for EHE decision: new cases in Autumn Term 2020

Table 13

Reason	Academic Year 2019-20		Autumn Term 2020	
	Number	%	Number	%
Attendance	2	2.2%	2	1.3%
Behaviour/exclusion risk	24	12.6%	8	5.0%
Bullying	13	6.8%	4	2.5%
Covid-19	N/A	N/A	38	23.9%
Cultural / Philosophical / Religious	28	14.7%	20	12.6%
Emotional/physical health	60	31.6%	31	19.5%
Not yet identified	10	5.3%	30	18.9%
Other	22	11.6%	13	8.2%
Preferred school unavailable	14	7.4%	9	5.7%
SEND	12	6.3%	4	2.5%
Total	190		159	



Comments

39. Covid-19 has been added as a new reason for choosing EHE. Parents talk about their decision in a variety of ways: shielding family members; anxiety regards catching the virus; feeling that home schooling during Lockdown 1 was a positive

experience for the family (including benefiting children with high levels of anxiety/SEND); not liking how schools manage Covid-19 restrictions including social distancing, hand washing, social bubbles (either not enough or too much).

CONSULTATION

40. The data provided in this report is based on communication with the EHE community on the Isle of Wight. We have a very good relationship with home educating families and local EHE support groups with more than 70 per cent of families accepting at least annual visits (pre-Covid-19 restrictions) and a further 20 per cent providing written reports or telephone updates.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

41. The increase in the numbers of parents choosing to EHE has had a financial implication. To cope with the significant increase (21%) additional administration has been arranged, 0.2 FTE on a temporary basis. A EHE home visitor (0.6 FTE) has also been appointed to ensure all EHE students are engaged. Engagement rates have therefore remained steady with only a slight decrease from 93% to 89%. Whether this will be sufficient once home visits are able to be recommenced will depend on how many children return to school and if the education is judged as suitable or not. EHE that is judged as not suitable involves considerably more officer time.

42. We have allowed an additional £20K for 2021/22 for the continuation of extra administrative support and a home visitor.

CARBON EMISSIONS

43. Working from home and the increased number of virtual meetings/telephone contacts/reports from parents has reduced mileage costs and therefore carbon emissions. This may be a sustainable model for the future with a home visit just for the most vulnerable pupils. It is too early at this stage to make a definitive statement.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

44. There are no legal implications, as the processes and policies have not changed.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

45. The council as a public body is required to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equal opportunities between people from different groups and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

46. Under the Equality Act 2010 we are required to have due regard to our equality duties when making decisions, reviewing services, undertaking projects, developing and reviewing policies. This must be done at the formative stage of your proposal, not retrospectively as justification for the recommendation.

RISK MANAGEMENT

47. As a consequence of Covid-19 and the increasing numbers of EHE there is a risk that the proportion of families being contacted will reduce. This risk has been minimised by the temporary employment of home visitors and additional administrative support. This decision can be reviewed once we know whether the increase in EHE numbers is sustained or whether significant numbers of children return to school. The EHE team prioritises all children known to social services, SEN or generally considered vulnerable to minimise safeguarding risks.

RECOMMENDATION

48. The committee to note the contents of the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The DfE updated guidance for local authorities April 2019:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education

The Isle of Wight EHE website:

www.iwight.com/council/OtherServices/Educating-at-Home/Elective-Home-Education-EHE

Contact Point: Louise Tatton, Lead Officer for Elective Home Education, ☎ 821000
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