

## **ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION IN DEVON 2015-16**

### **Key issues:**

- 1. Increasing numbers of home educated students**
- 2. Increasing numbers categorised as 'highly vulnerable'**
- 3. Increasing numbers at Key Stage 4**
- 4. Difficulty engaging some vulnerable families, potentially putting children at risk of harm and of not receiving a suitable education**
- 5. Increasing number of short term registrations**
- 6. Lack of funding for home educated students**

### **Increasing numbers of home educated students:**

The annual data shows a year on year increase in the number of home educated students over the last 5 years. In 2015-16 1018 students were registered with the Elective Home Education Service. This is a 33% increase compared to 2014-15 and the highest number recorded to date. The significant increase in the numbers of boys being home educated observed in 2014-15 has continued: In 2015-16 there were 557 boys (55%) and 461 girls (45%).

The increased numbers of home educated students is concerning as historically this group are 4-5 times more likely to go on to become not in employment, education or training (NEET) compared to students attending school.

### **Increasing numbers categorised as 'highly vulnerable'**

Whilst the numbers of home educated students with statements or Education Health Care Plans has remained fairly constant, there has been a growth in the numbers of students with complex needs, but without a statement or Education Health Care Plan. In a number of cases we have found the young person's needs have not been fully recognised in school and it has only been when the child has become home educated that their needs have been appropriately assessed and understood. During 2015-16 3 home educated students without statements or Education Health Care Plans underwent statutory assessment and were subsequently placed in Special Schools. These students had not received input from an Educational Psychologist whilst attending school. The Elective Home Education team work closely with colleagues from across Learners Support Services to highlight concerns and provide challenge and support to schools as required.

### **Increasing numbers at Key Stage 4**

The number of Key Stage 4 referrals is a particular concern. In 2015-16 there were 70 new Key Stage 4 students. The majority of students that come off school roll at this stage are not choosing home education for lifestyle/philosophical reasons but a range of other reasons. This includes: to avoid permanent exclusion; to avoid fines and prosecution for non-attendance (in some cases due to mental health issues); to attend Further Education

College on a part-time basis in order to undertake courses considered by parents and young people as being more appropriate than those being offered in school. In some cases parents have reported that schools have encouraged this, indicating that they are unable to fund relevant courses being offered at Further Education Colleges but students would be able to take them if they registered as home educated.

Whilst a significant number of Key Stage 4 students are now attending Further Education Colleges on a part-time basis - currently 59 students (30%) this does not equate to the level of education that they would receive if attending school on a full time basis.

In the last couple of years there has been a significant increase in the numbers of Year 11 students coming out of school in the autumn term whereas previously Year 11 students tended to come out of school from January onwards. (In 2015-16 19 Year 11 students came off roll in the autumn term). In some cases they have been led to believe that they could attend FE College, not realising that most courses offered by FE Colleges are 2 years in length and the Colleges are often unwilling to accept students' part way through. This increases the probability of them becoming disengaged with learning and going on to become NEET.

### **Difficulty engaging with some vulnerable families potentially putting children at risk of harm and of not receiving a suitable education**

The increasing numbers of vulnerable students coming off roll presents a considerable challenge to the Local Authority as current legislation around Elective Home Education provides Local Authorities with extremely limited powers. Whilst the Elective Home Education Service makes every effort to establish positive relationships with families and work with them, in some cases parents choose not to engage which potentially leaves children at risk of harm and possibly not receiving a suitable education.

As there is no legal right for education officers to see children who are being electively home educated, the child may have no contact with any professionals and whilst it is possible to do a MASH enquiry without being able to provide specific details of the concerns – other than we haven't seen the child for some time' – this does not fit with social care thresholds.

### **Increasing number of short term EHE registrations**

During 2015-16 there were 24 short term EHE registrations. In some cases we believe parents are choosing to register their child as home educated in order to avoid fines for taking holidays during term time. This can be extremely disruptive to a child's education but Head teachers do not have the authority to prevent this course of action.

### **Lack of funding for EHE students**

Devon has maintained its Elective Home Education Service, despite no central funding for home educated students. Support is targeted at the most vulnerable students, including those with special educational needs and where there are safeguarding concerns. However, with the increasing numbers of home educated students this is becoming a considerable challenge to the Local Authority.

JO OLSSON  
Chief Officer for Children's Services

Name of report author: *Emma Hitchins*

Job title: Professional Lead for Elective Home Education

Email address: [emma.hitchins@babcockinternational.com](mailto:emma.hitchins@babcockinternational.com)