

### What do we mean?

Elective Home Education (EHE) is a phrase used by the Department of Education to describe when parents choose to provide education for their children at home. All children have a right to education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have. The responsibility for children to receive education rests with their parents. However, this does not have to be in a school setting.

Parents therefore have a right to home educate and do so for a number of reasons. These reasons can be philosophical, related to the child's health, dissatisfaction with the 'system' or due to religious or cultural beliefs.

### Content of Elective Home Education

There are no specific rules or legal requirements as to the content of home education as long as it is suitable to a child's age, ability, aptitude and special educational needs.

This means content does not have to include any particular subjects, follow the national curriculum or a child be entered for formal exams like GCSEs. There is no obligation to follow a 'school day' or take holidays at the same time as school settings.

Many families that home educate do follow an academic structure based on topics and with a timetable to help plan a child's day. For families that take a more flexible approach it should not be assumed that this is less satisfactory.

### Regulation & Monitoring

Local Authorities have no formal powers or duties to monitor the provision of education at home.

However, they have a statutory duty (under s.436A of the Education Act 1996) to make arrangements to establish the identities, so far as it is possible to do so, of children in their area who are not receiving a suitable education.

Local Authorities should; seek to offer guidance to all known home educating families in their area about their rights and obligations; provide advice on good practice and available resources for parents who request it and make contact with home educating families at least on an annual basis.

If it appears a child in their area is not receiving a suitable education Local Authorities must make contact with families to assure themselves and this may include serving a notice on the family to provide information. Local Authorities can also issue School Attendance Orders if they continue to believe that a child is not in receipt of a suitable education at home.

### Why is it Important to Know about Elective Home Education?

Home education can be a **positive** choice for families with children receiving a successful and suitable education. Consequently, there is no evidence to suggest a direct causal link between home education and increased safeguarding risks.

**However**, professionals do not necessarily see a home educated child on a regular basis. This can cause particular vulnerabilities for a small minority of home educated children. **Plymouth and national** safeguarding case reviews that feature home education have highlighted the following learning themes.....

**Invisibility of Children:** Some families already struggling with a range of issues or trauma may use home education as a means of avoiding the attention and support of services. Children can become invisible, especially if the family also moves across areas. **In one case a young person had not left their home or seen a professional for 3 years.**

**Neglect:** The levels of neglect can be significant for children home educated by parents/carers who struggle with their own complex trauma, e.g. adult mental health.

**In one such case a child entered into a primary school setting, having been home educated for an extended period, barking like a dog, crawling on the floor and unable to communicate.**

**Non-Engagement & Professional Curiosity:** Patterns of family non-engagement add to a child's vulnerability. For example, families may not respond to Local Authorities attempts to see evidence that a suitable education is being provided. It may be that parents request to rearrange appointments regularly or answer a phone call following a period of no contact. Given parents are under no legal obligation to have contact with Local Authorities, or provide information requested, a false reassurance can develop that a child is receiving a suitable education when they are not.

Showing **Professional Curiosity** can help gain a true picture of what like is life for a child and gather a more accurate picture of family engagement.

### The role of Professionals

**Early Help** is the key to preventing vulnerable children being removed from the roll of a school to be home educated.

**Be the Voice of the Child:** Always think '**What does that child need me to do?**' they may be struggling at school and living in a family which is struggling with a range of complex issues. They may need you to be their voice at a difficult time in their lives in order to prevent them becoming home educated.

You may come across a child already in a home education system that has lost sight of them. They may need you to be their voice at a time in their lives when they have very little contact with professionals or the wider community. So, if you are aware that a child isn't in school during usual school hours ask yourself why not? Ask the family in a polite way 'How are the children being educated?' If you are not in a position to ask you can notify and **get advice from the Home Education Team on 01752 307405**  
[educationwelfare@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:educationwelfare@plymouth.gov.uk)

**Be Curious:** As well as being the voice of children we need to also be curious. Professional curiosity helps keep children safe so exploring situations, asking open respectful questions, following up information, not taking things at face value and checking the accuracy of information is essential. **This is especially important if there have been previous safeguarding concerns and a family is thinking about home educating their child.**

Lift yourself out of a situation and notice any patterns in family engagement, delays in contact or impact on the child's development.

For example you might notice a child's development is significantly harmed during times of home education but improves when in a school setting. If this pattern is a consistent one and a parent repeatedly requests to home educate their child this would cause concern. **Good reflective supervision or reflective conversations with colleagues can help us be curious.**

**Be informed:** It is really important that we are informed on the guidance and arrangements relating to elective home education as it's often an area not widely known about.

### What is my role as a Social Worker within this topic?

- If you have concerns regarding EHE you should email the EHE Inbox (see below) to highlight the concerns and request a referral to the Children Missing Education Panel (see technical paper 7).
- To work with the Inclusion Attendance and Welfare Team to make decision in respect of the suitability of the child's environment in respect of receiving an efficient home education.
- To prevent any child on a Child Protection Plan from being registered as home educated.
- To ensure that attendance at school for any statutory school aged child is prioritised.
- To alert the EHE Officer of any child who is registered as home educated where it appears that suitable education is not taking place.
- If a home educated child wants to return to school the EHE Officer can help the family through this process so please suggest to them to get in touch with their EHE Officer, or email the EHE Inbox.
- Please encourage home educators to be as open as possible with the LA.
- If you discover the identity of a child that is being Home Educated **please check that child is known to EHE team with LA via the EHE Inbox.**

Local authorities have a range of enforcement powers in respect of Elective Home Education and Children Missing Education. Home education may not be 'suitable' even if it is satisfactory in terms of content and teaching, if it is delivered in circumstances which make it very difficult to work (for example in very noisy premises). This might also affect whether it is 'efficient' and indeed, whether it is 'received' at all for the purposes of s.7 Education Act 1996. Education may also not be deemed suitable if it leads to excessive isolation from the child's peers, and thus impedes social development. It is really important that any concerns about home educated children are shared using the steps identified above.

### What is the role of Plymouth City Council?

- Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to identify children missing education.
- Local Authorities also have a statutory duty to promote high standards for all children of school age in Plymouth, including those educated at home.
- The **LA will challenge** schools where it appears that parents have been persuaded or coerced to de-register their child from school for the purposes of Elective Home Education.
- Once Plymouth City Council becomes aware of a parent's intention to home educate, checks will be made with the relevant, qualified Children's Services professionals to ensure that there is no known safeguarding or wellbeing concern (see technical paper 1, 2 and 4).
- Contact will be made with the parent(s) and a meeting offered where appropriate, to talk through the parents' decision and provide advice and support where possible.
- If the child is registered at a school in Plymouth the school will seek the consent of the parent to keep the child on roll until the local authority has had an opportunity to meet with the parent and ensure that home education is a positive and informed choice.
- Plymouth City Council will liaise with appropriate professionals within the organisation including Children's Social Care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Services to undertake assurance checks in relation to the suitability of the home environment for learning (technical paper 3 and 5).
- After 3 months the parent will be requested to provide information regarding the home education of their child, this will be requested within 3 months of starting home education and then at least annually after that.
- If no information about the provision of home education is received after two letters home, a third letter will be sent notifying parents that a Children Missing Education referral will be made (see technical paper 6 and 7).
- If a professional identifies concerns about a child who is home educated, a Children Missing Education referral will be made (see technical paper 7).
- If after trying to resolve our enquiries informally it continues to appear that a child is not receiving a suitable education the local authority will take statutory enforcement action (see technical paper 9)
- If it appears to the local authority that a home educated child is receiving a suitable education, contact will be made at least annually after that to monitor suitability.
- The Inclusion Strategy Board and Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership will maintain strategic oversight of the effectiveness of arrangements for Elective Home Education in Plymouth.

### Where can I get further information and who can I contact?

- EHE Team: either telephone 01752 307405 or email [educationwelfare@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:educationwelfare@plymouth.gov.uk)
- EHE public page <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/schoolseducationchildcareskillsandemployability/educatingyourchildhome>