

## Elective Home Education

Lead Officer: Phil Curd

Author: Phil Curd

Contact Details: [pjcurd@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:pjcurd@somerset.gov.uk) or 01823 355165

Cabinet Member: Cllr Frances Nicholson and Cllr Faye Purbrick

Division and Local Member: All

### 1. Summary

- 1.1. This paper is to provide the Committee with an update on the local authority's work in relation to Elective Home Education (EHE).
- 1.2. This follows previous presentations to the committee which has requested ongoing updates.  
EHE became a topic of interest to the Committee around 3 years ago when the Local Authority's approach to EHE was unclear, its policy was weak and numbers of EHE children within the county were disproportionately high when compared to similar authority areas.
- 1.3. The Local Authority's duty in relation to EHE can be summarised as to:
  - Have a written policy co-produced with home educators
  - Provide clarity on what constitutes a suitable education
  - Set aside resources to implement its policy effectively
  - Consider organisational structures to align expertise relating to suitability, attendance and safeguarding
  - Offer advice (on rights, obligations, good practice, and resources) to parents who choose to educate their children at home

The Local Authority fully recognises parental rights to home educate and is working with those parents to develop policy and access routes to support and advice.

The focus for officers will be to identify children for whom home education may not be appropriate (including safeguarding reasons) and work with families to address concerns.

### 2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1. To consider current data relating to EHE in Somerset (section 3).
- 2.2. To consider an overview of EHE development work within the Education

Safeguarding Service (ESS) and contribute to future developmental themes (section 4).

### 3. Data (01 February 2021)

- 3.1.** Over the previous two years, Somerset's EHE start numbers have been reducing, in contrast to national trends which have seen annual increases of between 10% - 15%.

This is regarded as a positive development but there is still work to do to reduce the number of parents whose decision to electively home educate is based on a dissatisfaction with the formal education system in Somerset.

Throughout Summer 2020, it was reported that nationally, local authority areas were experiencing increased numbers of EHE starts. This was not the case for Somerset.

We were anticipating a higher than expected number of EHE starts in September. This assumed that parents would not formally register their intent to home educate until their children were required to return to school.

This assumption proved to be accurate although the increased numbers of EHE starts (see data below) was significantly beyond our expectations. However, the position mirrored what other local authorities were experiencing across the South West region.

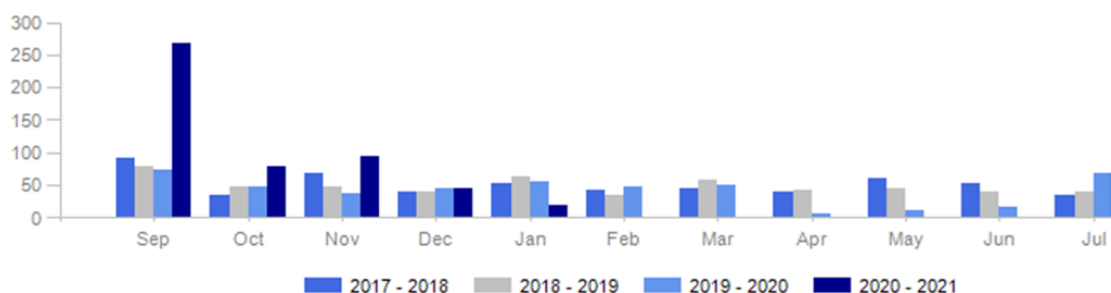
In November 2020 the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) produced the results of its annual EHE survey:

<https://adcs.org.uk/education/article/elective-home-education-survey-2020>

This reported a 38% increase in the number of children that were EHE nationally on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 when compared to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019.

In Somerset, over the same period, the numbers increased from 990 to 1251 or 26%.

### 3.2. EHE Starts



EHE starts had been in decline in the previous 3 years in Somerset, this ran

contrary to the national trend:

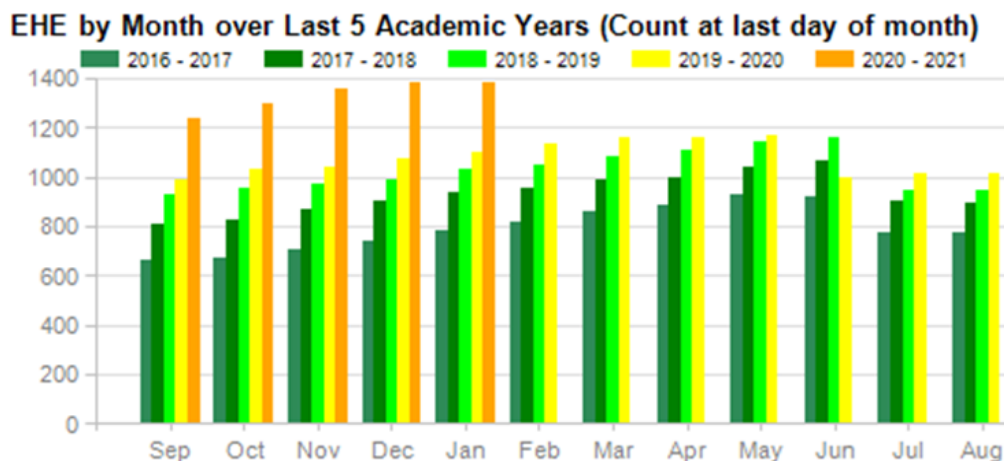
- 2017/18 = 554
- 2018/19 = 528
- 2019/20 = 455

However, the expected increase (as a result of a variety of factors) at the start of 2020/21 means there have been 500 EHE starts this academic year which has placed significant pressure on the Education Safeguarding Service in regard to triage and casework.

268 of the notifications were received in September 2020 and, while many will have been Coronavirus related, a number were delayed submissions from the previous term with approximately 60 received in relation to Avanti Park School, Frome – a former Steiner school.

### Current EHE

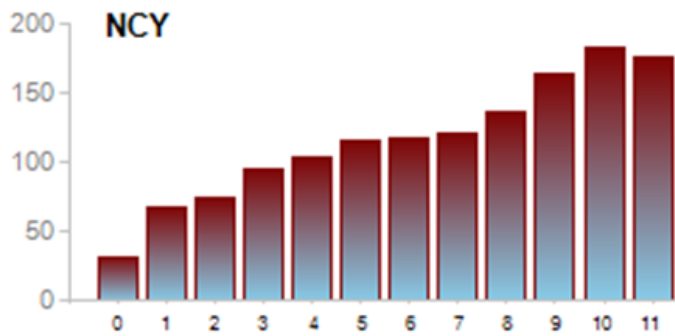
There are currently 1382 EHE children in Somerset but in the academic year to date, just over 1500 children have been EHE at some point with over 100 already returning to school:



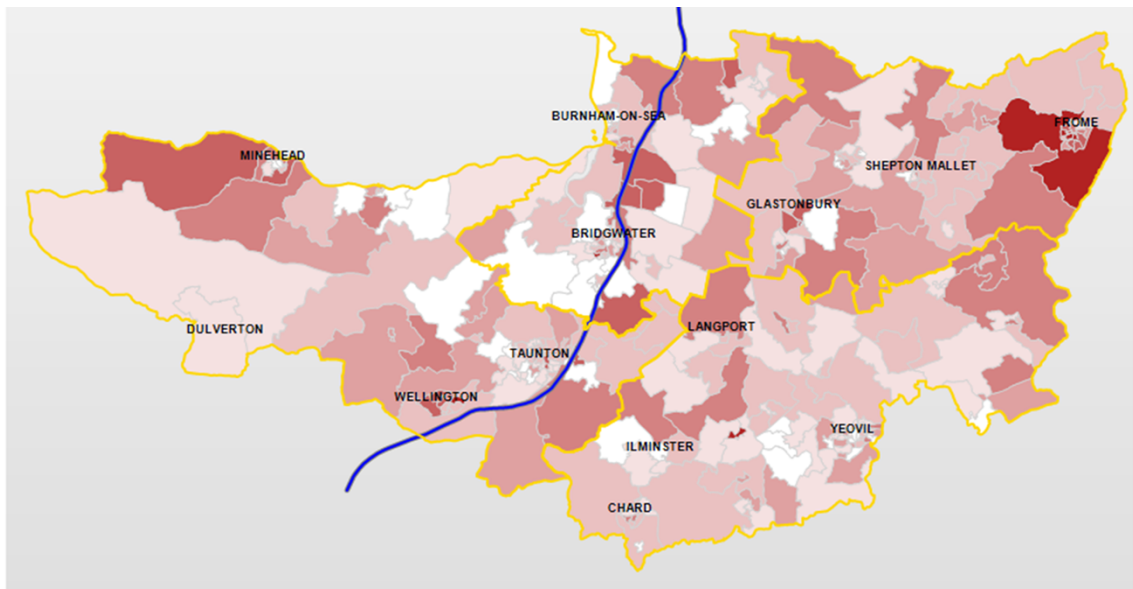
The gender split is typically very even with 707 boys and 675 girls making up the current cohort.

Key Stage 2 is the most popular exit point for children (463 of the current cohort became EHE in KS2) although it is made up of 4 separate year groups.

The year group split of the current cohort looks like this:



In terms of geographical spread:



In terms of Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)

- 44 EHE children have Education Health & Care Plans (EHCPs)
- 225 EHE children were regarded as requiring SEN Support when at school
- The most prevalent types of need are Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMh) and Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD).

#### 4. Development Work

- 4.1.** Somerset Council continues to have a robust approach to EHE and has continued to develop its processes to be sure that we utilise developing technology and release staff time.

A new EHE FAQs document was produced in the Autumn Term of 2020/21 and has been provided for parents, schools, and other professionals.

The triage of vulnerable children who have become EHE has been significantly improved using the Transform database and enables casework to be allocated in

a timely manner.

Co-production of a new EHE Protocol is underway with successful initial meetings having been held with EHE parents, SEND officers and Educational Psychologists. School representatives will be added to the working group in due course.

The protocol will update processes and provide further clarity on the assessment of 'acceptable' provision, pathways for support and arrangements for children transitioning back into schools after a period of EHE.

These meetings have also enabled EHE parents to feed into the development of the Autism & ADHD Pathway and ensure that the mechanisms for referral and assessment are accessible to all families, regardless of where and how the children are educated.

Presentations have been delivered to Children's Social Care (CSC) operational teams to improve the understanding of EHE across the service and ensure staff know how to register concerns relating to families they work with.

Reviewing inter-service processes to improve information sharing between ESS, CSC, SEND and the Family Intervention Service (FIS).

Designing a new online notification platform for schools so information (relating to a range of elements including EHE) can be electronically submitted to the local authority, automatically triaged by our information systems, and enable automated data reports for services.

## 4.2. Understanding EHE

The Education Safeguarding Service (ESS) recently undertook a survey of EHE parents to gather information we are not currently able to collect, but will be able to, once the online notification platform is operational.

An invitation to a short online survey was sent to 455 parents who had elected to home educate their children in the last 12 months.

Of those, 64 parents (14%) chose to respond, which in the context of this type of survey, is considered a positive return.

The questions included:

### ***What was your main reason for educating you child at home?***

Coronavirus concerns	9
Lack of confidence in local school(s)	18
Health reasons (including mental health)	7
Ideological reasons	10
Poor relationship with the school	5
Risk of exclusion	0

Risk of prosecution over attendance	1
SEND reasons	11
School suggested or advised it	1
To get my child into another school	1
Unable to secure a school place	0
Other	1

***What best describes how you arrived at your decision to home educate?***

It was entirely my choice	29
I was made to feel that I did not have a choice	12
It felt like the only option at the time	23

***Has home education impacted positively on your child's learning and development?***

Yes	52
No	2
I'm not sure	10

While it's not possible to draw solid conclusions from the responses, it has proved to be a useful exercise in terms of providing additional context and improving our relationship with the EHE parent community.

Of the 64 parents that responded, 33 provided their contact details and said they would welcome a conversation with ESS about their experiences of EHE. From that group we have been able to secure volunteers to work with us and co-produce our new EHE policy.

## **5. Implications**

**5.1.** As described in various sections above.

## **6. Background papers**

**6.1.** The most recent non-statutory DfE guidance for Elective Home Education can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education>