

Education Scrutiny Committee
Meeting to be held on 12 March 2013

Electoral Division affected:
All

Elective Home Education - the operation of the revised EHE policies since their introduction in April 2012

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Executive Summary

A review of the local authority's Elective Home Education (EHE) procedures was undertaken in the autumn term of 2011. The review was undertaken in order to address concerns identified by officers and by the home educating community in respect of the procedures and processes previously in place. The review also took into account the recommendations from the 2009 Overview and Scrutiny EHE Task Group.

Following consultation with home educating families, the procedures were revised and the new documentation was approved by the Cabinet Member in March 2012.

Documentation used by EHE officers to contact parents and to collect and record information was revised following the implementation of the new procedures. This was done to reflect the changes and to be more 'customer friendly.' A new website was designed and is available via 'your Lancashire' – Educating Your Child At Home. The site contains a range of information for home educating families and can be found at the following address:

http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/atoz/a_to_z/service.asp?u_id=388&tab=1

The work of the team has become more supportive towards home educating families who wish support. This contrasts with the more monitoring role, which had been the case in the past. Officers will continue to intervene with families if there is reason to believe that a child is not receiving a suitable education.

Recommendation

The Education Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- note how the arrangements for supporting families who home educate have progressed over the past twelve months.

Background and Advice

In December 2012 the House of Commons Education Committee produced a report – 'Support for Home Education' which can be found at the following address: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/559/55902.htm

It stated that:

The role of the local authority is clear with regard to home education. They have two duties: to provide support for home educating families (at a level decided by local authorities themselves), and if families wish it; and to intervene with families if the local authority is given reason to believe that a child is not receiving a suitable education. It is not the role of the local authority routinely to monitor whether a suitable education is being provided, and local authorities should not act as if it is, or cause parents to believe that it is.

This view clearly specifies how the EHE team in Lancashire should define and carry out their role.

Following the implementation of Lancashire's new procedures in March 2012 the Elective Home Education (EHE) team has continued to work closely with home educating families to ensure that a range of support is offered to those families who wish it. This support includes the publication of a leaflet for parents, found as follows:

http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/atoz/a_to_z/service.asp?u_id=388&tab=20

This leaflet was produced as a 'handy guide' and contains advice for families and includes a number of frequently asked questions. Letters and other documentation have been reviewed and revised.

A small group of officers led on the design of a new LCC website where all documentation, further advice and useful links may be found. This site currently includes information about how families may access exam centres. There are also details of three drop-in sessions that are to take place in February (Hothersall Lodge), April (Lancaster Library) and June (Woodlands Centre, Chorley) about the range of services they may be able to access.

Whilst the implementation of the procedures over the past twelve months has been positive, as with any new procedures there have been some issues that are yet to be fully resolved, including support for pupils identified as having Special Educational Needs and particularly those with statements.

Recently members of the Lancashire Home Education Forum Group carried out a survey that had 36 responses. One question asked about improvement since the introduction of the new procedures in March 2012. Two thirds of respondents commented that things had improved whilst just over a fifth weren't sure. One parent commented:

'I feel that Lancashire have finally started listening to home educators and have responded accordingly. I think that there is still some way to go but that the changes they have made so far have been very positive.....Thank you to the staff who have worked so hard to bring about these changes.'

The outcome of the survey whilst being generally positive indicates that there is still work to be done to ensure that the service provided by the LA and available to families is valued by all those who choose to home educate their children.

Lancashire has received a number of requests from other local authorities – including Oxfordshire, Liverpool and Staffordshire - to meet with officers and representatives of home educating families to talk about how the new procedures were developed and how they are being implemented. Lancashire is now recognised as having good practice that can be shared with other authorities. It has been reported to the LA that Graham Stuart MP, chair of the Education Committee, has said that he is "pleased Lancashire has made such progress and is helping to mentor other LAs".

Current figures show that there are 480 children on the authority's EHE data base. Of these 236 were girls and 244 were boys. 166 children were of primary school age and 312 were secondary aged children; 2 were unknown. However, this cannot be considered a full and definitive picture of the number of children being home educated in Lancashire as there is no requirement on parents to inform the local authority when they choose to home educate.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

There are no risks involved arising out of discussion of this report.

Legal

Advice has been sought from the County Secretary and Solicitor's Group when drawing up the procedures document to ensure that the authority is acting in accordance with legislation and guidance relating to EHE.

Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Tel
Elective Home Education Procedures (LCC)	March 2012	Mike Snelson, Directorate for Children and Young People, 01772 532439
Information for Parents (LCC)	September 2012	Mike Snelson, Directorate for Children and Young People, 01772 532439
Support for Home Education (House of Commons Education Committee)	December 2012	Mike Snelson, Directorate for Children and Young People, 01772 532439