



Elective Home Education: Summary for Practitioners & Managers

May 2019

Background

The Local Safeguarding Children Board Quality Assurance (QA), sub-group is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the work carried out by the Board partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and to make recommendations about ways this can be improved. It does this through an annual programme of case file audits and scrutiny of multi-agency performance data and inspection reports. The sub-group meets six times a year. Auditors include representatives from Health, Sussex Police and East Sussex County Council Children Services.

In January 2019 the QA Subgroup completed an audit of five cases of children who are, or were recently, electively home educated and where there had previously been social care engagement.

What is Elective Home Education?

In England, education is compulsory but schooling is not. Under section 7 of the *Education Act 1996*, the responsibility for a child's education rests with their parents.

Home education is not, in itself, a risk factor for abuse or neglect. However, there is a danger that these children can become invisible to local services and that a small minority of parents may withdraw their children from school as a means of avoiding services.

Local authorities have a duty to make arrangements to ensure that the children are in receipt of a suitable education but cannot insist upon seeing a child that is electively home educated, (EHE), as part of these checks. Local authorities also do not have powers to insist upon seeing EHE children if no safeguarding concerns have been identified.

In East Sussex the number of EHE children is regularly monitored by the LSCB via the LSCB performance dashboard. The number of EHE children in East Sussex rose by approximately 30% between July 2016 and June 2018. Currently (March 2019) there were 929 children who were recorded as home educated.

Method

Five cases with multi-agency involvement were selected using Children's Services data. Details of cases were gathered including family background, relationships, referral date, assessments and other key information.

The children's ages ranged from 6-15 years old. In three cases siblings were also home educated. In all five cases the records indicated that at least one parent, with caring responsibilities, experienced mental health problems. In only one case did auditors feel that home education was a deliberate choice by parent/s.

The audit tool was designed to examine the identification of risk, initial response, direct work, co-ordination, and how professionals listened and responded to the voice of the child. This summary provides a briefing on the findings of that audit.

Strengths in Multi-Agency Practice

In the cases audited, there was evidence of:

- ✓ Good initial response to safeguarding concerns.
- ✓ Excellent multi-agency working and record keeping.
- ✓ Good decision making and direct work in four cases.
- ✓ The child's views were heard in all five cases and used to inform planning in four relevant cases.
- ✓ There was good relationship based practice in two relevant cases with professionals successfully addressing difficulties with engagement and taking a non-judgemental, open and honest approach with the family.
- ✓ There was good collaboration between the Teaching & Learning Provision (TLP) team and social workers in three cases regarding planning and joint visits.
- ✓ Good management oversight in all cases.

Improvements in individual cases

Three cases were graded Good, with one of these having outstanding features and two cases were graded Requires Improvement (in one case because there was concern on the impact of child being out of school, and in the other auditors felt there should have been more work with the family prior to initiation of child protection processes).

Learning Identified

- ✓ There is scope for clarification on the distinct and shared roles and responsibilities held by the staff in the Children Missing from Education, (CME), TLP and Admissions and Transport teams regarding the support provided to home educated children.
- ✓ If a school records and communicates their concerns about the suitability of the provision of home education for a child - at the point that the child is 'off-rolled' - then this can help trigger a quicker home visit by the TLP team.
- ✓ The school health service reported that they lack clarity around the legal framework for intervention when agencies have concerns for the welfare of an EHE child.
- ✓ Problems experienced by parents with their own mental health, their child's behaviour and long term lack of financial resources creates additional stumbling blocks to getting the child back into education.

Recommendations for improvement

- There should be better embedded communication and collaboration between social work teams and the TLP team. Professionals working with a child should ensure that they keep the TLP team up to date with any changes in a child's status, or whenever there are any new concerns for a child.
- There should be a strategy discussion for a child that has disclosed meeting and having sex with an older male. This child should also have been offered an intermediary to support her if the case went to court.
- Social workers should ensure that the relevant TLP professional is invited to any strategy discussion about a child who is electively home educated and a representative from YOT when the alleged abuser is a child.
- Information recorded by and provided by GP surgeries about a child should take into account the fact that they are electively home educated and take into account the child's additional vulnerabilities.

Learning for Practice

The LSCB invite you to discuss some of the issues raised in this case audit in your team meetings or during group supervision. We encourage your responses to be included in your team minutes and forwarded to the safeguarding lead within your organisation.

Points for discussion:

Applying learning

- ✓ What have you/your team learnt from this audit?
- ✓ How might you/your team apply that learning?

Safeguarding electively home educated children

- ✓ How do you know if a child you work with is electively home educated?
- ✓ What factors might make an electively home educated child vulnerable.
- ✓ Who would you speak to about concerns you have for an electively home educated child?

Resources

If you think a child is being harmed or may be at risk of harm, please contact: SPoA (Mon-Friday 8.30am-5pm)

Phone: 01323 464222

Email: 0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.gov.uk



LSCB Multi-Agency Training:

The LSCB offers training for professionals on different aspects of the child protection process. Details of future courses can be found on the East Sussex Learning Portal: www.eastsussexlearningportal.org.uk

Pan Sussex Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures

Details of child protection and safeguarding procedures in relation to child protection procedure can be found at:

<https://sussexchildprotection.procedures.org.uk/>