

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

20 February 2019

YOUNG PEOPLES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

Elective Home Education

1. The number of home-schooled children is believed to have risen by about 40% over three years. Around 48,000 children were being home-educated across the UK in 2016-2017, up from about 34,000 in 2014-15.
2. We reviewed what the CYPS directorate knows in terms of the prevalence and experience of North Yorkshire children of compulsory school age whose parents opt, as is their right in law, to educate their child at home instead of sending them to school. This is referred to as Elective Home Education (EHE).
3. Under section 7 of the Education Act of 1996, parents have a duty to ensure their children are educated. They are not required to teach the national curriculum, have any specific qualifications, register with a local authority, allow inspectors into their homes, or get approval for the sort of education provided at home.
4. Data is not collected centrally by the DfE and while local authorities keep a register of home-educated children, this only covers children who have been withdrawn from school. Children who are never put into school are currently not required to register.
5. We wanted reassurance that we are meeting all our obligations. Whilst Local Authorities have no statutory duties in relation to monitoring the quality of home education on a routine basis, we do have a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. We heard that systems are in place to ensure that when we are notified of the intention to Home Educate, the case is allocated to a Family Outreach Worker. An offer of a home visit is made to the family. But as it is not a statutory requirement, parents are not obligated to accept the offer of the visit.
6. If at any stage concerns are identified with regards to the child/young person's welfare, these are immediately discussed with the Team Leader for Case Work.
7. If any concerns are identified regarding the quality of the home education, the Prevention Service will notify the Education and Skills Service.
8. If the child is identified as having Special Educational Needs or a Disability (SEND), the Inclusive Education Service are notified and will be sent a record of the visit.

9. In terms of prevalence, we are broadly in line with other local authorities who have reported an average 20% year-on-year increase in the number of children and young people known to be home schooled over the previous 5 years. On 4 October 2018, we were aware of 607 children and young people being home schooled in North Yorkshire.
10. We were interested in understanding the underlying reasons for this growth. Many of us wondered whether a factor contributing to the increase in the home education population relates to some schools poorly advising families about EHE and encouraging action that was not always in the best interests of the child.
11. In order to test just this hypothesis, CYPS undertook to directly contact 262 families over the 2018 summer, asking them to respond to some questions, and inviting them to offer additional comment on their EHE experience.
12. Overall, as part of the survey, 121 families (46%) were contacted. Most said their choice was freely made, without pressures from schools.
13. Key themes from the survey in terms of what led parents/carers to educate their child(ren) at home include:
 - Increased levels of stress/anxiety when at school, associated with mental health deterioration often linked to bullying and/or peer group pressure.
 - An unaccommodating school 'culture' in relation to not meeting the specific needs of the 'individual' child, leading to increasing parental (and pupil) disillusionment with the mainstream education system. Autism is also a feature.
 - Communication breakdown between schools and parents also feature within the responses to the survey
 - Where parents do not feel listened to or confident in the school's ability to meet the particular special educational or health needs of the child, they sometimes feel as if removal from the school roll is their only option.
 - More considered views are evident that some parents are able to provide a more appropriate education for their child, outside of the mainstream school system.
14. The results of this survey are informing directorate action. For example, the directorate is looking at how it can most effectively reduce those situations where families feel they have not 'freely' chosen to EHE.
15. The committee was reassured that procedures are in place when we are notified of the intention to home educate, and the directorate is doing what it can to understand the reasons for the rise in the number of parents opting for EHE.
16. The committee will return to this topic later in the year.

CYPS Financial Pressures

17. In October last year it became clear that the authority was heading towards a projected overspend in Children and Young People's Services of over £10m. I am pleased that committee members had an opportunity not just to understand how this situation had come about, but also receive a clear articulation of what the risks are to children's services.
18. Like many authorities, NYCC is having to cope with a year-on-year rising rise in demand of eligible pupils requiring special educational needs support. Quite rightly, members focussed on our most significant financial pressure – that relating to SEN within the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). In 2018-19, the Directorate is projecting an underlying overspend of £5.7m which is offset, in part, by the application of £1.66m which was agreed with Schools Forum. But this transfer has not been adequate to counter new cost pressures arising out of the unprecedented increase in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). In short, costs within the High Needs Block have continued to exceed the funding allocation.
19. Linked with this pressures arising from the increase in EHCPs, the local authority is also seeing financial pressure in SEN home to school transport budgets.
20. The committee believed it had received a reasonable, full and honest account of all the significant financial pressures the service is facing - not just those connected with having to find the necessary resources to meet special educational needs provision. Although satisfied that action is in place that will address this situation, the committee does not underestimate the scale of the task ahead to bring these budgets back into balance.
21. Since the recent adoption of the SEND Strategic Plan we had already planned to maintain a continuing interest in SEND. The evident budget risks associated with this service area vindicate that decision.

Looking ahead

22. Next meeting's agenda is a mixture of some themes previously worked on, and introduces topics hitherto not scrutinised:
 - A first look at the roles and duties of governing boards, and how we support and advise on the skills, knowledge and behaviours they need to be effective.
 - We'll continue our interest in early years by reviewing school readiness and the 30 Hours preschool programme.
 - An introduction into the local authority role in supporting underperforming schools, concentrating especially on what happens to schools which are rated 'inadequate' and in special measures.

23. Other topics in the pipeline include:

- Young People with additional needs transitioning to Adulthood.
- Healthy Child Programme.
- Disabled Children Service.
- Opportunities for Physical Activities and Physical Education in School and the community (including Disability and empowerment).

JANET JEFFERSON

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County Hall,

NORTHALLERTON

7 February 2019

Background Documents - Nil.