

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

19 February 2020

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN

YOUNG PEOPLES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Elective Home Education

1. Elective Home Education (EHE) is the term used by the Department for Education (DfE) to describe parents' decisions to provide education for their children at home instead of sending them to school.
2. The level of national and local awareness and attention in the topic has increased significantly over the last two years. There has been a major parliamentary enquiry; published guidance "Elective home education, Departmental guidance for local authorities in April 2019" has made the government's position on the responsibilities of schools, parents and local authorities much clearer; and the findings of an OFSTED inquiry have clarified particular issues such as "off-rolling" - of which more later.
3. North Yorkshire's experience of increasing numbers of known EHE children is in keeping with national trends. LAs 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.
4. As an authority we are compliant with the latest guidance. We use our power to require schools (including independent schools) to provide information about children who leave at the school's standard transition times, to help ensure that there is knowledge at local authority level of a child's schooling status.
5. Members noted that of the reasons quoted by parents for choosing to home educate the largest proportion, by some distance, was "stress and anxiety". Whilst it was acknowledged that this category could cover a range of experiences, members wondered whether it points towards just how many parents who opt to home-school their children are doing so possibly to avoid bullying, exam pressure and stress. This is about children having some sort of difficulty at school. The decision to home educate might sometimes be taken 'on the spur of the moment', often as a response to difficulties in relation to the child's schooling, difficulties that might or might not be resolvable. Members believed this may tell us a great deal about where NY efforts should be addressed.
6. Where parents have withdrawn a child from a setting they regarded as unsatisfactory, we explore options which are different from the previous setting. Members liked the practice whereby we commit to exploring with parents and the school the extent to which additional support can be put in place at the school even if initial efforts to secure this have not worked.

7. Some parents choose to home educate their children because they believe this is the best option. The worry for members was those parents and carers who are not actively choosing elective home education but are being compelled into it.
8. Members were reassured about efforts to identify “off-rolling”. This is the controversial practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without using a permanent exclusion, when the removal is primarily in the best interests of the school, rather than the best interests of the pupil. This includes pressuring a parent to remove their child from the school roll. It was noted that OFSTED if it finds evidence of the practice will now publish this in their inspection report. And under our new framework which takes effect later this year, any schools that are off-rolling are likely to be judged inadequate for leadership and management.
9. In the light of information given, and the evidence in front of them, members believed that the directorate has a good understanding of the issues associated with EHE, and procedures and practices are well thought through and are effectively observed.
10. The overall conclusion was that the issue is being handled well, with no further scrutiny work needed at this stage, but we will revisit this in about 6-9 months to pick up developments and progress.

Looking Ahead

11. At our next meeting we will look at:

- The challenges faced by schools, especially those in rural areas, in recruiting teaching staff.
- School deficits and Financial Pressures.
- An account of the work over the last 12-18 months undertaken by the Looked After Childrens Members Group.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JANET JEFFERSON

County Hall,
NORTHALLERTON
5 February 2020

Background Documents - Nil