

Safeguarding in elective home education (EHE): a summary and commentary on the elective home education practice examples submitted to C4EO

Monica Hetherington and Patricia Kearney with Anne Plummer and Sharon O'Donnell

May 2010

Contents

Summary and recommendations	1
1 Introduction	6
1.1 Purpose	6
1.2 Background	6
1.3 Information requested in the C4EO special call	6
1.4 Current legislation in relation to home education	7
1.5 Analysis of the mapping exercise	7
2 Overview of the practice examples	8
2.1 Responses and types of material received	8
2.2 Where home education ‘sits’ within the LA	9
2.3 Who undertakes the role, experience and training, including the Common Assessment Framework and safeguarding	10
2.4 Current policy and support offered to parents	11
2.5 Identification of children who are educated at home/liaison with Children Missing Education (CME) and monitoring arrangements	12
2.6 Child protection focus and responsibilities	15
2.7 The statutory duty to identify children not receiving a suitable education	15
2.8 Information sharing systems and cross agency arrangements	16
2.9 Increase in numbers for EHE and resourcing	18
2.10 Informing future practice	18
3 Conclusions and recommendations	19
References	
Annex of examples submitted to C4EO (attached separately)	

Summary and recommendations

This report has been requested by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) as recommended in the Badman report, 2009, p 44 (recommendation 26). It provides a summary and commentary on the examples of current safeguarding practice in elective home education (EHE) submitted to the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). These were submitted in response to a special 'call' for local examples to support the work of Children's Trusts in their home education responsibilities in the safeguarding and promoting welfare aspects.

C4EO is grateful to those Local Authorities (LAs) that have responded with accounts of their work. Examples were submitted to C4EO on a voluntary basis and not in a set template. Local Authorities (LAs) have been named and full submissions are included in an Annex. The report draws out those practice features we think are helpful to this complex area of work along with some of the difficulties that LAs have identified to us.

A total of 20 submissions were received from 17 Local Authorities. This represents just over 11 per cent of the Local Authorities in England. A breakdown of LAs by type shows a spread of four County Councils, seven English Unitary Councils, three London Borough Councils and three Metropolitan Councils. There were no responses received from either the East Midlands or Yorkshire and Humberside regions.

This exercise aimed to scope the landscape, providing a flavour of current safeguarding practice in EHE. Although it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about commonalities across LAs, in the light of the relatively small sample of evidence received, some useful practice features and common issues can be identified.

We would stress the wide variety of approaches and arrangements illustrated by this small sample but do not know whether this is a feature across all EHE services.

Key practice characteristics

EHE, Education Welfare Officer (EWO) and Children Missing from Education (CME) teams are likely to be small and the numbers of families seen and registered are not clear from the examples submitted. However, service arrangements that bring together available skills, resources and capacity are likely to strengthen collaborative focus, efficiency and effectiveness. This reports note these characteristics as:

1. Written service statements that:
 - place EHE within a child welfare context
 - articulate the relationship between support and monitoring activity, including access to children's health and social care support services
 - focus on the need to work in partnership with parents individually and collectively, including the development of service statements.

2. Services that identify family dissatisfaction with current schooling and facilitate alternative formal schooling arrangements.
3. Deployment arrangements that integrate social work and education personnel skills and information sharing from the start of a request for EHE, as distinct from linear 'referral on' arrangements.
4. Training arrangements that support integrated working across EHE, EWO, CME and other children's staff; that specify skills level, duration and frequency for teams and professional groupings and which make use of wider training arrangements on assessment, CAF and safeguarding.
5. Flow charts, protocols and other procedural documents setting out decision making and including time limits and information sharing.
6. Capacity for data collection and analysis (Buckinghamshire; Hackney).

These characteristics are briefly illustrated below. Fuller details are provided in the body of the report and the examples submitted to C4EO are provided in a separate **Annex**.

1. The best interests of the child

Service statements placing EHE within the context of the five ECM outcomes are a helpful reminder of the ethos of the work (Liverpool City; Buckinghamshire; Hackney; West Berkshire). Hackney states that 'staff need to be effective communicators with a clear knowledge and understanding of education and safeguarding'. This focus then helps to identify wider working arrangements:

The wider context of LCSB and Children's Trust responsibilities (Dudley; Hackney).

Identifying and supporting access to health care for children receiving home education (Liverpool; Coventry).

Identifying and supporting access children & family social care services (Brighton & Hove).

2. Balance between family engagement and safeguarding vigilance

This balance is a key issue for all EHE services. Some LAs have been clear and robust about articulating this and possible tensions, with approaches that support effective practice. A number of LAs state the importance of developing trusting and helpful relationships with parents as an essential part of managing this balance. These include:

- Statements of intent: Liverpool sets out the need to balance vigilance on behalf of children with respectful support for home education so that the best interests of the child are identified and agreed.
- Developing trust with families through participative approaches is recognised as elements in an effective and safe EHE service. Service initiatives include:
 - Developing partnership guidance and reciprocal responsibilities with families, for example, Home Education Liverpool Partnership (HELP).

- Providing collective information and forums for EHE parents through participatively designed booklets (Liverpool); newsletters (Darlington); 'Get Together' events for families and staff (Norfolk).
- Diversion and dispute resolution. Some LAs identify whether requests for EHE are because of problems at school and, where possible, helps to resolve the problem or to find a school transfer (Coventry; Liverpool).

3. Staffing arrangements

Submissions indicate wide variations in staffing arrangements, which may reflect how the LA defines its EHE and safeguarding. Staff include EHE support staff, with teaching and education services skills; EWOs likely to be registered social workers and CME staff, who may be EWOs. As well as different professional origins and training, these staff hold differing statutory responsibilities and powers, specifically for entering the family home. Some combine these resources from the start of an EHE request, others have a 'refer on if concerned about child protection' system. Most teams are very small. Examples of the various team mixes and responsibilities include:

Mixed professional teams (e.g. Liverpool).

EHE teams of education professionals (e.g. Croydon).

Initial request for home education assessed by EWO team and transferred to EHE team for ongoing contact. Sometimes the request arrives directly to Admissions (e.g. Hounslow).

Lead roles (e.g. Safeguarding lead in an EHE team, Buckinghamshire).

4. Safeguarding – assessment and referral

The wide variation of staff arrangements are paralleled by varied procedures for decision making. A number of LAs submitted procedural flowcharts that incorporated safeguarding concerns. This method allows the service to set out accountability, time limits for action and contingency actions in a clear and succinct way.

Examples were received from Hounslow and Wiltshire and referred to by West Berkshire.

5. Safeguarding training and skills for EHE staff

These arrangements are also influenced by how staff are deployed, their various professional backgrounds, legal responsibilities and powers.

Most submissions mentioned 'participation in safeguarding training'. Some specified Level 1 & 2 training and some CAF training. Some LAs described identification of training needs through in-service development days (Wiltshire) and induction programmes for EHE staff (Staffordshire). Some identified additional training on domestic violence and bullying (Darlington) and Norfolk reported that a member of the Services for Home Education (SHE) team has been trained to use ContactPoint.

6. Information gathering and sharing; data analysis

Specific attention to information sharing highlights the need for working together across a range of services and agencies. Integrated teams should minimise the need for information sharing about individual families across discrete services. However, some LAs noted that some information finding is difficult as when children move in and out of the area or have never attended school (Darlington, Brighton & Hove). Hackney has a specific resource to investigate their Pupil Databases and identify where follow up is indicated.

Data analysis was specifically mentioned by Buckinghamshire as useful for noting patterns to inform practice.

Conclusions and recommendations

Valuable evidence has been collected through the submission of examples of effective practice from 17 Local Authorities.

This exercise aimed to scope the landscape, providing a flavour of current safeguarding practice in EHE. Although it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about commonalities across LAs, in the light of the relatively small sample of evidence received, some key issues and trends can be identified.

Recommendations

- (a) The key practice characteristics are outlined in this report, and local examples could be made available, as illustrative material, to all LAs and Children's Trusts in what is likely to be a time of review and change of local arrangements for EHE services. C4EO could disseminate this through Summaries for Directors of Children's Services and Chairs of LCSBs, and through relevant pages on C4EO's website.
- (b) C4EO could offer a data collection tool as part of its web service to help individual LAs record, analyse and compare their EHE data. This could support LAs in their wish to develop more robust information systems.
- (c) This exercise has provided a 'taster' of current practice in elective home education regarding child protection. The availability of a reliable, more detailed, and more comprehensive picture of current practice in EHE would necessitate a questionnaire survey of all LAs in England, together with a small sample of interviews to provide in-depth case studies. This is necessary to further consider the ways in which EHE services include a child protection focus.
- (d) It may also be valuable to conduct a systematic review of the home education areas on all LAs' websites. This would establish the extent to which home education information is visible and accessible; and could produce a map of

the different types of information and resource available online to EHE families.

- (e) The variations in responses suggest that mechanisms to support wider discussion, dissemination of data and practice and collective development of services would be helpful. National bodies such as the National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE) could be included in this work.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an initial mapping, analysis and commentary on the elective home education safeguarding practice examples submitted to C4EO. These practice examples were collected as a result of a special call requested by the DCSF in 2009. Submission by Local Authorities was on a voluntary basis. The intention was for C4EO to begin to build a map of existing practice in home education which, in particular, would start to identify where safeguarding responsibilities are being built into systems and processes by LAs. This will help to indicate where further work is required in relation to developing both the safeguarding and welfare aspects of home education responsibilities for Children's Trusts.

This report aims to draw out some cameos and provide initial commentary on the current practice examples received. It also aims to highlight where safeguarding fits within home education responsibilities in Local Authorities' current practice.

1.2 Background

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (England and Wales. Statutes, 2006) placed a duty on all Local Authorities to make arrangements to identify children not receiving a suitable education. Later, in 2007, the DCSF produced guidelines on elective home education for Local Authorities (DCSF, 2007), specifically mentioning their safeguarding responsibilities (sections 2.12 – 2.15 and 4.7 – 4.9).

Revised guidance for Local Authorities on children not receiving a suitable education (DCSF, 2009) specifically examined potential barriers for Local Authorities and other public agencies in effectively carrying out their safeguarding responsibilities.

The Home Education Review report (Badman, 2009b) made 28 recommendations and included proposals for the DCSF to establish a compulsory national and annual registration scheme for home educators, closer monitoring of home education, and right of access to people's homes

1.3 Information requested in the C4EO special call

The special call acknowledged and set out some of the complexities involved in considering the safeguarding aspects of EHE:

- Parents may decide to exercise their right to home educate their child from a very early age and children may not have been previously enrolled in school.
- Parents are not required to register or seek approval to educate their child at home.
- Local Authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area and can apply to the courts for an order to enable an assessment of a child, where there are grounds for believing that he or she may be suffering or are likely to suffer significant harm.

- Home education visits are primarily undertaken to ensure that suitable education is being provided. How these visits are undertaken and by whom may vary between Local Authorities and may not involve staff with knowledge and skills in recognising when a child may be being abused or neglected and taking appropriate action, or in assessing whether a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. (Local Authorities cannot insist on meeting the home educating family, these visits are undertaken with the agreement of the family).
- Children who are not at school are not synonymous with those children who are home educated, and those 'not in school' include:
 - Children who do not have the usual access to universal services, such as children from traveller families, or refugee families, or those who are not known to universal services.
 - Children withdrawn from school because they experience difficulties there, such as bullying.
 - Children and families who disappear from view.

Within this context, the C4EO invited Local Authorities to tell them of their local examples to support the work of Children's Trusts in the safeguarding and promoting welfare aspects of their home education responsibilities.

1.4 Current legislation in relation to home education

In England, the law (Education Act, Great Britain. Statutes, 1996) states that while education is compulsory, school is not, and parents/carers may choose to educate their children at home for a variety of reasons. Responsibility for providing a child with a suitable education rests with the parents, who can decide to home educate their child at any stage. Local Authorities have a duty to identify children not receiving a suitable education but no duty to monitor home education. They may intervene, however, if education provision appears unsuitable and may request a home visit, or evaluate provision by alternative means (DCSF, 2007).

1.5 Analysis of the mapping exercise

In consultation with Patricia Kearney, C4EO Theme Lead for Safeguarding and Anne Plummer, C4EO Theme Coordinator for the theme, two questions were posed as shown below to underpin this initial analysis of the examples received:

- Is there enough information provided to describe current practice on safeguarding in home education?
- Are there clear frameworks of understanding, protocols and supportive action?

Follow-up telephone calls were made to a number of LAs for further information.

In addition, it was agreed that the variations in practice, and the implications of this, would be likely to result in three different scenarios:

- i) A common understanding of appropriate child protection responsibilities, skills and processes, played out in different places with a common purpose and common actions.
- ii) A commonality of understanding achieved through a variety of local arrangements.
- iii) A rather diffuse understanding with differing arrangements and gaps in arrangements, for example, in training and access.

The report and analysis which follows aims to provide a starting point or baseline on which to evaluate possible next steps in ensuring that guidelines and recommendations by government are being implemented by Local Authorities.

2. Overview of the practice examples

2.1 Responses and types of material received

A total of 20 submissions were received from 17 Local Authorities. This represents just over 11 per cent of the LAs in England. Table 1 shows the breakdown of LAs alphabetically by type and demonstrates a spread of four County Councils, seven English Unitary Councils, three London Borough Councils and three Metropolitan Councils.

Table 1: Breakdown of submitting LAs by type

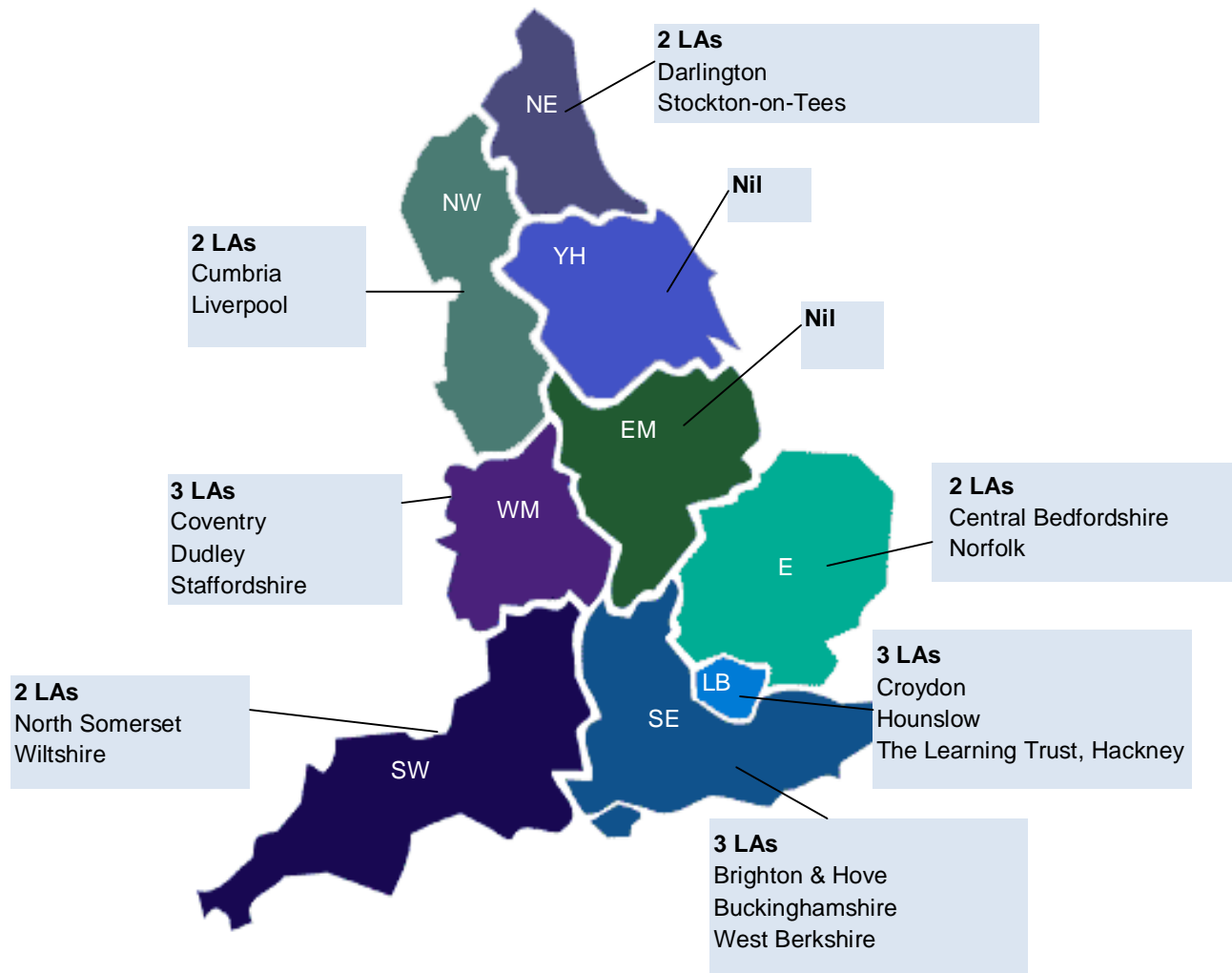
LA	Type	LA	Type
Brighton & Hove*	English Unitary	Learning Trust, Hackney	London Borough
Buckinghamshire*	County	Liverpool*	Metropolitan
Central Bedfordshire	English Unitary	Norfolk*	County
Coventry*	Metropolitan	North Somerset*	English Unitary
Croydon	London Borough	Staffordshire*	County
Cumbria*	County	Stockton on Tees*	English Unitary
Darlington*	English Unitary	West Berkshire	English Unitary
Dudley*	Metropolitan	Wiltshire*	English Unitary
Hounslow	London Borough		

**The authorities denoted with an asterisk were amongst the 74 LAs responding to a request for additional information (Badman, 2009a) linked to the Badman report (Badman, 2009b) in autumn 2009.*

Figure 1 below, in addition, shows the responses by Government Office region. There were no responses received from either the East Midlands or Yorkshire and Humberside regions.

A range of material was received in the submissions. This included descriptive text sent by email, guidelines for parents, flowcharts, protocols, web links, and slide presentations. These are provided in a separate Annex.

Figure 1 – Responses by Government Office region



2.2 Where home education 'sits' within the LA

Elective home education appears to 'sit' within a range of areas in LAs, the most common being the 'school support', 'school improvement', 'school effectiveness', or 'attendance' areas. Other submissions showed EHE as the responsibility of the Education Welfare Service (EWS), Children's Social Care department, and the Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) service.

2.3 Who undertakes the role, experience and training, including the Common Assessment Framework and safeguarding

From the practice examples received, six stated that the LA staff working in elective home education had backgrounds and experience in education and/or had community or counselling experience. Five of these specifically mentioned qualified teacher or headteacher status, and staff having specific expertise in areas including child protection; alternative educational provision, including hospital and home tuition; and in pupil referral units.

Twelve LAs also made reference to some form of training or update for staff on safeguarding or child protection. Although training arrangements are sometimes described, the rationale for training was not explicit and so further work would be required to find out what the skills and responsibilities are, and should be expected of, EHE staff who, quite properly, have primary skills in children's education. Within these 12 LAs, seven specifically mentioned Common Assessment Framework (CAF) training.

Table 2: Breakdown of LAs offering CAF/safeguarding or child protection training

CAF and Safeguarding/Child Protection	Safeguarding/Child Protection
Buckinghamshire	Brighton & Hove
Cumbria	Central Bedfordshire
Darlington	Coventry
Hounslow	Stockton on Tees
Norfolk	West Berkshire
North Somerset	
Staffordshire	

Darlington

Council-wide regular training sessions are provided in CAF and safeguarding at three levels, including training on specialist topics (e.g. bullying, domestic violence) at level 3 and CAF training at all levels. Visiting officers attend all these.

Visiting officers conduct joint visits from time to time and shadow officers when first starting.

A meeting every term is held with those teams involved in home education, to raise awareness, discuss issues and make suggestions for improvement. This includes colleagues in Social Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Connexions, Education Welfare, and the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Advisory Service (EMTAS).

A training event is organised for July 2010 for everybody involved in home education and a guide for EHE officers is currently being produced.

In Brighton & Hove, training is provided by the Learning and Development Centre as part of the Every Child Matters (ECM) skills and knowledge programme.

Brighton & Hove

Attendees at the core ECM skills and knowledge programme are from a mix of professional groups, not just social workers. The three-day programme has the following modules:

1. Developing core understanding
2. Assessment and investigation
3. Attendance at Case Conference

In Hounslow, Children's Services teams are alerted through regular communication with Admissions, EWOs, Safeguarding and CME that there are children at risk when they are not registered at a school or not known to services. Norfolk reported, after relevant training, the SHE team has read-only access to Social Care's CareFirst database, for information sharing purposes.

In Staffordshire, there is evidence of EHE staff working and liaising with District Councils.

Staffordshire

Staff expertise – an experienced headteacher/county adviser (curriculum) works within 'double' Districts. There is also partnership working with the Traveller Education Service/college access using the annual pupil weighting unit agreement.

All staff receive the following training and development: an Induction programme; buddying; shadowing; CAF training; Safeguarding Levels 1-2; and Team Around the Child Social Care training. There are also team meetings every term and regional Forum meetings (six days) as well as regular, specific safeguarding updates, information sharing on serious case reviews, neglect and Criminal Record Bureau Advanced training. These are essential.

2.4 Current policy and support offered to parents

The key points made in this report note the differences between Local Authority EHE policy, procedure and practice. It is useful, therefore, to set out some of these differing EHE arrangements to illustrate the contexts within which safeguarding is considered.

Although many of the responding LAs were able to describe their set procedures for EHE and, in some cases their criteria regarding home education, only two specifically mentioned that they had an EHE policy. Others were able to provide flow charts outlining processes and protocols.

Parents are offered support in a range of ways and to a greater or lesser extent by most of the LAs. This takes the form of: guidance documents; dedicated areas on

LAs' websites; use of online exam centres for GCSEs (Croydon Digital); lists of other useful websites; information sheets; newsletters; events – sometimes attended by other agencies; parent forums and partnerships; resource libraries (Croydon and Stockton on Tees); learning materials for science and mathematics (Dudley Grid for Learning); careers advice (Dudley); as well as telephone or email support; advice on education plans, examinations, exam boards and tutors; and advice on reintegration into school or college.

In Hackney, parents opting for home education are also provided with details of local after school clubs, supplementary schools, local EHE groups and sporting facilities in the Borough.

Croydon's approach is to arrange a consultative meeting for all EHE families for the purposes of discussion, sharing good practice and the mutual interchange of ideas. Croydon also mentions links with Connexions who meet with Year 11 EHE students in order to provide advice on further education and training opportunities.

Darlington reported that they do not provide teaching materials or recommend tutors for EHE students and, at present, they have no third party arrangements in place.

North Somerset, where the EOTAS teacher was only recently in post at the time of the C4EO's call for practice examples, reported that the Council is presently reviewing the current system for EHE and preparing a protocol.

The home education pages on the websites of the submitting LAs vary considerably in the type of support and resources offered and, in some cases, no web pages could be found. On some sites the home education pages are hidden behind layers of information and are not easily visible or accessible.

2.5 Identification of children who are educated at home/liaison with Children Missing Education (CME) and monitoring arrangements

The special call noted the complexity of identifying and distinguishing between children not in school for a variety of reasons. Dependable information and clear categories are, arguably, one aspect of good safeguarding practice. They lead to clear procedures for sharing, analysing and acting upon this information to safeguard children.

The practice examples provided were not always clear in respect of how Local Authorities identify children in the EHE or CME categories. Three authorities noted that they were in the process of reviewing information on either home education, children missing education or both.

In some LAs such as Liverpool, there appear to be good links and processes in place with schools for monitoring purposes. In such instances, the LA is informed as soon as a child has been removed from roll, and discussions take place between the headteacher and Lead Officer for Children's Services to establish the reasons for removal, and whether home education is appropriate.

In addition, Liverpool reports that close links with CME are maintained so that areas of concern can be effectively addressed. This results in CME services being able:

'to have an accurate understanding of how many youngsters are being home educated at any one time, where they are and where they have come from.'

Liverpool's Children's services are also able:

'to identify if a particular school has an unusual number of parents electing to home educate and this would be investigated through the LA school support staff.'

Hounslow also reported links between EHE and CME teams, schools, the Education Welfare Service, the CAF team, Connexions, Safeguarding, Admissions, and the special needs team.

One LA, Brighton & Hove, pointed out that current legislation can be a handicap, as the LA does not necessarily know which children have never attended school, compared with those who have been taken off roll. To try to overcome this, the LA maintains regular contact with the CME officer and with health professionals, to ensure they are aware of as many EHE children and young people as possible. Other examples of LAs that appear, from the practice examples, to have clear processes and procedures in place for identifying and monitoring children missing education and/or educated at home are provided below.

Hounslow

Three clear categories are established: child on school roll whom the parent wishes to withdraw; child of statutory school age but not registered at school; child of statutory age whose parents do not contact the LA on withdrawal from school. This strategy was deemed good practice by Ofsted in Hounslow's recent announced inspection. Children's Services teams are also alerted through training sessions when there are children at risk/not registered at school/not known to services. Hounslow's two flow charts (see 151, 1 and 2 in the Annex) show the three agreed categories and the clearly identified **risk element** running throughout the processes.

In Dudley, relationships between parents and EOTAS appear to be well developed, and frequency of monitoring is directly proportional to the individual needs of the child and reflects any concerns, such as any special educational needs the child may have, or any child protection and/or welfare issues.

Norfolk

In Norfolk, if there are still grounds for concern about the suitability of a child's EHE provision after the initial support, monitoring, follow up visit and further advice provided by the LA, the LA discusses this with parents/carers and then sends them a letter informing them that they should take steps to return their child/ren to school. At this stage, the LA's Services to Home Educators team also refers the child/ren to the relevant Pupil Attendance team, as well as to the CME officers and the child/ren is/are removed from the SHE register and transferred to the CME register until other

educational provision is arranged. This procedure is also followed when a home visit has been declined and a subsequent request for evidence of the home education has been ignored. The same procedure is followed if parents/carers fail to keep two consecutive appointments with the SHE team.

In Cumbria, where EHE/CME arrangements are currently being reviewed, there is a CME officer in each locality area. The LA is developing this CME link officer role to ensure that there is the capacity to meet the needs of the EHE cohort and the proposed new legislation.

Cumbria

EHE advisors visit families on an annual basis, or more frequently if requested by the referee. If the EHE provision does not appear to be appropriate to the needs of the child, the EHE advisor contacts the CME link officer, who makes a home visit to the family to discuss the issues raised by the EHE advisor. If there can be a resolution, for example, the parent gets support from an independent tutor who is able to bridge gaps in the education provision, the EHE advisor is advised and another visit is organised in a few weeks. If no EHE compromise can be found, the CME link advisor will discuss other options which may include local school admission, 'education otherwise', or flexi schooling. The CME link officer supports the parent and child into provision and monitors this for six weeks, before deciding if the Education Welfare Office should provide support on a longer term basis.

The action flowchart submitted by Wiltshire Unitary Authority (see 156 in the Annex) shows its process for EHE. The EWO is involved at the outset and makes the initial home visit/collects evidence from the parents/carers. The flowchart shows the steps involved for the scenarios of 'there are concerns', 'there are no concerns' and 'there is no response'.

A number of practice examples were received from Staffordshire LA (see 157 – slide presentation, 158 and 159 flow charts, 170 and email description in the Annex), and the LA offers a number of documents and resources to home educators on its website:

<http://education.staffordshire.gov.uk/Curriculum/Services/HomeEducation/UsefulDocumentation/>

<http://education.staffordshire.gov.uk/Curriculum/Services/HomeEducation/Resources/>

Staffordshire

Two flow charts/protocols were submitted:

- one for work experience for EHE youngsters – this includes advice for parents/carers and shows the process the parent needs to go through to check the potential employer of their child, including an insurance checklist and risk assessment for the young person

- one for EHE and alternative provision – this shows options for requesting Alternative Provision where the young person has been on the EHE register for 18 months – two years.

At the Learning Trust, a non-profit organisation providing education services in Hackney, a small dedicated team of officers work to identify children not in receipt of a suitable education. This involves regular interrogation of the pupil database which is updated by schools. A separate database has been set up for recording 'lost pupils'.

2.6 Child protection focus and responsibilities

Three Local Authorities, Hackney, Stockton on Tees and Wiltshire, specifically mentioned the use of School Attendance Orders where there are concerns about the provision of EHE, or where parents have refused to engage and/or have provided no evidence of satisfactory home education. In West Berkshire, there is close liaison between the EHE team and the EWO, and in some LAs joint visits are undertaken.

West Berkshire

If the home education teacher is unable to gain access or see evidence of suitable education provision, then s/he will contact the EWO to make a visit. Home education teachers have no right to see the child unlike the EWO. Close links between the EHE team and the EWO may result in the referral and assessment service being contacted and a record logged.

In Norfolk, where a growing number of new referrals to Services in Home Education are reported, priority is given to these new referrals, along with cases giving concern. If a home visit is refused by the parents/carers, they are given the option of meeting in an alternative venue, for example, the local library. Those not willing to meet with officers are given the option of submitting evidence of provision. If this is not forthcoming, then it is considered to be a safeguarding/child welfare concern.

Most examples submitted did not consider non-compliance and refusal to allow EHE staff into the home as child welfare or child protection matters.

2.7 The statutory duty to identify children not receiving a suitable education

LAs are required to identify children missing from education and children in elective home education. Four LAs provided some evidence of how their arrangements to meet the statutory duty had impacted on their work. These were: Liverpool, Norfolk, Buckinghamshire, and Hackney.

Norfolk

Arrangements for CME have had a significant impact on the identification of both children missing from education and children receiving home education. Clear procedures are now followed if there are concerns about a child's home education and regular liaison takes place between the Services to Home Educators team, the

CME Officer and the Attendance team. This is in order to pass on relevant information about children who, for instance, may have been removed from the school roll, may not have been previously known to SHE, but who are being home educated, or, have been removed from the SHE register due to the unsuitability of their home education provision. Although most schools in Norfolk are aware of the procedures when a child is deregistered in order to be educated at home, some are not, despite the fact guidance is available on the schools' intranet.

2.8 Information sharing systems and cross agency arrangements

Systems

Amongst the practice examples received, it was evident that LAs are at differing stages of development in relation to information sharing. Most examples showed evidence of some form of information sharing, although in a few cases this was implicit rather than explicit. Six LAs use data systems/databases to record information on EHE: Buckinghamshire (ONE data system and overarching admissions database feeding other internal databases); Croydon (ONE data system); Darlington (EMS database lined up with a separate Access database); Hounslow (EMS system); Staffordshire (ONE and a special drive for storing contact records); and Wiltshire (WICID – Wiltshire Integrated Children's Identification Database). In some of these LAs, staff are also receiving training on ContactPoint and the intention is that the LA systems will ultimately be connected to the national database. Liverpool reported that systems needed development.

Cross agency arrangements and information sharing

Twelve of the 17 responding LAs provided some information on cross agency arrangements. The sample did not show consistency of referral arrangements regarding child protection concerns. Some LAs were clear that their EHE staff had no legal right to enter the home, see or speak to a child if concerned. Some said that they would refer the case to their Education Welfare Officers who did have these legal powers. Other statements about referral to child protection services did not give much detail.

Buckinghamshire

There are Information Service protocols, individual service protocols and remits regarding cross agency working. Arrangements to support home educators are made under the practice guidelines and referral criteria of the individual service areas. Key links between the Achievement and Learning Division and other departments are maintained as good practice, and other factors are examined before going to the home of the child. Links are maintained with the Education Welfare Services, the CME team, teams responsible for schools and admissions, exclusions and re-integration, SEN, Social Care, local delivery teams responsible for CAF, safeguarding services attached to Education, Health and CAMHS, and with Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and the police when necessary.

In Darlington, the key leaders of services, including Youth Offending Services (YOS) and Connexions (but not, as yet, health or the police) meet every term. YOS and Connexions attend these meetings as there are cohorts of between 20 and 30 Year 11 children in home education in Darlington. A dedicated Connexions Officer also visits the young people. The LA reports good relations with both admissions colleagues and the Traveller cohort. Stockton on Tees and West Berkshire LAs also maintain links with the Traveller Education Service.

In Coventry, responsibility for EHE as well as exclusions, CME and safeguarding issues sits within the SEN management team. Other LAs specifically identifying links with the SEN teams were Hackney, Hounslow, Staffordshire, West Berkshire and Dudley.

The Learning Trust in Hackney operates a multi agency team that responds to all Metropolitan Police 'Merlin'¹ reports. The team undertakes multi agency checks on all young people identified in these reports, and aims to ensure that all young people of compulsory school age have access to appropriate education and, if necessary, takes steps to ensure that they do have access if no provision is identified. Hackney's EHE Coordinator also participates in regional and cross-Borough meetings and forums where good practice is shared.

In Croydon, there is close liaison between the EHE Support Teacher, the CME Officer, the Connexions Adviser and Education Welfare Services who are located together. Feedback is provided to the Behaviour Task Force and Exclusion Officer and there is liaison with the Youth Offending Team and Youth Inclusion team, plus communication with the Primary Care Trust, police, housing, admissions services and Social Care.

In Hounslow, EHE works closely with EWOs, Admissions, Educational Psychologists, and the Heads of SEN and Safeguarding. The list of children educated at home is shared with the Head of Safeguarding every half term to identify any vulnerable children and those who may be known to Social Services.

Staffordshire

The EHE service has a high profile with other agencies and links to District Inclusion Partnerships /District Teams (SEN); Parent Partnerships; EWS; Family Access and Support Services, Connexions, YOS, colleges and the Health Service. The LA also seeks information on its EHE service via a parental feedback questionnaire.

Dudley reported well embedded systems with other departments within Children's Services and other agencies, for example, admissions, the autism outreach team, Children's Health department, the CME team, Connexions (briefing sessions), Education Business Partnerships, Education Welfare Services and Education

¹ Merlin is a database that is run by the Metropolitan Police. It stores information on children and young people who have become known to the police.

Welfare workers, the Parent Partnership, the Safeguarding Board, speech and language therapy, schools and colleges, SEN, Social Services, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller services.

Dudley

The practice example from Dudley evidenced a culture of 'continuity, coherence and a shared purpose and philosophy within the team'; 'an ethos where [they] embrace [their] responsibilities and help each other succeed/communication [being] important between colleagues.'

2.9 Increase in numbers in EHE and resourcing

A rise in numbers of children receiving home education was reported in three of the 17 Local Authorities: Croydon, Norfolk and Staffordshire. Norfolk reports a growing number of new referrals to Services to Home Educators and in Staffordshire, numbers are growing year on year at all key stages (KS) apart from KS4. In Croydon, there is a high number of Year 10 and 11 pupils in EHE, and a need for GCSE examination provision, and there was evidence of resourcing issues in West Berkshire.

In instances of potential pressure on resources, Buckinghamshire uses guideline thresholds to ensure resources are prioritised.

Buckinghamshire

The use of **guideline thresholds for frequency and urgency of visits, guidance and advice** has been implemented by this LA. These thresholds are based on a number of criteria including any known welfare concerns, families identified as being in vulnerable groups, and a post-visit consultant assessment. There is then prioritisation of staff capacity and resources in accordance with these guideline thresholds. The initial impetus for the guidelines was the growing numbers of new referrals to Services to Home Educators, which meant that it had become increasingly difficult to maintain the previous system of routine annual visits to all families.

2.10 Informing future practice

There was little consistent information in the practice examples received of whether other current arrangements could inform future practice, for example, difficulties accessing universal services or where children are withdrawn from school.

In Liverpool, the 'Home Education Liverpool Partnership booklet has been recognised as being particularly helpful in showing home educators how to go about accessing the support and help they need at the level they consider suitable.' Other LAs, such as Brighton & Hove, recommend examining alternatives where EHE may not be the preferred option due to bullying or school refusal. Both Cumbria and Hackney offer flexi-schooling as an alternative to EHE.

The Learning Trust, Hackney

Flexi-schooling has proved to be an excellent alternative and supplement to home schooling families in Hackney, and it is an available option to parents who may wish to home educate their child.

Flexi-schooling is an initiative where the parent embarks on a contract with the child's school. The child is educated partly in the home and also educated elsewhere. Families have a chance to enhance their child's education outside of the school system and focus on other educational activities which may not take place during the normal school timetable, for example sports clubs or religious activities.

Parents and schools in Hackney are made aware of the flexi-schooling option by the EHE Co-ordinator working with the Trust and, if they adopt this route, the child's name is placed on the EHE register. The Trust completes six-monthly or annual reviews with families, as the school remains responsible for overseeing the child's educational provision.

Central Bedfordshire, a new English unitary authority, noted that areas for potential development in the future might include issues regarding funding for college placements, support for SEN and for the purchasing of resources.

In Buckinghamshire, data collection and analysis are regarded particularly important for the future.

Buckinghamshire

There are arrangements within multi-agency and multi-professional practice and information sharing which will inform future practice. This includes the use of CAF and re-advising support service areas so they are kept informed. The collation of EHE data and information, and the categorised analysis of this, will inform future practice by indicating where patterns, if any, exist. For example, a recent pattern that has emerged is that a significant minority of parents are electing to home educate in the short term in order to seek a place for their child at a school they prefer.

3 Conclusions and recommendations

Some valuable evidence has been collected during this initial exercise albeit examples submitted on a voluntary basis.

This exercise aimed to scope the landscape, providing a flavour of current safeguarding practice in EHE. Although it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about commonalities across LAs, in the light of the relatively small sample of evidence received, some key issues and trends can be identified.

Recommendations

Key practice characteristics are outlined in this report, and local examples could be made available, as illustrative material, to all LAs and Children's Trusts in what is likely to be a time of review and change of local arrangements for EHE services. C4EO could disseminate this by a small leaflet, web pages and email alerts.

C4EO could offer a data collection tool as part of its web service to help individual LAs record, analyse and compare their EHE data. This could support LAs in their wish to develop more robust information systems.

This exercise has provided a 'taster' of current practice in elective home education regarding child protection. The availability of a reliable, more detailed, and more comprehensive picture of current practice in EHE would necessitate a questionnaire survey of all LAs in England, together with a small sample of interviews to provide in-depth case studies. This is necessary to further consider the ways in which EHE services include a child protection focus.

It may also be valuable to conduct a systematic review of the home education areas on all LAs' websites. This would establish the extent to which home education information is visible and accessible; and could produce a map of the different types of information and resource available online to EHE families.

The variations in responses suggest that mechanisms to support wider discussion, dissemination of data and practice and collective development of services would be helpful. National bodies such as the National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE) could be included in this work.

A separate [Annex](#) shows the examples of practice relating to elective home education, children missing education, and safeguarding and monitoring in EHE received by C4EO as a result of its special call.

References

- Badman, G. (2009a). *Review of Elective Home Education*. Letter to Barry Sheerman, Chairman of the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee, 9 October 2009 [online]. Available: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/ete/independentreviewofhomeeducation/irhomeeducation/> [18 April, 2010].
- Badman, G. (2009b). *Report to the Secretary of State on the Review of Elective Home Education in England*. London: The Stationery Office [online]. Available: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/PDF%20FINAL%20HOME%20ED.pdf> [18 April, 2010].
- Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (2009). *Request for Practice Examples: Elective Home Education and Safeguarding*. London: C4EO. http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/safeguarding/files/safeguarding_home_education_cal.pdf (18 April, 2010).
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007). *Elective Home Education. Guidelines for Local Authorities*. London: DCSF [online]. Available: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/publications/elective/> [18 April, 2010].
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009). *Revised Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities in England to Identify Children Not Receiving a Suitable Education*. London: DCSF [online]. Available: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/IG00202/> [18 April, 2010].
- England and Wales. Statutes (2006). *Education and Inspections Act 2006. Chapter 40*. London: The Stationery Office.
- Great Britain. Statutes (1996). *Education Act 1996. Chapter 56*. London: HMSO