

Background:

There are several factors why families decide to home educate their children.

Whilst it is the responsibilities of families to ensure that their child receives a suitable education, the statutory duty to safeguard children in elective home education; remains with all the agencies and practitioners who continue to have contact with the child/ren and their wider support network.

Home educated children are less visible to agencies than those who attend school.

In June 2024 within St Helens, there are 380 known elective home educated children—yet legislation/guidance does not give schools or the education welfare service regular access to children who are educated at home.

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Focus of the event

This 7 minute briefing follows the publication of:

[Safeguarding Children in Elective Home Education \(May 2024\) The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#) which recommends the 'roles and responsibilities in relation to EHE are understood by all statutory agencies....and that they know what to do if they are concerned that children who are EHE may be at risk of harm and may be being deliberately hidden from the sight of statutory agencies.'

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What's working well?...



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St Helens Education Welfare Service:

- Conduct home visits to help parents/carers to remove the barriers creating school attendance issues
- Work directly with pupils to solve difficulties affecting their rights and responsibilities within the education law
- Supporting families when transferring schools
- Help parents to understand their rights and responsibilities within the education law
- Act as a link between home and school when communication has broken down
- **Provide a link with other agencies on behalf of families**
- Providing information on education otherwise than at school

Action

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1. **Review the learning:** [Safeguarding Children in Elective Home Education \(May 2024\) The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#)
2. **Circulate this briefing across networks. Discuss within teams your role in relation to children who are electively home educated; consider what current processes and/or the changes required, to effectively safeguarding and fulfil your statutory duty.**
3. **Share & utilise the [Elective Home Education Pathway](#) within practice.**
4. **Contact the education welfare service (cme@sthelens.gov.uk) when you become aware of a child being educated from home – Do not assume they are already aware of the child being home educated**

Reflections

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Are agencies clearly capturing and identifying children as Electively Home Educated in practice and sharing this information with key partner agencies including St Helens Education Welfare Service? **email: cme@sthelens.gov.uk**

Where are children's voices, needs and perspectives being considered in the decision to home educate them? Are children's vulnerabilities and safeguarding needs fully understood at the point of being removed from school rolls, **including if there have been concerns about not being brought to health appointments.** (Particular attention, if appropriate, should be given to children where there have been previous safeguarding concerns.)

Can Early Help Plans/Child In Need plans be developed, where required, to enable the child and family to receive help, support and protection they may need; **especially** where it is identified there are wider concerns such as not being brought to health appointments, domestic abuse, parental mental and/or physical health issues.



What now needs to happen?...

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[Professional curiosity](#) is a mindset. It involves asking questions, maintaining an open mind and looking beyond the surface.

Being professionally curious means not taking things at face value; be willing to challenge assumptions when necessary. The children who were the focus of the serious safeguarding incidents generally had weak links with people and networks outside their immediate family—'**BE THE ADULT THEY NEED—LOOK DEEPER AND SPOT THE SIGNS OF NEGLECT**'

Evidence from the national data suggests that the education of 12 children who were seriously harmed was focused on religious or faith-based teaching, 3 children were disabled or had special educational needs and disabilities, 17 children were known to children's services at the time of the incident and just over half had never attended school. Actively seek to gain a full understanding of the lived experience of elective home care families and **SHARE INFORMATION**.

What are we worried about?

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Between August 2020 and October 2021, 27 rapid reviews from across England; were referred to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel that featured children who were educated at home. The 27 reviews involved 41 school aged children.

Several children experienced several types of harms including:

- 20 children experienced physical neglect.
- 16 children suffered physical abuse.
- 10 children suffered sexual abuse.
- 8 children had their access to food restricted, were malnourished and underweight.

Of the six children who tragically died:

- 3 children completed suicide.
- 1 child died due to an undiagnosed eating disorder.
- 1 child died from undiagnosed leukaemia.
- 1 child died as a result of stabbing

Evidence in reviews suggests that while there are many good reasons why parents will choose to home educate their child, when this is combined with other factors that undermine the safety and wellbeing of a child, the benefit of school as a protective factor is lost and can increase children's vulnerability. This will increase the risk of harm for some children and the ability of statutory agencies to identify and respond to help and protect them.