

The Prevalence of Home Education in England: A Feasibility Study

Vicky Hopwood, Louise O'Neill,
Gabriela Castro and Beth Hodgson
York Consulting Ltd

**Research Report
No 827**

***The Prevalence of Home Education
in England: A Feasibility Study***

***Vicky Hopwood, Louise O'Neill,
Gabriela Castro and Beth Hodgson***

York Consulting Ltd

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education and Skills.

© York Consulting Limited 2007
ISBN 978 1 84478 885 9

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS
THE PREVALENCE OF HOME EDUCATION IN ENGLAND:
A FEASIBILITY STUDY

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
1 THE STUDY: BACKGROUND CONTEXT, AIMS AND APPROACH.....	1
2 THE FEASIBILITY OF DETERMINING THE INCIDENCE OF HOME EDUCATION	7
3 THE NUMBERS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF HOME EDUCATED CHILDREN KNOWN TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES.....	12
4 REASONS FOR HOME EDUCATION, METHODS USED AND THE EFFECTS OF HOME EDUCATION	23
5 PROCESSES FOR MONITORING AND SUPPORTING HOME EDUCATION	29
6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	35

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Background

- Elective Home Education (EHE) is defined as where parents or carers decide to provide education for their child at home rather than sending them to school.
- In the UK, there are no reliable data on the number of children educated at home. Available statistics are inconsistent and there is no officially recognised source. Despite this there is anecdotal evidence that home education is on the increase. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is keen to assess the prevalence of home education in England in order to be able to account for the perceived rise in home education.
- The DfES commissioned a small-scale feasibility study that was undertaken by York Consulting Limited in 2006. The aim of the study was to assess the viability of determining the prevalence of home education in England. It was also intended that the study would yield information on the numbers and characteristics of home educated children, the reasons why parents elect to home educate, the methods they use and perceptions of achievement.

Methodology

- The study involved nine Local Authorities (LAs) intentionally selected to include a mix of LA types across England. Three LAs were chosen because they were known to have some home educated children from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. In-depth qualitative interviews were undertaken with LA Officers including those with lead responsibility for home education, those responsible for undertaking monitoring visits and administrative staff. LA policy documentation was also collected.
- In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with home educating parents and stakeholders from home education organisations. In total 18 home educating parents were interviewed either face-to-face or via the telephone. Stakeholders from six home education organisations, including two of the main UK organisations, were also consulted.

Key Findings

Is a national study feasible?

- This study concludes that it is not feasible to reliably ascertain the prevalence of home educated children through a national survey of LAs and home education organisations (as a route through which to access parents/carers). This is because despite improvements in LA records, there could be significant numbers of home educated children who are not known to an LA.

Findings - Home Educated Children Known to LAs

- The numbers of home educated children **known to LAs** varied but on the whole were very small. The total number of home educated children known to the nine LAs sampled was 1,245. This ranged from 0.09% to 0.42% of the total school population in the areas concerned.
- The extent to which LAs believed they were aware of all the home educated children in their area varied but in the main most LAs felt that there may be numbers of children who were not known to them.
- Home educated children are represented across all the years of compulsory schooling. However, transition from primary to secondary marks a key point at which the numbers increase and there are far higher proportions of children being home educated at the secondary phase of education than at primary. In the LAs sampled almost twice as many children (1.8) are being home educated at the secondary phase of education than at primary.
- The gender distribution of children receiving EHE in the LAs sampled was even. Whilst the majority of home educated children in the sample were White British, there were high proportions of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children receiving EHE in three areas. These were the three LAs intentionally selected because they were known to have high proportions of EHE Gypsy, Roma and Traveller populations. Five percent of the children receiving EHE in the sample had a statement of special educational needs (SEN) compared with 2.9% with a statement of SEN nationally¹.
- There is some evidence to suggest that the numbers of home educated children are increasing but it is not clear whether this is due to improved recording as opposed to an actual increase per se.

Reasons for Elective Home Education

- Reasons for home education vary and the decision to home educate is often due to a combination of factors that may be subject to change over time. Common reasons cited for opting to home educate include bullying, discontentment with the quality of education provided in school, or parents' religious, cultural or ideological beliefs. Risk of prosecution for non-attendance and inadequate provision for SEN are increasingly cited as reasons to home educate according to some LAs.

¹ DfES Nationally available statistics on children with a statement of special educational needs – see www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000682/index.shtml

Methods used in Elective Home Education

- A wide range of methods are being deployed in EHE from highly structured programmes to informal, less conventional approaches to education. A minority of the parents interviewed were employing tutors and the two that did were from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community.

Effects of Elective Home Education

- Perceptions of LA staff responsible for monitoring EHE, highlighted that the educational achievements of home educated children were wide-ranging. Some performed highly and others achieved lower level skills. However, LA staff were conscious of the limitations of making *judgements* since a wide range of approaches in the educational provision of EHE may be utilised that make *assessment* of 'achievement' difficult. Beneficial effects of EHE reported by parents included high levels of confidence and self-esteem, a close relationship between parent and child, self-directed learning and the development of skills in line with, or in advance of, age-related peers.

Processes for Monitoring and Supporting Elective Home Education

- The team with responsibility for EHE varied across the LAs sampled. Some were employing external consultants alongside or in place of Education Officers to conduct monitoring visits. Most LAs had written policies and/or procedures for EHE.
- Children in receipt of EHE come to the attention of LAs via a range of routes – parents, other LA departments/services, GPs and the police. Several LAs had robust procedures for dealing with de-registration from school in order to minimise the potential to 'lose' children from the system. There is some evidence that children may become 'lost' at the point of transition from primary to secondary education or when moving from one LA area to another. Formal channels/processes for information sharing across agencies were still 'ad hoc' in most areas surveyed.
- Most LAs monitored EHE on at least an annual basis although contact with parents was more frequent where there were concerns regarding the suitability of educational provision. The majority of LAs provided some support and guidance to parents as far as resources would allow. However, several LA staff considered the provision of advice to be difficult. This was because it was felt that ambiguity in the definition of a "suitable" home education made it difficult for LAs to advise parents on what was considered "suitable".
- Issuing a School Attendance Order when education was not considered suitable was very much viewed as a last resort. Concerns were again expressed in determining whether or not education was suitable due to the vagueness of the definition in DfES draft guidance to LAs.

- There was considered to be an inherent tension between the legal rights of parents in EHE and LA obligations to protect the welfare of children. This was considered to restrict LA powers to intervene and to make reasonable assessments on the effectiveness of EHE.
- A key drawback of EHE as identified from interviews with parents is the opportunity cost of home education. The loss in income and associated costs of providing education themselves should not be underestimated.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- The main conclusion of the study is that it is not feasible to reliably ascertain the prevalence of home educated children through a national survey of LAs and home education organisations (as a route to obtain data and/ or access parents).
- Notwithstanding, it is acknowledged that LA systems for tracking and maintaining contact with all children may improve with the advent of the Children’s Information Sharing Index (which will include a field on educational setting) and the development of other multi-agency information systems. Whilst the implementation of these systems may improve the viability of a national LA survey of home educated children within the short to medium term, the likely reliability, effectiveness and robustness of such systems is not yet known.
- Suggestions of alternative mechanisms to reliably identify the EHE population are considered by the authors to be outside the remit of this research.
- LAs are increasingly facing tensions in terms of balancing the legal rights of parents with their obligations around child welfare and safety under the Every Child Matters agenda. The current definition of an “efficient and suitable” education is considered too vague to enable LAs to assess the suitability of EHE and protect the welfare of children.
- **Recommendation 1:** The DfES should take steps to address the concerns raised by LAs regarding the tension between the legalities surrounding EHE and LA obligations around child welfare. Action should be taken to more effectively define what constitutes an efficient and suitable education for the purposes of LA monitoring.
- Some parents report they are home educating because of conflict with the school/LA, or because local provision is considered incongruent with parental values and the child’s needs.

- **Recommendation 2:** LAs should analyse the reasons why parents are electing to home educate and take steps to address what some parents view as inefficiencies in the school system (such as bullying, special educational needs, standards, choice of school). There is evidence that, in some cases, the latter could be resolved (and some children could potentially remain in school) through greater flexibility in the system. This could be achieved by greater use of flexi-schooling, part-time placements and more vocational provision (for example that which is being developed as part of the 14-19 agenda).
- The opportunity cost of home educating families should be acknowledged. Some LAs feel restricted in terms of the extent of advice and support they can provide to parents. The resources (mainly staffing) for EHE are often small and several LAs are employing external consultants to monitor EHE.
- **Recommendation 3:** Attempts should be made to assess the capacity of LAs to monitor children receiving EHE should numbers continue to rise and tracking systems lead to more effective identification (and thereby increased numbers). Some LAs may lack the resource to cope with increasing numbers.

1 THE STUDY: BACKGROUND CONTEXT, AIMS AND APPROACH

Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the findings from a small-scale exploratory study to assess the feasibility of establishing the incidence of elective home education (EHE). The study was undertaken by York Consulting Limited on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

Background and Context

- 1.2 Elective Home Education (EHE) is defined as where parents, or carers, decide to provide education for their child at home rather than sending them to school. Home educated children are not registered at school or other educational establishments (Pupil Referral Units etc)².
- 1.3 Responsibility for a child's education rests with their parents. Whilst education for children aged five to 16 is compulsory in England, schooling is not. It is a parent's right to educate their child at home and a child does not have to be enrolled at a school. When a parent decides to educate a child at home the parent assumes financial responsibility for the child's education and for the provision of "an efficient education suitable to the age, ability and aptitude of the child"³.
- 1.4 In outlining an "efficient and suitable" education, DfES draft guidance cites case law that describes an "efficient and suitable" education as one that "*achieves that which it set out to achieve*" and that "*primarily equips a child for life within the community of which he is a member, rather than the way of life in the country as a whole, as long as it does not foreclose the child's options in later years to adopt some other form of life if he wishes to do so*"⁴.
- 1.5 Parents may make a decision to home educate a child from the outset or may choose to withdraw them from school to home educate part way through schooling. There is no legal obligation for them to inform the Local Authority (LA) of their choice, although many parents choose to do so⁵.

²Elective Home Education: Draft Guidelines for Local Authorities.

³ Ibid. Citing Mr Justice Woolf in the case of R v Secretary of State for Education and Science, ex parte Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass School Trust (12 April 1985).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ DfES Email Correspondence.

- 1.6 LAs have a duty to ensure that adequate education is being provided in their areas and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. LAs can intervene if they believe a child is not receiving a suitable education by serving a written notice on the parent requiring them to satisfy the LA that their child is receiving suitable education other than at school. Failure to reply or to provide a satisfactory response may result in the LA issuing a School Attendance Order (SAO)⁶.
- 1.7 In order to be satisfied that the child is receiving a suitable education, LAs may ask to meet with the family and to see examples of work. There is no legal obligation for parents to allow the LA into their home or to see the child. Nor is there a legal obligation for parents to follow the National Curriculum, or to provide a set number of hours of education⁷. Alternative approaches to education may be considered as “equally valid” as those adopted in school⁸.

Background to the Research

- 1.8 In the UK, there are no reliable data on the number of children educated at home. The statistical evidence on the incidence of home education is inconsistent and there is no officially recognised source. Numbers quoted in the literature vary markedly and suggest the figure lies between 45,250 and 150,000⁹.
- 1.9 Obtaining an accurate figure on home educated children is difficult. This is because there is no legal obligation for parents to notify a LA of their intentions to home educate (and, through which, children could be counted via school rolls for example). Moreover, parents may choose to exercise their right to home educate their child from birth. This means there may be children that are home educated who are unknown to the LA.

⁶ Elective Home Education: Guidelines for Local Authorities, DfES; DfES Invitation to Tender: The prevalence of Home Education: A Feasibility Study (2006)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, para 3.14

⁹ See for example: Meighan, R. (1995) Home-based education effectiveness research and some of its implications, Educational Review, Vol 47; Rothermel, P. (2002) Home Education: Rationales, Practices and Outcomes. University of Durham; Fortune Wood, M. (2005) The Face of Home Based Education, Who, Why and How. Educational Heretics Press.

1.10 Despite the limitations of statistical sources, there is some evidence that home education is on the increase.¹⁰ The DfES is keen to assess the prevalence of home education in England in order to be able to account for the growing numbers of children not educated in schools and to predict trends¹¹. As a result, the DfES commissioned a small-scale study to assess the feasibility of determining the prevalence of home education.

1.11 It was hypothesised that assessing the prevalence of home education in England via home educators and LAs may be possible given that:

- LAs are more likely to be keeping records and holding parents responsible for ensuring that children are receiving an efficient and suitable education;
- LAs are also required to ensure that all children in their area are safe from harm and have a requirement to know which children are home educated in their area in order to discharge this duty¹².

Study Aims and Objectives

1.12 The overarching aim of the study was to assess whether there was sufficient information at the LA level and through interviews with a small number of parents and carers, to be able to undertake a national survey on the prevalence of home education¹³.

1.13 It was also anticipated that the study would yield information on:

- the numbers and demographic characteristics of compulsory school-aged children currently educated at home in a small number of LAs in England;
- the number of home educated children moving in and out of schools;
- the proportion of home educated children not known to LAs;
- the reasons parents opt for home education;
- the type of teaching resources used with home educated children;
- LA and parental perceptions of attainment and achievement.

¹⁰ Ivatts, A. (2006). The situation regarding current policy, provision and practice in elective home education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, DfES. Scottish Executive (2006). Children Educated Outwith School and Pupil Projections.

¹¹ DfES Invitation to Tender: The prevalence of Home Education: A Feasibility Study (2006)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

1.14 Recent research¹⁴ has suggested that increasing numbers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families are opting to home educate. As a result, it was requested that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families be a subsidiary focus of the study.

Methodological Approach

1.15 The research involved nine LAs in England. Although not necessarily representative, the sample of LAs was intentionally selected to include a mix of different types of LA (county, metropolitan, unitary and London borough). Three LAs were explicitly chosen because they were known to have home educated Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

1.16 In-depth qualitative interviews were undertaken with LA Officers including those with lead responsibility for home education, those responsible for undertaking monitoring visits and administrative staff. LA policy documentation was also collected.

1.17 A total of eighteen parents, who had opted to home educate their children, were interviewed either face-to-face or via the telephone. The sample of parents was opportunistic and participation was entirely voluntary. Parents were approached to take part in the study via three routes, through:

- the LAs involved in the research;
- the Traveller Education Services or Connexions;
- third party contact via one of the main home education organisations in an attempt to access parents who may not be known to the LA.

1.18 In recognition of the diversity of the home educating population, all endeavours were made to include a broad mix of parents (for example, those from different backgrounds, home educating for differing reasons, length of time home educating, age of children home educating, those known to the LA and those not).

¹⁴ Ivatts, A. (2006). The situation regarding current policy, provision and practice in elective home education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, DfES.

1.19 Desk-based research was undertaken to identify home education organisations/charities. A small number of home education organisations were contacted to participate in the study. Some of the home education organisations contacted declined to take part. Stakeholders from six home education organisations took part, two main home education organisations and four smaller home education support organisations (including some with a religious affiliation).

1.20 Semi-structured telephone interviews with home education organisations explored:

- data held which may indicate the prevalence of home education;
- perspectives on the feasibility and value of a national study;
- the feasibility of using such organisations as a route to parents, (especially those not known to the LA) for the purposes of a national survey.

Limitations of the Study

1.21 The small-scale nature of this research and non-probability sampling strategies employed limits the extent to which generalisations can be made. Caution should be exerted when interpreting the findings presented. This is particularly important given the acknowledged extreme diversity of the home educating population¹⁵.

Notes on Terminology

1.22 It is acknowledged that the term ‘education’ (particularly within the context of home education) may refer to a wide range of pedagogical philosophies. Definitions of and perspectives on what constitutes ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ ‘education’ and ‘learning’ may differ according to affiliation and professional experience (e.g. social theories of learning versus ‘traditional’ classroom-based approaches to schooling).

1.23 It is also recognised that definitions of what constitutes ‘suitability’ and ‘adequacy’ in education are based on culturally constructed concepts.

1.24 In reading this report it should be acknowledged that the home education population is a heterogeneous one.

¹⁵ Petrie, A. J., Windrass, G., Thomas, A. (1999). The Prevalence of Home Education in England: A Feasibility Study, DfEE.

1.25 The term ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ is used throughout this report to refer collectively to ‘traveller’ communities involved in the research. The limitations of this as a generic shorthand to describe a variety of diverse cultural and ethnic groups is similarly acknowledged¹⁶.

Report Structure

1.26 The report comprises two main elements. It begins by outlining the potential of establishing the prevalence of home education in England via a national study (**section two**). In the remaining sections, the report presents the findings from the evidence collected in the course of the study:

- **section three** provides data on the numbers and characteristics of home educated children known to the LAs sampled;
- **section four** presents the reasons for home education, together with methods of education used and perceptions of achievements made;
- **section five** describes LA processes for monitoring and assessing home education. Issues and challenges facing LAs and parents are also discussed;
- conclusions and recommendations are outlined in **section six**.

¹⁶ Ivatts, A. (2006). The situation regarding current policy, provision and practice in elective home education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, DfES.

2 THE FEASIBILITY OF DETERMINING THE INCIDENCE OF HOME EDUCATION

- 2.1 In this section, the feasibility of determining the prevalence of home education via a national survey is considered. The findings are based on the experience of conducting small-scale research with the LAs, home education organisations and parents involved in this study.
- 2.2 From the start of the study it was recognised that there may well be proportions of the home educating population that were **not known** to LAs. This is because some children may have been in receipt of EHE from an early age and therefore never registered at school and because there is no legal obligation for parents to inform the LA if they choose to withdraw their child from school. However, with the integration of Children's Services and moves to improve multi-agency information sharing in the context of Every Child Matters (ECM), it was felt that LA data and information may be more reliable than was the case historically.
- 2.3 Recognising the potential limitations of LA data on home educated children, the study also sought to contact some of the home education organisations with a view to exploring the data held and feasibility of use.

Data Available from LAs

- 2.4 All of the nine LAs sampled were able to provide a figure on the number of home educated children they were aware of. Most were also able to provide details on the characteristics of home educated children such as:
- **number of families** home educating for which figures were available in eight out of the nine LAs;
 - number of children in receipt of EHE by **school year group** for which figures were available in seven of the nine LAs;
 - number of children in receipt of EHE by **gender** for which figures were available in eight out of the nine LAs;
 - number of children in receipt of EHE by **ethnicity** for which figures were available in seven of the nine LAs sampled;
 - number of EHE children with a **statement of special education need (SEN)** for which figures were available in eight out of the nine LAs sampled.

- 2.5 The level of information on the characteristics of children receiving EHE varied across the LAs sampled. Whilst some kept minimal data, others recorded detailed information. In two LAs the information recorded electronically included factors such as the date the child last attended school, whether an external tutor was used in EHE, whether they were 'looked after' and the reason for the decision to home educate.
- 2.6 Whilst most LAs knew the reasons why parents had elected to home educate, few quantified and recorded them in a systematic way.
- 2.7 None of the LAs in the sample formally tracked and recorded electronically the numbers of home educated children moving in and out of schools, though some were aware of children who had moved back into school.
- 2.8 Most LAs kept additional information on home educated children in individual pupil files. Thus whilst information may be available it is not necessarily easily accessible for the purposes of a national study/survey.
- 2.9 All LAs sampled were using databases and/or spreadsheets to monitor home educated children, although the length of time these had been in operation varied. In several cases, LA databases on EHE were linked to wider educational management systems although the extent to which these were used for the purposes of information sharing and cross service analysis was often considered 'embryonic' or 'ad hoc'.

Issues Affecting the Reliability of Figures Recorded

2.10 Consultations with LAs revealed a range of factors that have a bearing on the way figures are reported that would need to be taken into account in a national study. These include:

- **the extent of multi-agency collaboration** – which may affect the extent to which LA figures may be considered reliable;
- **the definition and treatment of EHE** – the parameters of what might be classed as home education vary in some areas. For instance in one of the LAs visited the policy is to promote flexi-schooling for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. This may include an element of work experience with a parent that might well be classed as home education in other areas. Similarly, there is some limited evidence to suggest ambiguity in whether or not a child should be included on an education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) list or an EHE list where there is a dispute about the child's allocated school placement;
- **willingness of parents to provide information** – parents are not obliged to supply information which means some of the data held by LAs, for example on ethnicity, may be partial;
- **treatment of multiple reasons for EHE** – the way in which the reasons for EHE are recorded may vary. Some LAs only count the main reason whereas others record multiple reasons.

Children Receiving EHE Not Known to the LA

2.11 The extent to which LAs believed they were aware of all the home educated children in their area varied but in the main most LAs felt that there may be numbers of children who were not known to them.

2.12 Some of the smaller LAs had greater confidence in the reliability of their figures because of information sharing protocols and established partnerships with other agencies.

2.13 On the whole, the evidence suggests that LA data is still not a reliable means to establish the prevalence of home education.

Data Available from Home Education Organisations

- 2.14 The data available from home education organisations were limited. In the main, home education organisations consulted were able to provide details on the size of their membership rather than the number of home educating families or children. The size of membership was not considered to be an accurate reflection of the proportions home educating. This is because some parents may join the organisation if they are considering EHE but may subsequently opt not to home educate, and because others may let their membership lapse even though they continue to home educate. In addition, membership may include families with children who are not of compulsory school age. As such it is not possible to obtain reliable figures on home education based on data held by the home education organisations consulted.
- 2.15 Whilst five of the six organisations said they may be willing to be involved in a national survey, most were sceptical about the purposes of such a study and had strong reservations about whether this would reveal anything not already known. A national study would need to make clear from the outset the purpose and parameters of the study in order for organisations to be able to make an informed decision regarding participation. In particular, the benefits for home educating parents would need to be explicit.

Involving Parents Providing EHE

- 2.16 It proved difficult to obtain access to home educating parents. The response from home educating parents to this research was low. Of the eighteen parents interviewed:
- half (9) were accessed via the LA;
 - four were accessed via Traveller Education Services or Connexions;
 - five came forward in response to an email distributed by one of the main home education organisations.
- 2.17 The evidence suggests that some LAs may be reluctant to contact all parents providing EHE for the purposes of research for fear of destabilising what might already be tenuous relationships with some families. There may therefore be an element of bias in terms of the parents approached by LAs for the purposes of research.

- 2.18 The response from parents informed of the research by a home education organisation was extremely poor. This suggests that home education organisations as a route to parents, including those not known to the LA is not viable. Parents were requested to contact the researchers with a view to taking part in a telephone interview. However, there is some evidence that some parents may be more amenable to an email survey. An online anonymous survey may therefore be a more feasible approach of obtaining feedback from parents, although there is a likely to be bias in the response.
- 2.19 The reluctance of parents and some home education organisations to take part in this study is understandable given their philosophical standpoint on education. Feedback from some of the parents and home education organisations suggests there is some concern that initiatives such as the Children's Information Sharing Index may lead to a gradual deterioration of their legal rights to home educate.

Is a National Study Feasible?

- 2.20 At the present time it is not feasible to reliably ascertain the prevalence of home education through a national survey of LAs and home education organisations. This may change in the short to medium term with the establishment of improved/greater information sharing systems as a result of the integration of Children's Services and the planned introduction of the Children's Information Sharing Index. The latter will contain a field on "educational setting". However, at present it is not possible to determine the likely effectiveness of such systems as a route to identifying the EHE population.
- 2.21 What follows in the remainder of the report therefore, is an overview on the numbers and characteristics of children receiving EHE that are **known to the LAs** sampled.
- 2.22 Where feedback is given from home educating parents, this is based on a small sample. No claims can be made regarding representation, especially in the light of the heterogeneity of the home educating population.

3 THE NUMBERS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF HOME EDUCATED CHILDREN KNOWN TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- 3.1 This section presents the numbers and characteristics of home educated children known to the LAs involved in the study. Factors affecting the accuracy of the figures reported by LAs are also explored.

The Number of Home Educated Children Known to LAs

Number of Children Known to LAs

- 3.2 The number of home educated children known to the LAs varied markedly across the sample but on the whole was very small (see **Table 3.1**).
- 3.3 The total number of home educated children known to the LAs sampled was 1,245 children. Across the LAs, the number of children in receipt of EHE ranged from 43 to 279 and from 0.09% to 0.42% of the total school population. This equates to between 1 in 237 and 1 in 1,133 children being educated at home.
- 3.4 It is of note that smaller metropolitan and unitary LAs in the sample recorded a higher percentage of home educated children. This may suggest a correlation between the size and type of the LA and the reliability of the figures recorded. It may be easier for these LAs to track and be aware of their home educated children.
- 3.5 It is also of note that larger or more urban LAs in the sample tended to record a lower percentage of home educated children.

Table 3.1: Number and Proportion of Children Educated at Home in LAs Sampled				
Local Authority	Characteristics	No of Children EHE	Prop of Children EHE as % of whole school population	Ratio (1 in x)
LA 1	London Borough Urban	43	0.09%	1133
LA 2	London Borough Urban	61	0.13%	768
LA 3	Unitary Urban	69	0.42%	237
LA 4	Metropolitan Urban	121	0.13%	762
LA 5	County Rural	127	0.15%	656
LA 6	County Rural	130	0.14%	723
LA 7	Metropolitan Urban	200	0.40%	251
LA 8	County Rural	215	0.25%	401
LA 9	County Rural	279	0.25%	402
TOTAL		1245	0.20%	506

Number of Families Known to LAs

- 3.6 Eight of the nine LAs sampled provided figures on the number of home educating families (see **Table 3.2**). The data show that across the 1,030 children for whom there are figures, there are 734 families. This represents an average of 1.4 home educated children per family.
- 3.7 The number of home educated children per family in most LAs was very close to the average figure, however in one LA, the figure was 2.39. Without more detailed information on the total number of children per family, no conclusions can be drawn.

Local Authority	No. of Children EHE	No. of Families EHE	Average no. of Children EHE per family
LA 1	43	18	2.39
LA 2	61	42	1.45
LA 3	69	58	1.19
LA 4	121	95	1.27
LA 5	127	88	1.44
LA 6	130	93	1.40
LA 7	200	140	1.43
LA 9	279	200	1.40
LA 8 = no data	-	-	-
TOTAL	1030	734	1.40

Demographic Characteristics

3.8 Most of the LAs in the sample were able to provide some information about the characteristics of the home educated children known to them.

Age/Year Group

3.9 Data on the number of home educated children by year group was available in seven of the nine LAs sampled, however, in some of these LAs data was missing for some individual children.

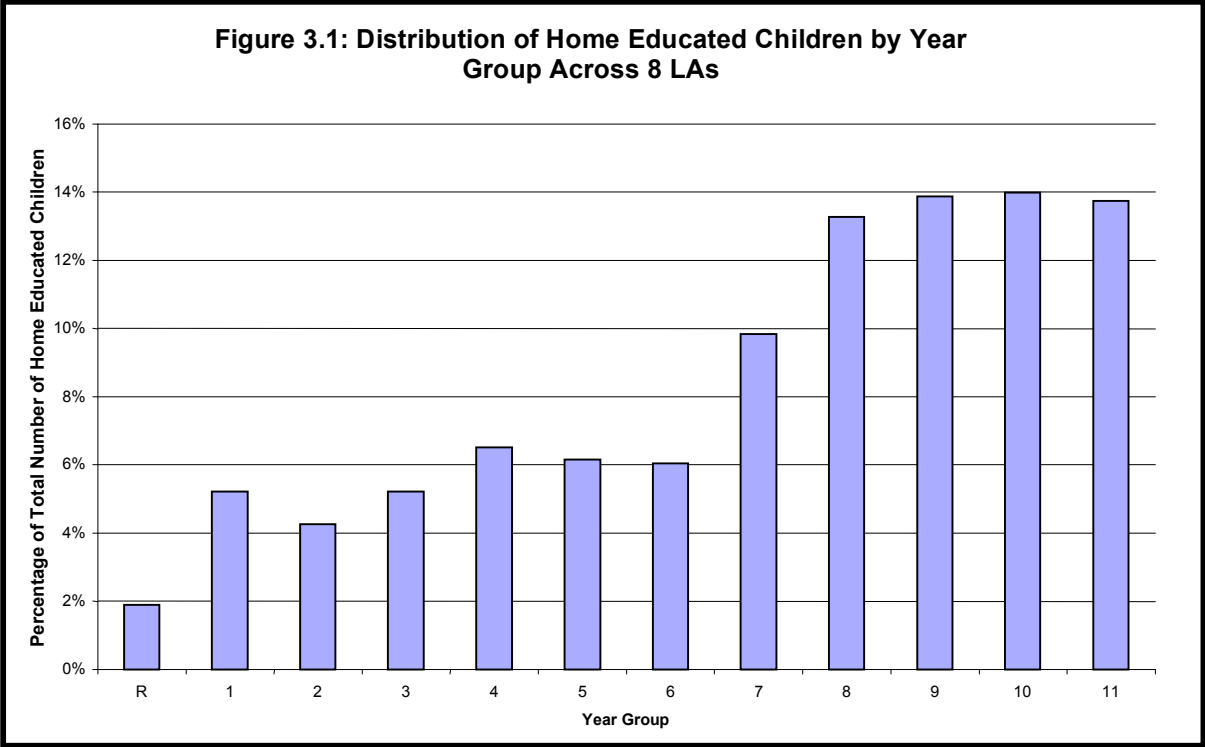
3.10 The available data show that there is a spread of home educated children across the school year groups from reception to the end of compulsory schooling at Year 11 (see **Table 3.3**).

3.11 Transition from primary to secondary marks a key point at which the numbers of home educated children increase and far higher proportions of children are home educated at the secondary phase of education than at the primary phase (see **Figure 3.1 and Tables 3.3 and 3.4**).

**Table 3.3:
Numbers of Children EHE in LAs Sampled by School Year Group**

Local Authority	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	TOTAL
LA 1	1	2	4	4	3	7	2	3	5	3	12	7	53
LA 2	1	5	6	3	2	1	5	4	10	6	6	12	61
LA 3	1	4	1	1	1	2	2	7	19	10	14	7	69
LA 4	3	6	2	3	11	10	6	14	14	21	10	19	119
LA 6	5	10	5	9	14	9	15	9	13	19	14	5	127
LA 7	3	7	4	5	4	7	15	27	30	34	33	31	200
LA 8	2	10	14	19	20	16	6	19	21	24	29	35	215
LA 5 = no data	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
LA 9 = no data	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	16	44	36	44	55	52	51	83	112	117	118	116	844

3.12 There is a noticeable increase in the number of children educated at home between Year Groups 6 and 7, from six percent in Year 6 to almost ten percent in Year 7 – i.e. the transition point from primary to secondary education (see **Figure 3.1**).



3.13 Overall, 65% of the children in receipt of EHE known to the LAs sampled were of secondary age compared to 35% who were of primary age. This represents almost twice as many children (1.8) being home educated at the secondary phase of education than primary. Whilst six out of seven LAs recorded an increase in the number of home educated children at the secondary phase of education, one shire county did not (see **Table 3.4**).

Table 3.4: Breakdown of Children EHE in LAs Sampled by Phase of Education				
Local Authority	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
LA 1	23	30	43%	57%
LA 2	23	38	38%	62%
LA 3	12	57	17%	83%
LA 4	41	78	34%	66%
LA 6	67	60	53%	47%
LA 7	45	155	23%	78%
LA 8	87	128	40%	60%
LA 5 = no data	-	-	-	-
LA 9 = no data	-	-	-	-
Total / Average	298	546	35%	65%

3.14 In one of the LAs sampled, there is a marked increase in the number of home educated children at Year 8, age 12-13 (see **Table 3.3**, LA 3). This LA also has a particularly high proportion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children who are home educated.

Gender

3.15 Eight out of nine LAs sampled were able to provide data on the gender of home educated children (see **Table 3.5**).

3.16 Overall, there is an even gender distribution. However, two out of eight LAs were slightly biased towards more boys being home educated than girls and these LAs were London authorities. One LA recorded more girls being home educated than boys and this LA also had very high proportions of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

**Table 3.5:
Gender Distribution of Children EHE in LAs Sampled**

Local Authority	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
LA 1	26	17	60%	40%
LA 2	34	27	56%	44%
LA 3	26	43	38%	62%
LA 4	61	60	50%	50%
LA 6	65	64	50%	50%
LA 7	104	96	52%	48%
LA 8	105	110	49%	51%
LA 9	60	67	47%	53%
LA 5 = no data	-	-	-	-
Total	481	484	50%	50%

Ethnicity

- 3.17 Details of the ethnic background of the home educated children known to the LA were provided in detail by seven out of the nine LAs sampled¹⁷ (see **Tables 3.6 and 3.7**).
- 3.18 The data show that the majority of home educated children in the LAs sampled are White British.
- 3.19 In three LAs, there are high numbers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. These three LAs were purposefully selected because they had known populations of home educated Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities (see **Table 3.6**).

¹⁷ There are some gaps in the data as some parents elected not to provide detail on ethnicity to the LA.

**Table 3.6:
Ethnic Distribution of Children EHE in LAs Sampled¹⁸**

Local Authority	Ethnicity											
	White British	Chinese	Pakistani	Black Caribbean	Any Other Black	Other Mixed Bckgrd	White and Asian	Mixed White and Black Caribbean	Indian	Gypsy Roma and Traveller	White Other	Not obtained/Unknown
LA 1	11			4	3	4	4	1	2	5	1	8
LA 2	18			3	1	2	1	1		2	3	30
LA 3	21									48		
LA 4	67		6							3		19
LA 6	123	2								5		
LA 7	136								1	63		
LA 8	106				2	3			1	49	24	30
LA 5 = data only recorded on G,R & T										6		
LA 9 = estimated data				30						20		
TOTAL	482	2	6	37	6	9	5	2	4	201	28	87

¹⁸ Limited data on ethnicity was available in LAs 5 and 9.

3.20 In the three LAs where there were higher than average numbers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children home educated, there were quite large differences in the levels of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller population:

- in LA 3, more than 2 in 3 of the children home educated were from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities;
- in LA 7, 1 in 3 of the children home educated were from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities;
- in LA 8, 1 in 4 of the children home educated were from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities (see **Table 3.7**).

**Table 3.7:
Proportion of Children EHE from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller
Background in the LAs Sampled**

Local Authority	Number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller	Total	%
LA 2	2	61	3%
LA 4	3	121	2%
LA 1	5	43	12%
LA 6	5	130	4%
LA 5	6	127	5%
LA 9	20	279	7%
LA 3	48	69	70%
LA 8	49	215	23%
LA 7	63	200	32%
Total	201	1245	16%¹⁹

Statement of SEN

3.21 Eight of the nine LAs sampled were able to provide figures on the proportions of home educated children with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) (see **Table 3.8**).

3.22 The data show that five percent of the children educated at home had a statement of SEN. This compares to 2.9% of children with a statement of SEN nationally²⁰.

¹⁹ The percentage is calculated using the number of home educated children.

²⁰ DfES statistics of children with a statement of special educational needs – see www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000682/index.shtml

**Table 3.8:
Proportion of Children EHE with a Statement of Special Educational
Need in the LAs Sampled**

Local Authority	No Statemented (SEN)	TOTAL	% Statemented (SEN) as a proportion
LA 2	1	61	2%
LA 3	2	69	3%
LA 1	4	43	9%
LA 6	5	130	4%
LA 7	7	200	4%
LA 5	7	127	6%
LA 4	8	121	7%
LA 9	21	279	8%
LA 8 = no data	-	-	-
Total / Average	55	1030	5%

3.23 However, these figures should not be taken to reflect the numbers of home educated children with special educational needs (SEN) since there are home educated children considered as having SEN who are not in receipt of a statement, but for whom figures cannot be accurately reported.

Is Home Education Increasing?

3.24 There are 1,245 children in receipt of EHE known to the LAs sampled. Based on the total number of children in school in England, it is possible to extrapolate crudely that the number of home educated children known to LAs could be around 16,000. Comparing the figure of 16,000 to similar estimates given in 1999²¹ suggests that the number of home educated children known to LAs may have increased almost three-fold.

²¹ Petrie, A. J., Windrass, G., Thomas, A. (1999). The Prevalence of Home Education in England: A Feasibility Study, DfEE.

3.25 The suggestion of an increase in EHE is supported by feedback from stakeholders interviewed during the study:

- six out of eight LAs sampled for whom historic figures were available reported an increase in EHE;
- four of the six home education organisations consulted reported an increase in their membership and/or a rise in the numbers of queries received;
- some of the parents/carers interviewed perceived an increase in the numbers attending local support groups/networks.

3.26 However, whether or not there is a substantive increase in home education is not known. This is because it could be that reported increases reflect better recording mechanisms. There is also evidence of improved information sharing and multi-agency collaboration in some LAs that could be producing more reliable figures rather than an actual increase in the figures per se.

4 REASONS FOR HOME EDUCATION, METHODS USED AND THE EFFECTS OF HOME EDUCATION

4.1 The reasons for home education are presented in this section, together with methods of education used and perceptions of effects/achievements made.

Reasons for Home Education

4.2 The evidence suggests that parents elect to home educate for a variety and combination of reasons. The reasons for home educating may be subject to change over time and are often interlinked.

4.3 The most common reasons²² for home educating according to stakeholders consulted as part of this study (eighteen parents, nine LAs and six home education organisations) included:

- **dissatisfaction with school discipline and safety** – this included factors such as:
 - **bullying** – experience of bullying prompted two of the parents interviewed to home educate. Bullying was also cited as key reason by LAs and home education organisations;
 - **school phobia** – one child was home educated because of a strong aversion to school which had a negative effect on the child's well-being;
 - **dissatisfaction with standards of behaviour in school** – several parents interviewed, as well as LAs and home education organisations, considered that anti-social behaviour and poor levels of conduct prompted decisions to home educate;
- **dissatisfaction with the quality of education and/or the curriculum offered** – some of the parents interviewed felt that standards of education had declined. This, coupled with a view that the current education system is overly bureaucratic, inflexible and assessment driven, prompted some parents to home educate.

²² The reasons given are not listed in order of importance since these were not quantified and reasons expressed were often interlinked.

- **religious, cultural and/ or ideological beliefs** – this included:
 - **cultural beliefs** – this was highlighted as a key reason why parents from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities elect to home educate. The reasons Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents cite for home educating their children included fear of racist bullying, differences in lifestyle/educational philosophy, cultural erosion, curriculum irrelevance, concern over how sex education is taught;
 - **religion of the family** e.g. Muslim, Christian – several parents cited religious values as a major reason for home educating;
 - **philosophical or political viewpoint** – several parents interviewed had a strong ideological opposition to the school system. Some, for instance, disagreed with the compulsory starting age for school, believing that children need longer with their parents and more one-to-one attention. Others were strongly opposed to traditional forms of education and teaching believing in more informal forms of learning (such as autonomous learning, and progressive learning²³). Some parents expressed concern regarding the detrimental effect of the government's policies for working families and extended schools on the time children spend with their parents.
- **special educational needs** – needs which parents considered were not being adequately met in school. These included:
 - dyslexia;
 - autism;
 - gifted and talented.

Of the small number of parents interviewed, there was no apparent link between a child being removed from school (because of parental concerns that the child's special educational needs were not being met) and the *type* of educational placement (special or mainstream) that the child was withdrawn from.

²³ See for example Gabb, S. (2004). Home Schooling: A British Perspective University of Buckingham; Fortune-Wood, J. (2000). Without Boundaries, Autonomous Learning. Educational Heretics Press.

- **choice of secondary school** – some parents had elected to home educate because they did not feel the secondary school their child had been allocated to attend was suitable. This finding was supported by more general feedback from home education organisations;
- **health reasons** – in one case a decision was made to home educate a child who had missed substantial periods of schooling due to chronic ill-health. It was felt that by virtue of being able to provide one-to-one tuition, the child would better be able to catch up with peers by being educated at home.

4.4 An additional reason for opting to home educate cited by LAs was **risk of exclusion or prosecution**.

4.5 Risk of prosecution for non-attendance and SEN as reasons for electing to home educate were considered to be on the increase by several of the LAs sampled.

Decisions to Home Educate: Preferred Choice or ‘Enforced’ Option?

4.6 For some parents interviewed, home education is the first and only alternative. For others, the decision to home educate was seen as a last resort and the only remaining option when conflict with the school or LA could not be resolved. In such cases, parents cited that if the child’s needs had been met (for example, if bullying had been addressed, the child’s special education needs catered for, or concerns regarding the child’s welfare in school listened to and acted upon) the child would not have been withdrawn from school.

4.7 In the case of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, there is some evidence that policies for flexi-schooling (where the child is registered at school but attends only part time) and more flexible, vocational pathways at age 14-19 (as a result of the developing 14-19 agenda) may encourage some parents to keep their children, particularly boys, in school.

4.8 Some of the parents interviewed considered that their child *may* enter school or college at some point in the future. Often this was something mooted in the context of children obtaining formal qualifications such as GCSEs or A-Levels at some point in the future.

Methods of Educating Children at Home

- 4.9 Feedback from LA staff undertaking monitoring visits and parents themselves suggests that a wide range of methods to educate children receiving EHE are used.
- 4.10 Methods of education vary from highly structured and 'formal' programmes to highly 'informal', less 'conventional' approaches to learning.
- 4.11 At one end of the spectrum, some parents are employing 'formal' structured routines of learning. Several of these are following the National Curriculum and some are using the 'Learnpremium' online teaching and learning resource website provided by the *Guardian* newspaper. Others are using American-based, on-line materials or religious programmes of learning. Such 'formal' approaches may make use of text books, focus on formalised subjects/sessions and employ fixed hours of learning.
- 4.12 At the other end of the spectrum, some parents may espouse more 'informal' practices that are responsive to the child's developing interests. Parents allow their child to learn and acquire an education through everyday living experiences. Children may be encouraged to pursue their own interests (music, drama, 'space') rather than being directed to 'subjects' by adult 'educators'. Learning, in this sense, is seen as something that happens continually rather than something that occurs within the confines of a structured 'school' day.
- 4.13 In many cases, parents are using a mixture of formal and informal methods. Many parents are accessing a variety of materials and resources available via the internet. Parents are also educating children in a range of environments. Trips out to museums for example are considered an important element of education.
- 4.14 A minority of parents consulted (5) have used or are using educational tutors. Of the two families currently employing a tutor, both are of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller origin.

Effects of Home Education: Perspectives on Achievement and Attainment

- 4.15 Although no attempt was made in the course of this study to define and measure the achievement and attainment of home educated children, *perceptions* on the effects and achievements of home educated children were obtained from the parents and LA staff interviewed.
- 4.16 There have been few systematic studies on the achievement and attainment of home educated children. A study of home educated primary children conducted in 2002²⁴ found that 64% of home educated reception-aged children scored over 75% on the Performance Indicators of Primary Schools (PIPS) baseline assessment, compared to 5.1% of children nationally. Alternatively, a small-scale recent study²⁵ concerning home educated Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children reported real anxiety regarding the adequacy of the education provided for these children. This was because of concerns regarding parents' capability in the areas of literacy and numeracy.
- 4.17 Perceptions of LA staff responsible for monitoring home educated children interviewed as part of this study, suggest that the achievements of home educated children vary and as such, "reflect the position of an average school." Some children reportedly perform highly, whereas others have lower level skills.
- 4.18 However, LA staff were conscious of the limitations of making *judgements* since a wide range of approaches in the educational provision of EHE may be utilised that make *assessment* of 'achievement' difficult.
- 4.19 Several of the parents and home education organisations consulted highlighted the difficulties of assessing the effects of home education because *achievement* can be defined in different ways and is not simply about school-based measures of assessment (such as SATs and formal qualifications). The need to acknowledge that children learn in different ways and at different rates was highlighted.

²⁴ Rothermel, P. (2002). Home-Education: Rationales, Practices and Outcomes, Durham University – see <http://www.dur.ac.uk/p.j.rothermel/Researchpaper/BERAworkingpaper.htm>

²⁵ Ivatts, A. (2006). The situation regarding current policy, provision and practice in elective home education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, DfES.

4.20 The effects of home education reported by parents interviewed included:

- **personal benefits** such as:
 - high levels of confidence and self-esteem;
 - happier children;
 - high standards of behaviour;
 - ability to mix with children and adults;
- **family benefits** such as:
 - a close relationship between parent and child;
- **benefits for lifelong learning**, for example:
 - a self-directed approach to learning;
 - motivation to learn;
- **developments in line with age-related peers**:
 - some parents reported their children to be successfully following the curriculum at the level of, or in advance of, their age-related peers.

4.21 Some parents who had withdrawn their children from school to home educate because of concerns over their welfare, reported mental health benefits as well as 'educational' progress such as a reduction in self-harm and improved self-confidence.

5 PROCESSES FOR MONITORING AND SUPPORTING HOME EDUCATION

- 5.1 In this section LA processes for monitoring and assessing home education are explored. Issues and challenges facing LAs and parents are also discussed.

Responsibility for EHE

- 5.2 The departmental location of EHE varied in the LAs sampled. In most LAs (5) EHE was positioned within Education and Welfare services. In two LAs, EHE was part of school improvement and, in the remaining two LAs EHE was the responsibility of the behaviour support team. In many LAs, the location of EHE had been the subject of debate during recent moves to restructure services for children and young people. Several managers had retained responsibility for EHE as part of an historic role or had inherited it by default during restructuring. For most of those managing EHE, responsibility was a small part of wider duties.
- 5.3 Several of the LAs in the sample were employing external consultants, typically with a background in inspection or head teacher experience, to monitor EHE on behalf of the authority. In other LAs, monitoring visits were undertaken by existing Education Officers. In one LA, monitoring is undertaken by a mixture of in-house and external staff.
- 5.4 Most of the LAs sampled had a written policy on EHE and had developed guidance documentation for staff undertaking monitoring visits as well as support information for parents.

How Children Come to the Notice of the LA

- 5.5 Children receiving EHE come to the attention of the LA via a range of different routes and the procedures for dealing with notification of EHE varied across the LAs sampled. LAs may receive notification of a parent's intention to home educate via the parent themselves, staff from other LA departments (such as Education Welfare staff) or via other agencies (such as Traveller Education Services, GPs, health visitors and the police). Some LAs were informed that a child in receipt of EHE had moved into their area by another LA.

- 5.6 Some LAs in the sample had developed detailed procedures for dealing with school de-registrations in order to ensure that children were not 'lost' from the system. For example, upon receiving a return (documenting the child's name and address) from the school, a LA may place the child on the 'education otherwise than at school' (EOTAS) list, or an 'off roll' register, or on an EHE database, through which the destinations of de-registered children can be monitored.
- 5.7 There is some limited evidence that children may become 'lost' from the system at the point of transition if the child is not allocated the preferred choice of secondary school. Children in receipt of EHE may also become 'lost' should they move between LAs since there is no obligation to inform the LA they have transferred area.
- 5.8 Formal channels/ processes for information sharing across agencies were still 'ad hoc' in most areas.

Recording and Monitoring Systems

- 5.9 All LAs sampled were using databases and/or spreadsheets to monitor home educated children. However, the level of data recorded and analysed electronically varied. Most LAs kept additional information in individual pupil files. In several LAs, electronic information on EHE was linked to wider LA databases/systems such as an education management system.
- 5.10 Most of the LAs sampled were in the process of implementing or consolidating their systems for identifying and maintaining contact with children missing, or at risk of going missing from education, for example via a database of children not currently in education. In several cases multi-agency systems to identify and track children were still in development. The potential impact of these information sharing systems (CME databases, Education Management system) and the integration of Children's Services on the identification of children in receipt of home education cannot yet be ascertained²⁶.

²⁶ It should be stressed that the authors are **not in any way wishing to imply that children in receipt of EHE are by de facto 'missing' education**. What is being questioned here is whether there is an increased likelihood that LAs will have greater awareness of home educated children once their processes for identifying and maintaining contact with *all* children as part of "children missing from education" procedures. As outlined in DfES draft guidance (DfES 2004), children missing from education are defined as "children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, or being educated otherwise... and who have been out of any educational provision for a substantial period of time..."

Monitoring Home Education

- 5.11 In accordance with DfES recommendations²⁷, the majority of LAs sampled are contacting home educating parents on at least an annual basis. Contact was on a bi-annual basis in one LA and every two years in another. In most LAs contact was more frequent where there were concerns about the suitability of education provided.
- 5.12 In most LAs 'contact' with parents constituted a home visit or meeting at a mutually agreed venue²⁸. In one LA 'contact' with LAs was on paper only in the first instance. This was in recognition of the fact that parents are not legally obliged to give the LA access to their home. Where there were concerns about the child, a referral would be made to Education Welfare Services.
- 5.13 A variety of information and evidence was collected by staff monitoring EHE to make an assessment of the suitability of the education provided. All staff interviewed were sensitive to the fact that approaches to education may vary.
- 5.14 Evidence gathered included observation, collecting samples of work, discussions with parents and in some cases children, and review of resources/materials used. Some staff sought to obtain a general impression of the education provided. Others were more curriculum-orientated seeking information relating to a range of subject areas, although it was recognised that there is no obligation to follow a traditional curriculum. In most cases visits to parents were followed by a written report.
- 5.15 Many of the LAs interviewed highlighted that they had struggled to access a minority of children/parents.

Guidance and Support

- 5.16 Most LAs provided some level of guidance to parents as far as resources would allow. This included verbal information, access to resources (library/ education centres), direction to websites (such as the Standards website), locally produced written information, lists of Criminal Record Bureau checked tutors. LA staff would also direct parents to other services such as Connexions or home education organisations.

²⁷ Elective Home Education: Draft Guidelines for Local Authorities, DfES

²⁸ All LAs interviewed were sensitive to the legal right of parents to decline access to their home.

5.17 Several LA staff felt restricted in the level of guidance they could provide. This is because:

- they felt too constrained by the legalities surrounding EHE for the provision of advice to be considered part of their remit. Staff felt that ambiguity in the definition of ‘suitability’ rendered them powerless to advise parents on what may help improve the ‘suitability’ of their provision;
- of resource constraints given that parents assume financial responsibility for the child’s education once they elect to home educate.

Dealing with ‘Unsuitable’ Provision

5.18 Where there are concerns regarding the efficiency and suitability of the education provision, LA staff may endeavour to visit the family on more frequent basis (for example every three months) to ascertain whether there is any improvement in what is being provided. Depending on the location of responsibility for EHE, referrals may be made to Education Welfare Services. Issuing a School Attendance Order (SAO) was very much seen as a last resort. Just three of the LAs in the sample had issued a SAO. Several LA staff interviewed expressed concerns about dealing with unsuitable provision and issuing SAOs because of what was considered as “vagueness” in the law.

Links with Home Education Organisations

5.19 The extent of links with home education organisations varied across the LAs sampled. Some LAs merely signposted parents to home education organisations, others had a strong association with their local HE networks.

5.20 Of the eighteen parents interviewed, nine had used the services of a home education organisation, typically for advice on legal matters. Parents often contacted home education organisations as a route to get in touch with other home educating families.

LAs Issues and Tensions

- 5.21 All LAs expressed concern in determining what constitutes “an efficient and suitable” education. There is considered to be a lack of clarity in the definition provided in current guidance²⁹ which makes it difficult for LAs to make an assessment and thereby effectively fulfil their obligations to protect the educational interests of children.
- 5.22 There was also considered to be an inherent tension between the legal rights of home educating parents and LA obligations to protect the welfare of children under Every Child Matters. As parents are not legally obliged to notify the LA of their intention to home educate, LAs feel restricted in the extent to which they can track and *monitor* children who may be in receipt of EHE - simply because they do not know about them. LAs also expressed concern that parental rights to refuse home visits “or otherwise see”³⁰ home educated children constrained their ability to assess the suitability of education provided in the home. (However, as a parent interviewed highlighted, a parent’s right to decline a home visit and to a private family life is protected by Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights).
- 5.23 At present, there is felt to be too much ambiguity in the law and inbuilt conflict for LAs balancing the rights of parents with their duties to safeguard the welfare of children.
- 5.24 These findings are not new and have been reported in two recent research reports on home education³¹.

Home Educator Issues and Tensions

- 5.25 Interviews with home educating parents highlighted that a key drawback of educating children at home is the high opportunity cost. Some of the parents interviewed had sacrificed income to stay at home and educate their child. One such parent, a single parent of a child with special educational needs, felt forced to give up his job and survive on benefits because conflict with the LA regarding the welfare of his child in school could not be resolved. He considered home education as the only option.

²⁹ Elective Home Education: Draft Guidelines for Local Authorities, DfES

³⁰ Ibid, para 2.9.

³¹ Kendall, S. and Atkinson, M. (2006). Some Perspectives on Home Education NFER; Ivatts, A. (2006). The situation regarding current policy, provision and practice in elective home education for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, DfES.

5.26 Parents also referred to the costs of resources and materials. One parent highlighted that reading schemes for young children may not be available in public libraries. Others highlighted the costs of public examinations and the difficulties of identifying an appropriate centre where their child could sit examinations such as GCSEs.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The **main conclusion** of the study is that it is not feasible to ascertain with any reliability the prevalence of home educated children. The incidence cannot be ascertained accurately through a national survey of LAs and home education organisations (as a route through which to access parents).
- 6.2 Notwithstanding this, it is acknowledged that LA systems for tracking and maintaining contact with all children may improve with the advent of the Children’s Information Sharing Index and development of linked systems to identify “children missing from education”³². Whilst the implementation of these systems may improve the viability of a national LA survey of home educated children within the short to medium term, the likely reliability, effectiveness and robustness of such systems is not yet known.
- 6.3 Suggestions of alternative mechanisms to reliably identify the EHE population are considered by the authors to be outside the remit of this research.
- 6.4 LAs are increasingly facing tensions in terms of balancing the legal rights of parents with their obligations around child welfare and safety under the Every Child Matters agenda. The current definition of an “efficient and suitable” education is considered too vague to enable LAs to adequately affect their duties to monitor EHE and protect the welfare of children.
- 6.5 **Recommendation 1:** The DfES should take steps to address the concerns raised by LAs regarding the tension between the legalities surrounding EHE and LA obligations around child welfare. Action should be taken to more effectively define what constitutes an efficient and suitable education for the purposes of LA monitoring.
- 6.6 Some parents are home educating because of conflict with the school/LA, or because local provision is considered incongruent with parental values (e.g. religious, cultural, value systems e.g. for standards of behaviour) and the child’s needs.

³² This is not to imply that children in receipt of home education are missing education, just that LAs awareness of children receiving EHE may improve as they seek to implement systems to account for *all* children.

- 6.7 **Recommendation 2:** LAs should analyse the reasons why parents are electing to home educate and take steps to address what some parents view as inefficiencies in the school system (such as bullying, special educational needs, standards, choice of school). There is evidence that, in some cases, the latter reasons could be resolved (and some children could potentially remain in school) through greater flexibility in the system. This could be achieved by greater use of flexi-schooling, part-time placements and more vocational provision (for example that which is being developed as part of the 14-19 agenda).
- 6.8 The opportunity cost of home educating families should be acknowledged. Some LAs feel restricted in the advice and support they can provide to parents. Neither is the provision of advice considered financially viable (because parents assume financial responsibility) nor practicable (because of ambiguity in what constitutes a suitable education which limits their power to advise).
- 6.9 The resources (mainly staffing) for EHE are often small and several LAs are employing external consultants to monitor EHE.
- 6.10 **Recommendation 3:** Attempts should be made to assess the capacity of LAs to monitor children receiving EHE should numbers continue to rise and tracking systems lead to more effective identification (and thereby increased numbers). Some LAs may lack the resource to cope with increasing numbers.

Copies of this publication can be obtained from:

DfES Publications
P.O. Box 5050
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottingham
NG15 0DJ

Tel: 0845 60 222 60
Fax: 0845 60 333 60
Minicom: 0845 60 555 60
Online: www.dfespublications.gov.uk

© York Consulting Limited 2007

Produced by the Department for Education and Skills

ISBN 978 1 84478 885 9
Ref No: RR827
www.dfes.go.uk/research