

ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION (EHE)

Professor Jonathan

Glazzard



IEUC Fellow, and Professor of Education
for Social Justice, University of Hull

*Co-author: Scott Thomas, Independent
Researcher, Leicestershire*



”

The failure of the schooling system to adequately meet the needs of all children is, arguably, a social justice concern and fixing the education system to make it more inclusive should therefore be the government's number one priority.

What is EHE

Elective home education (EHE) is a term used to describe education outside of the formal schooling system. It is a form of education which is led by parents rather than schools. The terms 'home schooling', 'home education' and 'elective home education' are often used interchangeably and the terminology varies across global contexts. EHE is different to 'flexi-schooling' where children might spend some of their time being educated at home and some time in school, but access to this model varies and is dependent on the willingness of schools to embrace this approach. [Research](#) highlights that although there is often a negative discourse about home education, home education can provide numerous social benefits, including opportunities to form networks with other home educators, thus connecting families together.

However, [The Centre for Social Justice](#) has expressed concerns about the number of parents who feel that they have been coerced by schools to home educate their children for reasons that are in the best interest of the school rather than the child. Parents are then often left with little or no support once the child has been removed from school. The report also highlights that some home educated children have been subject to safeguarding concerns, including abuse, neglect, criminal exploitation, and child employment. It states that 'We need a relentless focus, from everyone involved in a child's life, on reforming the system so that every single child is protected and has access to a high-quality education that matches the ambitions they hold for themselves' (p.6). The increasing numbers of young people being home educated suggests that some of the most vulnerable children are largely being forgotten about. Too often they rare out of sight,

out of mind, displaced and not given a voice. These are not the hallmarks of a civilised society.

Legal Responsibility and Statistics

All parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their child receives a suitable, efficient, full-time education, but the requirement for the child to attend formal schooling is not enshrined in UK law. We take the view that most parents who choose to home educate their child/ren do so with best intentions, but whether this is in the child's best interests is a matter for debate. In the United Kingdom (UK), home education is not regulated, unlike the formal education system, and parents do not have to be qualified teachers. However, if parents are dissatisfied with schools and if children's complex needs result in them not being able to attend school, then parents may view home education as a last resort.

In the UK, government [statistics](#) from 2024 show that the number of children in home education has increased in recent years, with a reported 111,700 children in home education, representing an increase from 92,000 in 2023. The statistics show a significant increase in parents reporting they are selecting elective home education due to mental health concerns or special educational needs and/or disabilities. Figure 1 shows the regional distribution of children in EHE in England, with the highest numbers reported in the South East of England. Across all regions, the numbers of children in EHE are increasing, which may indicate that parents are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the education system.

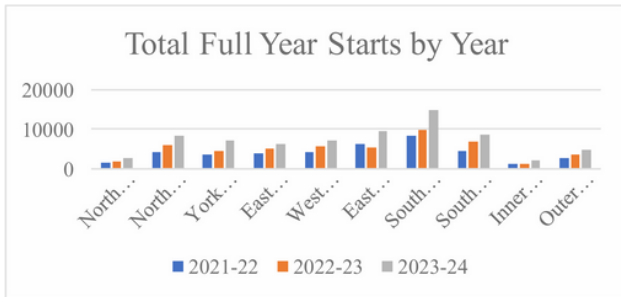


Figure 1 Number of children in EHE each year

Further breakdown of the [data](#) by characteristics reveals that 64% of children in EHE were of White ethnicity, 22% had special educational needs and roughly a third of home educated children were in secondary schools (Year 10 and 11). This raises serious questions about the capacity of the schooling system to support children with special educational needs and the inclusivity of secondary schools in particular. Almost 50% of children in EHE had previously attended Academy schools. These are not local authority maintained schools and operate with greater independence than schools which are run by local authorities. This raises further questions, including why more children in EHE previously attended academies and the factors that contributed to the decision to take these children off the school roll.

Why are parents choosing EHE?

Although approaches to home education vary in relation to educational philosophies, methods, curricula, styles and approaches, [literature](#) highlights some common reasons why parents make the decision to home educate. These include dissatisfaction with the formal schooling system, personal philosophies of parents, anxiety-related school phobia, pressure from schools to de-register children and the failure of schools to adequately meet the needs of neurodivergent children. We therefore argue

that in some instances, parents may feel that there is no choice other than to remove their child from school. The failure of the schooling system to adequately meet the needs of all children is, arguably, a social justice concern and fixing the education system to make it more inclusive should therefore be the government's number one priority.

The [Department for Education](#) outline several motivating factors which drive parents to home educate their child/ren. These include the following:

- Ideological or philosophical views which favour home education, or wishing to provide education which has a different basis to that normally found in schools
- Religious or cultural beliefs, and a wish to ensure that the child's education is aligned with these.
- Dissatisfaction with the school system, or the school(s) at which a place is available.
- Bullying of the child at school.
- Health reasons, particularly the mental health of the child.
- As a short-term intervention for a particular reason.
- A child's unwillingness or inability to go to school, including anxiety-related school absence or 'school phobia'.
- Special educational needs, or a perceived lack of suitable provision in the school system for those needs.

- Disputes with a school over the education, special educational needs or behaviour of the child, in some cases resulting in 'off-rolling' or exclusion.
- Familial reasons which have nothing to do with schools or education (for example, using older children educated at home as carers).
- As a 'stop-gap' while awaiting a place at a school other than the one allocated

Final Thoughts

In line with the recommendations from [The Centre for Social Justice](#) we agree that local authorities should provide home educators with a consistent package of support for all children in home education. We also agree with the recommendation to develop a set of minimum benchmarks which set out clearly what constitutes a suitable education, thus ensuring that home educated children receive their entitlement to an education which enables them to function in society as an independent adult. We would like to see greater regulation of home education, similar to the way in which schools are currently regulated, to ensure that minimum standards are being met, although we recognise that this will require financial investment.

In addition to these published recommendations, we also want to emphasise the urgent need to ensure that the schooling system is fit for purpose. Developing evidence-based models of inclusion within schools, which ensure that children's needs are met, and which work, is an urgent priority given the increasing complexity of special educational needs and/or disabilities that schools are required to address. Investing in

specialist staffing is one solution, but models of inclusion within the context of mainstream schools need to be researched, implemented and evaluated. This is currently a research gap. In addition, the government has a duty to ensure that the curriculum is ambitious, relevant/contemporary, socially-just and engaging. Finally, there is a need to broaden what is meant by 'achievement' so that all children have an opportunity to experience success, thus ensuring that academic achievement is not the only measure of success. Inclusive pedagogical approaches in schools will only take us so far along the journey to inclusive education. Systemic change at policy level is needed so that the structures that underpin education are transformed. Creating a more inclusive education system is the starting point to reducing the numbers of children who are home educated.

Focus On

EDI ©

Disclaimer: Focus of EDI © is a brand of the Institute for Equity, University Centre. The author of this article retains copyright, and views expressed are not necessarily those of the Institute.

Citation: Thomas, S. Glazzard, J. (2025) Elective home education (EHE) , Focus on EDI © – Issue 6, London: Institute for Equity, University Centre.