Proposal summary:

How families of children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) in Cumberland experience home education, and the implications for support and local service provision.

Thank you for agreeing to review this research proposal. This document will give a summary of the research plan so far.

I would appreciate hearing any comments or concerns you may have. Feedback can be shared at https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/vRkg87VqB3

If you have any questions, please contact alex.teague@cumbriacvs.org.uk

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*Community Co-Researchers (CCRs) are hosted by Cumbria CVS and work as part of **Cumberland Health Determinants Research Collaboration** (HDRC) to design and deliver research focused on tackling health inequalities in Cumberland. Cumberland HDRC is part of the **National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR)** and hosted by Cumberland Council.*

NIHR Health Determinants Research Collaboration

Cumberland Council

Cumbria CVS

The process:

The Community Co-Researchers are trained. Each researcher decides what project they want to do.



The community is asked to look at the research plan and give feedback. The plan is edited in line with people's suggestions. We are here!



The final research plan is approved by the ethics board. The project begins.



The research happens. Feedback is gathered throughout, to make sure it is being done well.



The results are published in different formats. This means the information is easy for people to find.

Scope and aims

The research will find out:

- Why families home educate their children with SEND
- What support families access, and where there are gaps
- How local authority professionals understand and respond to this group, and vice versa
- How local experiences compare to wider experiences

Information will be gathered through:

- Surveys of parents and guardians
- Semi-structured interviews with parents and guardians
- Semi-structured interviews with related professionals
- Secondary data analysis of local authority datasets, policy and guidance

What the study aims to do:

- Involve families who home educate a child with SEND in the project's development, and elevate their voices
- Identify key drivers behind home education among families of children with SEND
- Map access to support across education, health and social care
- Examine relationships between families and local authority services. Suggestions can then be given about how these could be improved
- Publish easily accessible data about these topics

Why research this?

The number of children being home educated is rising in Cumberland. This is in line with changes across England.

594 in 2021/22

663 in 2023/24

717 in Sept 2026

Report to People Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Elective Home Education in Cumberland

Obtained in conversation with EHE professionals

The number of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is also rising across Cumberland and the country as a whole.

13.9% of children who attend school received SEN support

2024/5 figures. Cumberland SEND Sufficiency Plan (updated 11th March 2025)

30% of home educated children required SEN support during their time at school

July 2025 figures. Cumberland SEND Sufficiency Plan (updated 11th March 2025)

An education, health and social plan (EHCP) is put into place when a pupil needs more support than typical SEN support can provide. Home educated children have a higher EHCP rate than their school educated peers.

8.36% of home educated children have an EHCP in place

Sept 2026 figures. Obtained in conversation with EHE professionals

5.7% of childen who attend school have an EHCP in place

2024/5 figures. Cumberland SEND Sufficiency Plan (updated 11th March 2025)

Even though the number of children with SEND who are home educated is growing, there is not a lot of local information about this group or their experiences.

Who can take part?

For this study, we will speak to parents and guardians who home educate a child with SEND.

Anyone who takes part **must** live in Cumberland because this is local research.

The home educated child does **not** need to have been formally diagnosed with a condition. This is because support should be given based on a child's needs; they do not necessarily need a medical diagnosis first.

The home educated child does **not** need to have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). This is because not every child with SEND needs an EHCP.

We will try to recruit a diverse range of participants. Particular effort will be made to engage underrepresented demographics such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families and foster/kinship carers.

We will also talk to professionals involved with Home Education and SEND. Professionals will be recruited through local authority networks.

Community feedback will be gathered and acted upon throughout the project.

Why not involve young people?

While the perspectives of young people with SEND are very important, the decision to exclude young people from direct participation in this research has been made for both practical and ethical reasons.

Parents and guardians are often the people who make educational decisions, talk to local authorities and arrange support for their children. This means they will be able to provide researchers with relevant information.

The scope, timescale and resources available for this project mean that it wouldn't be possible to provide the level of support needed for young people to take part in a meaningful way.

Focusing on parents and guardians will enable the research to identify key themes, challenges and areas for further investigation. The findings may help inform future research specifically designed to engage children and young people with SEND, using methods and resources tailored to their individual communication and support needs.

How will we reach people?

This project will be promoted both online and in-person. This is to make sure we reach as many people as possible.

We will promote the project through:

Email newsletters about home education, SEND or local events.

Social media groups about home education, SEND and local community groups.

Organisations who are involved like Cumbria CVS and the Cumberland HDRC.

Community venues like libraries, community centres and cafes.

Word of mouth by inviting participants to share with people they know.

Surveying

We will invite parents/guardians to take part in initial surveying.

The survey will gather information about:

- Demographics (such as family composition, where people live, economic situation)
- Type of SEND
- Reasons for home education
- Access to support and services
- Knowledge of rights and entitlements

This will let us spot patterns and trends.

Surveys will also gather people's preferences for any future engagement.

Surveys will be carried out both online and in person. This will make sure we can reach people who don't use the Internet or access online communities. We can also provide assistance completing the survey for anyone who has difficulty.

Contact details will be provided for any questions. There will be a section in each survey for participants to give feedback.

Interviews

We will use semi-structured interviews to talk to parents and guardians. This means that certain topics will be discussed, but there won't be a strict list of questions. These conversations will explore decision-making, experiences and perceived outcomes of home education.

We will also speak to professionals who work within relevant departments. This will provide their perspective and experiences, as well as comparing policies to how things are working in practice.

These interviews will give opportunities to identify recurring themes.

The perspectives of families and professionals will be compared to find points of agreement, disagreement, misunderstanding or friction.

Interviews will be carried out online and in-person, in locations where confidentiality can be maintained.

Reporting findings

We will give context to our findings by examining local authority Home Education and SEND datasets, policy and guidance.

The findings of this research will be made available in a variety of formats. At minimum, these will consist of:

- A full, formal report of the study, its findings and recommendations for the future
- An abridged version of the report using non-academic language
- A key facts document

Documents will be available both online and in-person.

Participant and community feedback will be gathered on any documents before publication, to ensure that they represent the information accurately and are presented in an accessible manner.

Give feedback

I would like to thank you again for reviewing this research proposal.

It is my intention to ensure this research reflects the priorities of the communities it is about. I have aimed to provide opportunities for shaping the project throughout its duration - starting here, with this document.

To share your feedback (whether positive or negative) please visit https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/vRkg87VqB3

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