

# Back to the classroom

With the government giving local authorities more powers to monitor rising numbers of children in home education, how can school leaders encourage families back? Words: Annie Makoff-Clark

The number of home educating families has surged since the pandemic. Last year in particular, many English councils saw a significant increase. Government statistics show that 111,700 children were in home education during autumn 2024, an increase of 92,000 from 2023.

Dr Victoria Carr, headteacher at Cheshire West and Chester, says the increase is partly due to “disillusionment” with the current education system, parental and child mental health issues and the cost-of-living crisis — heavily influenced by a school system predominantly designed for the four-fifths who are classed as ‘mainstream’, and neglecting the one-fifth who have additional needs.

Dr Martina Geromin, education academic and co-founder of School Beyond Limitations, cites overcrowded classrooms, a lack of individual attention and a relentless focus on assessments, tests and exams.

So, what can school leaders do to encourage a return to the classroom and help prevent more families from de-registering in the first place?

“Schools should clearly communicate the benefits of children returning to school by sharing

success stories, testimonials and measurable outcomes that resonate with parents,” says Dr Geromin.

She recommends “engaging directly” with home-educating families to listen to their concerns, needs and aspirations, as well as creating community-building events, bringing together home-educated and school students to foster a “sense of belonging and shared purpose”.

For headteacher Dr Carr, who’s worked across two schools facing challenges, her proactive approach is founded on looking at the reasons why families are considering deregistering their child from school and then attempting to problem-solve. Sometimes, it’s due to mental health issues (either child or parent) and the school is then able to provide support or signpost the family to the relevant services. Occasionally, it’s about reducing timetables and providing alternative provisions.

“Ultimately, it’s about making the school environment warm and welcoming for all, making the curriculum challenging and engaging, maintaining good relationships between staff and pupils and targeting mental health issues,” says Dr Carr. “It’s about how able a school is to divert resources to support families

as the other systems that once did this have been decimated.”

Rebecca Varrall, clinical psychologist and co-founder of Neurodiversity Unravelled, suggests implementing neuroaffirmative approaches to encourage a “culture of difference”, as well as implementing strategies such as teaching in bitesized chunks, providing standing desks or having clubs to aid structure. “Offering strategies for everybody removes stigma,” she explains.

According to Sarah Hannafin, head of policy at the National Association of Headteachers, it’s vital for leaders to ensure parents have made an informed choice with the right information and guidance, and are fully aware of the financial implications of home educating. They also need to know that their kids can return to full-time school education.

Ultimately, it’s crucial to keep lines of communication between the school and parents open. “Keep communicating and be curious and listen to the needs and concerns of the family,” Varrall advises. “It’s important to appreciate that schools are trying their best and teachers are under a lot of pressure, so communication is a hugely valuable tool.”



▲ IMAGE: GETTY

GET YOUR  
DIGITAL ISSUE  
FREE

## Read a brighter future with **THE WEEK Junior**

*The Week Junior* is the award-winning children’s magazine that inspires a love of reading and learning, and encourages kids to think for themselves. Published weekly, it features everything from news to sport, science, books, cooking, and craft — **feeding their natural curiosity, encouraging critical literacy and boosting confidence.**

Packed with engaging articles, eye-catching images, and big ideas, the bright and accessible pages inspire children to play a positive part in their world, setting them up to succeed in the future, and to lead happy, fulfilling lives.

It’s a brilliant way to:

- ★ **Spark their natural curiosity** in the world around them
- ★ **Help them see different viewpoints**, and form opinions of their own
- ★ **Boost their confidence** as they grow their understanding
- ★ **Get them reading, thinking and talking** — and excited to share what they learn!

We all want to give our children the best start in life. **An open, enquiring mind** is the best gift you’ll give them in 2025, and beyond.

**FREE  
DIGITAL  
ISSUE**

Scan the QR code or go to  
[theweekjunior.co.uk/modernfamily](http://theweekjunior.co.uk/modernfamily)  
to download your **FREE digital issue.**

This free digital issue of *The Week Junior* is available until 31 March 2025.

