

Children and Young People Select Committee

A meeting of Children and Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday 17th December 2025.

Present: Cllr Carol Clark (Chair), Cllr Barbara Inman (Vice-Chair), Cllr Robert Cook, Cllr Lynn Hall (sub for Cllr David Reynard), Cllr Jack Miller, Cllr Sally Ann Watson and Cllr Katie Weston

Officers: Vanessa Housley, Sharon Stevens, Gill McCleave and Judy Trainer

Also in attendance: None

Apologies: Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr David Reynard and Cllr Emily Tate

CYP/32/25 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

CYP/33/25 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interests recorded.

CYP/34/25 Minutes

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CYP/35/25 Monitoring - Scrutiny Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment

The Select Committee received progress updates in relation to its previous review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment.

The review had been carried out using an Appreciative Inquiry Approach. The benefit of the approach had been in the awareness raising of the issues. It had also brought all stakeholders together at events and secured support for agreed objectives and future action.

The Select Committee received progress updates in relation to the following recommendations:

Refine teaching strategies

Further refine teaching strategies to improve lesson enjoyment, encourage speaking and listening and strengthen understanding also ensuring that teaching is tailored to the needs of the individual child.

Developing speaking and listening skills

- Ensure the curriculum and school clubs provide opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills, for example through debating clubs.

- Raise awareness of regional and national opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills

Enhance curriculum development

Work with partners and labour markets, making more explicit links to future employment.

- Innovate a local curriculum.

Enhance skills to respond to special needs

Increase range of opportunities to enhance skills in mainstream schools to respond to Special Educational Needs (SEN), Child Protection Plans (CPP) and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA):

- Share best practice of integrating SEN pupils into mainstream schools.
- Promote vocational opportunities.

A presentation was also provided which highlighted:

Action Taken

- Established a (free) primary oracy network – meeting half termly
- Sharing of good practice
- Further developed the CPD programme – with a particular focus on SEN
- Development of Post-16 strategy
- Development of Skills for Success programme
- ‘Our Children, Our Future’ conference

What is Working Well

- Developing partnerships and joining the dots
- Sharing evidence-based good practice
- Constant reflection on impact – increasingly taking into account the views of children and young people
- Uptake of and access to CPD, particularly around SEND

Our Learning

- Even with free networks and Continuous Professional Development (CPD), it was difficult to engage with some schools
- Some of the initial plans had needed to change and adapt due to capacity and in response to the needs of stakeholders
- The focus on building partnerships (relating to all four priorities) had been beneficial and allowed individuals to engage with different perspectives
- Many schools were keen to develop oracy and could see the benefits – but were starting from a low baseline
- The CPD offered around SEND was much improved, but needed further development

Impact so far

- Although the gap in attainment for children in Stockton remained too wide, the attainment of disadvantaged children in Stockton was above the national average for this group on every measure and was consistently amongst the highest in the region

- Attainment of children with SEND was improving for every measure at KS2
- Over half the primary schools in Stockton had engaged with at least one of the oracy networks – 16 schools had registered to participate in the Poetry Slam in January 2026, and a programme of ‘big events’ was planned for the year
- Raised profile of oracy – school improvement priority for many
- 469 people had attended one of the free training events provided through the Delivering Better Value funding
- SENCo networks had been reshaped and were now providing more opportunity to share practice and promote school to school support and problem solving
- Skills for Success programmes had shown strong impact for individuals at risk of exclusion – and the Council had successfully secured a £31K bid from the DfE to further develop the programme
- Careers Leaders Network had been established and was growing – with schools committed to working collaboratively to develop opportunities for work experience and embed careers in the curriculum

Key issues highlighted and discussed were as follows:

- It was disappointing that even with free networks and CPD, it was difficult to engage with some multi academy trusts. However, it was acknowledged that some trusts operated cross boundary which added a complexity and many had their own successful approaches. Notwithstanding this, the team continued to seek to engage with all Stockton schools
- The ability for children and young people to articulate their views and feelings was important also for managing behaviour
- 10-12 schools to date had engaged with all the oracy events
- Research showed that debating had a positive impact on educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and Members asked the network to consider the benefits of establishing a Youth Council for the Borough
- It was important to reduce exclusion rates and Members asked for up-to-date exclusion data to be provided to the Select Committee
- The Poetry Slam was only focused on primary at this stage but might be extended to secondary in due course. Members asked whether some secondary schools could be invited to the event in January 2026

AGREED that the information be noted and further details be provided as set out above.

CYP/36/25 Scrutiny Review of Children Not in School

As part of their review of Children Not in School, the Select Committee received further evidence in respect of children falling under the categories of Home and Hospital, Electively Home Educated and Children Missing from Education.

The Elective Home Education Policy and Policy for Children Missing Education including Children at Risk of Missing Education had been circulated to the Select Committee with the agenda for the meeting.

The Select Committee received a presentation which outlined:

The role of the Locality Team

- Local authorities had a duty to identify; Children not registered at a school and children not in receipt of education

- The Locality team's main responsibility was the monitoring, and interpreting of absence trends from all schools and education providers in Stockton including alternative provision providers, children listed as Education other than at School (EOTAS) and children who were electively home educated and not in receipt of their education
- Also included were the Children who had an Education Health and Care Plan and were educated outside of the borough
- Identify and monitor children missing education, act promptly to provide support and intervention, and apply parental responsibility measures where necessary for unauthorised absence.

Elective Home Education

- The number of children electively home educated had risen each year
- Numbers were steadily increasing year on year up until Covid '19. It was evident numbers surged when school attendance once again became mandatory and the steady increase continued following the national and local lockdowns.
- DfE collect and publish the data on electively home educated children on a termly basis via the Children not in school (CNIS) COLLECT.

Monitoring Children who are Electively Home Educated

Safeguarding checks in isolation are not routine

- This reflected current legislative limits, but it underscored the importance of vigilance during educational monitoring. While checks could not be made without cause, caseworkers had all accessed safeguarding training and could recognise signs of harm and escalate appropriately.

Home visits made by caseworkers are within the remit of monitoring the child's education

- While the primary purpose was educational monitoring, caseworkers remained alert to safeguarding indicators during visits. Professional curiosity was vital—if anything observed raised concern (e.g. unsafe home conditions, signs of neglect), on education-focused visits, escalation to a manager discussion and Children's HUB referral and safeguarding procedures were triggered even though the visit was not a formal safeguarding check.
- This limitation highlighted the importance of inter-agency communication and professional curiosity. While proactive safeguarding checks could not be made without evidence, caseworkers used every interaction (e.g. education monitoring) to identify potential risks and escalate concerns promptly.

Overview of the Process including the Steps Taken

Building Relationships

- Introduced Parent network for EHE parents to inform of the services and facilities available to children and their families
- Health and immunisation
- Health information newsletters circulated
- Careers information
- KS4 college access
- Library and museum facilities
- Wellbeing information
- Feedback from parents resulted in a rewrite of initial contact letters and reports with a more relational approach
- Feeding families food parcels through the HAF Programme

Considerations

- Legislative limitations
- Limited opportunities for professionals' oversight
- Free school meal children
- SEND children
- School place availability

Next Steps

- Broader legislative changes were being debated
- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill currently going through the House of Lords and would bring provision for a compulsory register of children not in school and stronger local authority intervention powers
- Private Members Bill to establish a register of home education children at committee stage in the House of Lords

Children Missing Education

- Children Missing Education (CME) were at significant risk of underachievement, poorer health outcomes, harm, exploitation, radicalisation, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment, or training) later in life.
- National research Education Policy Institute "Estimates, trends and characteristics" December '24

The number of children referred to as CME has decreased in recent years

Internal Factors

- Better access to data and uptake on MIS systems
- Improved integration of Management Information Systems (MIS) allowed schools and local authorities to track attendance and pupil movements more accurately
- Real-time data sharing reduced delays in identifying pupils at risk of becoming missing from education
- More timely discussions on pupils absent/missing education
- Regular multi-agency meetings ensured early intervention for pupils with persistent absence
- Enhanced communication between schools and local authority teams helped prevent escalation
- Training for school colleagues on expectations and responsibilities
- Clear guidance on statutory duties for both schools and local authorities
- Training sessions improve understanding of safeguarding implications linked to absence and off-rolling
- Off-roll audits to identify errors or immature practice
- Systematic reviews of pupil off-roll cases to ensure compliance with regulations
- Identification of patterns that might indicate inappropriate practices or gaps in safeguarding

External Factors

- Introduction of Working Together to Improve Attendance
- National framework promoting consistent attendance strategies across schools
- Emphasis on partnership working between education providers and local authorities
- Updated Children Missing from Education Guidance
- Strengthened statutory guidance clarifying roles and responsibilities

- Increased accountability for timely reporting and follow-up
- National data availability
- Access to comparative data enabled benchmarking and identification of trends
- Supported evidence-based decision-making at local and national levels
- CNIS COLLECT data
- Centralised data collection had improved monitoring of pupil movements
- Facilitated early identification of vulnerable learners
- Focus on links to child exploitation and media exposure
- Greater awareness of safeguarding risks associated with missing education
- Media coverage drives public and professional attention to the issue

Safeguarding Information Requested

- Previous Risks
- Has the child been subject to a Child Protection Plan? (Yes/No)
- Previous involvement with social care (dates and reasons)
- Historical incidents (e.g. neglect, physical harm, emotional harm)
- Present Risks
- Current safeguarding concerns (nature and severity)
- Any ongoing investigations or plans
- Agencies currently involved (social care, police, health)

Risk Management

- Assurance reports to HSSCP on an annual basis
- Liaison with other agencies including schools
- Links within the local authority, teams within children's services and the wider council including housing and revenues and benefits,
- External agencies, health, other local authorities, Border Force, Police, voluntary agencies
- Access to DfE sites such as GIAS and S2S

Home and Hospital Team

- Worked with pupils of school age unable to attend school due to physical health problems
- Pupils with mental health problems are referred to SENDMAP for support
- Robust admissions process involving school, parents, agencies and home and hospital lead teacher
- Short term provision whilst pupils are receiving support from health professional (e.g. hospital consultants) and specialist services
- Must have been out of school for at least 3 weeks (exception can be made in some situations for accidents/ planned surgeries)

What we do

- Conduct baseline assessments in English and Maths to identify starting points and learning gaps
- Deliver targeted intervention teaching based on assessment outcomes to address specific needs
- Liaise with the pupil's school to obtain current work and incorporate it where appropriate, ensuring alignment with baseline results
- Include additional subjects as needed, with a focus on Science for KS4 pupils to support curriculum coverage and accreditation

- Use project-based learning approaches to build engagement and motivation through creative, real-world tasks
- Provide teaching through 1:1 sessions or hub-based delivery, selecting the most suitable model for the pupil's circumstances and reintegration plan

Welfare and Safeguarding

- Daily attendance tracking
- All lessons logged
- Home and Hospital teachers attempt to see the child even when not engaging in education
- Schools advised of absence to initiate their safeguarding procedure
- Review meetings are held at least once every half term all professionals involved attend along with the parent and pupil
- The team follow the medical experts' advice when it comes to lesson duration. For example, students with Chronic Fatigue may only be able to endure short lessons a few times a week
- Other students' medical needs might require teachers to wear PPE or to teach online
- The range of subjects might be limited to take into consideration the load on the young person
- The timetable was arranged around the needs of the young person. For example: lessons later in the morning due to sleeping issues or not teaching on days when there are CAMHS appointments as this could be emotionally draining

The team are flexible in their approach to every child offering a service that is tailored to their educational needs and their welfare.

Outcomes GCSE - Pupils were offered a mix of Functional Skills and GCSE qualifications in English and Maths depending on personal circumstances.

Moving On

- At the end of a Home Hospital placement:
 - Completed exit report sent to the school
 - Completed work returned to school
 - Support to return to an alternate provision if appropriate
 - If a year 11 pupil – support with transition to post 16 – link with careers team progression advisors

Feedback and Quality Assurance

- Termly satisfaction data collected from pupils and parents
- Respond to any suggestions for change
- Regular meetings with school contacts to monitor effectiveness of processes and support
- Teachers have lesson observations and book scrutiny
- Teachers have access to the CPD offer from the Education Inclusion and Achievement Service
- Overall, feedback is extremely positive

Key issues highlighted and discussed were as follows:

Electively Home Educated

- Most parents engaged well with the Local Authority and the Information Pack sent to parents clearly set out issues for them to consider prior to making the decision to home educate
- Some parents changed their mind about home educating their children, often within the first three months
- The policy was due for renewal and would be reviewed when there was greater clarity around the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill
- The reasons parent chose to home educate were collected. The most common reason related to mental health and wellbeing. Sometimes parents expressed dissatisfaction with the school
- Members felt that was wrong for parents of electively home educated children to pay for the examinations. Officers undertook to consider this including providing more information in the pack around examination costs
- Members requested further details around educational attainment of electively home educated children

Children Missing Education

- Children often fell into this category due to home moves and there was a multi-agency approach to tackling this issue, which included addressing any safeguarding concerns
- Members asked for more detail on the timescales for children of Asylum Seekers and Refugees accessing school places
- The Council had been awarded the School of Sanctuary Award – this national award recognised the welcoming and inclusion approach by Stockton schools for children and young people of asylum seekers
- The length of time that children were missing education varied as the Council was often dealing with other Local Authorities. However, officers undertook to seek a comparison within Tees Valley Local Authorities from School Admissions data

Home and Hospital

- Numbers of children not attending school due to Emotionally Based School Avoidance appeared to be reducing due to the alternative provision being rolled out across Stockton schools

AGREED that the information be noted and further details be provided to the Select Committee as set out above.

CYP/37/25 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme

AGREED that the work programme be noted.

Chair: