

Children and Young People Select Committee – Scrutiny Review of Children Not in School – Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations of the Children and Young People Select Committee's scrutiny review of Children Not in School (CNIS).
- 1.2 CNIS covers a range of scenarios where a child is not accessing a full-time education. The range of reasons a child may not be accessing a full-time education at a school is vast and covers:
 - All reasons for absence from school including authorised absence, unauthorised absence
 - Pupils on reduced/part-time time tables
 - Pupils who are accessing Alternative Provision (AP) not in a registered school (whether arranged by the school or the local authority)
 - Pupils receiving Home and Hospital Provision (H&H)
 - Pupils who are CME (Children Missing Education)
 - Children who are EHE (Electively Home Educated)
 - Children who have no school base and are EOTAS (Educated Other Than at School)
 - Children who move into the Borough and are waiting for a school place
- 1.3 The Committee undertook the following key lines of enquiry:
 - What are the scenarios where a child may be or become a CNIS? Why do parents choose to take their children out of school and what difficulties does this create?
 - What risks and safeguarding issues arise from CNIS?
 - What are the statutory requirements in relation to the different scenarios?
 - Who has responsibility and oversight to ensure appropriate systems are in place and there are no gaps?
 - What support is provided when a child is not in school?
 - How well do partner agencies work together?
 - What is the impact on the child of not attending school?
- 1.4 Contributions were sought from Council Officers and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Select Committee visited the homes of children being educated at home due to illness or being electively home educated.

Key Findings

Children Not in School (CNIS) – Overall

- CNIS covers a wide range of children not accessing full-time education
- Primary absence in Stockton is lower than the national average; secondary absence is higher than the national average
- Persistent absence remains a particular issue in secondary schools
- Illness is the main reason for absence, aligning with national patterns

- At the time of the review 164 children were on reduced timetables, 112 with SEND
- There are rising numbers of pupils moving into the Borough with EHCPs, creating pressure on specialist placements
- Admission timescales are normally 10–15 school days, though delays occur for complex or specialist placements

Home & Hospital Tuition

- Provides support for children unable to attend school due to health needs
- 13 pupils were accessing this provision at the time of the review
- Teaching is tailored, flexible, and welfare-focused
- Pupils are offered a mix of functional skills and GCSE qualifications depending on personal circumstances
- Health needs dictate timetabling
- Student and parent feedback is positive

Elective Home Education (EHE)

- Numbers continue to rise: 476 children were electively home educated at the time of the review
- In Stockton-on-Tees, the main reason for choosing to home educate is mental health
- The Local Authority monitors educational suitability but is legally limited in safeguarding checks
- 42 children were returned to school through statutory School Attendance Orders in the previous year
- Caseworkers rely on professional curiosity to identify risk when conducting educational visits
- Legislative change was anticipated, including possible compulsory national registers

Children Missing Education (CME)

- CME numbers have decreased due to improved data systems and off-roll audits
- In the current academic year, 115 children had been referred from Stockton schools. To date 61 had been traced. 32 enquiries had been made from other Local Authorities and 22 of these had been tracked as in a Stockton school.
- CME pupils face high risks (underachievement, poorer health outcomes, harm, exploitation, radicalisation, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment, or training) later in life.
- Improvements were being driven by stronger national guidance, better data sharing, and multi-agency cooperation

Education Other Than at School (EOTAS)

- Very small number of children access EOTAS
- Used only for the most complex SEND cases where school is inappropriate
- Provision remains stable, tightly monitored, and legally under the Local Authority's responsibility

Alternative Provision (AP)

- Rising numbers accessing AP, both school-commissioned and Local Authority commissioned
- Reasons include behaviour challenges, medical issues and exclusions
- Growth was particularly noted for primary-aged pupils
- Stockton's AP Framework was expanded in 2025; at the time of the review there were 29 approved providers
- There was a strong emphasis on quality assurance
- Regular multi-agency AP networks support consistency and best practice

Conclusion and Recommendations

- 1.5 Overall, the review highlights the wide range of reasons a child may not be accessing full time education at school and demonstrates that, while Stockton has strong systems in place for quality assurance, multi-agency working and engagement with families, there are pressures relating to emotional and mental health needs and rising demand linked to SEND. The Committee was also mindful that home visits to electively educated children were limited by legislation to the monitoring of the child's education. Increasing pressures continue to present risks to educational continuity and safeguarding.
- 1.6 The Committee's recommendations therefore focus on strengthening staffing capacity, consistency and partnership working to reduce time out of education and improve outcomes for vulnerable children. Alongside this, the Committee emphasises the importance of preparedness for anticipated legislative changes, improved information sharing to mitigate safeguarding risks, and early intervention to address emotional-based school avoidance. Collectively, these recommendations aim to ensure that all children and young people are supported to access suitable education safely and in a way that meets their individual needs.
- 1.7 The Committee recommends:

Home and Hospital (H&H)

- 1) That staffing capacity is reviewed to ensure provision remains, safe, responsive and broad enough in curriculum and that the staffing model adopted provides flexible and responsive provision in the most cost-effective way.
- 2) That opportunities are explored and expanded for peer social interaction.
- 3) That opportunities for partnership working to enhance both curriculum and enrichment are explored.
- 4) The re-integration pathways are explored.

Electively Home Educated (EHE)

- 5) That a more relational approach be strengthened with EHE families with identification of dedicated staffing resource to promote this.
- 6) That clearer information is provided to parents about:
 - Examination entry processes
 - Associated costs
 - Available support services
- 7) That work continues to prepare for legislative changes on compulsory registers and strengthened Local Authority powers.
- 8) That the range of support shared via EHE networks is broadened.
- 9) That opportunities for partnership working to strengthen intervention and support are explored.

- 10) That the capacity for schools to provide early intervention and support in response to emotional and mental health needs is reviewed.
- 11) That best practice identified at the Attendance Networks on re-integrating vulnerable learners into school is widely and regularly shared.
- 12) That the support available to children and their families experiencing Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is widely and regularly shared.
- 13) That the Team Around the School be fully appraised of the needs of previously Electively Home Educated pupils who are returning to mainstream education to support and nurture them back into school.

Children Missing from Education (CME)

- 14) That off roll audits are maintained and expanded to prevent inappropriate removal from school rolls.
- 15) That opportunities to work in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector are fully utilised to gather intelligence.
- 16) That consideration is given to how the social care reforms can be used to reduce the number of children missing from education.

Educated Other than at School (EOTAS)

- 17) That multi-agency working arrangements for children receiving EOTAS be strengthened, to ensure earlier, coordinated planning for children with complex needs, with education, health and social care partners jointly developing, owning and reviewing EOTAS packages to improve timeliness, quality and outcomes.

Alternative Provision (AP)

- 18) That the new QA framework is implemented fully with follow up action plans for providers needing improvement.
- 19) That AP networks continue to be expanded to promote consistent practice.
- 20) That action is taken to ensure that all AP placements have a clear education plan, regularly reviewed, with reintegration as a priority where appropriate.

Admissions

- 21) That processes and capacity for pupils with EHCPs who move into the Borough are reviewed to minimise time out of education.

Safeguarding

- 22) That caseworker training in professional curiosity is enhanced to seek to ensure that risks are spotted during educational monitoring visits.
- 23) That multi-agency information sharing for EHE and CME cohorts is strengthened, to compensate for restrictions on direct safeguarding checks.
- 24) That CME processes continue to involve agencies such as Border Force, Police, Health and Housing to track and protect high risk pupils.

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