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Children missing education

ISOS PARTNERSHIP
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Local Government Association

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Executive Summary

This research was commissioned by the Local Government Association in December 2019 in response to a growing concern that more and more children were missing out on their entitlement to a formal full-time education. The purpose of this research is to look at the issue of children missing education in its entirety. Drawing on evidence provided by local authorities, school leaders and parents we try to understand who the children are who are missing out on a formal full time education, how many children fit this description, what evidence there is for the long-term impact of children missing education and how local and national government might work together to address this issue.

The statutory definition for Children Missing Education states that "***Children missing education are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school.***" However, one of the clear conclusions of this research is that this relatively narrow definition risks some significant blind-spots in our collective understanding of the cohort of children missing education.

We are therefore proposing, for this research, a wider definition of children missing education – **any child of statutory school age who is missing out on a formal, full-time education**. By 'formal', we mean an education that is well-structured, contains significant taught input, pursues learning goals that are appropriate to a child or young person's age and ability and which supports them to access their next stage in education, learning or employment. By full-time we mean an education for at least 18 hours per week.

A common theme that has emerged from this research is that the way that the range of existing policies and guidance around pupil registration, attendance, admissions, exclusions and education otherwise than at school comes together is not seamless. While parents, local authorities and schools all have both responsibilities and powers to ensure that children receive the education to which they are entitled, some significant omissions in the current legislation mean that it is possible for children to slip through the net.

Children missing education do not form a homogenous group and are not always easy to identify. Our research has suggested that there are multiple routes whereby children may end up missing out on a formal full-time education, and eight main 'destinations' where these children may be found. These include a variety of both formal and informal education settings, at home receiving different forms of educational input or none at all, in employment or simply unknown to those providing services in the community. This complexity helps to explain why the numbers of children missing out on their entitlement to education might be routinely underestimated and why it has historically been a challenge to construct legislation and guidance that ensures that no children miss out on the education which is their right, by law.

Nationally, there is a distinct paucity of any comprehensive, reliable data outlining the numbers of children who are missing extended periods of formal, full-time education. However, the research evidence that does exist strongly suggests that the number is rising. Without a clear sense of how many children in England might be missing out on their entitlement to a formal full time education it is very difficult to be precise about the scale or nature of intervention that might be needed either locally or nationally to address the issue. We have therefore used this research as an opportunity to use existing data published nationally, and complementary data held locally, to develop an estimate for the number of children who may be missing out on a formal full-time education.

Our best estimate is that in 2018/19, more than a quarter of a million children in England may have missed out on a formal full-time education which equates to around 2% of the school age population. However, this is just an estimate. Depending on how one defines 'formal' and 'full-time' it could be closer to 200,000 or over 1 million. The main concern is that we simply do not know if children and young people are getting their entitlement to education, and we cannot be certain of the risks to which they are being exposed by not being in full-time education.

The evidence provided by those who engaged directly in this research all points to vulnerable children being far more likely to miss out on formal full-time education than their peers. In our data sample, local authorities shared some of the characteristics that were common to the cohort of children missing education. The large majority of these included those with social and behavioural needs; those with complex needs and no suitable school place available; those with medical or mental health needs; and of those with mental health needs, those accessing CAMHS either as an in-patient or through services in the community.

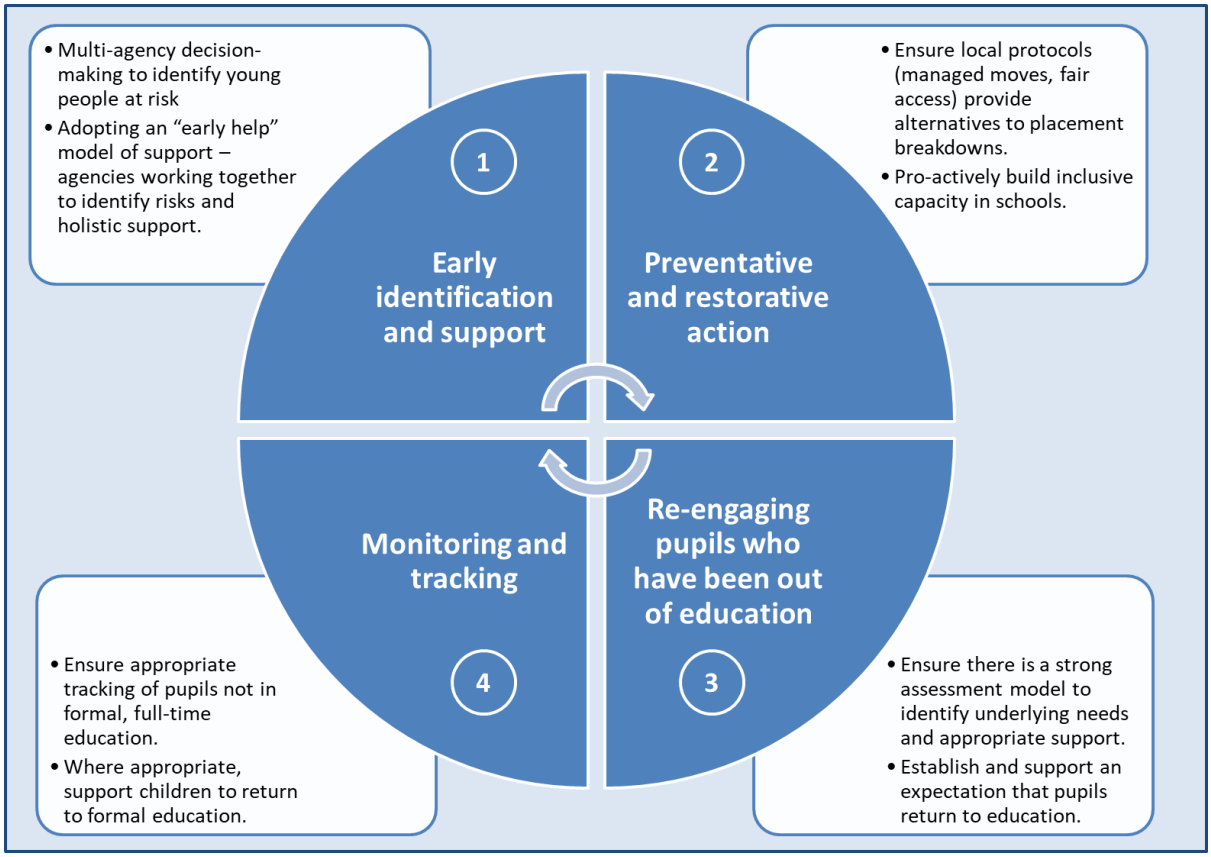
There is not a single factor that explains the growth we have seen in children who are not receiving suitable, formal, full-time education. Instead, the evidence we gathered suggests that it is a combination of three sets of factors that, taken together, have given rise to this trend. These are:

1. the changing nature of the needs and experiences that children are bringing into school;
2. pressures and incentives on schools' capacity to meet those needs; and
3. the capacity of the system to ensure appropriate oversight of decisions taken regarding children's entry to and exit from schools.

Put simply, wider societal factors have meant that children are arriving in schools with a combination of needs, often linked to disruption in their family lives, at a time when schools' capacity to respond is more limited and the way in which schools' effectiveness is judged has focused more sharply on the academic, and less on the inclusive, aspects of education. This has created a situation where the pressures on schools and families are manifesting themselves through parts of the education policy framework that were not designed to deal with these issues – the potentially inappropriate use of elective home education, part-time timetables and condoned non-attendance, permanent exclusion and alternative provision, for example. While LAs have the responsibility to maintain oversight of the suitability of the education received by school-age children, there is a mismatch between the scope of these responsibilities and the capacity and means to carry them out at a detailed, case-by-case level such that there can be assurance that all children missing from formal, full-time education are receiving a suitable education.

The impact of children missing out on formal full-time education is felt by the children themselves, by families and by society. For individual children, the negative implications can include slower progress in learning, worse prospects for future employment, poorer mental health and emotional wellbeing, restricted social and emotional development and increased vulnerability to safeguarding issues and criminal exploitation. Having children out of education also places enormous strain on families, both emotionally and financially. Furthermore, the lifetime costs to the state of a young person not in education, employment or training have been shown to be very significant. Children missing out on formal full-time education can also be detrimental to communities, reinforcing stereotypes and increasing isolation.

Many of the councils which took part in our research were taking a strategic and proactive approach to identifying, preventing and reengaging children missing education, in the broadest sense of the term. The key actions that they are taking are captured in the graphic below:



There is already considerable good practice in the system and opportunities from local authorities to learn from each other. However, local government would be the first to acknowledge that the safety net that they provide to ensure that *all* children, but particularly the most vulnerable, do not miss out on their entitlement to education is stretched to capacity. Furthermore, the omissions in the current powers that local authorities have to exercise their statutory duties create opportunities for some children to slip through the net. The rising numbers of children not in education, combined with diminishing resources at all points in the system, has created a very fragile equilibrium.

As a outcome from this research, we would therefore recommend that the Department for Education considers the following actions, that would support local government to discharge their duties in respect of ensuring all children are able to access a formal full-time education more comprehensively:

1. **Raise the profile of children missing formal full-time education**

   Our research has shown that the current statutory definition of children missing education does not capture many of the children who are missing out on a suitable education. Furthermore, the lack of published data pertaining to this cohort makes them less visible in terms of policy and unknown in terms of outcomes. We would therefore recommend that the Government adopts a broader definition of children who are missing out on formal, full-time education, collects and publishes data on the numbers of children who meet the definition and tracks the long-term destinations and outcomes for children missing formal full-time education.

2. **Resource local authorities adequately to fulfil their responsibilities in relation to ensuring all children receive a suitable education**

   The evidence gathered through this research suggests that the lack of capacity and resources within local authorities is one of the key barriers to ensuring that all children receive a suitable formal, full-time education. The work of identifying children who are missing education and then bringing together families, schools and other education providers to broker a solution that secures ongoing education for those who have dropped out of the system is a painstaking and labour-intensive task. There is no substitute for individual, careful case-management. In the current financial climate, few local authorities have the resources needed for the true scale of that task.

3. **Create a learning environment in which more children can succeed**

   It is a finding of this research, and many other similar projects, that in the current climate schools maintain a focus on inclusion despite the accountability and performance incentives, not because of them. There is a lot that Government could do to give schools back the flexibility they need to create an appropriate learning environment in which more children can succeed. This could include recognising and rewarding greater curriculum breadth; rewarding schools for inclusive practice through the accountability system; investing in pastoral and mental health support and significantly developing trauma informed practice in schools.

4. **Strengthen the legislative framework around electively home educated children**

   In April 2019 the Government consulted on changes to primary legislation that would strengthen the oversight and mechanisms for reassurance around electively home educated children. It proposed a new duty on local authorities to maintain a register of children of compulsory school age who are not at a state funded or registered independent school and a new duty on parents to provide information if their child is not attending a mainstream school. The purpose of these changes would be to enable better registration and visibility of those educated other than at school. The evidence collected through this research suggests that both changes would be beneficial in strengthening the oversight afforded to vulnerable children within this cohort and we therefore recommend that the necessary legislative changes are made at the first opportunity.

Introduction

At the time of writing this research report, between 97% and 99% of children of statutory school age in England have not been attending school due to the Covid-19 pandemic. School closures of this magnitude and duration are unprecedented and the longer-term implications for children are, as yet, unknown. However, at the point at which this research was commissioned, and the fieldwork undertaken, the context for children missing out on a formal, full-time education was very different.

This research was commissioned by the Local Government Association in response to a growing concern that more and more children were missing out on their entitlement to a formal full-time education. Previous research, select committee inquiries and independent government reviews have shone a light on various aspects of this issue, be it the rising numbers of pupils permanently excluded, the apparent growth in 'off-rolling' and the increasing trend in children being electively home educated. This research tries to look at the issue of children missing education in its entirety. Drawing on evidence provided by local authorities, school leaders and parents we try to understand who the children are who are missing out on a formal full time education, how many children fit this description, what evidence there is for the long-term impact of children missing education and how local and national government might work together to address this issue.

While the recent nationwide closure of schools puts the issue of children missing education into a starkly new and different context, the concerns highlighted in this research about how the most vulnerable children and young people are affected by the lack of access to a full-time formal education pre-date the current crisis and will endure beyond it; arguably some of these risks have become even more pertinent now.

Purpose and methodology

In December 2019, Isos Partnership was commissioned by the Local Government Association to carry out a national piece of research looking at children missing out on a formal full-time education. Specifically, the purpose of the research was to:

- develop a national picture of trends in numbers and characteristics of children and young people who are missing a formal full-time education;
- understand the routes whereby children and young people end up missing education;
- assess the factors which are contributing to the increasing numbers of children missing education;
- describe the impact of children and young people missing out on education;
- identify good practice in how local authorities and their partners can reduce the numbers of children missing education; and
- make recommendations for what might need to change nationally.

In carrying out this research we generated and collated evidence in four ways. Firstly, we carried out a literature review of key publications that relate to the issue of children missing education. A bibliography of the main sources from which we have drawn is included at Annex A. In parallel with the literature review we analysed the existing published data on children missing education to provide the context in terms of scale and trends.

Secondly, we carried out two workshops with local authority representatives, one in the north of England and one in the South, through which we collected local government experience of how and why children come to be missing education, what local areas and their partners are doing to address

these issues and the impact on children, families and society more generally. Around 35 local authorities attended the workshops representing a good mix of urban and rural areas with different levels of deprivation and a variety of contexts in terms of school organisation. As part of the local authority workshops we invited participating authorities to share the data that they held on categories of children missing education which are not well represented in the existing published or research data sets. 17 local areas generously provided us with their current data.

Thirdly, we conducted individual interviews with a range of professionals and experts able to offer a particular insight into the issues surrounding children missing education. These included headteacher representatives from the executive committees of ASCL and NAHT, Ofsted, a Regional Schools Commissioner and PRUsAP (the National Association for PRUs and Alternative Provision).

Finally, with the support of the National Network for Parent Carer Forums we conducted a small-scale survey of parents and carers whose children were currently or had previously been missing education. Through the survey we asked parents and carers to explain the circumstances in which their children had ended up missing formal full-time education, the factors which had contributed to them missing out on education and the impact this decision had had on both the young person and the family more broadly. We received responses from 183 parents and carers.

Chapter 1: Defining the problem – who are the children missing out on formal, full-time education?

Definitions of children missing formal full, time education

One of the key issues that has emerged, both from our review of the literature and from our workshops with local authorities, is that there is no universally accepted and widely used definition, either in policy or research terms, of 'children missing education'. This can best be illustrated by summarising some of the main ways in which this cohort of children and young people have been defined in statutory guidance and in the relevant research literature.

The 2016 statutory guidance for local authorities on Children Missing Education, published by the Department for Education, states:

"All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to an efficient, full time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have. ***Children missing education are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school.****"*

This statutory definition of children missing education therefore comprises a relatively small cohort of children. Critically, if children are deemed to be receiving an education "otherwise than at school" then they will not be counted as children missing education. Similarly, if children are on a school roll but are not attending or not attending full-time, they will also not be counted as children missing education. This definition risks establishing some significant blind-spots in our collective understanding of the cohort of children missing education. It does not, for example, acknowledge that there will be children and young people amongst those who are being educated other than at school whose education is neither efficient, full-time or suitable to their age, ability and aptitude. Nor does it highlight the children who may remain on a school-roll but only be subject to limited part-time timetables or may be otherwise unwilling or unable to attend school routinely. These children are missing out on their entitlement to a full-time education but are not captured with the legal definition.

While not offering their own definition of children missing education, Ofsted has recognised the potential vulnerability of a larger cohort of children in the new Education Inspection Framework published in September 2019. Critically, the inspectorate has responded to concerns that increasing numbers of children and young people were being prevented from accessing a full-time education because they were being 'off-rolled' from their school often, but not exclusively, resulting in the pupil becoming electively home educated. The framework now includes explicit attention to this issue, which contributes to the judgement on leadership and management. The framework states:

"Leaders aim to ensure that all learners complete their programmes of study. They provide the support for staff to make this possible and do not allow gaming or off-rolling."

and, in a subsequent footnote, describes what Ofsted means by gaming and off-rolling as:

"There is no legal definition of 'off-rolling'. However, we define 'off-rolling' as the practice of removing a learner from the provider's roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent to remove their child, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the provider rather than in the best interests of the learner. Off-rolling in these circumstances is a form of 'gaming'."

In her report *"Skipping School: Invisible children"*, the Children's Commissioner shines a light on those children who have been off-rolled according to Ofsted's definition but also those children who have been removed from school by parents because the school was unable to meet their child's needs or to place their child in an illegal school or unregistered tuition centre. This report, then, describes a slightly broader group of children missing education.

A core purpose of this research is to attempt to untangle what is a complex issue and understand the full extent of children and young people in England who may be missing out on their entitlement to education. We are therefore proposing, for this research, a wider definition of children missing education – **any child of statutory school age who is missing out on a formal, full-time education**. By 'formal', we mean an education that is well-structured, contains significant taught input, pursues learning goals that are appropriate to a child or young person's age and ability and which supports them to access their next stage in education, learning or employment. By full-time we mean an education for at least 18 hours per week, as set out in the DfE's recent consultation on defining full time education for the purpose of regulating independent educational institutions. Only by framing our definition thus widely can we be confident of raising awareness and understanding of all those children and young people who are missing out on their entitlement to education and learning.

Who is responsible for ensuring children do not miss education?

As well as understanding how children missing education are currently defined in statute, in inspection terms and in research terms it is equally important to understand the legal responsibilities which currently attach to local authorities, schools and parents in relation to children missing education. The 1996 Education Act sets out two over-riding duties:

1. It places a duty on ***parents*** to ensure that a child of compulsory school age receives an efficient, full-time education, either by attendance at school or otherwise (this might include education at home or in an educational setting other than a school such as a tuition centre)
2. It places a duty on ***local authorities*** to make arrangements, so far as possible, to establish the identities of children who are not receiving a suitable education.

Statutory guidance then sets out a range of more detailed responsibilities for both local authorities and schools to enable these duties to be fulfilled. Some of the key responsibilities and powers are summarised in the box below:

Currently **local authorities** are responsible for:

- Ensuring children of compulsory school age receive suitable education in school or otherwise.
- Identifying children who are not registered at school and who are not receiving suitable education otherwise.
- Requiring parents to satisfy the LA that a child is receiving suitable education.
- Arranging provision for children who have been excluded permanently on the sixth day of exclusion.
- Keeping children safe and co-operating with other agencies to do so.

In support of these responsibilities, **local authorities** can:

- Issue school attendance orders if parents do not satisfy the LA that their home-educated child is receiving a suitable education.
- Prosecute or issue penalty notices to parents who fail to ensure their child attends school regularly.

- Apply for an education supervision order for a child to support them to go to school.

Schools are responsible for:

- Entering pupils on their admission register from the first day that they are expected to attend.
- Making reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts and notify the Local Authority if a child does not attend.
- Monitoring pupils' attendance daily.
- Agreeing with the Local Authority at what intervals they will notify the LA about children who do not attend regularly.
- Notifying the Local Authority if they remove a child from their register and provide information about the grounds under which the child's name is being removed.
- Arranging provision after the sixth day of a fixed-period exclusion.
- Fulfilling their safeguarding duties.

The Department for Education has consulted on the regulations and guidance relating to elective home education and has acknowledged explicitly that "*a number of problems arise from lacunae or shortcomings in the current legislation which have been drawn to the department's attention by local authorities and by local children's safeguarding boards*". They describe the current legislative arrangement pertaining to home education as '*designed for a different age*'. Indeed, a common theme that has emerged from this research, both in the local authority workshops and the literature review, is that the way that the range of existing policies and guidance around pupil registration, attendance, admissions, exclusions and education otherwise than at school comes together is not seamless. Some of the limitations of the current legislative landscape in safeguarding children's right to a suitable fulltime education are:

- Parents are not currently required to notify the local authority if they decide to home educate their child or make provision for education at an institution other than a registered school. If a child is removed from the admissions register of a maintained school or academy the school has a duty to notify the local authority. But this provides no visibility for children who have never been registered at a school or may move local authorities while being educated other than at school. Local authorities cannot be confident that they have a full and comprehensive register of all children who are not receiving a full-time education at school. Although most local authorities maintain such a register to the best of their ability as good practice, and although parents are encouraged to voluntarily notify the local authority, there is no requirement to do so. In April 2019 the Department for Education consulted on primary legislation that would introduce a new duty on local authorities to maintain a register of children of compulsory school age who are not at a state funded or registered independent school and a new duty on parents to provide information if their child is not attending a mainstream school. However, no legislation has yet been brought before parliament to make these proposed changes.

- In terms of the quality of education being offered other than at school, there is no statutory definition of what constitutes 'suitable' education either in terms of curriculum, content, taught hours, progress or outcomes. Furthermore, local authorities have no express power to monitor on a routine basis the educational provision being made for a home educated child. Neither the statutory definition of suitable education, nor the powers of local authorities to monitor the quality of education other than at school, formed part of the Department's proposed legislative changes in the April 2019 consultation.

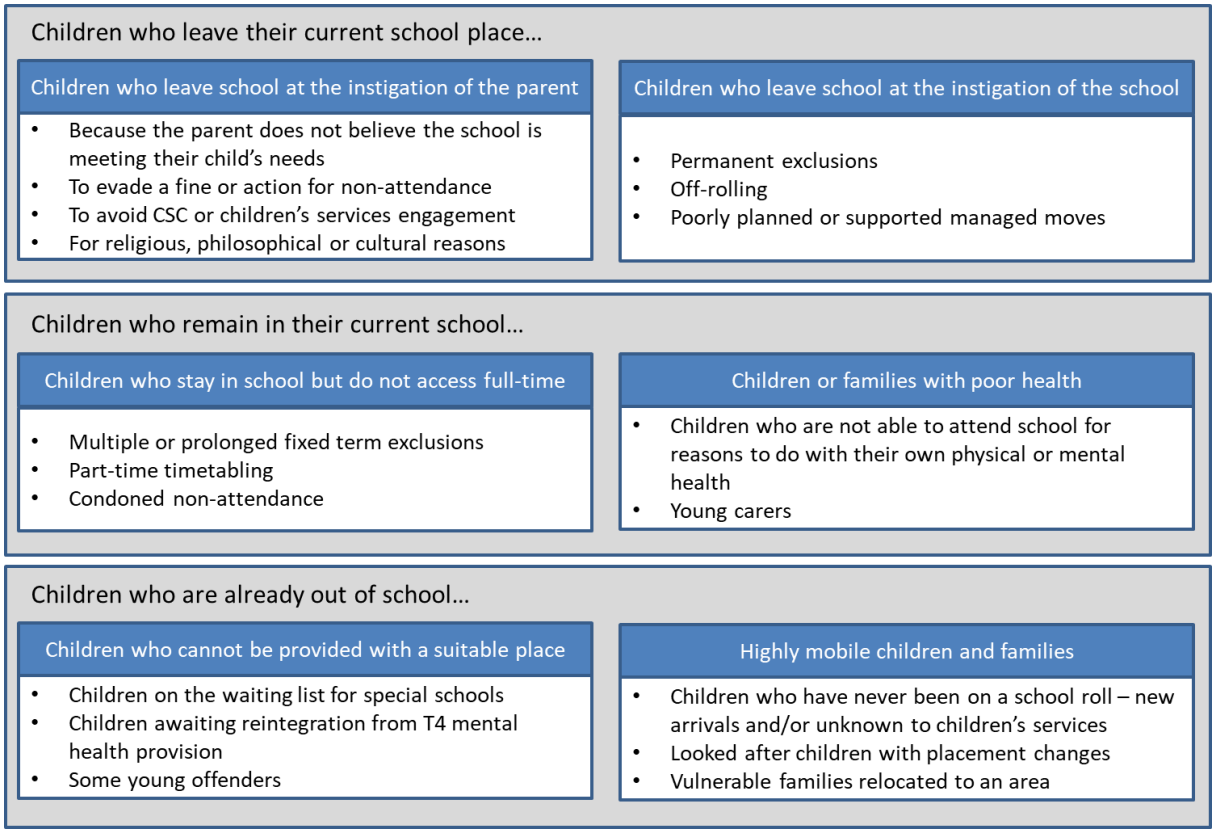
- All schools are required to maintain an attendance register. However, there is no specific code within the register to highlight individual pupils who are only attending for part of the day or the number of hours that they are in attendance. Attendance registers are taken at the beginning of the morning and afternoon school sessions, so part-time pupils may be identified who are only marked in attendance for one session of the day. But in some cases, even this will be an overstatement of the amount of schooling they are actually receiving. There is no requirement for schools to share attendance registers with local authorities, although some do so voluntarily. This means that local authorities cannot be confident that they have a comprehensive overview of all the children on part-time timetables.

Summarised simply, while parents, local authorities and schools all have both responsibilities and powers to ensure that children receive the education to which they are entitled, some significant omissions in the current legislation mean that it is possible for children to slip through the net. As the rest of this research suggests, it is often those children with additional vulnerabilities who are most at risk of doing so.

What are the routes whereby children can miss out on a formal full-time education?

The children who are missing out on a formal full-time education are not a homogenous group and the pathways that have led them there are equally varied. To understand fully the complexity of the issue it is important to create a comprehensive map of the routes that can lead children to miss out on their educational entitlement. These are summarised in the diagram below and are explained more fully in the following text. They have been generated through our workshops with local authority officers, conversations with headteacher representatives and evidence provided through parents in our on-line survey. It is helpful to consider these routes in terms of children who leave their current school place, children who remain on the roll of their current school and children who are already out of formal full-time education.

In describing these routes, it is important to note that not *all* the children captured by these descriptions will end up missing out on a formal full-time education. Indeed, none of the pathways that we describe are inherently wrong in themselves. Decisions to remove a child from a school or to place them on a part-time timetable, for example, can all be made for very rational and well-intentioned reasons. When these decisions are taken with the best interests of the child in mind, they may well contribute to that child accessing education more successfully in future. However, our research has highlighted these are the scenarios in which children *can* end up missing out on their entitlement to a formal full-time education, and in some of the scenarios described this outcome becomes highly likely.



Children who leave school at the instigation of the parent

There have always been a small proportion of parents who, for a variety of philosophical, cultural, lifestyle or religious reasons decide to remove their children from mainstream schooling and educate them at home, themselves. This is a right, set out in law, which parents are free to exercise. However, there is mounting evidence that more parents than before are choosing to take their children out of the school in which they are enrolled and educate them at home. Our research points to some of the reasons for this.

In our survey, many of the 183 parents who replied had opted to take their child out of school and educate them at home. Most had done so because they were dissatisfied with the ability of the school to meet their child's learning needs. In the large majority of cases this was because the parent felt that either their child's special educational needs or their child's mental health needs were not being met. Most of the parents who replied to our survey and had taken their children out of school described situations in which they felt that they had exhausted all other options, and this was the last resort. The quote below is from one parent who took time off work to home educate her child but is representative of many of the parental views and experiences expressed through the survey.

"My child was off school for 3 weeks in March 2019 with anxiety/depression, on a part time timetable for the summer term and has not been in school since Sept 2019. He is unable to attend school due to debilitating anxiety and depression, also diagnosed with ASD and tourettes. The school environment became increasingly difficult with noise, behaviour of other students, low level bullying and changes to lunch timings, supply teachers and timetable changes. My son was having frequent suicidal thoughts and severe mental health issues."

Several of the school leaders to whom we spoke also identified rising numbers of parents opting to educate their children at home due to levels of anxiety being experienced by the child. Research conducted by Isos Partnership for the Local Government Association on children and young people's

mental health and emotional wellbeing identified a number of factors that may be contributing to this growth including examination pressure and the impact of social media on bullying and issues of self-perception.[1] These were echoed by school leaders and local authorities engaged in this research. Parents who responded to our survey also identified the relationship between SEND, bullying, needs not being met in the school environment and consequently deteriorating mental health. However, some school leaders to whom we spoke also identified lower levels of resilience to setbacks in some families, choosing to remove their children from school rather than work through a difficult period in their child's educational life.

Several school leaders also identified an increase in the number of parents who decided to take their child out of mainstream schooling in order to evade local authority action or a fine for their child's non-attendance or if the school raised concerns with local authority children's services about the well-being of a child. One headteacher suggested that ten years ago, school attendance rates of 75% or 80% may have been 'tolerated' for some children where their parents were unable or unwilling to ensure that their children attend school. However, as both school and local authority approaches to increasing attendance have become sharper, with a more clearly defined pathway for pursuing non-attendance and published trigger points for action, some of those families have opted to remove their child from school rather than face a fine or what they deem to be unwarranted state intrusion into their family life. The children removed from full-time formal education where the school had concerns about the child's wellbeing or where the child was already subject to a protection plan by children's social care caused the greatest anxiety for school leaders.

Of course, as stated above, not all the children who are taken out of school at the instigation of their parents end up missing out on their entitlement to education. Far from it. Indeed, many parents provide an excellent education for their children outside of school. However, the more parents who opt for this route either out of desperation (because they simply do not believe that the education they can access is meeting their child's needs) or out of fear of or hostility to the actions that schools and government take to safeguard the well-being and development of children, the more children are likely to miss out on their entitlement to education.

Children who leave school at the instigation of the school

In parallel with more parents choosing to take their children out of formal full-time education, there is also evidence that the number of children leaving the school at which they are enrolled, at the instigation of the school, has increased over recent years.

There has been a significant focus on the increasing numbers of children being permanently excluded from schools in England, not least from Edward Timpson's far-reaching independent review. Numbers of permanent exclusions have increased by around 60% from 4,949 per year in 2013/14 to 7,905 per year in 2017/18. There are clear regulations with which schools must abide in order to permanently exclude a child and equally clear responsibilities for local authorities to provide education from the sixth day of a permanent exclusion. Therefore, the large majority of those permanently excluded will go on to receive formal full-time education either at another school or in a Pupil Referral Unit or other Alternative Provision. However, in a minority of cases the education on offer to a permanently excluded child is nowhere near full-time and comes some way short of meeting their needs. For these children, permanent exclusion ends up being a route out of formal-full-time education.

[1] https://www.local.gov.uk/building-resilience-how-local-partnerships-are-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health

The second main way in which children can leave the roll of their school, at the instigation of the school, is through a managed move from one school to another. These are typically negotiated between two schools, sometimes independently and sometimes with the local authority's fair access panel acting as a broker. Again, in many cases these can be a good option for providing a child or young person with a fresh start in a new school environment and provides a route for maintaining effective education, often in the face of significant behavioural challenges. However, again in a minority of cases, managed moves can be poorly executed and supported and breakdown within a few weeks. This can leave a child not on a school roll, and with the local authority having to provide education provision. Such children can end up in unsuitable part-time alternative provision in just the same way as those who have been permanently excluded.

The final way in which pupils can leave their existing school at the instigation of the school is through what Ofsted would call 'off-rolling' or 'gaming' the system. When this happens this often takes the form of parents being very strongly encouraged to choose to electively home educate their child in order to avoid, for example, the stigma of permanent exclusion. While most schools do not engage in such practices it is nonetheless important to shine a light on the small minority which do. All the local authorities which took part in our workshops were aware of a small number of schools which had pressured parents to remove their child. All the school leaders we spoke to were equally aware of the practice occurring in other schools. One headteacher described it as "not ethical" and "taking advantage of people who do not have the same level of education or knowledge and see the headteacher as someone who gives good advice". Successfully electively home educating a child requires dedication, preparation and full-time commitment. A parent who removes a child from mainstream education not through choice but under duress is unlikely to be able to provide that child with the formal full-time education to which they are entitled.

Children who stay in school but do not access full-time

The routes out of formal full-time education described above all centre on children who leave the roll of their current school. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, there are also children who remain on their current school roll but still miss out on their educational entitlement. Many of the parents who responded to our survey had children who were still on their school roll but were receiving little or no education. There are three groups of children who are of specific concern in this regard.

The first is the small number of children who experience either prolonged or multiple fixed term exclusions. In general, fixed term exclusions are used by schools as short term – one or two day – disciplinary measure to sanction poor behaviour. However, evidence from our local authority workshops and the parent survey suggests that in isolated cases some individual children might be subject to a fixed term exclusion of longer than normal duration or multiple fixed term exclusions very close together which can result in the pupil missing out on a considerable amount of their education.

The second group of children who are missing out on a formal full-time education, despite being on a school roll, are those on part-time timetables. Again, this is a measure that can be used constructively and purposefully by schools to enable gradual and supported reintegration into school life for example for those children who have been absent for a significant period or may otherwise not be coping well. However, most local authorities could cite examples of where such part-time education became the norm for the child and where the provision of education was very significantly below what might be described as a formal full-time education. In many cases this might mean a child attending for just one or two hours a day. Some school leaders suggested that where such a

pattern becomes routine it can become increasingly difficult to return to normal full-time schooling even on a progressive basis. Evidence from the parent survey confirms that there are children on minimal part-time timetables of lengthy duration, and in some cases these lead to the child stopping school altogether.

Finally, there are children who are routinely not attending school but rather than making every effort to increase their attendance the school in question might opt not to challenge the continued absence, particularly in circumstances where the behaviour of the child in question can be highly disruptive and detrimental to the smooth running of the rest of the school. Again, none of the evidence that we have collated for this research suggests that this practice is widespread, but it does occur in a small minority of schools.

Children or families with poor health

A small but very important subset of those children who remain on a school roll but do not attend school all day or every day are those children where either their own poor health or that of their family members makes routine attendance impossible. Local authorities drew attention to a group of children often missing from discussion of those missing out on education – young carers. Official data on numbers of young carers is collected through the census and is therefore somewhat out of date. However, the Children's Society reports that, according to the 2011 census, around 166,000 children aged 5 to 17 in England were caring for their parents, siblings or family members which represents an increase of 20% on the previous census. This figure is likely to be a significant underestimate as so many young carers 'remain hidden from official sight'. Nearly 15,000 children under 17 are providing more than 50 hours care a week and the Children's Society's own analysis shows that around 1 in 20 young carers aged 11 to 15 miss school because of their caring responsibilities.[2]

The local authorities and school leaders to whom we spoke also particularly highlighted the growing number of young people whose poor mental health and emotional wellbeing was preventing them from accessing a formal full-time education, with local areas reporting increasing numbers of school refusers and older pupils suffering from anxiety. Several school leaders highlighted the increase in long-term home tuition, which can be provided online, as a substitute or alongside school for these young people. Such offers can be extremely beneficial for some young people at some points in their education. However, both school leaders and local authorities identified instances where such tuition was insufficient both in terms of duration and depth.

Children who cannot be provided with a school place

The final two pathways out of formal full-time education relate to those children who are not on a school roll. Local authority admissions teams maintain a list of children who are waiting for a school place. Most of these children are likely to be in-year admissions where a family has moved and most will be placed quickly in a local school. However, local authorities at the workshops highlighted that there are a minority of children who are very hard to place and might remain on a waiting list for a significant period of time. One category of children who might be subject to longer periods on a waiting list than others are those with special educational needs. The increasing number of children with education, health and care plans and the concomitant rise in the number of children being educated in special schools is well documented.[3] This has left many local authorities up and down the country with a shortage of provision in special schools and some parents opting to wait for a

[2] *Hidden from view: The experiences of young carers in England*, The Children's Society, 2013 https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/hidden_from_view_-_final.pdf

[3] www.isospartnership.com/s/LGA-High-Needs-Tipping-Point

long time in order for a place to become available at the special school of their choice. Indeed, some of the evidence provided by parents to our survey identified exactly these constraints with parents citing examples of the challenges in accessing a range of specialist placements, particular those for children with ASD or social emotional and mental health needs.

Some of the other categories of children who have proved very hard for local authorities to place include those returning from tier four mental health provision and some young offenders. In these cases, the numbers of children affected are often very small but the delays to securing adequate educational provision can be lengthy given the scarcity of appropriate placements.

Highly mobile children and families

Finally, local authorities identified some children who may not be known to services in a local area at all, and when they do become known are often very challenging to find a school place for due to the complex nature of their needs. Within this category are those who meet the DfE's legal definition of children missing education – they are not and may never have been on a school roll and are not receiving education in any other setting, including at home. Many of these may be children in highly mobile families who do not reside long enough in one place to register for or receive services. Some may be families recently arrived in the UK from abroad.

There are two groups of children within this broader definition whom local authorities particularly highlighted. The first is looked after children who, following a placement breakdown, may be placed at short notice a considerable distance away from their current education provision without enough thought being given to where that child will be educated going forward. This challenge is particularly acute when a child is placed in a children's home outside their local authority area and the receiving authority may have little or no information about that placement. Local authorities highlighted instances of looked after children receiving insufficient education within a children's home setting for a significant period before the receiving local authority was even aware that the child had been placed there.

The second group of children about whom local authorities were particularly concerned were those in families who were rehoused in either temporary or permanent accommodation in a new local authority, but again where the receiving authority had no information about the family move and were dependent on the family themselves to make enquiries to access a suitable school place. The level of challenges and vulnerabilities experienced by many of these families meant that too often children remained out of school, without the local authority's knowledge.

Destinations of children missing out on a formal full-time education

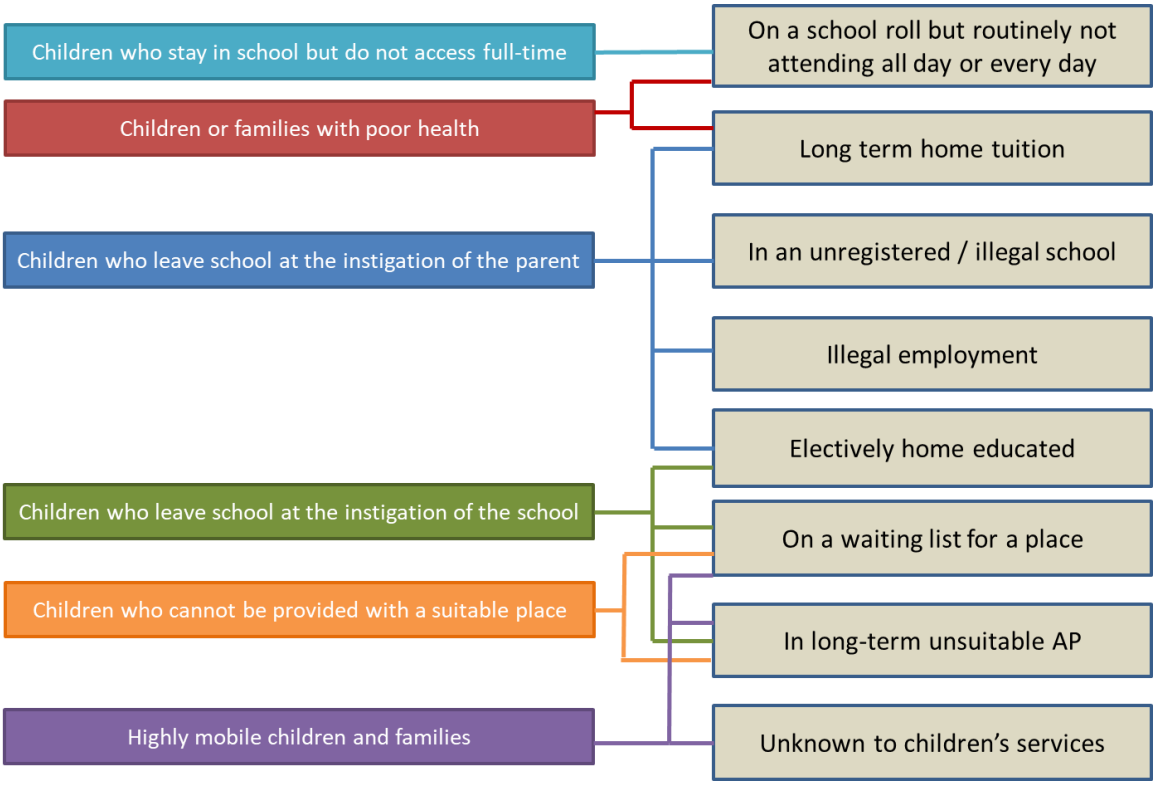
The section above describes the routes or pathways that lead to children missing out on a formal full-time education. The focus of this section is where these children who end up missing formal full-time education might be found, or their destination.

From the evidence provided by local authorities we have been able to identify eight main 'destinations' where children missing out on formal, full-time education might be found. These are:

- On a school roll, but either routinely not attending or only attending on a very limited part-time timetable.
- Receiving long-term tuition at home, either through an internet-based provider or through in-person tuition, when that tuition does not constitute formal full-time education in either duration or content.

- In an unregistered or illegal school. An unregistered school is defined as a setting that is operating as an independent school, without registration. It is a criminal offence to operate an unregistered independent school in England. According to Ofsted the most common types of unregistered school are alternative provision, general education providers and places of religious instruction.
- In illegal employment, which constitutes full-time employment of any kind for a child of statutory school age. Although local authorities acknowledged that this was not widespread, they knew of children going into employment in family businesses or some children of Gypsy Roma Traveller heritage entering employment at a young age.
- Elective home education where the parent is not able or not willing to provide education that would constitute formal full-time education in either duration or content;
- On a waiting list for a school place where the provision of a suitable school place cannot be resolved quickly. Local authorities also drew attention to some children on the waiting list who are offered places but then do not attend the place that they have been offered.
- In long-term unsuitable alternative provision, where that provision does not meet a child's educational needs in terms of developing the skills needed to progress in their learning or life or which falls a long-way short of a full-time educational offer.
- Unknown to children's services where the child or family is not previously known in any way by the local authority responsible for providing an education place.

Looking back at the routes into missing formal full-time education described in the preceding section, it is clear that some routes or pathways lead more clearly to particular destinations, whereas others can result in a much wider range of potential destinations for children. The diagram below attempts to map out how each route relates to the eight main destinations for children missing out on a formal full-time education.



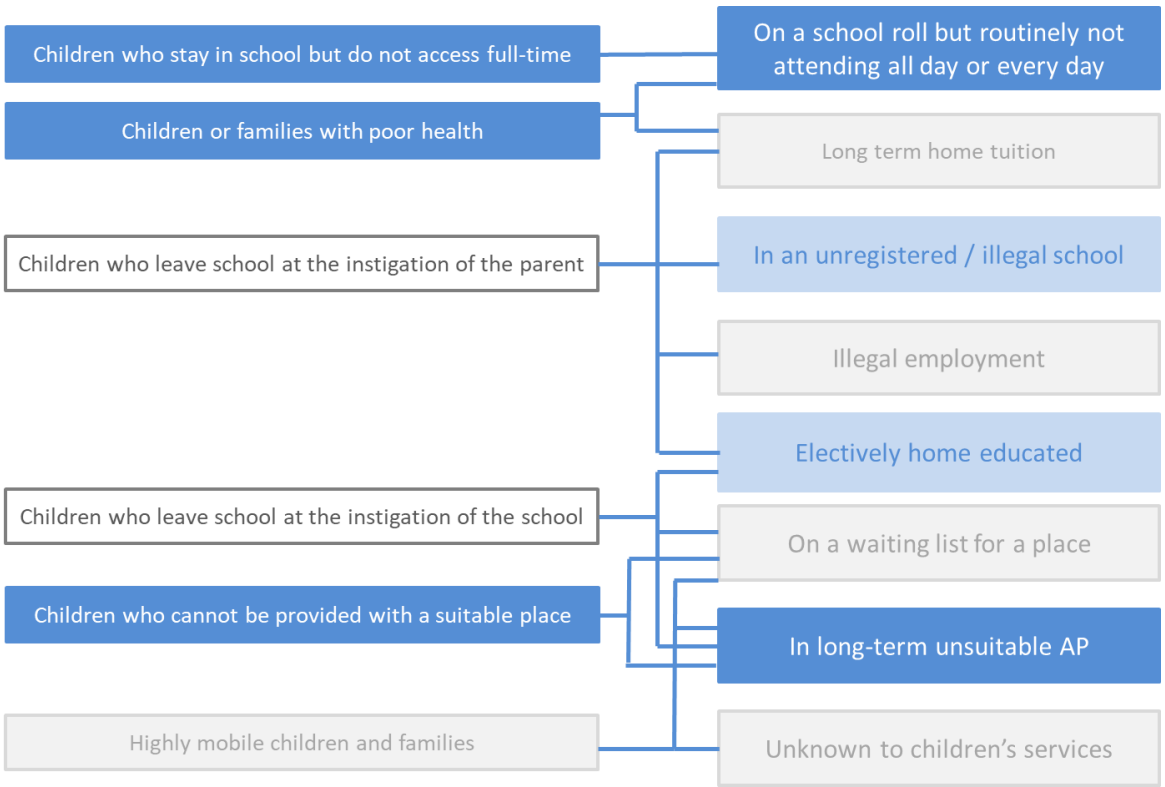
What this diagram makes clear is that understanding the full extent of children missing out on their entitlement to a formal full-time education is not a straightforward task. Children missing education can be found in a variety of both formal and informal education settings, they can be found at home receiving different forms of educational input or none at all, they can be found in employment and they can be simply unknown to those providing services in the community. This complexity helps to explain why the numbers of children missing out on their entitlement to education might be routinely underestimated and why it has historically been a challenge to construct legislation and guidance that ensures that no children miss out on the education which is their right, by law. In the next section we look at whether it is possible to estimate, nationally, the number of children who missed out on formal full-time education in 2018/19 and what we know about trends over recent years.

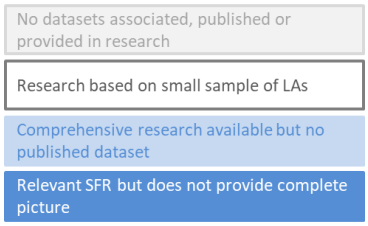
Chapter 2: What are the numbers and trends in children missing formal education?

The Children's Commissioner referred to children missing out on their education as 'invisible'. This is a powerful descriptor. At the level of the school, the community or the local authority these children can easily become 'invisible' – not in classrooms with their peers; not regularly seen by those delivering services to children; excluded from the community life that revolves around a school. But this research has also highlighted the risk that these children become 'invisible' in terms of national policy. This is because, nationally, we simply do not know how many children are missing out on a formal full-time education, who they are or where they are. We do not know whether the number is rising and we do not know what happens to these children and young people later in life. There is no statistical first release setting out the number of children missing out on a formal full-time education each year. Indeed, there is a distinct paucity of any comprehensive, reliable data outlining the numbers of children who are missing extended periods of formal, full-time education.

The graphic below uses our concept of routes and destinations of children missing education. It demonstrates the areas that have directly applicable datasets associated with them; those that can be estimated using a proxy dataset; and those where there is very little or no associated data. It is striking that there is very little directly applicable published data associated with these children and young people and where such data does exist it tends to be based on voluntary surveys which are, inevitably, less comprehensive and reliable than data published by the government.

Graphic to visually represent the level of available datasets associated with routes and destinations into children missing education





Available trends from published data

Although there is limited national published data about this cohort of children as a whole, there have been several insightful publications which demonstrate the rising trend in numbers of children being electively home educated and numbers of children leaving schools at times other than normal points of transition.

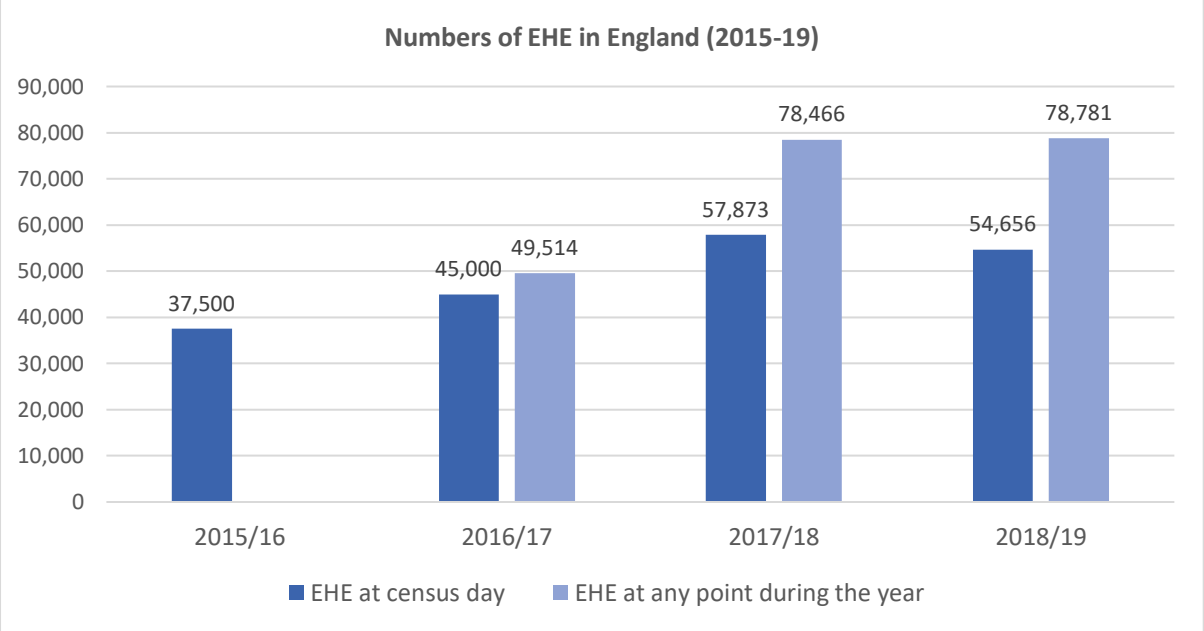
The Associated Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) annual survey on home education provides the most comprehensive estimate of the number of children and young people currently being electively home educated in England.[4] The survey, which is completed by local authorities every year, suggests that 55,000 children and young people were electively home educated on census day in 2018/19. This has grown from 37,500 in 2015/16. As shown in the chart below, the numbers climbed dramatically between 2016/17 and 2017/18 and have since plateaued. The ADCS survey also shows that 79,000 children were home educated at any point during 2018/19. This in-year variation suggests that a relatively high number of children and young people may be moving in and out of home education within an academic year. It is worth noting that this data is based on voluntary local authority returns. As parents are not currently required to notify their local authority of a decision to home educate it may be an underestimate. Other sources, including the Schools Adjudicator (December 2018) and the Call for Evidence (July 2019) suggest that between 53,000 and 58,000 children are home educated.[5] [6] Although there is some variation on exact numbers, they all point to sharp increases, with the Call for Evidence (2019) suggesting a rise of 40% since 2014/15.

4 https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_Elective_Home_Education_Survey_Analysis_FINAL.pdf
https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_EHE_survey_analysis_2018_FINAL_web.pdf
https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_EHE_Survey_Analysis_2017_FINAL.pdf

5 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/osa-annual-report

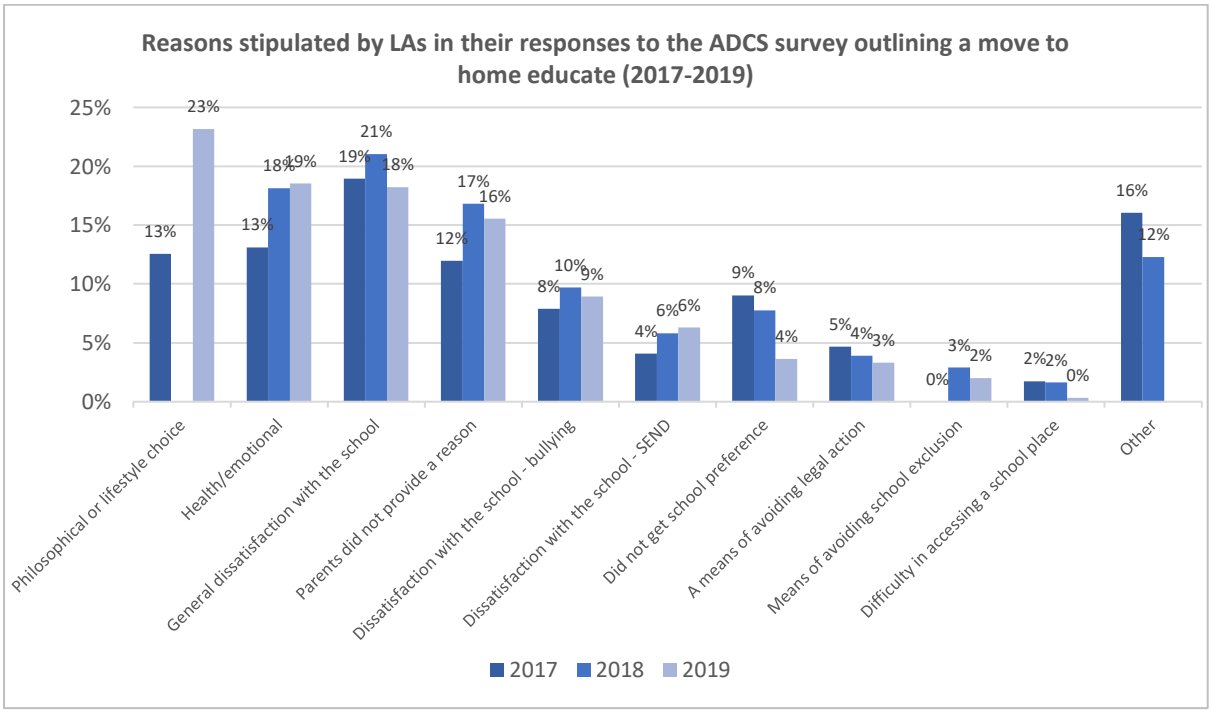
6 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791552/EHECfEResponseDocumentv9.4.pdf

Figure 1 - Numbers of children who are electively home educated in England between 2015 and 2019[7]



The ADCS survey also sheds some light on the reasons why parents are deciding to home educate their children. While 'philosophical or lifestyle choice' remains the most commonly cited factor, the chart below also shows that health or emotional reasons are one of the fastest growing factors for parents choosing to home educate their children. This reflects some of the issues and concerns voiced by parents in our survey and by the school leaders who engaged with this research.

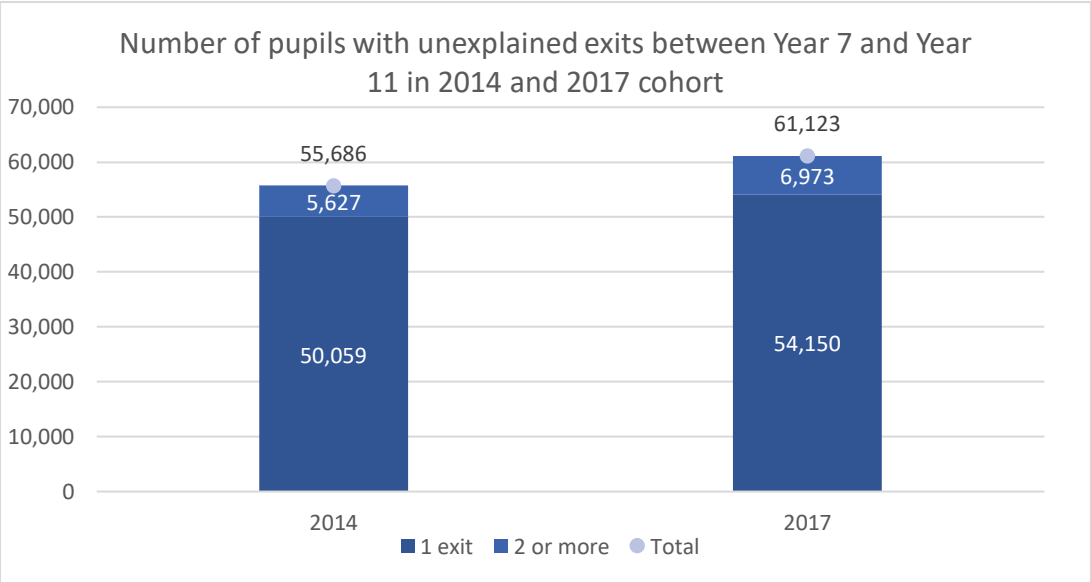
Figure 2 - Reasons cited why parents/carers removed children to be electively home educated (2017-2019)[8]



[7] ADCS (n 3) – no data provided for numbers of EHE 'at any point in the academic year 2015/16'
[8] Ibid.

Where the ADCS survey charts the growth in the number of children in home education (one of the eight destinations we identified for children missing education), the Education Policy Institute (EPI) provides some compelling analysis on the number of children leaving their current school for an unknown destination. The report 'Unexplained Pupil Exits from Schools' (October 2019) estimates the number and prevalence of young people who experienced an 'unexplained exit' from secondary school, particularly through off-rolling or managed moves.[9] EPI defines the term 'unexplained exits' as any pupil move between terms when the destination of the pupil is not known, for example, they do not show up on another school roll. The data, compiled and analysed by EPI, shows that unexplained exits grew by 8% over the three years between 2014 and 2017 from 55,686 to 61,123. The scale of the issue is similar to those becoming electively home educated and is likely to capture many of the same children. Within this number, EPI estimates that around 13% of unexplained exits are managed moves, having grown from 8% in 2014.

Figure 3 - Unexplained exits in English secondary schools, comparing 2014 and 2017[10]

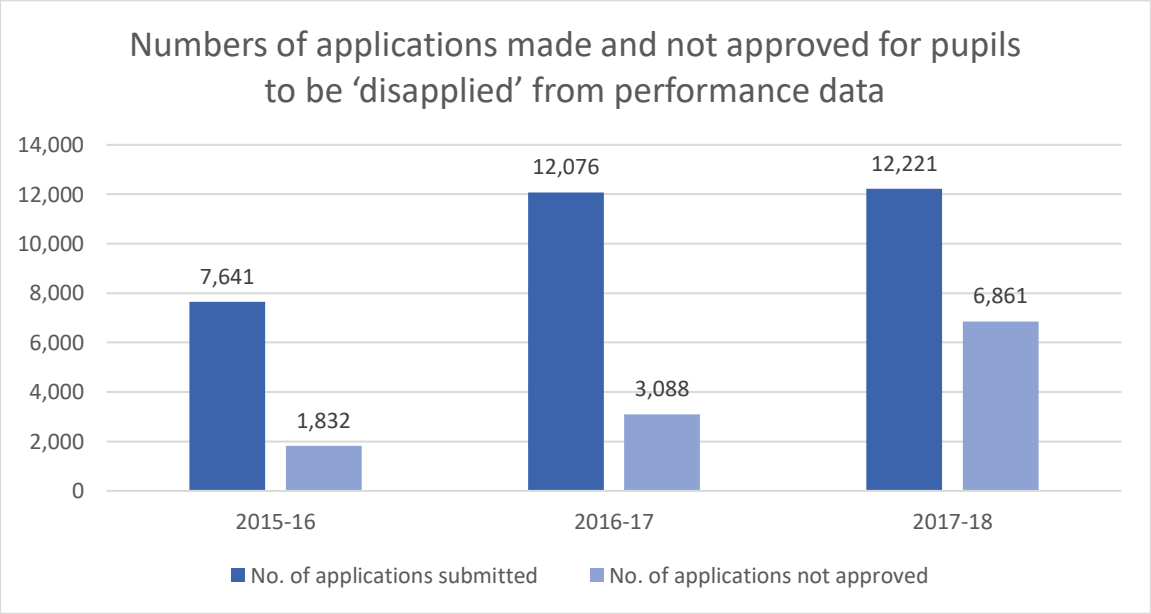


The FFT Education Datalab, in a blog series since 2015 called 'Who's Left', have demonstrated similar trends for children and young people disappearing from school rolls.[11] The series looks at the group of young people who leave mainstream state schools at some point between Year 7 and Year 11 and who are not recorded in state education again. They estimate that out of an expected GCSE cohort, the number of young people who left state education during secondary school rose from 20,000 in 2015 to 24,600 in 2019. Though FFT Datalab emphasise that not all those leaving state education are of concern, there is a high number in this cohort that are either not recorded as having sat GCSES or equivalent qualifications or, if they did, whose results did not count towards any establishment. In 2019, this number was 16,700 out of the 24,600 pupils leaving state education. Accounting for some legitimate reasons for exemptions (for example disapplications, movement out of the UK, mortality rates), FFT Datalab, therefore, estimate that 6,700-9,200 pupils in the 2019 Key Stage 4 cohort remained in England but did not take any qualifications or did not count in results anywhere. This

[9] https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/unexplained-pupil-exits-data-multi-academy-trust-local-authority/
[10] Ibid.
[11] https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/tag/whosleft/

compares to an estimate of 6,200-7,700 in 2018, confirming the upward trends seen in other sources.

A further piece of evidence that supports the hypothesis that more children are missing out on a formal, full-time education is the rising number of requests for disapplications from GCSEs which have been recorded in recent years. Schools can apply for the results of seriously ill pupils, those in police custody, those who are persistently absent or who are home-educated to be "disapplied" from performance data, on the grounds that teachers cannot reasonably be held responsible for their outcomes. The ability of schools to disapply some students' results makes an important contribution to an inclusive school system. It gives inclusive schools the confidence to maintain very challenging pupils on their roll, for example those in and out of the criminal justice system, without fear that their overall school performance will be negatively affected. However, the very marked rise in the number of requests for disapplications, coupled with the concomitant rise in the number of those requests that have been refused by the DfE, suggest that there are more young people not engaging with their programmes of study at GCSE, or not able to attend exams, for whatever reason. This is a further indication of a growth in the numbers missing out on formal, full-time education.



National estimate of 'children missing education'

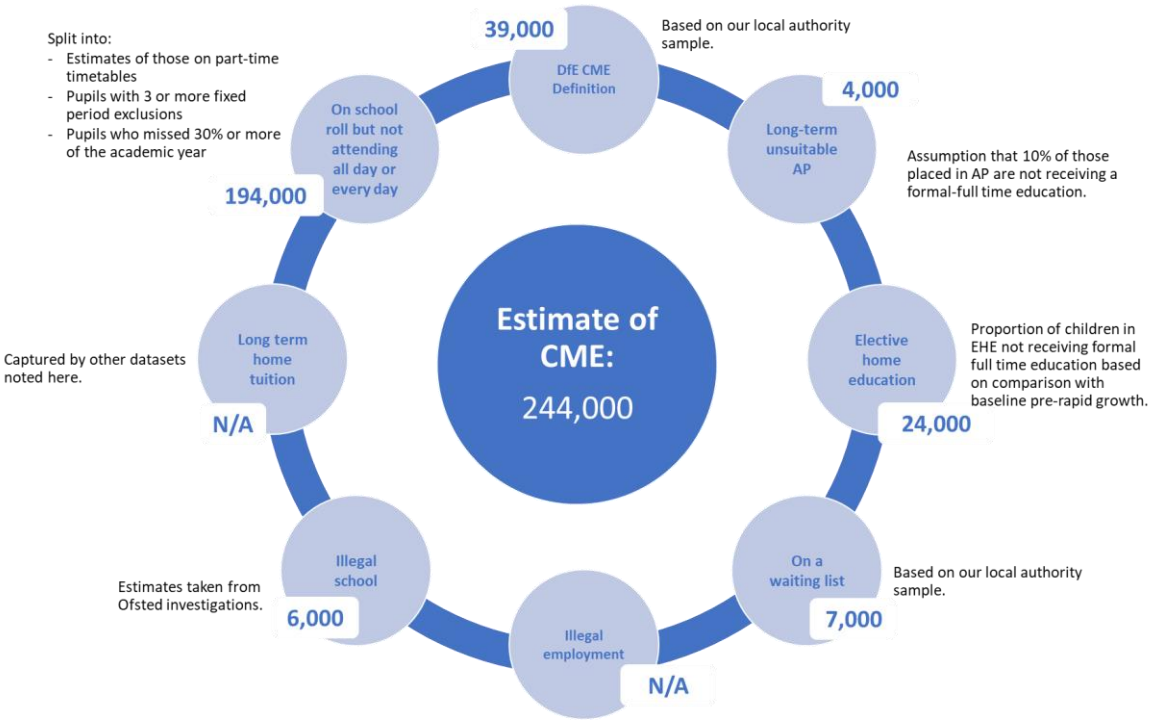
Without a clear sense of how many children in England might be missing out on their entitlement to a formal full time education it is very difficult to be precise about the scale or nature of intervention that might be needed either locally or nationally to address the issue. We have therefore used this research as an opportunity to use existing data published nationally, and complementary data held locally, to develop an estimate for the number of children who may be missing out on a formal full-time education.

We have used our rubric of the eight 'destinations' for children missing education as the basis for our analysis. For each destination we have drawn on the best available published data, in the first instance, to provide an estimate of the number of children and young people. Where there is a lack of published data, we have drawn on our own local authority dataset, as collected through the regional workshops. Our sample is of 17 local authorities, with varying rates of response per question. For reference, when scaling up the responses for our question on the number of electively

home educated children, we reach an estimate of 75,000. which maps well to the ADCS' figure of 79,000 for children who are electively home educated at any point in the year.

The following graphic (Figure 4) outlines the different destinations and the numbers we estimate for each. As this is a working estimate based on extrapolated data, we have rounded everything to 1000. It shows that a little more than a quarter of a million children may have missed out on a formal full-time education in 2018/19 which equates to around 2% of the school age population in England. Our full methodology is set out in Annex A, but below we summarise the key assumptions that we used to arrive at this estimate.

Figure 4 - Estimated total CME figure in England



Children and young people on school roll but not attending all day or every day

There is no single dataset that captures all children who are routinely not attending school or for whom part-time attendance has become the norm. However, we have estimated this number to be 194,000 based on both published data and information provided by local authorities in our sample. Specifically, we have included 124,000 children who are recorded in DfE statistics as having missed 30% of the academic year or more. We have also included pupils who have experienced three or more fixed period exclusions in the academic year. In 2018/19, this was 48,000. There is no published data on children and young people on part-time timetables. However, we received this information in our local authority returns. Nine local authorities provided answers to this question. When scaled up, we estimate there to be 22,000 children and young people on part-time timetables.

Long term home tuition

There is no separately published data on children in long term home tuition. Moreover, we have assumed that children and young people in the category 'long-term home tuition' will be captured by other datasets we have already used, in particular the absence data included above. We have not, therefore, included any additional children or young people under this category.

Illegal schools

Again, although there is no national data on the number of illegal schools (institutions operating as schools but not registered as an independent school) Ofsted estimated that there were 6,000 pupils being educated in the 259 unregistered settings they had inspected between January 2016 and August 2019.[12]

Illegal employment

We have not been able to find appropriate data on the number of young people of statutory school age who are in illegal employment. Our discussions with local authorities suggested that the number is very small, therefore we have not included an estimate in our calculation.

Elective Home Education

Not all children who are home educated are missing education. For the purposes of this analysis we have assumed that 75% of the *additional* children being electively home educated, from a baseline of 2014-15 are those who will be missing out on a formal full-time education. It is these additional children who are more likely to be those whose parents have chosen to home-educate reluctantly due to shortcomings in the education on offer for their child or those who are home-educating as a result of pressure having been applied by the school. In calculating the additional children in home education, above the 2014-15 baseline, we have used the number in elective home education on census day because there is a more secure comparative timeline for this figure. Based on these assumptions we arrive at 24,000 for the number of children educated at home and not receiving formal full-time education.

Children and young people on a waiting list

We have based this on the data provided by local authorities which attended our workshops. We received 6 responses to this question. When scaled up on the basis of local authority pupil population, we estimate there to be 15,000 children and young people in England who are out of formal education as they are awaiting a school place.

[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-data-shows-illegal-schools-are-a-huge-nationwide-problem

Children and young people in long-term unsuitable AP

We have assumed that 10% of those placed in alternative provision do not receive a formal full-time education. This proportion is based on our research into the AP system which suggested that 90% of those placed in alternative provision were in a full-time place with a single provider or split their time between mainstream and alternative provision. For the remaining 10% arrangements were less well defined.[13] This equates to 11,000 children and young people in 2018/19. [14]

Children and young people who are currently 'missing education' in terms of the Department for Education's statutory definition

The DfE defines children missing education as children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. This is not a published dataset and therefore, we have taken this from our own local authority data returns. We received 10 responses to this question – when scaled up on the basis of local authority pupil population, we estimate there to be 39,000 children and young people in England who are out of formal education.

When summed together, we therefore estimate there to be around 282,000 children and young people in destinations that constitute missing out on formal, mainstream education. That is around 2% of England's pupil population.[15]

However, it is important to recognise that this is an estimate based on a set of assumptions. By substituting a slightly different set of assumptions we can explore the likely range in children missing formal full-time education. If for, example we assumed that only children absent for more than half the year, only 50% of the growth in elective home education cases, and only 10% of those in alternative provision were missing out on formal full-time education then our estimate would be closer to 200,000. Alternatively, at the other end of the scale, data on persistent absences showed around 1 million children missed more than 15.5 days of school in 2018/19. [16] This is the number of days of absence for ill-health beyond which a local authority is required to put in place alternative provision. It could therefore be argued that this is the threshold beyond which a child ceases to access formal *full-time* education. The table below shows how different possible assumptions affect our calculation for the number of children missing out on their educational entitlement.

Assumptions:	How many children are not attending their school full-time	How many children in EHE are not receiving formal full-time education	How many children in AP are not receiving formal full time education	Impact on total number of children missing formal full time education
Minimum	**60,000** *Half a year or more*	**16,000** *50% of uplift in EHE numbers since 2014-15*	**2,000** *5% of those in AP*	**208,000**
Medium (as used in our methodology)	**124,000** *A term or more*	**24,000** *75% of uplift*	**4,000** *10% of those in AP*	**282,000**
Maximum	**965,000**	**32,000**	**11,000**	**1,138,000**

[13] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision-market-analysis
[14] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2019
[15] Pupil Population 2018-2019 https://www.gov.uk/guidance/section-251-2018-to-2019
[16] Gov.uk (n 5)

	15 days or more	*100% of uplift*	*25% of those in AP*	

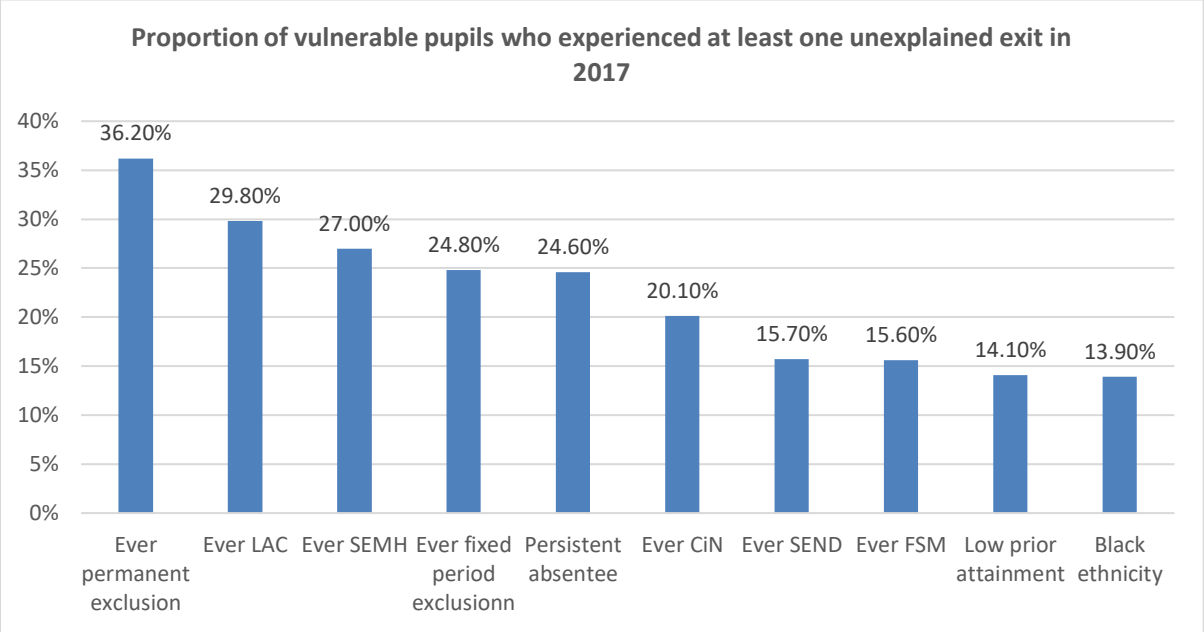
We cannot be certain of the overall scale of this problem. We have arrived at a figure of 289,000 which is our best-informed estimate of the number of children missing out on formal full-time education in 2018-19. However, depending on how 'full-time' and 'formal' are defined it could be as high as 1,140,000. It is unlikely to be lower than 210,000. The main concern is that we simply do not know if children and young people are getting their entitlement to education, and we cannot be certain of the risks to which they are being exposed by not being in full-time education.

Characteristics of children missing education

In our discussions with local authority officers, the consensus was that children with a range of vulnerabilities were more likely to miss large periods of full-time education. In our data sample, local authorities shared some of the characteristics that were common to the cohort of children missing education. The large majority of these included those with social and behavioural needs; those with complex needs and no suitable school place available; those with medical or mental health needs; and of those with mental health needs, those accessing CAMHS either as an in-patient or through services in the community.

This picture is reinforced by other research in this area. As the EPI report outlines (2019), 75.8% of the unexplained exits in 2017/18 were considered 'vulnerable', compared to 57.4% of the general pupil population.[17] **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.** shows the proportion of vulnerable pupils who experienced at least one unexplained exit in 2017.

Figure 5 - Vulnerable characteristics displayed by children missing full-time, formal, mainstream education



Similarly, the EPI data reveals a large number of children with SEMH needs (27%) or with more general SEND (16%) to be missing from education. The ADCS survey into home education explores this issue in-depth, indicating that in 2019/20, 38 of the 129 responding local authorities estimated that 6-10% of those in elective home education had Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

[17] EPI (n 8)

compared with 3.1% in the general population. [18] One respondent to the ADCS survey shared that there had been a "significant shift within the home education community, resulting in a surge of new referrals and an increase in cases with social care, SEND and multiagency involvement."[19] Published data also reveals that a growing proportion of children with SEND may be out of formal, full-time education. The numbers of children with EHCPs who were removed by their parents to be home educated has increased rapidly since 2017 and the number of those 'awaiting placement'[20] has also increased.[21]

The evidence base therefore strongly suggests that the quarter of a million children who may have been missing out on a formal full-time education – who are far less 'visible' in terms of policy or educational outcomes – are also those who are far more likely to be vulnerable. The next sections of this report will explore why this is happening and how this disproportionate representation of vulnerable children and young people contributes to a sharpening of social inequities and an ongoing cycle of poverty, unemployment and health inequalities.

[18] ADCS (n 3)

[19] https://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_Elective_Home_Education_Survey_Analysis_FINAL.pdf

[20] In 2019, this figure represented ~1% of all EHCPs at 3,500. This had increased by 1,400 cases since 2018

[21] Though in 2019, numbers with EHCPs removed to be home educated only represented 737 cases, this had increased on 2017 by 34% which proves higher than the percentage increase of total EHCPs since 2017 (24%). Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statements-of-sen-and-ehc-plans-england-2019

Chapter 3: Why are growing numbers missing out on formal, full-time education?

In the previous section, we considered the scale of the issue of children missing out on formal, full-time education and the growth in these numbers over time. In this section, we consider the factors that are contributing to this trend. To do this, we considered the existing research that has been done in relation to children who, for one reason or another, are not in formal, full-time education – children missing from school rolls, children who have been excluded, changes in school rolls and unexplained exits from schools. We collated the key findings from these studies and tested these through our workshops with local authority officers. We supplemented this with our interviews with school leaders, and with our analysis of the responses to our survey of parents and carers.

Overall, the picture we built up suggested that there is not a single factor that explains the growth we have seen in children who are not receiving suitable, formal, full-time education. Instead, the evidence we gathered suggests that it is a combination of three sets of factors that, taken together, have given rise to this trend. These factors are:

4. the changing nature of the needs and experiences that children are bringing into school;
5. pressures and incentives on schools' capacity to meet those needs; and
6. the capacity of the system to ensure appropriate oversight of decisions taken regarding children's entry to and exit from schools.

In this section, we explain each set of factors and how they relate to one another.

Factor 1: The changing nature of children's needs and experiences

During our research, local authority officers and school leaders highlighted that the needs and experiences that children were bringing into school were one important consideration in understanding why increasing numbers of children are missing out on formal, full-time education. Their point was not that the change in children's needs and experiences was itself a novelty – many reflected that the education system and local support services were in a constant process of adapting how they operated in order to reflect the needs of the communities and wider society in which they worked. Instead, they emphasised that local education systems were now seeing increasing numbers of children in the mainstream school system with types and combinations of needs that the school system had not had to meet in the past and was not necessarily equipped to identify and address consistently well.

Local authority officers and school leaders described three broad types of need that were presenting challenges to the education system. Often, they noted, children were not presenting with one type of need exclusively, but instead had combinations of these needs:

a. **needs related to experiences of deprivation and poverty**, including access to and support for learning at home, basic needs like food and hygiene not being met, and disrupted living arrangements where children may have experienced multiple re-locations and consequently multiple school moves and disruption to their education;
b. **needs related to adverse childhood experiences**, including poor mental health, high levels of anxiety, attachment issues, and the after-effects of trauma, abuse or neglect; and
c. **communication and interaction needs**, specifically relating to children with neurodevelopmental conditions or delays in developing language and communication skills.

A common underlying thread that local authority officers and school leaders identified as contributing to the growing numbers of children presenting with the types of need described above was the increasing numbers of children with chaotic or disrupted family lives.

In practice, at the level of the individual school, higher numbers of children presenting with these needs is leading to more instances of extreme anxiety or school refusal. Equally, despite some differences in the underlying causes, local authority officers and school leaders described how these needs and experiences could manifest themselves in forms of challenging, and at times violent, behaviour, that some schools found extremely difficult to manage in a way that kept pupils and staff safe.

This is not to say that, simply because the societal context in which the education systems operates is changing, more children will find themselves out of formal, full-time education. However, it does highlight the importance of schools being able to respond flexibly and creatively to some of the challenges, such as low resilience or poor behaviour, which can be caused by children's more complex needs. And to achieve this, schools require capacity, support and the right enabling environment. These necessary conditions are not always in place, as described in the next section.

Factor 2: Pressures and incentives on schools' capacity to meet those needs

The second factor contributing to children missing out on education is the range of pressures and perverse incentives which can limit or curtail the flexibility with which schools are able to respond to the changing needs of children described above. In setting out these pressures, our aim is not to make generalisations about schools' practice – it has been beyond the scope of this work to capture evidence about individual practices taking place at school level. Instead, our aim has been to consider the conditions that determine what schools can do in terms of their offer of education and broader support for their pupils, how their role in the education system and wider society is seen, and how their effectiveness in carrying out that role is judged.

There are three specific issues that our research suggested were limiting the scope of schools to respond to the changing needs of their pupils and communities. These issues have been highlighted in previous research studies looking at the topic of inclusion, exclusions and pupil exits from schools.[22]

The first issue influencing how schools could respond to changing pupil needs was the curriculum. School leaders and local authority officers argued that changes to the curriculum, with a focus on a narrower range of academic subjects and assessment through end-of-course examinations meant schools were not in a position to offer the breadth of subjects that might provide alternative pathways for children disengaged from academic study or in need of a more personalised curriculum. They argued that there is a limited range of options open to schools that could be considered as ways to avoid further disengagement from education and children moving out of mainstream education.

School leaders and local authority officers linked this to a second, related issue: the financial pressures schools have experienced. Ofsted's 2020 report, *Making the cut: how schools respond when they are under financial pressure*, for example, found that 80% of schools that took part in their research

[22] Previous research studies include: Department for Education, *Research on funding for young people with special educational needs* (2015), Department for Education, *Alternative Provision Market Analysis* (2018), Local Government Association, *Have we reached a tipping point?* (2019), FFT Education Datalab, *Who's Left* (2017-2019), Children's Commissioner, *Skipping School: Invisible Children* (2019), Education Policy Institute, *Unexplained Pupil Exits* (2019). See Bibliography for full sources.

highlighted financial pressures as one of their top three concerns, and 42% of primary schools and 48% of secondary schools anticipated that their school would be in debt by the end of the 2019-20 financial year. School leaders and local authority officers argued that financial pressures had had two significant effects in relation to support for children with additional needs. First, financial pressures compounded the challenges of maintaining a broad set of curricular choices, with schools not in a position to afford to run some of the additional options that they may have offered as part of a personalised study programme for more vulnerable, disengaged or at-risk pupils. Second, local authority officers and school leaders noted that many schools had been forced to find savings by reducing non-core teaching capacity, including by reducing capacity for pastoral support. A survey carried out by the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) in 2018, *Breaking Point*, found that 86% of schools had reduced teaching assistants to balance their budgets, up from 49% in 2015. A National Education Union poll carried out in 2019, found that 59% of respondents said support staff numbers had decreased in their school. Both the importance of in-school pastoral support in keeping children in formal, full-time education, and the reduction in pastoral support as a barrier to this, were highlighted in a report carried out by the National Children's Bureau, *Children Missing Education: Families' Experience*.[23]

Third, school leaders and LA officers highlighted the effect of the current accountability framework, and particularly the focus of current measures of school performance, in creating pressures on schools that limited how the education system was responding to the changing needs of pupils. The current accountability system places greatest weight on specific measures of performance and achievement. Despite the significant changes that have been made to the Ofsted inspection framework to provide a broader focus on how schools support the education of all pupils, the new framework is in its early stages of implementation and school leaders and LA officers reported some continuing mixed messages from inspectors about inclusion in mainstream schools.

The issue with the current suite of performance measures is that how schools are judged is focused on a narrow range of qualifying subjects and is skewed towards pupils who are likely to achieve higher grades. In secondary schools in particular, subjects outside the academic core, on a list approved by the Department for Education, do not count towards the measure of progress a school has helped its pupils to make – 'progress 8' (and the equivalent measure of achievement, or 'achievement 8'). These often tend to the more vocational or less 'academic' subjects that may form part of an alternative curriculum that might be offered as a programme of study to engage a vulnerable or disengaged young person. The construction of progress 8 also gives a school greater credit for pupils moving up from B grades to A grades than for pupils moving from G grades to F grades.[24] If the aim of the education system is to ensure all pupils receive a suitable education, as stated in the Education Act 1996, the fact that the way schools are judged in a high-stakes accountability system is skewed towards higher-achieving students studying academic subjects is likely to put schools in a difficult position regarding their support for students who have additional needs.

In this position, there are two ways in which schools can improve their performance. The first is to develop a strong, whole-school ethos of inclusion and learning, such that all pupils make progress. This is what most leaders in education strive to do, but it can be both time and resource intensive. The 'quick fix' for a school under pressure is to shift the balance of the school's intake, such that a higher proportion of the school population is made up children whose progress will count towards the school's performance measures. This is what HMCI refers to as 'gaming the system' and has said that

[23] https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Final%20CME%20Report_0.pdf
[24] www.isospartnership.com/s/LGA-High-Needs-Tipping-Point

it is “an invidious example of where schools have lost sight of the purpose of education”. It is probably also a corollary of the exceptional pressure to improve performance experienced by some school leaders.

During the research, local authority officers and school leaders described several instances in which they had witnessed this type of behaviour. This is not to say that all or even a majority of schools are engaging in such practices. Local authority officers were keen to emphasise that this was the case, and many placed on record their acknowledgement of the efforts schools made to be inclusive and prevent children from missing out on formal, full-time education in spite of the pressures facing schools. Equally, however, while not all schools are engaging in these practices, all local authority officers that we engaged agreed that they had come across examples where a minority of schools in their local area had engaged in these practices. The practices described by local authority officers, and in part also recognised by school leaders, included –

- practices designed to manage admissions to the school in the first place – these included practices of changing pupil admission numbers, admitting pupils above that number so reductions through pupil exits would appear less conspicuous, and practices of subtly discouraging parents from sending their child to the school (including by indicating that the school did not support children with additional needs);
- and practices designed to manage children out of the school, including inappropriate use of attendance codes, part-time timetables, informal exclusions, off-rolling, and inappropriate use of permanent exclusion.

In relation to the final point, there is also the issue of the perverse incentive that exists in relation to permanent exclusion. We have described this at length in research on this topic, while this was also the focus of the Timpson Review of exclusions. Put simply, under the current policy framework, schools remain responsible for the progress and meeting the costs of pupils that remain in school requiring additional support, but responsibility for progress shifts to an alternative provider and responsibility for the cost of an alternative placement shifts to the local authority when a pupil is permanently excluded. In other words, a school may be penalised in performance and financial terms for keeping a pupil requiring significant additional support in school rather than permanently excluding the pupil.

These pressures, taken together, mean that schools are not recognised in performance and accountability terms for keeping children with changing types of additional needs, as we described earlier, in formal, full-time education. These first two factors, however, are not sufficient causes of the growth of children missing from formal, full-time education. Our research suggests that there is a third factor that, when combined with the first two, help to explain how and why the number of children missing from formal, full-time education has grown in recent years.

Factor 3: The capacity of the system to ensure appropriate oversight of decisions taken regarding children’s entry to and exit from schools

Where a child is missing from formal, full-time education, in the large majority of cases this will not be the result of a decision that the child has made, but rather the result of decisions about the child’s education made by adults. In some instances, a child may miss out on formal, full-time education as a result of decisions made by health professionals or those in the criminal justice system, but for the vast majority of children who miss out on formal, full-time education the adults making decisions will be either the child’s parents or staff in the child’s school.

As we described in section 1, there is a range of routes through which a child may move out of formal, full-time education. Except for unlawful off-rolling, all of these routes are governed by regulations and are an established part of the education policy framework in this country. The issue is not that these routes are inherently wrong. However, the growth in the numbers of children missing formal full time education, coupled with the fact that vulnerable children appear to be disproportionately represented in this cohort, raises a question about whether parts of the policy framework regulating entry to and exits from formal, full-time education are being used consistently for the purposes for which they were designed.

In Section 1, for example, we described –

- **instances where children might leave school at the instigation of the school** – one way in which this might happen is through a child being permanently excluded, but evidence suggests numbers are growing and the findings from studies such as the Timpson Review and the feedback gathered through this research suggest there is considerable variation in how exclusion is practiced across the education system;
- **instances where parents may be pressured into removing their child from formal, full-time education** – while the rights of parents to educate their children in line with their own beliefs is enshrined in legislation, the evidence of the growth and fluidity of the numbers of children being home-educated, and the feedback we gathered about parents being "advised" or pressured to opt for home education to avoid their child being excluded, again raise a question about whether this aspect of the education policy framework is consistently being used for the purpose for which it was designed;
- **instances where parents may decide to remove their child from education due to frustration that their child's needs are not being met in school** – this was a particularly strong theme in the feedback we received from parents, who highlighted overly rigid ("zero tolerance") behaviour policies and a lack of understanding of specific needs as factors that had contributed to episodes that had then resulted in an exclusion or a child becoming disengaged and refusing to attend school; and
- **instances where parents had decided to remove their child from school due to perceived interference or sanctions from the state** – for example, we heard examples of parents removing their child from school to avoid sanctions for their child's non-attendance.

Aside from the instances of illegal removing of children from a school roll, in many of these instances there will be important nuances to unpick in order to understand how decisions about a child leaving school and potentially missing formal, full-time education have been reached. For example, in circumstances where a breakdown of trust and communication between a parent and staff at a school occurs over a period of time, local authority officers noted that it can be difficult to disentangle exactly what may be behind decisions taken that result in children leaving school in this context and whether that decision has been taken in the child's best interests.

This becomes an issue where there is not the capacity in the system to oversee those decisions made by adults that result in a child missing out on formal, full-time education. Local authority officers, school leaders and other partners in the education system argued strongly that there was not the capacity in the system to enable effective oversight of these decisions. They noted that the statutory framework set out a clear duty for local authorities to ensure that school-age children are receiving a suitable education. The issue was not a lack of clarity within the statutory framework, but rather a lack of capacity within LAs to carry out the sort of detailed checking that is necessary to ensure that where a child is not in school due to illness or has been taken out of school to be home-educated these

decisions have been taken appropriately and the child is safe and continuing to receive a suitable education.

Local authority officers argued that this issue had been compounded by two sets of factors. First, they noted that there were some barriers to collecting the right information to enable effective tracking of all children missing out on formal, full-time education. These included the discretion afforded to parents in whether they inform local authorities of elective home education arrangements and the different definitions of children missing education, which we described in Part 1. The fact that there is not an agreed definition of children missing out on formal, full-time education, and an accompanying national dataset collection, helps to perpetuate what the Children's Commissioner for England has called the invisibility of this cohort of children.

Second, they described some of the challenges resulting from changes to local education systems over the last decade. Specifically, they highlighted the different responsibilities to share pupil-level information between maintained schools and academies. Leaving aside the issue of the capacity to check that pupils are receiving a suitable education, at present local authorities have the power to check information about pupil registrations in maintained schools, but not in academies. (Whether local authorities could have access to this information is at the discretion of academies.) This means that, while local authorities have a duty to ensure school-age children are receiving a suitable education, there is not the capacity nor always the means to gather the information that would provide the necessary assurance that children are not missing out on formal, full-time education.

While there are other bodies with responsibility for oversight of schools – including Ofsted and the Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) – like local authorities they are not in a position to offer the detailed, granular oversight of individual cases where a child moves out of formal, full-time education. The RSC teams do not have the capacity to get involved at this level of detail. Where there are clear-cut cases of illegal practice, this can be referred to Ofsted, but, as we described above, many instances are not clear-cut and require detailed analysis. Furthermore, local authorities argued that inspection could in some cases be a blunt tool for dealing with specific instances of a child leaving formal, full-time education, and felt that the inspection regime was not always able to keep pace with the practices, described earlier in this chapter, that a minority of schools may use to "manage their roll".

None of these three factors on their own are sufficient to explain the growth in the numbers of children who are missing out on formal, full-time education. Our research suggests that it is the combination of these factors that helps to explain how this situation has developed. Put simply, wider societal factors have meant that children are arriving in schools with a combination of needs, often linked to disruption in their family lives, at a time when schools' capacity to respond is more limited and the way in which schools' effectiveness is judged has focused more sharply on the academic, and less on the inclusive, aspects of education. This has created a situation where the pressures on schools and families are manifesting themselves through parts of the education policy framework that were not designed to deal with these issues – the potentially inappropriate use of elective home education, part-time timetables and condoned non-attendance, permanent exclusion and alternative provision, for example. While LAs have the responsibility to maintain oversight of the suitability of the education received by school-age children, there is a mismatch between the scope of these responsibilities and the capacity and means to carry them out at a detailed, case-by-case level such that there can be assurance that all children missing from formal, full-time education are receiving a suitable education.

Chapter 4: What is the impact on children, families and society of children missing education?

Without a clear, comprehensive definition and national data set of children missing out on formal full-time education we cannot be certain about the long-term impact on these children and young people. However, there is a wealth of research evidence from a range of sources which explains, and in some cases quantifies, the impact of not attending school. At the same time, the evidence provided by local authorities and parents through this research project powerfully illustrates the impact experienced by individual children and young people, by families and by society more generally.

Of course, as we have outlined elsewhere in this report, the decision for an individual child to leave a specific school might be the right decision. There were examples in our parents' survey of where that particular choice has resulted in better outcomes for the child in question. For example, one parent said ""Since being out of full-time education my son has become much happier and calmer. He is free to learn/discover what he is interested in and learn at his pace. He attends English and maths class and will be sitting these as GCSE's. His confidence is improving, his teachers are really positive which is really helping my son to regain his self-confidence and self-belief which is something that I'm sure would have been totally destroyed if he'd remained in school." However, in such cases, the parent has stepped in to provide or commission the education that the child needs. The detrimental impacts we discuss in the following sections are where the child does not end up receiving formal, full-time education that is suitable for his or her needs.

Impact on an individual child or young person

Local authorities which took part in our regional workshops identified five ways in which missing out on formal full-time education might impact on an individual child or young person. Many of the local authorities taking part could provide direct examples of children and young people who had experienced negative impacts such as these from their case work. The five areas of concern are to some extent interdependent, and in the following sections we explore both the evidence for them and how they interrelate.

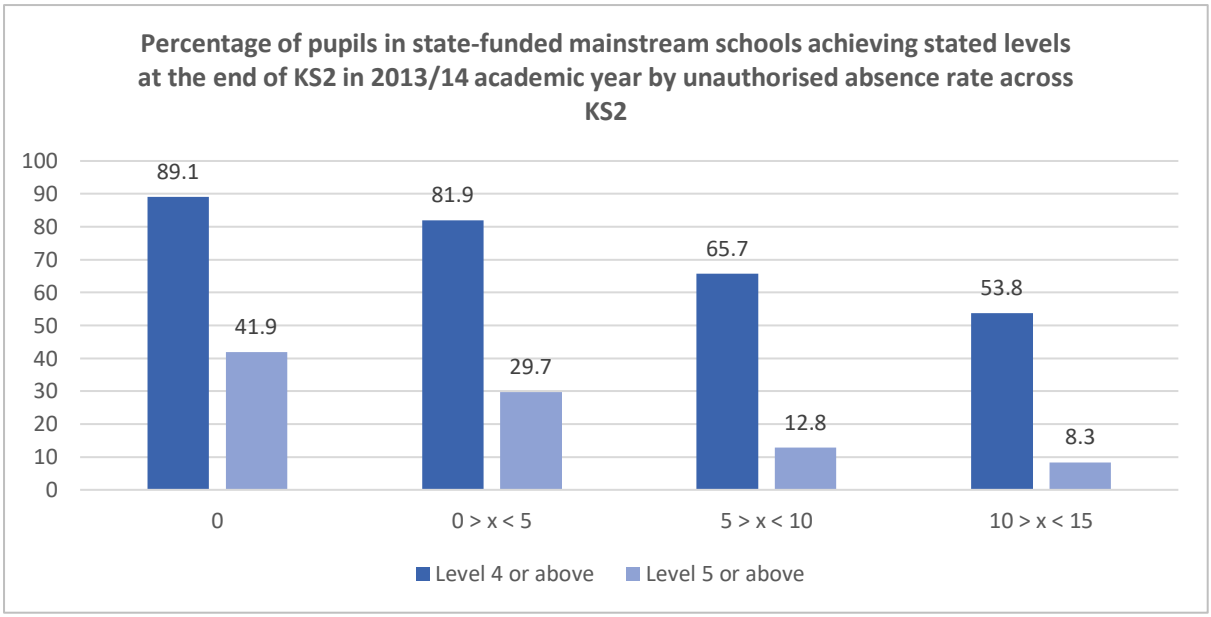
1. Educational attainment and employability
2. Mental health and wellbeing
3. Social and emotional development
4. Crime and exploitation
5. Safeguarding

Educational attainment and employability

The most obvious way in which missing out on a formal full-time education is likely to affect a child or young person is in their educational attainment and subsequent progress in learning and life. This theme came through clearly in evidence provided by those who took part in this research. A child or young person that misses full-time, formal education lacks consistent access to teaching and has their continuity of learning disrupted, often at crucial times in a year. In missing out, either intermittent lessons or large periods of a term, a child may miss important work and fall behind peers.

In 2016, the Department for Education published a report looking into the link between absence and attainment of pupils at the end of KS2 and KS4 in state-funded schools, whilst taking observed factors into account such as prior attainment, gender, special educational need and ethnic group. [25] The key findings of the report show that as absence increases within the 2013/14 cohort, the average percentage achieving expected levels of attainment at the end of KS2 and KS4 decreases. The study found that, when controlling for other characteristics, even quite low levels of absence could have an impact on attainment at key stage 2 and key stage 4. When observing the impact of unauthorised absences on attainment, the difference is even greater. Figure 6 and Figure 7 show the impact of unauthorised absences on attainment. At KS2, Figure 6 shows that pupils with no absences are 1.7 times more likely to achieve Level 4 or above compared with pupils who were absent for 10 to 15 days. At KS4, Figure 7 shows a drop from 71.7% to 51.6% of young people achieving 5 A*s to C at GCSE if they have missed no days compared to 1 to 5.

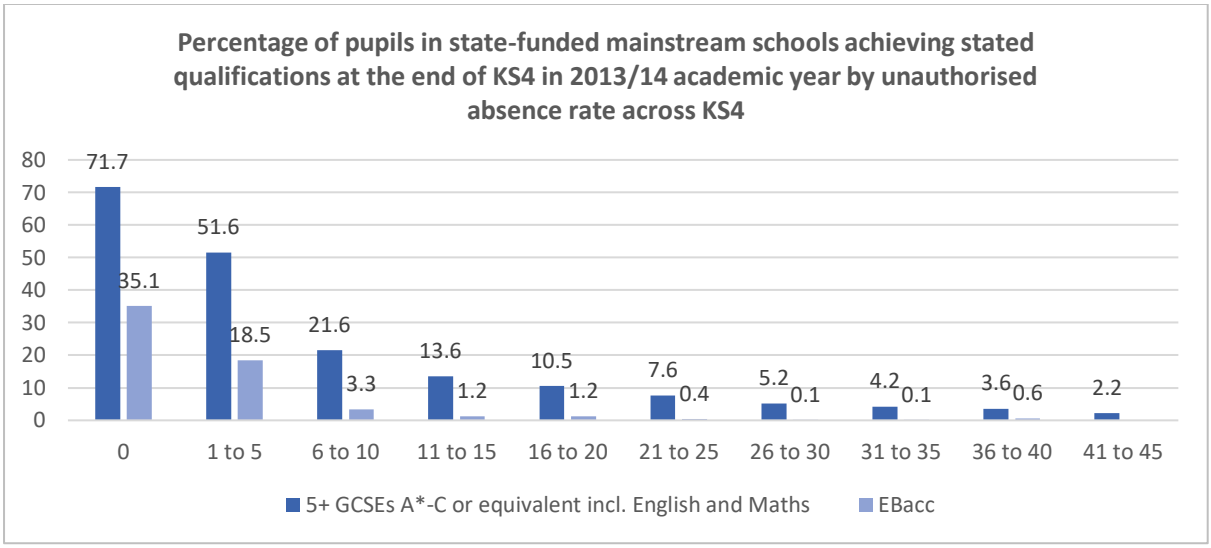
Figure 6 - Percentage achieving Level 4 and 5 or above at Key Stage 2 based on unauthorised absence rate[26]



25 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509679/The-link-between-absence-and-attainment-at-KS2-and-KS4-2013-to-2014-academic-year.pdf

26 ibid.

Figure 7 - Percentage achieving 5 or more A to C GCSEs or EBacc based on unauthorised absence rate*[27]



Most of the children and young people we are considering in this project are missing much more than the 5 to 10 days of education that research shows has a significant detrimental effect on attainment. Indeed, the DfE report shows that only 2.2% of young people who miss between 41 and 45 days of education (less than a term) achieved five or more good GCSEs. We might, therefore, assume that the impact on attainment for many children and young people's missing out on formal full-time education is pronounced.

There is, of course, a strong link between low attainment and future employability. In our regional workshops, participants emphasised the link between missing education, low attainment and poor employment prospects later in life. Local authorities emphasised that it was not just missing out on key periods of a school year impacting attainment that was a problem. But that missing out on careers advice and progress meetings with teachers and mentors to plan for the future also contributed to later low employability. This is borne out in the research - the Badman Review into home education presented to the Children, Schools and Families Committee in October 2009 outlined how in a sample of 74 local authority responses and a reported population of 1,220 home educated 16 to 18 year olds, 270 (22%) were not in education, employment or training (NEET). [28] Some of the quotes from parents which illustrate this diminution in life chances include:

"My son, a very intelligent boy, will finish Y11 with no GCSEs and no hope of ever getting any. He has no friends. He does not participate in any of the things that his peers do."

"Missing out on vital life skills."

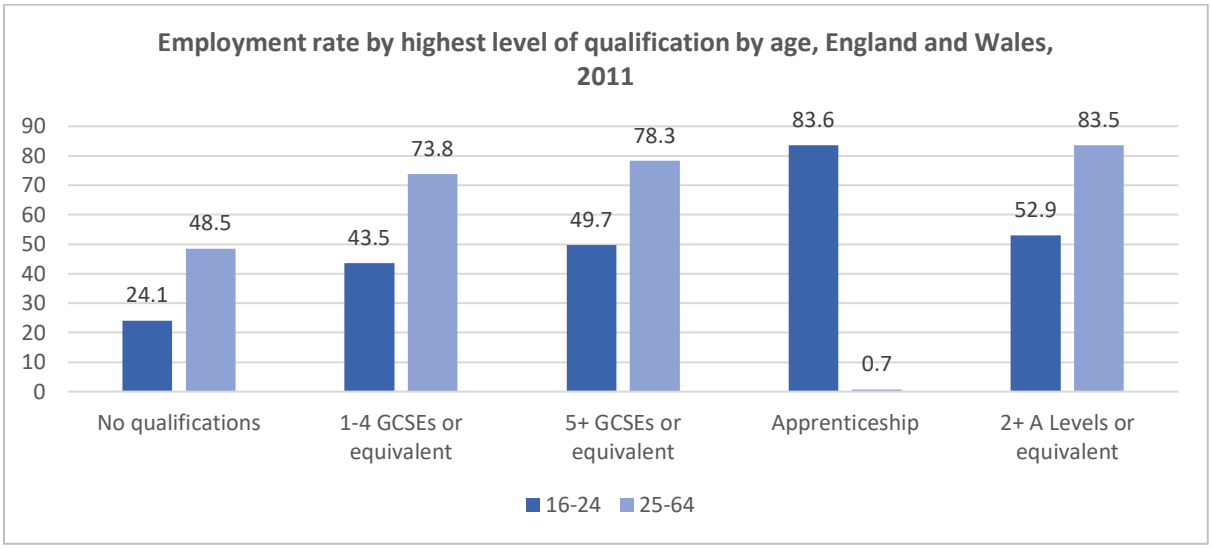
"I doubt that my son will ever be able to do his dream job now. His mental health has suffered so much and he's been traumatised by education so I doubt he'd cope with going to university."

[27] Gov.uk (n 23)

[28] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/328186/Review_of_Elective_Home_Education_in_England.pdf

The Office of National Statistics has also quantified the link between low attainment and employability in the general population. [29] It showed that out of 16 to 64 year olds in England and Wales with no qualifications, 48.5% were in employment compared to 80.7% of those with at least one qualification. Figure 8 breaks this down further, showing the higher the qualification the higher the employment rate.

Figure 8 - Employment rate for 16- to 64-year olds based on their qualifications[30]



Evidence provided by local authorities, parents, schools and national bodies, as well as existing data and research, therefore, suggests missing out consistently on education affects the educational attainment for children and young people, which in turn has long-term ramifications for employability through into later life.

Mental health and wellbeing

Unpacking the relationship between mental health and missing education is complex. As we have set out already in this report, poor mental health or emotional wellbeing, often linked to extreme anxiety, can be one of the factors that leads to a child missing out on formal full-time education. It was certainly a key consideration for many of the parents who responded to our survey. However, local authorities engaged in this research also underscored the potentially detrimental impact on mental health that missing education might have for many children stemming from the lack of consistent routine, reduced access to specialist support and, in some cases, greater exposure to a precarious or unstable home life. In a very small number of cases local authorities identified how the unsupported mental health needs of isolated young people who were not in school had tragically resulted in suicide.

In the survey we conducted with parents where we received 183 responses, declining mental health was regularly cited by parents as the most prevalent impact on their child of missing out on education. Specific issues that arose included depression, social isolation and social exclusion, suicidal tendencies, self-harm, anxiety, aggression and separation anxiety. One parent said that being removed from formal full-time education saw their son experience a "massive shift in mental health", where he would exhibit "aggressive behaviours" due to "boredom". They went on to explain that, "The lack of social peer interaction has been huge as he has no friends here. This makes him

[29] http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_367378.pdf
[30] Ibid.

reluctant to leave the house, which fuels low confidence and low mood". Other parents spoke about the low self-esteem their child now experienced due to the sense of rejection from school and by teachers who had seemingly "given up on them". The Children's Commissioner echoes these concerns raised by parents, emphasising the difficult choice that a parent can face – removing their child from school due to mental health issues to only contribute to them further by being out of full-time education. [31]

As the NSPCC's briefing on *'Home education: learning from serious case reviews'* (March 2014) outlines, children who are home educated become isolated because they have no right to independent access to friends, family but also professional agencies who could provide distinct and specialist support. [32] This can be problematic and leave mental health issues or other needs unsupported. In *A Chance to Change* (2012), Brown et al explain the theory that persistent conduct problems that go unsupported or undetected can contribute to long-term mental health issues. [33] It must be emphasised that although legally, home educated children have the same rights to access mental health support in the form of CAMHS, by not being in school, a child will have access to fewer trained professionals who can spot warning signs around mental health, such as school nurses, counsellors, external mentors and in-school specialist support.

Social and emotional development

The lack of social interaction experienced by children missing education and the potential negative impact of this was a key issue highlighted in our regional workshops. Local authorities expressed concern about children's low self-esteem and lack of confidence to interact with peers as a result of being removed from or missing full-time education and the possibility of poor emotional development in the longer term. Parents responding to the survey also reflected on the negative impact that both isolation and a sense of rejection was having on their children's development.

This is echoed by significant research into the importance of social interaction and the negative impacts (both short and long-term) of a child that is not socialising sufficiently early or consistently. Key impacts of a lack of social interaction include: low confidence and self-esteem, in particular the lack of belief in a child's ability to manage stressful situations; anxiety; social withdrawal; and a lack of ability to make friends and therefore, form supportive social networks throughout their lives.[34]

The impact that social isolation can have on a child's life are comprehensively examined in *'Social isolation in childhood and adult inflammation'* (August 2014) by Lacey et al.[35] The study uses data from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) which looked at babies born in 1958 and examined them at age intervals until they were 50 years old. The study suggests that children who experience isolation are more likely to have lower educational attainment by age 23. This in turn strongly determined the occupational social class the individual occupied at age 42. Similarly, participants who experienced isolation as a child tended to experience psychological distress in adulthood, were more likely to be obese and develop cardiovascular disease. Lacey et al argues that lack of social interaction, therefore, underpins a range of negative outcomes which are interrelated

[31] https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/cco-skipping-school-invisible-children-feb-2019.pdf
[32] http://www.home-education.org.uk/articles/nspcc-scr-review.pdf
[33] Brown, E.R., Khan, L. and Parsonage, M. (2012) A Chance to Change: Delivering effective parenting programmes to transform lives. London: Centre for Mental Health.
[34] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/461120/3a_Social_isolation-Full-revised.pdf
[35] https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0306453014003126?token=C67E9013A971C0A979D15F3BF87118EEBFE87B413A8F7B21F71E0CC460ACC69E72D74C980193CA68E72AA25546AFDB10

– few qualifications could lead to low confidence, low confidence can lead to psychological distress, psychological distress could lead to poor physical health. Lacey et al are specifically studying children who have experienced social isolation as 'social withdrawal' (prefers to do things on their own) and 'social rejection' (bullied by other children). Therefore, their definition of social isolation is not identical to the social isolated experienced by children missing education. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable that similar issues might also be experienced by children who are regularly missing out on exposure to peers and a variety of people.

Safeguarding

Throughout our research a key message that has come out of the evidence gathered is that schools and educational settings are a "protective factor" in society – that they can offer a safe space for learning; opportunities for accessing support; and for building relationships with peers and professionals.[36] Local authorities and school leaders stressed that when a child is out of education, they lack consistent access to these safeguarding opportunities. Local authorities we engaged in our regional workshops expressed anxiety around the inaccessibility of many of these children and the limited opportunities they had to monitor their wellbeing. They outlined how a child missing education would miss out on the protections a school offers through: fewer interactions with professionals who could identify warning signs for domestic violence, grooming, child sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation; fewer routes to gain specialist support; possibly fewer informal and formal mentoring opportunities.

In the context of the current pandemic it has become all too clear the extent to which schools are necessarily the frontline, the everyday eyes and ears, of our system to keep safe that small minority of children in this country who are in danger from their family or from the wider social environment in which they live. When a child is missing education, they miss out on both the informal and formal safeguarding powers a school can offer. Given the disproportionately vulnerable nature of the children and young people we have addressed in this report, limited access to the protective environment created in a school can put children in danger.

Crime and exploitation

We have argued how a child being out of education can limit their access to the protections that a school might provide. We heard frequent accounts in our regional workshops with local authorities that being out of education, in turn, increases some children and young people's susceptibility to being criminally exploited.

The issue of gang violence and child criminal exploitation has risen up the agenda in recent years, with 27,000 children and young people estimated to be involved in gangs nationwide.[37] In a report on gangs (2019), the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, outlines the interconnected ways in which a child becomes most at risk to being groomed or exploited by gangs: risks around home environment; issues such as mental health; and children at risk because of a failure of institutions to respond adequately.[38] The third risk factor encompasses the children and young people missing education that we have addressed in this report. Longfield identifies the point at which a child is removed from an institution, by being excluded or off-rolled, as integral to their shift towards gang involvement or exploitation.

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[36] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/809236/190614_CHILDREN_IN_NEED_PUBLICATION_FINAL.pdf

[37] https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2019/02/28/childrens-commissioner-for-england-warns-the-same-mistakes-that-led-to-child-sexual-exploitation-failings-are-being-repeated-with-gangs/

[38] https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/CCO-Gangs.pdf

Longfield particularly pinpoints the link between exclusions and gangs. She identifies exclusion as the point when a child moves from the periphery of a gang to full membership. Without the potential protection and specialist support of an institution, being groomed or exploited can occur more easily. Longfield outlines this as an institutional failure to support vulnerable children at risk – these institutions and agencies have a key role to play and can easily "moderate or exacerbate" these risks by either supporting children through inclusion or through provision of specialist support (such as mental health support or access to CAMHS). Similarly, the thematic report (2019), from the inspectorates Ofsted, HMI Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, the Care Quality Commission and HMI Probation, also outlines the instrumental role agencies have in allaying risks in how they respond when the child's needs first emerge. [39] Being missing from education, makes the ability of services to identify risk factors and respond quickly even harder. Longfield views the nationwide problem of rising exclusions and waiting lists for CAMHS as a poor institutional response to supporting vulnerability, and when this interacts with child-level characteristics (such as bullying, poor mental health and SEN) and with unstable family situations, this builds a likely combination for gang recruitment.

In February 2019, the Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (CSCB) published a thematic review of vulnerable adolescents. [40] It examines the experiences of sixty vulnerable adolescents with poor outcomes in Croydon or of considerable concern brought to the CSCB Serious Case Review group to determine whether there were any patterns in children's interactions with Croydon services to better inform a response. Within the cohort, 19 received a fixed term exclusion at primary; 17 of those went onto receive a fixed term exclusion at secondary and 14 later placed in secure units or young offender's institutions. There were 5 permanent exclusions at secondary and 33 managed moves. Similarly, of the 25 individuals that the CSCB were able to get attendance data on, 18 were classified as persistent absentees. The vulnerable nature of this cohort's family lives – with reports of abuse, neglect, family dysfunction or stress - makes missing education more problematic because it removes one of the protective factors which might have helped to stabilise the lives of these young people. The review demonstrates that in many cases the child missing education was a key point in the escalated vulnerability, leaving behavioural and mental health needs unsupported. This cohort of young people was reviewed because of their poor outcomes. Though extreme in their vulnerabilities and life outcomes, they point to the risks that can occur when a vulnerable child misses education.

On families and society

Local authorities that we engaged in our research were keen to express the broader impact children missing education had on families and society as a whole. From our discussions, the following themes emerged:

1. Family breakdown
2. Worklessness and poverty
3. Reinforcing stereotypes

[39] https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/protecting-children-from-criminal-exploitation-and-modern-slavery-addendum

[40] https://croydonlcsb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/CSCB-Vulnerable-Adolescent-Thematic-Review-PUBLISHED-Feb-2019.pdf

Family breakdown

From our parent survey, a theme that consistently emerged was the strain that a child missing education puts on the wider family. This tended to manifest itself in terms of declining parents' mental health, marital stress or tension with siblings. Having a child at home for extended periods of time can put strain on parents who are not necessarily trained in home education. With parents unable to leave a child alone, some mentioned how they had lost friendships and/or opportunities to socialise themselves. For some parents, they stated how high stress and home education had contributed to bouts of anxiety and depression.

Many parents cited how one child not going to school affected the aspirations of siblings. For siblings, school and education can seem less important when one child is not attending regularly or not undertaking equivalent studies. For example, one parent said, "Our younger child plays up, thinking that it means he does not have to go to school either".

Throughout both this and previous research, several local authorities have stressed that a child missing education can often be the trigger that moves a family from 'Edge of Care' to bringing a child into care. Given the disproportionately vulnerable nature of many children and young people missing education and the associated problems in their family lives, having a child at home can be very difficult to manage. In the '*National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015-2020: family outcomes'* (April 2017), one of the cited headline problems faced by troubled families was 'Education and School Attendance'. [41] The data from the National Impact Study showed that children in troubled families were over two times as likely to be persistently absent for 10% or more sessions in the last school year than other school children nationally. The link between school attendance and a family being 'troubled' can work both ways, where potential disruption in a family can contribute to absenteeism and that non-attendance can also contribute to disruption in a family.

Worklessness and poverty

Both from our parent survey and through discussions with local authority officers, many voiced concerns around the financial implications that a child missing education can have. This was particularly the case if a parent had to quit their job to look after or educate their child at home. But it was also problematic when families had to pay for resources for home education or for specialist treatments, advocates or professional reports if trying to support the child's special educational needs.

Studies have shown that the cost to society of worklessness is sizeable. The link between a child missing education and worklessness is twofold – both because of the increased probability that a parent may have to give up their job but also, because a child missing education might affect their educational attainment and long-term qualifications. As already established, adults with few or no qualifications are more likely to be unemployed or be in poorly paid work. This can lead to less tax income and other costs to the state in terms of income support or housing. It is estimated that the approximate lifetime cost of a single young person not participating in education, employment or training is £56,000 every year.[42] Therefore, given the twofold nature of worklessness (child and parent), this cost to society is huge.

[41] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-evaluation-of-the-troubled-families-programme-2015-to-2020-findings

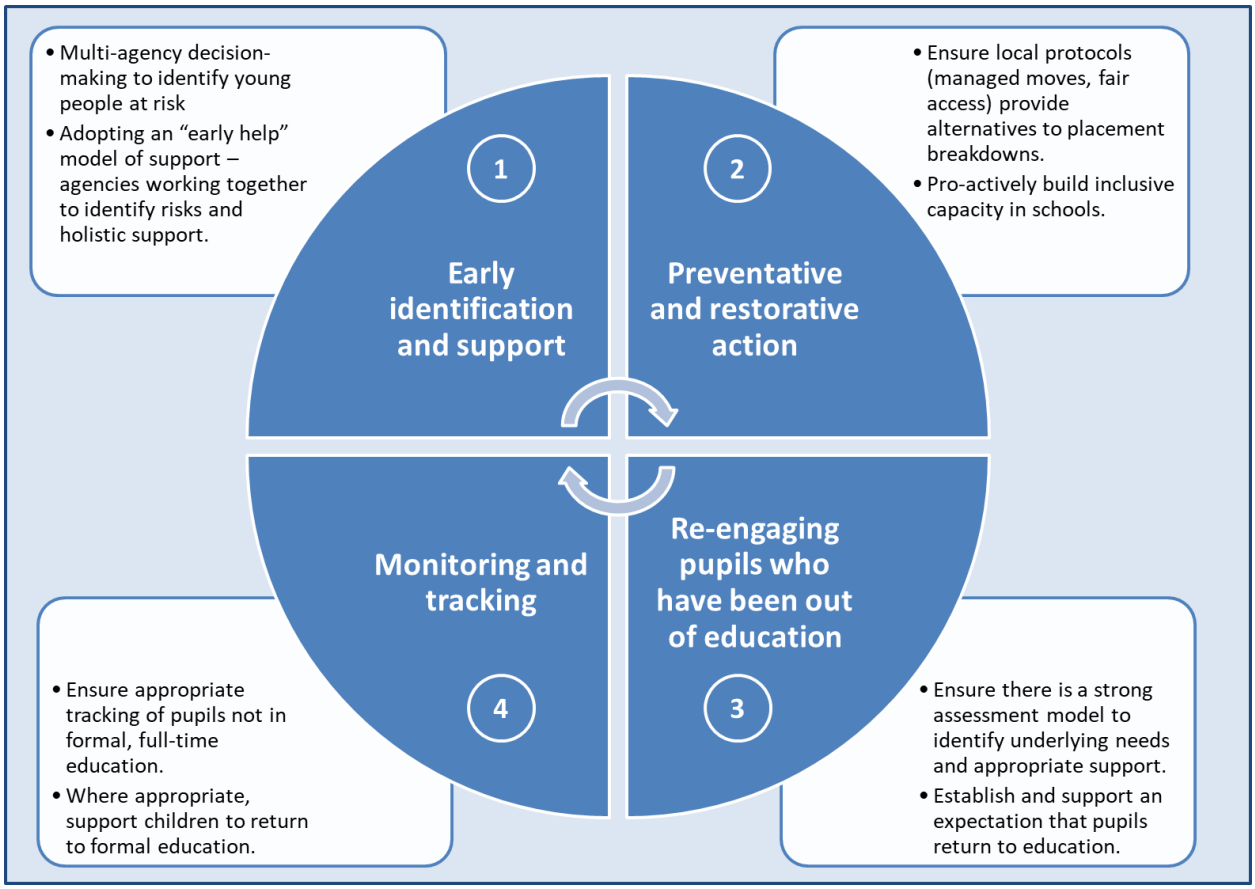
[42] B Coles, C Godfrey, A Keung, S Parrott and J Bradshaw, Estimating the life-time cost of NEET, July 2010

Reinforcing stereotypes

The evidence suggests that the impact of these less inclusive practices fall disproportionately on the most disadvantaged in society and therefore, as described above, they are more likely to fall into criminal exploitation, worklessness and/or gang violence. Local authorities expressed concern over the fact that, to the outside world, this can reinforce a certain stereotype about these disadvantaged groups and can lead to increased social isolation between communities.

Chapter 5: What Councils and local partners can and are doing

During our research, we asked Council officers about approaches that they had developed for preventing children from missing out on formal, full-time education, and supporting the return to education of children who had missed out. We have captured a summary of the approaches that local areas had developed in the graphic below.



Area 1: Early identification and support

Several local areas described the importance of having a multi-agency decision-making panel that met regularly to consider children identified as being at risk of missing out on formal, full-time education – for example, children attending school sporadically or infrequently, or where a child may not be attending school full-time and the reasons for this are not clear. Local authorities highlighted the importance of these panels being attended by representatives from those services that had the authority to make decisions and commit to actions that the panel may agree. These panel meetings often involved officers from inclusion, early help, children's social care, child & adolescent mental health services, the Virtual School for children in care, and youth services. The aim of these multi-agency discussions was to draw together information held about specific young people and their families and enable partners to identify underlying issues and formulate a holistic plan for supporting the young person and their family. Working in this way enabled services to work together as part of early identification and early help approach to supporting the families of children at risk of missing out on formal, full-time education.

Early identification: Salford

Salford has a strong and well-established multi-agency approach to identifying children at risk of missing out on formal, full-time education. The multi-agency panel, called Education on Track, was set up in September 2017 as a mechanism to find a multi-agency solution to children who were not attending school, either regularly or at all.

It currently comes together monthly to consider the cases of children who are not in formal, full-time education where the context is complex or where the reasons for the child missing out on education are not yet known. They are currently reviewing this and are planning to meet virtually every two weeks, with a more focused referral process in place. At the moment, cases are brought to the panel on the basis of advice from local teams and services – consideration is given to requests for support from individual schools, but time is taken to collate information about a child, their family and their situation in education before the case is brought to the panel, so that members can take an overall and informed view about why a child may be missing out on formal, full-time education and what the appropriate solution should be. They have recently recruited a dedicated caseworker to service the panel and ensure that actions are followed up swiftly.

The panel's membership is made up of managers representing the virtual school, inclusion, early help, social care, SEND, mental health and youth services. The breadth of membership and the principle that services are represented by managers with authority to take decisions means that the right people are around the table to commit to actions that draw together the right range of services to support a young person, their family and their school. This also helps to ensure that decisions taken in one service area that may have implications for another – for example, decisions about care placements that may have an effect on where a child attends school – can be considered and planned for collectively.

Having access to each agency's management information systems in one meeting builds a much fuller picture of a child for each service, highlighting where there might have been gaps in support and how they can jointly support a child going forward. Since its inception, Education On Track has supported over 100 children to reengage with education, reducing their risk of educational neglect. Most cases involved some form of social care concern or significant mental health concern preventing the child from attending school. Where these children have been positively reengaged in education it has often been as a result of key workers putting in place the appropriate intervention and support that addresses the child's or young person's specific needs. Importantly, the panel provides a mechanism to share information to facilitate partnership working. In turn, this has brought a sense of shared responsibility and accountability for all services.

Area 2: Preventative and restorative action

Local areas also described the importance of using key protocols that govern the movement of pupils between schools to make explicit how the local system would deal with instances where children were at risk of missing out on education or had been out of formal, full-time education in a fair and transparent manner. These protocols include activities like the use of managed moves, decisions taken under fair access arrangements, and supporting children who are electively home educated to return to mainstream school if the parent wished it. Local authority officers described different approaches that had been agreed within their local areas and argued that it was important to explore with school leaders and agree collectively an approach that was seen to be fair and transparent. In other words, there was not a single right approach to managing managed moves, fair access and the return of pupils

who had been electively home educated; instead, it was vital that there was collective agreement about how these processes could be used in ways that were transparent, fair and supportive of schools working with pupils at risk of missing or who had missed out on formal, full-time education.

In addition, local authorities argued that it was vital that the local system provided support to schools to broaden their understanding of how to identify children's underlying needs and how to support them effectively. Ensuring all children in a local area receive a suitable education, and preventing children from missing out on formal, full-time education where this is not a positive choice made by parents, requires a system-wide approach. Equally, ensuring schools understand the changing nature of children's needs and are equipped to identify and respond to them requires a pro-active, system-level approach.

Restorative action / reintegration / tracking: Telford and Wrekin

Telford and Wrekin have a strong approach designed to avoid placements breaking down and getting pupils back into education as swiftly as possible. This approach has been developed through close working with mainstream schools to ensure there is broad, system-wide buy-in to the local area's approach. There are three key elements to this –

a. **a strong approach to tracking children missing out on formal, full-time education** – the tracking team within the LA defines 'missing full-time education' in its broadest sense, from those with modified timetables to those who have missed more than 15 days and those receiving an insufficient education. This team includes the Group Manager for Access and Inclusion, Attendance Support Team Leader, Children Missing Education Tracking Officer, Vulnerable Children Casework Officer and EHE Advisory Teacher and they conduct weekly audits. This team is also supported by a broader group known as Ensuring Access to Education for All Children (EAEA), which is made up of SEND and Children in Care representatives, Attendance and School Admissions Team Leaders, and the PRU and they meet every 3 weeks. They identify children who are at risk or missing from their service, assigned a Red /Amber /Green risk rating to the child and agree specific actions and responsibilities to track the child. Actions might include specific intervention programmes. The idea behind this initiative is to bring together disparate teams to enable the tracking of a child across the system and prevent a missing child from bouncing between teams and ensure a collective responsibility;
b. **developing "layers" of support within mainstream schools** – through the 'Belonging Strategy', the LA has focused on building the capacity of mainstream schools across the local area to ensure that there are a range of pathways and options for supporting young people at risk of missing out on or returning to formal, full-time education,. Examples of support can include training on trauma-informed approaches, skill audits by Behaviour Support Teams, supporting designated mental health leads in schools and Educational Psychologist-led training for Teaching Assistants in emotional literacy assistance; and
c. **promoting a collective culture and avoiding blame** – taking a pro-active approach to communicate and reinforce the values that the Council, school leaders and other partners have agreed, inducting new school leaders into these values and ways of working, and dealing with issues in a fair, transparent, collective and solutions-focused way, rather than isolating and blaming individual schools where there are differences in practice.

One way in which the principles of fairness and collective responsibility have been put into effect in Telford and Wrekin relates to their approach to children who are Electively Home Educated. In Telford and Wrekin, the Council and school leaders have agreed that the fairest approach to elective home education is that where possible any pupil returning from being electively home educated returns to

their previous mainstream school. This has been agreed as an important means of ensuring that elective home education is not used as a way of removing a child from a school where it is not in the child's best interests and ensuring a sense of fairness and responsibility between schools for all pupils in their respective communities.

The approach outlined above is still in its early stages. However, there have been some positive changes. These include a recent drop in fixed term exclusions; six exclusion decisions overturned by governing bodies in the last 12 months, possibly linked to increased awareness and training around inclusion; and improved attendance in both primaries and secondaries. Longer term aims are for the programme to see a reduction in NEETs and/or dropout rate in Y12 due to better planning and support for children and young people whose engagement has dropped.

Preventing children from missing education: Warwickshire

Warwickshire's strategic response to reducing the number of children missing out on a formal, full-time education starts with their Area Behaviour Partnerships. These partnerships were established 8 years ago, when the local authority and schools decided to close the Pupil Referral Unit and devolve both the funding and responsibility for excluded pupils to groups of schools. Each Area Behaviour Partnership is multi-agency and includes schools, youth justice, early help, educational psychologists and the Children Missing Education team. Each partnership also has an area behaviour coordinator who works with schools to identify children at risk and prevent exclusions or children missing education for other reasons.

In 2018 these partnerships where reviewed and relaunched to establish multi agency panels in all 4 secondary area partnerships and one centralised one for primary aged children. These panels administered the Fair Access Protocol and readmitted into schools children and young people who met the criteria of the Fair Access Protocol. At this time a new managed move protocol was launched and these are also overseen and supported by the panels, which is chaired by a school in each area. The panel reviews the success of all managed moves.

Similarly, a new Alternative Provision (AP) framework was established for all alternative providers who operated across Warwickshire and an AP directory was published with those providers who met the quality standards of the framework. Further quality assurance was carried out by colleagues from the secondary panels who quality assured the quality of education in the alternative providers across the county to ensure value for money and good outcomes for CYP who required alternative provision.

For primary schools the local authority is developing a new "Significant Adult" role. The concept is that the new post-holders will be attached to a cluster of primary schools. The schools will then identify any children at risk of exclusion or being removed from a school roll for any other reason with the Significant Adult who will then be able to work with the school, the family and the child to agree the support needed going forward.

As in many areas the rising numbers of children being electively home educated has been a concern in Warwickshire. The Children Missing education team have agreed with schools and parents that they will implement a two week 'cooling off period' for every new request for elective home education during which they will work with the school and the family to explore the issues and try and find a resolution. These have been useful in breaking down some of the barriers in communication that can

arise and surfacing some of the significant concerns that parents have around mental health, anxiety or bullying which often contribute to decisions to electively home educate.

Ongoing monitoring of all CYP who are at risk of missing education occurs to reinforce the preventative work carried out through the Area Based Partnerships and primary clusters. Monthly meetings take place with a multi-disciplinary team who carry out robust monitoring and tracking of all vulnerable groups who may be at risk of missing education. A data dashboard of trends in exclusions, SEND and other 'at risk' indicators is being developed to support earlier interventions. This will be even more important at this time of COVID19.

Area 3: Re-engaging pupils who have been out of education

Local authorities described the importance of having a strong "assessment model" that enabled professionals to navigate to and put in place the right form of support based on a child's needs. For example, while some children may present with the same behaviour when in school, many of those to whom we spoke argued it was important to understand the extent to which this may be caused by underlying, additional needs such as communication difficulties or may be caused by disaffection, trauma or adverse childhood experiences. Having a robust model for assessing underlying barriers to learning puts local areas in a position where they can then take informed decisions about the appropriate form of support to keep a child in formal, full-time education or prevent them from missing out unnecessarily on their entitlement to education. This can ensure that professionals are in a position to identify specific aims and timescales for any form of support or placements outside formal, full-time education, with a clear plan to support a child to return. This can help to ensure that return and reintegration is established as a clear expectation in the system and the system in turn is equipped to support reintegration of children who have been out of formal, full-time education where this is appropriate.

Restorative action / reintegration: Luton

Luton has developed a multi-faceted approach to avoiding placement breakdown, identifying underlying needs and enabling reintegrative action to succeed. This approach is premised on the need to understand the factors that may place a child at risk of missing out on formal, full-time education and to put in place the most appropriate support strategies. Some of the key aspects of this approach include –

- school leaders agreeing to a collective approach to place vulnerable pupils. It is agreed that previously electively home educated children returning to mainstream go back on the roll of their original school, supported by wraparound care and interventions provided by the LA. This is written into the in-year Fair Access protocol and facilitates swift return to mainstream school.
- a Pupil Placement Panel, which facilitates collective decision-making to place vulnerable pupils with an appropriate package of support and is attended by representatives from all 13 secondaries;
- developing a weapons protocol, which focuses on understanding the reasons why a young person might be carrying a weapon rather than just punishing the act of carrying the weapon, and putting in place an intensive, six-week intervention aimed at enabling the young person to return to school;
- the Multi-Agency Gang Panel that receives referrals from any agency identifying young people involved in or at risk of becoming involved in gang activity. Agencies, such as YOS, Social Care, Safeguarding and Education, come together in a weekly meeting to discuss the referrals. The panel

acts as a means of sharing information so that interventions across agencies can be informed by the young person's broader context or so that escalation to Social Care/Child Protection can occur swiftly if required. For example, the sharing of information can inform local authority AP placements to avoid placing pupils together who have a history of involvement in gang activity; and

- flexible re-engagement of pupils who had been out of formal, full-time education, with a range of practical options. Pupils who would not otherwise cope at a mainstream school full-time are dual registered, split between a mainstream and alternative provision. The ultimate aim is for the child to be fully integrated back into mainstream. Dual registration is designed to be flexible so that time at mainstream can be increased or decreased in line with how the pupil is coping.
- By identifying underlying needs and adopting a collective approach, the local authority and schools have been able to work together so that no pupils are unplaced. Though both the weapons protocol and dual registration initiative are in their early stages, they have avoided permanent exclusions for pupils and prevented potentially vulnerable pupils being placed in alternative provision. Combined, they have supported 16 students to date.

Area 4: Monitoring and tracking

Lastly, local authorities underscored the importance of having well-established processes for tracking children who are not in formal, full-time education or at risk of missing out. They argued that this would often require putting in place agreements with schools to ensure a consistent and accurate flow of detailed information about pupils across all schools in a local area, and developing a sophisticated system for drawing together data on pupils from a range of sources. It also requires that the system has the capacity to follow-up cases where it is not known whether a child is in formal, full-time education, or the reasons why a child is not attending school full-time are not known, or in some cases to confirm that a child is actually receiving education where they are reported to be being educated.

Collective responsibility and information sharing: Portsmouth

In 2016 Portsmouth local authority and its schools established the Portsmouth Education Partnership which is the key strategic partnership that brings together system leaders within the city. This has provided a strong basis in collective responsibility for tacking the issue of children missing education.

Portsmouth and its schools have taken a wide and holistic view of the range of children who might be at risk of missing out on a full-time education. This includes those on reduced timetables, those with low attendance, those at risk of exclusion and those who are electively home educated but where the education provided is not deemed suitable.

Through the Portsmouth Education Partnership, schools and the local authority have agreed an effective protocol which means that all schools send in regular information and updates on any children on reduced timetables. This information is monitored to ensure a plan is attached to every child on a reduced timetable and that the steps are being put in place to resume full time education within six weeks. If it becomes apparent that a child is not able to return to full time learning, then schools are pointed towards a range of alternative resources and options such as alternative provision or well-supported managed moves. These will be agreed collectively through the Inclusion Support Panel which has representatives from all schools.

Similarly, rigorous six weekly monitoring systems are in place for children who may have experienced multiple fixed term exclusions and children's whose attendance falls below 90%. Schools and the local authority team will have a conversation about every child identified in this way and agree the next steps to be taken. In the case of chronic non-attenders, Children's Social Care and the Missing Exploited and Trafficked service will also be informed that the child may be at risk. Schools have recently agreed to use formal reciprocal arrangements of a 1 to 3-day alternative exclusion in another school as a substitute for more traditional fixed term exclusions. This has proved very effective as it is seen as a real sanction by pupils, but they do not miss out on critical learning.

In response to rising numbers of children being electively home educated, and a greater proportion of these children having a history of exclusions, child protection concern or historic non-attendance, Portsmouth and its schools have developed the most recent collective protocol. Now all headteachers have agreed that they will not take a child off a school roll until there has been a meeting between the school, the local authority and the parent or carer. Schools have also agreed that any child who has been electively home educated for less than six months will automatically return to the original school roll if returning to mainstream education. In the interests of openness and transparency the local authority has also committed to reflecting numbers of electively home educated children back to schools. In the year that the new protocol has been in operation numbers of electively home educated children have begun to fall, whereas previously they were rising rapidly.

Chapter 6: Recommendations for National Government

It is vital that, nationally, we have a system of oversight to ensure that all children receive their entitlement to a formal, full-time education. The current statutory framework recognises that this should be the local authority, working with schools, communities, and families. Furthermore, the recent response to the Covid-19 pandemic has served to highlight the essential role of local government in coordinating access to education across a local area.

There is already considerable good practice in the system and opportunities from local authorities to learn from each other. However, local government would be the first to acknowledge that the safety net that they provide to ensure that *all* children, but particularly the most vulnerable, do not miss out on their entitlement to education is stretched to capacity. Furthermore, the omissions in the current powers that local authorities have to exercise their statutory duties create opportunities for some children to slip through the net.

The rising numbers of children not in education, combined with diminishing resources at all points in the system, has created a very fragile equilibrium. The equilibrium is maintained so long as all those who have a duty to secure children's education – parents, schools, and local government – are working constructively together in the best interests of children. But if any of the partners in that contract stop doing all that they can to secure a formal full time education for all children in the community, the evidence suggests that the resources and powers are not in place to consistently identify the gap and bring partners together to develop a solution. In these circumstances it is the more vulnerable children who will quickly lose out.

As an outcome from this research, we would therefore recommend that the Department for Education considers the following actions, that would support local government to discharge their duties in respect of ensuring all children are able to access a formal full-time education more comprehensively:

5. **Raise the profile of children missing formal full-time education**

   Our research has shown that the current statutory definition of children missing education does not capture many of the children who are missing out on a suitable education. Furthermore, the lack of published data pertaining to this cohort makes them less visible in terms of policy and unknown in terms of outcomes. We would therefore recommend that the Government adopts a broader definition of children who are missing out on formal, full-time education, collects and publishes data on the numbers of children who meet the definition and tracks the long-term destinations and outcomes for children missing formal full-time education.

6. **Resource local authorities adequately to fulfil their responsibilities in relation to ensuring all children receive a suitable education**

   The evidence gathered through this research suggests that the lack of capacity and resources within local authorities is one of the key barriers to ensuring that all children receive a suitable formal, full-time education. The work of identifying children who are missing education and then bringing together families, schools and other education providers to broker a solution that secures ongoing education for those who have dropped out of the system is a painstaking and labour-intensive task. There is no substitute for individual, careful case-management. In the current financial climate, few local authorities have the resources needed for the true scale of that task.

7. **Create a learning environment in which more children can succeed**

   It is a finding of this research, and many other similar projects, that in the current climate schools maintain a focus on inclusion despite the accountability and performance incentives, not because of them. There is a lot that Government could do to give schools back the flexibility they need to create an appropriate learning environment in which more children can succeed. This could include recognising and rewarding greater curriculum breadth; rewarding schools for inclusive practice through the accountability system; investing in pastoral and mental health support and significantly developing trauma informed practice in schools.

8. **Strengthen the legislative framework around electively home educated children**

   In April 2019 the Government consulted on changes to primary legislation that would strengthen the oversight and mechanisms for reassurance around electively home educated children. It proposed a new duty on local authorities to maintain a register of children of compulsory school age who are not at a state funded or registered independent school and a new duty on parents to provide information if their child is not attending a mainstream school. The purpose of these changes would be to enable better registration and visibility of those educated other than at school. The evidence collected through this research suggests that both changes would be beneficial in strengthening the oversight afforded to vulnerable children within this cohort and we therefore recommend that the necessary legislative changes are made at the first opportunity.

Epilogue

The current public health crisis has thrown issues of children missing education into sharp relief. In the last few months, in which very few children have been able to attend school, we have learned a lot about the role of schools in our society.

It has become apparent very quickly that schools do not only provide education, essential as that is. Schools are also the eyes and ears of a society that cares about the welfare and safety of children. The first essential line of defence for that very small minority of children who are at risk from their families or the communities in which they live. It is also clear that schools provide advice and support within communities and an eco-system of social interactions that bring families who live in a local area together.

The economic impact of children not attending school has been writ large and, in particular, the economic impact on women who still, more often than not, pick up the responsibilities of education when the state does not. To an alarming degree it has also highlighted the number of children dependent on free school meals to meet their basic nutritional requirements. Perhaps it has taken this unprecedented crisis, when formal, full-time education has become the exception, to highlight quite so clearly what a small but growing cohort of predominantly vulnerable children have been missing in recent years.

The challenge, therefore, is when children eventually return to school that we do not lose sight of those for whom access to formal, full-time education has been denied for much longer than a few months in Spring 2020. When education returns to some semblance of normality it will be important to learn the lessons of this research and of the past few months. Perhaps, at that point, will be an opportunity to do some things differently.

Critically, the response to the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted some structural issues about how the education system works. It has reinforced the interdependency of education and children's social care. We cannot keep children safe without education and we cannot educate children if they are not safe. It has also highlighted the strength to be found in local government working together with families of schools, in local areas, to support their communities.

We may also return from this period of enforced absence with a better understanding of some of the support that might be put in place for children and young people for whom mainstream school has been a challenge. Anecdotally, some schools have reported that individual vulnerable young people who have continued to attend school have thrived in a post-lockdown environment. Smaller classes, a more relaxed timetable and curriculum have allowed some to flourish in education in way that they never have previously. How can we maintain some of these opportunities when the financial, physical and accountability pressure of educating all children returns? At the same time, the use of technology, the burgeoning wealth of online resources and the take-off in virtual teaching must surely provide a bridge or a means to re-engage for those young people who have previously lost touch with education.

Many have said that the world after lock-down might never be the same again. If that is the case, we should use this period of reflection to determine how we reconnect our education system going forward in way that we can be confident that *all* children can access their entitlement to a formal, full-time education. It is hoped that some of the insights in this research can make a contribution to that endeavour.

Appendix A

Methodology:

1. Children and young people **on school roll but not attending all day or every day:** we split this into three sub-sections:
    a. Children and young people on **part-time timetables:** we received this information in our local authority returns. Nine LAs provided answers to this question. When scaled up, we estimate there to be 22,000 children and young people on part-time timetables.
    b. Children who have experienced **multiple FTX**: 2018/19 published data[43] shows there to be 48,000 pupil enrolments with 3 or more fixed period exclusions.
    c. Children with **persistent absences** – 2018/19 published data on attendance[44] shows there to be 124,000 pupil enrolments who missed 30% of the academic year or more – that is approximately a term or more. We have made the assumption that missing a term or more will considerably compromise the education a child receives.

2. **Long term home tuition**; we have made the assumption that children and young people in the category 'long-term home tuition' will be captured by other datasets we have already used e.g. persistent absence. Therefore, to avoid duplication, we have not included numbers in CAMHS Tier 4 provision and in-patient wards.

3. **Illegal school** (Ofsted); by April 2019, Ofsted estimated that there were 6,000 pupils being educated in the 259 schools[45] they had inspected.

4. **Illegal employment** – we have not been able to locate appropriate data on the number of young people of statutory school age who are in illegal employment. Our discussions with local authorities suggested that the number is very small, therefore we have not included an estimate in our calculation.

5. **Elective Home Education**: as shown in Part 1, a parent opting to electively home educate their child can be a route into a child missing formal education. This does not mean, however, that all children who are home educated are missing education. What has been striking in recent years is the rapid increase in the numbers of children being electively home educated and, of those, the high proportion who are vulnerable in some way. Therefore, we have used the 2014/15 EHE figure taken at census (23,000)[46] as our baseline for 'children who are EHE and receiving adequate education'. The uplift from the 2014/15 deadline to 2018/19 is 31,656. Given this high growth, we have made the assumption that 75% of that uplift accounts for 'children who are EHE but not receiving adequate education'. We have assumed the remaining 25% growth might be accounted for by other factors, including population growth. Therefore, we estimate the number of children who are being EHE but are not receiving adequate education to be 24,000.

[43] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england
[44] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2018-to-2019
[45] https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/apr/12/ofsted-uncovers-500-suspected-illegal-schools-in-england#maincontent
[46] NB: There is no data from 2014/15 showing EHE numbers 'at any point in the academic year'

6. Children and young people on a **waiting list**; we have taken this from our own local authority data returns at regional workshops. We received 6 responses to this question – when scaled up on the basis of local authority pupil population, we estimate there to be 15,000 children and young people in England who are out of formal education as they are awaiting a preferred school place.

7. Children and young people in **long-term unsuitable AP**; we have made the assumption that 10% of those placed in AP are placed there unsuitably. This proportion is based on our own research into the AP system. 10% of total AP figure[47] is 4,000 for 2018/19.

8. Children and young people who are currently **'missing education' in terms of the Department for Education's statutory definition** (children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school); we have taken this from our own local authority data returns. We received 10 responses to this question – when scaled up on the basis of local authority pupil population, we estimate there to be 39,000 children and young people in England who are out of formal education.

When summed together, we estimate there to be ~289,000 children and young people in destinations that constitute missing out on formal, mainstream education. That is 2% of England's pupil population.[48]

[47] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2019
[48] Pupil Population 2018-19 https://www.gov.uk/guidance/section-251-2018-to-2019

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