



Where are England's Children? Interim findings from the Children's Commissioner's Attendance Audit

March 2022

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"There are no hard to reach children, only hard to reach services" – Virtual School Head

"I lived about a minute away from school so I could walk home, when my anxiety was bad I wouldn't tell anyone I left I would just walk out... it was bad for everyone. Now I'm preparing myself for college." - Boy, 15 ¹

Foreword from Dame Rachel de Souza DBE, Children's Commissioner for England

As Children's Commissioner for England, my mission is to help make England the best place to grow up in the world. This means the ambitions of every child being matched by the support around them – by their family, schools and, where needed, being able to access brilliant mental health, social care and Special Educational and Disabilities (SEND) support. It also means wherever you live, whichever school you attend, you should get the very best possible education and support – we should have no patience for "good enough".

This has got to start with all children attending school, or other high quality education, regularly, every day, unless there is a good and established reason not to. While the majority of children are attending every day, there are tens of thousands of children who are persistently or severely absent or missing from education altogether. I made it my mission to establish where these children are instead and understand the reasons for them not attending – illness, disengagement or where additional support is needed. And then find out how we can remove the barriers to getting them back into school. This is why I'm pleased to publish the interim findings from my Attendance Audit, ahead of my final report in the spring.

This work is especially important as we emerge from the pandemic. Children missed school. The absence of school from the routines of so many has confirmed what I already knew - schools, and the people who work in them, are vital. They are the place where children learn, where they make friends, where they find things they are passionate about and talented at. A place that is safe, with adults around them who care about their lives and that provides routine, structure, and discipline. I want to pay testament to everyone working with children for all of their hard work and commitment in improving children's lives and outcomes. I have spoken to many children about the impact of the lockdowns

¹ Quotes taken from an interview with the Children's Commissioner's office as part of the Attendance Audit

on their education and it is important that we celebrate the achievement of schools returning to something like normality this term. But there are some children who haven't come back after the lockdowns, and not just because of having to isolate due to Covid.

Even before the pandemic there were a group of children who were falling through the gaps in education – those awaiting a school place, those being educated at home because their needs weren't being met at school, and those who had simply fallen off the radar.

In The Big Ask, our survey of children in England, we heard from nearly 5,000 children who said they were home educated and nearly 2,000 children who were not in school at all. Of course, some families choose to home educate for philosophical reasons and have the resources and ability to do so. But many children spoke of the challenges they had faced in school, such as bullying, struggling with anxiety and other mental health needs, or having special educational needs which weren't being identified or supported. These children were out of school, not because of choice, but because they hadn't received the support they need.

In order to investigate how much Local Authorities (LAs) know about children that are missing education, my office has surveyed all LAs and the results are striking. Before this work there was no national picture of where children are and if they are attending schools. From the survey we have conducted we have found that LAs do not have an accurate figure of how many children there are in England – let alone the number of children not receiving education. Many LAs rely on time lagged population estimates to tell them how many children there are in their area, but migration and other factors mean this information is often inaccurate.

This is an urgent problem. It is crucial that we know where all children are, and that we develop the necessary infrastructure to maintain this understanding. We need to recognise the barriers to attendance that individual children face so we can build a system that will enable them to thrive.

The picture is complex. Even where LAs were able to provide an estimate of children missing from education (for example children who have dropped out of school), there are hundreds of children that have never interacted with the education system that we know nothing about. The 'known unknowns', includes children who have never been on a school roll, perhaps because they have gone missing from care or who have been trafficked into the country. It is essential that we change this worrying reality. There should be no 'unknown' children to the system. Policy makers, schools and LAs must be able to identify and reach these children. The results also show that complexities in data sharing and system design have led to a postcode lottery in the identification of children and the level of support in each area.

This is despite great work from many LAs to overcome the systemic barriers they face in identifying children, such as weekly meetings with safeguarding partners and schools, to provide wrap around care and additional support to children who are not in school. But these sorts of interventions are where individual leaders are going above and beyond for children despite the limitations of the system. It is often luck rather than design. And I want to eliminate that lottery from children's experiences.

Alongside this national survey, my team and I are talking to children, frontline professionals and system leaders across the country to really understand the story behind these statistics. The next stage of the work is a deep dive in 10 LAs. I want to understand children's barriers to attendance, to identify what gets in the way of safeguarding these children effectively, and to explore what they need to get back to school. I can only do that by getting out there and speaking to children and the adults that care for them.

Ultimately, these findings shed light on a very concerning situation: we cannot identify where each child is. There are thousands of children who support services do not have contact with, and authorities are therefore unable to ensure their safety, wellbeing and learning. This is an urgent problem that requires immediate, collaborative and practical solutions to improve our systems and give children the care and education that they deserve. It is not, however, insurmountable. There are places that are doing this well, so it can be done. We can solve this, together.

Dame Rachel de Souza DBE, Children's Commissioner for England

Executive Summary

Under the Education Act 1996, LAs in England have a legal duty to make arrangements to establish the identities of children in their area who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education. The Children's Commissioner's office is undertaking research to establish the extent to which LAs are able to meet this duty by understanding the data each authority holds about the numbers of children in education settings or who are not engaged in formal education. We are also conducting deep-dives into 10 LAs, where we are speaking to children, and in particular, the children labelled 'hard to reach'. We have spoken to hundreds of children across the 10 LAs we are auditing and plan to reach many more over the course of our project.

We sent an initial survey to all LAs in England (of which 145 responded) requesting that they provide the following information under [Section 2F of the Children Act](#):

1. The number of children enrolled in education, broken down by phase and education type: LA maintained, Academy, Independent (non-state funded).
2. Estimates of the number of children persistently absent and severely absent in the autumn term 2021.
3. The number of children home educated for the 2021/22 academic year and registered with the LA. We also asked whether they have an estimate for the number of children home educated who are not registered with the LA.
4. The number of children in the LA who missed a week or more of school in the Autumn 2021 term due to waiting for a school placement.
5. The number of children missing from education aged 11-15 and the number NEET aged 16-17.

We found that:

1. All LAs knew how many pupils were registered in LA maintained and academy schools in Autumn 2021, but just 18% of LAs provided an estimate of the number of children in mainstream Independent Schools.
2. Half of LAs provided estimates for persistent absence and severe absence. The average rate of estimated persistent absence (missing over 10% of sessions) was 22% and the average rate of severe absence (missing over 50% of sessions) was 1.5%. In total, we estimate that there were 1,782,000 pupils persistently absent and 124,000 pupils severely absent in the autumn 2021 term.
3. All LAs in this sample were able to provide estimates of the number of registered Elective Home Educated (EHE) children, but only 8% of LAs provided an estimate on the number of home educated children not registered with the LA.

4. 39% of LAs provided data on the number of children who missed more than a week of school in Autumn 2021 waiting for a school place
5. 92% of LAs could estimate the number of Children Missing Education aged 11-15 and 88% provided estimates of NEET.

From these key findings, we do not have an accurate real time figure of how many children there are in England, nor where they are – let alone the number of children not receiving education. This is an urgent concern. Estimates of children missing from education require timely, real-time data on the number of children in each LA, how many are enrolled in formal education and the number of EHE children.

In this report, we outline the key survey findings, and set out the Commissioner's initial recommendations in light of the data, on: school level data collection, LA level data collection and the roles and responsibilities of all public bodies in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of these children. Initial policy recommendations include:

1. School level data collection: we need to review how schools collect data and how this is used.
 - Attendance codes (e.g: use of the B code, and review of the new Covid 'X' code)
 - School-level attendance policy enactment (e.g: closing registration early)
 - Rationalizing the management systems for attendance
2. LA level data collection: we need to review and improve attendance data collection at LA level.
 - Implement a unique identifier for children
 - Improve and standardise the protocols for sharing data between MATs and LAs
 - Understand facilitators of good data collection and share and what works well, including data and tech solutions to eliminate the lottery and boundary issues
3. Roles and responsibilities: we need to clarify roles and responsibilities and align resources, data and accountability on attendance. This includes:
 - Setting clear structures for who does what – schools, LAs, health, police
 - Promoting what good looks like, including partnerships at a local level, including safeguarding partnerships and schools role in those
 - Multi-agency working

4. Make attendance everyone's business:

- Making sure all government departments work together to improve attendance
- Making sure that all professionals working with children prioritise attendance as a key outcome

Children have told us that they face a number of additional barriers to attendance, including lack of support around mental health, emotional and care needs, and problems around feeling safe and supported in school. We want to find out more, so, right now, we are conducting deep-dives into 10 chosen LAs to understand the story behind the attendance survey statistics. We are speaking to children, and in particular, the children labelled 'hard to reach', such as children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), children who have been excluded or who are at risk of exclusion, children in alternative provision (AP), children in pupil referral units (PRUs), young carers and children in care to properly understand their experiences with attendance. We have also spoken to families, schools, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), LAs, family hubs, AP and PRUs and a range of specialist youth services across the country. Through these conversations, we hope to build a real picture of the enablers of, and barriers to, attendance at a local level. Some of our initial reflections from the deep dives are included within this report. All potential solutions discussed in this report will be further investigated in the second phase of our work, after we have completed the deep-dive analysis and evidence review.

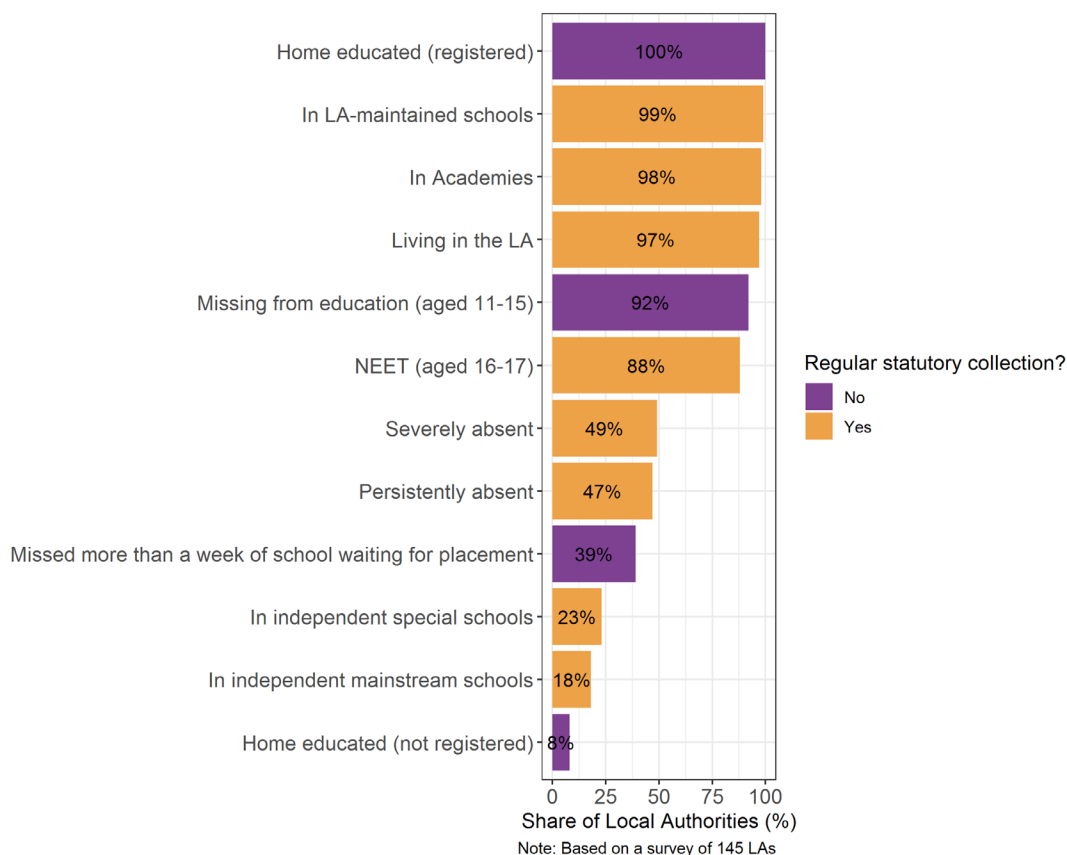
Survey findings

Overview of data availability and quality

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, we find that LAs do not all have good information on the number of children in their area. The results also find that there are several groups of children about whom LAs lack data or need to rely on out-of-date information. They also cannot estimate the number of children in Independent education settings. These problems mean that it is difficult to identify the residual number of children who are falling through the gaps between mainstream and Independent Schools and are missing education altogether. Only around half of LAs know how many children in their area are persistently or severely absent from school, which hinders their ability to provide support for these children to get back into education.

More concerningly, only 8% of LAs can provide an estimate of the number of children being home educated where the families have not notified the council, so the LA cannot identify if these children are receiving education at all.

Figure 1: Share of local authorities able to provide an estimate on the number of children in each school environment.



Over three-quarters of LAs used [ONS mid-year 2020 population estimates](#) as their estimates of the number of children in their local authority, which is based on 2011 census data and takes into accounts annual updated estimates of migration, births and deaths.² 4% of LAs provided estimates based on GP registrations data, 3% based on GLA population estimates, 12% from other sources and 3% did not provide any estimated count of the number of children in their area at all.

There are challenges and opportunities to using data other than ONS estimates. For example, the LAs who used GP registration data were able to provide more up-to-date estimates. One LA provided both ONS estimates and estimates from GP data, showing that the ONS estimates over-stated the number of children compared to GP data by approximately 1,700 children. However, in one case, an LA reported that their population estimates based on health records only cover children up to the age of 15. Moreover, not every family registers their children with a GP, and families with children missing from school are more likely to be in this category.

Arguably there is no perfect way to count the population. However, routinely linking together multiple data sources such as those collected on health, migration and education can provide more accurate and up-to-date estimates of local population. Fundamentally, LAs cannot identify children not receiving an education without knowing how many children there are resident in their local area. LAs could improve their estimates of local population by supplementing the ONS population estimates with GP registrations, hospital records and border force records of migration and resettlement, were those data readily shared.³

Number of children in LA maintained schools and academies.

Almost all LAs provided estimates on the number of pupils registered in LA maintained and academy schools in Autumn 2021. Some LAs couldn't report how many pupils were in LA maintained or academy Further Education (FE) settings because the National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS), used to track data on young people's post-16 activities, could not be broken down by LA maintained, academy and Independent

² Note that ONS is planning on publishing population estimates based on the 2021 census in early summer of 2022. See

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/methodologies/populationstatisticsandsourcesguide>.

³ Note that the ONS is planning on publishing new experimental statistics about the population at a local authority level based on administrative data in June 2022. See

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/methodologies/populationstatisticsandsourcesguide>

settings. So, whilst LAs are able to track the total number of 16 and 17 year olds in further education, some are unable to provide breakdowns by type of education setting.

Number of children in Independent Schools

While almost all of the LAs who responded knew the number of pupils in LA-maintained schools and academies, only 18% of LAs could provide an estimate of the number of pupils in Independent schools. In Independent Special Schools, placements for children with special educational needs are funded under contract with the LA, so a higher share of LAs (23%) could estimate the number of children in Independent special schools.

Private schools are required to complete an annual census reporting the number of children attending their school for the past year. However, this data is aggregate and pupil level data is not available to LAs, unlike the data collected through the termly School Census completed by LA maintained schools, academies, free and faith schools. Those LAs that did provide an estimate for children in private schools relied on the published school-level annual school census data collected by DfE for the previous academic year. This is another component of the equation required to calculate children missing from education, as it is essential to eliminate this group from the overall total. Nonetheless, there is no requirement for LAs to be provided with the information.

LAs discussed the difficulties in obtaining data from Independent Schools, reporting that they don't have access to pupil lists and that some Independent Schools don't have management information systems.

School Absence

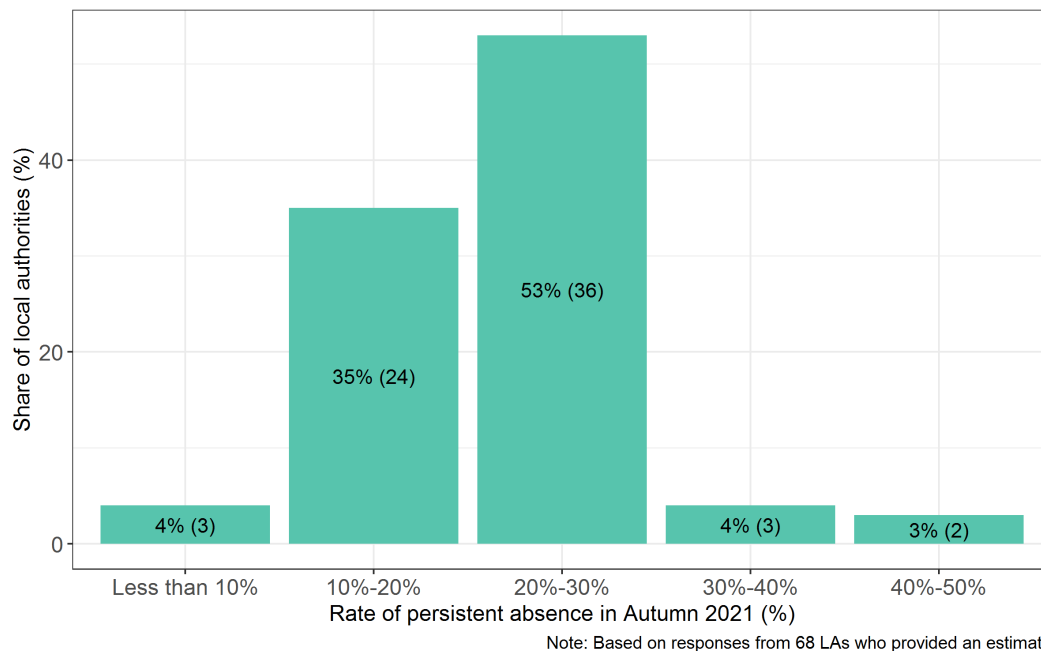
About half of LAs provided estimates of the number of children in LA maintained schools and academies who missed over 10% and over 50% of their sessions in autumn 2021. Most LAs who didn't provide estimates of absence explained they were waiting for the school census to be completed, some specifying that they did not receive live absence data from academies. One LA who didn't receive live attendance data from schools for all pupils, explained that they still track attendance of vulnerable pupils.

The data from those who have provided estimates so far suggest that 22% of pupils were persistently absent (missing over 10% of sessions or 10 school days) and 1.5% of pupils were severely absent (missing over 50% of sessions). These estimates suggest 1,782,000 children were persistently absent and 124,000 children were severely absent.

Whilst the majority of LAs reported persistent absence of between 10% and 29%, three LAs reported persistent absence of less than 10% and 5 LAs reported persistent absence of more than 30%. As an example of the scale of the challenge, in one LA-over 15,000

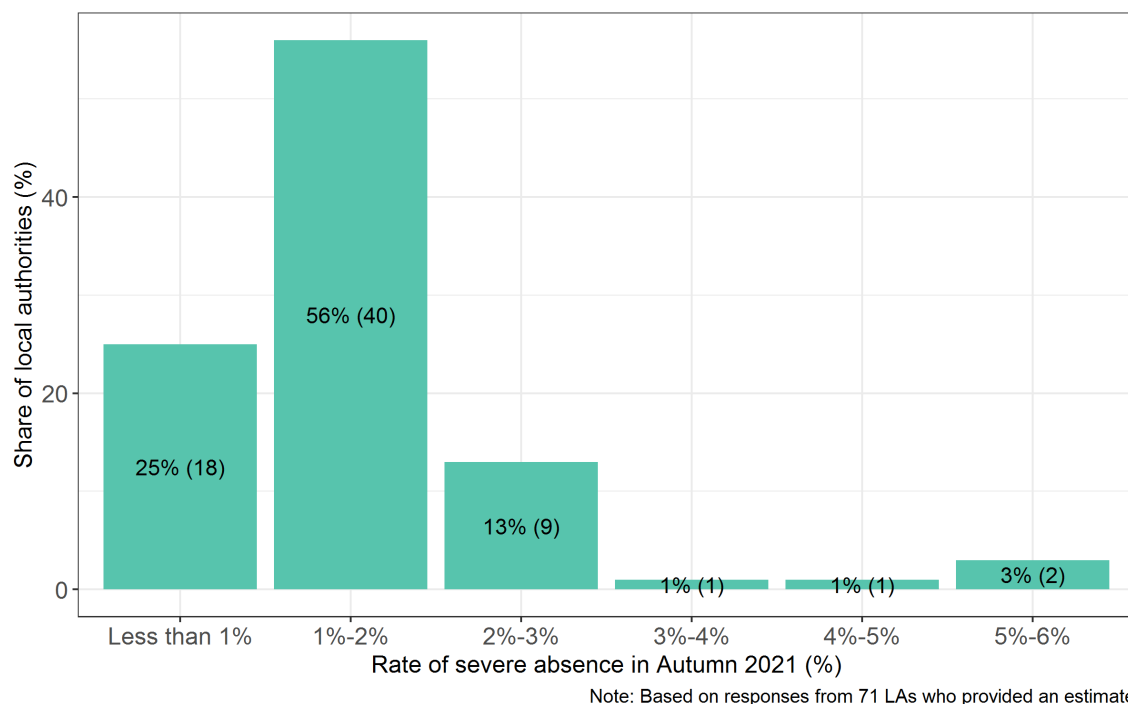
children were persistently absent in the 2021 Autumn term, this would equate to a case load of over 3,000 children per member of staff in the Inclusion and Attendance team.

Figure 2: Comparison of local authorities by rate of persistent absence



Note: Persistent absent rates are calculated as the number of pupils in LA maintained schools or academies who have missed over 10% of their sessions (reported by the LA) over the number of pupils in LA maintained schools or academies (reported by the LA)

Figure 3: Comparison of local authorities by rate of severe absence



Note: Severe absent rates are calculated as the number of pupils in LA maintained schools or academies who have missed over 50% of their sessions (reported by the LA) over the number of pupils in LA maintained schools or academies (reported by the LA)

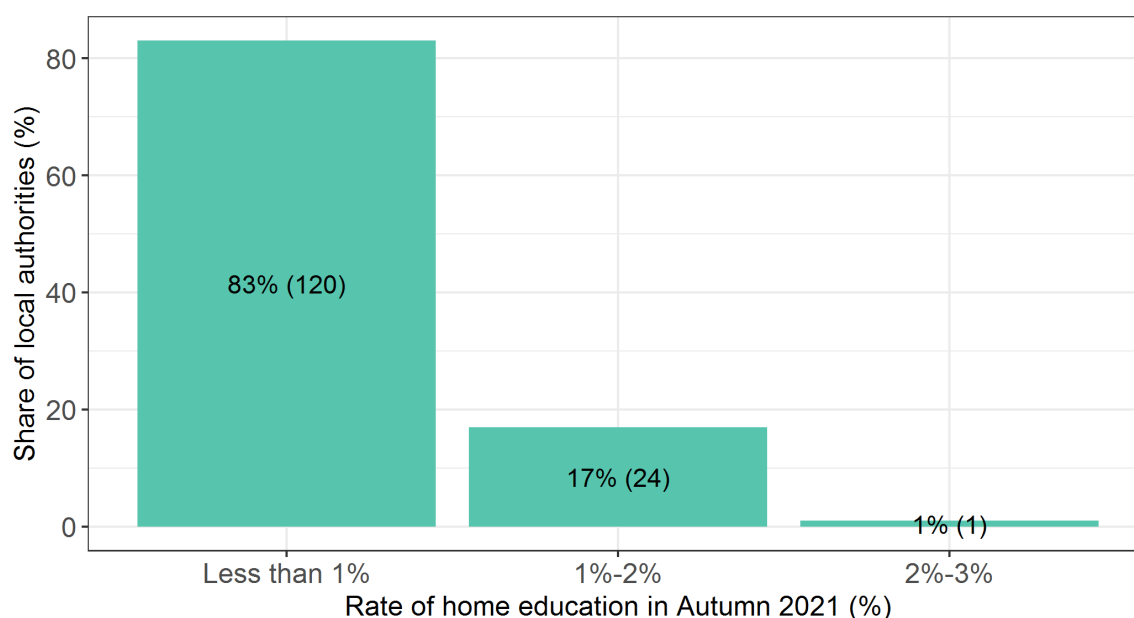
Number of children in elective home education (EHE)

All LAs provided the number of home educated children registered with them.

The rate of children aged 4-17 in home education who are registered ranges from 0%-2.4%, with an average of 0.9%.

Only 8% of LAs could provide estimates on the number of home educated children who were not registered with the LA. In one LA, they estimate the number of children who are being home educated by asking schools to notify them when a child is taken out of school to be home educated but the family refuse to register or further engage with the local authority. They noted that it is an estimate as there may be additional children that they don't know about, but they keep track of all children withdrawn from mainstream education. In other LAs, these children may be recorded as children missing from education rather than as a separate group of unregistered elective home education (EHE). Nevertheless, it is very concerning that LAs had so little information on this group of children.

Figure 4: Share of local authorities by rate of home education



Note: Based on responses from 145 LAs who provided an estimate

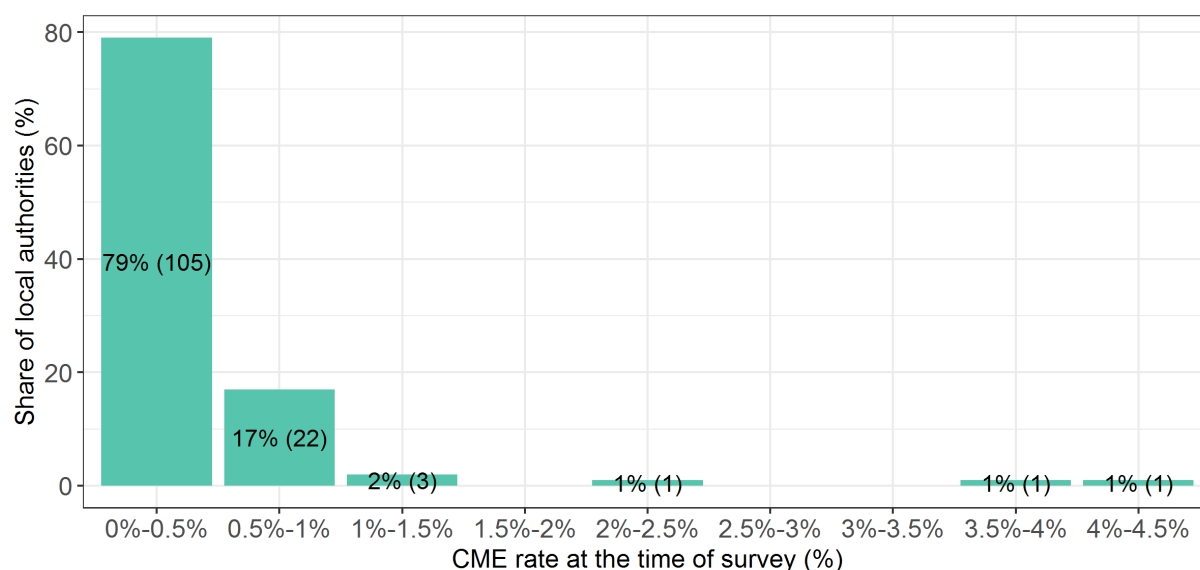
Note: Home education rates are calculated as the number of children aged 4-17 home educated (reported by the LA) over the ONS mid-year 2020 population estimate for children aged 4-17

Children Missing from Education (CME)

Almost all LAs provided a figure for the number of Children Missing Education (CME) aged 11-15 at the time of filling out the survey, ranging from 0% to 4.1% CME, with an average of 0.3%.

Most LAs provided the number of open referrals handled by their CME team at the time of the survey. Referrals are made to CME teams in a number of circumstances, but the majority come from children who have not attended school for a number of days. In one LA, after 10 days of non-attendance, if the school haven't been able to make contact with the family, the case is referred to the CME team to follow-up. CME teams are primarily dealing with children who have been on roll at a school, rather than children who have never been enrolled. CME teams are likely to only be managing a subset of the true number of children missing from education. One LA noted that Autumn 2021 saw higher than usual mobility which makes it more difficult to track vulnerable children. Some LAs noted some of the children missing from education are thought to be abroad or in unregistered education settings.

Figure 5: Share of local authorities by rate of CME



Note: Based on responses from 133 LAs who provided an estimate

Note: CME rates are calculated as the number of children aged 11-15 (reported by the LA) over the ONS mid-year 2020 population estimate for the number of children aged 11-15.

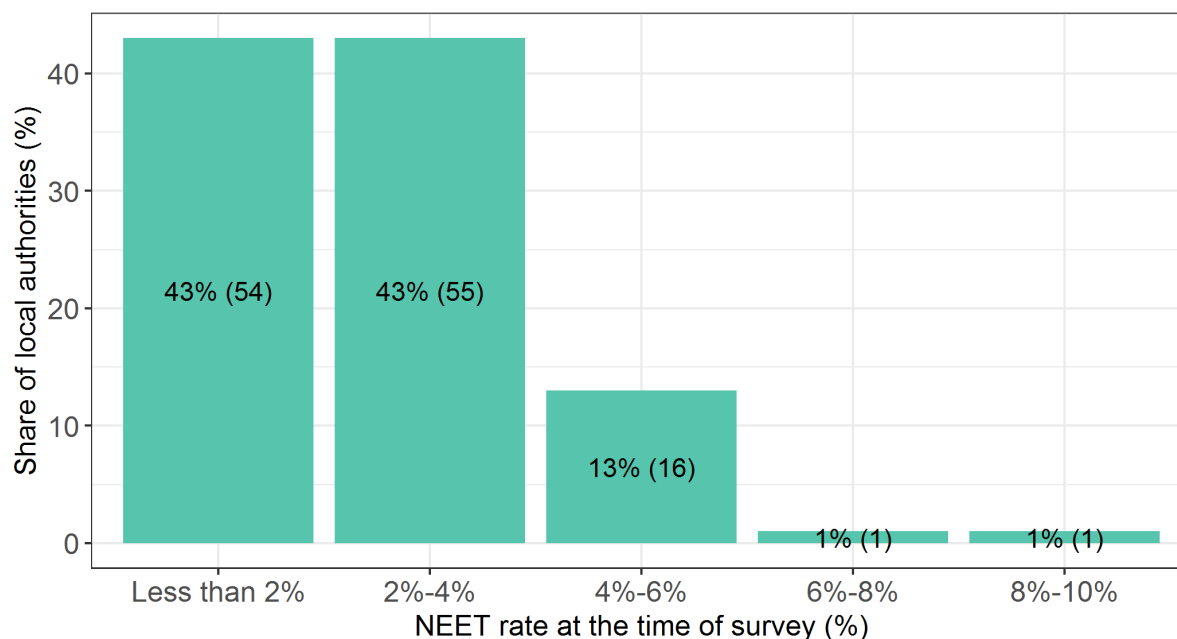
Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

88% of LAs provided an estimate on children who are NEET, typically from December 2021. It is unsurprising that most were able to provide this information as LAs are required to submit monthly data returns to DfE via the National Client Caseload

Information System (NCCIS).² It is, however, concerning that 12% were unable to provide an estimate, given their duty to provide these returns.

One LA noted that their NEET data was held by an externally managed service and so could not be provided. Some other respondents noted that their NEET data was held by a different team and not readily accessible.

Figure 6: Share of local authorities by rate of NEET



Note: Based on responses from 127 LAs who provided an estimate

Note: NEET rates are calculated as the number of young people aged 16-17 NEET (reported by the LA) over the ONS mid-year 2020 population estimate for the number of children aged 16-17.

Children waiting for a school place

4 in 10 LAs could provide data on the number of children who missed more than a week of school in Autumn 2021 while waiting for a school place.⁴ Some LAs who were unable to provide an estimate explained that they do not co-ordinate in year admissions or that this particular data wasn't available, or they have no way knowing how much school a child has missed if they're attending school in another LA while applying for a new place.

⁴ Note that the School Admissions Code, states that the admissions authority or the LA (if coordinating in year admissions) must notify the parents within 15 days (but should aim for 10 days), and if the child is considered under the Fair Access Protocol, a school place must be allocated within 20 days. See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1001050/School_admissions_code_2021.pdf

The average share of children who missed more than a week of school waiting for a school place was 0.3%. LAs explained that Covid related staff absences contributed towards the delay in admitting new pupils, some parents apply directly to schools that are already full for in year admissions and some pupils are waiting for school placement appeals.

What should we do about it?

Through this survey, and initial insight from deep-dives into 10 LAs, the Children's Commissioner's Office has identified four potential solutions to improve school attendance and engagement. As previously noted, we will explore these approaches further ahead of our final recommendations in the spring.

1. School level data collection

We need to look again at the way in which schools collect data and how that data is used and shared at a national and local level is urgently needed – the inconsistency of approach needs to be resolved. Data collection and sharing between schools and LAs needs to be in real-time, and on a pupil level basis, as opposed to a school-level basis, so that patterns or issues can be resolved quickly and early.

Rationalising Management Information Systems (MIS) to support attendance: Schools use a range of management information systems to log and manage attendance and performance data. Schools select from a number of private MIS suppliers to find the best fit for their school. As all MIS systems have different capabilities, they are not all compatible, and data may not be easily transferrable from one MIS to the next. School leaders have told us that incompatibility between MIS systems can affect how well a school can support a child who needs help. For example, children who are new to a school may arrive without background data on their past attendance, medical or safeguarding needs. This incompatibility can make it difficult for schools and LAs to track children who 'move around the system'.

Additionally, the inconsistency in MIS providers creates challenges for LAs who wish to set up automatic transfers of school registers to track pupil absence. In one LA for example, they are able to receive data automatically from schools using one MIS however other schools in the area using a different system are required to extract the data themselves manually and send it across to the LA team at the end of the week. Rather than a single, streamlined system enabling data to be used in real time, we see a piecemeal approach beset by delays in data provision and onerous data cleaning

processes. Rationalising the systems with requirements for data portability would result in significant cost savings to education services and LAs.

Independent and unregistered schools: As previously mentioned, Independent Schools are not legally required to send pupil level attendance data (data on individual pupils) to LAs, but they are required to submit a school-level (data on the total number of pupils at a school) annual school census to the Department for Education (DfE). All other schools have to return termly pupil level census data. LAs are therefore unable to accurately ascertain how many pupils are attending Independent Schools at the pupil level. One solution would be that all schools, including Independent and unregistered schools, could be required to complete a census every term to match the regular school census and as with the mainstream school census, data could then be shared with LAs at the pupil level. Overcoming these data collection and sharing problems is essential if LAs are ever to be able to meet their statutory duty to identify every child not receiving a suitable education.

Attendance codes: There are inconsistencies in how and when schools are using register attendance codes. This means that LAs may not receive an accurate picture of who is in school. The attendance data sent back to LAs could be incorrect because of school practice disparities.

There are a number of codes used by schools in school registers to indicate reasons for pupil absence. The 'B' code, for example, is meant to be used when pupils are present at an off-site educational activity that has been approved by the school. This code is not to be used to represent children who are doing schoolwork at home. Inconsistency in the use of the code means that some children could be 'B' coded when they are not attending education provision.

Another attendance code, 'Code X' was introduced in September 2021 to indicate Covid related absence. During Covid restrictions, the code did not count as an absence in school attendance records (to avoid penalising children who followed the guidance to self-isolate following a positive lateral flow test). If a child took a confirmatory positive PCR test, they were to be marked with Code I, which categorised them as a 'school absence'. With any changes to attendance coding, there is a risk that schools or trusts could interpret the guidance differently which could lead to a number of problems. A child who has a concerning attendance record and who may need additional support, for example, may be marked with an X code – which could mask any underlying barriers the child faces in attending school and prevent them from receiving help. Conversely, we have heard from school leaders that children with

100% attendance who become ill with Covid and were required to stay away from school, and who had been 'I' coded, felt as though they have been penalised for doing the right thing.

Developing a deeper level of understanding of the way in which attendance code policies are applied on a school level would help to spot inconsistencies, and help improve the information on attendance available to LAs.

2. LA level data collection

The way that data is collected and shared at a local level is not consistent or uniform. We propose the following to make this easier:

Unique identifier: One option to consider to address problems around data-sharing would be a 'unique identifier' (or a more consistent multi-agency use of widely used 'identifiers', such as an NHS number). This would enable LAs to better track children who move around the system. Having a single unique identifier would better enable services to share information on a child, identify where they need help, and allow services to support them back into school. This should be explored further.

Data sharing: Data sharing between MATs and LAs is needed to enable LAs to identify children who need additional support. In some areas, however, good partnership working between MATs and LAs is not well established. In such cases, essential data might not be openly shared between the MAT and the LA. Further guidance on this area would enable effective working relationships and data sharing between LAs and MATs so every child is accounted for and known to the LA.

More understanding about what facilitates good data collection and sharing what works well: There appears to be a lack of information available for LAs on what constitutes good practice in data sharing. Excellent work by LAs and other services working to overcome barriers posed by a fractured system are not well documented, and services can therefore struggle replicate good models of working. Though LAs and services within LAs are all different, and face different challenges and barriers, good working models could be shared and adapted to suit local needs. For example, the creation of a template Data Sharing Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding which documents the legal and ethical framework within which data can be shared within an LA would reduce the time LAs currently spend drawing up bespoke agreements with their partners.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Good and consistent attendance is primarily the role of parents. But where a child is not attending regularly or in any provision at all, we need all professionals to work together to get them back into school. At the moment, there is ambiguity in these roles and responsibilities. The roles and responsibilities within the system need to be clarified and funding and accountability must be aligned. Ultimately, attendance should be everybody's priority. This should include:

Setting clear structures for governance: Governance structures and the responsibilities and resources held by each body/authority involved in the welfare and identification of children are unclear. It is important to clarify where responsibilities lie, to prevent them being 'passed on' to other services.

Parental responsibility: Not all home educated children, or children registered in alternative education, are registered with the LA. This means these children do not show up in LA data or population estimates. Parents should be responsible for registering their child with the LA if they are not attending mainstream schooling. This is not about the state interfering when families make a philosophical decision to home educate and have the resources to do so, but about helping LAs identify where children and families need more support.

Safeguarding Partnerships: We believe that schools and colleges should become full statutory members of local safeguarding partnerships alongside the local authority, police and the NHS. Doing this gives schools a seat at the table designing and implementing safeguarding systems and policies to protect children and promote their welfare. It also provides a statutory framework for a more open exchange of data between schools and partners. But, along with these opportunities comes obligations, becoming a statutory safeguarding partner requires schools to comply with the policies created by the local safeguarding partnership. We believe this balance of enhanced power and responsibilities befits the role of schools and colleges within the system. We outline how we believe this should be implemented and overseen in our paper outlining the Children's Commissioner's proposals for the Schools White Paper, which will be published shortly.

Multi-agency working: We believe that all local safeguarding partnerships should agree a common protocol to work with schools to counter poor attendance and unnecessary exclusion, with automatic multi-agency escalation points when a child has two fixed term exclusions or their attendance drops below a defined threshold.

4. Attendance is everyone's business

Every department and public body needs to make the attendance and safeguarding of every child in England their priority. This includes departments and bodies that may not typically associate their work with school attendance policy (for example, the Home Office/Border Force hold information on children entering the country, but this is not shared with LAs). These bodies should work together with the Department for Education to understand how they can contribute to enabling school attendance and ensuring all children are receiving a suitable education. Sharing departmental insights nationally and locally will help to plug the gap in data for the 'known unknown children'.

From our work with LAs we have already seen some examples of great practice in supporting children to attend school regularly, from innovative AP to models of family support and multi-agency partnerships where attendance is everybody's priority. In our next report we will provide analysis of where these programs have delivered success for children and young people and explore what can be learned from them.

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