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Developing an understanding of Children Missing Education, Elective Home Educated and Not in Education, Employment and Training cohorts in the Humber



HUMBERVPP

Violence Prevention Partnership

Developing an understanding of Children Missing Education, Elective Home Educated and Not in Education, Employment and Training cohorts in the Humber

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Key Findings & Recommendations

Key Findings

- Rates of Children Missing Education (CME), Elective Home Educated (EHE) and Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) are increasing, linked to rising rates of non-attendance at school and challenges accessing support for SEND and mental health needs.
- The complexity of the SEND system may create a two-tier system where those with fewer resources are less able to access support needed, while schools lack staff and resources to manage students' needs.
- Similarly, home education may have positive impacts, but there are substantial barriers in terms of cost and access to exams which exacerbate disadvantage for vulnerable children removed from school.
- Coping strategies used by pupils struggling to cope in busy school environments may not be understood by teachers, leading to inconsistent support as schools struggle to cope with the diverse needs of pupils.
- The impact of Covid-19 Pandemic and cost-of-living crisis changed attitudes towards schooling for parents who may no longer believe every day matters.
- Punitive systems and policies have created a lack of trust in educational systems.
- Inflexibility in curriculums disengages and marginalises less academically inclined pupils. More vocational options and opportunities for engagement with employers are needed.
- Reintegration to mainstream schooling may be difficult due to school admissions processes and re-emergence of issues and triggers that led to removal.
- Difficulties accessing careers advice and baffling array of options presents barriers for EHE young people trying to access post-16 education.
- While it is important not to make automatic assumptions of safeguarding regarding EHE, lack of oversight has led to a situation where children may be invisible to state bodies.
- Reforms of the educational system are needed to tackle the attendance crisis, with more sharing of good practice and earlier identification of children at risk of early leaving.

Recommendations

- Explore a way of joining existing data sets to identify children not enrolled in schools.
- Consider supporting school to implement evidenced based anti-bullying programmes.
- Consider funding free, independent SEND advocates to support families and mediate with schools where there are conflicts.
- Continue to promote trauma informed practice in schools
- Explore piloting and evaluating interventions to improve attendance, confidence and aspirations with schools where there are more known challenges and issues, including culturally sensitive support for Gypsy/Roma and Traveller families.

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Executive Summary

Evidence review

Rates for all three cohorts are rising, but efforts to gather accurate data regarding numbers of CME and EHE children are hampered by an absence of regulatory systems regarding EHE, and difficulty identifying children not known to services. Studies suggested the official definition of CME excludes a cohort of potentially vulnerable young people who are persistently absent or excluded from school.

Rising rates of non-attendance have been linked to the growth of all three cohorts. Risk factors include SEND, mental health, low educational attainment, poverty, young people at risk of offending and those experiencing criminal and sexual exploitation. Environmental factors include living in a rural or deprived area, attending a school rated as 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' and difficult or unstable home lives. Studies found disproportionalities linked to ethnicity and gender. Gypsy/Roma and Traveller children are at higher risk of early exit from education and exclusion. Girls are more likely to be persistently absent, while boys are more likely to be excluded or CME.

It is widely accepted that the growth in EHE is due to children being removed from school. Studies reported **challenges accessing SEND support**, with difficulties navigating unsupportive and hostile systems leading to combative relationships between parents and schools. The evidence suggests parents may be **pressured to remove children from school**, but even so most move slowly towards home education. Flexi-schooling is a practical solution for struggling children which schools may refuse over concerns around attendance figures.

Forms of **exclusion** include isolation, fixed-term and permanent exclusions, part-time timetables, managed moves and 'cooling off' periods. The evidence suggests the application of these measures may feel arbitrary to the children involved and disproportionately affects children from disadvantaged backgrounds. When, in a minority of cases, processes breakdown they may leave children without suitable full-time education.

The **Covid-19 pandemic changed attitudes towards schooling** as it forced many parents to experience home education for the first time. Following the pandemic some parents no longer saw daily school attendance as essential. Added to this, the **cost-of-living crisis** saw many families facing significant issues over transport, essential care and clothing. School ceased to be a priority in the face of these day-to-day struggles.

Long waiting lists for **mental health** services mean children are making informed decisions to prioritise wellbeing when school feels exhausting and overwhelming. **Always-on digital social lives** may be both a comfort and a burden for young people that leaves them tired and disengaged before school begins. Online influencers making money through gaming and content creation without traditional qualifications may make school seem irrelevant.

School cultures of incentives and sanctions has led to a **loss of trust in the education system**. Pupils may feel coerced into attending to avoid fines and feel the rigid school day erodes their sense of agency. Inflexible and academically focused curriculums disengage vocationally

inclined pupils. Added to this, a **lack of careers advice** presents barriers to making informed choices in post-16 vocational provision. Several studies suggested the marketisation of education marginalised less academically inclined pupils and created a **'churn' of low-level qualifications, low-paid and unstable work, and periods of economic inactivity** for NEET young people**.**

The **long-term negative impacts** of NEET on future employment and health are well documented. Little is known about the long-term consequences of CME, but it is known that school absences are associated with poor health outcomes, unemployment, risk taking behaviours, substance misuse and involvement in Youth Justice. School exclusions also have long-term impacts on mental and physical health, employment prospects and housing stability.

Suitable education at home can have positive impacts on academic achievement, wellbeing and personal development. However **substantial barriers** exist in terms of finance, access to exams and specialist teaching resources. Home educating families may face marginalisation and difficulties accessing support services. Reintegration into mainstream education can be challenging for children used to following their own interests. While it is important not to make automatic assumptions of safeguarding, lack of oversight has led to a situation where children may be invisible to state bodies and professionals that can support them. This leaves them more vulnerable to criminal exploitation, grooming and gang recruitment.

Solutions include sharing good practice and earlier identification of children at risk of early leaving. Work placements, employer incentives and keyworker interventions have all been shown as effective in helping NEETs access employment. Reforms to the education system are needed to tackle the attendance crisis, with more vocational options and opportunities to engage with employers and work experience pre-16. Redefining achievement through enrichment activities can help engage less academically inclined students. Tutoring and mentoring can increase attainment, confidence and aspirations. Trauma informed practice can build stronger relationship between students and teachers. Rebuilding trust in the education system requires greater choice and flexibility for parents to create genuine parental engagement.

Many of these solutions require financial investment, not just for services and systems, but for children and families as well. It remains to be seen what the impact of recently announced SEND reforms and investment from the UK government will be. Locally, North East Lincolnshire Council has committed to a number of measures to support EHE families in their 2026-28 EHE Strategy.

Key findings

Case studies revealed unmet needs related to mental health, SEND and bullying. In some cases, wellbeing and achievement improved once removed from school. Cases revealed difficult relationships between teachers, students and parents, and demonstrated lack of awareness of support services available. The young people expressed earlier support and accommodations would have allowed continued education in school.

Stakeholder survey responses indicated mental health and SEND were the most common reasons for children leaving mainstream education. Although the small sample makes detailed analysis difficult, school responses were less likely to mention the impact of trauma, bullying or difficulties related to the school environment.

Factors impacting on **mental health** included undiagnosed SEND, social anxiety and home circumstances. Responses highlighted i**nconsistent SEND support** and issues related to the school environment that lead to coping strategies which may not adequately support the young person. The complexity of the SEND system may create a two-tier system where those with fewer resources are less able to access support needed, while schools lack staff and resources to manage students' needs. Responses around **bullying** suggested schools are unable or unwilling to tackle incidents effectively, leading to children feeling unsafe.

Inflexibility in educational systems were the focus of several responses, which suggested schools fail to understand the reasons for challenging behaviour and rely on management through punitive systems. It was felt more vocational options would engage students that struggle academically. Intergenerational disengagement may mean parents are less inclined to value school. Some of the responses suggested antagonistic relationships between schools and parents and provided examples of parents being pressured to remove a child from the school roll. Concerns were raised about the quality of education received once removed. **School admission processes** present barriers for young people attempting to reintegrate due to availability of places and, perhaps, a lack of understanding among parents about the academic cycle. Specific barriers exist for young people involved in Criminal Justice Systems for violent or sexual offenses due to the perceived risk to schools.

Problems in **post-16 transitions** for EHE young people included withdrawal of SEND support and benefits. Difficulties accessing careers guidance may lead to them choosing unsuitable options, which further disengages them. Difficulty accessing GCSE exams may also be a barrier to further education due to unrealistic entry requirements for post-16 options. **Transport** may also be a barrier, particularly in rural areas and for young people that are unable to travel independently in order to access work, further education and exam centres.

The majority of **support services** respondents listed came from schools and local authorities. Mental health support consisted mostly of NHS services with some large charitable organisations. Post-16 options were again provided by local authorities and some voluntary and community sector training organisations. There were very few responses regarding pre-16 support for EHE children or help for young people reintegrate. Responses that did address the issue suggested reintegration tends to fail. **Good practice** included multi-agency and relational approaches to build cultures of belonging. Child-centred and flexible methods were reported to be effective.

Further support needs identified included increased SEND and mental health support, more relational approaches and a broader range of educational options with better information exchange between educational phases regarding support needs. Earlier identification of CME, options to challenge a decision to EHE and more options to reintegrate in-year were called for. **Challenges for local structures largely related to lack of resources, staff and funding**.

Analysis of Department for Education (DfE) data confirmed numbers of CME and EHE are increasing in the Humber, with some variation between local authorities. Notably, Hull has the highest number of children awaiting a school place and North East Lincolnshire has the highest proportion of EHE children for reasons 'unknown'. Rates of persistent absence has continued to drop from a post-Covid peak but severe absences are rising. Although permanent exclusions

decreased slightly since the last academic year, suspension rates are increasing. The data confirmed disproportionate numbers of young people with SEND, those eligible for free school meals and Gypsy/Roma Traveller children were either persistently absent or excluded.

Across the region authorities report they offer extensive EHE support with advice and signposting, but other forms of support are less consistent. Notably, Hull is the only authority to report no support with exam access.

NEET rates dropped slightly in 2025 (the latest available data) although North Lincolnshire saw a sharp increase with disproportionately more young people of not known status. Data from Hull and the East Riding showed disproportionate rates of NEET among young people with an EHCP. NEET young people not available to the labour market were most likely to be caring for children or pregnant.

Conclusions

CME, EHE and NEET are not three distinct cohorts. There is a great deal of fluidity and clear pathways between them strongly underpinned by unmet needs relating to SEND and mental health. Inconsistencies in support between educational phases destabilises educational experiences, particularly at the post-16 stage for EHE young people. Interventions focussed on prevention, rather than reintegration, are needed. Punitive systems impact disproportionately on the most vulnerable children creating **cycles of disadvantage**. Similarly, inequalities can be seen in both EHE and SEND systems as parents with more cultural and financial resources are better able to access support. However, it is important to remember **systems too are traumatised** from the years of 'chronic underfunding' discussed in the stakeholder narratives.

Recommendations

Identification of CME was a recurring theme throughout the literature and stakeholder responses. The **Humber VPP should explore ways of joining existing data** sets to aid local authorities in identifying children not enrolled in schools.

The prevalence of reported bullying suggests either there is a failure to recognise it in some schools, or that teachers do not feel confident to tackle bullying effectively. There is strong evidence as to the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions and **supporting schools to implement one of the evidenced based anti-bullying programmes** available should be considered by the Humber VPP.

The data suggest combative relationship between schools and parents who may not feel confident of their rights or schools' responsibilities and limitations within current educational frameworks and policies. June's suggestion of and **free, independent advocate** that can support families, professionally challenge and act as mediator, where needed, is **a practical solution that should be considered**. The lack of awareness of available support services evidenced in the data suggested f**urther mapping and a directory of services and groups would be beneficial**.

The disproportionate numbers of young people with SEND needs removed or excluded from school cannot be ignored. Poor attendance and exclusions should be addressed through inclusive educational practices. The Humber VPP should **consider funding and evaluating pilot interventions to improve attendance, confidence and aspirations**, such as mentoring

schemes, enrichment and peer support programmes, working with schools where there are more known challenges and issues. The VPP should **continue to promote trauma informed practice** to build better relationships between pupils and teachers and fostering better understanding of the reasons for behavioural difficulties in school.

Similarly, the disproportionate representation of Gypsy/Roma and Traveller children in attendance and exclusion data highlights a need for **culturally sensitive support for this marginalised community.**

Methodology

Research aims

This research was conducted by Humber Learning Consortium (HLC) on behalf of the Humber Violence Prevention Partnership (VPP) to answer the question *"How can we better prevent children not receiving an in-person education in school or young people outside of formal training or education from being impacted by violence?"* . The aim of the study was to develop a better understanding of Children Missing Education (CME), Elective Home Education (EHE) and Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) cohorts by exploring:

- Barriers that prevent young people from remaining in or re-entering education in schools
- What support is available across the region for young people who are not attending education in school?
- What interventions or training opportunities they would find most beneficial and how we can best support improving their career goals and aspirations?
- How to better support the transition between primary and secondary education
- How to better support the transition from CME, EHE or NEET to education in school or training

Challenges

While local authorities were all supportive of the research and its aims, responses were slow in some cases due to internal deadlines. This impacted on all aspects of data collection, and the initial deadline for both the stakeholder survey and youth voice elements was extended by one week to allow for additional responses.

The short time period we had in which to complete the study was a significant limitation which made it difficult to build relationships with gatekeepers and potential participants. This also impacted on sample sizes, as we had a short period of time in which to collect data from participants.

Difficulties in identifying young people who were currently CME, EHE or NEET led us to open the study to young people who had previously been within one of these cohorts. We found that, having identified potential participants for the youth voice element, that young people were reluctant to talk to us because they did not know us. For this reason, we designed a brief paper-based questionnaire that could be completed with the support of a youth worker or parent to ensure that any young person that wanted to take part was able to do so. It emerged that one potential participant we were informed of was so traumatised by their experiences at school they did not feel able to take part at all; in itself an important finding that is perhaps reflective of some of the wider challenges we encountered.

Approach

The research took place between January and April 2026 and had four strands: Evidence Review, Stakeholder Views, Youth Voice and Quantitative Data.

A narrative **review** of the available academic and 'grey' literature was undertaken as a starting point for the study. A search was conducted using the University of Hull library search, which encompasses several databases of academic journals, news and media archive etc for articles related to "Children Missing Education", "Elective Home Education" or "Not in Education, Employment or Training". This was accompanied by a Google search for relevant articles and reports from Government departments, charities, think tanks and other NGOs. Results were limited to publications within the last five years, in English language and with a focus on CME, EHE or NEETs in the UK. Additional information was added manually. The results were thematically analysed using the aims of the study as a starting point, with sub-themes identified within each area.

Stakeholder views were captured by means of a survey. A snowball approach was used, initially distributing the questionnaire to contacts provided by the Humber VPP and HLC's own network of contacts. Both HLC and the Humber VPP also publicised the survey by social media channels and regular newsletters. Respondents were invited to leave a name and contact details if they were willing to discuss their responses further, but the survey was otherwise anonymous. The responses were thematically analysed using a deductive methodology, starting with the research questions but allowing new themes to emerge.

37 responses were received from across the Humber representing a variety of sectors and roles, as shown in Table 1, the 'Other' category comprises a small number of responses from Police, Youth Justice, Social Prescribing and Alternative Education. Survey respondents are identified throughout as SR *n*. 4 respondents were invited to take part in a short follow up interview (Hull n = 3, North Lincolnshire n = 1). We were unable to contact a further 2 respondents selected for follow up in North East Lincolnshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire.

Table 1: survey responses by area and sector

	Hull	**North Lincolnshire**	**East Riding of Yorkshire**	**North East Lincolnshire**	**Total**
Senior leadership	7	9	3	1	**20**
Frontline delivery	5		4	1	**10**
Support staff	1	4	2		**7**
Total	**13**	**13**	**9**	**2**	
Local authority	5	1	5	2	**13**
School or college	2	10	1		**13**
Voluntary and community sector	4	1	1		**6**
Other	2	1	2		**5**
Total	**13**	**13**	**9**	**2**	

Youth Voice was captured by a combination of 1-2-1 semi-structured interviews and a paper-based questionnaire. Participants had the option of being interviewed together with a parent/carer (dyadic) or separately. Where participants were very young <10 only parents would be interviewed. Interviews could take place in person or over Teams. Due to the potentially young

age and vulnerable nature of participants care was taken to minimise the risk of harm to young people taking part.

Support was requested from local authorities in identifying participants, and again, HLC reached out through existing partner networks. Due to the low number of respondents, the youth voice data was not thematically analysed, but instead each response was treated as a separate case. In total we received 5 responses (2 male, 3 female). All data from these responses was pseudonymised, to bring the young people's stories to life.

Aggregated and non-identifiable data for the **quantitative analysis** was requested from the four local authorities regarding CME, EHE and NEET cohorts in the region. Three authorities provided data but this was not consistent across all three cohorts. For this reason, the majority of analysis was done using public DfE school census data sets. The school census is completed three times per year, in Autumn, Spring and Summer from all schools, except private schools. DfE NEET data is comprised of data from the National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS). Where data was available from local authorities, this was used to add understanding to the DfE data where useful.

Evidence Review

In this section we present the findings of a review of the existing literature. This included academic literature and governmental and NGO reports from the last five years in the UK. As such, findings relate to the national level and are not necessarily reflective of the local picture or practices across the Humber region.

Key Findings

- Rates of Children Missing Education (CME), Elective Home Educated (EHE) and Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) are increasing, linked to rising rates of non-attendance at school and challenges accessing support for SEND and mental health needs.
- Home education may have positive impacts, but there are substantial barriers in terms of cost and access to exams which exacerbate disadvantage for vulnerable children removed from school.
- Parents may feel pressured to remove children from school without fully understanding what it entails.
- The impact of Covid-19 Pandemic and cost-of-living crisis changed attitudes towards schooling for parents who may no longer believe every day matters.
- Punitive systems and policies have created a lack of trust in educational systems.
- Inflexibility in curriculums disengages and marginalises less academically inclined pupils. More vocational options and opportunities for engagement with employers are needed.
- CME and EHE are both associated with long-term negative impacts for young people.
- While it is important not to make automatic assumptions of safeguarding regarding EHE, lack of oversight has led to a situation where children may be invisible to state bodies.
- Reforms of the educational system are needed to tackle the attendance crisis, with more sharing of good practice and earlier identification of children at risk of early leaving.

Who are Children Missing Education, Elective Home Educated and Not in Education, Employment or Training?

The Department for Education (DfE) defines **Children Missing Education** (CME) as "*Children that are of compulsory school age who are not registered at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school*" (Department for Education, 2025a). This includes children who have applied for or are waiting for a school place, children in unsuitable home education and children whose whereabouts are unknown. However, it excludes numerous other cohorts who are, for one reason or another, missing out on their entitlement to full-time education including children who are persistently absent from school, those who are temporarily or permanently excluded and those who remain on a school roll but may be subject to part-time timetables (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024; Parish et al., 2020). This leaves a potentially vulnerable cohort of children and young people who risk falling through the cracks of regulatory frameworks as well as "*significant blind-spots in our collective understanding of the cohort*" (Parish et al., 2020, p. 8).

Crenna-Jennings et al. (2024) delineated the cohort into distinct subgroups in order to better understand their differing needs, circumstances and risk: children of compulsory school age not

enrolled in school, children of compulsory school age neither registered in school or home education and children who have left the education system. Parish et al,. (2020) suggested the definition simply be broadened to "*any child of statutory school age who is missing out on a formal, full-time education"* (p. 2).

Elective Home Education is a term used in the UK for parents who have made the choice to take responsibility for the education for their child outside of a school setting. This is distinct from home schooling, where a local authorities provide tuition at home, for example because a child is too ill to attend school (Department for Education, 2019). Although the DfE guidance refers to EHE as a choice made by parents, the literature suggests there is a significant cohort within EHE for whom it is not so much as choice, as a 'last resort' when education in schools has failed (Fensham-Smith, 2021; Gillie, 2025).

Perhaps the least contested of the cohorts, at least in the UK, NEET refers to young people **Not in Education, Employment or Training**. Although originally conceived to describe young people aged 16-18 (Cornish, 2023), these days, in the UK, it is most often used in relation to young people up to the age of 24. Internationally NEET statistics may include those up to the age of 29 in recognition that "*the problems of non-participation or exclusion do not disappear once someone reaches their mid 20s"* (Holmes et al., 2021, p. 391).

How many EHE, CME and NEET young people are there?

NEET statistics are publicly available, from several data sources including Office of National Statistics (ONS) Labour Force Survey, DfE and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In addition, local authorities are legally required to keep track of NEET young people aged 16-17 in their regions in order to offer suitable provision for reengagement (Department for Education, 2025d). There may, however, be significant differences in these datasets due to how the data is gathered. The latest available data shows that, nationally, **NEET rates are on the rise** (Youth Futures Foundation, 2025), currently at 12.8%, although with considerable regional variation. The DfE destination data puts the number of NEETs aged 16-17 in the four Humber local authorities at 1,089. One difficulty in determining the number of NEETs lies in young people who are recorded as 'destination or activity unknown', which across the Humber region this accounts for an additional 519 young people (Department for Education, 2025b). While some of these young people may actually be in employment, this shows there are large numbers of young people who have no contact with support services or access to the interventions they can provide (Savvides et al., 2021).

While it is generally agreed that the **numbers of home educated children are rising** (Purcell et al., 2025), estimating just how many there are at any time is impossible due to the absence of a statutory regulatory system (Fensham-Smith, 2021) and government policies of non-intervention with families that choose to home educate (Buchanan, 2023). This means any official figures obtained from local authorities or the DfE are likely to be an underestimate, including only those children who are known to local authorities, such as children that have been voluntarily registered or have been removed from mainstream education. In addition, local authorities' limited powers to monitor EHE children (Buchanan, 2023), coupled with lack of guidance around what constitutes a 'suitable education' (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024) makes it difficult to estimate how many EHE are, in fact, CME. The latest DfE data for the four Humber local

authorities estimates 3,300 EHE at any point in the 24/25 academic year; a significant increase since 21/22 academic year (Department for Education, 2026b).

Similarly, accurate data regarding the prevalence of CME is nearly impossible to find, relying again on children that are already known to local authorities, and significant differences exist in how local authorities collect this data (Hayes, 2025). Other sources of data such as the Lost Pupils database is inconsistently used by local authorities and again likely to be an underestimate (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024). Although schools are required to report missing children to local authorities, they have no power to access school rolls (Hayes, 2025) making it difficult to identify missing children in the first place and to find them once they are identified as missing. Of course, "*identifying children who have never interacted with the education system or other public services remains inherently difficult.*" (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024, p. 8). What data is available all points to an **upward trend in numbers of CME** (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024). The latest DfE data available for the four Humber local authorities estimates 2,000 CME at any time in the 24/25 academic year, up from 1,810 in the 21/22 academic year (Department for Education, 2026a).

What are the vulnerabilities and indicators of CME, EHE and NEET?

Rising rates of non-attendance in school have been linked to the growth in numbers of EHE (Gillie, 2025), CME (Burtonshaw, 2023; Carr et al., 2025) and NEET (Connell et al., 2024). Several studies noted pupils with **SEND** and **mental health** needs were disproportionately represented across all three cohorts (Hayes, 2025; Lőrinc et al., 2020; Maxwell et al., 2020; Potter et al., 2022), as were those impacted by **poverty** (Burtonshaw, 2023; Hayes, 2025; Lindblad et al., 2025; Maxwell et al., 2020) and **school exclusions** (Adamson, 2022; Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024; The National Centre for Social Research, 2023). Studies evidenced that risk factors compound, with the risk of a child being CME or NEET increasing with the number of factors experienced (The National Centre for Social Research, 2023) as a number of risk factors impact on each other; for example even low levels of school absences are associated with lower academic attainment (Connell et al., 2024; Parish et al., 2020), and increased exclusions with youth offending (Lloyd, 2025).

Other risk factors associated with NEET status are fairly well documented such as being care experienced or **at risk of offending**, and **low educational attainment** (The National Centre for Social Research, 2023). Holmes et al. (2021) found that while having GCSE grade C qualifications lowered the risk of becoming NEET, there was little difference between qualifications above that, particularly for women, suggesting that other factors, such as starting a family, may impact more on females. Indeed, having a child before the age of 25 has been shown to significantly increase NEET risk (The National Centre for Social Research, 2023). The same study also found completing vocational pathways was linked to a higher risk of NEET for females, although further study would be required to know if this is due to the types of vocational qualifications taken or other unobserved differences (Holmes et al., 2021).

A study by Warburton et al. (2024) found a relationship **between failing to reach a 'Good Level of Development'** (GLD) aged 4-5 years and higher NEET risk. This was both indirect, by association of GLD with academic achievement at later stages, and direct through non-academic (e.g. social) skills, which are greatly valued in the labour market.

Geography may also play a part in NEET risks, as young people living in **rural areas** find it more difficult to access employment and educational opportunities. Living in more **deprived areas**, characterised by high crime rates and poor infrastructure also increases NEET risk (Lindblad et al., 2025). Both of these factors interact with local labour market conditions:

> In regions with high unemployment rates and limited job prospects, young people encounter substantial barriers to entering the workforce, a challenge that is exacerbated for those without higher education qualifications. (Lindblad et al., 2025, p. 629)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the paucity of data, it is difficult to determine other indicators for EHE and CME cohorts. The literature suggests that living in a deprived neighbourhood or attending a **school rated as 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement'** (Hayes, 2025) increases the risk of a child experiencing periods of CME. Children from **'troubled' families**, **young carers** (Parish et al., 2020) and **care experienced** young people were also found to be more at risk of periods of CME, possibly due to increased mental health needs, moved between care settings or experiences of bullying (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024). Children who have never been on a school roll could include **unaccompanied asylum seekers, trafficking victims, undocumented migrants and children born to parents of insecure immigration status** (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024).

Lloyd (2025) found that children and young people who were already **experiencing criminal and sexual exploitation** were substantially more likely to experience periods of CME due to isolation and exclusion from school. Reasons for exclusion were closely linked to their experiences of harm and, indeed, added to harm experienced by further disrupting lives and isolating young people from their pro-social peers.

Ethnicity also appears to be a factor, although it is unclear how. Hayes (2025) reported that local authority census data showed 35% of CME were white, granting that ethnicity data was not provided by nearly half of local authorities. One study, based in Nottingham, found cases of CME were more likely to be resolved by the local authority CME team where ethnicity information was provided, suggesting unobserved factors influence resolution. Identifying these families could help case workers gain a better understanding of their needs (Liu-Smith et al., 2025). A study by Crenna-Jennings et al. (2024), using a variety of data sources to estimate CME populations, found that children from Traveller and Gypsy/Roma backgrounds were substantially more likely to exit the school system before Year 11. This was potentially linked to highly mobile families crossing borders within the UK. They found that all ethnic groups are at higher risk than White British children, perhaps due to families moving out of the country. In the case of 'Other White' and White Irish this may due be to Brexit. Traveller and Gypsy/Roma children and those from mixed and white ethnic backgrounds were also far more likely to experience school exclusions (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024; The National Centre for Social Research, 2023). Research by The Traveller Movement found that many Gypsy/Roma children do not progress to secondary school, due to lack of cultural understanding and fears of bullying. They are, instead likely to be in unsuitable home education with little or no support (The Traveller Movement, 2021).

There is also disagreement around the impact of gender. While local authority census data showed that boys are more likely to experience periods of CME (Hayes, 2025), others found girls are less likely to be in school either due to mental health (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024) or

difficulties associated with Autism; although autistic boys are more likely to be excluded than their female peers (Nordin et al., 2024). There was agreement that school absenteeism grows more common with age (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024; Nordin et al., 2024).

What are the reasons for children leaving school or missing education?

The number of families home educating for **lifestyle or philosophical reasons** seems to remain fairly constant (Purcell et al., 2025). Reasons for doing so range from believing formal schooling should not start too early, parenting styles (Adamson, 2022) and the ability to provide bespoke education for a child (Graham et al., 2025). For example, allowing children to follow their own interests in self-directed learning (Fensham-Smith, 2021), or providing a religious and spiritual education (Zhang & Gibson, 2024). For some parents, particularly those raised outside of the UK, the formalised nature of the school system was a barrier, as was controlling home schedules through fixed school times and holidays (Adamson, 2022). Concerns about the demands placed on students by standardised testing and curriculums also featured in a number of studies (Adamson, 2022; Zhang, 2024; Zhang & Gibson, 2024). Taking the step to begin home education may, perhaps, have become easier due to the growth of online groups and support networks, making it easier to meet and learn from like-minded individuals and families (Fensham-Smith, 2021; Graham et al., 2025).

The view that increased EHE numbers are due to children that have been **removed from mainstream education** is widely accepted (Purcell et al., 2025). Children's anxiety and poor mental health is reported to be an increasingly common factor (Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd, 2021). Mental-ill health may be related to unmet SEND needs (Gillie, 2025) or issues related to the school environment such as bullying, peer pressure and experiences of violence within the school (Zhang & Gibson, 2024). There is evidence that parents have withdrawn children from school to avoid racial discrimination (Adamson, 2022). Although it must be acknowledged that many schools do their best to try and support struggling students (Lőrinc et al., 2020), in some cases, experiences of school can be so traumatic that children must undertake a period of 'de-schooling' before home education can start (Maxwell et al., 2020).

Zhang & Gibson (2024) identified 'advocate' typologies within home educators as parents in their study faced **challenges accessing SEND support** and social inclusion for their children. They described children struggling with the standardized curriculum and unsupportive learning environments leading to school refusal. Decisions to home educate were made upon realising their "*child's potential was not limited by their SEN but rather by the constraints of traditional schooling*" (Zhang & Gibson, 2024, p. 2611). Evidence suggests that teacher training is failing to prepare newly qualified teachers for the less than inclusive practices and cultures they may encounter when taking up a position in mainstream education. As such, any inclusive practices and values from training may not survive contact with reality (Potter et al., 2022).

Similarly, participants in Gillie's (2025) study described disappointment and disillusionment with the education system. They experienced difficulties communicating their child's SEND needs with schools and teachers as they navigated an "*unsupportive or even hostile system*" (Gillie, 2025, p. 298). **Failures in inclusion policy** were seen as schools either misunderstood or dismissed children's needs leading to worsening mental health, self-esteem, behavioural difficulties and punitive measures. Parents spoke of 'fighting' for their child's educational rights,

leading to combative relationships between them and the school. Potentially, school leaders may see parental involvement in SEND Issues as questioning their professional judgement (Potter et al., 2022) further eroding relationships. Despite these difficulties, it seems most parents move slowly towards de-registration, following extensive research or trialling home education for a period. In some cases home education began only after repeated suspensions or permanent exclusion (Gillie, 2025) as parents tried to keep their child in school:

> Participants had expected children to enrol and remain in school. Parents were disappointed when the reality of their children's educational experiences did not match expectations based on policy and guidance available online. (Gillie, 2025, p. 306)

There is considerable evidence that some schools put **pressure on parents to home educate** in order to maintain academic standards (Maxwell et al., 2020) or protect staff and other students from disruptive, antisocial or even violent behaviour (Lloyd, 2025). In some cases headteachers may believe that removing a child from the school roll is genuinely in the child's best interests (Whitehouse, 2022) either to avoid permanent exclusion appearing on the child's record (Purcell et al., 2025) or to avoid fines for non-attendance (Gillie, 2025). There is evidence that schools may choose not to assess children with suspected SEND as it is easier to exclude children with unidentified needs (Day, 2022). In other cases it has been found that schools may overstate the severity of behavioural difficulties to justify the use of exclusionary methods (Potter et al., 2022).

Other forms of **exclusion** include the use of isolation rooms, prolonged or multiple fixed-term exclusions (Parish et al., 2020), part-time timetabling (Maxwell et al., 2020), sending children home to cool off without registering a suspension (Whitehouse, 2022), and managed moves. Studies have found children may be subject to periods of isolation for the breaking of relatively minor rules, such as slight uniform infractions (Day, 2022), and what felt to young people like arbitrary and confusing reasons. While educators may regard isolation as a reasonable way to deal with disruptive behaviour, to the children involved it feels confining and frustrating (Savvides et al., 2021). Managed moves between schools can mean a fresh start for a young person and a route to continuing education in a school environment. However, in a minority of cases the process can break down, leaving the child without suitable full-time education in the same way as if they had been permanently excluded (Parish et al., 2020). In some cases, managed moves may be recommended by schools even though there is no suitable alternative provision available (Whitehouse, 2022). Exclusions disproportionately affects pupils who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, persistent absentees or those with previous low attainment and SEND needs (Potter et al., 2022) highlighting the "*inability of mainstream settings to support young people from at-risk groups*" (Savvides et al., 2021, p. 798).

Flexi-schooling can be a workable solution for children struggling with mainstream educational environments (Maxwell et al., 2020). Under flexi-schooling arrangements, children are enrolled full-time but attend part-time with permitted absence (Zhang & Gibson, 2024). Although legal, such arrangements are at the discretion of the school, with no right of appeal, and there is evidence **schools may refuse requests** due to fears over attendance figures and funding (Adamson, 2022; Gillie, 2025). Yet it seems such inflexibility may in itself be a factor in rising non-attendance rates.

There can be little doubt that the **Covid-19 pandemic represented a turning point in attitudes to schooling** in the UK. Both the number of children home educated and those persistently absent from school saw a marked increase post-pandemic (Fensham-Smith, 2021; Voogd, 2023). Lockdown forced families into what was, for many their first experience of home education. In the academic year that followed health reasons related to Covid-19 was the most commonly cited reason for continuing to educate children at home (Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd, 2021). Other reasons for continuing to home educate included parents seeing improvement in their child's mental health during lockdown (Purcell et al., 2025) or an absence of the stress that accompanied having a child persistently absent from school (Nordin et al., 2024). Some parents found lockdown to be a positive experience, as they were able to engage with their child's education and learning and maintain better relationships with them (Kent et al., 2022; Ludgate et al., 2022).

Post-Covid, some **parents no longer saw daily school attendance as essential**, weighing it against competing demands such as health, wellbeing and logistical demands. "*Parents simply didn't believe you could close schools for months and then go back to insisting that every day of school was essential*" (Burtonshaw, 2023, p. 15). This was compounded by the series of industrial actions which followed as well as the cost-of-living crisis and growing awareness of mental health problems experienced by young people following the pandemic (Burtonshaw, 2023; Kent et al., 2022).

Parents and young people struggling with the **cost-of-living crisis** may face significant issues in affording transport to school, essential care and clothing (Burtonshaw, 2023). One participant in Lőrinc et al.'s (2020) study had left education early as they could not afford a different outfit for each day of the week and were severely bullied as a result. Others reported struggling to balance education and employment as they were expected to contribute financially at home (Lőrinc et al., 2020). The cost differential in taking a child out of school to go on holiday in term-time makes the option impossible to ignore for many parents, who perhaps would not have thought of doing so pre-pandemic (Burtonshaw, 2023).

Worsening **mental health** in children and young people can be shown as underlying persistent absences and increasing NEET rates. Burtonshaw (2023) found that, for the most part, parents recognised wider issues, such as lack of resources in CAMHS as "*creating a devastating ripple effect on educatio*n" (Burtonshaw, 2023, p. 26). Parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, however, blamed schools as perhaps these were the only services they could reliably access. Allowing 'mental health' days off school was seen as a way of protecting their children.

This was corroborated by Carr et al. (2025) who found the young people in their study described school as exhausting and overwhelming, something to be endured. School dominated their lives, as homework filled their evenings and weekends with no time for rest and recovery. Yet schools failed to accommodate their exhaustion in a meaningful way. In the face of this, pupils are making informed decisions, well aware of the consequences of non-attendance, to prioritise their wellbeing:

> Pupils are not just tired in school, they are tired of school. (Carr et al., 2025, p. 24)

There is a growing need for alternative provision places for mental health reasons, particularly among girls, although local authorities may only become aware of the need after the child has already left the school system (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024). Similarly, NEET young people may report unmet needs in mental health and SEND that lead to coping strategies which fail to support the young person and eventual disengagement from education (Lőrinc et al., 2020).

The **always-on digital social lives** of many young people impacts school attendance. Late nights and early mornings in games and group chats is both comfort and an obligation that leaves young people tired and disengaged before the school day begins. These online interactions are essential to how young people create and maintain friendships offering "*affirmation, flexibility and immediacy, which are qualities they often feel are lacking in their school experience*" (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024, p. 49). Further disconnection between the way young people live, and the expectations of schools can be seen in the goals and role models they aspire to. Online influencers making money through gaming and content creation without traditional qualifications may make school irrelevant, particularly to those who are least likely to achieve the qualifications they are working towards (Carr et al., 2025).

Among both parents and young people there is a **loss of trust in the education system and policies**. Burtonshaw (2023) found the system of incentives and sanctions currently in place to manage attendance is seen as increasingly draconian, antagonistic and ineffective by parents, who view any level of attendance that does not trigger sanctions as acceptable (Burtonshaw, 2023). Communication from schools around attendance was viewed as excessive and often inaccurate:

> Parents believed that schools should be flexing to new social norms and attitudes, rather than the other way round. (Burtonshaw, 2023, p. 23)

In Carr et al.'s (2025) study, they found **pupils felt coerced into attending school** to avoid sanctions against their parents. In many cases the same teachers responsible for enforcing sanctions were the same as those supporting pupils in school, eroding what should be trusted relationships. Pupils are less likely than their parents to be understanding of the limited resources with which schools work. Overly rigid and controlled school days erodes young people's sense of **agency**, making a choice whether to attend on any given day a way of reclaiming some autonomy. The increasingly transactional nature of school – attendance in exchange for qualifications – leads to disengagement as pupils feel that "*school is something being done to them, and that their voice, feelings and needs are secondary*" (Carr et al., 2025, p. 36).

Rigid and inflexible curriculums are demoralising for both young people and teaching staff. The English Baccalaureate has reduced choice for students to study creative subjects as well as raising the level expected for GCSE English and Maths passes. Policies such as grade repetition and Maths and English resits likely damage self-esteem and confidence of young people through repeated failure. The push for academic subjects and performance measures has, historically, given lower status to vocational subjects. There is concern that T-levels, which attempt to redress this balance, are not fit for purpose (Richmond & Regan, 2022; Savvides et al., 2021).

Post-16 young people may struggle to **transition into further education and employment**. Government initiatives, such as Raising the Participation Age and the September Guarantee,

aimed at increasing attainment and keeping young people in education for longer, have been criticised for being ineffective and adding to the problem (Savvides et al., 2021). For those going on to further education, difficulty accessing careers advice and guidance presents a barrier to making informed choices about the options available (Rolph et al., 2024). Schools may push academic pathways rather than vocational options which are less well known, bafflingly complex and may be of little value to employers. Losing touch with peer groups as young people move from school to different colleges may lead to social isolation and educational disengagement (Lőrinc et al., 2020). Young people hoping to move onto employment feel that the emphasis on academic achievement and a lack of employability skills in the curriculum is not preparing them for 'real-life' (Lőrinc et al., 2020). This was echoed by employers who felt that young people lack necessary skills and work ethos, and are not willing to start 'at the bottom' (Rolph et al., 2024).

Several studies emphasized the **marketisation of education** as a significant policy change, which positions parents as 'consumers' of education (Adamson, 2022; Potter et al., 2022; Rolph et al., 2024; Savvides et al., 2021). While the government's view may be that increased competition promotes choice and raises quality standards (Cornish, 2023), studies suggest that in reality it has directly led to the marginalization of less academically inclined pupils, at odds with the policy and practice of inclusion (Gillie, 2025). This can be seen in the exclusionary practices applied to those children deemed to not fit in (Purcell et al., 2025) and the difficulties NEET young people experience in accessing higher level qualifications, as they are placed in competition with more academically capable students:

> Given their previous academic failure, so-called NEET and disengaged youth are less likely to be considered as favourable students as there is greater uncertainty whether they could help institutions achieve their performance goals and funding targets. (Cornish, 2023, p. 460)

This in turn limits progression to better quality jobs and leaves NEET young people in a **'churn' of low-level qualifications, low-paid and unstable work, and periods of economic inactivity** (Lőrinc et al., 2020; Tomlinson & Simmons, 2025). Austerity driven cuts to public spending has led to performance culture among schools which compete for the highest achieving pupils and funding, leaving those with more barriers to attaining qualifications on the 'outside' (Cornish, 2023; Purcell et al., 2025). Decentralized support services, such as careers advice, has left students navigating an increasingly disjointed landscape which reinforces social inequalities and is out of step with employer expectations (Rolph et al., 2024).

Historically, reintegration interventions aimed at NEET young people have tended to focus on those who are 'work ready', further disadvantaging those further from the labour market. Programmes aimed at individuals' social and educational characteristics have done little to address the economic, social and policy barriers which exist for young people accessing education and employment, making sustained progress difficult to achieve (Maguire, 2021; Savvides et al., 2021; Tomlinson & Simmons, 2025).

> intervention programmes are often time and funding limited, with an overemphasis on proving that the programme itself has worked in the quickest possible time, for political expediency, rather than tackling the underlying obstacles to reducing the NEET/EL [early leaver] populations. (Maguire, 2021, p. 835)

However, recognising that these barriers exist has not stopped young people internalising 'neoliberal individualistic discourses' and so viewing these barriers in deficit terms. Inability to overcome them thus becomes a personal failing (Lőrinc et al., 2020).

What are the impacts of being CME, EHE or NEET?

The substantial individual and societal costs of NEET status is well documented. **Periods of NEET negatively impact future employment and earnings**, **wellbeing and health** (Holmes et al., 2021). It can be difficult to progress from youth unemployment, with scarring effects lasting well into adulthood (Rolph et al., 2024). It comes with an estimated lifetime cost to the economy of up to £76bn in benefit payments, lost taxes and productivity (Lőrinc et al., 2020).

Unsurprisingly, given the difficulties in identifying CME there is little known about the long-term consequences of this in later life (Parish et al., 2020). It is known that persistent school absenteeism is associated with poor health outcomes, unemployment, risk taking behaviours, substance misuse and involvement in Youth Justice (Hayes, 2025; Nordin et al., 2024) as **young people miss out on the social, health and civic benefits of school**. As Burtonshaw (2023) noted "*school attendance underpins holistic wellbeing for young people*" (p. 6).

Similarly, **school exclusions have extensive impacts on young people and their families**, including mental and physical health, worse employment prospects and homelessness (Lloyd, 2025). Parish et al. (2020) identified several issues underlying these outcomes such as missing out on careers advice to plan for future employment; lack of consistent routines and access to specialist services to support mental health, coupled with a sense of rejection from school; social isolation impacts on confidence, self-esteem and the ability to form friendships and supportive social networks throughout life. Impacts on the family include financial strains, as parents may have to give up work due to having a child at home; parents may not be prepared or trained to home educate a child excluded from school; it can affect the aspirations and attendance of siblings and "*can often be the trigger that moves a family from 'Edge of Care' to bringing a child into care*" (Parish et al., 2020, p. 42).

Where a child is receiving **suitable education at home**, it can bring **positive outcomes** in terms of both academic achievement and personal development (Kent et al., 2022). Self-directed learning, tailored to a child's interests, can improve confidence, wellbeing and mental health (Gillie, 2025; Parish et al., 2020), better preparing young people for university education (Graham et al., 2025). Home educators seeking out clubs and activities for children to interact with their peers enables meaningful interaction with family and community, promoting social and emotional skills (Zhang & Gibson, 2024).

Apart from discretionary awards offered by a few local authorities (Fensham-Smith, 2021), lack of government support means **home educators bear the full financial burden of their child's education** (Graham et al., 2025). The prohibitive costs and 'postcode lottery' home educated children face in accessing GCSE exams is well documented (Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd, 2021; Berry, 2023; Fensham-Smith, 2021), as are the difficulties in finding alternative means of accessing Higher Education, such as Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (Fensham-Smith, 2021). In addition to general teaching resources, such as text-books, home educators may also need to pay for tutors (Berry, 2023), access to social and cultural

enrichment activities (Fensham-Smith, 2021) and specialist arts and science resources (Graham et al., 2025). Indeed, there is evidence that some, more 'traditional' home educators may not want or need financial aid preferring to live 'off radar'. But parents of those children that could not continue learning in school may welcome support and financial aid from local authorities (Maxwell et al., 2020).

Other than financial obstacles, home educators may face challenges in developing a curriculum (Zhang & Gibson, 2024), opposition from family and friends who may not agree with their decision, and marginalisation through being positioned as 'other' in a society for which school attendance is accepted as 'the norm' (Adamson, 2022). They may experience difficulties accessing support and services as there is no access to specialist SEND support for children educated at home (Graham et al., 2025). EHE children that go on to mainstream education may struggle within the confines of a set curriculum, as they are used to following their own interests (Adamson, 2022), or experience prejudice due to a lack of understanding about home education in the peer group (Graham et al., 2025). Although home educated children have the same legal right to access CAMHS as those in school, they may see fewer trained professionals that can spot warning signs (Parish et al., 2020). While home education networks and groups can be a source of support, learning and enrichment for both parents and children, existing inequalities may make access difficult for those from marginalised communities, such as Gypsy/Roma and Traveller families (Fensham-Smith, 2021).

However, it is impossible to ignore the considerable concerns raised by the **lack of oversight around home education** which exists, as Buchanan (2023) put it, in a "*regulatory void*" (p.30). Historically, attempts to draft new guidelines and increase powers for local authorities to visit children at home have led to difficult relationships between Government, local authorities and home educators (Maxwell et al., 2020). Previous attempts to force parents to register home educated children with local authorities were not well received (Purcell et al., 2025), but the current government has committed to a register of 'children not in school'. Robust safeguards would be needed to address concerns that such a register would be used for purposes not related to the child, such as benefit fraud investigation and immigration, as well as from those home educating parents who feel it undermines their rights without addressing the reasons they chose to home educate in the first place. (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024). While recognising that parents have the right to educate their children at home, and in the vast majority of cases do so very well, at present this extends to the right for their child to be "*invisible to state bodies"* leading to "*significant harm to a small number of children*" (Purcell et al., 2025, p. 179).

Studies have highlighted instances where children have been removed from school to be home educated in order to **avoid scrutiny following welfare concerns being raised**, or to avoid penalties for non-attendance. In some cases this may be children already subject to a protection plan from children's social care (Parish et al., 2020; Purcell et al., 2025). Purcell (2025) noted concerns about radicalisation among Muslim home educators although, in contrast, Adamson (2022) found Muslim participants in their study had removed children from school following racist bullying.

The practice of 'off-rolling', illegally removing a child from the school roll to avoid formal exclusions, may pressure parents into home education without fully understanding what it entails

(Whitehouse, 2022). Parents struggling to home educate may enrol their child in **illegal or unregistered schools** which Ofsted have linked to serious safeguarding and Health and Safety concerns (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024; Whitehouse, 2022). While care must be taken not to make an automatic assumption of safeguarding when discussing home education, where parents do not have the time or resources to provide 'suitable education' this is a concern in and of itself:

> A failure to provide suitable education is capable of satisfying the threshold requirement contained in Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm (Purcell et al., 2025, p. 174)

In the absence of suitable education, a child is no longer EHE, but CME. Children who are not attending school lack the "protective factor" that regular contact with professionals who can identify early signs of harm offers, with **fewer routes to access specialist support**. Removed from these protections, children are more vulnerable to criminal exploitation, grooming and gang recruitment (Parish et al., 2020). Other destinations include illegal employment, which although rare, has been found to be the case for children of Gypsy Roma Traveller heritage (Parish et al., 2020), though fewer safeguarding issues were reported where specialist Traveller Education Services were in place (Purcell et al., 2025).

Given the prevalence, already discussed, of vulnerable groups within CME cohorts the lack of, not just regulatory powers, but capacity within local authorities to carry out the sort of detailed checks needed to ensure that children missing from school are safe and continuing to receive a suitable education is of paramount concern (Parish et al., 2020; Purcell et al., 2025).

What are the solutions?

The literature suggests a number of policy recommendations and interventions to reduce the numbers of young people leaving the education system, with more needing to be done to **share good practice** as devolution has led to increasingly disjointed approaches across the four nations (Maguire, 2021). Better coding of school absences and removals to show the reasons behind them would better inform policy at a national level (Burtonshaw, 2023). Linking existing data sets, such as GP registration and school enrolments could help to identify children who were never enrolled in schools (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024).

Additional focus needs to be placed on **early identification** of those at risk of early leaving before they do so. We have the means to begin identifying children at risk of low attainment using data from school readiness assessments routinely collected by schools, and so put in place earlier interventions to support children (Warburton et al., 2024).

> Too often, government waits until a young person has already fallen through the cracks, only to then ask taxpayers to subsequently spend considerable sums of money trying to bring these young people back into the fold later. Not only is this desperately inefficient from a public expenditure perspective, but it is also an inexcusable waste of young people's talents. (Richmond & Regan, 2022, p. 7)

Previous interventions shown to be effective in reducing NEET numbers include **placement schemes** such as the 'Work Experience' and 'Kickstart' schemes, both of which were shown to

reduce time on benefits and increase time in employment for participants (Tomlinson & Simmons, 2025). **Keyworker based interventions** such as the Connexions scheme which ran from 2001 to 2012 under New Deal for Young People, provided young people with "*a stable relationship otherwise missing from their lives. Many young people found [Connexions] PAs to be reliable, trusted adults who provided valuable support*" (Tomlinson & Simmons, 2025, p. 11), although it's target driven approach was not without criticism (Richmond & Regan, 2022). The 'Get Britain Working' White paper which was released in 2024 promises to create a similar service, but it remains to be seen whether it will avoid the pitfalls of inconsistent delivery and poor design that have affected past incarnations (Tomlinson & Simmons, 2025).

> It is, however, fair to say that there is a genuine need to support young people outside education and employment back into the labour market, and through coaching and support to undo the psychological damage of unemployment. (Tomlinson & Simmons, 2025, p. 15)

The Youth Employment Initiative's Springboard programme was a keyworker based programme which showed a significant increase in the number of participants entering employment, although, it has to be noted, not for those with SEND (Department for Work & Pensions, 2025). The Springboard programme also included an element of **employer incentives**, another intervention shown to be effective in increasing job opportunities available to young people, particularly among smaller employers (Richmond & Regan, 2022). Reducing childcare costs and enabling work schedules that fit around childcare commitments would help NEET young parents back into work (Holmes et al., 2021).

Tackling the attendance crisis in schools is a must in order to decrease the number of NEET and CME young people. Schools must be enabled to engage with parents and communities to innovate and properly evaluate new interventions to improve attendance (Crenna-Jennings et al., 2024). Pupils have said they want more autonomy and flexibility in school (Carr et al., 2025); Government should review the Baccalaureate performance measures and end the bias towards academic subjects. More vocational options, including for children aged 14-16 would help to re-engage disaffected students, raise confidence and decrease permanent exclusions (Richmond & Regan, 2022). Alongside vocational options, young people need **more opportunities to engage with employers and work experience**. Workplace visits, mock interviews and joint projects can forge stronger links between schools and employers. Better coordination of youth and careers services can help young people to navigate the transition from education to employment (Richmond & Regan, 2022; Rolph et al., 2024).

There is strong evidence to show that **one-to-one tutoring**, or in small groups, raises attainment (Richmond & Regan, 2022). However, the Government Funded 'National Tutoring Programme', set up post-Covid to decrease the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, was ended in 2024. **Mentoring** programmes, while having little impact on attainment, have been shown to raise aspirations and confidence, and help with attendance and behavioural issues (Richmond & Regan, 2022).

Schools need to take wellbeing seriously and recognise that pupils come to school to socialise as well as learn. Less policing of behaviour during lunch and breaks, with more **enrichment and social activities** can foster a sense of belonging:

> Schools need to widen this definition of success for pupils… Enrichment activities – like sport, music, drama, clubs, volunteering, trips – give pupils other ways to succeed, connect and enjoy school… and are especially valuable to pupils who feel disengaged from lessons. (Carr et al., 2025, p. 50)

Support for pupils struggling with the impact of digital habits can help with engagement, but needs leadership and guidance at a national level (Carr et al., 2025). Adults in the system, too, need support to deal with the effects of dealing with difficult and sometimes violent behaviours, and the trauma experienced by the young people they support (Lloyd, 2025). **Trauma informed practice** is one approach that has been shown to have promise in this regard, as well as building more compassionate relationships between teachers and pupils, but may be hampered by wider educational frameworks (Burton et al., 2024). Increased wellbeing and **mental health support within schools**, with trusted adults who are not part of the disciplinary structure, can reduce low-level symptoms and reduce the need for more intensive support (Burtonshaw, 2023; Carr et al., 2025; Richmond & Regan, 2022). Trusted adults who can help to rebuild relationships between parents, students and teachers may also be the first steps to re-engagement for SEND students who are persistently absent (Nordin et al., 2024).

There is a lot of work to be done to **rebuild trust in the educational system**, starting with a review of fines and other punitive measures used to manage attendance, and separating support staff from disciplinary (Burtonshaw, 2023; Carr et al., 2025).

> If the person they are supposed to turn to for support is also the one issuing detentions, calling home, or authorising fines, it becomes harder for pupils to ask those individuals for help when they need it. (Carr et al., 2025, p. 61)

Parents need **more choices and flexibility** when considering education for their child, such as better access to flexi-schooling options (Gillie, 2025). Enow & Kapcia (2024) advocated for repackaging alternative education and PRUs as viable first choice options, instead of a second choice which is only available through managed moves once mainstream education has failed. This could provide a stable educational journey for children who may struggle in mainstream settings and alleviate the negative impacts to confidence and self-esteem caused by failure there:

> At least initially, the plan is for the pupil or student to return to mainstream at some point in future. As most, not all, pupils and students identify within the SEND and/or neurodivergent range, it is indeed rare to find that they have overcome their challenges and are ready to return to mainstream. The long- term outcome of the managed move is that the PRU or AP becomes their destination educational setting. (Enow & Kapcia, 2024, p. 200)

Parental engagement has shown strong potential to close the attainment gap between children from lower and higher socio-economic backgrounds (Kent et al., 2022), but parents who are struggling financially needs additional support - "*genuine parental engagement becomes challenging as families grapple with immediate survival needs*" (Spiteri & Cin, 2025, p. 774*)*. Engagement goes beyond the peripheral involvement typically seen in parent-teacher evenings or helping with homework but is based on open dialogue and partnership between school and home whereby "*both sides should become knowledgeable and respectful of the other side's*

agency and role" (Kent et al., 2022, p. 12). Home School Liaison Services have been shown to be effective in fostering relationship between home and school in early years education (Spiteri & Cin, 2025). It was argued that AI technologies could be used to redistribute labour so that teachers could have more time to effectively engage with parents (Kent et al., 2022).

Many of these recommendations, of course, require **financial support and investment**. Lack of capacity and resilience in schools and related systems (e.g. SEND and CAMHS) makes it impossible to effectively address many of the issues raised (Burtonshaw, 2023; Parish et al., 2020). Teachers need more training in inclusive practices and mental health support (Carr et al., 2025; Gillie, 2025). Young people and families too, need financial support; increasing bursary payments would reduce barriers to education for many young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Richmond & Regan, 2022), and financial support and access to resources for home educators would ease the burden of education for many families (Zhang, 2024).

Government is already taking steps to address some of the issues and concerns raised in the literature, such as the update to the Ofsted inspection framework in November 2025 which added Inclusion as a separate evaluation area. The announcement of £200m for SEND training in January 2026, though, was derided as too little too late by teaching unions (Standley, 2026). An overhaul of the SEND system proposed in the 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' White Paper has been welcomed in principle for its inclusive vision (Goldsmith, 2026), although there are concerns about proposed changes to EHCPs (Khan, 2026). In addition, a national consultation, titled 'Growing up in the online world', is underway to explore how technology impacts on children's wellbeing and what can be done to "*help families strike the right balance*" (Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, 2026).

Youth Voice

In this section we present case studies written from each of the responses we received from young people, either as interviews or written responses, followed by a brief cross-case analysis. Throughout this section, all names have been changed and quoted text is verbatim from the young person concerned unless otherwise stated.

Key Findings

- The young people struggled in school with unmet needs related to SEND, mental health and bullying. The described feeling intimidated and unsafe.
- There was evidence wellbeing improved in some cases once removed from school, but reintegration and accessing post-16 educational options were challenging due to ongoing mental health issues and triggering environments.
- In all cases the young people expressed that earlier support and accommodations would have enabled them to continue their education in a mainstream setting.
- The cases demonstrated a lack of awareness about support options both before and after school removal.
- Loss of trust ran through all five cases; some young people described their experiences in school as damaging.

Peter

Peter is 18 and lives in Hull. He was not fond of his neighbourhood, saying although he wished he didn't live there sometimes it was what he was used to. This related both to the bullying he experienced and anti-social behaviour in the area with people "*always arguing and beating each other up*". When he was younger, there was an incident of serious violence in the neighbourhood, "*somebody was basically shot to death*," and although he supposed it hadn't affected him he said *"I still wish that I wasn't, sort of, exposed to that."* His father, an aggressive alcoholic, left the family home when Peter was three. He said, because of his age, he wasn't 'fully exposed' to it, explaining he felt it had more of an impact on his mother:

> Because she was always the target. She'd always put herself in front of everyone else. So, then none of us all got hit... Which, I suppose in one sense was really brave of her, but also... really stupid, in my opinion, because she was risking her life for the kids.

Peter had little contact with his father now. He felt that his father made excuses not to see him but the lack of contact over the years meant "*it doesn't really affect me as bad as what it probably should do*". He recalled his mother working two jobs to make ends meet and depriving herself to make sure children had enough:

> There wasn't enough money... because she would always prioritise us lot over herself. So, like, we might need new shoes, but then she has no shoes, but then we'd get new shoes anyways.

He described Year 7 as 'really chilled' because this was the year of lockdown and all his schooling was remote. However, when he returned for Year 8 *" it was just non-stop bullying 24/7 to the point where it got that bad that I just didn't want to wake up the next day."* Peter explained he was

targeted by bullies due to some serious allegations that had been made against his brother. Although these were proven false the bullying continued both in and out of school "*because as my mum says, I think it was, mud sticks*." He recalled how, at home, people would knock on his door "*trying to lure me out, just so they could take me round the corner to, basically, beat me.*" In school, he was subjected to physical assaults, but felt he had no support from teachers who turned a blind eye to what was happening:

> I don't think they believed anything was happening to be honest because the people who were doing it… they was favourited by every single teacher. So, they could get away with murder and it'd always be my fault.

For a year, Peter struggled to attend, making himself ill and absenting himself because he was too scared to go to school. He described his mother's efforts to speak to the school, as she was constantly told the Head of Year and the Principal were not available, and could only speak to Peter's tutor "*who even said, the way they're treating it all is really poor*." Three times Peter attempted to enrol in another school. He recalled that as the reasons for his absences were not recorded, his attendance record went against him. A managed move between schools was never discussed to his knowledge. Eventually, Peter's mother told the school he would not attend until the situation was resolved and took him out to Home Educate him.

He explained there was a 'decompression period' before his home education started "*Since she [his mother] didn't want to stress me out too much. As she says, like, out the frying pan into the fire*." His mother would leave a timetable of work for him to complete with the support of his brother while she was at work and take him for sightseeing on her days off. He studied English, Maths and science with the help of DIY Kits "*which was, like, learning how electricity works and stuff like that which was pretty cool.*" He described how his mother would look at his work for strengths and weaknesses, and set him work to develop those areas, surprising himself with some of his identified strengths:

> Teachers used to say that I was horrible at maths until I started doing my home education and I found out that I was actually really good at it.

Peter had two Education Officers who monitored his progress "*and they said that I was progressing way better than I was in school*." He was unable to sit any GCSEs, however, due to the cost and the need to travel to the nearest exam centre 50 miles away. He did enrol in college when he turned 16, but he felt discriminated against due to being home educated and there was an incident of fighting with another student that led to him being excluded. After this, the Connexions service helped him to enrol on a Study Programme course. He made a few visits to the centre and "*instantly felt relaxed by the environment*". He is undertaking a work placement in IT and hopes to continue onto an apprenticeship in the same informal environment:

> We just always have a joke about, you know. Get along really good and whenever I'm doing my IT placement, then I'll often see them [tutors] just walking about, so then it's sort of more or less as if we're just really good friends instead of teacher pupil, which is really nice.

When asked what it would have taken to get Peter to return to a school environment, he said either a completely different school, or to *"have somebody there to actually listen to me, because I never felt listened to. I always just felt pacified when I was in school, which wasn't nice.*"

Shannon

Shannon is 17 and lives in Hull. She is autistic and has epilepsy. Although she lives in a 'nice' area, with plenty of transport links, safety concerns around her epilepsy meant she was not allowed to travel on her own. Her autism meant she struggled with new places and needed support to get used to them. She had an EHCP but she did not feel her needs were met and did not recall getting any support with either SEN or mental health from school. She moved school twice. At her first school she experienced 'insane levels' of bullying, which, she reported, the school wrote off as 'kids being kids':

> Kids threatened to throw me off a balcony and I was constantly called a 'Fat Spaz' and I was told to kill myself a lot on messages, group chats and social media.

This resulted in her refusing to attend and so she transferred to a new school. At her new school she didn't have any friends and recalled feeling unsafe, as her epilepsy was not controlled and she was not supposed to be left alone in case she had a seizure. "B*ut teachers left me on my own and I had a seizure, which was frightening."* She remembered on one occasion, being left on her own during a seizure and on other occasions being locked in classrooms. When she refused to attend classes because she was too overwhelmed by bright lights from the screens and the number of people in the room, she was called a "*disrespectful child."* She remembered when she was sexually assaulted on school grounds, the teachers said she was lying "*so I kicked off and called them names*." In Year nine she transferred to 14-16 vocational provision which she said, "*wasn't much better but the staff were at least nicer.*"

Currently, Shannon is enrolled with a college but is being home schooled due to new epilepsy medication that is making her too tired to attend. The college is sending work home for her to complete which, she said, they are not happy about "*but they can't do much about it. My attendance is only 10% but I can't do the work when I'm too ill*." She recognised her mother's support and specialist knowledge in negotiating home schooling with the college:

> It's been helpful that my Mum is a nurse and can explain my medical conditions to them. If she didn't have this knowledge it would have been really difficult and I don't think I would have been allowed to do work at home.

Shannon also attends a local youth centre who help her with her studies to give her mum a break, as well as social and wellbeing activities. They have offered a referral to the Home Education Team, but Shannon said, "*I would rather just come here [youth centre] so it gets me out of the house more"*. She recalled having phone support for autism and ADHD *"but it was just a weekly phone call so that didn't work for us and was no help*." Again, she credited her mother with finding sources of support for her to continue her education:

> School never worked for me which made me depressed and I had to go to CAMHS. My Mum has done a lot of finding places to help me and getting in touch with other places to try and help me undo the damage and be able to learn.

Shannon wants to work in law but recognises she would need additional support in order to gain the necessary qualification and go to university. She did not recall getting any careers advice from school or college to help with this. She felt that had she had more support in school with autism

and mental health, and "*an actual safety plan*" for her epilepsy she would have been able to continue her education there.

Dave

Dave is 17 years old and lives in Hull. He does not like the area he lives in as it is 'too busy' and stated, "*I have issues with strange men staring at me when I go out*." He has Auditory Processing Disorder (APD), which he felt was not understood by the teachers at his school. He also felt that teachers did not understand his mental health and physical difficulties, recalling "*I had a bladder problem and some teachers wouldn't allow me to go to the toilet*." He was persistently absent due to bullying which he felt the teachers did not help with, leading eventually to permanent exclusion. Dave reported he had no support while he was excluded, from any agencies. Dave is in an insecure housing situation but is getting support from local authority housing support and a local youth centre, although he finds transport is a barrier to accessing services.

He suggested several interventions which could have allowed him to continue his education, such as home tutoring and while he was excluded, more understanding of his APD from teachers, a teaching assistant and further support in classroom and mentoring.

Emma

Emma is 15 and lives in a quiet rural area of North Lincolnshire. She was interviewed for the study together with her mother, June. She was diagnosed with dyslexia aged nine. This was not picked up by her primary school, but by June, who requested an assessment. They were told Emma wasn't dyslexic enough to be assessed due to limited places, so the family paid for a private diagnosis. They have always known Emma was autistic, although she did not receive a formal diagnosis until she was 14. She waited two and a half years for an assessment which also revealed she has ADHD. Her autism is something the family 'celebrate'; Emma is very confident and aware of how it affects her and is able to articulate her needs.

Emma does not have an EHCP, as her parents felt it should not be necessary, June recalled "*I suppose we wanted to see how Emma fit into school*." Early on in primary school, Emma began to fall behind as she did not feel able to ask questions in class. After her dyslexia diagnosis she had a support plan which detailed the adjustments she needed, such as overlays, but this was not communicated to her secondary school when she made the transition.

Despite this, the first couple of years in secondary school were OK, although Emma's attendance was 'never great'. Problems began in year nine, with her teachers not understanding what autism is and how Emma's communication and sensory needs affected her. She was frequently threatened with suspension and told "*about three times, I think, that mum's going to get arrested and is going to go to jail. That I'm doing stuff that's illegal*" (Emma), a statement she took literally that caused significant anxiety. Emma and June recalled numerous examples of ableist language as Emma was told by various teachers that either she couldn't be autistic because she didn't look it, or she was too autistic and would never get a job. June described the language used as 'victim shaming' and bullying, recalling how she would drop Emma at the school "*and she would sit in the car and beg me, and I mean beg me, not to make her go.*" She questioned why trauma informed practice in custody services would have meant Emma was treated better there than in

school. They shared a document, which contained a full chronology of the problems Emma had encountered. It detailed 27 incidents over two years of schooling, involving 16 different teachers.

Each time there was an incident, June would speak to the school and they would promise to add information to Emma's support plan and accommodations would be made. The plan would then not be followed consistently, resulting in further incidents and threats of suspension. Emma was assigned a 'safe space' to regulate, close to a kitchen where cooking smells overwhelmed her. An alternative suggestion, that she use Isolation, left her feeling branded as naughty: "*I was seen as just a problem more than anything else*" (Emma).

Eventually, June considered removing Emma from school altogether after a request that Emma could attend on a reduced timetable to do Maths and English was denied. Emma was out of school for a month while they waited for a meeting to resolve the issue. Fortunately, through work contacts, June was able to get some advice from someone who works in inclusion before doing so. In this way she also learned that the Autism Spectrum Education Team (ASET) had been in Emma's school three times a week for the last five years, and yet a referral had never been made to them. Armed with the advice of her work colleague June was able to get the attendance concessions she had asked for, so Emma would not miss out on her exams, although her time out of school was still being recorded as unauthorised.

Emma described the impact masking all day to hide autistic behaviours had on her, as "*by the end of the week I won't want to move or speak to anyone*", especially before she got her diagnosis. Part-time attendance has reduced this strain, allowing Emma to revise more effectively for her exams as she has more energy and the flexibility to schedule learning for when she is motivated to do it.

Both Emma and June felt that the school viewed them as a nuisance, and that their advocacy was a challenge to the school's authority. "*It's like, the power, like, the power and authority that they actually have… it's like they could just suspend me whenever they decided to*" (Emma). Both June and Emma acknowledged the family's privilege in having the contacts and financial means to fight for the support Emma needed, and worried about other young people and families who did not have the same resources:

> But they'll have parents that don't really know a lot about it and will just believe the school and because, quite often, the school will try and lie to you about what's happened. (Emma)
>
> It makes me really sad for young people that don't have that backing or parents don't know because they will be branded as naughty. Who's advocating for them? (June)

June suggested free, independent SEND advocates across the four Humber regions could support such families and "*professionally challenge, know what a school should be providing and help parents advocate but also not feel intimated and overwhelmed*."

The impact of Emma's experiences at school were described as damaging for her; she said she felt 'sick' at the thought of ever sending her own children to school. June told of the shame she felt that she had let the situation go on for so long. She spoke about how difficult it was to make the decision to remove Emma from school, saying *"people just think you're just doing it because it's easy but it's never an easy decision, it's been hard*" (June). In spite of her experiences, Emma

was positive about starting college, as a visit there had already shown them to be much more accommodating to her needs and plans had been put in place for her start in September. "*The lady at college said to you, your autism is not a problem anywhere but school, so don't worry*" (June).

Heather

Heather is 22 years old and lives in Hull. While she is currently NEET she was Elective Home Educated after leaving school due to severe social anxiety. She remembered the transition from her small primary school to a larger secondary school was "*quite overwhelming and a big leap*." She found herself separated from her primary school friends who were assigned to different tutor groups and classes. Added to this, her mixed-year tutor group seated her with three older boys, which was not "*a great first impression*." She recalled "*I did make a few friends at school, but it was all very intimidating*." Lack of understanding from teachers about her anxiety led to misguided attempts to push her to engage more in lessons:

> some teachers at school knew I struggled so would ask me more questions to try and push me out my comfort zone, but it wasn't helpful and made things worse.

Heather's anxiety continued to increase throughout years seven and eight. Her father spoke to the school and some accommodations were made to try and make it easier for her to cope. While she found these adjustments helpful, they were made too late to really make a difference for her:

> I saw the school nurse weekly for a while because I was struggling. I struggled with getting the bus home after school so they arranged a pass so I could leave early… They did swap my classes around at one point so I could be with my friends which helped a bit, but this was at the last stages so a bit too little too late.

By year nine, Heather was regularly missing school due to her anxiety and started attending half days. The Education Welfare Officer became involved, and while Heather recalled they were "*nice and understanding*" she felt that the support was offered too late, only when her attendance had reached a certain threshold. Had interventions been made earlier perhaps things would not reached such a low point – "*It maybe would have been a different outcome if my anxiety could have been helped earlier on.*" She was offered some mental health support but felt that the advice offered was not relevant to her situation and recalled feeling isolated by her experiences:

> Maybe having some sort of support group where I could go… The school nurse was understanding but when you're young you feel like the only one – I think if I had other people around me that understood it would have been helpful.

Heather was offered a place in Alternative Provision (AP), but by this point her anxiety was so bad she could not physically attend the centre. She received home tuition at first, recalling "*they were all really friendly, but I was so nervous to see them*." After a while, the AP centre wanted Heather to attend in person, but despite some support with the transition, such as a visit to look around when the centre was closed, she did not feel able to do so. After nine months the home tuition ended, leaving Heather to continue her education at home using websites and online exams, although her mental health was so poor at this time she did not feel able to sit them. She had

support from her father, who "*did what he could to help me out... but obviously he is not a teacher*."

Heather had had ambitions to be an architect and felt she had missed out by not being able to continue at school and pursue this goal. She described her frustration at the interruption to her education at such a vital time, and the long-term impact on her adult life:

> Since been an adult I've missed out on a lot like college and being socialised. I don't have a job and education feels too much still with my anxiety so I'm a bit stuck at present.

Recently, she has started to make some progress attending a local youth centre which is supporting her to go through her employment options and plan for the future. She praised the flexibility of the centre in letting her take her time and progress at her own pace to regular attendance in person:

> I did a lot of speaking on email first, then a short visit then a step back when my dad passed and back to email contact – now I'm able to come in once a week.

She is receiving Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) through a self-referral online, which her GP told her about. There was a two year wait from her initial application before this could begin, although Heather admitted she missed a few phone calls which extended the wait. "*I would say my anxiety has made it difficult to access services and it takes a while to feel comfortable/ready to attend new places.*"

Cross-case analysis

In all cases the young peoples' issues were due to **unmet needs**. Both Peter and Shannon felt their concerns about bullying were dismissed by teachers who should have been supporting them. Emma recalled ableist treatment from teachers which she described as being bullied by adults. All three began to refuse school as their experiences impacted on their mental health. A number of these cases revealed inconsistent support, as accommodations and support plans were followed by some teachers, but not others. In Heather's case it appears her school tried to support her and made several accommodations, but she described these interventions as 'too little too late'. The young people remembered **feeling intimidated and unsafe in school settings**.

Some of the cases revealed how **wellbeing and achievement may improve** once the young people were removed from school. Peter surprised himself with his aptitude for Maths. For Emma, the impact of masking all day at school left her exhausted and unable to function. A reduced timetable enabled her to focus on studying essential subjects as and when she felt able to do so. For others, lack of support once removed from school and, in Heather's case, severe mental health issues prevented effective learning. In all cases the young people expressed that **earlier support and accommodations** would have enabled them to continue their education in a mainstream setting.

The cases demonstrated a **lack of awareness of services and support available**. Once removed from school, young people reported no support other than Home Education Teams and Education Welfare Officers. This may be because parents were dealing with services on behalf of their children, but even June who was well informed about local services, was unaware that ASET

were in Emma's school on a regular basis. This raises questions about how well informed less connected parents can be.

A **loss of trust in school** runs through all five cases. Peter felt teachers played favourites and enabled his bullies. Shannon too was not listened to when she reported sexual assault. She and Emma both referred to their experiences as damaging. Failure to follow support plans undermined relationships between students and teachers. Opportunities for referrals were missed further harming relationships between the school and families.

Reintegration and access to post-16 options was challenging for some of the young people due to ongoing mental health and health issues, discrimination or reoccurrence of issues that led to removal. Some of the young people benefited from the **informal environments** provided by youth services and training providers which helped them to explore options and plan for the future at their own pace.

Stakeholder Survey

In this section we present the results of the stakeholder survey. Due to the small number of responses from some regions, responses cannot be taken as representative across the Humber but do give some idea of the issues and barriers for young people in remaining in or re-engaging with mainstream education and the agencies and services supporting them.

Key Findings

- Unmet needs regarding mental health, SEND needs and bullying were indicated as key reasons for children leaving school.
- Responses highlighted inconsistent SEND support and issues related to the school environment that led to coping strategies which failed to support the young person.
- It was felt that inflexible systems fail to understand reasons for these coping strategies.
- Concerns were raised about the quality of education received once removed and poor understanding of academic cycles and admission processes among parents.
- Post-16 transitions for EHE young people are complicated by difficulty accessing careers guidance, changes to benefits and difficulty accessing GCSE exams.
- Responses highlighted the importance of relational and child centred approaches to build cultures of belonging
- Further support needed included more support for SEND and mental health with easier access and a broader and more flexible curriculum with increased vocational options.
- Challenges for local structures largely related to lack of resources, staff and funding.

Why are children and young people leaving education in schools?

Responses highlighted a number of barriers experienced by children and young people to remain or reintegrate in school education. Mental health and wellbeing was the most common barrier identified, followed by SEND needs, systemic issues and the home environment. Responses may each cover a number of themes (Figure 1). Although the small sample makes detailed analysis difficult, the data did reveal some interesting differences between sectors. For instance, school responses were less likely to mention the impact of trauma, bullying or difficulties related to the school environment.

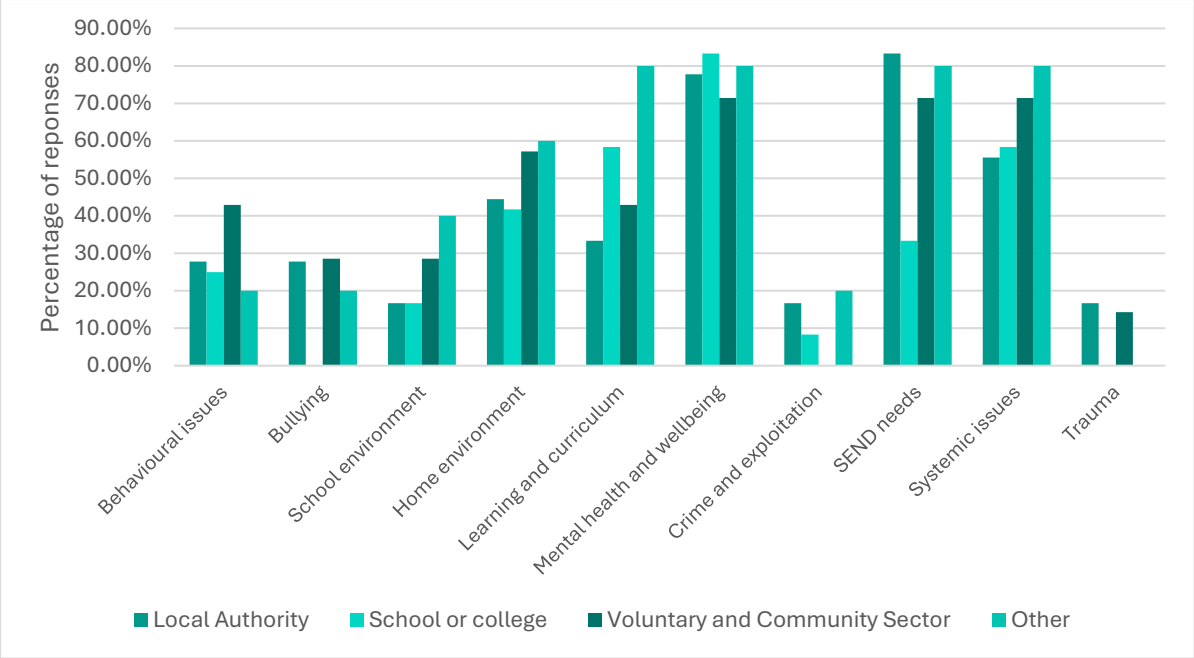


Figure 1: survey responses by theme

Issues raised around **mental health** included social anxiety, low confidence and anxiety related to other needs such as undiagnosed SEND (particularly Autism and ADHD) and trauma. Difficulty making friends, fear of getting things wrong in class and poor relationships with school staff were all mentioned. Factors outside of school impacting on mental health included involvement with social care and familial pressure or circumstances. In younger children of primary school age, separation anxiety was identified as a barrier, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, although the responses suggest this may be an ongoing issue for younger pupils. In a follow-up interview, SR 29 discussed how lack of support with mental health difficulties meant the young people in their service were leaving school after reaching 'crisis point':

> Some, like, really tried to enjoy school and I think it's just the lack of support and things weren't getting resolved... and then the parents felt like they had no choice then. And yeah, I think it's when a young person's mental health gets really, really bad, that's when, they're literally at a crisis point, I think.

The responses indicated young people returning to school after periods of CME or EHE face anxiety about returning to the school environment, fitting into friendship groups and "*shame, worry, embarrassment about being behind in class*" (SR 16). They may find that nothing has changed in their absence, and whatever problems they faced that led them to leaving school are still there on their return.

Responses related to **SEND needs** highlighted lack of inclusive provision, inconsistency of support, unidentified needs, and a lack of resources in schools to manage "*behaviour that is actually communication of distress*" (SR 16) arising as a result of this. Unsuitable sensory environments, large class sizes, lack of 1-2-1 support and schools' failure to follow support plans were all specifically mentioned. Respondents referred to **the school environment** as overwhelming and overstimulating due to chaotic environments, the size of the school and the number of pupils. This was identified as problematic not just for students with SEND, but for those that have experienced **trauma** as well. A number of responses linked sensory and

communication needs to exclusions, reporting that students who are trying to engage with school face sanctions for breaking rules:

> If you have a child who is struggling to wear a tie because they really can't be doing with things... being tight round their neck, then, you know, let's have a little bit of flexibility. Let's not send them home. (SR 20 interview)

> Majority have a suitable plan but the school consistently failing to follow it leading to daily incidents, threats of suspension. (SR 14)

Continuity of support between primary to secondary school was reported as an issue, particularly for pupils with no EHCP. The change of environment with different classrooms and teachers may be destabilizing for some children, in addition to which adjustments they were allowed in primary school may no longer be upheld in secondary:

> I just think at primary school they seem to have quite a lot more wraparound support and obviously they're only in one class, they have the same teacher, so they've got that stability, that routine... So, they're just getting some SEN support because that's all they need in primary. And then obviously the transition to secondary, it seems to fall apart... I mean, just little things like wearing ear defenders, whereas at senior school, not so much. (SR 13 interview)

In a follow-up interview, SR 20 spoke at length about the difficulties parents faced in navigating the 'complex and complicated' SEND system. They questioned whether EHCPs have 'done the job' and described how, across the country, families most likely to succeed in accessing EHCPs are those with the wherewithal and financial resources to engage with professional support and pay for private diagnoses. Within their service, there were very few parents with those resources:

> So, our parents are navigating a complex system whilst living a complex life... I feel as if we've got to fight for everything and that's not how it should be for our families, is it? (SR 20 interview)

They were, however, hopeful that with better early identification of additional needs younger children are now better supported in school, leading to fewer issues for them later in life:

> I'm hopeful that we're in a better place now, so we'll have far less coming through in the years to come... what we are still seeing now is older children who have been missed. (SR 20 Interview)

Behavioural issues arising from unmet needs may result in repeated periods of isolation and exclusion and lead to *"part-time timetables or reduced confidence in coping at school"* (SR 16) further impacting on mental health. Ultimately young people may feel they have been "*written off due to 'bad behaviour'*" (SR 10). In a follow up interview SR 26 provided an example of a young person who had left school for EHE due to bullying and behavioural issues, "*I think he threw a chair at a teacher once*" (SR 26), who struggled to reengage in college post-16:

> That behaviour resurfaced again because he was just triggered by a lot of past experiences... And I tried to tell the school, this is how you calm [him] down... because he did have diagnosed ADHD as well, and the school wasn't really interested in that, they were just more interested in like start dates and what course they wanted to do.

Once the school started to listen and made some adjustments, the student was, in this case, able to continue. SR 16 described a post-16 Study Programme learner who had been excluded from their previous school as "*absolutely full of sass and attitude*". While they were sympathetic to the teachers involved and in some ways understood the exclusion, they were clear that **systemic issues** such as lack of staff resources to manage behaviour in large classes was the underlying issue:

> There's nobody there to have that time with them, to spend that bit of time with them, finding out what the problem is. (SR 16 interview)

The structure, routine and lack of person-centred approaches in educational systems was raised in a number of responses. As SR 3 put it, "*Schools are a big wheel that teaches the masses and has to keep moving, so really doesn't have time to recognise differences*". The inflexibility of the curriculum and lack of support for pupils who struggle academically was the focus of several responses. Respondents felt the narrow curriculum and focus on the English Baccalaureate disengaged more vocationally inclined students who would benefit from qualifications with "*a direct link to the real working world*" (SR 35). Repeated resits of Maths and English GCSEs were seen as problematic and it was felt a Functional Skills offer from schools would have a positive impact. In some cases, it was suggested that schools were leaving behind pupils less likely to achieve academically or even encouraging removal so as not to affect performance ratings.

The overlap in responses between behavioural issues, SEND, mental health and systemic issues suggests there is a failure in some cases to understand the underlying reasons for challenging behaviour and poor attendance, with a focus on management through "*restrictive, old fashioned or punitive behaviour systems*" (SR 21) which dysregulated and vulnerable pupils struggle to follow.

Responses around **bullying** suggested schools are unable or unwilling to tackle incidents effectively, leading to children feeling unsafe and eventual school removal. One response indicated young people returning to school after periods of EHE are subjected to stereotyping and bullying as a result of their time out of school. SR 29, in a follow-up interview, suggested schools may find it difficult to tackle bullying which continues online, outside the of the school environment, due to lack of evidence:

> With like social media and the bullying was like online and on... when they were gaming... a lot of it don't have any evidence or proof so that's where schools get a bit confused when it's online and stuff. (SR 29 interview)

External factors reported to affect educational engagement included the **home environment**, such as parental ill-health, caring responsibilities, family breakdown and "*coercion by controllers or abusers*" (SR 1). SR 16 recalled a specific instance of children removed from school in order to avoid safeguarding concerns "*to stop the children disclosing anything, just to sort of like keep them out of the way from school because questions would be asked*." Children may be unwilling to leave parents to attend school due to concerns around domestic abuse or substance misuse. SR 3 noted teachers may not understand "*what young people have to cope with and that all home lives are different and can impact learning*."

Several responses mentioned intergenerational disengagement from education, that parents may have negative experiences of school themselves, or simply do not see the value, particularly in early years education. In a follow-up interview, SR 16 recalled from their time working as an attendance officer in a primary school, habits on non-attendance developed early:

> If those children are being brought up with parents not working... having their birthday off from school and the parent not seeing the importance of them being in school, then that definitely gets ingrained in that child and then when they move on to senior school it's already there... parents don't see the importance, it's just primary school, it's, oh, they're just drawing, they're just sticking and all that lot.

They went on to explain how this meant pupil missed out on foundational learning and social and communication skills development. By secondary school pupils may be so far behind their peers it is not possible for them to catch up.

A few responses identified **criminal exploitation** as a reason for poor attendance and "*the lure of that world, the fear instilled in them to carry out drop offs, transport drugs etc*" (SR 24). SR 1 explained that, based on their experience of working with children experiencing criminal or sexual exploitation, education providers may misinterpret behavioural indicators of exploitation as personal choice:

> For example, using victim blaming language "the child engages in risk taking behaviour or puts themselves at risk" . This often informs decision making , increasing the likelihood of exclusion rather than support, pushing children out of mainstream education. (SR 1)

An example of this was seen in a response from SR 36 who stated, "*they earn better money and have a sense of fulfilment from 'working' in crime (mainly drugs)*". Individualistic, rather than systematic attitudes to the issues raised could be seen in responses regarding the themes already discussed in phrases such as 'lack of resilience', 'poor parenting' and 'underachievement'. One response, from SR 30 criticized parents for "*enabling controlling behaviours by children*". Similar **antagonistic relationships between schools and parents** were revealed in several responses:

> Parents hiding behind / blaming a SEN and labelling the child excusing disengagement. (SR 36)

> When parents are not getting what they want i.e. an EHCP or a 1-1 as the school does not have the same issues. (SR 15)

> When a student is challenged on their behaviour and parents are in disagreement with the school they often remove their child from mainstream education and EHE. (SR 39)

> Parents not backing school system and the importance of education. (SR 41)

While a number of responses acknowledged home education as **a positive lifestyle or philosophical choice** which "*allows educational freedom and choice, and a highly personalised education*" (SR 34), many reflected this antagonistic state of affairs. Respondents reported parents removing children from school to avoid fines for non-attendance or due to dissatisfaction over support with SEND, mental health, bullying or learning support:

> I think it's a constant battle with some parents who have had various meetings with the school about adjustments and sometimes the school, 'we've made all the adjustments we can'. Some of the parents feel like they're not meeting them halfway. (SR 13 interview)

Some respondents reported parents may feel pressured to withdraw a child when the school is unable to resolve ongoing issues. "*Some providers offer fantastic wrap around care but those that do not, simply off-role [sic] a non-attender*" (SR 36). Concerns were raised about the **quality of education** some young people are able to access after leaving mainstream education for EHE. The data showed respondents were concerned that parents were not prepared to home educate children and highlighted the cost of private tutors and exams as barriers:

> They're still trying to but they're not really doing much education and then the home educator team... they do check on them to see if they are meeting like level of learning stuff and they are on the surface but when you're home educated you can choose what you want to... it's not a strict curriculum. (SR 43 interview)

> My fear that parents are not equipped to be able to meet the educational needs of their children and in reality are not EHE but CME. (SR 7)

Students face barriers from **school admission processes** in attempting to reintegrate as there may be long waits for places and lack of availability in their chosen area, particularly in rural areas, or schools may be unwilling to accept in-year admissions. SR 22 reported perhaps parents and young people do not have enough understanding of how the academic cycle works and "*drop out of one course and think they can just start another straight away*." Children may feel a sense of rejection when applications are not successful, although Fair Access Panels exist to support families with applications and reduce time out of education. Young people involved in Criminal Justice Systems for violent or sexual offenses may find it particularly difficult to find school places as "*schools feel unable to manage the perceived risk of that child"* (SR 7). Two responses from local authorities explained many CME are from families **unknown to services** having moved into an area and not registered, while others have "*left for another LA area and left and moved abroad*" (SR 29).

The data suggests the post-16 transition represents something of a **cliff-edge of support** for many young people. Students with no EHCP may find their support and accommodations are discontinued in post-16 learning, social care support is withdrawn, and child benefit stops for young people who are not in education. Young people continuing to home educate after this point would be considered NEET. This may lead to pressure to find work and contribute financially, or to engage with post-16 education. **Lack of information and careers guidance** can lead to EHE young people choosing unsuitable post-16 options, for the sake of 'doing something'; "*and that means then they come out and then that knocks the confidence more and then they disengage for longer and it's just that pattern*" (SR 13 interview). Without guidance, young people may focus on hobby interests without a realistic plan of how this fit with long-term goals:

> A lot of them just have no idea what they want to do and then some want to do what their hobbies are...it's like short-term goals, nothing wrong with that, but I think they don't have that guidance of how you're going to implement that into a career. (SR 43 interview)

SR 22 reported issues in preventing drop-out in post-16 education, as local authorities do not know a young person is at risk of dropping-out until they have already done so "*meaning we are re-engaging rather than preventing and there is no opportunity for a managed transfer as there is in Pre-16*." Respondents working in post-16 services reported that, in their experience, parents found it difficult to navigate systems and find information about what options are available and appropriate. In deprived area families may not have internet access, or parents may struggle with reading themselves. "*I think parents definitely advise them on what they experienced but that was like, it's a different time and then it's so different now*" (SR 43 interview).

The **high cost and availability of GCSEs** for EHE children was reported to be the biggest barrier when trying to re-engage with post-16 education. Students may find themselves placed on courses at too low a level which leaves them bored and disengaged. Additionally, examples were provided where unrealistic entry requirements for college courses prevented young people from accessing higher education:

> I'd do an application with a young person, it would be for like foundation level and that provider's getting them to do initial assessments... of Maths and English and then that young person's failing it and then they can't even get into a foundation course when that foundation course is teaching the Maths and English anyway so it's like why are you like cherry picking them? (SR 43 interview)

Problems with vocational options were reported such as a lack of employers offering work placements and apprenticeships, the narrow range of vocational options available, inconsistent and short-term funding and the pressures of Ofsted inspections impacting on smaller training providers.

Transport was identified as a barrier in a few cases, particularly in rural areas with poor transport links and for young people that are unable to travel independently. Suitable work or educational provision may not be available locally, meaning students must travel some distance and may be unwilling or unable to afford to do so. EHE young people may have to travel considerable distances to access exam centres, adding to the already considerable cost.

What support is available?

The most frequently mentioned providers of support services for young people were local authorities, followed by schools, then NHS mental health services (Figure 2). Specific services referenced in responses are discussed in the remainder of this section.

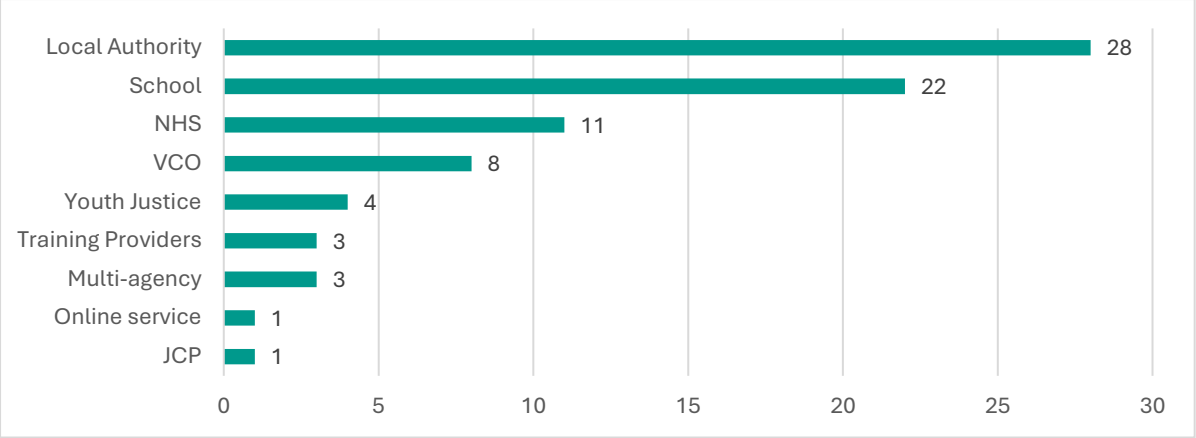


Figure 2: survey responses by service type

Schools themselves can offer a number of options to support with attendance and additional needs such as pastoral care teams, mental health support, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCo) and school nurses. Respondents in Hull and North Lincolnshire highlighted the ATTEND framework, a tool schools can use to help them better understand reasons for non-attendance and put support in place:

> [The framework] helps them to shape a conversation with parents and the wider family and the child, the young person, to say... What is it that's preventing you being at school? You know, what is it that we need to do differently? And what does that look like? (SR 20)

In Hull, this is also being used to facilitate referrals into other services through Team Around the School, a multi-agency response to support children who are struggling to attend. Although this is not available in every school but targeted at "*those target schools where we know that there are more issues and more challenges"* (SR 20 interview).

local authorities provide a wide range of services that can support families and children to remain in school and reintegrate where needed such as Education Welfare Services, Inclusion Officers and Fair Access Panels should families have difficulties finding a school place. Specific SEND support services mentioned include the Autism Spectrum Education Team (ASET) in North Lincolnshire, SEND Hub (Hull) and Children's Disability Team (East Riding). Across the region family support included Family Hubs, Early Help and Social Care. Other services listed by respondents included: Care leaver Teams, Child Exploitation Team and Making a Change (East Riding), Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked Team (Hull); Targeted Youth Support; Substance Misuse; Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (North Lincolnshire).

Mental health support mentioned mostly consisted of NHS services such as CAMHS and Emotional Wellbeing services, social prescribing and With Me in Mind (North Lincolnshire). The responses included charitable service such as Mind and Compass Go (North Lincolnshire). The data also included various other Voluntary and Community organisations offering a range of enrichment, support and post-16 training provision:

- Send Support - Aim Higher (Hull), SENDIASS (Kids), Barnardo's DSI Outreach
- Enrichment and post-16 training - Moorlands Centre, YEngage, (East Riding) Goodwin, The Warren, Tigers Trust (Hull)

There were **very few responses regarding pre-16 support for EHE young people** beyond local authority Education Welfare and Elective Home Education teams. In Hull Youth Services operate EHE groups at Kingston Youth Centre. On the South Bank John Leggott College, Scunthorpe, operates an EHE Hub to support study skills and access GCSE examinations. Beacon Academy in Grimsby also offer examinations. One response listed a number of independent organisations that can be accessed online such as Not Fine in School, Education Otherwise, The Centre for Personalised Education and Home Education Alliance. Localised EHE groups can also be found through Facebook.

There were also few responses regarding support for young people to reintegrate into mainstream education. Those that did address the issue reported that once children are back in school, any support offered tends to disappear, leading to eventual removal again:

> There is no support. It might be promised, but it rarely materialises on the ground. Promises made to get children back to school are dropped once the child is on school grounds. (SR 30)

> The Send department can help them re-entre, however that support tends to disappear once they are in lessons again. (SR 18)

> Most EHE pupils who we reintegrate fail after a short period of time. (SR 8)

Post-16 support included log_on_move_on (Hull and East Riding), Unifrog (through schools), and the Employment Hub and Connexions service (Hull). In addition to supporting young people to navigate post-16 educational options, Connexions offers quick access to social prescribers and Functional Skills online courses for EHE young people who were unable to sit their Maths and English GCSEs. In the East Riding a multiagency Inclusion Panel has been implemented to ensure a child-centred post-16 transition for young people at risk of NEET.

A number of responses indicated multi-agency and joined up working were most effective in supporting young people at risk of school removal and NEET, involving schools, families, and other agencies as appropriate. Other areas of **good practice** reported included relational approaches which tried to understand both the child and young person's needs as well as the parents' point of view. SR 16, speaking about their time as an Attendance Officer in a primary school recalled how they would try and work with parents who booked holidays during term time as it was cheaper for them to pay the fine for non-attendance. They tried to find compromises that maximised the child's time in school while recognising and respecting the parents' reasons:

> A lot of it comes down to communication, getting on board with the parent... making them realise that you're not like the big ogre... Actually, making them realise that you are a person and communicating with them. (SR 16 interview)

SR 20 stressed the importance of school leadership in building cultures of belonging and strong relationships between teachers and students. They explained Hull City Council's Relationships That Matter campaign:

> Looking at how we might celebrate really good work in schools by school staff who have gone the extra mile, who really have got that relational based approach with their children in that school and influencing then the wider culture of that school in terms of how they approach children feeling part of that school. (SR 20 interview)

Informal and flexible approaches that support the wellbeing of young people were also described as highly effective. For example, SR 43 described creating a regular, informal drop-in session for EHE young people to access information and applications for post-16 options based on the Lundy Model:

> The whole idea of it is that a young person just wants a safe space to feel comfortable to then be able to speak how they feel… it was like a little club really but not any pressure, it was just at their own pace. (SR 43)

Child-centred practice, with named people that children can go to for support and guidance was a recurring motif, particularly for younger children who were not yet able to regulate emotions independently. This was also reported to have benefits for wider families as the specialist knowledge of education professionals can help parents to navigate processes and systems.

What further support is needed?

Many respondents called for **higher levels of SEND support**, with earlier identification of needs and simpler, quicker pathways for diagnosis and support, particularly around neurodiversity. In addition, responses identified that higher levels of staff awareness around accommodations and adjustments are needed, with "*Proper SEND and trauma informed training for all teachers not just SENDCo*" (SR 14). One respondent suggested parental courses "*to understand their child's needs and why their behaviour is where it is*" (SR 35). Similarly, long waiting times for **mental health support** and better wellbeing support and pastoral care in schools was highlighted in several responses. One respondent proposed that psychoeducation in schools to teach children and young people how their brains work would be beneficial in helping them learn to manage and regulate emotions. Other specific measures suggested included smaller classes and buildings, support for barriers around housing and family, more adaptations to the school day and wellbeing support that teaches "*how to function well in life, and education about aspects of wellbeing that are important such as physical activity, social connectedness, etc*" (SR 12). SR 20 relayed parents' fears over the new SEND reforms, saying there had been 'unprecedented' applications for EHCPs as parents were worried they would not get one in place before the reforms changed eligibility.

More **relational approaches** to understand the needs of both children and their families could "*make school a kind place to be, not a challenge to be endured*" (SR 30). Understanding is needed for schools as well who, as SR 35 noted, "*are trying to support a child's needs but ultimately we are an educational setting and do not have the funds or provision to support all kinds of behaviour*". In another instance, the respondent recognized the extra support needed for young people involved in Youth Justice services. Although "*schools work hard in tandem with parents to keep children in school*" (SR 7) more trauma informed practice is needed to support their complex needs.

Several responses focussed on the need for a **broader range of educational options** with more flexibility in the curriculum. Suggestions included more vocational choices and the option to sit fewer GCSEs so young people can focus on essential qualifications, "*more room for creativity and arts*" (SR 10) and more access to alternative provision. The responses conveyed the sense of a

one-size-fits-all approach to education that does meet the changing needs and attitudes of young people:

> I feel that our young people are changing and they question things more and more and we need to look properly at how standard education just does NOT fit everyone and how we are losing really talented young people who become bored and disenchanted so we need to look at a different way. (SR 3)

Support needs identified for young people making the transition to post-16 education included more robust information exchanges between pre- and post-16 providers regarding all SEND "*not just those with EHCPs*" (SR 5), access to GCSE exams for EHE young people, Maths and English Functional Skills provision as well as Entry Level and Level 1 qualifications, and vocational taster days to help young people choose the right career path:

> Many young people are vocationally undecided upon leaving school but are not predicted the grades that would allow them to progress onto an open-ended academic programme e.g. A Levels. This effectively forces a young person working at Level 2 or below to choose a vocational direction without really knowing whether it would be a good match for them. (SR 5)

The respondents indicated a number of **systems changes** they felt were required, such as faster identification of CME children; "*in my experience a child had to be missing from school for 3 weeks before they can be identified as a CME with the local authority*" (SR 16). Strategic approaches with better multi-agency working featured in several responses, particularly regarding safeguarding and the risks faced by young people once they leave mainstream education:

> Aligned and joined up communication with social care, LA, EWO, Safeguarding and other relevant agencies who all join together to decide the suitability of the decision to EHE. Where a child moves local authorities, the leaving school has very little opportunity to communicate with the receiving area to share important info such as safeguarding. (SR 8)

> Strategic intervention with Academy trusts around 'off rolling', the principles behind it and the risks young people are exposed to when EHE is suggested to families is a key area that needs intervention. (SR 17)

Other responses highlighted the lack of options schools have to challenge a decision to Electively Home Educate and the limited resources of local authorities to manage caseloads of EHE children. Many respondents called for greater oversight of EHE, in one case calling for an outright ban, and more guidance to increase the quality of home education. Young people reintegrating into mainstream education need more options to join in-year through rolling programmes, timetables to allowed phased returns into schools with additional staffing to support this, and transitions "*that start in the home for those who are unable to leave their home*" (SR 22).

What are the challenges for local structures in supporting CME, EHE and NEET cohorts?

Lack of resources, staff and funding featured heavily under this theme. Increased demand for services without extra resources to support was prevalent in responses across the region and different sectors. Responses from schools indicated funding is needed for extra staffing to

support additional needs for students, and the reintegration of CME and EHE cohorts. In one instance there were reported challenges in recruiting staff due to "*levels of violent behaviour from pupils or high levels of needs in mainstream*" (SR 34).

The **short-term nature of funding initiatives** creates cash-flow problems for smaller training providers which, in turn, impacts on the breadth of vocational post-16 options. Funding models for DfE programmes and delays in funding from the new combined authority on the North Bank were described as creating 'a bottleneck' in NEET funding in both VCO and local authority responses. One VCO response revealed they felt 'forced' to take learners by local authority SEN teams that "*they cannot support, and where learners are [not] interested in their provision*" (SR 31).

local authorities also highlighted inconsistent post-16 support due to "*chronic underfunding and silo working*" (SR 24), and the challenge of working in areas of "*deprivation and high levels of need"* (SR 20). SR 11, who works in Social Prescribing, reported that "*learning, social interaction and wellbeing outside of places of education*" in more rural and remote areas was a barrier for the young people they support. However, this needs to be balanced against the challenges local authorities face in "*delivering sustainable, cost-effective services to a large rural area*" (SR 22).

Quantitative Analysis

In this section we present analysis of public datasets from the DfE, with additional insights from local authority data.

Key Findings

- The data indicate CME rates are rising across the region, as are severe absences and suspensions. Hull saw a sharp increase in CME numbers, while North Lincolnshire had a notable decrease.
- Gypsy/Roma and Traveller children and those eligible for free school meals are more likely to be absent or excluded from school than their peers.
- Both CME and EHE rates tend to increase as children get older, with particularly sharp increases between years 7 and 8.
- Average rates of NEET and EHE decreased slightly in 2025/26 from the previous year in the Humber with some regional variation. Notably there was a sharp increase in young people of not known status in north Lincolnshire.
- Mental health was the most frequent reason for EHE.
- Young people with SEND needs were disproportionately represented in NEET data.

Children Missing Education

The DfE CME data (Department for Education, 2026a) counts those known to local authorities, according to the official definition of "*Children that are of compulsory school age who are not registered at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school*". As this data collection is relatively new, changes over time may reflect differences and improvements in data quality and recording practices rather than changes to actual numbers.

The Autumn 2025/26 census indicates higher average CME numbers in the 2025/26 academic year than in 2024/25. Table 2 shows North East Lincolnshire has seen a significant decrease, although the data shows similar rates (per 100 pupils) across the four authorities. Males accounted for around half (n = 280) of CME children at Autumn 2025/26 census point.

Table 2: CME count in academic years

Academic year	East Riding of Yorkshire	Kingston upon Hull	North East Lincolnshire	North Lincolnshire	Total
2022/23	80	40	50	40	210
2023/24	167	0*	280	70	517
2024/25	80	170	107	40	397
2025/26	120	320	40	60	540

*No data available for Hull in 23/24

As shown in Figure 3, the census shows in the 2025/26 academic year almost half of children were missing education for periods of 4 weeks or less, although 70 were CME for lengthy periods of 6 months or more. North Lincolnshire shows higher proportion of CME lasting 8 weeks or more than the other three local authorities.

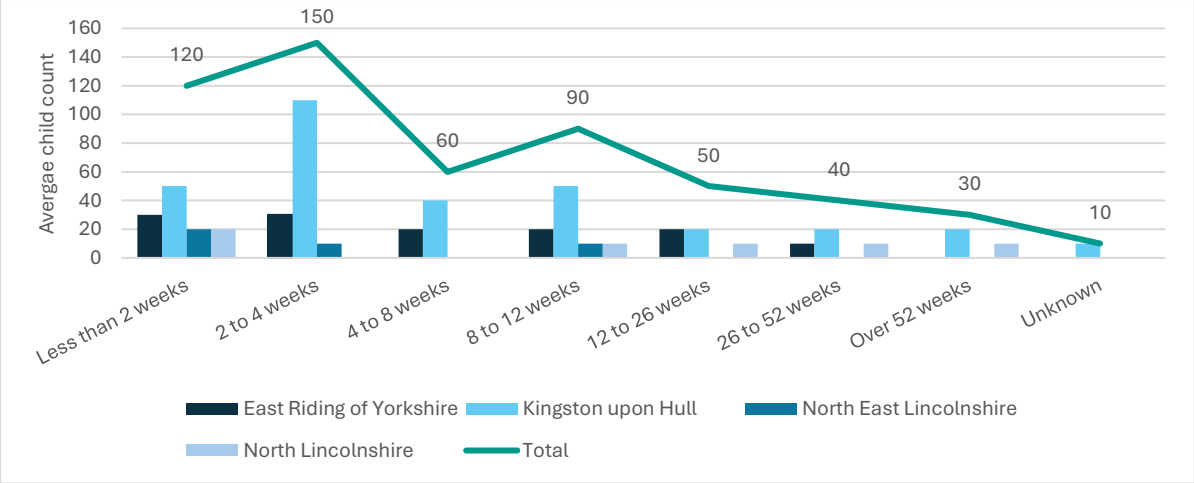
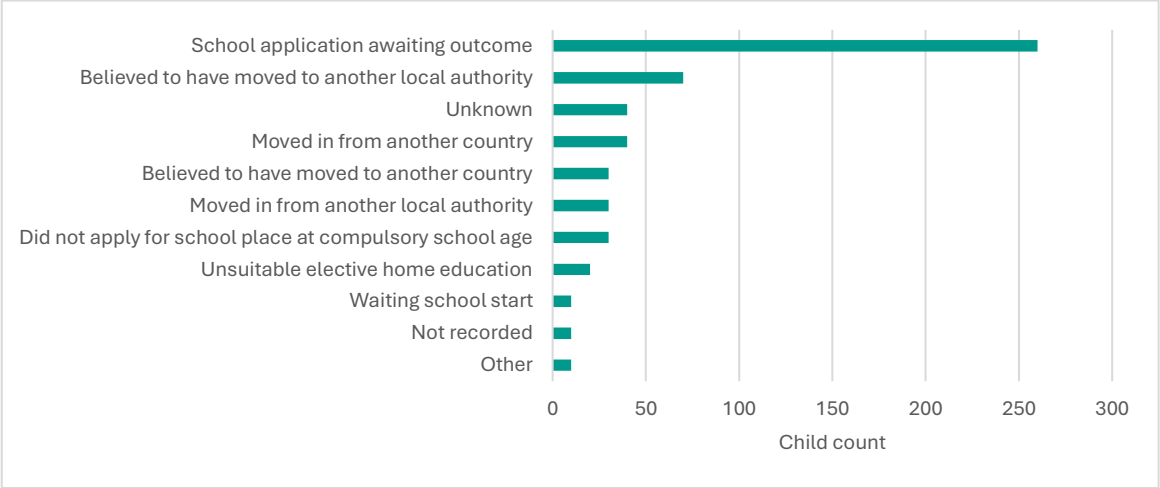


Figure 3: average duration of CME

The Autumn 2025/26 census includes reasons for CME in the data set for the first time. Surprisingly, given the qualitative findings, dissatisfaction with school, either in general or due to SEND, and mental health reasons do not feature, although they are included in the data set. Figure 4 shows the majority of numbers in Hull are due to school applications awaiting an outcome. Across the rest of the region the reasons most reported are children entering and leaving the local authority.



	East Riding of Yorkshire	Kingston upon Hull	North East Lincolnshire	North Lincolnshire	Total
School application awaiting outcome	40	220			260
Believed to have moved to another local authority	20	30		20	70
Moved in from another country		20	10	10	40
Unknown	20		20		40
Did not apply for school place at compulsory school age		30			30
Moved in from another local authority	10		10	10	30
Believed to have moved to another country	10	10		10	30
Unsuitable elective home education	10	10			20
Other				10	10
Not recorded		10			10
Waiting school start	10				10

Figure 4: reasons for CME

Census data shows that in the 2025/26 academic year the numbers of CME tended to increase as pupils got older with most missing children in years 8, 10 and 11 (Figure 5). There appears to be a relatively high number of CME in reception year in Hull, possibly due to the numbers awaiting a school place.

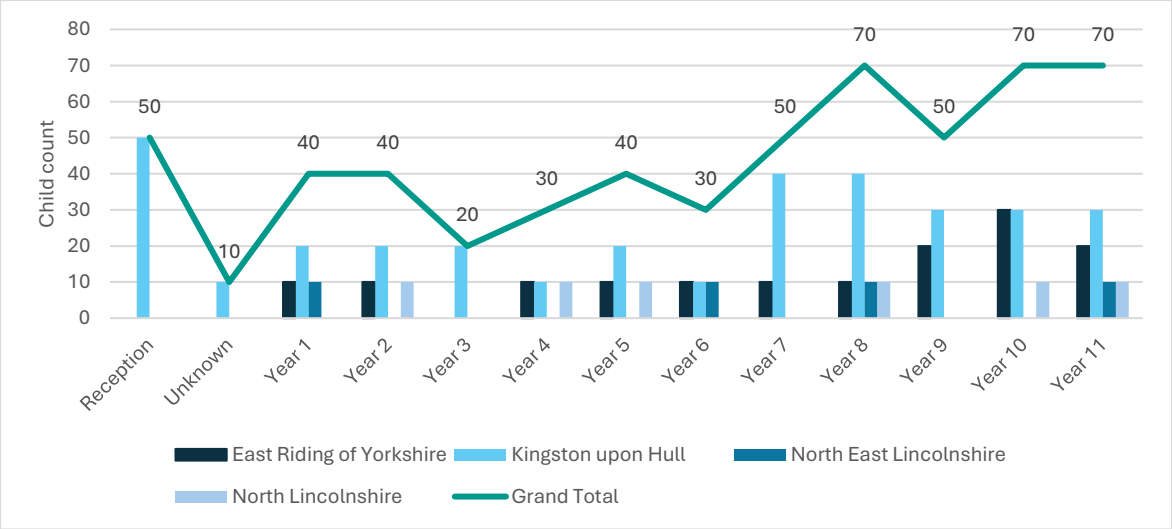


Figure 5: CME by year group

North Lincolnshire was the only local authority to provide data regarding their CME cohort, dated from January 2026. While broadly the same as the national data, this did additionally show 14% of CME in the region had SEND needs at the SEN support level and 3% were children in need.

In accordance with the broader definition of CME suggested by the evidence review, we include a brief analysis of pupil absence data from the DfE (Department for Education, 2026c). Figure 6 shows that, while the percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed) continues to drop from a post-Covid peak in the 21/22 academic year, severe absentees (50% or more missed) are rising steadily.

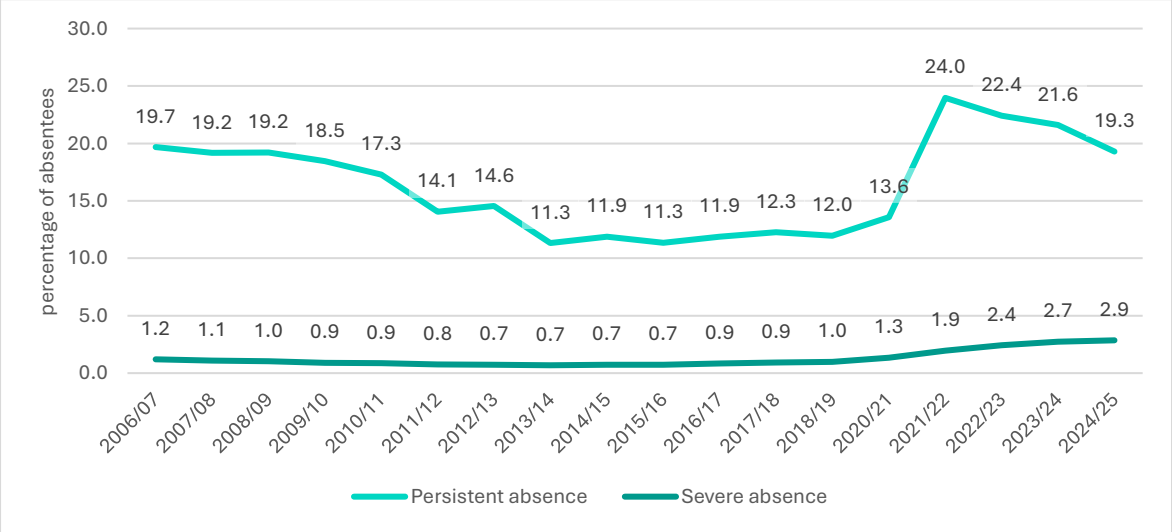


Figure 6: average percentage of absentees by academic year

Unauthorised absences accounted for 41% of absences in the Humber region during the 24/25 academic year as shown in Table 3. Exclusions and temporary reduced timetables each

accounted for around 5% of authorised absences. Over 70% of unauthorised absences were recorded as 'other' with another 20% due to term-time holidays.

Table 3: reasons for absences

	East Riding of Yorkshire	Kingston upon Hull	North East Lincolnshire	North Lincolnshire	Total
Authorised	67.83%	52.67%	56.03%	60.67%	59.47%
Of which excluded	3.11%	6.28%	6.40%	4.94%	4.93%
Of which temporary reduced timetable	4.44%	4.31%	5.06%	5.24%	4.66%
Unauthorised	32.17%	47.33%	43.97%	39.33%	40.53%
Of which other unauthorised	69.12%	74.06%	70.95%	73.47%	72.11%
Of which unauthorised holiday	23.21%	19.85%	20.75%	19.21%	20.74%

The attendance data revealed some disproportionalities in the characteristics of persistent and severely absent pupils. Females had slightly higher rates of absenteeism than males. Rates of persistent absenteeism were more than twice as high for children in receipt of free school meals than their peers, and three times higher for severe absences. Similarly, rates were higher for students with SEND – twice as high for persistent absences and six time higher for severe absences. Over half of Gypsy Roma and Irish traveller children were persistent absentees, with Gypsy Roma children having consistently higher rates of severe absenteeism than other ethnic groups.

Similarly, the DfE exclusion data (Department for Education, 2025c) shows over half of Gypsy/Roma children were excluded in the 2024/25 academic year. They also have the highest rates of suspensions, alongside White Irish children. Those with identified SEND needs at either EHCP or SEND support level were, on average over three times more likely to be suspended and four times more likely to be permanently excluded. Children eligible for free school meals were six times more likely to be permanently excluded and over four times more likely to be suspended. Males had slightly higher rates of exclusion and suspension than females.

Overall, as shown in Figure 7, the average rate of permanent exclusions have decreased across the Humber since the last academic year. Average suspension rates and rates of pupils suspended more than once have both increased (Figure 8).

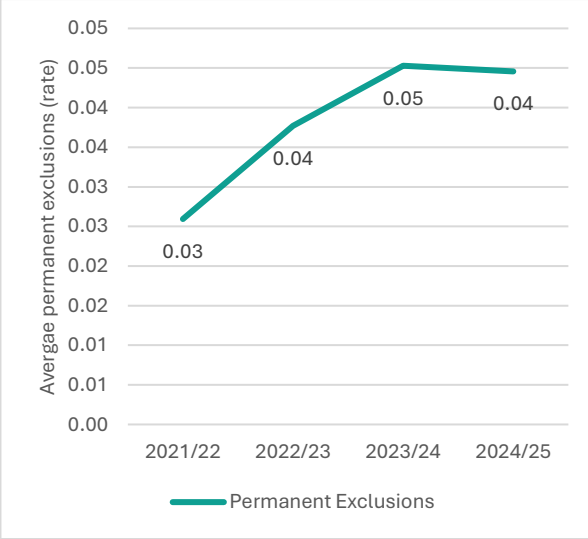


Figure 7: average exclusions by academic year

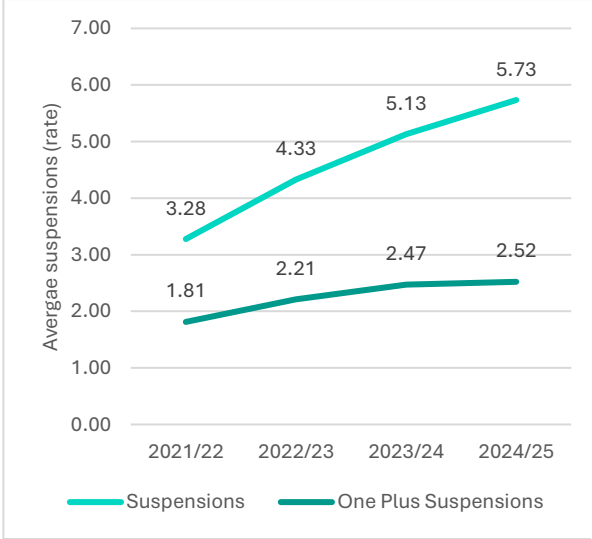


Figure 8: average suspensions by academic year

Elective Home Education

EHE data is again being taken from DfE data (Department for Education, 2026b) as only two authorities provided a dataset. As the DfE dataset is also relatively new the same cautions apply as for the CME data.

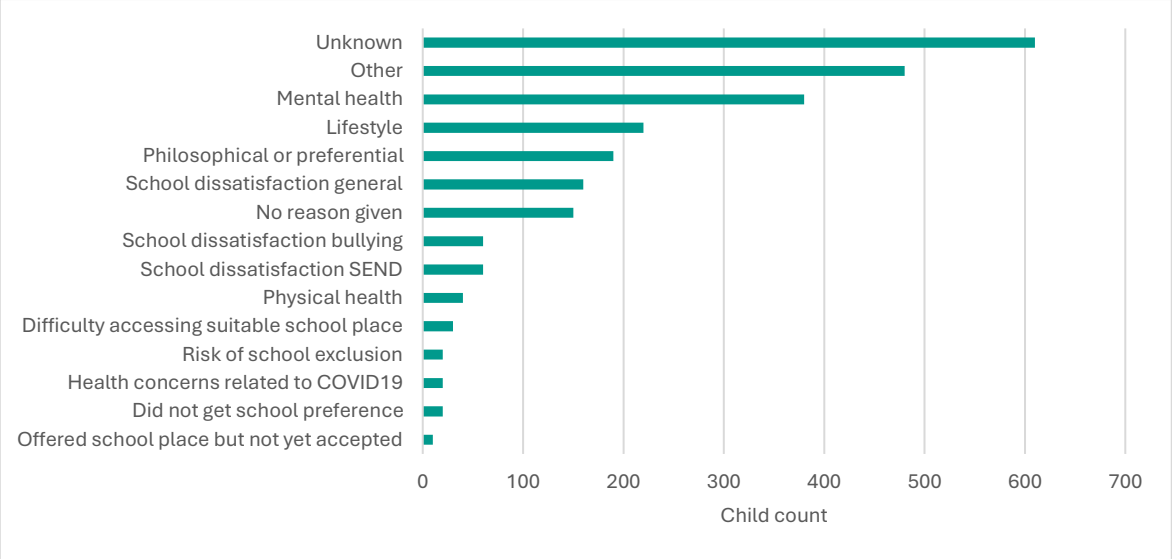
School census data from Autumn 2025/26 shows an average increase in EHE numbers in all four regions over the previous three years (Table 4). Over half of EHE children at the Autumn 2025/26 census point were female (n = 1270).

Table 4: EHE count by region and academic year

Academic year	East Riding of Yorkshire	Kingston upon Hull	North East Lincolnshire	North Lincolnshire	Total
2022/23	490	447	313	250	1500
2023/24	620	840*	400	310	2170
2024/25	690	847	500	387	2424
2025/26	760	830	440	410	2440

*No data available for Hull in Autumn/Spring 23/24

The most reported reason for EHE in the 2025/26 census data across the Humber was 'unknown', as shown in Figure 9. Over half of these children are in North East Lincolnshire. In Hull, the most reported reason was 'other', accounting for just over two thirds of the count. In the East Riding, the most reported reason was mental health, and in North Lincolnshire lifestyle.



	East Riding of Yorkshire	Kingston Upon Hull	North East Lincolnshire	North Lincolnshire
Unknown	90	80	360	80
Other	130	310	30	10
Mental health	150	150	10	70
Lifestyle	40	40	10	130
Philosophical or preferential	40	140	0	10
School dissatisfaction general	60	40	10	50
No reason given	130	0	20	0
School dissatisfaction SEND	20	10	0	30
School dissatisfaction bullying	20	20	0	20
Physical health	20	10	0	10
Difficulty accessing suitable school place	10	20	0	0
Did not get school preference	10	10	0	0
Health concerns related to COVID19	20	0	0	0
Risk of school exclusion	10	10	0	0
Offered school place but not yet accepted	10	0	0	0

Figure 9: reasons for EHE in the 2025/26 academic year

As with the CME census data, the number of EHE children tended to increase with age, with a steep rise between years 7 and 8, continuing to year 11 as shown in Figure 10.

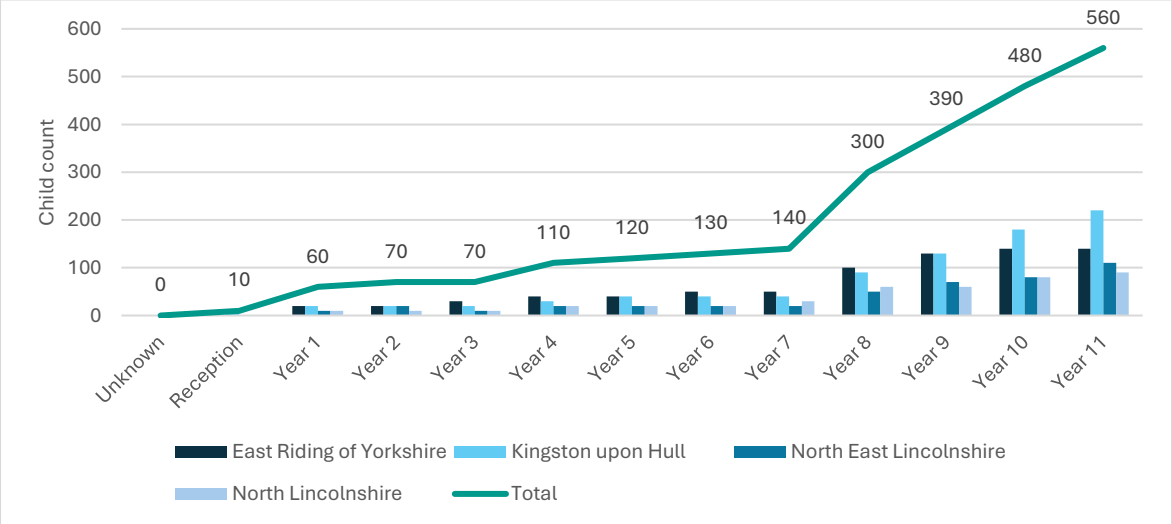


Figure 10: EH count by school year

The Autumn 2025/26 school census includes data from local authorities regarding the levels of support they offer to home educating families, shown in Table 5. Across the region authorities report they offer extensive support with advice and signposting to services, but other forms of support are less consistent. Notably, Hull is the only authority to report no support at all with exam access, while North Lincolnshire is the only authority to offer support in all categories.

Table 5: EHE support offered by local authority in school census data 2025/26

	East Riding of Yorkshire	Kingston upon Hull	North East Lincolnshire	North Lincolnshire
Advice about EHE	Extensively	Extensively	Extensively	Extensively
Signposting to sources of assistance	Extensively	Extensively	Extensively	Extensively
Distribution of useful information	Extensively	Extensively	Sometimes	Extensively
Resource development	Extensively	Extensively	Not at all	Extensively
Examination access	Extensively	Not at all	Sometimes	Extensively
Discounted access to amenities	Not at all	Extensively	Not at all	Extensively
Preferential access to services	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Extensively

Data provided by North Lincolnshire Council regarding their EHE cohort, dated January 2026, showed one third (n = 154/471) had SEND needs at either SEN Support or EHCP level. 10 were children in need, under a child protection plan or involved with Youth Justice Services.

Hull was the only authority to provide data regarding destinations for EHE young people in year 11 at the start of the 2025/26 academic year. Table 6 shows, off the 181 young people in education or training, 171 were in further education.

Table 6: EHE destinations, Hull

	Male	Female	Total
In training or education	74	107	181
In employment with training	1	0	1
In employment without training	1	1	2
Re-engagement activities	2	1	3
NEET (unemployed)	0	2	2
NEET (inactive)	0	1	1
Not known	4	0	4

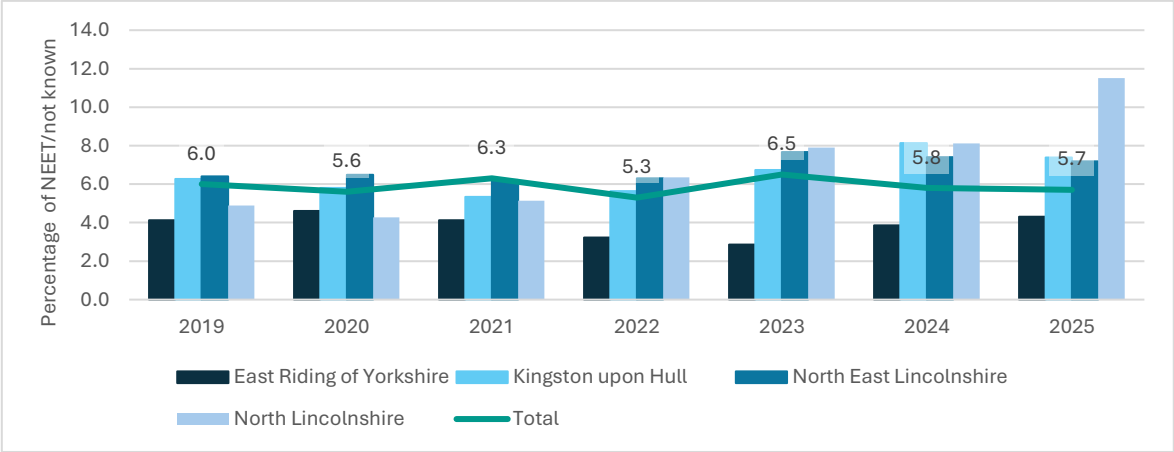
North East Lincolnshire provided a copy of their 2026-28 Elective Home Education Strategy during the course of this research. Many of the issues reported in the document corroborate those in the literature and stakeholder survey. The strategy promises to:

> empower parents with the knowledge, tools and confidence to make an informed decision regarding their child's education… by promoting effective partnership working to support those families considering home education at the earliest opportunity through relational practice and multi-agency information; allowing us to assess the likelihood of suitable education and any impact on a child's welfare or development in line with statutory guidance. (North East Lincolnshire Council Children's Services, n.d., p. 9)

The authority are committing to a cooling-off period as best practice to allow children to return to enrolled settings; support for home educated children to explore post-16 options; identification of all four to five year olds for whom an application has not been made; better information sharing between local authority education, SEND and children's social care; clear processes for reintegration to school settings and effective collaboration with families

Not in Employment, Education or Training

DfE NEET data (Department for Education, 2025b) includes young people of compulsory school age (16 -17) up to March 2025. There are considerable local variations in how well authorities track this cohort, which may reflect the individual challenges of each region, leading to differences in proportions of NEET/not known. While the proportion of NEET/not known across the region has remained fairly steady, North Lincolnshire has seen a sharp increase since 2024, while Hull and North East Lincolnshire saw a slight drop (Figure 11).



Year	East Riding of Yorkshire	Kingston upon Hull	North East Lincolnshire	North Lincolnshire
2019	4.12	6.27	6.41	4.88
2020	4.60	5.80	6.48	4.27
2021	4.12	5.34	6.21	5.14
2022	3.23	5.64	6.31	6.36
2023	2.87	6.74	7.67	7.91
2024	3.86	8.14	7.40	8.11
2025	4.31	7.38	7.18	11.51

Figure 11: average percentage of NEET by region and academic year

In North Lincolnshire, for the 2025 calendar year, this seemed to be due to young people of not known status, rather than NEET as shown in Table 7. This was the only area where the not known rate was higher.

Table 7: NEET/Not known percentage by region 2025

	East Riding of Yorkshire	Kingston upon Hull	North East Lincolnshire	North Lincolnshire
Percentage NEET/Not known	4.31	7.38	7.18	11.51
Percentage Not known	0.86	0.40	0.26	9.75
Percentage NEET	3.45	6.98	6.92	1.76

Across the region, NEET/Not known rates were more than twice as high among young people with SEND needs. There were higher proportions of males than female of NEET/Not known status, with the biggest difference in North Lincolnshire.

Data from the East Riding of Yorkshire local authority, from January 2026, showed the highest proportions of NEET were white young people, specifically White Irish. The data also provided more details regarding the activities of NEET young people that have reached statutory school leaving age. Regardless of EHCP status, the majority of NEET young people were available to the labour market and actively seeking work, education or training (Table 8).

Table 8: NEET activity, East Riding of Yorkshire

	Yr 12		Yr 13	
	Non-EHCP	EHCP	Non-EHCP	EHCP
Cohort total	**3393**	**276**	**3529**	**234**
NEET Group	**71 (2%)**	**31 (11%)**	**111 (3%)**	**71 (11%)**
Available to labour market	**67**	**30**	**84**	**25**
Working not for reward	2	0	3	2
Not yet ready for work or learning	6	2	23	4
Start date agreed (other)	0	0	0	0
Start date agreed (RPA compliant)	4	0	3	0
Seeking employment, education or training	55	28	55	19
Not available to labour market	**4**	**1**	**27**	**1**
Carer	0	0	7	0
Teenage parents	3	1	9	0
Illness	0	0	6	1
Pregnancy	1	0	4	0
Religious grounds	0	0	0	0
Unlikely to be economically active	0	0	0	0
Other reason	0	0	1	0

The proportion of young people with an EHCP in the East Riding who are NEET increases dramatically with age. By Year 16 a quarter of young people with an EHCP are of NEET/not known status. Similarly, data from Hull City Council, also dated January 2026, showed high proportions of NEET young people with an EHCP. As with the East Riding data, NEET rates for young people with EHCPs increased dramatically after compulsory school leaving age with just over half of young people with an EHCP NEET by year 15.

Combining data from both Hull and East Riding on vulnerable cohorts showed young people not available to the labour marker are most likely to be caring for children or pregnant as shown in Figure 12.

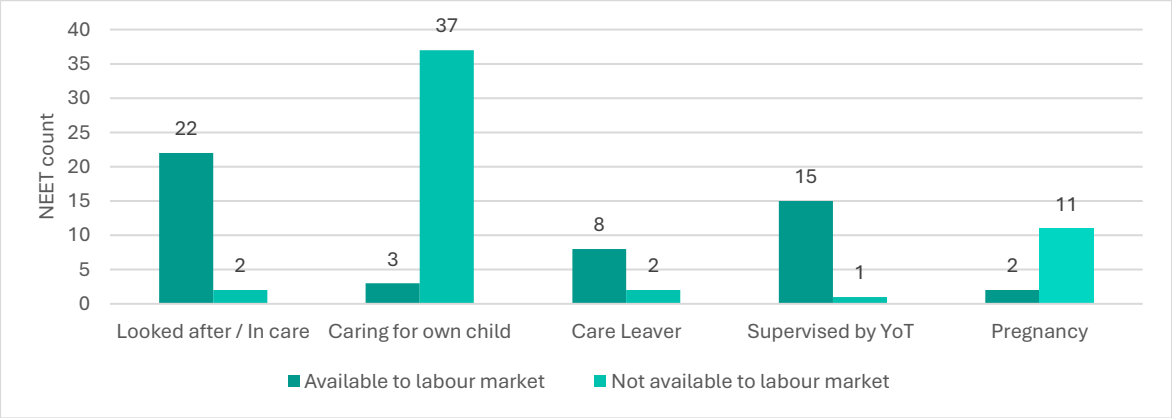


Figure 12: NEET by vulnerable cohorts

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The evidence presented strongly suggests that **CME, EHE and NEET are not three distinct cohorts**, but there is, in fact, a great deal of fluidity and clear pathways between the three. This can be clearly seen in the five case studies, which demonstrated a pattern of absenteeism, missing education and elective home education, culminating in periods of NEET.

2. The Humber VPP should **consider funding and evaluating pilot interventions to improve attendance, confidence and aspirations** working with schools where there are more known challenges and issues. For example, the structured social environment provided by organised enrichment programmes can help students with social anxiety or neurodiversity interact with others and build tolerance of difference (McAllister & Sloan, 2016). Peer support between neurodiverse students or those with poor mental health, can help to build positive self-identities and lessen feelings of isolation (Crompton et al., 2023). Mentoring schemes have been shown to improve aspirations, confidence, behaviour and attendance (Richmond & Regan, 2022).

3. **Failed transitions between primary and secondary school** were characterised by the withdrawal of support for SEND needs and failure to consider the impact of the transition on mental health. Fears around bullying among marginalised communities means some young people may not even enrol in secondary school. Withdrawal of benefits and SEND support presented a **'cliff-edge' of support for those making the transition to post-16 education from EHE**. Difficulties accessing careers guidance, along with a lack of vocational options may lead young people into enrolling in unsuitable post-16 options, exacerbating patterns of disengagement.

4. Inflexible and punitive school cultures were a common theme across the data. Although wider educational reform is beyond the remit of the Humber VPP, they should **continue to promote trauma informed practice** which has been shown to be effective in building better relationships between pupils and teachers and fostering better understanding of the reasons for behavioural difficulties in school. Although the HU9 trauma informed pilot encountered problems in implementation due to wider policy contexts, the new Ofsted framework and renewed focus on school inclusion may make implementation easier in future.

5. Barriers to remaining in mainstream education were strongly underpinned by **unmet needs relating to mental health, SEND**. Lack of support leading to behavioural issues impacted on attendance and, in turn, suspensions, exclusions and school removal. Quantitative analysis confirmed overrepresentation of SEND pupils in absence and exclusion data. Both young people and stakeholders reported experiences of victim blaming and ableism in mainstream educational settings. In some cases, bullying was due to disabilities or neurodiversity. Crucially, the young people's stories revealed how they felt bullied and victimised not just by other pupils, but by teachers as well.

6. The young people's narratives revealed bullying was not taken seriously by their teachers. Our previous focus group study into young people's experiences of violence in the Humber also contained extensive reports of bullying (Richards & Hamlett, 2023). While caution must be taken regarding the small sample size in the present study, the lack of school responses

regarding bullying and its prevalence elsewhere in the data suggests there is either a failure to recognise it in some schools, or that teachers do not feel confident to tackle bullying effectively. There is strong evidence as to the effectiveness of anti-bullying strategies (Youth Endowment Fund, n.d.), and **supporting schools to implement one of the evidenced based anti-bullying programmes** available should be considered by the Humber VPP.

7. The findings confirm parents are removing children from school, not because it is the 'easy option' but because they feel pressured to do so or they feel they have no other choice. The stakeholder survey contained examples of illegal exclusions, or off-rolling, where children are removed from the school roll to improve performance data. Children and their families feel they are labelled as 'a problem' or a nuisance as they fight for their educational rights. There is evidence that combative relationships between families and school hampers resolution. June's suggestion of a **free, independent advocate** that can support families, professionally challenge and act as mediator, where needed, is **a practical solution that should be considered**.

8. While Elective Home Education does not automatically pose a safeguarding risk, the high numbers of young people with SEND needs either being removed or excluded from school cannot be ignored. Given the well-established 'exclusion to prison pipeline' and prevalence of undiagnosed neurodiversity in Youth Justice Services (Day, 2022) **tackling poor attendance and exclusions through inclusive educational practices** is something for the Humber VPP to explore with education providers.

9. Related to the above, there needs to be **greater awareness of disabilities, neurodiversity, sensory and mental health needs** in schools so teachers are properly prepared to support students. Simple adjustments, such as low-sensory spaces need to be provided and support plans consistently adhered to by all staff so pupils are able to access them. **Disability and autism awareness for pupils**, for example through PHSE classes, could promote understanding of different needs and help reduce instances of bullying (Hasson et al., 2024). Although the £200m SEND training investment announced by the government is welcome, wider reforms have raised fears among parents about continuation of support. Independent SEND advocates could, perhaps help to allay some of these fears.

10. The data yielded examples of young people who had struggled to reintegrate with mainstream education due to behavioural, health and mental health issues. The issues that led to removal in the first place do not disappear when reintegration is attempted. Stakeholder responses indicated that support promised in order to return a child to school had a tendency to disappear once they were through the gate. **Earlier and effective interventions focussed on prevention**, rather than reintegration, are needed. Young people conveyed that had they had more timely support, things may not have reached the point of school removal.

11. The findings confirm many of the issues highlighted by the evidence review at the national level are occurring locally. Local authorities are aware of and trying to address many of these problems, and there is some excellent practice in the education sector. However, when considering trauma informed practice, it is important to remember these are **traumatised systems** from the years of 'chronic underfunding' discussed in the stakeholder narratives.

12. The marketisation of education has led to '*a system riddled with perverse incentives to exclude*' (Whitehouse, 2022) which impacts disproportionality on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Given the long-lasting impacts of missed education and exclusion in later life, this is creating a generational **cycle of disadvantage**. Similarly, the data revealed **inequalities in both the SEND system and EHE**. Parents with the cultural and financial wherewithal are able to access support needed for their children to access diagnoses, EHCPs and learning resources. Other families with fewer resources may be less prepared for EHE and less able to navigate complex SEND systems.

13. Quantitative analysis of the DfE attendance and exclusion data corroborates **disproportionalities regarding exclusion and attendance rates for Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller children**. However, only survey respondents based in North Lincolnshire mentioned a specific Traveller Achievement Service and an internet search did not find any specific services in the rest of the region. **More culturally sensitive support is needed for this marginalised group**.

14. There is a **lack of support for EHE young people after school removal**. Home educating parents get no financial support from government and bear the full cost of their child's education. Access to GCSE examinations may be difficult and is inconsistently supported across the Humber. Despite school census data indicating local authorities report providing extensive signposting to services, the case studies and stakeholder survey suggested a general lack of awareness regarding this, beyond local authorities' Home Education teams. **Further mapping and a directory of services and groups would be beneficial**.

15. Identification of CME was a recurring theme throughout the literature and stakeholder responses. The **Humber VPP should explore ways of joining existing data** sets to aid local authorities in this endeavour. For example, health data may be used to identify children not enrolled in schools. In addition, other services such as Fire Service, which have been successfully utilised in identifying safeguarding concerns in the past could again be leveraged in identifying CME.

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