

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21 MARCH 2022
REPORT OF PARTNERSHIPS DEPARTMENT

Children Missing Education

(Report prepared by Rebecca Morton, Executive Projects Manager)

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report provides an overview to the issue of “missing children” – the CLOSC item:

“To enquire into the safeguarding and educational position concerning those of school age not attending mainstream schools.”

INVITEES

Anita Patel-Lingam, Statutory Education Compliance Manager, Essex County Council and,

Michael O’Brien, Head of Specialist Education Services, Essex County Council

The presentation will provide the Committee with an overview and update on children of school age not attending mainstream schools. Both officers will be available to answer questions.

BACKGROUND

What is the statutory definition of children missing education?

Children missing education are defined as; “children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school.”

Local Government Association (LGA), Children Missing Education Report 2020

The LGA report also identifies the main scenarios which occur whereby children potentially end up missing out on their entitlement to a formal full-time education, and in some of the scenarios described this outcome becomes highly likely:-

- Children who leave school at the instigation of their parent, e.g. because the parent for example doesn’t believe the school is meeting the child’s needs
- Children who leave school at the instigation of the school, e.g. permanent exclusions
- Children who remain in school but do not access full time, e.g. multiple or prolonged fixed term exclusions
- Children and families with poor health, e.g. children not able to attend school due to their own physical or mental health
- Children that cannot be provided with a suitable place, e.g. children on the waiting list for a special school
- Highly mobile children and families, e.g. children who have never been on a school roll - new arrivals or unknown to children’s services

Nationally, there is a rising trend in numbers of children missing education. Research would suggest that this trend is not a result of one single issue, in fact it is a combination of three factors that, taken together, have given rise to this trend. These factors are:

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

ECC colleagues will present the committee with the most recent figures relating to children not in mainstream education in Essex including Tendring.

DETAILED INFORMATION

What is the potential impact on children missing education?

Research suggests the impact of children missing education can include the following:-

- slower progress in learning
- worse prospects for future employment
- poorer mental health and emotional wellbeing
- restricted social and emotional development and
- increased vulnerability to safeguarding issues and criminal exploitation

Children missing out on a formal full-time education can also have significant emotional and financial implications, be detrimental to communities, reinforcing stereotypes and increasing isolation.

The LGA report also highlights the complexity of trying to identify missing children; *"Children missing education can be found in a variety of both formal and informal education settings, they can be found at home receiving different forms of educational input or none at all, they can be found in employment and they can be simply unknown to those providing services in the community."*

For further information: LGA – Children Missing Education Report 2020 – LGA link: <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/children-missing-education#download>

There are certain children within our communities who are more at risk of missing education which includes:-

- Children at risk of harm/neglect
- Children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families
- Families of Armed Forces
- Missing children/runaways
- Children and young people supervised by the Youth Justice System
- Children who cease to attend a school

A recent bi-annual report by the Essex Children's Safeguarding Board (ECSB) – "Child Exploitation and Missing" Sept 2021, reported the following in terms of missing children. In summary, some of the key findings were:-

- The total number of missing Essex children during the last six months has increased by 37% when compared to the previous six month period. The majority of Essex children went missing from within the North Quadrant, with more than half of all missing Essex children went missing from within the North and Mid quadrants.
- The majority of missing Essex children were aged 10-15, with 15 year old males accounting for the majority of the rise seen in this age group.
- Of those Missing Essex Children from a BAME background, the majority were from a mixed/ multiple ethnicity group.
- During the last 12 months the volume of children at risk of exploitation has increased across Essex by 41 children (43.6%) when compared to September 2020. The majority continue to be at risk of criminal exploitation.

Overall, the number of missing Essex children and episodes have increased during the past six months when compared to the previous six month period.

Between April and September 2021 inclusive, 526 Essex children went missing, accounting for 1047 missing episodes, with 59 children having 3 or more missing episodes within the last 90 days. This is an increase of 142 missing Essex children (up from 384) and 227 episodes (up from 820) when compared to October 2020 to March 2021.

Of the 526 Essex children that went missing between April and September'21, the majority went missing from the North quadrant (158 - 30% of all missing Essex children) followed by Mid at 149 children (28%). The number of Essex children missing from within the South quadrant was the lowest at 105 whilst West saw 115 missing children.

Missing Children by District:-

Missing Essex Children & Episodes		
District	Episodes	Children
TENDRING	162	81
BRAINTREE	152	80
COLCHESTER	141	77
BASILDON	169	76
CHELMSFORD	146	55
HARLOW	73	49
EPPING FOREST	43	26
UTTLESFORD	51	26
CASTLE POINT	21	18
BRENTWOOD	21	14
MALDON	25	14
ROCHFORD	43	11
Total	1047	526

More than half of all missing Essex children went missing from within the North and Mid quadrants during the last six months. Tendring and Colchester accounted

for 30% of all missing Essex children with Braintree and Chelmsford accounting for 25.7%.

Tendring saw the highest number of missing children at a district level accounting for 15.4% (81) of all missing Essex children between April and September 2021. Braintree saw the second highest volume at 80 children(15.2%) whilst Rochford saw the lowest number of missing Essex children at 11 (2.1%).

Despite Tendring holding the highest number of missing children they did not see the highest number of missing episodes. Basildon recorded 169 missing episodes with Tendring seeing the second highest at 162, the district with the lowest number of missing episodes was Castle Point and Brentwood seeing 21 each.

When looking at average number of missing episodes per child Rochford recorded the highest at 3.91 missing episodes per child during the last 6 months whilst Castle Point recorded the lowest at 1.17 missing episodes per child.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee determines whether it has any comments or recommendations it wishes to put forward the relevant Portfolio Holder or Cabinet.

**Anastasia Simpson
Assistant Director, Partnerships**