
OFSTED Thematic Review Findings

Committee considering report:	Corporate Board
Date of Committee:	15 th April 2025
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Heather Codling
Report Author:	Hannah Geddert; SEND Strategy Officer

1 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the findings from the recent thematic review of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who are not in school, conducted by OFSTED and the CQC.

2 Recommendation(s)

To note the key findings from the OFSTED Thematic Review (full letter in Appendix A).

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	N/A for this report.
Human Resource:	N/A for this report.
Legal:	N/A for this report.
Risk Management:	N/A for this report.
Property:	N/A for this report.
Policy:	<u>National</u> Thematic Review of Children not in School in local areas

OFSTED Thematic Review Findings

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?				As this report provides an update, rather than a request for a decision, an equalities impact assessment is not applicable in this instance.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?				As this report provides an update, rather than a request for a decision, an equalities impact assessment is not applicable in this instance.
Environmental Impact:				N/A for this report.
Health Impact:				N/A for this report.
ICT Impact:				N/A for this report.
Digital Services Impact:				N/A for this report.
Council Strategy Priorities:				This report provides an update, rather than proposals, and therefore it is not applicable to assess the positive or negative impact against the Council's Priorities.
Core Business:				N/A for this report.
Data Impact:				N/A for this report.

Consultation and Engagement:	<p>During the thematic visit, parents and carers were given the opportunity to meet directly with inspectors to share their experiences and perspectives. Additionally, surveys created by OFSTED and the CQC were distributed to both parents/carers, young people and professionals with the responses informing analysis and findings of the thematic review.</p> <p>Following the visit, the draft outcome letter was shared with key colleagues across the Local Authority and Integrated Care Board (ICB) to check for factual accuracy prior to its finalisation. A follow-up meeting is currently being arranged with the Chair of the Parent/Carer Forum to discuss the findings outlined in the final letter.</p>
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4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Area SEND Inspection system includes thematic visits to a small number of local areas each year, to investigate a particular aspect of the SEND system in depth.
- 4.2 West Berkshire was the first to be selected for OFSTED and CQC's thematic review focussing on children not in school.
- 4.3 Whilst we have received a letter outlining the findings from the thematic visit, this will not be published; instead, the learning will be aggregated into a national report designed to support whole-system improvement.
- 4.4 It is important to note that this was not a graded inspection, and no individual judgements have been made about the Local Area.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 This report presents a high-level summary of the findings from the OFSTED Thematic Review which focussed on children with SEND not in school.

Background

- 5.2 In recent years, there has been a growing focus on children missing school, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, with concerns about increased absence, especially persistent absence (missing 10% or more of school sessions).
- 5.3 The purpose of the OFSTED and CQC 2025 thematic visits is to better understand:
 - How the Local Area Partnership work together to meet the needs of children not in school across health, education and children's social care.
 - The reason why children with SEND leave full-time education, and what schools are doing to support them to remain in school.

OFSTED Thematic Review Findings

- The role, and impact, of Local Authorities in supporting children with SEND to receive a suitable education.
- The role, and impact, of social care in supporting children with SEND who are in school and are in need of help and protection.
- The role, and impact, of health providers in meeting the health needs of children with SEND who are not in school.
- How Local Authorities support children not in school, particularly hard-to-reach children and families, including where there are safeguarding concerns.
- Parents', children's, practitioners' and leaders' views about why children are not in school and how their needs are being met.

5.4 For the purpose of the thematic review, children with SEND not in school was defined as:

- Children of compulsory school age, who are not registered pupils at a registered independent school or any type of state funded school.
- Children who are on a school roll but are flexi-schooled, on part-time timetables, receiving education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) or who are severely absent.

5.5 The letter following the thematic review outlines a number of key findings, including areas of strength as well as aspects where improvements are needed.

5.6 The review did not highlight any issues that we were not already aware of through our own self-evaluation.

5.7 The key findings are summarised below:

5.8 Information Sharing

- Whilst dedicated professionals work on building trust with families who have become disengaged or distanced from a professional network, this is on a personalised, individual level, rather than part of a wider, more strategic approach.
- Whilst there is an online form to report Children Missing Education (CME), there is no clear strategy for alerting professionals across agencies when children are not in education.
- Families have strong multi-agency support to access, or remain in, education when children's social care is involved.
- Schools have an effective partnership with the Local Authority SEND team, who are easily accessible and provide timely support.

5.9 Access to Health Services

- Parents reported difficulty in accessing health services; particularly therapy support for children not attending school; often having to privately commission these services. This system is under review noting that there is a shortage of local therapists. For families who can use a Personal Budget for therapy, accessing support remains a challenge.
- A growing number of children are starting school with underdeveloped social skills, communication difficulties or requiring additional care e.g. toilet training. Headteachers reported that these needs can sometimes be seen as SEND rather

than gaps in learning. The development of Early Years strategies will begin to address this so that needs are identified early so the right help can be put in place to secure school attendance.

- Whilst some children who are not in education present at the Crisis Service with more acute mental health needs having not been identified earlier, those children on the Dynamic Support Register (DSR) benefit from multi-agency support and regular monitoring.
- Support and training from the Medical Tuition Service and NHS teams e.g. diabetic nurses' team helps to maintain attendance and improve the confidence of families that their child's needs can be met in school.
- The Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) team works effectively with Primary Schools to improve attendance. For Secondary schools it is a choice as to whether they 'buy-in' the services of this team resulting in a question about equitable support for children in secondary schools who experience EBSA.
- A clear pathway is becoming established to ensure the right support, in the right place, for the right children through a graduated approach.

5.10 Oversight of Provision

- There is ongoing work to identify the children most at risk of not being in education, using flags and alerts to identify these children.
- Commissioning arrangements for therapies are at an early stage of review due to the barriers of accessing this support for children who need therapy but do not attend school. It was recognised that we are working on implementing a joint brokerage and commissioning team with an ambition to coproduce this.
- The strategic oversight of children in Alternative Provision (AP) is underdeveloped, especially for those awaiting special school placements. Levels of oversight vary on a case-by-case basis. We recognise that there is more work to be done here.
- The Local Authority have a limited power to challenge schools on the six-week limit for part-time timetables.
- Data sharing remains a challenge due to differing recording systems used across maintained schools, academies, and independent schools. Unclear reporting requirements for children placed outside of the Local Authority has a negative impact on data analysis.
- There are not the powers for professionals to prevent a child from being removed from the school roll to Electively Home Educated (EHE) for example. Other than seeking court orders for this, it is hard for professionals to contribute towards this decision making.
- Offering Personal Budgets for children who are EHE to meet specific needs outlined in the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), increases engagement with these families and helps maintain oversight of the children's wellbeing and development.

5.11 Enablers and Barriers to Remaining in Education

- We are working to address gaps in attendance through targeted interventions and additional mental health support through the development of an Attendance Strategy and improvements in data and information systems.
- Parental anxiety around whether a school can meet their child's needs often leads to parents considering EHE. Attendance data shows that the primary needs for low

attenders are Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, followed closely by Autism.

- There is a shortage of placements, including specially resourced provisions for children with SEND, to meet needs locally. This contributes to increasing numbers of children not attending school or increasing numbers placed outside of the Local Area in special schools. It was recognised that there were plans in place to expand local specialist provision.
- Permanent exclusions are notably higher in secondary schools and for pupils with SEND. It was recognised that work is being done to foster a consistent culture of inclusion across schools.
- iCollege was recognised as playing a critical role in keeping children in education or helping them reintegrate into school.
- For children who are out of school receiving EOTAS or education under the Medical Tuition Service, robust processes ensure the right support is in place with children's voices central to these efforts.
- A profiling tool for children with potential neurodiverse needs is being piloted to gather evidence of needs, with plans to co-produce and roll it out for schools to better identify strengths and strategies to better meet the needs of children with SEND in mainstream settings.

5.12 Children Not in School who need Help & Protection

- Safeguarding in health services considers children not in education.
- Early Help and social care services are well-organised, focussing on relationship building and keeping children's needs at the centre of interventions.
- Early Help services address issues for children not in school affecting attendance and engagement with education effectively. There is a need to improve services for children who no longer require a social worker.
- Attendance at child in need meetings, core groups and looked after children reviews, helps address the challenges with education, such as improving children's attendance.
- The 'Right Service, Right Time' approach identifies families not making progress. In social care, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Child Protection Chairs take proactive steps to address issues affecting children's engagement in education. This could be strengthened by sharing learning about 'what works'.
- There are a range of resources available to support joint work with families e.g. youth workers in schools. However, there are some parts of the children's system where these skills cannot be directly accessed by social workers which we are looking at to overcome these barriers.
- Our well-engaged Virtual School offers a range of support to children and is effective at supporting children's education, working well with partners and supporting children well, even if they are placed in other Local Authorities and at a considerable distance to check if children are in school and take action if they are not.

5.13 It is important to note that **no safeguarding concerns were raised** during the thematic review.

Proposals

5.14 Not applicable for this report.

6 Other options considered

Not applicable for this report.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 In conclusion, this report summarises the findings outlined in the letter following the thematic review. It is important to recognise that some of the issues identified are part of broader national challenges, which cannot be addressed by the Local Area alone. However, learning from the review will contribute to a national report aimed at supporting whole-system improvements.
- 7.2 For those areas where improvements are needed at a local level, these have been incorporated into the SEND & Inclusion Strategy Delivery Plan (Appendix B). Progress on delivery will be closely monitored through the SEND Strategic Improvement Board to ensure ongoing accountability and success.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Thematic Review of Children not in School Summary Note
- 8.2 Appendix B – DRAFT Innovation in SEND Delivery Plan 2025-2026 (See DBV Closedown report for details)

Background Papers:

None

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☐ No: ☒

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Wards affected: N/A

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