

Brighton &
Hove's
Hidden Children
Strategy **Full**
time education as
a protective
factor to
reducing risk for
children & young
people

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Brighton & Hove
City Council

Introduction and definitions

This report provides an overview to our approach in identifying and supporting children who are at a higher risk of harm due to not being in receipt of full-time education.

Ofsted do not provide a specific definition for how they categorise Hidden Children. The new inspection framework for Local Authority Children's Services is clear that they will be looking at the quality of what is known about those missing from education and those being offered alternative provision.

[This article](#) published in December 2017 refers to a range of situations a child might be in that means they are not in full time education, but its focus is around inadequate elective home education / unregistered schools as a potential risk.

Our Local Safeguarding Children's Board has for some time taken a wider view on Hidden Children – with private fostering, migrants and home education all featuring in their multi-agency training.

We share this view that a narrower definition does not provide sufficient assurance that all of those at risk of harm will be identified and supported appropriately.

In Brighton & Hove we want all children and young people to receive their full entitlement to education and for that learning to be delivered in a way that is suited to their needs. By being in receipt of their full entitlement children and young people will be less vulnerable, at reduced risk from harm and have improved outcomes.

We understand children can be vulnerable if they are not attending school, have a history of family dysfunction, abuse, neglect and being in care, privately fostered, excluded or have unmet special educational needs.

“Schools act as a protective factor in children's lives. Children who do not attend school can become hidden, which means that we are less able to help and protect them. Some of these children may experience risks within their family, such as abuse and neglect. There may also be risks outside their family, such as radicalisation or exploitation. Protecting children from these external risks is known as contextual safeguarding. Children who do not attend school may be at further risk of not achieving their educational potential. They may not be able to access formal education or employment in the future if they have not gained recognised qualifications. They will also not benefit from the role that schools play in developing children's skills to participate fully and constructively in society.” Eleanor Schooling, previous director of Ofsted Social Care

We wish to ensure that the Council has an overview on all pupils that are at potential risk to harm who are not in receipt of full-time education. Thereby providing challenge and support for arrangements that reduce the child's vulnerability. This goes beyond just those pupils whose education is the direct responsibility of the council.

By identifying concerns we seek to reduce the risks to these young people. We are committed to working with the whole family through the formulation of a relationship based approach and to the creation of a city for all.

The voice of children & young people shapes how we commission and deliver services with them and it will determine what provision is available to meet their needs.

This report seeks to draw together what we mean by hidden children, what we already know and what is already happening. It will also identify what we need to continue to do and provide everyone with an understanding of why we are doing this. Whilst compulsory school age determines the entitlement to full time education we take a wider view on those who are at risk but remain focussed on those who can expect to receive a full-time education.

This approach enables a further fostering of good relationships across professional disciplines. Those working with these children and their families hold collective responsibility for this issue.

Policy and service context

This report does not stand in isolation. It is closely related to the recently launched Whole Family Working strategy which sets out the city's vision that early help is the responsibility of everyone who works with children and families. The aim of the strategy is to transform services to improve outcomes for vulnerable families and reduce the demand for high cost services.

It is also closely linked to the Education Partnership's focus on school attendance. This document is part of a focus on ensuring pupils are able to access good quality education.

The adolescent strategy (and emerging approach to Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation) covers some of the same issues within this paper.

It is also important to stress that we cannot overcome this issue in isolation. We need to take a multi-agency approach to ensure that a child's needs are taken in to account and that all agencies are signed up to an approach that will work.

The Families, Children & Learning Directorate Plan 2018-2020 includes under the Directorate Objective to provide access to high quality and appropriate childcare, school and education provision, an action to develop systems to support families to improve attendance of children at school.

Who are our hidden children?

Children may be in full sight but their lack of educational opportunity may not be noticeable or regularly reviewed. It is possible that the following circumstances will mean children are hidden and questions should be asked. This is not to say all the children in these circumstances are at risk, it's about identifying and being aware of the potential and take action where needed. This list is not exhaustive but identifies the main groups of children we are likely to need to be concerned about.

- Pupils on part-time timetables
- Pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans yet to be placed
(We know there are 3 children who currently do not have an identified school and 11 children who are being electively home educated).
- Mobile Travellers and secondary aged Travellers (including on a council site)
- Transient families
- Pupils in unregistered schools
- Emotional based school refusers
(We know there are at least 439 pupils that secondary schools consider to be consistently or intermittently not attending school for emotionally based reasons)
- Pupils receiving inadequate Elective Home Education
- Excluded pupils
- Pupils in receipt of flexi-schooling
- PRU pupils who are not attending
- LGBT young people who experience bullying
- Pupils in private fostering arrangements
- Children Missing Education
- Children Missing and Out of Education
- Young Carers
- Pupils who move school frequently
- Pupils whose family are homeless or at risk of homelessness (including those in emergency housing outside of the city)
- Persistent school non-attenders
- Pupils at risk or experiencing multiple exclusion
- Children with medical needs
- Children in Care recently placed in Brighton & Hove or by Brighton & Hove in other areas
- Children either not taking up their early years free entitlement or with low attendance
(We know that 16% of two year olds and 4% of three and four year olds are not taking up their entitlement)
- Children subject to a section 85 referrals and are educated in a private hospital

Why do we think this is an issue?

We know that the city council, the education providers and other partners in the city work hard to ensure pupils receive the appropriate education and will advocate on behalf of families. We know our performance in regards to permanent exclusions and the numbers of pupils in elective home education compares favourably with national benchmarks. However, a range of partners, families and practitioners tell us that some pupils remain at risk of harm due to not receiving their full-time education entitlement.

There can be a number of barriers to overcome to ensure that children who are potentially hidden can be identified and supported. These include:

- A lack of understanding of the needs of this group of children and young people
- Family and young person reluctant to engage and / or hard to reach
- Lack of centrally shared data to effectively monitor the provision of education and the potential risk of harm
- Inability to enforce certain groups to register children in school
- The reduced availability of mental health support
- The use and acceptance of part time timetables
- Parent's responsibilities in relation to Elective Home Education

- School capacity and resource to respond differently and creatively
- Support for the identification and management of pupils with SEND
- The early use of preventative strategies to reduce the chance of risk escalating for a young person or their family
- The acceptance of delays to a change in a pupil's schooling or education provision.
- Agencies working in isolation

What are the current controls supporting / catching these children? How do we mitigate potential risk?

What we do

There are a range of processes already in place across the city which ensures consideration is given to the risk of harm as a result of a child not receiving an appropriate education.

- These include various panels (such as the Children Missing Education Panel and those overseeing children identified as at risk of exploitation) that look at individual children and young people and consider appropriate next steps / wider referrals
- Those working with families in the city use the newly refreshed threshold document to identify levels of need and take appropriate referral decisions (add link to threshold document).
- The Council monitors the providers offering education in the city to ensure that any suspected unregistered schools are identified and reported.
- The Council ensures any private fostering arrangements are overseen by a dedicated social worker.
- We monitor the take up of the early years free entitlement for low income two year olds by comparing children in places compared to eligibility lists sent by the Department for Work and Pensions. We encourage health visitors to promote the early years free entitlement and the importance of regular attendance to parents.
- The Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships for primary and secondary schools consider pupils who need placing under the Fair Access Protocol, have been excluded or are at risk of exclusion.
- Multi-agency outreach is provided to specific groups including children of Travellers, those educated at home and children unable to access education for medical reasons.

How we check what we do

Oversight of the operational work is monitored through a range of supervisions as well as more formal performance management processes including corporate procedures.

- Managers monitor that services apply thresholds appropriately and ensure that identified children at risk take priority.

- We routinely monitor performance measures such as exclusions and attendance and are held to account through corporate risk management and performance management processes.
- Embedding a culture of quality assurance outside of social work
- The LSCB receives regular reports on the work undertaken by the council and its partners to ensure the needs of young people are at the forefront of what we do.

How others check what we do

The council reflects upon its work and the work of partners through the analysis provided by others.

- With nearly all schools rated good for leadership and management we know that safeguarding is effective in the vast majority of our schools. The Pupil Referral Units are rated as good by Ofsted and provide a high standard of education to pupils who attend their provision.

What would an 'ideal' situation look like for these children?

Our common purpose for these children is that we will have a coordinated approach to identifying and supporting hidden children. We want to know where children are, we want to increase their attendance and we want to meet their needs.

We want children in Brighton & Hove to receive a well-coordinated response that reduces the harm or risk of harm to them. There needs to be urgency in identifying the situation and putting in place plans to reduce the risk of harm or further harm.

Ensuring children and young people have access to their educational entitlement that meets their needs is an imperative. It is acknowledged that services continue to operate with challenging pressures such as budget constraints and greater expectations on pupils attaining better education progress and outcomes. Prioritising a reduction in risk benefits all and will help to ensure those challenging pressures are better managed.

As a complex, entrenched and seemingly immovable issue we seek continual improvement in our ways of working rather than a defined end result.

We expect children to be receiving an appropriate education that meets their needs and allows them to achieve better outcomes. We will prioritise a child's right to an education over concerns of resources.

This will look like:

Better Understanding

We want all services working with this cohort to know that when a child or young person is not in education full time they are more at risk of harm and therefore we want people to be inquisitive and to know who needs to be informed if they are not receiving their entitlement. This [LSCB briefing](#) on vulnerability, violence and exploitation explores some of the risks to young people.

We know that there will often be complex issues linked to securing their full time entitlement but collectively that support and challenge should be focussed on the needs of the child or young person.

It is important that professionals understand the necessity of taking a whole family approach. Those working with these children and their families need to know what support is available and how it can be delivered.

With better understanding, professionals will be confident and tenacious in reducing the risk of harm for the child or young person. This includes supporting pupils with PSNA (Persistent School Non Attendance) with the use of an ATTEND form currently being trialled by Family Coaches and Primary Mental Health Workers.

They will also be able to problem solve ways to manage the reduction in risk for themselves at an early stage and use the process set out in the LSCB Threshold Document. Using the Front Door for Families when needed and only after they have tried making an assessment and pulling together a plan for intervention themselves.

Better Assessment and Tracking

We want those who are working with the groups of children and young people most at risk of being 'hidden' to know what education the children are receiving, to consider the impact that is having on the young person and family and, when relevant, what time limited plan is in place to get them back to full-time education.

In line with existing processes this information needs to be recorded and available for the use by the relevant people working with the family.

Better Communication

We want professionals to share their own service user lists and referral information with relevant colleagues to ensure we have a joined up understanding of the needs of Brighton & Hove's hidden children. This needs to be through regular face to face communication so that the nuances of family situations are properly understood.

The conversation needs to be about ensuring their full-time education provision and all services need to know who they should be speaking with to bring about the necessary support and challenge.

A recorded plan of what is known and what will happen for each individual child will be held. This may already be part of a wider plan for a child or family however the relevant part will be extracted for this purpose. Where possible there should be a co-ordinated single plan for the family.

Better Provision

All children need full time provision that meets their needs. This renewed focus on the risk of harm to these children and young people together with the information gathered must inform the commissioning of relevant services using resources available.

Where possible the interventions should be relationship based, small scale and highly personalised for the child/young person and their family.

We would expect to see the outcomes for this group improving as a result of better provision being in place and the result of this demonstrated through existing performance management processes.

Appendix 1 Action Plan (June 2018 – March 2019)

Hidden children - better understanding actions			
Action	Owner	Timescale	Outcomes/Impact
Ensure FCL wide understanding of the Hidden Children agenda in relation to school attendance	Head of School Organisation /Head of Safeguarding and Performance	By July 2018	- Staff can articulate the importance of school attendance and what actions to use when children are not in receipt of full time provision.
School attendance officers understand whole family working and the importance of attendance linked to keeping children safe	Access to Education Manager/ Lead Consultant Learning & Development	By December 18	- Attendance Officers in schools are aware of and access the emerging single-agency Strengthening Families Assessment training - Attendance Officers in schools are aware of and access the LSCB multi-agency Hidden Children and Invisible Families training
Use the SAWASS data to inform the discussion about the impact of not receiving a full time education including the views of young people.	Performance Manager / Access to Education Manager / Partnership Adviser: Health and Wellbeing	End July 18	- Young Person's voice informs this work - Survey responses help illustrate the strategy
Information on the work with St Giles Trust on VVE circulated to others	Head of Safeguarding and Performance	For beginning of Autumn Term 2018	- VVE issues better understood - Schools in all phases have wider options around supporting children at risk
Provide briefing to primary and secondary headteachers on the work about hidden children including refreshed guidance on use of part-time timetables and flexi-schooling.	Head of School Organisation	June 2018	- Schools understand their responsibilities to provide information on part time timetables
Information available on	Head of School Organisation /	June 2018	- Hidden Children communication strategy

internet pages and through social media releases	Deputy Head of Communications		considered - The city is vigilant to the issue of hidden children
Provide links to work ongoing by BHISS on supporting the inclusion of pupils in school	Head of BHISS/PEP	September 2018	- Work around supporting vulnerable young people undertaken by BHISS is co-ordinated with HC agenda.

Hidden children - better assessment and tracking actions			
Action	Owner	Timescale	Outcomes/Impact
All children on part time timetables are notified to the LA by schools – creating a single coordinated list of 'potential hidden children' to be held by LA	Access to Education Manager	From July 2018	- LA understands scale of the issue and the type of children involved
Develop a Carefirst indicator flag for hidden children	Performance Manager	Sept 2018	- Better reporting - Professionals know which children are at risk
Review roles and functions in the Access to Education team regarding statutory functions and strategic priorities.	Head of School Organisation / Access to Education Manager	September 2018	- This work can be supported and managed appropriately
Review the purpose of the CME panel to undertake a wider function in regards to hidden children	Access to Education Manager	September 2018	- Multi-agency scrutiny of LA actions to track and monitor the children identified.

Hidden children - better communications actions			
Action	Owner	Timescale	Outcomes/Impact
Develop a predictive analytical tool to identify what factors make a child susceptible to being hidden	Performance Manager / Access to Education Manager	Dec 18	- A set of factors that could predict susceptibility to being not in receipt of full time education

			helps to quality assure information received from school.
Review the existing panels and meetings established to consider their relevance and role in addressing the issues	Access to Education Manager / Richard Barker	September 2018	- Efficient use of collaborative meetings
Ensure HC is discussed in a range of meetings to embed understanding and identify new ways of working.	Head of School Organisation	September 2018	- A wide range of partners understand the issues and discussions continue within partnership groups as needed.

