

January 2020.

Proposal for Support and Development Funding to Improve the Identification of and Reintegration of Children Missing Education.

A. Summary: Children missing education (CME) are vulnerable as a result of not receiving suitable education; many are not registered at a school. Most CME are from the vulnerable groups that Ofsted expects LAs to have a good local understanding of and strategies to intervene with and this features as part of the ILACS process.¹ They are likely to: underachieve, have poor employment prospects, have special educational needs (SEN); be at risk of criminal activity, and at risk of sexual exploitation. This proposal is for short term funding during 2020 to support the development of practice-sharing, robust data-gathering and approaches to improvement across, and between, SESLIP LAs. It will enable two sub-groups of the AD Education Network to establish a coordinated approach to data gathering, to feature in the new Education Dashboard, and to produce written evidence of strategic responses to CME and of collaboration across the South-East which will improve practice.

B. Why are children missing education a Children's Services priority:

The DfE defines children missing education (CME) as those "of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school."² Missing significant amounts of formal education leaves children more likely to: underachieve and have poor employment prospects, and be at risk of criminal activity, sexual exploitation and other safeguarding risks.

The 2019 SESLIP CME task-and-finish group recommended that the scope of LA responsibilities for CME be defined across several groups of children and young people: those who are subject to exclusion (permanent, fixed-period), those placed on part-time / reduced / re-integration timetables that go beyond 6 weeks, those persistently absent from school, those being 'off-rolled' and children educated at home. This was accepted by the SESLIP AD Education Network.

A disproportionate number of CME are also known to social care or have special educational needs (SEN), or have social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, and are eligible for free school meals.³ There is evidence that the number of CME is growing: an increase of 48% was noted over the period 2015 to 2018 by a snapshot taken by the Office of the Children's Commissioner⁴. In the South-East, there is a rising number of pupils who are absent, persistently absent and / or excluded from school and, LAs report, a rise in the number and proportion of pupils who are on reduced timetables or are being electively home educated. In addition, some areas of data gathering are more opaque, for example a report by the Education Policy Institute found that approximately 24,000 children who exit a school to an unknown destination do not return to a state-funded school by the spring term of year 11⁶.

Monitoring and intervening to reduce the numbers of CME presents challenges for LAs:

- Much CME data is not a statutory requirement for schools to report, so is reliant upon local arrangements and good strategic relationships with schools and academies.
- CME is an umbrella term across a number of vulnerabilities, which presents challenges with consistency and the collation of comparable data.
- Schools' budgets continue to be stretched, whilst, at the same time, wrap-around services for children and families are contracting and/or being charged for.
- Approaches to address CME and re-engage them with suitable education require strong strategic education partnerships together with multi-agency working: including early help, social workers, school nurses, mental health practitioners and the voluntary sector, as well as schools and academy trusts. There can be challenges due to pressures on staff time and competing priorities.

- Some who fall under the CME definition, such as some who are home educated, are receiving suitable education and present no vulnerability.

C. How can collaboration across the South-East lead to improvement:

SESLIP's Education Network's task-and-finish group identified that all LAs in the South-East face challenges with capacity, data-sharing with schools and with strategic leverage, in order to achieve further improvements and reductions in the number of children missing education (CME). Anecdotally, some SESLIP LAs have more rigorous and comprehensive CME data and offer a wider range of support and intervention than others.

Collaboration through this project will achieve more systematic data collection across our region, based on shared definitions of the groups of CME. This will result in an improved picture of the scale of need and identify where approaches are having an impact. A sub-group of the AD Education Network, which is focused on CME, has already met once and will continue to meet through 2020 to ensure momentum is maintained with this work. Working through definitions, highlighting challenges and identifying areas of good practice and shared policy options will be central to this group's agenda.

Collaboration is a means to improving practice across our region. In particular we would want to ensure that similar LAs are enabled to collaborate and to support-and-challenge one another's practice. There is evidence that strategic coordination, within Children's Services and across the local education system, impacts positively on the numbers of CME and reduces the length of time they are not receiving a suitable education. We expect there will be great value in agreeing policy positions about CME across SESLIP LAs and that this will support increased consistency and better intervention. These areas would be discussed and developed by the CME sub-group then reported to the AD Education Network and recommendations made to the DCS group for consideration.

D. What do we want to develop?

1. Agreed definitions to underpin robust CME data collection. Working across the SESLIP Education Data Sub-group and the CME Sub-group to achieve comparative reporting about CME as well as data about the achievement and progress of other vulnerable groups.
2. Sharing advice and practice examples for tracking and intervening with more challenging groups such as: those on a reduced timetable, those subject to off-rolling and those who are home educated but never known to the school system / moved into area.
3. Sharing of local practice, policies and strategies via a curated page on the SESLIP website. To evidence effective strategic approaches and research evidence and draw on these to produce recommendations for shared policy positions about CME across SESLIP LAs.
4. To enable paired or triad support and learning between officers in similar LAs, which results in improved monitoring and support for CME and reduces numbers of vulnerable learners missing time at school.

E. Our impacts / outputs will include:

- Publish a series of practice vignettes as a result of the paired improvement work.
- Recommend shared policy positions on CME to the SESLIP Steering Group.
- Share more rigorous and reliable data about CME between south-east LAs, that can identify progress and impact.
- Hosting a shared library of local policy and practice documentation that is accessible to LAs via the SESLIP website, overseen by the CME sub-group.
- Periodic presentations to the AD Education Network and to SESLIP DCSs about the impact of this programme.

F. Estimate of costs:

This phase would run until December 2020.

a. A fund for pairs and triads to make applications for up to £1,000 to achieve delivery changes in one or more of the LAs. Decisions about these applications will be overseen by the CME sub-group and are expected to result in at least one practice vignette.

Approximate budget: £9,500

b. Consultancy support for:

- Maintaining and updating the CME library of practice and policies on the SESLIP website
- Research for and consulting with LAs and the sub-group about areas for a joint, SESLIP CME policy position
- Meeting with paired / triad LAs to generate material for practice vignettes and to then write these up and edit with the lead officers and sub-group
- Effective liaison between the Education Data sub-group and the CME sub-group to achieve an agreed, defined dataset for the SESLIP area.

Estimate 25 days consultation time.

Approximate budget: £10,500

Total project costs: **£20,000**

DCS Sponsor(s):

Cate Duffy, DCS Slough, and Lucy Butler, DCS Oxfordshire.

The delivery will be led by Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director Education and Early Help, Portsmouth City Council and will report to the AD Education Network Group.

References:

1. "Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspection of local authority children's services." Published by Ofsted, August 2019.
2. "Children missing education: Statutory guidance for local authorities." Published by DfE Sept 2016.
3. "Children missing from education in England 2016-17." By Robyn Ellison and Dustin Hutchinson; published by National Children's Bureau in Jan 2018.
4. "Skipping School: Invisible Children. How children disappear from England's schools" Published by the Office of the Children's Commissioner, Feb 2019.
5. "Timpson Review Of School Exclusion" Published by DfE May 2019.
6. "Unexplained Pupil Exits From Schools. Analysis by multi-academy trust and local authority." By Jo Hutchinson and Whitney Crennan-Jennings, published by the Education Policy Institute Oct 2019.