

Missing education: a casework snapshot of neurodivergent children and young people

What We Found

The majority of our cases involve interrupted education for neurodivergent children and young people.

We took a snapshot of 88 cases of families we support and found within those a majority (56%) of cases where neurodivergent school-age children were not attending school full-time. Fifteen (17%) were not attending school at all and 34 (39%) attended on a part time basis.

Of the 15 children who were not attending school at all, 11 had been out of school for more than a year and over half (53%) had no alternative arrangements in place for their education.

Where children attended part-time only, 16 (47%) parent/carers were reported to be in agreement with this, while 18 (53%) did not agree with their child attending part time.

Part-time timetables were more in evidence for Primary pupils, whereas Secondary pupils were more likely to have stopped attending school all together.

What We Suggest

Children who are not in school should be identified and given appropriate educational support.

Our data raises significant concerns about the equity of provision of education for children and young people who are neurodivergent.

Local authorities have a duty to offer alternative education provision when a child or young person is not attending school, but we found this was only happening in a minority of cases. This is an area where we would like to see local authorities start by increasing their awareness of the numbers of school-age children who are missing out on education.

We would like to see local authorities developing their capacity to support children and young people who are not attending school full-time. They should be working with families to create models that work for everyone.

It is unsatisfactory for children to be placed on part-time timetables without their parent or carers' consent. It is essential for parents and carers, and the child or young person, to be fully involved in key decisions.

Schools should have the resources to support children and young people to attend full time, where this is the preference of the child and their family.

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What We Did

We analysed our cases to find the children who were not in school full-time.

To investigate the education provision being accessed by neurodivergent school-age children, and to provide an evidential base for further research, we carried out an enquiry across the Salvesen Mindroom Centre team. We designed a brief questionnaire which was completed by all members of our team during the period February to March 2021 in relation to the families we were supporting at that time.

The questionnaire helped us to identify how many school-age children were out of school, the length of time they had been out of school, and whether they were receiving any educational provision from their local authority during that period.

We took account of the impact of school closures due to Covid-19, and ascertained that the casework snapshot was representative of families we support generally, and the results were not due to the pandemic.

Although our sample is not representative of the general population (these are all families actively seeking our support) our data do show how common it is for neurodivergent children who are struggling to be out of school.

Why We Did It

Neurodivergent children and young people often do not receive their full entitlement to an education.

All children in Scotland are entitled to an education under domestic law¹ and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)².

Specifically in Scotland, local authorities have a duty to offer alternative education provision when a child or young person is not attending school, but we found we were encountering many cases where this was not happening. We wanted to formalise those observations and develop a deeper understanding of the situation.

Children and young people who are neurodivergent should not be discriminated against or receive less education than their peers. It is difficult to capture relevant data about those who are missing out on school education due to a lack of consistent recording. Therefore, although ours is a small sample, it presents a unique opportunity to reveal an important finding.

This casework snapshot helps to highlight that there is inequality of provision by describing the extent and nature of the problem and suggesting ways to move towards equity of provision.

1. Standards In Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000
2. UNCRC Articles 28 and 29 focus on a child's right to an education and on the quality and content of education.