

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

16 April 2026

Children out of School or in Home Education For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

All

Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report author:

Miriam Leigh

Job title:

Head of Children Thriving in Education and Principal
Educational Psychologist

Tel:

01305 228320

Email:

miriam.leigh@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report status: Public [Choose an item.](#)

Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

1. This report provides a summary of the current position of children of statutory school age who are considered to be Children Missing Education (CME) or Children Missing out on Education (CMOOE) including those who are Electively Home Educated.
 - 1.1 The report sets out that it is anticipated that local authorities will acquire additional responsibilities with regards to children missing education and children electively home educated as a result of the imminent Children Wellbeing and Schools Bill, and that additional resources are likely to be required.
 - 1.2 There are several positive areas of performance highlighted within the report as follows:
 - Dorset's rate of children missing education is lower than the national and Southwest average
 - Dorset's rate of children electively home educated is lower than the Southwest average

- The number of permanent exclusions overall have decreased year on year for the last two years in Dorset
- The number of fixed term suspensions has decreased in Dorset

2. Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to note:

- The current position regarding children missing education, children missing out on education, and children who are electively home educated, and Children's Services approach to supporting these children, and,
- The strong possibility that the imminent Children Wellbeing and Schools Bill will result in additional responsibilities being placed on local authorities with regards to the above cohorts of children and that this is highly likely to require additional resources.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

3.1 The Children and Schools Wellbeing Bill is currently at the final stages for consideration of amendments in the House of Lords and the timescale for amendments is unknown. We believe that there will be practice and resource implications for Children's Services and our partners.

3.2 It is expected that the White Paper will include making it compulsory for all LAs to:

- maintain a register of children who are not in school
- remove the automatic right for parents to home educate their children

4. Context

4.1 Who are children missing education

CME are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school.

CME includes children who:

- are in the process of applying for a school place
- have been offered a school place for a future date but have not yet started
- are receiving elective home education (EHE) that has been assessed as unsuitable
- have been recorded as CME for an extended period, for example where their whereabouts is unclear or unknown

4.2 CME are not children who:

- are receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school (for example, pupils who are electively home educated or attending alternative provision) which is suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have
- are EHE but the local authority has not had an opportunity to assess whether the education being provided is suitable
- are registered at a school, even if they are persistently or severely absent from that school

(Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools September 2025)

5. Current situation

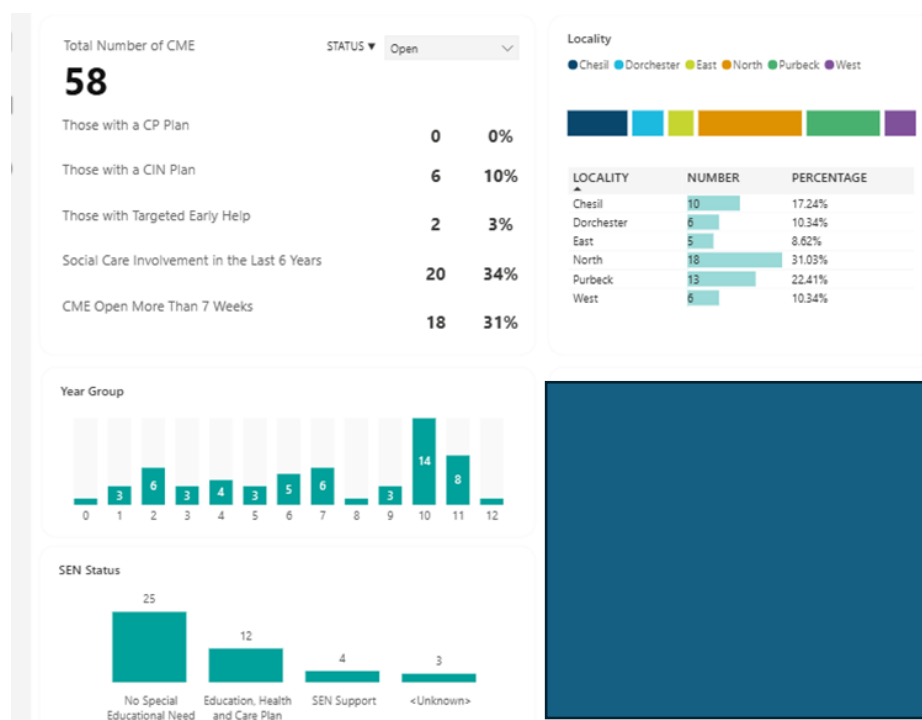
Children Missing Education (CME)

5.1 There are currently 58 children who are CME in Dorset. These are children where their whereabouts are unknown to their registered educational provider, home education has been deemed unsuitable, they are in the process of applying for a school placement or they are not yet accessing an offered school placement.

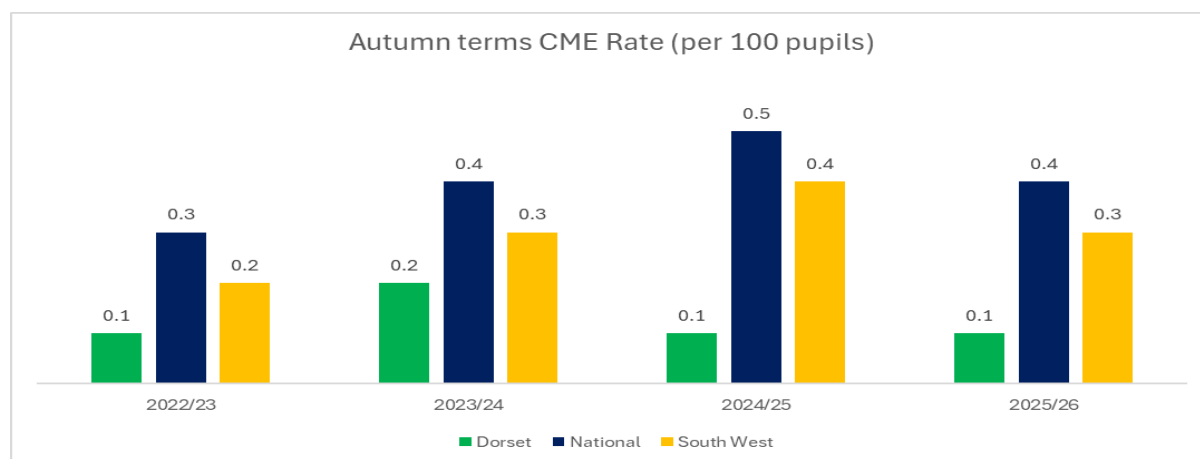
5.2 Of the current children identified as CME:

- none are on a child protection plan or in care
- 10% (6 children) are on a child in need plan
- 3% (2 children) are supported at targeted early help
- 86% (50) are not currently known to Family Help or Child Protection services
- 34% have been known to social care within the last 6 years
- 34% have identified Special Educational needs (including 26% who have an Education and Health Care Plan [EHCP]).

We have been actively working with 31% of the families and children identified as CME to make suitable education arrangements as elective home education (EHE) has been deemed not suitable. Our data enables us to understand when a young person is removed from a school roll by locality and by school. This provides us with the details to work with a specific school to understand the reasons for this and work within the locality to ensure children are safe and receiving a suitable education.



- 5.3 Since September 2025, 93 children have been identified as CME and 89% (83) of all CME are found suitable education within 7 weeks. Dorset CME rate is lower than National and South West rates.



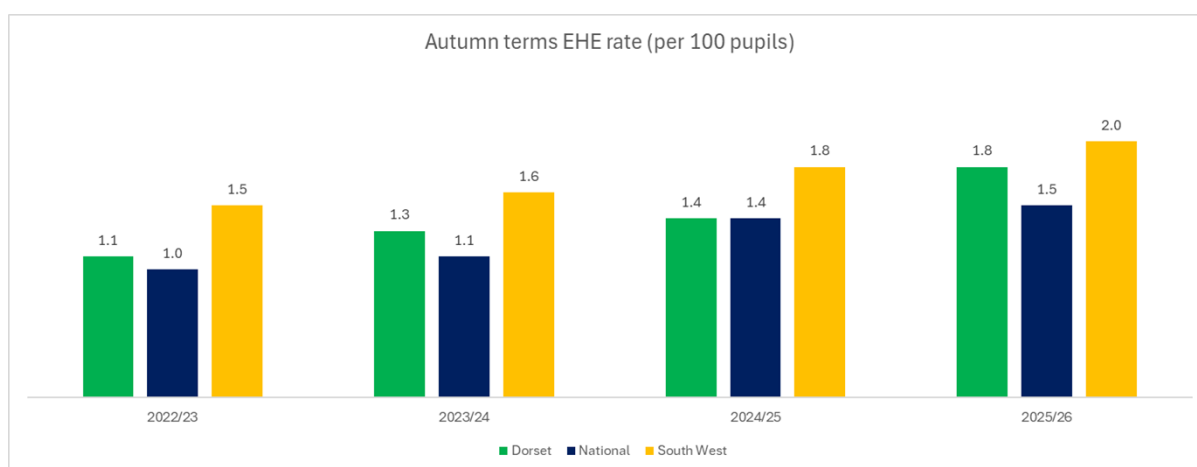
6. Children with an EHCP

- 6.1 There are a small number of children with an EHCP who are not attending the school we have offered them. We will have agreed this school placement based on the Code of Practice of whether the school has agreed they can meet the child's needs set out in the EHCP and whether they are able to deliver the provision in the EHCP.
- 6.2 In these circumstances the SEND provision lead works with the family to understand what school setting and provision the family believe is more

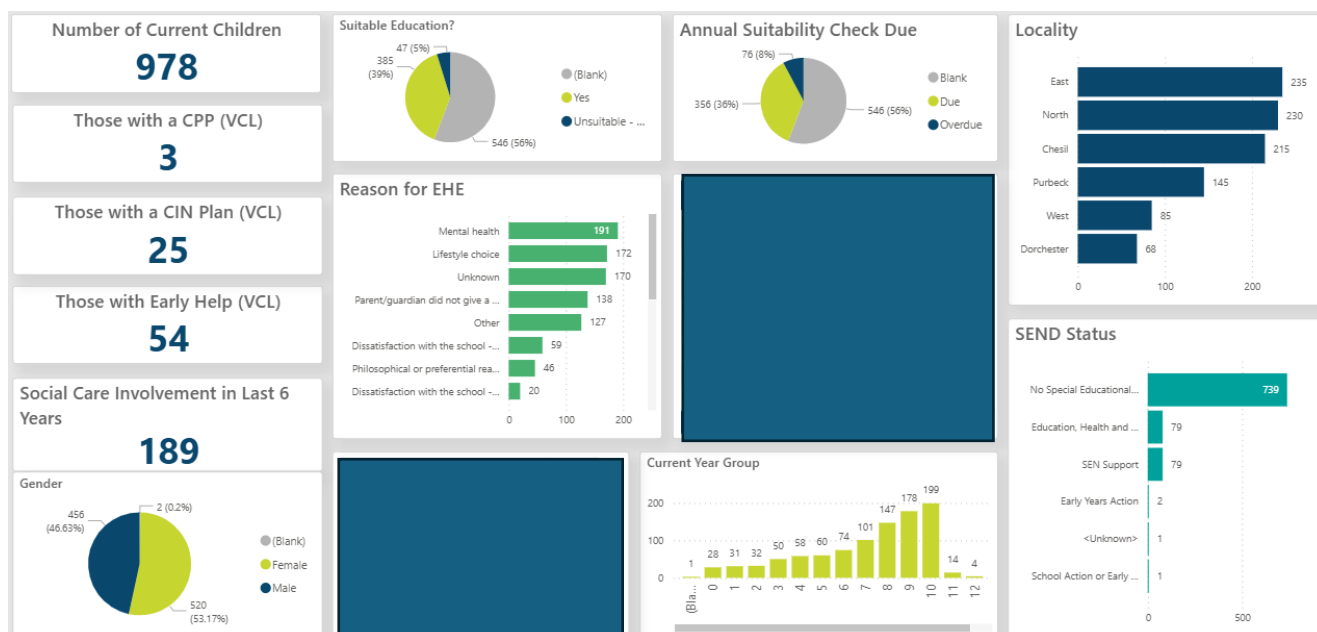
suitable. While we work to resolve this, we may provide the child with suitable alternative provision. We have a duty to follow the attendance guidance and may have to take legal action in relation to non-attendance. The SEND provision lead will seek support and guidance from the inclusion lead to secure education for the child.

7. Elective Home Education (EHE)

- 7.1 Dorset Council currently has 978 children who are electively home educated. Dorset has seen a rise in children and families electing to home educate every year since 2022. This is also in line with the National and South West trends.



- 7.2 From our data dashboard we can see that '*Mental Health*' is now cited as the most likely reason for families to choose home education for their child in Dorset. The Children's and Schools Wellbeing Bill will place additional responsibilities on local authorities to monitor the suitability of home education if introduced into legislation.



7.3 With the rise in the number of children and families choosing to electively home educate there has been a notable increase in the workload of our Learning and Belonging Workforce which is having an impact on being able to complete the initial 10-day contact when we receive an EHE notification. Inclusion Leads are currently responsible for annual suitability monitoring for children who do not have an EHCP who are electively home educated. SEND Provision Leads are responsible for monitoring the suitability of home education for children with an EHCP.

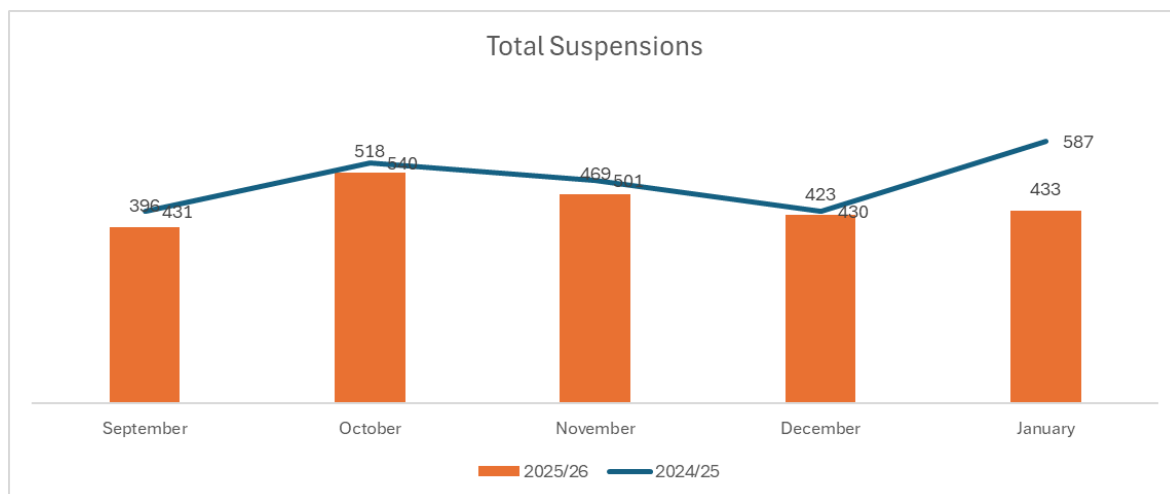
7.4 The SWAP Audit partnership audit on Elective Home Education practice identified the risk of the potential of increased work due to the introduction of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

8. Permanent Exclusions and Suspensions

8.1 There have been 34 children permanently excluded from Dorset schools within the current academic year 2025-2026 (from September 2025). This represents a year-to-year decrease in permanent exclusions compared to the same period last academic year. We have seen a notable decrease in children being permanently excluded in secondary schools. However, there has been an increase in children in primary schools being permanently excluded most notably 2 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (year R). Although the numbers are small this requires our attention and scrutiny. The learning and belonging workforce are working together with Dorset schools to ensure we have a clear process in place to prevent children being permanently excluded due to unmet needs.

8.2 We are also seeing an improving trend in children being suspended with a year-to-year decrease in the total number of suspensions within Dorset

Schools. The four schools with the highest number of suspensions remain the same to the previous year. These schools are governed by academy trusts and we are working closely with the Academy Trust leadership to support culture change and thinking differently about children's behaviours. We continue to work with these schools and trusts to learn and implement a different approach to suspensions and in meeting children's needs.



- 8.3 Children's Services continues to roll out Therapeutic Thinking and Relational practice for schools with further support to embed this into school practice. This is an evidenced based approach with a proven impact of improving inclusion in schools. Several Dorset schools have adopted this whole school approach evidenced by their school Behaviour policy which takes a relational approach. It is noticeable that schools that have adopted this practice have seen a reduction in recorded suspensions.

9. Reduced Timetables

- 9.1 There are currently 188 children and young people (CY) who attend a Dorset school who are on a reduced timetable. Reduced timetables are intended to be a short-term reasonable adjustment implemented to support the needs of a child who may be unable to attend school full time due to health needs. Currently 54% of children on a reduced timetable have known special educational needs (21.3% supported at SEN Support in school and 33.5% have an EHCP).
- 9.2 The Learning and Belonging inclusion leads are the lead for children who do not have an EHCP. They work with schools to ensure that there is a robust plan in place to ensure the child is receiving a suitable education and that there is a joint plan in place with the family, child and school.

9.3 The SEND provision leads take the lead for children with an EHCP and have responsibility for ensuring we are meeting the child's needs as stated in their EHCP.

9.4 Dorset Council Children's Services continues to offer workforce SEND and Inclusion training that supports understanding of the needs of children out of Education or Electively Home Educated.

10. Financial implications

10.1 There are no current financial implications. We are mindful that the Children's Schools and Wellbeing Bill may result in changes in practice and workforce needs.

11. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

N/A

12. Well-being and health implications

N/A

13. Other implications

N/A

14. Risk implications

14.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

15. Equalities

N/A

16. Appendices

N/A

17. Background papers

None

18. Report sign-off

18.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer),

the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and
the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)