

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8 January 2026

Update on NEETs – Not in Employment, Education or Training

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Summary

This report provides Members with an update on the position regarding NEET and Unknown destination young people and provides an overview of the current situation as well as looking at what initiatives are available to the council to progress this agenda positively.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the report and provide any feedback and comment.

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. Medway Council has a duty under Raising the Participation Age (RPA) that requires 16 and 17-year-olds in England without level 3 qualifications to continue education or training until 18, with encouragement to do so beyond that age.
- 2.2. This report references the council plan sub priorities to ensure all children and young people access a high quality, inclusive education and supporting children, young people and adults to lead successful lives and secure employment opportunities.

3. Background

- 3.1. All young people in England must stay in education or training until at least age 18, with ongoing reforms improving available options including apprenticeships, technical qualifications, and supported internships. Local authorities play a crucial role in supporting participation, tracking engagement, and providing targeted support to those at risk of NEET (not in education, employment, or training), including vulnerable groups such as children with

SEN or care leavers. They are responsible for collecting data, promoting participation, ensuring appropriate placement offers, and working with partners such as schools, colleges, Jobcentre Plus, and other agencies. Funding for this support comes from government grants and specific bursaries aimed at reducing financial barriers. Authorities are also tasked with strategic leadership, collaborating with partners, and monitoring performance through regular reports, with a focus on re-engagement programs and safeguarding vulnerable youth to improve their participation outcomes.

- 3.2. The duties under Raising the Participation Age (RPA) require 16 and 17-year-olds in England without level 3 qualifications to continue education or training until 18, with encouragement to do so beyond that age. Education providers must promote participation, monitor attendance, and notify authorities of dropouts. Local authorities are tasked with leading support efforts, ensuring access to transport, early identification of non-participants, re-engagement, and regular review of education plans, especially for vulnerable groups. Exemptions exist for young people with medical or disability needs, and authorities must provide support sensitive to diverse backgrounds, adhering to legal frameworks like the Equality Act 2010.
- 3.3. A young person is considered to be in education employment or training (EET) if they follow one of the pathways set out in this section.

3.4. Full-Time Education:

Young people attending school or other full-time education settings (e.g., sixth form, colleges) are considered to meet their participation duty if they engage in at least 580 hours of planned learning annually, roughly 19 hours weekly. Home-educated young people are exempt from hourly requirements, with the content and hours at the discretion of the home educator or local authority, provided they support transition into formal education, work, or training.

3.5. Apprenticeships and Traineeships:

Entering an apprenticeship or a traineeship (for ages 16-24, up to 25 with an EHC plan) counts as fulfilling the participation duty, with providers required to notify authorities if a young person ceases participation. Traineeships transitioned into the Study Programme in August 2023, funded through colleges and independent providers.

3.6. Supported Internships & Work-Based Learning:

Supported internships are work-based programs for those with EHC plans to develop skills for paid employment, also counting toward participation. Full-time work combined with part-time education (minimum 280 hours annually) is valid if the job lasts at least 8 weeks, for 20+ hours weekly, or an average of 40 hours over two weeks, including self-employment, public office, or volunteering.

3.7. Special Education & Armed Forces:

Young people in specialist institutions (e.g., St Piers college) are deemed compliant with participation. Those in the armed forces participating in training are also considered to meet their duty, with waiting periods for training not breaking participation.

3.8. Young People with Care Responsibilities & Parents:

Young carers with a prior assessment and who balance full-time caring with part-time study meet their duty. Young parents are responsible for returning to education as soon as practicable, with local authorities providing support and considering individual circumstances for their return.

3.9. Young People in Jobs & Breaks from Education:

Young people in untrained jobs are encouraged to pursue part-time, relevant qualifications. Those in training not leading to regulated qualifications should also be supported to undertake suitable education or training. Extended time out of education is discouraged unless activities are positive, such as studying abroad or engaging in skill-building activities, which may still count as fulfilling participation if appropriately assessed.

3.10. The recent Post 16 Education and Skills White Paper outlines several targeted measures to support NEETs.

Youth Guarantee

- Every 16-year-old will have a college place in reserve, even if they initially choose another path. This ensures a safety net for re-engagement.
- Guaranteed job offers for long-term unemployed young people on Universal Credit, helping them transition into the workforce.

Pathways to Work Guarantee

- Offers tailored support to help NEETs move into employment or further training.
- Includes skills bootcamps, sector-based work academies, and intensive job coaching.

Reformed 16–19 Study Programmes

- Introduces 'V Levels'—streamlined vocational qualifications that are more relevant to employer needs.
- Ensures clearer progression routes from school to work or higher learning.

Local "Get Britain Working" Plans

- Local authorities will coordinate wraparound support for NEETs, including mental health services, mentoring, and transport assistance.
- Focus on re-engaging young people through community outreach and targeted interventions.

- Increased employment rates for individuals with level 2 and 3 qualifications

Ambitious Targets

- Aim to reduce the NEET population significantly by 2030.
- Part of a broader goal to have 80% employment rate and two-thirds of young people reaching Level 4+ qualifications by age 25.

3.11. These reforms reflect a shift toward early intervention, flexible pathways, and employer-aligned training, all designed to prevent young people from falling through the gaps, whilst providing positive pathways.

4. Advice and analysis

4.1. **What are the current known NEET and UNKNOWN volumes for the academic year 2025/26?**

In September 2025 there were 240 NEETs (73 16-year-olds and 167 17-year-olds) which equates to 3.12% of the cohort and 1847 unknowns which is 24% of the cohort. This is due to a lack of appropriate provision with Mid Kent College full, and very few training providers within the post 16 arena. It would generally be expected that over the coming weeks and months these figures will improve, which is the usual trend. This level of NEETs and unknowns aligns with our comparator authorities. However, Medway does sit at 1% higher NEET levels than the national average and South East regions.

4.2. 33.8% (81) of NEETs belong to a vulnerable group; these are identified as

- Children in care - 5
- Young people with SEND - 61
- Carers 5
- Young people accessing the Youth Offending team – 6
- Teenage parent 2
- Mental health factors 1
- Pregnancy 1

61.7% of NEET young people are male, 34.2% are female with 4.2% unknown

The most prevalent ethnic groups for NEETs are White British at 54.6%, Other ethnicity 19.2%, 7.1% no ethnic info, and Black African at 5.4%.

4.3. **Medway ward breakdown – NEETs**

Gillingham South has the highest percentage of NEET young people in the borough at 13.33% followed by Chatham Central and Brompton at 10.42% and Gillingham North at 8.75%

Cuxton, Halling and Riverside, Rainham South West and St Mary's Island have the lowest NEET percentage by ward with 0.42%. They are followed by Hempsted and Wigmore and Fort Horsted with 0.83%. All Saints and Rainham South East have the next lowest level of NEET with 1.67% Medway's current NEET figures show a direct correlation between being NEET and deprivation.

4.4. **Medway ward breakdown – Unknown destination**

Gillingham South has the highest Unknown Destination with 7.48% followed by Chatham Central & Brompton with 6.88%, then Strood West with 6.23%.

Gillingham South and Chatham Central & Brompton are also both in the top 2 NEET wards.

Fort Horsted has the least Unknown Destinations in Medway with 1.08%. This is followed by All Saints with 1.35% then St Mary's Island with 1.73%

St Mary's Island is also in the lowest 3 for both NEET and Unknown Destinations.

Medway's current Unknown Destinations figures show a direct correlation between being Unknown Destinations and deprivation.

4.5. **Last establishment recorded for the young people in the combined NEET and unknown cohort**

This list shows those establishments showing in excess of 2% of the cohort

Mid Kent College - Medway Campus	19.24%
Educated at Home	10.27%
Out of County - Misc College	7.58%
Out of County - Kent School	4.94%
The Howard School	3.98%
Rainham School for Girls	3.93%
Brompton Academy	3.69%
Hundred of Hoo Academy	3.55%
The Victory Academy	3.55%
Greenacre Academy	3.26%
St John Fisher School	3.12%
Strood Academy	3.07%
Thomas Aveling School	3.07%
NACRO	3.02%
Robert Napier School	2.93%
Walderslade Girls School	2.30%
Waterfront UTC	2.16%

This data is used to target schools directly to help contact ex-pupils who are in the Not Known activity group or to confirm current activity. Some of these children will be NEET but as the school may have more current information than we do this may reduce the numbers of NEET and Not Knowns. Currently the top 2 destinations account for almost 30% of the last known destination for the combined NEET NK cohort. Work will continue over the year to reduce these figures.

4.6. Which NEET cohorts or young people groups are most underserved locally for 2025/26 (e.g., SEND, EHCP, NEET, Care Leavers)?

Low Achieving young people continue to make up a large part of the NEET cohort. A significant issue is that many sixth forms are not accepting students who have not achieved a pass in either English or maths, even when those students have performed well in their other subjects. This means that capable young people are unable to progress due to narrowly missing out on a qualification.

There is also a noticeable increase in NEETs that are home-educated young people, many of whom struggle with the transition into post-16 education or training due to a lack of structured support. Additionally, young people with SEND and SEMH are increasingly represented in our NEET figures, highlighting ongoing challenges in accessing appropriate post-16 pathways.

4.7. Are there specific subject areas or types of provision (e.g., Foundation, Level 1, Level 2, T Levels, vocational study programmes) where demand is not being met?

There are significant gaps in provision, foundation courses which facilitate Maths and English retakes, and vocational programmes. More specifically, construction and trades are in high demand but limited in availability.

Full time education opportunities in Medway are very restricted once the academic year begins. This means that when young people do not achieve the grades required for their chosen courses, or if their placements fall through for other reasons, there is often nowhere to refer them. By the time GCSE results are released, most providers are already full, and waiting lists are in place. As a result, the focus shifts to securing a place for the next academic year, leaving these young people out of education or training for an entire year.

4.8. What is the current level of sufficiency in post-16 education provision across your region for 2025/26?

The current level of sufficiency in post-16 education provision across Medway for 2025/26 is poor. There are more young people in the cohort than there are academic spaces available, and this imbalance is becoming increasingly difficult to manage. The lack of capacity, particularly for those who do not meet strict entry requirements, is leaving many young people without a viable pathway.

This is not just a local or short-term issue; it reflects a wider systemic problem in the region and nationally. We urgently need more inclusive and flexible provision to meet the needs of all young people, especially those who miss out on GCSE passes or require supported education. Without this, we are unable to offer immediate solutions, and many young people are left waiting until the next academic year to engage in education.

4.9. How does this compare with the level of sufficiency experienced during the previous academic year, 2024/25?

In previous academic years, there has been access to a local training provider (Nacro) that enrolled young people even after the academic year had commenced, which provided a vital opportunity when young people became NEET unexpectedly. This year, although that provider has expanded its facility, they are now at full capacity and operating waiting lists. This has effectively resulted in no immediate provision for young people who find themselves without a place after results day.

This change has had a significant impact on the ability to respond quickly and support young people into education or training. It highlights the urgent need for additional, flexible provision in Medway, particularly for those who miss out on initial placements. Without this, it is not possible to offer full time education to our cohort and are left with no choice but to focus on securing places for the following academic year instead.

4.10. What positive steps are being taken

The Post 16 and IAG teams are working relentlessly on behalf of Medway's young people and although restricted by budget and provision availability, a number of workstreams are underway over and above the day-to-day engagement with young people and providers.

- Implementation of Kent Choices – a one stop shop platform for young people where they can access information, guidance and signposting towards courses at all local providers including schools, colleges training providers and apprenticeships.
- Focus on Electively Home Educated (EHE) year 10 and 11 pupils through a common facebook page for parents, which around 50% of families are engaging in; google classroom 15% engagement; and a pilot initiative whereby monthly lists are provided of new year 10 and 11 EHE pupils who are contacted with engagement on the Post 16 landscape, signposting appropriately. There will be contact with young people and families four times per year. Impact will be measured via feedback forms and analysing future destinations. Each EHE pupil is provided with a Kent Choices log in, which would normally be provided by schools.
- Focus on a Youth Offending pilot, whereby all year 11 young people under YOT are contacted similarly to the EHE cohort. Whilst at the initial stage, 50% of young people identified under this pilot have engaged in the process.
- A supported Internship event on 29 January 2026 at the Corn Exchange.
- NEET conference planned for April 2026.

- Planned events in 2026 coordinated with universities to promote educational engagement and aspirational thinking aimed at NEET prevention, including a Maths workshop and inspiration innovation.
- Receipt of weekly data from Mid Kent College identifying those young people dropping out of courses. This enables the team to make early contact with students with the aim of returning to some form of education or training as soon as possible.
- Runway Training continue to provide support to NEET young people including with Maths and English skills.
- A successful programme in partnership with Adult Education to provide maths and English courses to young people to enable them to engage in further training and education courses.
- Increased networking with providers including Mid Kent College and KCC to look at opportunities for joint working on NEET prevention
- Liaising with the libraries team which is holding initiatives linked to numeracy and literacy to support young people, as well as supporting a careers fair planned for 2026
- Overseeing CSCS courses for young people interested in construction
- A retail work experience and training programme.
- Increasing engagement with schools with the expectation of commencing a NEET prevention pilot, initially targeting the schools with the highest NEET numbers.
- Proposal to increase numbers of IAG team staff to provide greater coverage to all NEET young people and increase capacity to work with providers.

4.11. **Barriers to success**

The main barriers to reducing and managing NEET numbers are a lack of funding within the post 16 arena which has resulted in a reduction in the number of courses and training providers available. There is also a lack of courses suited to the interests and abilities of young people. For low achieving students there are limited post 16 options e.g. level 1 and 2 courses as well as vocational pathways.

Schools' strict entry criteria into 6th form are also a significant cause of NEET young people, which coupled with a lack of a plan B whereby pupils assume they will achieve a 6th form place without a back-up plan. This results in large numbers of pupils being left without a pathway after GCSE results day, by which time college courses are full.

It remains to be seen if, and how quickly, the impact of the Post 16 Education and Skills White paper can positively affect outcomes.

4.12. No Diversity Impact Assessment accompanies this report.

5. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
No or limited funding available within the Post16 arena	If no additional funding is made available nationally to implement positive initiatives, then there is a risk that more young people will become NEET	Utilise any available funding to implement initiatives that benefit the greatest number of young people in a positive manner.	BII
Increase in NEET young People	Due to school's criteria for 6 th form and a limited number of courses are available at college and external providers	Initiate pilots aimed at NEET prevention at an earlier stage ensuring young people have access to appropriate advice for career and educational progression	BII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

6. Consultation

6.1. No consultation has been undertaken nor is required for this report.

7. Climate change implications

7.1. [The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019](#) - item 1038D refers and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050.

7.2. There are no immediate climate benefits from this report, however the Post 16 team do promote sustainable travel options.

7.3. Where sites and funding allow, officers will create additional provisions locally and in accessible locations within Medway to enable young people to use public transport helping to reduce carbon emissions.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1. There are no direct financial implications from this report, however limited funding is available within the Post 16 arena and nationally this is an issue as it limits the options available to the council to implement or fund courses, training and work experience/readiness programmes.
- 8.2. It is expected that additional budget will be made available locally for 2026/27 financial year as part of the budget setting process. Whilst this is welcomed and will realise some additional options, it will only provide limited benefit. Officers will look at the optimum way to utilise the additional funding to get the most benefit for the greatest number of young people possible.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1. All Local authorities must encourage, enable, and assist young people (16–18, and 19–25 with an EHCP/SEND) to participate in education or training under Sections 10, 12, 18, 68 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.
- 9.2. The Children and Families Act 2014 covers those aged 16–25 with EHCPs, defining local authority duties for that group.
- 9.3. Local authorities have a statutory duty to submit data returns (NEET, September Guarantee, Post-16 participation)

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None