



Scrutiny committees gather evidence on issues affecting local people and can make recommendations based on their findings.

## Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 13 March 2025

### Post 16 provision and support in Milton Keynes

Report author                      **Simon Sims**  
Head of Service -Access to Education, Employment, and Training

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Reason for report	Requested for work programme by planning group	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	To inform executive policy development	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Pre-decision scrutiny	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Item referred by other body	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (see summary)	<input type="checkbox"/>

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### Summary

Local authorities have a duty to ensure that young people can continue in education or training until they are 18 (or 25 if they have an EHCP). Whilst local authorities do not directly provide post-16 education they need to work with schools, colleges, and training providers to ensure sufficiency of provision. They must also work with partners to identify those who are not participating (Not in Education, Employment, and Training ‘NEET’) and provide support, advice and guidance to help them to re-engage.

Milton Keynes City Council works in collaboration with the local schools to identify and support those at risk of becoming NEET before they enter the Post 16 phase. There is also significant local collaboration to identify and address forthcoming gaps in Post 16 provision, and to provide support for those who become NEET.

As a result of this local partnership working, the proportion of young people in Milton Keynes who are NEET has remained significantly below national and regional comparators. However, in line with the national picture, the rising demographic pressures, increasing consideration of need in young people - particularly in relation to SEND and Mental Health issues, and limitations in relation to availability of funding and suitable accommodation, presents a significant challenge that we are working to address.

### 1. Recommendation

1.1 The Committee is invited to note the report and offer any recommendations.

## 2. Background and overview

- 2.1 The law requires all young people in England to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday. To increase participation and reduce the proportion of young people who are 'Not in Education Employment or Training' (NEET), responsibility and accountability lies with local authorities in supporting young people to access education and training and in understanding the characteristics and current activity of the young people in their area.
- 2.2 Local authorities are monitored in delivering their duties, and specifically in their tracking and supporting of 16 and 17-year-olds, using data collected by authorities and submitted to the National Client Caseload Information System (NCCIS). NCCIS includes data showing the numbers of young people participating in education or training, those who are not participating, those who are NEET or those whose current activity is not known. Local authorities have a duty to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training for all those over compulsory school age, but under 19, or aged 19 to 25 with an Education and Health Care Plan in their area.
- 2.3 The ability for young people to engage with and access Education, Employment and Training from Post-16 is dependent on having sufficient availability of local provision. Post-16 provision is operated by a wide range of organisations, which are not directly funded by local Authorities, and local authorities do not have direct access to capital funding to support the creation of additional provision. To fulfil their duties, local authorities must therefore hold a strategic overview of demand and supply of provision within the local area, and work in partnership with a range of providers to identify local gaps through feedback and triangulation of data and agree how they might be resolved.

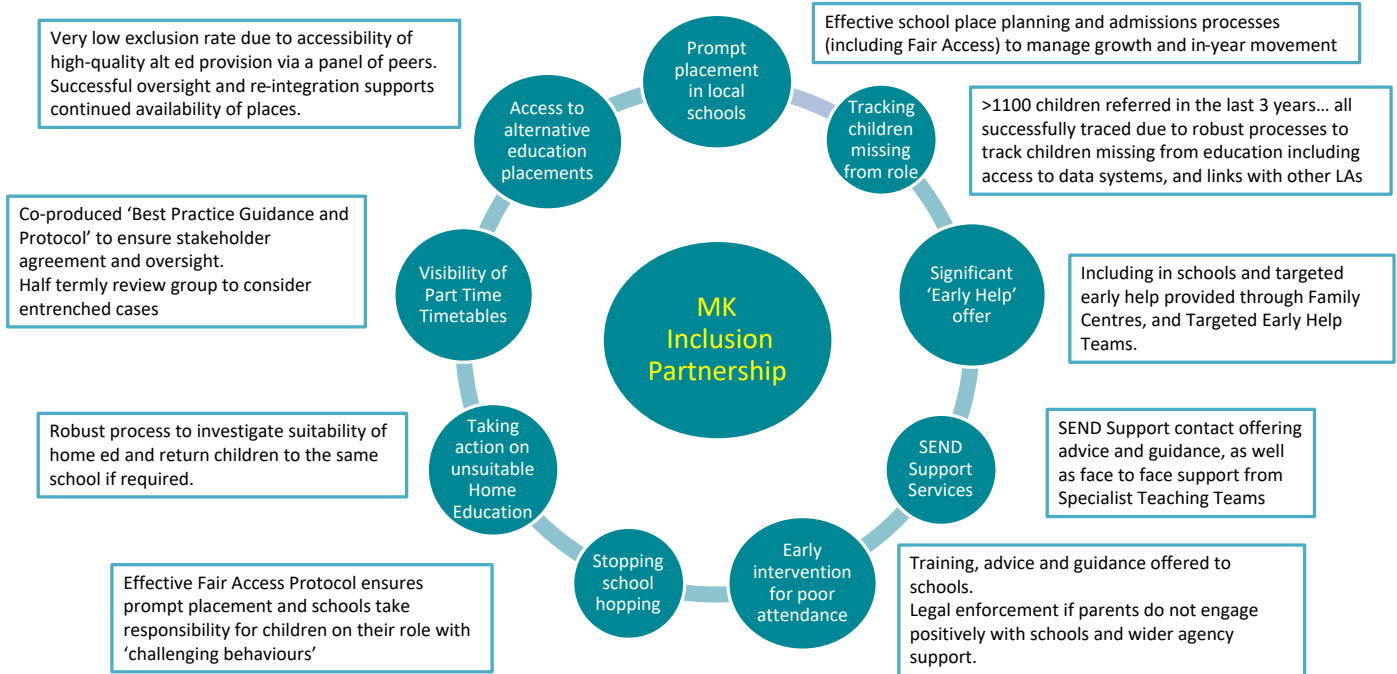
## 3. Main issues for scrutiny

### System wide support strategies Pre-16

- 3.1 Milton Keynes City Council has collaborated with local schools to create a holistic local strategy to identify children of statutory school age that are missing, or at risk of missing, education as early as possible. The strategy is aimed at statutory school aged children and operated through the Milton Keynes Inclusion Partnership (MKIP). The strategy focusses on identifying children who are struggling to access education, identifying the underlying issues, and engaging the support required. In essence it seeks to 'close the exits' which would otherwise exist in our local school system and put vulnerable children at risk. The focus of this work at the Pre-16 phase is vital to supporting the success of our young people at post-16, and therefore reducing the risk of

them becoming NEET. The work strands within the local strategy are set out in the following graphic.

## Identifying and supporting those at risk



### Sufficiency of local post-16 provision and pathways

3.2 Ensuring sufficiency of local provision is crucial. Milton Keynes City Council works in partnership with local education providers and other local stakeholders, to ensure there are sufficient pathways available locally to support young people into Education, Employment, and Training, at post 16 depending on their needs and desires. The following table illustrates the local pathways currently available, and where they can be accessed:

Destination	Pathway	Provider Type
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Levels</li> <li>• T Levels</li> <li>• Vocational Courses, including BTECs and NVQs</li> <li>• Entry Level qualifications for those with SEND</li> <li>• GCSEs</li> <li>• International Baccalaureate</li> </ul>	Sixth form in school, including special schools
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Levels</li> <li>• T Levels</li> <li>• Access Courses</li> <li>• Foundation Courses</li> <li>• Level 1 and 2 courses and GCSEs, in Maths, English and Digital Skills or vocational subjects</li> <li>• Vocational Courses: BTECs, NVQs and others in subjects such as engineering, health and social care or business.</li> </ul>	Colleges, including: MK College Moulton Northampton Aylesbury Bedford

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusive learning for learners with SEND in catering and hospitality, independent living, new horizons, and vocational programmes</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BTEC Level 1 in Vocational Studies</li> <li>Health and Wellbeing Studies</li> </ul>	Community Learning MK
	Entry and level 1 and 2 courses in English and Maths	Local training providers such as the Milton Keynes Christian Foundation and SOFEA
<b>Training</b>	Higher apprenticeships Apprenticeships Traineeships	Local employers in partnership with local colleges and training providers
	Access to higher education courses Supported Internships (SEND)	Colleges
	Study programmes in vocational areas and employability	The Christian Foundation SOFEA
<b>Employment</b>	Employment with or without accredited training	Local employers

3.3 A 'Post 16 Strategy Group' consisting of Local education providers and local industry representatives, meets termly to review and consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of the local pathways in supporting young people and addressing the skills shortages within local industry. The group considers local destination and NEET data, industry needs, and how national changes to the post 16 pathways could impact the local area - such as the recent introduction of T-levels. The group also makes recommendations which are followed up and progressed with appropriate stakeholders. Recent discussions highlighted the implications of the DfE plans for Post-16 change to vocational qualifications and the defunding of BTEC and other L3 courses. There is the implication that there will be a significant number of students who will not have appropriate courses to progress to and there may be capacity issues also. MK College will not have the capacity to increase its intake if schools do not offer courses appropriate to students who would previously have taken L3 vocational courses.

3.4 A 'Place Planning Group' consisting of representatives from local secondary schools and MK College meets termly to review the current and future supply and demand for Post 16 education provision and consider how any gaps in the availability of provision across Milton Keynes (particularly geographic/ demographic) might be addressed. This includes considerations of proposals to create additional sixth form places within schools and supporting bids to central government for any capital funding required. As a result, expansions are currently being progressed at Oakgrove School, St Pauls Catholic School, The Radcliffe and Watling Academy to provide additional places to support the growing demand for Post 16 provision. Based on current trends for school-based post 16 provision, these schemes are projected to provide sufficient places across the borough in

the short to medium term, but this will continue to be monitored and reviewed, along with consideration of any further localised pressures.

#### Support for NEET and Pre-NEET young people.

3.5 Local schools and education providers have their own careers advisors, who work with young people on their roll to consider their interests and potential pathways. In addition to this, Milton Keynes Council operates a Young People's Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Team as part of the Community Learning and Employment Support Service, within the wider Access to Education, Employment, and Training Service. The team focusses on tracking and supporting the most vulnerable young people aged 15-19 (up to 25 for Care Leavers and those with SEND/LLDD) who are identified as not participating, or at risk of not participating in education, employment and training (NEET). The team consist of a Team Leader, Tracking Officer, and five Personal Advisors (PAs).

3.6 Although the Young People's IAG Team is skilled at supporting young people who are NEET, much of their work is focussed on working proactively with schools and other teams within Children's Services to identify and support Pre-NEETs (school aged children who are at risk of becoming NEET). The team is therefore part of the same service and has close working links to the Children Missing Education Team, which plays a significant role in the MK Inclusion Partnership. Details of Pre-NEET children, including children in Year 11 who are home educated, are passed to the Young People's IAG Team to follow up, and offer support. The team also delivers an Annual Opportunities Fair in Partnership with other Children's Services teams to provide specific opportunities and support for our most vulnerable young people.

3.7 As the Young People's IAG Team is part of the Community Learning and Employment Support Service, there is an ability for Community Learning MK (our in-house adult education provision) to develop and design specific courses and interventions to support sufficiency of pathways and address identified needs. For instance, to support those at greatest risk of remaining long term NEET, the team is able to identify and share information regarding any specific gaps or requirements for particular courses, which could be the need for specific courses a health and wellbeing course has been developed for students as a first step back into education, and a BTEC Level 1 course offers progression for those needing longer term interventions but who are unable or not wanting to access school or college. Many of these young people are experiencing significant mental health challenges.

#### Impact - Year 11 Destinations

3.8 The latest 'moving on' data published by the DfE showing the initial destination of Yr11 leavers on 1 November 2023, which therefore accounts for movement at the start of the academic year, is set out below. This information is derived from the annual activity survey return, and shows:

- Participation rates in Milton Keynes are significantly higher than average across statistical neighbours/South East/England.
- MK is significantly above average against statistical neighbours/South East/England for those remaining in full time education (94.8%).
- Despite the above, the proportion of young people in Milton Keynes entering an apprenticeship (3.0%) is slightly higher than average for statistical neighbours/South East/England.
- ‘Not Participating’ (NEET / Unknown/other employment) rates for Milton Keynes are lower than average across all other comparable areas at 1.4%.
- Given the proportion of young people whose activity is ‘Not Known’ is significantly lower in Milton Keynes than in other areas (0.3%), there is confidence in the accuracy of the destination data, the effectiveness of the service, and the availability of local pathways for young people leaving school.

	Survey total	Participating					Not Participating			
		In education and training				Total	Other Employment	Not settled		Not known
		Full time education	Training	Apprenticeship	Employment with training			Active	Not active	
<b>Milton Keynes</b>	3,568	94.8%	0.8%	3.0%	0.1%	<b>98.6%</b>	0.3%	0.6%	0.2%	<b>0.3%</b>
<b>England</b>	634,446	90.2%	1.0%	2.9%	0.3%	<b>94.4%</b>	0.8%	1.90%	0.3%	<b>2.4%</b>
<b>South East</b>	100827	88.8%	0.7%	2.2%	0.1%	<b>91.9%</b>	0.7%	1.60%	0.2%	<b>5.2%</b>
<b>Stat Neighbour average</b>		91.3%	0.7%	2.4%	0.28%	<b>94.9%</b>	0.71%	2.1%	0.31%	<b>1.8%</b>

- 3.9 Further breakdown of this data over the previous three years shows that: Participation or positive destinations rates have remained stable; Young people opting for further education has increased with sixth form rates dropping slightly in 2023; Apprenticeship levels also dipped in 2023, but data suggests that students opted for T levels instead (changed their decision during the application stage); and NEET and unknown percentage remain low.
- 3.10 In addition to this, the DfE published the latest ‘local authority scorecard’ in January 2025, which relates to data from the end of 2023 and snapshot data in March 2024, and this also shows a very positive picture for Post 16 in Milton Keynes, particularly when compared to national and regional (see Annex A).
- 3.11 Whilst the destination data for Milton Keynes is consistently better than national, regional, or statistical neighbour averages, there are increasing challenges in relation to Post 16. There has been a rising demographic demand that has been experienced within the local Primary and Secondary Sector and is now transitioning into Post 16. In addition to this, there has been a significant increase in complexity of need of young people, particularly those experiencing illness and mental health barriers, who have struggled at pre-16, particularly following covid. This means there is a growing pressure for availability of places

for those working at entry level 1, and some young people just want to study the core subjects of maths and English to gain these qualifications, but this isn't possible as these subjects need to be part of a study programme. Some have expressed that they don't like the size and noise of formal learning environments and feel overwhelmed in schools or college.

#### 4. Further actions and timescales

- 4.1 Further work with colleagues and partners (MKCC Teams, Schools and Colleges) to identify and support young people at risk of becoming NEET (Pre-NEET) as soon as possible - particularly those with SEND and mental health issues. A NEET forum is now taking place twice a month between the SEND and 16-19 CIAG team to discuss and agree actions for those who are NEET with SEND. The aim is to ensure the best pathways are sought for those young people with an EHC plan. We will continue to review and strengthen this forum over time to ensure for maximum effectiveness and outcomes.
- 4.2 Further partnership work through Post-16 Strategy and Place Planning Groups to identify potential gaps in provision and how they might be resolved - Particularly geographical gaps, and requirement for additional local SEND provision to mitigate people having to access provision out of the borough. This potentially includes delivery of smaller provision away from big campuses (subject to the availability of funding, appropriate accommodation and sustainable modelling).
- 4.3 Working with partners, including local secondary schools, to identify and secure further opportunities for apprenticeships / supported internships (for SEND).
- 4.4 Supporting young people and parents to consider future careers and pathways to employment earlier in their school life. This includes raising young people's awareness at the start of their secondary school education, of what skills and careers are needed within local industries, and what are the best pathways to this.
- 4.5 Further strategic planning of careers advice and guidance across the CLMK team to support the young people into adulthood. This will include pathways into the Connect to Work programme from the summer of 2025.

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#### List of annexes

Annex A – Department for Education 'NEET and participation LA Scorecard' for Milton Keynes.