



Report to Children's and Education Select Committee

Date:	3 November 2022
Reference number:	n/a
Title:	Children Missing Education
Relevant councillor(s):	Anita Cranmer, Joseph Baum
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Ward(s) affected:	none specific

Executive summary

This paper:

- **recommends that members of the Committee note the content of this report.**
- sets the context of children missing education (CME) and children missing out on education, including those children most at risk and the collective responsibilities of parents, school, and local authorities.
- describes the team structure in place to ensure that children missing education are identified and that suitable provision is made for the child's educational needs.
- details the number of CME involvements and closures for the academic year 2021/22 and processes for supporting the most vulnerable.
- describes the priorities for the next 12 months for supporting children missing education and children missing out in education.

Content of report

1.0 Context

Buckinghamshire Council is committed to ensuring all children receive an efficient, full-time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude, and any special

educational needs they may have. Wherever possible education will take place in a mainstream school. However, there are many factors in the life of a child or that of their family that can affect attendance at school.

- 1.1 Children missing education is not the same as a child that goes missing. Legally, children missing education are defined as those not on a school roll and not receiving education other than at school, such as at home. Ofsted, however, uses a wider definition of pupils missing from education in their inspections, which includes those on a school roll but not receiving a full-time suitable education for example those on unsuitable part-time timetables or those that may have been unlawfully excluded. Data on children missing education is not collected at national level, meaning there is not currently a reliable figure for the whole of England. (During the 2022/23 academic year, the Department for Education are piloting the collection of aggregate termly data regarding children missing education (CME) and children who receive elective home education (EHE) from local authorities on a voluntary basis).
- 1.2 Pupils who are known to be most at risk of missing education include those from families who frequently move house; Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children; those who are excluded from school; children with parent/carers in the Armed Forces; those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; children with chronic health problems or disabilities; teenage mums; young carers; refugee/asylum seekers; young people affected by domestic violence or sexual abuse; those who have been bullied; looked after children; children with special educational needs (SEN); young offenders; and those forced into marriage.
- 1.3 In Buckinghamshire, as above and in accordance with guidance, a child missing from education is defined as being of compulsory school age who is not on a school roll, nor being educated otherwise (e.g., at home, in independent schools or in alternative provision) or who have been out of any educational provision for four weeks or more and after reasonable enquiry by the school or Children Missing Education Officer, still cannot be located. Whereas a pupil missing out on education is defined as being of compulsory school age who may or may not be on a school roll, nor being educated otherwise (e.g., at home, in independent schools or in alternative provision) or who has been out of any educational provision for four weeks or more, even if they are on roll at a school. Children missing education may not have ever been on a school roll and are differentiated from those children who are on a school roll but not receiving an education.
- 1.4 Why do children go missing from education?
The most common reasons are:
 - They do not start school when they reach school age and therefore fail to enter the educational system

- They do not transfer to secondary school when they should
- The family move house regularly, or becomes homeless or there are other domestic issues
- The family have experienced domestic violence and have been placed in a refuge
- The child ceases to attend due to exclusion, illness, bullying or other school-based issues
- Parents “withdraw” children from school due to a dispute or disagreement with the school
- The child has behaviour or attendance concerns
- No school places are available when a family moves to a new area
- Parents decide to home educate unofficially i.e., without the Local Authority knowing
- The family move out of area without notifying the school

1.5 Why do some pupils miss out on education?

The most common reasons are:

- They have been permanently excluded and suitable alternative provision has not been put in place
- They have been placed on a reduced timetable
- They are pregnant or are young mothers of compulsory school age
- They have complex needs and no suitable school place is available
- They are returning from custody
- They are new to county and awaiting a school place
- They have moved from another area and a school place has not been secured this may include children who are looked after
- They were previously registered as EHE but now require a school place

2. Roles and Responsibilities

Parents and carers, schools and the Local Authority all have responsibilities in preventing children missing and missing out on education. The Government places a duty on local authorities, through Section 436A and supporting statutory guidance, to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children in their area

who are not registered pupils at a school and not receiving a suitable education at home or by other means than at school.

A suitable education is defined in Section 437 of the Education Act 1996 as: “...efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs he may have...” (Section 437, Education Act 1996).

1.1 As the Local Authority we have a responsibility to:

- have arrangements in place to be able to identify children in the area who are not registered at a school or being otherwise suitably educated
- act promptly to support a child who is not in suitable education to return to full-time education or access an alternative provision
- appoint a person whom schools and other agencies can contact to make a referral about a child who is missing education
- undertakes the statutory responsibility for issuing penalty notices and to prosecute parents for irregular school attendance; and
- consider the reasons for CME and how to promote effective safeguarding of children
- have arrangements for sharing information with other agencies to ensure effective joint working and contribute to wider work designed to improve outcomes of children
- work with schools to make reasonable joint enquiries into the whereabouts of a child who is missing from education
- make a referral to children’s social care (and the police where it is suspected that a crime has been committed) where there is a concern for a child’s welfare.

1.2 Parents have a responsibility to:

- ensure that their children, of school age, are receiving a suitable full-time education
- notify a school where a decision is made to home-educate a child
- if home educating a child with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, provide suitable education that meets the special educational needs of the child.

1.3 Schools have a responsibility to:

- follow their safeguarding duty in promoting the welfare of children and investigating any unexplained absences
- maintain an accurate register of student admissions and enter students onto it on the date agreed for them to attend the school
- notify the local authority within five days of adding a child's name to the admission register and provide the information held on the register about the child
- where a child fails to attend school on the agreed date, make reasonable enquiries to establish the whereabouts of the child and consider notifying the local authority
- monitor student attendance through daily registers and take steps to address poor attendance
- The Department for Education released new non-statutory guidance (expected to become statutory from September 2023): [Working together to improve school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114111/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance.pdf) to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance and improve consistency of support.
- To do this, the guidance focusses on managing attendance by:
 - Preventing patterns of absence from developing by promoting good attendance
 - Intervening early by using data to spot patterns of absence before they become persistent and working with families to remove the barriers to attendance
 - Targeting support for persistent and severe absentees with all local partners working together to reengage pupils.
- inform the Local Authority of any students that fail to attend school regularly, or miss 10 school days or more without permission
- remove a child from the admission register where they have not returned to school after 10 days following an authorised absence, or is absent for 20 consecutive days without authorisation and reasonable joint enquiries between the school and Local Authority have failed to establish the child's whereabouts
- inform the Local Authority when a child's name is going to be removed from the admission register for any of the grounds set out in Regulation 8 of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations (2006)

- arrange full-time education for students who are excluded, from the sixth day of fixed-term exclusion.

1.4 Electively home educated children who are not receiving a suitable education at home are defined as children missing education. Parents have a right, under Section 7 of the Education Act (1996), to home-educate their child, so long as it is suitable to their age, ability and needs. There are many reasons why a child may be electively home educated and may include ideological preferences, health or mental health reasons or previous negative school experiences. Parents should notify the school when they are choosing to home-educate their child. This should normally be in writing and the school must delete the child's name from the admission register and inform the Local Authority. Where a school is notified verbally, they must still inform the Local Authority at the earliest opportunity. Parents are not required to provide a reason for the decision to home educate.

1.5 If a child has an EHCP the parent must contact the Integrated SEND Service when requesting Elective Home Education and if the child attends a special school, the Local Authority must give permission before a child can come off the school's roll.

1.6 To support CME efforts, the Local Authority also has additional duties and responsibilities, these include:

- arranging full-time education for children who are permanently excluded from school after the sixth day of exclusion
- cooperating with other agencies to improve wellbeing and protect from harm and neglect
- requiring parents to provide evidence that a child is being suitably educated, where it is suspected that they are not and issuing School Attendance Orders (SAOs) to parents who fail to provide this assurance
- prosecuting or issuing penalty notices and fines to parents who fail to ensure good school attendance
- delivery of the Fair Access Protocol in partnership with all schools in their area to ensure vulnerable children, and those who are having difficulty securing a school place in-year, are allocated a place as quickly as possible
- Reduced Timetable Protocol (non-statutory requirement) to establish agreed approaches for all maintained Buckinghamshire schools in the appropriate use of reduced timetables and to identify and track any pupil receiving anything less than a full-time education.

1.7 **Children at particular risk of missing education**

- 1.8 For schools, their governing bodies and academy trusts, understanding the factors that affect CME and the roles and responsibilities of professionals is important for ensuring the best outcomes for children and young people. Some factors may place a child at higher risk and should be considered in the planning of preventative monitoring and support by schools.
- 1.9 Pupils at risk of harm/neglect: Children may be missing from education because they are suffering from abuse or neglect. Where this is suspected schools should follow local child protection procedures. Local Authority officers responsible for CME should check that a referral has been made and, if not, they should alert children's social care. If there is reason to suspect that a crime has been committed or the child's safety is at risk, the police should also be involved.
- 1.10 Children of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) Families: Research has shown that many children from these families can become disengaged from education, particularly during the secondary school phase. It is therefore vital that schools inform the Local Authority when a GRT pupil leaves the school without identifying a new destination school, particularly in the transition from primary to secondary so that they can attempt to facilitate continuity of the child's education.

Although many are settled, some GRT families move regularly, and their children can be at increased risk of missing education. Local Authority CME officer will advise schools on the best strategies for ensuring the minimum disruption to GRT pupils' education, for example dual registration with other schools. In Buckinghamshire the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Education Officer (non-statutory role) provides outreach support and interventions to GRT families, supports schools with pupil attendance concerns, and helps build relationships between schools and parents of GRT children. The GRT Education Officer also offers support to colleagues where safeguarding concerns have been raised/ identified by undertaking joint visits to Traveller sites and provides up to date advice and guidance to schools and other Buckinghamshire Council departments and agencies to help improve the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children.

- 1.11 Families of Armed Forces: Families of members of the Armed Forces are likely to move frequently – both in UK and overseas and often at short notice. Buckinghamshire Council has signed a covenant to the armed forces which contains a number of pledges to the armed forces community. This includes ensuring a smooth transition for children from Forces families, alleviating issues that may be experienced in finding a school place mid-term, when a serving parent has been transferred to Buckinghamshire or surrounding area, then the Local Authority has mechanisms to assist finding a school place for a dependent child. In addition, the

MOD Children's Education Advisory Service provides support to ensure continuity of education for those children when the family moves.

1.12 Missing children: Children who go missing or run away from home or care may be in serious danger and are vulnerable to crime, sexual exploitation, or abduction as well as missing education.

1.13 Children and young people supervised by the Youth Justice System: Children who have offended or are at risk of doing so are also at risk of disengaging from education. Buckinghamshire Council Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) are responsible for supervising those young people (aged 8 to 18). Buckinghamshire YOT works with the Local Authority CME Officer to ensure that children are receiving, or return to, appropriate full-time education. Where a young person was registered at a school prior to custody, the school may keep the place open for their return.

1.14 **Children Missing Education in Buckinghamshire**

1.15 In Buckinghamshire we are committed to ensuring that all pupils who go missing from one of our schools, or who may have arrived in Buckinghamshire and not attending a school, are speedily located.

1.16 The CME Team is a small team that consists of one 0.5FTE term-time only CME Officer and 1FTE Tracking Officer. In the last year they managed a total of 609 CME involvements.

1.17 Where children have left a Buckinghamshire school with no known destination and are untraceable by professionals, along with children who may have moved from other local authority areas to an unknown destination in Buckinghamshire, our Children Missing Education Officer will liaise with external agencies to trace them, although the responsibility for identifying and supporting CME cases is shared across all agencies and services.

1.18 Buckinghamshire Council is committed to ensuring that all pupils who go missing from schools in the County, or who disappear from other counties and may have arrived in Buckinghamshire, are speedily located, ensuring that:

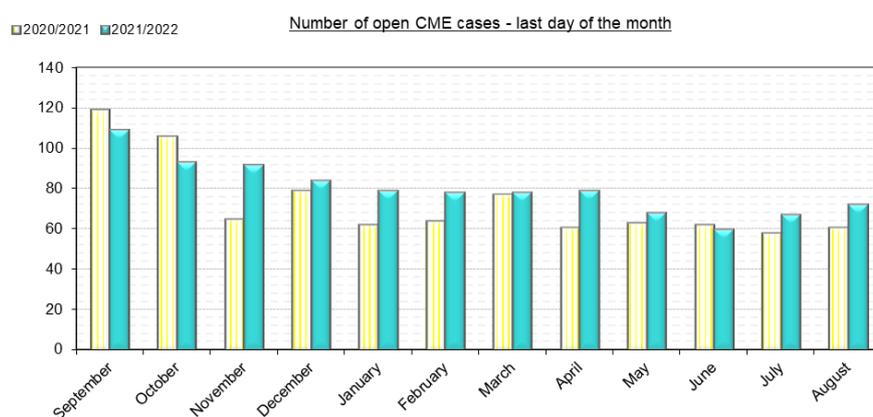
- The whereabouts are known of all pupils who go missing, who move to other areas or who are lost from schools in Buckinghamshire.
- Partnership is established with other local authorities and agencies to locate missing/lost pupils who may have moved across boundaries.
- Children Missing Education are identified, and that suitable provision is made for the child's educational needs.

1.19 What we do to reduce the number of CME:

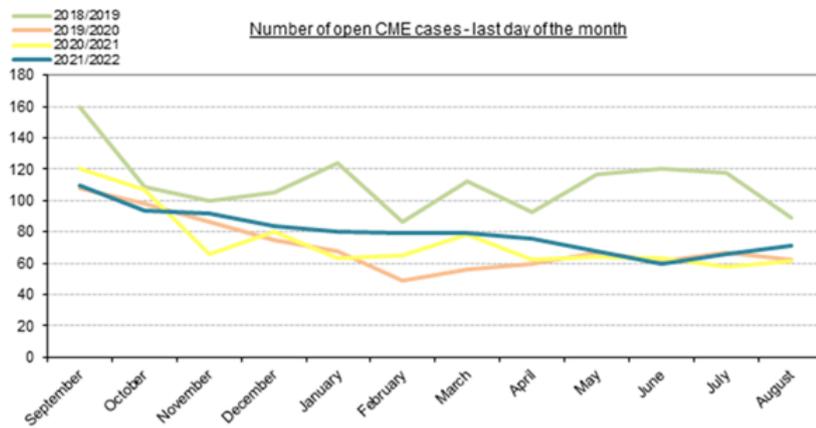
- Encourage schools to carry out their own checks as part of their joint responsibility to locate CME – to reduce number of initial referrals made
- Develop good relationships with other CME teams to facilitate smooth referral processes between local authorities and chase referrals where needed
- Utilise a wide range of agencies/ partnership working to locate families - for example developing links with Revenues & Benefits, existing links with Childrens Safeguarding (health), other local authority data teams, GP's, solicitors, police, Foreign and Commonwealth Office etc.
- Work on improving processes to ensure accurate data to avoid instances where a child may be incorrectly recorded as missing education
- Improving relationships with schools and other teams – to ensure referrals are made when appropriate and to offer advice and guidance, to help resolve referrals quickly

1.20 CME involvements for the academic year 2021/22

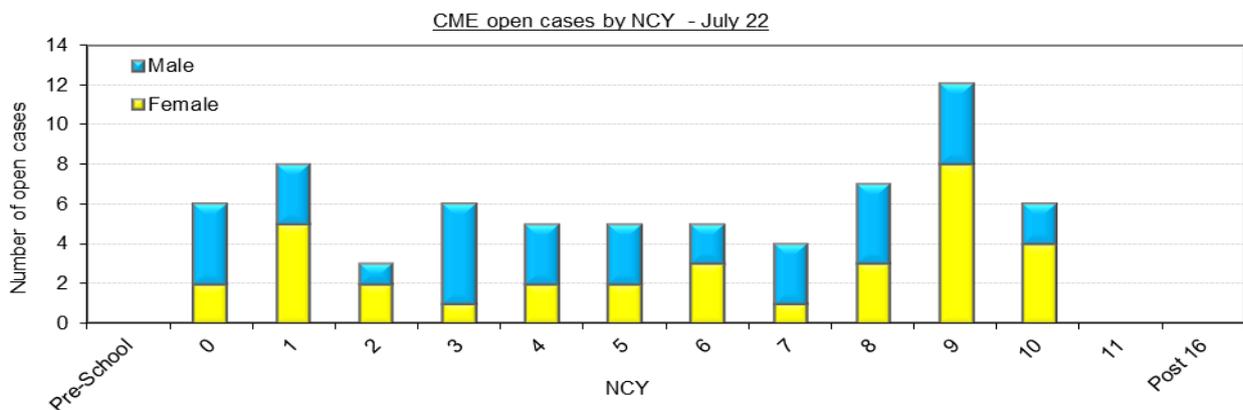
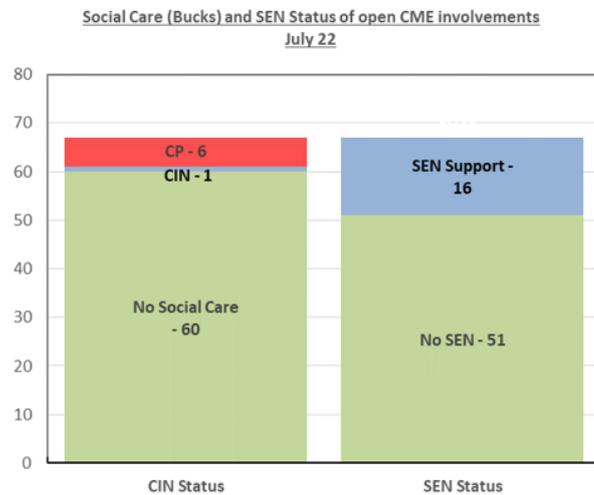
1.21 As of 31st July, there were 67 Children Missing Education involvements open. This is 7 more than on 30th June and 9 more than on 31st July 2021 (+16%) Month on month data and open cases by school year (NCY), Social Care status and SEN status are shown below.



1.22 CME involvements follow a cyclical pattern, with the high point being in the September figures each year, then broadly declining throughout the academic year. The number of CME involvements remains stable, the increase in figures during 2021/22 reflects the anticipated return to levels that were seen pre-pandemic (see below). The Covid-19 pandemic brought about reduction in families moving home and school, which in turn saw a reduction in the number of CME involvements.



1.23 The diagram below gives a snapshot at the end of July 2022 of the number of CME involvement and Social Care and SEN status.



1.24 Supporting the most vulnerable

When a child has a CME involvement created, checks are carried out to confirm if the family are known to Children Social Care or the SEND Service. Where they are,

contact is made with the team and relevant information shared. Referrals for pupils with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) are not opened to CME, unless the pupil is no longer locatable, but the SEN team is made aware. Monthly reports are sent to the CME team to confirm children who have an open involvement and who are on a Children in Need (CIN) or Child Protection (CP) plan, or who have an EHCP. This ensures that we capture information on the child that may have changed since the involvement was first created.

- 1.25 The children who are open to social care are prioritised in weekly reviews of open CME involvements, to confirm expected actions are up to date. Where the referral is not within the usual remit, but the child is known to social care the team will sometimes open a CME involvement to be an extra support/point of contact for schools, social care, and families. For example, a student on roll at a school but not currently living nearby.
- 1.26 Where a child is known to social care, the CME officer will attend core group and conferences as appropriate, acting as both a support and challenge in terms of education provision. This often involves liaison with colleagues in Elective Home Education, County Attendance Team and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Education Officer.
- 1.27 The CME Team have also developed relationships with external agencies that support vulnerable families - such as the Wycombe Refugee Partnership and the Women’s Refuge. When the CME team are notified of a family that could benefit from extra support in finding school places, we liaise with the agency, family, and admissions (both within Buckinghamshire Council and for individual schools) to help secure school places for these vulnerable children.
- 1.28 A case study is included at Appendix 2 which gives an overview of the work of the team.

1.29 CME involvements and closures

Of the 67 open CME involvements, 55% have been open for less than 3 months (37) while 33% (22) have been open for more than a year.

Months since start date	Number of open CME involvements
0	13
1	10
2	14

3	1
4	1
5	2
6	1
7	0
8	1
9	1
10	1
11	0
12-23	9
24+	13

1.30 There have been 609 CME involvements open at some point during the 2021/22 academic year (578 children). Following enquiries, most of these involvements will result in a closure and present no significant concerns relating to the child's whereabouts, welfare, and education provision. For example, where parents have yet to accept a school place or where families have legitimately moved out of area, but details of new school have not been provided by outgoing school.

	Total Involvements	Total CYP	New Involvements	Closed Involvements	Average Length of closed involvements	% of closed involvement closed within 2 weeks	% of closed involvement closed within 4 weeks
2021/2022	609	578	547	542	5.9 weeks	48.0%	66.2%
2020/2021	589	561	528	528	8.0 weeks	52.5%	66.7%

1.31 There has been a reduction in the percentage of CME involvements closed within 2 weeks between 2021/22 and 2020/21, this is in part due to the increased volume of cases and the speed at which the team are able to respond. However, there can be other factors that impact on closure timeframe, for example, where we are waiting to hear back from other CME Teams to confirm that a child is known elsewhere.

1.32 The reasons for CME involvement closure are detailed below. 26% have been closed as OLEA pupils and 40% with an identified school placement.

	July 22	2021/2022	Av length of case in weeks	2020/2021	Av length of case in weeks
BUSC: Bucks school	2	114	8.8	84	13.7
IND: Independent placement	0	11	1.9	12	4.9
OLAB: OLEA School, Bucks Res.	0	63	6.3	51	5.1
OLAN: OLEA School, Non-Bucks Res.	3	4	1.5		
SB: School base	1	24	4.9	21	5.3
<i>School placement</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>216</i>	<i>7.2</i>	<i>168</i>	<i>9.4</i>
NCA: Not CME - Attendance	4	4	6.6		
NCE: Not CME - EHE	2	40	14.4	38	4.7
NCO: Not CME	4	75	1.9	50	6.3
OLCM: OLEA CME	1	143	4.8	164	7.6
OLEA: Other LEA	0	9	3.0	13	1.4
OTAG: Other agency	0	1	5.0	2	1.9
OVER: Overseas	3	49	3.0	39	20.9
SLA: School leaving age	0	1	12.1	2	8.9
All Outcomes	21	542	5.9	528	8.0

1.33 The above categories are in the process of being updated to reflect the destinations of CME more accurately. For example, to include whether the independent placement/other Authority school is for a Buckinghamshire resident or not; and adding a category for referring to the County Attendance Team for a School Attendance Order. We are aware that a significant number referred to CME are found to not be true CME - for example they have not been contactable by the school/EHE team but on CME contacting or visiting the family they have not moved, and it is an attendance/communication matter. To try to reduce this number we are encouraging schools to ensure they carry out their own reasonable checks before referring to CME, including the use of methods we have found successful, as well as home visits and talking to friends/other contacts.

1.34 Supporting Children Missing Education

Once a young person has been found and they are without educational provision they will, in most cases, be expected to join a mainstream school via the normal admissions process. Where necessary the Buckinghamshire Fair Access Protocol will be used. This ensures the most vulnerable young persons are offered a place at a suitable school. However, should they be deemed vulnerable, challenging, or hard to place in any way their name will go forward to the Fair Access Board to enable that young person to re-engage with education. Where appropriate an Exclusions & Reintegration Officer will support this process. Where the child has an EHC plan or Statement of Special Educational Needs, the case will be referred to the Integrated SEND Service.

1.35 **Financial implications**

The total budget associated to the CME Team including salaries is £56,761 and is funded through core budget.

1.36 **Priorities for the next 12 months**

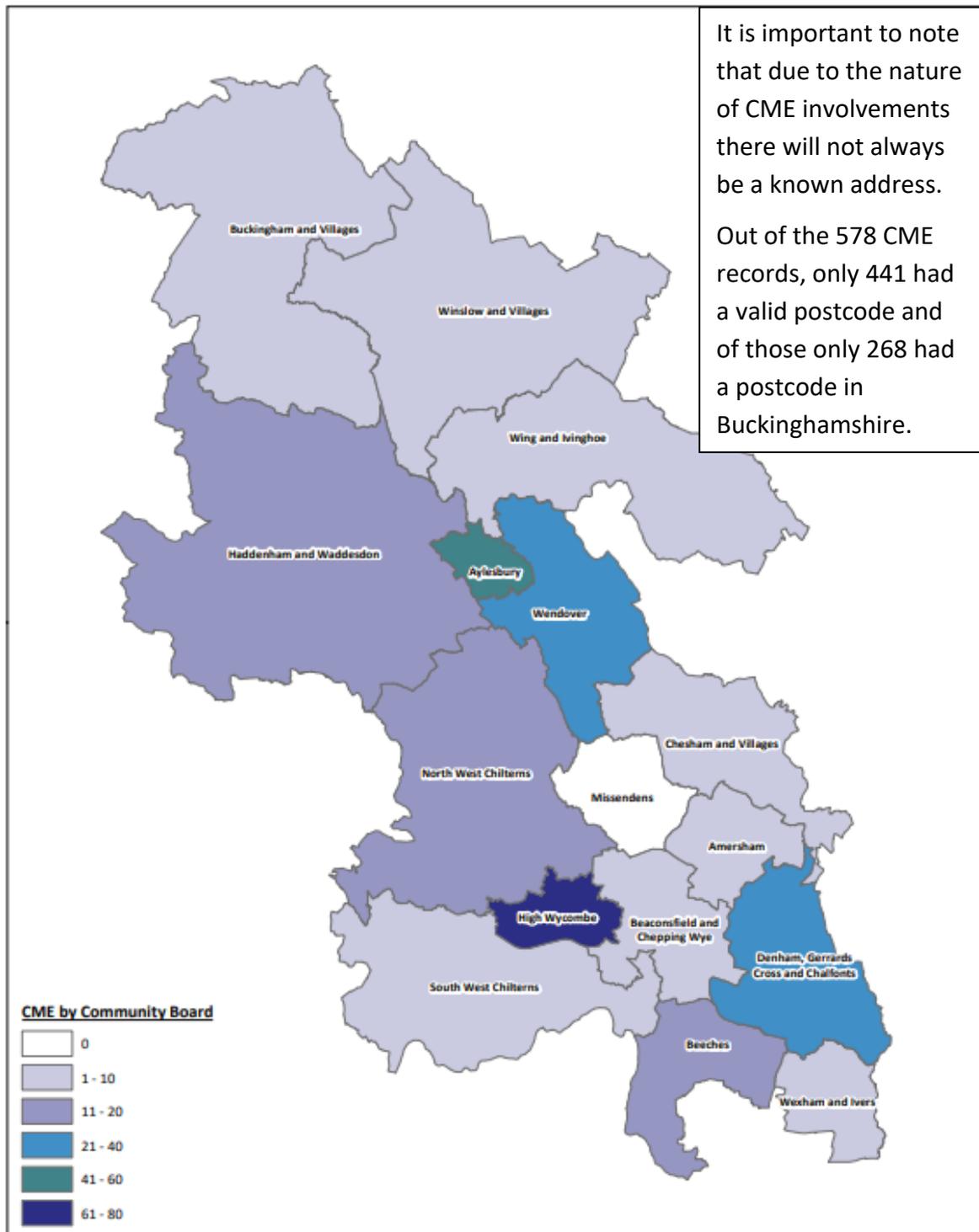
- Improve collaborative working across Buckinghamshire Council to reduce potential CME investigations. There are strong partnerships with internal teams like Admissions already in place and since the transfer to Unitary, relationships have been developed with Revenue's and Benefits to support the tracking and identification of children missing education.
- To continue to develop collaborative working across Buckinghamshire Council and with schools to identify potential CME. To raise the profile of CME and to improve understanding of our work, we are focussed on improving relationships with schools and other teams. Headteacher meetings have been attended and regular reminders sent via email and articles in the Schools Bulletin.
- Establish new multi-agency Pupil Missing out on Education Panel that will review all children who are defined as missing out on education, escalate individual cases and support reintegration back into education.

1.37 **Background papers**

None



Appendix 1: Children Missing Education Buckinghamshire locality heat map 2021/22



Children Missing in Education
(open involvements at any point in 2021-2022 with valid Buckinghamshire postcode)



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Produced by School Management Support Team
Business Intelligence and Insight.

Appendix 2: CME Team Case Study

Background	What we did <i>Week 1</i>	Outcome <i>Week 2</i>
<p>Integrated SEND Service requested CME help tracking a child - parents claimed to have moved to Scotland but refused to give details. Conflicting info given by each parent meant there were concerns about the veracity of information provided.</p>	<p>Calls to family - refused to share info</p> <p>Contact with Occupational Therapist ("Scotland"), NHS address check (same Bucks address returned).</p> <p>Contact to all Scots CME teams - no positive response</p> <p>Call to registered Bucks GP.</p> <p>Contacted Primary Care Support England "not registered".</p> <p>Contacted NHS again - told to contact NHS Scotland.</p> <p>Called - given 3 health board contact numbers. Child eventually located to Clyde Area.</p> <p>Call to Argyll and Bute CME, liaised with CME - school name given</p>	<p>Contacted named school who confirmed child on roll of school.</p>