Against the odds

Re-engaging young people in education, employment or training

Briefing for schools, October 2010
The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone.

Our work across local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services means that we have a unique perspective. We promote value for money for taxpayers, auditing the £200 billion spent by 11,000 local public bodies.

As a force for improvement, we work in partnership to assess local public services and make practical recommendations for promoting a better quality of life for local people.
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On Friday 13 August 2010, the CLG announced that the Audit Commission will be abolished in 2012/13. Before the announcement the Audit Commission published Against the Odds: Re-engaging young people in education, employment or training. This briefing is a tool that accompanies Against the Odds, and the research was completed before the announcement. The themes and messages of the report, and this accompanying briefing remain relevant for schools in this time of economic uncertainty.

Introduction

1 Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are likely to feel bored and isolated. They have more chance of long-term unemployment, ill-health, and criminality than their peers. When they do get work, they are more likely to be in low paid jobs.

2 Against the Odds looked at how local authorities, schools, colleges, Connexions and other partners can work together to re-engage young people who are NEET in learning or training. Key messages from the study are:
   - Young people NEET at 16-18 have fewer life opportunities and are more likely to be a long-term cost to the public purse.
   - Councils get better outcomes by targeting their approaches to the profile of their local NEET population.
   - Commissioners must target resources to the most sustained NEET group, and remove waste and duplication.
   - Better targeting and collaboration can reduce lifetime cost and increase well-being.

3 This briefing highlights schools’ key roles in preventing young people becoming NEET and ensuring they make successful transitions from primary to secondary school and then on to further learning, work, and training. It also includes local examples and self-assessment questions that schools can use to assess and improve their own performance in preventing young people becoming NEET.
The role of schools

4 Young people who are NEET age 16-18 often show signs of being at risk at an early age (Table 1). Early action can prevent young people becoming NEET in the future and lessen social and economic costs to the individual, their family, and to society.

Table 1: Young people face risks that might lead to disengagement from education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal and social risks</th>
<th>Risks at school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive home lives</td>
<td>Poor relations with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in care</td>
<td>Poor literacy and numeracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring responsibilities</td>
<td>Fallen behind at school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Living in a household where no one works</td>
<td>School absences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Excluded</td>
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<td>Victim of bullying</td>
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<td>Truancy</td>
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<td>Behaviour problems</td>
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Source: Audit Commission

5 Many schools already identify the early risks of young people becoming NEET and it is possible to identify some risks as early as primary school. Pupils who fall behind by age 11 find it hard to catch up. Literacy and numeracy support in primary schools can prevent later obstacles to work and learning (Ref. 1). Pupils from deprived areas or households where no one works may have low ambitions and not see the value of education. Primary schools can use the curriculum to raise ambitions and help young people think about what they would like to do in the future (case studies 1 and 2).

6 The move from primary to secondary education is a key transition point in a child’s education. It is important to ensure a smooth transition for all children, but especially those who have already displayed risk factors. A difficult transition can lead to long-term disengagement: but support at this transition point can lessen risks (Ref. 2). Secondary schools can work with primary schools to collect information on pupils who might struggle to make the transition (case study 7).
Schools can identify the issues that could lead to disengagement such as falling behind, bullying, behavioural problems, or truancy. Young people bullied at school are twice as likely to be NEET at age 16 than their peers (Ref. 3). Effective relationships with children’s services can help schools when tackling issues that can lead to disengagement.

Parents and carers can have a big impact on a child’s engagement in education. Parents who had a bad experience of school sometimes pass on a negative view to their children. Schools can work with families to:
- explain the benefits of continued participation in education;
- raise ambitions for their children; and
- identify and address issues that may lead to disengagement (case study 3).

Working with partners can help schools support young people as they prepare to leave at 16. An effective link to Connexions will ensure they provide suitable information, advice, and guidance (IAG), together. By working with colleges, training providers and employers, schools can ensure that young people and their parents and carers are aware of education and training opportunities. Taster courses, open days, and work experience can effectively show young people the choices available. Many schools already provide Connexions and post-16 destinations with information on young people who may find the transition difficult. Working together they can make sure young people have the right support (case study 9).

Schools play a vital role in preventing the problems that can lead to young people becoming NEET. Schools can work with families to raise ambitions and give young people the skills needed in the local labour market. As schools take on a more independent status as academies or free schools they can develop strong partnerships for the benefit of young people at risk.

Audit Commission research for Against the Odds shows how schools can influence children’s progression; and prevent them becoming NEET in the future. Schools can make a difference to NEET levels by:
- Using the primary school curriculum to raise the ambitions of young people and prepare them for future learning and employment.
- Working together to support young people to make the transition from primary to secondary school.
- Working with children’s services to tackle circumstances that can lead to young people becoming NEET such as bullying, truancy and exclusions.
- Working with parents and carers to raise their ambitions and support them in helping their children make decisions about work and learning.
- Working with Connexions, colleges, and the council to support pupils’ transitions to further education, employment, or training at age 16 and reduce duplication of effort.
- Working with Connexions, other schools and children’s services, to collect and share information to improve planning provision, track pupils’ progress, and learn what others are doing to prevent pupils becoming NEET.
- Making links with local employers to understand the skills they are looking for, build this into the curriculum, and raise students’ awareness about the local labour market.

The next chapter gives examples that schools can learn from.
How schools make a difference

12  Schools use various approaches to prevent pupils becoming NEET in the future. Effective projects satisfy one or more of the following criteria:
   ■ raising ambitions of young people and their parents or carers;
   ■ working with partners to identify and support those at risk of disengagement; or
   ■ working with partners to ensure smooth transitions from:
     – primary to secondary school; and
     – secondary school to post 16 employment or learning.

Raising ambitions of young people and their parents or carers

13  Encouraging young people to think about what they would like to do in the future can raise ambitions and help them understand the role of education in reaching their goals. Young people are influenced by the jobs they see in their local area. If their parents are not working, or they live in an area with high unemployment, they may have low ambitions for their future. Schools can work with local businesses, colleges and universities to encourage pupils to think about work in a wider context and to review what they would like to do in the future.

14  It is also important to provide good IAG to pupils and their parents. Parents can have a big impact on their children’s employment and learning choices. By engaging children at an early age, schools can raise ambitions and move to break the cycle of intergenerational worklessness.

Case study examples

Case study 1

Swalwell Primary in Gateshead has raised pupils’ ambitions by improving their confidence and by showing them different career paths. Swalwell Primary is on an estate where many residents are long-term unemployed. Children do not always understand work or they have limited aims.

The school is one of four involved in Headstart. The scheme, funded by AimHigher and Connexions Gateshead, delivers hands-on workshops for pupils to get a feel for jobs.
Local employees, including telecommunications engineers, chemists, and mechanics, help to inspire pupils.

The school use the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme, which improves the confidence and social skills of the pupils. Teachers link subjects like maths to work and employment and pupils visit local universities to see how staying in further education could help them achieve their dream job.

*Source: Audit Commission*

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**Case study 2**

Newcastle Connexions has developed the ‘Inspire’ project to raise the ambitions of year six pupils and help them think about what they may like to do when they grow up. Primary schools in the area host visits from employers to talk about their job and what they needed to do to get there. A police officer, engineer, beauty therapist, dentist, and barrister have all spoken to groups of year six pupils.

Pupils also get the chance to visit local employers to learn about careers. Pupils from one primary school visited a local shopping centre to learn about careers in retail, property management, and construction. The manager took the pupils on a behind the scenes tour with the aim of raising ambitions and helping pupils think about future careers. Other pupils have visited the Discovery Museum, the Theatre Royal, and the local FE College as part of the project. The project also includes the parents to raise their ambitions for themselves and their families. Parents visit the local FE College with their children and some parents have since enrolled in college.

Connexions also works directly with pupils in year six. Personal advisers run workshops in schools, including a session where pupils design their own town and discuss what local services it would need. By engaging young people at an early age Connexions staff explain how staying in education can help young people achieve their goals. The project does not use any extra funding, teaching staff are already in place, and Connexions staff attend as part of their wider role. Local employers also see the benefit of the project and take part for free.

*Source: Audit Commission*
Connexions in Salford gives parents information about its services. A dedicated page on the website, and paper flyers, describe what Connexions is, how it works, and its role in helping young people make choices about their futures. Connexions explains parents' roles in helping their children make choices: it provides contact details so parents can get in touch with Connexions. A guide, “How can I help my son/daughter to succeed after Year 11” has a checklist for parents to help their children in progression to post-16 learning or employment.

Connexions also works closely with schools. Staff attend parents' evenings where they can talk directly with parents and carers. Connexions has a good practice guide for parents' and carers' evenings that schools and colleges can use to make the most of Connexions at the events. They have also increased accessibility to online resources and encourage parents to use e-mail to contact Connexions, allowing parents who find it difficult to attend parents evenings or guidance interviews another route to access the service.

Connexions has also piloted ‘The Passport Programme’, an eight-week programme delivered in partnership with a motivational coach, training providers, and voluntary and community groups. The programme engages parents and carers with their children. Together they can gain vocational qualifications, including manual handling, health and safety, and first aid certificates alongside personal development opportunities such as kayaking, mountain biking, and gorge walking. Where parents are identified as needing additional support they are referred to adult services via the Working Neighbourhoods Team. The programme ends with a celebration where young people and their parents receive their certificates.

Source: Audit Commission

Working with partners to identify and support children at risk of disengagement

15 Schools have a better chance of acting on, and preventing, future disengagement if they spot risks early. Schools can often deal with issues themselves: but they need to know when, and how, to involve other services. Support can come from occupational health, special education provision, Connexions, the voluntary and community sector, or from other schools.
When working with other services schools must ensure effective information sharing provides the most appropriate provision for young people in their area. This will include sharing information on what works and allowing partners to learn from one another.

Case study examples

The Arts Included at Thornhill (TAIT) is an inclusion programme that uses the arts as a tool to re-engage young people at risk of social and academic exclusion.

TAIT, developed by two teachers at Thornhill school with the support of the head teacher, uses the arts as a ‘hook’ to get youngsters to engage with a programme based on citizenship. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, with chaotic home lives and low ambitions attend the programme. TAIT is delivered in the school, but is not part of the mainstream curriculum. Seventy-five pupils, 15 from each year group, spend either half a day a week (Key stage 3) or a day per week (Key stage 4) on TAIT.

The programme uses art, drama and music to address social, economic and health issues faced by young people. Projects have included photography and poetry based on the 1914 Boxing Day truce, learning about different cultures and creating a peace banner. TAIT has built up partnerships with organisations including Durham University, a local dance studio and the Red Cross. Representatives from these organisations come to work with young people.

The programme costs £1,290 per pupil per year. In the academic year 2008/09 all 13 young people on the programme moved on to further education, employment or training.

The programme is valuable to the pupils and the school. Pupils improve their self-esteem, motivation, social and learning skills. The school find benefits through a positive impact on attendance, behaviour and motivation.

Source: Audit Commission
Case study 5

In February, each school in Tower Hamlets identifies ten pupils in year-11 who are most at risk of becoming NEET. They provide this information to Connexions who provides targeted support and IAG based on individual needs. Some young people require increased IAG, others are supported to take part in personal development opportunities or positive activities for young people (PAYP). This support will continue through the summer and beyond. The key aim is to ensure each young person has identified, applied for and enrolled on appropriate work or learning choices by that September. In 2009, 136 of the 144 most at risk pupils, 94 per cent, were offered a post-16 work or learning place.

Source: Audit Commission

Case study 6

Connexions Salford uses Neighbourhood Renewal and European Social Funding to work with schools with high NEET levels at age 16. Albion School got £58,000 over 20 months to introduce alternative provision for young people at risk of detaching at Key Stage 4. These young people get support and an individual curriculum that includes vocational qualifications. All young people have a mentor and an action plan devised with a Connexions personal advisor (PA). Thirty-five young people have gone through the scheme and 31 are no longer at risk of being NEET. Permanent exclusions at the school have fallen from 12 to 2 a year and attendance rates have improved by 3 per cent.

Paybacks from this innovation start to accrue after one year. Every exclusion prevented is a saving of about £1,000. If the 31 young people no longer at risk go on to further education, training or employment, Salford will save up to £250,000 in not having to support them to age 18. The scheme will pay for itself if only eight pupils go on to work and learning.¹

Source: Audit Commission

¹ The savings are based on the average cost of being NEET age 16-18, calculated by the University of York research commissioned as part of Against the Odds.
Working with partners to ensure smooth transitions

17 The two transitions where young people are most at risk of disengagement are from primary to secondary school and from secondary school to post-16 employment or learning. Schools and their partners can use shared information on pupils needs, and suitable IAG, to make sure that young people make as smooth a transition as possible.

18 Schools can also build strong links with Colleges, training providers and employers so students have a good knowledge of the available choices. This is valuable for the destination employment or learning providers to understand any young peoples' support requirements. It is also useful to schools, who can better understand the skills post 16 providers expect young people to have when they leave school.

Case study examples

Case study 7

Many secondary schools work with primary schools to ensure a smooth transition for year six pupils to secondary school. Garth Hill College, a secondary school in Bracknell Forest, supports all year six pupils by providing induction events and activities for pupils and parents and by creating a continuity of work between primary and secondary school.

Staff also visit feeder primary schools to collect academic and other background information on every year six pupil. This is important for pupils who have shown early risk signs so the school can organise suitable provision in time for transition to secondary school.

The school have introduced initiatives to support those who are most at risk of disengagement. Secondary school special educational needs (SEN) coordinators (SENCOS) develop specific plans for children with SEN to ensure the support they received in primary school continues into secondary school.

Primary schools also identify groups of young people who may find it difficult to settle in secondary school. The schools organise activities through the transition period for these young people. For example, pupils visit a local outward bounds centre where they take part in team building activities to improve social skills and confidence to aid a successful transition.

Source: Audit Commission
In 2007, eight per cent of 16-year olds leaving Rotherham schools did not progress to further education or training. The council negotiated separate progression targets with each school based on past and current achievement rates, and on the pupil risk factors. The council also organised a conference for school staff to share learning on what works. Within a year, the non-progression rate fell to 6 per cent. 82 young people were prevented from becoming NEET, making an estimated saving of £654,000. The council aims to get this figure to below 5 per cent in the next year. ii

Source: Audit Commission

Connexions PAs in Nottingham work with each school and with other partners (for example youth offending teams, social care, and health) to agree a priority level for every pupil in year 8. Priority one pupils get intensive support, priority two get targeted support and priority three get decision-making and transition support. Connexions then uses a formula based on the number of pupils in each group to decide on the support for each school. The Connexions partnership agreement with each school outlines how resources are used and the targets for the coming year. These levels of support continue post-16, until a young person has settled for three months in work or learning.

Source: Audit Commission
Case study 10

Small Heath School in Birmingham has a work-related learning programme with local businesses. Partners include Aston Villa football club, Warwickshire County Cricket Club, Citroen, the Confederation of British Industry and Birmingham Chamber of Commerce. Pupils work with these businesses in various ways, including conducting research, improving websites and catering for conferences.

The school has built up good links with Birmingham International Airport. Art students have mounted an exhibition at the airport, the catering group provided a buffet for 300 guests at the airports 70th birthday and media students have redesigned the airport newspaper banner. The school is also working with car manufacturer Jaguar Land Rover to develop an education programme.

The school sees developing links with business and industry as a fundamental part of the curriculum. These links weave work-related learning into all years and subjects, and allow students to develop and practise their skills in real-life. There is no extra cost to the school or business partner for most of the project work as it is already budgeted for in curriculum time. Additional expenses are funded through the work-related learning budget and through contributions from the business partners. The work-related learning programme has also led to increased motivation among pupils at risk of disengagement and reduced the number of pupils who are in danger of becoming NEET.

*Source: Audit Commission*
Conclusions and self-assessment questions

19 Schools can play a key role in preventing young people becoming NEET. They can provide IAG and raise young people’s hopes, which can prevent young people dropping out of post-16 work or learning. They can work with partners to ensure smooth transitions from primary to secondary school and from secondary school to post-16 work or learning. They can also play a role in identifying young people at risk of disengagement and working with partners to put support in place.

20 Schools can use the following self-assessment questions to assess current provision and identify improvement actions.

- How is the school raising ambitions of young people and their parents?
  - How is the school using the curriculum to raise ambitions?
  - How is the school working with local businesses to inform young people about careers in the local economy?
  - How is the school communicating with parents to raise their, and their children’s, ambitions?
  - How is the school measuring the effectiveness of its work to raise ambitions?

- What information can the school share to aid transition from primary to secondary education and from secondary to post 16 work or learning?
  - How could information sharing among primary schools and secondary schools be improved to aid transition to secondary school?
  - What information is the school sharing with Connexions to help them provide both IAG and targeted support to students?
  - How do the school use information to track progress at 16 and identify and share what works, for whom, and why?
  - What information does the school share with parents so they can help their children decide on post-16 work or learning?
  - How are the school building links with post-16 providers, including employers, colleges and training providers to understand the skills required?

- How do the school identify young people at risk of disengagement
  - What role do teachers play in identifying young people at risk of disengagement?
  - Once identified, what support is available within the school to prevent disengagement?
  - How could you improve the way you identify young people at risk of disengagement?
  - How could you improve the support provided within the school?
How well is the school working with partners to target support to young people at risk of disengagement?
- Which partners are the school working with to provide support for young people at risk of disengagement?
- Which are the strongest partnerships, and why?
- Which are the weakest partnerships, and why?
- In what ways could partnerships be improved?
- How are the school working with partners to minimise duplication of support?
- What approaches are the school taking to improve partnership working with individual children’s services?

21 This briefing is one of the tools that supports Against the Odds. The report and accompanying tools are available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/neet
References

1 DCSF, *Deprivation and Education - The Evidence on Pupils in England Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4*, DCSF, 2009.


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