

**Office of the Police and Crime  
Commissioner for Gwent**

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# **Understanding The Triggers**

**The Correlation Between Vulnerability,  
Criminality and Exploitation of Children**

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## Overview

**This report presents the findings gained from an inquiry into the complex and intersecting factors that trigger children's exposure to criminality and exploitation.**

The inquiry process was undertaken in partnership between the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent (OPCC), Newport City Council, Gwent Police and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board.

In light of growing national concern regarding the correlation between school exclusions and children's subsequent involvement in crime, the OPCC undertook a rapid evidence assessment to understand this issue at a local level.

There was strong evidence to suggest that the issues identified nationally were also present in Gwent.

However, the research also found that school exclusions were not necessarily a causal factor for criminality, but rather an indicator of a series of vulnerabilities that increase both exposure to crime and exploitation.

More specifically, the research suggested that children excluded or at risk of exclusion from school sit within a network of vulnerability, including adverse childhood experiences, special educational needs and care experience.

It was therefore decided to develop further understanding of how children experience this full spectrum of vulnerability and what work could be done from the perspective of early intervention and prevention.

This research was shared with the Youth Justice Service Strategic Partnership Board for Newport, where it was decided to explore the findings with a specified cohort of children.

The cohort chosen for the inquiry consisted of 13 children from Newport who were identified through offending data shared by Gwent Police.

## Partners Involved

**The task and finish group meetings between the partners below were facilitated by the OPCC, with meetings taking place over a four-month period.<sup>1</sup>**

Following the inquiry process, it was agreed by partners that the OPCC would develop a report presenting the group's findings.

The following partners took part in this inquiry:

- Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Gwent Police
- Llanwern High School
- Newport Education Service
- Newport Safeguarding Service
- Newport Youth Justice Service
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent
- Newport Youth Support Services

We would like to thank all partners involved in this inquiry for their commitment to collaborative working and information sharing.

The efforts of partners during this process are a testament to both the value and importance of partnership working and demonstrates their commitment to improving outcomes and services for children.

## Scope and Methodology

### **The overarching principles of the inquiry were informed by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) approach of ‘child first and offenders second’.**

Through following this approach, the inquiry placed emphasis on building understanding of the significant life events for each child that preceded offending behaviours, rather than focusing on this behaviour in isolation. However, in order to establish a cohort for research, it was necessary to first start with offending data and work backwards to map out wider contact with partner services.

At the request of the OPCC, Gwent Police produced a report identifying 13 children with the most frequent offending behaviours in Newport between 2018 and 2019.

The frequency of this offending was determined by each child’s level of contact with Gwent Police during the specified period. It should be noted that not all offences for each child received a formal outcome. Furthermore, many of these children are also known to the police as both victims of exploitation and through missing person episodes.

After receiving Gwent Police’s report, partners were keen to identify each child’s engagement with services. It was therefore agreed to take the group of 13 children as a cohort for this inquiry.

Upon review, it was determined that all 13 children had been in contact with each partner agency at some point in their lives. It was therefore possible to access service information for every child in the cohort. This data provided diverse insights into the children’s lives, allowing the group to build visual chronologies tracking each child’s service involvement.

These visual chronologies served to illustrate key themes, trends and potential correlations between key events and changes in behaviour. Much of the information collected and presented

in this report is drawn from historical records. In some cases, these records date back several years. As such, it should be recognised that the services discussed may have developed or evolved their practices since the point at which they are mentioned below.

This report does not intend to review services. Instead, it focuses specifically on the cohort of children and their experiences. However, where areas for improvement or gaps remain, recommendations to address these concerns are provided in the conclusion.

Each agency uses a different database to store personal information on service users. Listed below are the systems used by each agency to produce the information used in this inquiry:

- Gwent Police online crime recording system (NICHE)<sup>2</sup>
- Safeguarding / Children’s Services Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS)<sup>3</sup>
- Vulnerability Assessment Profile (VAP) information<sup>4</sup>
- Education SIMs system<sup>5</sup>
- ChildView database<sup>6</sup>

During the data collection process, there were notable data and information gaps regarding the children’s primary school records. Therefore, Education colleagues undertook follow up interviews with each child’s respective primary school in order to establish a comprehensive picture of each child’s education history.

## Common Themes

### **Through analysis of partners’ information, four recurring themes were identified.**

Those themes are – ‘key characteristics’, ‘trauma within the home’, ‘challenges in education’ and ‘criminality and exploitation’. These themes are explored in more detail below. Although not included as a common theme for discussion in this report, poverty was often an implicit theme in the information analysed during the inquiry. Twelve of the

13 children in the cohort were living in areas identified as being highly deprived<sup>7</sup>. While this is a strong indicator of poverty, it is not conclusive. It is also unclear to what extent poverty influenced the children's exposure to criminality and exploitation.

Therefore, poverty is not included as a common theme because the information available could not support the same level of analysis undertaken across the other themes. In taking the inquiry's findings forward, more work will be required to determine how experiences of poverty shape or influence behavioural concerns in children and, if necessary, what interventions are most effective to address this issue. However, when reading this report, it should be remembered that poverty was present for most children in the cohort, whether that be in their homes, with their peers or in their communities.

## 1. Key Characteristics

### **The task and finish group examined all available information about the 13 children chosen for the inquiry.**

Ten of the children in the cohort were boys. There were some notable differences in the experiences of criminal exploitation between boys and girls. These differences are analysed in depth later in this report.

The average age for children in the inquiry was 15-years-old. Breaking this down by gender, the average age of the three girls in the cohort was 15, while the average of the boys was 14. Partners also undertook work to estimate each child's average age of 'disruption'. The term 'disruption' was used to define the point at which the children's challenging behaviours began to escalate. These escalating behaviours were not necessarily criminal.

The average age at which the girls began to demonstrate an escalation in disruptive behaviour was at 13-years-old, whereas behaviour among boys began to escalate at the age of 11.

## 2. Trauma within the Home

### **Poor living conditions, domestic abuse and parents' inability to safeguard their children were among the main challenges experienced in the home environment.**

The majority of children suffered poor living conditions. The inquiry found many accounts from social workers stating that living conditions were 'unsuitable'. With most cases, there were a number of accounts by professionals detailing limitations in parental safeguarding abilities and boundary settings within familial contexts. In the following sections, specific concerns regarding trauma within the home environment are outlined in more detail.

#### 2.1. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Negative experiences in early life can leave individuals exposed to a number of vulnerabilities.

Research shows that children with ACEs suffer chronic stress that can result in violent behaviour, anxiety and disengagement in school. Parental separation, domestic abuse, substance misuse and other forms of neglect featured often in the accounts of early childhood experiences for most children in the cohort.

The recurring adverse experiences identified in this study consisted of child abuse (mostly neglect), parental substance misuse and domestic abuse. Each child had contact with children's services at some point in their lives.

The majority of these children experienced inter-familial abuse, which in some cases extended to extreme forms of harm and abuse. Although neglect appears to be the most commonly experienced abuse, accounts from services also included occasions of sexual and physical abuse.

The following case study demonstrates the common types of abuse experienced by children in the cohort.

## Case Study 1

Child 12 is 16-years-old. Key signs of disruptive behaviour began displaying at the age of 10. However, challenges and adverse experiences within the family home extend back to the child's early years. After significant familial safeguarding concerns were identified, Child 12 entered care aged 13. There is a correlation between the time when Child 12 entered care and an escalation in disruptive behaviour and reduction in school attendance. Child 12 finished their education in Bridge Achievement Centre (BAC) with an attendance rate of 18%.<sup>8</sup> Child 12 received numerous school exclusions, including a permanent exclusion from one secondary school. At the age of 13, Child 12 was known to be dealing heroin. Through the National Referral Mechanism process, Child 12 was given a positive outcome in recognition of them being criminally exploited.

The case study demonstrates how trauma in early life may have a substantial adverse effect on key transition periods for children. Substance misuse within the immediate family was likely to be a trigger for this child's later engagement in criminal exploitation, among many other factors.

Exposure to substance misuse in early childhood was also identified as a concern for four other children in the cohort. Childhood

trauma was also identified in other cases.

However, the full extent of this trauma is likely to be under-reported due to some minor limitations in the information gathered for the inquiry.

As demonstrated in the case study below, early life trauma can play a significant role in shaping the disruptive behaviours displayed by children as they develop.

## Case Study 2

Child 8 entered the UK illegally in 2017. Following the death of their father in a car bomb and their mother being kidnapped, Child 8 was taken to an orphanage in Romania and spent time there before coming to the UK in a lorry. Child 8 was picked up in Newport and immediately placed into foster care.

Following a breakdown of eight foster placements in ten months due to aggression, Child 8 was placed in Cambridge House, a children's residential home. Despite low attendance, Child 8 engaged well with school. They also engaged positively with some key workers.

Over time, however, Child 8's school attendance declined. Later, Child 8 received a positive outcome through the National Referral Mechanism process.

This outcome was given due to Child 8 being exploited for labour. There is also information to suggest that Child 8 was involved in drug running activity. Child 8 is now in an independent placement and no longer attends school.

The two case studies included in this section offer insight into the ways in which ACEs can have a detrimental effect on children's lives.

Across the cohort, adverse experiences were found to have occurred in the majority of cases.

In the minority of cases where ACEs were not present, other vulnerabilities were identified, such as difficulties with speech and learning.<sup>9</sup>

However, given that ACEs manifested in most cases, it is reasonable to assume that early



life trauma was a contributing factor to the disruptive behaviours displayed by children in the cohort.

This assumption is supported by a significant body of research around ACEs, which suggests that trauma can dramatically shape behaviours and life outcomes of individuals.<sup>10</sup>

A significant amount of work has already been undertaken to train both police and partners in Gwent about how to recognise ACEs.

The evidence suggested by this inquiry indicates that all services should take a holistic view to both understand and respond to ACEs in a variety of settings, whether that be in the home, school or the wider community.

## 2.2. Domestic Abuse Witnessed At Home

As suggested in the previous section, children who witnessed domestic abuse in the home were more likely to display disruptive

behaviours. They were also more likely to be reported as missing and have lower school attendance.

The link between domestic abuse and these three concerns was identified in several of the cases reviewed.

Within the school, disruptive behaviour, fixed-term exclusions and a decline in attendance followed domestic abuse in the home, whereas anti-social behaviour (ASB) and missing episodes were noted in the wider community.

Separate to this inquiry, five of the children within the cohort were identified as being victims of domestic abuse through Operation Encompass.<sup>11</sup>

The following case study demonstrates how the impact of witnessing persistent domestic abuse in the home might influence and lead to further patterns of abuse, violence and exploitation.

## Case Study 3

Child 9 is 17-years-old. Prior to moving to Newport, Child 9 was on the Child Protection Register under the category of 'neglect' in another county. At the age of 14, after witnessing several incidences of domestic abuse (DA) in the family home, Child 9's school attendance fell to 55%. There were also increases in aggression and substance misuse during this time. Child 9 was reported missing on a number of occasions, including from school. In 2017, Child 9 was placed in the Bridge Achievement Centre (BAC).

Following further DA incidences, Child 9 received additional school exclusions. These exclusions were followed by incidences of anti-social behaviour within the wider community, particularly when socialising with peers. Records show a series of disputes between Child 9 and their neighbours, with Child 9 acting aggressively and making threats.

Association with peers was identified as a key risk factor for increasing Child 9's exposure to criminal exploitation. More recently, Child 9 was involved in a DA incident as the perpetrator.

The case study above provides a brief overview of the patterns of behaviour following persistent domestic abuse at home.

These include an overall decline in school attendance, an increase in school exclusions, exploitation and perpetration of domestic abuse.

Consistent with these findings, the following case study also highlights how experiences such as witnessing domestic abuse can have a detrimental impact on a child.

## Case Study 4

Child 10 is 14-years-old. Key signs of disruptive behaviour were evident at age 11. Child 10 has received a number of school exclusions and attendance is consistently low. In the Foundation Phase at school, Child 10 was considered by staff to be a 'noticeable' pupil and was often taking charge or acting as the leader amongst their peer group. During upper Key Stage 2, Child 10's behaviour became more challenging. By the end of primary school, Child 10's attendance stood at 85%, with a pattern of absence occurring on Mondays and Fridays every week. Following several incidences of domestic abuse at home, Child 10's behaviour escalated. This ultimately led to Child 10 being excluded from school, with drug and alcohol use being a key factor behind this exclusion. In the early stages of secondary school, Child 10 engaged in low-level criminality. These offending behaviours increased in severity through influence of peers. Child 10 currently attends Bridge Achievement Centre (BAC), where they have an attendance rate of 8.8%.

It is worth noting that school attendance fell for Child 10 most often on specific days of the week (Monday and Friday). This pattern in school absence may have overlapped with incidences in the home.

As such, it is worth considering what work may be taken forward when children experiencing domestic abuse are regularly absent following an incident in the home. This work may include formalising processes to align Operation Encompass data with schools' attendance data, with recognition that patterns of absence can serve as indicators of potential vulnerability.

### 2.3. Care Experienced Children

Of the 13 children in the cohort, five had been placed in local authority care.

Various intersecting factors led to these children entering care.

However, the consequence of entering care appeared to have a significant adverse effect on all five children.

In each case, those who entered care displayed signs of disruption and increased vulnerability soon after.

## Case Study 5

Child 3 is 17-years-old and finished education in Bridge Achievement Centre (BAC) with an attendance rate of 4.5%. During Child 3's time in primary school, there were no evident concerns with behaviour. However, Child 3 was identified as having moderate learning difficulties and was therefore provided extra support. In Year 6, Child 3's behaviour became challenging. This escalation in behaviour was found to coincide with periods of contact with their mother.

Child 3 entered care in 2016 due to their mother's issues with substance misuse. Placement into care was followed by several missing episodes from both their residential children's home and school. After entering care, Child 3's attendance dropped to 69% at BAC on a reduced timetable. Police reports note Child 3's association with a known child sexual exploitation (CSE) nominal.

There are further concerns over Child 3's exposure to CSE resulting from socialising with peers at their children's residential home, where there are other children known to be at risk of CSE. Child 3 is managed under Operation Quartz and has had a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) referral due to coercive and controlling behaviour from their partner.



All three girls in this cohort are care experienced and have been placed into supported accommodation. Entering care for all three girls appeared to be a trigger point for escalations in their behaviour. It also resulted in them becoming exposed to exploitation. Similarly, the boys who entered care soon became victims of criminal exploitation by being recruited for drug-running activity. They also started to engage in other forms of serious offending behaviour.

Almost all children in this cohort were moved several times from care placements. This included temporary placements, of which in

one instance a child was placed out of county for some time. Another child attended 10 foster placements over an eight-month period. Feedback from partners and the patterns of behaviour surrounding these moves indicates that this was generally disruptive for the children. The evidence suggests that moving from various care placements can affect both the mental and emotional well-being of children, as well as their school engagement and behaviour. The following case study captures various disruptions in the child's life over a relatively long period, with concerns surrounding periods of transition and placement moves.

## Case Study 6

Child 5 is 17-years-old. Signs of disruptive behaviour began to emerge at the age of 13. However, concerns for Child 5 extend back to when they were five-years-old, when they were placed on the Child Protection Register. Child 5 experienced significant challenges within the family home and subsequently attended various care placements. Child 5's behaviour at school and the wider community stabilised after they were placed with an extended family member. At age 11, this care arrangement broke down, after which Child 5 entered care. In primary school, Child 5 engaged well in a small 'nurture' group and had a positive relationship with a teacher. During primary school, there were indications that Child 5 may not fully integrate into the wider school community. Additionally, there were occasions when Child 5 displayed low-level behavioural concerns. Records indicate that Child 5 struggled with the transition from primary to secondary school. This transition occurred alongside the time when Child 5 entered care. While moving from various care placements, Child 5's school attendance declined and they later received fixed-term exclusions. Child 5's behaviour declined significantly following a summer school holiday. Prior to this holiday period, Child 5's primary carer was hospitalised. After returning to school, missing episodes and exclusions became cause for increased concern. Following the death of the primary carer, Child 5's behaviour escalated, including self-harm. In addition, Child 5 was identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation through their place of residence and personal associations. This risk of exploitation culminated in a positive outcome through the National Referral Mechanism process. Child 5 finished education at Bridge Achievement Centre on a reduced timetable with an attendance rate of 81%. Child 5 is now in a work placement and is still being supported by the local authority where possible.

In a small sample of cases, some children in the cohort experienced several school and care placement moves. The effect of these moves can be seen in a decline in attendance and an increase in school exclusions. In the section below, the wider concerns regarding the children's engagement in school are explored further. However, before concluding this section, it is important to stress the increase in exposure to criminality and exploitation faced consistently

by children placed in care. Following placement into a residential children's home, disruptive and concerning behaviours escalated at an accelerated pace.

Based upon these findings, it is imperative that further consideration is given to determine what support is available for children in order to mitigate the clear risks that are present for vulnerable care experienced children.

### 3. Challenges in Education

**In the majority of cases, children within the cohort struggled following the transition from primary to secondary school.**

An example of how this struggle manifests can be seen in the case of one child, where their attendance fell from 90% in primary school to 60% after entering secondary school.

Children also experienced marked declines in their attendance and escalation in disruptive behaviours in school following incidences of abuse or violence at home. School exclusions appear to be given late in a broad pattern of challenging behaviour. In most cases, exclusions were given at a point when attendance had declined substantially.

It is also worth noting that all children in the cohort had additional learning needs, and most had speech and language requirements. The high number of learning needs in the cohort, as well as speech and language requirements,<sup>12</sup> aligns with the national trend of children experiencing these challenges being over-represented in exclusions statistics.<sup>13</sup> The following sections will explore the key recurring education issues experienced by the cohort in more detail.

#### 3.1. Patterns in Attendance

The results of the study outline various potential

causal factors for the decline in the children's school attendance. School attendance often fell after experiencing distressing or traumatic incidences at home. As highlighted above, witnessing domestic abuse frequently resulted in lower attendance at school.

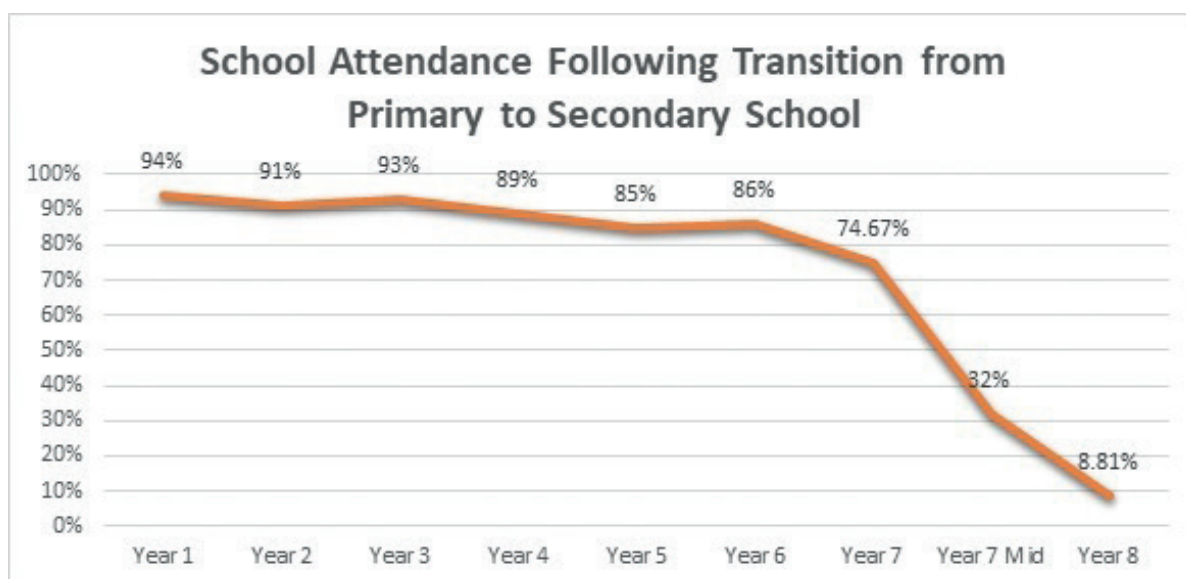
Additional causes of reduced attendance included entering alternative provision along with half-term and other school holidays. In particular, low school attendance following half-term was seen frequently among boys where their peer groups were identified as a concern.

For almost all the children in this cohort, primary school attendance was largely within the expected level of 95% or above. A small sample had periods of primary school attendance of around 90%, but this was not considered persistent absenteeism.

Indeed, only one child had a primary school attendance record that met the persistent absenteeism threshold. However, after entering secondary school, attendance fell for all children.

For some children, this attendance fell dramatically following the transition from primary school; while for others a more sustained decline can be traced over the academic year, starting from Year 7.

The graph below illustrates the cohort's overall decline in attendance following the transition from primary to secondary school.



The notable decline in attendance between the start of Year 7 to Year 8 can be situated in the periods following school holidays of two weeks or more.

Along with this pattern in attendance, school holidays also saw an increase in disruptive and anti-social behaviour (ASB). Escalations in ASB paired with low school attendance were particularly present around the Christmas, Easter and summer holiday periods.

However, it should be stated that this increase in ASB is consistent with wider data trends observed by Gwent Police, which indicate that ASB tends to see an overall increase during these holidays.

As such, the key point to take from these observations is not the rise in ASB, but rather the resulting low attendance.

Crucially, this finding identifies a flashpoint for escalating behaviour and marks a significant moment in many of the children's trajectory towards disengagement.

All children in this cohort, apart from one, had been referred to Bridge Achievement Centre (BAC), a pupil referral unit in Newport.

Most children in this cohort demonstrated a substantial decline in attendance while at BAC, which coincided with an increase in their engagement in criminal activity and exposure to exploitation.

It must be stressed that the link between the children's escalating behaviours, exposure to exploitation and attendance at the BAC is one of correlation rather than causation.

At this point in their lives, these children were experiencing significant challenges that ultimately affected their behaviour and resulted in them being excluded from school.

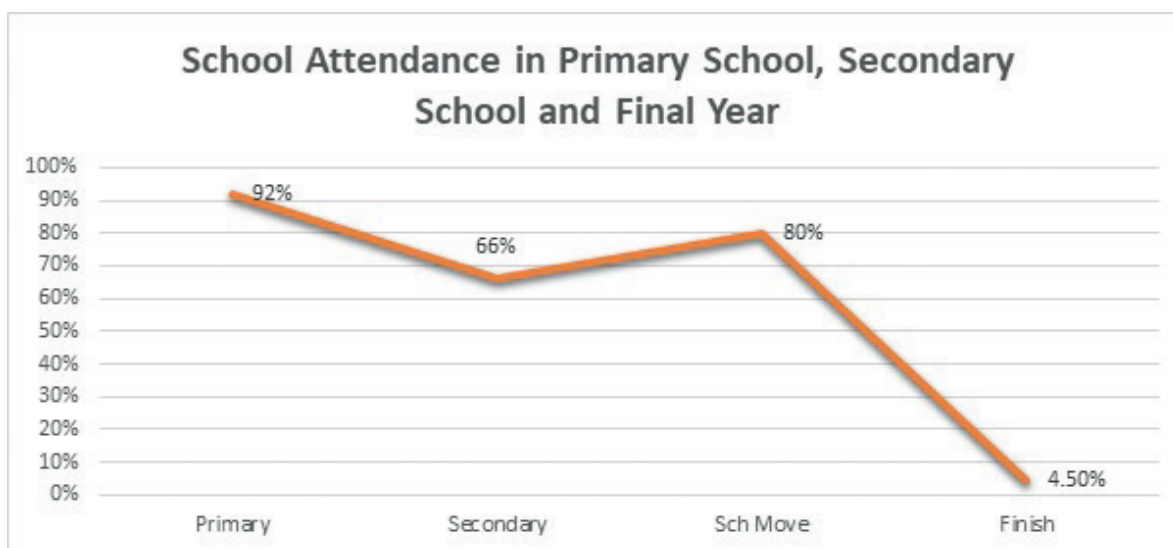
While attendance at BAC marked another step on their path towards the criminal justice system, it is important to recognise the wider context of vulnerability the children experienced.

Indeed, many contributing factors occurred concurrently with the children's movement away from mainstream education.

The graph below charts the cohort's overall attendance in primary school, secondary school (including after a school move) and their final year of education. It suggests a number of trends that warrant further exploration.

Firstly, there is need to understand why attendance is higher both in primary school and in the initial period after transitioning to a new secondary school.

One reason for this trend may be that the care and attention provided to children in both primary school and following a school move may offer support and serve as a protective factor.



The children in this cohort experienced significant challenges in their home environments (familial and non-familial).

The presence and support of a trusted adult in primary and following a school move may address the additional needs of these children. Also of note is the dramatic fall in attendance following a school move, despite initially rising.

It is unclear why this trend occurs, but it may be related in part to the support offered in primary and following a school move.

Secondary schools give more independence to children and, unlike primary school, the school day is not spent in the presence of one consistent and trusted adult.

School moves are likely to provide an additional level of support to a child as they adapt and transition into their new school. Again, this support may come in the form of a trusted adult.

Children with difficult experiences and challenges in the home, like those within the cohort, are likely to benefit from the focused support given in both primary school and immediately following a school move.

Based upon the findings in the graph, it can be assumed that the effects of removing this support results in declining attendance.

It is important to stress that these assumptions need to be tested further before they can be considered conclusive.

However, should this interpretation prove accurate, there will be need to consider what additional pastoral support can be provided to children.

This support may involve providing a specified worker to act as a trusted adult for children in order to support them throughout both primary and school.

This work would establish consistency for the children and help them to adapt to the transitional period between primary and secondary school.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.2. Patterns in Behaviour

Boys who experienced domestic abuse in the home tended to display violent behaviours within school and in the community.

School exclusions also increased following negative experiences in the home environment.

As such, these were children at an increased risk of exclusion as their behaviours became more violent in school in response to violence witnessed at home.

It is hoped that initiatives such as Operation Encompass will help mitigate this risk, as schools become more informed about episodes of abuse experienced by children and respond to their manifest behaviours accordingly.

Although low-level disruptive behaviours were identified early in primary school, more challenging behaviours began to appear in Year 5.

In this year, these behaviours were particularly prevalent with boys, whereas girls tended to display them in Year 6.

Across the cohort, the transition from primary to secondary school resulted in disruptive behaviour by the majority of children.

The case study that follows reflects a recurring theme for several children in the cohort. For these children, behaviours tended to be stable in primary school.

This stability in behaviour when in primary school can be attributed to the protective factors offered by primary school, as previously discussed (i.e. caring and nurturing environment with one consistent and trusted adult).

However, as Child 1 transitioned to secondary school, disruptive behaviour escalated quickly.

This following case study is chosen to demonstrate the speed at which behaviours changed following transition, a time when many of the protective factors present within primary school are lost.



## Case Study 7

Child 1 is 13-years-old. They began displaying signs of disruption at the age of 11. Child 1 first came to the attention of services in 2018 after they had committed an assault. Prior to this incident, information available about Child 1 was limited due to them spending their early life in a different county. Child 1 only attended primary school in Newport in Year 6, during which time attendance and behaviour were acceptable. While in primary school, Child 1 had good relationships with their teacher and peers. English was not Child 1's first language and therefore support for language acquisition was provided. Following the transition to secondary school, attendance began to decline. Reductions in attendance were most pronounced following half-term school holidays.

Child 1 witnessed domestic abuse at home. Around this time, they began engaging in disruptive and criminal behaviour. In light of increasingly challenging behaviour in school, Child 1 was referred to Bridge Achievement Centre (BAC). After joining BAC, their attendance decreased further.

Child 1 recently received a positive outcome through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process. This outcome was given in recognition of Child 1 being exploited for the selling and distribution of drugs. Prior to being referred to the NRM, Child 1 had been reported missing on 39 occasions.

### 3.3. School Exclusions

Within the cohort, the majority of exclusions were given for disruptive behaviour. However, some exclusions were given for serious behaviours, such as physical assault and verbal abuse.

Several exclusions occurred after children had been referred to BAC. These exclusions were given at a point in which children's behaviours had escalated substantially, with offending and exposure to exploitation being key concerns. In addition, a number of children were excluded within close proximity to them being reported missing. Again, this should be seen as an indication of the risk of exploitation, either criminally or sexually.

The point at which children in the cohort were excluded varied between genders, with the boys often being excluded at a younger age than the girls were. In most cases, school attendance fell following a fixed-term exclusion. Only one child in the cohort was given a permanent school exclusion, with all the other children receiving fixed term exclusions of five days or less. Across the cohort, it was noted that all school exclusions occurred within a short time span, rather than over a longer period. The exclusions also served as a pre-cursor to the

children participating in criminal behaviour. This trend suggests that the critical point at which disruptive behaviours escalate to the point of criminality is often a concentrated period. That is, behaviours resulting in exclusion occur within quick succession prior to the child engaging in crime.

There is more work needed to understand why this escalation appears to progress at a rapid pace. This work should be paired with further research to determine what preventative interventions could be adopted and at what point they should be initiated in the child's path towards escalating behaviours.

The case study that follows provides an example of the repetitive nature of exclusions for children within the cohort. Crucially, it is important to note that the behaviours leading to Child 7's first exclusion were already manifesting in school.

In most cases, fixed-term exclusions are only given after exhausting all the available options for internal interventions and exclusions from the classroom. Therefore, this case study demonstrates the clear need to consider what additional external support can be provided to children to prevent exclusion when internal school-based interventions do not succeed.

## Case Study 8

Child 7 is 12-years-old. Concerns over Child 7's behaviour began manifest when they were aged five. In early primary school, Child 7's attendance was low (89%) and their mother suggested that they might have learning difficulties.

Child 7 received thirty-five school exclusions at the age of six. This was followed by criminal activity, starting at the age of 11. Offences included criminal damage and theft. Professional opinion stated that Child 7 has complex needs and limited social and emotional skills.

Child 7's family struggles financially and there are poor living conditions within the family home.

Child 7 appears to be influenced by a wider peer group. Members of this peer group are also in the cohort for this study.

### 3.4. Speech, Language and Additional Learning Needs

All children in this cohort were identified as having special education needs (SEN). The majority were non-statemented, but did receive either School Action or School Action Plus.<sup>15</sup>

An additional four out of the cohort had individual development plans with Newport City Council. In addition, speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) were evident in almost all children in the cohort.

Three children within this cohort required language acquisition support while in primary school, as English was not their first language. In these cases, there were signs that the children struggled to engage and integrate in the school community.

During the research process for this inquiry, Youth Justice Service colleagues reported that the majority of their referrals involved children with SLCN.

However, addressing these issues with children can be challenging, as it is widely acknowledged that SLCN difficulties require interventions at an earlier age in order to achieve an effective resolution.

Moreover, there is strong evidence to suggest that children with SLCN often go undiagnosed

prior to reaching the Youth Offending Team screening process, where their needs are identified for the first time.<sup>16</sup>

Such findings reveal missed opportunities for additional intervention and support prior to the point of children becoming involved in offending.

Discussions between partners involved in this inquiry considered changes to service provision for children with SLCN.

In Newport, a dedicated centralised provision had been available for children experiencing these difficulties.

However, this service was changed to an integrated provision in schools, which saw the introduction of a commissioned service (SenCom) to train school staff in identification and interventions.

SenCom also provides direct work with groups and individuals with speech, language and communication difficulties.

The following case study provides an example of one child within the cohort who had SLCN, but no other identifiable vulnerabilities or risk factors.

It is chosen to provide indication of how SLCN may contribute to children's involvement in criminal behaviour and susceptibility to exploitation.



## Case Study 9

Child 6 is 18-years-old and has now completed school. They are from an affluent area, with no known issues in the family home. In primary school, Child 6 had speech and language difficulties and challenges concerning their cognitive ability. Child 6 was quiet in primary school and did not have many friends. Throughout primary school, no issues were identified regarding Child 6's behaviour or attainment. In secondary school, attendance was lower, but was not considered persistent absenteeism.

Child 6 received no school exclusions and finished mainstream education at the age of 16. Despite there being little indication of disruptive behaviour through school and early life, Child 6 is now serving a three-year sentence for possession of an imitation firearm. Prior to this they received a positive outcome through the National Referral Mechanism process, which was given for criminal exploitation through drug-running activity.

Overall, the key issues concerning the cohort's education history revolved around attendance, behaviour, exclusions and learning needs. It is likely that these concerns are interrelated.

However, as seen with Child 6, this is not always the case and individual vulnerabilities and risk factors can be enough to result in offending behaviours and exploitation.

Yet, more frequently, children in the cohort often displayed long patterns of disruptive behaviour and gradually disengaged from education.

By the time children were excluded from school or alternative provision, they would have experienced a number of internal exclusions in order to address and improve their behaviour.

As previously stated, there is further work required to establish what additional support can be provided to prevent children from being excluded when internal interventions have been exhausted.

It was observed in many instances across the cohort that children excluded soon became involved in criminality and faced exposure to exploitation.

The next section will explore how this criminal behaviour and exploitation manifested within the cohort.

## 4. Criminality and Exploitation

### **Each child in this cohort was known to Gwent Police.**

This nature of the children's contact with police involved offending behaviour, missing episodes and concerns over exploitation. Initial discussions during this inquiry centred on persistent engagement in criminality. However, as the research process developed, exposure to exploitation became a recurrent theme across the cohort. Indeed, of the 13 children chosen for the inquiry, 10 were identified to either have been exploited or at risk of exploitation.

The sections below explore the various findings gained from partners' information relating to offending behaviour and exposure to exploitation.

### **4.1. Patterns in Offending**

Although not explicit in the information provided, there was a strong indication that certain criminal behaviours were differentiated between age and gender. Across the cohort, the children's offending behaviour began to escalate at the ages of 13 and 14. As already noted, disruptions in behaviour, including ASB and criminality, were concentrated around half-term and other school holidays.<sup>17</sup>

Data provided by Gwent Police highlighted a notable increase in ASB over the summer holiday period. These offending behaviours were largely perpetrated by boys and within a peer group setting.

It is perhaps expected that offending would increase during this time, when the structure and protective environment offered by school becomes largely absent.

Due to challenges at home or placement in care, it is unlikely that children in the cohort saw the support offered by school replicated during the holiday periods.

In the absence of this support, the children were without positive influences and thus became further involved in disruptive behaviours.

ASB and criminal damage appear to be the most common pre-cursors to serious offending.

Girls in the cohort often engaged in serious crime earlier, while the boys' offending behaviour increased in severity more gradually. Violence perpetrated by girls was committed by those identified as victims of sexual exploitation.

This violence was usually perpetrated against or in the company of other girls known to be at risk of sexual exploitation.

From this finding, there is clear indication that vulnerable children tend to associate and socialise together as peers.

The collective vulnerabilities within these peer groups are likely to exacerbate any underlying issues and manifest, as the data suggests, in situations of peer-on-peer violence.

## 4.2. Missing Episodes

Missing episodes were reported for all but one young person within the cohort. Some were reported missing in excess of 50 times, with one being reported missing more than 30 times in a month.

Both criminal and sexual exploitation incidences were linked to frequent missing episodes.

In instances where girls were reported missing, there were usually indications of association with girls at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) or older males known for exploitation offences.

For the boys in this cohort, missing episodes were frequently linked to criminal exploitation through drug-running activities, often with peers.

The case study below presents an example of the dynamic between missing episodes and criminal exploitation.

## Case Study 10

Child 2 is 14-years-old. At the age of 13, Child 2 began displaying significant disruptive behaviour. Child 2 witnessed domestic abuse at home at a young age. It is at this point that Child 2 was first brought to the attention of services. Child 2 received their first exclusion at the age of 13 and behaviour has since declined.

During primary school, Child 2 formed good relationships with staff and peers, and displayed no behavioural concerns. However, an Individual Development Plan was in place for their learning abilities. Disruptions at home were followed by missing episodes. In one month alone, Child 2 was reported missing 20 times.

After entering care, Child 2's behaviour escalated further. Child 2 began displaying signs of sexual exploitation and became engaged in serious forms of criminality. At this time, their attendance rate at school declined and they also saw changes in their place of residence (Cambridge House and Forest Lodge).

When reviewing the sources for missing referrals, it was clear that many episodes were reported by schools and, in particular, Bridge Achievement Centre (BAC). The higher number of missing episodes reported from BAC is consistent with the findings that children's attendance reduced dramatically after they transitioned from mainstream education to alternative provision.

Taken together, this information indicates that the progressive decline in attendance was concurrent with an increased risk of either criminal or sexual exploitation. That is to say, as disruptive behaviour and disengagement from school increased, so too did the children's exposure to exploitation.

Several missing episodes were also reported from Cambridge House and Forest Lodge, two residential children's homes in Newport. These episodes involved children identified to be at risk of exploitation. Additionally, children in the cohort were also reported missing following incidences of abuse in the family home, particularly after they had witnessed violence.

### 4.3. Exploitation

In all incidences where exploitation was suspected, children were found to have associated with other known high-risk individuals, including both perpetrators and victims of exploitation.

The inquiry process determined two recurring patterns for exploitation. In the first instance, there was strong evidence to suggest that exploitation arose from children's association with peers who were also at risk of being exploited. This peer association occurred most frequently in children's residential homes. In the second instance, exploitation arose in all cases where familial support was absent. For many children in the cohort, their status of being at risk of exploitation was flagged soon after they had been placed in care. This is a concerning trend given that these children were placed into care in the interest of safeguarding them. Given that the cohort reflects a small sample

size, more work is required to understand whether the link between care experience and exploitation is mirrored within the larger population of children in care.

Information provided by partners demonstrated a clear gendered divide between criminal and sexual exploitation. Overwhelmingly, boys in the cohort were exposed to criminal exploitation, whereas the girls were exposed to sexual exploitation. All three girls within the cohort were victims of sexual exploitation. Again, consistent with the findings above, their exposure to sexual exploitation increased following their placement into care. While there were only three girls within the cohort, the fact that all had been sexually exploited suggests that vulnerable girls may have a particularly high risk of exploitation. However, this assumption should be tested with a larger cohort to determine its accuracy.

The criminal exploitation of boys in the cohort manifested in both dealing and running drugs. Four boys had received the outcome of 'positive conclusive grounds' through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). This outcome was given for their exposure to criminal exploitation.

These boys were also receiving support through existing pilot work aimed at tackling serious organised crime in Newport. However, it should be noted that in the absence of this pilot work, they would not have received similar support. This is because the positive NRM outcome prevents them from entering the criminal justice system, where they could be supported to disengage from criminal activity.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, three boys within the cohort, aged between 11 and 13, displayed behaviours indicating that they may go on to exploit others. This suggests that there may be a fluid dynamic between being exploited and exploiting others. Given that vulnerable children often end up associating with each other, either in pupil referral units such as BAC or in children's residential homes, the risks presented by this reciprocal relationship are likely to be heightened. The impact and effects of peer influence between groups of vulnerable children is detailed in the following section.

## 4.4. Peer Influence

The inquiry found strong evidence to suggest that the risk of criminal activity and exploitation increased for the cohort when associating with peers. As previously stated, children within the cohort were more likely to associate with children who had similar challenges and experiences.

This concentration of vulnerability was likely to be a significant influencing factor behind the children's offending behaviours and exposure to exploitation. The effects of peer association on offending behaviour were most pronounced with boys in the cohort, with whom peer influence was identified as a concern in the majority of cases.

Feedback from all relevant partner agencies drew attention to peer influence. Across the cohort, missing episodes and absence from school were often linked to peer association. Moreover, a number of police accounts

reviewed during the inquiry drew direct links between escalations in offending and association with peers or known older offenders.

These concerns over peer influence between vulnerable children – particularly when they are gathered in pupil referral units and residential children's homes – raise questions about the types of environments created for children who may feel isolated or excluded. Through systemic processes to both safeguard and manage challenging behaviours, vulnerable children often find themselves closely associated.

However, these associations often lead to escalations in offending and exposure to exploitation. For that reason, consideration needs to be given to how vulnerable children can be supported in a way that does not increase or contribute to their risk of criminality or exploitation. The following case study provides an example of how peer association can exacerbate ongoing challenges experienced by vulnerable children.

## Case Study 11

Child 13 is 13-years-old. At 11 years of age, they began displaying signs of disruptive behaviour. In primary school, Child 13's behaviour was challenging. In early life, Child 13 witnessed domestic abuse in the home. Following these incidences, Child 13's behaviour became more disruptive, resulting in low-level ASB activity.

During the school holidays, Child 13's ASB activity increased. This activity increased in line with them associating with peers known to Gwent Police. Once the school term resumed, Child 13's attendance rate declined. After a managed move to another school, their attendance rate fell further. In their new school, Child 13 was excluded a number of times before being referred to Bridge Achievement Centre (BAC). Attendance is currently about 60% at BAC.

There are concerns that Child 13 is at risk of criminal exploitation. This exposure to exploitation has been linked to Child 13's peer group.

As demonstrated in this case study, peer influence can serve as one of many interrelating factors leading to escalating behaviours. The peers referred to in this case study were also included in the cohort and each had their own vulnerability factors. Issues and challenges experienced by these peers included neglect, domestic abuse and special educational

needs. The peers in question had participated in low-level offending at a young age before gradually escalating to more severe behaviours, including violence, weapons offences and sexual exploitation. Both peers also had low attendance records and displayed challenging behaviours in school. As with Child 13, one peer had been transferred to BAC.



From looking at the challenges experienced by Child 13's peers, it is clear that a significant amount of trauma and disruptive behaviour is gathered within one group. Throughout the inquiry, it was evident that difficulty within the home environment was a key influencing factor for the children's escalating behaviour and risk of exploitation. However, as seen in the last case study, association with similarly vulnerable children further reinforces negative behaviours and adds additional risk of exploitation. It is for this reason that understanding the role of peer influence must be considered essential to developing a comprehensive approach to address the various and intersecting factors that may result in children engaging in crime or being exploited.

## Conclusion

### **Throughout this inquiry, collaborative working and information sharing between partners has been integral.**

Addressing the complex challenges and vulnerabilities experienced by the cohort and other similar children is beyond the scope of one agency. Therefore, it is imperative that partners recognise the benefits realised for all services and children when partnership solutions are actively sought in the first instance.

Many of the case studies included in this report highlight missed opportunities for early and collectivised interventions to steer children away from criminality and exploitation. It is hoped that the findings of this inquiry and their accompanying recommendations will further strengthen partnership efforts and reduce missed opportunities for children in the future.

The observations and analysis presented in this report were informed by robust research processes through which all information was considered by partners across a range of expertise. The majority of these observations are grounded in a solid evidence base.

However, in recognition of the smaller sample

size for the cohort, some observations are made as informed assumptions. Consequently, this report does not contain all the answers, but it does raise additional pertinent questions that warrant further exploration. Nevertheless, the scale of the work undertaken to gather such a comprehensive amount of information about these children should not be underestimated. We are grateful for the sustained commitment shown by all partners throughout this inquiry. Without their efforts, this work would not have been possible.

As demonstrated in the body of this report, there were a number of key recurring themes identified across the cohort. The following sections provide a summary of each theme accompanied by recommendations. However, these recommendations cannot and will not resolve the full breadth of challenges identified throughout the inquiry. The purpose of this report has been to communicate the issues and provide an evidence base for understanding the challenges experienced by vulnerable children exposed to criminality and exploitation.

To progress the findings of the report and respond with solutions, further work and ownership will be required of the partners who contributed throughout this process. As a retrospective examination, we recognise that partners will have made some changes to their processes, practices and provisions. These changes should also be examined against the recommendations to understand if they address effectively any of the themes identified within the report.

We propose that this work takes place under the arrangements of Gwent Regional Safeguarding Board, with a task and finish group convened to report progress against an action plan informed by the recommendations provided. It is our view that this report provides an evidence base to consider policy and practice development at both a national and local level. Indeed, for agencies outside of Gwent, we hope that these recommendations will offer a starting point to test and explore these findings within their own areas.

## 1) Key Characteristics

The average age of children within the cohort was 15-years-old. However, the point at which their started displaying disruptive behaviours and disengaged from school occurred much earlier.

For boys, who represented the majority of the cohort, the average age at which their behaviour escalated was 11 years old. The girls in the cohort were slightly older, with disruptive behaviour starting at age 13.

These findings make clear the need to adopt an early intervention and prevention approach when working with vulnerable children experiencing significant challenges.

Taking the cohort of boys as an example, the four years between the ages of eleven and fifteen saw their behaviours and exposure to exploitation increase gradually to the point of what is now of significant concern. Had collective initiatives been in place to support these children at home, in school or in care, these outcomes may have been avoided.

Throughout this inquiry, it was found that services often worked in silos and relied on information drawn from their own internal databases. This approach ultimately limits the potential range of support services can provide to vulnerable children, as they cannot gain a full understanding of the circumstances and issues they are experiencing in life.

In seeking to improve outcomes for children, services should gather and share information with all relevant partners. This process should start for all agencies from the point at which they have identified concerns about the child. When sharing information during the inquiry, it was found that not all agencies were aware of certain children.

However, had all services known about the children and their challenges, more could have been done to support them. We must not miss these opportunities again.

## Recommendations

- Welsh Government to improve the definition of “cause of concern”, recognising that these “causes” can occur at any point in a child’s life and must receive a service response.
- All agencies to review their current arrangements for early identification and prevention and multi-agency information sharing in relation to the findings of this report, with focus on whether criminally exploited children are considered appropriately in these arrangements.
- Psychology services to continue existing work into the ways in which experiences of poverty can shape or influence disruptive behaviours and share findings to develop multi-agency interventions.

## 2) Trauma within the Home

Across the cohort, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) could be identified in the majority of the cases reviewed.

Of those ACEs, witnessing domestic abuse at home was one of the defining trigger points for escalating behaviour and disengagement from school.

Following incidents of domestic abuse, children in the cohort were more likely to display challenging behaviours in school and wider community.

As such, these children were at higher risk of being excluded from school and becoming involved in criminality.

Witnessing domestic abuse also saw an increase in missing episodes and subsequent exposure to exploitation for the children.

Additionally, for children placed into care, the transition into a residential children’s home was soon followed by escalating behaviours and exploitation.



## Recommendations

- The OPCC to lead on a scoping exercise to determine what support is available for children identified as victims of abuse, including efficacy of support and current gaps in service provision.
- Children's Services, Education and the OPCC to establish a task and finish group (further referred to as the Systems Change Group) to explore opportunities for whole system changes and service enhancements relating to the report's findings. This work to be shared with Welsh Government.

## 3) Challenges in Education

Information shared by Education partners revealed that school attendance fell dramatically for the cohort following the transition from primary to secondary school. It also showed that attendance often saw a significant decline after children moved to a new secondary school, as well as in their final year of education.

Falling attendance between primary to secondary school and following a school move was attributed to the removal of a trusted adult for the children. Consistent with the findings on ACEs, attendance frequently fell after children witnessed domestic abuse at home. The effect of experiencing domestic abuse often resulted in children behaving more disruptively in school and thus increased their risk of being excluded.

Furthermore, where exclusions did occur, these were found to take place within a short period. During this time, behaviour outside of school escalated to the point of criminality. In addition, all children in the cohort were identified as having special educational needs (SEN). This finding was consistent with the national trend of children with learning difficulties being at a higher risk of exclusion and involvement in crime. For many children in the cohort, challenges with SEN were further complicated by additional speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

Where children experienced SLCN, it was noted that there were particular issues with them being able to integrate into their school communities.

## Recommendations

- Systems Change Group to consider requirements for supporting vulnerable children in the transition between primary and secondary school, recognising the need for a trusted adult to provide stability during this time.
- Systems Change Group to consider resourcing requirements for a service providing vulnerable children with the support of a trusted adult during school holidays. This service must be tailored to meet the needs of children with the experiences and trauma identified in this report.
- Systems Change Group to review the multi-agency provision of specialised additional services to children who struggle in mainstream education. This work may be integrated alongside the work of a trusted adult and include on-site support.
- All agencies to ensure that provision (see above) meets both the educational requirements and wider needs of vulnerable children. Options may include in-class support, on-site support or alternative provision.
- Education to determine the positive factors affecting improvements in attendance for vulnerable children, including those considered for managed school moves. This work to be shared with Welsh Government to inform policy around managed moves.
- Education to work with Health and other partners to examine whether current support for children's additional learning needs, including SLCN, intervenes early, preventing occurrences where support is delayed until a child becomes known to and assessed by the Youth Offending Service.
- All relevant agencies to recognise escalating behaviours as symptomatic of emotional distress or trauma and prioritise response to the trauma, rather than the behaviour.
- Where behaviour such as offending occurs, all agencies to follow a trauma-informed response and adopt the enhanced case management model.

## 4) Criminality and Exploitation

When reviewing the patterns of offending for children in the cohort, it was clear that half-term and school holidays were key trigger points for escalating behaviours.

Following these periods, the children's behaviour and disengagement from school worsened rapidly.

Of all offending behaviours, ASB and criminal damage were the most common pre-cursors for later serious criminality across the cohort. Regarding exploitation, missing episodes often served as an indicator of risk for exploitation for the children.

Furthermore, it was found that experiences of exploitation were clearly gendered. That is, boys in the cohort were often criminally exploited, whereas the girls were exposed to sexual exploitation.

Finally, peer influence was identified as significant contributing factor for both increasing involvement in crime and exposure to exploitation.

Crucially, it was noted that peer groups often consisted of children with similar challenges and vulnerabilities. Indeed, many of the children in the cohort were known to be closely associated with each other.

These findings raised questions over how vulnerable children are grouped together through systemic approaches to safeguarding or managing behaviours (i.e. in care placements or pupil referral units).

### Recommendations

- Children's Services, Education and Gwent Police to develop further understanding about missing episodes in order to facilitate a better service response.
- Children's Services and Education to determine what interventions can be introduced to manage the adverse impact of association between vulnerable peers in environments that may increase exposure to criminality or exploitation (care placements or pupil referral units).

## Common experience matrix

	Domestic abuse	Neglect	Safeguarding involvement*	ALN (inc SLCN)	Low attendance	School exclusions	PRU placement	Care experience	Missing episodes	Exploited (criminal or sexual)
Child 1	x		x	x	x				x	x
Child 2	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Child 3	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Child 4		x		x	x	x			x	
Child 5		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Child 6				x	x					x
Child 7				x	x	x	x			
Child 8	x			x	x			x	x	x
Child 9	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x
Child 10	x		x	x	x	x	x			x
Child 11			x	x			x		x	x
Child 12	x	x		x	x	x		x		x
Child 13	x		x	x	x	x	x			x

\* including parental substance misuse, family dysfunction and offending/ASB concerns

## End notes

1. All information shared between partners was done so under Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
2. Chronology created for each child and young person through the NICHE system, containing only events of relevance notified to the Police.
3. WCCIS holds case specific information on CPR information, as well as referrals and support plans.
4. Used by all schools, the VAP calculates level of risk of disengagement based on attendance, attainment and behaviour.
5. SIMs is used by all schools to hold all of the relevant information on each student; this was used in this study for attendance data.
6. A database holding multi-agency information about children supported by the Youth Offending Team.
7. Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, accessed at <https://gov.wales/welsh-index-multiple-deprivation-full-index-update-ranks-2019>
8. Where behaviour is of particular concern, children are referred to BAC for short or long-term interventions before reintegrating back in to mainstream school.
9. Further detail on speech and learning difficulties as a risk factor for exposure to criminality and exploitation can be found in Section 3 of this report.
10. See <https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/resources/early-action-together-learning-network.html> for a wide body of research detailing the effect of ACEs.
11. Operation Encompass is an initiative whereby Gwent Police share intelligence with specified school staff following an incident of domestic abuse in the home.
12. Learning needs included Special Educational Needs (SEN), statemented or non-statemented, receiving School Action or School Action Plus.
13. Statistics for Wales, Permanent and Fixed-term Exclusions from Schools in Wales, 2016/17 (2018).
14. A recent report into child criminal exploitation, published by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, states that children at risk of being exploited require strengths-based, relationship driven interventions. This finding echoes the suggestion that a service should be in place to provide a trusted relationship to vulnerable children transitioning from primary to secondary school. For more detail, see Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, It Was Hard to Escape: Safeguarding Children at Risk of Criminal Exploitation (2020), p28.
15. School Action is an intervention whereby the school provide additional support or interventions that are additional to or separate from the regular curriculum. School Action Plus is a continuation of this support but has the added element of support provided by specialist services outside of the school.
16. See Youth Justice Board, Practice Advice: Speech, Language and Communication Needs in the Youth Justice System, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/speech-language-and-communication-needs-in-the-youth-justice-system/practice-advice-speech-language-and-communication-needs-slc-in-the-youth-justice-system> (2015).
17. As stated above, this increase in ASB during school holidays is consistent with wider trends reported by Gwent Police. The distinguishing factor is that for children

in the cohort, this offending behaviour acted as a trigger for further escalation and disengagement in school.

18. This issue with the NRM process is often abused by those who criminally exploit children. Consequently, children are encouraged to identify themselves as being exploited so that they can no longer be prosecuted for criminal activity, thus allowing them to be exploited further.

