



NEET Prevention through Early Risk Identification



Overview:

This report presents findings from the [NEET Risk Index: Methods Report](#), produced by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and commissioned by Youth Futures Foundation. It draws out insights of broader relevance to policymakers and the wider youth employment sector.

What is a Risk of NEET Indicator?

A Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) is an approach that uses data from sources such as education providers and local authorities to identify young people at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET).

It draws on indicators associated with higher NEET risk – such as attendance, attainment, and disadvantage – to identify young people who may need additional support. Those identified can then be monitored and offered targeted support, such as guidance or mentoring, to help them remain engaged in education or training and transition successfully into work or further study.

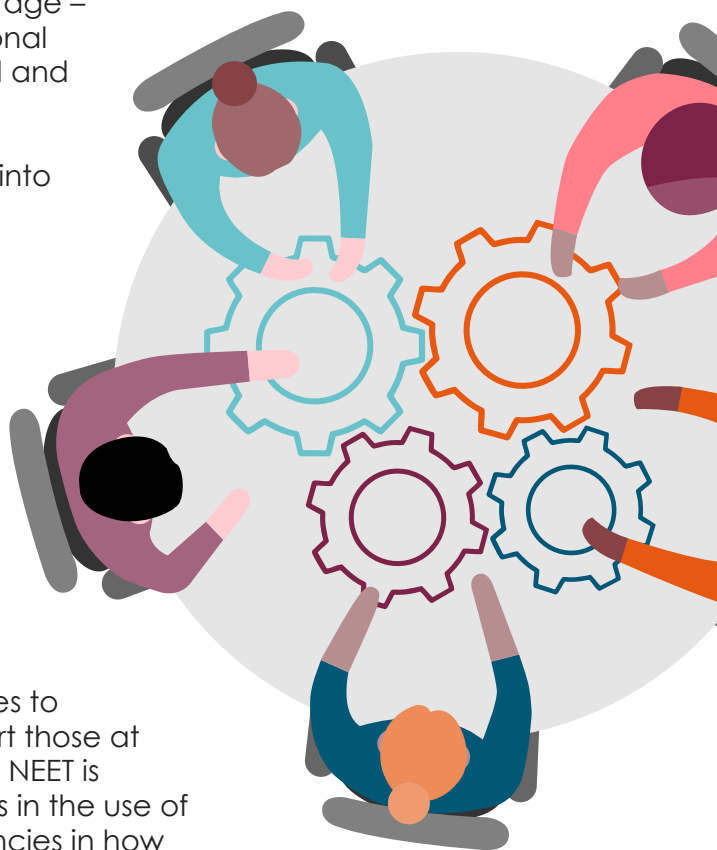
Department for Education's RONI framework and context

Local authorities have a statutory duty to support young people to participate in education or training and to reduce the number who become NEET. They must gather data on young people in their area to identify those not participating, or who may be at risk of disengaging, and to use this information to focus resources on those most in need.

Using a RONI approach can help local authorities to deliver their duties by intervening early to support those at risk, but there is significant variation in how risk of NEET is identified, tracked, and acted upon. Differences in the use of indicators and thresholds have led to inconsistencies in how information about young people at risk is captured and how those young people are subsequently supported.

In this context, the Department for Education's guidance on [Risk of NEET Indicators](#) for local authorities provides a valuable foundation for improving consistency and strengthening the uptake of more systematic RONI approaches.

The framework brings together a standard set of indicators—including attendance, attainment, exclusions, and other vulnerability markers—which can be adapted to suit local demographics, the needs of young people, and available data. These are gathered, typically from Year 10 onwards, to support early identification and monitoring of young people at risk of becoming NEET.



Designing an enhanced RONI tool

This project set out to develop an enhanced RONI tool to provide a more nuanced approach to understanding a young person's risk of becoming NEET by showing how much different indicators matter. By developing an evidence-based model for identifying and weighting relative risk indicators, this research complements and enhances existing frameworks, including DfE's RONI framework.

To achieve this, a statistical model was built using data from over one million children in England who left school between 2010 and 2012. The model estimates how each risk factor—such as school absence, Free School Meal eligibility, academic attainment, and type of Special Educational Needs— affects the likelihood of experiencing at least one 12-month period out of education, employment, or training between the ages of 16 and 24. The information can then be used alongside pupil level data to generate a scaled risk score from 0 to 100, reflecting a young person's likelihood of becoming NEET- thus supporting practitioners to identify emerging vulnerabilities early, target resources where they are most needed, and offer support before young people spend long periods out of education or work.

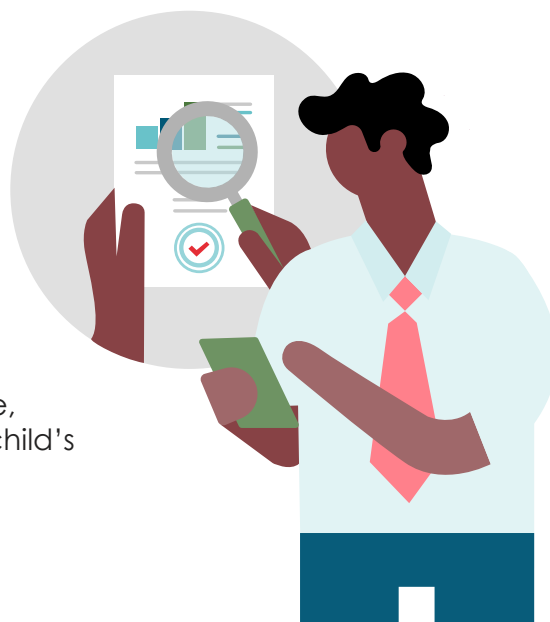


The updated tool, called NERI (NEET Early Risk Index) offers three main improvements to existing approaches:

<p>1. Earlier Identification</p>	<p>The index captures risk from Year 6, enabling targeted prevention earlier in the school journey. This improves on previous RONI approaches, which typically provide risk estimates beginning in Year 10. By updating a young person's risk profile as their circumstances change, it identifies emerging vulnerabilities sooner, increasing the window for timely, precise interventions and helping limit cumulative disadvantage. The graph at the end of this report illustrating the journeys of two young people (A and B) demonstrate the model's role in supporting those at risk of NEET.</p>
<p>2. Improved accuracy</p>	<p>Rather than treating each factor as having equal risk to a young person's NEET outcome, this new tool provides a more accurate estimate of an individual's risk of becoming NEET by weighting factors according to their known and relative impact on NEET outcomes. It enables users and policymakers to understand how combinations of factors contribute to disengagement and where early support is most effective.</p>
<p>3. Greater use of existing data</p>	<p>This tool draws exclusively on existing educational data (the National Pupil Database) that is readily available, removing the additional burden of further resources for additional data collection. The required data is already gathered for all students in England and compiled centrally by government, making this tool immediately scalable to the whole country.</p>

Findings from building NERI

This updated approach allows the relative importance of different factors to be quantified, highlighting those indicators which are the strongest drivers of NEET. The next section of this report focuses on a selection of the most influential risk factors identified through building NERI: educational attainment, socio-economic disadvantage, and special educational needs. Other factors included in the model are persistent absence, school exclusion, and whether English is the child's first language.



1. Risk linked to educational attainment

Educational attainment emerged as the strongest predictor of a young person becoming NEET. Among young adults aged 16–24, only 4% of those who achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A*–C (including English and Maths) experienced a period of being NEET, compared to 33% of those with fewer than five A*–C grades¹. In the model’s dataset, 19% of young people fell into the latter group, highlighting a substantial population at higher risk.

Even after accounting for other risk factors, GCSE attainment remained highly influential. Young people who did not achieve any GCSEs were over five times more likely to experience a period NEET than those who achieved five or more A*–C grades.

Earlier educational attainment also plays an important role in predicting NEET outcomes. While Key Stage 2 attainment loses much of its independent predictive power once GCSE outcomes are taken into account – highlighting the critical role of secondary school performance in shaping NEET risk – KS2 results still usefully provide an early indicator of later vulnerability.

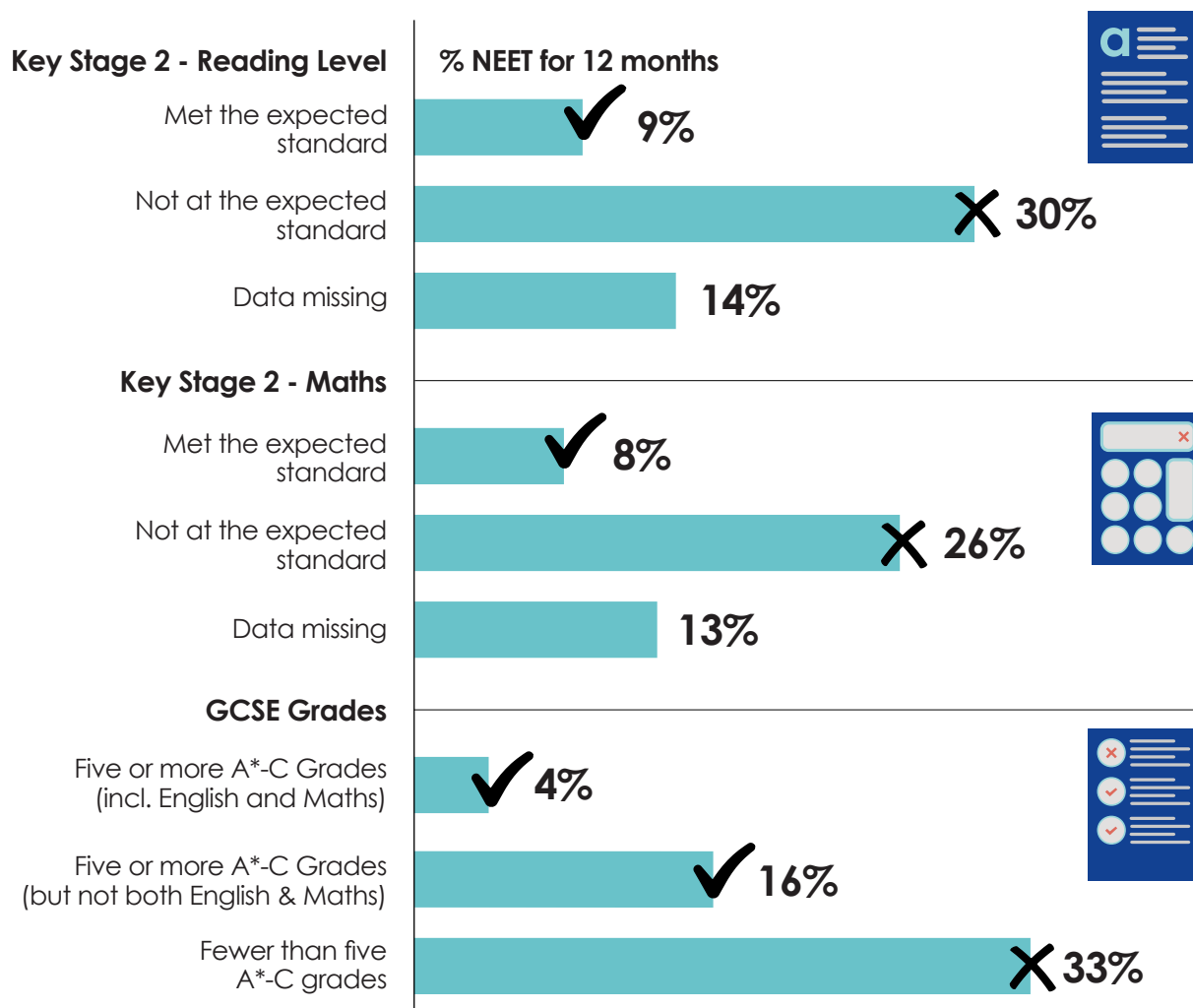
At the end of Year 6, just 9% of pupils who met the expected standard in Key Stage 2 Reading went on to experience a continuous 12-month period NEET, compared to 30% of those who did not. The pattern is similar in Maths, with 8% of pupils meeting the standard experiencing NEET, compared with 26% of those below it. When accounting for other factors, Maths emerged as the stronger predictor, with lower attainment linked to roughly double the likelihood of being NEET, whilst the increase associated with reading is closer to 1.3 times.



¹ A grade A* to C is equivalent to a grade 9 to 4 in the updated Department of Education grading system, for more information see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-grade-scale-explained/gcse-9-to-1-grade-scale-explained>

Educational attainment

Percentage of young people who spent a continuous 12-month period NEET between ages 16 and 24, among those in Year 11 in school years 2010/11 and 2011/12



Source: NatCen analysis of the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) dataset. Standard Extract V2. Analysis draws on two cohorts of children – who were in Year 11 in 2010/11 and 2011/12.

2. Risk linked to socio-economic disadvantage

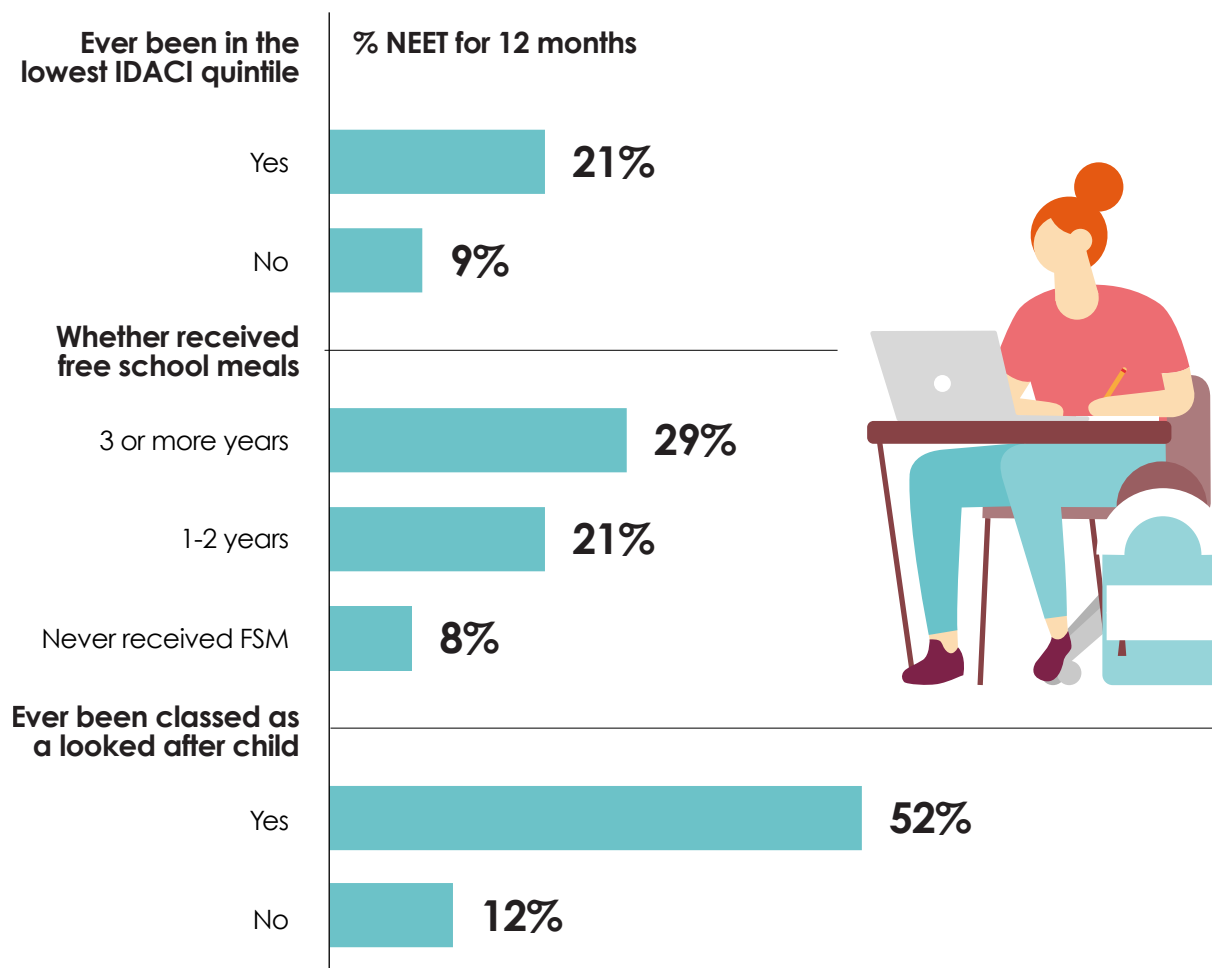
Young adults who were ever eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) were more likely to experience NEET, and the risk increased the longer a young person remained eligible. In the data, 8% of those never eligible for FSM were NEET, compared to 21% of those eligible for 1–2 years and 29% of those eligible for 3+ years. Accounting for other factors in Year 11, young adults eligible for FSM for 1–2 years were 1.8 times more likely to experience NEET, rising to 2.2 times for those eligible for 3+ years. The estimated NEET risk associated with being eligible for FSM was even higher in models measuring the risk between Year 6 and Year 10, as they did not include the GCSE attainment results.

Young people who had ever been classed as a Child Looked After (CLA) were also at substantially increased risk of being NEET. In the data, 52% of young people who had been looked after for at least one day during a school year went on to experience a period of being NEET, compared to 12% of those who were never CLA. Even when taking into account other factors, having ever been CLA almost tripled the risk (2.9 times), with even higher relative risk observed in earlier years before accounting for GCSE attainment. For example, in Year 6, children who had ever been looked after were four times more likely to become NEET than those who had never been in care.



Socio-economic disadvantage

Percentage of young people who spent a continuous 12-month period NEET between ages 16 and 24, among those in Year 11 in school years 2010/11 and 2011/12



Source: NatCen analysis of the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) dataset. Standard Extract V2. Analysis draws on two cohorts of children – who were in Year 11 in 2010/11 and 2011/12.

Footnote: IDACI (the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) measures how many children in a local area live in low-income households. The lowest IDACI quintile means areas that fall within the most deprived 20%; those with the highest proportion of children growing up in low-income families.

3. Risk linked to special educational needs (SEN)

Special Educational Needs (SEN) presents a complex pattern of NEET risk, varying by type of need. The model identified that young people with profound, multiple, or severe learning difficulties had the highest rates of becoming NEET, followed by those with autistic spectrum disorder.

After accounting for other factors such as GCSE attainment and socio-economic factors, young people with profound, multiple, or severe learning difficulties, and those with autistic spectrum disorder, remain at substantially higher risk of being NEET, with odds around 2.6 and 2.2 times higher respectively than those without SEN.

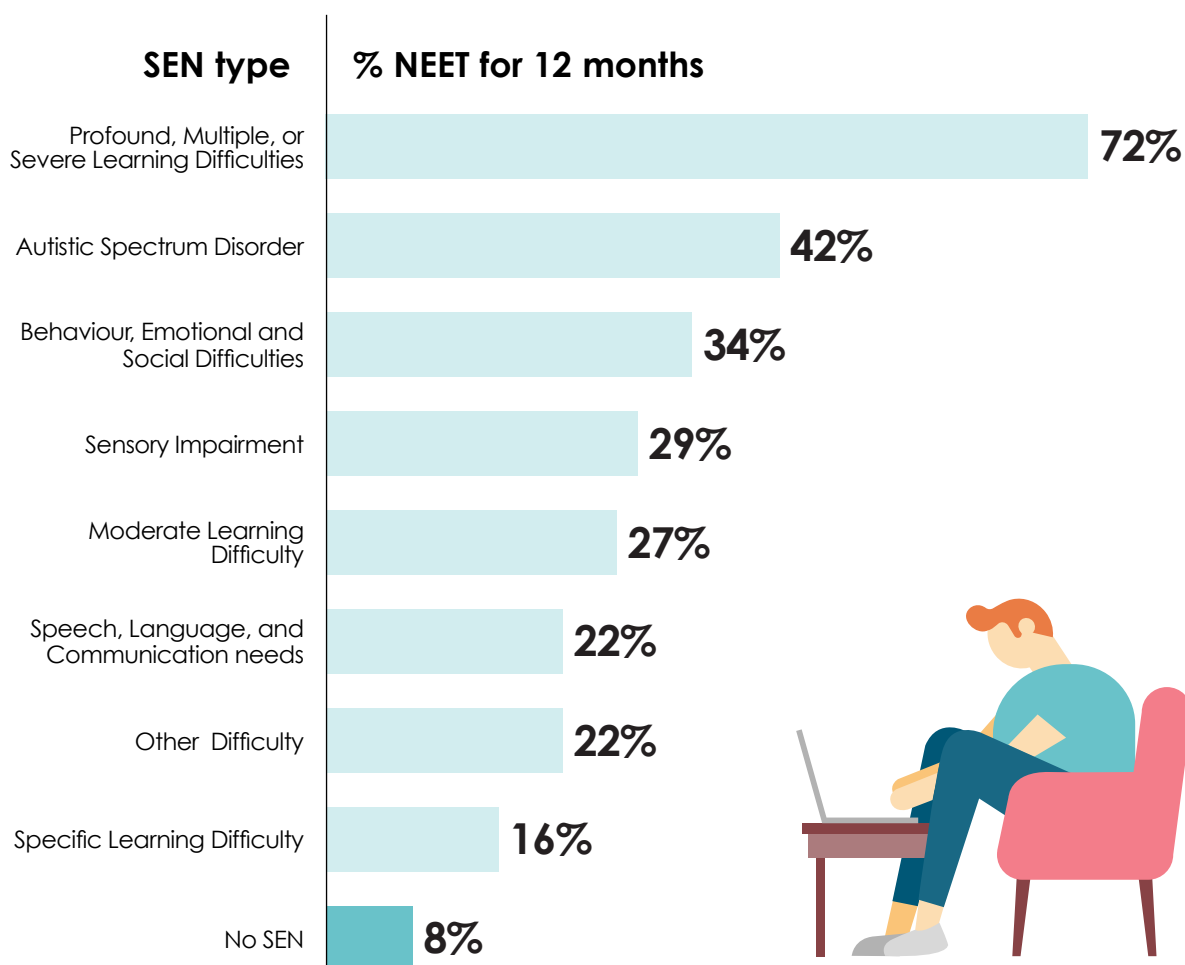
By contrast, young people with specific learning difficulties - such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, or other language disorders – were more likely to be NEET overall (16% compared to 8% for peers without SEN). However, once attainment and background are accounted for, their risk is similar to that of young people without SEN. This lower observed risk may reflect the effect of early, targeted support that helps sustain young people's engagement and transition more smoothly into post-school pathways.

These patterns highlight that different types of SEN carry different levels of NEET risk. Distinguishing between them allows interventions and additional resources to be targeted to those most likely to experience extended periods out of education, employment, or training



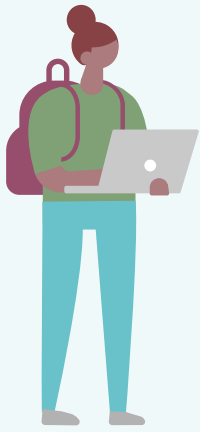
Special education needs

Percentage of young people who spent a continuous 12-month period NEET between ages 16 and 24, among those in Year 11 in school years 2010/11 and 2011/12



Source: NatCen analysis of the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) dataset. Standard Extract V2. Analysis draws on two cohorts of children – who were in Year 11 in 2010/11 and 2011/12.

Young person A - Consistently High Risk



This young person has been **eligible for free school meals (FSM)** throughout their school years, as well as being **a child looked after (CLA)**.



From primary school onwards, they have **frequent absences and exclusions** from schools each year.

68

At the end of primary school, **they did not meet the expected standards** in either English or Maths at Key Stage 2. **Their NEET risk is already high - around 68** in Year 6, 7, and 8 - and remains at a similar level in Year 9 and Year 10.

80

Caseworkers only receive an official high-risk flag in Year 10, meaning **support arrives too late to make a meaningful difference**. The pupil ultimately fails all GCSEs and **finishes Year 11 with an elevated NEET risk score of 80**.

Young person B - Risk Reduced Through Early Support



This young person has a similar risk profile in the earliest years but here **caseworkers identify him as at risk from Year 6**, allowing support to begin much sooner.



Although they cannot change underlying factors such as FSM eligibility, **they work with him to improve his school attendance**.

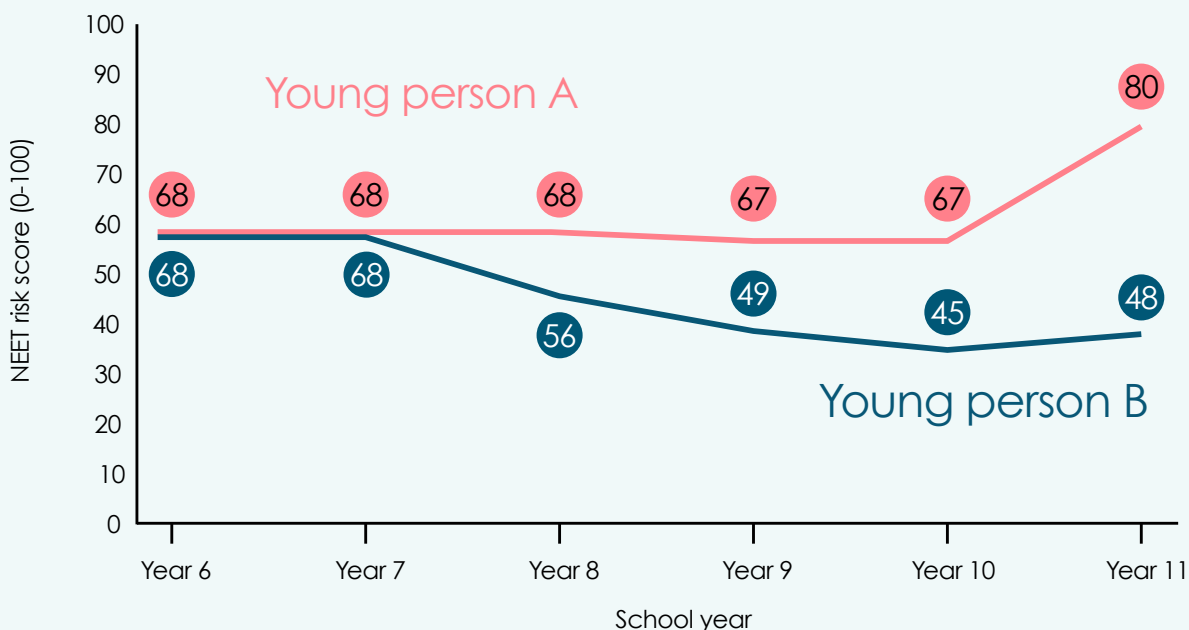
68
56
45

His NEET risk remains 68 in Year 7, but then **falls steadily**: to 56 in Year 8, 49 in Year 9, and 45 in Year 10.

48

He completes his GCSEs with five or more passes (A*-C), including English and maths, and finishes Year 11 with a reduced NEET risk of 48.

Estimated risk of becoming NEET





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