



Oversight and Governance

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CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL – SUPPLEMENT PACK

Thursday 14 November 2024
11.00 am
Warspite Room, Council House

Members:

Councillor Reilly, Chair

Councillor Wood, Vice Chair

Councillors Mrs Beer, Gilmour, Krizanac, McLay, McNamara, Simpson, Steel, Stephens and Tippetts.

Please find additional information enclosed.

Tracey Lee
Chief Executive

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

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|---|------------------------|
| 6. Educational Attendance in Plymouth: | (Pages 1 - 28) |
| 7. Alternative Provision Assurance Report: | (Pages 29 - 42) |
| 10. Child Exploitation and the Philomena Protocol: | (Pages 43 - 50) |

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	14 November 2024
Title of Report:	Educational Attendance in Plymouth
Lead Member:	Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Interim Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Isabelle Kolinsky
Contact Email:	Isabelle.kolinsky@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	Children missing full time education and pupil mobility report
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To provide the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel with a breakdown of key metrics for children's attendance in Plymouth. The paper covers areas including severe absence, pupil mobility, part time timetables and children missing education.

Recommendations and Reasons

For the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel to note the report.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. NA for information only.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The ambition of Plymouth's 'Bright Future' plan is for all our children to live full and happy lives. The plan recognises the importance of the local area partnership working together to ensure that children are supported by a system which works seamlessly to spot difficulties early, responds quickly and effectively, and makes sure that help is there for as long as it is needed. The learning from this paper is being used across the local area partnership to plan and deliver collaborative, evidenced based approaches and support our collective ambition for children.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

NA for information only.

Financial Risks

NA for information only

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

NA for information only.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

NA for information only.

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Lisa Linscott											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 07/11/2024											
Cabinet Member approval: Cllr Cresswell approved verbally											
Date approved: 07/11/2024											

Pupil attendance

Date: 24th October 2024

Author: Isabelle Kolinsky



1.0. Introduction

1.1. Plymouth's Corporate Plan sets out a commitment to keeping children and families safe, alongside improving education; providing high quality services and engaging communities and empowering staff. We have agreed a vision with our partners, set out in 'A Bright Future 2021-26.' The plan recognises the importance of the local area partnership working together to ensure that children are supported by a system which works seamlessly to spot difficulties early, responds quickly and effectively, and makes sure that help is there for as long as it is needed.

1.2. Many children in Plymouth have a positive experience of school and experience good outcomes. However, we know that some children are not yet well enough supported and included to achieve their full potential. We want all children and their families to benefit from provision in their local communities which meets their needs and helps them to make good progress. This is particularly the case for children who may be more vulnerable to poor outcomes because of their family circumstances or their additional needs.

1.3. This paper provides a deep analysis of school attendance, with a particular focus on severe absence; part time timetables, Children Missing Education and pupil mobility. The attendance strategy is being used across the local area partnership to plan and deliver collaborative, evidenced based approaches, which prevent children from missing or missing out on education and support our collective ambition for children.

2.0. School Attendance in Plymouth

2.1. Over the last 3 academic years Plymouth's overall rates of attendance have consistently sat below national and regional benchmarks. In 2023/24 the Department for Education launched a national data hub for school attendance and pupil absence, providing experimental statistics. In August 2024, daily attendance reporting by schools to the Department for Education became statutory and we now have a reliable data set which enables Plymouth City Council to track school level attendance data on a weekly basis.

2.2. Comparative data provided by the Department for Education in respect of Autumn and Spring Terms 2021/22 – 2023/24 shows that rates of overall absence and persistent absence both nationally, regionally and locally are improving (appendices 1 - 3). In 2022/23 Plymouth's rates of absence improved more rapidly than regional and national benchmarks. 2023/24 Plymouth's rate of persistent and overall absence reduced at a slower rate than regional and national benchmarks. Rates of severe absence have risen nationally, regionally and locally year on year.

2.2.1. Overall absence:

- 2021/22 Plymouth 8.8%, South-West 8.0% and England 7.4%
- 2022/23 Plymouth 8.1% (a reduction of 0.7%), South-West 7.6% (reduction of 0.4%) and England 7.3% (reduction of 0.1%).
- 2023/24 Plymouth 8.1% (no change on previous year), South-West 7.4% (reduction of 0.2%) and England 6.9% (reduction of 0.5%).

2.2.2. Persistent absence:

- 2021/22 Plymouth 29.9%, South-West 24.7% and England 22.3%.
- 2022/23 Plymouth 24.4% (a reduction of 5.4%), South-West 21.9% (reduction of 2.8%) and England 21.2% (reduction of 1.1%)
- 2023/24 Plymouth 23.1% (a reduction of 1.3%), South-West 20.3% (1.6%) and England 19.2% (reduction of 2%).

2.2.3. Severe absence

- 2021/22 Plymouth 1.9%, South-West 1.8%, England 1.5%
- 2022/23 Plymouth 2.3% (increase of 0.4%), South-West 2.2% (increase of 0.4%), England 1.9% (increase of 0.4%). The increase in the rate in Plymouth was on a par with national and regional benchmarks.
- 2023/24 Plymouth 2.9% (increase of 0.4%), South-West 2.6% (increase of 0.4%), England 2.1% (increase of 0.3%)

3.0. Delivering the attendance strategy for Plymouth

3.1. Plymouth's attendance strategy, which is aligned with the Place-Based plan, was launched in November 2023 and sets out the commitment of all partners to ensuring that all children and young people are given the best possible start in life and that they attend school regularly. The strategy sets an ambitious target of 96% attendance across the city. Following the launch of the strategy Plymouth's Service Manager for Inclusion and Welfare has held termly Attendance Networks with school attendance leads. These have been designed and delivered in partnership with schools and Children's Social Care Early Help and Targeted Support Teams. Through the network we share best practice and raise the profile of attendance in Plymouth.

3.2. Throughout the academic year 2023/24 our Place-Based approach has been focused on inclusion, particularly the attendance, mobility and outcomes for children who experience disadvantage or who have special educational needs. As a result, the Attendance Team Plan has been written in order to drive forward the strategy. The plan was approved by the Plymouth Education Board in June 2024. The plan is being delivered at pace, working with schools, families and multi-agency partners to implement consistent, graduated responses to children and young people who are not attending school regularly.

3.3. The headteacher conference held in October 2024, provided an opportunity for school and trust leaders to develop each of the six strands of the Place-Based plan of which the development of a belonging framework specifically targets raising school attendance through developing increasing relational practices with families and schools. In addition, the deep dive reporting of persistent and severe absence, elective home education, suspensions and permanent exclusion will continue to drive the attendance strategy.

3.4. In September 2024 the national rate of attendance was 94.5%. Early analysis taken from Plymouth's inclusion scorecard identifies the rate of attendance in Plymouth as below the national benchmark. Despite this, attendance across all schools in the city has showed early signs of improvement. In September the rate of overall attendance increased to 93.98%; a 0.13% increase when compared to the same period the previous year (93.85%). The rate of persistent absence (attendance below 90%) fell by 1.72% from 20.38% to 18.66%. This means that more children are attending school regularly in Plymouth.

3.5. Severe absence (attendance below 50%) is on the rise nationally and continues to be a stubborn issue in Plymouth. In September 2024, the rate of severe absence was 2.65%. An

increase of 0.27% when compared to the same period in 2023/24. Whilst severe absence is going down in Plymouth primary schools it is increasing in secondary and special schools.

3.6. In September 2024 the national overall attendance rate in primary schools was 95.8%. In Plymouth the rate was 95.63%; this is broadly in line with the national average and represents an improvement of 0.05% when compared to the same period the previous year. The rate of children who were persistently absent from Plymouth primary schools fell by 1.49% to 14.54% when compared to the same period the previous year (16.03%). Severe absence in primary schools also fell by 0.02% to 1.01% (1.03% in September 2023) (appendix 4).

3.7. In September 2024 the national overall attendance rate in secondary schools was 93.2%. In Plymouth the rate was 92.34%; whilst this is below the national benchmark it represents an improvement of 0.36% when compared to the same period the previous year. The rate of children who were persistently absent from Plymouth secondary schools fell by 2.23% to 22.57% when compared to the same period the previous year (24.80%). The rate of severe absence has increased in Plymouth secondary schools and rose by 0.33% to 4.09% when compared to September 2024 (3.76%) (appendix 5).

3.8. In September 2024 the national overall attendance rate for special schools was 88.6%. In Plymouth the rate was 89.38%: 0.78% better than the national benchmark. Despite this improvement, the rate of attendance in Plymouth special schools fell by 1.12% when compared to the same period the previous year. The rate of children who were persistently absent from Plymouth special schools increased by 0.38% to 29.74%. The rate of severe absence has also increased and rose by 2.34% to 5.17% when compared to September 2023 (2.83%) (appendix 6).

3.9. School attendance is a priority for all schools and teams across Children's Services. Multi agency work to support pupils who are severely absent has been a focus of targeted support meetings. These meetings have been held in partnership with schools, Access and Attendance Officers and Early Help workers. The 0-25 SEND Team will begin to attend termly targeted support meetings, where need is greatest, from the summer term to ensure joint planning in respect of children with Education Health and Care Plans and absence (see 4.3 and 4.4).

3.10. The Department for Education publishes statutory guidance in respect of school attendance and pupil absence ([updated August 2024](#)). The guidance strengthens the role of the local authority with regards to its working arrangements with schools and multi-agency partners. Decisive action is being delivered through the Attendance Strategy and Team Plan as we work together to improve school attendance. We continue to work with schools and multi-agency partners to deliver training; for example, developing a support first approach to attendance casework. We are also continuing to embed evidenced based best practice to support families and remove barriers to attendance as well as promote the importance of school attendance in Plymouth through media campaigns and in the early years.

4.0. Severe absence in Plymouth

4.1. Whilst overall attendance in Plymouth is showing signs of improvement, the number of children who are severely absent from school has risen by 1% in Plymouth over the last three academic years (appendix 7 and 8). These children are missing out on at least 50% of their education due to their absence from school.

4.2. All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to an efficient, full-time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have. Children missing out on full time education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET)

later in life. Plymouth City Council is committed to supporting school leaders, settings and practitioners to ensure that all children in Plymouth are supported to receive the education to which they are entitled.

4.3. Plymouth schools each have a single point of contact within the Attendance Team. The Access and Attendance Officer will meet at least once every 6 weeks with each school in their locality to provide information, advice and guidance on matters relating to school attendance. Using data from the DfE and the Plymouth Inclusion Scorecard; Access and Attendance Officers support schools to share best practice and use data to analyse strengths and areas for development. By understanding the drivers of pupil absence, we can work collaboratively to remove barriers to attendance. The meeting also provides an opportunity to discuss and agree casework referrals for severely absent children with a specific focus on those known to Children's Social Care and those with additional vulnerabilities such as SEND. The 0-25 SEND Team will also begin to attend termly Targeted Support Meetings to ensure joint planning in respect of children with Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs) who have poor attendance. In addition to the termly Targeted Support meetings, Access and Attendance Officers have been using data from the Inclusion Scorecard and Eclipse to have targeted early help conversations with each school on a fortnightly basis to discuss and agree plans for our severely absent, missing and vulnerable children and young people.

4.4. Using national data as a benchmark, Access and Attendance Officers conduct regular analysis of attendance data to prioritise schools within their locality area to target support for severely absent pupils. Access and Attendance Officers then use both national and local data during their fortnightly conversations with identified schools to agree support and action.

5.0. Severe absence, Pupil Characteristics

5.1. In the Academic Year 2023/24, 1146 (3.2%) of Plymouth's statutory school age children had missed 50% or more of their education. When looking at the data in terms of gender there are no significant emerging themes with 580 females and 566 males having an attendance rate of less than 50%. 995 (86%) of severely absent children in 2023/24 identify as white British or white English. The data does not indicate any themes or trends in respect of black and minority ethnic groups.

5.2. Of the 1146 children who were severely absent from school:

- 633 (55.2%) were known to Children's Social Care in the past 6 years.
- 629 (54.9%) have had one or more episodes of child protection planning.
- 496 (43.3%) are entitled to Pupil Premium and/or free school meals.
- 488 (42.5%) had one or more suspension from school.
- 404 (35.2%) require Special Educational Needs Support in school.
- 304 (29.7%) had one or more episodes of part time timetable in school.
- 158 (13.8%) have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- 93 (8.1%) were permanently excluded from school.
- 27 (2.3%) are from service families.

6.0. Severe absence by year group

6.1. Whilst severe absence in primary schools has remained at an average 0.8% over the three academic years, the rate of severe absence in secondary schools has increased by 1.2% across the same period. The data for the academic year 2023/24 shows that severe absence rates more than doubled following the year 6-7 transition with a rise from 32 (2.7%) severely absent pupils in Year 6 to 83 (7.2%) in Year 7. Severe absence rates significantly rise again by a further 6.5% in Year 8.

Rates continued to rise through Years 9 and 10 and by Year 11, 265 (23.1%) pupils were severely absent (see Appendix 9).

7.0. Severe absence and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

7.1. Of the cohort of severely absent children in the city in 2023/24, 158 (13.8%) had an EHCP. Within the primary phase, there were 52 (4.5%) children with EHCPs. At secondary phase, this more than doubled to 106 (9.2%). Of the cohort 404 children (35.2%) require SEN Support. 45 (11.1%) of these children were within the primary phase. Of the 359 (88.9%) children recognised as needing SEN support in the secondary phase, 53.2% (191) were in years 10 and 11 (appendix 9).

7.2. **The Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP)** resource has been co-produced with families and partners across education, health and social care. It includes information and resources to support schools in their work with a specific chapter on collaborating with families. The resource clearly identifies what schools must do support all children and young people and this includes specific reference to school attendance. The universal provision described in the OAP is the offer created by schools to ensure they are inclusive by design and consistently work to reduce as many barriers as possible for children and families. This clearly allows schools and professionals to then identify where a child is making progress with a consistent universal offer and where extra targeted provision will need be given in a mainstream environment. Implementation and impact of the OAP will be monitored and evaluated through applications for targeted funding for individual children; feedback from the educational psychology service and specialist teachers via their termly consultations with SENCOs; parent surveys and a reduction in the number of children being withdrawn to home education.

7.3. Plymouth City Council has collaborated with special schools within the city to develop an outreach offer of support for mainstream schools. This was launched in September 2024. The outreach offer provides specialist advice and support to professionals in mainstream schools so that they can be equipped to meet the needs of complex children and/or cohorts within school; this will include consideration of barriers to school attendance. In September alone, 56 referrals from schools across the city were received, which indicates that there is an appetite across schools to better understand and meet the needs of children with SEND.

7.4. School leaders report children's mental health needs are having a significant impact on school attendance. At the Elective Home Education Task and Finish Group held on 23rd October 2024 the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) reported national, regional and local increases in significant mental health needs in children. However, Plymouth has not seen the rises in hospital admissions which are indicated by south-west and national benchmarks. In feedback to CAHMS, children have described that they feel neuro diversity is not always understood in schools. In response, mental health support teams in schools are supporting school staff with work around neurodiversity and reasonable adjustments. As part of their work CAHMS professionals also continue to develop their parental support offers.

7.5. The research [Frontiers | Parental stress in families of children with special educational needs: a systematic review \(frontiersin.org\)](https://www.frontiersin.org) identifies single parents, in particular females, who have children with SEND as facing increased levels of stress, overwhelm and social isolation. This can lead to withdrawal from engagement with schools. Emotional support is one of the main protective factors to supporting parents of children with SEND. It is important for professionals in schools to provide meaningful opportunities for parents to express their concerns, unmet needs, and worries. Parents also benefit from access to groups where they can share their experiences and hear from others. Evidence in Plymouth shows that there is a strong correlation between severe absence and elective home education. The home education task and finish group are using the analysis from the Elective Home Education deep dive report and individual school level intelligence to develop a risk matrix.

Development of the matrix is being led by a Multi-Academy Trust in Plymouth and will be piloted with schools in the city. If effective in supporting early identification, the methodology will be applied to other cohorts of children who are vulnerable to missing out on full time education in order to prioritise early help.

8.0. Severe absence and pupil mobility.

8.1. Of the 174 primary age children who were severely absent in 2023/24, 62 (35.6%) children attended two or more Primary Schools. Within the secondary age cohort of 972 pupils, 400 (41.1%) had two or more primary school moves. Of those 394, 192 (48%) then went on to have two or more school moves during their secondary education. 196 children became registered as Electively Home Educated (EHE) during the academic year 2023/24. A recent deep dive analysis of EHE has highlighted that children who were persistently and severely absent from school are more likely to become home educated.

9.0. Severe absence safeguarding and child protection

9.1. Severely absent children are amongst the most vulnerable. Of the 1146 children who were severely absent in 2023/24, 633 (55.2%) of them have been known to Children's Social Care as 'Child in Need' in the past 6 years. Sixty-nine children were open to Children's Social Care under the Child in Need category in 2023/24, and 36 children were subject to Child Protections Plans. Action is being taken to audit and dip sample this cohort to see whether there are common themes and opportunities to support children more effectively in removing barriers to attendance. The dip sample will be completed as a partnership between Children's Social Care and the Inclusion Attendance and Welfare Team in November 2024. The themes arising from the audit will be published as a 'learning on a page' in December 2024 and a briefing session for social workers will be delivered in January 2025.

9.2. A new Vulnerable Pupils Panel has also been set up with schools and multi-agency partners across the local area. The panel is a partnership between education, health, police and Children's Social Care, providing early help and prevention to support children, removing barriers to their access and engagement with education. The first panel meeting will be held on 15th November 2024.

9.3. In April 2023 Access and Attendance Officers co-located with the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) to fulfil the role of the dedicated decision maker for education. Working as part of the multi-disciplinary team has enabled improved information sharing in respect of individual children who are missing out full time education or at risk of exclusion. This is because pupil absence as a potential safeguarding risk is now explored consistently. Access and Attendance Officers also attend the multi-agency Daily Intelligence Briefing and share educational information about children who go missing. Working in this way improves joint planning for children who are missing out on full time education.

10.0. Severe Absence schools, neighbourhood and localities

10.1. There is a strong correlation between deprivation and severe absence. The west locality has the highest prevalence of severely absent children, accounting for 33.6% of the cohort.

10.2. Three mainstream secondary schools have disproportionately high rates of severe absence when compared to other schools in the city. Of the three schools the average rates of severe absence ranged between 8.3% and 8.9% of their statutory school aged cohort. A new framework to offer early help support to vulnerable cohorts of children in schools is under development. Using

data led insight the framework will prioritise schools for support. The framework is being developed between Plymouth's Early Help Team and the Inclusion, Attendance and Welfare Service. It will be piloted and evaluated in the Spring Term 2025.

10.3. Plymouth City Council is acting as system leader with schools and partners to develop inclusive practice and approaches to create the conditions for success and inclusion in schools in order to raise attendance. This is being achieved through a combination of System Change Projects which include priority 3 of the SEND Improvement Strategy and the development of the Place-Based plan. Priority area 3 of the SEND Improvement Strategy is focused on eliminating permanent exclusions for children with an Education, Health and Care plan and Strand 1 of the 'place-based' plan focuses on developing a 'belonging framework' so that parents and children feel an increasing sense of being welcome and included in their school communities in order to raise school attendance.

11.0. Part time timetables

11.1. All children have a right to a full-time, efficient education suitable to their age, ability and any special needs they may have. Part time timetables should be considered only within the context of a school's wider strategic planning for all pupils regardless of their needs. Schools have a statutory duty to provide full time education for all pupils unless the parent/carer chose to educate their child otherwise.

11.2. All pupils registered at school should receive full time education consistent with their key Stage. As a general rule this equates to:

- 21 hours at Key Stage 1
- 23.5 hours at Key Stage 2
- 24 hours at Key Stage 3
- 25 hours at Key Stage 4

11.3. A part time timetable requires agreement between the pupil, parent/carer and school. The number of hours spent in education must only be reduced for a time-limited period of no more than six weeks, unless there are exceptional circumstances which include professional advice from the multi-agency team around the child, for example, health professionals, the police or Children's Social Care.

12.0. Part time timetables in Plymouth

12.1. In Plymouth, schools notify the local authority of any child who is on a part time timetable using a notification form. The information is held on a central data base and children are tracked on a termly basis. Three-year trend data shows that the numbers of children on part time timetables in Plymouth is increasing. Data for this cohort is not captured nationally and as a result it is not possible to measure Plymouth's performance against national, regional or statistical benchmarks.

12.2. The rate of part time timetables in Plymouth is increasing (appendix 10). In academic year 2021/22, 615 children were placed on a part time timetable. This increased by 8.4% (54) to 669 in 2022/23. In 2023/24 the rate increased by 13% (93) to 762 children on a part time timetable.

13.0. Part time timetables - pupil characteristics

13.1. 762 children in Plymouth were on a part timetable in 2023/24. Males are disproportionately represented within the cohort at 63% (480). 37% (282) of the cohort were female.

13.2. The Department for Education expects that part time timetables will be used in very

limited circumstances i.e. because of a child's physical or mental health needs and the guidance is clear that part-time timetables should not be used as a strategy to manage a child's behaviour. This position is reflected in [guidance](#) published by Plymouth City Council. Where school leaders are found to use part time timetables as part of a behaviour management strategy, Access and Attendance Officers provide consultation, sign-posting and support so that children are returned to full-time education rapidly. This support is delivered through termly Targeted Support Meetings (see 4.3 and 4.4).

13.2.1. The reasons for males to be on a part time timetable were:

- Special Educational Needs and Disability, 43% (208)
- Behaviour, 25% (120)
- Reintegration, 19% (95)
- Medical, 12% (56)

13.2.2. The top three reasons for females to be on a part time timetable were:

- Reintegration, 28% (79)
- Medical, 28% (79)
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, 24% (67)
- Behaviour, 20% (57)

13.3. Based on the evidence, males with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are more likely to be placed on a part time timetable than their female counterparts. Of the males on a part timetable in 2023/24, 59% (285) of the cohort have received one or more suspension.

14.4. Of the females on a part time timetable in 2023/24, reintegration and medical needs have the highest prevalence within the cohort and represent 56% (combined) of reasons. Of the females, 44% (124) have received one or more suspension. A higher percentage rate of females with medical needs or who are being reintegrated to school are on a part time timetable than their male counterparts.

14.5. **Part time timetables by year group**

In secondary schools the highest rates of children on part time timetables were in Key Stage 4 and accounted for 43% (327) of the total cohort (762) (appendix 11). The rates remained stable throughout Key Stage 1 (145), Key Stage 2 (152) and Key Stage 3 (138). The numbers increase significantly in Key Stage 4.

15.0. **Part time timetables, hours and duration of provision**

15.1. Hours and duration of part time timetables are varied. The duration should not extend beyond 6 weeks unless there is a significant medical need which limits a child's ability to access a full-time education. In Plymouth 54% (412) of children in a part time timetable received 16 hours or more of education each week. A significant challenge is in respect of the duration of part time timetables. 71% (541) of children were on a part time timetable for more than 24 weeks.

15.2. Of the 762 children on a part time timetable in 2023/24:

- 54 (7%) received five or less hours per week of education.
- 134 (18%) received between six and 10 hours of education per week.
- 162 (21%) received between 11 and 15 hours of education per week.
- 306 (40%) received between 16 and 20 hours of education per week.
- 106 (14%) received between 21 and 25 hours of education per week.

15.3. Of the 762 part time timetables in 2023/24

- 18 had a duration of six weeks or less.
- 25 had a duration of seven-12 weeks
- 178 had a duration of 12 – 24 weeks.
- 541 had a duration of 24 weeks or more.

16.0. Part time timetables by school and academy trust

16.1. In 2023/24 all secondary schools in Plymouth had two or more children on a part time timetable. Four secondary schools within the cohort are overrepresented within the data with the highest numbers of children on part time timetables.

16.2. In 2023/24 53 of the 69 primary schools had one or more child on a part time timetable. Four primary schools within the cohort had a disproportionate number when compared to other mainstream primary schools.

16.3. In 2023/24, 98 children who attended a special school were placed on a part time timetable. Nine special schools had one or more children on a part time timetable however two special schools were over-represented when compared to other special schools. The two special schools with the highest numbers of children on part time timetables and account for 58% of the total cohort.

16.4. Three multi-academy trusts are over-represented within the data in respect of numbers of children on part time timetables. In order to understand reasons and address barriers at a Trust level, the Director for Education meets with the CEO of each Trust on an annual basis. From each meeting a set of improvement actions are agreed which also inform the strategic planning of inclusive approaches and best practice across the city.

16.5. Strand 4 of the 'place-based' plan for the 2024/25 academic year is the development of an early language acquisition project across the city. The aim of this work, based in the primary phase, will be to support children with social, emotional and mental health needs to develop their communication skills. The intended outcome will be a reduction in the number of children at risk of permanent exclusion, subject to part-time timetables and suspension as a result of improved ability to understand and communicate their feelings to key adults.

16.6. Strand 4 of the place-based plan for the 2024/25 academic year is the development of a Pre-16 Vocational Offer to support children in secondary schools to be able to access a curriculum which matches and meets their needs and aspirations. This offer will mean that a greater number of children at Key Stage 4 will be able to spend part of their week at school studying core subjects and part of their week at City College Plymouth undertaking a vocational route. A key impact of this strand, which is in the pilot phase, will be a reduction of children subject to a part-time timetable at Key Stage 4.

16.7. The Service Manager Inclusion and Attendance is exploring opportunities for Access and Attendance Officers to shadow targeted support meetings in good or outstanding local authorities to learn from best practice. Shadowing opportunities will take place in the Autumn term 2024 and complement the monthly dip sampling and learning from quality assurance activities.

17.0. Primary in-year pupil mobility

17.1. There are 69 mainstream primary schools in Plymouth. The School Admissions Team received 1926 in-year applications for children to move primary school in 2023/24. Of the 1926 applications, 1036 were from children currently attending a Plymouth school. The remaining 890 children were not registered at a Plymouth school. Within the dataset some Plymouth primary

schools are overrepresented with regards to the numbers of parents submitting applications to leave.

17.1.1. One Primary Academy had the highest proportion of parental requests to leave the school followed by three other schools. The 15 schools with the highest numbers had a combined number of 415 and accounted for 41% of the in-year parental requests to leave Plymouth primary schools.

18.0. The reasons for applying to leave a Plymouth school in-year, but not moving address, is categorised on the in-year school admissions form as follows:

- Unhappy in some way with the school.
- Behaviour (permanent exclusion or risk of permanent exclusion).
- Other reasons where the current school is not mentioned as an issue, e.g. distance, to be with a sibling, subjects offered at preferred school, etc.

18.1. It is important to consider in-year pupil movement as a percentage of the number on roll of a school. The in-year mobility analysis identifies 10 schools with the highest rates of parental requests to leave due to being unhappy with the school.

18.1.1 Two primary schools had disproportionately high rates of parents wanting to leave. The three schools with the highest rates of parents wanting to leave overall are in the west locality.

19.0. Secondary in-year pupil mobility

19.1. There are 19 mainstream secondary schools in Plymouth. Six schools make up a disproportionate number of applications to leave, with 60% of applications coming from only 32% of schools.

19.2. In 2023/24 The School Admissions Team received 1727 in year applications to move secondary school in-year. Of the 1727 applications; 804 applications were for children who were already attending one of the 19 mainstream secondary Plymouth schools. The remaining 923 children were not registered at a Plymouth school at the time of application.

19.3. Of the 804 applications for children currently attending a Plymouth school, 91 parents stated that the application was as the result of a house move and 713 were not moving. One secondary school in the west locality had the largest number of applications to leave. 9% of the applications stated that a house move was the reason for the request.

19.4. Of the 804 applications 88% (713) were not connected to a house move. Of the 713, 28% of applications were from year 7, 28% from year 8, 29% from year 9, 13% from year 10 and less than 1% from year 11 (Appendix 12). Of the 713 applications with no house move, 60% of the children came from six schools. Of the 713, 84% of the reasons given by parents for wanting to leave the school without a house move were due to unhappiness with the school.

19.5. Of the schools with the highest percentage rate of parents applying to leave:

- One school in the west locality had 7.4% of the school population request to leave the school via an in-year application to another school. 100% of the applications state that the reason for the move is due to unhappiness or risk of permanent exclusion.
- One school in the north locality had 6.4% of the school population request to leave the school via an in-year application to another school.
- One school in the west locality, 6.4% of the school population requested to leave the school via an in-year application to another school. 88% of the applications to leave one school state unhappiness with the school.
- One school in the east locality had 6.2% of the school population request to leave the school via an in-year application to another school.

20.0. Children missing education

20.1. A child missing education is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect and is at an increased risk of underachieving, being victims of abuse, being sexually exploited and becoming not in education, employment or training on reaching school leaving age. Local authorities have a duty to establish, as far as it is possible to do so, the identity of children of compulsory school age who are missing education in their area.

20.2. A child is classed as a Child Missing Education if they are:

- of compulsory school age; and
- not on a school roll; and
- not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being at school, for example, at home, privately or in alternative provision.

21.0 Children Missing Education in Plymouth

21.1. Nationally the rates of children missing education is increasing. This trend is reflected locally (appendix 13). The three-year trend shows the rates of Children Missing Education in Plymouth as lower than national and regional benchmarks.

21.2. In Plymouth 2023/24 there were 372 children who were recorded as Children Missing Education, this was an increase of 12 when compared to 2022/23 and 59 when compared to 2021/22. Of these:

- 172 (46%) were believed to have moved to another local authority area in England and did not provide a forwarding address.
- 126 (34%) moved to Plymouth from another local authority area; or had moved address in Plymouth and were waiting to start at a new school.
- 47 (13%) children moved abroad with no forwarding address.
- 28 (8%) children spent a period of time in unregistered provision following a permanent exclusion.
- 14 (4%) children were missing education following a period of unsuitable home education and were issued a Notice to Satisfy.
- Less than ten children have no reason recorded.
- Less than 10 moved to Plymouth from another country.
- Less than 10 were removed from school because of parental dissatisfaction with the school.

21.3. Children who move out area or abroad and whose parents do not provide a forwarding address are tracked by a CME caseworker. This includes liaison with other local authorities, the UK Border Force, the Department for Work and Pensions (benefits), national school census data and the National Health Service (GPs). The UK Border Force and the Police will support local authorities to trace children if there is sufficient evidence of a safeguarding concern.

22.0. Children missing education – vulnerability**22.1. Of the 372 CME in 2023/24:**

- 139 (37%) children have been registered at two or more Plymouth primary schools.
- 128 (34%) children were known to Children’s Social Care within the previous six-year period.
- 127 (34%) children have had one or more episodes of Child in Need.
- 103 (28%) children have been registered at two or more Plymouth secondary schools.
- 82 (22%) children require SEN Support.
- 73 (20%) children have received one or more suspension.
- 60 (16%) children are eligible for the Pupil Premium.
- 59 (16%) children are eligible for Free School Meals.
- 40 (11%) children have had one or more episodes of needing Child Protection.
- 40 (11%) children have had between one-and-two episodes of part time timetable.
- 40 (11%) have had two or more episodes of CME.
- 30 (8%) have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- 28 (8%) have been permanently excluded.

22.2. Of the 372 children missing education in 2023/24, 332 (89%) have been located and the case has been closed. Of the 40 (8%) children who have not yet been located 8 (20%) are believed to have moved abroad and 24 (60%) are believed to have move to another local authority area in England. Of the remaining children, support is in place to secure suitable, full time education.

22.3. Every child who lives in Plymouth and who is referred as a Child Missing Education has an allocated Officer from the Inclusion, Attendance and Welfare Team who will hold the case and undertake casework until the child is receiving a suitable, full-time education. The Officer will liaise with the family and the professional team around the child to ensure that the right support is in place to secure the child’s education.

Next steps

What	Who	When
Write the Plymouth Place-Based plan following conference feedback from Headteachers.	Rob Williams, Place-Based Co-ordinator.	15 December 2024

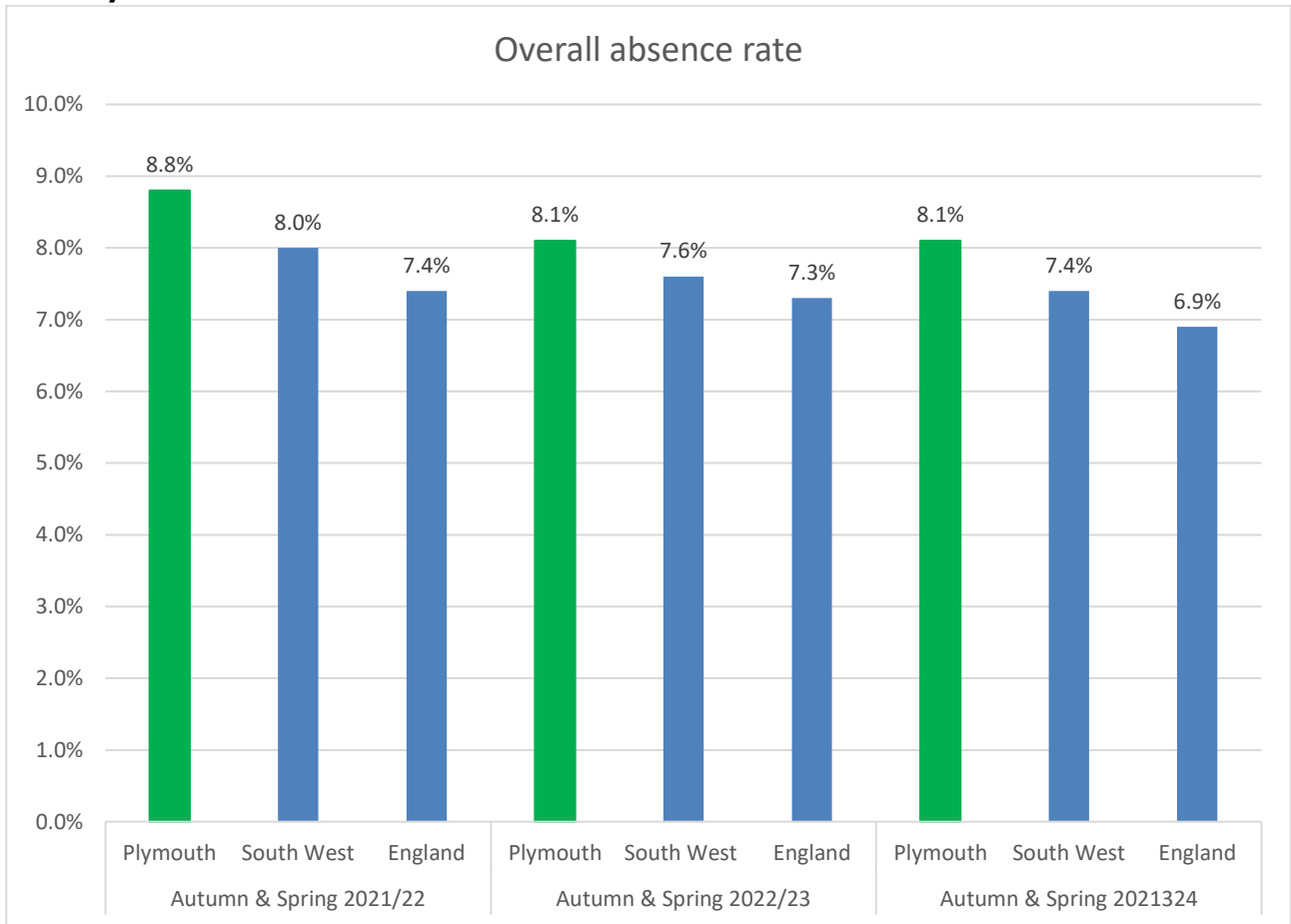
Complete a multi-agency practice review in respect of permanently excluded children.	Isabelle Kolinsky, Service Manager, Inclusion and Attendance.	30 November 2024
Report the findings of the practice review to the Quality Assurance Delivery Group of the Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership.	Isabelle Kolinsky, Service Manager, Inclusion and Attendance.	17 December 2024
Deliver the attendance professional development programme for schools and multi-agency partners.	Isabelle Kolinsky, Service Manager, Inclusion and Attendance.	1 December 2024 – 15 July 2025
Evaluate the impact of the Vulnerable Pupils Panel on the number of part-time timetables and permanent exclusions within the current academic year.	Isabelle Kolinsky, Service Manager, Inclusion and Attendance.	15 July 2025

Author: Isabelle Kolinsky, Service Manager Inclusion and Welfare,

Date: 24 October 2024

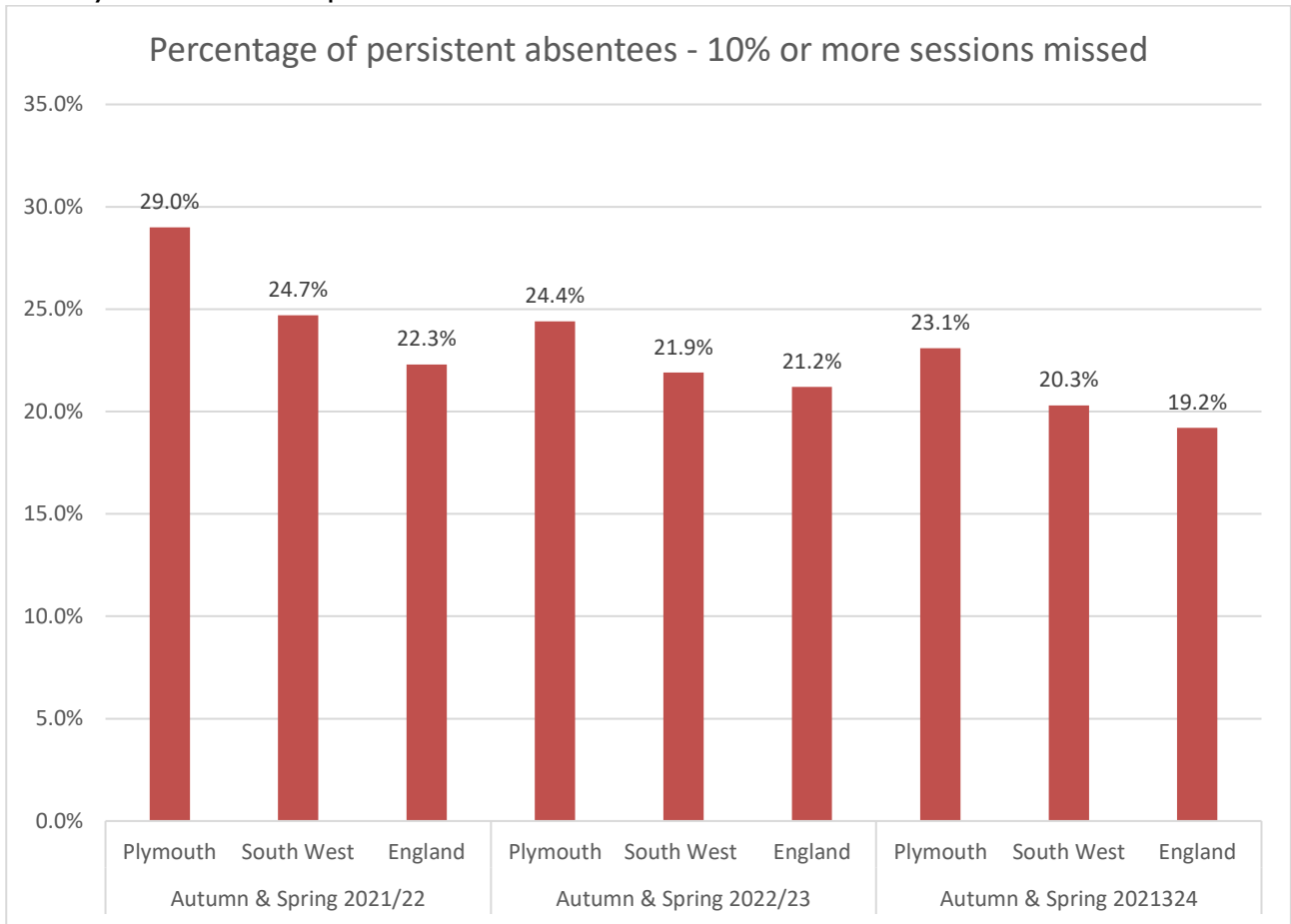
Appendix I

Three-year trend data – overall absence



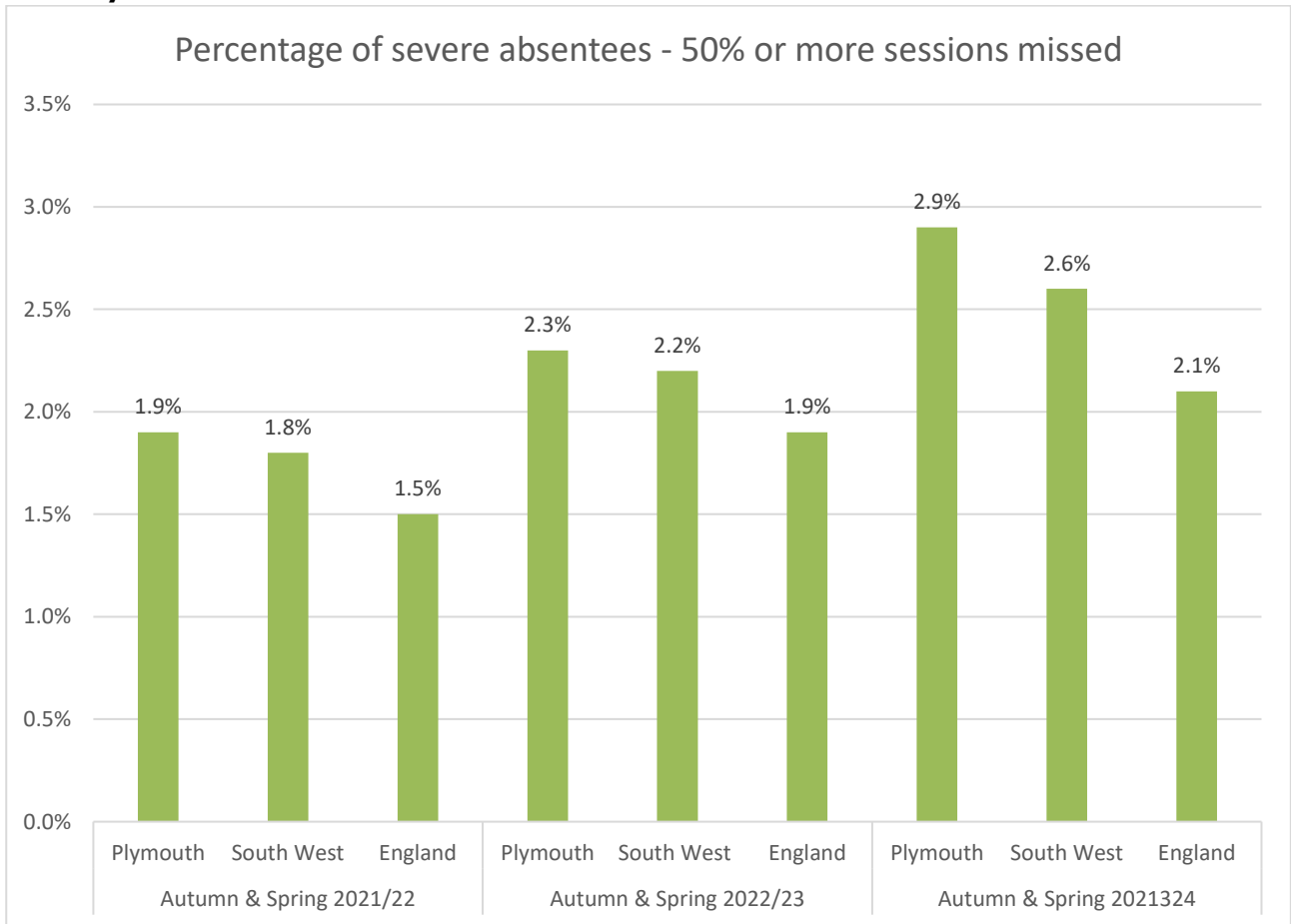
Appendix 2

Three-year trend data – persistent absence



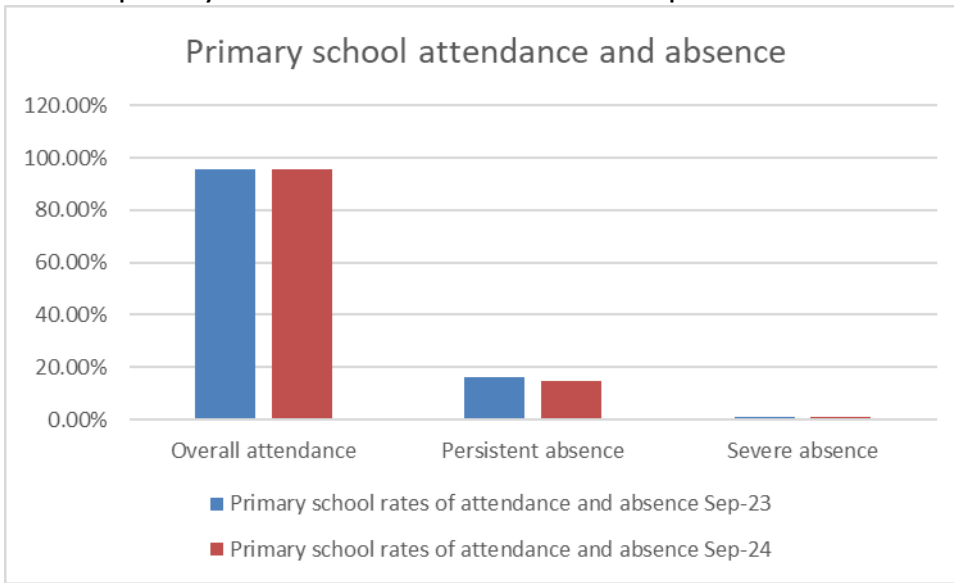
Appendix 3

Three-year trend data – severe absence



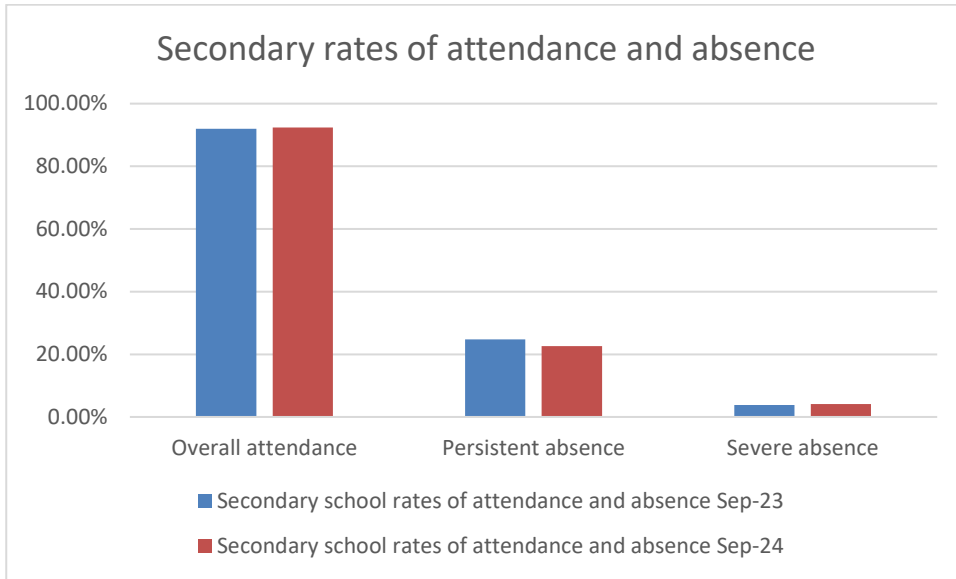
Appendix 4

Rates of primary school attendance and absence September 2023 and 2024



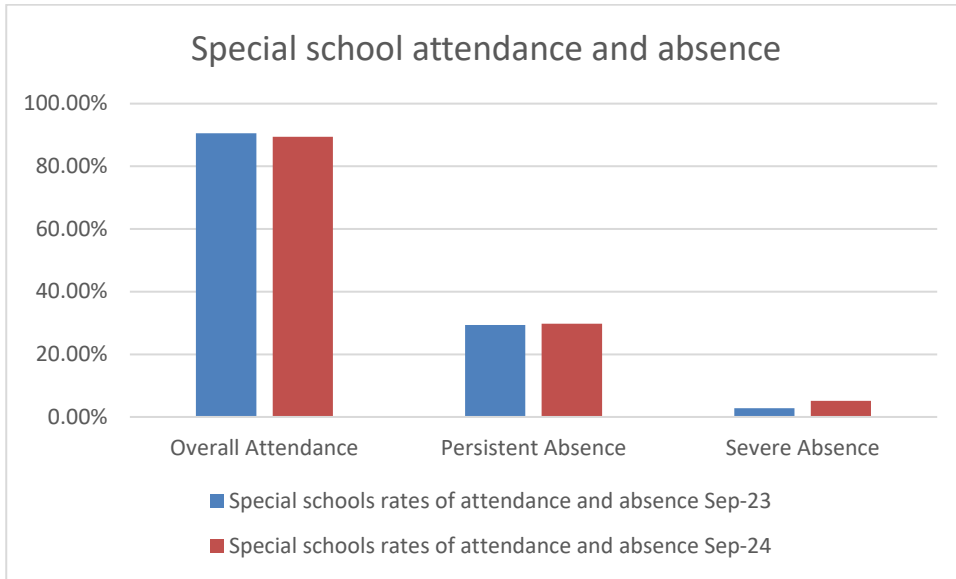
Appendix 5

Rates of secondary school attendance and absence September 2023 and 2024



Appendix 6

Rates of special school attendance and absence September 2023 and 2024



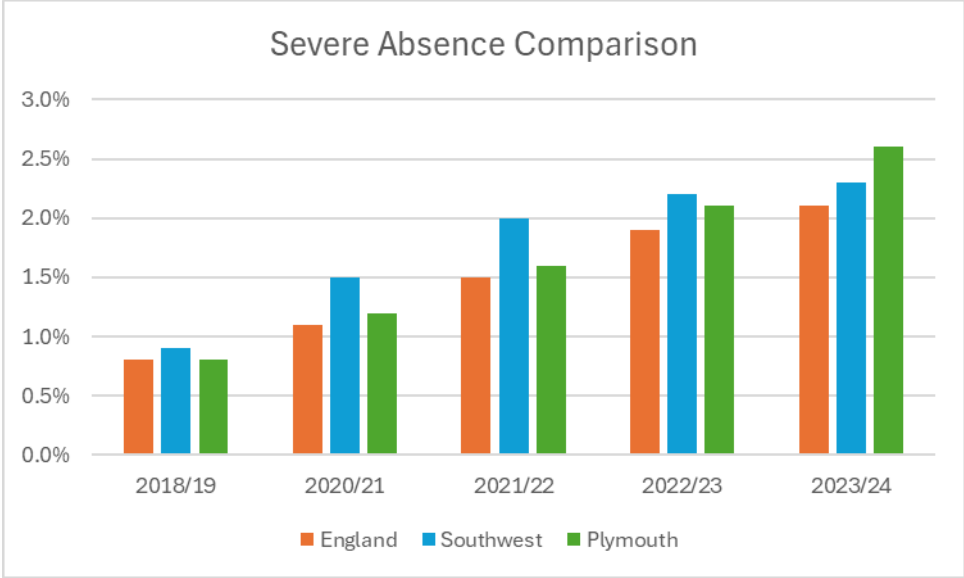
Appendix 7

Plymouth severe absence (< 50%) Autumn Term and Spring Term comparative data national and regional benchmarks

Academic Year	England	Southwest	Plymouth
2018/19	0.8%	0.9%	0.8%
2020/21	1.1%	1.5%	1.2%
2021/22	1.5%	2.0%	1.6%
2022/23	1.9%	2.2%	2.1%
2023/24	2.1%	2.3%	2.6%

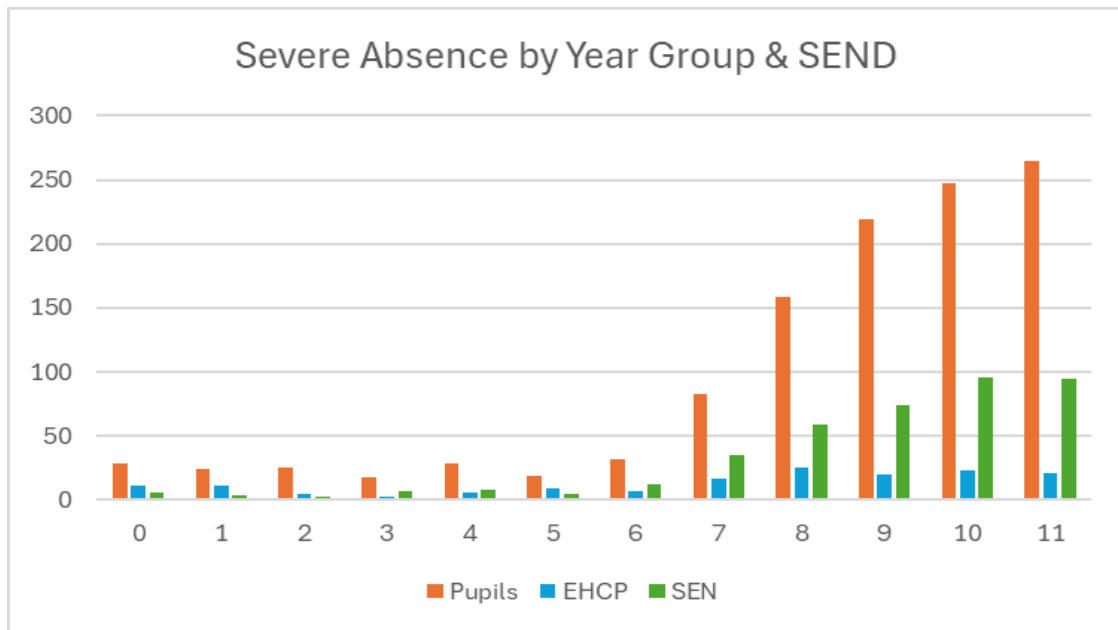
Appendix 8

Three-year trend data – regional and statistical benchmarks

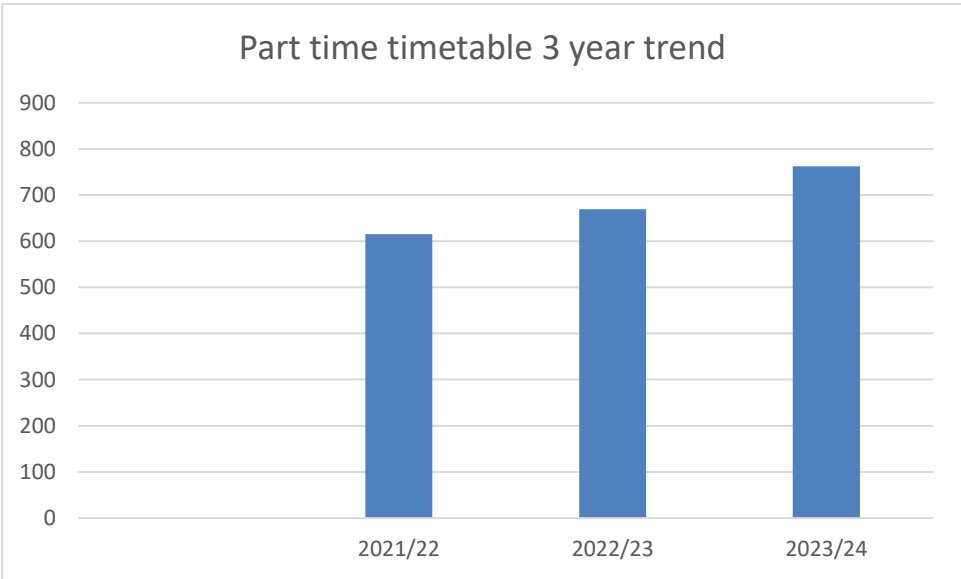


Appendix 9

Severe absence by Year group and SEND

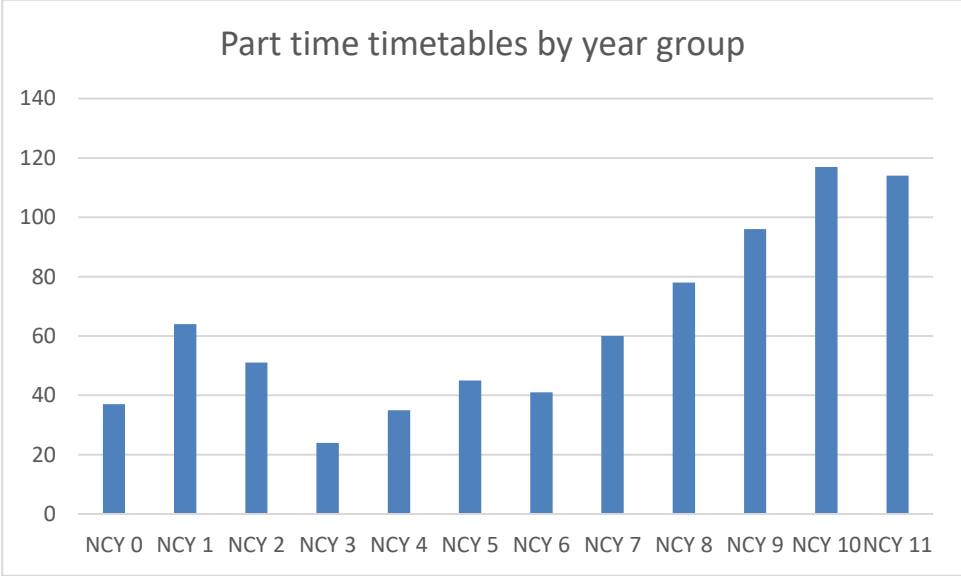


Appendix 10
Part time timetable three year trend

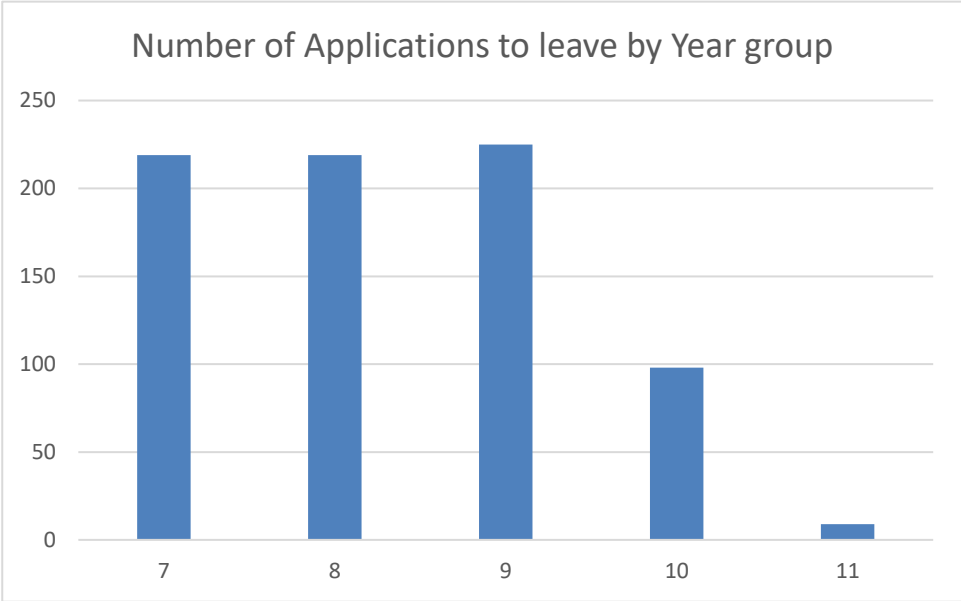


Appendix II

Part time timetables by year group



Appendix 12



Appendix 13

Rate of CME on census day by population for 'CME at census date' in England, Plymouth and South West between 2022/23 Autumn term and 2023/24 Autumn term

		2022/23 Autumn term	2022/23 Spring term	2022/23 Summer term	2023/24 Autumn term
England		0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.40%
South West	South West	0.20%	0.20%	0.10%	0.30%
	Plymouth	0.10%	0.10%	0.10%	0.20%

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	14 November 2024
Title of Report:	Alternative Provision report
Lead Member:	Councillor Sally Cresswell (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Apprenticeships)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Jim Barnicott
Contact Email:	Jim.barnicott@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	JB
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To provide the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel with a breakdown of key metrics for children who attend ACE. The paper also sets out the next steps for developing multi-agency support for those children who attend ACE following permanent exclusion from a mainstream school.

Recommendations and Reasons

- I. For the Children, Young People and Families Panel to note the report.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. N/A

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

The ambition of Plymouth's 'Bright Future' plan is for all our children to live full and happy lives. The plan recognises the importance of the local area partnership working together to ensure that children are supported by a system which works seamlessly to spot difficulties early, responds quickly and effectively, and makes sure that help is there for as long as it is needed. The learning from this paper is being used across the local area partnership to plan and deliver collaborative, evidenced based approaches and support our collective ambition for children.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

N/A

Financial Risks

N/A

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

None

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	Click here to enter text.	Leg	Click here to enter text.	Mon Off	Click here to enter text.	HR	Click here to enter text.	Assets	Click here to enter text.	Strat Proc	Click here to enter text.
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Lisa Linscott, Service Director for EPS											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes 07/11/2024											
Cabinet Member approval: Cllr Creswell approved verbally Date approved: 07/11/2024											

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Context

Alternative provision (AP) includes pupil referral units (PRUs), alternative provision academies, hospital schools as well as a variety of independent, registered and unregistered settings. For permanent exclusions, the local authority must arrange suitable full-time education for the pupil to begin from the sixth school day after the first day the permanent exclusion took place. In Plymouth, ACE, part of Transforming Futures Trust, is commissioned to provide day 6 provision for both primary and secondary aged pupils.

As of October 2024 there were 35,340 children and young people in 98 schools across Plymouth including one alternative provision school, ACE and 7 special schools. During the Academic Year 2023/24 there were 114 permanent exclusions from Plymouth Schools. The number of children subject to permanent exclusions both nationally and from Plymouth schools across all phases has risen (table 1). Within these figures are a high proportion of children with SEND and/or who are vulnerable.

Table 1: Permanent exclusion rate (published data*)

Permanent Exclusions	England		South West		Plymouth	
	Academic Year	Total PEX	Rate	Total PEX	Rate	Total PEX
2019/20	5057	0.06	556	0.07	43	0.11
2020/21	3928	0.04	391	0.05	37	0.09
2021/22	6497	0.08	682	0.09	45	0.12
2022/23	9376	0.11	1002	0.13	84	0.22
2023/24	NYA	NYA	NYA	NYA	114	0.3

NYA: not yet available (March 2025)

Like most other local areas there was a significant increase between 2021/2 and 2022/3 in the number of permanent exclusions in Plymouth. The permanent exclusion rate in Plymouth is above the national and regional averages.

The approach to reducing permanent exclusion is set out in 'Achieving Excellence', the Children's Services three-year strategic plan 2024-27. Key to this is the implementation of the Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) tool and a renewed focus on the Graduated Approach To Inclusion (GATI) which have been developed following extensive consultation with schools and settings. The Place Based Plan will be the mechanism by which both the OAP and GATI are embedded into city-wide educational practice.

Achieving Excellence also sets out that we will develop and implement a responsibility-based model of AP, bringing leaders together to develop a local system to ensure that where it is needed, children and young people are placed in high quality AP settings which meet their needs and enable them to achieve good educational attainment on par with their mainstream peers.

From Sept 2024 the Place Based Working Group has agreed that Reducing Pupil Mobility will be the city improvement priority. 'Mobility' includes unplanned in-year school moves, permanent exclusion, suspension, elective home education and any form of off-rolling. Pupil mobility in Plymouth is a 'wicked problem' and remains stubbornly high. Within this priority there are 6 strands which are designed, based on feedback from school leaders, to tackle the underlying causes of mobility (appendix 1). The strands with specific relevance to broadening the education offer and reducing the number of children requiring alternative provision are:

- develop school-level alternative provision across the city, alongside a strategy for effective collaboration;

- Building a pre-16 offer; and,
- addressing vaping in schools.

Key Challenges

We are experiencing an increase in the number of children experiencing permanent exclusions, particularly at key stage 3. In 2023/24, 114 children had been permanently excluded of which 63 were children in Key Stage 3. This has led to a greater number of children requiring unregistered AP placement for day six provision.

An unintended consequence of this rise has been an expansion in the number of places both in ACE, our commissioned Alternative Provision (AP) and in the Unregulated Alternative Provision (UAP) sector as the programmes of work to reduce numbers of permanent exclusions will have a lagged impact.

In 2023/24 the number of pupils accessing UAP who have been permanently excluded increased the requirement for assurance and monitoring checks carried out by the local authority. This resulted in the direction of resource away from early intervention to prevent permanent exclusion in the form of early advice and consultation with schools.

Plymouth's Local Authority Commissioned AP Provision

The statutory day 6 provision in Plymouth is provided by ACE, an Ofsted registered alternative provision school which is part of Transforming Futures Academy Trust. In Plymouth, ACE operates across 4 sites, each meeting the needs of a different cohort of pupils.

Site	Need met	Number of pupils Academic Year 23-24
Dover Road (including the community hospital education service)	Pupils with medical needs	58
North Hill	Pupils with SEMH who benefit from a small environment	37
Bretonside	Day 6 provision secondary	122
ACE primary	Day 6 provision primary	23

Transforming Futures Trust are commissioned by the Local Authority to provide 200 places across all phases to support children requiring day 6 provision and 34 places to children with medical needs.

Between April and September 2024, ACE was commissioned additionally to work with a small cohort of children who had been permanently excluded (nine children) using an outreach model in order to facilitate transition rapidly back into the mainstream school placement identified through the Fair Access process. This commissioning arrangement was put in place as a temporary measure to expand day 6 places as a result of an uplift in permanent exclusion, particularly at Key Stage 3; reflective of the national trend.

The package, delivered in the school the student was transitioning into, took account of any factors that had the potential to negatively affect a successful transition, for example, matching curriculums as well as support for any complex circumstances which may require input from a specific agency, for example, health or children's social care.

The six-week programme of support was facilitated by a full-time teacher, 3 full time Learning Mentors and a Pastoral Support Worker (0.4). The programme was additional to existing capacity and ran until the end of September 2024. Once a pupil has completed the programme, they will remain dual

registered for a further 6 months allowing for additional support from ACE. All students who engaged in the programme successfully transitioned into their next placement.

Unregistered Alternative Provision

In addition to the registered day 6 provision, during 2023/24 Plymouth City Council directly commissioned five unregistered alternative provision (UAP) settings to deliver a programme of reintegration into a mainstream setting following permanent exclusion. This was a temporary programme in order to manage an increase in Key Stage 1, 2 and 3 children who were permanently excluded whilst work was undertaken with schools to understand reasons and reduce numbers. All five unregistered provisions utilised are registered on the framework for unregistered alternative providers (held by Plymouth City Council).

In the academic year 2023/24, 24.14% (28) of the 114 permanently excluded children were placed in unregistered alternative provision for day 6 education following their permanent exclusion. This is because ACE (our commissioned Day 6 education provider) was full and unable to accommodate additional children in KSI, KS2 or KS3.

Cohort Information

Gender and age:

In the 2024/25 academic year, cohort of children and young people was split at 25% (7) female and 75% (21) male. Of this cohort, 14.29% (4) were excluded from primary schools. All 4 children were male, 50% (2) were from Key Stage 1 and 50% (2) were from Key Stage 2. The remaining children from the cohort, 85.71% (24) were in Key Stage 3 at the point of permanent exclusion. Of these 24 children, 29.17% (7) were female and 70.83% (17) were male.

Reasons for exclusion:

Of the 4 males excluded in the primary phase and placed in unregistered alternative provision, 75% (3) permanent exclusions were for a physical assault against and pupil and 25% (1) were for persistent disruptive behaviour. Of the 7 females permanently excluded and placed in unregistered alternative provision in KS3, 57.14% (4) permanent exclusions were for drug and alcohol related activity and 42.86% (3) permanent exclusions were for persistent disruptive behaviour. Of the 21 males permanently excluded and placed in unregistered alternative provision in KS3, 38.1% (8) permanent exclusions were for persistent disruptive behaviour, 23.81% (5) permanent exclusions were for a physical assault against a child, 14.29% (3) permanent exclusions were for a physical assault against an adult, 9.52% (2) permanent exclusions were for verbal abuse or threatening behaviour towards an adult, 4.76% (1) permanent exclusion was for drug and alcohol related activity, 4.76% (1) permanent exclusion was for damage and 4.76% (1) permanent exclusion was for the use or threat of use of a weapon or prohibited item.

Deprivation:

Of this cohort, 57.14% (16) children were eligible for Pupil Premium, therefore 57.14% (16) children were eligible for Free School Meals, additionally, 3.57% (1) child was recorded as from a Service Family.

Mobility:

Of this cohort, 14.29% (4) children had attended more than two primary schools, 14.29% (4) children had attended more than two secondary schools, and 14.29% (4) children had one or more episodes of Elective Home Education.

Exclusion History:

Of this cohort, 96.42% (27) children had never been permanently excluded previously, however, 3.57% (1) child had been permanently excluded once previously. Additionally, 89.29% (25) children had received one or more suspensions.

Attendance:

Of this cohort, 32.14% (9) children had one or more Child Missing Education episode and 42.86% (12) children had one or more episodes of part time timetable. 53.57% (15) children were persistently absent from school and 35.71% (10) children were severely absent from school.

Children's Social Care Involvement:

Of this cohort, 89.29% (25) children had been known to Children's Social Care in the last 6 years. 14.29% (4) children were on a Child Protection Plan and 14.29% (4) children were on a Child in Need Plan.

Special Educational Needs and Disability:

Of this cohort, 3.57% (1) child had an EHCP and 67.86% (19) children were identified as requiring SEN Support.

Outcomes:

At the end of the academic year 2023/24, all 100% (28) of the children in the cohort were on roll with a registered setting and all unregistered alternative provision packages had ceased. 53.57% (15) children currently remain with their registered mainstream school, 21.43% (6) children are on roll with ACE, 14.29% (4) children are on a dual registered package with ACE and their named mainstream school, 3.57% (1) child has moved to a specialist setting and 7.14% (2) children no longer reside in Plymouth.

Quality and Impact of LA commissioned Registered AP (ACE)

To continue to drive up quality and impact, the senior leadership team of ACE is supported by a programme of Team Around the School (TAS) meetings. The purpose of the meetings is to ensure that support targeted to ACE is informed by the on-going analysis of key performance data. Examples of how practice has developed as a result of the TAS process include the assignment of a dedicated locality member of staff, support from children's social care staff for an attendance project which saw children picked up from homes and the commencement of a monthly meeting with the SEND Service Manager to support the planning of transition for children with an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP).

The leadership team at ACE report that the TAS process has helped to open channels of communication with other agencies, and that they value the time senior professionals take to wrap around the service. In particular, a range of professionals have taken part in the "Friday on the bus offer" which picks up children with barriers to school attendance from their homes. As well as targeting attendance, this partnership work has provided an opportunity to engage with young people in relation to exploitation, substance misuse and criminality.

During the 2023/24 academic year 143 children were placed at ACE. This was in line with the 2022/23 academic year (144). In this current academic year, as in previous years, the commissioned available provision at ACE and as a result of the overall increase in the number of permanent exclusions have increased our use of UAP. However, there has been an increase in the number of pupils who are placed in AP due to permanent exclusion resulting in more children accessing UAP for day 6 provision 79 (2021-22) and 82 (2023-24) which is a noticeable increase from 2021-22 (63).

Academic outcomes

Year on year, the percentage of young people achieving a GCSE in English and maths; and English, maths and Science (at any grade) has remained stable; however, over time (since 2019), the number of young people achieving a GCSE grade in these subjects has significantly increased with almost half the year 11 cohort studying both English and maths in the 2023/24 academic year.

Table: Academic outcomes at ACE

ACE Exam Results										
	Maths and English GCSE		Maths, English + Science		Any GCSE		3+ GCSEs		5+ GCSEs	
Measure	Number	% of Yr II	Number	% of Yr II	Number	% of Yr II	Number	% of Yr II	Number	% of Yr II
2018-19	36	24.32%	22	14.86%	82	55.41%	36	24.32%	10	6.76%
2019-20	32	34.78%	29	31.52%	64	69.57%	43	46.74%	21	22.83%
2020-21	28	31.46%	20	22.47%	62	69.66%	36	40.45%	10	11.24%
2021-22	41	46.59%	36	40.91%	70	79.55%	50	56.82%	30	34.09%
2022-23	43	46.24%	35	37.63%	63	67.74%	44	47.31%	27	29.03%
2023-24	40	46.51%	31	36.05%	55	63.95%	39	45.35%	15	17.44%

Suspension

In terms of the number of suspensions the leadership team at ACE have focused on reducing the likelihood of suspensions by introducing an after-school timetable slot which lasts for one or two days. This has been used as a strategy 239 times within the 2023/24 academic year and has contributed to a continued overall reduction in the numbers of children experiencing suspensions as shown in Table 2

Table: Suspensions data

Key stage	Number of suspensions	Number of suspensions	Number of suspensions	Trend
	2021/22*	2022/23*	2023/24	
KS1	4	0	10	Increasing
KS2	45	14	12	Decreasing
KS3	281	363	349	Decreasing
KS4	313	291	285	Decreasing

In addition, with the exception of Key Stage 1, average suspension length at ACE is at the lowest point in three years. Whilst the number of suspensions at Key Stage 1 has increased, this is partly due to an increase in pupil numbers.

Pupil attendance at ACE has improved year-on-year across all key stages (table 3). This has been supported by partnership working through the Team Around the School (TAS) approach. For example, services including family support workers and youth workers have taken part in the school bus project as previously described.

Table: Attendance data

	Overall attendance	Overall attendance	Overall attendance	Trend

Key stage	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Increasing/ decreasing
KS1	75.6%	66.7%	85.2%	Increasing
KS2	78.4%	81.5%	82.9%	Increasing
KS3	63.7%	60.8%	64.3%	Increasing
KS4	59.8%	57.2%	58.6%	Increasing
KS5	N/A	N/A	90.2%	-

The table below sets out the number of pupils who have experienced a reduced timetable at any point in the last academic year. It is important to note that a reduced time timetable may have been used with a student on more than one occasion with the timeframe varying from 1 to 6 weeks. As such a reduced timetable may have occurred only once in the year and may have only lasted a week. At individual child level, 61% of pupils had one period of time on a reduced timetable. All reduced timetables are reviewed every 2 weeks.

Some of the reduced timetables were utilised as a result of specific needs in relation to the S19 outreach programme.

- Of the pupils in KS2 on reduced timetables, all of the pupils were on the S19 outreach programme (which is not full-time, to allow for medical needs, ACE are only commissioned to provide 0.5 FTE).
- 10 of the 32 pupils in KS3 who have experience reduced timetables were also on the S19 outreach programme.
- 16 of the 61 pupils in KS4 who have experience reduced timetables were also on the S19 outreach programme.

As a snapshot of who was on a reduced timetable on the 17/02/2024, 0% of KS1 were on a reduced timetable, 7% of KS2 (S19 outreach pupils only), 10% of KS3 (24 pupils, of which 9 are S19 outreach pupils) and 8% of KS4 (30 pupils, of which 12 are S19 outreach pupils).

Table: reduced timetables

Key Stage	Reduced timetables	Reduced timetables	Reduced Timetables	Trend
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Increasing/ decreasing
	Number of pupils (%)	Number of pupils (%)	Number of pupils (%)	
KS1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	Same
KS2	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (6%)	Increasing
KS3	14 (23.7%)	14 (17.1%)	32 (36%)	Increasing
KS4	63 (42.6%)	38 (27.3%)	61 (42%)	Increasing

As noted earlier, the underlying principle of the day 6 provision is to have a successful reintegration back into a mainstream setting. This is a bespoke process dependant on the individual pupil's needs. For

some pupils the transition can be a relatively swift process, whereas for others, as needs emerge, the process can take longer. For the pupils where ACE provides the day 6 provision the reintegration rates are shown in the table below.

Table: Pupils reintegrating back to mainstream schools

	No. of pupils 21/22	% of cohort 21/22	No. of pupil 22/23	% of cohort 22/23	No. of pupils 23/24	% of cohort 23/24	Trend Increasing/decreasing
Primary ACE	7	35%	6	33%	4	17%	Decreasing
Secondary ACE	7	3%	8	4%	30	24%	23/24 - Increasing – all pupils allocated at FAP getting a much better experience moving back into mainstream
ACE Health and Welfare	17	29.3%	1	0%	5	17%	Increasing

Challenges remain for the primary age cohort with the large increase in permanently excluded pupils. Several pupils are ready to move on from ACE and who have an EHCP but there is not the capacity in appropriate special schools within the city for them to be placed.

At the secondary age level there has been considerably more success with 30 pupils moving back through the Fair Access Protocol. Mainstream secondary schools were very supportive in the last academic year taking a joined-up approach to admissions and working with the families to allow for smooth transitions and ongoing support from ACE across a period of dual registration.

This is a step forward from the situation in previous academic years, which will lead to the avoidance of 'bed blocking' within ACE, increasing its ability to take and support children from day 6 of a permanent exclusion, reducing the need for utilising unregistered AP. The most significant benefit though being that the young people are able to access and engage within a mainstream school setting.

Unregistered alternative provision: city framework

In partnership with schools and trusts, Plymouth City Council have led the development of a framework for unregistered alternative providers (UAPs) which operate in the city and its travel to area. The framework was first commissioned with schools in 2019 and has recently been updated. The procurement process was completed in June 2024 and a launch event with schools, is scheduled for term 2.

As part of the retendering process, due diligence checks were performed on all UAPs currently, or expressing an interest to, start commissioning with Plymouth schools. To join the framework, UAPs were asked to complete two method statements as part of a supplier questionnaire. The questions covered themes including safeguarding practice and procedures; knowledge and understanding of illegal schools and curriculum rationale and development. The method statements were required to clearly indicate how the provision will match the expectations of the DfE where alternative education provision should:

- Have a clear purpose with a focus on education and achievement as well as meeting the pupils needs and rigorous assessment of progress;
- Offer appropriate and challenging teaching in English, mathematics and science (including IT); on par with mainstream education - unless this is being provided elsewhere within a package of provision;

- Be suited to the pupil's capabilities, give pupils the opportunity to take appropriate qualifications and involve suitably qualified staff who can help pupils make excellent progress; and
- Have good arrangements for working with other relevant services such as social care, education psychology, child and adolescent mental health services, youth offending teams, and drug support services, etc.

There are clear roles and responsibilities for identified professionals, these being the school's Safeguarding and Inclusion Lead, the Contract Monitoring Officer, Access and Attendance Officers, Service Managers and the Education Improvement Partner. Regular, fortnightly monitoring was undertaken by the Contract Monitoring Officer to ascertain, and quality assure quality and impact- this involved the provision's staff and students, checking on welfare and safety as well as progress towards the targets set for moving the young people back into mainstream school.

The purpose of a commissioned place at a UAP is to engage children with education so that they are able to transition into a mainstream school as quickly as possible. In terms of places directly commissioned by the local authority for the academic year to date, 28 children have had places commissioned at a UAP in the 2023/2024 academic year. All of this cohort successfully transitioned into a registered provider, for example, a mainstream school, by the end of the last academic year.

4. Planned Next Steps

Develop and pilot an Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce

An Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) is a workforce model which builds capacity and skills in Alternative Provision schools such as ACE. Taskforces are teams of co-located specialists, for example, social workers and speech and language therapists who are based onsite within AP schools undertaking integrated, child-centred work with pupils, responsively information-sharing, as well as sharing their expertise and embedding their practice within the whole school.

Research led by the Department for Education (Nov 21 – to date) has tested the impact of APST on pupil outcomes in 22 APs across the country and there have been early signs of its positive impact. The first impact evaluation of the model will report in 2025, followed by another at the end of the pilot, in 2026.

There is already an established 'team around the school model' in place to support ACE, and this pilot would extend and develop this model so that a range of professionals became further integrated into day-to-day functioning of the school in order to take a more holistic approach to child and wider family support as well as staff development.

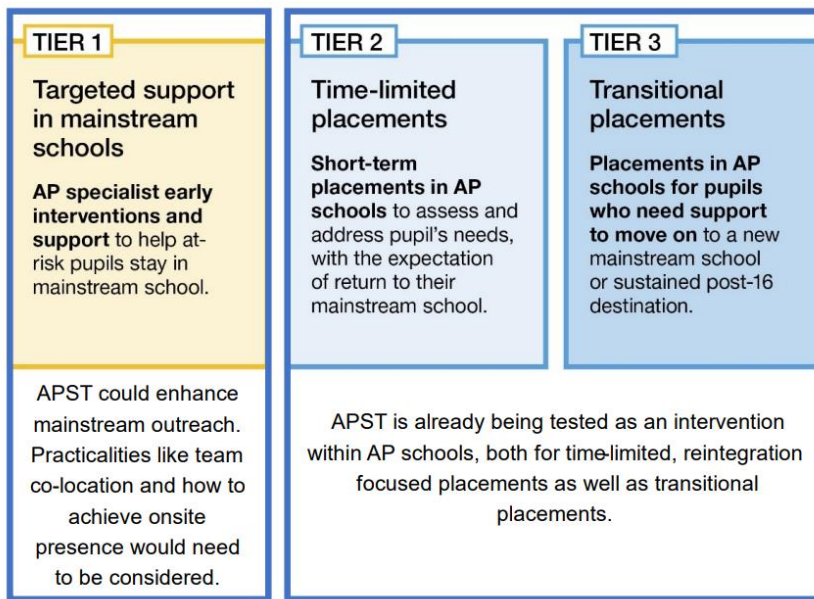
Further details of the APST model can be found at [Alternative provision specialist taskforces](#)

Develop a responsibility based model for alternative provision

A responsibility based model for alternative provision will set out the roles of each key stakeholder within a three tier model of alternative provision (figure 1). Schools in the city have a direct role to play in the development of tiers 1 and 2 and this is directly addressed through strand 1 of the Place-Based plan, 'Develop school-level alternative provision across the city'.

Figure 1

A three-tier model for alternative provision



An initial consultation with Headteachers and school leaders has been held (24 October 2024), in order to develop a detailed plan which will be developed across term 2. The consultation group is being led by an experienced trust-level leader with responsibility for behaviour and culture in a large cross-phase trust. The plan will focus on ensuring that tiers 1 and 2 of the AP system are robust in the city; specifically, that mainstream primary and secondary schools are able to develop and access a range of interventions to help pupils stay in school through professional development and practice sharing; and where needed, children are able to access specialist intervention through outreach work from ACE.

Alongside this, an Ordinarily Available Provision interactive live resource, co-produced by schools, parents and young people, is has been launched through bespoke sessions to the full range of stakeholders. This will be embedded into city practice over this academic year and will underpin the strategies and support that schools develop at tiers 1 (school-based provision) and tier 2 (alternative provision commissioned by schools).

In addition, we are trialling a preventing exclusions project led by the Educational Psychology Service in two schools, which is targeting schools that are struggling to reduce their exclusions by offering support through early consultation and planning for children who have been suspended. This work is in the early phase development and impact will be reported through strand 3 of the Local Area SEND Partnership Improvement Plan.

Actions

What	By when	Who
Write the detailed action plan for strand 1 of the Place-Based Plan	30 November 2024	Rob Williams, Place-Based Co-ordinator
Identify relevant professionals from across partners to develop the APST model at ACE schools.	30 November 2024	Jim Barnicott, Head of Education, Plymouth City Council
Write an action plan for implementing the APST trial at ACE schools	15 December 2024	Jim Barnicott, Head of Education & Martine Aquilina, Head of Service, Plymouth City Council

Appendix

Appendix I: Strands of the place based plan 2024/25

1. Develop school-level alternative provision across the city, alongside a strategy for effective collaboration

- Within the city, demand for AP significantly outstrips supply. The limited capacity of short-term AP places/support has led to an escalation in behaviours for some pupils, which has undoubtedly contributed to the number of permanent exclusions. Often children enter AP, and then fail to successfully reintegrate back into their home school setting. The aim here is to help build capacity and expertise at school-level and across the city, to provide increased early AP intervention/support opportunities for key pupils, to overcome barriers and importantly reintegrate back into normal school life. School-to-school collaboration across Plymouth will be key.

2. Develop a 'Belonging Framework'

- Attendance has failed to return to pre-pandemic levels, especially at secondary level. This is despite schools having robust policies and procedures, as well as in many cases, committing substantial additional resources. In the words of Dr Dan Nicholls *"The social contract is fracturing. A system that has powerful ways of telling children that they do not belong, playing out asymmetrically to make life precarious and insecure for far too many. A national crisis rages, children are becoming more invisible, opting out of education and they are being pushed to the edges. Those who most need school are not there, absent and missing from the very place that could offer social justice and opportunity"*. We are not going to reduce absence and EHE through simply tightening procedures or increasing the severity of fines or sanctions. A key part of reversing this trend is through re-building that social contract and creating a greater sense of belonging. The aim here is to develop a framework of approaches and strategies, utilising research and successful practice, that will support schools to build a deeper sense of belonging with children and their families.

3. Develop and pilot an early language acquisition project

- Simply put, having a large vocabulary helps children learn more. Communication and language is a EYFS prime area as it's one of the important building blocks for all the other areas. If it's not developed early, it's difficult to achieve later. Evidence shows that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds may have fewer chances to develop their vocabulary. We also know that young people, especially the most vulnerable in secondary settings, who have poorly developed language skills are more likely to be excluded and have higher levels of absence. The aim of this strand to pilot a project that identifies the most effective approaches to early language development.

4. Further develop enhanced transition

- Thoughtful transition planning between different phases can create a seamless shift, ensuring pupils and their families feel they are moving from one safe space to another. Continuity, security, and creating a sense of belonging in the new school community are crucial for long term success, especially for those with SEND. Establishing this early can support pupil attendance, reduce the risk of emotional school-based avoidance, and potential suspensions and exclusion. The cross-phase transition work has been a notable success in the city. The aim is to now build on that success to further improve the transition of our most vulnerable pupils, especially those with SEND.

5. Addressing vaping in schools

- Vaping amongst young people both in and out of schools is a national problem. Within Plymouth this issue has contributed to a substantial number of suspensions, some permanent exclusions, and even has resulted in multiple pupils being hospitalised over the last year. Incidents of vaping have even occurred in some primary settings. We intend to build on the existing work in the city around vaping, by seeking to enhance the proactive support on offer to schools to reduce the number of young people using vapes.

6. Building a pre-16 offer

- In collaboration with City College Plymouth, we aim to develop a wider pre-16 offer, that offers a hybrid curriculum for key pupils. We know that a contributing factor for some pupils in absence, EHE and even suspensions, is disaffection with the curriculum they follow. The goal is to make available a planned hybrid offer that enables key pupils to access some vocational options at City College, whilst still continuing core subjects within their home school, where they remain on roll.

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Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting:	14 November 2024
Title of Report:	Child Exploitation Update
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director of Children's Services)
Author:	Martine Aquilina
Contact Email:	
Your Reference:	Click here to enter text.
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide information to Scrutiny Board to enable them to scrutinise and provide challenge to the service in how we respond to children at risk of child exploitation (harm from outside the home).

Recommendations and Reasons

For the Scrutiny Panel to note the report.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Information only

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

This report directly links to The Plymouth Plan 2014-2034 'to create the conditions where children, young people and families can thrive, assisting them to build resilience through the early development of good physical and emotional health and by equipping young people and parents with the skills to improve their wellbeing'.

A Bright Future 2021-2026 states that 'As partners, we want to make sure all children and young people in Plymouth have a Bright Future, supported by a system which works seamlessly to spot difficulties early, responds quickly and effectively, and makes sure that help is there for as long as it is needed'.

The Youth Justice Plan 2025 vision is to 'To develop a youth justice system in Plymouth that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society. Diverting Children early will prevent offending and create safer communities with fewer victims in the City.'

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Information only

Financial Risks

N/A

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

N/A

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	Click here to enter text.	Leg	Click here to enter text.	Mon Off	Click here to enter text.	HR	Click here to enter text.	Assets	Click here to enter text.	Strat Proc	Click here to enter text.
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Temilola Salimon											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 06/11/2024											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Laing via email											
Date approved: 07/11/2024											

1. Introduction

At the request of the Scrutiny Panel, this briefing report has been prepared to offer a further update on the issue of Child Exploitation in Plymouth. The report presents an updated account of our City's work to address and combat child exploitation within the context of a wider extra-familial harm definition, including the progress made in implementing a contextual safeguarding approach, through the Adolescent Safety Framework. The report also includes an overview of the various approaches adopted by agencies in responding to missing children.

'Extra-familial harm' refers to a broad category of harm types, including peer-on-peer harm, sexual and criminal exploitation and bullying. Often, these different harm types share overlapping drivers, methods and consequences for young people.

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understand and respond to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.

Children's social care practitioners, child protection systems and wider safeguarding partnerships have developed new ways to engage with individuals who are at risk from threat outside the home. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse beyond their front doors.

Our holistic framework for this approach in Plymouth is called the Adolescent Safety Framework.

2. What we know about extra-familial harm in Plymouth

The development of a comprehensive data system that can quantify the type, range and distribution of extra-familial harm across the City will be progressed with urgency with the appointment of a data analysis role with the Plymouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership (PSCP). The Safeguarding Adolescents Working Group, established in Spring 2024, are also devising methods of gathering good quality, multi-disciplinary data. Much of the extra-familial harm we are seeing in the City is peer on peer, particularly aggression and violence between children, Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) and drug use and supply. Concerns remain regarding some adults of concern and the risks posed to children by County Lines gangs, as detailed below.

Aggression and violence between children

In terms of serious youth violence in the City, the picture is mixed. We have seen a welcome decrease of 6% year on year in the number of boys committing violence offences which result in a statutory intervention from the Youth Justice Service. In addition, knife crime involving children in the City remains substantially below the national average.

However, in Plymouth, we have seen an increase in girls in the criminal justice system, when compared to the pre-pandemic, which have almost doubled (20% (2020) to 38.5% (2024)) - the majority of whom are committing violent offences. The Police have also seen an increase to 35% (girl on girl violence) and Probation, although unable to provide figures, also stated they have seen an increase in female offenders under 25 who are violent. This is a pattern emerging across the 4 Local Authorities in Devon and Cornwall. Within the City, the 3 main areas where female juvenile violence has taken place in the 12 last months are, City Centre (including Stonehouse), Whiteleigh and Plympton and the violence appears to be premeditated as the result of peer pressure. The average age of the girls involved is 15 years and 9 months. Often, these violent acts are then posted on to social media platforms increasing the shame felt by the victims.

Of the 20 girls currently open to the Plymouth Youth Justice Service, 19 are the result of violent offences. Often, the girls are telling us they are being threatened themselves and if they do not assault someone, they would be assaulted themselves. As a result, the Community Safety Partnership in the City are commissioning Plymouth Argyle Trust to work with schools, prioritising those in the 3 main areas of the City where we are seeing this violence, to raise awareness of the consequences for both the victims and the child who enters the Youth Justice system. Where an offence has been committed and a statutory intervention has been imposed, the victims are also offered the opportunity to work with a Restorative Justice service in the City known as Make A Mends with the aim of holding a face-to-face meeting with the perpetrator if requested. Nationally, violence perpetrated by females is increasing with very little accredited interventions available. As the result, the Youth Justice Board has instigated a meeting in December to discuss best practice and how to address this issue and Plymouth Youth Justice Service will be attending.

Not surprisingly, we are seeing girls who are both the victims and perpetrators of the violence reported as missing increasing their risk of exploitation.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)

For three years, the councils Be Safe Team have worked alongside the NSPCC to triage and coordinate support for children in Plymouth presenting with Harmful Sexual Behaviour. In recent months we have seen a significant increase in requests for support as well as Court-directed work. We have therefore secured and delivered training in AIM Assessment (a recognised evidence-based assessment tool to identify sexual harmful behaviour) and Intervention for staff in Be Safe and the wider Youth Justice Service. Both the Be Safe and Youth Justice Team Managers are now trained in specialist AIM Supervision, which ensures that capacity for HSB practice and supervision / quality assurance has significantly improved. Weekly triage discussions continue with the Team Manager from NSPCC to share expertise, ensure a robust understanding of children's needs and promote best use of capacity between services.

Drug use and supply

Drug use and supply has been a consistent theme within the Daily Intelligence Briefing (DIB) since its inception; particularly regarding the use of 'THC / Spice Vapes'. However there has been an increase in intelligence and level of concern more recently. Through the DIB, conducting Return Home Conversations and general intelligence sharing we have in the last month built a picture of a group of children involved in the use and supply of THC / Spice vape liquid. There has been a reported increase in violence and threats of violence between the children, observed both in the community and in their education setting. Further intelligence work has been undertaken between Child Centred Policing, Be Safe, Education, the Youth Justice Service and Community Youth and plans are underway for intervention with individual children as well as in a group context. This will involve supportive engagement as well as more formal measures including police enforcement.

County lines

As identified in our July briefing, 'County Lines' is a form of criminal exploitation concerned with the storage, movement and distribution of drugs and money across the country. County lines gangs are highly organised criminal networks, using sophisticated and dynamic methods to groom vulnerable adults and children in their activity. Involving children in this process is a form of child abuse.

Earlier this year we saw an increase in active county lines with Police investigations and operations undertaken to disrupt these activities. Drugs Groups are operating across Devon and Cornwall at any one time, and that drugs threats in the area largely operate from outside of Plymouth. Police intelligence suggests that there are several active drugs threats currently operating in Plymouth, with Merseyside and London as main exporting areas. Intelligence also suggests an increase in the use of Fast Parcels and Post to move illicit substances into Devon and Cornwall.

Due to the methods used to evade detection and in preventing children from sharing pertinent information, understanding exactly how our children are involved in county lines is difficult. While we

are aware of children's involvement in drug supply, identifying the individuals who are directing them is challenging, meaning that we are not clear as to whether this is led by local adults or county lines gangs. Nonetheless we continue to seek to disrupt these activities on a larger scale through collaborative work and intelligence sharing with colleagues including Police, Community Youth, Education and Children's Social Care, and on an individual scale by persistently seeking to engage with children, their families and professional networks.

Adults of concern

Through intelligence sharing, both within the DIB and between partner agencies / neighbouring Local Authorities, we continue to monitor adults of concern and potential risks posed to children and young people in Plymouth. Where contact from these adults towards our children is identified we work collaboratively with police colleagues to deliver swift, effective and proportionate intervention to disrupt contact and reduce risk to children. This has included, for example, an incident where a 17-year-old child travelled out of area with an adult known to pose a risk to children. Be Safe gathered information regarding the adult's connections to the area they had travelled to, supporting police to identify an address where the child was located and eventually returned safely to Plymouth. The adult is now in custody.

3. Adolescent Safety Framework (ASF)

Following on from the briefing provided in July which detailed significant development within the Adolescent Safety Framework, work is continuing to ensure the revised framework is understood and embedded in practice across Children's Services and the Partnership.

The streamlined Safer Me Assessment and Process has now been shared across Children's Social Care and a cohort of 10 professionals are trained to deliver bespoke training to Social Workers in late 2024 / early 2025. The training has been carefully designed to promote a robust understanding of child exploitation, contextual safeguarding and how the Safer Me Assessment should be utilised in addressing risk in these areas. The initial wave of training has been tailored to social work practice in recognition of key learning points from our Ofsted inspection earlier this year which identified a need for assessment of contextual risks to be better reflected within social work assessments.

The Be Safe Team Manager is now engaging with Child Centred Policing and other partners to consider how ASF processes responding to peer groups can be adapted. This will be to enable a more timely and effective response to children experiencing / at risk of contextual harm where there is no known adult linked to them. Improving these processes will ensure earlier intervention, reduce risk and in some cases driver children from statutory intervention.

4. Daily Intelligence Briefings (DIB)

Daily Intelligence Briefings continue to be held and consistently attended by partners including Police, Health, Education, Children's Social Care, Youth Justice Services, Edge of Care Team, Targeted Help and Community Connections. Work has been undertaken over the last twelve months to ensure representative yet proportionate attendance, ensuring a timely review of intelligence and subsequent responsible for children who have been reported as missing, presented as homeless, been brought into custody, presented at the Emergency Department within the previous 24 hours. Actions are reviewed until the Chair is satisfied that appropriate measures are in place to ensure a child's safety, and / or broader contextual safeguarding measures (e.g. Peer Group Mapping) is underway.

The briefings have received ongoing praise and recognition from partners due to the timely response to children at risk of harm and was recognised during January's Ofsted Inspection as an example of good practice.

Between 1st August 2024 and 1st November 2024, the DIB group have covered 358 case discussions, and 785 since April. Discussions include the review of all missing incidences involving Plymouth children, as well as topics such as new or increasingly used substances, locations and adults of concern. Broad themes are in line with those set out earlier in the report in relation to extra-familial harm, as well as trends in where children are going while missing. This has included Air BnB properties and addresses of vulnerable young adults requiring coordinated intelligence sharing and response across agencies represented within the DIB.

5. How we respond to children who are missing, at risk of exploitation or presenting with harmful sexual behaviours

The review of REACH (Reducing Exploitation and Absence from Care and Home) in Summer 2024 saw the team re-named as Be Safe, formally moving within the remit of the Youth Justice Service and developing roles to support children with Harmful Sexual Behaviours. The team's core function continues to be the offer and delivery of Return Home Conversations (RHC) for Plymouth children who are reported as missing. Previously all the team offered both RHCs and intervention work, however this was reviewed after we observed a reduction in performance over the summer months. It was recognised that delivering intervention work restricted staff's flexibility in offering RHCs, meaning they were less able to meet the statutory deadline of 72 hours. As such, the team is now configured so that four staff deliver RHCs only, while two deliver specific interventions focused on reducing contextual risk. This has been successful, and we have seen a significant improvement in performance in September and October, as illustrated below.

The team has also begun to develop further specialisms, for example a Professional Youth Worker is now a Care Leaver's link worker, offering guidance and consultation to Personal Advisers supporting Care Experienced Young Adults. This was in recognition that several children who are reported as missing have friendships or other links with Care Experienced Young Adults, who often have their own vulnerabilities and support needs. A more collaborative approach across the teams supports the safety of both groups and the work is positive for Care Experienced Young Adults.

The Philomena Protocol

The Philomena Protocol is a process established by police forces across the country in partnership with local Children's Services. The core focus of the Protocol is to support a timely and effective response to Children in Care who are reported as missing. This is facilitated primarily by a core document, designed for foster carers and residential placement staff to complete and update in real time, for example with information about the child's peer group, preferred locations and items of clothing. This document can then be shared if the child is reported as missing, to support police in locating and safeguarding them.

The Philomena Protocol was formally implemented in Plymouth in April 2024 and visits were conducted by Child Centred Policing and Be Safe to social workers, foster carers and residential placement providers to promote understanding and effective use of the tool. While initial response and implementation was positive – a cohort of children were identified and included in the protocol – it is noted that in recent months engagement and use of the process has reduced. There are some possible reasons for this; where there are changes in placement for children and the protocol may not follow or be as well embedded by new carers. This may also be the case where a child's social worker changes. It is also possible that full understanding of the purpose and scope of the protocol is not yet embedded across the City with placement providers and foster carers. As such, work is being undertaken between Child Centred Policing and the Permanency Service to renew knowledge and use of the tool. There may also be some barriers for carers, and particularly foster carers who may not have the same access to secure information storage and facilities to share information securely as staff in residential settings. To address these barriers, contact is being made with Local Authorities who are further forward in establishing the protocol to gain insight into how this might be replicated in Plymouth.

6. Performance

The table below contains performance data for Be Safe for August to October 2024. While there has been an increase in missing episodes for children in Plymouth in this period, performance in our core KPI – completing RHI now exceeds national performance benchmarks. We have also observed a reduction in children, parents or carers declining RHCs, evidencing improved engagement with our service. Where children are not seen or seen outside the statutory window of 72 hours, this is due to declines, the young person being missing, being in custody or moving out of area.

7. Conclusion

In the last 2 years, the City's response to child exploitation has improved, the Daily Intelligence Briefing has been replicated by Local Authorities locally and nationally and helps agencies respond to the ever-changing picture of exploitation. We need to continue to build trusting relationships with children to counter the pull of county lines gangs and to continue to build on the progress we have evidenced to date.

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