

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	28 February 2024
Title of Report:	Attendance strategy summary 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 (Head of Education)
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Your Reference:	
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the impact of the city's Attendance Strategy.

Recommendations and Reasons

For councillors to review and note:

- key activities that have taken place across the autumn & spring terms for the 2023/24;
- End of year data position for 2022/23;
- The data position for the autumn term 2023/24.

Alternative options considered and rejected

- I. Not applicable.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

This report has specific links to the fairness aspect of the Corporate Plan. Ensuring that all young people achieve the outcomes they are capable of because of good school attendance is key to addressing inequality.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

No direct implications.

Financial Risks

No direct implications.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

No direct implications.

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

Evidence shows that educational outcomes of children who do not attend school are significantly impacted.

Evidence also shows that children who experience factors of poverty are at greater risk of low school attendance, for example, those children who are known to a social worker.

** 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.*

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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If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.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							

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
Attendance Strategy							

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: David Haley											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes											
Date agreed: 20/02/2024											

Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Sally Cresswell

Date approved: 20/02/2024

Context

Following the pandemic, the profile of school attendance as a national issue of concern has risen significantly. In response, the Department for Education published revised [guidance](#) in May 2022 which changed the roles of schools and local authorities in managing school attendance and delivering support to families.

School responsibilities	Update
Develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance	All schools have attended a local authority attendance network meeting and have trusts have network meetings in place between their own schools.
Have a clear school attendance policy which all staff, pupils and parents understand	All schools have an attendance policy in place. The Spring term network (WK 18 March) will consider co-production to develop policy and practice families.
Accurately complete admission and, with the exception of schools where all pupils are boarders, attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence	Feedback from Attendance networks indicates that schools and trusts have increased the promptness and frequency of absence follow up.
Regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place	Schools and trusts are in process of developing processes to monitor and analyse attendance data. The approach used by the Ted Wragg Trust was shared at the November 2023 Attendance conference.
Build strong relationships with families, listen to and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them	Best practice regionally relating to strong partnership communication with families was shared by the Cabot Learning Federation at the November attendance conference.
Share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities, and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe	The city's attendance network is embedded into city ways of working. Schools regularly share and develop models of good practice.

Local authority responsibilities	Update
They should rigorously track local Attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance -as near live as possible	In place. A data sharing agreement is in place with all city schools. An inclusion scorecard which includes all categories of absence data is published 6 times per year.

Targeting Support Meetings: to 'identify, discuss, and agree' actions for pupils who are persistently or severely absent and those at risk of becoming so	In place. A full team of Access and Attendance Officers is in place following autumn term recruitment. Officers meet termly with all schools to carry out targeting support meetings.
Regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area	In place. Networks are convened in the spring and summer terms. A conference is convened in the autumn term.
Provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance.	In place. Targeting support meetings are fully integrated with the early help locality link workers. Meetings with schools are held in partnership.

How is the place-based plan addressing attendance in the city?

School attendance has an extremely high profile in Plymouth. Improving the overall school attendance figure to above 96% is one of the three priority areas contained in the 2023/24 Place-based plan.

[Place-based Plymouth Portal – Place-based School Improvement \(placebasedplymouth.org\)](https://placebasedplymouth.org)

What does the attendance data tell us?

The overall absence rate in Plymouth for the 2022/23 Autumn and Spring Term combined was 7.3%. This was lower than the national absence rate of 7.6% and Southwest absence rate of 8.1%. The DfE will publish the national benchmark for the 2022/23 full academic year in March 2024. Termly unvalidated national attendance data by term is available through the Wonde system.

Local unvalidated data from the Plymouth Inclusion Scorecard showed that the overall attendance rate for the 2023/24 Autumn term was 92.9%. This is an increase from 91.9% in the same period for the 2022/23 academic year. This benchmarks us below the regional attendance rate of 92.4% and the national rate of 92.7%.

Table 1: persistent absence (less than 90% attendance)

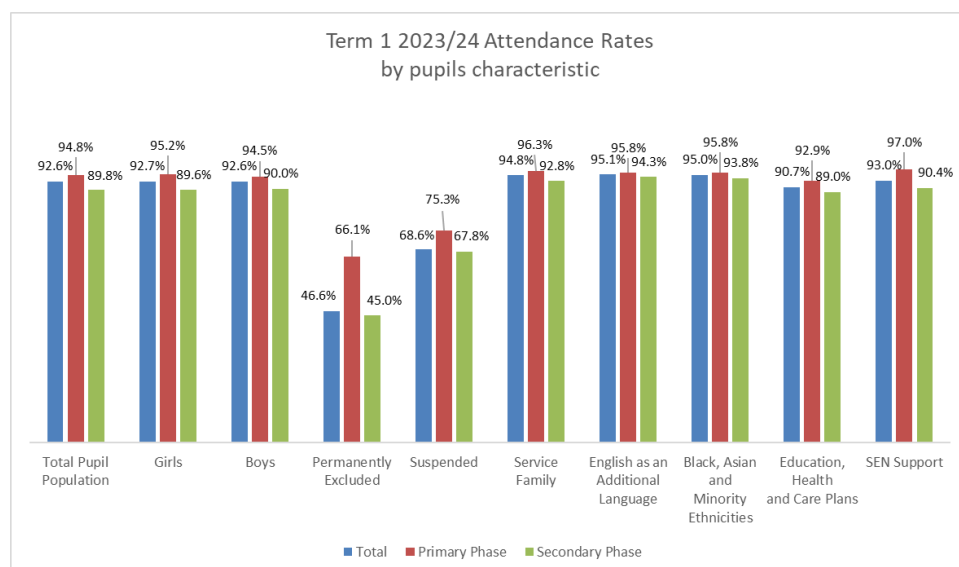
	Overall	Primary phase	Secondary phase
1.9.23 – 9.2.24	22.58%	15.56%	30.12%
1.9.22 – 9.2.23	25.38%	19.61%	31.4%

Table 2: severe absence (less than 50% attendance)

	Overall	Primary phase	Secondary phase
1.9.23 – 9.2.24	2.92%	0.96%	4.91%
1.9.22 – 9.2.23	2.23%	0.71%	3.77%

In summary, 2023/24 academic year to date has seen a reduction in the percentage of secondary and primary aged pupils who are persistently absent from school. At the primary phase, this has been a 4.05% improvement. However, the number of children who are severely absent from has increased at both phases with the increase in the secondary phase standing at 1.14%.

Table 3: attendance by pupil characteristic



The latest autumn term 2023/24 data from the inclusion scorecard indicates that overall attendance for all pupils remains above the 2022/23 benchmark by 0.5 percentage points (pp). However, there is a 5pp adverse gap between secondary and primary school attendance. This pattern is repeated across gender groups although there is less than a percentage point between the attendance of boys and girls at the secondary phase.

Attendance rates for those children subject to permanent exclusion and suspension remain a key recognised priority. Many students who are permanently excluded meet the definition of severe absence (missing 50% or more of school) and many children subject to suspension meet the definition of persistent absence (missing 10% or more of school); for example, research shows that 90% of young offenders had been persistently absent.

Other groups highlighted by the data for specific action are children at SEN Support (89%) and children with an EHC plan (90.4%) at the secondary phase. Attendance rates for both these cohorts are indicative of greater persistent absence.

Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing

A report entitled Educational Perspectives on Emotional Health and Wellbeing was presented to Scrutiny Committee on 12 September 2023. A section in this report outlines factors relating to attendance and engagement with school. Children with SEN in the area of Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) are more likely to be subject to a reduced timetable, experience poor school attendance and be more likely to find themselves suspended or permanently excluded from school. Some children experience high levels of anxiety that can lead to emotionally based school avoidance. The Covid lockdowns have also led to an increase in social emotional and mental health needs in children and young people.

The SEND graduated approach to Inclusion and iThrive frameworks [Graduated approach to inclusion - SENCO Guide - Plymouth Online Directory](#) define the processes to support schools/settings and families within localities at universal, targeted and specialist levels. Principles underpinning a whole setting approach with preventative and early intervention strategies are important, with specific

targeted and specialist interventions for groups and individual children being triggered and prioritised through monitoring and assessment meetings.

A range of professionals provide co-ordinated provision. This includes Mental Health Support Team practitioners, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) professionals, school nurses, Educational Psychologists and SEND advisory practitioners. The locality Connect 2 early help support workers link with these teams.

Individual interventions with families are co-ordinated in conjunction with school staff, for example, where there is emotionally based school avoidance. Specific Guidance for children and young people, parents/carers and school staff has been jointly produced by the Educational Psychology Service and CAMHS and is accessed through services, schools and the local offer pages. [Emotionally Based School Avoidance Resources for school staff, parents, and young people - Plymouth Online Directory](#)

The Plymouth Attendance strategy

Since the launch of the Attendance strategy (2023-26) in term 6 of the 2022/23 academic year a number of actions have been completed under priority areas. In addition, actions have been prioritised for the spring and summer terms:

Priority 1: Consistent Plymouth wide ambition, policy and practice

Priority actions for the spring and summer terms 2023/24

Priority	Action	Update
P1/001	Agree, publish and circulate the 'Plymouth Attendance Policy'	This is a priority for the summer term 2024 and will be a focus for the spring term attendance network.
P1/004	Develop locality, school and trust attendance data sets in order to ensure that children who fall into an absence category, who are missing out on education or who are subject to a reduced timetable are identified at the earliest opportunity	Targeting Support meetings are being rolled out to all mainstream secondary schools in the Spring Term 2024. All maintained schools and academies will have a termly targeting support meeting in the Summer Term 2024 and each term after that. The severely absent cohort will be prioritised for discussion.

Priority 2: Training development and communication

Priority	Action	Update
P2/001	Establish an annual multi-agency Plymouth attendance conference	Complete
P2/002	Agree, publish and circulate a multi-agency Plymouth Attendance Charter	On the agenda for the Attendance Network March 2024. Roll out September 2024
P2/003	Attendance updates are included in Plymouth's education bulletin.	Termly updates starting Spring Term 2024.

P2/004	Establish termly locality networks for designated school senior leaders in order to embed and share best practice	Complete
P2/007	Design and deliver a city-wide media campaign that promotes the importance of good school attendance	Complete. The campaign ran in the summer term 2023 and attracted local coverage. The toolkit created with schools was considered by the DfE as part of the national strategy.
P2/008	Carry out a city-wide audit in order to map the opportunities that support children and families to engage with education	Ordinarily Available Provision document is being developed and will share best practice and resources for schools to use to support children and families. Roll out May 2024.

Priority 3: Early identification leads to the development of targeted interventions

Priority	Action	Update
P2/002	Develop and embed an attendance data dashboard that provides data at a school and trust level.	The Plymouth Inclusion Scorecard is published on a termly basis. The attendance data will be extracted and shared at attendance networks from March 2024.

Priority 4: consistent approach to transition

Priority	Action	Update
P4/005	Plymouth's Graduated Approach to inclusion is refreshed to include strategies and support for children with barriers to school attendance	Complete. A draft of the Graduated Approach to inclusion is complete and will be launched in May 2024 as part of the SEND Improvement Strategy.