

## PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

<b>Subject:</b>	School Attendance
<b>Committee:</b>	Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	6 February 2019
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor McDonald (Cabinet Member of Children and Young People) Councillor Jon Taylor (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Transformation)
<b>CMT Member:</b>	Alison Botham (Director of Children's Services)
<b>Author:</b>	Jo Siney (Head of SEND)
<b>Contact details</b>	Tel: 01752 308744 email: jo.siney@plymouth.gov.uk
<b>Ref:</b>	JAH/JS
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Part:</b>	I

---

### **Purpose of the report:**

The following report has been prepared at the request of the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide members with a briefing on School Attendance.

---

### **Corporate Plan**

This report supports 'A Growing City'. It helps to make sure children and young people benefit from regular education in order to achieve; develop the necessary skills to be productive citizens who can make a sustained contribution to both the society and economy of the city. It will also help to reduce inequalities within the city.

The work reflects our values of co-operation between partners and the recognition that as a society, we are responsible for each other.

The report supports 'A Caring Plymouth – Focus on prevention and early intervention'. The document provides an overview of the support offered to young people where school attendance is a concern in order to take timely steps to resolve and make sure the appropriate support is in place.

---

### **Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land**

None for the purpose of this briefing report.

---

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

- **Child Poverty:** Regular attendance at school provides a routine for parent/carers which allows them to take paid employment and reduce the impact of child poverty. It improves children's potential for future employment, education and training.
  - **Community Safety:** (due regard to preventing crime and disorder): Poor school attendance increases the risk of child exploitation and anti social behavior. It is important to safeguard children who are vulnerable by ensuring children are seen and supported by professionals and families to reduce this risk.
  - **Health and Safety** (any health and safety implications): Regular attendance at school provides oversight and monitoring that identifies when a child is at risk, or vulnerable and in need of support. This identification enables support to be arranged in a timely way.
  - **Risk Management** (to identify any risk management issues): The management of children missing education and concerns arising regarding successful inclusion in school enable both action to be taken to safeguarding the individual child, and take steps to reduce the impact of this for other children. Close working with school and other partners is important to achieve this outcome effectively.
- 

**Equality and Diversity**

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? Not completed for the purpose of this briefing report.

---

**Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:**

For the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive the report for consideration.

---

**Alternative options considered and rejected:**

This is a briefing report only.

---

**Published work / information:**

None for the purpose of this report.

**Background papers:**

None for the purpose of this report.

Title	Part I	Part II	Exemption Paragraph Number						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7

---

**Sign off:**

Fin	DJN.1 8.19.1 90	Leg	It/31 964/ 240 1	Mon Off		HR		Assets		IT		Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member Judith Harwood													
Has the Cabinet Member(s) agreed the contents of the report? Yes													

## Introduction

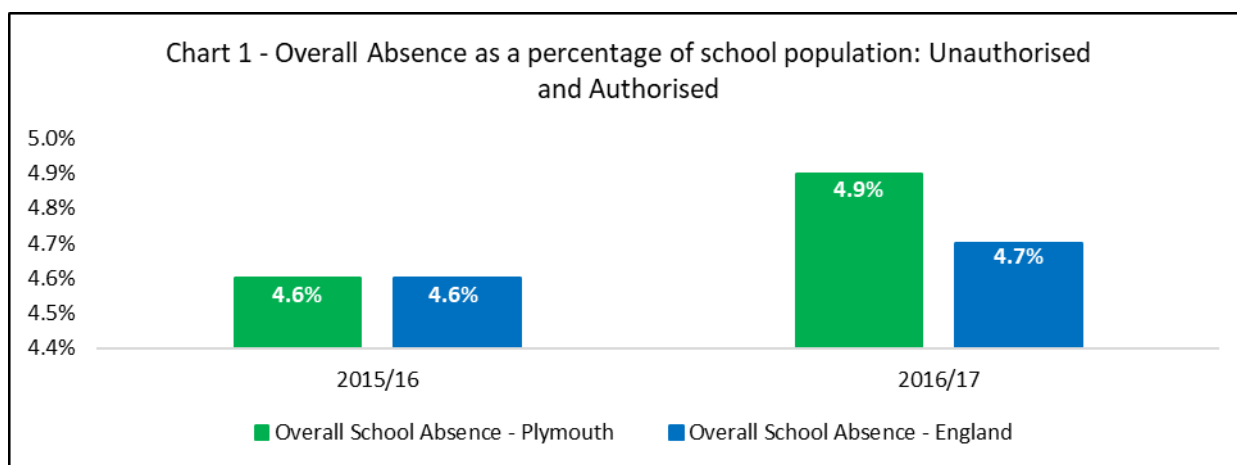
This briefing paper sets out the current position in Plymouth in relation to pupil attendance at school. It considers trends regarding pupil absence from school, areas for concern and plans for improvement. The data relating to pupil absence requires careful monitoring and review due to increasing levels of absence from Plymouth schools. It is important that we continue work to better understand the reasons for increasing levels of absence and review evidence-based approaches available to improve this position for children and young people in Plymouth. Absence ultimately impacts on pupil attainment and outcomes. Understanding and developing robust action plans underpinned by data enables us to uphold and deliver our corporate values.

The data collated by the Education, Participation and Skills department included within this report set out our current position on pupil absence and provides an overview of the data related to persistent (attendance below 90%) and overall absence of pupils in Plymouth.

The paper highlights that overall absence from school is increasing for children and young people in Plymouth. There is an upward trend in persistent absence from school which is a cause for concern in terms of the impact on outcomes for children and young people. The priorities for the City with regard to this issue, and areas for development are held in scope within this paper and are detailed towards the end.

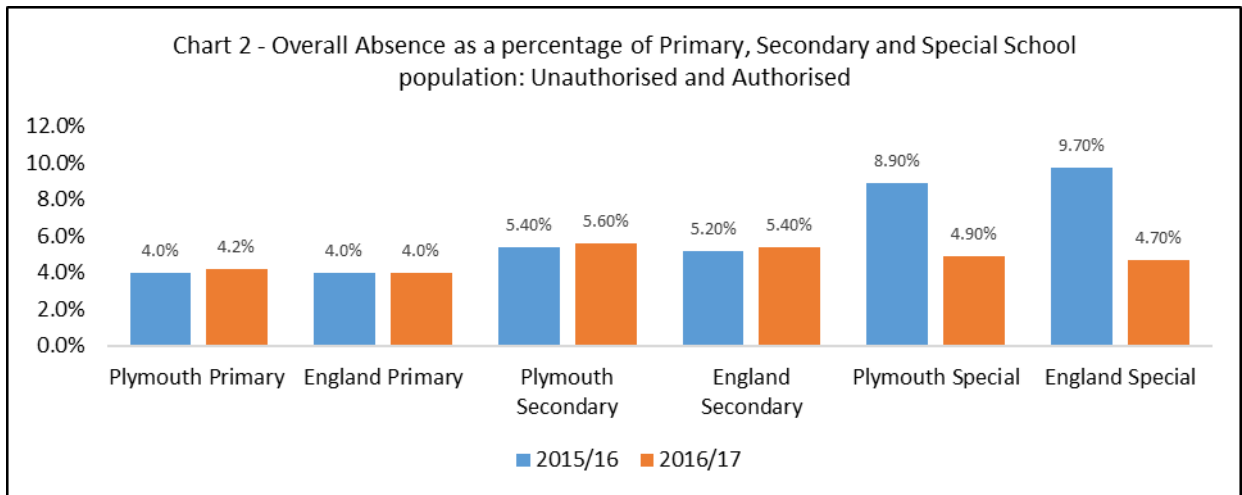
## Overall Absence

In 2015/16 the Overall absence rate in Plymouth was on par with the National average (chart 1). By 2016/17, the percentage of overall absence in Plymouth had increased by 0.3 percentage points (pp) which is larger than the national increase (0.1pp).



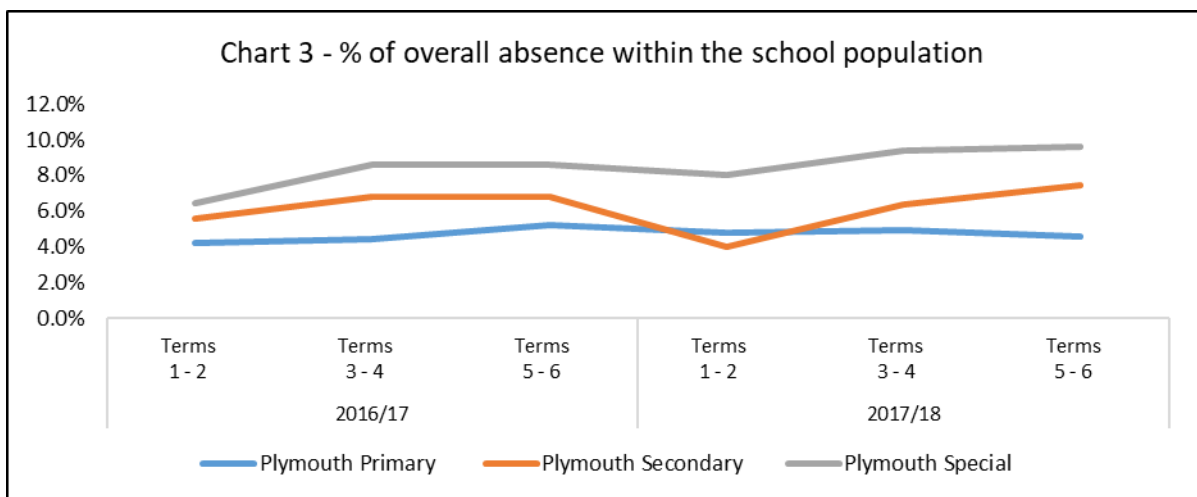
A further breakdown (chart 2) shows that the overall absence rate of:

- Primary pupils was on par with the England average in 2015/16 but increased by 0.2pp in 2016/17;
- Secondary pupils was 0.2pp above the England average. Both Plymouth and the national averages increased by 0.2pp in 2016/17
- Special school pupils was 0.8pp lower than the England Average. In 2016/17 rates across the country dropped and Plymouth became 0.2pp above the England average.



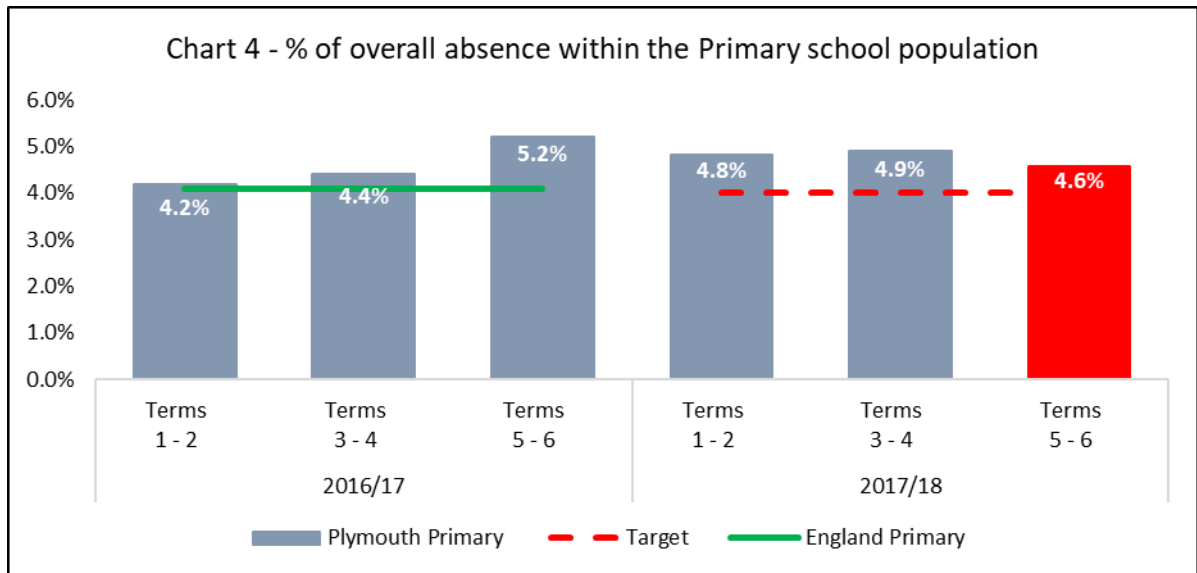
The trends in the overall absence in pupils seen locally in Plymouth do not match the trends seen nationally and is a cause for concern.

A closer look at local data (Chart 3), across two years spanning 2016/17 and 2017/18, shows that increases in overall absence has increased across all school phases. Further analysis will be required to understand the dip in terms 1 and 2 at secondary level.



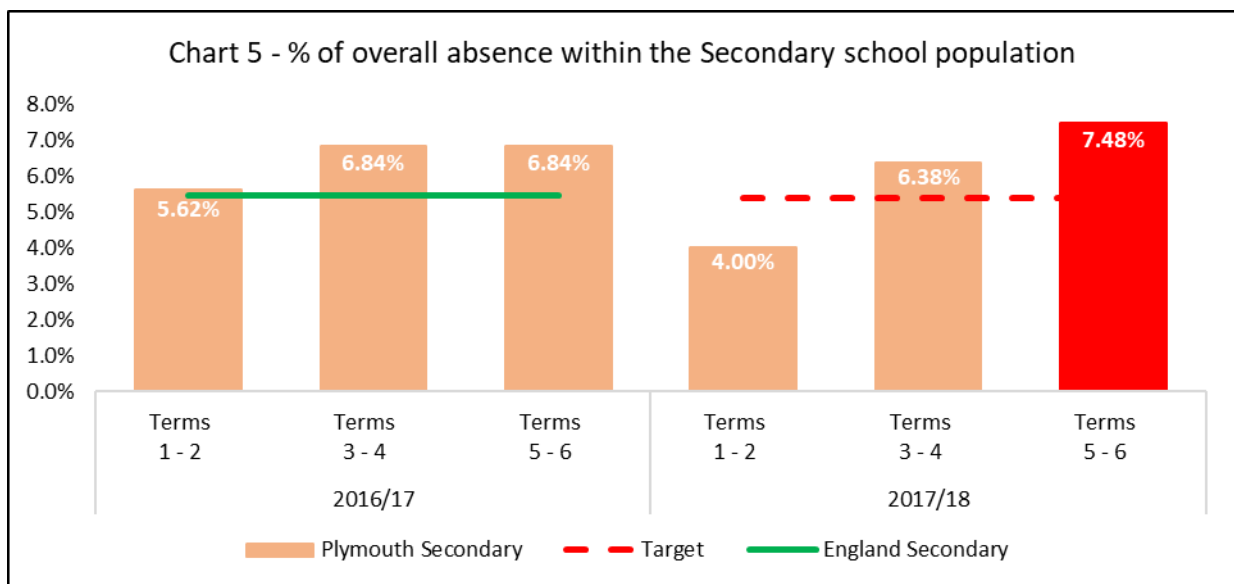
A closer look at **overall absence rates in primary schools** (chart 4) show that whilst increases were seen throughout 2016/17, there is a decreasing trend in 2017/18. A target of 4% had been set for 2017/18. We set this target so that we continue to strive to reduce the % of overall absence of children in Primary schools to reach the current benchmarks. The target for 2018/19 remains at 4% and for 2019/20 is set for 3.8% in order to improve above the current benchmarks by 2019/20.

Currently Plymouth performance does not meet the target set and the national benchmark. Whilst this is a cause for concern our trends are improving.

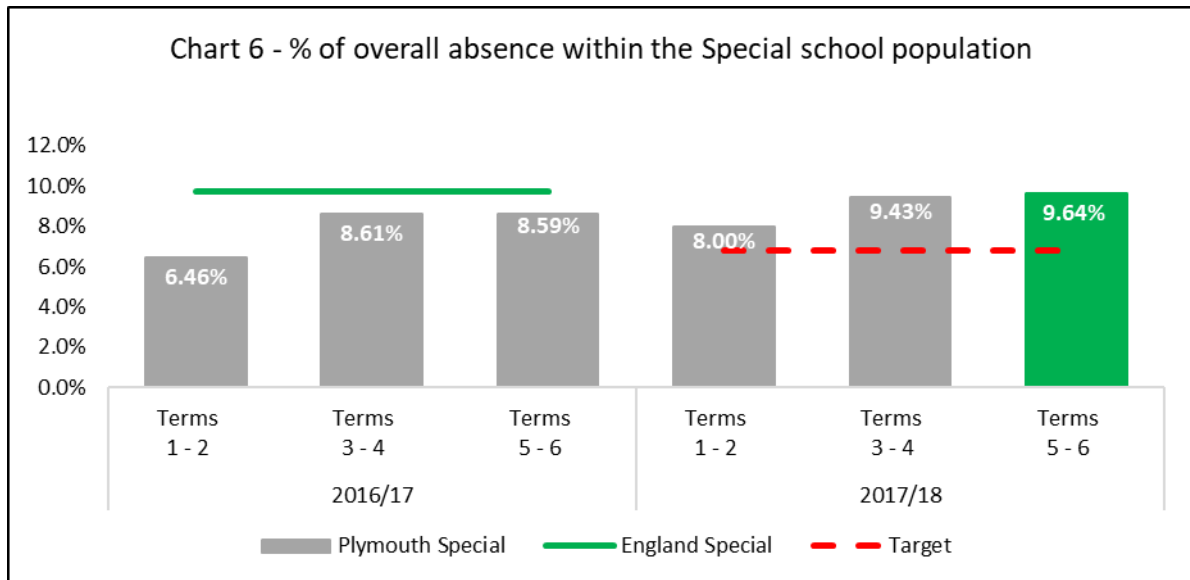


**Overall absence rate in secondary schools** (Chart 5) show that despite lower levels of overall absences in terms 1 and 2, for both 2016/17 and 2017/18, increases occur throughout the academic year. A target of 5.4% has been set for 2017/18 through to 2019/20. We set this target so that we continue to strive to reduce the % of overall absence of young people in secondary schools.

Currently Plymouth’s performance is not meeting our set target or improving against benchmarks; this is a cause for concern.



**Overall absence rate in special schools** (Chart 6) show that despite lower levels of overall absences in terms 1 and 2, in both 2016/17 and 2017/18 increases occur throughout the academic year. A target of 6.8% has been set for 2017/18 through to 2019/20. Currently Plymouth exceeds its target but remains below the current national benchmark.

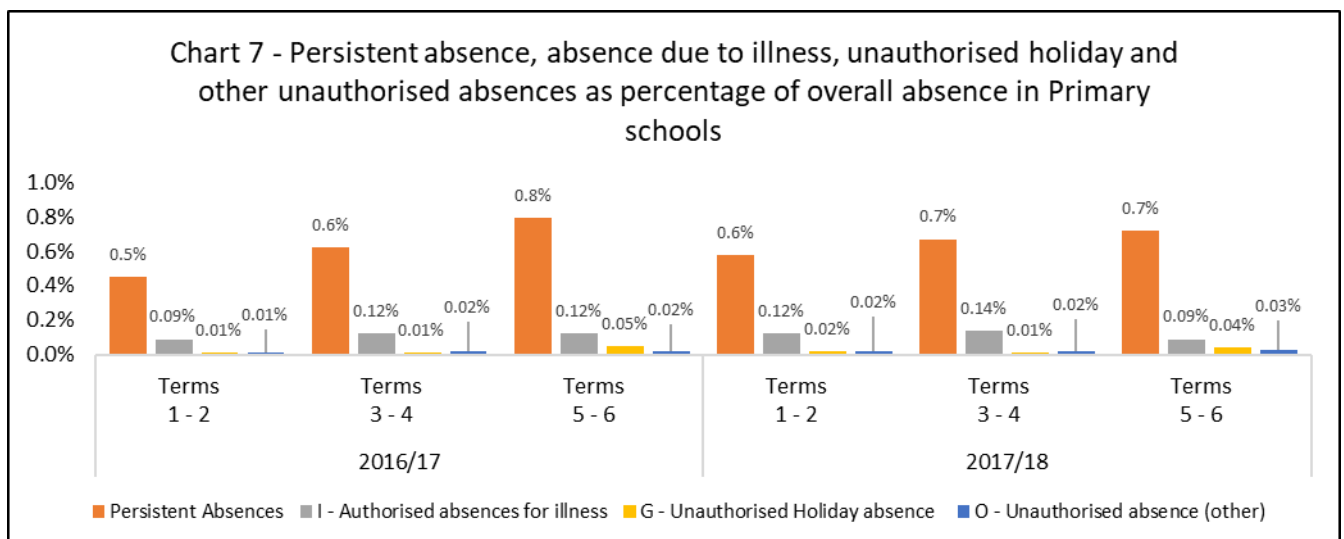


## 2. PERSISTENT ABSENCE

In order to better understand the causes behind overall absence rates, the Inclusion, Attendance and Welfare Service have been monitoring Persistent Absence (number of pupils with attendance below 90%). Reasons for absence are categorised by schools against a schedule of codes. The three categories that account for the highest percentage of absence are authorised absence for illness, unauthorised absence for holidays and unauthorised absences 'other' across all school phases (Chart 7, 8 and 9). These charts show that persistent absence rates and authorised absences for illness remain areas of concern. As a result 'inadequate pupil attainment linked to different patterns of non-attendance' is an amber risk within the operational risk register. This is monitored quarterly and reported to the Risk Management Committee.

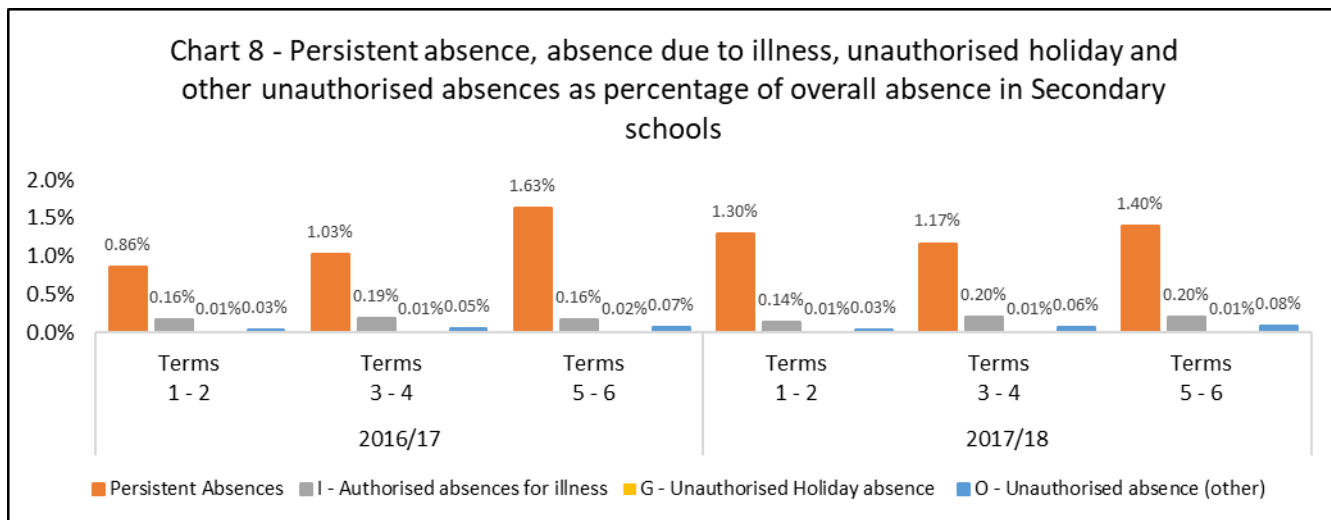
At **Primary school phase**, as a percentage of overall absence:

- Persistent absence increased by 3 percentage points (pp) in 2016/17 and by 1pp in 2017/18. Whilst the trend is an increasing one, the rate of increase is lower in 2017/18.
- Authorised absence for illness increased by 0.3pp in 2016/17 but decreased by 0.3pp in 2017/18



At **Secondary school phase**, as a percentage of overall absence:

- Persistent absence increased by 0.8 percentage points (pp) in 2016/17 and by 0.1pp in 2017/18. Whilst the trend remains an increasing one, the rate of increase is lower in 2017/18.
- Authorised absence for illness peaked in the spring term. This declined in 2016/17 but remained at the same levels in 2017/18.



At **Special school phase**, as a percentage of overall absence:

- In 2016/17 persistent absence peaked in the spring term but the overall increase was 0.7 percentage points (pp). In 2017/18 persistent absence had a lower rate of increase (0.5pp) but overall remains higher than the previous year.
- Authorised absence for illness peak in the spring term. This declined in 2016/17 by 0.09pp. These trends were not seen in 2017/18; an increase by 0.09pp occurred and was 0.05pp higher than the end of the academic year than the previous year.

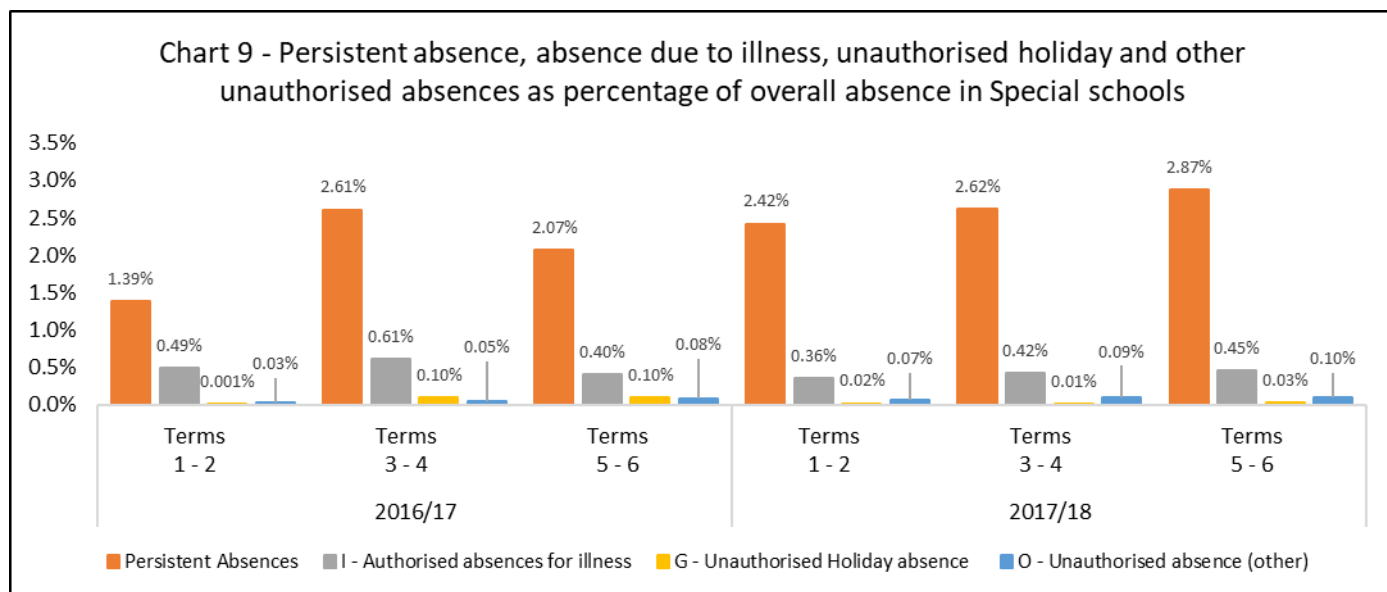
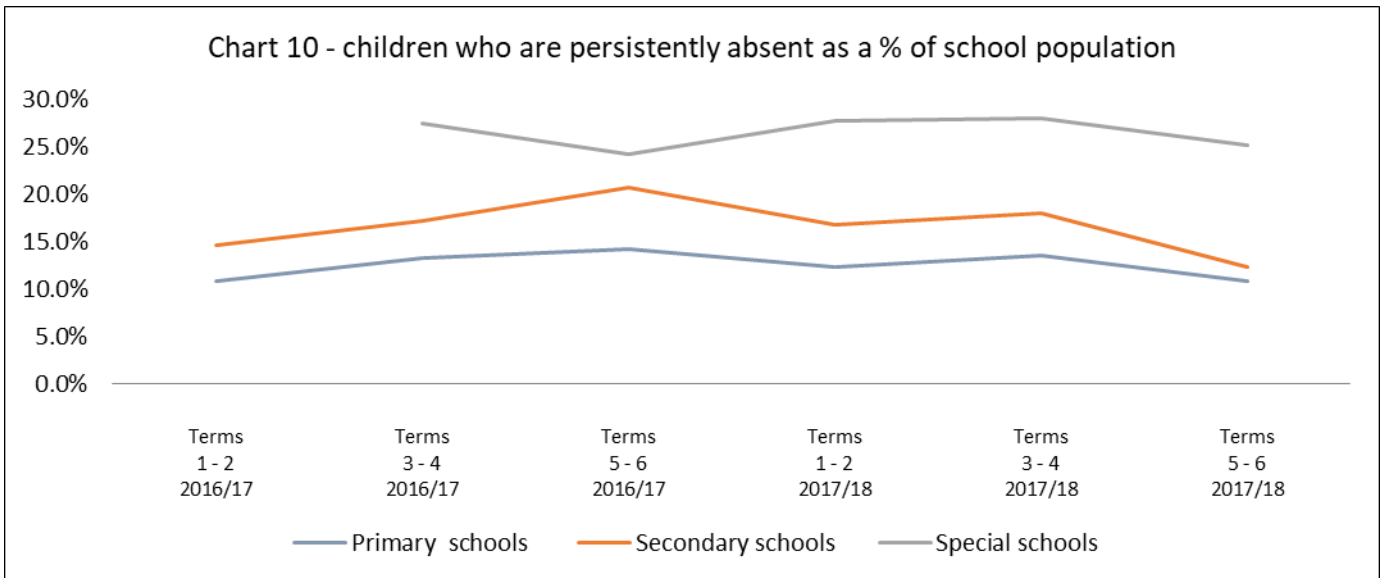


Chart 10 shows the trends of persistent absence rates across all school phases as a percentage of the whole school population (not as a percentage of overall absence as previously discussed)

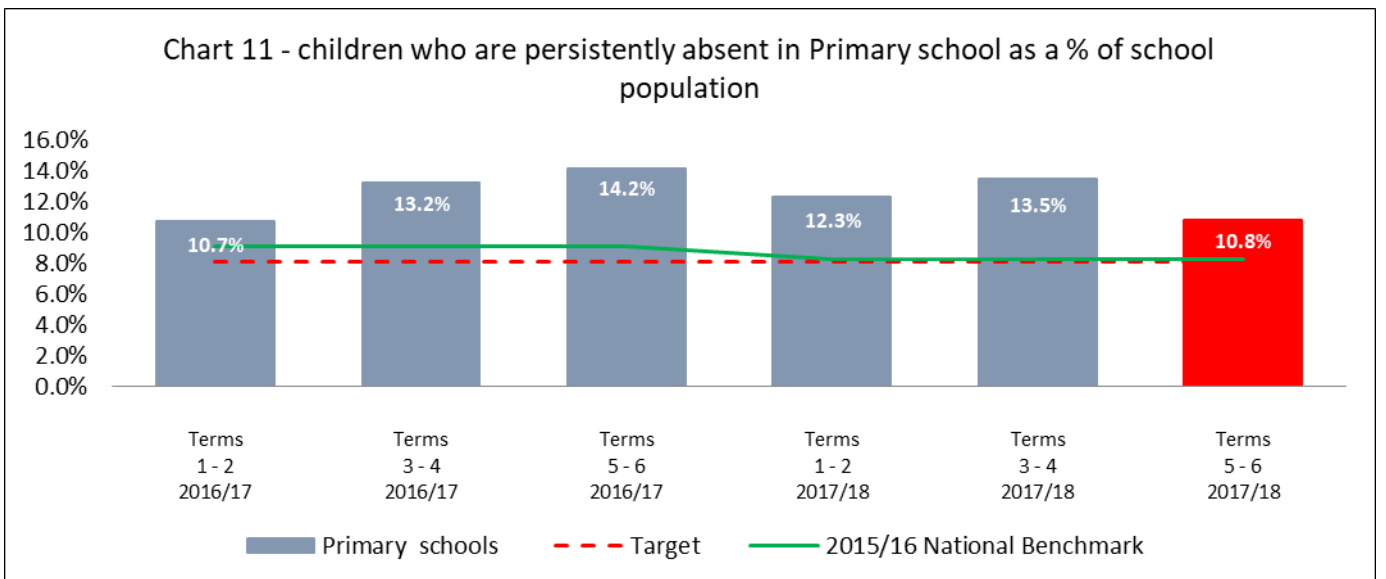




A closer look at persistent absence local data (Chart 10), across two years spanning 2016/17 and 2017/18, shows that increases in persistent absence had increased across both primary and secondary phase in 2016/17. In 2017/18 decreases in persistent absence across all school phases can be seen.

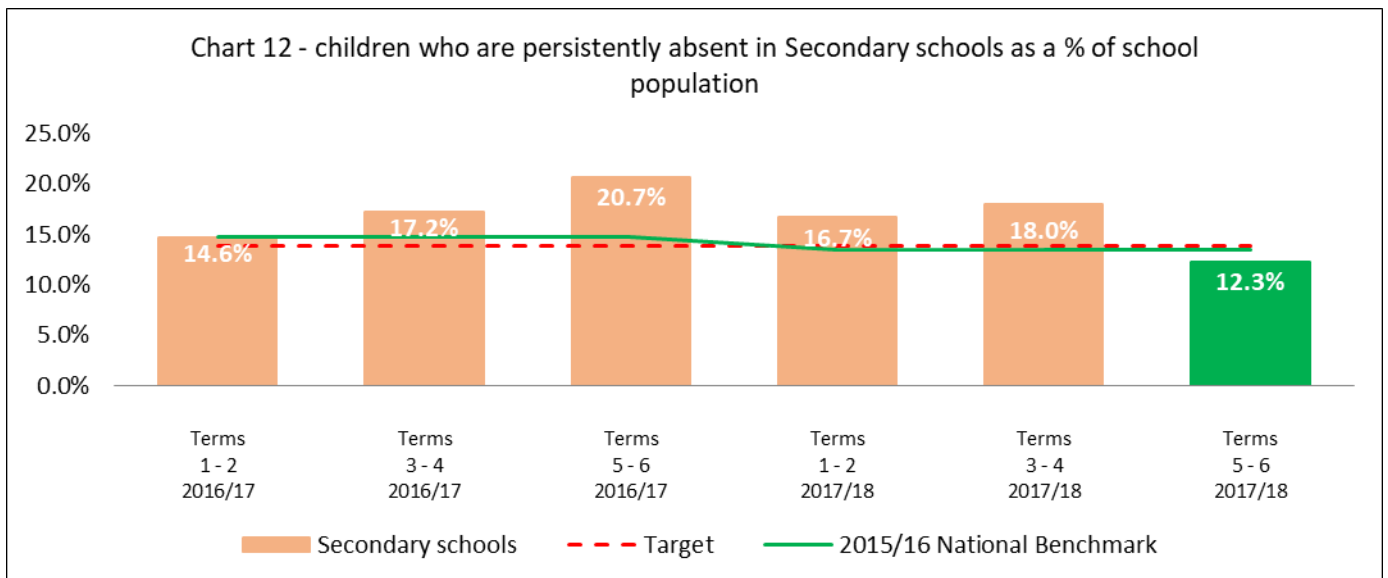
**Persistent absence rates in primary schools** (chart 11) show a decrease of 1.5pp throughout 2017/18 and were on par with the beginning of the 2016/17 academic year. A target of 8.1% had been set for 2017/18 to reach the current national benchmark.

Currently Plymouth exceeds its target and the national benchmark. Despite trends improving, this is a cause for concern.



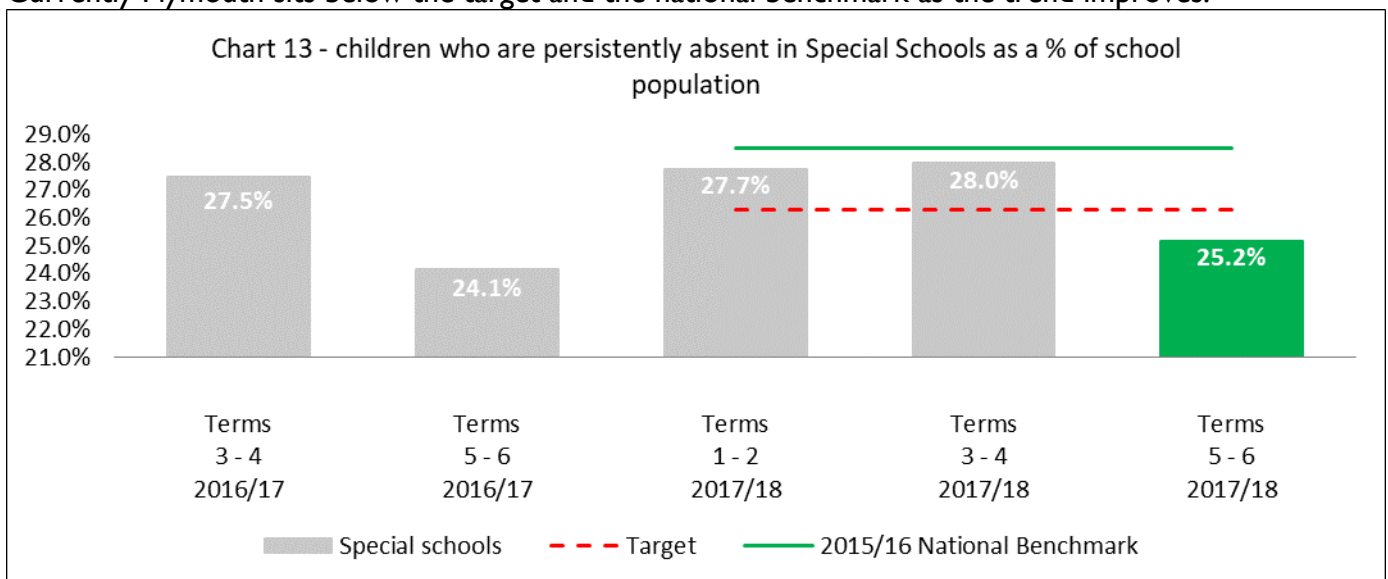
**Persistent absence rate in secondary schools** (Chart 12) show a decrease of 4.4pp throughout 2017/18 and were 2.4pp lower than the beginning of 2016/17 academic year. A target of 13.8% had been set for 2017/18. We set this target to reach the current national benchmark.

Currently Plymouth sits below the target and the national benchmark as the trend improves.



**Persistent absence rates in special schools (Chart 13)** show a decrease of 2.4pp throughout 2016/17 but were 1.1pp higher at the end of 2017/18 academic year compared to the end of the 2016/17 academic year. A target of 26.3% had been set for 2017/18. We set this target to reach the current national benchmark.

Currently Plymouth sits below the target and the national benchmark as the trend improves.



## Trends and Action

The Inclusion Attendance Welfare Service (IAWS), whose primary function is to ensure that all statutory school aged children are accounted for, receiving and attending suitable, full time education has identified the top causes of absence from school and have asked all schools in the city to submit data on a termly basis (as shown above in charts 7, 8 and 9 above). This is to ensure we can effectively monitor the data and take any actions necessary to support schools to manage absence.

*N.B. All data from ACE Multi Academy Trust and Plymouth School of Creative Arts is excluded from the analysis below. The reason for this is because their data would not reflect the different phases of school as their pupils are in Primary and Secondary and the data would be skewed.*

The IAWS fulfil Plymouth City Council’s (PCC) statutory responsibilities in relation to children missing education (CME), persistent absence, Fair Access reintegration admissions (Managed Transfers) and exclusions. The IAWS has safeguarding responsibilities specifically for all statutory school age children on roll in all Plymouth schools, those in un-regulated settings, educated at home and CME.

The Team currently provide the enhanced traded service to 63 of the 68 Plymouth Primaries; 17 of the 18 secondary Schools (Stoke Damerel Community College opted out in 2017); 6 of the 7 Special Schools and the Alternative Complementary Education Service. Each has a named Education Welfare Officer who regularly visits the school to undertake attendance monitoring meetings with designated members of staff and provide advice, support and challenge. While schools continue to pay for the enhanced service, we are able to continue to have a close and collaborative relationship with schools and EWOs are able to access attendance information, and monitor attendance effectively.

In addition to the work undertaken by the IAWS, the Education Participation and Skills Department has a number of teams who work directly with schools to improve outcomes for children and young people, as an example the Plymouth Leadership Advisors (PLAs) challenge schools regarding their data and act as a critical friend, monitoring the schools development (maintained schools only) and carry out safeguarding reviews. We signpost to other services within the department e.g. 0-25 SEND Team and in addition schools are encouraged to use the expertise of local teaching schools where the issue may be a teaching and learning one. PLAs investigate every Ofsted complaint they receive and where appropriate suggest strategies for improvement.

As a city the absence codes that have been identified as the highest percentage of all absences are:-

Code G	Holiday not authorised by the school or in excess of the period determined by the head teacher.
Code I	Illness (not medical or dental appointments)
Code O	Absent from school without authorisation

Monitoring of these codes indicates the following:-

**Code G (unauthorised holiday during term time)** – whilst this is not a high percentage for either Secondary schools or special schools it remains in the top 15% for primary schools. This contributes to the overall persistent absence rate in the city and we have been concerned about the impact this will have on pupil attainment. Therefore, in an attempt to gain an understanding of any possible correlation locally, we ran the whole nationally published 2016/17 validated datasets for key stage 2 attainment and primary persistent absence through a programme called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This showed that nationally the correlation between Persistent Absence and KS2 attainment was significant. This means that there is a correlation between persistent absence and levels of attainment and the correlation is very unlikely to be down to chance.

**Code I (illness)** - the percentages are reflected across all phases of school (Primary, Secondary and Special). The evidence shows that pupil illness accounts for the highest percentage of all absences from school across all of the schools in Plymouth. High levels of absence due to illness have always been a concern and focal point for attendance monitoring and challenge within schools and with parents. There is consistent approach taken across all schools in Plymouth to challenge absence due to illness where there are concerns that the absence appears excessive or unusual. Where there is reason to believe absence is unjustified and school have been unable to resolve the concern themselves, referrals are made to the IAWS.

During the academic year 2016/17, there were 3924 school attendance and welfare cases open to the IAWS and in 2017/18, there were 3966 across Primary, Secondary and Special Schools.

Absence due to anxiety and mental health issues accounts for a significant proportion of the absence in the city and the lack of specialist support services is regularly cited as a major concern by schools, parents and agencies. However, extracting data from the figures above to show the impact of mental health on school attendance is not possible as attendance monitoring databases in schools do not allow for different types illness to be recorded.

Of the referrals made to the IAWS over the last 2 academic years, the numbers of pupils referred who have SEND has remained stable at 24%. Service realignment now means that the IAWS sits within the SEND and Inclusion service area, this will facilitate further development in relation to reducing absence for pupils with SEND. In addition, the service and schools are supported by the SEND Leadership Associate Team across both primary, secondary and special schools.

The data for 2016/17 showed that the overall absence rate for pupils in Plymouth is lower than pupils across the comparator groups (national and regional). This is true across all school types. In Plymouth, primary school pupils with a Statement of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) have a higher absence rate than all other primary school pupils; Secondary school pupils who receive SEN support have a higher absence rate than all other secondary pupils.

The data for 2016/17 shows that the persistent absence rate in Plymouth's primary schools is lower than the rate across the comparator groups. In Plymouth, primary pupils with a Statement or EHCP are most likely to be persistently absent. However, this still compares favourably against comparator groups. The persistent absence rate in Plymouth's secondary schools is higher than the national rate but lower than our regional or statistical neighbour's rates. In Plymouth, secondary pupils who receive SEN support are more likely to be persistently absent. The persistent absence rate in Plymouth's special schools compares favourably against comparator groups. The data for 2017/18 is currently being finalised for the Plymouth Book.

### **Supporting Pupils with Health Needs**

Schools have responsibility to ensure that all children with health needs should have a Health Care Plan (not to be confused with an Education Health Care Plan under SEND). Most children and young people who are supported under the multi-agency Early Help Assessment process or through school based 'Team around Me' plans. In cases where a child is appropriately deemed unable to access education in school, the LA provide support for children to access alternative provision via the s19 (Supporting Pupils with Health Needs) Panel. However, this is a finite resource. ACE is currently funded for 34 full time equivalent places for pupils who cannot attend school due to a health need. 16 of these places cover the education provided at the Hospital settings. This leaves 18 full time places for Outreach and Dover Road placement.

A project group has been established to review the current policies and processes over how students with medical needs access a suitable education provision. The project group is now looking at ways to broaden the offer for students with medical needs that will make their education more accessible. This includes exploring options which make better use of the available resources and new technologies. Discussions are underway with two well established providers and the Local FE College to explore the option of distance learning for some students who would benefit from this offer. The IAWS have also developed stronger links with CAMHS over the last 18 months following meetings with the Consultant Psychiatrists, Managers and Mental Health Practitioners. This work centred on promoting a shared understanding of the capacity to support children in school as an alternative to simply being 'signed off' school. This remains an on-going piece of work.

The introduction of the Reduced Timetable Protocol in October 2017 sets out Plymouth's position in relation to pupils who experience reductions in their full time education. This along with improved recording on the CME Risk Register is enabling the LA to gather data regarding the number of children experiencing a reduction in their entitlement to a full time education. The Reduced Timetable Protocol was created following the identification of the misuse of the B code resulting in children's absence being hidden within normal attendance monitoring checks. Code B represents 'Off Site Educational Activity' and statistically counts as a present mark. This code should not be used when children are just completing set school work at home. Schools are now correctly coding the absence as I for illness or C other authorised circumstances, which are obviously absence codes. Further analysis will need to be undertaken regarding the use of the B code and RTTs in order to understand the impact this has had on the overall absence rate in the city.

Schools are now aware that all children on reduced timetables are classed as CME and that this needs to be reported to the LA. The CME at Risk Register enables the LA to monitor and challenge excessive use of reduced timetables and where children may be at risk of remaining on reduced timetables without a clear plan of support and reintegration.

**Code O (unauthorised absence)** – This is in the top 15% of all absences for all three phases of schools Primary (7.59%), Secondary (15.43%) and Special Schools (12.44%) reflecting the overall data for the city. Three secondary schools out of the 18 account for a high percentage of the figure. They are in localities where there are additional challenges due to deprivation.

**Unauthorised absence (code O and G) are offences under s444 of the Education Act 1996 and can lead to legal action**

Legal enforcement action is taken by the IAWS as a last resort following extensive casework and support offered. The low number of prosecutions compared to the average number of open cases over the last 2 years- 3945 per annum is demonstrated in the table below.

### Prosecution data

	2016/17	2017/18
Primary	65	51
Secondary	98	87
Total	163	138

### Penalty Notices

As an alternative to prosecuting parents in court, the law allows the LA to issue penalty notices (fines) instead. In Plymouth, we use discretionary powers to issue penalty notices in relation to unauthorised absence. Penalty notices are an alternative to taking parents to court and avoid the potential for parents to receive a criminal conviction. Payment of the fine settles the matter completely and it cannot be referred to again. This is why penalty notices were used for unauthorised absence due to holiday and are currently used for low level and first time offences. Of the average number of referrals per annum (3945) very few resulted in a penalty notice as demonstrated in the table below.

NB: If a parent does not pay the penalty notice it results in a criminal prosecution for the offence not the non-payment of the fine.

### Penalty notices issued:

	2016/17	2017/18
Primary	64	59
Secondary	196	182
Total	260	241

The IAWS team through extensive and complex casework continue to be successful in improving attendance for a large proportion of persistent absentees. However, the complexities around mental health diagnosis have presented an increasingly challenging landscape in terms of improving attendance for many children and young people. The extent to which we can challenge and pursue non-attendance in these circumstances is often greatly limited.

**Code C** Leave of absence authorised by the school. This code is used to indicate absence due to an unavoidable cause or circumstances that do not fall within the codes above. An example would be absence to attend a family funeral. This code is also sometimes used by schools in place of the illness code when a child is on a reduced timetable. If a child is on a reduced timetable as part of a behaviour management plan the expectation is that schools will use this absence code for the sessions that the pupil is not expected to attend.

This code accounts for 5.44% of the total absences from school and this is reflected across all three phases of school.

- Primary Schools 4.40%
- Secondary Schools 4.65%
- Special Schools 10.49%

## **Conclusion**

We have a clear understanding of our priorities and in response we have set about establishing a steering group, which will drive the agenda for inclusion forward for children in this City and address the following areas for development:

- Systems and processes in relation to primary Fair Access to be reviewed and updated with impact assessment. Further analysis is required to understand the impact of changes to behaviour management policies in schools.
- Analysis of impact of new Secondary Placement Panel arrangements to be undertaken. Further analysis of the range of reasons for absence due to illness in order to identify any potential steps which might improve the impact on school attendance.
- Impact assessment of reduced timetable protocol to include numbers of pupils with reduced time tabled and compliance with protocol included in management data set.
- Work with schools to review the approaches taken to monitor children who are being educated off-site (Code B) including risks and outcomes.
- Review Section 19 (medical needs) provision to ensure sufficiency in the available offer.
- Explore evidence-based interventions which may support and improve school attendance for children and young people.