

Report of Children’s Services – Targeted Services

Report to Inner East Area Committee

Date: 24th October 2013

Subject: Targeted Services response to managing School Attendance

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Burmantofts and Richmond, Gipton and Harehills, Killingbeck and Seacroft
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. Previous reports to the Area Committee have provided an overview of the local data and a summary of some of the tools and powers available for improving attendance. This report will provide examples of the approaches taken and the outcomes that are being achieved.
2. Education Supervision Orders (ESO) provide a high challenge, high support approach to more enduring issues of poor school attendance. 100% of the cases where an ESO has been used have shown a significant improvement in attendance.
3. When a Penalty Notices warning is used the available data suggests that these are effective in improving attendance and in many cases a Penalty Notice fine is not required.
4. Working with primary schools and parents early in their children’s school life is a key approach to prevention and early identification of the underlying issues relating to poor school attendance. Considering how authorising absence for minor illnesses may perpetuate poor attendance has resulted in a successful programme of work in Parklands Primary school which is now being offered to other primary schools in the Area.

Recommendations

5. The Area Committee note the content of the report.
6. The Area Committee identify any specific areas of interest raised in the report for which they would like further detailed information; this could include:
7. The impact created by the highly mobile/transient nature of the local population or
8. More information on specific initiatives to improve attendance

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 At the Inner East Area Committee meeting in June 2013, detailed information was provided in relation to the attendance performance of individual schools within the Inner East Area Committee area. This information was requested and was broken down by attendance rates and persistent absenteeism for individual schools.
- 1.2. This report will focus on the specific activities and outcomes that are being delivered and provide some case study examples.

2. Background information

- 2.1 At the Area Committee meeting in September 2013 the bi-annual Children's Services report set out performance data for the Area which showed that for both primary and secondary schools, attendance is the lowest in the city. There has also been a 0.7% reduction in attendance in primary schools for the comparable previous period.
- 2.2 Poor attendance is often a symptom of more complicated family issues and cannot be dealt with in isolation or by an individual service. Where efforts at working with families to improve a child or young person's attendance have not been successful, in a small number of cases the local authority is obliged to make use of the statutory enforcement tools available to take legal action against parents.
- 2.3 The conversion to academy status for some schools in the Area does affect the amount of influence the Council has over the non – statutory element of work for improving attendance.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 All schools, whatever their status, should aim to achieve the highest possible levels of attendance as schools, children's services and local authorities are all accountable for outcomes for children and young people.
- 3.2 Every school should have a current, effective attendance policy detailing the procedures and systems for encouraging regular school attendance and investigating the underlying causes for poor school attendance. There should be a clear escalation of intervention within the school which is understood by all teaching and non-teaching staff.

- 3.3 Poor school attendance is often the symptom of much wider issues and in Children's Services we are working towards a model of delivery in which the lead family practitioner (from whichever discipline they may come) is the best person to understand the needs within a family and how those needs can be supported.
- 3.4 A six stage process has been developed which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the school, local authority (non-statutory role) and local authority (statutory role). This document can be provided by contacting the report author.
- 3.5 The status of schools does have a bearing on services that can be provided by the local authority. Academies are funded directly for the provision of support services for attendance and therefore do not receive any non-statutory provision from the local authority. A service level agreement is in place for Academies which sets out the statutory provision and allows Academies the opportunity to buy in additional traded services. The 3 primary academies in the Area have agreed to a traded service for attendance and receive the same level of support as they did prior to conversion.

4. Statutory Enforcement

- 4.1 Where efforts at working with families to improve a child or young person's attendance have not been successful, in a small number of cases, the local authority is obliged to make use of the statutory enforcement tools available to take legal action against parents. This represents a relatively small proportion of the total work with families and is only sought when all other avenues have failed to secure an improvement in attendance.
- 4.2 Penalty Notices can be issued when a child has been absent from school for five days in the same term or period of 12 weeks. For example a parent could be issued with a £60 fine for a child missing one day of school every week over a five week period or another parent could have a fine for a two week block of absence. A protocol is in place setting out the process for the issuing of a Penalty Notice and this includes the use of warning letters, when attendance levels are starting to fall.
- 4.3 Information on the use of Penalty notice warnings and fines issued during the last academic year for schools in Inner East Area for maintained schools:
- **228 penalty warnings of which 29 became fines (8 for unauthorised holidays).** A fine will only be issued if the attendance does not improve following a warning.
 - **87% penalty warnings resulted in improved attendance.**
 - **Average attendance improvement was 21%**
- 4.4 We do not have easy access to the data for the academies relating to their prevention work, so we do not know how many penalty warning letters they issued. We do know that we issued 11 penalty notice fines on their behalf for the last academic year.

4.5 An Education Supervision Order (ESO) is an order that is placed on the child and the parent when the local authority is appointed by the court to supervise that child's education for specified period of time. Education Supervision Orders are often successful when the parent is willing to engage with services but feels unable to bring about changes without significant support. They are a restorative approach providing a high level of challenge through the statutory process with support provided to for the parent and child to address the issues that may be causing the poor attendance. Education supervision orders are generally used with primary school pupils. **Case study 2** provides an example of the impact of an ESO and also demonstrates the complex nature of the families where attendance may be symptomatic of wider issues.

- **6 ESOs in 2012/13**
- **100% of those cases saw an improvement in attendance**
- **Average improvement being 32%.**

4.6 We will use legal enforcement and prosecute parents who fail to ensure their child's regular attendance at school under section 444 of the Education Act.

- **42 prosecutions**
- **25 (60%) have resulted in an improvement in attendance**
- **average improvement being by 34%.**

Case study 3 provides an example of the use of a parenting order.

4.7 Prevention and Early intervention.

4.8 Persistent Absence can include authorised and unauthorised absence and a pupil becomes a Persistent Absentee (PA) when their attendance drops below 85%.

4.9 In response to concerns from the Head Teacher and Governors at Parklands Primary a project was undertaken in the Summer Term 2013 to target the Persistent Absentees in one of 2 ways.

4.10 A cohort of 17 pupils, where there was a high number of unauthorised absences, were sent Penalty Notice warning letters and monitored for 4 weeks, 4 of these families were invited in to school for a meeting as there was no improvement. Following the meetings all 4 pupils' attendance improved.

4.11 A cohort of 15 pupils where the absence was due to illness, and was authorised, received a more supportive letter offering help to improve their child's attendance. This was followed up with home visits, and meetings in school for the 8 pupils whose attendance was of greatest concern. All but one of these pupils showed an improvement in attendance over the summer term.

4.12 As a result of this intervention the number of pupils at Parklands Primary who were Persistent Absentees fell from 35 to 26 in this time period, and the whole school attendance improved from 91.7% in March to 94.1% at the end of the summer

term. The school has incorporated the practice of meeting with parents whose children are ill, into their approach. The Attendance Adviser and Attendance Improvement Officer will continue to offer support to the school to ensure that the improvement is sustained. This is a model of support that can be offered to any school in the Area.

4.13 In each cluster there is a support and guidance panel where agencies and services in the cluster consider cases where additional needs have been identified. In the last academic year 65 referrals were made to the Inner East Cluster for specific support relating to attendance issues.

4.14 Initiatives are useful and do usually have an impact albeit for a limited period, pressure on resources mean they cannot always be repeated to sustain long term change. The Give it 100% (covered in the June report) saw over 2,000 children achieve 100% attendance during March 2013. The late gate initiative has been offered to all schools in Inner East with 8 schools taking part.

Other factors affecting attendance in Inner East Area.

4.15 The transient nature of the population in the Inner East Area of the city, coupled with the pressure on school places and high levels of deprivation can have a significant impact on attendance rates. Schools with a high turnover of pupils during the school year in particular are affected by this and while there are procedures in place for dealing with Children Missing Education (CME) to ensure that they are safeguarded the volume of this work, the impact on children's education and the overall impact for schools should not be underestimated.

5 Corporate Considerations

5.1 There are no corporate considerations this report provides information requested by the area committee into specific local activity.

5.2 Consultation and Engagement

5.2.1 The report provides additional information relating to school attendance issues for the committee area, as a result of the report further consultation with key stakeholders may be required to focus on specific areas of the report.

5.3 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

5.3.1 Equality issues are implicit in the information provided in this report. The differences shown illustrate that there are different levels of need and outcomes across the area and the wider city.

5.4 Council policies and City Priorities

5.4.1 A significant proportion of the information included in this report relates to the city priorities for children and young people and the outcomes contained in the CYPP 2011-15

5.5 Resources and value for money

5.5.1 There are no resource implications in this report

5.6 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

5.6.1 This report is not eligible for call in due to being a Council function

Risk Management

5.6.2 There are no risk management implications in this report.

6 Conclusions

6.1 This report provides information on some of the statutory approaches to dealing with attendance and provides a couple of case studies that demonstrate the impact that can be achieved.

6.2 If attendance levels begin to drop the use of warning letters can be effective, however, where more entrenched attendance is evident the use of statutory interventions with support can achieve success.

6.3 While individually cases can be dealt with as attendance starts to drop, some of the more challenging issues for the area include the movement of pupils in year and the pressure on school places. Future reports to the committee could consider the extent of the issue and explore some of the challenges faced by schools.

7. Recommendations

7.1 The Area Committee note the content of the report.

7.2 The Area Committee identify any specific areas of interest for which they would like future reports.

Attendance Case Study: Case study 1

What were the issues?

Referral made by a high school for a family that had recurrent attendance problems. The pattern over the previous years had been a number of week's good attendance followed by a few weeks poor attendance. The 3 pupils still at school typically had had 75% attendance or less for a number of years. School felt this was partly weather related as they walked to school despite living some distance away and had more absences in winter. The parents were poor and were not able to pay regular bus fare. School were contemplating paying for the families bus fare directly.

The eldest in the family had left school with no qualifications despite being very bright due to poor attendance. Of the three pupils still at school one was entering year 11 and it was feared would end up the same as the elder sibling. The others were in years 10 and 7. It was felt that unless the pattern was stopped the poor attendance would affect them all.

What did we do?

A panel was arranged and school sent out their letters for the meeting. The family were contacted by phone and the mother said she would attend. The AIO offered to meet with her at home but she declined but did agree to attend the panel meeting when it was explained that we would be trying to make supportive arrangements in regards to the travel issues.

The parents did not attend the panel meeting. Instead their children were seen by the panel. The possible legal consequences of continued poor attendance were explained to them. Also discussed the problems of walking to school and the weather, grades aspirations and the effect of absence. It was decided to pursue free transport for the family either through school or Leeds City Council.

The AIO met with a senior transport officer for Leeds City Council and explained the case, it was agreed that due to the family circumstances a discretionary bus pass could be granted.

However the family went missing. Community Benefits and Rights were contacted who confirmed they had been evicted but no new address was known. Despite contacting the mother by phone only addresses that did not exist were given. The pupils stopped attending.

When the pupils did return to school a new address was given. Apparently the family had been sleeping in relative's houses after they were evicted and had only just been given new accommodation.

Successful home visits started to be made. More complete and up to date contact

details were made available to school. The forms for free bus passes were eventually filled in and the application was successful.

The two older pupils had over 92% attendance but the younger sibling had only 78% attendance and continued to miss lots of add days. It was decided to issue a Penalty Notice warning as the only reason for absence now appeared to be getting up late. The warning of a fixed penalty was enough to improve the attendance significantly.

Did it make a difference?

The case was eventually closed. School were pleased as the family had never attended as well for such a long period (9 months). School home contact was much stronger despite a continued reluctance on behalf of the parents to attend in school meetings. The suspected main reason for lack of attendance (transport) had been addressed. The family were in a better financial position due to the discretionary award of a bus pass.

Attendance Case Study 2

What were the issues?

Girl aged 9. Year 5 at school.

Lives with Mother;
brother aged 2;

2 half-brothers with BESD (behavioural, emotional and social difficulties) aged 16 and 19.

Mother is the designated carer for the 2 older boys with BESD. Half-sister in her early 20s lives independently, but regularly visits the family home.

Father has contact with his children at least 3-4 times a week and is in a relationship with their mother but does not live with them.

Long history of irregular school attendance and lateness.

Health – Kidney infections and chronic infestation of head lice. Parent not seeking appropriate medical attention for children.

Older boys had Anti- social Behaviour Orders

Concerns that drug dealing maybe happening from the property.

Young people in and out of the house.

Safeguarding risk to younger children.

Family did inconsistently work with professions.

A large dog (vicious) in property.

What did we do?

Due to the inconsistently way that the family engaged with professionals a prosecution was taken in December 2011 for irregular school attendance for the year 11 half-brother. Mother did not attend court and was issued a large fine. The bailiff was brought in by the court within 3 weeks.

A post court review meeting in February 2012 was held and it was explained to the mother that the action had been taken due to her lack of engagement with the support that was available to her. She agreed to work with us to improve the attendance and punctuality of her 9 year old daughter so that she did not follow the same route as her older siblings i.e. disengaging with school and becoming involved with anti-social behaviour. Mother was helped to deal with the bailiffs by the Attendance Improvement Officer and a Payment Plan was put in place by the Courts.

The case was taken to the cluster support and guidance meeting to support the family. A professionals meeting was held and the family were known to many agencies and a referral was made to Children's Social Work Service (CSWS) giving a much fuller picture of the needs of the family and a core assessment was undertaken by CSWS. The family were referred for Intensive Family Support.

Agencies now involved providing high challenge and support.

Targeted Services Attendance (Education Supervision Order)

CSWS – Core Assessment resulting in Child Protection plan

Family Intervention Service (overseeing lead practitioner and co-ordinating the agencies around the family)

Children's Centre

Catholic Care – Counsellor

School nurse

Connexions

Did it make a difference?

At the time of the Education Supervision Order (ESO) attendance was 75% at the end of the ESO attendance was 90.48%

Year 5 girl

Attendance has improved significantly, Punctuality stills needs to improve.

Father telephones each morning to make sure child up and getting ready for school.

Head lice now nearly cleared. Hair combed, cut and worn up for school. No further urine infections. Overall appearance and hygiene improving. Parents engaging better with services under the ESO. A Child Protection Plan was in place but the progress made has reduce this to a child in need plan.

2 year old brother

Attendance at the Children's Centre improved.

No concerns anymore regarding behaviour issues (Aggression)

Risk from the dog has now gone as he has been removed by the police.

16 year old Half-Brother

Connexions worker to help him with next steps towards Education, Employment and training.

No issues with Anti- Social Behaviour.

Wants to volunteer to work with dogs.

Next Steps

To help mother establish parenting skills that will give her confidence as her 2

youngest children grow up.

To keep the attendance and punctuality at school improving.

To get 16 year old a volunteering placement so that he is moving towards no longer being NEET

For Mother to put the youngest children's needs first and her expectations of them to be age appropriate. For the family to engage in the future with any support that is needed.

Attendance Case Study 3

What were the issues?

A primary school child with 69.19% attendance in Year 1 and 26.7% attendance for the start of Year 2. Attempts to address this within school had failed and the relationship between the parent and school was deteriorating.

What did we do?

The AIO made regular home visits and held fortnightly meetings in school to explore the reasons for the child's absence, to identify any support needs, and to set clear targets for improvement. A Common Internal Record was completed and a CAF offered but refused by the parent. A Parent Contract was issued with clear targets and expectations for the parent, school and professionals.

A cluster Family Support Worker (FSW) was allocated at the parent's request, which supported the parent to address housing needs, and began to explore the parent's difficulties in prioritising her child's attendance. The parent showed limited engagement with this support and the case was closed to the FSW once a house move had taken place.

The AIO provided mediation support between the parent and school, particularly in regard to the parent's concerns that her child was being bullied.

The parent identified that she wanted to transfer schools, and was given the appropriate information and support by the AIO.

The parent failed to meet the targets agreed for improving her child's attendance, as set out in the Parenting Contract and agreed at the School Attendance Panel meetings. It was felt by professionals that she could benefit from further support and work around parenting and routines, and so a Parenting Order was requested and granted in May 2013.

Did it make a difference?

Following the issuing of the Parenting Order the child's attendance improved and has been 90.68% since the Order was issued, and 100% so far this academic year.

The Parenting Order means that the child's attendance can continue to be monitored and addressed if it begins to decline. Also, the parent will receive support in

establishing routines and boundaries through a parenting programme, to maintain and embed the improvements she has made in her child's attendance.