

## School Attendance

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Report of: Children Missing out on Education and Exclusions Monitoring Lead

Report to: Children and Families Scrutiny Board

Will the decision be open for call in?

Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?

Yes  No

### Brief summary

**This report provides:**

- **an overview of the national school attendance picture**
- **the Leeds data**
- **an overview of actions the LA has taken to support schools in their work to improve attendance**
- **a summary of planned actions the LA will take to support schools in their work to improve attendance and reduce absence**

### Recommendations

- a) Children & Families Scrutiny to note the contents of the report.

## What is this report about?

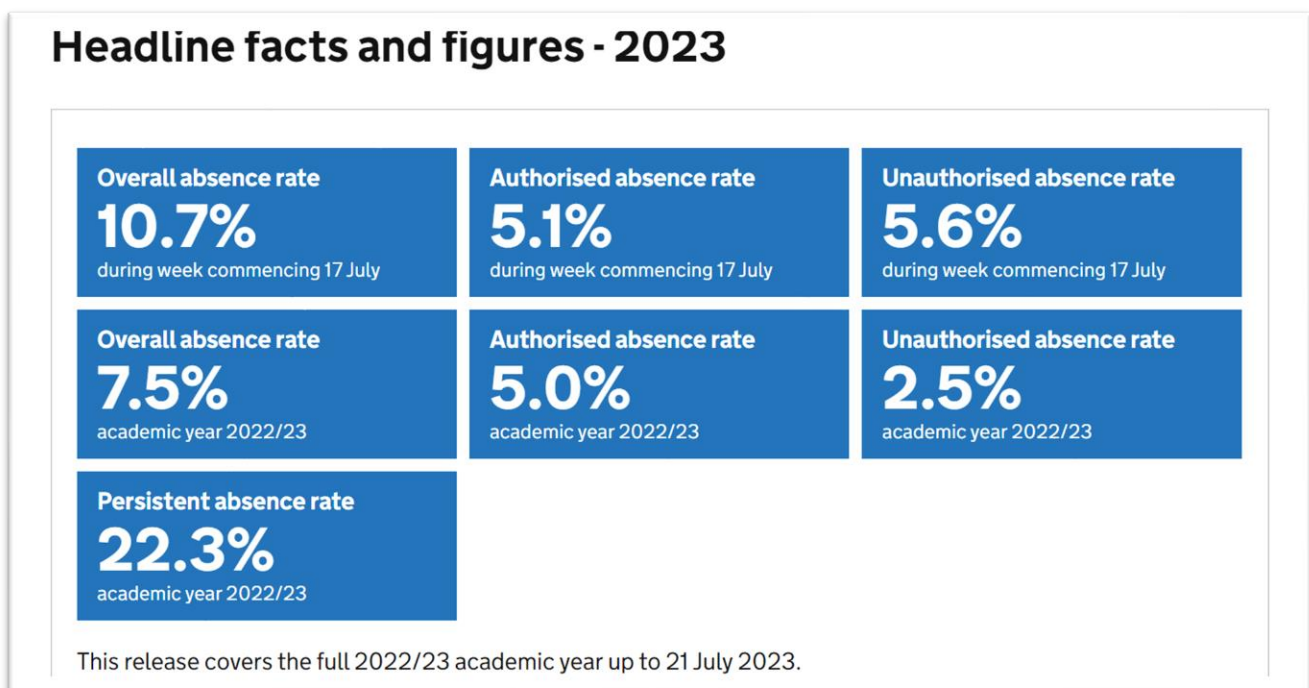
1 Children and Families Scrutiny Board has set out an interest in looking more deeply at school attendance after this was highlighted in the annual performance report (June 2023). This report provides an overview of the national context; school attendance in Leeds; a summary of the Leeds City Council Learning Inclusion Service support for schools to improve attendance; and the planned next steps for increasing attendance and reducing school absence.

## 2 School attendance – nationally

2.1 The DfE published [‘Working together to improve school attendance’ guidance - May 2022](#) following a period of consultation, in a bid to improve school attendance following the Covid-19 pandemic. The new guidance aimed to be statutory by September 2023, with all LAs and schools encouraged to prepare and work in the spirit of the guidance in advance of this date. The guidance sets out new expectations on schools and LAs, along with the development of a national attendance data dashboard to support schools to target pupils most vulnerable to poor attendance; and establishing a national “Attendance Action Alliance”.

2.2 The Alliance is chaired by the Education Secretary and the Schools Minister, and includes members such as the Children’s Commissioner, HM Chief Inspector, and school and union leaders, with the single aim of raising attendance and a single belief that ultimately children are better off in education – and all barriers to this should be removed. The minutes of the meetings of the Alliance are published by the [Department for Education](#). Attendance hubs and mentoring programmes have been piloted and developed for areas with the highest levels of pupil absence (Doncaster, Salford, Stoke on Trent and Knowsley) and Leeds City Council is committed to engaging with the learning and outcomes from these activities.

2.3 National attendance data headlines:



This national data dashboard is informed by regular data automatically submitted to the DfE by **participating schools** (including state funded primary, secondary and special schools).

By school type, the **absence rates** across the academic year 2022/23 were:

- 6.0% in state-funded primary schools (4.3% authorised and 1.7% unauthorised)
- 9.3% in state-funded secondary schools (5.8% authorised and 3.5% unauthorised)
- 13.1% in state-funded special schools (10.0% authorised and 3.1% unauthorised)

By pupil characteristics, the absence rates across the academic year 2022/23 were:

- 11.4% for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and 6.2% for pupils who were not eligible for free school meals
- 13.3% for pupils with an Education, Health, and Care plan (EHCP), 11.1% for pupils with SEN support and 6.9% with no identified SEN
- 7.4% for boys and 7.6% for girls

Across the academic year 2022/23, 22.3% of pupil enrolments missed 10% or more of their possible sessions and are therefore identified as **persistently absent**. By school type, the persistent absence rate across the academic year 2022/23 was:

- 17.2% in state-funded primary schools
- 28.3% in state-funded secondary schools
- 38.7% in state-funded special schools

2.4 Nationally, absence generally peaks in the weeks prior to planned school holidays – peaking at 14.1% in the final full week of the Autumn term (the week prior to the Christmas break), and 10.7% in the final week of the Summer term. There were additional peaks in absence during the week prior to the Summer half term (8.8%) and the week commencing 26 June (9.9%) when there was high absence due to religious observance around Eid al-Adha.

The increase in illness absence at the end of the Autumn term was in line with increases in rates of seasonal flu and other seasonal respiratory illnesses, as shown in [UK Health Security Authority data](#). Although it decreased after the Christmas break, illness absence (which includes positive COVID cases) remained higher than pre-pandemic levels, at 3.7% during Spring term and 3.0% during Summer term compared with around 2.5% pre-pandemic.

The table below shows the increase in national persistent absence since 2016:

	2016/17 Autumn Term	2017/18 Autumn Term	2018/19 Autumn Term	2019/20 Autumn Term	2020/21 Autumn Term	2021/22 Autumn Term	2022/23 Autumn Term
Persistent Absence rate (%)	11.6%	11.7%	10.9%	13.1%	13.0%	23.5%	24.9%

National persistent absence rate in England between 2016 and 2022

2.5 In January 2023, the Education Committee announced an inquiry into [“causes and possible solutions to the growing issue of children’s absence from school.”](#) The inquiry planned to examine links between pupil absence and related factors such as economic disadvantage, special educational needs and disabilities, ethnic background, and whether a child or a family member is clinically vulnerable to Covid-19. It also intends to examine the impact on attendance of support for pupils and their families both inside and beyond the school system, such as breakfast clubs, free meals, and after-school or holiday activities.

As part of the enquiry the Education Committee convened in June 2023 where they discussed the great concern about the slow recovery from the pandemic. The School’s Minister responded with detail about flu and scarlet fever having a direct effect on persistent absence alongside the resurgence of covid – with two thirds of national persistent absence coded as illness. Longer term consequences of the pandemic were also questioned, asking what schools are doing to address this. The committee voiced concerns that nationally parents are more cautious about sending children to school. Some say it is easier to allow a child

to stay at home now - more parents/carers are working at home, and this means children can stay at home too. The committee raised concerns that there were increasing mental health issues before the pandemic and now there seems to be a further increase after the pandemic.

The inquiry report has not yet been published and we await the findings with interest.

2.6 In May 2022, the Schools Bill was published and proposed to:

- Require local authorities to work to improve school attendance in their area, and to have regard to any related guidance produced by the Secretary of State
- Require all schools in England to have an attendance policy
- Allow the Secretary of State to make regulations to set out when a fixed penalty notice for school absence should be considered, and for coordination of these processes locally
- Extend the Secretary of State's power to regulate the granting of leave of absence from school to include all academies

The Schools Bill, however, was abandoned in December 2022. The Education Secretary cited wider pressures, outside education, for leading to the Bill being dropped. The Education Secretary has said that post-pandemic attendance levels remain a focus for the Government.

2.7 Nationally, it is worth noting that school absence due to Covid saw variations across local authorities and regions. This reflects the differences in community level transmission of Covid and also different local restrictions across the country (known as 'tiers'). Covid related absence was highest in the North West region (22.6%) and lowest in the South West (19.3%).

2.8 Attendance levels since schools returned to usual patterns following lockdowns during the Covid pandemic have caused widespread concern. Particular concerns have been raised that increased persistent absence is concentrated among disadvantaged pupils, such as those who receive free school meals. The referenced article below suggests some of the many reasons why children have not returned to school after the pandemic. *'Some have experienced crippling anxiety and a loss of social and academic confidence. Others have been struggling to pay for bus travel. Perhaps most troubling of all, some families appear to have lost their belief that attending school regularly is necessary for their children. Some parents are openly questioning whether the return to schooling is needed, given that results were so good last year, when many pupils were absent due to COVID.'* [Rising school absences: the post pandemic education divide | British Politics and Policy at LSE](#)

Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, has said that, since the pandemic, some parents have come to see school as optional:

*"I think there's been a very clear social contract ... the clear expectation is that parents should get their children to school every day, unless the child is too ill to go [...]. The pandemic disruption and the expectation that children should be kept at home broke that. [...]"*

*Post-pandemic, a minority of families have just sort of lost sight of the importance of that consistency of getting children to school every day — that it's not an optional thing. It's not a 'when you feel like it, and not when you don't.'*

Ms Spielman was speaking in the context of [Ofsted's annual report](#), published in December 2022, which noted that "initial high levels of absenteeism have fallen, but there are still concerns about a smaller number of persistent absentees."

2.9 Ofsted continue to include a focus on attendance and punctuality when inspecting schools and have reported in "[Securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence](#)" (Ofsted, 2022) that there are attendance challenges including sporadic attendance because of disaffection following the national lockdowns and other barriers to attendance include pupils who see parents facing more stress or facing financial hardship, or pupils from families experiencing domestic violence.

2.10 The Centre for Social Justice think tank [published a report in January 2022](#) which said that the pandemic had created a generation of 'ghost children' who had not returned to school and were at significant safeguarding risk as well as educational disadvantage.

The consultation document which led to the ‘working together to improve attendance’ guidance highlighted the impact of the pandemic on attendance and argued that this, alongside the wider importance of school attendance, required action from the Government:

*‘We recognise the impact that the pandemic is continuing to have on children’s education, and although recent trends in attendance levels have been largely driven by covid, the government is determined to address the wider underlying causes of children not being in school, because it is the best place for their development and wellbeing. To that end it is more important than ever that agencies work together to secure the regular attendance of pupils and minimise unnecessary non-covid absence as much as possible.’*

2.11 In response to the data trends, and the recognised issues, school attendance is being prioritised nationally as ‘everyone’s responsibility’. GPs have been advised to encourage attendance and to advise that children should go to school even if they have a cough or a cold but stay at home if they have a fever.

Chief police officers have had the same message to encourage all children back to school and the Chief Social Worker has been running seminars supporting social care with best practice guidance to support the return to school. This multi-sector approach is one that Leeds has been part of both pre and post pandemic.

2.12 Summer 2023 saw a reinforcement nationally of the importance of attendance driven by letters from the principal social worker Isabelle Trowler issued to principal social workers across the country, and the secretary of state for education – The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan who wrote to all schools and Directors of Children & Families Services. Copies of these can be found at Annex A.

The School attendance service in Leeds has a strong record of supporting schools through a partnership approach and will continue with the support through an attendance offer that is working in the spirit of the new DfE guidance.

### 3 School Attendance in Leeds

3.1 All data regarding school attendance is collated from a multitude of sources and is used locally on an operational basis. The linked document below outlines these sources of data, yet all are incomplete and so we rely on published DfE statistics as the only verified data. [SPO-CFIPS - Sources of School Attendance Data - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

3.2 The latest **published / verified** attendance data for Leeds (2021/22)

Indicator	Pupil Category	Leeds 2018*	Leeds 2019*	Leeds 2020*	Leeds 2021*	Leeds 2022*	Change	Latest National
<b>Attendance in primary schools</b>	All pupils	95.9	96.0		96.4	93.9	-2.5	93.9
	Non SEN	96.1	96.2		96.8	94.3	-2.5	94.1
	SEN Support	94.5	94.7		95.0	92.2	-2.8	92.0
	Statement/EHCP	93.4	92.0		91.7	90.1	-1.6	90.3
<b>Attendance in secondary schools</b>	All pupils	94.2	94.2		94.3	90.8	-3.5	91.0
	Non SEN	94.7	94.7		94.9	91.6	-3.3	91.7
	SEN Support	90.8	90.3		90.8	85.7	-5.1	87.3
	Statement/EHCP	91.7	91.1		87.3	85.0	-2.3	86.3
<b>Attendance in special schools</b>	All pupils	88.5	88.0		83.9	86.2	2.3	91.0
	Non SEN							
	SEN Support	78.9	77.6		86.3	85.9	-0.4	87.3
	Statement/EHCP	88.7	88.2		83.9	86.2	2.3	86.3

\*the year denotes the year the academic year ended, eg Leeds 2018 is the academic year 2017/18

The Department for Education monitors pupil absence levels using two key measures; **overall absence rate** and **persistent absence (PA)** rate. These key measures are calculated for pupils who are of compulsory school age (between 5 and 15 as at the start of the academic year).

Overall absence is the aggregated total of all authorised and unauthorised absences. Authorised absence is absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences and arrivals after registration has closed.

**Persistent absence -10%** is when a pupil enrolment's overall absence equates to 10 per cent or more of their possible sessions.

**Severe absence - 50%** is when a pupil enrolment's overall absence equates to 50 per cent or more of their possible sessions ranking.

**3.3 Secondary Pupil attendance** has decreased when compared to pre-pandemic levels and although there have been increases in authorised and unauthorised absence, it has been larger within authorised absence due to illness.

- The attendance rate for 2021/22 for Leeds' secondary schools is 90.8 per cent; this is below the pre-pandemic attendance rate of 94.2 per cent and below national and Statistical Neighbours. Out of 151 local authorities, Leeds is ranked in 91<sup>st</sup> position, placing it in quartile band C for performance.
- The authorised absence rate is below all comparators with 5.2 per cent of absences recorded as authorised, but above the rates seen in Leeds prior to the pandemic and is driven by an increase in the number of sessions missed due to illness which equate to 318,290 school days lost. Out of 151 local authorities, Leeds is ranked in 31<sup>st</sup> position, placing it in quartile band A for performance.
- 4 per cent of pupil absences were categorised as unauthorised absences in Leeds secondary schools; this is above the national figure of 2.8 per cent and all other comparators except Core Cities. The figure is also above the rates for the pre-pandemic years where it ranged from 2.3 per cent in 2017 to 2.7 per cent in 2019. Leeds is ranked in 131<sup>st</sup> position, placing it in quartile band D for performance.
- 27.2 per cent of pupil enrolments (equivalent to 13,229 pupil enrolments) in secondary schools are classed as being persistently absent (missing 10 per cent or more of their sessions); this is almost double the rate for the average for the three years preceding the pandemic. Despite this increase, the 2022 figure is below the national figure of 27.7 per cent as well as all other comparators. Leeds is ranked in 64<sup>th</sup> position, placing it in quartile band B for performance.
- Severe absence rates (pupil enrolments who have missed 50% or more of their possible sessions) has also increased from 1.7 per cent to 3.6 per cent; this is above the national figure and all other comparators and equates to 1758 pupil enrolments.
- Secondary school pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals and pupils who have an EHCP had the lowest attendance rates across all pupil groups, 85.2 per cent and 85 per cent respectively reflecting national trends although the rate is slightly higher nationally. For both groups, this was due to higher levels of authorised absence. For both groups, the authorised and unauthorised absence rate was above the city average for secondary age pupils.
- In terms of persistent absence, almost five in every 10 pupil enrolments who are FSM eligible were recorded as missing 10 per cent or more of their overall sessions. In total, this equates to 5,733 pupil enrolments.
- When compared to non-FSM eligible pupils, more than twice as many FSM eligible pupil enrolments are recorded as being persistently absent.
- White pupils and those in Year 10 and 11 had the lowest attendance rates, 89.9 per cent and 89.2 per cent, respectively.
- Black pupils in Leeds had the highest attendance rate of all ethnicities (95.6 per cent)

**3.4 Primary Pupil attendance** has decreased when compared to pre-pandemic levels and can be attributed to an increase in authorised absence due to illness.

- The attendance rate for Leeds primary schools for 2021/22 is 93.9 per cent; this is below the pre-pandemic rates, but above the national figure of 93.7 per cent. Out of 151 local authorities, Leeds is ranked in 54<sup>th</sup> position, placing it in quartile band B for performance.

- The authorised absence rate is 4.1 per cent, which is the highest it has been in the last five years. The total number of sessions missed due to illness equates to 380,285 school days lost. Despite this, Leeds primary schools have a lower rate of authorised absence than all comparators which is reflected in the ranking position of 14<sup>th</sup> out of 151 local authorities, placing Leeds in quartile band A for performance.
- Unauthorised absence in Leeds is above national, statistical neighbours and Yorkshire and Humber with 1.9 per cent of absences being recorded as unauthorised. Out of 151 local authorities, Leeds is ranked in 129<sup>th</sup> position, placing it in band D for performance.
- Persistence absence rates in Leeds are lower than all comparators with 17.1 per cent of pupil enrolments recorded as being persistently absent (missing 10 per cent or more of their own possible sessions). This equates to almost 10,500 pupil enrolments. Leeds is ranked in 70<sup>th</sup> position, placing it in quartile band B for performance.
- Severe absence rates (pupils who have missed 50 per cent or more of their possible sessions) has also increased from 0.3 per cent in 2019 to 0.6 per cent in 2022. Performance is in line with national.
- Primary age pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals and pupils who have an EHCP had the lowest attendance rates across all pupil groups, 91.4 per cent and 90.1 per cent respectively reflecting national trends. Although this was largely driven by high authorised absence rates, for both groups the authorised and unauthorised absence rates were above the city average for primary age pupils. Nationally, the authorised absence rate is higher than in Leeds, but the unauthorised rate is lower.
- In terms of persistent absence, just over three in every ten pupil enrolments who are FSM eligible or have an EHCP were recorded as missing 10 per cent or more of their overall session.
- Black pupils in Leeds had the highest attendance rate of all ethnicities (96.4 per cent) and Asian pupils the lowest (93.2 per cent).

### 3.5 Termly data

Although as yet 'unverified data' the termly statistical first release has been provided by the DfE for Autumn term of the 2022/23 academic year. Key take aways indicate that whilst absence remains much higher than pre-pandemic this is largely in line with national increases – however where we stand out compared to national data is in relation to severe absence, particularly in secondary schools (rank 135) and for unauthorised absence across all phases.

#### 3.5.1 All schools

Attendance for the autumn term across all Leeds schools in 2022 is 92.5%; this is the lowest figure in the seven-year period covered by the Statistical First Release (SFR) for this measure and is 3.1 percentage points below the pre-pandemic figure of 95.6%. Despite this, the figure is in line with national.

The lower attendance rate is due to an increase in the authorised absence rate (from 2.7% in 2019 to 4.6% in 2022); this figure is however below the national figure of 5.4%. In Leeds, and nationally the majority of absence was due to illness. (Government health data referred to in the national picture supports the trend of increased absence being due to illness and normal health spikes around flu and scarlet fever and a resurgence of covid).

Unauthorised absence is 2.9%; this is above both the pre-pandemic figure of 1.7% and above the national figure of 2.1%. Reasons for unauthorised absence which show a notable change include 'holidays' (0.6%), although this could be correcting lower rates in previous years as holidays may have been postponed due to the pandemic, and 'other reasons' (2.1%).

The persistent absence rate (a pupil missing 10% or more of their possible sessions) has more than doubled since 2019, 23.2% pupil enrolments compared to 11.5% in 2019, and is the highest in the seven years period covered in the SFR for this measure. This figure is equivalent to 25,724 pupil enrolments. Despite this significant growth in persistent absence locally, it is broadly in line with the national figure which is one percentage point above the Leeds figure.

The severe absence rate (pupil enrolments missing 50 per cent or more of their own possible sessions) has also more than doubled from just under one per cent of pupil enrolments in 2019 to 2.2% (2420 pupil enrolments). This is above the national rate of 1.7%.

For attendance, Leeds ranks equal 74<sup>th</sup> out of 152 local authorities and is in band C for quartile performance. For authorised absence Leeds ranks equal 14<sup>th</sup> and is in band A, but for unauthorised absence, Leeds ranks equal 133<sup>rd</sup> and is in band D. For persistent absence (10%), Leeds ranks equal 51<sup>st</sup> and is in band B and for severe absence 50%, Leeds ranks 141 and is in band D.

### 3.5.2 Primary schools

Attendance for Leeds primary schools is 93.9%; this remains below pre-pandemic levels when it was 96.3%, but slightly above the national figure of 93.7%. This is in the main caused by higher levels of authorised absence (4.3%). Whereas the authorised absence rate is below national, the unauthorised absence rate is just above (1.8% versus 1.4% nationally) and is the highest it's been in the 15-year period covered by the SFR. The persistent absence rate remains high with 20% of pupil enrolments missing 10% or more of their own sessions (equivalent to 11,981 pupil enrolments); this is however slightly below the national figure of 20.9%. The persistent absence rate for pupil enrolments missing 50 per cent or more of their own possible sessions is 0.7% (425 pupil enrolments) and is in line with national.

For attendance, Leeds ranks equal 43<sup>rd</sup> out of 151 local authorities and is in band B for quartile performance. For authorised absence Leeds ranks equal 13<sup>th</sup> and is in band A, but for unauthorised absence, Leeds ranks Equal 116<sup>th</sup> and is in band D. For persistent absence (10%), Leeds ranks equal 44<sup>th</sup> and is in band B and for persistent absence 50%, Leeds ranks 88<sup>th</sup> and is in band C for quartile performance for both measures.

### 3.5.3 Secondary schools

Attendance for Leeds secondary schools is 90.9%; this remains below pre-pandemic levels when it was 94.8% and below the national figure of 91.2%. This is caused by higher levels of authorised absence (4.8%). This figure is below the national figure of 6%, however, the unauthorised absence rate of 4.3% is above national rate of 2.8%. The persistent absence rate remains high with 26.6% of pupil enrolments missing 10% or more of their own sessions (equivalent to 13,114 pupil enrolments). The persistent absence rate has varied over the years and although the autumn figure is not the highest, it is considerably above the average of 19.4% for the preceding 16 years. Despite this, the rate is below the national figure of 27.4%. The persistent absence rate for pupil enrolments missing 50 per cent or more of their own possible sessions is 3.8% (1882 pupil enrolments). Not only is this the highest rate in the 17-year period covered by the SFR, but it is also above the national rate of 2.8%

For attendance, Leeds ranks equal 92<sup>nd</sup> out of 151 local authorities and is in band C for quartile performance. For authorised absence Leeds ranks equal 22<sup>nd</sup> and is in band A, but for unauthorised absence, Leeds ranks 137<sup>th</sup> and is in band D for quartile performance.

For persistent absence (10%), Leeds ranks 65<sup>th</sup> and is in band B for performance but for persistence absence (50%), Leeds ranks equal 135<sup>th</sup> and is in band D for performance.

### 3.5.4 Special Schools

Attendance for Leeds secondary schools is 86.8%; this is the lowest figure in the seven-year period covered by the SFR, but above the national figure of 86.6%. This is mainly driven by higher levels of authorised absence (9.2%). This figure is below the national figure of 10.5%, however, the unauthorised absence rate of 4% is above national rate of 2.8%.

The persistent absence rate remains high with 37.5% of pupil enrolments missing 10% or more of their own sessions (equivalent to 629 pupil enrolments). This figure has seen an increase in each of the autumn terms since the pandemic, however, the national figure of 40.9% is higher. The persistent absence rate for pupil enrolments missing 50 per cent or more of their own possible sessions is 6.7% (113 pupil enrolments); this above the national rate of 5.8%



For attendance, Leeds ranks equal 73<sup>rd</sup> out of 149 local authorities and is in band C for quartile performance. For authorised absence Leeds ranks equal 29<sup>th</sup> and is in band A, but for unauthorised absence, Leeds ranks 125<sup>th</sup> and is in band D for quartile performance.

For persistent absence (10%), Leeds ranks Equal 34<sup>th</sup> and is in band A for performance but for severe absence (50%), Leeds ranks equal 107<sup>th</sup> and is in band C for performance.

3.6 **Analysis** indicates that in Leeds, there are more pupils who have 'unauthorised' absence than nationally, which is perceived to be due to the clear commitment that Leeds headteachers have made to only authorising absence in exceptional circumstances – in line with the statutory guidance, and to ensure that there is a clear message to all families about the importance of school attendance. However, the data indicates that there are also more pupils who have severe persistent absence (absence greater than 50%) which indicates that steps need to be taken to return pupils to school quickly following absence.

One challenge faced is that the data available does not provide a clear indication of the underlying reasons for pupil non-attendance at school. This understanding is currently informed by school and practitioner casework and records.

Attendance of pupils with identified special educational needs continues to be of concern, and it is acknowledged that parental confidence in mainstream schooling for pupils with SEND and the increasing demand for special school places may be leading to a reduction in parental commitment to ensuring attendance in mainstream schools. In response, as part of the annual review process for all pupils with an EHCP, attendance is reviewed and the ongoing suitability of the plan and intervention described is considered through that review process. In addition, the monitoring and quality assurance framework (MQA) for schools also includes attendance as a key indicator to be considered and assessed. It is proposed that a significant school absence panel is also introduced to ensure that all cases where parents consider that their child is 'unable' to attend school – leading to extended absence - are considered by a multi-professional panel and a decision made about whether an alternative education needs to be offered, or whether support needs to be enhanced to ensure the pupil returns to their mainstream school offer.

#### 4 Legal Intervention

4.1 There are a range of legal interventions that schools and LAs can use to improve a child's attendance at school. The DfE published the Parental Responsibility Measures 2021/22 Statistical First Release (SFR) on 15 December 2022. It includes data on:

- penalty notices
- attendance case management
- parenting orders and parenting contracts
- education supervision orders

Penalty notices are issued to parents for failing to ensure that their child attends school. The amount payable is £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt rising to £120 if paid after 21 days. If the penalty is not paid within 28 days, the local authority must either prosecute for the original offence (of failing to ensure their child attends school) or withdraw the notice. The information is based on data collected from local authorities in England through the parental responsibility measures attendance census. The analysis included in this paper only focuses on penalty notices and the reasons they have been issued.

The SFR can be accessed on the DfE's website using the following link: [Parental Responsibility Measures](#).

4.2 When looking at the data it is important to take the impact of the pandemic into account as outlined below:

- School attendance was significantly disrupted in the 2020/21 academic year. As such all figures should be treated with caution when comparing to other years. Except for the two periods of lockdown set out below, the DfE have made clear that schools and local authorities are able to use their usual measures to improve attendance where appropriate.
- No data is available for 2019/20 as a decision was made not to run the data collection exercise for the 2019/20 academic year. This data has not been retrospectively collected and is therefore not available. Care should therefore be taken when looking across time periods that would otherwise include 2019/20.

- Due to the pandemic, the Secretary of State for Education issued legal notices, under the Coronavirus Act 2020, disapplying section 444(1) and (1A) of the Education Act 1996. These notices covered the period 7 January 2021 to 6 March 2021 which coincided with the period of national restrictions. These notices disapplied offences relating to the failure of parents to secure regular attendance at the school of a registered pupil and guaranteed that parents would not be prosecuted or receive a criminal conviction for not sending their children to school during this period. This was in line with the Secretary of State's commitment that no parent would be penalised for following public health advice.

4.3 From a service perspective the overall approach taken by Leeds attendance service is to encourage all schools to follow the statutory attendance processes. Support is available for schools to do this and to answer queries about process and how to interpret guidance. With the national and local drive to improve attendance schools have been supported with the use of Penalty notices as part of the approach to improving attendance. Communication regarding attendance processes, including the use of penalty notices, goes through the school's bulletin, meetings in schools, Family of school's meetings and Cluster meetings.

The service streamlined processes in 2021/22 to support schools to access the process easily, including an easy to access eForm for schools to request penalty notices to be issued where families have taken a holiday in term time.

Anecdotally the School Attendance Service noted that some of the holidays in term time were due to the number of cancelled holidays during the pandemic. (Some of which had originally been booked out of term time).

#### 4.4 Key headlines from the Parental Responsibility Measures SFR include:

- In 2021/22 the total number of penalty notices issued in Leeds was 5,192.
- This equates to 469 per 10,000 pupil enrolments; this is above the national and Core Cities rate, but below the Statistical Neighbour and Yorkshire and Humber rate of 480.
- 96% (4974) were issued due to unauthorised family holidays and the remaining four per cent for 'other reasons.' There were no notices issued in Leeds for students being late.
- The rate of penalty notices per pupil enrolment issued in Leeds has increased from 4.1 in 2018/19 to 4.7 in 2021/22; compared to a reduction amongst comparators for the same period.

Nationally, the use of penalty notices varied greatly by local authority. Three LAs issued no penalty notices, nine LAs issued less than 100 and six local authorities, including Leeds, issued more than 5,000. Three of these authorities, along with Leeds, are in the bottom quartile for performance for unauthorised absence for half terms 1-4 2021/22.

Out of 152 local authorities, 27 (17%) accounted for over 50% of all penalty notices. When the number of penalty notices issued are converted to the rate per 10,000 pupil enrolments, Leeds has a rate of 469, which is above all comparators.

#### Number of penalty notices issued for unauthorised absences

	2017/18		2018/19		2020/21		2021/22	
	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000	Number	Rate per 10,000
<b>Leeds</b>	2,907	278	4,349	411	1,062	98	5,192	469
<b>National</b>		370						
	260,877		333,388	467	45,809	65	218,235	300
<b>Stat. Neighbours</b>	2,008	487	2,614	640	438	119	1,938	480
<b>Core Cities</b>	2,876	412	3,939	555	294	39	2,870	336
<b>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</b>	38,627	537	51,853	717	8,221	113	35,180	480

Data source: DfE SFR PRM 2021/22

Data notes: 2020/21 data is not directly comparable with other years due to attendance being disrupted due to the pandemic, and for two months measures being disapplied when schools were not open to all pupils.

Similar to Leeds, 85% of penalty notices nationally were issued due unauthorised family holidays; 14% were issued for 'other reasons' and one per cent for being late.

## Reasons for the penalty notices

	2018/19			2021/22		
	Holidays	Late	Other	Holidays	Late	Other
<b>Leeds</b>	4,070	0	279	4,974	0	218
<b>National</b>	288,239	1,164	43,985	186,281	1,269	30,685
<b>Statistical Neighbours</b>	2,358	4	252	1,676	63	200
<b>Core Cities</b>	2,671	1	1,267	2,608	77	185
<b>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</b>	48,557	28	3,268	32,113	610	2,457

Data source: DfE SFR PRM 2021/22

Data notes: 2018/19 comparison provided rather than 2020/21 due to attendance being disrupted due to the pandemic, and for two months measures being disapplied when schools were not open to all pupils.

Between 2009/10 and 2012/13, Leeds issued between 192 and 266 penalty notices. From 2013/14, there was a sharp increase to 1,795 followed by a year-on-year increase with the exception of 2017/18 and 2020/21 where the numbers were lower. In 2017/18 Leeds bucked the national trend with a 34% decrease in the number of penalty notices being issued despite unauthorised absence increasing in the same period for primary, secondary, and special schools. The large decreases seen in the data for 2020/21 covers the period of the pandemic when attendance at school was heavily disrupted, and for two months measures were disapplied when schools were not open to all pupils.

### Number of penalty notices

Year	No. of penalty notices issued	
	Leeds	National
2009/10	192	25657
2010/11	192	32641
2011/12	266	41224
2012/13	233	52370
2013/14	1795	98259
2014/15	3322	151125
2015/16	4269	157879
2016/17	4401	149321
2017/18	2907	260877
2018/19	4349	333388
2020/21	1062	45809
2021/22	5192	218235

Data source: DfE SFR PRM 2021/22

The changes in trend since 2015/16 follow the Isle of Wight Council v Jon Platt cases where the local authority issued proceedings against a parent who had taken their child on a term time holiday. Local authorities with large increases were asked to provide reasons and many cited the Supreme Court judgement, either as a result of returning to pre-court case levels following a slowdown or from a change in behaviour since the ruling. Further information on the cases is given below:

- October 2015 - The magistrates' court ruled that the parent had no case to answer.
- May 2016 – The High Court supported the earlier ruling.
- April 2017 - the Supreme Court, however, ruled that no children should be taken out of school without good reason and clarified that 'regularly' means 'in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school'.

The DfE attendance guidance suggests local authorities should be issuing penalty notices when pupils are absent, and the abandoned Schools Bill included an intention to standardise the approach to issuing penalty notices recognising the variations in use across the country. Although the Local Authority is the body responsible for issuing penalty notices, schools are required to submit the request and evidence to enable this to happen.

The use of fixed penalty notices in Leeds as a response and intervention to improve attendance is mixed, and the expectation of the nationally standardised approach was welcomed. In partnership with schools, we

will be considering a locally standardised approach, taking into account the impact of penalty notices on improving attendance, considering our restorative approach and taking into account the financial impact of penalty notices on families who may already be facing financial challenges.

Analysis of the unauthorised absence rate for half terms 1-4 2021/22 for the six local authorities who issued the most penalty notices shows three of the six are in the bottom quartile for performance, and the remaining three are spread across the first, second and third quartile. This suggests that penalty notices are used as both a tool to prevent unauthorised absence, and also in response to high unauthorised absence rates.

## **5 Actions from the LA to support schools to improve attendance**

- 5.1 The School Attendance Service is in a period of transition and has been developing and building on existing procedures and processes alongside considering the new guidance 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' published in May 2022. The expectation that has been outlined through a DfE webinar program is that the Local Authority and schools will begin to implement elements of this guidance, described as 'working in the spirit', prior to it becoming statutory.
- 5.2 The LA will continue to support schools by working towards the approach outlined in the guidance and a clear phased plan has been developed to take us towards these. We are mindful that the new guidance places more emphasis and expectation on the role of schools in relation to attendance, and as such, phase 1 (March – Sept 2023) included the ceasing of the LAs traded offer; roll out of training and briefings for schools to support schools to understand their role under the new guidance; register checks; and confirming processes for schools seeking attendance advice – this is primarily through attendance improvement officers and day to day queries are managed on a rota basis via the attendance email address to ensure that there is ongoing capacity to respond to queries in a timely manner.
- 5.3 We must be ready for legislative changes and plans began last year to accommodate the changes. September 2022 to March 2023 introduced an interim offer for the summer term 2023. We have a new phase of the offer in place for all schools from September 2023, and launched our 2023/2024 offer at the end of August, which will be in place from November 2023.
- 5.4 Expectation of parents and schools' summaries were prepared (in line with the guidance recommendations and feedback from DfE webinars) and were uploaded to Leeds for Learning from September 2022.
- 5.5 Risk factors were identified which may impact on the ability of the LA school attendance team to be able to fulfil the existing, and new statutory duties of the local authority in relation to the requirements of the attendance guidance. Until Spring 2023, it was expected that the guidance would be statutory from September 2023. Current indications are that this will not be statutory guidance before Sept 2024 at the earliest. It is noted that a significant increase in operational capacity will be required to meet all the expectations of the LA outlined in the 2022 DfE guidance – which currently remains non-statutory.
- 5.6 There are existing pressures on the service, with no ring-fenced funding allocated by the DfE. Some of the work that was previously traded to schools will become mandatory for LAs to provide when/if the guidance becomes statutory. This has required a resourceful and creative approach to the traded offer. More online training events and pre-recorded training is necessary to manage the changes in guidance. Once the status of the guidance is confirmed, the service we will be seeking to expand the school attendance service so that additional services can be offered to schools on a traded basis, recognising the pressure on schools that the 2022 guidance introduces.
- 5.7 The interim core offer from the School Attendance Service (Phase 1) was effective from 1st April 2023 and during the summer term the SAS team committed to work with schools, agencies, and other LA partners to identify, respond, and resolve any working issues. Detail of the SAS offer in response to the DfE 2022 guidance is detailed in Appendix B.

5.8 Schools have expressed concern about the reduction in capacity to support school directly with casework. This is being addressed through our Phase 3 November onwards offer. We are using data to target schools with the greatest concerns, and we are bringing groups of schools together through the cluster model to support the new targeting support meetings and examples of good practice will be shared and cases discussed collectively as there are many common themes around poor attendance. We ultimately aim to increase the service capacity but await clarification on the status of the guidance becoming statutory in nature.

5.9 Attendance has always been at the heart of children's council plans, and we have always encouraged being an effective practitioner in supporting the 3As in work with Children and Families. When talking to families about their children's attendance, attainment and progress, practitioners deploy all their restorative and relational skills: these aren't 'tick-list' questions, they invite practitioners to be engaged, curious and enabling in those interactions with the parent/carer/young person.

5.10 The School Attendance Service have worked on best practice guidance with other services in the LA and encouraged all practitioners to take an interest in school attendance – seeking to embed school attendance as a core element of every frontline role. This includes encouraging practitioners to ask questions in their regular interactions with children and families such as:

- where do the children go to school
- do they enjoy good relationships with their friends and adults and teachers at school
- can they talk about adults they trust and who help
- can they enjoy success in different aspects of school life
- are parents/carers supportive of their children's attendance and engagement in learning
- do parents/carers themselves experience good communication with school and feel included in their children's progress as well as experiencing a sense of belonging to the school community
- do children look forward to going to school and talk about their school day and
- do parents experience any challenges

This helps to ensure practitioners can think about what might be helpful to the child/young person/family. We want practitioners to work with families to understand any barriers to good attendance and provide the right support to help overcome those barriers, at the right time.

5.11 In the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan which ran from 2018 to 2023, there were three obsessions. One was "improve achievement, attainment and attendance at school." To address that obsession the 3As Strategy was developed. The intervention of Covid meant that some of these priorities changed, therefore in June and July 2021, a series of discussions with educationalists from early years to further education were held to find out what they considered to be the barriers to achievement, attainment, and attendance at school.

As a result of those consultations, the Refreshed 3As Plan was drawn up, with five priorities of:

- All children in Leeds are supported to improve their fluency in reading taking into account their individual needs.
- All children, young people and families are supported to access and regularly attend early years education settings, schools, and post-16 education settings to benefit from learning opportunities, protective factors, and enrichment activities.
- Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families receive timely and appropriate support to achieve their best possible outcomes and prepare for adult life.
- All children and staff working in learning settings are supported with their wellbeing.
- All children make the best start to each stage of their learning.

As we approach the launch of the new Leeds Children and Young People's Plan, it is also the right time to update the 3As Plan. It takes account of the change to one of the obsessions which is that "young people in Leeds attend school, achieve, and attain well," and they also "continue their route of a sustained education, apprenticeship or employment destination."

5.12 Through roundtable events and Families of Schools' meetings, school leaders told us what their concerns are and what they need from the local authority. These will be reflected in the new 3As plan, which

is our way of marshalling our combined LA forces and energy so we can help the school leaders to undertake their duties in the service of young people in the city.

The Refreshed 3As Plan Update is the means by which the local authority will provide services to education settings to enable them to improve the outcomes of the children they work with through constant interaction. The sections reflecting the importance of attendance are:

## **Priority 2 – Support education providers to ensure children and young people regularly attend.**

### **Why we have chosen this priority:**

Children who have strong attendance in learning settings are more likely to fulfil their potential and achieve their best possible outcomes in education. Access to education settings also keeps children safe from harm, promotes protective factors such as positive relationship with adults and access to targeted services that sit around schools and settings, and enables them to get involved with enrichment activities such as sports, the arts, and volunteering. Regular attendance also enables them to develop good routines and habits which prepare them well for the world of work.

We know that Attendance in schools is much lower than it was before the pandemic and that the number of young people excluded from Leeds' schools is also rising, which has an impact on attendance figures. There is an extensive evidence base that children who are excluded from school face further adverse life experiences. Supporting children to stay in school often leads to higher educational attainment and more opportunities in the future, and ensures children remain in a safe environment.

### **What education leaders in the city have told us needs to sit under this priority:**

- *A shared commitment to not permanently excluding young people.*
- *For Social Care to support schools when children are not attending and continue to be involved with the family.*
- *Making attendance a big priority for the city, for example, by having a very visible advertising campaign.*
- *Consistent policy on fines, clear steer from LA for one approach for all schools and HTs.*

The new DfE guidance, although currently non-statutory is explicit about the LA and school roles in improving attendance (See appendix C for the LA responsibilities outlined in the guidance)

We have worked on what attendance support looks like at its best and contributed to the leadership standards amongst other areas of the whole school SEND review and audit tool.

It is crucial we are prepared for the new guidance becoming statutory, however there are restrictions on making changes to the current School Attendance Service offer due to the non-statutory nature of the guidance, lack of clarity on when it may become statutory, and the current financial challenge and recruitment freeze in place.

The new guidance makes it clear that we should have an early intervention approach and schools should identify attendance concerns early on and address these issues. The LA takes a "support first" approach and encourage all schools to follow the same model.

### **5.13 Making attendance everybody's responsibility**

To embed the message 'Attendance is everyone's responsibility' and equip LA teams and other agencies to support, signpost and guide with 'all things' Attendance, the School Attendance Service delivered attendance briefings during the summer term to

- AIP's
- Clusters
- Early help hubs

Alongside this, work is being developed on attendance good practice guides for social care and teams and services are regularly invited to Children Missing Out on Education (CMOOE) team meetings including Youth Justice, the Virtual school, SENSAP and admissions. Joined up practice and sharing of information is one of the keys to making attendance everyone's business. Members of the attendance team are sitting on MACE panel to guide and help first hand with vulnerable students who need to improve attendance as a safety factor.

Some examples of the cross-service work are below. All services within Learning Inclusion have met regularly and attendance has been a focus for the last term.

**See appendix C** for school attendance service offer for the summer holidays and Phase 2 offer – September 2023.

Further support will be rolled out over the academic year and will include additional training and briefing opportunities for all schools, additional guidance documents and templates including parenting contracts.

5.14 A range of interventions and support are currently offered by the School Attendance Service and other teams within Children & Families Services with the aim of improving school attendance, either by upskilling and supporting schools in their work, or promoting the importance of school attendance to all practitioners. These are detailed in Appendix D, including:

D1: Primary School Case Study – impact of register checks

D2: Letters issued to partners and schools to support children to “Be a Top Attender in September”

D3: Virtual School support to improving attendance

D4: Educational Psychology team support to improve attendance – focussing on Extended School Non-attendance (ESNA)

D5: Safe task force support to improve attendance

## 6 Future actions the LA will take to support schools

- 6.1 **Working with the DfE** The attendance service has utilised the offer of a DfE attendance advisor. An initial meeting has been held and we have submitted our plans for the coming year and an audit of current service delivery. We have primarily asked for the advisor to support the School Attendance Service around the sharing of good practice to reduce persistent absence particularly across vulnerable groups.
- 6.2 **Significant absence panel.** A new development to be piloted in Autumn 2023, this will offer a specific focus on children who have been absent from school for 15 days or more and will ensure that schools have a clear route of notification to the LA, ensuring that appropriate support is given to the schools to explore any options they may not have considered and the sharing of good practice. This approach will also help us to understand more about the underlying reasons for non-attendance in our schools, so that support, training and appropriate intervention offers can be identified.
- 6.3 **School Attendance Service offer Autumn 2023 and onwards** Significant planning and preparation has taken place in response to the new DfE school attendance guidance. We know that it is schools who deal with the vast amount of the challenging work required to have any significant impact on improving attendance levels in Leeds, and one of the current priorities is ensuring that schools are equipped and supported to fulfil these crucial roles in supporting children and young people back into learning. It is also true that we need to ensure that school attendance is everyone’s responsibility, as the impact of poor attendance risks significant impact on children’s outcomes. As such, children, families and schools need all services to respond and work towards providing the support needed to enable families to prioritise attendance in education.
- 6.4 **Sport and the arts to improve attendance** The Education Endowment Fund is currently undertaking a study to understand more about the practice of the use of sports and the arts to engage children in education. We intend to utilise this study to determine opportunities for building on existing good practice.
- 6.5 **Safe Taskforce** A government funded pilot, this project aims to target vulnerable young people at risk of involvement with youth crime and violence. A statistical analysis highlighted that poor attendance at school indicated a risk factor for engagement with youth crime and violence. The KPIs for this project

include sustained attendance at school and engagement in learning. This project is being evaluated nationally by RAND, and runs from 2022 – 2025.

### What impact will this proposal have?

- 7 No proposals included – this paper outlines the existing and planned interventions of the LA in relation to school attendance.

### How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

8

### What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: All

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

### What are the resource implications?

- 9 As yet, the DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance Guidance is non-statutory, however there is a clear expectation that the LAs begin to ‘work in the spirit’ of the new guidance. This guidance places additional burdens on both schools and the Local Authority in relation to improving school attendance, and has resulted in the previously traded offer to schools being ceased, as the guidance describes the previously traded activity as a core responsibility of the LA.

Increasing the focus on school attendance risks an increase in the number of requests by schools for legal intervention to be undertaken by the Local Authority. There is a risk that the current capacity within the LA team to process these requests and ensure that appropriate legal action is insufficient. There continues to be an expectation that supportive rather than pejorative action is taken wherever possible, and the LA will continue to support schools with this approach whilst ensuring that the importance of good school attendance is promoted to all families and communities.

### What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 10 The uncertainty relating to the statutory nature of the DfE Guidance poses a risk to the LA in terms of the expectation of the role in improving school attendance. The guidance is explicit in the role it expects LAs to take, however the abandonment of the Schools Bill which would have provided the legislative basis for the guidance, and the subsequent instruction to ‘act in the spirit of the guidance as though it were statutory’, is of concern for both schools and the LA. This risk is being managed by working in partnership with schools to ensure that they receive support from the LA to understand how they can best support children and families to improve school attendance.

### What are the legal implications?

- 11 As noted above, at present the guidance for schools and LAs is non-statutory, however the LA is seeking to work within the spirit of the guidance, as though it were statutory.



## Appendices

- Appendix A – National letters to encourage widespread commitment to improving school attendance:
  - Letter to LA Principal Social Workers from Isabelle Trowler and Principal Social Worker Chairs
  - Letter to all Local Authorities on school attendance July 2023 (Education Secretary)
- Appendix B – School attendance Service core offer (Phase 1 and Phase 2)
- Appendix C – Summary of responsibilities re School Attendance - LA and Schools, from Working Together To Improve School Attendance 2022
- Appendix D – Case studies
- Appendix E – Articles relating to school attendance for reference and further reading

## Appendix A Letter to LA Principal Social Workers from Isabelle Trowler and Principal Social Worker Chairs



Office of the Chief Social Worker –  
Isabelle Trowler

Principal Social Worker Network  
Chairs –  
Rob Tyrrell  
Paul McGee  
Clare Poyner

10 July 2023

Dear Principal Social Workers,

We are writing to you today because we would like to highlight the school attendance figures of some of our most vulnerable children and ask for your continued commitment to addressing these absences.

Attending school is vital to all children's educational progress, for their wellbeing and for their wider development. Non-attendance can cause significant pressures for families already under strain. For children with a social worker, attending school is often also a protective factor, offering a safe space when home is not. You might have seen the recent Channel Four documentary, '[Surviving Dad](#)', which highlighted the importance of identifying low attendance, and understanding the possible underlying reasons for that.

As the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, Isabelle is a member of the Attendance Action Alliance. Chaired by the Secretary of State, Gillian Keegan MP, the aim of the Alliance is to raise school attendance, and to provide visible leadership on removing barriers to education for all children. Isabelle has pledged to work with the PSW Network to help reach the whole community of practitioners across children's social care, to promote the importance of attendance and champion attendance in the government's programme of children's social care reform.

Data published recently by the Department for Education (DfE) showed that:

- there has been an increase in the overall absence rate across children on Children in Need plans, Child Protection Plans and children in care for less than 12 months (with the exception of children in care for at least 12 months) since the 2020/21 academic year and across all groups since 2018/19.
- pupils in all social care groups were more likely to be persistent absentees than the overall pupil population with the exception of children in care for at least 12 months (19.1%).

- pupils on Child Protection Plans at 31 March had the highest proportion of (56.2%) persistent absences. This equates to missing more than 7 weeks on average compared with around 5 weeks pre-Covid. <sup>1</sup>

As Principal Social Workers you play such an important role in working with local partnerships to put the right support in place for this cohort of children to attend school. Last year we ran some great webinars in which we highlighted best practice and discussed how to encourage attendance for children known to children's social care.

We are asking you all to give school attendance your renewed attention and use your knowledge, skills and networks to reduce absences. The DfE's [Working together to improve school attendance guidance](#) sets out what support is available for school and academy staff, local authority attendance staff, social workers, virtual school heads, safeguarding partners, parents, carers and how we can all work together to tackle attendance challenges.

By the end of this year the DfE will issue the new statutory Children's Social Care National Framework, which will set out the purpose and principles of children's social care, and the outcomes we should meet for children and families. The National Framework will highlight the important role children's social care should play in improving attendance.

We would like to thank you all for your continued hard work and the many ways that you ensure vulnerable children are given the opportunities they deserve, attending school and accessing the support they need.

Warm regards,



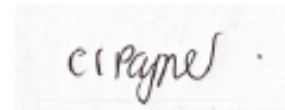
Isabelle Trowler  
Chief Social Worker for  
Children and Families  
(England)



Rob Tyrrell  
Co-chair of National  
Children's Principal  
Social Worker Network



Paul McGee  
Co-chair of National  
Children's Principal  
Social Worker Network



Clare Poyner  
Co-chair of National  
Children's Principal  
Social Worker Network

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<sup>1</sup> [Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England, Reporting year 2022 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)



The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP  
Secretary of State for Education

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT  
tel: 0370 000 2288 [www.education.gov.uk/contactus/df](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus/df)

19 July 2023

Dear Chief Executives,

## **LETTER TO LAs: CALL TO SUPPORT STRONG ATTENDANCE FROM THE FIRST DAY OF TERM.**

I am writing to thank you for your hard work and dedication over the past school year in supporting school attendance, and to ask for your continued support in ensuring strong attendance from day one of the new academic year.

Together, we have begun to turn the tide on one of the biggest challenges that COVID-19 has posed to children and young people, their academic and wider development and safety. Over 350,000 fewer pupils were persistently absent in Spring 2023 compared to Summer 2022 and this is due to the collective efforts of the public services that support children and families. Councils up and down the country have responded with purpose to [new school attendance guidance](#) which sets out how schools and local authorities should work together to tackle absence, focusing on a 'support first' approach.

However, as I said at the [LGA conference](#) earlier this month, there is more to do, with absence rates still well above pre-Covid levels, and the most vulnerable children more likely to be absent. Improving attendance is a critical priority for me and the Department, for the Levelling Up agenda, and I know for local authorities as well. We know attendance has long term impacts on a child's life chances, including attainment, employment prospects and future earnings. We need to work together on this issue. To that end, I have written to schools to recognise their efforts and ask them to prepare for the warmest possible welcome for all children and families this September - including those who may have struggled with attendance in the past. We know that those first days back in school really matter. Evidence from a [recent Children's Commissioner report](#) showed that children who miss days 2, 3 and 4 of the new term for unauthorised reasons had a predicted overall absence of almost 45%, or 31 days across the term, compared to children who missed days near the end of term, with a predicted overall absence of 20-30%.

To make the most of the new start that September represents, local authorities have an important role to play in ensuring that as many children as possible are attending from day one of the new academic year.

Firstly, I ask that your school attendance support team takes forward the most ambitious possible preparations for September. In line with the attendance guidance, good practice here involves rigorous analysis of absence data to identify the pupils, cohorts and schools that need the most support, ensuring join-up and data-sharing is established with relevant agencies such as children's social care and SEND, and communicating the area-wide school attendance strategy across the council.

Secondly, over the summer I urge you to mobilise your wider services and staff who have contact with parents and children to help to communicate the importance of a strong return to school. I believe we have a real opportunity to reset the system, if we can ensure that trusted voices are giving the same messages.

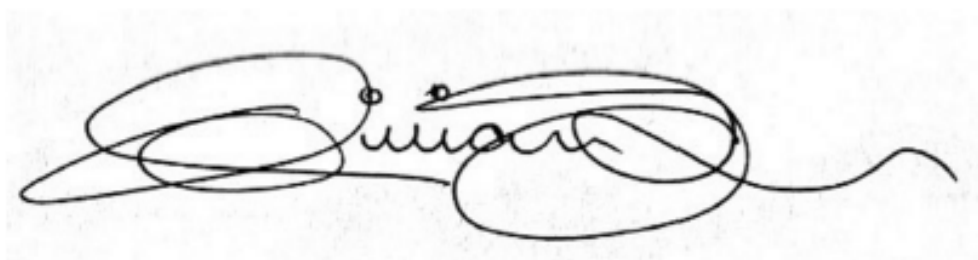
Some great examples I have seen across the country include:

- social workers and early help workers ensuring that that every conversation with a pupil and family involves school attendance and addressing any barriers
- school nurses identifying and working with pupils who are anxious about returning to school
- family hubs giving out information to parents on [illness and absence](#) and sharing our attendance [guidance for parents](#)

Thirdly, it is essential that services are ready in those early weeks of the new Term, working in partnership with schools, to intervene early where problems emerge, and particularly for children and families with more complex circumstances. A joined-up local effort will be critical.

Thank you once again for your commitment to reducing pupil absence and helping to lead the local response. I look forward to continuing to work with you, schools, trusts and partners in health and beyond, so every child and young person starts the next academic year as strongly as possible.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gillian Keegan', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

**The Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP  
Secretary of State for Education**

# APPENDIX B

## Summer Term 2023 – Phase 1 Core Offer

### School Attendance Service

Actions Phase 1	Notes
School Attendance Support Team – School Attendance Service	The team includes 1 CMOOE officer, 5 Team Managers, 16.5 FTE AIO'S
All schools have access to School Attendance Service mailbox (Schoolattendanceservice@leeds.gov.uk)	This is a busy mailbox that receive queries from parents, schools, agencies etc. To enable a timely response to queries additional staff are going to be allocated to this mailbox and trained to respond appropriately. (AIO's)
Attendance Toolkit (Leeds for Learning)	The Toolkit is available for all schools on LfL and is currently being updated for the summer term. The toolkit contains useful documents and guidance including how to refer a case for legal intervention.
Leeds for Learning – Attendance Articles to be added throughout the summer term	The School Attendance Service has made a commitment to produce Attendance articles on LfL the content will be determined by attendance trends and themes and commonly asked questions.
Attendance updates in Headteachers newsletter	The School Attendance Service will use the half termly HT newsletter to keep Senior Leaders up to date with Attendance communication.
Attendance Manager in attendance at Family of Schools meetings	CMOOE officer/Team Managers will attend FOS meetings, this will improve communication and will also be an opportunity to address concerns/issues in a timely manner.
All schools to receive individual school data giving comparative date to primary/secondary cluster and primary/secondary Leeds city wide data.	Through Targeted Support Meetings and Register checks school will be given a copy of their data. This data will form part of the discussions within these meetings.
Enforce attendance through Legal action	A change to the traded package for schools in the summer term will add additional capacity for the team to complete Legal intervention.
Targeted Support Meeting offer for all schools	In the summer term the School Attendance Service have an aspirational target to offer all schools Target support meetings. The priority schools will be offered in the first instance. Priority by attendance data.
Register Checks offered to schools where attendance has been highlighted as a concern	Register Checks will continue in the summer term. Register checks are an opportunity for the LA to closely analyse school registers, offer recommendations, celebrate good practice, and challenge processes/coding when appropriate.
Model Attendance Policy will be available on Leeds for Learning	The School Attendance Service is responding to the new guidance and requests received from schools by developing a Model Attendance Policy template that will be available on LfL
Themed attendance drop-in sessions e.g., Removing barriers to Attendance	The School Attendance Service will be offering three drop-in sessions for schools these sessions will look at key areas and be an opportunity for schools to share good practice.

Attendance briefing session ' What the new guidance means for schools' will be available to book on Leeds for Learning	This briefing session will support schools in implementing the new guidance in their own setting. This session will be repeated four times during the summer term.
Attendance briefing session ' What the new guidance means for the LA' will be available to book on Leeds for Learning	This briefing session will outline to schools the expectations/responsibilities of the LA in implementing the new guidance in their own setting. This session will be repeated four times during the summer term.

## Traded Training

In addition to the core offer of training there is an additional eight training sessions available during the summer term for schools to purchase.

## Traded Offer to schools from September 2023

Traded - Training	Cost	Notes
Attendance Analysis and Persistent absence Virtual training	£110	Cost per delegate. Next session 27/06/2023
Admissions and CME Virtual training	£110	Cost per delegate. Next session 09/05/2023
Casework Virtual Training	£110	Cost per delegate. Next session 17/05/2023
Fast Track and Penalty Notice Virtual training	£110	Cost per delegate. Next session 13/06/2023
eLearning - Parenting Contracts	£150	Per setting (Training to be devised)
eLearning – Attendance Policy and procedures	£150	Per setting (Training to be devised)
eLearning – Legal, ESO's, PO's (3 separate modules)	£150	Per setting (Training to be devised)

Working together to Improve School Attendance Briefing (Expectations of Schools)		Working together to Improve School Attendance Briefing (Expectations of LA)		Admissions Procedures, Children Missing Education (CME)		
	11/05/2023		25/04/2023	Casework	17/05/2023	21/06/2023
	16/05/2023		08/06/2023	Fast Track and Penalty Notices	03/05/2023	13/06/2023
	25/05/2023		20/06/2023	Attendance Analysis and Persistent Absence	23/05/2023	27/06/2023
	22/06/2023		04/07/2023			

Actions Phase 1	Updates
All schools have access to School Attendance Service mailbox (Schoolattendanceservice@leeds.gov.uk)	Mailbox training for all SAS staff on 10/05/2023 to include training manual. Rota for SAS staff to be sent to all staff on 05/05/23. Implementation of new process commences 15/05/2023 This has now commenced, and the response time is reducing, and we are responding to everything within 3 days.
Attendance Toolkit (Leeds for Learning)	Toolkit is reviewed and updated. Uploaded to Leeds for Learning by 05/09/2023

Leeds for Learning – Attendance Articles to be added throughout the summer term	Various supportive articles added and updated
Attendance updates in Headteachers newsletter	All bulletins and updates include attendance. The Learning Inclusion bulletin is the main mechanism for distributing attendance news.
Attendance manager in attendance at Family of Schools meetings	There will be an attendance service staff members to all meetings possible. Effective communication with FOS support and feedback provided to meetings if attendance not possible.
All schools to receive individual school data giving comparative data to primary/secondary cluster and primary/secondary Leeds city wide data.	The Data is currently being sent to schools at the same time they are offered register checks. Schools are using the DFE attendance tool.
Enforce attendance through Legal action	Development of a more streamlined penalty notice process is being looked at by the transformation team and a specific legal action guide is being developed to be in place by December 2023. We are waiting for new DFE guidance being released after a consultation last year.
Targeted Support Meeting offer for all schools	Summer term – 39 offered – 24 completed
Register Checks offered to schools where attendance has been highlighted as a concern	April to July – 82 offered, 40 completed, 27 booked in Sept/Oct 2023.
Model Attendance Policy will be available on Leeds for Learning	Available on L4L
Themed attendance drop-in sessions e.g., Removing barriers to Attendance	Bookable on L4L – will become targeted as themes emerge this year – planned already are support for mental health concerns and navigating the legal processes
Attendance briefing session ' What the new guidance means for schools' will be available to book on Leeds for Learning	Dates 11/05/2023, 16/05/2023, 25/05/2023, 22/06/2023 58 schools attended
Attendance briefing session ' What the new guidance means for the LA' will be available to book on Leeds for Learning	Dates 25/04/2023, 08/06/2023, 20/06/2023, 04/07/2023 59 schools attended and 2 clusters



<b>Traded Training Academic Year 22/23</b>	<b>Number of schools attended</b>
Admissions and CME	7
Fast Track and Penalty Notices	41
Casework Training	23
Attendance Analysis and PA	23

# CMOOE - School Attendance Service – Phase 2

## School Attendance Service (SAS) – September 2023

The Phase 2 universal core offer from the School Attendance Service will become effective - 1st September 2023.

Further support will be rolled out over the academic year and will include additional training and briefing opportunities for all schools, additional guidance documents and templates including parenting contracts.

### September 2023 – Phase 2 Universal Core Offer (All schools)

The school attendance service is part of the Children Missing out on Education team (CMOOE)

Lead – Alison Finley [alison.finley@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:alison.finley@leeds.gov.uk)

### School Attendance Support Team

The team includes 1 Lead officer – Tracey Black – [tracey.black@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:tracey.black@leeds.gov.uk) , 5 Team Managers, 16 FTE AIO'S

Please note – elements with an \* were previously traded and are now part of the universal core offer to all schools.

September offer - Phase 2	Notes
All schools have access to School Attendance Service mailbox ( <a href="mailto:Schoolattendanceservice@leeds.gov.uk">Schoolattendanceservice@leeds.gov.uk</a> ) *(some elements)	This mailbox is managed by the School Attendance Service staff both attendance improvement officers and team managers to ensure a timely response to school queries. (Target response - 3 Days)
Attendance Toolkit (Leeds for Learning)	The toolkit is available for all schools on LfL (Leeds for Learning). The toolkit contains useful documents and guidance including how to refer a case for legal intervention.
Attendance updates in newsletters	The school attendance service will use Leeds for Learning newsletters to keep Senior Leaders and Attendance staff up to date with attendance communication.
SAS manager attendance at FOS (Family of Schools meetings) *	CMOOE (Children Missing Out on Education) officer/team managers will be available to attend FOS meetings upon request, this will improve communication and will also be an opportunity to address concerns/issues in a timely manner.
SAS manger attendance at cluster meetings * (some elements)	CMOOE (Children Missing Out on Education) officer/team managers will be available to attend cluster meetings, this be an opportunity for attendance leads/officers to come together to share good practice and remove area wide barriers to attendance.
All schools to receive individual school attendance data including the Leeds picture	Through targeting support meetings and register checks school will be given a copy of their data. This data will form part of the discussions within these meetings.
Enforce attendance through legal action	The school attendance service have trained additional staff to support with the increase in request for legal intervention. Schools are reminded to continue with attendance processes after submission and that all avenues of support need to be exhausted.

Targeting support meeting offer for all schools *	Each school will be offered a termly targeting support meeting. These meetings will be an opportunity to discuss individual pupils and create targeted action plans.
Register checks offered	An annual register check will be offered to all schools. register checks are an opportunity for the LA (Local Authority) to closely analyse school registers, offer recommendations, celebrate good practice, and provide challenge to processes/coding where appropriate.
Model attendance policy available on Leeds for Learning	The school attendance service has responded to the new guidance and requests received from schools by developing a Model Attendance Policy template which is now available on LfL.
Themed attendance drop-in sessions *	The school attendance service will be offering half termly online drop-in sessions for schools. These sessions will look at key areas identified through work with schools and are an opportunity for schools to share good practice and ask questions. These can be booked on LfL.
Attendance briefing session ' What the new guidance means for schools' will be available to book on Leeds for Learning *	This briefing session will support schools in implementing the new guidance in their own setting. This session will be repeated half termly.
Attendance briefing session ' What the new guidance means for the LA' will be available to book on Leeds for Learning *	This briefing session will outline to schools the expectations/responsibilities of the LA in implementing the new guidance in their own setting. This session will be repeated half termly.

## Traded training

In addition to the universal core offer there are 20 established virtual training sessions available for schools to purchase on Leeds for Learning.

These include:

- Admissions and CME (Children Missing Education)
- Attendance casework
- Fast track and penalty notices
- Attendance and persistent absence

Bespoke training will remain available throughout the academic year 2023/24 – you can request through Leeds for Learning. (Subject to staffing availability)

Over the academic year 2023/24 the school attendance service will look to expand and develop further traded offers in response to DFE guidance and local issues.

## School Attendance Service (SAS) – Autumn term 2023 – Phase 3

The Phase 3 universal core offer from the School Attendance Service will become effective no later than - 1st November 2023.

Further support will be rolled out over the academic year and will include additional training and briefing opportunities for all schools, additional guidance documents and templates including parenting contracts.

### Autumn 2023 – Phase 3 Universal Core Offer (All schools)

The school attendance service is part of the Children Missing out on Education team (CMOOE)

Lead – Alison Finley [alison.finley@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:alison.finley@leeds.gov.uk)

### School Attendance Support Team

The team includes 1 Lead officer – Tracey Black – [tracey.black@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:tracey.black@leeds.gov.uk) , 5 Team Managers, 16 FTE AIO'S

Please note – elements with an \* were previously traded and are now part of the universal core offer to all schools.

Autumn term - Phase 3	Notes
All schools have access to School Attendance Service mailbox ( <a href="mailto:Schoolattendanceservice@leeds.gov.uk">Schoolattendanceservice@leeds.gov.uk</a> ) *(some elements)	This mailbox is managed by the School Attendance Service staff both attendance improvement officers and team managers to ensure a timely response to school queries. (Target response - 3 Days)
Attendance Toolkit (Leeds for Learning)	The toolkit is available for all schools on LfL (Leeds for Learning). The toolkit contains useful documents and guidance including how to refer a case for legal intervention.
Attendance updates in newsletters	The school attendance service will use Leeds for Learning newsletters to keep Senior Leaders and Attendance staff up to date with attendance communication.
SAS manager attendance at FOS (Family of Schools meetings) *	CMOOE (Children Missing Out on Education) officer/team managers will be available to attend FOS meetings upon request, this will improve communication and will also be an opportunity to address concerns/issues in a timely manner.
SAS manger/CMOOE attendance officer facilitate attendance meeting for AIP, Cluster and Early Help staff	CMOOE (Children Missing Out on Education) officer/team managers will facilitate a citywide meeting, this will be an opportunity for staff to come together to share good practice and remove area wide barriers to attendance.
All schools to receive individual school attendance data including the Leeds picture	Through targeting support meetings and register checks school will be given a copy of their data. This data will form part of the discussions within these meetings.
Enforce attendance through legal action	The school attendance service have trained additional staff to support with the increase in request for legal intervention. Schools are reminded to continue with attendance processes after submission and that all avenues of support need to be exhausted.
Targeting support meeting offer for all schools *	Each school will be offered a termly targeting support meeting through the cluster model. These meetings will be an opportunity to anonymously discuss individual pupils

	and create targeted action plans, as well as an opportunity to share good school practice.
Register checks offered	An annual register check will be offered to all schools. register checks are an opportunity for the LA (Local Authority) to closely analyse school registers, offer recommendations, celebrate good practice, and provide challenge to processes/coding where appropriate.
Model attendance policy available on Leeds for Learning	The school attendance service has responded to the new guidance and requests received from schools by developing a Model Attendance Policy template which is now available on LfL.
Themed attendance drop-in sessions *	The school attendance service will be offering half termly online drop-in sessions for schools. These sessions will look at key areas identified through work with schools and are an opportunity for schools to share good practice and ask questions. These can be booked on LfL.
Attendance briefing session ' What the new guidance means for schools' will be available to book on Leeds for Learning *	This briefing session will support schools in implementing the new guidance in their own setting. This session will be repeated half termly.
Attendance briefing session ' What the new guidance means for the LA' will be available to book on Leeds for Learning *	This briefing session will outline to schools the expectations/responsibilities of the LA in implementing the new guidance in their own setting. This session will be repeated half termly.
Fair Access Panel (FAP) cases admissions meeting.	All schools/academies can request an admission meeting with the parent/carer chaired by an Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO) to support integration on to the school roll. (Effective September 2023)
Year 7 pupils (23/24) with no identified school place.	SAS officers have been working with families who have failed to secure a year 7 place for September 2023 and will continue this work during the Autumn term.
'Attendance is everyone's responsibility'	CMOOE team members will continue to be available to attend key partner meetings. To discuss CME, EHE, Attendance and exclusions.
Year 6 (22/23) persistent absence (unauthorised absence)	Attendance letter has been sent reminding parent/carers of the importance of regular attendance.  (School Imported Data – SID)
Penalty Notice policy	Penalty Notice policy to support school with the implementation of requesting penalty notices including updated penalty notice code of conduct. (Effective December 2023)

## Traded training

In addition to the universal core offer there are 20 established virtual training sessions available for schools to purchase on Leeds for Learning.

These include:

- Admissions and CME (Children Missing Education)
- Attendance casework
- Fast track and penalty notices
- Attendance and persistent absence

In the autumn term the School attendance service are introducing three new traded elements as detailed below:

- eLearning module 'Parenting Contracts' includes template document and guidance.
- eLearning module on 'Punctuality' includes template letters.
- 'Year 7 or Reception pupils who have failed to take up school place in September' an Attendance Improvement Officer will complete enquires including a home visit to support the return to school.

Bespoke training will remain available throughout the academic year 2023/24 – you can request through Leeds for Learning. (Subject to staffing availability)

### **Targeting support meetings**

*As patterns of attendance are habitual, early identification and support is essential for individual pupils in need of help. Where barriers go beyond the classroom, this requires schools, local authorities, and other partners to work together to put joint support in place as quickly as possible. **Working together to improve school attendance DfE 2022***

Each school/academy will be invited to a cluster targeted support meeting, prior to the meeting data analysis will be undertaken by the School Attendance Service. Each school/academy will receive their individual data in preparation.

### **Agenda - Targeting support meeting**

1. Introduction/check in
2. SAS updates
3. Staffing updates
4. Traded updates
5. Training updates
6. Data analysis
7. DFE updates
8. Common themes/sharing good practice to improve attendance including:
  - Barriers to attendance*
  - Improving attendance*
  - Reducing absence*
  - Mental health support*
9. Case work discussion
10. Topics for discussion next meeting
11. AOB

## Summer 2023 school holiday plan

### Action

- Identify all current year 6 without an allocated school Those on roll in year 6 on waiting lists
- Those with no current roll (further identify CME (CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION) status WK (Whereabouts Known) or WUK (Whereabouts Unknown))
- EHE cases that want school places to be supported to find a place -1153 Total number of EHE children and young people
- EHE cases that have not provided any detail for over one year of the education to be received by the child to be referred to CME or where the whereabouts are unknown
- Letter to all partner agencies to reinforce our attendance message (DFE message) and importance of first day attendance in September
- Investigate if we can use SID data to identify the vulnerable learners who have PA or SA prioritise current year 6 and 9 with PA/SA letter/email
- mailshot all families with any child who has SA/PA Mail merge – Blanket PA email that excludes authorised absence
- DfE Daily Attendance Data - monthly webinar for schools, trusts and LA
- DFE attendance data collection to promote with schools on the same letter as webinar reminder. Upload to LfL
- Poverty Board – 66 families in emergency accommodation
- Attendance working with the GRT team preschool starting - GRT team offer drop-in session for families, support with school applications and encourage regular school attendance.
- Inform other services on CME WK referral route. Including health, CSWS, and police
- Extra ordinary attendance cases – identified as vulnerable learners (non-attenders) at MACE or through TSM/Reg check
- ESNA – Briefing /training attended by all CMOOE officers
- ESNA advice been given to parents and other professionals to support regular attendance.
- Expectations set to high schools through register checks and TSM to target year 6 pupils with low attendance e.g., summer visits and communication with families
- CSWS drop-in service continues over the summer. An opportunity for social workers to discuss attendance concerns for pupils with a social worker. Advice and guidance given to support regular school attendance.
- School Attendance Service Mailbox continues to be available over the summer to answer parent/carers and professional queries pertaining to attendance. An opportunity to promote and set high expectations for attendance.
- Continue with statutory duties (Legal intervention including SAO's and PN's to enforce attendance)

# Appendix C

[Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

- Have a strategic approach to improving attendance for the whole area and to make it a key focus of all frontline council services.
- Have a School Attendance Support Team that works with all schools to remove area-wide barriers to attendance.
- Provide each school with a named point of contact in the School Attendance Support Team who can support with queries and advice.
- Offer opportunities for all schools in the area to share effective practice. The phased plans have addressed all the expectations and are working through delivery to schools and some changes in practice.
- For pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent the LA must hold a termly conversation with every school to identify, discuss and signpost or provide access to services for pupils who are persistently or severely absent or at risk of becoming so.
- Where there are out of school barriers, provide each identified pupil and their family with access to services they need in the first instance. If the issue persists, facilitate a voluntary early help assessment where appropriate.
- Take an active part in the multi-agency effort with the school and other partners.
- Provide the lead practitioner where all partners agree that a local authority service is best placed to lead.
- For Persistently absent pupils continued support as for pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent and: Work jointly with the school to provide formal support options including parenting contracts and education supervision orders. Where there are safeguarding concerns, ensure joint working between the school, children's social care services and other statutory safeguarding partners. Where support is not working, being engaged with or appropriate, enforce attendance through legal intervention (including prosecution as a last resort).

For severely absent pupils continued support as for persistently absent pupils and: All services should make this group the top priority for support. This may include a whole family plan, consideration for an education, health and care plan, or alternative form of educational provision. Be especially conscious of any potential safeguarding issues, ensuring joint working between the school, children's social care services and other statutory safeguarding partners. Where appropriate, this could include conducting a full children's social care assessment and building attendance into children in need and child protection plans.

Support for cohorts of pupils with lower attendance than their peers. Using data to help school identify these cohorts and look at support packages.

Track local attendance data to prioritise support and unblock area wide attendance barriers where they impact numerous schools.

Support for pupils with medical conditions or SEND with poor attendance – we are currently working with one of the monitoring quality and assurance officers in SENSAP.



# Appendix D1

## Primary School Case Study – impact of register checks

July 2023 register check - an example of a school that has improved their attendance. Overall Review

X Primary School has 207 pupils whose attendance is monitored daily by the Safeguarding and Attendance Officer and the data is analysed every half term by the Head teacher. X Primary school have a good relationship with their families and the community in which they live. The school works hard, along with their dedicated Attendance Governor to encourage good attendance which then supports positive educational outcomes.

X Primary School have highlighted their attendance policy on the school website which shows expectation and support which is explained as the 3 P's Prevention, Punctuality and Promotion and the RAG table is used to show parents what good attendance is to the level of concern and intervention if needed.

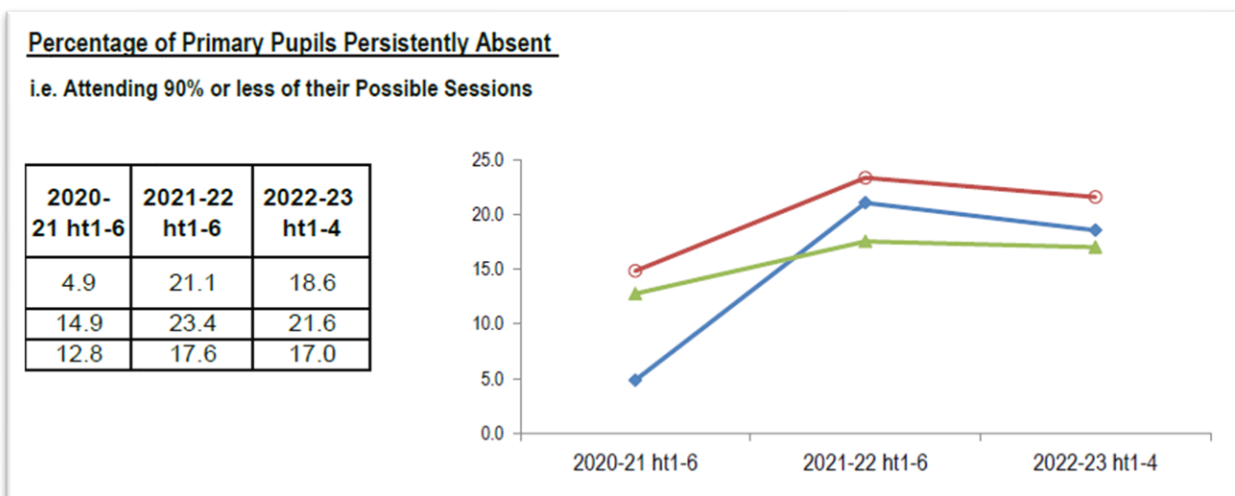
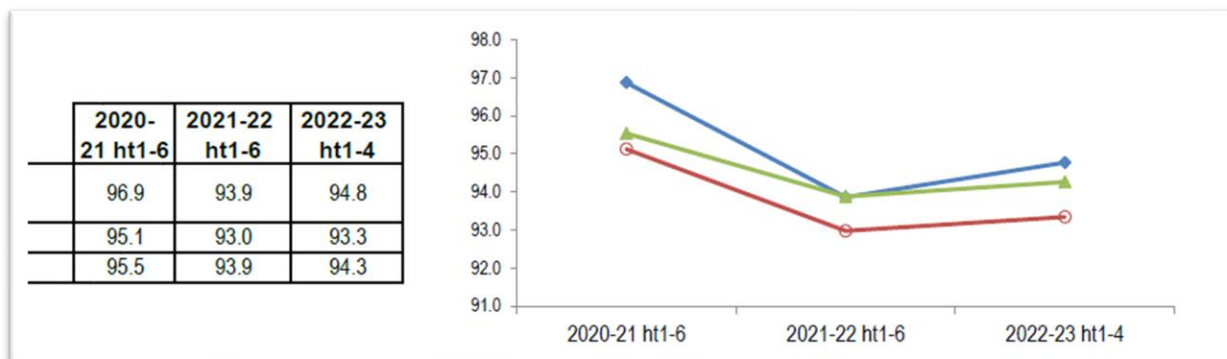
X Primary School use the code analysis to address any low patterns of attendance and as well as keeping an updated analysis with their vulnerable groups. This group have individual attendance plans which is a contract signed by the parent.

X Primary School is part of the X Cluster and whilst X oversees and follows the attendance process in school the Cluster AIO supports with home visits.

The attendance codes are used correctly however one suggestion is that school use the 'U' Code as per guidance 30 minutes after the register closes instead of 20 minutes after registration as this might also increase the overall school attendance.

There are plenty of attendance charts around school, a school council in which pupils also discuss attendance, classopoly is an inventive attendance monopoly board in which each class competes with their attendance moving around the board each week. Attendance prizes range from certificates to a prize draw for money vouchers.

The good overall school attendance reflects the hard work and commitment that goes into working on a daily basis with the families to improve their children's attendance.



Key - Primary school Cluster Leeds City wide primary

# Appendix D2

**Letters issued to partners and schools to support children to “Be a Top Attender in September”**

**Letter sent to services across Leeds this summer to encourage a good start in September.**

## **CALL TO SUPPORT STRONG ATTENDANCE FROM THE FIRST DAY OF TERM**

We are asking for everyone’s support to improve school attendance across the whole of our city of Leeds. You are part of a service that has members of staff that will have contact with parents, carers and children over the summer and we want all our trusted voices communicating the same message about the importance of a strong return to school in September.

**‘Be a top attender in September’**

**‘Get off to a flying start in September’**

Absence rates are still well above pre-Covid levels, and the most vulnerable children and young people are more likely to be absent. We need to work together on this issue and make improving attendance a critical priority for everyone.

Schools have worked so hard to improve attendance and we all have an opportunity to work with schools to reduce absence.

We would like all professionals and trusted voices, when you meet with children, young people, and families over the summer to include attendance in every conversation.

We know attendance has long term impacts on a child’s life chances, including attainment, employment prospects and future earnings. Your support on this issue is essential as we all work together to improve the outcomes for children and young people across Leeds.

### **The importance of a strong return to school**

We know that those first days back in school really matter. We know many children have struggled with attendance and that the return to school is one of the biggest challenges that COVID – 19 has posed to children and young people. Evidence from a recent Children’s Commissioner report showed that children who miss days 2, 3 and 4 of the new term for unauthorised reasons had a predicted overall absence of almost 45%, or 31 days across the term, compared to children who missed days near the end of term, who had a predicted overall absence of 20-30%.

We are determined as a local authority to make the academic year 2023/24 a fresh start for attendance for all children and young people in Leeds and we would like to see this reflected in attendance on the first day of term. With your help we can support families to get ready for the new term.

We believe we have a real opportunity to make a difference and support children and young people to return to school and make a flying start in September. With a ‘support first’ approach we want to encourage everyone to include school attendance and the importance of being there at the start of term in conversations over the summer.

Let’s help all children and young people get ready to start in September and be ready to learn. Please ask all your staff to include the importance of good attendance and starting back on the first day in all conversations over the summer.

Thank you for your continued support with children and young people and their families in Leeds.

Alison Finley  
Children missing out on education & exclusion monitoring lead

Alison.Finley@leeds.gov.uk

Tracey Black  
Attendance Lead Officer  
Tracey.Clegg@leeds.gov.uk

### Useful links

[Leeds School Uniform Exchange - Leeds School Uniform Exchange \(leedsuniformexchange.org.uk\)](http://leedsuniformexchange.org.uk)

[Directory \(leedslocaloffer.org.uk\)](http://leedslocaloffer.org.uk)

[Home | Family Information Service Leeds](#)

[Is my child too ill for school? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Back into School | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](http://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

[Resources for families | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](http://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

[Let's get ready for September | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](http://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

[What are 'ghost children' and why is school attendance important? - The Education Hub \(blog.gov.uk\)](http://blog.gov.uk)

**Be a Top Attender this September**

...and get off to a **FLYING START** at school

**Are you ready for your first day?**

- What date is my first day back?
- Set my alarm
- Uniform ready
- Plenty of sleep
- School bag ready

★ See your friends   ★ Learn new things

★ Attendance leads to success!

**Leeds**  
CITY COUNCIL

We Are Child Friendly Leeds

# Appendix D3

## Virtual School support to improving attendance

### Attendance work with the Virtual School

Support for pupils with a social worker is clear in the new guidance. In light of this, the Virtual School have:

- delivered training to Child Protection Conference chairs as part of the extension of the VS functions to include children with a social work intervention. CP chairs are now including attendance as key aspect of plan, and this has been evidenced in audits where children's attendance is now captured on CO plans
- arranged meeting with principal social worker, School Attendance Service, and workforce development to consider how to respond to letter from Isabelle Trowler with proposal to ensure front door, child and family assessments and CiN plans capture attendance and workforce development/training requirements.
- ensured that Personal education plans for CLA have to capture child's attendance and activity/intervention when required and PEP co-ordinators support all children new to care with first PEPs so earliest possible intervention at point children become looked after
- ensured DSL networks are being supported by EP service to deliver extended non-school attendance training during autumn term 2023
- ensured the Virtual School DT/DSL visit framework requires schools to review the attendance of the cohorts for whom VS have responsibility i.e., looked after, previously looked after and children with a social worker
- offered Attendance Team Manager and Virtual School focussed attendance 'consultations' for schools who have accessed their DT/DSL visit
- influenced School Attendance Service register checks to include query around attendance of CLA/PCLA/CWSW
- a SAS team manager seconded to VS team to present fortnightly reports on children persistently absent using attendance monitoring system Iris Looked After Call
- attended foster carer networks to promote school attendance
- Drop-in sessions to social workers from VS and SAS
- A SAS team manager delivering training through DSL network
- The CMOOE lead attending the DSL network
- supported Youth Justice Education Officers meetings and use 3A's as strategy
- embedded 'lines of enquiry' document in YJS Asset assessments with focus on 3A's

# Appendix D4

## Educational Psychology team support to improve attendance – focussing on ESNA

### Attendance work with the Educational Psychology team (EPT)

During the pandemic, the DfE Wellbeing for Education funding led to the provision of online resources for schools including access to training which include supporting the evidence base related to school anxiety.

The EPT recognised school attendance as an ongoing need, which was highlighted and exacerbated as a result of the pandemic. In response the EPT developed and offer of support called 'extended school non-attendance' (ESNA).

ESNA can be understood under the umbrella term of social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs. SEMH is a term introduced by the SEND Code of Practice in 2014 in an attempt to move away from the word behaviour and to acknowledge that a behavioural presentation is a way of communicating something more significant, such as an unmet need.

The ESNA offer has been embedded into the EP team offer and is a free offer to all schools.

A significant focus of the ESNA offer is to provide free training offer to all settings to support the understanding, thinking, and developing practice around extended school non-attendance (ESNA). The aim of this training is to ensure practitioners understand what is meant by ESNA and is explicitly linked to the expectations on settings in light of the new DfE guidance [Working together to improve school attendance](#). The intended outcome of the training is to support understanding and exploring ESNA on an individual basis and provide suggested ways of meeting needs.

The training offer also supports developing understanding of anxiety in children and young people and how it can impact on their education and attendance. The training supports understanding how to manage anxiety and provide supportive interventions with the aim of improving school attendance. Across the city 53 schools, 2 AIPs and the Virtual School have accessed the training offer to date and the EPT are supporting the Virtual School to support and address ESNA for Children Looked After. Feedback from the training states relevance of the course to current need is 100% good or excellent, with 80% stating it is excellent. This is based on a small number of returns however it provides qualitative information on what went well; what could be better and impact on practice.

The team are also able to offer targeted individualised short-term intervention using psychological approaches to reduce anxiety to improve school engagement and attendance. These individuals are identified by the EPT through work with schools and other partners. Anecdotally there are increasing requests and concerns around ESNA. Individual casework at this time is held in a system which is coded for SEMH. The individuals have significant difficulties with attendance which are linked to wider needs which are complex. In the 2023-2024 we will be using goal-based-outcomes to further evidence the impact of ESNA individual intervention.

The EP team have made links with Parent/Carer forums to enable co-production and ensure the offer is reflective of needs and supports making a positive contribution.

Next steps are to strengthen the system wide approach within Learning Inclusion through the working party/strategic group. This will include a data informed approach to targeting the offer more effectively and continuing links with parent carer forums, in order to strengthen the ESNA offer overall. In preparation for next academic year the ESNA strategic group is intending to collaborate with wider partners, particularly within Health and Care. The action plan includes development of a Leeds Offer. Leeds EPT are currently finalising an ESNA resources page will be available on LfL as of 04/09/23 to link to a range of resources and documents to support settings to support improving attendance.



# Appendix D5

## **SAFE Taskforce involvement with attendance in Leeds**

The SAFE Taskforce is working on a mentoring programme that is aimed at young people who are vulnerable to being engaged in serious violence. Two of the key indicators for a young person to be referred is low attendance and more than one fixed term suspension.

Each referral made, currently 250, is reviewed and notes the young person's current attendance at school. During the course of the long-term intervention, the mentor monitors the young person's attendance. The mentor will liaise with school, the young person, parents and other agencies to agree on actions to reduce the young person's vulnerability, which includes increasing attendance at school and reducing negative behaviour.

The majority of the mentors are based in secondary schools across Leeds full time. They will often deal with matters relating to a young person's attendance and behaviour on a daily basis. With duties such as, checking attendance on school registers, calling home for absentees, home visits for low attending young people and school refusers. The intervention aims to help the young people regulate in school better, and access lessons more successfully by identifying and resolving potential barriers to learning.

The mentors have been involved in breaking down barriers to school attendance engagement. Meeting parents and young people outside of the school environment has been an effective approach to re-establish contact with hard to reach families. The mentors have put on successful, bespoke, after school activities on which are targeted at these low attending young people, taking into account their interest and personal preference of support.

The after school intervention has also been extended to holiday provision. This is where our mentors will put on activities in all school holidays to maintain engagement, reduce involvement in crime and to maintain a supportive link with the young people.

One of our mentors have been based within the attendance department in their targeted school.

The support team in the SAFE Taskforce has been trained on the vulnerability and long term impact, low attendance has on young people.

# Appendix E

## Articles related to attendance for reference and further reading

[Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

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