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School Attendance

Date: 9th October 2024

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   **An overview of the Leeds school attendance data**   **An overview of actions the LA has taken and will continue to take to support schools in their work to improve attendance**

Recommendations

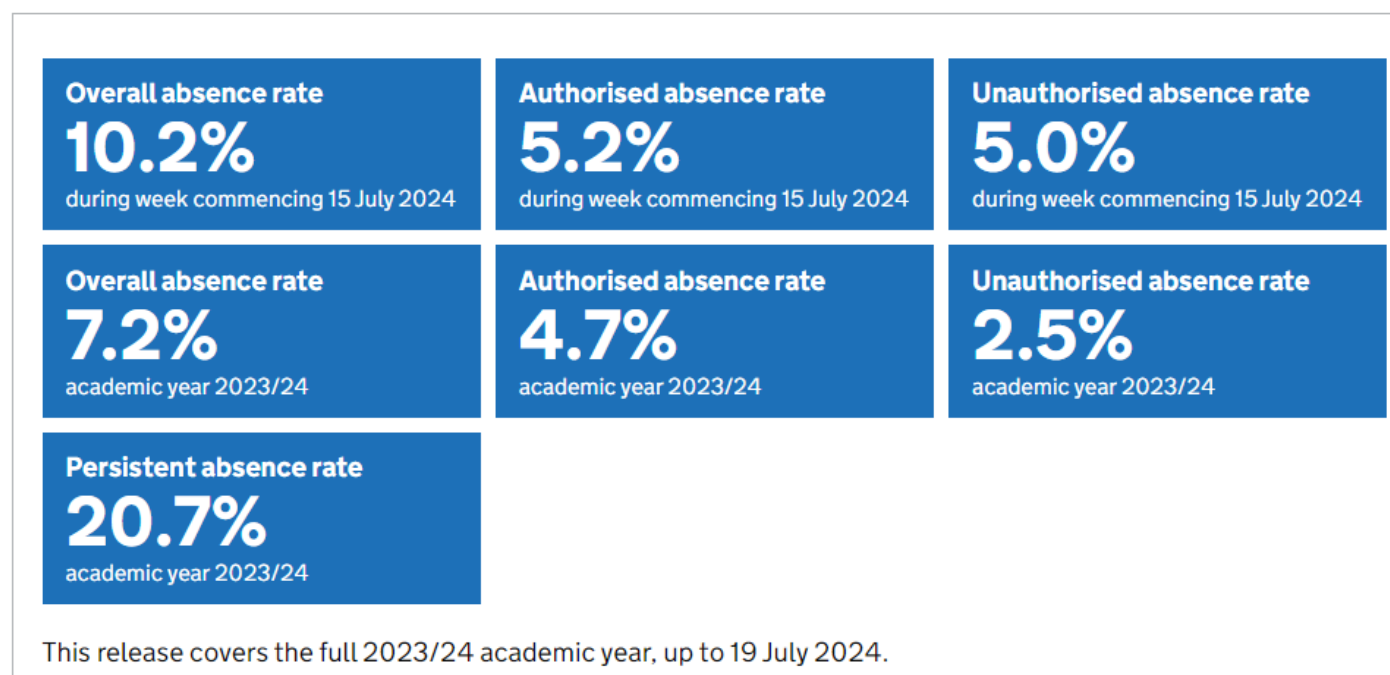a) Children & Families Scrutiny to note the contents of the report.

1. **What is this report about?**

   Children and Families Scrutiny Board has set out a continued interest in looking at school attendance. This report provides an overview of the national context; school attendance in Leeds; a summary of the Leeds City Council support for schools to improve attendance; and the planned next steps for increasing attendance and reducing school absence in the city.

2 **School attendance - nationally**

2.1 The DfE first published [Working together to improve school attendance](#) in May 2022 following a period of consultation, in a bid to improve school attendance following the Covid-19 pandemic. This guidance has been revised and became statutory from 18 August 2024. The guidance sets out 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.

2.2 National attendance data headlines:

Overall absence rate **10.2%** during week commencing 15 July 2024	Authorised absence rate **5.2%** during week commencing 15 July 2024	Unauthorised absence rate **5.0%** during week commencing 15 July 2024
Overall absence rate **7.2%** academic year 2023/24	Authorised absence rate **4.7%** academic year 2023/24	Unauthorised absence rate **2.5%** academic year 2023/24
Persistent absence rate **20.7%** academic year 2023/24		

This release covers the full 2023/24 academic year, up to 19 July 2024.

Source: [Pupil attendance in schools, Week 29 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)](#)

2.3 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)**.** This data is unverified and does not include all schools, but does align with local sources of data and therefore

   By school type, the **national absence rates** across the academic year 2023/24 were:

   - 5.5% in state-funded primary schools (3.9% authorised and 1.6% unauthorised)
   - 9.1% in state-funded secondary schools (5.5% authorised and 3.6% unauthorised)

- 13% in state-funded special schools (9.7% authorised and 3.3% unauthorised)

2.4 The statutory guidance [Working together to improve school attendance](#) has laid out a number of approaches to addressing the national issue of persistent absence and unauthorised absence which includes working with families rather than against them, and taking a 'support first' approach through a model of:

- *Expect:* Aspire to high standards of attendance from all pupils and parents and build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn by prioritising attendance improvement across the school;
- *Monitor:* Rigorously monitoring data to identify patterns of poor attendance early so that partners can work together to address them before they become entrenched;
- *Listen and understand:* When a pattern is spotted, discuss with pupils and parents to listen to and understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them
- *Facilitate support:* Remove barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.
- *Formalise support*: Where voluntary support measures are not impacting on attendance, or are not being engaged with, collaboratively plan for how attendance barriers will be overcome, through attendance contracts and Early Help plans where appropriate;
- *Enforce*: finally, where all other avenues have been exhausted, to enforce attendance through statutory intervention.

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 can be seen over the page (academic year 2022/23)

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 DfE published attendance data for academic year 2022/23 (latest available verified data)

Indicator	Academic Year					Trend	Change	Rank	National Quartile Position	Comparators 2023			
	2018	2019	2021²	2022	2023					National	Statistical Neighbour	Core Cities	Yorkshire & Humber
Attendance - Half Terms 1-6													
Primary													
Percentage attendance in primary schools	95.9	96.0	96.4	93.9	94.1		0.2	79/151	Band C	94.1	94.2	93.6	94.0
Percentage authorised absence in primary schools	2.7	2.6	2.4	4.1	3.7		-0.4	12/151	Band A	4.2	4.1	4.0	4.0
Percentage unauthorised absence in primary schools	1.4	1.5	1.2	1.9	2.2		0.3	128/151	Band D	1.6	1.8	2.4	2.0
Percentage of enrolments classified as persistently absent in primary schools	8.9	8.8	8.8	17.1	17.0		-0.1	93/151	Band C	16.2	16.3	19.3	16.9
Percentage of enrolments classified as severely absent in primary schools	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.7		0.1	85/151	Band C	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.8
Secondary													
Percentage attendance in secondary schools	94.2	94.2	94.3	90.8	90.3		-0.5	113/151	Band D	91.0	91.0	90.0	90.3
Percentage authorised absence in secondary schools	3.3	3.1	3.2	5.2	4.5		-0.7	17/151	Band A	5.6	5.3	4.9	5.2
Percentage unauthorised absence in secondary schools	2.5	2.7	2.5	4.0	5.2		1.2	138/151	Band D	3.4	3.8	5.1	4.5
Percentage of enrolments classified as persistently absent in secondary schools	14.8	14.6	16.0	27.2	27.2		0.0	91/151	Band C	26.5	26.7	29.2	28.6
Percentage of enrolments classified as severely absent in secondary schools	1.5	1.7	1.9	3.6	4.8		1.2	140/151	Band D	3.4	3.4	4.5	4.3
Special Schools													
Percentage attendance in special schools	88.5	88.0	83.9	86.2	87.0		0.8	84/149	Band C	87.0	88.0	84.7	86.9
Percentage authorised absence in special schools	8.2	8.3	13.2	9.4	8.7		-0.7	34/149	Band A	9.9	8.9	10.2	9.8
Percentage unauthorised absence in special schools	3.3	3.8	2.8	4.4	4.3		-0.1	126/149	Band D	3.2	3.2	5.1	3.2
Percentage of enrolments classified as persistently absent in special schools	31.9	32.7	49.7	37.3	35.9		-1.4	44/149	Band B	38.3	35.2	42.6	37.6
Percentage of enrolments classified as severely absent in special schools	6.7	6.7	6.9	7.6	7.4		-0.2	111/149	Band C	6.2	6.1	8.8	7.1

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

3.4   **All Schools**

3.4.1   There has been a reduction in authorised absence and an increase in unauthorised absence which has resulted in a small decrease in attendance overall. Persistent absence has remained static, but the severe absence figure has increased, driven overall by an increase across secondary schools.

3.4.2   Authorised absence has decreased to 4.1% and remains below national. Leeds ranks 10th out of 151 LAs and is in band A for quartile performance.

3.4.3   Since 2021/22, overall attendance rate across the 'all schools' figures has decreased slightly to 92.4% as well as being below the national figure of 92.6%, it is the lowest figure in Leeds in the 16-year period covered by the SFR. Out of 152 LAs, Leeds ranks 101st and is in quartile band C for performance.

3.4.4   Most absence was due to illness, which accounts for 3% of possible sessions in 2022/23, down from 3.6%.

3.4.5   There has been a notable increase in the last two years in the proportion of sessions missed due to 'other unauthorised circumstances,' which is a proxy for truancy. Between 2006/07 and 2020/21, the average was 1.1% and in 2023 this has increased to 2.6% with the increase predominantly driven by the secondary school phase. Leeds is above the national figure of 1.7%.

3.4.6   The unauthorised holiday rate has been steadily increasing over the last 16 years and remains slightly elevated when compared to pre-pandemic rates accounting for 0.7% of possible sessions which is above the national figure of 0.5%.

3.4.7   The persistent absence rate (a pupil missing 10% or more of their possible sessions) has remained static at 21.8% (24,775 pupil enrolments), equating to just over two out of every ten pupils. Leeds is just above national where 21.2% of pupil enrolments are recorded as being persistently absent, down from 22.5% in 2021/22. Leeds ranks 88th and is in band C for quartile performance.

3.4.8   The severe absence rate for pupil enrolments missing 50 per cent or more of their own possible sessions has however increased from 2% to 2.6% (2,992 pupil enrolments) mirroring the national trend where 2% of pupil enrolments are classed as being severely absent. The Leeds figure is above national where the increase has been smaller. Leeds ranks 142nd and is in band D for quartile performance.

3.4.9   Pupils with an EHCP and those who are FSM eligible have the lowest attendance rates, 87.1% and 87.9%, respectively. For pupils who are FSM eligible this is because of high absence mainly due to 'other unauthorised circumstances' which is a proxy for truancy. For pupils with an EHCP low attendance is due to absence mainly caused by illness. Both groups of pupils also have the highest persistent absence rates too.

3.4.10 The new guidance for schools and local authorities began being implemented in late 2022, and it is anticipated that the impact on the steps taken to respond to the guidance will begin to be seen in attendance data for the 2023/24 academic year and beyond.

3.5   **Secondary Pupil attendance** has decreased by 0.5% however the rate has slowed. Authorised absence has come down, but there has been an increase in unauthorised absence. Persistent absence (absence of 10% or more) has remained static, but severe absence (absence of 50%+) has increased. Leeds ranks 113th of 151 LAs and is in quartile D for performance.

3.5.1   Severe absence rates for pupil enrolments who have missed 50% or more of their own possible sessions has increased from 3.6% to 4.8% - equivalent of 2,421 pupils. This is above all

comparators with Leeds ranking 140th of 151 local authorities. 3 Core Cities have rates above Leeds, however Leeds is in quartile band D for performance.

3.6 **Primary Pupil attendance** has increased slightly due to a reduction in authorised absence, but unauthorised absence has increased. Persistent absence (absence of 10% or more) has reduced slightly, but the severe absence figure has increased slightly too. Out of 151 LAs, Leeds ranks 79th and is in quartile band C for performance.

3.6.1 Severe absence rates for pupil enrolments who have missed 50% or more of their own possible sessions has increased slightly to 0.7% in 2023, this equates to 443 pupils. Performance is in line with national but below other comparators. Leeds ranks 85th and is in band C for quartile performance.

3.7 **Termly data – early indications of 2023/24 attendance figures**

3.7.1 The termly statistical first release has been provided by the DfE for Autumn term of the 2023/24 academic year.

3.7.2 Overall, this data indicates that attendance improved in Autumn 2023 compared to Autumn 2022, but unauthorised absence has increased in both primary and secondary phases. Persistent absence has decreased, but severe absence has increased, with the largest increase seen across the secondary phase.

3.7.3 There has been a continued increase in attendance across all phases, albeit remaining lower than pre-pandemic years. There has also been a continued reduction in authorised absence in all phases of education, indicating the rising expectations for good school attendance. Overall, the statistical first release indicates that Leeds ranks 23rd of 153 LAs for authorised absence.

3.7.4

	Overall Attendance (%)	Authorised Absence (%)	Unauthorised Absence (%)	PA 10%	Severe Absence (50%)
Leeds	92.9	3.9	3.2	20.1	2.5
National	93.3	4.5	2.2	19.4	2.0
Stat Neighbours	93.1	4.5	2.5	20.5	2.0
Core Cities	92.8	4.1	3.2	21.2	2.6
Yorkshire and The Humber	92.9	4.3	2.8	20.9	2.3

Source: DfE SFR Autumn Term 2023

3.8 **Cohort analysis**

3.8.1 The lagged nature of the verified data from the DfE makes it challenging for the LA to analyse and respond to data in a timely way. In recent months, the LA has established more regular access to sessional attendance data via a live connection with school management information systems.

3.8.2 Although this data work is an ongoing development, early indications highlight that there are key cohorts of children and young people for whom a strategic and coordinated response is required in order to understand more about the reasons for absence and what support can be offered to improve it.

3.8.3 *SEN status*
In Autumn and Spring terms of 2023/24, 35.8% of pupils with an EHCP were persistently absent (attendance below 90%) and 9.1% of pupils with an EHCP were severely absent (attendance

below 50%). This is significantly above the persistent and severe absence rates for pupils without an EHCP.

In Autumn and Spring terms of 2023/24, 30.5% of pupils who were recorded as SEN Support were persistently absent, and 5.8% were severely absent. This is above the persistent and severe absence rates for pupils who are not in receipt of SEN Support.

Whilst nationally the attendance of pupils with SEND is below their peers, often due to health related needs leading to absence from school, further work needs to be undertaken to understand more about the underlying reasons for absence for Leeds pupils with SEND so that action can be taken to support children, families and schools to address this.

3.8.4   *Social Care status*
In Autumn and Spring terms of 2023/24, 27% of children looked after, 53% of children in need and 69% of children on a child protection plan were persistently absent from school. 8.6% of children looked after, 14.2% of children in need and 21% of children on a child protection plan were recorded as severely absent from school (attendance below 50%).

This data indicates a small improvement on attendance data for 2022/23 for this cohort, however our ambition and determination to improve the attendance of vulnerable children remains.

For children looked after, the regularly updated Personal Education Plan (PEP) for each child includes a focus on the most recent attendance information and what support is needed to improve this. The Virtual School continues to offer support to social workers, schools and partners around the approach to supporting and encouraging improved attendance for this cohort.

3.8.5   *Ethnicity*

Attendance by Ethnicity (2023-24 includes Autumn + Spring Terms only)

Ethnic Group	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	Overall
Chinese	97.4%	96.7%	97.1%	96.9%	**97.0%**
Black - African	97.0%	96.6%	96.3%	96.9%	**96.6%**
Indian	96.2%	94.4%	94.7%	95.0%	**95.0%**
Any other Black background	95.6%	95.0%	94.5%	94.5%	**94.9%**
Any other Asian background	94.1%	93.6%	93.3%	94.6%	**93.8%**
Any other ethnic group	94.2%	93.6%	93.0%	94.5%	**93.7%**
White and Black African	94.2%	92.9%	93.0%	92.6%	**93.1%**
White and Asian	93.8%	92.4%	92.4%	92.9%	**92.8%**
Any other mixed background	93.9%	92.4%	92.2%	92.9%	**92.8%**
White - British	94.2%	92.1%	92.2%	92.3%	**92.6%**
Black Caribbean	93.5%	92.4%	91.9%	92.1%	**92.4%**
Any other white background	93.4%	91.9%	91.3%	92.0%	**92.1%**
Pakistani	92.0%	91.7%	91.2%	92.7%	**91.8%**
White - Irish	93.1%	91.0%	91.3%	90.7%	**91.5%**
Bangladeshi	91.5%	91.4%	89.7%	91.6%	**91.0%**
White and Black Caribbean	91.8%	90.0%	89.6%	89.4%	**90.2%**
	89.1%	88.9%	88.8%	90.6%	**89.3%**
Gypsy / Roma	78.0%	81.1%	79.2%	80.5%	**79.8%**
Traveller of Irish heritage	80.4%	78.1%	78.0%	80.8%	**79.1%**
All	**94.0%**	**92.4%**	**92.3%**	**92.7%**	**92.8%**

Source: School Census data

When reviewing attendance across different ethnicities, there is a clear gap between the ethnic groups with highest attendance rates and those with the lowest. This highlights a need to ensure that attendance improvement activities, including ensuring that aspirations for school attendance are appropriately high for pupils from all ethnic backgrounds, needs to be a priority for action within schools, clusters and communities and all partner agencies. The recent developments in data collation will support the LA in the coming months to explore whether attendance coding is being used appropriately across all schools – particularly for the traveller and Gypsy Roma communities – so that we have more understanding about the nature of absence at individual pupil level.

4. Legal Intervention

4.1   There are a range of legal interventions that schools and LAs can use as a last resort to improve a child's attendance at school. The DfE published the Parental Responsibility Measures 2022/23 Statistical First Release (SFR) in December 2023. It includes data on the use of:
- penalty notices
- attendance case management
- parenting orders and parenting contracts
- education supervision orders

4.2   Penalty notices are issued to parents for failing to ensure that their child attends school regularly. The amount payable was previously £120, reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt (now £80 and £160 under new legislation from August 2024). 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.

4.3   All schools are encouraged to take an approach of support first, followed by enforcement as necessary. Schools are supported to make use of the legislative enforcement actions available to them where early identification, informal support and formalised support have been unsuccessful in improving attendance.

4.4   **Key headlines from the Parental Responsibility Measures SFR include:**
- In 2022/23 the total number of penalty notices issued in Leeds was 7,046 (an increase from 5,192 in 2021/22). The vast majority (96.3%) of these penalty notices were issued due to unauthorised holidays in term time.
- This equates to 620 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. This is the highest rate in the last 10 years since the current methodology has been used and is reflective of the higher unauthorised absence rates seen post-pandemic.
- Out of 152 local authorities, Leeds has a rank of equal 94 (down from equal 125) and is now in quartile band C for performance.

4.4.1   **Table 1: Number of penalty notices issued for unauthorised absences | rate per 100**

	2018/19		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	
	Number	Rate per 100	Number	Rate per 100	Number	Rate per 100	Number	Rate per 100
Leeds	4,349	4.1	1,062	1.0	5,192	4.7	7,046	6.2
National	333,388	4.7	45,809	0.6	218,235	3.0	398,796	5.4
Stat. Neighbours	2,614	6.4	438	1.2	1,938	4.8	3,250	8.0
Core Cities	3,939	5.5	294	0.4	2,870	3.4	5,349	6.1
Yorkshire & Humber	51,853	7.2	8,221	1.1	35,180	4.8	64,137	8.6

Data source: DfE SFR PRM 2022/23
Data notes: 2020/21 data is not directly comparable with other years as attendance was disrupted due to the pandemic, and for two months measures being disapplied when schools were not open to all pupils.

4.4.2   When reviewing the reasons given for penalty notices being issued, in line with the Leeds figures, 89.3% of penalty notices nationally were issued due unauthorised family holidays.

Table 2: Reasons for the penalty notices

	2021/22			2022/23		
	Holidays	Late	Other	Holidays	Late	Other

Leeds	4,974	0	218	6,782	0	264
National	186,281	1,269	30,685	356,181	985	41,630
Statistical Neighbours	1,676	63	200	3,025	6	218
Core Cities	2,608	77	185	4,806	4	539
Yorkshire & Humber	32,113	610	2,457	60,623	29	3,485

Data source: DfE SFR PRM 2022/23

4.4.3 Since 2013/14, there has been 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. Between 2021/22 and 2022/23 there has been a 36% increase in penalty notices being issued, however, nationally there has been an 83% increase which is perhaps reflective of the increase in unauthorised absence rates.

Table 3: Time series | number of penalty notices

	No. of penalty notices issued	
Year	**Leeds**	**National**
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
2022/23	7046	398,796

Data source: DfE SFR PRM 2022/23

4.4.4 *Penalty Notice Code of Conduct*
As part of the new statutory guidance, the Local Authority is required to review and update our Penalty Notice Code of Conduct. This will outline the Local Authority's approach to the use of Fixed Penalty Notices as one possible option for improving attendance.

5.   Working together to improve attendance – in practice
5.1   The context of schools within the city is important to note when considering the drive for improved school attendance. In Leeds, there are currently:

- 22 Primary Schools with a total capacity of 71,753 places (100 places in smallest primary, 700 places in the biggest primary school - often 420 places per school, 60 per year group)
- 40 Secondary Schools, with a total capacity of 49,971 places (100 places in smallest secondary, 2065 places in largest secondary, often 180 per year group)
- All Through Schools - total capacity 5984
- 9 Independent (fee paying) schools - 5104 places
- Alternative Provision Schools - 714 places, and
- 11 Special schools (including 2 Independent / non-maintained Specials) - 2303 places.

5.1.2   There are 135,289 places available throughout our city, with 1.7% of those places available in special schools, and a further 0.5% of all places being available in Alternative Provision.

98% of children receive their education in a 'mainstream' provision. All families are supported to engage with the mainstream offer, and the Local Authority One SEND support teams continue to support schools to ensure that their offer is adapted and responsive to the changing needs of pupils in the city.

5.1.3   There are currently 1394 electively home educated children in the city. Anecdotally, some parents share that they are choosing to home educate as they are disillusioned with the school system, however the majority of families who choose to home educate do not provide a reason for their decision.

5.2   The LCC Elective Home Education Team fulfils the LAs statutory duty to identify children who are not in receipt of full-time age and aptitude appropriate education and facilitates an EHE parent / carer forum to support home educating families. Where the LA is notified that a child will be home educated, safeguarding checks are carried out to ascertain whether there are any concerns about this decision, and whether the decision to home educate may impact on protective factors in place. A robust safeguarding pathway is in place to work in partnership with Children's Social Work Services where there are any concerns about the child being home educated, whilst recognising that home education is not, in and of itself, a safeguarding risk.

5.3   The Working Together to improve school attendance guidance became statutory in August 2024. The School Attendance Service has been working towards this guidance since its publication in 2022, therefore we have been in a good position to implement the operational elements of guidance and support schools with their responsibilities, despite no additional funding being provided for these functions. Progress towards the rigorous and strategic response to attendance is ongoing, and involves key partners from outside Learning Inclusion including health, social care and early help services.

5.4   The requirements of the 2024 Working Together guidance include the following responsibilities for the Local Authority:
- Rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools on which to provide support and focus its efforts on to unblock area wide barriers to attendance.

- Have a School Attendance Support Team which provides the following core functions free of charge to all schools (regardless of type):
  - ❖ Communication and advice: regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area.
  - ❖ Targeting Support Meetings: hold regular conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils.
  - ❖ Multi-disciplinary support for families: provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance.

- ❖ Legal intervention: take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with.

- Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through the Virtual School

These responsibilities are in addition to the existing responsibilities to children missing out on education, where the local authority is required, as far as is reasonably possible, to identify any child who is not in receipt of full time, age and aptitude appropriate learning.

Alongside the new responsibilities within the 2024 guidance, the duty to identify children who are missing out on education sits with the Children Missing Out on Education (CMOOE) teams (38 officers) – which includes the CME team, School Attendance Service, Exclusions Monitoring Officer, Pupil Tuition Team and the Elective Home Education Team.

6.0 **Early Help**
Early Help is both a term which describes a service or a collection of services, and a description of a principle, or a way of working (supporting early in the life of a problem). Whilst the DfE guidance outlines the ways that schools and local authorities can use legal interventions as a means of improving attendance at school, it is clear that in the majority of cases, these should be used as a last resort, with an explicit expectation of "support first", which aligns to the Leeds Practice Principles.

Good school attendance starts with ensuring children have a school place to attend, with any support needs in school being identified early and then ensuring that support is available, either from within school or in partnership with agencies outside the school, to address barriers to good attendance as early as possible.

Poor attendance at school is also recognised as a symptom of other needs being unmet. With education recognised as a protective factor, all services working to support children and families, in a vast range of contexts, have the potential to impact positively on school attendance, despite improved school attendance not always being the explicit goal. Examples include family and parenting support, parenting programmes, counselling and therapeutic support, holiday activities and encouraging a culture of positive regard for learning through the early years.

In Leeds, our Early Help approach to improving school attendance includes a range of activities delivered by the 3rd sector, the council, health services and schools, some of which are outlined below.

6.1 *School Admissions*
All families are supported to apply for their local schools through the annual cycle (normal round admissions) and the in-year application process. Since September 2024, the Leeds School Admissions Team have been coordinating applications for school places outside the normal round to ensure that parental requests are responded to as quickly as possible, and to ensure that where places are available, they are allocated in line with the school's admissions policy. Since the start of September, over 1000 in-year school places have been allocated.

The Fair Access Protocol also ensures that vulnerable children, where they are facing challenges with securing a school place through the usual in-year process, are offered a school place as quickly as possible. The Area Inclusion Partnerships (AIPs) all support the re-inclusion of pupils through the fair access process, with AIPs receiving funding for the role of 're-inclusion officer' to ensure that transitions into school for vulnerable pupils are supported and take place without delay.

6.1.1 *Training for school staff*
SAS – School briefing sessions
Throughout 2023/24 academic year a range of free briefing sessions and drop-in sessions have been offered by the CMOOE teams alongside a small amount of traded training. This offer to all schools was to support them in the implementation of the statutory guidance. This training offer continues in the academic year 2024/25 and will be continually reviewed. The training offer has seen 907 delegates from across schools and clusters where staff are working together to support school attendance.

Session title 2023/24	Number of delegates attending
Attendance Coding briefing session	128
e-learning: Parenting Contracts (traded)	4
Virtual workshops facilitated by DfE and LCC School Attendance Service	94
Virtual: CME and Attendance (traded)	36
Virtual: Attendance analysis and persistent absence (traded)	25
Virtual briefing: National Attendance Penalty Notice Framework	133
Virtual: casework (traded)	38
Virtual: Fast track and penalty notices (traded)	59
Drop-in sessions	27
Virtual: targeting support meetings for schools who are not part of a cluster	12
Virtual: Attendance Briefing – what the new statutory guidance means for schools and the LA	347
TOTAL:	907

6.1.2 *Educational Psychology Team – Extended school non-attendance (ESNA) training*
The Leeds One SEND service includes our Educational Psychology Team, who have developed a range of resources to support schools in understanding, identifying and addressing extended school non-attendance. The training focusses on school staff and partners developing a greater understanding of how anxiety can impact on school attendance and how extended non-attendance can be perpetuated. The training and resources provide ideas on how schools and partners can understand non-attendance, exploring challenges for children and families; how the graduated approach can seek to resolve non-attendance; and seeks to develop in-school awareness of the different ways that needs can be met.

6.2 *Targeting support meetings*
In line with the August 2024 Working Together to Improve Attendance statutory guidance, the Leeds School attendance Service has worked with 161 schools throughout 2023/24 delivering 22 targeting support meetings by making use of the existing cluster model.

These meetings provide opportunities to consider thematic barriers to attendance; problem solving case examples; analyse school attendance data and provide an opportunity to share key information between school, clusters and other locality based partners.

A standardised approach to these meetings across the city is in place, however there is also the opportunity to explore locality-based issues and barriers which may be impacting on attendance. These meetings include representatives from schools, clusters and the Family Hubs teams as they are established.

6.3 *Attendance Steering Group*
The Leeds Attendance Steering Group was established in Summer 2024 with support from the DfE. This steering group includes representatives from schools, health, clusters, Family Hubs, WY Police and the OneSEND service. As first actions, this group will be reviewing a proposed reduced timetables policy for the city, an updated Penalty Notice Code of Conduct, and will be contributing to strategic oversight of citywide attendance data and identifying the appropriate strategic response required.

6.4 *Breakfast Clubs*
One example of how the wider system menu supports children and families through Early Help is through Breakfast Clubs. The provision of breakfast at schools is recognised as having a significant potential benefit on school attendance, with many headteachers agreeing that breakfast has a link to improved attendance. Leeds City Council is working closely with the University of Leeds on an annual breakfast survey which is used to help target schools and communities where breakfast club provision may be of support. The government has also announced recent commitments in relation to breakfast club provision and is seeking the involvement of 750 schools nationally to be part of a test and learn pilot. In Leeds, many schools already offer a breakfast club, with some supported by organisations such as Greggs or Magic Breakfasts who subsidise the costs.

Family Action, through the National School Breakfast Programme also supports schools in areas of highest deprivation (defined as 40% or more of children living in IDACI bands A-F) by subsidising the costs of breakfast clubs at 75% of the cost. The programme is currently running until July 2025 and also provides good practice sharing opportunities, resources, and the opportunity to learn from a national network of schools.

6.5 *Local third sector support*
Leeds is fortunate to have a thriving 3rd sector which provides a varied menu of support for schools and families across the city. Through the cluster model, many schools have established relationships with 3rd sector providers who deliver a wide range of support services which impact on families. Whilst few of them purport to target school attendance directly, we understand that attendance at school is often a symptom of wider child and family wellbeing, and where there are support needs within the family, school attendance may be adversely affected. As such, all 3rd sector provision which supports children and families has the potential to impact positively on school attendance.

6.6 *Leeds Local Offer*
The Leeds Local Offer (LLO) provides information for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their parents or carers in a single place. It shows families what they can expect from a range of local agencies including education, health and social care. The LLO is increasingly used as a resource for support and signposting to other resources for families where a child or children have SEND. Given the known impacts on attendance of SEND (and in particular unmet need) the LLO, and the contents of the signposted resources are a further example of how the principle of a system of Early Help can impact on attendance.

6.7 *Gypsy Roma Traveller Team*
We know that at particular points in the year, children from the GRT community can sometimes have extended periods of absence from school. The Leeds GRT team works closely with families, children, schools, communities and other agencies to provide support in this complex space. Part of the outputs of this team's work is a drive towards improved attendance at school, including working alongside community leaders and families to ensure that support is available for educational continuity.

6.8 *Virtual School for Children Looked After and Previously Looked After*
The virtual school has been offering attendance education consultations targeted at children with a Social Worker (including Children Looked After, Previously Looked After, Child in Need, and those on a child protection plan). The consultation sessions provide an opportunity for discussions about individual case concerns and problem solving. 18 settings attended a consultation session during 2023-24, including Primary, Secondary and Special Schools, Alternative Provision settings and social workers.

Attendance continues to be an area of focus within child protection audits. 20 sets of conference minutes were audited in Summer term 2024. This audit demonstrated very good progress last academic year compared to the first audit carried out in 2022. Highlights include:
- School attendance included in the majority of child protection plans, with a specific target attendance % recorded
- Narrative and detail included in the minutes relating to school attendance. This included a comparison to previous attendance data, the impact of interventions used and reference to specific terminology found in legislation relating to pupil attendance.
- Some evidence of understanding of the barriers to attendance
- Strong evidence of the child's voice being included in the plans
- Clear narrative around other agencies involved to improve a child's attendance – indicating an improved multi-agency approach and understanding of roles within this
- Evidence of supportive and preventative rather than reactive approach to attendance
- Clear strong line of questioning from CP Chairs and Social Workers relating to the use of alternative provision and / or reduced timetables

The Head of the Leeds Virtual School, through her role on the National Association of Virtual School Heads, is continuing to raise challenge with the DfE to enable Virtual Schools to be able to access the national WONDE data to enable timely tracking of sessional attendance for children looked after who attend education provision in other Local Authority areas.

The Leeds Virtual School is exploring the possibility of procuring the eGov PEP (digital PEP portal). Nationally, other LAs who use the eGov PEP are working with WONDE to examine the possibility of live sessional attendance data feeding directly into PEPs, which will support Social Workers when reviewing PEPs, to ensure that attendance information is accurate and any concerns are swiftly acted upon.

6.9 *Life Coaching*
The Life Coaching Service is a skilled team of eight qualified youth workers who are Mental Health First Aid trained, as well as a Life Coach Co-ordinator. The team began delivery in October 2022 and due to its success, a second team has been established to meet the demands on the service.

The Life Coaches work with young people who are experiencing poor mental health, disengaged from education or NEET, and on the 'edge of care'. Young people do not have to meet all three areas to receive support from the team and they can work with young people on a one-to-one basis for a period of around six months. The support can take place in a setting that is most appropriate for the young person's needs such as at home, within the community or an education setting and the team have fully adopted the Leeds Practice Model in their day to day practice.

6.10 *Significant Absence Panel*
A multi-disciplinary significant absence panel has been established as a pilot project. This project aims to review cases where pupils have been absent from school for more than 15 days. The panel considers the individual circumstances of the case and formulates next steps –this may include advice and guidance to schools about the support they could offer; additional support being allocated from services in health, education or early help services; or a decision that the local authority will make arrangements for provision in line with the Section 19 duty within the Education Act 1996. This provision includes short-term 121 tuition, a place at the Medical Needs Teaching Service, or a place at an Alternative Provision.

6.11 *Risk Of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training at post 16) Pilot*
Work has begun to pilot a Risk Of NEET Indicator (RONI) tool, which aims to identify young people who are at risk of becoming NEET once they leave compulsory school age. Low attendance at school is recognised as an indicator that a young person is likely to become NEET at the end of Year 11, and following identification via the RONI, personalised packages of support, drawing on the skills and expertise of cluster, early help, Virtual School, school, Youth Justice and Pathways colleagues aims to improve school attendance in Years 10 and 11, to maximise the chances of the young person progressing into a sustained post 16 employment, education or training place.

6.12 *SAFE (Support, Attend, Fulfil, Exceed) Taskforce*
This project, funded by the DfE since 2023, has focussed on reducing children's vulnerability to the harms of serious violence by supporting them to engage in education. The taskforce brings together secondary schools and partners to commission evidence based interventions 'upstream' to act as a preventative measure for young people at risk of engaging in violence and crime in the future.

In Leeds, the project has focused on three main evidence-based interventions:
- Education Inclusion Mentors employed in schools and across area inclusion partnerships to provide mentoring support to individuals in Years 7, 8 and 9 who are identified as at risk. Supporting them to engage in positive activities, to attend school more regularly and to raise their future aspirations.
- Whole school development opportunities re: pro-social skills via staff training and assemblies for all pupils
- Afterschool activities and summer activities for targeted cohorts of young people

Although the evidence of the impact of this project is still being collated and analysed, the focus on preventative and early intervention work makes demonstrating an immediate impact on this vulnerable cohort a challenge. Despite this, there are case study examples which demonstrate positive impacts on individual young people's attendance, and the national research and local analysis will be available towards the end of the project (Spring 2025). This this will inform future plans for the continuation of any elements of the project, subject to available funding.

What impact will this proposal have?
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

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: All		
Have ward members been consulted?	☐ Yes	☒ No

What are the resource implications?

The new statutory responsibilities placed on the LA, along with the high levels of pupil absence, have increased the workload for the School Attendance Service in all areas, including the legal work to progress cases to penalty notice, school attendance order or education supervision

order; support and advice to schools, the robust analysis of data and strategic response required. Some of this risk is being mitigated by taken a systems approach and ensuring collaboration of all partners to take some of this strategic work forward, primarily through the attendance steering group.

There is no increased funding provided to LAs by the DfE to support the additional school attendance burdens.

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

As above, there is a risk that the existing resources available to support the functions of the Children Missing Out on Education are not sufficient to meet the requirements of the statutory guidance. Some of this risk is being mitigated by taking a systems approach and ensuring collaboration between all partners.

Further mitigation of this risk is through the support provided through the Leeds Early Help approach and ensuring that the workforce understands that school attendance is 'everyone's business'.

Income from fixed penalty notices can be used to support the delivery of the school attendance service, and as the standard fixed penalty notice rate has increased, this is likely to generate additional income. However we will also need to consider expanding the traded training offer to schools to ensure that there are sufficient resources available to provide the support, guidance and challenge to schools that is required in order to overcome barriers to school attendance for individual pupils.

As part of the 3As plan consultation exercise, school's highlighted support that they would like from the LA in relation to improving attendance. This included:
- *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.*

Whilst support is ongoing in some of these areas – for example the LA is developing our Penalty Notices Code of Conduct and is working with Social Care to ensure that attendance is acknowledged as a protective factor; there is limited capacity available to develop a visible advertising campaign. In addition, the DfE have made clear that there are no grounds for the Local Authority or any individual school to commit to 'no permanent exclusions'.

There are a range of activities carried out which have an impact on school attendance, however many of these are a consequence of time-limited funding being prioritised for this work. Although improving attendance is a cross-party priority, the uncertainty of ongoing funding creates sustainability challenges.

What are the legal implications?

From August 2024, the Working Together to Improve Attendance guidance is statutory. The LA must ensure that the expectations within this guidance are met.