

**Draft Scrutiny Inquiry Final report  
Improving School Attendance  
26 April 2012**

DRAFT



# Introduction and Scope

## Introduction

1. Leeds City Council has defined a vision for children and young people which states that Leeds will be a child-friendly city where the voices, needs and priorities of children and young people are heard and inform the way we make decisions and take action.

Our children will:

- be safe from harm;
- do well in learning progressing to further and higher levels so they have skills for life;
- choose healthy lifestyles;
- have fun growing up; and
- be active citizens who feel they have voice and influence.

2. In order to achieve the ambition of being a child-friendly city, we must ensure that every child in Leeds is accessing educational opportunities and that services effectively support children and families to mitigate those factors that may limit access.
3. The Leeds Education Challenge makes a city-wide pledge to ensure that successful schools are at the heart of a child friendly city. The first pledge in the Leeds Education Challenge is that 'Every child and young person of school age will be in school or in learning.' Leeds City Council's Children's Services will evidence this pledge by:
  - Reducing the unauthorised absence rate to 1% for secondary and 0.5% for primary in Leeds by 2015
  - Fully implement the Raising the Participation Age.

4. The Scrutiny Board (Children and Families) was tasked by Council with carrying out a piece of work this year on each of the three Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) obsessions. The second of these relates to school attendance.
5. Terms of reference for this inquiry were agreed at our Board meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2011 when we concluded that the purpose of the inquiry was to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on multi-agency efforts to address persistent absence from school.
6. We are very grateful to everyone who gave their time to participate in this inquiry and we hope that our findings will provide a timely and positive contribution to tackling this particular obsession within the Children and Young People's Plan.

## Scope of the Inquiry

7. The Board conducted the inquiry over two sessions, during November 2011 and December 2011
8. In relation to this inquiry, the Board agreed to follow a similar approach to that successfully adopted for its inquiry last year on combating child poverty and raising aspiration. We identified two 'case study' areas of the city and instead of our formal Scrutiny Board meeting, half of the Board Membership went to each area for a morning. The areas visited were Rothwell and Inner East Leeds. In both areas, Members had the opportunity to talk to local practitioners and to undertake some additional visits in smaller groups, including meeting local people, before



# Introduction and Scope

reconvening for a round table discussion with senior officers. We found this to be a very effective way of working.

9 Recognising the range of stakeholders involved and responsible for improving school attendance, we received a range of evidence both written and verbal from the following:

- Officers from Children's Services
- Cluster<sup>1</sup> Chairs and Cluster Managers
- Representatives of multi-agency partners at a local level

10 We considered that the main contributor to this inquiry would be the Children's Services Attendance Strategy Team. The team already has strong links with the clusters and the individual schools in order to monitor and improve attendance across the city.

11 In order to promote our level of understanding we received a brief strategic overview and information on the Council's vision to improving school attendance. This was provided at the initial stages of the first inquiry session.

13 The Director of Children's Services has been requested to strengthen partnership arrangements with other local authorities and schools not in Leeds City Council control.

14 We feel that communication to parents promoting the benefits of good school attendance can be expanded particularly in year 1 and pre-school.

15 There are aspects of operational and resource review requested in order to facilitate targeted support.

## Anticipated Service Impact

12 Our recommendations require a number of measures which seek to improve school attendance across the city and in localities. Such measures will require resources, the cost of which may be required from existing budgets.

---

<sup>1</sup> Local groups of schools and services that work closely together to meet the needs of children and young people through an integrated approach.



# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Introduction

16. Information from the Department of Education states that there is a clear link between poor attendance at school and low levels of achievement. Of pupils who miss more than 50% of school only three percent manage to achieve five A\* to Cs GCSE's including English and maths. Of pupils who miss between 10% and 20% of school, only 35% manage to achieve five A\* to Cs.
17. Poor attendance disrupts learning and creates gaps in the knowledge and skills of children. These pupils are more likely to become 'Not in Education, Employment of Training' (NEET) when they leave school and could easily fall into anti-social behaviour and crime.
18. Information was presented to us which stated that Leeds has already chosen an approach that aims to secure the commitment of all those who work with children and families, to contribute to improving school attendance. Improving attendance will be based on:
  - strategies that have a strong evidence base of 'what works'
  - active partnership with young people and local communities
  - the involvement of parents and families in promoting and supporting children and young people's learning
  - all partners taking responsibility to promote, encourage and support children and young people's involvement in learning and their families support for learning
  - the provision of learning responding to individual needs, such as those of young carers

- the clear role of schools and their relationship with children and young people and with parents and families
- universal and targeted support being available and delivered within localities including use of the Common Assessment Framework
- more specialist support being available, prioritised to those with greatest need and the most vulnerable
- that good levels of school attendance is a measure of success applied to work with children and young people wherever possible

19. We are reassured by the objectives and desires presented to us and we will maintain a keen interest to ascertain how these objectives develop in practice.

## The Current Position

20. Leeds has seen good reductions in secondary and primary persistent absence as demonstrated in the tables detailed below.<sup>2</sup>

### Half-term 1-4 primary attendance

	Leeds	National	Statistical Neighbour Average
2005/06	94.30	94.24	94.36
2006/07	94.79	94.82	94.98
2007/08	94.67	94.74	94.88
2008/09	94.09	94.54	94.60
2009/10	94.26	94.66	94.72
2010/11*	94.70		

Source: DfE statistical first release; \* provisional data from School Census

<sup>2</sup> Provisional 2010/11 half-term 4 attendance analysis



# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Half- terms 1-4 secondary attendance

	Leeds	National	Statistical Neighbour Average
2005/06	90.58	91.76	91.67
2006/07	90.83	92.14	92.23
2007/08	91.51	92.70	92.87
2008/09	91.43	92.70	92.80
2009/10	91.60	93.16	93.18
2010/11*	92.39		

Source: DfE statistical first release; \* provisional data from School Census

21. Despite the improvements demonstrated, Leeds was ranked in the bottom 10 authorities for secondary attendance levels, unauthorised absence levels and persistent absence levels in 2010. This demonstrates to us the clear need for continued improvement and the potential to learn from other Cities who are performing better.
22. We were advised that in Leeds there is a clear relationship between attendance and attainment which follows the trends defined by the Department of Education. For the years 2008 to 2010 above 60% of the pupils who attended 95% or more of school sessions achieved 5 good GCSEs including English and maths; for the groups attending less than 80% of sessions around 10% achieved this standard each year.
23. In October 2011 the Department of Education raised the threshold for persistent absence from 80% to 85%. Schools are recommended to take action when a pupil misses 15% of educational time. The Department of Education have stated that raising the threshold will ensure that schools will take action sooner to deal with absence.

When applying the new thresholds there is a significant increase in the number of children and young people reported as persistently absent. Based on 2010/11 data the change in the threshold would increase the number of pupils meeting the persistent absence criteria from 955 to 2624 for primary school pupils, and for secondary school pupils, from 2,733 to 5,285.

24. Throughout this inquiry we have been advised that early intervention is one of the most important factors in resolving poor attendance. Any initiative that drives involvement at an earlier stage should be welcomed.

## Collection of Absence Data

25. We were advised that all schools are under a statutory obligation to inform the Local Authority of certain attendance information. However, the Department of Education no longer requires persistent absence data from schools although Children's Services endeavours to collect the data each half term in order to monitor performance and identify trends.
26. There was a significant amount of discussion and concern expressed relating to gathering persistent absence data from schools not in local authority control, such as Academies. We were reassured that most Academies work constructively with the Attendance Team. We acknowledge however that difficulties in data collection could occur as a greater number of schools move to Academy status. We recognise that a partnership approach between Leeds City Council and non local authority





# Conclusions and Recommendations

schools will be mutually beneficial in order to identify trends and target absence across the city.

to monitor attendance at their school and challenge unacceptable absence levels. We fully support this initiative.

**Recommendation 1 - That the Director of Children's Services continues to engage with all schools not under Leeds City Council Control, including Academies to ensure continued positive working relationships and continued persistent absence data collection.**

**Recommendation 2 - That the Director of Children's Services engages with School Governors to establish a special responsibility for one Governor in each school which includes challenging the attendance performance of the school and maintaining a focus on reducing absence levels.**

27. We were advised by officers that a technological solution would be beneficial which would enable all schools to use software in order to provide live attendance information. An option that we feel should be explored in order to retain accurate and up to date information and simplify data reporting processes for all schools.

## Persistent Absence

31. We wanted to identify if there is any correlation of poor attendance within families. Particularly where siblings attend other schools. We were advised that patterns of attendance are usually replicated through families and the attitude of parents towards learning can also have a strong influence.

## School Governors

28. The Chair of the Scrutiny Board stated that as Governor she receives attendance reports, but recognised that similar information was not shared with Governors in all schools. She suggested that Governors should challenge schools on their attendance performance and ask how absence is checked and monitored.

32. In addition we were advised that children who do not regularly attend primary school will often follow the same trend into secondary education.

29. We were advised that a Governor training programme is provided and to support this there is a Governor's crib sheet which can be used as a prompt when asking for attendance information.

33. Officers informed us that primary schools are usually good at picking up and acting on non attendance, and this is reflected in their attendance data. Attendance in year one however is usually the most poorly attended primary year.

30. The Executive Board Member for Children's Services suggested that there is a role for an 'Attendance Governor' in each school, who is specifically tasked

34. With regard to secondary school pupils we were advised that there were a number of characteristics which summarised those who are persistently absent:

- Pupils eligible for free school meals are four times more likely to be



# Conclusions and Recommendations

persistently absent than pupils that are not eligible.

- Persistent absence increases with age, with levels of persistent absence 4 times higher in year 11 than in year 7. Over a third of pupils that were persistently absent in 2010/11 were in year 11.
- Overall, the level of persistent absence for pupils of Black and Minority heritage is lower than for non-BME pupils. However, some ethnic groups have levels of persistent absence significantly higher than the Leeds average such as pupils of mixed heritage, White Eastern European, Bangladeshi and traveller groups.
- Pupils with special educational needs are more likely to be persistently absent, particularly those on School Action plus, a quarter of these pupils are persistently absent.

35. We consider that it is important to reinforce to parents the benefits of good school attendance at the earliest possible time in a child's education to stop the trend of increasing absence throughout their school life. There is a need to change patterns of behaviour. The merits of good attendance should be instilled pre- school in children's centres and during year 1, which has been identified as the poorest attended primary year.

**Recommendation 3 – That the Director of Children's Services formulates a strategy for targeting and improving school attendance during year 1, whilst promoting pre-school the benefits of good attendance.**

**Recommendation 4 - That the Director of Children's Services works in collaboration with the clusters to identify the siblings of persistently absent children who are approaching school age in order to ensure support is in place from day one of their education.**

36. Evidence was presented to us which identified that one of the most prevalent reason for absence in both Primary and Secondary schools is due to family holidays.

37. Those who gave evidence felt strongly that there should be clear communication to parents that removing their children from school during term time was not a right. Penalty notices are issued however families are still opting to go take their children out of school, without authorisation, to take advantage of reduced holiday costs. We were advised that some schools have adopted a zero tolerance policy to this practice, however we were not advised successful this policy is.<sup>3</sup>

**Recommendation 5 - That the Director of Children's Services investigates if the impact of a zero tolerance policy to term time holiday absence has improved school attendance rates, and the potential for recommending such a policy (if successful) to governing bodies city wide.**

<sup>3</sup> Behaviour tsar Charlie Taylor announced on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2012 that unpaid truancy fines should be recovered directly from child-benefit payments in a crackdown on absenteeism



# Conclusions and Recommendations

38. Children on occasion are required to attend dental and medical appointments for regular checks or due to specific illness. The health service functions and provides treatment predominantly during the school day when a child is required to attend lessons. Children who require medical treatment for ongoing conditions will miss a larger proportion of educational time.
39. It was evident in the Inner East cluster that there is a lack of synergy between education and health services which warrants further investigation. We feel that there should be dialogue with health service providers to overcome this.

**Recommendation 6 - That the Director of Children's Services engages with National Health Service providers and General Practitioners in Leeds to identify how absence from school for health appointments could be reduced.**

## Supporting Children and Families

40. During our visit to Rothwell and Inner East we focused on the targeted support provided to children and their families in order to identify underlying problems, remove barriers and improve attendance at school.
41. Officers advised us that non-attendance at school is only one symptom of other, often complex, problems. To rectify the situation is generally not a single service solution and will involve support from partners, schools, services and family members. This was evident during meetings between parents and Attendance Improvement Officers (AIO's), (which were observed by members of the Board) where experiences of domestic violence, poverty, mental health problems and language barriers were apparent.
42. Each school has its own system for following up on non attendance on a daily basis. Actions include texting or phoning parents and in some schools collecting children from their homes.
- Family Support and Attendance Improvement
43. Where is identified that a child is persistently absent and subsequent efforts by the school to rectify this have failed an AIO could become involved. Where is it identified that families needed extra support a Family Support Worker (FSW) may be engaged where appropriate.
44. AIOs or FSWs endeavour to make contact with the parents where possible to discuss the reasons why their child is persistently absent. A comprehensive assessment (CAF) would also be undertaken for the child. Other specialist services such as Child Adult Mental Health Services, Behavioural Support Workers, Parent Support Advisors or Family Outreach Workers (to name but a few) may also be engaged.
45. AIOs and FSWs liaise and work with various agencies, signposting parents and children to appropriate organisations. They work directly on the front line, visiting houses and conducting interviews with parents, getting children out of the house where necessary and to school.
46. We wanted to identify how overall family support and monitoring is achieved, for





# Conclusions and Recommendations

example where siblings attend other schools. We were advised that there are discussions about more complex family cases at a cluster level. This will focus on the child and potentially their brothers and sisters. The cluster will look at which other services are working with the family and will then decide which person is best to make contact with the family. This could be an AIO or a FSW. Where younger siblings are identified the operational processes in the cluster will ensure that the Early Years Service is involved.

47. In cases where support workers cannot engage with parents and absence levels have not improved, the necessary legal action may be taken by Leeds City Council's (LCC) Targeted Services.
48. It was very apparent that the services provided by both FSWs and AIOs are highly valued by the schools they support.
49. We were advised that 3 FSWs cover 13 schools in the Rothwell cluster. Each FSW has about 15 cases which is a manageable level. However we were made aware that Royds School would be able to make many more referrals if that were possible. Royds has also stated that it would benefit from having its own full time AIO and that extra support is needed to deal with attendance and welfare but there are budgetary constraints.
50. We were advised that the AIOs in the Inner East cover 30 intensive cases each and we expressed concern about this level of caseload.
51. Both the AIOs and FSW expressed that early intervention in cases is incredibly

important. In the cases presented to us a number of escalated problems could have been avoided if they had engaged with the family earlier. We believe that early intervention and family support is fundamental to the welfare of children and as a result improvement in school attendance. Therefore the functions of FSWs and AIOs are essential.

**Recommendation 7 – That the Director of Children's Services works in collaboration with the Cluster Chairs to undertake a review of the attendance improvement and family support service configuration. The purpose of this review would be to identify if there is sufficient resource appropriately allocated to each cluster.**

## Youth Service

52. We were advised that the Youth Service provide targeted support, working with a number of partners such as family support and the police. They primarily look at the problems which may be causing non attendance and help children to cope or resolve those problems. It was pointed out to us that there are wider issues related to non-attendance for example where the child is involved in, or being subject to, anti social behaviour.
53. The Youth Service will try to establish if young people with attendance problems are already engaged in an activity which motivates them. Alternative educational provision such as Step Up (which provides points towards GCSE's) or an alternative education course may generate greater interest and participation.



# Conclusions and Recommendations

54. We were advised that Youth Worker support is provided from 13 years upwards. The Youth Workers reiterated that early intervention is important and therefore they should provide dedicated support from the age of 11, when young people start their education at Secondary School. We agreed that this could prevent the cycle of bad attendance developing, particularly as a child adjusts from primary to secondary education.

**Recommendation 8 – That the Directory of Children’s Services establishes as part of the Youth Offer Review the possibility of providing Youth Service support for young people, who are persistently absent, from school from the age of 11 years.**

## Teaching Staff

55. During the session at Rodillian School we were advised that school attendance has improved since the new school building opened, therefore the improved environment is clearly helping motivate children and there is a desire to come to school. Exam results have also shown improvement.

56. We were advised that there is a need to improve the attitudes of year 10 and 11 children towards school attendance. A system of mentoring has been established for all those attending year 10 and 11 which seems to be working well. Heads of year also provide pastoral care and other support is provided by form tutors, and SENCO (supporting special educational needs coordinators).

57. We have met with a number of teaching staff who advised us that incentives

have been put into place to motivate children to attend school. To qualify to attend the Rodillian School year end prom a child must have a school attendance figure of 93% or above. St. Theresa’s Catholic Primary School provides a number of incentives for each educational year including a mention in their newsletter, stickers and certificates, stationary and an entry into a draw for Leeds United tickets. Corpus Christi Catholic College and Oulton Primary also reward good attendance.

58. We find that this approach is popular, it creates a goal on which children and young people can focus, and will provide a sense of achievement when attained. It could be argued that attending school should not need to be incentivised. We conclude however that all avenues of motivation should be explored and if it works then an incentive system should be implemented.

## **Area specific problems**

59. Whilst there are apparent similar attendance problems in both Rothwell and the Inner East, each inquiry session identified that some of the issues were unique to their area. We therefore recognise that the methodology of managing attendance at a cluster level is a sensible approach.

### Rothwell

60. The Rothwell cluster sits on the boundary of the neighbouring authority of Wakefield. We were advised that the siblings of some children attend schools that are within the Wakefield area. This causes a number of issues as school holidays do not always align and teacher training days will generally fall



# Conclusions and Recommendations

on different days. There have been examples where older siblings are taken out of school to provide childcare for their younger siblings whose schools are closed.

61. Parents have also kept children out of school for extended time covering both the holiday periods in Wakefield and Leeds, this could extend absence by one week. We believe that this problem will probably be replicated in any cluster that sits on the boundary of the city. We consider that there is potential for co-ordinated school holiday schedules to be agreed on a regional basis, which should also have a positive influence on school attendance for our neighbouring local authorities.

**Recommendation 9 – That the Director of Children’s Services engages with our neighbouring local authorities and schools within Leeds not in local authority control to explore the potential for co-ordinated planned school closure dates for holiday periods and teacher training days.**

62. Both the Family Support Worker and Cluster Chair advised us that Rothwell had a lack of support services in the locality to help children and their families with more specific needs such as coping with domestic violence or mental health problems. This in turn creates difficulties in signposting individuals to an appropriate and comprehensive support network.
63. We feel that the underlying cause for these difficulties need to be explored further to identify if there are gaps in the provision of support organisations in localities, or if there is simply a need to raise awareness within clusters of the

support available (which may be in a neighbouring local authority area).

**Recommendation 10 – That the Director of Children’s Services works in collaboration with Cluster Chairs to identify gaps in specialist support and investigate which organisations are accessible to provide a comprehensive support network. In addition to also ensure that awareness is raised about supporting organisations in localities for relevant LCC and cluster based employees.**

## Inner East

64. We were advised that the inner east cluster suffered particular problems due to a transient population, with 31% of pupils moving school last year. This has knock on problems if a place at another school cannot be secured. Potentially a child could be out of the education system for 4 – 6 weeks. An additional issue is the possibility of being placed at a school which is a distance from a child’s residence, resulting in children travelling from outside a cluster to attend school. Siblings are also placed in different schools. This creates problems getting children to and from their place of education and additional expense for some of the poorest families in the city.
65. The challenge that manifests is that the basic living needs of families are prioritised before education and that there are greater social problems to tackle such as poverty, poor housing and crime. Paying for transport is an issue and there have been cases where families run out of money towards the end of the week so children will not be sent to school. On a positive note we were advised that Harehills Primary



# Conclusions and Recommendations

Schools have two members of staff who go round every morning picking up children where necessary and that Oakwood Primary School has its own bus.

**Recommendation 11 – That the Director of Children’s services investigates the problems associated with transient neighbourhoods. In addition, investigates how the schools admissions system for Leeds could be adapted in our most deprived wards to ensure parents can place their children in schools close to their homes and siblings.**

66. The proportion of pupils in Leeds schools that are of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) heritage has increased by more than 6 percentage points since 2005 to 22.5% of pupils in 2011. A higher proportion of primary than secondary pupils are of BME heritage. 14% of pupils have English as an Additional Language and over 170 languages are recorded as spoken in Leeds schools.
67. We were advised that there are a significant number of languages spoken in the Inner East cluster, in one school 40 languages are spoken. This can present significant barriers and children can be kept off school to translate for their parents. Schools commission translation services where parents need to be contacted because their children are persistently absent however this is very expensive.
68. We inquired if the local community could help schools to translate, however we were advised that there are confidentiality and safeguarding obligations which would prohibit this.

69. We considered that English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses for parents would be beneficial but this is a long term solution.

## Improving attendance – The cluster approach

70. Each cluster in the city has either already conducted, or is committed to undertaking, an Outcomes Based Accountability workshop in order to bring a wide range of partners, agencies and services to the table to address attendance and persistent absence. We were advised that the learning from these workshops would be shared across all partnerships and will be used to inform city-wide strategy and activity.
71. A number of suggestions and outcomes from the workshops were presented to us during the first session of the inquiry some of which were reinforced during our visits to Rothwell and the Inner East. The full list of ideas and initiatives as presented to us is attached to this report as appendix 1, which we fully support.
72. We were advised that the development of cluster based resources has been effective and has enabled the commissioning of a part time counsellor in the Rothwell cluster. The cluster has developed strong links with police and other organisations who are engaged in guidance and support meetings to discuss cases and identify the appropriate package of support for families with the right services commissioned.



# Conclusions and Recommendations

73. The exchange of case information with partners involved in supporting families is currently done manually. The lack of integrated information was highlighted and we were informed that operational efficiencies could be achieved if all agencies involved in the support of families (cluster managers, family support workers, youth service etc.) could create and log their information on a shared database. This would easily enable access to the profile of children and their family to identify which organisations are already engaged in providing support.

**Recommendation 12 – That the Director of Children’s service in collaboration with Cluster Chairs identifies the most effective way of sharing case information with stakeholders involved in the support of children and their families, whilst adhering to required data protection legislation and safeguarding requirements.**





### **Monitoring arrangements**

Standard arrangements for monitoring the outcome of the Board's recommendations will apply.

The decision-makers to whom the recommendations are addressed will be asked to submit a formal response to the recommendations, including an action plan and timetable, normally within two months.

Following this the Scrutiny Board will determine any further detailed monitoring, over and above the standard quarterly monitoring of all scrutiny recommendations.

### **Reports and Publications Submitted**

Update on Children's Services Obsessions – Improving School Attendance Report to Children's Trust Board - 12 September 2011

Attendance Outcomes Based Accountability events reoccurring outputs and suggestions - 2011

Department for Education press notice – Government changes definition of persistent absence to deal with reality of pupil absenteeism in schools - 12 July 2011

Department for Education - Reducing absence – ensuring schools intervene earlier

Attendance Strategy persistent absence research report - 2008

Scrutiny statement on attendance - March 2010

Inner East Cluster data profile – 09 September 2011

Rothwell Cluster data profile – 09 September 2011

Attendance, A guide for Governors – November 2010



## Witnesses Heard

Nigel Richardson – Director of Children’s Services  
Jancis Andrew – Head of Service Attendance Strategy Team  
Adele Scargill – Family Support Worker  
Adrian Lee – Youth Work Manager, Youth Service  
Glen O’Malley – Youth Work Manager, Youth Service  
Jackie Claxton – Ruddock – Targeted Service Leader (Interim)  
Melanie Robinson - Targeted Service Leader (Interim)  
Jayne Bedford – Team Manager, Children and Young Peoples Social Care  
Jo Shiffer – Cluster Manager  
Diane Walker – Cluster Leader  
Kath Bryan – Royds School  
Ken Higgins – Deputy Head, Rodillian School  
Rebecca Ingram – Headteacher, Oakwood Primary School  
Susan Kneeshaw – Headteacher, St Patrick’s Catholic Primary School, Torre Road  
David Pattison – Headteacher, All Saints CofE Primary School, Richmond Hill  
Michelle Ritson – Oulton Primary School  
Cassandra Grant – Attendance Improvement Officer  
Vicky Wade – Attendance Improvement Officer  
Joy Fry – Attendance Improvement Officer  
Brenda Hogg – Attendance Improvement Officer  
Graham Murley - Attendance Improvement Officer  
Jane Dodds - Attendance Improvement Officer  
Janine Wallace – Manager Osmondthorpe Children’s Centre  
Chris Radelaar – Manager Shakespeare Children’s Centre  
Debbie Gedge – Manager Gipton Children’s Centre  
Anne Connor – Specialist Practitioner School Nurse Co-ordinator  
Jim Hopkinson – Head of Service, Youth Offending Service  
Jenny Millington – Wykebeck Attendance Team  
Janet Procter – Wykebeck Attendance Team  
Lynne McLaughlin - igen



## **Dates of Scrutiny**

### Scrutiny Board meeting – 10 November 2011

- The CYPP action plan relating to the Attendance obsession, as background and context to the inquiry
- Obsession progress report to the Children's Trust Board
- Information on progress against the CYPP action plan
- Data on Leeds levels of school attendance and persistent absence
- Information on the reasons for absence
- Information on local initiatives and activity to address attendance, including cluster OBA activity plans and cluster level funding
- Information on the latest changes in government requirements in relation to the definition of persistent absence
- Information on best practice from other local authorities
- The report of previous work on school attendance carried out by the Scrutiny Board in 2009/10
- Research on persistent absence commissioned by Education Leeds

### Scrutiny Board meeting - 8 December 2011

The Board split into two groups, who visited one of the two identified clusters to carry out more detailed field work.

Members received information about the local context and data in relation to attendance, including information about local OBA activity.

In each area, members visited relevant local services in smaller groups (including meeting service users where appropriate).

This was followed by a round table meeting in the chosen locality in order to discuss issues arising from the visits and consider the overall impact of work in the locality.



# Appendix 1

## Attendance OBA events reoccurring outputs and suggestions

### Data development

1. Knowing the names of children/families who are absent at a local level so that they can be targeted.
2. Improving 'coding' of attendance data / breaking down data – i.e. sickness type / the months in which holidays are taken etc.
3. Improving the quality of attendance data and recording and or improving confidence in attendance data.
4. Identifying indicators of non attendance early – i.e. through health appointments and at children's centres.
5. Identifying trends for non attendance in families.

### Best ideas – what works best - ideas that regularly came up

1. Early intervention – i.e. through children's centres.
2. Taking a consistent approach to attendance e.g. treating non attendance at a health visitor appointment in the same way as a school. Also identifying trends early – i.e. in non attendance at HV apps as a precursor for non attendance at school and addressing this as an attendance issue.
3. Incentivise attendance ( for children/young people and their parents – engage local businesses in doing this).
4. Information sharing – between settings/providers/agencies.
5. Targeting families early when there are indications of low / or when siblings have been low attendees.
6. Ensure the accurate and detailed recording of data – if this is already happening then we need to communicate this.

7. Ensure seamless transitions (i.e. children Centres to primary, primary to secondary, transfer of info from health etc).
8. Cluster (city) wide policy on attendance – encompassing health, children's centres, schools.
9. Closer working with the police/PCSOs – door knocking / truancy patrols/ early response
10. Using the school nurse to work with children / families where illness is a recurring problem
11. Implementing an agreement between schools (high school and primary) regarding school holiday dates including training days – at cluster level if not city wide.
12. Walking buses for children who are often late
13. Need for an integrated multi-agency early intervention response
14. Become better at engaging parents in school – open events, back to school days, open door policy, children's centres helping with the transfer from CC to primary school
15. Engaging parents generally in the agenda – helping them understand the importance of attendance.

### Good or initiative ideas / off the wall ideas

- Set up contract with family when a child starts school and then develop policy around attendance and follow up on non attendance
- Use of technology – texting young people to get them out of bed
- Developing pride in the local area and the local school
- More use of Peer Support
- Change the patterns of school holidays to better suit parents needs

DRAFT

**Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)  
Improving School Attendance  
26<sup>th</sup> April 2012  
Report author: Sandra Newbould**