

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Date: September 2022
Report for: Information
Report of: Director of Education, Standards, Performance and Quality Assurance

Report Title

Overview of School Attendance

Summary

Trafford council wants all children to have the best possible attendance at school to enable each and every child to reach their full potential. There is a strong link between good school attendance and achieving strong outcomes for children. This report provides an overview of the current position in Trafford, legislative measures and support strategies to improve attendance rates.

Recommendation(s)

That the contents of the report are noted.

Contact person(s) for access to background papers and further information:

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Karen McCallum: Head of the Education of Vulnerable Children Service
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1. Introduction

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

Central to raising standards in education and ensuring all pupils can fulfil their potential is that pupils need to attend school regularly to benefit from their education. Missing out on lessons leaves children vulnerable to falling behind. Children with poor attendance tend to achieve less in both primary and secondary school. Indeed, statistics report that

The government expects schools and local authorities to:

- ✓ promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence
- ✓ ensure every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled
- ✓ act early to address patterns of absence

- ✓ parents to perform their legal duty by ensuring their children of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend regularly
- ✓ all pupils to be punctual to their lessons.

2. Attendance data for Trafford

The following data captures the reported attendance figures over the last 3 years. Due to the pandemic and school closures, 2020 data was not collected.

i. Total absence

		2019	2020	2021
TOTAL	Trafford			
	National			
	SN			
PRIMARY	Trafford	3.20	-	2.90
	National	4.0	-	3.60
	SN	3.78	-	3.30
SECONDARY	Trafford	4.60	-	4.80
	National	5.50	-	5.50
	SN	5.29	-	5.04
LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN	Trafford	4.80	-	10.30
	National	5.10	-	9.10
	SN	4.87	-	8.84
CHILD IN NEED	Trafford	10.10	-	14.60
	National	11.50	-	13.80
	SN	11.96	-	14.19
SEND	Trafford		-	5.2
	National		-	6.8

*Data source: Local Authority Interactive Tool: An interactive spreadsheet for comparing data about children and young people across all local authorities in England

3. The importance of attending school regularly

Regular attendance at school is critical as evidence shows that the students with the highest attendance throughout their time in school gain the best GCSE and A Level results.

This is what the data shows:

- Pupils with higher attainment at KS2 and KS4 had lower levels of absence over the key stage compared to those with lower attainment.
- Pupils who did not achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in 2019 had an overall absence rate of 4.7% over the key stage, compared with 3.5% among pupils who achieved the expected standard and 2.7% among those who achieved the higher standard.
- Pupils who did not achieve grade 9 to 4 in English and maths GCSEs in 2019 had an overall absence rate of 8.8% over the key stage, compared with 5.2% among pupils who achieved a grade 4 and 3.7% among pupils who achieved grade 9 to 5 in both English and maths.
- Generally, the higher the percentage of sessions missed across the key stage at KS2 and KS4, the lower the level of attainment at the end of the key stage.

- Among pupils with no missed sessions over KS2, 83.9% achieved the expected standard compared to 40.2% of pupils who were persistently absent.
- Among pupils with no missed sessions over KS4, 83.7% achieved grades 9 to 4 in English and maths compared to 35.6% of pupils who were persistently absent.

Furthermore, the table below details the days of lost learning when children/young people do not attend school regularly.

Attendance Rate	Lost Learning Time
100% attendance	0 weeks
95% attendance	1 week & 4 days
90% attendance	3 weeks & 4 days
85% attendance	5 weeks & 3 days
80% attendance	At least 7 weeks & 3 days
80% attendance over 5 years = 1 whole year of education lost.	
Research suggests that pupils who have an average of 20 days absent per school year see negative effects throughout their educational journey, resulting in a whole GCSE grade deficit by the time they leave secondary education.	

There are certain circumstances for which absence can be permitted:

- The child is too ill to attend that day.
- The parent has requested absence in advance, and has been given permission due to exceptional circumstances.
- The child cannot attend school on that day because they are taking part in religious observance
- The local authority is responsible for arranging your child's transport to school and it is not available on that day or has not been provided yet; or
- A gypsy/traveller family with no fixed abode, who is required to travel for work that day meaning the child cannot attend their usual school.

Parents should plan their holidays around school breaks and avoid requesting leaves of absence for holidays unless it is unavoidable.

As leave of absence is only granted in exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely that the headteacher will agree a leave of absence for a family holiday.

4. Persistent Absence

If a pupil's overall absence rate is 10% or higher of their possible sessions, they're classified as a persistent absentee and we know that one in nine pupils are persistently absent.

Clearly, the pandemic has made things worse. More children than ever have missed school due to isolation or illness, and existing risk factors driving absence have been exacerbated, with additional ones, too, coming to the fore.

This is particularly the case for vulnerable children or those in more deprived areas where persistent absence is most common. In fact, nearly half of persistent absentees live in the 30 per cent highest areas of child poverty.

The Big Ask survey from the Children’s Commissioner in 2021 included 1,900 children who were not permanently in school. It highlighted that attendance has an important role to play in children’s life chances and reiterated the importance of understanding individual children’s experiences.

Disappointingly, children cited unhappiness at school as their biggest barrier to attendance. This was particularly apparent among pupils with special educational needs or disabilities and those with poor physical health, who felt that they did not receive the adequate level of support at school for their needs, and who also experienced bullying. It was also similar for children who suffered with mental health issues, who said that support was not accessible enough to support their attendance.

The following data reflects the Trafford position over the last 3 years.

Persistent Absence %		2019	2020	2021
TOTAL	Trafford	7.90	-	9.80
	National	10.90	-	12.10
	SN	9.71	-	10.50
PRIMARY	Trafford	5.50	-	5.60
	National	8.20	-	8.80
	SN	7.07	-	7.57
SECONDARY	Trafford	10.00	-	13.50
	National	13.70	-	14.80
	SN	12.53	-	12.91
LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN	Trafford	13.80	-	35.60
	National	12.10	-	30.40
	SN	11.91	-	28.97
CHILD IN NEED	Trafford	29.60	-	44.20
	National	33.50	-	42.20
	SN	34.43	-	42.23
CHILD PROTECTION	Trafford	40.40	-	53.30
	National	39.50	-	52.80
	SN	41.39	-	51.68
SEND	Trafford	20.80	-	40.10
	National	25.5	-	44.20

*Data source: Local Authority Interactive Tool: An interactive spreadsheet for comparing data about children and young people across all local authorities in England

5. Support for school attendance

Children may struggle to attend school for a wide range of reasons. The DfE has recently published guidance on improving school attendance ([Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/improving-school-attendance-support-for-schools-and-local-authorities))

This sets out the principles underpinning an effective whole school strategy for attendance and outlines actions that school staff and local authorities may consider taking to improve attendance for all pupils, pupils at risk of persistent absence and pupils who are persistently absent.

In addition, Trafford’s attendance officers offer a service level agreement aimed at supporting Headteachers, staff and attendance leads, to achieve better

outcomes for children, comply with current legislation, raise standards and close the gap by improving engagement and attendance in school.

The team deliver tailored packages of support which include advice, guidance, training, attendance reviews and action planning and updates on changing duties and current issues pertaining to all aspects of attendance in school.

Trafford Team Together (TTT)

TTT is a co-ordinated partnership approach between family services, education, health and community services and organisations, to help families find the right support at the right time.

One of their intended outcomes is to improve school attendance and reduce levels of persistent absence. 42 schools are now working with their TTT co-ordinator, with 42 children/young people receiving support around school attendance.

Emotionally-based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

Some of our children and young people who live and go to school in the Trafford area are struggling with high levels of anxiety related to attending school.

The need for parent carers, school staff and specialist services to work together has become even more important as children, young people and families try to adapt to the short and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Trafford schools and services have developed a pilot Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) Early Identification Tool (EIT) which aims to be a user-friendly but comprehensive progress document.

It is hoped that this tool will help prevent families, children and young people reaching crisis point.

The tool is based on EBSNA research evidence and similar tools that have been shown to be successful in other communities and can be very effective in helping families and schools to quickly identify what risk factors and triggers might be contributing to a child or young person's anxiety and feeling unable to attend school.

The aim is to empower staff and parent carers to have conversations together that are structured, and solution focused. This awareness can then lead to possible adjustments and available support being offered to the child, young person and families through a joint support plan.

Multi-disciplinary Groups

Attendance officers hold monthly meetings where complex cases are discussed with a range of agencies, including Children's Social Care. This is aimed at providing an integrated response to support the child and family, to return to education ahead of any punitive actions being taken.

Training and support is to be rolled out to Social Workers around the importance of school attendance to.

The Virtual School

The new responsibilities for Virtual School Heads (VSH) were introduced in September 2021 – giving them a strategic leadership role to champion the educational attendance, attainment, and progress of children with a social worker. This is because children with a social worker are around 3 times more

likely to be persistently absent from school and between 2 to 4 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers. This group are also over ten times more likely to attend state-funded alternative provision settings than all other pupils. For children with a social worker, attending school is also a protective factor, offering a safe space when home is not.

As strategic leaders for children with a social worker VSHs should work to create a culture of high aspirations across both education and social care that helps to ensure children with a social worker make educational progress and reach their potential no matter their starting point.

The Virtual School Governing Body hold the VSH to account and addressing attendance is a priority. Key improvement actions include:

- A Learning Mentor has been appointed to monitor electronic registers, contact schools and families where children are not in school and offer enhanced support to pupils who are persistently absent.
- Daily reports are uploaded to LCS (Social Care Database) regarding any school absence to ensure social workers are informed.
- Tuition, mentoring, and counselling are available to all children and 166 children have accessed additional support commissioned by Virtual School this year – more than half of our Virtual School roll.

6. Legal Action

Local councils and schools can use various legal powers if a child is missing school without a good reason. They can issue:

- an Education Supervision Order
- a School Attendance Order
- a fine (sometimes known as a 'penalty notice')

Education Supervision Order (ESO)

Where a voluntary early help plan, or formal parenting contract has not been successful, an Education Supervision Order (ESO) can be a useful alternative to provide formal legal intervention without criminal prosecution. In deciding whether to progress to an ESO, the school and local authority should have exhausted voluntary support and be clear that making the order would be beneficial for the pupil and parent.

Where safeguarding concerns exist, the lead practitioner should also discuss with the school's designated safeguarding lead and children's social care services and agree an ESO would be a more suitable option than a s.17 (Children in Need) or s.47 (Child Protection) plan. In all cases, local authorities must fully consider using an ESO before moving forward to prosecution.

ESOs are made through the Family or High Court, rather than Magistrates Court. They give the local authority a formal role in advising, helping and directing the pupil and parent(s) to ensure the pupil receives an efficient, full-time, suitable education.

Where parents persistently fail to comply with the directions given under the ESO, they may be guilty of an offence. Local authorities can prosecute in the Magistrates Court for persistent non-compliance with the Order and parents (upon conviction) will be liable to a fine of up to £1,000.

School Attendance Order

A School Attendance Order is issued, if the local authority believes the child is not getting an education. The parent/s have 15 days to provide evidence that they have registered their child with the school listed in the order or that they are giving them home education.

No School Attendance Orders have been issued this year.

Fixed Penalty Notice

Fixed penalty notices are served on parents as an alternative to prosecution where they have failed to ensure that their child of compulsory school age regularly attends the school where they are registered or at a place where alternative provision is provided. Fixed penalty notices can be used by all schools (with the exception of independent schools) where the pupil's absence has not been authorised by the school and the absence constitutes an offence. The penalty is £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt, rising to £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days. The payment must be paid direct to the local authority regardless of who issued the penalty notice.

If the penalty is not paid by the end of the 28 day period, the local authority must decide either to prosecute for the original offence to which the notice applies, or withdraw the notice. Parent(s) can only be prosecuted if 28 days have expired, and full payment has not been made. There is no right of appeal by parents against a fixed penalty notice.

Trafford Parental Responsibility Measures 2021/22

- Penalty Notices issued : 663 (58 irregular attendance and 605 holiday)
- Income from Penalty Notices: £27,600
- Prosecutions Completed: 2
- Prosecutions Pending: 77

There has been a substantial increase in Penalty Notices this year. (92 in 2020/21)

The back log for court hearings has meant that only been 2 prosecutions have been concluded and there are currently 77 cases pending.

The DfE has indicated that Parental Responsibility measures should now only be used as a last resort after all supportive measures have been exhausted.

7. Attendance Reform

The new DfE Attendance Strategy ([Working together to improve school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/103111/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance.pdf)) sets out new attendance responsibilities for schools/governing bodies, parents and local authorities. This guidance is non-statutory, and has been produced to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance. Following public consultation earlier this year, and subject to Parliament, the Secretary of State has committed to this guidance becoming statutory when parliamentary time allows (this will be no sooner than September 2023).

The reforms are clear that it is the local authority, statutory safeguarding partners and other local partners who have a crucial role in supporting pupils to overcome barriers to attendance and ensure all children can access the full-time education to which they are entitled.

As local authorities vary significantly in size, organisational approach and demographics, the DfE recognise that it is right that the specifics of attendance service delivery and how those roles are discharged should be determined locally to meet local needs of pupils, parents, and schools. As a minimum, however, all local authorities are expected to:

- 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 termly 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 their Virtual School

The service is working together with members from across the local authority, to establish an implementation plan in readiness for September 2023.