

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Date: November 2023
Report for: Information
Report of: Director of Education, Standards, Performance and Quality Assurance

Report Title

Overview of School Attendance

Summary

Trafford's Attendance Strategy has an overarching objective for every child that is on a school roll to be in school every day and on time so that every young person can 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:

Name: Karen Samples: Director of Education, Standards, Quality and Performance
Sarah Butters: Head of Education Places, Access and Vulnerable Children
Martina Mould: School Attendance Officer

1. Introduction

"Improving attendance is everyone's business. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families. The foundation of securing good attendance is that school is a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn."

(Working together to improve school attendance: DfE: May 2022)

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.

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

Trafford schools' attendance is amongst the best in England and often used as a benchmark for other LAs to aspire to. Both overall absence from school in Trafford, and Persistent Absence (PA) has been consistently below the National Average for many years now. The recent pandemic however has impacted on school attendance nationally and Trafford has reflected those national trends.

In normal circumstances, some areas of the borough, and some schools, have tended towards lower-than-average attendance, but in recent years we are seeing higher rates of absence generally across the borough with increased absences due to health issues/ anxiety.

Absence from school can be the most complex area to address, as it is usually the symptom of some other issue. Schools and Academies have the primary role in trying to identify the underlying cause of non-attendance and, once identified, it is essential to provide well-coordinated, planned interventions from the range of services available across the LA.

Persistent Absence and Severe Absence

A pupil becomes a 'persistent absentee' (PA) when their attendance drops to 90% or below for any reason whether the absences are authorised or not.

Over a full academic year this would be 38 sessions (19 school days; equivalent to 1 day or more a fortnight across a full school year). Absence at this level will cause considerable damage to a child's educational prospects.

A pupil becomes 'severely absent'(SA) when their attendance drops to 50% or below for any reason, whether the absences are authorised or not. As persistent absence is often a symptom of wider issues in a child's life; schools, local authorities and their partners play a crucial role in overcoming barriers to attendance and ensuring all children can access the full-time education to which they are entitled.

School Year 2021/22 Attendance (Latest Published Data)

SEND		Overall absence	Unauthorised absence	Persistent absence %	Severely absence %
All pupils	Trafford	6.4	1.1	17.6	0.94
	National	7.6	2.1	22.5	1.65
Pupils with an EHCP	Trafford	10.3	2.7	29.5	3.9
	National	12.1	3.0	36.9	5.2
Pupils with SEN Support	Trafford	8.6	1.9	26.1	2.2
	National	9.97	3.2	32.0	2.99
Pupils with no SEND	Trafford	3.9	2.7	15.8	0.52
	National	5.2	3.0	20.0	0.98

**Persistently absent (PA) is an absence of 10% or more
Severely absent (SA) is an absence of 50% or more*

Attendance data for 2022-23

	All	EHC	SEN Support	FSM	LAC
Trafford Primary Overall	94.9	91.4	93.7	91.9	95.1
Trafford Primary Persistent Absence	16.3	21.3	18.2	17.3	17.0
Trafford Secondary Overall					
Trafford Secondary Overall	91.9	83.7	88.8	86.4	85.7
Trafford Secondary PA	19.5	34.4	23.8	24.8	29.3
Trafford Special Overall					
Trafford Special Overall	88.5	NA	NA	85.9	88.4
Trafford Special PA	28.3	NA	NA	28.9	29
Trafford Overall Attendance 92.8%			National Overall Attendance 92.5%		
Trafford PA 19.6%			National PA 22%		

Attendance data for Autumn Term 1 2023

4 September to 18 October 2023		Trafford					
School Type	Measure	All	EHC	SEN Support	FSM	LAC	CP Plan
All Schools	Overall attendance	95.2	89.5	93.1	91.1	92.9	88.8
	Unauthorised absence	1.3	3.5	1.9	3.2	2.5	4.8
	Persistent Absence (PA)	12.3	26.6	19.3	25.2	18.0	32.3
	Severe Absence (SA)	1.2	5.4	2.2	3.1	3.5	4.6
Primary Schools	Overall attendance	96.1	93.0	94.7	93.4	96.8	93.7
	Unauthorised absence	1.1	2.2	1.5	2.3	1.3	2.9
	Persistent Absence (PA)	10.2	21.7	15.7	21.7	11.0	18.2
	Severe Absence (SA)	0.5	2.0	0.9	2.0	0.0	0.0
Secondary Schools	Overall attendance	94.7	86.5	91.7	89.4	89.5	80.4
	Unauthorised absence	1.3	4.7	2.2	3.9	3.9	9.3
	Persistent Absence (PA)	13.3	30.4	22.6	28.9	23.9	13.6
	Severe Absence (SA)	1.4	8.0	3.1	4.2	6.4	45.5
Special Schools	Overall attendance	90.2	n/a	n/a	88.7	94.6	91.1
	Unauthorised absence	3.1	n/a	n/a	3.5	1.3	1.0
	Persistent Absence (PA)	25.5	n/a	n/a	30.5	15.2	1.0
	Severe Absence (SA)	4.6	n/a	n/a	5.6	0.0	0.0

3. The importance of attending school regularly

Regular attendance at school is critical and is everyone's responsibility.

In July 2023, the Secretary of State for Education wrote a letter to all Local Authorities, supporting strong school attendance from the first day of term (**Appendix 1**) and new research from the Children's Commissioner published recently, has shown the link between post-pandemic absenteeism and poor academic attainment.

- School attendance data from 2020/21 and 2021/22 and 2022 GCSE results data shows that in 2022, only 5% of children who were severely absent in both Years 10 and 11 achieved at least 5 GCSEs, including English and maths.
- This is compared to 78% of children who were rarely absent in both years who achieved at least 5 GCSEs, including English and maths and 36% of children who were persistently absent.
- Children who are persistently absent are also more likely to end up Not in Education, Employment, or Training, according to research from the Department for Education.
- Children who end up in the criminal justice system have some of the highest rates of school absences.
- In 2019/20, 81% of children who committed any offence and 85% of those who committed a serious violence offence had a history of persistent absenteeism

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.	

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. Working together to Improve School Attendance

Successfully treating the root causes of absence and removing barriers to attendance, at home, in school or more broadly requires schools and local partners to work collaboratively with, not against families.

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/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114147/Improving_school_attendance_support_for_schools_and_local_authorities_-_GOV.UK.pdf))

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 have established a model attendance policy and guidance 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.

This outlines the expectations for schools in light of the government’s guidance as stated below:

- Develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance. This includes having a clear vision for attendance improvement, evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes, oversight of data analysis and communicating messages to pupils and parents.
- Have a clear school attendance policy which all staff, pupils and parents understand, with a whole school approach where every staff member has a role to fulfil in improving attendance.
- Accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow up absence.
- Robustly track, monitor, and analyse attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place.
- Build strong relationships with families, listen to, understand, and where possible remove barriers to attendance.
- Share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities, and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe.
- Facilitate support by removing barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school.
- Formalise support where absence persists, and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with. The use of a parenting contract can be discussed with the Pupil Absence Team.
- Enforce support when formal support is not working.

The team will always recommend following a graduated approach in relation to pupils with low attendance, assessing why they are not attending regularly, creating a plan to support improvement in attendance, implementing the plan and reviewing it to see if improvements have been made.

Graduated Approach

LEVEL ONE	FAILURE TO SEND CHILD TO SCHOOL AFTER REFUSAL OF LEAVE OF ABSENCE.
Criterion	Failure to send child to school after request for leave of absence refused
Vulnerability	
Service Provider	School/LA
Intervention	Head Teacher to consider issue of a penalty notice and send request to Pupil Absence Team via the school portal
	Prosecution in the absence of the penalty being discharged within 28 days

LEVEL TWO	LOW LEVEL LATE / IRREGULAR / NON-ATTENDANCE
Criterion	Attendance between 90%-100% over four weeks
Need/Vulnerability	Child/ family may be vulnerable
Service Provider	School
Intervention	School to contact parent to determine reason for pupil’s absence on first day of absence and expected date of return.

	Attendance and monitoring process to identify when absence or punctuality becomes a concern
	Support from the school's attendance officer through telephone calls, letters, emails and home visits
	Parents to be offered access to sources of support via attendance plans or an individual health care plan.
	Praise and reward scheme for children entering level two from any higher level

LEVEL THREE	MEDIUM LEVEL LATE / IRREGULAR / NON-ATTENDANCE
Criterion	Attendance between 80% - 90% over four weeks
Vulnerability	Child/Family may be vulnerable or have a low level need requiring single or multi agency support
Service Provider	School/ LA
Intervention Welfare Support	Identifying pattern of absence Attendance concern letter
	School meeting with parents – Individual Attendance Plan EBSNA toolkit
	Early help assessment / involvement of Trafford Team Together
	In school pastoral and mentoring support and counselling
	Home visits
	Individual health care plan
	Referral to external support services / alternative provision
	Referral for specialist assessment (e.g. SEND/CAMHS)
Intervention Enforcement	Non-attendance warning letters
	Parenting contract
	Home visit

LEVEL FOUR	HIGH LEVEL LATE / IRREGULAR / NON-ATTENDANCE
Criterion	Attendance below 80% over four weeks
Vulnerability	Child/Family may have a complex level of need requiring higher level intervention, including referral to specialist assessments & services.
Service Provider	School/LA /Legal Services
Intervention Welfare Support	As at Level 3
Intervention Enforcement	When all attempts to engage with the family at levels three and four have failed referral to legal services with a view to penalty notice/prosecution/ Education Supervision Order

LEVEL FIVE	SAFEGUARDING NEEDS
Criterion	Any level of attendance
Need/Vulnerability	Child/Young person has acute needs that require statutory intervention to promote and protect the welfare of children/young people.
Service Provider	All Agencies
Intervention	Immediate referral by school, attendance officer or other concerned agency to Children's Services.

	Children's services to conduct an immediate assessment of need or a multi-agency assessment under Children's Act 1989, s17 as appropriate.
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The Local Authority has priorities in line with DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance

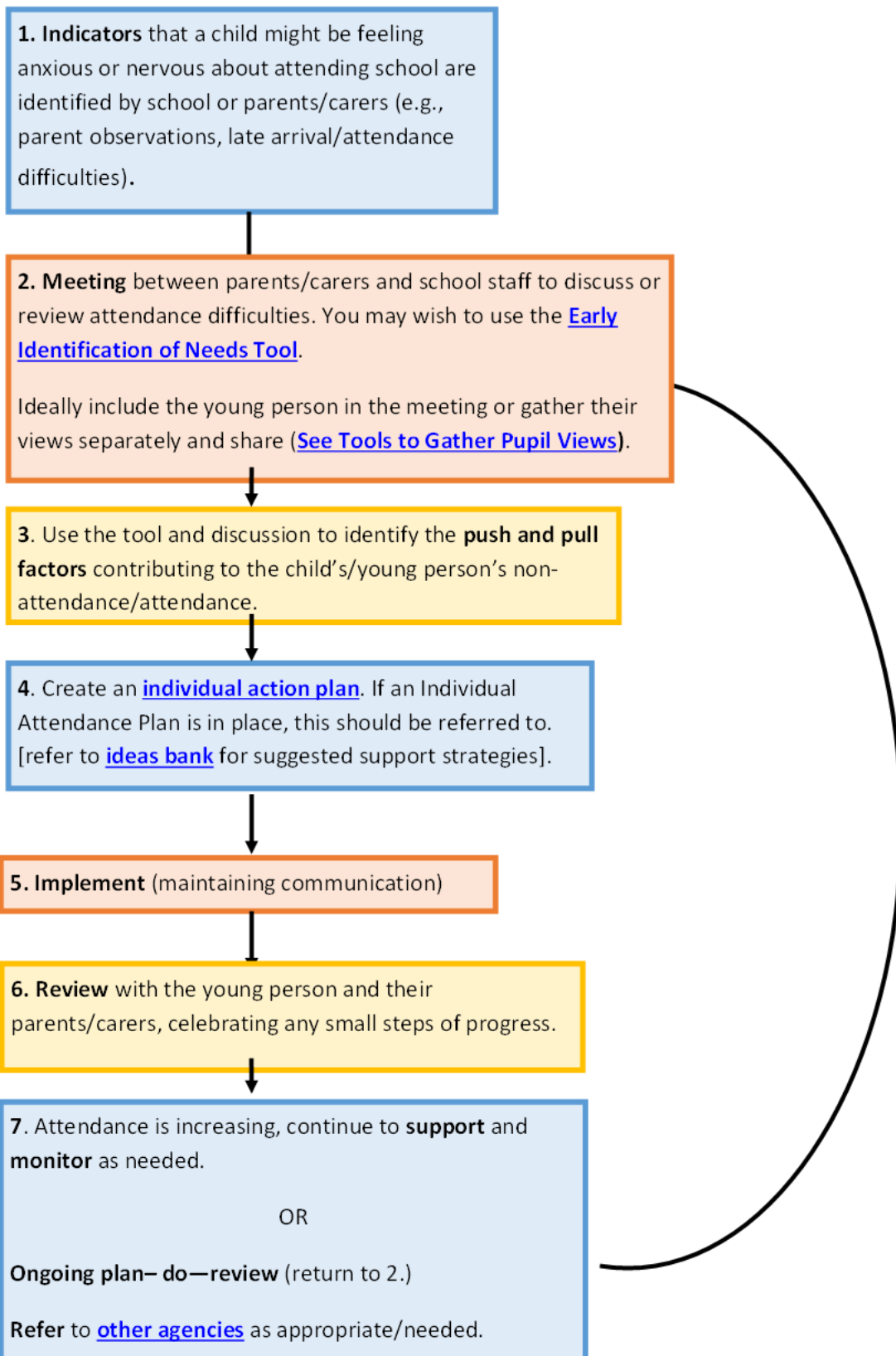
1. Rigorously track local attendance data
2. School attendance support team
 - Communication and advice
 - Targeting support meetings
 - Multi-disciplinary support for families
 - Legal Interventions
3. Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through the virtual school.

5. Emotionally-based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) is a term adopted by Trafford Council and a number of authorities to describe children and young people who have significant difficulties in attending school due to a range of factors. This is distinct from other types of school non-attendance and relates specifically to the emotional distress that they experience around attending school (Thambirajah, Grandison & De-Hayes, 2008).

The following flow chat represents the process of support that should be followed when a child or young person is identified as experiencing difficulties attending school (or as at risk of becoming persistently absent). This may be triggered by concerns shared by school staff, parents/carers, or a reduction in the child's attendance.

Flow Chart of Support



It is important that this cycle of support is completed promptly, and that the support and progress is agreed and regularly reviewed with the young person and their family (e.g., every 3 – 4 weeks). Research suggests that early intervention is the best approach to maintaining regular school attendance.

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.

****See Appendix 2 for the EBSNA Strategy***

6. Trafford's Family Help Approach

Trafford's Family Help Offer is premised around an 'approach' not a service model harnessing strength of the family help partnerships that exist within communities and across the system.

We are currently developing three main strands to our family help approach which includes Family Hub development, Trafford Team Together and targeted family support, recognising that some families will need support from statutory services including Children's Social Care.

Trafford Team Together (TTT)

Trafford Team Together is a system enabling approach to meet the needs of any child and their family living in Trafford and /or attending Trafford. TTT finds support for children and families living in Trafford or attending a Trafford school preventing small worries turning into bigger problems, TTT also finds support for children and families recovering from crisis. Parents and wider family members are empowered through the shared relational culture, with services working alongside families as partners. The core intent is to 'work with', not to 'do to'. TTT is a holistic approach considering the child, their family and their environment as a whole, rather than a single service issue, it is facilitated by the TTT Co-ordinator identifying the TTT Advocate: the person who knows the child and family best; who has their trust, captures their voice, and secures their engagement. Improving school attendance is one of the outcomes TTT is seeking to address.

TTT is currently in 43 schools across three neighbourhoods North, West and South partially and within the school year dating September 2022 – July 2023, TTT supported 284 families.

Targeted Family Support (Early Help Workers/Intensive Family Support)

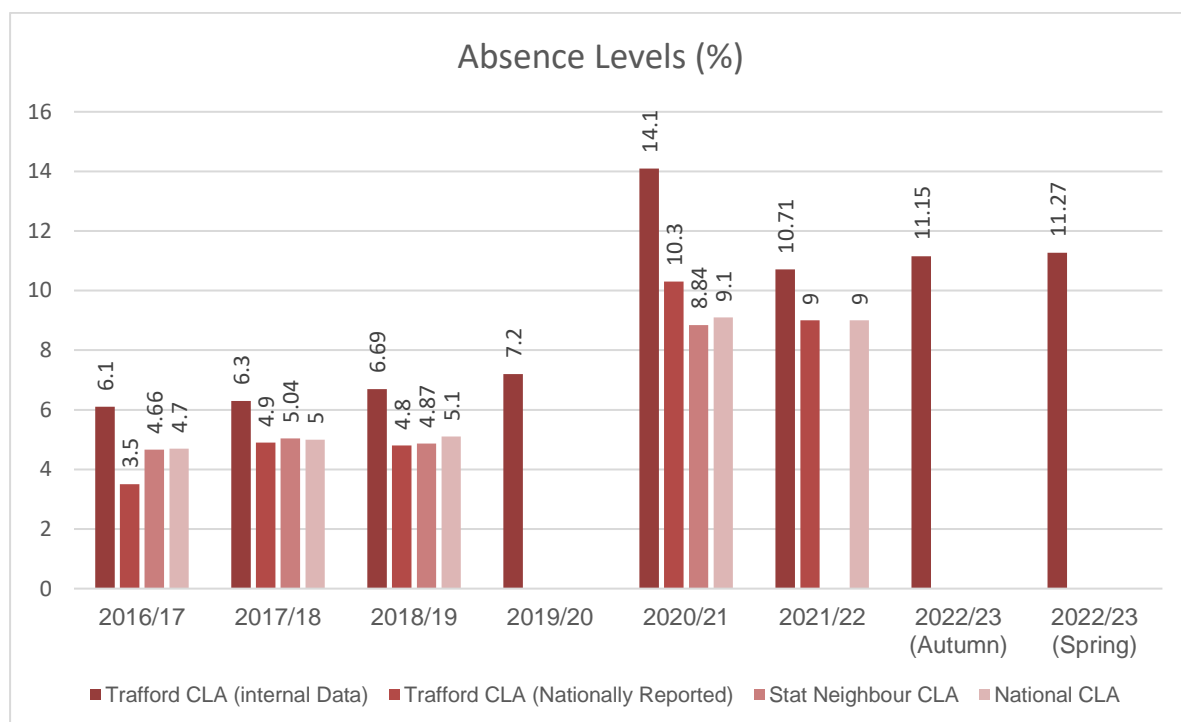
The Early Help Hub Workers & Intensive Family Support (IFS) Service are an internal service. IFS takes a multi – agency, whole family approach to working with children and families who need more targeted help and support to help them cope with significant stressors or problems that impact on family's ability to nurture their children and improve outcomes. IFS workers coordinate the multi-agency team. They undertake direct work with the children and their parents, offering practical assistance where needed, to enable them and equip them with new strategies and tools to implement positive change.

54 families were supported via IFS in the last 12 months where attendance (either SA/PA) was an issue – this equates to 15% of all families supported by IFS in this period.

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.

Attendance of our looked after children continues to be an area of concern for us with our internal data (collected via our online attendance management system) showing an increase in absence in Spring Term 2023 compared with Autumn Term 2022 and 2021/22.



The Virtual School's Strategic Improvement Plan cites the improvement of attendance as a key priority with oversight achieved through the Governing Body and Corporate Parenting Board. Attendance data is also presented to the Social Care Quality and Performance meetings

Daily monitoring of registers and liaison with professionals for school aged looked after children takes place and weekly monitoring of registers and liaising with professionals for post-16 students. Where appropriate, there is direct work with children and families which includes the use of the EBSNA toolkit.

Both the Looked After Children and Child in Need panels provide multi-disciplinary oversight of all persistent and severe with actions agreed. A monthly email to Social Workers and managers for all Persistently Absent and Severely Absent children (which includes information around SEND and placement type) is distributed and daily reports are uploaded to LCS (Social Care Database) regarding any school absence to ensure social workers are informed.

Further strategies for these vulnerable cohorts include:

- A Learning Mentor is in post to monitor electronic registers, contact schools and families where children are not in school and offer enhanced support to pupils who are persistently absent. More details regarding the Learning Mentor's work can be found in the Learning Mentor section.
- Tuition, mentoring, and counselling are available to all children and 144 children have accessed additional support commissioned by Virtual School this year – more than half of our children of statutory school age.
- The Virtual School will be launching a new half-termly attendance training programme in 2023/24 aimed at supporting professionals and family members

who have children who are persistently absent (attendance less than 90%) or severely absent (attendance less than 50%) from school, led by our Assistant Educational Psychologist and Wellbeing Lead. The sessions will explore the impact of low attendance on future outcomes, consider the ways in which mental health and special educational needs impact on attendance, share resources and strategies to improve attendance (including the Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance guidance and toolkit), and will facilitate solution focused discussions around improving attendance for looked after children, previously looked after children and children in need.

7. Support for Schools

All LAs are expected to organise termly **Targeting Support Meetings** with each school in their area so the school's attendance leads and their point of contact in the local authority's School Attendance Support Team can identify, discuss, and agree joint targeted actions for pupils who are persistently or severely absent and those at risk of becoming so.

Due to the capacity in our attendance team being limited (there are only 4 officers), we are using other means of carrying out this responsibility and capitalising on the Autumn term school improvement quality assurance visits carried out by Associate School Improvement Advisers. We have also rag-rated our schools to ensure effective prioritisation. The purpose of the meetings are to discuss the following:

- Attendance data and any concerns and actions resulting from this
- Day-to-day processes for managing attendance
- Current strategies for promoting and incentivising good attendance and for reducing persistent absence in the school including thresholds for accessing wider support services and legal intervention
- Pupils considered to be persistently or severely absent
- Pupils accessing some of their learning off site, to ensure this is used as a short-term intervention to support a child re-engage in their learning

All schools in the borough are entitled to advice and guidance from the Trafford Pupil Absence Team, using a portal for referring individual cases for advice and a dedicated email address for general absence enquiries. Officers are also creating a School Attendance Hub which will be a "one stop share point" for the dissemination of good practice, pro forma templates and letters, and training webinars and presentations.

8. Legal intervention

Where all voluntary support options are unsuccessful or are not appropriate (e.g. an unauthorised holiday in term time), Attendance Support officers will liaise with school and the early help lead practitioner or social worker (where applicable) to take forward attendance legal intervention to formalise support and/or enforce attendance. Attendance legal intervention can only be used for pupils of compulsory school age and decisions should be made on an individual case by case basis.

VOLUNTARY SUPPORT
Helping parents to access services of their own accord and/or a voluntary whole family plan to tackle the barriers

FORMAL SUPPORT
A formal **parenting contract** agreed by the pupil, parent, school and/or LA

Progressing to a legally binding **Education Supervision Order** in the Family Court if there is non-engagement and deemed necessary

STATUTORY SOCIAL CARE INVOLVEMENT
Where there are safeguarding concerns and an Education Supervision Order is not appropriate or has not been successful the case should be considered for statutory social care involvement

ATTENDANCE PROSECUTION
Where all other routes have failed or are not deemed appropriate, the case should be considered for attendance prosecution in the Magistrates Court (or a Fixed Penalty Notice for irregular attendance)