TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to:	**Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee**
Date:	**January 2025**
Report for:	**Information**
Report of:	**Director of Education, Standards, Performance and Quality Assurance**

<u>**Report Title**</u>

Overview of Persistent and Severe Absence in Trafford

<u>**Summary**</u>

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 including rates of persistent and severe absence and support strategies to improve attendance rates.

<u>**Recommendation(s)**</u>

That the contents of the report are noted.

<u>Contact person(s) for access to background papers and further information:</u>

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. Overview – National Context

1.1 The Department for Education (DfE) published the statutory guidance on "Working together to improve school attendance" in August 2024, and required schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities to have regard to it as part of their efforts to maintain high levels of school attendance.

1.2 The guidance had been updated to be clearer on the link between improving attendance and wider school culture, including the importance of working in partnership with families to find supportive routes to improve attendance.

1.3 The guidance also reflects the changes to the law on keeping school attendance and admission registers including a revised set of codes, granting leaves of absence and access to, and sharing of, attendance information introduced through the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.

1.4 Finally, the guidance also set out the new National Framework for issuing penalty notices and reflect changes to the law introduced through the Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024 and the change of 'parenting contracts' for

attendance to 'attendance contracts' to better reflect the agreement between parents, schools and/or local authorities.

2. Attendance Matters

2.1 Improving attendance is everyone's business. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex and are often specific to individual pupils and families. Schools and partners should work in partnership with pupils and parents collaboratively to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place.

2.2 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.

2.3 Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school. This is essential for pupils to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances. For the most vulnerable pupils, regular attendance is also an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided. Research has shown associations between regular absence from school and a number of extra-familial harms, including crime (the proportion of children that had been cautioned or sentenced for any offence that had ever been persistently absent was 81% and for serious violence offence was 85%).

3. Role of the Local Authority

3.1 The expectations of Local Authorities in the revised national guidance are as follows:

a) **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.

b) 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 their Virtual School.

4. Persistent and Severe Absence

4.1 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.

4.2 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 and severe 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.

5. Attendance Data

Table 1: Overall Attendance 2022/23 and 2023/24

School Type	Measure	Published Data 2022/23 Full Year		Published Data 2023/24 Full Year		DfE Portal Autumn 2024
		National %	Trafford %	National %	Trafford %	Trafford %
Primary	Attendance rate	94.1%	**95.2%**	94.5%	**95.3%**	**95.9%**
	Authorised absence	4.2%	**3.8%**	3.9%	**3.6%**	**3.2%**
	Unauthorised absence	1.6%	**1.0%**	1.6%	**1.0%**	**0.9%**
	Persistent absence	16.2%	**11.4%**	15.2%	**10.9%**	**10.5%**
	Severe absence	0.7%	**0.4%**	-	**-**	**0.4%**
Secondary	Attendance rate	91.0%	**93.1%**	90.9%	**93.0%**	**94.2%**
	Authorised absence	5.6%	**5.4%**	5.5%	**5.3%**	**4.5%**
	Unauthorised absence	3.2%	**1.5%**	3.6%	**1.7%**	**1.3%**
	Persistent absence	26.5%	**18.1%**	26.7%	**18.2%**	**15.2%**
	Severe absence	3.4%	**1.7%**	-	**-**	**1.8%**
Special	Attendance rate	87.0%	**88.5%**	87.0%	**88.3%**	**89.7%**
	Authorised absence	9.9%	**4.6%**	9.7%	**7.6%**	**6.2%**
	Unauthorised absence	3.2%	**1.3%**	3.3%	**4.1%**	**4.1%**
	Persistent absence	38.3%	**30.6%**	37.6%	**32.3%**	**26.2%**
	Severe absence	6.2%	**5.5%**	-	**-**	**4.4%**

Table 2: Pupil Characteristics Attendance Overview

Type	Characteristic	Published Data 2023/24 Full Year				DfE Portal Autumn 2024 - Trafford Data @ 20/12/24					
		Attendance Rate		Persistent Absence		Overall Attendance		Persistent Absence		Severe Absence	
		National %	Trafford %	National %	Trafford %	No.	% Rate	No.	% Rate	No.	% Rate
Primary	All	94.50%	95.30%	15.20%	10.90%	18,430	95.90%	1,935	10.50%	67	0.40%
	FSM	91.90%	92.30%	28.10%	25.20%	3,463	93.50%	788	22.80%	30	0.90%
	Non-FSM	95.40%	96.00%	10.70%	7.80%	14,967	96.50%	1,147	7.70%	37	0.20%
	EHC	89.70%	91.80%	32.10%	25.30%	649	93.20%	134	20.60%	10	1.50%
	SEN Support	92.50%	93.90%	23.90%	17.40%	2,439	94.60%	385	15.80%	22	0.90%
	No SEN	95.00%	95.70%	13.30%	9.80%	15,342	96.30%	1,416	9.20%	35	0.20%
	Boys	94.30%	95.30%	15.70%	11.10%	9,114	95.80%	962	10.60%	41	0.40%
	Girls	94.60%	95.40%	14.60%	10.60%	8,939	96.00%	947	10.60%	26	0.30%
Secondary	All	90.90%	93.00%	26.70%	18.20%	17,535	94.20%	2,665	15.20%	316	1.80%
	FSM	85.40%	86.80%	44.80%	40.90%	3,077	88.50%	1,044	33.90%	162	5.30%
	Non-FSM	92.90%	94.20%	20.20%	13.60%	14,458	95.40%	1,621	11.20%	154	1.10%
	EHC	83.00%	83.50%	44.50%	40.50%	634	84.40%	241	38.00%	73	11.50%
	SEN Support	85.80%	88.90%	40.70%	32.10%	1,821	89.90%	489	26.90%	98	5.40%
	No SEN	92.10%	93.80%	24.20%	16.20%	15,080	95.10%	1,935	12.80%	145	1.00%
	Boys	91.30%	93.20%	25.50%	17.70%	9,026	94.50%	1,342	14.90%	131	1.50%
	Girls	90.60%	92.80%	28.00%	18.70%	8,507	93.90%	1,323	1.60%	185	2.20%
Special	All	87.00%	88.30%	37.60%	32.30%	850	89.70%	223	26.20%	37	4.40%
	FSM	84.90%	86.20%	43.40%	38.20%	393	88.40%	127	32.30%	17	4.30%
	Non-FSM	88.90%	90.00%	32.20%	26.10%	457	90.80%	96	21.00%	20	4.40%
	Boys	86.70%	89.60%	36.80%	31.30%	631	89.40%	162	25.70%	31	4.90%
	Girls	87.10%	87.90%	39.50%	34.80%	218	90.60%	60	27.50%	6	2.80%

| Type | Characteristic | Published Data 2023/24 Full Year | | | | DfE Portal Autumn 2024 - Trafford Data @ 20/12/24 | | | | | |
| | | Attendance Rate | | Persistent Absence | | Overall Attendance | | Persistent Absence | | Severe Absence | |
		National %	Trafford %	National %	Trafford %	No.	% Rate	No.	% Rate	No.	% Rate
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	All	-	-	-	-	117	49.60%	98	83.80%	58	49.60%
	FSM	-	-	-	-	65	51.80%	57	87.70%	30	46.20%
	Non-FSM	-	-	-	-	52	46.30%	41	78.80%	28	53.80%
	EHC	-	-	-	-	21	46.00%	19	90.50%	14	66.70%
	SEN Support	-	-	-	-	55	51.70%	44	80.00%	24	43.60%
	No SEN	-	-	-	-	41	48.50%	35	85.40%	20	48.80%
	Boys	-	-	-	-	61	49.60%	55	90.20%	31	50.80%
	Girls	-	-	-	-	56	49.40%	43	76.80%	27	48.20%

Table 3: Mainstream Year Groups (excludes Special Schools)

| Year Group | DfE Portal Autumn 2024 Trafford Data @ 20/12/24 | | |
	Attendance	PA	SA
YR	-	-	-
1	95.70%	11.40%	0.40%
2	96.10%	9.70%	0.20%
3	96.40%	8.40%	0.30%
4	96.20%	10.00%	0.30%
5	96.00%	10.90%	0.50%
6	95.30%	12.50%	0.40%
7	96.20%	9.70%	0.70%
8	94.60%	14.60%	1.30%
9	93.50%	17.40%	2.10%
10	93.40%	17.70%	2.60%
11	93.30%	16.80%	2.40%

5.1 Trafford schools' attendance is amongst the best in the Northwest 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. However, just as the years following the pandemic has impacted on school attendance nationally, Trafford has reflected those national trends.

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.	

5.2 The overall attendance data across primary, secondary and specialist provisions as shown in Table 1, reflects year-on-year improvements, most significantly in the secondary sector and remain above national statistics. Rates of persistent absence remain much lower than national, although this grew in the specialist sector in 2023, but appears to have reduced once again, in the Autumn Term of 2024. This is related to the complexity of need of pupils in our secondary school, and most significantly linked to those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties.

5.3 **Attendance of all groups of pupils remains better than their national comparative group** as demonstrated in **Table 2** in overall attendance and persistent absence. In 2023/24, the attendance gap between those pupils who are in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and those who are non-FSM is in line with the national gap. However, the attendance gap between those pupils with SEND and Non-SEND is narrower than the national gap, which is a very positive outcome.

5.4 **Table 3** provides a snapshot of the most current year group data in Trafford, from the Autumn Term 24. This highlights the worsening of attendance as pupils move from primary schools into the secondary sector with significant increases in persistent absence noticeable from year 7 to year 8.
Research suggests that there is an emerging challenge of a '**second transition'** from Year 7 to Year 8 that deserves greater attention. The drop-off in attendance rates and attendance drivers from Year 7 to Year 8 is noticeable in Trafford, as it is larger than for any other year group.

6. Working Together to Improve School Attendance: Attendance Strategy

6.1 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's statutory guidance 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 an **on-line School Attendance Hub** which provides schools with a whole host of resources, guidance and model policies 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 can be accessed at https://www.traffordeducation.co.uk/attendance

6.2 As part of this support, Trafford has also established an Attendance Strategy. Our strategy is based around 3 key principles:
  ➢ Strong and trusting relationships.
  ➢ Clear, graduated response built on early intervention.
  ➢ Collaboration to provide families with the right support at the right time.

In developing this strategy, one of our guiding principles has been to build on our existing good practice working with schools, multi-agency partners and families. As well as our approach to meeting current legislation and guidance, it is important it recognises the needs of our children, young people and families and seeks to empower and support them. Through surveys and conversations, we have identified what is important for our children and families when it comes to school attendance.

Parents and carers
  ❖ Trust and compassionate professionals who listen
  ❖ Nurturing, safe environment
  ❖ Clear communication, jargon-free
  ❖ Reasonable adjustments in school
  ❖ Flexible approach to meet children and young people's needs
  ❖ Knowledgeable, well-trained professionals
  ❖ Effective signposting to other services and peer support

Children and young people
  ❖ Sense of school belonging
  ❖ Positive relationships with peers and consistent relationships and support from adults
  ❖ Positive transition, particularly when starting secondary school
  ❖ Positive experience of learning
  ❖ Emotional wellbeing

Our **Graduated Approach to School Attendance** documents the steps and stages schools must consider before escalating to statutory action. The document reinforces the 'support first' approach to be taken by schools and ensures a strong universal provision and support pathway is in place at a school level. This includes links and signposting to services that support pupils and families experiencing barriers to attendance.

Level 1 - Low Level Late / Irregular / Non-Attendance	
Attendance between 90% and <100% over four weeks	**Child / family needs being met by universal services**
Support Interventions	• 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 own attendance officer through telephone calls, letters, emails, and home visits. • Praise and reward scheme for children entering level one from any higher level. • Parents to be offered access to other sources of support if necessary, for example signposting via Trafford Directory.
Legal Interventions	• In cases of parental non-engagement, absences should be unauthorised, pupil attendance should be closely monitored, and a warning letter sent reminding parent of legal responsibility.

Level 2 - Medium Level Late / Irregular / Non-Attendance	
Attendance between 80% and <90% over four weeks	**Child / family may require or would benefit from additional input or support from an agency or agencies**
Support Interventions	• Identifying pattern of absence • School meeting with parents • Individual attendance plan • Request for advice from Trafford Pupil Absence Team • Request for medical evidence • Involvement from school nursing team • Emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA) toolkit • Family help assessment / involvement of Trafford Team Together • In-school pastoral and mentoring support and counselling • Home visits • Individual healthcare plan • Referral to external support services / alternative provision such as the Medical Education Service • Referral to Trafford Virtual School for children with a social worker • Referral for specialist assessment (e.g. SEND / CAMHS / EP)
Legal Interventions	• Notice to improve • Attendance contract

Level 3 - High Level Late / Irregular / Non-Attendance	
Attendance below 80% over four weeks	**Child / family are experiencing multiple or complex needs. They are struggling to effect change without the support and intervention of services.**
Support Interventions	• As at Level 2
Legal Interventions	When all attempts to engage with the family at levels 2 and 3 have failed, referral to pupil absence team for: • penalty notice to be issued by Trafford Council. • prosecution in the absence of the penalty being discharged within 28 days. • consideration of Education Supervision Order (ESO)

Unauthorised Absence after Request for Leave of Absence Refused	
10 sessions or more	**Any level of child / family vulnerability**
Legal Interventions	• Headteacher requests penalty notice to be issued by Trafford Council. • Prosecution in the absence of the penalty being discharged within 28 days.

Safeguarding	
Any Level of Attendance	**Child / young person is at risk of or suffering significant harm and is in need of help and protection. Has a high level of unmet and complex needs requiring statutory interventions.**
Interventions	• Immediate referral by school, Pupil Absence Team 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.

7. Targeted Support Meetings

7.1 As patterns of attendance are habitual, early identification and support is essential for individual pupils in need of help. Where barriers go beyond the classroom, this requires schools, local authorities, and other partners to work together to put joint support in place as quickly as possible. To enable this to happen, all local authorities

are expected to organise regular 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

➢ Build strong relationships and work collaboratively.
➢ Identify, discuss, and agree action plans and joint approaches for severely absent pupils (where they do not already have a plan in place).
➢ Discuss and agree approaches for persistently absent pupils where they have barriers to attendance that require a multi-agency response to overcome.
➢ Where schools seek it, conduct data analysis, including comparisons to other schools in the geographical area or identifying areas to focus attendance efforts on

7.2 The LA Attendance Team RAG-rate our schools according to their attendance outcomes, including overall performance and rates of persistent and severe absence. The criteria for the RAG rating is based on comparatives to national data; the table below reflects this criteria and associated support.

Category	Criteria		Individual School Meeting with LA	Wider Offer All Schools
Red	• Overall absence less than national measure for phase of education	or	• Mandatory - In person School Attendance meeting held termly	• School Attendance Hub for guidance and resources
	• Overall absence for any vulnerable cohort less than national measure for phase of education – EHCP, SEN Support, FSM, children with social worker		and	• Email and telephone helpline advice for whole school attendance
			• Attendance covered in ASIA visit for LA maintained schools	• Portal referrals for individual pupil advice
				• Termly network meetings
Amber	• Overall absence no more than 2 percentage points above national measure for phase of education	or	• Mandatory - Online School Attendance meeting held termly	• School Attendance Hub for guidance and resources
	• Overall absence for any vulnerable cohort no more than 2 percentage points above national measure for phase of education – EHCP, SEN Support, FSM, children with social worker		and	• Email and telephone helpline advice for whole school attendance
			• Attendance covered in ASIA visit for LA maintained schools	• Portal referrals for individual pupil advice
				• Termly network meetings
Green	• Overall absence more than 2 percentage points above national measure for phase of education	or	• By Request - School can choose to book a School Attendance meeting	• School Attendance Hub for guidance and resources
	• Overall absence for any vulnerable cohort more than 2 percentage points above national measure for phase of education – EHCP, SEN Support, FSM, children with social worker		and	• Email and telephone helpline advice for whole school attendance
			• Attendance covered in ASIA visit for LA maintained schools	• Portal referrals for individual pupil advice
				• Termly network meetings

7.3 In the last term of 2024, 22 schools were rag-rated red and received a Targeted Support Meeting and the response from schools has been very positive. The meetings are resulting in greater insight and focus on targeted groups, with action plans in place for individual pupils particularly those with severe absence.
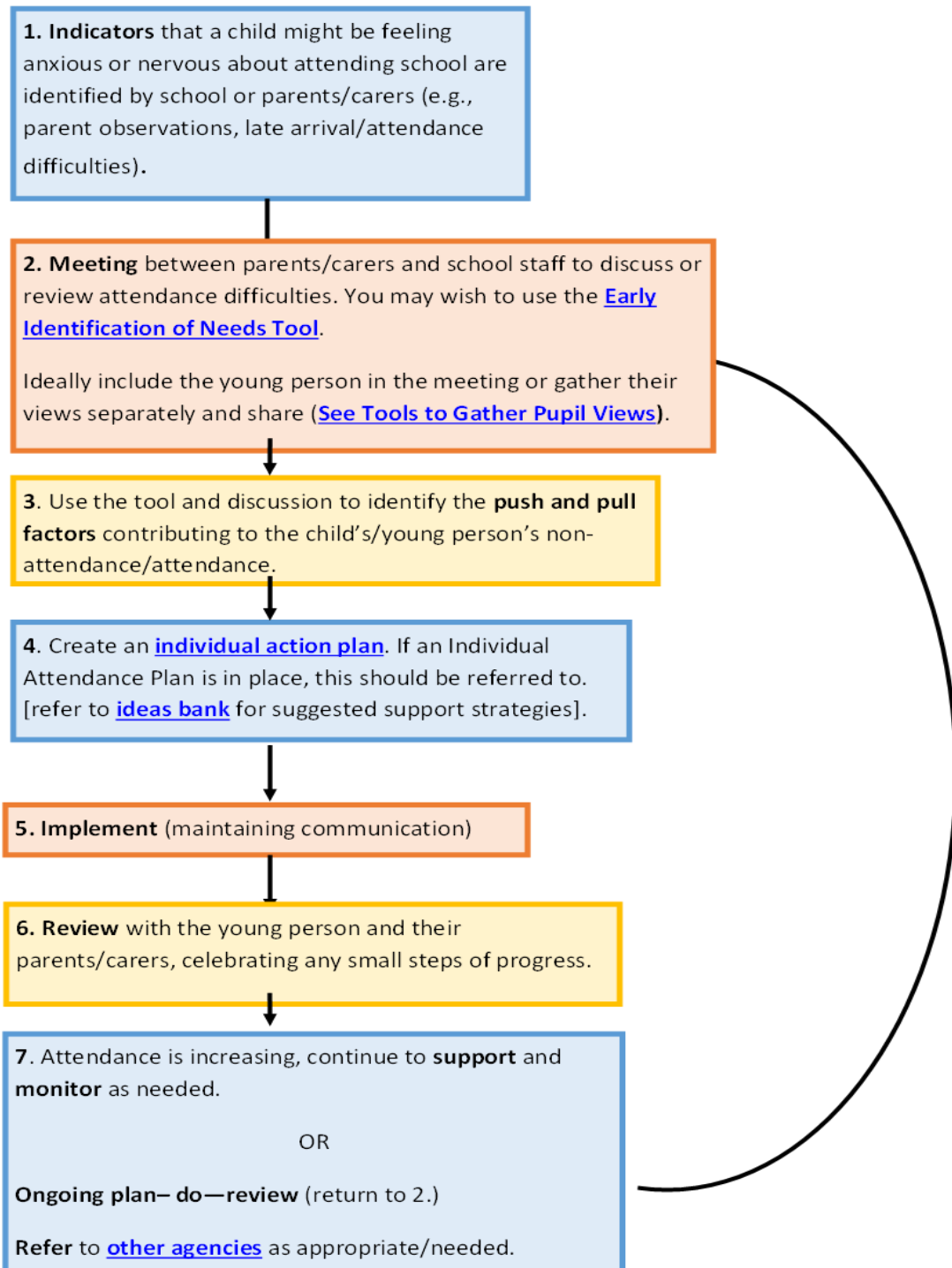
Key themes across all schools are Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) and unmet SEND needs, the main drivers for severe absence. Some schools are skilled in recognising EBSNA and offering support; where schools required additional support around this, these have been encouraged to undertake the Educational Psychology Service's training offer. It is also being made apparent that there is an increase in parents wanting to know how to help their children attend school. The key outcomes have been:

➢ Advice and support on how best to implement effective supportive strategies and schools were informed of commissioned services that they may not have been familiar with.
➢ Oversight and support with action plans for individual pupils.

- ➢ Discussions around individual school compliance with statutory responsibilities including coding issues which is helping to ensure accuracy of attendance registers.
- ➢ Informing a more thematic approach to clinics and network meetings and our strategic approach to attendance, particularly through family help.

8. Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)

8.1 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.

1. Indicators that a child might be feeling anxious or nervous about attending school are identified by school or parents/carers (e.g., parent observations, late arrival/attendance difficulties).

2. Meeting between parents/carers and school staff to discuss or review attendance difficulties. You may wish to use the **Early Identification of Needs Tool**.

Ideally include the young person in the meeting or gather their views separately and share (**See Tools to Gather Pupil Views**).

3. Use the tool and discussion to identify the **push and pull factors** contributing to the child's/young person's non-attendance/attendance.

4. Create an **individual action plan**. If an Individual Attendance Plan is in place, this should be referred to. [refer to **ideas bank** for suggested support strategies].

5. Implement (maintaining communication)

6. Review with the young person and their parents/carers, celebrating any small steps of progress.

7. Attendance is increasing, continue to **support** and **monitor** as needed.

OR

Ongoing plan– do—review (return to 2.)

Refer to **other agencies** as appropriate/needed.

The flow chart above 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.

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.

8.2 The multi-agency EBSNA Steering Group, provides an important vehicle to gather the lived-experience of families and young people with EBSNA and is chaired by an Educational Psychologist. As a result, a number of key activities have taken place with families and schools to support young people who are struggling to attend school.
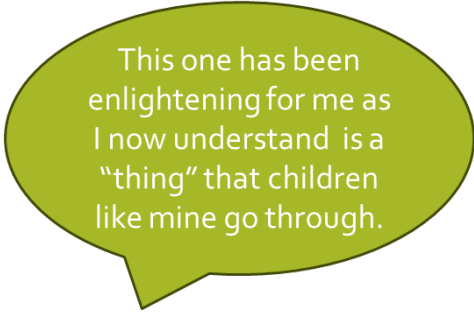
➢ A pilot EBSNA project with 4 targeted schools based on their attendance data. Training was provided by the EP service which included pre-training audits, review of evidence-based early intervention approaches aimed at whole school and individual child level which delivers specific action planning. Action learning tasks took place following the training with reviews and ongoing coaching/networking was provided.
All schools provided positive feedback in terms of their own learning and ability to support families.

➢ Training and support has been provided for families, which focused on "What is EBSNA?" and "What can families do to help at home" and what can be expected from schools. 46 parents attended the sessions, although 70 will have received the training materials.

Feedback from 1 family said:

I found the EBSNA session I attended in person invaluable. It gave me the knowledge and tools to approach my daughters school. Unfortunately, it did not help her with school. We were asked to complete the toolkit questionnaire and send it to school but despite lots of chasing, no further progress was made.

We have recently completed the toolkit again alongside the Learning support manager and had a much better experience. It helped us all identify my daughters needs and has been used by the setting and the EP who is completing a needs assessment. Whilst it hasn't resulted in my daughter being able to return to the setting, we have a much better understanding of her needs and feel supported going forward.

I think my main feedback would be that all schools are made aware of this toolkit and use it. I would also like all schools to receive training in EBSNA

This one has been enlightening for me as I now understand is a "thing" that children like mine go through.

I now feel I can better support my child and can approach the school with a plan for supporting her as a result

8.3 However, it was apparent that experiences were mixed, and the feedback demonstrated that timeliness of response was a common thread right across all engagement activities and support; there is a need to be more proactive not reactive. As a result, the steering group will focus more on audit activity and the "lived experience" to inform training and support going forward.

Details of the support available to young people, families and professionals is available on the Trafford directory: [Trafford Directory | School Attendance Difficulties and Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)](#)

9. 0% Attendance Audit

9.1 In summer 2024, an audit exercise was carried out using a sample size of 12% of the 347 instances of 0% attendance recorded in the DfE system, with a cross section of vulnerable groups. Across the sample, it was identified that 47% had access to alternative provision, 41% were identified as either having left the country or transferring between schools and the remaining 12% were accounted for in an external residential medical or custodial setting.

9.2 Access to alternative provision has been strengthened through Trafford Guidance and an accompanying toolkit which supports with the commissioning of education. Several alternative ways to provide education are unable to be recorded as a present mark on the register, this includes online education and telepresence machines (AV1 Robots).

9.3 The audit highlighted the complexity of monitoring pupils accessing alternative provision. Updates to the Trafford school education portal have strengthened this area with schools now submitting the outcomes to be achieved and the reasons for pupils accessing alternative provision directly to the LA's Attendance Team. National changes to school attendance codes were implemented from September 2024 to also help improve this area.

10. Greater Manchester Local Attendance Action Alliance (GMLAAA)

10.1 The **GM LAAA launched in March 2024** and is chaired by the Children's Commissioner Rachel de Souza alongside the Regional Director for the North West, Vicky Beer; membership includes all GM LAs, Health representatives, DfE and Academy Trust representation.

10.2 The GM LAAA has two main priorities to improve attendance overall attendance these are:

➢ **Transitions** – improving attendance for pupils transitioning from year 6 to year 7. We know that if we can maintain year 6 attendance as pupils move into year 7 this will result in over 1 million additional school days attended across Greater Manchester

- **Severe Absence** – to understand the barriers to attending school that result in pupils becoming severely absent from school.

Work on the above priorities has been carried out in taskforce meetings.

10.3 Transitions Taskforce
This work included each LA undertaking specified data analysis to understand the secondary schools where year 7 pupils are most likely to have a dip in their attendance. This was then shared with the schools to support them offering targeted support to those pupils during the first term.

In addition, secondary schools were identified who were predicted to have the highest year 7 absence in September to be part of an action research group. This enabled these schools to implement targeted support for priority pupils both prior to starting and specifically during the first term. Networking with other schools from across Greater Manchester enabled a sharing of good practice too.

Feedback provided from one of our schools included the following:
As you know, we identified a priority group in year 7 using the year 6 attendance data you shared. It is a group of 28 students whose attendance was below 90% in year 6. Indeed, the overall absence rate for this group in year 6 was 13.34%.

The absence rate for these children over their first half term here at school is 4.4%... we are seeing a real impact on setting up those great attendance habits from day 1.

10.4 **Severe Absence Taskforce**
GM LAAA agreed to commission the GMCA research team to undertake analysis of school census data, covering the period September 2021 – July 2023.
The scope of the agreed work was to provide a 'deep dive' quantitative analysis at the cohort level, with a focus on (i) comparative analysis between districts; (ii) intersectional analysis of pupil characteristics; and (iii) longitudinal appraisal of improving and deteriorating trends over the three-year review period.

As an accompaniment to this quantitative analysis from the GMCA research team, LAs were also asked to undertake a case study review.

10.5 The data report for Greater Manchester established the following findings and replicates the overall Trafford picture:
- There has been a decrease in the numbers of pupils in the primary sector who are severely absent over the 2 years, whilst in contrast the numbers of secondary aged pupils increased
- Across both phases, the Spring term is that which records the highest number of pupils severely absent, relative to the rest of the academic year
- There are higher rates of severely absent pupils who are also eligible for free school meals
- Across all three academic years, and both school phases, the proportion of pupils with severe absence with SEN support or an EHCP is significantly greater compared with the general school population
- A transition between primary and secondary school may be a potential trigger for female pupils in particular

10.6 Further to carrying out an audit with a family, the following themes were identified:
- Increased demands in formal educational provision and curriculum expectations – although the relationship with the school was extremely positive. A part-time timetable was deployed.

> ➢ The school was not adequately supported from professionals with the knowledge and expertise required
> ➢ The EHC Plan was not supporting the needs of the child and support from Family Support and Social Care was negative. However, there was involvement from some health professionals.
> ➢ There was a loss of love for learning

10.7 These findings aligned with the overall findings from across the region as did the support that was put into place. Some of the other challenges experienced by many LAs, including Trafford include:
> ➢ Disagreement between schools and family
> ➢ Challenges getting diagnosis due to non-attendance
> ➢ Reintegration into settings not adapted to meet needs
> ➢ Access to support while awaiting a diagnosis
> ➢ Entrenched disengagement due to long waits for support
> ➢ Thresholds for social care involvement

10.8 The aim is for GM to host a series of four workshops with Directors and Leaders across education, health and social care in the New Year where we will talk about different drivers of severe absence based on the audit activity. This will support our Trafford Attendance Strategy workstreams and inform the workforce development that is required.

10.9 **Additional communications to promote attendance**
As agreed across the GMLAAA partnership, steps were also taken to promote good school attendance and signposting to help and support as required. In September, as agreed throughout the region, a letter was sent out to all parents of year 7 pupils, welcoming young people back to school and signposting families to support so that young people can be in school every day and get the chance to experience all the educational, extra-curricular and social benefits school can bring.
This included referencing to the Family Information Service, the Trafford Padlets for Families, the EBSNA toolkit, our Family Help and Community Hubs and the resource page from the Children's Commissioner's website.

11. Family Help Approach

11.1 Trafford's Family Help Offer is critical in supporting families and young people to attend school.
Trafford Team Together (TTT)
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. Improving school attendance is one of the outcomes TTT is seeking to address.
TTT has now been rolled out borough wide to all mainstream schools and 181 families with 382 children were supported in the 2023-24 academic year, many of whom shared challenges in school attendance.

12. The Virtual School

12.1 In addition to the benefits for all pupils, good attendance at school also provides an additional safeguard for vulnerable pupils. Therefore, new responsibilities for Virtual School Heads (VSH) were issued to give 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.

12.2 Attendance of our looked after children continues to be an area of concern for us. The average absence for 2023/24 was 16.7%, which is a 4.3% increase from 2022/23 at 12.4%. This is a significant increase in absence compared to the previous two years. However, we know that overall absence for all children nationally has increased sharply since 2021 too.

12.3 86 pupils were categorised as 'Persistent Absentee' at the end of 2023/24. 71 of these pupils were in secondary school and 15 of these pupils were in primary school. 31 of the pupils who were persistently absent were in Year 11 which was 63% of the Year 11 cohort.

12.4 In 2023/24, there were 33 looked after children who were severely absent, a third higher than 2022/23. The majority of these children were secondary aged and had SEND.

12.5 **Attendance Support Strategies**
In response to these growing concerns, the introduction of 'waves' has been rolled out across the Virtual School, enabling targeted work from professionals in the service and external partners. This work will assist in the early identification of attendance concerns and appropriate escalation where required.

Wave 1 - 80% - 95%:	**Lead - Virtual School Learning Mentor** • Direct caseload (approx. 10 children/families). Visits to home and school to promote positive attendance strategies. Attending Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings for caseload. Signposting to wider support services and training. Directing to and utilising the EBSNA toolkit. Promoting attendance guidance • Guidance that all PEP documents include a SMART outcome re: attendance • Consideration of the use of Alternative Provision (tuition/mentoring etc)
Wave 2 – 60% - 79%:	**Lead - Virtual School PEP Leads** • Links to Assistant Educational Psychologist, school attendance officers, EBSNA toolkit, Virtual School Attendance Training, discussion with school SENCO to consider potential SEN needs • Use of Alternative Provision (tuition/mentoring etc)
Wave 3 – 0% - 59%:	**Lead - Virtual School SEND services** • Links to Educational Psychology / Speech and Language / CAMHS / Changing Minds • Mandatory Virtual School Attendance Training – targeting Social Workers and carers

12.6 **Virtual School Learning Mentor (Statutory School Age)**

The role of this Learning Mentor is to monitor attendance using our online attendance management system, contact schools and families when a child is absent from school and provide more intensive support when there are attendance concerns. In the academic year 2023/24, the Learning Mentor for school aged children has provided direct support to 61 looked after children. 45 of those were Secondary pupils and 16 were Primary aged children.

Support ranged from high, medium, or low-level support depending on the needs of the pupil. In most cases, the Learning Mentor supported children, young people or their carers with emotionally based school non-attendance. A high proportion of persistently absent young people are placed with their parents or family members, and these children have been a targeted focus group for the mentor.

Case study

James (pseudonym) has previously struggled to attend school or engage with services such as mentoring or tuition. Over a period of time, the Virtual School Learning Mentor was able to build up a positive and trusting relationship with James and his carer, listening to his views and experiences and reassuring him that he was being heard.

After a few weeks, the Virtual School Learning Mentor introduced the idea of James engaging in activities with the support of a mentor. Although initially reluctant, the Virtual School Learning Mentor was able to coach James and support him to feel able to attend an initial meeting. The Virtual School Learning Mentor facilitated a meeting with the external mentor, who would support James with visiting places he was interested in. The relationship with James and the external mentor flourished. James grew in confidence by attending various educational opportunities such as car workshops, radio stations and music studios, where he demonstrated his knowledge and understanding. This new confidence has encouraged him to be aspirational about his future and consider gaining some qualifications

13. Legal intervention

13.1 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 Family 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.

14. Strategic Approach to School Attendance in 2024-25

14.1 To further improve our attendance rates and our approach to supporting our young people to attend school, the strategic approach for the next academic year fulfils both statutory requirements and a continuation of wider partnership working with schools and wider services.

4 themes have been identified as follows:
- ✓ **Strategic Approach**: Data management and oversight, review of statutory business approaches, policy review & education neglect

✓ **Support for Schools:** Advice and support, Implementation of Targeted Support Meetings, Learning Circles to share good practice, delivery of GMLAAA workstreams
✓ **Support for Families:** Establishing a family help pathway embedded in the attendance graduated approach, improve the co-ordinated support for families, identify a targeted family help offer based on intervention and support
✓ **Monitor and Support the Attendance of Vulnerable Groups:** Develop automated processes for regular data collection around identified groups, refine the EBSNA pathway of support, embed the use of audits to inform practice and development, champion education across family help and social care

Implementation of the strategic approach will be monitored through the Attendance Steering Group which will promote a multi-disciplinary approach to improving attendance.

14.2 Partnership working with social care and family help will continue. The lead for attendance has already delivered briefings for partners across Childrens Services on the new statutory guidance. A key focus has been on how to challenge families to improve their children's school attendance and what support is available at a locality level.

14.3 The Local Authority will use the autumn Quality Assurance school visits to focus a section of the visit on school attendance. This will support a further understanding of the strategies schools are deploying to address absence but also the barriers that schools are experiencing in relation to school attendance and any use of alternative provision as a means to supporting young people back into education.

15. Conclusions and Recommendations

15.1 School attendance has not returned to pre-pandemic levels and the focus in 2024/25 will be on the support needed for schools, services and most importantly families to improve absence levels. It should also be recognised that this is a significant and long-term complex issue. However, Trafford's positive attendance data overall should also be celebrated whilst we know there is more to do.

15.2 We will endeavour through a multi-agency approach to continue to support schools in removing barriers and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school through our strategic approach.