

Report to:	EDUCATION ATTAINMENT IMPROVEMENT BOARD
Date:	18 October 2022
Reporting Officer:	Catherine Moseley – Head of Access Services
Subject:	WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE
Report Summary:	Regular school attendance is essential to ensure our children and young people are able to attain reach their potential and recover lost learning due to the pandemic. This report informs the Board of the work that is being done to implement the new guidance issued by government of 'Working together to improve attendance'. Subject to legislation passing through parliament, this guidance will be statutory from September 2023.
Recommendations:	That the board notes the content of the report
Corporate Plan:	The proposals contained within this report will support the theme of starting well, aspirations and hopes.
Policy Implications:	None currently but the reported DfE guidance will necessitate policy change in future and further governance report will be brought to EAIB and Executive Cabinet
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	<p>This change in legislation will require an full review of finances for the Access team, the team currently trade schools attendance services, if this must now be provided free of charge. The DfE have carried out an assessment of cost using HM Treasury Green book, with comparing existing work against the proposed changes. This will be considered as part of the review, it is recommended proposed changes are presented to members outlining how Tameside's proposed changes.</p> <p>The DfE's view is that the discharge of these new duties, does not require specific funding and should be delivered by integrating services to work alongside other initiatives such as supporting families and family hubs to succeed.</p> <p><i>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance-improving-the-consistency-of-support-new-burdens-assessment/school-attendance-improving-the-consistency-of-support-new-burdens-assessment</i></p>
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	<p>As this is a preparatory report in expectation of the changing legislation there are no immediate legal implications.</p> <p>In due course when the guidance become statutory the authority and schools will have to amend their policies accordingly, which will be subject to the necessary due diligence, governance and decision making at that time.</p>
Risk Management:	Without a priority around attendance, there is a risk that our children and young people will not reach their potential and catch up on lost learning due to the pandemic.

Access to Information:

NON-CONFIDENTIAL

This report does not contain information, which warrants its consideration in the absence of the Press or members of the public.

Background Information:

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Catherine Moseley, Head of Access Services



Telephone: 0161 342 3302



e-mail: catherine.moseley@tameside.gov.uk

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Members will recall that at the March Board meeting an update on school attendance was provided. The report provided information on a consultation on school attendance and improving the consistency of support to schools and it also provided information on the outcome of a consultation from 2019 on children not in school.
- 1.2 Earlier this year, the government published its white paper and several pieces of guidance. Many of these touched on school attendance. The main piece of guidance is [Working together to improve school attendance](#).
- 1.3 The Working together to improve attendance guidance is to help schools, academy trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance including roles and responsibilities. From September 2022, this will replace all previous guidance on school attendance except for statutory guidance for parental responsibility measures.
- 1.4 The guidance makes clear the values the DfE places on school attendance. It also states that:
- securing good attendance cannot be seen in isolation;
 - effective practices for improvement must be closely linked with curriculum, behaviour, bullying, special education needs support, pastoral and mental health and wellbeing, and effective use of resources such as the pupil premium;
 - attendance cannot be improved through a single member of staff or organisation and must be a concerted effort across all school staff, the trust or governing body, the local authority and other local partners.
- 1.5 It is important to note that this guidance is non statutory. This means it is currently a set of expectations for schools, rather than legal duties. The guidance will remain in place until such time that it becomes statutory through the Schools Bill. This will be no sooner than September 2023.

2. EXPECTATIONS OF SCHOOLS

- 2.1 The guidance states that all schools have a continuing responsibility to proactively manage and improve attendance. The guidance sets out six key priorities that schools are expected to deliver on in order to manage and improve attendance effectively. These are summarised as follows:
- 2.2 Schools are expected to:
- develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance and is an integral part of the school's ethos;
 - have a clear school attendance policy that all staff, pupils and parents understand. This policy should be easily accessible to leaders, staff, pupils and parents;
 - accurately complete admissions and attendance registers and have effective day-to-day processes in place to follow up when absence occurs;
 - regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance. Effective strategies then need to be put in place;
 - build strong relationships with families, seek to understand the barriers to attendance and work with families to help remove these. Schools should treat all pupils and parents with dignity. This supports the recognition that poor attendance is habitual and prevention and early intervention is critical;
 - 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.

2.3 As this is currently non statutory guidance, schools may be working towards these expectations, rather than already meeting them and schools do not need to urgently implement new policies or procedures.

2.4 However schools may find it useful to review their current attendance policies or introduce one if a policy is not already in place. The guidance sets out some key points that should be included in school attendance policies as a minimum:

- The attendance and punctuality expectations of pupils and parents, including start and close of the day, register closing times and the processes for requesting leaves of absence and informing the school of the reason for an unexpected absence.
- The name and contact details of the senior leader responsible for the strategic approach to attendance in school.
- Information and contact details of the school staff who pupils and parents should contact about attendance on a day-to-day basis, such as a form tutor, attendance officer, etc., and for more detailed support on attendance, such as a head of year, pastoral lead or family liaison officer, etc.
- The school's day-to-day processes for managing attendance, for example first day calling and processes to follow up on unexplained absence.
- How the school is promoting and incentivising good attendance.
- The school's strategy for using data to target attendance improvement efforts to the pupils or pupil cohorts who need it most.
- The school's strategy for reducing persistent and severe absence, including how access to wider support services will be provided to remove the barriers to attendance and when support will be formalised in conjunction with the local authority.
- The point at which fixed penalty notices for absence and other sanctions will be sought if support is not appropriate (e.g. for an unauthorised holiday in term time), not successful or not engaged with.

3. EXPECTATIONS ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES

3.1 As part of the Government's drive to ensure attendance is an issue shared across all relevant organisations, the guidance sets out the expectations on local authorities. In summary, these are:

- Carefully track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools that need the most focus on which to provide support and focus its efforts on to unblock area-wide barriers to attendance.
- Have a School Attendance Support Team that provides a number of core functions free of charge to all schools. As part of this, schools should be provided with a named point of contact in the School Attendance Support Team who can support with queries and advice.
- All schools including independent schools will have a termly targeting support meeting
- Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through their Virtual School.

4. IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

4.1 There are some significant new expectations on schools and the local authority and work has already begun to implement the expectation within the guidance in time for September 2023.

4.2 We have:

- Established an initial steering group has been formed which will be expanded in the coming school year to include headteachers.
- Formulated an action plan

- Developed a programme of webinars for schools on school attendance matters and the new school attendance support services. This is being communicated to schools in the Autumn Term
- Begun to work on respective roles and responsibilities for the new School Attendance Support Service within the Council including Early Help; Youth Justice; Virtual School; Educational Psychology
- Begun work to evaluate the impact on attendance traded services and the income generated through this work
- Continued to honour service level agreements with schools
- Continued to provide training for schools on good attendance practice
- Continued to provide support and networking opportunities for schools through termly Tameside Attendance Groups
- Continue strategic engagement from the Education Welfare Service at existing networks (MARAC, early help panels Tameside Attendance Groups, governor networks)
- Begun work on developing a pilot agenda for termly meetings with schools
- Begun to evaluate the additional capacity needed for the statutory School Attendance Support Service including the need for regular data analysis of each school
- Begun to evaluate the impact of the statutory School Attendance Support Service on other statutory work undertaken by the Education Welfare Service for example, supporting children who are electively home educated; supporting children who are asylum seekers or refugees; ensuring children in employment and entertainment are safeguarded; providing safeguarding training to schools; ensuring single justice process is followed for all attendance prosecutions; supporting children with medical conditions unable to attend school
- Requested external legal advice on behalf of GM authorities on the responsibilities for education of children otherwise than at school

4.3 Activity planned for Autumn Term 2022

- Pilot termly attendance meeting with some schools
- Develop a pro forma for attendance plan for severely absent pupils
- Ensure schools are aware of the new guidance and developing plans through Tameside Attendance Groups (TAG)
- Begin to develop new Tameside multi agency attendance strategy
- Reassure schools that existing service level agreements will be honoured

4.4 Activity planned for Spring Term 2023

- Finalise a draft attendance strategy and report to Executive Cabinet and Education Attainment and Improvement Board
- Develop a register for children not in school
- Ensure communication with parents begins about the new School Attendance Support Service and Children Not in School requirements

4.5 Activity planned for Summer Term 2023

- Multi agency attendance conference to launch the new School Attendance Support Team and attendance strategy
- Review parenting order process
- Review education supervision order process
- Publicise new system to enable parents to notify the Council when they elect to home educate

4.6 Activity for September 2023

- New parental guidance on support for school attendance and children not in school published
- Develop local offer to support improved school attendance

5. OFSTED REPORT – SECURING GOOD ATTENDANCE AND TACKLING PERSISTENT ABSENCE

- 5.1 In February 2022, Ofsted published a report on attendance [Securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/103111/securing-good-attendance-and-tackling-persistent-absence.pdf). The report looked at different aspects of school attendance and how schools tackle the challenges, particularly post covid lockdowns.
- 5.2 The report identified a number of common features in schools that improve attendance or maintain high levels of attendance. In these schools, leaders:
- have high expectations for every pupil's attendance at school
 - communicate these expectations clearly, strongly and consistently to parents and to pupils
 - set expectations about attendance from the outset – from Nursery onwards
 - explain to parents and pupils why good attendance is important and how it helps pupils to achieve
 - listen to parents carefully to find out why their children are not attending well enough so that they can act accordingly
 - challenge parents who do not make sure that their children attend, but also offer support where needed
 - have the right people in place to have these conversations with parents
 - ensure that attendance is always recorded accurately
 - systematically analyse attendance information so that they can see patterns and trends
 - use this analysis to target their actions, both for individuals and at a whole-school level
 - make sure that attendance is 'everyone's business' in school
 - understand that good attendance does not happen in isolation – there is an interrelationship between attendance and the quality of the school's curriculum, ethos, behaviour and inclusivity
 - do not stop pushing for whole-school improvement once attendance reaches the national average
 - see the process of securing good attendance for all pupils as an ongoing process, never something that is 'finished'
- 5.3 Schools have found that some new challenges have emerged since the start of the autumn term 2021. These include:
- higher than usual numbers of pupils with non COVID related illnesses
 - families that went to red list countries in the summer to visit family then did not return at the start of term because of the cost of isolating in hotels, or could not afford the flights back
 - families who say that they have not had a holiday for a long time, so take a holiday, or a previously cancelled holiday, in term time (though some schools are reporting fewer than normal term-time holidays)
 - parents keeping children home unnecessarily because of proximity to COVID; a relative or another child in a separate class testing positive, for example, and finding it hard to move on from the 'bubble' mentality
 - families isolating before a family event, such as a wedding or a holiday
 - pupils attending sporadically because of disaffection following the national lockdowns
- 5.4 The most recent attendance data from Tameside schools certainly illustrates that we are following the national trend.

Education Scorecard	Date updated:	01/09/2022								
Name of indicator	Latest data point	Previous data point	Previous data point	Current data point	National	SN position (if applicable)	GM position (if applicable)	Target (national averages)	Direction of travel	
Rate of EHE pupils per 1,000	July 2022	5.7	5.3	5.5	-	-	-	-	↑	
Overall absence (rolling: autumn, autumn & spring, full year)	Autumn & Spring 202122	-	3.58	7.06	6.9	1	5	6.9	↑	
Persistent absence (rolling: autumn, autumn & spring, full year)	Autumn & Spring 202122	-	8.34	20.11	23.5	1	5	23.5	↑	

- 5.5 Heads also described situations where 'possible covid' appears to be used as an excuse by some families whose children are usually poor attenders. Schools do encourage the family to test the child, however current lateral flow test availability is a problem and children can stay away from school for 10 days. Some parents still think that remote education can be provided for non covid related circumstances, such as being on holiday, which is not the case.
- 5.6 It appears that the provision of remote education during national lockdowns has negatively affected some pupils' perceptions of the need to be in school, particularly in secondary schools.
- 5.7 There are still increased requests from parents for elective home education. While these may not be as high as they were at the peak of the pandemic, they continue to be at an increased level from pre covid.
- 5.8 Conversely, some schools are now seeing pupils who were previously poor attenders attending well. Schools attribute this to the work that they did with vulnerable pupils during the national lockdowns. Some of these pupils attended school when schools were closed to most. During this time, colleagues in schools were able to work more intensively than usual with pupils individually and in smaller groups. This led to some 'poor patterns of attendance being cracked'. Many families seem just to want their children to be back at school, following such long periods of time at home.
- 5.9 The report highlights key components of securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence:
- Communicating expectations to parents
 - Communicating expectations to pupils
 - Finding out what the problem is
 - Having the right people in place

- Noticing patterns
- The importance of ambition
- The role of governors
- Getting beneath the surface
- Working with each individual

5.10 The new School Attendance Support Service will take the good practice highlighted in this report and feed it back through the attendance networking groups in the borough.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 There is no doubt that ensuring good attendance is rightly going to be a focus for schools, the Council, partners, Ofsted and government over the coming years. Tameside has already identified attendance a priority action and historically, has good attendance that exceeds Greater Manchester and statistical neighbours. We are in a good position to take this work forward in partnership with our schools and partners and will report further on this important area of work later in the school year.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 As set out at the front of the report.