

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 7 September 2022

Subject: School Attendance in Manchester

Report of: Director of Education

Summary

This report covers a presentation reviewing school attendance in Manchester in 2021/2022 and a summary looking at Manchester's plans for the implementation of the new DFE guidance: *Working together to improve school attendance*. The 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 by September 2023.

The presentation highlights the main implications of the new guidance and summarises Manchester's strategic approach to improve school attendance in 2022/23.

Recommendations

The committee is asked to note the changes in 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' and discuss the implications, opportunities and challenges it presents for schools and the Local Authority. The committee is asked to comment on the proposed strategic approach and next steps.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city
Through the learning and education system children are informed and understand environmental issues and the negative impact of carbon, promoting safe and healthy lives.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS/Contribution to the Strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

1.0 Introduction

In May 2022 the Department for Education (DfE) published working together to improve school attendance (Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities). The guidance will apply from September 2022.

Nationally, there has been a renewed focus on school attendance since the beginning of 2022:

- The Children's Commissioner, recognising that school attendance is lower than pre-pandemic levels, has made absence or children missing education one of her key priorities. Her findings were published in *Voices of England's Missing Children in June 2022*.
- The Department for Education (DfE) published new school attendance guidance in May 2022 which included significant changes in policy with the much sharper focus on a 'whole system' response to attendance: *Working Together to Improve School Attendance*.

The new DfE guidance sets out specific requirements for schools, local authorities and partners to work closely together to improve school attendance.

This includes:

- A requirement for all schools to share attendance information and work more closely with local partners informing a stronger multi-disciplinary approach to attendance.
- For the local authority to have a specific Attendance Support Team and provide more support and challenge to schools and settings.
- For partners to help breakdown out of school barriers to attendance.

The presentation in **Appendix 1** provides an overview of the main changes including Manchester's position in delivering the guidance.

Summary (Unvalidated) Attendance data (2021/2022)

1.1 School attendance in Manchester continues to be strength of the city and significant strides have been made to support improved levels of school attendance over the past year following the disruptions and impact of the pandemic on school attendance and closures.

1.2 The majority of schools have adopted Manchester's model school attendance policy which has provided them with a robust and structured framework to work with. There is ongoing communication from the Local Authority attendance team with schools throughout the year to support them with a range of attendance matters either through direct support in school, workshops, attendance support helpline, modelling good practices to engage parents and a planned conference for the Autumn term. Successful partnership working with the Early Help Hubs and the school attendance team has also provided schools with an invaluable

resource in supporting with families that have a range of complex issues affecting their children’s level of attendance.

Phase	Percentage Persistent Absenteeism (PA) pupils	Percentage Overall Attendance
Primary	20.3%	94.0%
PRUs	74.7%	64.5%
Secondary	24.7%	92.5%
Special School	54.0%	82.0%
All Schools	23.5%	93.0%

- Half Term 1 (September – October) showed a demonstrable increase from Summer 21 with 94.2% overall attendance.
- Reasons for absence show disproportionately high levels of ‘illness’ and medical absences which will be due to ongoing cases of COVID across the city in late Autumn and Spring term. The use of the X code was disallowed in Spring 22 and schools used the ‘illness’ code to record and monitor covid related illness and absences.

Persistent Absenteeism

1.3 Despite Manchester’s strong position on overall attendance a significant proportion of our pupils were persistently absent (PA). PA is 90% attendance or lower, the equivalent of missing 19 school days):

Persistent Absenteeism (PA) Percentage (%)	
Primary School	20.3
Secondary School	24.7
Manchester Overall	23.5

1.4 The impact of percentage absences can be reviewed in slide 4 for further information. DfE research shows that overall absence had a negative link to attainment, with every extra day missed associated with a lower chance of achieving 5 or more good GCSEs or equivalent at grades A* to C including in English and Mathematics or gaining the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).

2.0 Manchester’s Strategic Approach

The implementation of the guidance provides an opportunity to further develop good practice and work with school leaders to reset our priorities for school attendance. The Local Authority will work in partnership with the DfE to develop its strategic response and monitor the impact of intervention in the preparation for September

2023. This will incorporate a request for a persistent absence action from each school causing concern.

Key focus in 2022/2023 will be:

- **Implementation of a stakeholder engagement strategy** to increase communication and review of impact across services; in support of raising school attendance. This will include working closely with our internal front-line teams as well as external partners to raise awareness of school attendance and provide them with the tools to support families.
- **Ensure schools, education teams and front-line services work more closely** to tackle poor attendance.
- Work closely with schools and ensure more pupils who are persistently absent or severely absent return to school.
- Increase accountability within schools in terms of monitoring and evaluation of impact of intervention and action. Schools will have the opportunity to seek support through targeted support and network meetings which will be district led.

3.0 Challenges

There are key challenges linked to implementing the new guidance in Manchester and successfully tackling long term absences. Some of the poor attendance can be linked to holidays taken in term time and this will be addressed through revised school policy and practice. However, there are a significant proportion of our pupils with more complex needs who have not returned to full time education post COVID, which reflects the national picture and is a concern raised by the Children's Commissioner. Although there are no quick or easy solutions for tackling the out of school barriers which include for example, anxiety-based school avoidance or continued parental concerns about COVID over the last year we have been developing and implementing strategies with schools to ensure that pupils who are severely absent will have more targeted support to enable them to access a full offer of education and remain safeguarded through a graduated approach.

These include:

- **Targeting severely absent pupils not known to frontline services:** We expect schools to be proactive in tackling severe absence. We are therefore developing models and forums that will provide schools with opportunities to more easily access support, advice and guidance from front line teams such as early help or social work. These include Advice and Guidance Service 'drop ins' and school cluster meetings. Ultimately where a school is concerned about the welfare of a pupil not attending school they should follow Manchester safeguarding procedures.
- **Wythenshawe Attendance Pilot:** In Wythenshawe these approaches are being tested through a pilot between primary schools and the 'front door' that looks to support schools where they have done all they can to improve school attendance and where severe absence is continuing to cause concern.
- **Targeting Families with Social Workers:** A minority of severely absent pupils are already known to social work teams. Where this is the case we can break down the data and target families with high absence already known to

social work teams. We have held education sessions for these social workers to help them in their work to support the family to ensure the children return to full time school.

- **Coproduced and disseminated an Anxiety based school avoidance pathway:** This is a tool which sets out early indications of anxiety based school avoidance and a graduated response for schools which has been implemented over the last 2 years.
- **Team Around the School:** Developed over the last 2 years, this is an approach whereby a multi agency team is convened around a school in response to specific issues. This approach includes where there are identified cohorts of children with poor school attendance. In addition to this the Secondary PRU was successful in bidding for grant funding to establish a multi agency 'taskforce around' the school which includes ensuring young people are accessing education.
- In the next academic year termly **Targeted Support Meetings which are a requirement of the new DFE guidance** will also provide support and challenge on attendance, but specifically on severely absent pupils.
- **SAFE programme:** Manchester will receive £1.2m funding from government for the next 3 years to implement this programme whereby on behalf of schools, the Local Authority will commission a suite of evidence based interventions to secure regular school attendance and positive outcomes for young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

4.0 Next steps

To deliver an effective strategic approach and to help improve school attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism.

The following next steps have been implemented:

- Deliver a Manchester strategic approach that forms part of our Inclusion Strategy which recognises that Attendance is Everybody's Business.
- Create a 'joined up' approach with internal front-line services - such as social care, Youth Justice and early help- education services and schools improving communication and partnership working.
- Promote the importance of school attendance to external partners and ensure they know where to go for support.
- Monitor our city-wide data and target schools who need additional support through targeted support meetings or network meetings.
- Host an Attendance Conference for all schools on 6th October 2022

5.0 Recommendations

- The committee is asked to note the strong attendance data for 21/22 and the areas for improvement in 22/23
- The committee is asked to note the renewed national focus on attendance and our Manchester strategic approach to deliver the new DfE guidance
- The committee is asked to actively promote school attendance in their day to day work at ward level

- The committee is asked to comment on the proposed approach and next steps to support raising school attendance across the city and reduce persistent and severe absenteeism.