

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 6 September 2023

Subject: School Attendance in 2022 / 2023

Report of: Strategic Director of Children and Education Services

Summary

This report provides a summary of attendance data in Manchester for the academic year 2022/2023. It also reviews some of the activity that has taken place over the course of the last academic year and outlines the strategic approach for 2023/2024 for Committee Members.

Recommendations

- To note the progress made on school attendance in 2022/2023
 - To approve the strategic approach for 2023/2024 which both meets the DfE non statutory requirements and improves support to schools.
 - To approve the strategic approach for 2023/2024 which looks to build a partnership consensus around attendance so that a multi-disciplinary approach is embedded across Children's Services and wider agencies.
 - To build a 'think attendance' approach into Members ward level activity so that attendance at school is encouraged and promoted with all residents.
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Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

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

Our Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities.	Effective Children and Education Services are critical to ensuring our children are afforded opportunities and supported to connect and contribute to the city's sustainability and growth.
A highly skilled city: world class and home-grown talent sustaining the city's economic success.	Ensuring children and young people are supported and afforded the opportunity to access and achieve in the city; empowered and supported by the delivery of a strong and cohesive system that works for all children.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities.	Improving education and social care services that are connected to the wider partnership build the resilience of children and families needed to achieve their potential and be integrated into their communities.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work.	Improving outcomes for the children and families across the City, helps build and develop whole communities and increases the liability of the City
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth.	Successful services support successful families who are able to deliver continuing growth in the city

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

Department for Education *Working Together to Improve School Attendance*
[Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

1. Overview - National Context

- 1.1 The Department for Education (DfE) published new guidance for improving school attendance in May 2022 entitled '*Working Together to Improve School Attendance*'. This guidance is non statutory, and has been produced to help schools, multi academy trusts (MATs), governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance. Following public consultation and subject to Parliament, the Secretary of State has committed to this guidance becoming statutory when parliamentary time allows. The ambition is before September 2024.
- 1.2 For the most vulnerable pupils, regular attendance is an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and supported as well as achieving positive educational outcomes. Research has shown associations between regular absence from school and a number of extra-familial harms. This includes crime (90% of young offenders had been persistently absent) and serious violence (83% of knife possession offenders had been persistently absent in at least 1 of the 5 years of study).
- 1.3 The local authority has a crucial role in supporting pupils to overcome barriers to non- attendance and ensuring all children can access the full-time education to which they are entitled. As local authorities vary significantly in size, organisational approach and demographics, it is right that the specifics of attendance service delivery and how those roles are discharged should be determined locally to meet local needs of pupils, parents, and schools.
- 1.4 The expectations of Local Authorities in the guidance are as follows:

Local Authority Expectations	Rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises pupils, pupil cohorts and schools	Legal intervention: take forward attendance legal intervention where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with e.g., Fixed Penalty Notice	Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker
Communication and advice: regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best	Targeted Support Meetings: hold termly conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted	Multi-disciplinary support for families: provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where	Have a School Attendance Support Team which provides advice, guidance and support to schools

practice between schools and trusts within the area	actions	needed to tackle out of school barriers to attendance	
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1.5 The Secretary of State for Education has written to Directors of Children’s Services with a call to support strong attendance from day one of the new academic year 23/24. In particular, she urged Local Authorities to mobilise wider services and staff who have contact with parents and children to help to communicate the importance of a strong return to school in September 2023.

2. Attendance Data Overview in 2022 / 2023

2.1 In 2022 / 2023 Manchester saw a slight increase in its overall absence rate and Persistent Absence (PA) rate in comparison to 2021 / 2022.

School Phase	2021 / 2022		2022 / 2023		
	% Attendance HT 1 – 5	% PA pupils for HT 1-5 (16 days missed)	% Attendance HT 1 – 5	% Persistent Absence (PA) pupils for HT 1-5 (16 days missed)	Severe Absence (SA) Pupil 50% attendance or under
Primary	94%	20.3%	93.9%	20.6%	1.6%
Secondary	92.5%	24.7%	91.7%	25.7%	5.6%
Special	82%	54%	83.2%	51.6%	17.5%
CITY	93%	23.5%	92.6%	24%	3.9%

* SA unavailable in 2021/2022

National Data

	Overall	Primary	Secondary	Special
National*	92.6%	94%	90.8%	87%
Manchester	92.6%	93.9%	91.7%	83.2%

*DfE data is currently ‘experimental and representative of a sample of 87% of schools nationally.

2.2 Further observations of overall 2022/2023 data:

- Primary was in line with attendance in 21/22 with the biggest drop in attendance at the secondary phase. Special Schools saw an increase in overall attendance and a reduction in persistent absence compared to last year.
- 2022 / 2023 was a challenging year for school attendance. Around Christmas time schools were impacted by public health concerns (scarlet fever etc) and

there were five teacher strike days within the course of the year. From the strike day analysis there was a demonstrable impact on attendance for schools with partial openings, where the strike day fell on a particular day towards the end of the week and on attendance when schools were open between strike days.

- Of the 7.4% absence across all schools this academic year, 4.2% was authorised absence (e.g. illness, medical appointments) and 3.2% was unauthorised absence (e.g. holidays, no reasons given, arrival after register closes).
- Attendance Code analysis shows that 0.57% of unauthorised absences were related to holidays taken in term time.
- National Data from the DfE is currently classed as 'experimental' but it does provide an indication of how Manchester LA compares to other local authorities. National data shows a positive correlation to the Manchester data for primary.
- Manchester secondary school attendance data is better than the national averages. However, Manchester special school attendance is below the national average.
- The ward level analysis (see appendix 1) shows that the area in the City most affected by absence is Wythenshawe. Outlier schools within the locality have been offered multi-disciplinary support through a Team Around the School intervention or a Targeted Support Meeting. More information on 2022/23 strategic work can be seen under section 3.
- There remains disproportionality in attendance for some ethnic groups post-pandemic (see appendix 2). However, support and intervention is being provided to schools through the Targeted Support Meetings (see 3.5) and termly networks.

3. Overview of Attendance Work in 2022-23

Strategic Overview

- 3.1 There has been a significant amount of work on attendance throughout the academic year with the overall aim of shifting the focus of the Council's approach from a largely statutory/legal function to one that is more focussed on school and family support. The continued development of strong partnership working to support schools has included:
- the promotion of the Anxiety Based School Avoidance (ABSA) pathway;
 - the launch of the Inclusions Strategy Toolkit;
 - access to early help support where attendance is a concern;
 - Collaboration with M Thrive where low level mental health or anxiety is impacting pupils.
- 3.2 In October 2022, the Council hosted an **Attendance Conference** at the Ethiad Stadium. 220 delegates attended the event representative from over 90 schools. The Conference delivered national updates, advice and guidance from OFSTED, DfE and National Leaders of Education. The aim of the conference was to raise the profile of school attendance and provide strategic updates from the national regulatory bodies including the DfE in light of proposed

legislation changes from September 2022.

- 3.3 An important requirement of *working together to improve school attendance* is the delivery of **Targeted Support Meetings (TSM)**. These are termly meetings held with every school that focuses on the school's attendance data and pupils causing concern. We have piloted an approach in 2022/23 with 10 schools (including both primary and secondary schools in Wythenshawe) as we look to develop our strategic approach in 2023/24. The TSM pilot has been well received by schools who have appreciated input from the attendance team on a range of areas including strategy, policy and pupil level advice and guidance. The TSM model will be rolled out to all 186 schools over the course of the next academic year.
- 3.4 Good collaboration between children's social care and schools forms a vital part of improving attendance for some families. This year we have piloted a new framework in Wythenshawe which improves the communication between schools and the 'front door' where the lack of school attendance is deemed 'neglectful'. This will be rolled out to all areas in Autumn 2023 with the aim of improving pathways into front line services if appropriate.
- 3.5 Support and challenge to families on school attendance is a central part of social work. As well as improving access to Children's Services where this is required we have also been looking at further developing how to build strong education action into social work plans. For example, challenging families to improve their children's school attendance.
- 3.6 In Manchester, for many years school attendance forms a significant part of the school quality assurance process. Live school attendance data is collected directly from schools, reported to senior officers weekly and analysed each half term. A half termly attendance report is provided to all schools so they can review their performance against other schools in the city. Other performance information is reviewed at monthly School Quality Assurance meetings. In cases where there have been specific concerns about a school's attendance, the headteacher and chair of governors are invited to attend a support and challenge meeting for a discussion about what the school is doing to improve attendance and what is needed for it to improve. The outcome of this meeting may be, for example, the offer of an attendance audit or a multiagency team around the school.
- 3.7 In addition to this, attendance data for the City is regularly reported at headteacher briefings and this information is also shared with Chairs of Governors.

Statutory Attendance

- 3.8 A core function of the attendance team is the deployment of statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education. In 2023:
 - the team issued 8,650 fixed penalty notices (to end of July 2023). 75% of

- these are for holidays taken in term time;
- PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) interviews were re-introduced for families who have multiple attendance offences. The family are invited to provide evidence, but it also gives them an opportunity to have face-to-face conversations about some of the barriers they face.
 - 542 notifications were issued which resulted in 243 orders for School Attendance Orders (SAO), for failing families to register their child at a school. Following an SAO the vast majority of families accept the offer of a school place.

4. Strategic Approach 2023 / 2024

- 4.1 In order to deliver the requirements of the DfE '*Working Together to Improve School Attendance*' and to maintain and improve city rates in line with national averages, we have developed a strategic approach for 2023 / 24 that fulfils both our statutory requirements and continues to build partnership working on attendance with schools and wider services across the city.
- 4.2 The main focus for 2023/24 will be rolling out the DfE's Targeted Support Meeting (TSM) model which recommends that all schools have a targeted support meeting every term with local authority officers. This would require 546 meetings in Manchester and therefore the approach in the city will be to provide at least one targeted support meeting for all schools next year and thereafter proportionate to need. As well as being a requirement of the new DfE guidance, our pilot (mentioned in 3.5) has shown that the outcomes for school are 'positive' as a result of these conversations.
- 4.3 In partnership with One Education we have coordinated a comprehensive Manchester Attendance training and traded offer for schools in 23/24 to supplement the targeted support meetings. This includes bespoke training sessions for strategic leaders in schools to support the development of effective attendance strategy and resources in school.
- 4.4 Maintaining a focus on attendance with our Children's Services workforce is another key area of focus. In 2023 we will:
- Continue with support sessions for social work teams looking for support on education.
 - Continue the work of the virtual school in improving social work plans to reflect positive education outcomes
 - Host a Children's Services staff engagement event in September with an attendance focus.
 - Co-locate three attendance officers in our three Early Help Hubs to support with education/attendance queries.
- 4.5 Mobilising the workforce of all teams that come into contact with children was the challenge from the Minister of State for Education and in 2023 / 2024 we will:

- Take an Attendance Charter to our Children's Board to enable partners to sign up to a shared approach for tackling school absence. Each agency/service will be expected to support the breaking down of out of school barriers to attendance and will commit to do so through the shared charter. The request will be for services to add attendance to their service delivery plans in terms of key actions they can deliver and support.
- Improving our connections with health services such as GPs and Mental Health commissioning to ensure all agencies 'think attendance'. For example, making sure families return to school following a medical appointment rather than take a day off and looking at opportunities for services to deliver appointments in school so attendance is not impacted.
- In partnership with Education Psychologists, review the Anxiety Based School Avoidance (ABSA) pathway so schools can support young people where mental health is affecting their engagement with school. The ABSA pathway will be a key support tool for schools when addressing needs in this difficult area.
- Implementation of the strategic approach will be monitored through the Manchester Attendance Steering Group which will promote a multi-disciplinary approach to improving attendance.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 5.1 School attendance has not returned to pre-pandemic levels and the focus in 2023/24 will be on the support needed for schools, services and most importantly families to improve absence levels. However, it is recognised that this is a significant and long-term challenge.
- 5.2 The TSM approach allows us to reallocate resources within Education to directly support schools whilst the ongoing work and 'call to action' with frontline teams will support the breaking down of out of school barriers to attendance.
- 5.3 We will endeavour through a multi-disciplinary approach to support schools in removing barriers and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.
- 5.4 Members are asked:
- To note the progress made on school attendance in 2022/2023.
 - To approve the strategic approach for 2023/2024 which both meets the DfE requirements and improves support to schools.
 - To approve the strategic approach for 2023/2024 which looks to build a partnership consensus around attendance so that it is considered everybody's business.
 - To consider a 'think attendance' approach into their ward level activity so that attendance at school is encouraged and promoted with all residents.