

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 17 July 2024
Subject:	School Attendance Headline Outcomes (provisional) & Strategic Overview
Report of:	Director of Education

Summary

The report provides the committee with a summary of the 2023-24 provisional school attendance data and the proposed changes to school attendance legislation as outlined in the revised Department for Education (DfE) guidance '*Working together to improve school attendance*' statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities. The revised national guidance is effective from August 2024 in preparation for the next academic year.

As seen nationally, there have been improvements in overall school attendance and a reduction in persistent absence. The provisional data for Manchester shows improvements in overall school attendance across phases and a reduction in both persistent and severe absence rates.

The improvements in school attendance reflect some of the impact of universal and targeted support provided to schools in 2023-24. Outcomes correlate with an increase in engagement with the Local Authority attendance support team and wider services as part of a multi-disciplinary approach to supporting schools with reducing pupil absence rates.

The report reviews activity that has taken place over the course of the current academic year and an outline of the strategic approach for 2024/2025 for Committee Members.

Recommendations

- To note the progress made in relation to the Manchester school attendance data (provisional) in 2023/2024.
- To approve the strategic approach for 2024/2025 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.

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	

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 can deliver continuing growth in the city

Contact Officers:

Name:	Sean McKendrick
Position:	Acting Strategic Director of Childrens and Education Services
E-mail:	Sean.McKendrick@manchester.gov.uk

Name:	Amanda Corcoran
Position:	Director of Education
E-mail:	Amanda.corcoran@manchester.gov.uk

Name:	Sonia Schofield
Position:	Thematic Lead for Attendance
E-mail:	sonia.schofield@manchester.gov.uk

Name:	Ed Haygarth
Position:	Statutory Lead for Attendance
E-mail:	Ed.Haygarth@manchester.gov.uk ed.haygarth@manchester.gov.uk

Background Documents (available for public inspection):

The following national documents have been used to support the content of the report.

Department for Education *Working Together to Improve School Attendance* (August 19th 2024)

This should be read in conjunction with the [statutory guidance on parental measures for school attendance and behaviour](#)

1. Overview - National Context

- 1.1 The Department for Education (DfE) published the revised guidance for improving school attendance in March 2024. The guidance is statutory from August 2024, and schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities must have regard to it as part of their efforts to maintain high levels of school attendance.
- 1.2 The guidance has 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 reflects 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 The guidance includes a new National Framework for issuing penalty notices which reflects changes to the law introduced through the Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. These changes have been reflected in the newly launched Manchester 'Attendance Code of Conduct' which has been issued to all schools/academies in June 2024. The Code of conduct proposes that all schools have robust policies detailing how they will support pupils to attend as regularly as possible and sets out how legal intervention including penalty notices should be used in promoting good attendance by local authorities.
- 1.5 The local authority, statutory safeguarding partners and other local partners have a crucial role in supporting pupils to overcome those barriers and ensuring all children can access the full-time education to which they are entitled. The Local Authority is viewed as a facilitator of the wider support needed by individual families and schools to overcome barriers in the short term.
- 1.6 The expectations of Local Authorities in the revised national guidance are as follows:
 - **Rigorously track local attendance data** to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools, and unblocks area wide barriers to attendance.
 - **Have a School Attendance Support Team** which provides the following core functions free of charge to all schools: Communication and advice to schools 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 where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with. Legal intervention should always be a last resort when all other avenues of support have been exhausted.
- **Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker** through their Virtual School.

2. Attendance Data Overview in 2023 / 2024

2.1 The table below shows the attendance data for the 2023/2024 academic year.

The data presented is the annual cumulative data for half term 1-5 Manchester data (provisional).

Please note: A pupil enrolment is identified as persistently absent if 10% or more of possible sessions are missed, and severely absent if 50% or more of possible sessions are missed. 10% of sessions translates to around 7 days of absence across the term.

Sector	2022 / 2023			2023/2024		
	Attendance	Persistent Absence	Severe Absence	Attendance	Persistent Absence	Severe Absence
Primary	93.9%	20.6%	1.6%	94.4%	15.6%	1%
Secondary	91.7%	25.7%	5.6%	91.8%	21.9%	4%
Special	83.2%	51.6%	17.5%	84.8%	41.8%	9.3%
Overall	92.6%	24%	3.9%	93%	19.4%	2.6%

2.2 Analysis of provisional Half Term 1-5 Cumulative data in 2023-24:

- The current academic year's attendance data demonstrates improvements in all areas of the key performance measures for school attendance.
- Overall attendance across phases has improved by **0.4%** which equates to **57,000** more days of school attendance this year (or 114,000 sessions). *This is a significant improvement.*
- The current data shows improvements across all phases in reducing persistent absenteeism. Persistent absence across phases has reduced by **4.6%** meaning approximately 3,000 fewer pupils were persistently absent in 23/24 in comparison to the last academic year.
- Primary attendance demonstrates the biggest year-on-year improvement

North Locality					
School Ward	Establishment	% Attendance	% Absence	Percentage of 10% PA pupils	Percentage of 50% SA pupils
Ancoats & Beswick Ward	6 Schools	93.19%	6.81%	17.12%	3.39%
Charlestown Ward	8 Schools	91.82%	8.18%	22.33%	3.20%
Cheetham Ward	8 Schools	95.20%	4.80%	13.65%	1.61%
Clayton & Openshaw Ward	7 Schools	95.09%	4.91%	13.71%	1.52%
Crumpsall Ward	7 Schools	92.14%	7.86%	24.21%	1.86%
Harpurhey Ward	9 Schools	92.76%	7.24%	19.46%	3.20%
Higher Blackley Ward	10 Schools	91.55%	8.45%	22.63%	4.00%
Miles Platting & Newton Heath Ward	7 Schools	93.64%	6.36%	19.02%	1.56%
Moston Ward	6 Schools	94.22%	5.78%	17.26%	0.90%
Central Locality					
School Ward	Establishment	% Attendance	% Absence	Percentage of 10% PA pupils	Percentage of 50% SA pupils
Ardwick Ward	8 Schools	93.07%	6.93%	18.82%	3.84%
Gorton & Abbey Hey Ward	8 Schools	94.44%	5.56%	15.58%	1.56%
Hulme Ward	6 Schools	94.82%	5.18%	12.66%	1.13%
Levenshulme Ward	8 Schools	93.38%	6.62%	18.06%	2.63%
Longsight Ward	9 Schools	93.34%	6.66%	20.16%	1.94%
Moss Side Ward	5 Schools	93.71%	6.29%	18.48%	3.70%
Rusholme Ward	4 Schools	93.66%	6.34%	18.34%	2.32%
South Locality					
School Ward	Establishment	% Attendance	% Absence	Percentage of 10% PA pupils	Percentage of 50% SA pupils
Burnage Ward	6 Schools	94.27%	5.73%	15.60%	1.79%
Chorlton Ward	4 Schools	95.56%	4.44%	8.62%	0.50%
Chorlton Park Ward	7 Schools	90.75%	9.25%	25.09%	6.92%
Didsbury East Ward	6 Schools	93.13%	6.87%	18.27%	3.15%
Didsbury West Ward	4 Schools	92.37%	7.63%	21.37%	2.60%
Fallowfield Ward	2 Schools	93.01%	6.99%	21.31%	2.37%
Old Moat Ward	3 Schools	93.66%	6.34%	17.54%	1.17%
Whalley Range Ward	5 Schools	93.79%	6.21%	17.12%	1.30%
Withington Ward	4 Schools	94.72%	5.28%	14.47%	0.73%
Wythenshawe					
School Ward	Establishment	% Attendance	% Absence	Percentage of 10% PA pupils	Percentage of 50% SA pupils
Baguley Ward	7 Schools	92.13%	7.87%	21.80%	2.79%
Brooklands Ward	4 Schools	87.35%	12.65%	35.34%	8.13%
Northenden Ward	6 Schools	91.02%	8.98%	23.84%	3.41%

Sharston Ward	6 Schools	92.71%	7.29%	21.29%	1.46%
Woodhouse Park Ward	4 Schools	91.57%	8.43%	22.68%	4.34%

with an increase in attendance of **0.5%** and a decrease in persistent absence by **5%**.

- Secondary attendance shows a slight increase in overall attendance. However, the data shows a significant decrease is in the percentage of persistent absence. **3.8%** less pupils identified as persistently absent in comparison to the previous academic year.
- Special school data demonstrates overall improvements with a decrease in persistent absence from **51.6%** in 22/23 to **41.8%** in 23/24. The data also highlights a significant reduction in the number of pupils categorised as severely absent.
- Whilst holidays taken in term time remain at a high level in the current academic year, holiday coding equates to **0.7%** overall from the register code analysis.
- Authorised absence makes up **43% of all absences** and unexplained absence (unauthorised absence) makes up **32% of all absences**.

2.3 The attendance of children with SEND and children and young people with an Education, Health & Care plan remains a priority for the local authority. Although overall attendance has improved, in our secondary schools children with an EHCP had **78.77%** attendance in comparison to their non-SEND peers who had **92.81%** attendance. This data is the cumulative half term 1-5 data for the city.

3. Analysis of Ward Level Attendance Data & Targeted Intervention

The table below covers statutory school aged pupils only (primary and secondary aged children). The data is the cumulative half term 1-5 data by ward.

- 3.1 Analysis of ward level data shows the Brooklands Ward has the lowest levels of attendance across the city and highest rates of persistent absence. Further targeted support is planned in the autumn term for the Chorlton Park ward where there is a larger percentage of secondary schools.
- 3.2 Targeted intervention has been put in place for the Wythenshawe locality and wards to support raising attendance. A series of '**Attendance Sweeps**' have been undertaken in the summer term to support schools and settings with their raising attendance strategy. The Attendance sweeps have been supported by services across the locality including Social Care, Early Help, Wythenshawe Housing, and the Local Authority Attendance team.

During a targeted Attendance Sweep Local Services and the School's designated Attendance Officer will undertake a series of home visits to discuss reasons for their child's absence and address any barriers the family are experiencing to attending school. Local services who have supported the sweeps, have found the experience to be highly beneficial in terms of offering advice, support and guidance for families in collaboration with the school.

The sweeps have shown demonstrable impact on school attendance in half term 6 data with further sweeps planned for the autumn term in the Wythenshawe area. In one sweep 137 visits were conducted, and over 80% of children returned the following day and/or the following week which reflected the impact of the sweep on absence.

In one Secondary school, following the one-day sweep, Senior leaders confirmed pupils had improved attendance (75%) of the 32-pupil cohort visited. This shows demonstrable impact from the initial visits and sustainable improvements as part of a longer strategic approach to reducing absence.

- 3.3 The autumn sweeps will focus on pupils who have transitioned from primary school and ensuring they are attending their allocated secondary school. Where barriers are identified support will be provided through the multidisciplinary teams involved.

4. Statutory Attendance Processes and Analysis

- 4.1 In 23/24 the Local Authority attendance team have issued 7,500 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) to the beginning of July 24. The trajectory for 23/24 is reflective of the FPNs issued in the previous academic year. In 22/23 9,500 FPNs were issued by the Local Authority. However, the breakdown by reason has changed. In 22/23 the breakdown was 75% for holidays and 25% for sporadic absence. This year the attendance team have introduced additional 'support first' expectations of schools before requesting a penalty notice for sporadic absence. There is an expectation for schools to demonstrate their escalation of intervention and support first approach for families prior to a consideration for statutory action. This has resulted in a breakdown of **87%** for holidays and **13%** for sporadic absence in 2023/2024.

- 4.2 **PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence)** interviews were re-introduced for families in 23/24 who have multiple school 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 in sending their children to school. The meetings have been successful in working with families to support their child's reintegration to school through an agreed plan.

- 4.3 There has been a significant increase in the number of School Attendance Orders (SAO) issued in this academic year. An SAO is issued to families for failing to register a child at school. In the current year **164 SAOs have been issued to Manchester residents**. Following an SAO the vast majority of families accept the offer of a school place.

5. Targeting Support meetings

- 5.1 As patterns of attendance are habitual, early identification and support is essential for individual pupils in need of help. To enable this to happen, there is an expectation from the revised guidance for each local authority attendance team to organise regular Targeting Support Meetings (TSMs) with

schools. In the current academic year, the **attendance team have delivered 80 TSMs to schools**. The meetings have supported a shift in the work attendance officers are undertaking with schools and providing the opportunity for more focused support for schools at an earlier point.

The key outcomes have been:

- Agreeing action plans and joint approaches for severely absent pupils (where they do not already have a plan in place).
- Discussing and agreeing approaches for persistently absent where they have barriers to attendance that require a multi-agency response to overcome.
- Signposting to other services who can provide support and guidance for families.
- Where schools seek it, conducting data analysis, including comparisons to other schools in the geographical area or identifying areas to focus attendance efforts on.

5.2 In partnership with One Education we have developed a comprehensive Manchester Attendance training and traded offer for schools in 24/25 to supplement the targeted support meetings. This includes bespoke training sessions for attendance leads in schools to support the development of an effective attendance strategy.

5.3 Schools will also have access to the termly attendance network meetings facilitated by the Local Authority attendance team. The networks include representatives of other partners and services in these sessions such as health, youth justice and children's services to promote a multi-disciplinary approach.

6. Strategic Approach to School Attendance in 2024-25

6.1 To deliver the statutory duties of the DfE '*Working Together to Improve School Attendance*' and to further improve city rates in line with national averages, the strategic approach for the next academic year fulfils both statutory requirements and a continuation of wider partnership working with schools and wider services across the city. The development of the 'graduated approach to school attendance' will be launched in September. The approach 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.

6.2 Partnership working with social care and early help leads to address severe absence is being developed further. As well as improving access to Children's Services where this is required, the statutory lead for attendance has delivered briefings for social care colleagues 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.

- 6.3 In January 2025, Manchester City Council and One Education will deliver the Biannual Attendance **Conference** at the A J Bell Stadium. The Conference will deliver national updates, advice, and guidance from OFSTED, DfE and the Children's Commissioner. Other workshops and sessions will revisit and introduce the support available from local Manchester Services. The aim of the conference is to raise the profile of school attendance and provide strategic updates from the national regulatory bodies.
- 6.4 Mobilising the workforce of all teams that come into contact with children is the challenge from the Children's Commissioner for England and in 24/25 we will:
- Launch the 'Education Attendance Charter'. Asking wider services to pledge their commitment to an '**Education Attendance Charter**' so that everyone is aware of their responsibility for improving attendance. This charter is not just for staff in Education and Social Care, it includes Police, Health, Community and Voluntary sector, local businesses, and all Local Authority Staff.
 - Run a '**back to school**' attendance campaign for Manchester schools in the Autumn term. Utilising the resources from the national attendance campaign provided by the DfE for Local Authorities. The campaign will include some targeted work in August in the Whytheshawe wards which includes a campaign bus. The bus will be in operation for four days in August promoting the back-to-school campaign and support for parent/carers in the area.
 - **Improve our shared work 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 the One Education Educational Psychologists, **launch the Emotional Barriers to School Attendance (EBSA) guidance** and support pathways resource so schools can successfully work with children and young people where mental health is affecting their engagement with school. The EBSA guidance will be a key support tool for schools when addressing needs in this area. The guidance will be officially launched in September.
 - Implementation of the strategic approach will be monitored through the Manchester Attendance Steering Group which will promote a multi-disciplinary approach to improving attendance.
 - To work with senior leaders across the city, through our training and traded offer to schools to drive further improvements in school attendance.
 - The Local Authority will use the autumn Quality Assurance Professional school visit 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.
 - Implement a system for 'illness' reporting for schools. In line with the new guidance schools will be expected to report a child or young person who

has been absent due to illness after a continuous or cumulative period of 15 days.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 7.1 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. However, it is recognised that this is a significant and long-term challenge, and the current data suggests continued improvements in the next academic year.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 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.

Members are asked:

- To note the progress made on school attendance in 2023/24.
- To approve the strategic approach for 2024/25 which both meets the DfE requirements and improves support to schools.
- To approve the strategic approach for 2024/25 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.