

REPORT TO: Children, Young People's & Families Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 11 November 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director - Children's Services

PORTFOLIO: Children & Young People

SUBJECT: Changes to School Attendance Guidance

WARD(S) All Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report outlines recent changes in school attendance policies following the release of the Department for Education's (DfE) *Working Together to Improve School Attendance* guidance in August 2024. These measures are designed to promote regular attendance, enhance monitoring, and offer targeted support to pupils facing barriers. This report highlights the key changes, their implications, and local authorities responsibilities.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Daily Data Sharing and Monitoring

All state schools in England are now required to share daily attendance data with the DfE, local authorities, and academy trusts. This initiative aims to enable early identification of students at risk of persistent absenteeism. The shared data allows for more timely interventions by schools and local authorities to prevent long-term disengagement from education .

3.2 Enhanced Multi-Agency Collaboration

Schools, academy trusts, and local authorities are required to work together more systematically, sharing data and resources. Schools are now expected to appoint attendance champions within their leadership teams to drive attendance improvements and engage directly with families facing attendance barriers.

3.3 Increased Fines and Legal Interventions

The guidance enforces stricter penalties for unauthorised absences. Fines for parents have increased to £80 (if paid within 21 days) or £160 (if paid within 28 days) per parent per child. Local authorities are responsible for administering these fines, as well as working with schools to ensure compliance with attendance policies.

3.4 **Support for Pupils with Mental Health and SEND Needs**

Schools are now required to provide additional support for students struggling with mental health issues or special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). However, the new guidance highlights that these challenges should not excuse prolonged absence, and regular attendance is still expected. Schools must inform social workers or relevant youth justice teams about unexplained absences, facilitating collaborative interventions with local services.

3.5 **Changes to Attendance Codes and Registers**

The new guidance introduces updated attendance codes to better categorise student absences:

- New Code K:** For education provided by a local authority, rather than the school.

- Restrictions on Code B:** Schools must ensure that off-site education meets safeguarding and educational standards.

- New Codes C1, C2, and Q:** These codes provide more precise tracking of exceptional circumstances and access issues.

Schools cannot retrospectively removing students from registers without a joint decision with local authorities, ensuring that students are not excluded prematurely from education systems .

3.6 **Role of Local Authorities**

- Monitoring Attendance Data:** Using the shared attendance data to intervene early with at-risk pupils.

- Collaboration with Schools:** Local authorities must offer free attendance support teams to schools, providing a named contact for addressing attendance challenges. They are also tasked with tracking attendance data and prioritising interventions for students at risk of persistent or severe absence, including those with a social worker or other vulnerabilities.

- Legal Enforcement:** Administering fines and ensuring compliance with attendance policies through legal measures, where necessary.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 All directly relevant policies have been updated with regard to new statutory responsibilities and guidance.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Income from fines must now be put back into LA attendance services to further support the delivery of statutory duties and wider services to improve attendance. This is to be monitored and tracked

throughout this academic year 24/25.

- 5.2 Income from fines and SLA to be analysed along with the costs to deliver the statutory attendance services in addition to the support for preventive work, this currently includes an Attendance Data Officer and 3 School Attendance Support Officers (temporary funded by PEIA until end March) these roles are in addition to the Education Welfare Officers.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Good school attendance improves academic achievement, fosters social and emotional development and prepares students for future success in adulthood.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Good school attendance improves academic achievement, fosters social and emotional development and prepares students for future success in adulthood.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Good school attendance improves academic achievement, fosters social and emotional development and prepares students for future success in adulthood.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Good school attendance improves academic achievement, fosters social and emotional development and prepares students for future success in adulthood.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None identified.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

None identified.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 Increasing numbers of EHE (Electively Home Educated) have led to a significant increase in the hours that are spent weekly undertaking the statutory duties related to EHE. Two EWOs are now linked to ensuring these duties are undertaken previously only 1 officer.

- 7.2 Currently the EWS (Education Welfare Service) offer an SLA to all schools to purchase additional hours. With increased new statutory duties capacity to sustain an SLA offer will need revisiting at in the new year (January 2025).

8.0 EQUILITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Medical needs and consideration for health impacting upon attendance. Collaborative efforts needed to ensure that education and health needs are balanced. Schools have a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 by providing reasonable adjustments and further guidance is in Supporting Pupil with Medical conditions (2014).

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None Identified

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act.