

Committee:	Dated:
Safeguarding Sub-Committee	12/05/2022
Subject: Education Welfare services and school attendance and persistent absence	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	<p>Contribute to a flourishing society</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People are safe and feel safe 2. People enjoy good health and wellbeing. 3. People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential. <p>Support a thriving economy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. We have access to the skills and talent we need. <p>•</p>
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Theresa Shortland, Head of Service Education and Early Years Kirstie Hilton Lead Advisor – Universal Education Services	

Summary

- The last couple of years have been unprecedented for schools. As a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have experienced higher-than-average absences due to COVID-19 and other illness.
- The Education Welfare Service fulfils the statutory legal functions invested in the local authority that relate to school attendance, including direct one-to-one education welfare support, and has ensured that schools benefit from having

access to City of London officers who can help with advice, signposting and referrals where applicable. This has allowed schools to ensure that pupils are able to access the multi-agency services they need.

- Nationally the persistent absence rate is 4.6%. The Aldgate School's overall attendance 96% and most recent persistent absence rate from the spring term 2022 is 4%, a rate relatively low in comparison to, and lower than, the national rate of absence.
- Some children who are missing from education are identified and supported back into education quickly. In the City of London we monitor children missing education regularly. Reports are shared with the Assistant Director, People monthly and with the Executive Director Community and Children's Services termly. In the City of London there are currently eight children at risk of missing education for medical or other reasons.
- The Education Welfare Service also maintains an overview of the children who are electively home educated. This is a term used to describe a choice by parents to provide education for their children at home or in some other way they desire, instead of sending them to school full time. There are many reasons why parents may decide to educate their child at home. In the City of London we maintain regular contact with the parents of children who are educated at home, of which there are currently three. This figure increased over the COVID-19 period, but has now returned to pre-pandemic figures.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London has a unique educational landscape in that it has only one maintained primary school and no maintained secondary schools. There are four independent schools and one independent college (David Game College); the majority of children attending these schools are non-City residents. Most of the City of London's primary-age children and all secondary-age children, in the maintained sector, are educated outside the City of London.
2. Many children, especially in the London area, attend schools located in a different borough to the one in which they live. For City of London children this is no exception. Our latest figures show that around 400 children of statutory school age who live in the City of London attend approximately 80 different schools in and around the London area. This is mainly due to the wide range of secondary school options available to City of London children in neighbouring areas and good transport links.
3. The parent of every child of compulsory school age is required to ensure that the child receives a full-time education suitable to the child's ability, age, aptitude and any special education needs the child may have, either by regular attendance at

school or otherwise. Local authorities and schools have legal responsibilities regarding accurate recording of a pupil's attendance.

4. All maintained schools are required to provide two possible sessions per day, (morning and afternoon), to all pupils. Schools must meet for at least 380 sessions or 190 days during any school year to educate their pupils. Persistent absence is when a pupil overall absence equates to 10% or more of their possible sessions.

Current Position

Persistent Absence

5. A child is considered to be persistently absent from school if they miss 10% or more of all possible schools sessions, regardless of whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.
6. All maintained schools are required to provide two possible sessions per day, (morning and afternoon), to all pupils. The length of each session, break and the school day is determined by the school's governing body. Schools are required to take attendance registers twice a day: once at the start of the first/morning session of each school day; and once during the second/afternoon session.
7. Securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence is a constant challenge for schools and local authorities alike.
8. Generally, attendance below 95% would be the threshold at which point schools would intervene and raise the issue with parents/carers. This has proven difficult during COVID-19 where children were having to self-isolate in order to follow government guidance. More recently schools have had to focus their attention on pupil's attendance that is below 90% and monitor attendance to identify patterns and trends and support parents and pupils to be in school.

The National Picture

9. In March 2022, the government produced its latest statistical release on persistent absence. This release provides a national picture and considers pupil absence across the 2020/21 academic year. It includes information on the reason for absence, the types of school, and pupil characteristics.
10. The key headlines nationally reveal that 21.3% of possible sessions in the 2020/21 academic year were recorded with pupils not attending in circumstances related to COVID-19. This includes pupils self-isolating and shielding, including when a class or 'bubble' has been required to stay at home, and includes the period of national restrictions in the spring term 2021 when 57.5% of sessions were recorded with pupils not attending. Schools were expected to provide immediate access to remote education. The overall absence rate in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in the spring term 2020/21 was 4.6%.

Persistent Absence Rates Within Schools Located in the City of London

11. Nationally the persistent absence rate in the City of London is measured on the school attendance and absence data for The Aldgate School. This is the one maintained primary school in the City. All other schools are Independent Schools. The Aldgate School's overall attendance is 96%, and most recent persistent absence rate from the spring term 2022 is 4%, rate relatively low in comparison to the national rate of absence.

12. The Aldgate School has been very successful in ensuring that all children returned to school after both lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, and has continued to maintain good levels of school attendance, mainly through strong leadership and working with parents effectively.

Statutory Responsibilities

13. The parent of every child of compulsory school age is required to ensure that the child receive a full-time education suitable to the child's ability, age, aptitude and any special education needs the child may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Failure of a parent to secure regular attendance of their school registered child of compulsory school age can lead to a penalty notice or prosecution.

14. All schools should have access to Education Welfare services. This could be in the form of an attendance officer based within the school or a local authority based officer who oversees a number of schools.

15. Local authorities and Education Welfare services operate within a statutory framework:

- The Education Act 1996 – sections 434(1)(3)(4)&(6) and 458(4)&(5)
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 as amended.

In addition, the guidance and legislation related to Children Missing Education (CME) and Elective Home Education (EHE) is considered. Every local authority has to ensure that it delivers its functions related to pupil attendance, CME and EHE. The City of London provides an Education Welfare Service in this context. The service provides advice and support to all schools in the City local area.

16. For children who live in the City of London but who attend schools in another local authority area, education welfare is the responsibility of the local authority where the school is located and the pupil attends. When there is a persistent absence problem that requires additional support, schools will escalate through their own local processes. This could be in the form of an attendance officer based within the school or local authority. Referrals can be made to the City of London Early Help Service, or the Children's Social Care Service supports these children.

17. The City of London has commissioned an Education Welfare Service as part of the Education and Early Years Service. The key responsibility of this role is making sure that all children of the age to receive formal education are sufficiently educated, be it in school or from home.

18. In the context of supporting the welfare of children in school, the City of London Education Welfare Officer (EWO) has a strong relationship with schools, education services, children's social care and partner agencies.

19. The Education Welfare Service in the City also provides advice and support to the City of London's one maintained primary school to support their efforts to maintain a good level of attendance at school. The school has robust school attendance policies

and protocols in place to monitor and support pupils with persistent absenteeism. These policies and processes are reviewed regularly.

20. The EWO in the City of London will have, on average, a school-based caseload of approximately four active cases, and will be monitoring approximately 20 cases. Most issues are dealt with by providing advice to the schools, but direct interventions are also made. These include home visits, direct contact and correspondence with parents. All schools make use of the service offered. The EWO attends meetings on a fortnightly basis with the line manager and picks up cases and issues in those meetings.
21. The City of London resident caseload fluctuates according to need, and some cases require the attention of the EWO for extended periods of time. This includes cases with school attendance elements (including health-related absence), permanent exclusion support, prevention of exclusion, supporting and advising a child on elective home education. After a prolonged intervention, cases where there are ongoing medical concerns may require support and advice from the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) team around whether there is a need for educational assessments or even an Education, Health and Care Needs assessment.
22. Local councils and schools can use various legal powers if a child is missing school without a good reason. They can give:
 - a Parenting Order – This means parents/carers have to go to parenting classes and do what the court says to improve the child’s school attendance.
 - an Education Supervision Order (ESO) – If the local authority thinks a parent needs support getting their child to go to school and they are not co-operating, they can apply to a court for an ESO. This means that a supervisor will be appointed to help parents/carers get their child into education.
 - a School Attendance Order – a School Attendance Order can be issued if the local authority think a child is not getting an education. The parent/carer has 15 days to provide evidence that they have registered their child with the school listed in the order. If this is not done, then parents/carers can be prosecuted or given a fine which is sometimes known as a ‘penalty notice’.
23. The Education Welfare Service fulfils the statutory legal functions invested in the local authority that relate to school attendance, instigating legal proceedings where required against parents/carers who have not ensured their children’s regular attendance through the use of Penalty Notices (PN), applications for ESOs, and the issuing school attendance orders. The local authority only has the power to issue PNs to state maintained schools, therefore the independent schools located in the City are out of this remit.
24. To date, the City’s Education Welfare Service has not been required to issue any legal orders. This is mainly due to the collaborative work that the service does with The Aldgate School, including early intervention and preventative work. The aim of any intervention will always be to encourage and, where necessary, enforce attendance to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children in order that they may reach their full potential.

25. The Education Welfare Service also works with children missing education. Children missing education are children of compulsory school age who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. Children missing education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later in life.
26. Some children who are missing from education are identified and supported back into education quickly. In the City of London, we monitor children missing education regularly. Reports are shared with the Assistant Director, People monthly, and with the Executive Director Community and Children's Services termly. In the City of London, there are currently eight children at risk of missing education for medical or other reasons.
27. The Education Welfare Service also maintains an overview of the children who are electively home educated. This is a term used to describe a choice by parents to provide education for their children at home or in some other way they desire, instead of sending them to school full time. There are many reasons why parents may decide to educate their child at home. In the City of London we maintain regular contact with the parents of children who are educated at home, of which there are currently three. This figure increased over the COVID-19 period but has now returned to pre-pandemic figures.

Future Priorities

28. Our main priorities over the next year are to:

- continue to work with the schools in the City of London to offer advice and support where needed, and to ensure that all cases of persistent absence are monitored and addressed
- continue to ensure that families are supported to maintain good attendance at school and referred or signposted to relevant services where needed
- monitor the trends and maintain an overview of all school attendance and school absence issues.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

29. This work supports priorities 1 and 2 in the Children and Young People's

- Our children and young people are safe and feel safe
- Our children and young people have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and are well prepared to achieve in adulthood.

30. Financial implications – N/A
31. Resource implications – N/A
32. Legal implications – N/A
33. Risk implications – N/A
34. Equalities implications – N/A
35. Climate implications – N/A

36. Security implications – N/A

Conclusion

37. Over the last year, our key priorities within the Education and Early Years Service remain the safeguarding and wellbeing of City-resident children accessing education, and to offer educational welfare support to our City of London schools. We are committed to providing an excellent service to all our families who require support, and we continue to anticipate what challenges families may have in transitioning back to school following the lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Appendices

- None

Theresa Shortland
Head of Service – Education and Early Years

T: 07711919718

E: theresa.shortland@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Kirstie Hilton
Lead Advisor – Universal Education Services

T: [07803437510]

E: kirstie.hilton@cityoflondon.gov.uk