

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Community and Children's Services Safeguarding Sub Committee	10/10/2022
<b>Subject:</b> Working Together to Improve School Attendance	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	- Contributing to a flourishing society - People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	Yes
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	<b>The Dedicated Schools Grant</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	The Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block
<b>Report of:</b> Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theresa Shortland, Head of Service – Education and Early Years</li> <li>• Kirstie Hilton – Lead Advisor, Universal Education Services</li> </ul>	

### Summary

- The Department for Education (DfE) published new guidance in May 2022 for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities. *Working together to improve school attendance* comes into effect from September 2022 and becomes statutory from September 2023. The purpose of the guidance is to help maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities to work together to maintain high levels of attendance. Each plays an essential and different role, which will need to work collectively to improve attendance.
- The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the plans by the City of London's Education and Early Years Service to respond to new guidance and meet the needs of our statutory school cohort and schools by working together to improve school attendance.
- It is recognised that local authorities will need time to transition to implement the new statutory guidance in the academic year 2022–2023, so the guidance

is non-statutory until September 2023. The guidance outlines the requirement for local authorities to develop a School Attendance Support Team.

### **Recommendation**

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

### **Main Report**

#### **Background**

1. The City of London has one maintained primary school and no maintained secondary schools. There are four independent schools and one independent college (David Game College). Most 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 either in the independent sector or outside the City of London altogether.
2. The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure that their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances, such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.
3. It is essential for pupils to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances. The pupils with the highest attainment at the end of key stage 2 (Year 6) and key stage 4 (Year 11) have higher rates of attendance over the key stage compared to those with the lowest attainment. For the most vulnerable pupils, regular attendance is also an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided.
4. Where barriers to attendance for a pupil or family are complex and signposting to services is not sufficient, the City of London, schools and other services will continue to work together to provide more intensive whole family support to address those barriers. A clear pathway on ensuring that a collaborative approach takes place will be agreed with schools. All multi-disciplinary support will be co-ordinated using existing Early Help structures. For children resident in the City of London, a referral will be made to the City of London Early Help team. For children attending schools in the City of London but residing in other areas, then the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) will be responsible for facilitating referrals to other local authorities.

#### **Persistent Absenteeism**

5. Persistent Absenteeism (PA) (when a child's attendance falls below 90%), has always been a challenge within schools. However, COVID-19 has exacerbated the situation, resulting in an increase in the number of children with growing absence concerns. In February 2022, a report submitted to this Committee highlighted that

there are some pupils who are experiencing social, emotional and mental health difficulties, which are resulting in emotional-based avoidance. This is especially apparent in the secondary schools, resulting in persistent absenteeism.

## Current Position

### Education Welfare

6. The Education and Early Years' Service has an embedded Education Welfare Service (EWS), which has been responding to the needs of our pupil cohort at risk of exclusion or low attendance for over 10 years. Over the years we have built up an excellent working relationship with all of our educational settings.
7. The EWS also works with City resident children and families when required, even if the children attend schools outside of the local area. These families must be known to the children's social care and Early Help team to access this support. Most City resident children attend school outside of the local area, which requires us to be more aware of any activity that may be of concern and have an impact on educational outcomes.
8. Over the last couple of years, in response to a growing need for more individual casework, the number of children that the EWS has worked with has increased significantly: between 2019 and 2022 the number increased by 150%. This figure includes direct case work with children resident in the City of London but attending school outside of the City, as well as non-resident children attending City of London Schools. The EWO remains pivotal in working with families to ensure that cross-borough working is achieved, and that any issues resulting in low attendance are addressed.

Increase in demand pre & post COVID-19 for EWO cases				
Year	2019	2020	2021	2022 Only half a year to date.
EWO cases	13	20	27	33

9. Following the publication of the new guidance in May 2022, the EWS began to review relevant policies and processes and respond to an increase in demand and the complexity of current cases.
10. The Education and Early Years' Service works closely with the City schools, the Children's Social Care and Early Help team and the Virtual School Head to ensure positive outcomes for children. On a strategic level this includes regular attendance at the Education Safeguarding Forum; on a more operational level, the EWS attends Child in Need and Child Protection meetings and attendance at Team Around the Family meetings for children with an Early Help Worker.
11. The induction for new staff working in People's Directorate includes a meeting with officers within the education team, so that staff understand the importance of school absence as a symptom of wider need, and the benefits of improving attendance to achieve effective outcomes for the whole family. The new guidance makes it clear that school attendance is everyone's business.

## The Aldgate School

12. The Aldgate School is the one maintained primary school in the City, with 240 children on school roll. The school has historically been very proactive in addressing any persistent absence issues, and their latest PA level is below the national average at 9.9%. In May 2022, the Government produced its latest statistical release on persistent absence on a national level in the Autumn term 2021. It concluded that 23.5% of pupils were persistently absent during the autumn term 2021. Similar to other schools, there has been an increase in the number of children experiencing social, emotional and mental health difficulties, which are resulting in emotional-based avoidance.
13. The Aldgate School has revised their attendance policy to include a more robust system of addressing persistent absence in the form of penalty notices. Penalty notices have not been issued previously. However, in response to the growing concern about PA, the Education and Early Years' Service also revised its Code of Conduct Policy, which supports the school's decision to issue a penalty notices and fines a parent for:
- children whose attendance is poor
  - children who have been taken on an unauthorised term time holiday
  - where the pupil is present in a public place during the first five days in the cases of exclusion.

## New Statutory Guidance

14. The DfE Guidance *Working together to improve school attendance* published in May 2022 is currently non-statutory guidance that has been produced to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance. This new guidance sits alongside other current statutory guidance on parental responsibility measures, children missing education, supporting pupils with medical conditions at school, suspensions and exclusions, alternative provision, and safeguarding.
15. It is recognised that local authorities will need time to transition to implement the new statutory guidance in the academic year 2022–2023, so the guidance is non-statutory until September 2023. The guidance outlines the requirement for local authorities to develop a School Attendance Support team. They will be expected to track local school attendance data and devise a strategic approach to school attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools. This offer should be available to all schools, free of charge (and free from any service level agreement) by no later than September 2023. These teams will hold termly 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.
16. The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a

school. Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances, such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

Within the context of this new guidance, The City of London will be expected to develop a strategic approach to school attendance, so that all relevant services recognise its importance. This includes how attendance improvement is everyone's business (including all frontline council services), especially access to education services, Early Help, statutory social care, and the Virtual School. The statutory guidance also refers to the expectation to 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. It also refers to the work of the Virtual Head.

### **Virtual School**

17. The City of London Virtual Head teacher promotes the education of all children with a social worker as set out in the June 2021 guidance, *'Promoting the Education of Children with a Social Worker, Virtual School Head Role Extension'* (DfE. 2021). The purpose of the role is to oversee the education, training and employment opportunities provided to all children who have been assessed as needing or previously needing a social worker within the past 6 years due to safeguarding and/or welfare reasons. It includes all children aged 0 to 18 across all education settings subject to a CiN plan or a Child Protection plan. This cohort has been identified as a group of children who face significant barriers to education as a result of experiences of adversity, most commonly abuse and neglect.

### **Future Priorities**

18. In light of the new statutory basis, the City will need to develop a sustainable approach to managing school attendance, and will need to expand the current support provided to schools. Over the next year, the Education and Early Years' Service will ensure that the measures are put in place to meet the statutory guidance required for September 2023, and continue to support schools and partners to work with pupils and parents to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place.
19. The Aldgate School has anticipated possible attendance issues by ensuring that families receive more information about the importance of good attendance through their regular newsletter. Work has also been taking place with the families of preschool and nursery-aged children to encourage better time-keeping in preparation for the children starting in Reception.
20. The new DfE guidance promotes **three** key priorities, which include the following:
  - Tracking local attendance data
  - School attendance support team
  - Targeting support meetings.

21. To fully understand the local and national patterns and trends, benchmarking against neighbouring local authorities will take place. This will enable a greater understanding of how the City of London attendance figures compare regionally and nationally. Regular reports will be submitted to this Committee to ensure that Members are aware of progress.
22. The City of London currently has an Education team, which includes a Lead Advisor, Universal Education Services, Admissions and Attendance Manager and Education Welfare Officer, all of whom respond to the needs of pupils either residing or attending school in the City of London. The EWO will act as the point of contact for all schools.
23. The new guidance includes the requirement to establish a School Attendance Support team by September 2023. The work being carried out by the Education Team currently reflects much of the work the School Attendance Support team will need to do when the guidance becomes statutory from September 2023. Over the course of the year, we will review this and establish the School Attendance Support team by the end of the Spring Term 2023.
24. A new Head of the Virtual School for Children with a Social Worker took up post in the City of London in September 2022. They will be responsible for:
- regularly monitoring the attendance of children with a social worker in the City of London area, including those looked-after by the local authority
  - setting aspirational targets for attendance of pupils with a social worker living in the City of London, and put in place personal education plans for looked-after children
  - providing training for designated teachers about their role in promoting the attendance of children who have ever needed a social worker
  - securing regular attendance of looked-after children as their corporate parent and provide advice and guidance about the importance of attendance to those services supporting pupils who were previously looked after
  - working across children's social care services to make sure all social workers recognise the importance of good school attendance, and that attendance is built into every Child in Need or Child Protection Plan where attendance is a concern.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

25. **Strategic implications** – Corporate outcome: Contribute to a flourishing society by ensuring that people have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential.
26. **Resource implications** – There is an Education team that manages attendance and case management work. The Guidance says the offer of support to schools should be free of charges to them. It is likely that the funding for extending this role of the EWS will be via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) although so has been a commissioned as a consultancy. The funding may be required for the Local risk budget. The EWS service is currently a commissioned service. This may need to be

reviewed so there is a sustainable service by recruiting a post within the COL Education & early Years Team structure.

27. **Financial implications** The resources required to meet the increase in demand for the EWS and to meet the new duties will be considered. It is yet unknown if the DfE will provide additional funding to local authorities to meet the new guidance by September 2023.
28. **Legal implications** – There is a statutory duty to ensure that all children attend school regularly and that the City of London ensures that all children have a school place.
29. **Risk implications** – There is a reputational risk if the City do not comply to the guidance. The plans to establish a School Attendance Support Team mitigate this risk and build on the current work of the Education Welfare Service.
30. **Equalities implications** – All children have the right to an education.
31. **Climate implications** – N/A
32. **Security implications** –

### **Conclusion**

33. The DfE guidance *Working together to improve school attendance* published in May 2022 is currently non-statutory guidance that has been produced to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of schools attendance. The City of London has revised their policies to ensure that we are working to the new guidance.
34. The new guidance includes the requirement to establish a School Attendance Support team by September 2023. The work currently underway reflects much of the work the School Attendance Support team will need to do when the guidance becomes statutory in September 2023. We will review this and establish the School Attendance Support Team by the time the end of the Spring Term 2023.

### **Appendices**

### **Background Papers**

#### **References to DfE documents:**

a. *Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities.*

Published: May 2022.

Applies from: September 2022

[Working together to improve school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

This is guidance from the DfE. This 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 when parliamentary time allows (this will be no sooner than September 2023).

*b. Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities.*

Published: May 2022

Applies from: September 2022

[Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

This document summarises the attendance responsibilities for parents, schools, academy trusts and governing bodies, and local authorities that are outlined in *Working together to improve school attendance*.

c. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/virtual-school-head-role-extension-to-children-with-a-social-worker>

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