

Committee:	Dated:
Community and Children's Services Safeguarding Sub-Committee	23/11/2023
Subject: Working Together to Improve School Attendance (Update)	Public Appendix 2 – non-public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	- Contribute to a flourishing society 3) People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Yes
What is the source of Funding?	The Dedicated Schools Grant
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Y
Report of: Judith Finlay, Executive Director, Community and Children's Services	For Discussion
Report author: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theresa Shortland, Head of Service – Education and Early Years • Kirstie Hilton – Lead Advisor, Universal Education Services 	

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* came into effect from September 2022 and was due to become 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 group plays an essential and different role, and will need to work collectively to improve attendance.
- The purpose of this report is to update Members on the work that has been carried out by the City of London's Education and Early Years Service over the last academic year to respond to the new guidance and meet the needs of our statutory school cohort and schools by working together to improve school attendance.

Recommendation(s)

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 of London 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 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. 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, the Education Welfare Manager (EWM) will be responsible for facilitating referrals to the local authorities where they live.

Persistent Absenteeism

5. Persistent absenteeism (when a child's attendance falls to 90% or below), 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. Some pupils who are experiencing social, emotional and mental health difficulties, can resort to emotional-based school avoidance. This is especially apparent in secondary schools, resulting in persistent absenteeism. Children attending at 50% or below are considered as severe absentees.

Attendance Strategy

6. Since the last update to this Committee in September 2022, The City of London's School Attendance Strategy 2023–2025 (see **Appendix 1**) has been finalised, presenting the service's vision with an emphasis that *improving attendance is everyone's business*. The strategy has been developed with all our key partners, and all schools in the City of London local area have engaged with us in developing this strategy. This is a collaborative approach to managing school attendance.
7. The purpose of the City of London's School Attendance Strategy is to ensure that that the Aldgate School and independent schools in the City of London work together with partners to maintain high levels of school attendance, and improve school attendance for all children educated in the City of London and for our resident children attending schools outside of the locality.

School Attendance Support Service (SASS)

8. The SASS includes the Lead Advisor for Universal Services, Education Welfare Manager, and Admissions and Attendance Manager, and is now formally part of the Education and Early Years Service. The SASS has a new referral form and dedicated inbox (attendance@cityoflondon.gov.uk), which schools can use to alert the team to any pressing attendance issues.
9. The aim of the SASS is to track local attendance data, visit schools regularly to discuss any attendance concerns and hold targeting support meetings when required. The new Education Welfare Manager, Davinder Kaur, who started at the City of London in July, is essential in delivering an excellent frontline service to our schools.
10. The SASS is a year-round service, also working with City of London resident children and families when required, even if the children attend schools outside of the local area. Most City of London resident children attend school outside of the local area, which requires the team to be more aware of any activity that may be of concern that can have an impact on educational outcomes. The SASS remains pivotal in working with families to ensure that cross-borough working is achieved, and that any issues resulting in low attendance are addressed.

Attendance Data

11. In preparation for delivery of our School Attendance Strategy from September 2023, we asked schools to provide a snapshot of attendance data for all children educated within the City of London local area in May 2023 who have attendance at 90% or below. The data requested was:
 - Number of children on school roll
 - Pupil Unique Identifier (no names required)
 - Year Group
 - Postcode

- Attendance if 90% or below (both authorised and unauthorised) *and if any of these pupils have special educational needs (SEN).*

12. All schools responded, however, the schools' varying data systems presented challenges to the SASS, and resulted in differing data returns. Work with schools will continue to take place to further interpret school attendance to identify trends and patterns of absence, to help make more strategic decisions. Data collected in the summer term 2023 will be used as a platform for development of SASS service response during the autumn term 2023.
13. To give the City of London access to real-time attendance data, accessing school attendance data through applications such as Wonde and Power BI is being explored with the DfE and the Strategy and Performance Service. Currently, the City of London does not have a central management information system that connects to all the pupil management systems held in schools in the City of London.

The Aldgate School

14. The Aldgate School is the one maintained primary school in the City, with 210 children on its school roll. The school has historically been very proactive in addressing any persistent absence issues.
15. In September 2022, the Aldgate School re-launched its attendance policy to include a more robust system including penalty notices to address persistent absence. Penalty notices have not been issued previously. To enable school leaders to tackle increased persistent absenteeism, the Education and Early Years Service also revised its Code of Conduct Policy, supporting the school's decision to issue parents with penalty notices and fines for:
 - children whose attendance is poor
 - children who have been taken on an unauthorised term-time holiday
 - instances where the pupil is present in a public place during the first five days in the cases of exclusion or long suspension from school.
16. Regular half-termly meetings have taken place over the 2022/23 academic year to address any attendance issues and will continue at this frequency throughout the 2023/24 academic year. Monitoring meetings have taken place over the course of the year to ensure that absence is being coded correctly and measures are in place to address and challenge attendance issues. The City of London's Code of Conduct Policy, which was reviewed and approved in July 2022, came into force during the 2022/23 academic year to support school leaders in implementing sanctions.
17. During the 2022/23 academic year, the City of London SASS received 12 referrals for further action, resulting in Penalty Notice Warning letters.

Vulnerable Children

18. Since the pandemic, the Department of Community and Children's Services has maintained a Vulnerable Children's Register, which includes children known to the Education and Early Years Service, Children's Social Care and Early Help Service and the Virtual School. This includes children who are missing education, children at risk of missing education, children being electively home educated, children with Education, Health and Care Plans, children known to Early Help, Children in Need, children with a Child Protection Plan, Ukrainian children who have resettled here, Children in Care and care leavers who are in Year 13.
19. At the end of September 2023, there were 74 children on the register. Specific, higher-risk cases on the register are considered and reviewed each month by the different teams, with actions agreed. This provides support and challenge, reduces the possibility of 'drift', and quickly highlights incidents of low school attendance and missing education so that support can be provided.

Alternative Provision

20. One local priority for the City of London is for all children and young people living in the City of London to have access to high-quality alternative provision. With no alternative provision in the local area, this is a particular challenge for the City of London, however, work has begun on developing a more robust approach to ensure that children accessing alternative provision receive quality services (**please see Appendix 2**).

Virtual School

21. The City of London Virtual Head Teacher continues to oversee the education, training and employment opportunities provided to all care-experienced children, children who have been assessed as needing, or previously needing, a social worker for safeguarding and/or welfare reasons. This includes all children aged 0 to 18 years across all education settings subject to a Children in Need Plan or a Child Protection Plan. This cohort has been identified as a group of children who face significant barriers to education due to experiencing adversity, most commonly abuse and neglect.

Future Priorities

22. 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 SASS will ensure that measures are put in place to meet the statutory guidance. The SASS will 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 to ensure that the right support is in place.
23. The SASS will lead on the collection of attendance data on a termly basis (twice termly for the Aldgate School), which will then be analysed and presented in the form of a termly report. The first of these reports will be written and presented to this Committee in the new calendar year.

24. Twice-termly meetings will take place in the schools to support school leaders in identifying and addressing whole school attendance issues as well as individual cases. The SASS will lead on reviewing school attendance policies where required, and supporting the independent schools in adding rigour to their processes to develop sanctions.

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 a dedicated Education team (the SASS) that manages attendance and case management work. The guidance says the offer of support to schools should be free of charge to them. It is likely that the funding for extending this role will be via the Dedicated Schools Grant. The funding may be required for the local risk budget. The post of an Education Welfare Manager has changed from a commissioned post to a permanent full-time role, which is integral to the success and sustainability of the work delivered in the attendance strategy.

27. **Financial implications** – 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 of London does not comply to the guidance. The now established School Attendance Support Service will mitigate this risk and build on the historic 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** – N/A

33. The DfE guidance *Working together to improve school attendance* published in May 2022 continues to be non-statutory guidance that has been produced to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities to maintain high levels of schools attendance. The City of London has formulated an attendance strategy to push ahead in working with schools to address whole school and individual attendance concerns.

34. The City of London has set up the School Support Attendance Service (SASS), new referral forms, and has already begun collecting attendance data to gain a strategic overview of the attendance landscape within the local area.

35. Work will continue with the schools and local partners to formalise referral pathways and access to key services, which schools will need when addressing attendance

concerns. Ultimately, this will lead to better outcomes for our children and young people.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: The City of London's School Attendance Strategy 2023–2025
- Appendix 2: COL alternative provision statement.

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/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)

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.

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/government/publications/summary-table-of-responsibilities-for-school-attendance)

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. Guidance: Virtual school head role extension to children with a social worker

Published: 16 June 2021

Last updated: 19 June 2023

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

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