

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Community and Children's Services Safeguarding Sub-Committee	16/04/2024
<b>Subject:</b> Working Together to Improve School Attendance (Update)	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	Providing Excellent Services – Supporting people to live healthy, independent lives, and achieve their ambitions, is dependent on excellent services. Vital to that continued pursuit is enabling access to effective adult and children's social care, outstanding education, lifelong learning, quality housing, and combatting homelessness
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	Yes
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	The Dedicated Schools Grant
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	Yes
<b>Report of:</b> Judith Finlay, Executive Director, Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Kirstie Hilton, Head of Service – Education and Early Years	

### 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 Team since September 2023 in response to the new guidance, as well as progress against the implementation of the Attendance Strategy and meeting the needs of our statutory school cohort and schools by working together to improve school attendance.

- The report will also cover how the team responds to its most vulnerable children and young people, including children performing under child employment.

### **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 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. When 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 as it offers the best opportunity for children's needs to be identified and appropriate support to be 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 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 to be 'severe absentees'.

## **Attendance Strategy**

6. At the last Committee meeting in November, The City of London's School Attendance Strategy 2023–2025 was presented, with a key emphasis that *improving attendance is everyone's business*. The Attendance Strategy was 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. Over the autumn term of 2023, following the development of an action plan, the Attendance Support Team has been working with all City of London Schools to ensure that the key priorities are translated into actions, with progress that can then be measured over the academic year. The five key outcomes are:
  - **Priority 1:** Develop systems and processes to collect and monitor data; to manage and report on the performance of school attendance for all City based schools in the local area.
  - **Priority 2:** Establish a City of London School Attendance Support Team.
  - **Priority 3:** Establish a City of London multi-agency governance framework approach to monitor performance outcomes for school attendance.
  - **Priority 4:** Establish governance to ensure there is an emphasis on vulnerable children and children missing education that focuses on their school attendance, progress, and attainment.
  - **Priority 5:** To ensure there are sufficient good quality options for alternative provision for all children that need this type of provision.
8. On 29 February, the City of London and other local authorities received correspondence from the Minister for Schools confirming further government action on school attendance, including making *Working together to improve school attendance* statutory. This will include publishing a revised version as statutory guidance from 19 August 2024.

## **Attendance Data**

9. To ensure that the City of London has a strategic overview of attendance for all schools located in the City of London, a schedule of dates was sent to all schools at the beginning of the autumn term 2023, requesting data at the end of each term. All schools submitted their data by the required date, which has enabled the School Attendance Team to analyse the data. This will continue on a term-by-term basis.

The key findings from the data are:

- Overall attendance for the City of London is 95.8% for the autumn term 2023; this is above the national average of 93.7%.<sup>1</sup> We will be working with our schools, families, and partner agencies to ensure that school attendance continues to move in an upward trajectory.
- Targeting support meetings are taking place in all schools, on average twice a term (once every half term). For the Aldgate School, our one maintained primary school, the Education Welfare Manager visited three times. This is going to be increased to two times every half term to ensure that there is continuity of support for our one maintained school.
- The majority of schools in the City of London have a low percentage of persistent absenteeism, compared to the national average calculated over the 2022/23 academic year. By analysing the attendance data, we have been able to identify that most persistent absenteeism is authorised absence as opposed to unauthorised absence; this is something that is being discussed this term during the targeting support meetings.
- There is currently no evidence of a direct correlation between children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and persistent absenteeism.

### **Attendance Support Team**

10. The Attendance Support Team 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 Attendance Support Team has been working with all schools during the autumn term to encourage all referrals and enquiries to be sent to the team's inbox ([attendance@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:attendance@cityoflondon.gov.uk)), which schools can use to alert the team to any pressing attendance issues.
11. The Attendance Support Team is developing a solid framework they can use to provide a comprehensive and continuous programme of support and challenge to the schools. The Education Welfare Manager is currently building positive relationships with school staff, including the attendance leads and Dedicated Safeguarding Leads.

### **Governance**

12. Dedicated Safeguarding Leads from all schools attend the Safeguarding Education Forum, which is held once a term and provides schools with an opportunity for the City of London Schools (including the City of London Academy Trust (COLAT) academies) to meet on a termly basis to share and consider policy, practice and procedural issues relating to safeguarding arrangements in school settings in the City of London.

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<sup>1</sup> [Pupil attendance and absence in schools in England \(shinyapps.io\)](https://shinyapps.io)

13. The Education Welfare Manager is in the process of establishing a network meeting for school staff, which will provide a platform for sharing information and best practice and discussing any areas for development. An initial questionnaire has been developed and will be sent out to key personnel this term. It is proposed that this network will take place at least once a term and will report to the Safeguarding Education Forum.

### **Vulnerable Children**

14. 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 and Afghan children who have resettled here, Children in Care and care leavers who are in Year 13 and in full-time education.
15. At the end of February 2024, there were 60 children on the register. Specific, higher-risk cases on the register are considered and reviewed each month by the different teams, with actions agreed on. 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**

16. 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 (AP). With no AP 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 AP receive quality services.
17. The SEND Panel will be developed and extended to oversee all AP agreed for all children and young people, including those with and without special educational needs. A new Terms of Reference for the SEND and AP Panel will be written to ensure that there is a rigorous quality assurance framework for any AP commissioned by the City of London Department of Community and Children's Services (DCCS) Commissioning Service. A review of children's progress at AP will be held at regular intervals and brought to the SEND and AP Panel. This is similar to the annual review process for children with Education, Health and Care Plans.
18. Following receipt of the London QA Framework, the Commissioning Team will adapt the framework to City services. This will include tutor services, which the City of London uses as an interim or long-term arrangement when presented with a child or young person who has been permanently excluded, or who cannot attend school for medical reasons.

## **The Aldgate School**

19. The Aldgate School is the one maintained primary school in the City, with a Pupil Admission Number of 210 children. The school has historically been very proactive in addressing any persistent absence issues.
20. 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.
21. Regular half-termly meetings have taken place since the start of the academic year to address any attendance issues and will continue at this frequency throughout the year. Monitoring meetings have taken place over the year to ensure that absence is being coded correctly and that measures are in place to address and challenge attendance issues. The City of London's Code of Conduct Policy is currently under review to reflect the new penalty notice system. The system will allow the team to record and monitor all activity relating to the issue of court warning letters and any penalty notices. The system will also provide parents with a platform they can use to pay any fines.
22. During the 2023/24 academic year so far, the City of London Attendance Support Team has received five referrals for further action, resulting in penalty notice warning letters. Last year, during the 2022/23 academic year, the City of London Attendance Support Team, received 12 referrals.

## **Virtual School**

23. 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.
24. In November 2023, the Virtual Headteacher and Lead Advisor for Universal Services delivered training to colleagues on the importance of attendance and barriers to learning. This gave attendees the opportunity to learn about the education statutory duties and have open conversations about the current challenges and how groups in the department can work together to address attendance issues.

## **Child Employment**

25. The City of London offers itself as a prime location to host filming, musical, and theatrical performances, and therefore many young performers have been issued with Child performance Licences from their home borough. There was a total of 21 Child Performance notifications during the autumn term 2023. Six performances have been inspected by officers, all resulting in satisfactory safeguarding visits.
26. The City of London also receives a high number of requests for Body of Persons Approvals (BOPAs), mainly for performances held at the Barbican and Guildhall School of Music and Drama. During December 2023, there was a sharp increase in Child Performance notifications and BOPA exemption requests. This was due to Christmas-related and end-of-year performances.
27. For all BOPA applications, a risk assessment, safeguarding policy, full schedule of the event and chaperone information are required before a BOPA is granted. There have been five BOPA applications, one four-day rule performance, and two collective worship performances. From these notifications, three have been inspected. All inspections have resulted in an assessment of a 'satisfactory standard'.

## **Future Priorities**

28. Over the academic year, the Education and Early Years Service will continue to develop its sustainable approach to managing school attendance. The Attendance Support Team will ensure that measures are put in place to meet the statutory guidance. The team 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 ensuring that the right support is in place.
29. The Attendance Support Team will lead 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.
30. 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 Attendance Support Team will lead in reviewing school attendance policies where required and supporting the independent schools in adding rigour to their processes to develop sanctions.
31. Work will take place in preparation for the implementation of the new statutory guidance from August 2024.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

32. **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.
33. **Resource implications** – There is a dedicated Education Team (the Attendance Support Team) that manages attendance and case management work. The

guidance says the offer of support to schools should be free of charge. The funding for extending this role will likely be via the Dedicated Schools Grant. The funding may be required for the local risk budget. The post of 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.

34. **Financial implications** – There is currently no additional funding to local authorities to deliver the new statutory guidance from August 2024.
35. **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.
36. **Risk implications** – There is a reputational risk if the City of London does not comply with the guidance. The established School Attendance Support Team will mitigate this risk and build on the historic work of the Education Welfare Service.
37. **Equalities implications** – All children have the right to an education.
38. **Climate implications** – N/A
39. **Security implications** – N/A

## **Conclusion**

40. The DfE guidance *Working together to improve school attendance* published in May 2022 has been updated to become statutory guidance from 19 August 2024. The guidance has been further developed to support trusts, governing bodies and local authorities to maintain high levels of school attendance. The City of London is working with schools to address whole-school and individual attendance concerns.
41. The Education and Early Years Service has established the School Support Attendance Team, and new referral forms. The team is actively collecting attendance data to gain a strategic overview of the attendance landscape within the local area.
42. 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.
43. The Education and Early Years Service continues to prioritise its most vulnerable children and young people under the child employment regulations by issuing BOPAs, carrying out on-site performance licence inspections, and overseeing and maintaining the co-ordination of the Vulnerable Children Group.

## **Appendices**

- None



## Background Papers

### References to DfE documents:

- a. *Working together to improve school attendance: Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities*  
Published: 29 February 2024  
Applies from: September 2024  
[Working together to improve school attendance \(applies from 19 August 2024\) \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)

This guidance from the DfE is statutory and has been produced to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance.

- b. *Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance: Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities.*  
Published: 29 February 2024  
Applies from: September 2024  
[Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance \(applies from 19 August 2024\) \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](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, governing bodies and local authorities that are outlined in *Working together to improve school attendance*.

- c. *Children's social care: Virtual school head role extension*  
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>

This guidance details how local authorities should extend the Virtual School Head role to champion and promote the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care.

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