

Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

11 November 2024

Subject:	Schools Attendance Support Service
Director:	Director of Childrens' and Education Services Sally Giles
Contact Officer:	Manager, Schools Attendance Support Service Louise Morris louise_morris@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the recent challenges and improvements in School Attendance in Sandwell.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 To report upon the strategies being used to support schools to improve attendance.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Growing Up in Sandwell	Children and young people have good levels of attendance at school.
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The main aim of the Schools Attendance Support Service is to improve school attendance in Sandwell. It undertakes its duties as follows:
- The focus of the offer to schools is to support them to be able to support families and so improve school attendance. Through

improved school attendance, the children of Sandwell have better life chances.

- Schools have an allocated officer from the team. There are nine officers, and they support approximately 15 schools each.
- Officers visit their schools on a regular basis to look at any children where attendance is a cause for concern, to offer strategies and support to improve attendance.
- The 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' guidance from the Department for Education, became statutory on the 19 August 2024 and this has had far reaching implications for schools and the Local Authority.
- Due to the number of changes, the team has provided training sessions which have been attended by 72% of schools.
- The team produce a 'Schools Attendance Support Pack' for schools, which contains help and guidance on every area covered within the team (see Background / Support Papers).
- The team works closely with partner agencies to ensure everyone is supporting the attendance agenda.
- The team offers a multi-agency meeting, Attendance Solutions Panel (ASP) attended by partners, including Strengthening Families, Housing, School Health Nursing, Youth Service, Police. Cases can be referred into this panel where it is felt all other offers of support have not been successful. A multi-agency approach to improving attendance is then put in place.
- There are 2 court officers who prepare cases to send to legal for prosecution if **all other offers of support have been ineffective.**
- The team also covers Child Employment and Licensing, Children Missing Education, Removal from School Rolls and Business Support:
 - Children Missing Education – ensure there are applications completed for all children coming into Sandwell and supporting the family until they are in school.
 - Child Employment – working with schools to inform them of the legalities around students having paid work or appearing in performances / modelling.
 - Removal from school Rolls – It is important we work with schools to enable them to remove children from their roll in a timely manner and in accordance with the DfE Guidelines, so that places can be offered to children waiting for a school place.

Current academic year up to Friday 04 October 2024

Number of pupils 54,503		Overall attendance % 94.0%		Overall absence % 6.0%		Unauthorised absence % 2.8%	
Persistently absent				Severely absent			
Number of persistently absent pupils		Percentage of persistently absent pupils		Number of severely absent pupils		Percentage of severely absent pupils	
8,609		15.8%		1,162		2.1%	

- As can be seen from the above data, there is still work to do as there are 9771 children whose attendance is currently below 90%. This will be done through the visits to schools and having an action plan for these children. It should be noted that at the same period last year we had in excess of 11000 students falling into this category, therefore progress is being made.
- DfE data shows an improvement on attendance rates from the same point last academic year:

Term	Attendance %	Absence %	Unauthorised absence %
Autumn 2023-2024	92.8%	7.2%	3.0%
Autumn 2024-2025	93.8%	6.2%	2.9%
Trend	↑	↓	↓
Spring 2023-2024	92.2%	7.8%	3.4%
Spring 2024-2025			
Trend			
Summer 2023-2024	89.7%	10.3%	4.1%
Summer 2024-2025			
Trend			
Overall 2023-2024	91.5%	8.5%	3.5%
Overall 2024-2025	93.8%	6.2%	2.9%
Trend	↑	↓	↓

5 Implications

Resources:	Ensuring adequate staff to support the schools to continue improving attendance
Legal and Governance:	Any legal action taken is in line with the Penalty Notice Code of Conduct and Sandwell Prosecutions Policy

Risk:	There were no risk implications associated with this report.
Equality:	All students should have the same opportunities, both through their education journey and after the period of statutory education
Health and Wellbeing:	Greater attendance at school supports the safeguarding of the young person, and ensures we effectively monitor their wellbeing
Social Value:	Giving young people the best start in life and giving them the ability to gain qualifications to support them in having career options
Climate Change:	There were no climate change implications associated with this report.
Corporate Parenting:	Ensuring all Children in Care are supported in their education

6 Appendices

None

7. Background Papers

- Working Together to Improve School Attendance - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf