

Local Members' Interest
N/A

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee – 20th June 2018

Improving Attendance and Participation in our Schools and Settings

Recommendations

1. That the Select Committee scrutinises the progress of attendance across the primary, secondary and special schools in Staffordshire compared to the national average.
2. That the Select Committee scrutinises and comments on the poor attendance of the Pupil Referral Unit schools, and the work in place to challenge this.
3. That the Select Committee scrutinises the progress been made in reducing the number of permanent exclusions from schools across Staffordshire
4. That the Select Committee recognises the work undertaken in addressing the issues of Children Missing Education and Children Missing Out on Education.

Report of Cllr Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Cllr Philip White, Cabinet Member for Learning and Employability

Summary

5. Staffordshire continues to have below national average overall absence rates, in its primary, secondary and special schools. The County is 0.2% lower than the national average of 4.7%, this is the fourth consecutive year in which it has maintained lower than the national average absence rates.
6. Whilst the Primary and Secondary schools have both achieved 0.2 % below the national average rate for their overall absence, the special schools have achieved 1.8% below the national average for their overall absence rates.
7. It is acknowledged that there has been an increase in Staffordshire's absence figures, however, this is within the context of a national rise in student absence figures.
8. It will be a concern to the members to know that Staffordshire Pupil Referral Unit schools (PRUs) are 13.5% above the national average for overall absence; however, there are some signs of improvement with a narrowing of the gap between the national and Staffordshire figures for persistent absences. The local authority is working with the PRU Head teacher to explore ways to improve attendance.

9. In respect of Permanent Exclusion from schools, unvalidated data for this academic year is indicating a notable reduction in the year on year increase previously experienced. This is not solely due to a reduction in permanent exclusions, but a significant increase in permanent exclusions been rescinded. This is often achieved through the work of the District Inclusion Officers who now sit within the local authority and who liaise between the school, parents and a potential alternative education provider or school, to agree a managed move or package of support which means the child can continue in their education without the period of disruption usually caused by a permanent exclusion.
10. Children Missing education has been a previous area of interest to members and continues to perform a vital task of identifying children in Staffordshire who are without education, and then ensuring they are provided with an opportunity to receive education. In the current academic year to date, we have processed 729 cases, having had a positive outcome rate of 97.5%.
11. The work to identify children who are missing out on education, has begun to embed itself this year, with high numbers of schools responding to a regular census, which reports on students who are on reduced timetables and therefore are categorised as a children missing out on education, and those that have a plan in place and are expected to return to full-time education (see attached data at Appendix 1). Work has also now begun to develop a data platform to capture this information, which will create live report on these children, enhancing our ability to identify promptly and where necessary to challenge any cases of concern.

Report

Background and Context

12. The Strategic Plan for 2018-2022, Education and Skills, states that every child deserves the best possible education, and prioritises; holding head teachers and governors to account for improving results and giving additional support to the most vulnerable in our communities, including children with special educational needs.
13. Education is fast changing landscape given the ongoing acadamisisation of schools and the delegation of resources and responsibilities more directly into schools. Staffordshire County Council recognises that its relationship with schools is changing and accepts that its position is less as a direct provider and more as having an overarching responsibility to ensure that schools provide a suitable education.
14. Within the above changes the local authorities officers are building a strong relationship with the regional schools' commissioner, so that they might raise with them any concerns in respect of attendance or exclusion levels within an Academy.
15. It is worth noting that Headteachers and Governors are responsible for ensuring that when parents fail to ensure their children attend school regularly, they are

contacted, engaged with, challenged or supported to ensure their child's attendance improves. Should this not bring about an improvement in their attendance, then the school can request the local authority consider taking statutory action as part of their Core Education Offer.

16. As of the 25 May 2018 the local authority has this academic year, issued 1025 Penalty Notices and prosecuted 60 cases in the Magistrates Court for irregular attendance.
17. Members will be aware that the Schools Forum members agreed to reduce the funding for Education Welfare Services by 757K, delegating this sum back to individual maintained schools. This has meant that all schools/academies in Staffordshire are now responsible for providing early intervention and prevention for unauthorised absence, with the local authority now focusing on in its role of providing statutory intervention when requested.

Alternative Provision Panel (APP)

18. Local Authority officers have initiated an Alternative Provision Panel to bring greater accountability and scrutiny to the provision offered to children who are permanently excluded from school and require an alternative educational provision. The intention of the panel is to ensure that children are placed at the most appropriate short-term provision and that through regular reviews are progressed back into mainstream education, or specialist provision as appropriate to the child needs.
19. A key measurement of the success of the APP would be an increase in the number of children returning to mainstream / special education and a reduction in the time taken to achieve this return. This information will begin to become available over the next academic year.

Independent review of the PRU's

20. An independent review has been commissioned by the local authority of the entire PRU estate, whilst this review is considering the wider issue of their function and role including but not exclusively reducing permanent exclusions and improving attendance, nevertheless these will be a specific area's which it is asked to consider. It is therefore anticipated that it will produce some positive observations or options that we can implement to improve the attendance in these provisions
21. A recent training session has been held with all PRU's to specifically look at the issue of attendance, and several actions were agreed for Pru's to immediately put in to practice, these included the review; of how absences are recorded and monitored, how difficulties with transport impacted on attendance, and how to manage attendance all students during exams.
22. Despite the change in funding for the EWW provision in mainstream schools the local authority has agreed to allocate an EWW to each of the PRU's to ensure that the local authority continues to support and challenge the PRU's in improving their attendance.

23. On the 18th May 2018, a review of unvalidated attendance data across the PRU's was undertaken which identified that there had been some improvements in attendance, with an overall absence rate at this time is 41.1%, if this was maintained it would represent a 6% improvement on the previous year.

In order to ensure that Staffordshire's children continue to have good attendance at school, and that permanent exclusions reduce, the local authority will:

24. Analyse the performance of Staffordshire schools and, use this information to identify maintained schools that require improvement and intervention.
25. Work with the Regional schools' commissioner, to ensure swift and effective action is taken when poor attendance or high levels of exclusions causes concern in an Academy.
26. Encourage good and outstanding schools to share their practice, to support and enable other schools to access their achievements.

The select Committee is invited to provide comment and feedback to further shape our way forward.

Link to Strategic Plan – Staffordshire County Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022
Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity – Elective Home Education Enquiry

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Appendices/Background papers –

Appendix A – Children Missing out on Education
Appendix B – Attendance data
Appendix C – Exclusion report