

Local Members' Interest
N/A

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee – 4th September 2015 Improving Attendance and Participation in our Schools and Settings

Recommendations

1. Comment on and scrutinise the progress made by Staffordshire's Attendance Working Group, providing feedback to further inform the work of the group going forward.
2. Review and comment on the draft "Improving Participation and Attendance at our Schools and Settings: Our Principles and Priorities for 2015-2017" (Appendix A).
3. Advise and inform the county council in regard to the next steps for wider dissemination and sharing of this work-stream.

Report of Ben Adams, Cabinet Member for Learning and Skills

Summary

What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?

4. Select Committee is invited to review the work undertaken by the Attendance Working Group that was established in the Spring 2015. The group has undertaken a range of activity to bring together the diverse intelligence, data and information sets in order to inform further improvement in local delivery arrangements. This spans a number of connected functions that the council and its partners all undertake or contribute to. All are associated with participation and attendance in education.
5. Select Committee are being asked to look at this important area of work because attendance and participation is part of a number of statutory duties that the council fulfils to provide pupils with a suitable education, monitor arrangements regarding elective home education, promote good attendance, inclusion and safeguard children's welfare, fulfil duties for those excluded from school, serve penalty notices and school attendance orders, and investigate the whereabouts of pupils who have poor attendance or are at risk of being deleted from school admissions registers.

6. Good attendance is also critically important to successful attainment, achievement and progression into adult life. It contributes to aspects of the county council's business plan including supporting "best start in life" and being "ready for life". It is also fundamental to the robust safeguarding arrangements for Staffordshire children and young people.

Report

Background and Context

7. Attendance in education really matters. Not only does the Local Authority hold statutory duties in regard to admissions, participation and attendance¹ but research at both national and local level gives clear messages about the imperative of promoting good attendance and also highlights the potential consequence of poor attendance on performance and prospects.
8. The negative impact of poor school attendance are known to be felt not only in lower attainment and poorer achievement at school, but also to be felt into adult life and as a determinant of wider prospects.² Pupils with no absence at Key Stage 2 are 4.7 times more likely to achieve a level 5 or above at the end of Key Stage 2 than pupils who missed 15-20% of sessions. At Key Stage 4 (GCSE level) pupils with no absences are 2.8 times more likely to achieve 5+ GCSE A-C including English and maths than pupils missing 15-20% of sessions. The negative impact extends into adult life with higher proportion of those who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) post 16 having a record of poorer school attendance and there is a higher rate of offending found in young people who have been excluded from school. Prisoners are 10 times more likely to have been a regular truant compared with the general population.
9. So there is a lot of compelling evidence to indicate that we should all take attendance, participation and inclusion very seriously and act collectively to promote good attendance and to tackle incidences of poor attendance or fixed term and permanent exclusion.
10. An added dimension – with heightened public interest and media focus – has presented in the form of the national awareness of risks related to children missing from education (CME). Ofsted's recent inquiries linked to the "Trojan Horse" debate and their subsequent reviews into the local arrangements in Birmingham and Tower Hamlets has resulted in an advice letter to Ministers from Sir Michael Wilshaw.³ In this letter Ofsted highlight concerns regarding

¹ Statutory Guidance Children Missing from Education Jan 15
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education>

² See Appendix A - Improving Participation and Attendance p 2/3 for full references

³ 14th July Letter from Wilshaw to SoS Advice Letter Birmingham and Tower Hamlets
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-advice-note-on-schools-in-birmingham-and-tower-hamlets>

the tracking of pupils who are removed from schools' admissions registers and they recommend a clearer requirement on schools to record and share the details of the onward destination of their pupils, in order to mitigate safeguarding risks and support even more robust tracking.

11. A further area of national and inspection focus is the experiences of Children Missing Out on Education (CMOOE). In November 2013 Ofsted reported that too many children are either missing out on full time education or are not getting the education that they are entitled to. The Inspection of Children's Services has become more alert to reviewing local authority arrangements linked to this array of issues.

Staffordshire's Attendance Working Group

12. In Staffordshire we maintain a range of well-developed arrangements that operate across a range of partners. We continue to keep these under regular review and scrutiny – including as part of our self-evaluation and self-improvement systems. Over recent months a working group has operated to undertake a “deep dive” into our local arrangements and as a result of their work we are proposing a number of further improvements in already robust arrangements. These are set out in “Improving Participation and Attendance at our Schools and Settings: Our Principles and Priorities for 2015-2017” (Appendix A).
13. The Attendance Working Group has mapped the range of functions, teams and data measures that are undertaken and this is illustrated in Appendix B “Education Absence Provider Data Map”. This illustrates the business area that all contribute to local arrangements and demonstrates the span from county council internal teams, through to Families First, Entrust and onward to the array of schools and settings that all contribute an essential role or function.
14. A new Attendance and Exclusion Reporting Schedule has been devised by the Working Group (see Appendix C). This sets out the inflow of data that will inform regular and robust reporting and monitoring of key measures related to attendance and participation. Underpinning this, a full data pack (which includes restricted information and therefore is not appended to this report) has been collated and analysed. This is the first time that Staffordshire has systematically mined a rich set of attendance-related data and the recommendations set out in our key partnership document – ref Appendix A – is the direct product of this exercise and therefore a positive development of local arrangements.

Next Steps

15. As set out its Task Log (Appendix D) the Attendance Working Group has a series of actions in train to take forward this work stream. This includes partnership engagement with schools and settings on the Priorities document, and a Staffordshire-wide Attendance Conference, hosted and delivered in collaboration with our partners Entrust. Working to the

overarching Attendance Working Group are a number of specialist task groups, that bring together the relevant leads on elective home education, alternative provision and pupil referral units (PRUs), post 16 participation and NEET, exclusion, children missing out education, and the range of policies that operate linked to these areas of education provision.

Links to the Council's Strategic Outcomes

16. The County Council places priority on all children having access to a good education. The right foundation in learning and skills is vital if our young people are to access good jobs and live healthier, happier and independent lives. Keeping our children safe and well, by ensuring that we have a good understanding of where they are attending school and working together to ensure that their learning is equipping them to succeed is central to the statutory duties and corporate priorities of the County Council. Participation and attendance is therefore fundamentally linked to the delivery of strategic outcomes.

Links to other overview and Scrutiny Activity

- Staffordshire Learning Infrastructure Forecast
- The Ofsted Focussed Inspection
- School Improvement Programme

Conclusion

17. Significant progress has been made as a result of the work undertaken by the Attendance Working Group. Select Committee's comment and scrutiny will contribute further to local confidence in the robustness of our arrangements and our demonstrable commitment for further improvement of robust arrangements.

Select Committee is recommended to:

- Comment on and scrutinise the progress made by the Attendance Working Group, providing feedback to further inform the work of the group going forward
- Review and comment on the draft "Improving Participation and Attendance at our Schools and Settings: Our Principles and Priorities for 2015-2017" (Appendix A)
- Advise and inform the county council in regard to the next steps for wider dissemination and sharing of this work-stream

Appendices

Appendix A - Improving Participation and Attendance at our Schools and Settings:
Our Principles and Priorities for 2015-2017

Appendix B - Education Absence Provider Data Map

Appendix C – Attendance and Exclusion Reporting Schedule

Appendix D – Attendance Working Group Task Log

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