

Improving participation and attendance at our schools and settings: Our principles and priorities for 2015-2017

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Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee (04/09)

To be sought from:

Cllr Adams (29/07), schools (In September via e-bag and survey), Education Standards and Performance Board (7/10),

For sign off and approval at Children's Improvement Board (20/10) and for info to Health and Well-Being Board (12/11)

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Introduction

Every child deserves a good education. The right foundation of learning and skills is vital for our young people to access good jobs and live healthier, happier and independent lives. Parents of children of compulsory school age (aged between 5 and 15 at the start of the academic year) are, by law, required to ensure that their children receive a suitable education through regular attendance at school or otherwise¹.

'Good behaviour and attendance are essential to children's educational prospects'².

Staffordshire's Learning and Skills Strategy³ outlines the context and aspirations for Staffordshire schools and settings and sets out high expectations for all our children and young people. This document recognises how important the take up of early education places and good school attendance is to ensure that children and young people achieve their full potential and gain the skills they need to access good jobs in the future. There is evidence that shows that children who attend pre-school from under the age of three achieve better intellectual development. Furthermore, disadvantaged children tend to attend pre-school for shorter periods of time. Take up of free early education, particularly those eligible for Think2⁴, is therefore an essential component to improving school readiness and closing the gap between the most disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers.

There are substantial potential negative impacts on young people if they have poor school attendance. Nationally the evidence shows that children with poor attendance are unlikely to succeed academically and are more likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET) when they leave school⁵. Recent research by the DfE suggests that attendance has an impact on attainment in both the primary and secondary phase of schooling with the general trend being that a higher percentage of sessions missed is linked to lower levels of attainment. Pupils with no absence at Key Stage Two are 4.7 times more likely to achieve a level 5 or above at the end of KS2, than pupils that missed 15-20 percent of sessions. At Key Stage Four, pupils with no absence are 2.8 times more likely to achieve 5+ GCSEs A*-C or equivalent including English and maths than pupils missing 15-20 percent of KS4 sessions⁶.

¹ See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/412638/The_link_between_absence_and_attainment_at_KS2_and_KS4.pdf

² DfE School attendance parental responsibility measures Statutory guidance for local authorities, school leaders, school staff, governing bodies and the police. Jan 2015

³ See SCC Achieving Excellence in Learning and Skills (insert weblink)

⁴ Free childcare for disadvantaged 2 year olds see: <http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/childcare/families/EarlyEducation/think2/fundedplacesfortwoyearolds.aspx>

⁵ 'Improving attendance at school' DfE, Charlie Taylor, 2012 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-attendance-at-school>

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/412638/The_link_between_absence_and_attainment_at_KS2_and_KS4.pdf

The negative impacts of poor school attendance can continue into adult life as well as impacting on young people's experience of crime. In 2004, MORI explored young people's experience of crime and found a higher rate of offending amongst excluded young people (60%) in comparison to those in mainstream education (26%). National data also indicates that prisoners are 10 times as likely to have been a regular truant compared with the general population.

In addition, local research undertaken in 2015 by the Council's Insight team indicates that good school attendance is one of the most significant contributory factors to enabling children to progress and achieve at school alongside Free School Meal (FSM⁷) eligibility and having special educational needs (SEND).

'Local authorities and all schools have legal powers to use parenting contracts, parenting orders and penalty notices to address poor attendance and behaviour in school. In addition to using these powers, local authorities and schools can develop other practices to improve attendance⁸.

As the national expectations with regard to school attendance get more demanding, it is increasingly important for all partners to understand their roles and responsibilities and the contribution they can make to ensure that together we achieve the new national target of 90% attendance for all children and young people. Staffordshire County Council is committed to fulfilling its statutory responsibilities⁹ for improving attendance and reducing exclusions through working in partnership with parents, schools, our strategic partner Entrust¹⁰ and other partners and service providers. By working together, we will ensure that all Staffordshire children and young people and all those who are enrolled at a Staffordshire school or setting have good attendance and are not excluded, as this will enable all children and young people to enjoy and achieve their full potential.

This document outlines Staffordshire's current performance with regard to securing good attendance in schools and settings from the early years to post-16, and identifies a number of key priorities for improving attendance and reducing exclusions. It also sets out how those with a role to play in improving attendance and reducing exclusions for Staffordshire's children can work together. Through each of us playing our part we will make best use of the time and money we have and ensure that all Staffordshire's children and young people attend their school or setting, are not excluded and achieve their full potential.

⁷ Free School Meals eligibility

⁸ See 1.

⁹ See DfE Annex A Clarification of local authority statutory duties relating to services relevant to the Education Services Grant July 2014

¹⁰ Staffordshire County Council's strategic partner responsible for delivering some services relating to improving school attendance and reducing exclusions

Current participation and attendance at our schools and settings

Attendance in schools, and participation in early years settings and post-16

- 1. Early Years Participation:** Think2 take up of early education childcare places for disadvantaged 2 year olds continues to be one of the highest (10th) in the country with Staffordshire securing 74% take up as at January 2015, this is 16 percentage points higher than the national take up of 58% (DfE Statistics for Early Years Provision). More recent locally held data indicates that Staffordshire has achieved 80% take up for 2 year olds by July 2015. Take up for 3 and 4 year olds in January 2015 is 99% which is 1pp higher than in 2014, and also higher than the national average (DfE Statistics for Early Years Provision).
- 2. Primary and Secondary School Attendance:** School attendance rates in Staffordshire's primary and secondary schools continue to be broadly in line with the national average, and with our statistical neighbours. Staffordshire primary schools have slightly better persistent absence rates than national indicators, and secondary schools are broadly in line with the national average. District level absence rates showed varied performance across the county. Absence rates (for Primary, Secondary, and Special schools combined) in 2013/14 ranged from 4.2% for the best performing district to 5.0% for the worst performing district, which is 0.6pp above the national absence rate of 4.4%. A targeted approach will address the districts that are performing poorly.
- 3. Special School Attendance:** Special schools attendance rates are better than the national average, and in the second lowest absence rates amongst Staffordshire's statistical neighbours. In 2013/14 the percentage of persistent absentees for Staffordshire's special schools was 9.6% which was 5 percentage points lower than national.
- 4. Attendance of Vulnerable Groups:** In 2013/14 Staffordshire's Free School Meal (FSM) pupils had a higher percentage absence rate than national following comparable performance to national in the two years previous to this. Staffordshire also had a higher proportion of FSM pupils that were classed as persistent absentees than national in 2013/14, this was following three academic years where Staffordshire's performance was better than national. Positively, the percentage absence of pupils who have been looked after continuously (LAC) for 12 months or more and Children in Need (CIN¹¹) are both less than national and Staffordshire's statistical neighbours averages in 2014.

¹¹ Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 defines a child as being in need in law if: He or she is unlikely to achieve or maintain or to have the opportunity to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without provision of services from the LA

5. **Schools performing below national expectations for attendance:** The proportion of schools which do not meet the national averages for attendance and persistent absence in 2013/14 has decreased in the primary phase and in special schools, but has increased in the secondary phase.
6. **Attendance at our Pupil Referral Units (PRUs):** Overall Absence for Staffordshire's PRUs is 43.5% compared to 31.8% nationally, and persistent absence rates at our PRUs is 55.5% compared to 35.9% nationally (DfE national statistics). There are notable variations in absence rates and persistent absence rates between the 6 PRUs in Staffordshire.
7. **Post-16 Participation:** The percentage of 16 and 17 year olds in education or training as at 31 December 2014 was 89.3%, this is slightly lower than Statistical Neighbours at 91.1% and national at 90.2%. The percentage of 16-18 year olds that are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) has reduced in the last two consecutive years to 4.5% in 2014; this is higher than the Statistical Neighbour group average of 3.8% but slightly lower than the national average of 4.7% (DfE Local Authority Interactive Tool).
8. **Children Missing Education (CME) and Children Missing Out On Education (CMOOE¹²):** Some children and young people do not have access to a suitable full-time education as quickly as they need it. In the 2014-15 Academic Year 38 children and young people were missing education (CME) for more than 6 weeks. Also, there is a small number of children and young people who are being offered a part-time timetable. Nationally there is now an increased emphasis on the recording, reporting and tracking of Children Missing Education (CME) and Children Missing out on Education (CMOOE), and like many authorities, this is a priority for Staffordshire.

¹² Children who have a school place or educational provision but are not accessing it fully, i.e. due to exclusion, non-attendance or a reduced timetable

School Exclusions

9. **Permanent Exclusions:** Early indications based on local data shows the number of permanent exclusions in Staffordshire has nearly doubled over the last 2 years in both the primary and secondary phases - expressed as a percentage of the school population, the Primary phase has increased from 0.03% to 0.07% of pupils receiving a permanent exclusion between 2012/13 and 2014/15. Secondary schools have seen an increase from 0.12% of the school population receiving a permanent exclusion in 2012/13 to 0.25% in 2014/15. 10 LAC children have been permanently excluded in the last 3 years. 5 LAC children have been permanently excluded in the last academic year, 4 of them Looked After to Staffordshire and 3 of those were of primary age. There has been a challenge to find suitable alternative provision for this age range.
10. **Fixed-term Exclusions:** The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced in both the primary and secondary phases over the last 2 years. However, our most vulnerable children (FSM eligible pupils and pupils with a statement of SEN) are the most likely to be excluded. More worryingly, in 2013/14 our Looked After Children 4.5 times more likely to have a fixed term exclusion than all Staffordshire pupils as a combined population.

Working together to improve participation and attendance at our schools and settings: Our principles

No single organisation can ensure that all Staffordshire's children and young people will attend their early education, school or setting 100% of the time and the roles and responsibilities of the parent and the child are critically important. We have to work together and to do that we need to be clear on how we can all make a contribution. Here, we set out principles to guide the way we work together and give an overview of different roles and responsibilities.

Working in partnership: We will work in partnership with children and young people, families, childcare providers, schools, District Inclusion Partnerships, post-16 providers, alternative education providers, Entrust and other services to ensure that the right support and services are available at the right time to ensure that all children and young people attend their school/ education setting. We will help all involved to understand their roles and responsibilities and take pride in playing their part in achieving our common goals.

Early Help: We will ensure that where children and young people need help to access their early years or post-16 setting, to stay in their school or setting or to attend their school or setting, they get the help and support they need as soon as possible.

Targeted support: We will make intelligent use of data and performance measures to allocate resources and target support to schools and settings and vulnerable children and families who need it most to ensure that we achieve our aspiration of securing improved attendance and reduced exclusions.

Affordable and sustainable: We will ensure that council resources are efficiently and effectively deployed so that support for improving access and participation, improving school attendance and reducing exclusions is affordable and sustainable and provides value for money.

A foundation for excellence: We will ensure that all children and young people will maximise their attendance in education in order to give every child and young person the best possible opportunity to receive achieve their full potential access local jobs and enjoy a prosperous future.

Working together to ensure that all children and young people attend their school or setting so that they can achieve their potential

Accountable: We will each be responsible for taking action to ensure that all children and young people receive the appropriate support they need to participate and attend their school or setting.

Our Roles and responsibilities

1. Parents, carers, children and young people

- To ensure that children of compulsory school age who take advantage of the offer of a suitable full time education attend their school or setting on time, every day

2. Governors and leaders providing education and childcare places (early years to post-16) in Staffordshire:

- To understand who is entitled to free early education and when, and commit to maximising take up of this offer
- To understand who should be participating in education post-16 and when, and commit to ensuring meeting the September offer and maximising take up and retention in the full breadth of provision, including apprenticeships
- To contribute to data and trends and actions needed around improving attendance and reducing exclusions for your school/ setting; your locality/ district and for the council as a whole
- To be accountable for the attendance and exclusions rates in your school or setting, monitoring and reporting on attendance and exclusion rates and actively working to improve these
- To work with others to help design and deliver effective and affordable ways of improving attendance and reducing exclusions acting in accordance with statutory guidance and local protocols

Working together to ensure that all children and young people attend their school or setting so that they can achieve their potential

3. County council officers and strategic partners (Entrust):

- To establish a clear understanding of local need and performance and establish robust monitoring, reporting and evaluation arrangements
- To undertake our statutory duties and responsibilities for attendance and exclusions working with all partners (especially schools) to do our best to meet the needs of all children, young people and their families
- To use our statutory powers to ensure the safeguarding of all children and young people and ensure every child has access to a suitable full-time education
- To ensure that the provision we commission and provide is cost effective and targeted to meet local need,
- To ensure that all parts of the council, and those it commissions, work together effectively and efficiently

4. Elected Members/Councillors:

- To have high aspirations for all children and young people, regularly scrutinising current performance and plans for improving the attendance and reducing exclusions of all children and young people particularly the most vulnerable

5. Together:

- To offer a suitable full-time education to all children and young people
- To be informed partners in improving participation, attendance and reducing exclusions
- To champion our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people to ensure all achieve their full potential
- To have a common understanding of our current performance re: attendance and exclusions

Working together to ensure that all children and young people attend their school or setting so that they can achieve their potential

- To make the most efficient use of limited resources

What will success look like? Our priorities

We all want what's best for Staffordshire's children and families. We want Staffordshire's children and young people to attend their local school and avoid exclusion so that they have the best possible opportunity to enjoy their own personal successes and to be able to contribute to the county's economy in the future. This is what success will look like for Staffordshire's children and young people.

By Summer 2017:

1. **Early Years Participation:** To maintain the take up of Think2 early education (for 15 hours at week) at or above 80% and continue to perform in the top quartile nationally for take up for 3 and 4 year olds.
2. **Primary and Secondary School Attendance:** Staffordshire will perform above the national average for attendance and persistent absence in primary and secondary schools and no district will perform below the national average for attendance and persistent absence rates.
3. **Special School Attendance:** Attendance and persistent absence rates at all Staffordshire's special schools will continue to perform well compared with the national average and better than our statistical neighbours.
4. **Attendance of Vulnerable Groups:** Attendance and persistent absence rates for all our most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of children and young people (SEND, FSM, CIN, CYPP, LAC) in our primary, secondary and special schools will be much closer to the Staffordshire average and better than equivalent rates for similar groups in those LAs which are our statistical neighbours.

Working together to ensure that all children and young people attend their school or setting so that they can achieve their potential

5. **Schools performing below national expectations for attendance:** All schools and settings in Staffordshire to be at or above the national average rates for attendance and persistent absence.
6. **Attendance at our Pupil Referral Units (PRUs):** Attendance and persistent absence rates in all of our PRUs will be better than the national average for PRUs.
7. **Post-16 Participation:** The percentage of 16 and 17 year olds in education or training will be better than our statistical neighbours and the national average. The percentage of 16 – 18 year olds that are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) will also be better than our statistical neighbours and the national average.
8. **Children Missing Education (CME) and Children Missing Out On Education (CMOOE):** All services will work in partnership to ensure that all children who are not in receipt of a suitable full-time education will be centrally recorded, monitored and tracked so that no child will be missing from a suitable full-time education for longer than is absolutely necessary. We will fulfil all of our statutory obligations with regard to CME and CMOOE.
9. **Permanent Exclusions:** Permanent exclusion rates in primary and secondary schools will be decreasing and Staffordshire schools will be performing better than the national average. No Looked After Child (LAC) or Child in Need (CIN) or Child on a Child Protection Plan (CYPP) will be permanently excluded.
10. **Fixed Term Exclusions:** We will continue to reduce the number of fixed term exclusions in our schools and ensure that our most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of children and young people (LAC, FSM, GRT, SEND, CIN, CYPP¹³) have the early help and support they need to ensure that they are no more likely to be excluded than other children and young people

¹³ Children subject of a Child Protection Plan

How will we deliver these priorities?

1. We will ensure good leadership and governance. The Attendance Working Group was established in March 2015 with representatives from across council departments and included colleagues from Entrust, our strategic partner. This group is responsible for taking forward Staffordshire's priorities to ensure that all children and young people attend their school or setting so that they can achieve their potential. See the following documents for further information:
 - ✓ Attendance Working Group Terms of Reference
 - ✓ Attendance and Exclusions Reporting Schedule
 - ✓ Workplan for the Attendance Working Group
 - ✓ Monthly Attendance Performance Reports
 - ✓ List of LA policies
2. We will ensure appropriate commissioning and performance management arrangements are in place to ensure that the right services are delivered by the right people at the right time, and crucially, deliver improvements. See the following documents for further information:
 - ✓ Education Absence Provider Data Map
 - ✓ KPIs for Education Absence Providers
3. We will ensure a relentless focus on our statutory duties and identified priorities and particularly on supporting our most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people to achieve their potential. We will work in partnership to ensure that all those working to improve participation and attendance and reduce exclusions have access to training, information and support to enable our collective ambitions to be achieved.

Get in touch

We are currently seeking feedback on this document and would value your views on our principles and priorities. Please go to [and complete a short survey by ?](#). If you have any questions, please contact us at [?](#)