

# Barnet Children's Partnership Board Report

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**Title:** Working together to improve school attendance

**Meeting Date:** 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

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**Service/ Dept.:** Barnet Education and Learning Service

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## 1. Summary of Key Information.

- On 6<sup>th</sup> May 2022, the Department of Education published new guidance for Local Authorities and Schools, including special and Independent schools. The guidance is intended to be made statutory from September 2024 at the earliest.
- The Department of Education are currently in consultation about how Local Authorities and schools use and issue fixed penalty notices, with the intention of setting a national standard to unify the process and ensure equity across boroughs. The DfE intend for this to become statutory by September 2024.
- In response to the 'Working Together to Improve Attendance' guidance, BELS has recruited to the position of Attendance Support Team Officer as a move towards the responsibilities in the guidance.
- In response to the 'Promoting Education for Children with a Social Worker' guidance published in June 2022, the Education Welfare Team has co created the Children with a Social Worker (CWSW) Attendance Forum, which identifies and reduces barriers for those with severe absence who are subject to a child protection plan.

## 2. DfE Guidance and implementation

### 2.1 Working together to Improve Attendance Guidance

The Working Together to Improve Attendance guidance was first published in May 2022, with the intention of being made statutory from September 2024. The guidance placed additional burdens on the Local Authority to provide a free service to all schools, including Independent Schools to improve attendance through meetings with headteacher and families, developing training for schools with identified attendance concerns and forging close ties between Education and Family Services.

The guidance places more onus on schools to embed attendance at a senior level and look more creatively at supporting children with barriers to attendance, utilising Early Help Assessments as a way of supporting families with attendance.

The Department for Education have advised that all Local Authorities have an Attendance Support Team that is tasked with supporting all schools, identifying area wide barriers to attendance, and ensuring that all front-line council services include attendance in their practice.

Below are the additional responsibilities of the Local Authority in response to vulnerable pupils in Barnet:

Pupils at Risk of becoming Persistently Absent*	Persistently Absent Pupils	Severely Absent** Pupils	Pupils with SEND who have low attendance	Pupils with a Social Worker
<p>1. Hold a termly conversation with every school to identify, discuss and signpost or provide access to services for pupils who are persistently or severely absent or at risk of becoming so.</p> <p>2. Where there are out of school barriers, provide each identified pupil and their family with access to services they need in the first instance. If the issue persists, facilitate a voluntary early help assessment where appropriate. Take an active part in the multi-agency effort with the school and other partners.</p> <p>3. Provide the lead practitioner where all partners agree that a local authority service is best placed to lead. Where the lead practitioner is outside of the local authority, continue to work with the school and partners</p>	<p>1. Continued support as for pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent and:</p> <p>2. Work jointly with the school to provide formal support options including parenting contracts and education supervision orders.</p> <p>3. Where there are safeguarding concerns, ensure joint working between the school, children's social care services and other statutory safeguarding partners.</p> <p>4. Where support is not working, being engaged with or appropriate, enforce attendance through legal intervention (including prosecution as a last resort).</p>	<p>1. Continued support as for persistently absent pupils and:</p> <p>2. All services should make this group the top priority for support. This may include a whole family plan, consideration for an education, health and care plan, or alternative form of educational provision.</p> <p>3. Be especially conscious of any potential safeguarding issues, ensuring joint working between the school, children's social care services and other statutory safeguarding partners. Where appropriate, this could include conducting a full children's social care assessment and building attendance into children in need and child protection plans.</p>	<p>1. Work closely with relevant services and partners, for example special educational needs, educational psychologists, and mental health services, to ensure joined up support for families.</p> <p>2. Ensure suitable education, such as alternative provision, is arranged for children of compulsory school age who because of health reasons would not otherwise receive a suitable education.</p>	<p>1. Regularly monitor the attendance of children with a social worker in their area.</p> <p>2. Put in place personal education plans for looked-after children.</p> <p>3. Secure regular attendance of looked-after children as their corporate parent and provide advice and guidance about the importance of attendance to those services supporting pupils previously looked after</p>

\*Persistently Absent Pupils are those pupils whose attendance is less than 90%

\*\* Severely Absent Pupils are those pupils whose attendance is less than 50%

Whilst this is new guidance, most of the responsibilities listed are already in place through established working partnerships between Education, Family Services, and schools. The area of new responsibility is the role of Attendance Support Team Officer and the offer of support to all schools in Barnet.

### **The role of Attendance Support Team Officer**

From September 2023 BELS has appointed an Attendance Support Team Officer (ASTO) to deliver the free service to all schools in Barnet. Due to being a brand-new role we are able to shape and develop the service to best suit the needs of the families and schools in Barnet.

In a move towards the guidance, the ASTO is supporting all schools by offering advice and information as the named contact for BELS. The intention for the role is to:

- Identify schools with low attendance and provide training.
- Use good practice from schools with high attendance.
- Provide termly communication to all schools on their attendance data
- Be a named contact for all schools
- Monitor and identify vulnerable cohorts and support schools with their attendance
- Identify area wide barriers and trends across the borough

## WONDE

WONDE is the attendance portal designed by the Department for Education to show attendance in real time, it links to schools' attendance systems and takes the data daily to reflect a weekly picture.

We currently have 103 schools signed up to WONDE and intend to have the remaining 30 schools signed up by the end of this academic year.

Below is a front page of all schools that have signed up to WONDE, it has a filter on the right-hand side to identify vulnerable groups and can show the attendance of every pupil on roll.

Insights dashboard **Local authority** School Pupil Guidance Feedback

Last updated: 02/11/2023  
Latest session available: 27/10/2023

### Local authority attendance data

Get attendance and absence figures for the whole LA, school and pupil characteristic groups. Use the filter pane on the right hand side of the screen to select pupil characteristics. Data is updated weekly.

Select school

All

Number of schools	Number of pupils	Overall attendance	Persistently absent pupils	Severely absent pupils
103	48,700	94.5%	7,733	694

School Name	URN	UKPRN	Phase	School Type	Pupils	Attendance	Absent	Authorised	Unauthorised	Persistently Absent	Severely Absent
All Saints' CoFE Primary School N20	101329	10073987	Primary	Voluntary aided school	206	96.0%	4.0%	3.8%	0.2%	28	1
All Saints' CoFE Primary School NW2	101315	10074716	Primary	Voluntary aided school	165	94.2%	5.8%	3.1%	2.6%	30	0
Alma Primary	139562	10041642	Primary	Free schools	196	96.0%	4.0%	3.2%	0.9%	21	0
Ark Pioneer Academy	147061	10083729	Secondary	Free schools	908	95.2%	4.8%	3.7%	1.1%	113	7
Ashmole Primary School	142772	10056951	Primary	Free schools	423	96.7%	3.3%	3.0%	0.2%	41	0
Barnfield Primary School	101258	10071300	Primary	Community school	453	94.9%	5.1%	3.1%	2.0%	59	3
Blessed Dominic Catholic Primary School	101339	10071670	Primary	Voluntary aided school	464	96.2%	3.8%	2.2%	1.6%	58	3
Broadfields Primary School	140236	10043449	Primary	Academy converter	716	94.7%	5.3%	3.1%	2.2%	122	7

Filters

Phase is (All)

Sex is (All)

Ethnicity is (All)

Year group is (All)

Persistently absent is (All)

Severely absent is (All)

Special educational ne... is (All)

Free school meals (F... is (All)

Education, health and ... is (All)

Looked after child (L... is (All)

Previously looked after ... is (All)

Child in need (CIN) is (All)

Child protection plan (... is (All)

Compulsory school age is (All)

We have been using WONDE in September/October 2023 to identify all pupils showing as 0% to investigate their whereabouts and reasons for non-attendance for safeguarding purposes.

## 2.2 Consultation on Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs)

The Department for Education are in the final consultation stage of renewing the legislation for FPNs, this was in response to the difference in practice from Local Authorities and the imbalance of response from different schools and different boroughs for those families that live on a border of two boroughs or from families that live in different areas of England.

The proposal intends to increase the cost of fixed penalties for families from September 2024 from £60/£120 to £80/£160 in line with inflation.

When parents/carers receive a second fine within a 3-year period, they will not be able to pay the reduced rate and the fine will be payable at the higher rate only.

There will be a national limit of no more than two FPNs in a three-year period before moving onto the next step (e.g. Prosecution)

When the proposal becomes legislation BELS will update its code of practice to reflect the changes.

### 2.3 Promoting Education of Children with a Social Worker Guidance

The Promoting Education for Children with a Social Worker guidance has new responsibilities for Virtual School Heads giving them a strategic leadership role to champion the educational attendance, attainment, and progress of children with a social worker.

In response to this new guidance, the Education Welfare Team has co-created with Virtual School a monthly 'children with a social worker attendance forum'. This forum will identify those children with a social worker who are deemed persistently absent or severely absent and invite schools to discuss barriers to attendance with the panel members.

The forum is made up of key members who attend every meeting:

- Education Welfare Team Manager
- Head of Virtual School
- Parenting Intervention Lead, Barnet Integrated Clinical Services (BICS)
- Service Manager for Early Help
- Head of Intervention and Planning for Social Care
- Education Psychologists
- Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for the Pavilion Meadway PRU and Outreach

An invitation is sent to schools for a member of SLT to attend, who can implement any plans agreed at the forum. It is hoped that the core members of the meeting represent service areas that have the resources and knowledge to unblock the barriers for children with a social worker to attend school.

As of 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2023, there are currently 36 Children on a Child Protection (CP) Plan with attendance under 90%, 16 of these are severely absent. The forum can discuss 4/5 cases per sitting and has started with the lowest attending children on a CP plan, the intention is to then move through the CP cohort before identifying those children who are Children In Need (CIN) with low attendance.

### 3. Attendance Data

The Department for Education are now using WONDE as their data collection portal, whilst this provides quicker and more accessible data – it only shows the schools that have signed up to the database therefore is only a close estimate.

The below is the information on the national picture of attendance:

#### Year to date summary 2023/24

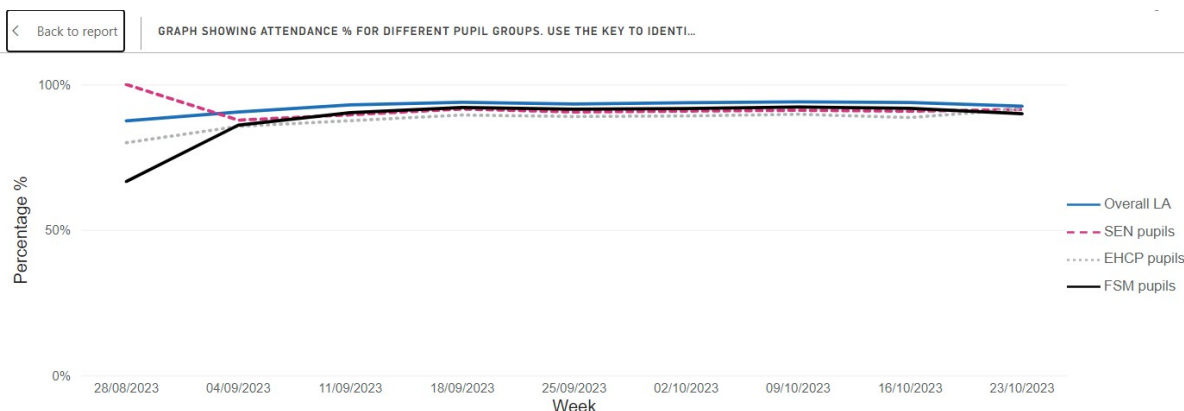
	Total	Primary	Secondary	Special
Attendance rate	93.9%	95.4%	92.1%	88.1%
Overall absence rate	6.1%	4.6%	7.9%	11.9%
Authorised absence rate	4.1%	3.2%	5.0%	9.0%
Unauthorised absence rate	2.1%	1.4%	2.9%	2.9%

**Barnet:**

	Total	Primary	Secondary	Special
Attendance rate	94.5%	95.5%	93.4%	87.6%
Overall absence rate	5.5%	4.5%	6.6%	12.4%
Authorised absence rate	3.8%	3.5%	4.2%	10.9%
Unauthorised absence rate	1.7%	1.0%	2.4%	1.5%

Barnet is achieving better than nationally overall, with primary schools achieving slightly higher and secondary schools doing considerably better than national average.

Special schools in Barnet are performing below national average with most absences being authorised, this is an identified area of work for the new Attendance Support Team Officer to support Barnet’s special schools to increase their attendance.



The graph above shows the first weeks back to school in September, tracking attendance of key groups of pupils. Whilst the overall school population and EHCP pupils are consistent, you can see that there was a sharp decline in the first weeks for children with SEN and an increase in attendance for those children who are eligible for free school meals.

The role of the ASTO will be to identify trends and patterns across different cohorts of pupils to seek an explanation into different data sets.

**4. Elective Home Education (EHE)**

The total number of children currently registered as EHE is 391, since the Pandemic we have tracked the number of registrations and de-registrations on a weekly basis.

Key information on the registration of children to EHE is:

Academic Year	September registration	Total new registrations	Number of children de-registered – not including Year 11 leavers	Cumulative total of children known to EHE in the year.
2018/2019	25	104		406
2019/2020	6	69		242
2020/2021	76	337	97	567
2021/2022	21	193	179	603
2022/2023	24	297	245	670

The EHE register is fluid with children registering and de-registering continuously, in the last two academic years the gap between children registering and de-registering has closed in comparison to the 2020/2021 year.

We have identified that, since the pandemic parents feel more empowered being able to deliver education at home, so when parents are dissatisfied with school or do not get their school preference they opt to home educate until a more suitable school is found.

We have not returned to pre-pandemic levels however, given the reason provided above and parents increasingly knowing their rights with withdrawing their children from school, we don't believe that pre-pandemic levels will be achieved.

For those parents who provided a reason to EHE on the current register:

265 Children are EHE due to a lifestyle choice.

48 Children are EHE due to disaffection at school.

27 Children are EHE due to COVID.

19 Children are EHE as didn't get preferred school place.

2 Children are EHE due to medical needs

Currently we have 25 children registered as EHE who are subject to an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP): 15 secondary aged children, 9 primary aged children and 1 Early Years. We also have, 93 children registered, who have a reported SEND, this includes the children with an EHCP.

The EHE Advisory Teacher meets regularly with the SEND Lead for Barnet to share information on EHE and SEND children and to keep respective data and processes accurate and up to date.

The EHE grid is shared with Family Services to monitor and track those most vulnerable and safeguard children who are no longer in mainstream settings. The Grid is shared with Family Services monthly to identify children and their families known to Social Care & Early Help and this information is filtered to Social Workers to add to their case files. Any cases we identify with safeguarding concerns are discussed through an open-door policy between Social Care Leads and EWT Manager for responsive actioning as and when a concern is identified.

See below agreed processes between BELS and Family Services:

## Elective Home Education & Family Services Flow Chart

