

CHILDREN'S SERVICES ATTENDANCE STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

EVERY SCHOOL DAY MATTERS – EVERY CHILD AND YOUNG
PERSON MATTERS

*“Your head’s just full of things that worry you” **

*“School attendance cannot be separated out from other aspects of the child’s life” **

*“I’ll take anything” **

*“non- attendance at school is just a symptom” **

*Comments from children, parents and practitioners taken from research undertaken by Education Leeds around persistent absence – **‘Just a symptom of confusing lives’** Children Leeds and Education Leeds 2008. Report author: Kate James

Foreword

Good attendance at school lies at the heart of everything we are doing here to ensure that our children and young people are happy, healthy, safe and increasingly successful. It is both a safeguarding and a standards issue. We know that our schools are increasingly brilliant places where every child can be helped to read, to count, to sing, to dance, to play and to become a confident and powerful little learner by eleven and where every young person can be on a pathway to success by sixteen... but only if they attend, engage and learn.

We must all work together to support and encourage families and communities that good and regular attendance is the key to success. We must work together to reach those families who are not tackling this and ensure that they do. We must work together to make learning, school and achievement cool and to release the talent, the potential and the magic in every child and every young person.... whatever it takes!

Written by Chris Edwards

DCS Children Leeds, Chief Exec EL, Lead Councillor for CYP, Area Inclusion Partnerships, Headteacher leads etc - To be signed off by reps of all to underline the partnership approach

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Introduction

Excellent attendance is the key to ensuring that children and young people have the best life chances and opportunities. We strongly believe that having access to and receiving a good education is the best way we have to ensure that all children achieve across the five outcomes. This in turn empowers them to be able to make the best and most positive choices about their future lives.

To achieve this, the right to education is embedded in law, requiring parents and carers to ensure that their children receive a suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. For the vast majority of parents and carers of children and young people in Leeds, that responsibility is met through regular attendance at mainstream and, sometimes, more specialist provision. We should also not forget that we share that responsibility as corporate parents to children who are Looked After by the local authority.

Through regular attendance at those provisions, there is an expectation that all children should be accessing high quality learning and a curriculum which meets their needs as well as having appropriate support from those services who can work together support the school to fully meet their needs including ensuring those children are kept safe from harm.

Given that the evidence clearly tells us that non-attendance at school is mostly only one symptom of other, often complex, problems, the Children's Services Attendance Strategy aims to secure the commitment of all those who work with children and families to contribute to improving school attendance and therefore improving the life chances of young people in the city. The responsibility for reducing Persistent Absence from school cannot reside with one service and demands a multi-faceted response.

Why tackle absence from school?

- **Outcomes** – the negative impact of poor attendance on children is well documented. Local and national research tells us that non-attendance at school is often an indicator of more deeply rooted problems for individuals and families. We want children and young people to enjoy and achieve and be safe at school enabling them to grow up to be successful adults. If they fail to have acquired the skills they need to make the kinds of positive choices we hope for, then they become heavier users of additional services later in life and this cycle often repeats down generations.
- **Safeguarding** – through school attendance we can track the progress of all children including vulnerable groups such as Looked After Children, those subject to a child protection plan and other cohorts at significant risk of failing or slipping through the net. If children attend school regularly then this is a protecting factor against other potential risks. Schools are often the first to detect a possible concern when a child fails to arrive at school and can initiate contact with home. For some children, school is a safer place to be for them to be than home, and for many others the only place they may get a nutritious meal.
- **Accountability** - we are responsible for monitoring regular school attendance and ensuring that our schools and services meet the needs of the young people in our city, enabling them to get the best outcomes and fulfil their potential. Rightly, we are measured by those outcomes.

The National Context

Promoting regular school attendance is a key component in the Government's strategy to raise educational standards.

The Public Service Agreement (PSA) target was set to improve levels of school attendance so that by 2008, school absence is reduced by 8% compared to 2003. For Leeds, this means reducing the level of absences from school from 6.98% to 6.42%, as measured by data from the School Census.

The Children's Plan states the goal of reducing persistent absence in secondary schools to 5% across all local authorities by 2011. To achieve this there are now statutory requirements on local authorities to set annual targets to achieve or maintain low levels of persistent absentees. All state schools must set targets to achieve or maintain low levels of overall absence. Children Leeds endorse this approach as our intelligence tells us that for all children and young people good attendance is the key to improved life chances and greater choice post 16.

This area of work is also influenced by reports and legislation in relation to behaviour, attendance and learning, as all three aspects impact on each other. A selection of those most pertinent to attendance and that reinforce the necessity of a shared responsibility are:

1. *'Learning Behaviour – lessons learned'* (Sir Alan Steer) - review of behaviour standards and practices in schools, recommending that Children's Trust Boards should routinely consider the impact of behaviour and attendance issues on all five *Every Child Matters* outcomes and reflect this in a specific behaviour and attendance section in their Children and Young People's Plan. It went on to state this should be monitored and regularly reviewed and requires the active engagement of all reflecting their ownership of the partnership and their commitment to all local children.
(www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications)
2. *The Laming Report* - Lord Laming clearly states that attendance is a safeguarding issue. Regular attendance at school offers many physical, emotional and social safeguards to children and young people as well as access to additional specialist support when they need it.
(www.publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk)
3. *The Lamb Inquiry* – The recent review of SEN and Disability Information is relevant to attendance in that children and young people who have a disability and/or have been determined to have SEN are over represented in the PA cohort.
(www.dcsf.gov.uk/lambinquiry)
4. *Review of Elective Education in England (Graham Badman)* – The review highlights a set of 28 recommendations for changing the way that parents are able to educate their children at home in order to ensure good outcomes and safeguard children who are not registered at a school.
(www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations)

The Leeds Context

There is much evidence that Leeds is moving in a positive direction. Over 2007/08 Leeds has seen its best ever levels of secondary school attendance (representing the largest single year on year increase of 0.71%) and a significant fall in persistent absence. There has been a 22% reduction in the number of persistent absentees between 2005/06 and 2007/8. Good progress can be seen in those schools targeted for specific focus.

However, whilst significant progress has been made, secondary figures remain below the national average. Leeds is classified by the DCSF as an intensive support authority and a reduction of 1.2 points was required in the 2007/08 academic year for the authority to achieve its target of 7.7% persistent absence (defined as the cohort of children with on average less than 80% attendance). Our revised attendance strategy has placed a greater emphasis on partnership working to support further improvements as well as the sharing of best practice between and with schools. Attendance is a key priority within the Children and Young People's Plan.

Attendance across primary and secondary schools improved by 0.2 percentage points in the 2007/08 academic year, this is the equivalent of an additional 23,000 school days attended.

The Attendance Strategy Team has worked closely with the DCSF Regional B&A Consultant, local National Strategies Consultants and School Improvement Advisers/SIPS to provide intensive targeted support and challenge to target secondary schools for persistent absence. The impact of this joint support and challenge has been positive, resulting in greater ownership of attendance at school level, improvements in attendance and significant reductions in Persistent Absence (PA).

Levels of persistent absence in all 18 DCSF designated secondary schools reduced with reductions by twice the amount than seen in Leeds schools overall. Significant reductions were seen in years 9 and 11 where persistent absence decreased by almost 2%.

In targeted Primary Schools, where direct group work was undertaken, a significant decrease of 11% persistent absence pupils has been achieved. Although Government emphasis and target setting has focused predominantly on the secondary sector, it is vital that we focus strongly on pre-school and Primary phases as poor patterns and attitudes can be set at this stage which are much more resistant to change later in school life.

The Attendance Strategy Team is also the lead agency for the Children Missing Education (CME) Strategy. Revised guidance was issued in January 2009 which now confirms that Children Missing Education are defined as:

"... not on roll of a school, not placed in alternative provision by a local authority and who are not receiving a suitable education at home."

However, it is important that other agencies are partners in safeguarding these children and ensuring that they do not fail to achieve because on average some 600+ children are 'found' in Leeds every year. The strategy also seeks multi-agency approaches to children who go missing from home or their care setting. The Badman Review into Elective Home Education will also require a multi-team response in order that children who don't access school are seen regularly.

The Leeds Vision

The Leeds vision is that all children and young people will have access to and enjoy brilliant learning in brilliant learning environments that gives them confidence, knowledge, understanding and skills to thrive and achieve their potential. Education Leeds has a strong commitment to removing barriers to learning and enabling children and young people to attend, whatever it takes.

It is our vision that all children and young people in Leeds are happy, healthy, safe, successful and free from the effects of poverty. In order to achieve our integrated working ambitions we need to transform the way we work together to help children, young people and communities in a more co-ordinated and joined up way and to ensure this kind of working follows children as they grow and move across key times of transition.

We are therefore committed to an integrated services approach to tackle this issue. We know that behaviour, attendance, teaching and learning are inextricably linked together. Building on effective partnership working we will share best practice, challenge and support each other to improve. By doing this we will improve the outcomes for children and young people.

What are the aims and objectives of the Strategy?

The aim of the strategy is to secure the ownership of school attendance across all children's services and to raise the aspirations of parents, pupils, schools and communities to empower children and young people, their families and their communities to improve their ability to attend appropriately at every age and stage of their lives. The strategy also aims to capture the wide and diverse range of activities that all services are engaged in that impact on school attendance. By doing so they will be able to raise their standards of achievement and attainment, be fully included in their communities at home and at school and be able to become active and positive young citizens who understand their rights and responsibilities.

Our approach

The Children's Services Attendance Strategy for Leeds is a multi-agency strategy which recognises that the highest standards of attendance can only be achieved through the input of children and young people, families and carers, schools, Education Leeds (including CME, Early Years, School Improvement etc), Children Leeds, and other partners such as the Police, social care, health, housing and voluntary services. The strategy also seeks to link with key partnerships to enable delivery including ALMOs, Area Committees (Local and Area Delivery Plans), Area Inclusion Partnerships, Area Safeguarding Boards, Community Safety etc.

The strategy will be supported by a multi-agency action plan where each agency details how their work cuts across the attendance agenda and how the role that they currently play supports good attendance and plans for how this work will become embedded in practice for all services for children, young people and their families. The creation of the Children Leeds Panels and locality Intervention Panels will also be crucial in securing a multi-agency approach and embedding the CAF as a tool to improve attendance.

Key Principles

The Strategy has three overarching principles that map across from the CYPP. This Attendance Strategy emphasises the needs of the child/young person and focuses on the recognition of the complex nature of many attendance difficulties and the need to tackle root causes including family work, through the following:-

- Child Centred Services
- Think Family
- World Class Services

KEY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The activities that agencies are engaged in around attendance aim to achieve the following objectives:

1. Safeguarding

By attending school regularly children and young people are kept safe, are able to access free school meals and access to other services, health care and education which increases their own emotional and physical resilience and therefore their ability to keep themselves safe when not at school. Persistent absence is often an early indicator of children/families with additional needs. Another key element of the strategy is the CME strategy which requires input from all agencies to ensure as many pupils as possible are tracked .

2. Integrated early intervention – Preventative Approaches and CAF First

Good attendance behaviours need to be established from when children start school but universal providers also need to intervene early using CAF/Lead Professional etc where appropriate before poor patterns become entrenched. This will require CAFs to be undertaken for attendance by other than the AST. Sharing of intelligence around vulnerable groups and situations e.g. transfer between school phases. This objective can only be achieved through developments of the Leeds Inclusive Learning Strategy and locality working. There is also a much bigger picture around aspirations of children, parents, schools and communities.

3. Shared Responsibility and Accountability

Practice around attendance varies across education providers (as well as between school phases) which does not provide equity for all children and young people e.g. authorisation of family holidays during school time. When services align their work with the strategy, there will be improved coherence and consistency in policy and practice. It is also crucial that when the Attendance Advisory Panel Stage 6 (Attendance Strategy Team process) is reached i.e. where not even enforcement has brought about change, that there is an on-going shared ownership because at this stage, the absence should be deemed a safeguarding issue.

4. Raising standards - Reducing persistent absence and all forms of exclusion

There are clear indicators that if behaviour and attendance are improved then standards and attainment also improve. Local and national evidence demonstrates

the impact of high quality leadership and management to achieve this and are supported by National Strategies and School Improvement.

Other key influences on the Attendance Strategy

Apart from national drivers, the Strategy is also driven by and related to other local strategies and plans such as:

Leeds Inclusive Learning Strategy (LILS) 2007-2010

The LILS activities aim to deliver several outcomes that will be evident by 2014. These are:

- Appropriate local pathways to enable children and young people with learning and behaviour difficulties, to be educated in the most appropriate provision to meet their needs
- Integrated services will be locally available to support children and young people, parents and schools. Services will be locally managed and shaped according to local needs
- SILCs will become core members of the Area Inclusion Partnerships and together they will provide a continuum of support for SEN and behaviour
- Clear accountability frameworks which set out the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of parent/carer(s), schools, clusters of schools, Area Inclusion Partnerships, Education Leeds and Children's services
- Children, parent/carer(s) and other agencies will consider that provision is of a high quality, appropriate and responsive to meet identified needs

The LILS will enable the kind of partnership approach at a local level that will enable attendance to be tackled in the way that the research leads us to believe will have an impact i.e. through multi-disciplinary teams who can offer early identification and intervention before needs become acute. The Area Inclusion Partnerships also perform the statutory functions of a Behaviour and Attendance Partnership which builds in an accountability framework – this shared responsibility of all services committing to the common thread of attendance in their work is the only way absence from school will be addressed at the level it needs to be.

In addition the Children's Services Attendance Strategy is influenced by:

- National Strategies work
- School Improvement Policy Framework and Strategy
- Early Years Strategy and Children's Centres
- Safeguarding Strategy
- Children Missing Education Strategy (CME)
- Revised guidance on Elective Home Education
- 14-19 Strategy
- NEET Strategy
- Anti-Bullying Strategy
- Aiming High and Aiming High for disabled children
- Integrated Youth Support Strategy and Targeted Youth Support (IYSS and TYS)
- Looked After Children Strategy
- Young Carers Strategy
- SEN Strategy
- Community Cohesion and the Duty to Prevent violent extremism

- Children’s Workforce Development Strategy
- Healthy Schools Strategy
- Extended Services Strategy
- Children and Young People’s Plan
- Youth Justice Plan

What do we need to do next?

To achieve our aim we have to work with and across all partners, taking shared responsibility for the strategy, as no single agency should take this forward alone.

This strategy is linked to our new arrangements for commissioning.

Children and Young People

Children Leeds

Education Leeds

All schools and other learning providers

Health providers

Housing

Child and Adolescent Mental Health services

Adult mental health services

Community based services such as the Police and other emergency services

Voluntary sector providers such as faith based organisations, children and young people’s play and youth organisations, disability support organisations, community centres, substance misuse organisations and many others

Delivery mechanisms

We have established a Project Management Board to drive forward, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the strategy and related action plan. The membership and terms of reference of this Board is outlined in Appendix A. Once the Strategy is signed off by the Board, its delivery and monitoring will transfer to the Area Inclusion Partnership at a local level and through annual reports to the Education Leeds Board.

Through this shared action plan we will address the areas for improvement that have already been identified. This plan will also include shared targets against local and national indicators.

Next steps

The head of the Attendance Strategy Team will engage partners through a variety of mechanisms i.e. the Area Inclusion Partnerships, locality enablers, Integrated Process Co-ordinators etc and secure agreed actions for services that will support the agenda of raising school attendance in Leeds