

## **Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

### **Attendance Update**

**Wards** All

**Service:** Access Service

**Portfolio:** Councillor Kaur, Education and Skills.

#### **1. Aim**

The aim of this report provides an update of on how Walsall continues to meet its statutory responsibility regarding attendance in schools.

#### **2. Recommendations**

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the contents of this report and decides whether there should be further information or updates

#### **3. Report detail**

##### **3.1 Attendance – overview**

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school. Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly.

##### **3.2 Attendance – Statutory Duties of the LA**

On 29 February, the Department for Education (DfE) published a revised version of 'Working together to improve school attendance' as statutory guidance from 19<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

The guidance sets out expectations of schools, trusts and local authorities drawn from the best practice across the system. Since the guidance was originally published in May 2022, there has been significant progress in implementation across Walsall.

The guidance makes clear that all local authorities are expected to:

- Rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools on which to provide support and focus its efforts on to unblock area wide barriers to attendance.
- Have a School Attendance Support Team which provides the following core functions free of charge to all schools (regardless of type):
  - Communication and advice: regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area.
  - Targeting Support Meetings: hold termly conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils.

- Multi-disciplinary support for families: provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance.
  - Legal intervention: take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with.
- Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through their Virtual School.

### **3.3 DfE – Statistical Release**

DfE publishes termly pupil absence data and statistics via the following 3 National Statistics releases each year:

- autumn term data and statistics - published in May
- autumn and spring terms data and statistics - published in October
- full year data and statistics - published in March

Only the full year absence release gives a definitive view of pupil absence.

Termly publications can be affected significantly by term length with findings from these releases for indicative purposes only and the results should be treated with caution.

The DfE monitors pupil absence levels using two key measures - overall absence rate and persistent absence (PA) rate.

These key measures are calculated for pupils who are of compulsory school age - ie aged between 5 and 15 as at the start of the academic year (31 August).

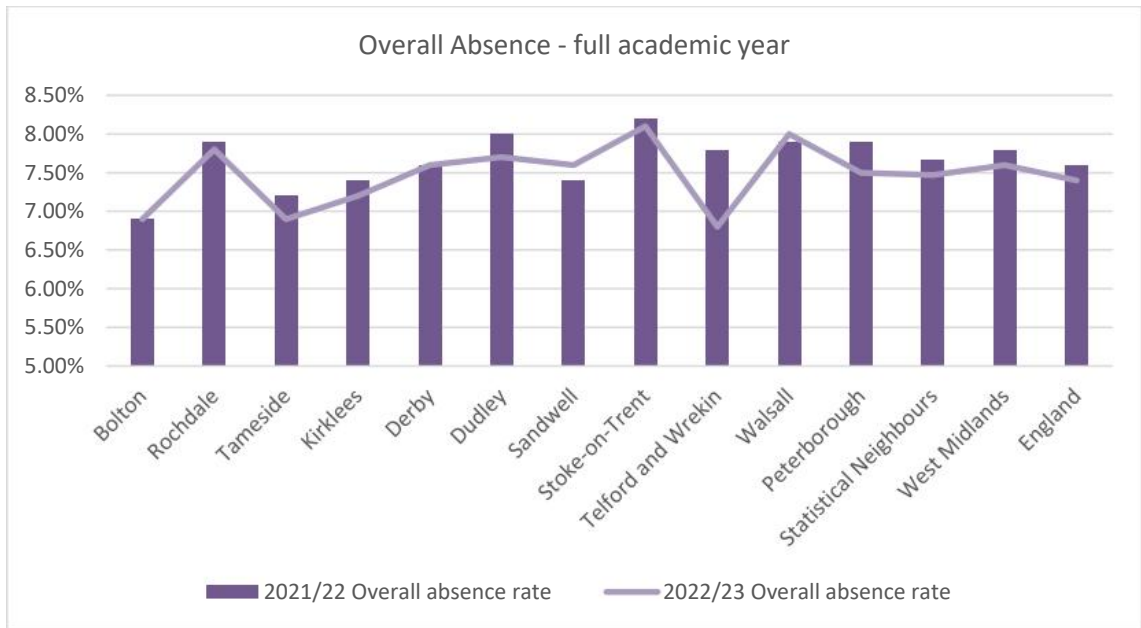
Overall absence is the aggregated total of all authorised and unauthorised absences.

Authorised absence is absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised school representative - including absences where a satisfactory explanation has been provided. For example, through illness.

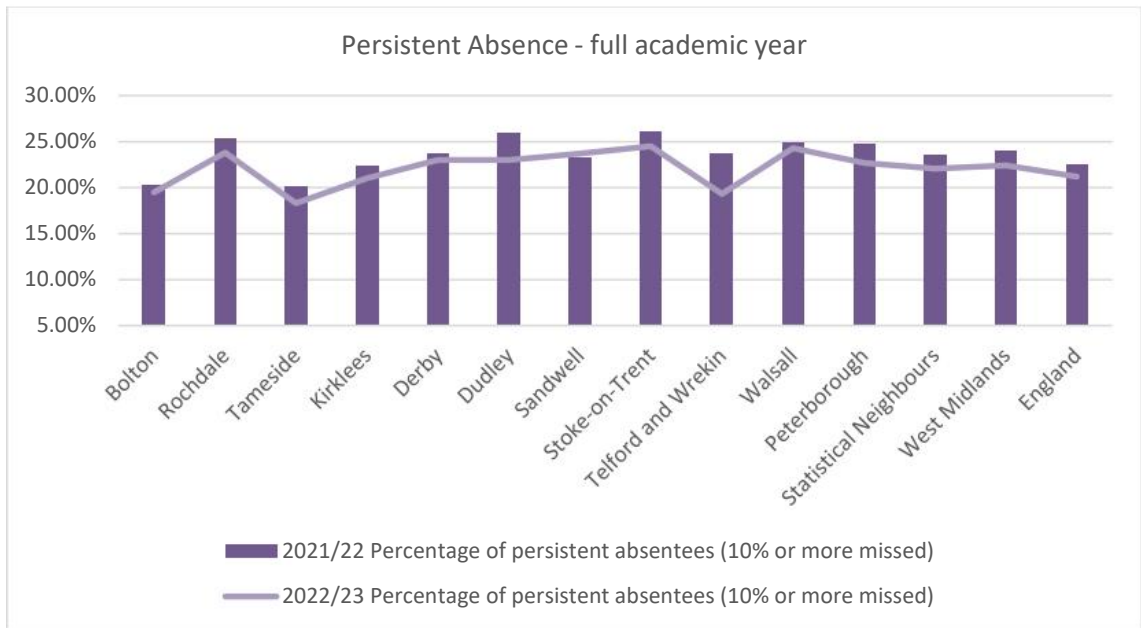
Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences and arrivals after registration has closed.

Persistent absence is when a pupil enrolment's overall absence equates to 10% or more of their possible sessions.

The 2022/23 academic year is the latest full year data.

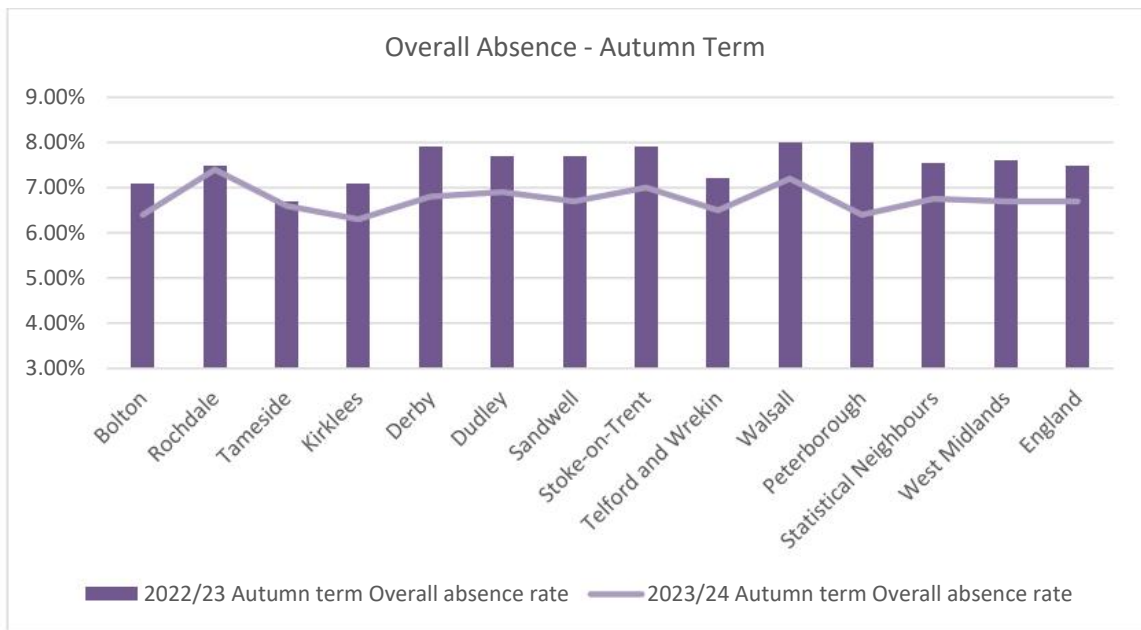


Walsall’s overall absence increased by 0.10% in 2022/23 compared to the previous academic year. Overall absence in Walsall was 0.60% higher than the national average.

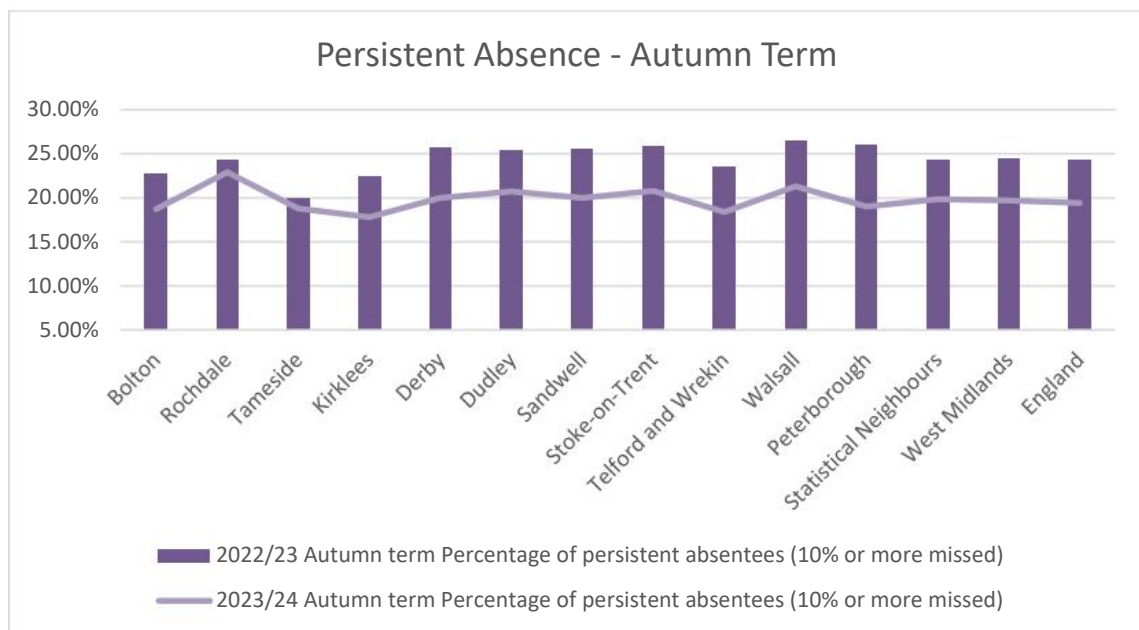


Walsall’s persistent absence decreased by 0.60% in 2022/23 compared to the previous academic year. Persistent absence in Walsall was 3.10% higher than the national average.

The latest data release is for the Autumn term 2023/24.



Walsall’s overall absence decreased by 0.10% in 2023/24 compared to the previous academic year. Overall absence in Walsall was 0.50% higher than the national average.



Walsall’s persistent decreased by 5.20% in 2022/23 compared to the previous academic year. Persistent absence in Walsall was 1.90% higher than the national average.

Experimental official statistics produced from daily data submitted automatically by schools to the Department are available in the [Pupil attendance in schools](#) publication. Due to the timeliness of the data and that they are based on a subset of schools, the figures are estimates that we expect to change as registers are adjusted. They should be viewed as an early indicator for the data provided in later national statistics releases.

### 3.4 How the Local Authority is continuing to support improvements in school attendance

The LA has worked with a DfE allocated strategic attendance officer to develop attendance processes, review data ensure attendance is considered across all relevant

services, and build strong links with schools, families and other partners to develop a whole school culture of excellent attendance across our schools. These plans have been recognised by the advisor as being rigorous and demonstrating good practice.

As part of our action plan, we discussed how Walsall schools share attendance data with the LA and have monthly performance meetings with a LA attendance officer focusing on strengths, concerns, and next steps. Half-termly data comparisons identify increases and decreases, and weekly attendance trackers support targeted support meetings. Each school has a named point of contact who routinely works with schools to tackle the fundamental challenges that they face, using lessons learned from other schools. The termly 'Targeting Support Meetings' that have been established has been really positive received and schools feel confident in how to adapt their processes to meet their new expectations. A self-assessment tool has been developed to help schools identify where there is good practice in relation to reducing pupil absence and to identify where further strategies need to be developed to ensure maximum attendance by all pupils. This has been shared with schools and is used as part of the termly meeting and support and challenge conversations.

A working group of headteachers, NHS practitioners and LA colleagues from social care, early help, SEN and inclusion services has also been established over the last academic year, and half termly meetings take place. This group provides opportunities for schools to shape improvements across Walsall. The focus of the group is to support schools and families in ensuring school attendance is a key priority for all and share good practice where individual schools have had improved school attendance. Attendance is a key priority as part of our wider 'belonging' approach and reduce absences, suspensions and exclusions by making inclusion and belonging a reality in Walsall.

The Early Help Support in Walsall is embedded, and schools can provide early preventative support, and know how to source further advice and interventions when required. Walsall's Early Help Partnership recognises that an effective Early Help offer is not the responsibility of one single agency. It requires a partnership approach from all stakeholders working with children, young people, their families and the community. Schools are aware of referral processes and are advised to do so (if not already) where there are potential indicators of concern for children and their families and can be used to enhance and support collective understanding of risk.

The Virtual School monitors Walsall's children's attendance using 'Looked After Call', providing daily emails to highlight unauthorised absences and authorised absences over three days. A dedicated attendance officer follows up on poor attendance. The vulnerability matrix in the Inclusion Hub tracks and monitors attendance of children with a social worker. Staff liaise with schools and social workers to raise awareness of poor attendance. Training is provided for teachers and safeguarding leads to improve educational outcomes. The Head of the Virtual School reports on attendance at monthly and termly social care performance meetings.

It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school. Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

Where all voluntary support options are unsuccessful or are not appropriate, the local authority's school attendance support team will liaise with the school and the early help lead practitioner or social worker (where applicable) to take forward attendance legal intervention and to formalise support and/or enforce attendance.

In line with new DfE guidance we have reviewed the way we work to ensure:

- robust assessments of parents' failings is evident in the support that has been offered,
- all support to remove any barriers to education, has been exhausted
- formalised support has been implemented or considered,
- and we feel that taking forward an attendance prosecution will bring about change.

#### **4. Financial information**

There are no direct financial implications of the report.

#### **5. Reducing Inequalities**

The local authority will continue to identify characteristics of good practice in addressing inequalities in school attendance with particular attention to the following factors, gender, ethnicity, and Special Educational Needs (SEN).

#### **6. Decide**

Scrutiny may decide to note the current position.

The Committee may decide to request further information or assurance in respect of the progress of elective home education.

#### **7. Respond**

Any recommendations made by the Committee will be assessed against the Access and Inclusion work programme and performance board.

#### **8. Review**

All areas are under constant monitoring and assessment via Children's Services Performance Board.

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