

**March 2022**

**Update on Education Welfare Service (Attendance)**

**Ward(s): All**

**Portfolios: Councillor Chris Towe – Education and Skills**

**1. Aim**

The aim of this report is to:

- Outline DfE current attendance expectations.
- Provide an update with regard to attendance in education during/post COVID-19
- Explain when and how attendance data is collected.
- Explain what is classed as persistent absence
- Provide information on interventions used for improving attendance in Walsall schools.
- Provide current attendance data for Walsall Borough 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 – know**

**DfE guidance on current Attendance expectations**

3.1 School attendance is mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age and it is a priority to ensure that as many children as possible regularly attend school. The usual rules on attendance continue to apply, including:

- parents' duty to ensure that their child of compulsory school age attends regularly at the school where the child is a registered pupil
- schools' responsibilities to record attendance and follow up absence
- the ability to issue sanctions, including fixed penalty notices, in line with local authorities' codes of conduct
- the duty on local authorities to put in place arrangements for identifying, and to follow up with, children missing from education.

Schools are expected to:

- Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence.
- Ensure every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled.

- Act early to address patterns of absence.

## Post Coronavirus update

- 3.2 On 21<sup>st</sup> February the Prime Minister set out the next phase of the Government's COVID-19 response. School attendance is mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age and it is a priority to ensure that as many children as possible regularly attend school.

There is no longer a legal requirement for people with coronavirus (COVID-19) infection to self-isolate, however if you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19 or a positive test result, the public health advice is to stay at home and avoid contact with other people. This also applies to children and young people who usually attend an education or childcare setting.

In most cases, parents and carers will agree that a pupil with the key symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend the school, given the potential risk to others. If a parent or carer insists on a pupil attending your school where they have a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19, you can take the decision to refuse the pupil if, in your reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other pupils and staff from possible infection with COVID-19.

Where a child is self-isolating (awaiting a test result) or in quarantine because of COVID-19, they should be recorded as code X (not attending in circumstances related to coronavirus). Where they are unable to attend because they have a confirmed case of COVID-19 they should be recorded as code I (illness).

Following expert clinical advice and the successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme, people previously considered to be particularly vulnerable, clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), and high or higher-risk are not being advised to shield again.

Children and young people who were previously identified as being in one of these groups are advised to continue to follow [Guidance for people previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19](#).

Children and young people over the age of 12 with a weakened immune system should follow [Guidance for people whose immune system means they are at higher risk from COVID-19](#).

Children and young people previously considered CEV should attend school and should follow the same COVID-19 guidance as the rest of the population.

In some circumstances, a child or young person may have received personal advice from their specialist or clinician on additional precautions to take and they should continue to follow that advice.

Guidance for people previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19

## Attendance data collection

- 3.3 Attendance data is collected and analysed every half term (see below), to identify areas for improvement and focus.

The majority of Walsall schools share their attendance data with the Local Authority via Capita One. This allows the service to enable us to identify the number of persistence absence, authorised and unauthorised absences, unauthorised holidays and attendance relating to vulnerable cohorts.

## Persistent Absence

- 3.4 If a pupil's overall absence rate is **10% or higher** of their possible sessions, they are classified as a persistent absentee. A 'session' is one morning or afternoon in school.

There is a clear link between poor attendance at school and low levels of achievement.

Children with persistent absence are at increased risk of involvement in crime, child exploitation and anti-social behaviour.

The Education Welfare Service work with schools, parents and pupils in order to prevent pupils becoming persistence absentees.

Interventions used for improving attendance:

- Undertake home visits to engage families and ensure that parents fully understand their legal responsibilities for attendance.
- Identify potential barriers to regular attendance and identify relevant support agencies if required.
- Following a graduated approach for PA pupils, instigate warning letters, penalty notices or legal action where appropriate.

## National and Local Authority Attendance data

- 3.5 On 8<sup>th</sup> March, the Government released the latest publication, which provides national and local authority level summary estimates from the Department for Education's daily education settings survey  
DfE link to data: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/9de6934b-5725-4014-99e6-c34a4c97a444>

		Primary		Secondary	
		2020/21 Autumn Term	2020/21 Spring Term	2020/21 Autumn Term	2020/21 Spring Term
Walsall	Overall absence rate	4.00%	3.20%	6.70%	3.60%
	Persistent absentee rate	11.30%	7.00%	20.30%	8.00%
	Rate of sessions recorded as not attending due to COVID circumstances	7.70%	54.60%	10.50%	66.90%

Data is based on responding schools only.

Response rates vary by local authority and different schools within a region may respond on different days. Care should be taken when comparing regions and when interpreting trends over time because differences could be due to response bias or different schools being included in the data.

#### **4. Reducing Inequalities**

In accordance with the Walsall Right for Children Inclusion Strategy, the Education Welfare Service is committed to ensuring that all children and young people are able to access appropriate, high quality, inclusive education to ensure the best possible outcomes, whatever their abilities or needs. We aim to identify vulnerable learners and those with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) including those from other disadvantaged backgrounds. We strive to encourage good school attendance to enable an environment where all children can achieve, feel safe and included.

#### **5. Decide**

The Committee may decide to note the current position and request further information or assurance in respect of the progress of school attendance within Walsall.

#### **6. Respond**

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

#### **7. Review**

The work of the Education Welfare team in promoting good school attendance is subject to constant monitoring and assessment via the Children's Services Performance Board process.

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