

14th November 2012

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member (Education) - Councillor Kershaw

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Children, Learning and Young People

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Review of the new Coventry Strategy for improving attendance

Is this a key decision?

No - Although this issue affects all Wards in the City the impact is not expected to be significant

Executive Summary:

This report summarises the levels of attendance in the 2011/12 school year. Attendance has improved across all phases, however Persistent Absence appears to have increased as the Persistent Absence threshold has been raised from attendance of 80% and below to 85%. The report goes on to set out the enhancements to the LA support for attendance.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member is recommended to approve the enhancements to the strategy and action plan on school attendance.

List of Appendices included:

Coventry Local Authority Attendance strategy

Background Papers:

Nil

Other Useful Documents

(i) Improving attendance at school – available at

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/t/improving%20attendance%20at%20school.pdf>

(ii) Response letter from the Secretary of State for Education to Charlie Taylor on 16th April 2012 – available at

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/r/response%20letter%20from%20the%20secretary%20of%20state%20for%20education%20to%20charlie%20taylor%20on%2016%20april%202012.pdf>

(iii) Letter from Charlie Taylor setting out progress on 31st July 2012 – available at

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/l/charlie%20taylor%20to%20secretary%20of%20state%20attendance%20review%20implementation.pdf>

Has it or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it, or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title:

Review of the new Coventry Strategy for improving attendance

1. Context (or background)

- a. The LA has maintained close monitoring of attendance through the *Capita One* Attendance Module, to allow early warning of changes in the attendance patterns for all children and young people, including the more vulnerable sub-groups of children and young people (e.g. Looked After Children). The Capita One system updates school attendance data daily so the Local Authority has an accurate data set to inform our work and to monitor and challenge schools.
- b. Where the overall levels of attendance in a school have been causing concern then the LA has worked with key school staff to support their self review and improvement of strategies and actions to improve attendance. Education Improvement Advisers will support schools to achieve the National Average for both Overall Attendance and Persistent Absence measures.
- c. Following extensive consultation, the LA introduced on 1st September 2012, a new multi-disciplinary approach to tackling persistent absence which replaced the education welfare service. The work of the new Children and Family First Team (CFF) will reflect the recommendations made in the Charlie Taylor report for the need for early intervention, in age and onset of issues. It is widely accepted that supporting families through a multi-disciplinary approach is the most effective method to improve school attendance and reduce persistent absence, long term. This involves schools and other educational settings working with the Children and Family First Team (CFF), Social Care, workers from the Integrated Youth Support Service, Community Safety Team, the Police and other agencies. This multi-disciplinary approach addresses the issues that impact on a child or young person's ability to attend school regularly and make academic progress. This is particularly crucial for circumstances involving family bereavement and breakdown, financial difficulties leading to loss of the family home, unemployment, domestic violence, bullying, peer pressure, inability to access the curriculum, low self-esteem, poverty impacting on pupils' everyday requirements (eg footwear, school uniform, school bags, dinner money, bus fare).
- d. The Overcoming Barriers to Learning (OB2L) Programme continues to identify improving school attendance as a City wide priority for 2012/13. Many of the individual OB2L cross-phase multi-disciplinary groups have identified attendance and persistent absence as a priority. The Cross Phase groups are looking at ways that they can offer school to school support around early identification and intervention for attendance issues. This may include sharing an attendance officer to deliver traditional EWO type activities.
- e. This includes all state-funded (i.e. including academies in addition to LA maintained) primary and secondary schools. Data from 2010/11 from Coventry and its statistical neighbours, released by the DfE earlier this year, indicated that:
 - For primary schools Coventry's overall level of attendance (94.8%) was fractionally below the average for the statistical neighbours (94.88%), whilst the overall level of persistent absence (4.6%) was higher than the average for the statistical neighbours (4.3%). This the new measure of 15%, compared to 20%, Persistent Absence, introduced in September 2011.

- For secondary schools Coventry's overall levels of attendance (93.1%), was again, just below the average for the statistical neighbours (93.3%), whilst the overall level of persistent absence (9.70%) was slightly above the average for the statistical neighbours (8.96%).

- f. Data on outcomes for the 2011/12 school year follows. Table (i), below, shows primary attendance in 2011/12 shows an increase of 0.52% on the previous year to 95.32% which was above the 2010/11 national average. (The 2011/12 national averages are not yet available). Primary persistent absence was 4.6%) which was slightly higher than the National Average of 3.9%. It is not possible to compare Persistent Absence for this year, compared to the previous year due to the change in the PA threshold.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Coventry	94.37%	93.82%	94.48%	94.8%	95.32%
National	94.74%	94.70%	94.79%	95%	-

Table (i): Overall primary attendance (Source: Schools Census to 2010/11; Capita One for 2011/12)

Table (ii), below, shows the distribution of primary mainstream schools across bands of attendance.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
< 90%	0	0	0	0	0
90.0 - 90.99	1	0	0	0	0
91.0 - 91.99	2	5	0	1	0
92.0 - 92.99	9	19	6	12	0
93.0 - 93.99	15	23	20	15	8
94.0 - 94.99	30	22	32	22	20
> 95.0%	28	16	27	35	56

Table (ii): Numbers of Primary Mainstream Schools within Attendance Level Bands (Source: Schools Census to 2010/11; Capita One for 2011/12)

In 2011/12 there were no primaries with attendance below 92.99% (13 in 2010/11, 6 in 2009/10, 24 in 2008/09 and 12 in 2007/08,)

The secondary school attendance levels in Coventry, and nationally, are shown in table (iii), below. All figures in tables (iii) and (iv) including academies (except one, where the data was unavailable to the LA). In 2011/12 the rising trend in secondary school attendance continues to be sustained.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Coventry	92.37%	92.43%	92.95%	93.10%	94.08%
National	92.66%	92.79%	93.12%	93.5%	-

Table (iii): Secondary School Attendance (Source: Schools Census to 2010/11; Capita One for 2011/12)

Table (iv), below, shows the distribution of secondary schools across seven attendance level bands. Again, the 2011/12 data does not include that from one of the academies.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
< 90%	1	1	1	0	0
90.0 - 90.99	3	1	0	0	0
91.0 - 91.99	3	3	5	4	0
92.0 - 92.99	6	10	5	5	3
93.0 - 93.99	5	2	3	5	7
94.0 - 94.99	0	1	4	4	5
> 95.0%	1	0	0	0	3

Table (iv): Numbers of Secondary Mainstream Schools within Attendance Level Bands (Source: Schools Census to 2010/11; Capita One for 2011/12)

By the end of 2011/12 there were no secondary schools with attendance below 92% (14 in 2010/11, 12 in 2009/10, and 13 in 2008/09).

Secondary persistent absence had decreased to 3.9% of the pupils on roll in 2010/11. However, with the raising of the Persistent Absence threshold to 85% attendance, the persistent absence rate has increased to 9.7%. Reducing Secondary persistent absence continues to remain the key priority of the Children and Family First Team.

Special school attendance levels in Coventry, and nationally, are shown in table (v), below.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Coventry	91.84%	91.30%	84.53%	86.0%	87.02%
National	89.43%	89.28%	89.75%	90%	-

Table (v): Special School Attendance (Source: Schools Census to 2010/11; Capita One for 2011/12)

Each special school faces a different set of challenges in promoting attendance. For example, some have significant numbers of children and young people with high levels of absence due to physical health difficulties. In 2011/12 there were continuing challenges in relation to the attendance of young people in provision for those experiencing severe behaviour emotional and social difficulties. Much of this group of young people has previously been educated away from their families in out-City special schools. The Children and Family First Team have allocated a dedicated Children and Family Worker to schools, with detailed knowledge and experience of working with Special schools to deliver the family centred approach. The purpose is to further improve the outcomes for these vulnerable young people.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

2.1 There are unusually high levels of authorised absence in some schools. Schools are expected to work closely with the School Nursing Service to determine whether there are reasonable medical grounds for the absence of individual pupils. Clearly where a pupil is absent and there are not acceptable medical grounds for absence then the absence will be classed as unauthorised and followed up accordingly. The new Attendance Strategy

has proposed that schools become more challenging to parents who wish to take their children out of school during term time for holidays. It is proposed that parents put in a written request to the school for exceptional leave of absence, which the head has the discretion to approve.

2.2 The Strategy clearly sets on the roles and responsibilities of Parents/Carers; schools and the Local Authority for improving the attendance of children and young people. This includes schools intervening at a much earlier stage when poor attendance patterns are forming. This may be through the school's own support systems or the Common Assessment Framework, to meet the needs of the pupil. An additional 6 CAF coordinators have been appointed to support schools in staff training; completion of assessments and to model the role of the Lead Professional. This brings the total number up to 9 for the city, where they have been allocated to each Overcoming Barrier to Learning Cluster.

If a positive outcome is not achieved this would then be escalated with a referral to the Children and Family Worker Schools, typically where attendance had dropped below 85%. Other agencies have also been highlighted within the strategy, which may be able to support the schools with interventions to improve school attendance such as the Integrated Youth Support Service.

2.3 All schools have been asked by the Children and Family First Team to identify targets for the reduction of persistent absence. In 2012/13 there continues to be a greater focus on primary schools and early identification and intervention. Over the 2012/13 school year the LA is continuing to collect half-termly updates from schools.

Using the data gathered, each school is being asked to:

- Identify which pupils make up their persistent absentees and, recognising that some pupils may have a chronic or serious illness or injury, take specific action as appropriate.
- Identify pupils meeting the persistent absentee criteria who have high levels of unauthorised absence or a mixture of unauthorised and authorised absence.
- Identify pupils who meet the persistent absentee criteria where there is a reason to doubt the justification for their authorised absence.
- Implement actions for those cases through school staff and external service support services/agencies
- Use a whole-school action plan for tackling persistent absence that commits all staff, the senior management team and governors to improving the attendance of persistent absentees and reducing their numbers. Schools are asked to track and monitor the attendance of Children and Young People and put in preventative measures and early intervention to prevent non attendance from escalating.
- Multi-disciplinary working will continue to be the key element in the drive to support families and reduce absence coordinated by the Children and family First Team.

2.4 The new Attendance strategy has been developed following wide consultation and has been disseminated to all schools and stakeholders within CLYP and each school that has bought into the CFF service has received an attendance toolkit, highlighting strategies and good practice to promote positive school attendance.

2.5 The Children and Family First Team retain responsibility for providing both Statutory and non-statutory duties for school attendance including Prosecutions; Fixed Penalty Notices; Performance Licences and Missing Children from education.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

3.1 A group of Head teachers from Primary, Secondary and Special schools took part in the consultation process of the new strategy, and all Heads were invited to briefing sessions during the Spring and Summer terms of 2011/12.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

4.1 The changes to the strategy to the LA support for attendance came into effect on 1st September, with the full Children and Family First Team being launched in November. The strategy will be monitored through quarterly meetings of senior officers in Children and Family First and Education and Learning Services.

5. Comments from Director of Finance and Legal Services

5.1 Financial implications

As part of the FSR, the Education Welfare Service (previously within Education & Learning) has been reorganised and placed within the Children & Families First structure – school attendance issues will be supported by Children and Families Workers (schools). For 2012/13 this can be funded through current resources. Additional support will also be provided by CAF coordinators for a time limited 3 year period, resources through the Troubled Families programme.

The Children and Families Workers (schools) team is currently funded by core budget. Although there has been an academy recoupment for core funded services, it is currently being met corporately. This is clearly not sustainable, particularly as the number of academies increase; therefore it is likely that this element of the CFF budget will be reduced in future. Any shortfall would have to be met through an income target and/or service reductions.

5.2 Legal implications

None. Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 establishes that it is the responsibility of the parent(s) to ensure that a child of compulsory school age receives efficient full-time education suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude, and any special educational need, by regular attendance at school or by educating the child otherwise (home education).

6. Other implications

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / LAA (or Coventry SCS)?

This proposal is based on a commitment to further improve attendance at schools and other educational settings, which will help to ensure that children and young people are safe, achieve and make a positive contribution.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

The risk of further improvements in attendance being compromised by reductions in the capacity of some services will be managed through careful monitoring of progress and targeting the available staff resource in the highest priority areas.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

None

6.4 Equalities / EIA

By improving the attendance of all children and young people, with a particular focus on the more vulnerable, this strategy helps to ensure that all children and young people are safe, achieve and make a positive contribution

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

Potentially, a greater call for input from the School Nursing Service.

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