TITLE:	Working Together to Improve School Attendance
FOR CONSIDERATION BY:	Children's Select Committee
REPORT DATED:	10 July 2024
DIRECTOR:	Kathryn Davis Education and Skills
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide a regular update on the Council's implementation of the February 2024 DfE guidance 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance'.

1.2 The 2024 DfE guidance has statutory status with effect from 19th August 2024 and until that point the LA must continue to work to the previously published 2022 Working Together to Improve School Attendance non-statutory guidance.

1.3 In addition to the Working Together to Improve School Attendance statutory guidance the government has introduced the following regulations which also become effective 19th August 2024 and which support the statutory guidance.

- The Education (Information About Individual Pupils) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. These regulations mandate the sharing of attendance data with the DfE
- The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024. These regulations govern all aspects of attendance and admission registers. This includes changes to deletions from school roll and the introduction of new attendance and absence codes to support better understanding and analysis of reasons for absence from school
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. These regulations introduce a standard national approach to how local authorities and schools can issue penalty notices related to absence from school.

2. Implementation planning for the introduction of statutory guidance and new Regulations

2.1 We welcomed a visit with Sara Griffiths MBE, DfE Attendance Advisor on 04/07/2024. This was to discuss our progress towards implementing the new statutory guidance and review the Wiltshire attendance self-assessment document. She confirmed that we are firmly on track to implement the statutory guidance and recommended that a number of areas of our self-assessment should be upgraded to reflect this. She was particularly impressed with the work taking place directly with schools to support their implementation and the work with other services to support them with prioritising attendance for learners.

2.2 As part of a range of supportive measures for schools as they implement the statutory guidance, we have created a funded four session course, 'Improving School Attendance Programme' drawing on expertise from across LA service areas and beyond. The programme is designed to support school leaders to plan and develop equitable and effective school attendance strategies which will deliver and sustain change Improving School Attendance Programme (ISAP) | Right Choice (wiltshire.gov.uk).

99 schools have taken part, 74 primary schools and 25 secondary; a mix of academies and maintained from across the county. Feedback shows high impact for schools to engage and network, particularly understanding the importance of attendance in recognising the issues for vulnerable pupils and the importance of taking a tiered approach to improving attendance.

An information briefing for Governors of schools on the programme has also been delivered, with 69 Governors signed up.

2.3 A series of Attendance briefings have also been delivered to support schools with their understanding and implementation of the statutory guidance. We have delivered:

- 4 briefings with 87 schools in attendance.
- 2 sessions at the School Business Manager Forum – attendance will be a standing item into next academic year.
- 2 sessions at the termly Headteacher's briefing.

2.4 To support school leaders understand their school's attendance, including that of vulnerable groups in comparison to all Wiltshire schools, we have begun to publish monthly attendance headlines on the school's newsletter. This is alongside the more detailed School Profiles which contain school level absence trends and comparators to national and Wiltshire data. These are updated 3 times a year.

3.   Attendance Data

3.1   Breakdown of the attendance data from Wiltshire schools. This is the latest published data by the DfE (June 2024) Time period: 2023/24 Spring term between 2 January and 31 March 2024

Source: Explore Education Statistics > Pupil absence in schools in England > spring 2024 data:
* Arrows to show change in Wiltshire data from previous report. Green showing improvement, amber decrease within 2%, red decrease of more than 2%.
* highlighting as a comparator to national

		Wiltshire	South West	England
Total	Number of pupil enrolments	53,077	601,173	6,173,296
	Overall absence rate	8.3% ⬆	8.0%	7.3%
	Authorised absence rate	5.9% ⬆	5.7%	4.9%
	Unauthorised absence rate	2.4% ⬆	2.2%	2.3%
Special	Number of pupil enrolments	917	12412	148,585
	Overall absence rate	12.6% ⬇	13.8%	13.2%
	Authorised absence rate	10.0% ⬇	10.4%	10.0%
	Unauthorised absence rate	2.5% ⬇	3.3%	3.1%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	34.8% ⬇	38.1%	36.8%
State-funded primary	Number of pupil enrolments	36,659	398,606	4,484,966
	Overall absence rate	5.3% ⬌	5.8%	5.6%
	Authorised absence rate	4.4% ⬌	4.6%	4.2%
	Unauthorised absence rate	0.8% ⬇	1.1%	1.4%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	16.2% ⬆	18.3%	17.8%
State-funded secondary	Number of pupil enrolments	31,364	333,618	3,530,151
	Overall absence rate	9.4% ⬆	10.4%	9.1%
	Authorised absence rate	6.3% ⬆	6.9%	5.6%
	Unauthorised absence rate	3.1% ⬆	3.4%	3.5%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	26.4% ⬆	29.3%	26.2%

Source: Explore Education Statistics > Pupil absence in schools in England > Absence rates by pupil characteristic - full academic years:

* Arrows to show change in Wiltshire data from previous report. Green showing improvement, amber decrease within 2%, red decrease of more than 2%.
* highlighting as a comparator to national

		Wiltshire	South West	England
FSM (Free School Meals) eligible	Overall absence rate	13.2% ⬆	13.2%	11.3%
	Authorised absence rate	8.8% ⬆	8.1%	6.4%
	Unauthorised absence rate	4.4% ⬌	5.1%	4.9%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	38.5% ⬆	39.7%	34.6%
SEN - EHC plans	Overall absence rate	13.8% ⬆	15.8%	13.5%
	Authorised absence rate	9.9% ⬆	11%	9%

	Unauthorised absence rate	3.9%	⬆	4.6%	4.5%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	31.2%	⬇	40.2%	36.0%
SEN - SEN Support	Overall absence rate	10.5%	⬆	12.5%	11.1%
	Authorised absence rate	7.1%	⬆	8.4%	7%
	Unauthorised absence rate	3.3%	⬆	4.1%	4.1%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	29.9%	⬆	34.2%	31.8%

3.2   Live attendance data is available via the DfE WONDE portal. For the academic year 2023-24 this data is unverified but it provides useful statistical information related to attendance and absence trends nationally and regionally to enable the authority to make comparisons and initial judgements about attendance performance.

We now have 213 Wiltshire schools submitting data so are on course for a complete dataset by the autumn term.

3.3   *Source: WONDE DfE*

Current academic year up to Wednesday 03 July 2024

Number of pupils	Overall attendance %	Overall absence %	Unauthorised absence %
63,155	92.2%	7.8%	1.9%

Persistently absent

Number of persistently absent pupils	Percentage of persistently absent pupils
14,202	22.5%

Severely absent

Number of severely absent pupils	Percentage of severely absent pupils
1,415	2.2%
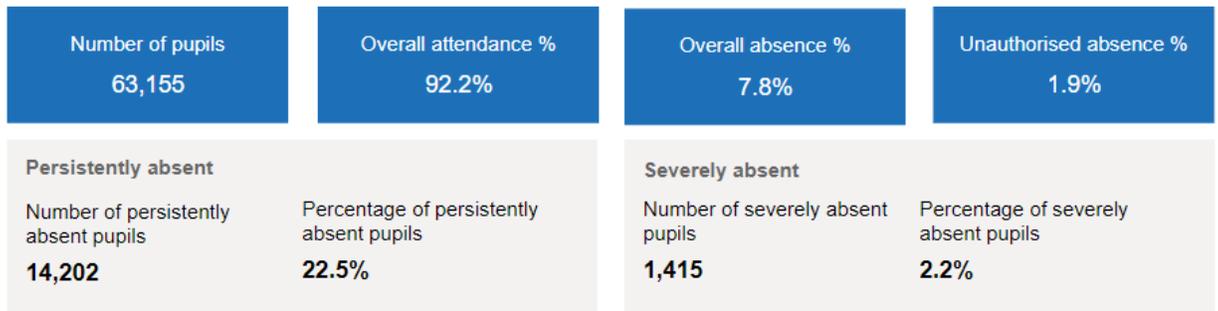
The data reflects better performance in Wiltshire than nationally.

92.2% of sessions were recorded as attending in Wiltshire (compared to 92% of sessions at national level).

7.8% of sessions were recorded as absence in Wiltshire (compared to 7% of sessions at national level).

22.5% of pupils were recorded as persistently absent in Wiltshire (compared to 20% of pupils at national level)

PUPILS WITH AN EHCP

Current academic year up to Wednesday 03 July 2024

Number of pupils	Overall attendance %	Overall absence %	Unauthorised absence %
3,641	86.0%	14.0%	3.8%

Persistently absent

Number of persistently absent pupils	Percentage of persistently absent pupils
1,371	37.7%

Severely absent

Number of severely absent pupils	Percentage of severely absent pupils
309	8.5%

PUPILS WITH SEN SUPPORT INDICATOR

Current academic year up to Wednesday 03 July 2024

Number of pupils	Overall attendance %	Overall absence %	Unauthorised absence %
9,492	89.9%	10.1%	3.0%

Persistently absent

Number of persistently absent pupils	Percentage of persistently absent pupils
2,766	29.1%

Severely absent

Number of severely absent pupils	Percentage of severely absent pupils
390	4.1%

PUPILS WITH FSM INDICATOR

Current academic year up to Wednesday 03 July 2024

Number of pupils	Overall attendance %	Overall absence %	Unauthorised absence %
11,274	87.6%	12.4%	4.5%

Persistently absent

Number of persistently absent pupils	Percentage of persistently absent pupils
4,282	38.0%

Severely absent

Number of severely absent pupils	Percentage of severely absent pupils
645	5.7%

4. Permanent exclusion and suspension from school

DfE published data – permanent exclusions. 2021/22	Rate		
	No SEN	SEN Support	EHCP
Wiltshire Total	0.00%	0.01%	0.03%
Primary	0.00%	0.02%	0.08%
Secondary	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Special	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
National Total	0.05%	0.25%	0.13%
Primary	0.00%	0.08%	0.13%
Secondary	0.11%	0.50%	0.27%
Special	0.00%	0.00%	0.05%
South-West Total	0.05%	0.32%	0.21%
Primary	0.00%	0.11%	0.22%
Secondary	0.10%	0.59%	0.35%
Special	0.00%	0.00%	0.10%

4.1 Despite an increase in permanent exclusion this academic year in Wiltshire, the rate of permanent exclusion is consistently significantly lower than the national rate and compared to schools in the south-west.

The majority of secondary schools receive devolved funding through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to prevent the need for permanent exclusion. For primary schools, the behaviour support team supports schools to build their capacity and to implement individual plans of support including alternative provision where appropriate.

This academic year there have been 26 secondary aged pupils (one of whom has an EHCP) who were permanently excluded. 19 of these permanent exclusions relate to pupils from two schools within one multi academy trust that withdrew from the SLA in relation to the devolved inclusion funding.

Four primary aged pupils were permanently excluded, including one pupil with an EHCP.

4.2 Suspension rates

2022/23 full year comparative data will be published by DfE in July 2024

DfE latest published suspension data 2021/22	Rate		
	No SEN	SEN Support	EHCP
Wiltshire Total	4.0%	16.7%	28.7%
Primary	0.34%	8.6%	20.4%
Secondary	8.5%	29.2%	54.3%
Special	X	X	15.8%
National Total	4.7%	18.6%	17.6%
Primary	0.35%	6.3%	13.8%

Secondary	10.3%	36.2%	38.0%
Special	X	X	9.6%
South-West Total	**4.9%**	**23.0%**	**26.0%**
Primary	0.33%	7.7%	19.5%
Secondary	10.6%	43.1%	54.0%
Special	9.1%	3.1%	11.8%

4.3 The rate of suspension in Wiltshire of pupils with no identified were lower than the national rate and the rate for schools in the south-west. Rates of suspension for pupils with SEN Support and with an EHCP were higher than these comparators.

The reasons for these higher rates are hard to identify for certain but are likely to relate to the significantly lower rates of permanent exclusion in all phases and higher rates of pupils with identified SEN Support and with an EHCP compared to national rate and the rate for schools in the south-west. Data collated locally indicates a reduction in the suspension rate in Wiltshire in 2022/23 and in 2023/24 of pupils with an EHCP.

To further support schools to reduce the need for suspension and permanent exclusion, a new behaviour support offer will be in place for secondary schools in the autumn term and the primary behaviour support team will continue to prioritise advice support and challenge to schools around suspension of pupils with SEN Support or an EHCP.

5. Recommendation

5.1 For the committee to note this update.