TITLE:	Working Together to Improve School Attendance
FOR CONSIDERATION BY:	Children's Select Committee
REPORT DATED:	24 May 2024
DIRECTOR:	Kathryn Davis Education and Skills
REPORT AUTHORS:	Louise Lewis Head of Service, Targeted Education Karen Green Team Manager, Education Welfare

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 (Explanation of changes provided in last Select Committee report)

2.1 The Education Welfare Service is reviewing all processes relating to the management of attendance in readiness for 19th August 2024. This includes service delivery options and supporting information, documents and templates to be made available to all schools to assist with the implementation of the statutory requirements.

It should be noted that the LA must provide some support services related to the management and improvement of attendance to all schools in the authority area including independent schools. There are elements of the support, referred to as a core offer, that must be provided at no cost to the establishment concerned.

2.2 The penalty notice regulations require the publication of a new Wiltshire Penalty Notice Code of Conduct. All local authorities must be compliant with the national guidance in this regard. Consultation with schools and the Police is in process as mandated by the Regulations prior to the publication of the new code of conduct. We welcome the change to regulations as it ensures that all local authorities will be working consistently in the use of penalty notices for absence from school.

2.3 To support schools to understand the changes and expectations Wiltshire has a planned series of attendance briefing sessions that are available to school leaders, senior attendance champions and governors. Updates are also provided through school newsletters, headteacher and governor briefings.

3. Attendance Data

3.1 Breakdown of the attendance data from Wiltshire schools. This is the latest published data by the DfE (March 2024) for the full academic year 2022-23

Source: Explore Education Statistics > Pupil absence in schools in England > full academic years:

		Wiltshire	South West	England
Total	Number of pupil enrolments	62,971	686,421	7,396,032
	Overall absence rate	7.0%	7.6%	7.4%
	Authorised absence rate	5.1%	5.4%	5.0%
	Unauthorised absence rate	1.8%	2.2%	2.4%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	18.5%	21.3%	21.2%
	Percentage of severe absentees (50% or more missed)	1.9%	2.4%	2.0%
Special	Number of pupil enrolments	854	11,458	132,534
	Overall absence rate	13.6%	13.6%	13.0%
	Authorised absence rate	10.8%	10.6%	9.9%
	Unauthorised absence rate	2.8%	3.0%	3.2%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	38.3%	39.2%	38.3%
	Percentage of severe absentees (50% or more missed)	7.0%	7.4%	6.2%
State-funded primary	Number of pupil enrolments	34,350	363,469	3,957,555
	Overall absence rate	5.3%	5.8%	5.9%
	Authorised absence rate	4.2%	4.4%	4.2%
	Unauthorised absence rate	1.1%	1.4%	1.6%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	12.4%	15.0%	16.2%
	Percentage of severe absentees (50% or more missed)	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
State-funded secondary	Number of pupil enrolments	27,767	311,494	3,305,943
	Overall absence rate	8.9%	9.6%	9.0%

	Wiltshire	South West	England
Authorised absence rate	6.1%	6.5%	5.6%
Unauthorised absence rate	2.8%	3.2%	3.4%
Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	25.4%	28.1%	26.5%
Percentage of severe absentees (50% or more missed)	3.3%	4.1%	3.4%

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

		Wiltshire	South West	England
FSM (Free School Meals) eligible	Number of pupil enrolments	10,486	144,181	1,855,167
	Overall absence rate	11.8%	12.3%	11.1%
	Authorised absence rate	7.5%	7.6%	6.4%
	Unauthorised absence rate	4.3%	4.7%	4.7%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	37.0%	39.8%	36.5%
	Percentage of severely absent pupils (50% or more missed)	4.7%	5.0%	3.8%
SEN - EHC plans	Number of pupil enrolments	2,972	30,370	313,718
	Overall absence rate	12.3%	13.3%	12.3%
	Authorised absence rate	8.9%	9.7%	8.8%
	Unauthorised absence rate	3.4%	3.7%	3.5%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	34.9%	37.8%	36.0%
	Percentage of severely absent pupils (50% or more missed)	6.4%	7.2%	5.9%
SEN - SEN Support	Number of pupil enrolments	9,533	97,688	984,202
	Overall absence rate	9.6%	11.0%	10.2%
	Authorised absence rate	6.6%	7.2%	6.4%
	Unauthorised absence rate	3.0%	3.7%	3.8%
	Percentage of persistent absentees (10% or more missed)	27.1%	32.2%	31.1%
	Percentage of severely absent pupils (50% or more missed)	3.6%	4.9%	3.8%

3.2   Live attendance data is available via the DfE WONDE portal. For the academic year 2023-24 this data is unverified. This means that this data set may be incomplete 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.

3.3   For the academic year 2024-25 the live attendance data will be reliable as a result of the mandated sharing of attendance data by schools through the Education (Information About Individual Pupils) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

Current academic year up to Monday 27 May 2024

Number of pupils	Overall attendance %	Overall absence %	Unauthorised absence %
53,876	93.1%	6.9%	1.8%

Persistently absent		Severely absent	
Number of persistently absent pupils	Percentage of persistently absent pupils	Number of severely absent pupils	Percentage of severely absent pupils
9,223	17.1%	1,136	2.1%

The data reflects better performance in Wiltshire than nationally.

93.1% of sessions were recorded as attending in Wiltshire (compared to 93% of sessions at national level)

6.9% of sessions were recorded as absence in Wiltshire (compared to 7% of sessions at national level)

17.1% of pupils were recorded as persistently absent in Wiltshire (compared to 20% of pupils at national level)

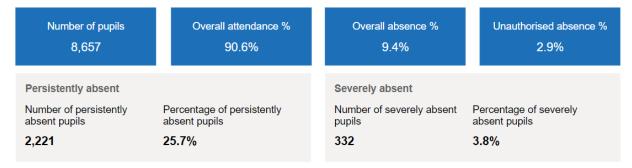| Attendance	National	South West	Wiltshire
Primary	94.6%	94.5%	94.9%
Secondary	91.2%	90.1%	91.1%
Special	87.2%	86.8%	88%

PUPILS WITH AN EHCP

Current academic year up to Friday 24 May 2024

Number of pupils	Overall attendance %	Overall absence %	Unauthorised absence %
3,349	86.7%	13.3%	3.8%

Persistently absent		Severely absent	
Number of persistently absent pupils	Percentage of persistently absent pupils	Number of severely absent pupils	Percentage of severely absent pupils
1,149	34.3%	265	7.9%

PUPILS WITH SEN SUPPORT INDICATOR

Current academic year up to Friday 24 May 2024

Number of pupils	Overall attendance %	Overall absence %	Unauthorised absence %
8,657	90.6%	9.4%	2.9%

Persistently absent

Number of persistently absent pupils	Percentage of persistently absent pupils
2,221	25.7%

Severely absent

Number of severely absent pupils	Percentage of severely absent pupils
332	3.8%

PUPILS WITH FSM INDICATOR

Current academic year up to Monday 27 May 2024

Number of pupils	Overall attendance %	Overall absence %	Unauthorised absence %
10,194	88.4%	11.6%	4.4%

Persistently absent

Number of persistently absent pupils	Percentage of persistently absent pupils
3,481	34.1%

Severely absent

Number of severely absent pupils	Percentage of severely absent pupils
551	5.4%

3.4 Attendance performance in Wiltshire compares positively with national and South West benchmarking. We continue to work with schools across the authority area to support them to address absence matters. There is collaboration and commitment within teams across children's services to assist children, young people and their families to identify and overcome barriers to attendance at school.

In recognition of the challenges we face in regard to the attendance of disadvantaged learners in Wiltshire, The School Effectiveness Service and the Education Welfare Service will be delivering the Improving School Attendance Programme. This is aimed specifically at school attendance leads, senior attendance champions and designated leads for disadvantaged learners in school. The programme will offer 6 sessions across the next academic year with each session having a different focus on aspects of attendance and engagement specifically related to disadvantaged learners.

4.   Recommendation

4.1   For the committee to note this update.