



CHILDREN & LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 21 January 2014

Subject Heading:

Review of attendance data for schools/academies for the school years 2009-10 to 2012-13 (autumn and spring terms only) and the work undertaken by the local authority to support attendance in maintained schools and academies in the London Borough of Havering.

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Policy context:

Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children of compulsory school age receive efficient full-time education. This can be by regular attendance at school, alternative provision, or by education otherwise.

The local authority has a legal duty to work with maintained schools and academies to improve overall levels of pupil attendance and alternative providers and use the range of legal measures available to it to secure regular attendance and reduce the number of pupils with high levels of absence.

The Local Authority also has a duty to make appropriate arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children residing in their area who are not receiving a suitable education and take appropriate action to ensure that they do so.

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

SUMMARY

Good, regular attendance of pupils at school is crucial. At the 'pupil' level, there is a close correlation between attendance at school, levels of progress and attainment of pupils. At school level, good and outstanding schools have significantly better rates of attendance than those schools that require improvement or intervention, with better levels of attainment and progress.

Attendance lies within the third of the four key areas of focus for school inspections (pupil achievement, the quality of teaching, the behaviour and safety of pupils, and the quality of leadership and management) under Ofsted's new inspection framework, which was implemented in September 2012.

Moreover, the extent to which a school promotes equality and tackles discrimination contributes to the overall inspection judgement about its effectiveness. This means that Ofsted inspectors judge not only how well pupils' behaviour and attendance is managed overall, but also how effective is a school's strategy to close gaps and reduce disadvantage experienced by different groups of pupils on the grounds of their protected characteristics (gender, race, disability, etc) and / or socio-economic background (looked-after children, children on free school meals, etc) .

Accordingly, this report:

- sets out the national context and priorities, and the legal framework for attendance at school;
- explains the terms used, and the consistency of their use against government policy and guidelines;
- provides information concerning the overall rates of attendance and the rates of "persistent absence" (PA) for schools, including academy schools , in the borough for the four school years from 2009-10 to 2012-13, providing comparisons with figures both national and for outer London boroughs; and
- makes recommendations for further action to improve rates of pupil attendance and reducing persistent absence at Havering schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 1 A school and pupil level analysis of pupil attendance cross-correlated by age, sex, ethnic group, religion, care status, English as an additional language, disabilities and special educational needs, and socio-economic background is completed.
- 2 An action plan is drafted following the analysis, for implementation in the financial year 2014/15, to include the recording and analysis in future of attendance at nursery and in year R.
- 3 A further report setting out the equality analysis and the action plan to address the issues arising from the assessment will be presented to OSC in March 2014.

REPORT DETAIL

1 Improving school attendance – the national context and priorities

- 1.1 Improving the overall level of attendance of pupils at school is a government priority, because of the clear evidence over time of the correlation between attendance, progress levels and attainment at the 'key stage' assessments in England.
- 1.2 The government commissioned a report by its expert on attendance and behaviour, Charlie Taylor, whose report *improving attendance at school* starts with a stark figure of 57 million days of schooling being missed in England, about 5.5%, in the 2010 / 11 school year.
- 1.3 Taylor noted that 'truancy' – pupils missing school without parents' knowledge – was only an issue in secondary school and has distracted attention from parent-condoned non-attendance in primary education
Taylor pointed to some key issues:
- as children move up through the school system, overall attendance falls and the numbers of children who are 'persistently absent (that is, absent more than 15% of school days in a period) increases – this means the main focus should be on attendance levels;
 - patterns of attendance are established very early in a child's schooling, and children with poor levels of attendance at primary school are likely to have parents who do not value education, and who missed a lot of school themselves; and
 - there are no nationally-collected data on children's attendance in nursery and reception; that schools are not held to account for attendance until children are age 5; that many schools do not take action about non-attendance until their pupils are 5, which for some children is too late; and that children with low levels of attendance are most likely to come from poor backgrounds.
- 1.4 Some of Taylor's key recommendations are:
- the focus should be on overall attendance and there should be less use of the word 'truancy';
 - there should be a focus on improving the attendance of 'vulnerable' pupils;
 - the headline figures for attendance should be overall absence and persistent absence;
 - that changes should be made to strengthen the rules on term-time holidays, so that term time holidays become a rare exception; and
 - that all primary schools should focus on supporting parents in nursery and reception who fail to get their children into school regularly and on time, and analyse their data so they pick up quickly on pupils who are developing a pattern of absence.

2 The legal framework

- 2.1 Local authorities are responsible for identifying children missing education (CME) and ensure they are not at risk of becoming CME, and for ensuring that children in their area do not work in breach of minimum ages for employment, start and finish times, maximum hours of employment and in proscribed employment. LAs have a wide range of powers (see <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/c/cme%20guidance.pdf>) to support these duties.
- 2.2 Schools must monitor pupils' attendance through their daily register; inform the LA of the details of pupils who are regularly absent from school or have missed 10 school days or more without permission; and monitor attendance and address it when it is poor. They must ensure that pupils' irregular attendance is referred to their LA, and investigate unexplained absences as a part of their safeguarding duties.
- 2.3 Parents have a legal duty⁴ to ensure that their children of compulsory school age are receiving efficient full-time education. This is enforceable under section 444 of the Education Act, 1996. It is LAs that have enforcement powers, through serving a notice requiring parents to satisfy them that their child is receiving appropriate education; issuing a school attendance order (SAO); and prosecuting or fining parents who do not ensure a school-registered child attends school regularly.

3 School attendance – general information and an explanation of terms

- 3.1 When examining absence rates. It is important to note that no school, except perhaps a tiny primary school in an exceptional year, is going to achieve 100% attendance, or close to it. The schools with the very best attendance records achieve about 97% attendance (or 3% overall absence), which equates to about 6 days of absence per pupil. This is about the lowest illness rate. In the best-performing LA areas (which are North Lincolnshire, Rutland, Kingston and Richmond – all affluent areas) attendance is under 96%, which equates to about 8 days of absence per pupil on average.
- 3.2 In the secondary phase, only very best 6 LAs – five in London, one in the south east, have attendance of over 95% (about 10 days of absence a year) with the overall average at just under 96% attendance (12 days absence a year).
- 3.3 The rate of persistent absence (PA) is a completely different measure: the number of pupils who miss 15% (it was 20% - the new base is applied from 2011) or more of all sessions as a percentage of all pupils. The attendance rate of this group of pupils is low, and therefore drives up the overall absence rate. Nationally, across all schools, about 5% of pupils are 'persistent absentees' – about one in 20 pupils.
- 3.4 Section 4 of the report analyses overall absence levels in primary, secondary and special schools in Havering against the overall levels in England; in inner and outer London; amongst its 'statistical neighbours, comprising Havering plus 10 other boroughs that are statistically close' to Havering (see annex 1 to this report according the Department for Education (DfE)).

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3.5 The bottom line of each table shows Havering's position when measured against the performance of the 152 top tier LAs in England (including Havering). The top authority is '1' and the bottom one is 152 – thus, the lower the number, the worse the performance, with 1-38 top quartile, 39 to 76 second quartile, 77 to 114 third quartile and 115 to 152 bottom quartile.

4 Rates of attendance and persistent absence in Havering primary schools

Table 1: primary schools – overall absence levels

Area	2010	2011	2012	2013
England - all state funded schools	5.2	5.0	4.4	4.8
Inner London	5.4	5.3	4.4	4.7
Outer London	5.3	5.0	4.3	4.7
Statistical neighbours	5.0	4.9	4.3	4.7
Havering	5.1	5.0	4.6	5.0
Havering – ranking against all 152 LAs	63	63	109	97

4.1 While the overall absence rate has fallen slightly here (0.1 points, or 2%), nationally the reduction is 0.4 – or nearly 8%. In London (the best performing area, along with the north-west and south east of England), the reduction is even greater – about 6.5 points, or a 12% reduction.

4.2 The failure to match the reductions in the comparator groups in table 1 is reflected in the fall in our 'league table' position. It was lower second quartile in 2010 and 2011, but has been in the lower third quartile – in other words, well below average – in the last two years, albeit with a small improvement between 2011/12 and 2012/13.

4.3 The percentage reduction also shows clearly the much slower rate of reduction in absence levels here – a 2% reduction against a national reduction level of 8% – four times greater – and almost 12% in London as a whole.

Table 2: primary schools – persistent absence rate

Area	2010	2011	2012	2013
England - all state funded schools	1.4	3.9	3.1	3.6
Inner London	1.5	4.4	3.4	3.7
Outer London	1.3	3.7	2.8	3.3
Statistical neighbours	1.3	3.6	2.9	3.3
Havering	1.1	3.6	3.6	4.3
Havering – ranking against all 152 LAs	27	53	122	127

4.4 Nationally, in London and amongst our statistical neighbour groups, the percentage of pupils who were PA fell between 2011 and 2013. Nationally, the rate fell 0.3 points, or 8%; in inner London by 0.7 points (16%); and in our SNs and outer London and by 0.3 to 0.4 points (8 and 11%). In contrast, here the rate increased by 0.7 points, which is an almost 20% increase.

4.5 We do not presently have a local breakdown of the profile of pupils who are PA, but a national review by the DfE of the period between 1996 and 2010 found that pupils eligible for free school meals were twice as likely as all other pupils to be PA; more likely to come from lone parent households; and that almost a third of PAs come from households where the principal adult/s are not in employment.

4.6 Our fall from second to bottom quartile between 2011 and 2013, and the fact that more than one in 25 primary-age pupils is PA requires urgent attention, which is reflected in the recommendations of the report. While it is almost certain that vulnerable groups of pupils will form the majority of PAs here, as is the case nationally, the first issue is to establish the profile of PAs in Havering.

5 Rates of attendance and persistent absence in Havering secondary schools

Table 3 secondary schools – overall absence levels

Area	2010	2011	2012	2013
England - all state funded schools	6.9	6.5	5.9	5.8
Inner London	6.3	6.0	5.3	5.1
Outer London	6.5	6.0	5.3	5.2
Statistical neighbours	6.6	6.2	5.7	5.6
Havering	6.6	6.1	5.6	5.7
Havering – ranking against all 152 LAs	54	27	48	56

5.1 Table 3 shows that absence rates have fallen here by almost one point (14%) between 2010 and the first two terms of the 2012 / 2013 school year. This is creditable, and is very similar to the national reduction – 1.1 points (16%) – but from a higher level. By 2013 our position nationally is almost the same as in 2010 (mid second quartile) although in 2010 / 11, our performance was top quartile.

5.2 Our reduction is marginally and insignificantly less than that of our SNs. However, both inner and outer London boroughs as a whole have been much more successful than we have in reducing pupil absence levels – inner London being especially impressive with a 1.2 point reduction (19%). London is by some margin the most successful English area in terms of the overall attendance levels and the reduction in absence over the period.

Table 4 secondary schools – persistent absence rate

Area	2010	2011	2012	2013
England - all state funded schools	4.4	8.4	7.4	6.5
Inner London	3.9	7.5	6.3	5.3
Outer London	3.6	7.0	6.0	5.0
Statistical neighbours	4.0	7.6	7.0	6.2
Havering	3.1	6.5	6.1	6.2
Havering – ranking against all 152 LAs	11	15	28	63

5.3 Looking at PA in secondary schools, again over three rather than the four years in the table, Havering's rate of PA was top quartile – but still involved one in 15 pupils. In the period, however, English, inner and outer London and our SN LAs have all reduced the number and percentage of pupils who are PA – by 1.9 points (23%), 2.2 (30%), 2.0 (29%) and 1.4 (18%) respectively. Our reduction is 0.3 of a point, or 5%.

5.4 In summary, the outcome is that the lower rate of reduction of PA here has led to us falling from upper top quartile (in fact within the top 10% of LAs) to lower second quartile PA. While it is still true that a pupil of secondary age is less likely than average across the country to be PA, 16 out of every 100 secondary age

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pupils here are persistently absent from school, against about one in 20 in London as a whole.

- 5.5 Given the close correlation between school attendance, attainment, the chances of not being in education, employment or training after leaving school, and life chances generally, secondary PA is a significant and serious matter here. This is reflected in the report's recommendations, which in summary are that the groups most affected are identified and action taken at LA and school level.

6 Rates of attendance and persistent absence in Havering special schools

Table 5 special schools – overall absence levels

Area	2010	2011	2012	2013
England - all state funded schools	10.3	10.0	9.6	
Inner London	11.3	11.3	10.6	
Outer London	10.5	9.9	9.6	
Statistical neighbours	9.2	9.0	8.8	
Havering	8.7	9.2	7.9	
Havering – ranking against all 152 LAs	36	55	27	

- 6.1 Special school attendance data for the first two terms of the 2012/13 school year was not available at the time of writing. However, rates of absence here in the period shown are lower than all the comparator groups, as is our rate of reduction in between 2010 and 2012 (0.8 points, 9%), against 7% nationally and only 4% amongst our SNs.
- 6.2 It must be noted that rates of absence are higher at special schools, due to rates of illness being higher amongst special school pupils. Pupils at our special schools are more likely to be at school in 2012 compared with 2010, in which year on average one school day in 11 was missed. In 2012, it was down to about one day in 13.

Table 6 special schools – persistent absence rate

Area	2010	2011	2012	2013
England - all state funded schools	10.5	16.7	16.3	
Inner London	13.4	21.7	19.5	
Outer London	11.7	18.1	18.0	
Statistical neighbours	9.2	15.2	14.9	
Havering	8.9	16.5	13.8	
Havering – ranking against all 152 LAs	51	73	38	

- 6.3 Moving on to persistent absence rates, these are also higher in special schools due to the much higher incidence of chronic and long-term conditions in the pupil population that make it much more likely that pupils will reach the 15% level that is the threshold for PA.
- 6.4 Here, the rate of PA is much lower than in all the comparator LAs; moreover, the year on year reduction between the school years 2010 / 2011 and 2011 / 2012 is much greater – 2.7 points, or 16%. This compares with reductions of between 2% and 10% in the comparator groups. We have moved into the top quartile from the bottom of the second quartile between the two years.

- 6.5 Despite the comparatively good rate of attendance and the relatively low level of persistent absence amongst pupils in special schools here, the same analysis of patterns of absence amongst vulnerable groups, followed by action to reduce further both general and persistent levels of absence is required.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

7 Financial implications and risks:

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications or risks arising as a result of this report. The recommendations made in this report will be delivered utilising existing resources available to the learning & achievement service, predominantly staffing.

8 Legal implications and risks:

- 8.1 There are no legal implications from the recommendations contained in the report. There has been no recent change in the legal duties of the LA, schools or parents. The legal responsibilities of all these parties are summarised briefly in section 2 of this report.

9 Human Resources implications and risks:

- 9.1 There are no direct HR implications or risks affecting the Council's workforce that can be identified from the recommendations made in this report.

10 Equalities implications and risks:

- 10.1 The report highlights significant equalities implications arising from both overall and persistent absence levels in primary and secondary schools in Havering. There are also likely implications identified in our special schools, despite the fact that attendance rates are better, and PA rates much lower than England and comparator LAs. Currently, the implications cannot be fully assessed due to lack of pupil profile data.
- 10.2 The recommendations proposed to address the identified equalities issues and concerns are set out on page 2 of the report. In summary, these are:
- Robust collection and analysis of pupil diversity profile data that should inform the development of an evidence-based action plan which should be in place for the beginning of the 2014/15 financial year.
 - An additional report, setting out the extent to which vulnerable groups experience lower levels of attendance and higher levels of PA is brought back to OSC before the end of March 2014.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Improving attendance at school - Charlie Taylor – the government’s expert adviser on behaviour, March 2012

Improving behaviour and attendance in schools – DfE April 2013.

Pupil absence in schools in England, including pupil characteristics: DfE, 2012.

Ofsted subsidiary guidance: Office for Standards in Education, January 2014

Persistent absence: government changes definition to deal with reality of pupil absenteeism in schools: DfE, July 2011

Pupil absence in state-funded schools: DfE statistical tables, autumn 2013

Primary and secondary absence compared with all English, London and SN LAs

Haverling draft JSNA: LB Haverling, December 2013