

London Borough of Enfield

Children, Young People & Education Scrutiny Panel - 2.11.22

Subject: School Attendance

Cabinet Member: Cllr Abdul Adullahi

Executive Director: Peter Nathan

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides Members with information about school attendance in Enfield and details work being carried out to improve attendance in our schools.
2. The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

Background

Enfield Education Welfare Service

3. Enfield has an established team of Education Welfare Officers who work in partnership with schools, agencies and families across the Borough offering a holistic approach to improving school attendance. In addition to carrying out the LA's statutory duties, the Service also offer a traded element to Enfield's academy and free schools. This can range from contributing to school assemblies about attendances issues, outreach work with families to the presentation of cases at court.

Main Considerations for the Panel

Impact of the Pandemic on Attendance and Enfield's Response.

4. In March 2021, the DfE issued guidance on the reopening of schools which confirmed that there would be a mandatory attendance expectation for all pupils. Whilst Enfield shared the view that all pupils should be in school, we acknowledged that some would find this difficult following such an unsettled period in education. Our approach in the first instance was to offer support to schools in contacting anxious or reluctant families to discuss any concerns, provide reassurance and encourage return to school. There was also concern that there could be an increase in the numbers of families deciding to withdraw their children from school to home educate (EHE) and the team were available to contact the families concerned to ensure that they were fully aware of their responsibility for providing education should they choose to follow this path and allowing them the opportunity to change their mind. Of the 112 cases where

contact was made, the parents of 16 children and young people decided they would remain in school rather than EHE.

Attendance Data Pre and Post Pandemic (no data collection took place 2019/2020)

2018-2019				
	Authorised %	Unauthorised %	Attendance %	PA %
SPECIALS - 6 Schools (663 Enrolments)				
National			89.9	28.8
Enfield	8	1.9	90.1	34.1
Outer London			90.1	30.2
PRIMARIES - 68 Schools (28,499 Enrolments)				
National			96	8.2
Enfield	2.9	1.4	95.7	10.2
Outer London			96.1	7.9
SECONDARIES - 22 Schools (20,695 Enrolments)				
National			94.5	13.7
Enfield	3.3	2.3	94.4	15
Outer London			95	12

SCHOOLS 2020-2021					
	Authorised %	Unauthorised %	Attendance %	PA %	COVID recorded Absence%
SPECIALS - 6 Schools (821 Enrolments)					
National	13.1	2.1	85.8	48.9	11.6
Enfield	10.5	1.5	88	36.8	18.3
Outer London	12.1	2	85.7	45.9	14
PRIMARIES - 68 Schools (26,762 Enrolments)					
National	2.7	0.9	96.4	8.8	18.7
Enfield	2.9	1.5	95.6	11.9	21.6
Outer London	2.7	1	96.2	8.7	20.5
SECONDARIES - 22 Schools (21,334 Enrolments)					
National	3.8	1.6	94.6	14.8	25
Enfield	3.6	2.2	94.2	17	26.6
Outer	3.5	1.5	95	13.1	24.6

London					
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5. Data for the 2021/22 academic year is not yet available. However, data gathered by the DfE for 2020/21 shows that overall attendance levels are very similar to prepandemic levels in the primary and secondary sectors with an improvement within the special sector. There has, however, been a worrying increase in the level of persistent absence in both primary and secondary schools. Schools report that there has been an increase in the number of children and young people who are finding it difficult to attend school as well as an increase in the number who are missing school due to unauthorised absence for holidays.
6. During the 2021/22 academic year, the Service has worked with schools and partners in the Authority to identify barriers to attendance. There has also been an increase number of academies who have engaged with the Service and accessed support and advice in relation to attendance issues in their schools.
7. Officers have been able to work with schools and families in person rather than through virtual platforms and suggest strategies for improving attendance.
8. As well as data analysis with school attendance leads to identify where action may be needed to improve attendance, officers have been working directly with families to encourage more engagement with school or signposting to other services such as the Parent Support Service, the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and in some cases a referral to the Attendance Support Unit managed by West Lea School for secondary aged students who have very low levels of entrenched non attendance (less than 30%) known as Emotionally Based School Non- Attendance (EBSNA).
9. Working closely with the Enfield EPS, the Education Welfare Service has been involved in the delivery of workshops for parents/carers and professionals about children who find it difficult to attend school for emotional reasons. Further sessions are being held during the Autumn and Spring Terms (appendix 1).
10. The Virtual School has put in place Welfare Call to track attendance for all looked after children and those who are subject to a CP plan. Tracking is also in place for those involved with the Youth Justice Service. The Education Welfare Service has forged close links with Enfield's Virtual School and a representative attends a monthly meeting to review children and young people whose level of engagement in education is identified as a concern. A similar monthly meeting is also held to discuss engagement/attendance concerns in relation to those children and young people involved with the Youth Justice Service.
11. Our schools acknowledge, though, that there are cases where legal intervention is an appropriate strategy to improve attendance. Term time leave of absence for holidays is problematic and this year, schools have been encouraged to use penalty notices (PN) where holidays are likely to

be the reason for non-attendance. The Service issued 112 PNs during September 2022, two less than the whole of the 2021/22 academic year. Although our data is limited, the highest proportion of PNs have been issued to families who fall within the White Eastern European category. Further information is given in appendix 2.

The White Paper and New Non-Statutory Guidance on Improving Attendance

12. On 6 May 2022, the Department for Education released new non-statutory guidance "Working together to improve school attendance" to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance and improve consistency of support. It is not yet clear if and when this will become statutory guidance.
13. The document in appendix 3 sets out the expectations for schools, academy trusts and governing bodies and local authorities. The DfE has recognised that most LAs and schools will not be in a position to meet all the expectations until the beginning of the 2023/24 academic year.
14. Enfield intends to continue to build on the current services offered by the Education Welfare Service. In addition to the support offered to schools on an individual basis, the Service has planned a series of on line training sessions for attendance leads due to be held later in the Autumn Term. Following on from these sessions, the LA will be coordinating an Attendance Forum involving all schools in Enfield. Colleagues from other support services such as Early Help and the Virtual School will be involved in the forum to ensure that there is clarity about the support available for families.
15. Individual Officers are continuing to discuss and analyse attendance data with schools and working with them to advise on the necessary enhancements to school attendance policies.

Conclusions

16. If the guidance issued by the DfE becomes statutory, there are resource implications for both schools and the LA. When the guidance was first published, the Department commented that this was a cost neutral policy.
17. Progress has been made in relation to the new guidance but further clarity is needed in relation to the status of the White Paper before all the recommendations are put in place.

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Date of report 2.11.22

Appendices

Background Papers

The following documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

White Paper

Non Statutory Guidance on Improving School Attendance