

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) Cabinet Council	Date of Meeting:	26 January 2021 4 February 2021 4 March 2021
Subject:	Persistent Pupil Absence Working Group Final Report		
Report of:	Chief Legal and Democratic Officer	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member – Children, Schools and Safeguarding		
Is this a Key Decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

To present formally the final report of the Persistent Pupil Absence Working Group.

Recommendation(s):

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding), Cabinet and Council are requested to support the contents of the Working Group Final Report and approve the recommendations, as follows:

1. That the good practice regarding school attendance currently undertaken by the Council and schools, as outlined in the findings of the Final Report, be acknowledged and noted.
2. That the Interim Head of Education be requested to explore the possibility of:
 - (a) a campaign to tackle school attendance across all key stages with a specific emphasis on the early years and foundation stage, the campaign to focus on conveying clear messages about how absence affects attainment, wellbeing and wider outcomes.
 - (b) delivering of clear messages about expectations, routines and consequences to new pupils and families through prospectus and admission/transition events.
 - (c) ensuring that the attendance of vulnerable children is monitored across the early years stage.
 - (d) an aspiration for a post of a dedicated worker for children who are

supported by Education, Health and Care Plans, in order to address any barriers for children and young people attending school; this aspiration could be considered in the future as part of the on-going work on school attendance.

- (e) attendance being part of the enhanced transition and not just for children and young people on the Special Educational Needs and disability (SEND) register, as this will address the early identification of any school attendance issues.
 - (f) sanctions for non-attendance being applied consistently across primary and secondary schools.
 - (g) schools providing an adult mentor to those children who have contact with the school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) but who are not on the SEND register, with whom the children can have regular access and build up a relationship.
 - (h) strongly encourage schools to provide training in SEND and Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) conditions to all staff.
 - (i) Extending buddy schemes with older peers to all schools, pupils to be “matched up” to ensure they have something in common.
 - (j) Improving communication between primary and secondary schools at transition stage, to ensure children are “understood” by teaching staff in secondary schools and that any good practice is shared.
3. That the Senior Democratic Services Officer be requested to liaise with relevant officers in order to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding) receives a six-monthly monitoring report, setting out progress made against each of the recommendations outlined above.

Reasons for the Recommendations:

The Working Group has made a number of recommendations that require approval by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding), the Cabinet and the Council.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

No alternative options were considered. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding) established the Working Group to review persistent pupil absence and the Working Group has performed this task.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

There are no financial implications arising for the Council as a direct result of this report. In the event that future consideration is given to progressing recommendation 2 (d), any

necessary financial investment will be the subject of a separate report at the appropriate time.

(B) Capital Costs

There are no financial implications arising for the Council as a direct result of this report.

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): None directly.
Legal Implications: None.
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.

Contribution to the Council’s Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: The recommendations support on-going school attendance for the most vulnerable children.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: The recommendations support on-going school attendance for all pupils.
Commission, broker and provide core services: The recommendations support the statutory requirement for pupils to attend school.
Place – leadership and influencer: None directly associated with this report.
Drivers of change and reform: The recommendations support the statutory requirement for pupils to attend school.
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: None directly associated with this report.
Greater income for social investment: None directly associated with this report.
Cleaner Greener None directly associated with this report.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.6263/21) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.4464/21) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

The Interim Head of Education has been involved in Working Group meetings.

(B) External Consultations

Not applicable

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Council meeting.

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Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report:

- The Final Report of the Persistent Pupil Absence Working Group

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 At its meeting on 9 July 2019, the Committee established a Working Group to review the topic of persistent pupil absence in schools. Councillors Bennett, Carragher (Lead Member), Keith and Mrs. Sandra Cain, Independent Advisory Member, were appointed to the Working Group.

1.2 The Working Group agreed to the following definition in considering persistent pupil absence:

“Any pupil whose attendance falls below 90% will be classed as a Persistently Absent student. Therefore, if a student misses 19 or more days over an academic year they will be classed as Persistently Absent.”

1.3 The Working Group agreed the following terms of reference and objectives for the review:

“To review persistent pupil absence in primary schools within the Borough.

Focus will also be given to those pupils with SEN Support; with Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans; and those pupils supported by Child Protection, Child in Need and Early Help Plans.”

1.4 Prior to lockdown in March 2020, the Working Group undertook site visits as follows:

- A visit to the Council’s Complimentary Education Service, Pinefield Centre, Formby, to meet with members of staff and hear about the services provided. Completed on 27/11/19.
- A visit to Jigsaw Primary Pupil Referral Unit, Thornton. Completed on 25/02/20.
- A visit to Newfield School, Thornton. Completed on 28/02/20.

1.5 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Working Group has not been able to meet since February 2020 for some time. It was October 2020 before Members were able to meet remotely to conclude their work.

1.6 The Working Group acknowledged and recognised much of the good work already taking place by both the Local authority and many of the Borough’s schools. It was considered that focus should be on continuous improvement.

1.7 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding), Cabinet and Council are requested to support the contents of the Working Group Final Report and approve the recommendations contained therein.