

**Education recovery: increasing school attendance and reducing exclusions and part-time timetables**

**PURPOSE**

1. This paper from Portsmouth City Council considers the case for a renewed collective PEP focus on reducing time lost from school through non-attendance, exclusion or reduced/part-time timetables against the background of learning loss through the pandemic. The paper:
2. Updates the Board on the most recent comparative (pre-pandemic) data on school attendance and exclusions and shares local data on the use of part-time timetables
3. Sets out for the Board the wide range of work that has taken place over the past few years to improve attendance and reduce exclusions / part-time timetables
4. Sets out PCC's concern about time lost from school by children, our belief in the potential for improvement, and our request to PEP Partners for their engagement in a drive to secure that improvement on a consistent basis across the city.

**INTRODUCTION**

1. Schools in Portsmouth are coming to the end of an extraordinary two academic years in which the global Coronavirus pandemic has put huge pressure on school leaders, teachers and other staff. They have been faced with the immense challenges of providing Covid safe environments when children have been in school, developing and delivering remote learning options at speed and supporting families practically and emotionally in a wide range of ways. They are working out how to make the best possible use locally of national resourcing for education recovery including summer schools and arrangements for individual and small group tutoring. These have been, and continue to be, times of unparalleled challenge for schools to which they have responded with energy, imagination and hugely impressive resilience.
2. We have heard and can see from data that the majority of children have returned to face to face learning enthusiastic and keen to learn, and some have developed new resilience and adaptability through their experience of the pandemic. In common with other areas, however, we know that there are still a significant number of children who are not regularly attending when they could be. We also know that some children have experienced fixed term exclusion from school over the course of this time; we have shared data weekly on this. The attached additional data on part-time timetables also shows that a number of children, while not subject to formal fixed term exclusion, are nevertheless not able to attend school full time. We generally have good processes and data in Portsmouth so we are better placed than many areas to judge the full extent of lost school time. We do pick up anecdotal evidence from time to time of parents and carers being asked to collect children early from school, however, so we cannot exclude the possibility of our data slightly underestimating lost time.
3. It is clear from the studies which have been undertaken nationally, and from the evidence Portsmouth school leaders have shared with us, that the pandemic has had a significant impact on children's learning. While we can and should contribute to national debate about what is now needed to address this, we know that decisions will be taken by others on this. In our own city, we are in a position, and have a clear responsibility, to reflect hard together on what we need to try to do to give our children the very best life chances.
4. Historically, we know that children in Portsmouth have experienced, pre pandemic, more lost school time than in other areas, including areas with as much or greater social deprivation than Portsmouth. This paper sets out what we know about our position from the most recently available pre pandemic data as well as local intelligence about learning loss from the use of part-time timetables, which is not collected nationally. It calls for a new collective commitment significantly to reduce lost school time in the city as we move forward into recovery from the pandemic

**ATTENDANCE AND EXCLUSIONS DATA PRE PANDEMIC**

1. There are several key performance indicators around school attendance and exclusions. The DfE publishes the data for all Upper-Tier Local Authority Areas.
2. The Tables below outline the most recently available position with regard to key indicators, including our position against all 152 Upper Tier Local Authority Areas.

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| **Persistent Absence - Primary** |
| **2018/19 Rate (% of pupils)** | 8.7% |
| **National Rank** | 94th |
| **Three-year Trend** | Worsening |
| **Comparators:** For this measure, Portsmouth is 2nd highest compared to 11 most similar LA areas. Only Telford and Wrekin has better outcomes |

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| **Persistent Absence - Secondary** |
| **2018/19 Rate (% of pupils)** | 17.9% |
| **National Rank** | 144th (with Bradford and Bristol) |
| **Three-year Trend** | Worsening |
| **Comparators:** The only LA areas with worse performance are: Blackpool, Redcar and Cleveland, Salford, Knowsley, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough  |

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| **Overall Absence - Primary** |
| **2018/19 Rate** | 4.1% |
| **National Rank** | 82nd |
| **Three-year Trend** | Steady |
| **Comparators:**For this measure, Portsmouth is 2nd highest compared to 11 most similar LA areas. Only Telford and Wrekin has better outcomes |

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| **Overall Absence - Secondary** |
| **2018/19 Rate** | 6.7% |
| **National Rank** | 146th (with Bradford and Redcar) |
| **Three-year Trend** | Worsening |
| **Comparators:** The only LA areas with worse performance are: Salford, Knowsley, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool |

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| **Fixed Term Exclusions - Primary** |
| 2018/19 | 1.58% |
| National Rank | 108th |
| Three-year Trend | Improving |

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| **Fixed Term Exclusions - Secondary** |
| 2018/19 | 17.94% |
| National Rank | 134th |
| Three-year Trend | Worsening - nearly quadrupled in 4 years |

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| **Permanent Exclusions**  |
| 2018/19 | Primary - 0.01%Secondary - 0.15% |
| National Rank | Primary - 39thSecondary - 47th |
| Three-year Trend | Primary - SameSecondary - Improving |

**Additional measures**

1. There are three other key measures of educational absence where national comparator data is hard to come by:
* Requests for Elective Home Education
* Reduced Timetables
* Demand for Alternative Provision
1. Local data on reduced timetables is provided below. The figures indicate that RTTs have increased but this also reflects a greater level of tracking and monitoring by the Local Authority as our processes to do this have developed over time.

**Reduced Timetables: Portsmouth**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Autumn Term 17/18 | Autumn Term 18/19 | Autumn Term 19/20 | Autumn Term 20/21 |
| Number of pupils  commencing an RTT with the timeframe | 55 | 60 | 100 | 125 |

**Deprivation context**

1. Portsmouth is not a wealthy city and there is a correlation between deprivation and poor childhood outcomes. So to add a little context, the city is ranked as follows for key deprivation indicators:
* 97th of 152 in terms of % children in low income families (where 1st is low )
* 127th of 152 for % of primary children eligible for Free School Meals
* 119th of 152 for % of secondary children eligible for Free School Meals

**WORK IN THE CITY TO DATE TO INCREASE ATTENDANCE AND REDUCE EXCLUSIONS**

1. Over the past few years there have been a number of pieces of work aimed at, among other things, increasing attendance and reducing exclusions.
2. **School attendance campaign** 'miss school miss out' and the subsequent welcome back to school campaign and associated resources for schools
3. **Work of the Behaviour and Attendance Group (BAG)** - tracking and monitoring of school attendance and exclusions
4. **Implementation of the SEND Strategy**
5. **SEMH Vision** - **i**n 2018 we agreed a Vision for SEMH Inclusion - see Appendix 1
6. **SEMH Principles** - in 2018 we agreed a set of Principles - See Appendix 2
7. **SEMH Framework** - In 2018 we outlined a 4-Tier framework to structure our work around reducing demand for AP - including reducing exclusions - See Appendix 3
8. **Emotional Wellbeing Strategy** - in 2017 we rolled out the Strategy including a wide range of improvements to address a range of mental health issues impacting on children's inclusion and learning
9. **PACE** - in 2018 we launched the Turnaround Project and more importantly in terms of driving inclusion - the PACE Training - with over 160 school professionals trained in the PACE model
10. **Restorative Practice in Schools** - since 2017, we have trained professionals across 30 schools in RP, set up the RP School Network and provided intensive whole school support to some schools in partnership with Portsmouth Mediation Service. Significant impact in some schools.
11. **Attachment Aware Schools** - up to 2019, 17 schools had received training from the Virtual School
12. **Near-to-School and Short Stay School** - have been developed as options to avoid long-term exclusions.
13. **Ordinarily Available Provision** - in 2018 we published a shared OAP for the city including expectations of schools vis-à-vis SEMH support
14. **SEMH Partnership** - in 2018 we set up regular meetings with external agencies to co-ordinate provision in school (school nurses, CAMHS, MABs etc)
15. **PIE QM** - In 2018 we launched the PIE QM to improve school leadership, culture and practice around inclusion. Consistent use of the PIE QM across our schools offers a real opportunity to drive inclusion and reduce exclusions
16. **EHE Protocol** - which has successfully reduced demand for EHE (pre-pandemic)
17. **Reduced Timetables** - revised process and tracking of those children on reduced timetables that exceed 6 weeks
18. **Team Around the School** - in 2019 we piloted two schools for joint work with leadership teams to improve SEMH and safeguarding practice, building on previous work
19. **Inclusion Outreach Service** - in 2019 we launched the new outreach model, with a more flexible, multi-agency offer of support for schools
20. **PCC traded services** including Attendance and Education Psychology
21. **Identifying schools needing focussed support** - in 2019 we used data (and a new way to stratify schools) which identified 9 'very high' or 'high' excluding' schools and 10 medium excluding schools to work with
22. **Mental Health Support Teams** - in 2019 we commissioned (Wave 2) MHSTs with an additional (Wave 4) Team secured in 2020. Roll out continues.
23. Since the pandemic started, more work and planning has taken place including:
24. **LA Education Link Co-ordinators** - moving beyond lockdown related issues to focus conversations between the LA and schools on inclusion issues and monitoring attendance of vulnerable children and young people in each school, with a particular focus on chronic non attendees (CNA). The latest data available on CNA is attached.
25. **Studybugs** - using real-time attendance and exclusion data at child-level to reduce absence and exclusions
26. **Early Help Assessments** - we have a multi-agency working group redesigning the EHA to make it easier to use for schools to be lead professionals and do holistic family-based assessment to reduce exclusions/raise attendance
27. **Review of In-school AP** - commissioning Delta Academy Trust to review on site secondary AP (Tier 3 of our model)
28. **Reshaping MHSTs** - moving beyond the CBT model to better focus on children with 'behavioural' challenges. Better alignment with MABS and a more sensible approach to whole school work in line with our principles and approaches
29. **Termly LA School Resource Allocation Meetings** - ensuring the local authority support services are appropriately and proportionally allocated to schools
30. This is obviously in addition to the significant efforts by every school in the city to increase attendance and reduce exclusions.
31. It should also be noted, that all of these initiatives build on a long standing set of very good arrangements in terms of the LA Inclusion Services, traded services such as Education Psychologists and MABs and wider health and early help and safeguarding services

**OUR CONCERN: WHY THIS MATTERS**

1. Relatively low levels of attendance and high levels of fixed term exclusions particularly in secondary schools have been a feature of the Portsmouth education landscape for a long time - these are not new findings. We remain concerned about the impact of low attendance and continuing high levels of fixed period exclusions on the life chances and wellbeing of individual children. We know that being in school consistently is crucial to children making progress and gaining the qualifications they need for success in their lives.
2. We also know that being out of school places children at significant risk in terms of criminal exploitation, involvement in criminal activities and other safeguarding risks. Where children are looked after, periods out of school or with poor attendance can threaten the stability of their placements, leading to more enforced changes for them and harming their emotional wellbeing. Being fully part of their school community is essential to the sense of belonging and self-worth which is the right of all children. It is crucial to the developmental progression and social networks which will sustain them beyond their statutory school years.

**OUR BELIEF: IMPROVEMENT IS POSSIBLE THROUGH WORKING TOGETHER**

1. **First, do exclusions and part time timetables work? Are they necessary to maintain standards of behaviour?**
2. Fixed term exclusion, now to be renamed suspension, works first time round for some children. For the majority of children who experience more than one exclusion, however, it quickly ceases to act as a deterrent to poor behaviour. Instead it becomes normalised by children as something they come to expect, and contributes to a vicious cycle of low self-esteem and expectations. For teachers who suffer from the impact of poor behaviour and lack of respect, the temporary exclusion of a child demonstrates that school leaders acknowledge that impact and also provides them with a short period of respite. It is also sometimes seen as the only equitable way to maintain clear, consistent expectations of good behaviour. The price paid by a minority of children for this approach is very high, however. There is moreover no evidence that the threat of exclusion is what keeps the behaviour of other children good.

**So how can we best promote increased attendance and good behaviour?**

1. We believe that there are a number of **positive success factors** which it is realistic for us as a Partnership to achieve, working together. These are set out below as an initial proposed programme, as a basis for discussion with Board members. They may seem obvious and we know they reflect many existing aspirations in schools, but we believe they are worth stating and discussing, particularly (d) below which is challenging to implement well.
2. **High quality external challenge and support for families who need it** by services beyond school which work hand in hand with schools, and which champion strongly the importance for children of full attendance and positive participation in school life. PCC is committed to continuous improvement in its targeted tier 3 and 4 services for families: we aim to be judged "Outstanding" by Ofsted and a key part of the high quality we aim for is the best possible joint work with schools to support attendance and good behaviour by children. We want to hear from schools when we fall short in our aspiration. We recognise that there will probably always be a feeling in schools that more of this support is needed than we are able to provide. Investment by PCC has been consistent over recent years, however, with a cross party commitment to continue to invest in targeted early help as well as statutory social care. Ofsted judge the quality of our support to be "Good" and peer scrutiny continues to be positive. With continuing feedback from schools we should be able to build on this foundation to keep improving the contribution which these services can make.
3. **A consistent approach to championing school attendance by all agencies** including the NHS. We and NHS partners are also committed to maintaining strong health visiting, school nursing and other NHS services which support families' understanding of the importance of education. Services which are not supportive, for example GPs who do not sufficiently challenge negligent behaviour by families, will be robustly challenged by PCC through our strong partnership networks and by colleagues in other parts of the NHS, particularly local commissioners of GPs.
4. **High quality early help support and challenge for vulnerable families by pastoral teams in schools**, using the Early Help Assessment planning tool. Across the country, schools provide early intervention support and challenge for families and Portsmouth schools are no exception. We know that pastoral capacity is stretched. We also know that the right conversation with a family, at the right time, including connecting families with other support in the city such as VCS organisations, housing and welfare support, can make a real difference. Workshops this term with schools colleagues are providing an opportunity to explore the art of the possible and most effective approaches.
5. **A consistent city-wide culture in schools of high expectations for all**, in which all children feel both challenged and supported to meet those expectations and where all children know that they belong. Developing and maintaining an effective restorative culture in schools with high behaviour expectations is not a "soft approach to discipline". It is very challenging for both children and adults. We know from examples both elsewhere in the country and in Portsmouth, however, that such a culture can be created and maintained. Consistently championed it could reduce significantly the school absence, voluntary and enforced, which blights the lives of too many children in our city.
6. **High quality, effective teaching of an appropriate and ambitious curriculum**. Planning to teach the knowledge and cultural capital that our children need in order to access and understand the curriculum is vital to enable them to engage with education and go on to thrive in later life. We know that this is already the key aim of all schools in the city, as is the identification of barriers that some children face in school and within each subject discipline. It is important to underline its importance, however, in increasing attendance and reducing exclusion.
7. **A rich extra-curricular offer, and expectation, for all children**. Many children in Portsmouth take full advantage of the enrichment opportunities schools offer, in sport, arts or other interest areas. The lengthening of the school day proposed by the Government is an opportunity to explore how **all** children might be helped to benefit. Children who look forward to doing things they love want to come to school and are motivated when they are there.

**OUR REQUEST: A SHARED MISSION**

1. Back in the late 1990s, Portsmouth was the highest permanent excluding (now referred to as expulsions) local authority in England - 152nd out of 152. Within three years, we had moved to the top half of that table. 20 years later we remain in the top quartile. We have also made improvements in recent years in the levels of reduced timetables and elective home education.
2. Whilst fixed term exclusions, part-time timetables and absence are more complex issues, history does suggest that radical improvement across the public service delivery system can be done at pace and be sustained. Our request and proposal is that under the auspices of the Portsmouth Education Partnership, and alongside partners in the police, NHS, parent representative bodies and the voluntary and community sector, we co-produce and jointly deliver a coherent, ambitious strategy to make a radical difference to levels of attendance and exclusions in the city. The success factors set out above reflect a view about some key elements, but we need to work together on a shared mission - with across the board commitment - to make that step change.
3. To do this, we believe that we should hold ourselves and each other to account in a restorative and relational *high support: high challenge* way. We should be prepared to do things differently, change the structures of accountability and planning, be unafraid to learn from what works and doesn’t work locally, and be open to learning from other places and the evidence of what works nationally and internationally. Equally, we must not throw everything away - the long list of initiatives set out in this paper includes some very good work, much of which has not had the chance fully to impact due to the pandemic. The city has an abundance of good thinkers, good developments and good practice from which to build. We see this mission as a joint leadership challenge, led by the PEP, but involving everyone with a role to play.

**APPENDIX 1 - A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK**

The 'Tiered' Model below outlines a Strategic Framework to help us structure our current work and identify where we may need to invest additional time and resource.

5. Children in Specialist Provision

4. Children in External Alternative Provision

3. Specialist work for children at risk of repeated exclusion or permanent exclusion including internal AP and family practice

2. Targeted work with cohorts of children to meet SEMH needs, improve behaviour and relationships

1. Whole-school work on culture, relationships and curriculum

**Tier 5** describes those children whose needs are such that they require an EHCP (usually under SEMH) and require long-term specialist provision (e.g. Harbour or Out of City placement)

**Tier 4** describes those children whose needs are such that they require Alternative or specialist Provision (currently in the Harbour School and Flying Bull Resourced Provision. There should be an ambition for re-integration into mainstream school, particularly at Key Stage 3

**Tier 3** describes this children whose unmet needs are leading to repeated fixed term exclusions and/or are educated for a significant part of the week in in-site or school-commissioned Alternative Provision. These children are likely to have complex or entrenched social, emotional and relational needs requiring early help or statutory safeguarding family-based practice to improve the home environment.

**Tier 2** describes work in the school to target groups of children at risk of disengaging from learning through unmet SEMH need. This may include a range of targeted interventions.

**Tier 1** describes whole-school work to improve inclusive practice across the school environment. It would include developing and delivering an engaging and ambitious curriculum, strong teacher-pupil relationships, passionate and compassionate leadership, and a safe, welcoming and inclusive school ethos and culture.