

Title of paper:	School Attendance	
Report to:	Children's Partnership Board	
Date:	27/01/10	
Director(s)/Corporate Director(s):	Mark Andrews	Wards affected: All
Contact Officer(s) and contact details:	Irene Andrews Email: Irene.andrews@nottinghamcity.gov.uk tel:91 50712	
Other officers who have provided input:	Jackie Richardson-Martin Luke Murray	
Relevant Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) objectives(s):		
Provide early, effective support and protection to children, young people and families		✓
Nurture and support strong, healthy families		✓
Increase children and young people's emotional resilience and the maturity of their decision-making		✓
Ensure that all our children, young people and families are provided with a sound foundation for lifelong learning and progression into skilled economic activity		✓
Reduce deprivation and its impact on children and young people		✓
Summary of issues (including benefits to customers/service users):		
<p>The following report is an update on current performance in reducing school absence. It outlines the success which is being had at secondary but raises concerns about the deterioration of attendance performance in primary schools for both persistent absence and overall absence.</p>		
Recommendations:		
1	The Partnership note the contents of the report	
2	The Partnership sign up, in principal, to the draft protocol to address non attendance at school and once finalised by the Senior Officers Group, partners agree to promote this within their organisation	
3	The Partnership identify areas of partnership work that might add value to reducing schools absence	

1. BACKGROUND AND PROPOSALS

(Explanatory detail and background to the recommendations)

The Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) aim to reduce Persistent Absence (PA) so that by 2011 no local authority will have more than 5 per cent of its secondary pupils as persistent absentees. A Persistent Absentee is defined by the DCSF as a pupil who has missed 20% or more of their education, or roughly one half term out of the five for which data is collected. In the bench mark year of 2006/07 Nottingham City stood at 11.1% for secondary PA in the 2006/07 school year. This ranked the local authority at 145 out of 148 local authorities nationally. A tremendous amount of focus and effort has been placed on reducing absence by schools and the Local Authority.

Performance

There have been improvements in both overall and persistent absence in secondary schools improving the numbers of Persistent absence (PA) and Overall Attendance (OA). At the end of the spring term Nottingham's PA levels had fallen a 27% from 11.2 to 8.1% this year and OA had fallen 13% from 9.9 in the 06/07 base line year to 8.6 this year. This is on target to meet the 5% PA target for 2011 set by the DCSF. Secondary schools have also improved attendance and PA across all special needs groups and children in care. It should be noted however Nottingham still remains in the bottom quartile for secondary absence.

The picture in primary schools is not as consistent as in secondary schools with 60% of primary schools improving PA levels and 33% improving overall absence. Nottingham's Primary school attendance has been following national trends but Nottingham's position back to 01/02 was poor. Despite seeing improvements Nottingham has not been able to close the gap to England rates; indeed the gap from 01/02 of 1.2% remained the same in 07/08. By end Autumn & Spring Term 08/09 data this gap has now widened despite there being a decline nationally. Nottingham City's overall absence rate is 7.15% a decline from 6.6% at this point last year. This ranked the city 152 out of 152 (down from 148 at this point last year). The city's Primary's have had attendance improvements in children in care, as well as the special needs cohorts of school action and school action plus.

Nottingham's Primary sector has more sickness than the national average but this does not appear to be linked to health deprivation. There is also more religious observance and agreed extended holidays. However it should be noted this makes up about 13% of the negative difference with the National picture in primary. This picture is very different depending on the primary school and issues are not as consistent as they are in the secondary phase due to the size of the cohort. There is higher absence in the early years of primary school. Nevertheless 78% of the negative difference with the national picture in primary schools is made up of authorised absence. In our secondary on the other hand the majority (two thirds) of the negative difference is made up of unauthorised absence, resulting in a greater potential for the challenge and support model currently applied, with an escalating legal intervention, being successful.

Despite the worsening primary absence figures there are still more primary schools showing improvement in number of persistent absentees compared to last year, with 49 improving/no change and 30 showing an increase in PA numbers. However, overall Nottingham City's primary persistent absence rate was 4.9% a decline from 4.4% from this point last year. This ranked the city 151 out of 151 (down from 146 at this point last year).

Unlike overall attendance, in which negative performance was seen across nearly all ethnicities in primary schools, there were PA improvements across ethnicities with the exception of Travellers and Asian pupils, with the biggest increases in Pakistani pupils, a population that is increasing within the city.

Improvement Action Undertaken

Previous actions have included:

- **Improved attendance management processes**
- **A greater focus on intensive preventative work across transition, particularly in families with multiple siblings**
- **Setting up a pilot for Schools to adopt consistent attendance policy and approaches**
- **Increased legal interventions include ones that give Magistrates greater powers of disposal, including issuing larger fines or community orders**
- **Running high profile attendance campaigns across**

DCSF RAG rating

As Nottingham remains an Intensive Intervention Authority, Nottingham is subject to regular assessments by the DCSF to monitor progress in tackling poor attendance, in particular persistent absence. The LA is RAG rated against thematic areas for improving attendance and reducing persistent absence. The attendance RAG rating for the authority was red/amber in October 2007, this has improved to and remains green due to the interventions and commitment Nottingham has shown to address this issue.

Political and strategic partnership ownership

Tackling absence is now well embedded politically and across partnership developments. Reducing persistent absence has been a priority of the lead member and chair of the children's partnership. Partnership developments such as Targeted Youth support, early intervention pilots and targeted safer school interventions have all targeted poor attendance. Scrutiny has carried out full review of attendance and will receive regular updates on progress. The excellent level of political and strategic ownership has been recognised by the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) RAG rating.

Next steps

Although it is important to not lose focus on secondary school persistent absence the lack of progress in primary schools is of great concern and needs to be a priority of the city. The lead member for children's services has therefore amended his priorities to focus on primary absence. A primary attendance action plan has been put together and will be overseen by a newly formed primary attendance taskforce. This will include further work with governors and improved School Improvement Partner interventions with schools. A list of targeted primaries has been refreshed and a challenge event that will facilitate intensive review, sharing of good practice and the development of school level RAG rated attendance action plans. The Pilot set up for Schools to adopt consistent attendance policy and approaches will include the central education improvement partnership, an area of high density BME populations; this will include work on some of the ethnic inequalities of primary attendance. A draft protocol to guide partners in challenging children who are absent is attached in appendix one. The Partnership is asked to consider and comment on this and agree to promote this within their organisation. If the Partnership members agree to implementing this it will be included in the attendance campaign for this year. The Partnership is also asked to identify areas of partnership work that might add value to reducing schools absence.

2. RISKS

(Risk to the CYPP, risk involved in undertaking the activity and risk involved in not undertaking the activity)

Failure to reduce absence will affect the partnerships ability to raising educational attainment and skills

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None at this stage

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None at this stage

5. CLIENT GROUP

(Groups of children, young people or carers who are being discussed in the report)

All children who are absent from school

6. IMPACT ON EQUALITIES ISSUES

There are concerns about absence increasing in some ethnic groups work is being done with communities to look at ways of addressing this. This and issues such as bullying will also be looked a presentation to the City's Equalities Forum.

7. OUTCOMES AND PRIORITIES AFFECTED

A To provide early, effective support and protection to children, young people and families, by:

- 1) refocusing services on prevention and early intervention; and
- 2) improving the safeguarding and outcomes of children and families with complex needs.

B To nurture and support strong, healthy families, by:

- 3) improving support to parents and carers (particularly young parents and young carers);
- 7) ensuring that children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, receive co-ordinated child and family-centred services of high quality.

C To increase children and young people's emotional resilience and the maturity of their decision-making, aiming to:

- 10) reduce the incidence and impact of bullying, and to divert children and young people from antisocial and offending behaviour.

D To ensure that all our children, young people and families are provided with a sound foundation for lifelong learning and progression into skilled economic activity, by:

- 11) raising educational attainment and skills;
- 12) closing the gap in attainment and skills between disadvantaged groups and their peers; and
- 13) improving attendance and increasing engagement in education, employment and training and increasing progression into further education, higher education and skilled economic activity.

E To reduce deprivation and its impact on children and young people, by:

- 14) increasing the proportion of the working age population who are qualified to at least level 2 or higher; and
- 15) reducing the number of working age people who are on out of work benefits.

8. CONTACT DETAILS

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Tel: 91 50712

PROTOCOL TO ADDRESS NON ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL

The Children Act 2004 places a **duty** on **all** agencies to work together to promote the welfare of children and to share information. There is an expectation that all agencies will work together to ensure children are safely on a school roll.

In the course of your normal duties you become aware of a child (ren) present in the home or out in the community, during the school day. It may well be that the child is genuinely absent from school; however, the intention is to make it part of the collective duty of our local partnership to challenge absence from school.

The following is intended to act as guidance to colleagues on addressing the issue of non attendance and promoting the importance of school attendance.

What you can do if you

(i) **See a parent in the home with school age children who are not attending school**

(This is likely to apply to anyone with access to a child's home including Health Visitors, G.P.s, District Nurses, Social Workers, Attendance Officers, Mentors, Housing Officers, and Neighbourhood Support Officers, Family Support Workers.)

- Ensure that the householder is very clear who you are and what service they are employed in and conduct your actual business first.
- Approach the subject of the child (ren) by explaining that Nottingham City Council has engaged its partners (your agency being one of them) to help in its determination to raise the life chances of its children and young people. As such you have been asked to enquire about the reason for a child being absent from school.
- Give the householder the attendance enquiry card explaining what is being done and ask if he/she would be agreeable to answer questions regarding the child (ren)'s absence.
- If yes, give them an opportunity to say what the reason is. Ask the appropriate questions shown in points 1-7 at the end of this document in appendix 1a:
- The details on the form should be completed as fully as possible. Familiarise yourself with the requirements of the form as you may not necessarily want to carry it around with you; but ensure that you have the means of recording. Remember the card provided will inform parents about this initiative.
- If the child/ren does not live at the address, request their current address.

If the parent refuses to give details of their child (ren), the form can still be sent through with the address or details that you have obtained whereby checks can then be made through the Education Welfare Service.

As soon as possible after the visit forward the details on the form which will be available at www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/schoolattendancealert and it email to educationwelfareservice@nottinghamcity.gcsx.gov.uk This is a secure email address.

Use the card provided to highlight the obligations on parents in relation to school attendance and the law.

(ii) **See a parent/adult with a school aged child in the street**

(This is likely to apply to colleagues in a position to stop anyone in the street. Including Members of Safer Neighbourhood Teams - Police Officers, Community Protection Officers, Community Protection Support Officers).

- The parent/adult should be approached and you must identify yourself with your I.D. badge. Explain to the parent/adult what it is you would like to talk about. Showing the attendance enquiry card may help with engagement.
- If possible, invite the parent/adult/child to somewhere where the interview is less public and unlikely to be overheard.
- Politely seek an explanation for the child's absence from school

Refer to points 2-7 below in appendix 1a.

(iii) **Groups of children gathering in or around your organisations premises**

(This is likely to apply to Safety Neighbourhood Teams, Police Officers and staff based in Libraries, Community Centres, Parks etc.)

Colleagues working in community settings may observe groups of pupils 'loitering' during school hours. If this is a regular occurrence, the Safer Neighbourhood Team needs to be alerted to the place and times that this occurs. In all cases please contact the Education Welfare Service as above.

(iv) **See a child of school age who is not accompanied by an adult**

Colleagues are asked not to compromise themselves by approaching unaccompanied children or young people in the street. Only the Police have the authority to do this. However please contact the Education Welfare Service as above.

- The Police Officer should ask the child/young person to stop and should introduce him/herself and explain to the child/young person why they have been stopped.
- It is important to remember that the young person who *may* be truanting is not actually breaking the law. The offence of 'Failing to Ensure Regular School Attendance' is an offence by the parent(s)/carer(s).
- Request the name, date of birth, home address, the name of the school and the reason for not being there. NB: Some young people may have 'Pass-out' slip from school authorising their absence.
- Hand the young person the attendance enquiry card.
- Assess the child's safety. Make a decision about whether the child/young person is safe to continue on his/her way, or whether s/he should be returned to

a place of safety. In the case of such assessments the place of safety will be the school or home.

Councillors may also engage with their constituents by way of surgeries or as they go about their day to day business. If issues are raised with in relation to school attendance matters, the parent/adult should be given an attendance enquiry card. They should be advised to liaise with the school first; if they require support then they can either make direct contact with the Education Welfare Service where someone will support, advise or signpost them to the relevant service. If attendance issues are raised about another family then you should report this by completing the attached form, giving the address of the property and any relevant details.

What happens next?

The Education Welfare Service will liaise with the schools and/or homes as necessary and record any further intervention. The attendance of the child/young person will be monitored by the school. Any further concerns that may be experienced about absence in relation to the child/young person will be challenged by the school. A request for service from the Education Welfare Service may be made once the school has undertaken the interventions employed within their setting. Once those attempts have been tried and tested, then a discussion will take place with the designated Education Welfare Officer.

The Agency that raised the alert will be notified once a resolution regarding the particular absence period has been reached.

NB: The form should not be used when an agency considers a child is not receiving full-time education entitlement.

Reasons why a child (ren) may be absent from school and appropriate questions to ask.

1. The child may be ill, the parent should be asked why the child is out rather than at home. Ask if the school has already been notified. If not, remind the parent that the school should be contacted on the first day of absence.
2. The child may be excluded from school or an alternative provision. Enquire where the child is excluded from and the date when this occurred.
3. It may be a school INSET day. The Education Welfare Service would wish to check this is indeed the case so ask for the school details.
4. The child/ren may not be registered at a school. In this case assure the parent that you will pass this on to someone who can help
5. The child may be Home Educated due to illness for example, education is provided other than at school by the Local Authority,
6. The child may be being educated by his/her parent formally known as Education Otherwise or Elected Home Education.
7. If a parent declines to co-operate then you should complete the attached form, giving the address of the property and any relevant details

Non Attendance Agency Alert

Child's name			
Date of birth			
Ethnicity		First Language	
Address of where child lives / lived			
Parent or carer's name			
What is the name of their current school (if any)?			
Your name/Position			
Agency			
Telephone number/email address			
Address			
We will follow this up. Is there any other information that you can give us that will help us do this?			

Please send or fax this form to:

F.A.O. Rosalind Wilkie
 Senior Education Welfare Officer (Manager)
 Children's Services



Sandfield Centre, Sandfield Road, Nottingham. NG7 1QH
Telephone: 0115 915 0717
Fax: 0115 915 0726
Email: educationwelfareservice@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

This form will be acknowledged and the information will be passed to the appropriate person in the area to make enquiries regarding the educational circumstances of the child. The person making the notification will be informed of the outcome of these enquiries and of the proposed action.

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- All staff within Nottingham City Council and its partners has a duty to report non school attendance. You will have been spoken to today by someone with that duty.
- The success and achievement of children and young people is a major priority for Nottingham City Council.
- The Education Act 1996 places a duty on parents to ensure the regular school attendance of their child(ren). Failure to do so **may result in your prosecution.**



- The Education Welfare Service can be contacted if you require assistance in resolving any issues you may have that prevent your child attending school regularly or will signpost you to a Service or Agency that can.

For more information, phone 0115 915 0717 or visit:

www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/schoolattendance