

Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 01/23

Date: March 2023

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Business Support Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: This briefing note provides further information into the indicator EDU3(b) – Percentage of children persistently absent from school

ATTENDANCE AND PERSISTENT ABSENCE IN SCHOOLS

Background

Data has been attached in Appendix 1.

In the academic year 2018/19 Medway's rate of absence from schools was in line with National, increasing to 0.3 percentage points (p.p) above national in 2020/21 before reducing again to 0.1p.p above national in 2021/22.

Persistent absence (PA) however, recorded as the percentage of pupils with an average attendance of less than 90%, varied more significantly than national, indicating that Medway have a higher proportion of pupils with attendance of less than 90% than national.

Medway's overall rate of persistent absence has increased as has the national proportion, following the pandemic, however Medway rate remains higher than national.

PA for the academic year 2021/22 is 24.2% - this is 10,059 children. Of these, the primary rate is 21.5% and the secondary rate 27.3%.

It is noted that the percentage of severe absence, pupils with less than 50% attendance, remains lower than national, indicating that the most challenged cohort are those pupils with between 50 and 90% attendance.

Understanding the reasons for absence is difficult as most recorded reasons for 21/22 (table 2) are in line with national, with the exception of 'unauthorised other' and exclusion (which refers to what is now called suspension).

Impact of the Pandemic

The pandemic served to widen Medway's attendance gap with National. During 2020-21, Medway recorded a 9% higher rate of COVID related absences than national. The most significant differences being at primary and special schools where Medway's rates were 10% and an 11% higher respectively. Secondary schools in Medway were 8% above national.

We know this has served to increase the proportion of parents opting to electively home educate their children and caused some delay in more vulnerable children returning to school. Whilst absence directly related to Covid has returned to in line with National in 2021/22, it is likely that the pandemic is still having effect on the attendance of some pupils but recorded as anxiety, mental health issues.

Actions Taken in Response

We have set clear goals and actions to support the inclusion agenda in Medway, including:

- Developing a core offer of training and support to embed whole school approaches to support inclusion, linking to and complementing the broader system of targeted and specialist support, to build upon skills and expertise within individual schools.
- Embed trauma informed practice across Medway schools.
- undertaking a thorough and robust review of our Alternative Provision (AP) offer, with a view to increase the capacity of AP to support pre-emptive and reintegration activity, including revolving door and outreach.
- Revising the funding arrangements around SEND learners so that more resource is provided to mainstream schools to support inclusion.
- There is a Task and Finish Group of school leaders who are working together to identifying improvement for attendance drawing on best practice and national initiatives.
- The council has been assigned a Department for Education attendance advisor to work with them on addressing the attendance and PA issues. Council officers have met with the advisor and a deep dive is scheduled for 3rd April which will inform the development of a robust action plan.
- Medway Council have joined with Kent County Council and the DfE, to pilot an Attendance Alliance group. This is a DfE driven initiative which is in its very early stages but has a focus on a multiagency approach to addressing attendance issues.

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Appendix 1: Data

Tables 1 to 5 below show the Absence Rates by Geographical Level in England and Medway between 2018/19 and 2021/22

Please Note:

- (1) Total includes state funded primary, secondary and special schools. Data for special schools is available from 2016/17 to present.
- (2) Sessions recorded as not attending due to COVID circumstances are included as possible sessions in 2020/21 and 2021/22 only, but not as an absence within absence rates.

Table 1: Overall Absence Rate

	2018/19	2020/21	2021/22
England	4.7%	4.6%	7.8%
Medway	4.7%	4.9%	7.7%

Table 2: Authorised Absence Rate

	2018/19	2020/21	2021/22
England	3.3%	3.4%	5.5%
Medway	3.2%	3.5%	5.5%

Table 3: Unauthorised Absence Rate

	2018/19	2020/21	2021/22
England	1.4%	1.3%	2.1%
Medway	1.5%	1.4%	2.2%

Table 4: Percentage of Persistent Absentees (10% or more missed)

	2018/19	2018/19	2020/21
England	4.7%	10.9%	12.1%
Medway	4.7%	11.4%	13.4%

Table 5: Percentage of Severe Absentees (50% or more missed)

	2018/19	2020/21	2021/22
England	0.8%	1.1%	1.7%
Medway	0.4%	0.8%	1.4%

Table 6: Reasons for Absence 2021/22

	2021/22	England	Medway
Authorised holiday rate		0.1%	0.0%
Authorised other rate		0.5%	0.5%
Authorised reasons rate		5.4%	5.4%
Excluded rate		0.1%	0.2%
Illness rate		4.4%	4.4%
Medical appointments rate		0.3%	0.3%
Rate of sessions recorded as not attending due to COVID circumstances		1.0%	0.9%
Religious observance rate		0.0%	0.0%
Study leave rate		0.0%	0.1%
Traveller rate		0.0%	0.0%
Unauthorised holiday rate		0.4%	0.3%
Unauthorised other rate		1.4%	1.6%