



SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 22 MARCH 2023 AT 5PM

**THE EXECUTIVE MEETING ROOM - THIRD FLOOR, THE GUILDHALL,
PORTSMOUTH**

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Catherine Hobbs

(NB This supplementary agenda should be retained for future reference with the main agenda and minutes of this meeting).

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

- 4 Review into school attendance with a focus on transitional years 6-7
(Pages 3 - 44)**

RECOMMENDED that the review into school attendance with a focus on transitional years 6-7 be signed off.

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Agenda Item 4



Portsmouth CITY COUNCIL

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

REVIEW INTO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE WITH A FOCUS ON TRANSITIONAL
YEARS 6-7

Date published: 22 March 2023

Under the terms of the Council's Constitution, reports prepared by a Scrutiny Panel should be considered formally by the Cabinet or the relevant Cabinet Member within a period of eight weeks, as required by Rule 11(a) of the Policy & Review Procedure Rules.

PREFACE

Short introductory statement to the report from the Chair. To set out context and purpose of the review, quotes from any relevant legislation or other publications, a thank you to witnesses, the panel and finally commending the report to Cabinet/Cabinet Member.

Councillor Ryan Brent
Chair, Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel.

Date: 22 March 2023

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1. Aims of the review

The aims of the review are to:

- Understand the main reasons for school absence in transitional years 6 to 7 and to review the Council's and wider Portsmouth Education Partnership strategies to improve school attendance; and
- Investigate where there is good practice and where there is scope for improvement in relation to the transition years into secondary.

2. Conclusions

- (i) School attendance remains a key concern in Portsmouth and absence rates remain above the national average, particularly in secondary. Absence rates markedly rise in Year 7 and above. The vast majority of children, however, are engaged and attending school and deal with the transition to secondary school well.
- (ii) There is some good collaboration between schools but support around transition between Year 6 and 7 is very inconsistent. Some good resources were developed a number of years ago to support this transition but are not being used.
- (iii) The Portsmouth Education Partnership (PEP) is a strong and effective partnership with a clear education strategy in place. All 14 Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) are represented on the PEP Strategic Board. The PEP is leading on the Priority Education Investment Area (PEIA) work; attendance is one of the four priorities that are included in the PEIA Delivery Plan for Portsmouth.
- (iv) The School Attendance Team at Portsmouth City Council is under resourced and as a result of the covid pandemic school attendance figures have worsened (as they have nationally) which in turn has increased work in the team. There are four link co-ordinators covering 61 schools in the city who are doing great work.
- (v) Good work is taking place under the city-wide relational practice programme and evidence is showing that this is having a positive impact on attendance and suspensions (exclusions).
- (vi) The work done by the Virtual School & College to support children who are look after with their transition into secondary school is regarded as a model of best practice.
- (vii) Studybugs is proving to be an excellent resource which is providing live attendance data that is shared across the Partnership. To date the resource has been funded by the LA. The vast majority of schools now use Studybugs.
- (viii) Excellent initiatives are taking place to improve literacy levels including identifying those children who need additional support and that the right interventions are in place from the start of year 7.

3. Recommendations

- (i) That the Local Authority work with headteachers on a transition protocol which is based on best practice with a shared commitment for continuous improvement, in order to better support children's transition from primary to secondary school. This should include consistency in terms procedures and processes (including the sharing of data) and the development of a resource pack which would detail how schools will work with each other to create a city-wide approach for Year 6 to 7 transition. This process should be embedded within the next three years.**
- (ii) That any child who is identified as having poor attendance when starting secondary school receives a home visit to establish why the pupil is not attending school to help them support good habits to prepare for school.**
- (iii) That an active attendance plan be introduced which would identify those pupils who are struggling with school attendance, may have been adversely affected by the covid-19 pandemic and who have underlying needs such as anxiety or neurodiverse needs and therefore require extra multi agency support. In some cases it may be appropriate to conduct an Education, Health and Care assessment.**
- (iv) To maintain and ideally increase the number of LA Link Co-ordinators including a focus on supporting year 6 to 7 transition.**
- (v) That the principles adopted by the Virtual School & College, including the intensive support that is provided, be expanded to all vulnerably pupils in Year 6 including those who have an EHCP.**
- (vi) That all schools in the city share automated daily attendance figures with the Local Authority building on the successful implementation of Studybugs.**
- (vii) That the local authority encourages all schools to actively engage in the relational practice programme over the next 3 years following the evidence that this is having a positive impact on attendance and reducing suspensions in schools.**
- (viii) That the local authority and headteachers encourage school governors to scrutinise the transitional process in their schools and closely monitor attendance for years 6 and 7.**

4. Background

On 12 January 2023 the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel (henceforth referred to in this report as "the panel") met informally with the Director of Children's Services, Sarah Daly, to discuss ideas and topics for a review in the 2022-23 municipal year. In view of the timescales it was agreed that the scope of the review would be very focussed and concentrate on

attendance on the transitional school years 6 -7. This topic was agreed by the Scrutiny Management Panel on 16 January 2023.

The panel met formally on three occasions to receive evidence from a number of internal and external witnesses, a full list can be viewed at the end of the document.

The national context

School attendance and the rise in school absence from Year 6 to Year 7 is of national concern, which has been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic leading to a post pandemic rise in school absence fuelled by an increase in anxiety amongst children and parents linked to wider societal issues, with children and young people experiencing poor mental health.

The latest published figures show that overall absence significantly rises between Year 6 and Year 7 in England from 6.4% to 7.3% (2021/22), as is the case with both persistent absence (from 18.3% to 21.3%) and severe absence (0.7% to 1.3%) with further rises in all three categories in Year 8.

The local picture

In common with the national picture above, overall absence rises markedly between Year 6 and Year 7 in Portsmouth from 6.9% to 8.3% (2021/22), as is the case with both persistent absence (from 20.3% to 24.7%) and severe absence (1.1% to 2.2%) with further rises in all three categories in Year 8. All of these figures are above the national average.

In reviewing school attendance rates it is important to note the local education landscape and the way schools are organised. Like many areas, Portsmouth has many transition points due to a structure of early years settings, infant and junior schools, primary schools and post-16 provision. The only all through state funded school is Mayfield. But unlike many other areas, Portsmouth is heavily academised with 14 Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) responsible for 70% of Portsmouth's schools.

The majority of pupils transition well, however there is a problem with consistency across schools on the transition process. Despite the fragmentation there are good levels of collaboration across the city and this is underpinned by the work of the Portsmouth Education Partnership and the SEND Board. This includes a focus on school attendance and implementation of the city wide multi agency strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions (suspensions) - updated in February 2023 (Appendix 1). The strategy builds on several years of work and range of initiatives, many of which continue to be delivered. The strategy takes a whole system strategic approach to tackling school absence and suspensions, a major strand of which is around a whole school approach to relational practice building on previous work to support restorative practice in schools.

It is important to note that Portsmouth has been named as a Priority Education Investment Area and the DfE has recently approved a three year delivery plan based on four key priorities, one of which is school attendance.

To support transition from Year 6 to Year 7 there are some well established processes in place that all schools support. These include:

- **Open days** - these are organised by secondary schools in the Autumn for parents, carers and pupils who are in Year 6, to come and visit the secondary school the pupils are likely to go to in Year 7.
- **Transition days for Year 6 pupils** - all schools offer at least two transition days on the first two working days of July. Some schools have offered longer transition periods, but all schools ensure the core offer of two days is offered to ensure consistency across the city. The transition days provide an opportunity for Year 6 pupils to meet with teachers / tutors and to familiarise themselves with the school.
- **Data / information transfers between primary and secondary schools** - information regarding attainment & progress, school attendance, learning, behaviour, vulnerability / safeguarding, etc, are transferred securely between the relevant staff in primary and secondary schools (e.g. Designated Safeguarding Lead, SENCo, Inclusion Lead) via the Schools Secure Environment (SSE). Equally, after secondary allocations have been finalised by Admissions, a Year 6 data set is produced which will flag any causes for concern / closer scrutiny (e.g. attendance, suspensions, pastoral support, EP involvement, Early Help involvement, children who are looked after, EHCPs, looked after children, children in need, children protection plans, etc) and which is sent to the relevant secondary school via SSE. This exercise is repeated before the summer break to ensure that any allocation or data changes are captured.
- **Transition activities** - secondary schools and feeder primaries will also usually plan transition activities to provide some continuity e.g. Year 7 teachers visiting local primary schools to see Year 6 pupils in their KS2 classes, planned learning projects which start in KS2 and continue into KS3 and summer holiday programmes which are organised by the receiving secondary school.

In addition to the above, the **city-wide Year 6 Big City Read project** now has a transition literacy unit of learning written collaboratively and annually by Year 6 and Year 7 teachers. The aim is for all Year 6 pupils across the city to receive a free copy of a chosen book which they read together in their primary schools, attend a virtual Q&A webinar hosted by the School's Library Service and the relevant author, and then for them to take this home and have at least one thing in common with other pupils new to Year 7 from different primary schools.

Around 90% of pupils get their first preference of secondary school which is good compared to the national figure. This is largely due to the authority expanding secondary school places to meet demand. The next 4-5 years secondary schools will be full.

5. Evidence

Portsmouth Education Partnership Strategy to improve attendance and reduce exclusions

Portsmouth Education Partnership Strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions (Appendix 1) has been updated and builds on work over a number of years and sets out a range of work completed more recently. Since the pandemic, LA link co-ordinators have been attached to all schools to allow the LA to track and monitor vulnerable young people who are not attending school regularly. The Council has also refreshed the guidance for schools in line with the DfE guidance.

Work with schools is taking place to refresh family support plans to help improve attendance for those children. Work around mental health support teams who provide support to all schools in the city, has also taken place which has been useful. Officers are now focussing work on neuro diverse children and there is a Neuro Diverse Multi-disciplinary Team and a profiling tool to try and improve attendance. A key strand of the strategy is relational practice which is about developing relationships with children and high support, high challenge.

The strategy feeds into the Removing Barriers to Inclusion Group who monitor and track the strategy which then feeds into the PEP . Portsmouth is one of the Priority Education Investment Areas, there are 24 across the country. This is largely down to attainment progress to give support to improve that. There is a delivery plan which has been submitted and approved by government and attendance is one of the four priorities that has been put forward. There will be additional funding to improve attendance over the next three years which is welcomed. All key partners are included on the PEP and underneath that is the Removing Barriers to Inclusion Group which is a multi-agency group with a range of partners all responsible to help improve attendance.

Portsmouth School Attendance Service

There are significant challenges around attendance, particularly at secondary level; primary has seen some improvements over recent years. The pandemic has impacted on this as attendance has started to decline and suspensions and reduced timetables have increased. The authority is monitoring and tracking this very closely and there is a lot of challenge and support going into schools. There is a collective desire from all partners to improve this situation.

The Attendance Team has always worked at capacity and has been under increasing pressure with a 1.75 vacancy. The vast majority of pupils are in schools and are engaged, the school attendance team work with about 5% of pupils with poor attendance. When a pupil starts missing weeks at a time this writes off an academic year which has a knock-on effect to the next academic year and then it can become habitual. As a result of the pandemic attendance figures have worsened and this has increased work in the team. When the schools returned all the work came back into the enforcement area and there was less time to focus on looking at support and challenge on attendance. Schools have seen the attendance audits as a supportive mechanism and has given them the chance to reflect.

There are a range of schools with good and poor attendance and the spread across the city is uneven. There is always a context, and these have to be taken into account. The authority is very transparent with data, in the weekly message to headteachers attendance data, data about suspensions, elective home education and reduced timetables is included.

There is always a particular cohort of children with persistent absence, the most common reason for this is health related absences and this affects the overall figures. If 10% of sessions are missed these are labelled as persistent absences and these are the most concerning. It is early intervention which is key. It is a mixed picture in terms of if parents/carers want to engage.

The authority used to have a large number of Education Welfare Officers (EWO) who had a dual role of support and challenge and there was also an element of case work. These posts were removed approximately 10 years ago due to budget pressures and there is now only an enforcement team that is largely office based and half the workforce was lost. The enforcement team is very effective, but it meant that the team did lose touch with schools on casework and lot of intelligence was lost. The authority has been trying to re-establish those processes over recent years and it was hoped that through the funding from the DfE some of these roles might be reinstated. Attendance audits take place which look at school processes and a report is produced with recommendations.

There are many variables within the transition process that leads to a lot of inconsistencies within schools. Schools are aware from allocation of the data and where there are persistent absentees. Schools should then be liaising to discuss the identified individuals and focussing on these pupils. Unfortunately there is no one size fits all and there are lots of inconsistencies. Secondary schools have said that primary schools are not giving them all the information they need, and then primary schools have said that secondary schools do not seem to want the information they are trying to give to them and there is a lack of pastoral support.

The Council uses *Studybugs* which gives the authority live data on attendance in all schools and that oversees the national information system to allow officers to access daily data which is very helpful, particularly for the link co-ordinators. This is funded by the Local Authority and the contract is due for renewal in one year, all but one school use this software. *Studybugs* can produce heatmaps which look at persistent absentees in relation to deprivation areas, the team then need to act on that information. There are many advantages of using this as it allows officers to see the live data and enables the authority to challenge schools and also helps the frontline services across the system. For Looked after Children there is also Welfare Call which provides live data on if a child is late for example and therefore allows stakeholders to track vulnerable children at all times. There is also the Insight Hub which the LA link co-ordinators use which looks at data of vulnerable pupils in terms of family support plans and what social care are doing with them and the attendance team can link into this.

Alternative Provision

There are four tiers of alternative provision. Tier 1 - work on relational practice and culture within schools and behaviour management. Tier 2 - this is what schools will do in house; they offer an alternative curriculum for a short period of time to re-

engage a child struggling with attendance to get them back into mainstream classes. Tier 3 - where schools will commission alternative provision from other providers such as the City of Portsmouth College and Motiv8. Tier 4 - the local authority commission places with Flying Bull or the Harbour School. This all goes through the Inclusion Support Panel and will be short stay before they are reintegrated back into mainstream education.

Transitional activities

Geographically, as a densely populated city within a small mileage distance, young people from a Year 6 cohort attending their local primary school may move on to a number of different secondary schools despite there being catchment areas and notional feeder schools.

Historically, transition days have been mutually suggested by schools across the city as the first one or two days of the first week in July annually. However, reaching agreement and consistency of sign up to this has been somewhat challenging in past years with individual schools having their own planned events, activities, and transition programmes, in addition to the different transition dates for schools in other nearby local authorities.

Not only is there a transition from the primary Key Stage 2 curriculum to the Key Stage 3 curriculum when pupils transfer from primary to secondary school but there are considerable differences in pastoral and organisational arrangements. Pupils in Year 6 who may have just one class teacher for all subjects across the curriculum and remain in one classroom for most lessons can then move to a form tutor and separate subject teachers in many different learning spaces across a secondary campus. This is a considerable change, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils who need safe and secure relationships and environments.

To mitigate and minimise the disruption of transfer from Year 6 to Year 7, secondary schools and their feeder primaries will usually plan transition activities to provide some continuity e.g. Year 7 teachers visiting local primaries to see Year 6 pupils in their own Key Stage 2 classes, planned learning projects which start in Key Stage 2 and continue into Key Stage 3, summer holiday programmes in the receiving secondary school.

Additionally, the Year 6 Big City Read project which has really gained pace and engagement over the last 2 years now has a transition literacy unit of learning written collaboratively by Year 6 and Year 7 teachers annually. One parent has reported:

'Taking part in the Year 6 Big City Read was a fantastic experience for my daughter in Year 6 and she thoroughly enjoyed hearing the author answer their questions and talk about the book they had all read. It also had a big impact on her settling into her Secondary School at the start of Year 7, as it meant that despite all the pupils in her English class being from various feeder schools in the city, they all had something in common. They were able to discuss the shared experience of the Year 6 Big City Read as well as the book itself.'

Information regarding data, learning, behaviour and vulnerability/safeguarding are

transferred securely between the relevant staff in primary and secondary schools e.g. Senco, DSL. Equally, after secondary allocation responses have been finalised, a year six data set is produced highlighting any factors that could be cause for concern or closer scrutiny (attendance, suspensions, pastoral support, Educational Psychology involvement etc). These spreadsheets with potential flags are then distributed to the secondary schools for those children allocated to them via the Schools Secure Environment (SSE). This exercise is repeated just before the summer break to ensure that any allocation or data changes are captured as well as they can be.

Relational and Restorative Practice

The goal of all schools should be to establish the best possible climate for learning for students. Students learn best when they feel safe, not just physically but also emotionally. Restorative practice provides a framework for creating and sustaining a school climate where teaching and learning can take place effectively and where students and adults can thrive as they learn from each other. Creating a relational and restorative school is a deliberate act of design that flows through structure, policies, procedures, and everyday interactions. Relational practice describes a way of being, an underpinning ethos, which enables us to build and maintain healthy relationships. It provides a strong framework within which we can promote a whole-school ethos founded on the importance of relationships. This includes a range of approaches to managing conflict and tensions in a way that repairs harm and mends relationships if and when these relationships do break down. Although its roots are clearly in restorative justice -as a way of repairing harm -restorative practice has the bolder ambition of proactively developing the sense of community and seeking to increase the social capital between and across the school and, from there into the wider community.

High Challenge, High Support The underlying premise of Restorative Practices rests with the belief that people will make positive changes when those in positions of authority work with them, rather than doing things to them or for them. This is achieved by providing a combination of high challenge and high support. "Challenge" does not mean confrontation, but setting, rules, limits, and expectations. There are consequences to actions, concerns are outlined openly and honestly, and responsibility and accountability are encouraged. "Support" includes ensuring people have the tools to meet the expectations and are shown empathy, encouragement, compassion, kindness and respect.

RP in Portsmouth Trafalgar School (part of Salterns Academy Trust), have exemplified what can be achieved through relational practice and by taking the whole-school approach, with one clear measurable impact being extremely low suspensions, underlined by the fact that in 2020/21 the school recorded just two suspensions and the same in 2021/22 compared to mainstream secondary school averages of 95 and 120 respectively. From January 2022, a number of schools in Portsmouth have been working with Trafalgar school as the first "wave" (on behalf of the PEP) to further develop relational and restorative practice in their settings. Funding has been secured from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) carry forward for the next three years, which was approved by Schools Forum. This will allow officers to work with other schools in the city over the next three years, with a view to make this self-sustaining. It was hoped that all schools would be involved by the end of the three years. The aim is that developing a whole school relational culture

and ethos and establishing practices to build, maintain and repair relationships, should become, "the way we do things in Portsmouth". Relational Practice is not a "programme" or an "intervention". It is an embedded cultural mindset rather than a model. Leaders, staff and pupils will explore values and principles as well as skills, strategies and techniques that will support the culture and ethos needed to build, maintain and repair relationships.

This could include:

- Visits to Trafalgar for Head teachers to explore 'What does it feel like to be in a restorative school'
- Development sessions in small groups with Head teachers and their pastoral leaders ·
- 3-day course for 2-3 pastoral leads from each school
- Bespoke outreach support for schools, for example whole staff training, working with pastoral staff, TAs or midday assistants, reviewing policies and action plans · Reflective circles and networking between and within schools ·
- continuing to access multiagency training via the PSCP available

Working towards becoming more relational and restorative does not preclude schools from participating in other programmes and opportunities. On the contrary it is a way of being that is complementary to other strands of work delivered by the SEMH partnership (including the EP Team, MABs, MHST, and the ND in Schools Project) This work with schools is part of the broader strategic commitment to Relational and Restorative practice within the children's workforce as set out in the Children's Trust Plan. Terminology - Relational and Restorative Practice We used the term "relational and restorative" practice to emphasise that the focus of the work in schools is on the whole school ethos of building and maintaining relationships. The term "restorative practices" includes a whole spectrum of ways of being and of working from building to maintaining relationships to, when needed, restoring them. One important part of this spectrum is the use of questions (often five) to enable others to share their perspective, express emotions, understand impact and find a solution.

- What happened?
- What were you thinking/ feeling?
- Who is affected?
- How are they affected?
- What needs to happen to make it better?

These questions (or variations of them) are a key part of the relational and restorative "toolkit". However, there is often a misunderstanding that bringing people together for conversation after something has gone wrong is the essence of restorative practice in schools. We hope that by referring to "Relational and Restorative Practice" it makes the focus on the proactive work slightly more explicit.

In Wave 1 there are 11 schools who are going through this process. Wave 2 there are now 19 schools who have shown an interest in starting the journey and half of schools are actively engaged in saying how do we positively build and maintain relationships between staff, children and families in the school. It is also about working alongside everyone else who is supporting the social, emotional and mental health in schools including mental health support teams, virtual school, EP team, safeguarding partnership who all come together to work on relational practice.

Virtual School & College

Transition to secondary school can be a challenge for care experienced children. Change is even more stressful for care experienced children because it can trigger deep rooted feelings of insecurity, instability, loss and separation. It is important for young people to know that they can come back and visit their primary school and because some care experienced young people believe that people in their lives simply 'disappear' without reason.

It is often noted that the vulnerability of some care experienced children increases over time in secondary school with difficulties being further exacerbated by the onset of adolescence, which can also begin in Year 5/6. For this reason, transitions for care experienced young people need to be managed very carefully in order that children can be successful in the next phase of their education.

'Transition' package

A holistic, bespoke and person-centred approach is required which is tailored to the needs of the individual. We know that care experienced children want to be treated in the same way as other children, however, we also know, there are additional factors at play relating to their unique experiences of trauma, separation and loss, which make them especially vulnerable at these times. So, in practical terms this means they should benefit from the same transition preparation as all Year 6 children, but account must be taken of these additional factors, which will need to be responded to in a sensitive and considered manner.

Things to consider

Continuity of relationships is vital. Relationships should be a key component of the transition programme. Learning support assistants' working with vulnerable children in the final term of Year 6 and visiting the new school with the young person as their trusted adult is highly significant in this.

Self-efficacy is a significant protective factor in increasing wellbeing and supporting positive mental health. There is widespread evidence that this is negatively impacted by maltreatment and neglect so often key in the lives of young people.

Resilience too has a positive impact on capacity to cope with change. We should therefore be looking at how to develop vulnerable children's resilience well ahead of their transition date.

We know that children who have experienced developmental trauma often have poorer executive functioning skills. These skills help us to control impulses, to plan ahead with a clear aim in mind, to organise ourselves, to work out what we need to do next and to be able to shift from one thing to another as any situation arises. These skills are extremely relevant to the increased level of independent behaviour that we require of children as they move to secondary school, but it is also easy to see how many of children will really struggle with this - through no fault of their own.

The child's voice

The Virtual School ask children what they are most looking forward to and if they are worried about anything.

Most looking forward to:

- Meeting new people
- Clubs event and activities
- Learning new subjects
- Wearing a new uniform

Most worried about:

- Getting lost.
- Bullying (social media, playground and toilets)
- Peer relationships (fitting in, being like, feeling valued)
- New routines and strange environments - Lessons no longer come to them
- Workload - Additional subjects and that dreaded word - Homework
- Feeling tired - Carrying loads of books, walking all day

The school transition programme will discuss these topics areas, some of which will be very practical, as well as some being the more emotional aspects of transition directly relating to relationships, losses, separations and endings.

Key principles of transition planning

• Early planning and good information sharing (both prior to and after transition) which involves all stakeholders. The key people would include:

- Young person - must be at the heart of everything
 - Carer /Parent/Other Family member
 - Education advocate from Virtual School and College
 - Social worker
 - Designated Teachers (DT) from new secondary school and current primary school. Primary school DT has responsibility for liaison with all concerned and coordination of activities and support; this responsibility will be handed over to the secondary School DT in the September of Year 7
 - Teacher in primary school/LSA (Transition key adult)
- Finally - anyone who the child identified as a key person to them.

- Transition support needs to be holistic and consistent
- Support should be individualised – there is no ‘one size fits all’ transition package.

What is the timeline? The timeline starts in Year 5 and ends usually in the Spring of Year 7, although support may still be required beyond this for some children.

Year 5

Schools and the network working with all children on resilience and self-confidence. Summer Term PEP (personal education plan) - conversations about identifying school/any specific needs/care plan.

For those with an EHCP - Annual review for planning and thinking about secondary transition and to hold the next annual review early in the next year.

Ensure all stakeholders are aware of the local offer.

Autumn Term Year 6

Carers/Parent - to start visiting local schools/attend open evenings.
Depending on needs - identify a key adult to support transition.
Are additional one-to-one visits to a school required?
Information to be specified as targets in PEP.
Application for Secondary school - deadline end of October.

Spring Term

Bespoke transition visits to the secondary school - out of school hours to include Year 7/8 'buddy' introduced to talk about positive experiences at secondary school.
Have there been other interventions identified as part of the PEP or wider discussions.
Induction/taster days planned.
School to support a pin profile to be prepared - all about me.

Summer Term

Summer term PEP the transition plan (pro forma and consistent for all) and transition pack which the young person takes home with them (e.g., see through pencil case, scientific calculator, pens, post its). All key adults attend this face-to-face meeting including secondary school. This is a wonderful opportunity to share and celebrate successes and for the young person to show pieces of work of which they are proud.
Child pin profile to be shared (all about me) written by the child.
Summer holiday transition planning
Are there any identified needs for the new school ready for September (e.g., medical or other training),

Autumn Term - Year 7

The first day - Buddy system in place to meet and greet on first day plus primary LSA if appropriate.
DT shares appropriate information with subject teachers.
Carers/Parent have a named contact in the secondary school.
In school - Weekly check in with child with chosen key person (FT) - share news from Primary.
Early PEP to ensure transition plan remains appropriate and identify any new needs.

Evidence from Headteachers

The Panel heard from two Headteachers of Primary and secondary schools in the city to hear about what arrangements are in place to support transition and ensure good attendance.

Ms A H Chapman, Ark Ayrton and Ark Dickens Primary Schools

All secondary schools collect data around May for pupils that are due to move in September. Some secondary schools come to visit children in their primary schools. She felt the lack of visiting the children is an issue, data is transferred across but this does not tell a story about the child, particularly vulnerable children, where transition to secondary school is a big deal and could potentially affect their attendance.

She felt that previously there was more collaboration between primary and secondary schools and more flexibility if they felt that individual children needed more support around transition. Over time as more multi-academy trusts (MATs) have developed she felt that schools are working more towards what their MATs require and there is perhaps less collaboration. She did not feel that the MATs talk enough to each other to support transitions because they are all working with their own systems. There is however good work taking place and they are working with Trafalgar School on the relational practice model.

There are good levels of collaboration taking place in the city, an example of this is the Teaching and Learning conference organised by the PEP which focussed on literacy which showed really good examples of work across the city and this was well attended. The MAT model was intended to have a small number of MATs to support transition however this had not materialised and there are now 14 MATs in the city.

ARK Dickens and ARK Ayrton schools have been very clear with the receiving secondary schools about the levels the children are working at. However, when they get to secondary school pupils are often taken back to a more basic level and the children get bored as they are not being challenged enough. She felt that secondary schools need to listen and understand the data and trust the SAT results. In some secondary schools pupils are being tested on their transition days to verify the results that their primary school had given them, which was not a good experience for the children. There needed to be more fluidity in schools so that secondary teachers are aware of what primary teachers are teaching and the high expectations of the children.

The relationship with Charter Academy was very good due to being in the same MAT. The music and PE teacher will visit the primary schools to deliver subject specific teaching which has benefited those children who have moved across to Charter Academy as they recognise the teachers. Children often struggle at secondary school with the amount of teachers for each subject. Year 6 pupils in her primary schools now have a different teacher for maths and another teacher for reading and they also move classrooms which starts to prepare them for secondary school where each lesson is in a different classroom.

It is often the more vulnerable children who struggle more with the transition but there was an inconsistent approach about how flexible schools can be. They are aware that there are children that need more transition visits or more one to one support on transition days if they are particularly anxious and this information is fed across to secondary schools but this is not always acted upon. A more collaborative approach was welcomed to get the package of support right, particularly for more vulnerable children as this is often where attendance is more of a concern. They are supportive to seeing their children through and will visit them, provide support and will not step away until they are comfortable that their children are settled into their secondary school. Primary schools have built up a relationship with families which secondary schools will not have had chance to do yet so she felt primary schools could help to bridge this relationship and help to formulate a plan for those children. It was important to take the time to build relationships with families and this needed to be prioritised.

Ms Chapman said when it came to attendance there is a policy and support from ARK but they understand that the school is a Portsmouth school and are working closely with the LA and partners. ARK support them with the strategy but there is not a conflict.

Vulnerable children are those who are persistently absent, children on child protection plans, children who are at risk or permanent exclusion, children with SEMH needs and children who are school refusers. Numbers vary from cohort to cohort. The LA link co-ordinators work with all schools and track and monitor vulnerable young people, this is agreed by schools and they are RAG rated. This was an outstanding success during the pandemic as there was a danger that these children would become very isolated however twice weekly conversations took place with the LA link co-ordinators about their vulnerable pupils which established good collaborative working. The LA has invested in this resource so it was able to continue post pandemic. Gathering information about vulnerable students is integral part of this. Mr Vaughan said they try to make transition a process over a few months and SENCOs will go out to collaborate with primary schools in advance. The aim is to create an environment where the universal offer will hit that middle ground of pupils who have the potential to become vulnerable and in parallel to that there are the individual support plans for those children who the LA and school know are vulnerable.

Ms Chapman said more roles available to help support children with transitions such as family link workers and more support in school when needed would be welcomed.

Mr S Vaughan, Headteacher, Priory Secondary School

Mr Vaughan said the transition process at Priory School will start 12 months before a child arrives at the school with the open evening process which provides reassurance and information to parents and pupils. Up to 31 October parents can have a tour of the school and meet with the leadership team. From 1 March the school have their list of students for September and there is a designated member of staff whose role is transition. There are three main feeder schools to Priory but they take pupils from up to 15 different schools which can be a challenge in terms of receiving data. The leadership team will go out to the three main feeder schools to have face to face conversations with pupils - ideally, they would go out to all schools but resources are finite.

In terms of transition days, these are designed around pastoral priorities and pupils are not tested on these days. Pupils are asked at the end of the two days how they are feeling with the aim that they are enthusiastic and excited to start secondary school. The meetings with parents at the end of the induction process are relational with the intention to find out about the child and the dynamic of the family.

In July summer camps are held, inviting children to come in to increase bonds and provide a sense of orientation. The government started this initiative and the school decided to continue with this and subsidise this for pupils. The school will use the data sent from the primary schools to identify the potentially vulnerable families and they are targeted for this initially before opening it up to all.

On the first day of term year 7 are the only year group in order to help with the transition, and within three weeks of the start of term the school hold a tutor evening when parents can meet with tutors to find out how things have been going. Tutors are the first point of call for pupils as they see pupils each day. A report is provided in the autumn term on how each pupil is settling to inform parents. Tests around literacy and reading ages are carried out to provide a useful baseline and the school trust the SAT results given to them from primary schools and they will set a plan based on those results.

The SENCo and special needs team are vital in carrying out additional visits to ensure those pupils who require have additional care and support. If resources were infinite Mr Vaughan would like to see more resources for this wraparound care and a team of primary phonics experts to support and to give a clear link from primary school up until the end of year 7. He felt they would see a huge increase in engagement, attendance and outcomes as literacy is key.

He added that their MAT is clear that they have a local curriculum; an example of this is that they start with Macbeth in year 7 as the majority of the feeder schools do this in year 6 so it is a natural progression. The school are keen to do more work on curriculum transition. He felt where it sometimes fails is when students need an EHCP and perhaps the assessment has not been done in year 6. He felt though that overall the collaborative working was very good with the primary schools. In terms of facilitation of curriculum transition and supporting the transfer of data, Mr Stoneman felt that the LA has a role to play and could perhaps do more to support that under the remit of the PEP.

Priory School do monitor the number of parents who come to parents' evenings. They also recognise that sometimes different approaches need to be taken such as going out to parents' homes. The beginnings of a relationship with parents is established within the first 2-3 weeks of their child starting school, some parents are immediately trusting and some relationships take time to build.

Ms Robinson, Inclusion Manager, said that if the problem is an unidentified SEN that that should be addressed and there is a graduated response of doing that under the SEN code of practice which all schools have signed up to. There is also SEN support and then EHCP so there is a very robust system in place for moderating those requests that come in. Other vulnerable children might need support and need alternative provision to cater for a different vulnerability that is not a SEN. There is good inter-agency working and schools are very good at identifying who they need to get support for either through a psychologist, MABSS, the inclusion outreach service which involves therapists and specialists from Solent Academies Trust, however there are children who sometimes fall through the gaps. The best time to intervene is as soon as the LA or school starts to see attendance starting to drop. 97% of EHC assessment requests in Portsmouth are agreed which is more than the majority of LAs in the region, due to having a robust system in place for moderating and agreeing requests.

Headteachers talk anecdotally about what each school is doing and through the PEP there are collaborations which helps to glean what other schools are doing better. He did not feel his school were doing anything radical but just being as supportive as they are able.

6. Integrated Impact Assessment

An integrated impact assessment would be carried out when the Cabinet makes its decisions based on the recommendations set out in this report.

7. Budget and policy implications of the recommendations

The following table highlights the budgetary and policy implications of the recommendations being presented by the panel:

	Recommendation	Action By	Budget & Policy Framework	Resource Implications
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Portsmouth Education Partnership - City wide multi agency strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions

Meeting Date	Witnesses
1 February 2023	Sarah Daly, Director of Children's Services and Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director children's Services and Education.
22 February 2023	Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director Children's Services and Education; Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement; Donald McIntyre, School attendance Team Leader; Sarah Christopher, Partnership & School Inclusion Team Leader; Tina Henley, Head of Virtual School
8 March 2023	Anne H-Chapman, Executive Headteacher - ARK Ayrton Primary Academy and ARK Dickens Primary Stewart Vaughan, Headteacher - Priory Secondary School

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A city wide multi agency strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions

Updated February 2023



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A. Purpose

1. This strategy sets out the case, and a proposed way forward, for a renewed collective effort on reducing time lost from school through non-attendance, exclusion or reduced timetables against the background of the learning loss that so many of our children and young people have experienced throughout the pandemic and unfortunately for some continue to do so.
2. The strategy **builds** on several years of work and a range of initiatives, many of which will continue to be delivered under this strategy. However, this strategy takes a **whole system strategic approach** to tackling school absence and exclusions, a major strand of which is around a whole school approach to **relational practice** building on previous work to support restorative practice in schools.
3. A central theme of the PEP education strategy is **inclusion** and this will be the case for this strategy - *creating an educational environment that is welcoming to all children and young people and not giving up on any child whatever their circumstances*. Inclusion is about ensuring that there is in place comprehensive Ordinarily Available Provision that meets the educational needs of the majority of children; that any additional needs are identified early, and support is put in place, as part of a graduated response, to avoid exclusion and enable children to make progress with their learning; and that children are able to attend their local mainstream school wherever possible
4. The strategy has strong links with the PEP Education Strategy (Priority 8) and the SEND and SEMH Strategies, focusing on improving inclusion for all children, but with a particular focus on the provision of education for children with SEND / additional needs and improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people including children in need, looked after children, children at risk of or already being exploited and/or experiencing the criminal justice system, children receiving targeted early help and other children identified by schools as requiring additional support.

B. Rationale and why this matters

5. 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. Attainment outcomes at key stages 2 and 4 remain low in Portsmouth and Portsmouth is now one of a number of Priority Education Investment Areas to address this. We know that being in school consistently is crucial to children making progress and gaining the qualifications they need for success in their lives.
6. 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. Children also miss out on support for special educational needs and mental health problems.
7. 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.

8. The argument for **suspensions** is we believe generally weak based on the evidence available to us. For some children fixed term exclusions can work first time round. For the majority of children who receive more than one exclusion 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 the 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 and expectations of good behaviour. However, the price paid by a minority of children for this approach is very high. There is moreover no evidence that the threat of exclusion is what keeps the behaviour of other children good.
9. In the case of **reduced timetables** for children, the reasons for such measures should be exceptional and limited, short term and require parental consent. A clear plan should be in place to support early transition back into full time education. Early Help Assessments should be considered for all cases. Reduced timetables that go well beyond six weeks rarely succeed in positive outcomes for the children concerned.

C. Background

10. Schools in Portsmouth have had to endure two extraordinary academic years in which the global Coronavirus pandemic has put significant pressure on school leaders, teachers and other staff. This has extended to early years settings and post 16 providers. They have all been faced with the immense challenges of providing Covid secure and safe environments when children and young people have been in school, developing and delivering remote learning options at speed to ensure learning can continue at home and supporting families practically and emotionally in a wide range of ways. Despite the full return to school the impact of Covid on school attendance continues.
11. Whilst many children have returned to school since the restrictions were eased in June 2021, early provisional data for attendance - and particularly persistent absence - for 2021-22 indicates a significant post-pandemic rise in school absence. It is likely that this will be found nationally and not just with the provisional Portsmouth data. A 'post-pandemic recovery' lens does need to be placed on how we now tackle a larger issue than we had before. The reasons for absence will have shifted over the past 2 years. For example, parents may be more concerned about the spread of infection and may be more inclined to keep children at home if they are showing signs of illness, or if they know there are illnesses in the community, whereas in previous times they may have sent children in to school.
12. There appears to be an increase in anxiety amongst parents and children linked to the pandemic and also wider societal issues, with more children and young people

experiencing poor mental health. Furthermore, attendance may not be seen as quite so important following periods of on-line, home learning.

13. There are still a significant number of children who are not regularly returning to school when they could be. We also know that some children have experienced fixed term exclusions from school over this course of time. We also know that a significant number of children are on reduced timetables, which whilst not subject to a formal fixed exclusion, are nevertheless not able to attend school full time.
14. It is clear from the studies which have been undertaken nationally, and from the evidence Portsmouth school leaders have shared, that the pandemic has had a significant impact on children's learning. Historically, we also know that children in Portsmouth have experienced, pre-pandemic, more lost school time than most other areas, including areas with as much or greater levels of social and economic deprivation than Portsmouth.

D. The evidence base and why change is needed (21/22 data to be added in March 23)

15. There are a number of key performance indicators around school attendance and exclusion which the DfE publishes for all upper tier Local Authority areas. The tables below outline the most reliable position (pre-pandemic) with regard to these key indicators, including our position against all 152 upper tier LA areas.
16. Exclusions data is also available for 2019/20 which paints a rather more positive picture but due to the impact of the pandemic the figures have to be treated with a high degree of caution. The DfE did not collect absence data for the Spring and Summer Terms 2020 due to the pandemic and there is therefore no full year 2019/20 absence data to provide comparisons with.

Overall absence primary	2018/19	2019/20
	4.1%	n/a
National rank	82 nd	n/a
3 year trend	Steady	n/a
Comparators: for this measure, Portsmouth is 2 nd highest compared to 11 most similar LA areas. Only Telford and Wrekin have better outcomes.		

Overall absence secondary	2018/19	2019/20
	6.7%	n/a
National rank	146 th	n/a
3 year trend	worsening	n/a
Comparators: the only LA areas with worse performance are: Salford, Knowsley, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool.		

Persistent absence primary (% of pupils)	2018/19	2019/20
	8.7%	n/a
National rank	94 th	n/a
3 year trend	worsening	n/a

Comparators: for this measure, Portsmouth is 2nd highest compared to 11 most similar LA areas. Only Telford and Wrekin have better outcomes.

Persistent absence secondary (% of pupils)	2018/19	2019/20
	17.9%	n/a
National rank	144 th	n/a
3 year trend	worsening	n/a
Comparators: the only LA areas with worse performance are: Blackpool, Redcar and Cleveland, Salford, Knowsley, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough.		

Fixed term exclusions (suspensions) primary	2018/19	2019/20
	1.58%	1.1%
National rank	108 th	100 th
3 year trend	Improving	

Fixed term exclusions (suspensions) secondary	2018/19	2019/20
	17.94%	7.5%
National rank	134 th	97 th
3 year trend	Worsening (nearly quadrupled)	

Permanent exclusions primary	2018/19	2019/20
	0.01%	0.02%
National rank	39 th	104 th
3 year trend	No change	

Permanent exclusions secondary	2018/19	2019/20
	0.15%	0.09%
National rank	47 th	50 th
3 year trend	Improving	

17. There are three other key measures of educational absence where robust and official national data is unavailable:

- Reduced (or part-time) timetables
- Severe absence - less than 50%
- Requests for elective home education (pupil de-registrations from school)

18. Local data is provided below for reduced timetables. The figures indicated that the number of pupils commencing a reduced timetable has increased but this also reflects a greater level of tracking and monitoring by the Local Authority

Reduced Timetables				
	Autumn Term 17/18	Autumn Term 18/19	Autumn Term 19/20	Autumn Term 20/21
Number of pupils commencing a reduced timetable	55	60	100	125

19. By the end of the Autumn term 2021 there were 360 **severely absent children** of which:

- 156 have a social worker or Early Help worker as lead Professional with a relevant safeguarding/care or early help plan in place
- 204 are without an LA Lead Professional. Many had school-led plans of differing types but the quality of these is unknown
- 28 children had not been to school at all in the term
- 67 children have EHCPs of which 31 were at Harbour, 4 at Cliffdale, 5 at Redwood Park and 6 at Mary Rose
- 70 are under the age of 11 (NCY 6 and below). 290 are of secondary age

20. Portsmouth is not a wealthy city and there is a **correlation between deprivation and poor childhood outcomes**. To provide further context, three deprivation indicators are given below with the city's ranking compared to other local authority areas. The figures demonstrate that there are many other areas that have higher levels of deprivation than Portsmouth and yet are doing better when it comes to school attendance and rate of exclusions.

- 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

E. Previous and current work in the city to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions

21. Over the past few years there have been a number of pieces of work aimed at, among other things, improving school attendance and reducing exclusions. Much of this work has been city wide and multi-agency, involving the council, education settings, health, the voluntary sector, etc. Details of these are summarised below:

- a) **High profile school attendance campaign 'miss school miss out'** and the subsequent welcome back and return to school campaigns and associated resources for schools. The *miss school miss out* campaign is considered to be important and further consultation with parents is planned for a relaunch following a pause as a result of the pandemic.

b) **Work of the Behaviour and Attendance Group (BAG)** - tracking and monitoring of school attendance and exclusions. The Group is now a sub-group of the PEP Removing Barriers to Inclusion Group.

c) Implementation of the SEND Strategy

d) **SEMH Partnership, Vision, Principles and Framework** - in 2018 we established regular meetings with partners to co-ordinate provision in school (school nurses, CAMHS, MABs, etc). We also agreed a Vision for SEMH Inclusion, a set of principles and outlined a 4 tier framework to structure our work around reducing demand for Alternative Provision, including reducing exclusions.

e) **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.

f) **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.

g) **Relational 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.

h) **Attachment Aware Schools** - schools have received training from the Virtual School.

i) **Near-to-School and Short Stay School** - have been developed as options to avoid long-term exclusions.

Ordinarily Available Provision - in 2018 we published a shared OAP, refreshed in 2022, for the city including expectations of schools vis-à-vis SEMH support.

j) **Portsmouth Inclusion Education Quality Mark (PIE QM)** - In 2018 we launched the PIE QM to improve school leadership, culture and practice around inclusion - this is a self-assessment tool supported by peer moderation, in order to identify strengths and areas for development in relation to inclusive practice. This piece of work helped to identify training requirements for our workforce and has helped shape the plans proposed within the Priority Education Investment Area programme submitted to the DFE

k) **Elective Home Education (EHE) Protocol** - agreed by all schools in 2019. This has reduced demand for EHE pre-pandemic as well as resulting in only a small increase during the pandemic - in stark contrast to most other LAs in the South East who have witnessed significant increases in EHE. Now it appears that requests for EHE is rising and it is important to understand what is driving the increase.

l) **Reduced Timetables** - revised process and tracking by the LA of those children on reduced timetables that exceed 6 weeks and where there is no clear plan in place to ensure a transition to full time education.

- m) **Team Around the School** - in 2019 the LA piloted two schools for joint work with leadership teams to improve SEMH and safeguarding practice, building on previous work.
- n) **Inclusion Outreach Service** - in 2019 the LA launched the new outreach model, with a more flexible, multi-agency offer of support for schools where they have concerns about meeting children's additional needs. The outreach support is available to all mainstream schools, delivered by a range of professionals from a partnership of services including Multi-agency Behaviour Service (MABS), Solent Academies Trust, Children's Therapy Service, and experienced Outreach SENCOs from mainstream schools in the city.
- o) **PCC traded services** including Attendance and Education Psychology.
- p) **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
- q) **Mental Health Support Teams** - in 2019 we commissioned (Wave 2) MHSTs with an additional (Wave 4) Team secured in 2020. All schools now have access to MHSTs
- r) A task and finish group with e Virtual school land partners to investigate what we need to do to improve attendance for children we care for.
- s) The "go to grow" Early Years campaign to promote consistent, regular attendance in nursery settings.

22. Since the pandemic started, more work and planning has taken place all of which have the potential to impact on school attendance and exclusions. These include:

- a) **LA Education Link Co-ordinators** - during the pandemic, systems were established with schools to track vulnerable children and respond to a wide range of issues impacting on families as a result of the lockdown, including RAG-rated child level data on spreadsheets, LA Link Co-ordinators attached to schools and colleges and the Children's Hub. These systems have now been adjusted with a particular focus on children who are severe non-attenders, with attendance below 50%. The vulnerable children tracking team has now been established as a permanent team, with additional funding and recruitment to 3 dedicated Link Co-ordinator posts, due to the positive impact of this work. This being extended further to include Early Years and Post-16 providers.
- b) **Guidance for schools** - updated school attendance guidance for schools was published in September 2021. It provided: guidance on a range of strategies to improve school attendance; graduated response flowchart and guidance; chronic non-attendance flow chart; and initiatives and local support available to schools to help improve school attendance.

- c) **Studybugs** - using real-time attendance and exclusion data at child-level to reduce absence and exclusions. 60 of 61 schools have signed up to this.
- d) **Family Support Plans** - a multi-agency working group has redesigned the Early Help Assessment to make it easier to use for schools to be lead professionals and do holistic family-based assessment to reduce exclusions/raise
- e) **Review of in-school Alternative Provision (AP)** - the LA commissioned Delta Education Trust to review on site secondary AP (tier 3 of our model). The reviews were completed in Autumn 2021 and learning is being shared across the Lead Links network
- f) **Tailoring MHSTs to meet local need** - extending the MHST offer, in addition to 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.
- g) **Termly LA School Resource Allocation Meetings** - ensuring the local authority support services are appropriately and proportionally allocated to schools supported by a termly review of all schools.
- h) **Supporting neuro-diverse children in school** - Portsmouth has been successful in securing innovation funding from NHS England allowing us to work in partnership with schools across the city to transform support for children who have a level of neuro-diversity that is impacting on their engagement with and enjoyment of school. The programme will have 4 key areas of focus: training and development for the school; a programme of specific support for schools; development of our existing Parent Carer Forum to create a central hub from which small, local forums will be set up; and development of a digital platform that provides families, young people and practitioner's access to a range of resources and tools, up to date information and interactive functions, building on existing good practice such as the new Portsmouth ND Resource Pack.

23. All of the above is in addition to the significant efforts by every school in the city to increase attendance and reduce exclusions. It should also be noted that all of these initiatives build on a long standing set of very good arrangements in terms of the local authority's Inclusion Services (statutory and traded), the Multi Agency Behavioural Service (MABS) and wider health, early help and safeguarding services.

F. What collectively we need to do - positive success factors

24. We believe that there are a number of **positive success factors** which it is realistic for us as a Partnership to achieve, working together. They may seem obvious and we know they reflect many existing aspirations in schools, but we believe they are worth setting out here to underpin the work we want to take forward over the coming months and years:

- a) **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. The LA is committed to continuous improvement in its targeted tier 3 and 4 services for families and are aiming to be judged "Outstanding" by Ofsted. A key part of this is the best possible joint work with schools to support attendance and good behaviour by children. The LA want to hear from schools when they fall short in this aspiration and recognise that there will probably always be a feeling in schools that more of this support is needed than the LA is able to provide. Investment by the LA has been consistent over recent years with a cross party commitment to continue to invest in targeted early help as well as statutory social care. Ofsted judge the quality of the 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.
- b) **A consistent approach to championing school attendance by all agencies including the NHS**. The LA 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. The LA is working with the GP network to support GPs to challenge poor attendance at school. Any negligent behaviour by families, will be robustly challenged by the LA through the strong partnership networks and by colleagues in other parts of the NHS, particularly local commissioners of GPs.
- c) **High quality early help support and challenge for vulnerable families by pastoral teams in schools**, using Family Support Plan. 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. There will be an expectation that in the case of any child who is severely absent there should be a Family Support Plan in place.
- d) **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 relational 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. A key strand of this strategy is to take forward a whole school approach to relational practice building on previous work to support restorative practice in schools. Details of this approach is set out in Section G.
- e) **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.

- f) **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. Children who look forward to doing things they love want to come to school and are motivated when they are there.

G. Focus on severe absence

- 25. As referred to in section D and the snapshot of data from October 2021 we continue to have a relatively high number of children (309) who are severely absent from school, i.e. less than 50% attendance. And of these children, less than half have a named Lead Professional.
- 26. A key strand of this strategy will be to ensure all chronically absent children have a plan in place either through a Family Support or plans developed as a result of being open to tier 3 and 4 services, including an expectation of having a Lead Professional in place.
- 27. Partners will continue to share information with the Missing Exploited and Trafficked (MET) Group and Early Help, encouraging schools to complete a Family Support Plan and have a Lead Professional in place, working with Early Help and / or contacting MASH where school interventions and previous legal sanctions have failed.
- 28. The role of the LA Link Co-ordinators will be an important factor, working closely with schools to track and monitor chronically absent children and to make sure that appropriate plans are in place.

H. Focus on relational practice

- 29. The early work on Restorative Practice in schools from 2016 - 2019 had some notable successes, although most schools tended to focus on restorative practice with specific children and held the work in their pastoral and safeguarding functions.
- 30. Where schools have embraced relational practice as their school ethos and approach, attendance can improve and suspensions and exclusions reduce. Trafalgar School (part of Salterns Academy Trust), have exemplified what can be achieved by taking the whole-school approach (referred to **relational** rather than restorative practice). We also know from Hull and Leeds, where this whole-school approach has been adopted by the majority of schools in these areas, that exclusions have been markedly reduced as a result. See Appendix 2 for evidence of impact in other areas.
- 31. The Portsmouth Education Partnership (PEP) Strategic Board agreed that the city needs to take a whole-system strategic approach to tackling the very high levels of absence and exclusion in the city and Relational Practice in schools is now a major plank of the strategy to improve outcomes in these areas.

32. Relational Practice is not a silver bullet and there are other things we need to do as part of a strategy to reduce schools days lost as set out in this strategy and detailed in sections E and F. Curriculum flexibility for particular pupils being one amongst many others. Moreover, we know the things that count can't always be counted and we do expect to see a wide range of other major benefits from relational practice in schools including improved relationships, children feeling safer and happier at school, reduced anxiety etc. The direct and indirect impact on mental health and educational progress and attainment should not be underplayed. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to set an early expectation that relational practice in schools will make a very significant impact on:

- Days lost to exclusion
- School attendance, and in particular, reducing the proportion of children who are persistently and chronically absent
- Number of pupils on reduced timetables
- Demand for Alternative Provision

33. Schools have been invited to participate in **'Waves' of implementation** 11 of our 61 schools have completed phase one of Wave One starting in 2021/22, with 17 more schools starting wave 2 in January 2023

34. Three key resources needed to roll out relational practice in our schools are in place:

- A commitment from Headteachers and their senior leadership teams, governing boards and Multi Academy Trusts to ensure a whole-school approach is adopted and followed through
- The Local Authority working in partnership with the Salterns Academy Trust who will lead this work on behalf of the Portsmouth Education Partnership facilitating school visits, school-to-school support and networking
- Support from external professionals providing bespoke packages of support for schools in each Wave

I. A shared mission

35. 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.

36. Whilst suspension (were 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. 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 in section F 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.

37. 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 section E 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.

J. Governance, accountability and targets

38. The Portsmouth Education Partnership and SEND Board already have in place structures which can oversee and monitor this strategy in the shape of the Removing Barriers to Inclusion Group (RBIG) and the Behaviour and Attendance Group (BAG) which reports into the RBIG. Much of the current and planned work set out in section E sits within these groups. The implementation plan, below, shows where the governance for each strand of work lies, including monitoring detailed plans.
39. The Groups will be accountable to the PEP Strategic Board who will receive reports on a termly basis. For 22/23 the PEP Strategic Board has agreed that one of its four top priorities will be a focus on reducing exclusions and improving school attendance, so will therefore be committed to scrutinising, and supporting this work.
40. The success of this strategy will ultimately be measured by improvements in school attendance and a reduction in school suspensions, against the last set of reliable data from 2018/19.
41. A set of 3-year targets, following analysis of local, national and statistical neighbour performance, were set to achieve by the end of the 2023/24 academic year. The rationale for the targets was that for Primary phase (where we have historically stronger performance), Portsmouth should aim to be at or near the top of the statistical neighbour pack and that for Secondary phase we should be aiming for above statistical neighbour average. This would represent significant progress whilst at the same time being proportionate, ambitious and achievable.
42. Early provisional data for attendance - and particularly persistent absence - for 2021-22 seems to indicate a very significant post-pandemic rise in school absence. It is likely that this will be found nationally and not just with the provisional Portsmouth data. **In light of this the 23/24 targets set out below will need resetting.**

	2018/19 (pre-pandemic baseline)	2023/24 Target
Overall absence rate in primary	4.1	3.5
Overall absence rate in secondary	6.7	5.0
Persistent absence rate in primary	8.7	6.8
Persistent absence rate in secondary	17.9	13.5

Fixed term exclusions / suspensions in Primary	1.08	0.6
Fixed term exclusions / suspensions in Secondary	7.47	5.5
Reduction in the number of children on reduced timetables	125	70
Chronically absent children to have a Named lead Professional and a plan in place	44%	100%

43. In addition to the Local Authority level targets, the PEP expects MATS and schools to set and review aspirational targets to improve attendance and reduce exclusion at an individual school level. It is recommended that schools set targets that would place them in, at least, the top half of similar schools nationally, such as FFT and EEF.

Implementation plan 22/23

44. The 'post-pandemic recovery' lens does need to be placed on how we now tackle a larger issue than we had before. The reasons for absence will have shifted over the past 2 years as outlined in section C. In addition, we need to consider the new DfE Attendance Guidance

45. We will continue to adopt the approach of 'school attendance is everyone's business', turning the rhetoric into tangible reality

Actions / priorities	Monitored by:
1. Implementing Relational Practice across all Portsmouth schools	Relational Practice Steering Group - reporting into Removing Barriers to Inclusion (RBIG) Group Priority Area for RBIG
2. Engagement and consultation with young people on the reasons for school absence	Behaviour and Attendance Group (BAG) - reporting into RBIG
3. Review effectiveness and impact of the campaign 'Miss School: Miss Out' consulting with parents and carers and implementing a post pandemic Attendance campaign ,	Behaviour and Attendance Group (BAG) - reporting into RBIG
4. Making school attendance everyone's business Priority Education Investment Area: Priority 3. Maximise the opportunities for learning through a continued focus on improving	Priority Area for RBIG

<p>school attendance including reducing persistent absence and the use of suspensions and reduced timetables.</p> <p>Ensure the workforce understand and are able to tackle the barriers to attendance for individuals and groups of pupils, and implement bespoke approaches to removing those barriers</p>	
<p>5. In light of the new DfE Attendance Guidance: Consideration of how to recreate the functions of LA Education Welfare Officer role, which was cut in 2013 at the start of the period of LA austerity, to provide direct support and challenge to families in addition to the functions of Pastoral Staff in schools</p>	<p>Priority Area for RBIG</p>
<p>6. Severe Non-Attendance and the response of NHS services (GPs, school nursing, therapy services, CAMHS) in addressing school absence</p>	<p>Behaviour and Attendance Group (BAG) - reporting into RBIG</p>
<p>7. Studybugs - using real time data to support schools and inform strategy</p>	<p>BAG</p>
<p>8. Rolling out the Family Support Plan</p>	<p>PSCP</p>
<p>9. Neurodiversity in Schools and the ND profile for neurodiverse children</p>	<p>ND Steering Group Reporting into SEND Board</p>
<p>10. Review the continuum of Alternative Provision</p>	<p>Priority Area for RBIG, requiring its own governance structure. TBC</p>
<p>Business as Usual and Teams that contribute to this strategy</p>	<p>Monitored through business plans and line management arrangements</p>
<p>11. Turnaround Project</p>	<p>DELTA/THS Standing Item on the RBIG agenda</p>
<p>12. Inclusion Outreach Service</p>	<p>IOS steering group Standing Item on the RBIG agenda</p>
<p>13. Elective Home Education</p>	<p>School Attendance Team</p>
<p>14. Reduced Timetables</p>	<p>School Attendance Team</p>

15. NEET Youth Prevention Strategy	Post 16 Commissioning Manager
16. LA Education Link Co-ordinators and introduction of Severely Absent meetings	Admissions, Exclusions and Reintegration Manager
17. Mental Health Support Teams and the linkage to wider mental health work in schools and beyond (MHST, My Happy Mind, Kooth etc)	PEP and Inclusion Manager

Appendix 2: Evidence of the Impact of Relational Practice in Other Local Authorities

Some evidence of outcomes and impact Relational Practice at whole system and culture change level in a multi-agency setting and across large local authorities.

Leeds Children's Services

"A unique investment and commitment to "Restorative Practices" is having a transformational impact on culture and professional practice across both social work and the Children's Partnership. This places children, young people and families at the heart of decisions that affect them" Ofsted Report - Leeds City Council, 2015

- Leeds looked after children figures down by 132
- Leeds child protection plans halved -1232 to 687
- Time spent in the social care system (from 34 weeks to 24 weeks) and average saving per family of £755

Leeds Children Service were rated by Ofsted as Good across the board with outstanding for leadership – Restorative practice was explicitly named in report 2015. Leeds was subsequently rated Outstanding by Ofsted in 2018

LA wide data for Leeds on suspensions and permanent exclusions indicates a positive and sustained impact in these areas.

	18/19	19/20	National Rank	3 year trend
Primary Suspensions	0.95	0.63	41	Improving
Secondary Suspensions	11.94	7.21	85	Improving
Primary Exclusions	0	0	1	Maintaining
Secondary Exclusions	0.02	0.02	9	Improving

Examples of school level impact in Leeds

Carr Manor Secondary

Over a period of 3 years:

- Pupil attendance increased from 89.5% to 95%
- Attendance of pupils receiving FSM 84.5% to 94%
- Persistent Absence reduced from 12.5% to 6.8%
- Fixed Term Exclusion reduced from 165 a year to 14

Collingwood Primary School

Over a period of 18 months:

- Pupil attendance increased from 87.7% to 95%
- KS2 exclusion from class during lessons (average per week) - reduced from 60 to 1
- Racist Incidents (average per week) - reduced from 4 to 1

Endeavour High School

Over a period of 18 months

- Fixed term exclusion reduced from 272 to 151
- Incidents of verbal abuse reduced from 114 to 62
- Staff absence reduced from 1380 days to 517 days

Other area wide impact

Stockport Children Services

Whole system, whole family, partnership working underpinned by restorative practice across Stockport, contributing to £1.2m savings for looked after children

N E Lincolnshire

- The number of children on child protection plans down by 50%
- The number of child in need cases down by 18%

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