

Title of meeting:	Education Advisory Board
Subject:	Strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions
Date of meeting:	Monday 1 st November 2021
Report from:	Sally Hodges, Interim Director of Children, Families and Education
Report by:	Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director, Education
Wards affected:	All

1. Requested by Sally Hodges, Interim Director of Children, Families and Education

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to share with Board Members the draft city wide multi agency strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions, a major strand of which is relational practice. A copy of the draft strategy is provided at [Appendix 1](#).

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 **Board Members are recommended to comment on and endorse the draft city wide multi agency strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions. A final version of the strategy and an update on the implementation of the action plan will be brought to the next Board meeting in February 2022.**

4. Summary

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 The draft 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.

- 4.3 The strategy sets out **the case for why a renewed effort is required**. 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 term exclusions on the life chances and wellbeing of individual children. We know that being in school consistently is crucial to children making progress and gaining the qualifications they need for success in their lives. 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
- 4.4 **Data** from the last set of reliable data in 2018/19 highlights the distance we have to travel if we are to match national averages and those of our statistical neighbours.
- 4.5 The strategy provides details of **what has been done over the past few years to improve attendance, including more recent work that has been initiated during the pandemic**. Much of this work will continue as will the significant efforts by every school in the city to increase attendance. It should 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.
- 4.6 But clearly we need to do more and the focus on **Relational Practice** represents a key strand of this strategy which we believe has the potential to make the greatest impact based on similar work done in cities such as Hull and Leeds. We now have a stand-out example in the city, **Trafalgar School** (part of Salterns Academy Trust), who have exemplified what can be achieved by taking the whole-school approach (referred to **relational** rather than restorative practice) with one clear measurable impact being very low exclusions. This is in addition to other anecdotal and measurable impacts in several other Portsmouth schools since 2016
- 4.7 Schools have been invited to participate in 'Waves' of implementation over the next 2-3 years. 17 of our 61 schools have expressed an interest to be in Wave 1 starting in 2021/22, with the addition of The City of Portsmouth College.
- 4.8 There are three key resources that will be needed to roll out relational practice in our schools:

- A commitment from each Headteacher and their senior leadership team, governing board and Multi Academy Trust (where relevant) to ensure a whole-school approach is adopted and followed through
- Support from the Local Authority which will be through a 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 L30 (Mark Finnis) who will provide a bespoke package of support for schools in Wave 1 during the course of 2021/22 working closely with Salterns Academy Trust

4.9 We believe that there are a number of **positive success factors** which it is realistic for us as a Partnership to achieve:

- **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. .
- **A consistent approach to championing school attendance by all agencies** including the NHS.
- **High quality early help support and challenge for vulnerable families by pastoral teams in schools**, using the revised Early Help Assessment (EHA) planning tool (Family Support Plan).
- **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. 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 as referred to above
- **High quality, effective teaching of an appropriate and ambitious curriculum**
- **A rich extra-curricular offer, and expectation, for all children.**

4.10 In terms of **governance** 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 (RBIC) and the Behaviour and Attendance Group (BAG) which reports into the RBIC. Much of the current and planned work set out in the strategy sits within these groups and it is therefore proposed that the implementation of this strategy and the work on Relational Practice will be monitored through these structures

4.11 Finally, the strategy contains some **ambitious targets** by which the strategy will be measured and which will provide the baseline for reports and updates to future meetings of the Education Advisory Board, details of which are contained within the draft strategy at [Appendix 1](#).

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Signed by Director of Children, Families and Education

Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location