



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 at least double 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 particularly 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 (PEP) 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. School

attendance is rigorously tracked and monitored and a weekly report is shared with all schools in the city and outcomes are reported to the PEP.

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:

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action By</b>	<b>Budget &amp; Policy Framework</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
1	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	Working Group established in the summer term 2022/23 - reporting to the PEP Removing Barriers to Inclusion Group.  Protocol and resources agreed by the end of the Autumn term 2023/24	Within existing policy framework and School Attendance Strategy	Officer time required (through existing resources) to support the working group and draft the protocol / resources, working alongside headteachers.
2	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.	Action to be incorporated into transitions protocol as above	Within existing policy framework and School Attendance Strategy	Resource implications for schools but with multi agency support for our most vulnerable
3	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	Action to be incorporated into transitions protocol as above. Attendance should form part any	Within existing policy framework and School Attendance Strategy	Officer time required (through existing resources) to support the working group and draft the protocol /

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action By</b>	<b>Budget &amp; Policy Framework</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	appropriate to arrange an Education, Health and Care assessment	appropriate plan e.g. Family Support Plan, Personal Education Plan, CiN, etc		resources, working alongside headteachers.
4	To at least double the number of LA Link Co-ordinators including a focus on supporting year 6 to 7 transition.	Fran Shaul, Supporting Families Manager - responsible for management of LA Link Co-ordinators	Within existing policy framework and School Attendance Strategy	The current 5 co-ordinators are funded from grant funding - Supporting Families and Virtual School extended duties.
5	That the principles adopted by the Virtual School & College, including the intensive support that is provided, be expanded to all vulnerable pupils in Year 6 including those who have an EHCP.	Action to be incorporated into transitions protocol as above	Within existing policy framework and School Attendance Strategy / Virtual School Business Plan	Officer time required (through existing resources) to support the working group and draft the protocol / resources, working alongside headteachers.
6	That all schools in the city share automated daily attendance figures with the Local Authority building on the successful implementation of Studybugs.	Agreement for implementation in 2023/24 and 2024/25 be secured for all schools by June 2023.	Within existing policy framework and School Attendance Strategy	LA to continue to provide the core funding for Studybugs

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action By</b>	<b>Budget &amp; Policy Framework</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
7	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	Wave 1 commenced in Sept 2021 Wave 2 implementation commenced Jan 23 Further waves planned between 2023 and 2025 to cover all schools	Within existing policy framework and School Attendance Strategy	Funding already secured through the DSG - £0.5m over the next 3 years
8	That the local authority and headteachers encourage school governors to scrutinise the transitional process in their schools and closely monitor attendance particularly for years 6 and 7.	Action to be incorporated into transitions protocol as above	Within existing policy framework and School Attendance Strategy	Officer time required (through existing resources) to support the working group and draft the protocol / resources, working alongside headteachers.

## **Appendices**

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

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Witnesses</b>
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