

**Title of meeting:** Cabinet Meeting

**Date of meeting:** 27 June 2023

**Subject:** Education, Children and Young People (ECYP) Scrutiny panel - review into school attendance with a focus on transitional Years 6 to 7.

**Report Author:** Mike Stoneman, Deputy Director, Education

**Report by:** Sarah Daly - Director of Children, Families and Education

**Wards affected:** All Wards

**Key decision:** No

**Full Council decision:** No

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**1. Purpose of report**

The purpose of this report is to set out the response of officers to the (ECYP) Scrutiny Panel's recommendations arising from a review into school attendance with a focus on transitional Years 6 to 7.

**2. Recommendations**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:**

- a) Thank the panel for its work in undertaking the review;**
- b) Note and support the 8 recommendations of the review, which are listed in Section 4 and Appendices A and B of this report, including the financial implications relating to recommendations 4 and 6; and**
- c) Note and support the responses from officers detailing how each of the recommendations will be implemented as set out in Section 4 of this report.**

**3. Background**

**Aims of the review**

- 3.1** The (ECYP) Scrutiny Panel agreed to review school attendance with a focus on transitional Years 6 to 7. There were two main aims:

- Understand the main reasons for school absence in transitional Years 6 to 7 and to review the Council's and wider Portsmouth Education Partnership's 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.

3.2 The review took place between February and March 2023 over a series of three meetings on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 22<sup>nd</sup> February and 8<sup>th</sup> March. The Panel's full report can be viewed in [Appendix A](#).

### **National context**

3.2 School attendance and the rise in school absence from Year 6 to 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 increasingly experiencing poor mental health.

3.3 In common with the national picture, overall absence rises markedly between Years 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.

### **Review of evidence**

3.4 Evidence was gathered from a range of sources and involved a series of presentations from officers and education professionals where panel members were given the opportunity to ask questions and probe further about school attendance and transition from Year 6 to 7. This included:

- Headteachers - Anne Hibberd-Chapman, Executive Headteacher of Ark Ayrton and Ark Dickens Primary schools and Stewart Vaughan, Headteacher of Priory Secondary School
- Don McIntyre, School Attendance Team Manager, PCC
- Tina Henley, Head of the Virtual School & College, PCC
- Debbie Anderson, Head of School Improvement & Early Years, PCC
- Sarah Christopher, Portsmouth Education Partnership & Inclusion Manager - leads on relational practice
- Liz Robinson, Head of Inclusion, PCC

### **Conclusions**

3.5 The key conclusions that emerged from the review were as follows:

- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 62 schools in the city who are doing great work.
- 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).
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

#### 4. Scrutiny Panel's recommendations and officer's response

4.1. The Scrutiny Panel made 8 recommendations. Several of the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations are already in progress whilst others require additional work. A response from officers to each of the 8 recommendations is set out below:

4.2 **Recommendation 1:** that the Local Authority work with secondary and primary 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 city wide within the next three years.

**Response:** a working group involving school leaders and LA officers will be established in the summer term 2022/23 and will report into the PEP Removing Barriers to Inclusion Group with the aim of agreeing a Years 6 to 7 transition protocol by the end of the Autumn term 2023/24 and which can be fully

implemented at the start of the 2024/25 academic year. The working group will build on the previous work that was undertaken to improve transition and will incorporate good practice identified in the Years 11 to 12 transition protocol which is currently being developed between secondary schools and colleges. The views of pupils and parents and carers will also be sought to inform this work.

- 4.3 **Recommendation 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 in order to prepare for school.

**Response:** this will be incorporated into the transition protocol and will focus on both transition between Years 6 and 7 and the first half of term in Year 7. It will refer to the red flags (which includes attendance) that are provided by the LA and the work of the LA Link Co-ordinators and will include reference to a safety net to include children whose attendance starts to significantly dip during the first half of term. Meetings with parents and carers will be recommended for children whose attendance is a concern or is becoming poor and home visits will be recommended for the most vulnerable where attendance is poor, building on existing good practice in our schools. The protocol will seek to front load this in the first half of the Autumn term in Year 7 when visits can have the most impact.

- 4.4 **Recommendation 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 appropriate to conduct an Education, Health and Care assessment.

**Response:** as part of the transition protocol there will be a commitment that for every child whose attendance is poor (a threshold will be determined by the working group) a Family Support Plan (FSP) will be offered which will include a focus on school attendance, integrating with processes around Early Help. If there are other plans in place e.g. Education, Health and Care Plan, Children in Need Plan, Personal Education Plan, etc; then it will ensure that school attendance is included in the plan - making school attendance everyone's business.

- 4.5 **Recommendation 4:** to at least double the number of LA Link Co-ordinators including a focus on supporting year 6 to 7 transition.

**Response:** as a minimum the current resource of 4.8fte LA Link Co-ordinators which track and monitor vulnerable children in our schools, early years settings and post-16 and support and signpost schools, will be maintained. This is currently funded through funding grants from Supporting Families and the Extended Duties of the Virtual School (total of £0.2m). The additional resource (expansion of the school attendance team) provided by the government's Priority

Education Investment Area (PEIA) funding and which lasts until March 2025 will be reviewed to determine impact and the budget implications.

- 4.6 **Recommendation 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 Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

**Response:** the principles adopted by the Virtual School & College will be built into the transitions protocol and will also reflect the current arrangements for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

- 4.7 **Recommendation 6:** that all schools in the city share automated daily attendance figures with the Local Authority building on the successful implementation of Studybugs.

**Response:** to continue with the implementation of StudyBugs and ensure full sign up for 2023/24. The funding from the CCG / ICB for this ends in August 2025 but funding from the transformation budget has been identified for 2023/24 (£12.5k). This will be reviewed and will take into account DfE developments and national collection of attendance data from schools, the development of Synergy and the data feeds from schools that will be collected through Orchestra Lite and StudyBugs developments including an updated dashboard for next year.

- 4.8 **Recommendation 7:** that the local authority encourages all schools to actively engage in the city wide relational practice programme over the next 3 years underpinned by the evidence that this is demonstrating a positive impact on attendance and reducing suspensions in schools.

**Response:** to continue with the current city wide programme for relational practice which is now into its second wave and which covers over half of all schools in the city. The aim will be to run subsequent waves to encourage all schools to participate and embed relational practice. The £0.5m programme is fully funded through the DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant).

- 4.9 **Recommendation 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.

**Response:** to be incorporated into the transitions protocol. This will be implemented through the LA School Governor Briefings (for all schools) and the annual meetings that are held with Chairs of Governors of LA maintained schools. The LA will also reach out to Multi Academy Trusts to ensure trustees and Local Governing Board members are aware of the protocol and can scrutinise and challenge appropriately.

**5. Integrated impact assessment**

5.1 No specific changes arise from this report and an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) is not required.

**6. Legal implications**

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

**7. Director of Finance's comments**

7.1 The report outlines the financial plans for these areas, which will need to be kept under review as part of the normal budget monitoring and planning processes.

Signed by Sarah Daly, Director of Children, Families and Education

**Appendices:**

Appendix A: ECYP Scrutiny Panel's full report

Appendix B: Summary of recommendations and budget and policy implications

**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
Portsmouth Education Partnership - city wide multi agency strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions	<a href="#">School Attendance - Portsmouth Education Partnership</a>

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by ..... on .....

.....  
Signed by: