

School Attendance and Absences Scoping document

Key Information

Scrutiny Committee	Education Scrutiny Committee
Working Group Title	School Attendance and Absences
Date established	Education Scrutiny Committee, 13 December 2017
Lead Scrutiny Member	Councillor Michael Waine
Membership	Councillor Sobia Afridi Ian Jones – Statutory co-optee 1 to be confirmed
Supporting Officer	Lauren Rushen, Policy Officer
Operational Lead(s)	Roy Leach, Strategic Lead for Education Sufficiency Joanna Goodey, Senior County Attendance Officer

Working group rationale

‘Thriving People’ is one of three core aims in Oxfordshire County Council’s corporate plan. This includes a commitment to work with schools, families and partners to support increased attendance at schools and other education settings with the aim of improving attainment levels.

The Education Scrutiny Committee selected school attendance and absence as a priority area at their meeting in 19 July 2017. Primary school absence rates in Oxfordshire have historically been in line with or below the national average, yet rates for Oxfordshire secondary schools have been consistently above the regional and national average since 2013-14. In 2016-17, 5.7 half days were lost to absences at Oxfordshire secondary schools to absences compared to 5.2 in the South East and nationally. 13.5% of these absences were classed as ‘persistent absences’. Whilst this figure has been decreasing since 2013-14, it is still one of the higher rates in England with the national average being 13.1%. The pupil group with the highest rate of persistent absences in 2016-17 were those in the youth offending service (accounting for 76.7% of all persistent secondary school absences).

The most common reason given for authorised absence at both primary and secondary age groups is illness (66.9% at primary and 61% at secondary). The

second most common reason at secondary school level is medical/dental appointments (6.8%).

In December 2017, the Education Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of absence and attendance with the following aim:

To gain a greater understanding of trends associated with absence and attendance at secondary schools across Oxfordshire; identifying the pathways that exist to tackle unauthorised and persistent absence and to develop recommendations that enable the sharing of good practice to reduce absence rates across Oxfordshire.

Working group objectives

In order to achieve the deep dive's aim, the working group have identified the following objectives:

1. Undertake analysis of absence and attendance data for secondary schools in Oxfordshire to identify:
 - a. Secondary schools with low/high levels of absenteeism and persistent absenteeism
 - b. Greater understanding of the reasons for authorised absence, particularly illness and medical/dental appointments across schools in Oxfordshire
 - c. Pupil groups with the highest levels of persistent absence
2. Identify and share examples of best practice in managing absence and persistent absence rates, including pathways that are being developed with Oxfordshire County Council's Locality Community Support Service (LCSS) and good examples of shared working with partners/parents/pupils.
3. Investigate why absence rates for illness and medical/dental appointments are higher than the national average and to explore the role that school nursing and partners in health could play in addressing these statistics
4. To investigate the reasons for high levels of absence for certain pupil groups, particularly in the youth offending service and children in care
5. To investigate whether there are higher levels of authorised absences in areas with higher levels of service families in Oxfordshire
6. To gain a greater understanding of the methods used to address unauthorised absences e.g. the prevalence of warning letters, school attendance orders, attendance panel meetings and issuing of fixed penalty notices.

The working group will not look at the following:

- a. Primary school absence/attendance rates as these have consistently been above the local and national average rates since 2013-14
- b. rates of exclusion or levels of attainment, as these areas are planned to be the focus of other Education Scrutiny working. The learning and intelligence gained from the 'Exclusions' working group will assist with

informing this 'Attendance' working group.

Working group scope

The focus of the working group will be on pupil groups with higher rates of absence/persistent absence.

The timescales for the working group are as follows:

- February- March 2018 – finalising the scope and identifying schools/pupil group areas for particular focus
- March – April 2018 – research and consultation with schools, parents/carers, pupils and partners etc., avoiding Easter Holidays.
- May 2018 – finalisation of recommendations and final report, including sharing of recommendations with consultees
- June 2018 – Committee meeting to consider final report and recommendations

Evidence required

The Committee received a briefing from officers at their December 2017 meeting that informed the areas of interest for the deep dive work:

1. **Meeting with lead Oxfordshire County Council officers** to understand the details of the Oxfordshire context, particularly the new pathways that are being developed through the LCSS and more detailed attendance and absence data.
2. **Review of key guidance, policies and data in relation to school attendance and absence** – the County Council has a statutory code of conduct in relation to Education, Sufficiency and Access which details how penalty notices could be used for unauthorised absences
3. **Meeting with schools** – including head teachers and governors, where rates of absence are comparatively low or decreasing and those where absence is high or increasing. The aim of the meetings will be to identify good practice in reducing rates of absence, particularly persistent or unauthorised absences and the barriers schools face in addressing these issues.
4. **Meeting with the Youth Offending Service**– to understand the barriers that those in the service face in attending school and what methods are used to maintain levels of attendance
5. **Engage with the Children in Care Council** – to understand the experience and challenges facing children in care in relation to school attendance.
6. **Meeting with Oxford Health School Nursing Services** – to find out what role school nurses can play in addressing absence
7. **To identify whether absence rates are higher in service families and to**

identify the reasons for this.

- 8. Write to representatives of the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group** to identify whether there are ways to reduce instances of absence due to medical/dental appointments

Activities for gathering evidence

The following methods will be used to gain the evidence required:

- Meetings with officers
- Visits to schools and developing good practice case studies
- Meet with school nursing services, youth offending service, representatives from service personnel
- Desk research to identify relevant policies and statutory guidance documents

Indicative Project Plan

Task	January 2018	February 2018	March 2018	April 2018	May 2018	June 2018	July 2018
Scoping review							
Desk Research			14 March 2018 ESC				
Consultation activities							
Consultation analysis							
Final report drafting						27 June 2018 ESC (final report)	
Cabinet response							

Key:

	Pre-deep dive scoping and background research
	Internal briefings/desk research
	Public consultation activities e.g. site visits, meetings with schools etc.
	Analysis of research/consultation and interim draft report writing
	Recommendations workshop, final report writing and informing stakeholders
	Awaiting response from Cabinet to recommendations