

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING: Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 17th September 2024

SUBJECT: School Attendance Data

REPORT FROM: Janet Lloyd, School Attendance, Exclusion & Community Education Team Service Manager

CONTACT OFFICER: Janet.lloyd@bury.gov.uk

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Government has emphasised the importance of raising school attendance. Targets have been set for schools and local authorities to promote regular attendance. Ensuring that students consistently attend school positively impacts their learning outcomes and overall wellbeing.
- 1.2 The Department for Education (DfE) in England provides guidance on maintaining high levels of school attendance. The guidance is aimed at maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities.
- 1.3 The key aspects include:
- 1.3.1 Roles and responsibilities: it outlines the roles and responsibilities of parents, carers, schools, trusts, governing bodies and local authorities in maintaining attendance.
 - 1.3.2 Support for families: Schools should provide support to families and pupils who are persistently absent or at risk of becoming so.
 - 1.3.3 Legal Interventions: When attendance efforts don't work, schools and local authorities have legal interventions available.
- 1.4 The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) conducted a Rapid Evidence Assessment of Attendance Interventions in March 2022. A list of the interventions categories that have been explored:
- 1.4.1 Mentoring
 - 1.4.2 Family Engagement
 - 1.4.3 Legal Interventions
 - 1.4.4 Whole School Approaches
- 1.5 On the 19th August 2024 the DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance became a statutory document.
- 1.6 According to official statistics, the number of pupils regularly missing school in England has not returned to pre-COVID levels. These persistent absences are driven by various factors.

- Illnesses, including flu and other viruses, have contributed to the absence rate. However, it's essential to recognise that illnesses are only part of the picture.
- Many schools state that absences are often listed as stress, anxiety and long waiting lists for mental health treatment and disengagement with education due to the national pandemic.

2.0 ISSUES

- 2.1 Implementing the new DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance has ensured that school attendance is 'everyone's responsibility'.
- 2.2 The statutory document has impacted on the Children Missing Education (CME) statutory guidance. Bury Council has updated the CME Policy to ensure that we are in line with the statutory guidance and created an implementation guide. The guide will support schools with the CME process and also provide evidence for inspection purposes regarding Ofsted outcomes.
- 2.3 School Penalty Notices have seen an update with the new DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance Guidance 2024. There have not been any changes to the Penalty Notice system for 10 years.
- 2.4 The new legislation has required the local authority to produce new literature for all schools and parents to provide advance notice of the new changes coming into force. A new Code of Conduct has been produced and circulated to all schools in Bury along with proforma letters and forms for schools to use around this process.
- 2.5 The school attendance team has strengthened the legal process around school attendance and school penalty notices to ensure that the DfE working Together to Improve School Attendance Guidance is met within the local authority and schools. A new attendance guidance document has been produced for September 2024 which has been shared with all schools in Bury. This provides a step by step guide to the process along with proforma letters and forms to use. A supporting model school attendance policy is also available for the schools.
- 2.6 To support school attendance in Bury schools, guidance has been produced in relation to Part-Time Timetables and Alternative Provision. During the 'targeted support meetings' that take place regularly across all schools with the school attendance team officers, the information that is sent in to the local authority will be discussed at these meetings. This will help reduce the amount of children on part-time timetables and ensure that a multi-agency approach is being used.
- 2.7 School attendance orders have been established in Bury since 2023. An internal panel of children's services has been created to form a 'Children Not in School' panel to support the school attendance order process. The outcomes from this panel will increase vulnerable children are secured school place quickly and reduce their time out of education.
- 2.8 The School Attendance, Exclusions and Community Education Team underwent a large restructure which came into effect from September 2023. The team has increased by 50% with the recruitment of staffing taking place over the last 12 months. The team has not been at full capacity throughout the year.
- 2.9 The new guidance has placed a lot of responsibility on schools to carry out home visits and referrals. The School Attendance, Exclusions and Community Education Team have worked closely with schools in Bury to upskill the staff in order for them to be able to carry out their new duties.
- 2.10 School attendance forums have taken place on a termly basis over 2023/24 to support schools with the new guidance and training has been provided. This has placed extra work

on the team, however the benefits have been stronger working relationships, better outcomes for families, children and young people.

- 2.11 From 19th August 2024, data collection around school attendance has become statutory. Prior to this date, Bury Local Authority has struggled to gather the school attendance data. Schools within the borough use different systems to gather their school attendance data. In Bury, we have had a number of schools convert to academy status mid-way through the term which has impacted on the schools' status and new DfE numbers. Any data that was being collected by the DfE was cancelled as a result. The summer term attendance data is not available due to these issues.

3.0 NATIONAL DATA

- 3.1 The DfE release covers the full 2023/24 academic year **nationally**, up to 19 July 2024.

- 3.2 The data shows that the attendance rate across the **academic year 2023/24** for all schools nationally was 92.8%. The absence rate was, therefore, 7.2%.

- 3.3 By school type, the absence rates across the academic year 2023/24 were:

- 5.5% in state-funded primary schools (3.9% authorised and 1.6% unauthorised)
- 9.1% in state-funded secondary schools (5.5% authorised and 3.6% unauthorised)
- 13.0% in state-funded special schools (9.7% authorised and 3.3% unauthorised)

- 3.4 By pupil characteristics, the absence rates across the academic year 2023/24 were:

- 11.1% for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and 5.8% for pupils who were not eligible for free school meals
- 13.3% for pupils with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan, 10.9% for pupils with SEN support and 6.5% with no identified SEN
- 7.3% for female pupils and 7.1% for male pupils

- 3.5 Across the academic year 2023/24, 20.7% of pupil enrolments missed 10% or more of their possible sessions and are therefore identified as persistently absent. By school type, the persistent absence rate across the academic year 2023/24 was:

- 15.2% in state-funded primary schools
- 26.7% in state-funded secondary schools
- 37.6% in state-funded special schools

4.0 BURY DATA

The current overall attendance data for Bury schools is 92% however, this is based on 95% of schools data in Bury. As mentioned elsewhere in the report, there are discrepancies in this data due to:

- mainstream schools converting to academy status
- Schools changing their schools platform data supplier which prevented the data being received into the DfE, View Your Own Data
- Not all schools signed up to the DfE to share their data until this became statutory on 19th August 2024

- Some schools only commenced sharing their data towards the end of the academic year (June / July)

After the October census, Bury Local Authority will be able to retrieve the accurate attendance figure for Bury.

The figure for 2022/23 was 92.9%. It is pleasing to see that despite the fact that we have not received all of the schools data, the figure has not reduced below 92%. All stakeholders will be updated as soon as the final figures are available after the October census date.

4.0 PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- 4.1 The data across **primary** schools for autumn / spring (we do not have the summer data available) across the academic year 2023/24. The absence rate for secondary schools 5.4%.

2023/24	5.4% Bury – autumn / spring	5.3% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	5.6% Bury whole year	5.9% National whole year
2021/22	5.7% Bury whole year	6.3% National whole year
2020/21	3.6% Bury whole year	3.6% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024. Since 2021, Bury has been successful in overall absences at being below the national benchmark figure.

- 4.2 Persistent absence rate across primary schools for autumn / spring academic year 2023/24

2023/24	14.4% Bury – autumn / spring	15.0% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	14.5% Bury whole year	16.2% National whole year
2021/22	14.7% Bury whole year	17.7% National whole year
2020/21	8.1% Bury whole year	8.8% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024. Since 2021, Bury has been successful in persistent absences at being below the national benchmark figure.

- 4.3 Severe absence rate across primary schools for autumn / spring academic year

2023/24	0.7% Bury – autumn / spring	0.8% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	0.7% Bury whole year	0.7% National whole year
2021/22	0.4% Bury whole year	0.6% National whole year
2020/21	0.5% Bury whole year	0.7% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024. Since 2021, Bury has been successful in reducing the severe absences figures since 2021 to ensure that we are below the national benchmark figure.

5.0 SECONDARY SCHOOLS

- 5.1 The data across **secondary** schools for autumn / spring (we do not have the summer data available) across the academic year 2023/24. The absence rate for secondary schools 8.8%.

2023/24	8.8% Bury – autumn / spring	8.4% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	8.9% Bury whole year	9.0% National whole year
2021/22	8.8% Bury whole year	9.0% National whole year
2020/21	5.6% Bury whole year	5.5% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024. In 2022/23, Bury was successful in reducing the overall absences across secondary education and placed us below the national benchmark figure.

5.2 Persistent absence rate across primary schools for autumn / spring academic year 2023/24

2023/24	24.4% Bury – autumn / spring	23.9% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	26.8% Bury whole year	26.5% National whole year
2021/22	27.6% Bury whole year	27.7% National whole year
2020/21	15.3% Bury whole year	14.8% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024.

5.3 Severe absence rate across primary schools for autumn / spring academic year

2023/24	3.60% Bury – autumn / spring	3.40% National – autumn / spring
2022/23	3.02% Bury whole year	3.40% National whole year
2021/22	2.76% Bury whole year	2.74% National whole year
2020/21	1.43% Bury whole year	1.48% National whole year

We are unable to provide the data comparison for 2023/24 until we have received the summer term data which will be available after the census, October 2024.

The severe absence data has fluctuated each year Bury. Each child who is classed as severely absent has a package of support in place to help reduce this figure. We aim to continue working on this area to help reduce the figure further whilst working with partner agencies.

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 The DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance statutory guidance 2024, has demonstrated the document to be a strong working tool that has put school attendance at the forefront of everyone's responsibility.

6.2 There is still work to be done in Bury to improve school attendance and plans are in place to continue on this improvement journey.

6.3 Through regular consultations with the DfE, it is evident that Bury Local Authority is working well with the new guidance and to quote the DfE, we have 'moved mountains' to implement the changes.

6.4 The Target Support Meetings in schools have been established for 12 months. This support strategy has improved relationships with schools and we are seeing positive outcomes in relation to reduced absences. We are aware that other local authorities are yet to implement the target support meetings in their schools.

6.5 There is an increase in schools applying for penalty notices. This reflects the work that has taken place via the school attendance forums and training implemented by the school attendance team and accompanying documentation.

- 6.6 The new 'LEAP', Legal Enforcement Attendance Panels that have commenced this September, along with the 'PACE', Police and Criminal Evidence Act before proceeding to legal action for non-school attendance is in place.
- 6.7 There had been a backlog of outstanding cases waiting to be heard at the Magistrates' Court which was an overlap from Covid. We have worked closely with the legal team in Bury Local Authority and now have up to date court dates. This has helped reinforce the relationships with schools who understand the pressures the local authority were under. The schools can see a clear path and feel supported and positive outcomes are being reached.
- 6.8 Bury continues to work collaboratively with GM colleagues through the Greater Manchester Local Authority Attendance Alliance (GMLAAA) sharing good practice and working regionally to improve attendance for all our children.

List of Background Papers:-

1. Bury Attendance Guidance Document September 2024
2. Bury model school attendance policy
3. Bury LA Guidance on Part-Time Timetables & Alternative Provision September 24
4. Penalty Notice, Code of Conduct, September 2024
5. Children Missing Education Protocol 2024
6. Children Missing Education Implementation Guide 2024
7. Children Not in School Terms of Reference (School Attendance Orders)

Contact Details:-

Janet Lloyd, School Attendance, Exclusions & Community Education Service Manager

Executive Director sign off Date:_____

JET Meeting Date:_____