



Wakefield Attendance Strategy 2023-2026

**A Graduated, Responsive,
Partnership Approach to
Improving Attendance**

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Foreword by Wakefield Integrated Education Partnership

The Integrated Education Partnership (IEP) welcomes the new Wakefield attendance strategy.

As a partnership dedicated to working in an integrated system for the benefit of young people and educators across Wakefield, **we fully endorse the ambition of improving school attendance**, and the recognition that **achieving this ambition requires that attendance is everybody's business**. Maintained schools, multi-academy trusts, local authority services and key partners such as health services and the Police must work together to improve school attendance in Wakefield.

School attendance all day, every day, matters for all young people. Regular and consistent attendance forms good habits, promotes better outcomes, and offers protection for potentially vulnerable young people. Attendance is inextricably linked to educational outcomes. Put simply, children with higher school attendance are more likely to do well at school. School attendance is also a crucial protective factor for more vulnerable young people, as it gives professionals the best chance to spot gaps in learning or signs that a young person is at risk. That is why ensuring that children attend school every day is the law.

Despite the benefits of and legal responsibilities for ensuring school attendance, we recognise that the experience of the pandemic has altered attitudes to school attendance. The IEP welcomes the ambition of the Wakefield attendance strategy to **reset expectations, promote the benefits of school attendance, and foster a culture of good school attendance**.

Put simply, **attending school all day every day is crucial to a child's development and future life opportunities**. We will work with leaders across the system to ensure that this position is upheld consistently, and school leaders are supported when faced with irregular attendance patterns, or "broken weeks" where children are not attending school for parts of the school day, week or year.

We also recognise that, at times, some children may find school difficult and challenging. The evidence, however, indicates that this is outweighed by the educational and wellbeing benefits of being in school for the vast majority of pupils. Since the pandemic, absence relating to illness has increased. The IEP considers that it is important for the Wakefield education system to **strike a balance between recognising where children have specific and identified needs that mean that they cannot attend school due to ill-health whilst encouraging resilience so that minor ailments do not disrupt regular and consistent school attendance for young people**.

Where children have specific and identified needs that mean they face additional barriers to attending school and engaging with education, **we affirm the importance of taking a consistent, proportionate, child-centred approach to consider how the child's needs can be met and how they can be supported to return to full-time education**.

Where children have specific and identified needs that mean that they cannot attend school, **the IEP endorses the joint development of timely support and interventions as outlined in the strategy**, to be delivered by schools and/or the LA or other partners, as appropriate.

The IEP also welcomes the strong focus on persistent and severe **absence, and the fact that absence may constitute "educational neglect"**, requiring system leaders across the district to be focused on spotting and taking action to address issues early.

The pandemic showed how absence from school can widen the gap between disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils and their peers. We know that poor attendance is more common among pupil groups with additional needs and vulnerabilities. The IEP welcomes the recognition that **behaviour, including behaviour relating to attendance at school, is a form of communication**, and thus it is essential that professionals work together to understand what a child may be communicating in their pattern of attendance or absence, and seek to meet their needs.

Introduction

In Wakefield, we strive for the best educational outcomes for our children and young people, regardless of background, and ensure by working together that they are Happy, Healthy and Safe.

It is well-evidenced that securing improved school attendance leads to improved educational outcomes for children and young people and therefore better life chances.

Regular attendance, particularly for the most vulnerable, also helps to keep children and young people safe and provides better opportunities for identifying needs and providing support.

However, school attendance has dropped locally and nationally post-pandemic.

The DfE guidance, *'Working Together to Improve School Attendance'*, was produced in the wake of the pandemic and sets out a vision for effective school level policy and practice which incorporates partnership working with the Local Authority and other partners where necessary.

We have worked in consultation with our local partners and families, using recent research and evidence, to support the creation of our ambitious attendance strategy for all schools, academies, families, children and young people across Wakefield.

This has been directly informed by a wide range of sources, including:

- Statutory Attendance Guidance
- DfE Non-Statutory Guidance, including 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' and 'Summary of responsibilities where a Mental Health Issue is Affecting Attendance'

- Feedback from children, young people and families, particularly those with co-existing vulnerabilities such as SEND
- LA Services and frontline officers, including the Education Welfare Service, Alternative Provision Team, WISENDSS, SENART, Educational Psychology and all areas of Children's Social Care
- Consultations with Heads and Senior Leaders across Wakefield's schools and academies, including a free district-wide attendance event and a district survey
- West Yorkshire Police
- Local Headteachers, CEOs & Senior LA Officers via the Integrated Education Partnership (IEP)
- Wakefield Safeguarding Children Partnership and their work on Educational Neglect
- The Wakefield Health and Wellbeing Board
- The Partnerships for People and Places Research Project in Castleford and Airedale
- Research by the British Psychological Society
- The project work developed via Educating for the Future, a two-year pilot to test locality delivery of support for vulnerable pupils.
- Wakefield Attendance Strategy Consultation Report 2023

¹ [The link between absence and attainment at KS2 and KS4, Academic year 2018/19 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics)

² [7PB Educational Neglect \(wakefieldscp.org.uk\)](https://www.wakefieldscp.org.uk)

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this strategy. This is the core document for our mission to ensure that attendance truly matters for all. It sets how we will achieve our vision and goals. It also sets out what we will achieve during the first year. It will be reviewed and updated every term, to reflect our learning and ongoing commitment.

Creating the Strategy

Working Together to Improve School Attendance: Strategy and Implementation



Moving Forwards with the Strategy

Strategy Outputs



Our Vision

Every child has a right to an education, and for the vast majority this education should take place within our schools. We and our partners are fully committed to this. Together, we will initiate and forge a cultural shift within our families, schools, communities and services to ensure that everyone takes responsibility for the attendance of Wakefield's children. We will jointly aim for 100%. No excuses.

Our Core Principles

1 Schools and education

We recognise that school is the best place for the vast majority of children and young people to access an effective education and secure their happiness, safety and wellbeing. By increasing attendance, we will jointly improve life chances, broaden outlooks and ensure better outcomes for children, families and communities.

2 Individual and collective responsibilities

All partners acknowledge, understand and uphold their individual and collective responsibilities. We will use and build onto our strong, existing partnerships, recognising that attendance is everybody's business.

3 Continuous improvement and appropriate support

Partners will jointly problem solve where necessary and are open to feedback. Policies and practice are evidence-based and are reviewed and updated annually. An attendance continuum sets out our graduated approach to support. The child is at the centre of supportive decisions and actions.

4 Clarity and consistency

'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' is the foundation for the majority of our work. In some cases, additional/amended policy and process, supported by effective communication and training, will provide clarification and consistency to ensure that we jointly offer the best approach for our local context.

Attendance Matters

Regular attendance enables children and young people to access the best possible start in life, one which sets them up for a lifetime of learning.

They will be better-equipped to make positive contributions to their communities, achieve economic wellbeing, and live happy, fulfilled and healthy lives in which they make educated, informed choices and can achieve self-actualisation. The aim for all partners should therefore be 100% attendance.

The vast majority of children and young people will receive the best formal educational opportunities in mainstream schools. Here they will learn, make friends, grow in confidence and discover their passions and talents supported by a setting that is safe, with adults around them who care about their lives, and who provide opportunities, routine and structure.

School attendance is also a protective factor for our most vulnerable children and young people, for example as a safe haven from familial issues such as domestic abuse, or the risk of criminal exploitation. Schools provide the most regular and consistent point of contact for children and young people, and they enable their wellbeing and safety to be monitored, and early intervention to be put in place where necessary.

The [Department for Education \(DfE\)](#)³ published statistics in relation to the link between absence and attainment at Key Stage 2 (KS2) and Key Stage 4 (KS4) in 2018/2019:

- The pupils with the highest attainment at the end of KS2 and KS4 have higher rates of attendance over the key stage compared to those with the lowest attainment.
- At KS2, pupils not meeting the expected standard in reading, writing, and maths had an overall absence rate of 4.7% compared to 3.5% among those meeting the expected standard.
- Moreover, the overall absence rate of pupils not meeting the expected standard was higher than among those meeting the higher standard (4.7% compared to 2.7%).
- At KS4, pupils not achieving grade 9 to 4 in English and maths had an overall absence rate of 8.8% compared to 5.2% among those achieving grade 4 and above.
- The overall absence rate of pupils not achieving grade 9 to 4 was over twice as high as those achieving grade 9 to 5 (8.8% compared to 3.7%).
- For care-experienced children, the overall absence rates (2020/21) were 9.1%. For children in need, the absence rates were 13.85%, and for children on protection plans, the absence rates were 17.6%.

In Wakefield, local data shows that vulnerable children and young people, such as those with SEND, with Social Care intervention, those who have been permanently excluded, and/or are from disadvantaged backgrounds, are more likely to be persistently or severely absent, with the consequent further negative impact on outcomes.

We recognise the importance of working in partnership to raise attendance for all groups, with a particular focus on partnership working for children in vulnerable groups who are severely absent.

³ [Absence and attainment at key stages 2 and 4: 2013 to 2014 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

The findings from the 2012 Charlie Taylor report '[Improving Attendance at School](#)' highlighted the link between poor attendance at school and lower academic achievement.

National absence rates remained fairly static in the following years. In 2018/19, the overall absence rate was 4.7% nationally, with persistent absence at 10.9%. This was the last full year of data before Covid-19. Since then, attendance has not recovered to these pre-pandemic levels. In 2021/22, the national overall absence rate was 7.6% and the persistent absence rate was 22.5%; 2022/23 rates are so far at similar levels.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon attainment has been researched by the Education Endowment Foundation. [The Impact of COVID-19 on Learning: Review of the Evidence](#) highlighted that the enforced lack of school attendance negatively impacted the attainment of all pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

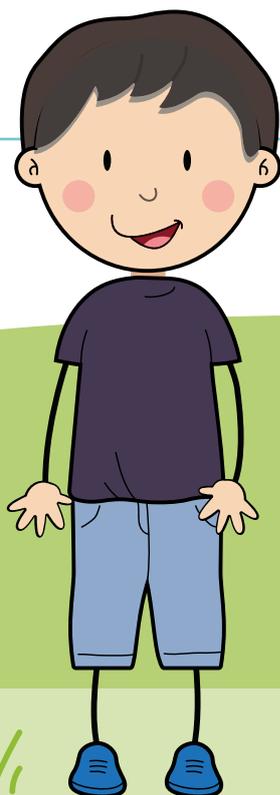
In September 2020, the Children's Commissioner published the report [Childhood in the Time of Covid](#), setting out the key ways in which children's lives were impacted as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, in particular their attainment. This reached the same conclusions as the EEF review; before the crisis, disadvantaged children were 18 months behind their wealthier peers in their learning by the time they finished their GCSEs, and the report concludes that the closures have worsened this attainment gap.

Post-pandemic, our local data shows that more children and young people are absent from school due to illness issues than pre-pandemic. This is repeated in national data.

Persistent and severe absence rates have escalated nationally and locally post-pandemic. Local consultations also highlight a 'culture of non-attendance' in some communities, with one respondent school leader stating,

"Our school has identified that the mindset of some parents (not all) no longer sees school as being important to attend daily. Odd days off are becoming increasingly common, holidays and having time off for appointments and minor illness have increased."

The impact of Covid-19 and other issues such as social media and anxiety in our contemporary world should not be underestimated, and our response to that is set out in this strategy.



Local context

Wakefield's school attendance rates have historically been lower than the national average.

Autumn Term 2022/23 Census Data for Attendance⁴

Autumn Term 2022/23		All Schools				
		Overall absence rate	Authorised absence rate	Unauthorised absence rate	Percentage of persistent absentees	Percentage of severely absent pupils
Wakefield	AY22/23	7.6%	5.4%	2.2%	24.7%	1.8%
	AY21/22	7.1%	5.3%	1.7%	24.5%	1.4%
	Change	0.5%	0.1%	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%
National	AY22/23	7.5%	5.4%	2.1%	24.2%	1.7%
	AY21/22	6.9%	5.3%	1.6%	23.5%	0.4%
	Change	0.6%	0.1%	0.5%	0.7%	0.4%
Difference to National	AY22/23	0.0%	-0.1%	0.1%	0.5%	0.0%
	AY21/22	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%	1.1%	0.1%
Change Relative to National		-0.1%	-0.1%	0.0%	-0.5%	0.0%
Rankings	All Local Authorities (Out of 152)	90	79	94	90	88
	Statistical Neighbours (Out of 11)	2	10	3	5	3
	Yorkshire & Humber (Out of 15)	8	13	6	9	3
	West Yorkshire (Out of 5)	4	4	2	4	2

Until 2021-22, Wakefield attendance data was published in arrears via census returns, with the council having no access to 'live' school data. Following the DfE attendance data pilot, Wakefield has access to 'live' data from a growing number of schools. As time goes on, we hope to have full membership of this pilot and/or a statutory system from the DfE. This will enable the Local Authority to make fully informed strategic decisions and provide leadership in attendance across the district.

Attendance data for 2021/22 and for Autumn Term 2022 showed that Wakefield ranked just below the national average for attendance, with lower than average attendance in primaries and particularly low attendance in some specialist settings, when compared to national data. Secondary schools perform comparatively well against statistical neighbours, being ranked 3/11 in this category.

Wakefield's data, in common with national data, shows a clear link between severe absence/ persistent absence, and other vulnerabilities such as economic disadvantage, SEND, and family/community issues, including social care involvement.

We aim to jointly forge a culture shift in attitudes to attendance, 100%, no excuses, and will work to the following ambitious KPIs:

- Wakefield's average attendance figures to align with or exceed the national average
- Wakefield's average attendance figures to place us in the top 3 amongst our statistical neighbours
- Severe absence rates amongst annually identified vulnerable groups, hotspot areas and/or settings to stabilise and then reduce year on year
- Evidence that all partners have aligned their policies and procedures to ensure that attendance matters for everyone
- Evidence of undertaking regular review activity to inform further improvements, such as lessons learned, dip sampling and case study development

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-autumn-term-2022>

Our Graduated, Responsive, Joint Approach

The DfE's (currently) non-statutory guidance, 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' will underpin and inform Wakefield's Attendance strategy for the next 3 years.

We will strive to meet the specifications of this guidance, and combine this with a focus on issues related to our local area, and develop partnership working to ensure that Attendance Matters for Everyone. By consulting and being responsive to data, feedback and research, and drawing on our Core Principles, we have identified the following local priority areas for our strategy:

1 We are in this together:
Clear roles and responsibilities for all partners

2 We are consistent:
Recommendations for shared approaches

3 We recognise and support the most vulnerable:
Severe absence and groups

4 We are responsive:
Meeting need in the local context and contemporary world



1. We are in this together: clear roles and responsibilities for all partners

“Schools quoted different interpretations of the guidance. They felt that the new guidance states that ‘the local authority should provide EWO support to all schools and academies without the need for an SLA’ but schools were divided as to what ‘support’ comprised, with some being under the impression that the LA should provide EWOs who would undertake home visits and others asserting that LA support is advisory.”

(Wakefield Attendance Event feedback, Feb 2023)

Parents, schools, governing bodies, trusts and the Local Authority will work together to improve school attendance, recognising and fulfilling their individual and collective responsibilities, including the acknowledgement that children and young people themselves should take an increasing responsibility for their attendance as they mature.

We have adopted the DfE’s Summary Table of Responsibilities for School Attendance⁵, as this document provides clarity regarding responsibilities when dealing with cases for:

- All pupils
- Pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent
- Persistently absent pupils
- Severely absent pupils
- Cohorts of pupils with lower attendance than their peers
- Support for pupils with medical conditions or SEND with poor attendance
- Support for pupils with a social worker
- General monitoring of attendance

⁵ [Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

All partners including parents, schools, academies and Local Authority Services should adopt and refer to this guidance when considering and fulfilling their individual and collective responsibilities, and we would expect that they incorporate it into their own policies and practice.

1

We expect that we will hold each other to account when partners do not fulfil their responsibilities, be open to feedback and improvement in the best interests of children and young people, and where necessary take swift, determined and effective actions under statute to ensure that our children and young people are safeguarded and receive their right to an education.

2

We will ensure that we produce and collectively adhere to consistent processes and clear communication pathways, and systematically monitor and improve the quality of our offer.

3

We will also ensure that Early Years settings are aware of our approach and we will involve them in any district-wide appropriate campaigns/advice, to ensure that good attendance habits start early.

As a Local Authority we will provide the following Core Offer to all local schools where there are pupils of statutory school age, including independent schools.⁶:		We will do this via:
<p>Communication and advice:</p> <p>Regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area.</p>	<p><i>Including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Guidance on how partners will work together ☑ Named point of contact for each school ☑ Answering queries from school-based staff: ☑ Bringing schools together to share best practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Strategy and Policy, Website and Traded Services free information including on attendance law and Emotionally Based School Avoidance ☑ Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) ☑ EWS Telephone & Email Advice line ☑ Half-Termly Attendance Forum
<p>Targeting support meetings:</p> <p>Hold termly conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils.</p>	<p><i>Including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Meeting at least termly with each school in the local authority area: ☑ Signposting schools to relevant services and voluntary sector partners: ☑ Agreeing joint action plans for severely absent pupils (where there are out of school barriers) ☑ Agreeing joint actions for persistently absent pupils (where necessary) ☑ Agreeing any legal action to be taken forward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Via Team Around the School for cases with additional familial factors ☑ Individually via EWO where attendance is the only issue ☑ Refer to Education Welfare Service

⁶ Local Authority School Attendance Support Teams – trading services with schools, DfE, 2023

Multi-disciplinary support for families:

Provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance.

Including:

- ✓ Providing access to existing support systems where appropriate – including early help, social care, SEND etc
- ✓ Advising the family's lead practitioner on any attendance elements of the family's plan
- ✓ Acting as lead professional in a family plan where an LA team is the most appropriate to do so (e.g. a housing issue)

- ✓ Via Team Around the School
- ✓ Via named EWO
- ✓ Via Attendance Helpline
- ✓ Via EHCP SEND Officer
- ✓ Via Social Worker
- ✓ Via Virtual School for CiC

Legal intervention:

Take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with.

Including:

- ✓ Parenting contracts
- ✓ Education Supervision Orders
- ✓ Building attendance into child in need or child protection plans where relevant
- ✓ Issuing fixed penalty notices
- ✓ Parenting Orders
- ✓ Taking forward attendance prosecutions (including for persistently breaching any Education Supervision Order or Parenting Order in place)

- ✓ Information on website
- ✓ Via Educational Welfare Service Advice Line
- ✓ Via named EWO
- ✓ For severely absent cases where multi-agency approach is required but parents will not give consent, refer to named EWO or advice line.



Examples of areas of practice that we may trade beyond the core offer, for schools who choose to subscribe:

School processes:

Acting on behalf of the school to fulfil their day to day expectations as set out in section 1 of Working together to improve attendance.

For example:

- First day calling
- Home visits, calls and/or sending out letters from the school
- Late gates
- Parent drop ins or attendance services
- Providing advice and support on attendance at parents' evenings
- Running attendance reward and recognition systems
- Attendance assemblies
- Analysing the school's data

Casework on behalf of the school:

Delivering the attendance work with individual pupils and families that is expected of the school (rather than of the local authority and other partners as defined in section 4).

For example:

- Contacting families and understanding what the barriers to attendance are
- Setting up and leading attendance meetings with families
- Developing in school reasonable adjustments and initial attendance action plans
- Completion of referrals to other services, including early help assessments

Training:

One off or ongoing training delivered to school staff on attendance.

For example:

- Training for school-based staff on attendance law, casework or application of guidance
- Training for governors on their responsibilities
- Training on how to analyse data and make use of attendance data in day to day practices
- Professional supervision of attendance staff employed by the school or trust

Audits and attendance management support:

ad hoc work with schools to support development of new systems, policies and processes

For example:

- Intensive work with a school to develop a whole school strategy
- Help developing an attendance policy
- Policy reviews
- Support with developing day to day processes, eg Register Audits

1

To ensure that our core offer is high quality, and continues to improve, we will consult schools and partners about what works for them and what needs to improve, reviewing and building upon current good practice such as Team Around the School and our Education Welfare offer. We will do this via an annual online survey and via Attendance Forum activities and will undertake actions every year to improve based on the feedback.

2

We will continue to consult regarding attendance with children, young people and families with vulnerabilities such as SEND, and we expect schools and academies to consult with their children, young people and families regarding attendance on an annual basis during regular consultation events. We request that schools and academies share these outcomes with us so that they can inform district-wide as well as school/academy improvements.

3

Our core offer to schools may annually change in detail and allocation, dependent on the identified focus for the academic year, which will be based on local data against KPIs and other evidence. For example, we may increase our core offer to some schools based on their deprivation levels or identified issues within a cluster or type of school. However, all schools will continue to be offered the core offer universally.

4

An Attendance Report for the district will be created annually and shared at management, directorate and board level and with schools, as well as being made publicly available on our website. This will focus on progress against KPIs, consultation results, research and good practice, responsiveness to feedback, general activities, and updates to regulations, policies and processes.



2. We are consistent: recommendations for shared approaches

“School Heads and Education Welfare Service frontline staff felt that there is significant inconsistency across schools as to what is considered to be a concerning level of non-attendance (and also what constitutes authorised absence and which attendance codes to use in non-standard circumstances). This can provide mixed messages to families, particularly where there are sibling groups across schools. There is also an inconsistency in fining, particularly with regard to taking holidays during term time. This leads to mixed messages within communities that are served by a number of schools.

Heads asked: ‘Is it possible to have Wakefield-wide consensus on what is ‘concerning’ levels of non-attendance that should trigger a response? Is it possible to have a consistent approach to punitive action?’”

(Wakefield Attendance Survey February 2023)

Consultations in 2022-23 included concern regarding inconsistencies. Section 1 ‘We Are in this Together’ sets out a consistent approach to responsibilities, but consensus is also necessary in terms of the detail, to ensure that we all move together towards our vision, with our joint expectations clear.

In all but the last case, new DfE guidance provides consistency. This will be combined with clear policy guidance from the LA’s Education Welfare Service, which will provide a named Education Welfare Officer for every school and academy, plus a telephone and email helpdesk for schools, academies and families, ensuring a consistent approach to these matters where schools/academies choose to engage. This will be supported by key backing and communication from the district’s Integrated Education Partnership (IEP) and joint adherence to the approaches outlined in Working Together to Improve School Attendance (Section 8) should remove inconsistencies as far as possible. Headteachers and governing bodies/trusts have ultimate decision-making power in attendance matters such as termtime holidays, and we expect them to only agree these in the most exceptional of circumstances.

Each attendance case should follow its own pathway dependent on elements such as the severity of the individual needs of the student, relevant vulnerabilities, and evidence gathered by schools (and other partners where relevant).

It is essential that the school, supported by partners where necessary, ensures that their staff have strong relationships with and a deep understanding of their children, young people, families and communities, in order to ascribe a reason or reasons. We recognise that behaviour is communication, and this includes behaviours around attendance. Combined with other factors known to the school and partners, what is the pattern of absence communicating to the school? Once the ‘push’ factor behind the absence is understood, pathways to support or other action become clear.

It must also be remembered that the school's own ethos and approach is essential as a 'pull' factor. This includes providing appropriate and attractive curricular, extra-curricular and teaching offers combined with ensuring that the school is safe, welcoming, nurturing and provides a strong sense of identity, shared values and belonging to all of its students.

We expect schools to work towards 100% attendance, no excuses, by consulting their children, families and communities, and improving their pull factors.

1

Wakefield Local Authority will continue to offer traded school improvement advice, resources and training for schools who wish to develop these aspects of their offer.

2

We will create a Universal Procedure for identifying types of absence and allocating pathways and actions. This will be used within our policies and procedures, and schools and partners will incorporate it into theirs to ensure consistency of identification and pathways across the district. Alongside this, it must be remembered that some cases are unique and schools should be prepared to follow a unique pathway of their own when the need arises.

3

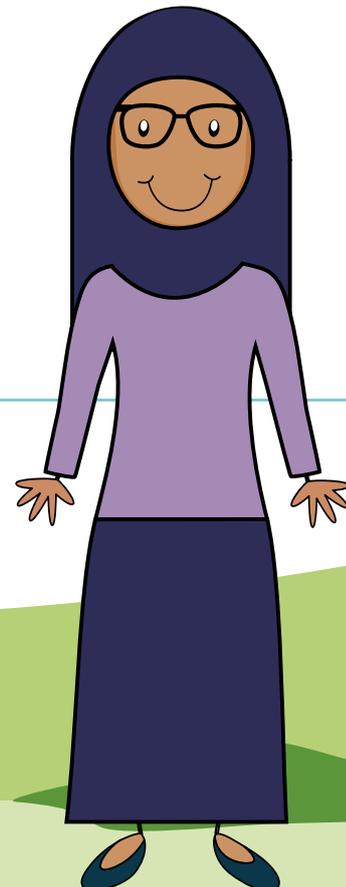
The Universal Procedure flowchart will inform the approaches and pathways of the school and partners in each case of absence and ensure consistency of approach. It is essential that families accept their responsibilities to ensure the child or young person attends, that schools fulfil their universal offer in order to understand and identify the needs and motivations of the student, family and community, and that partners fulfil their responsibilities to advise and support where necessary, in order to accurately take the first step towards reducing absence in each case.

4

By agreeing and sharing this joint approach to the identification of barriers and pathways, consistently successful and timely outcomes can be achieved. Some of these outcomes, for example a fixed penalty notice, will require further support from the Local Authority who will ensure that they follow their responsibilities in line with Section 6 of 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance', and Section 7 of the Education Act 1996.

5

We will review, improve and share our procedures for legal action including: Parenting Orders, Education Supervision Orders, School Attendance Orders and Penalty Notices (Fines) to ensure clarity and consistency of purpose, and create a new Attendance Policy for September 2023.



3. We recognise and support the most vulnerable: severe absence and groups

Severe Absence

“Particular focus should be given by all partners to pupils who are absent from school more than they are present (those missing 50% or more of school).”⁷

In Autumn Term 2022-23, 1.8% of students in Wakefield were severely absent. This equates to approximately 700 cases across the district. This group is our top priority group for support. All partners in our consultations recognised the particularly complex and concerning issue of severe absence.

By using the Universal Procedure flowchart, schools and partners can begin to unpick the complexities of these cases. Most cases will require exploration of multiple levels of support and effective partnership working with an agreed joint approach.

Parents are expected to:	Schools are expected to:	Academy trustees and governing bodies are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:
<p>Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance.</p> <p>Proactively engage with the formal support offered – including any parenting contract or voluntary early help plan to prevent the need for legal intervention.</p>	<p>Continued support as for persistently absent pupils and:</p> <p>Agree a joint approach for all severely absent pupils with the local authority.</p>	<p>Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.</p>	<p>Continued support as for persistently absent pupils and:</p> <p>All services should make this group the top priority for support. This may include a whole family plan, consideration for an education, health and care plan, or alternative form of educational provision.</p> <p>Be especially conscious of any potential safeguarding issues, ensuring joint working between the school, children's social care services and other statutory safeguarding partners. Where appropriate, this could include conducting a full children's social care assessment and building attendance into children in need and child protection plans.</p>

⁷ [Working together to improve school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101421/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance.pdf) (page 32)

Common vulnerabilities in cases of severe absence

Data (Schools Census Spring Term 2022) shows that children and young people in Wakefield are more likely to be severely absent if they:

- i. Are from an economically disadvantaged background:
- ii. Have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities
- iii. Have Familial Vulnerabilities, and/or Require Social Care or Early Help involvement

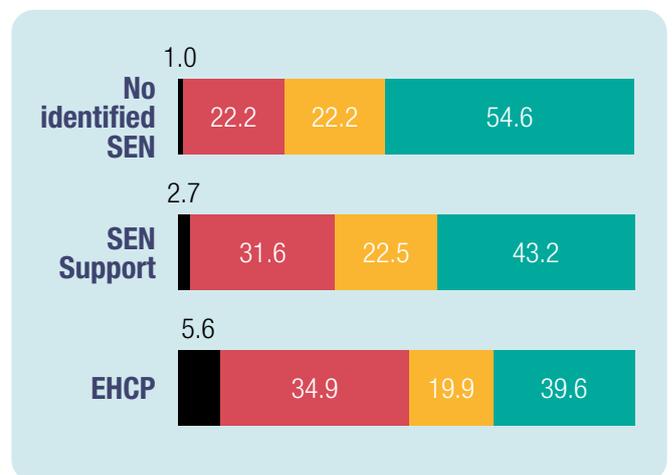
Or a combination of the above.

The following diagrams taken from census return data provide a sharp visual representation of how stark the inequalities of attendance are for these groups in our district. Red and black sections show the proportion of persistent and severe absenteeism respectively for each group.⁸

Attendance Band, by FSM Eligibility (%)



Attendance Band, by SEN (%)



Attendance Band, by Social Care Status (%)



Attendance Band, by Early Help Involvement (%)



SA PA 90-94% 95%+

⁸ Taken from Spring Term 2022 Census Data

Economic disadvantage

All partners need to be aware of families and students who are economically disadvantaged, and they must work together to recognise and overcome barriers to attendance related to this issue.

Issues such as the lack of a car coupled with poor, unreliable and sometimes non-existent public transport in our area and/or a lack of food and heating in the home can, for this group, create multiple barriers to attending every morning, which have a knock-on effect on routines, lateness and regular attendance. Schools must show understanding in these cases and for example devise ways to sympathetically admit students who may be late, hungry and/or cold with compassion and support, without drawing attention to them in front of others. They must also expect parents to work proactively with them to problem solve, whilst also being vigilant about non-compliance, which may be a flag for educational neglect. Schools must also make use of income such as their pupil premium funding to support this group, and be aware of partners who can support families in difficult circumstances, and make links with these, such as Wakefield District Housing.

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The Local Authority may, when designing our offers, weight the offer based on levels of deprivation in particular schools or areas, to support with this issue.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Children and young people with identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities generally have more severe and persistent absence than those without. This can be for a number of reasons, including medical issues and social, emotional and mental health issues reducing attendance. We understand the challenges around this and will work to continue to understand these further and develop our practice.

As a group, SEND students have regular, documented reviews by their schools and in the case of students with Education Health and Care Plans, the Local Authority's SEND services, and partners such as Health and Social Care, with the involvement of parents, carers and the students themselves.

This provides an excellent opportunity to discuss, address and document any issues with attendance on a regular basis. Those with SEND arguably need more regular attendance than other groups, particularly if they require specialist support to learn and are already behind.

In Wakefield, we recognise the vulnerability of this group of students, and will work to ensure that all generic SEND documentation and procedures emphasise attendance as everyone's business, containing sections where attendance can be addressed with discussion, targets and joint actions to remove barriers to attendance. For EHCP students, attendance will be discussed at annual reviews and more often if needed. This includes ensuring that our SEND specialist staff access training regarding attendance regulations, our strategy and understand how to promote, monitor and support the improvement of attendance in their cohorts, and that this is also available to schools, particularly SENDCos and Inclusion Leaders.

Some of the ways we focus on and support SEND attendance:

- Attendance figures are included on the paperwork that SEND Officers and case workers submit to the EHCP Panel so strategic discussions and actions can be agreed as appropriate.
- Education attendance is now included on short breaks paperwork and actions are allocated.
- Within school planning meetings undertaken by Wakefield Inclusion SEND Support Services and our Education Psychologists schools are asked about SEND pupils whose attendance they are concerned about.
- At the special school heads fortnightly meeting attendance levels are a standing agenda item.
- We have included the focus of improving educational attendance in our external funding bids which has enhanced our support offer.

SEND Areas for future development:

1

SEND Services will collaborate with schools and partners to ensure that children and young people with EHCPs and co-existing vulnerabilities including severe absence receive support from the right professionals and that plans created for the severely absent EHCP cohort take into consideration the nature of the Special Educational Need.

4

Working practices will be reviewed to ensure that all of the SEND responsibilities set out in Working Together to Improve School Attendance document are fulfilled. We expect parents, schools, governing bodies and trusts and other partners to do the same and will hold them to account for this where necessary in EHCP attendance cases.

2

SEND attendance data will be monitored and reported to the SEND Board in order to ensure that attendance is a strategic priority.

5

We will review and develop our policies and procedures for children with health issues.

3

SEND Services will continue to listen and respond to children, young people and families with SEND, via their current channels such as the SEND Parent Carer Forum, and will ensure that items on attendance are incorporated into their communications and consultations.

Parents are expected to:	Schools are expected to:	Academy trustees and governing bodies are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:
<p>Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance.</p> <p>Proactively engage with the support offered.</p>	<p>Maintain the same ambition for attendance and work with pupils and parents to maximise attendance.</p> <p>Ensure join up with pastoral support and where required, put in place additional support and adjustments, such as an individual healthcare plan and if applicable, ensuring the provision outlined in the pupil's EHCP is accessed.</p> <p>Consider additional support from wider services and external partners, making timely referrals.</p> <p>Regularly monitor data for such groups, including at board and governing body meetings and with local authorities.</p>	<p>Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.</p>	<p>Work closely with relevant services and partners, for example special educational needs, educational psychologists, and mental health services, to ensure joined up support for families.</p> <p>Ensure suitable education, such as alternative provision, is arranged for children of compulsory school age who because of health reasons would not otherwise receive a suitable education.</p>

Familial vulnerabilities

Respondents to consultations expressed 'frustration due to SCD and EHH refusing to take attendance as a safeguarding concern'. There were more than 10 comments from schools during the attendance event that described schools being 'stuck in a cycle where the Police won't conduct welfare checks, social care won't pick up poor attendance, so the school are left to try and address the issue on their own'. Where attendance is an issue for children with CIN and CP schools felt that stronger joint working was required and that some partners needed to understand that lack of attendance can be a form of neglect.

Severe absence is both a flag of other vulnerabilities and a vulnerability in itself. Children and young people who are regularly out of school can be exposed to additional risks such as vulnerability to exploitation and criminal gangs. Children and young people who have poor attendance are also likely to have a range of other co-existing vulnerabilities

'Since the restructure, we have had really positive experiences with TAS, particularly with our hard to reach families where attendance is part of a wider concern' (Headteacher respondent to consultation)

Children in Care: The Virtual School

The Virtual School has statutory role to monitor the attendance of pupils on its roll. Wakefield fulfils this duty by continuing to utilise the attendance management service provided by Welfare Call to monitor attendance at school and alternative provisions. A daily call is made to check that every pupil is attending their education provision. Where pupils are not in attendance, the carer is contacted to ascertain the reason for absence and the social worker and the Virtual School is notified. This ensures that the whereabouts of every pupil is monitored on a daily basis.

Attendance data is reported to:

- Virtual School Governing Board (on a half termly basis)
- Wakefield CYP Good to Great Group (Wakefield CYP improvement group), on a half termly basis as part of the continuous improvement journey
- On the monthly Annex A 3.08, which is the Virtual School accountability measure for DfE

The Virtual School works across CYP services with professionals to address issues and pro-actively plan on an individual pupil basis. The attendance data per pupil is also captured on a termly basis on their PEP (Personal Education Plan) and this is recorded on the LA social care database.

In future we intend to develop our systems to ensure that Children in Care attend at least as well as their peers

To support in achieving this the Virtual School will additionally:

1

Continue with current good practice, and work with partners to ensure that the attendance gap for CiC closes to be at least in line with the national gap.

2

Periodically identify attendance as a theme for Education Clinics, to ensure plans are robust for each pupil.

3

Report on a weekly basis to Children's Social Care all non-attending children, to ensure care plans enable children to attend school.

Social Care, Early Intervention and Prevention, Youth Hubs, Youth Justice, Targeted Early Help

During 2022-23, Early Intervention and Prevention Services in Wakefield have been developing approaches to supporting attendance for vulnerable children and young people, demonstrating an improved focus and outcomes for children and young people with attendance issues that sit alongside other vulnerabilities. In particular, the use of Team Around the School for termly meetings focusing on attendance, in partnership with Educational Welfare Service, and the development of the Youth Hubs, with the first embedded Hub now mentoring secondary aged students, have created the foundations of excellent practice to continue to build upon over the coming years of this strategy.

From September 2022, the Youth Hub team have taken the lead in TAS meetings with secondary schools across the district. Support plans put in place include measures for supporting increased attendance, where appropriate. The Youth Hub Team at The Hut have been operational since June 2022. Youth Hub support and interventions include a focus on Emotionally Based School Avoidance, independent skills, communication skills, emotional wellbeing support, anger management, online safety and other universal youth support. Interventions are delivered in 1-1 and group settings and can be at The Hut, in school, home or a location where the young person feels most comfortable. It is planned that this offer will be developed and rolled out across all Youth Hubs in 2023-24.

Partnership working around attendance is also blossoming. The Partnerships for People and Places project (PfPP) was a DfE sponsored initiative to research the reasons for non-attendance when these may be emotionally based. This is being jointly developing further with Castleford and Airedale Youth Hubs, Enrich KS4 Academy, the LA Alternative Provision Service and Education Welfare Service, Public Health and a third sector provider, St Giles Trust, developing the Partnership for People and Places Project and feeding the findings from this into practice for young people with multiple vulnerabilities including Emotionally Based School Avoidance.

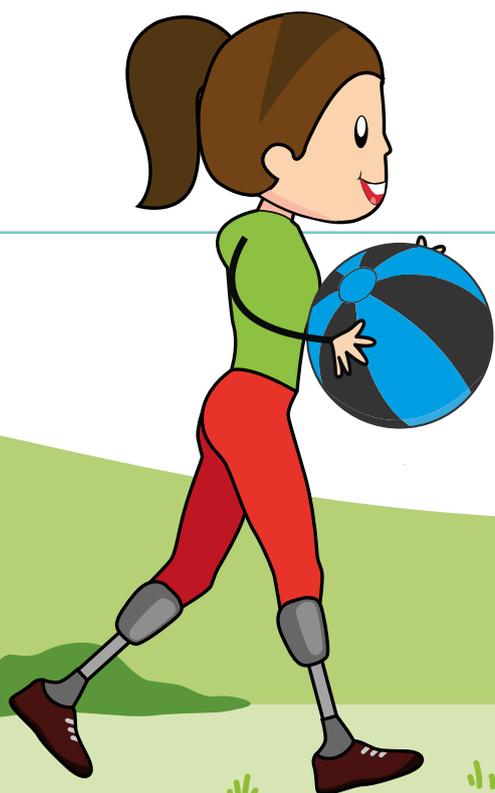
Youth Justice Service

Regular participation in education is a key protective factor in preventing children's involvement in offending behaviour. To support this, Wakefield Youth Justice Service (YJS) have a dedicated resource to identify and assess the educational needs of each child entering the youth justice system and work with schools and families to improve or maintain children's attendance and participation. The YJS also provide impartial information advice and guidance to support children in accessing post-16 education training or employment.

Statutory Social Care Involvement

It is imperative that all partners recognise that a child or young person who is supported by social care whether voluntarily or via statute may have difficulties with attendance, and that these will increase their vulnerabilities further. Attendance will be an area of focus in formal meetings and actions.

In addition, it must be accepted across all partners that poor attendance can be a flag of other vulnerabilities and that this is taken into account when making decisions regarding levels of risk and support requirements.



In response to consultations, Social Care partners will review and improve where necessary the following to ensure that Attendance Matters for all partners:

1

Front Door MASH processes; to review and join up systems in order to access and cross-reference attendance data, and take these into consideration during assessment processes where relevant.

2

Attendance training: partner workers in all areas of Social Care will have access to training in order to recognise attendance as a priority area, a flag of possible other familial vulnerabilities and a risk factor in itself, including an understanding of the language and definitions of Educational Neglect.

3

Paperwork and processes for all CYP who have Social Care involvement: Ensuring that attendance is a focus of every meeting and is documented as such, with attendance-specific outcomes led by the Social Worker in cases with severe absence.

4

'Step Down' arrangements for CYP at all levels of Social Care involvement will be reviewed. For example, cases will not be closed if severe absence is still an issue. Instead, the case should be kept open, or other pathways identified (eg CP case steps down to Youth Hubs as all other areas of the plan are complete but the CYP continues to be severely absent from school). This will be documented in process maps.

5

Language and definitions of Educational Neglect⁹: to be embedded into discussions and actions and evidenced via paperwork and processes. Awareness of this will be raised via training packages.

6

Ensuring that the Social Care aspects of 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' are recognised as joint responsibilities and that where appropriate full social care assessments are conducted in response to severe absence and vulnerabilities, and that attendance is built into Child in Need and Child Protection plans. In practice this means where there are concerns in respect of attendance and some additional vulnerability and a TAS process has already been attempted/is not sufficient, consideration should be given to either Targeted Early Help support or social work assessment/intervention. For children subject to CIN and CP planning, their school attendance is tracked and monitored as part of those plans.

7

Increase opportunities for exploring cases with attendance issues via dip sampling and engaging with what works.

8

The Youth Justice Service will share good practice examples which have shown to have made a measurable difference to attendance outcomes, and continue to work as case holders/partners in our multi-agency approach where their involvement in attendance cases is appropriate.

9

Continue to roll out the Family Hub and Youth Hub offer across the district including the attendance aspect for secondary schools. Adapt and improve this work in response to learning. Consider support for primary aged children via family hubs. Make arrangements to regularly collaborate with the Education Welfare Service and Educational Psychology Service, plus any other relevant services such as SENART (for EHCPs) and the Virtual School (for Children in Care) regularly over attendance issues.

⁹ ZPB Educational Neglect (wakefieldscp.org.uk)

Health and Wellbeing Partners

Health and Wellbeing Partners will:

1 Review and define communication, access and approaches for school nursing, GPs and other Health Services.

2 Review their Continuum of Support for Mental Health, for children and their families, detailing points of access and levels of intervention.

3 Trial approaches to supporting attendance of children and young people where there are identified parental mental health needs

Police

1 The Police, the Local Authority and schools will review and develop their processes in order to liaise regarding school attendance data, for example to understand hotspots and how these link to issues such as anti-social behaviour and crime, and what action the Police might take in order to support the district's focus on attendance.

2 Communications with schools will be reviewed with the aim that schools are aware in good time of severe issues that impact on attendance, including where children have gone missing.



Community/Third Sector Partners

We will engage with third sector and other community partners to ensure that we share best practice as a two-way process and collaborate with partners where appropriate.

Community

Everyone's involvement and support can greatly enhance a child's educational experience. By staying engaged you can foster a love of learning, strengthen their academic skills and nurture their overall development. We are asking all members of our Wakefield families and communities, from councillors to cousins, to engage in positive conversations and encouragement with our children and young people regarding learning, education, and, where appropriate, schools.

Questions that everyone can ask children and young people:

- What was the most exciting thing you learnt today?
- Did anything you learnt today surprise you?
- Can you share something you learnt today?
- Did you ask any questions in class today?
- Is there something you're curious about to learn more about in school or elsewhere?

Remember to actively listen, show genuine interest and engage in meaningful conversation about learning. The questions may spark discussion and provide insight and allow you to stay connected and involved in their learning journey. We must collectively take responsibility for forging cultural change around attendance, by asking 'How was school?' and other related questions, and engaging and noting the answer when on official business. *This should be in our everyday lives as well as children with whom we work professionally.* By showing how and why we care about attendance, and staying positive about education and schools, we will influence others to care and take responsibility, too, forging lasting cultural change for the benefit of our children, young people, families and communities.

4. We are responsive: meeting need in the local context and contemporary world

‘Our school has identified that the mindset of some parents (not all) no longer sees school as being important to attend daily. Odd days off are becoming increasingly common, as are holidays and having time off for appointments and minor illness...’

(Headteacher during Attendance Event)

The changed attitudes and anxieties around school attendance of some individuals, families and communities post-covid is clearly recognised by the schools and services that serve communities across Wakefield, and takes some part of the increase in absence in our district data.

Every parent and carer has responsibility for ensuring their child’s attendance at school, and every school has responsibility for creating a nurturing and inclusive setting and recognising and responding to individual attendance issues, as per the Summary Table of Responsibilities, including DfE guidance around attendance for those with mental health issues¹⁰. The Local Authority will support by identifying themes across Wakefield based on data and on feedback from partners including schools, and leading cross-district campaigns on these themes.

The Local Authority will also provide support for schools on selected key themes using their core and traded offer model. These themes will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they are current with contemporary issues and research. The Wakefield EBSA (Emotionally Based School Avoidance) approach has been developed with this in mind. Other identified issues may be subject to a service area review and some to development of further resources, as capacity allows.

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

The post-pandemic rise in school absence includes a significant number of cases where reasons for not attending include those linked to emotionally based factors, particularly anxiety. ‘Emotionally Based School Avoidance’ is not a diagnosis, but an umbrella term for this issue, which can be attributed to a multitude of factors and barriers.

The Wakefield approach to attendance difficulties including EBSA aims to enable schools/settings and/or services to identify the underlying needs and barriers in each case, so that any which include elements of anxiety can be provided with appropriate support and intervention following an evidence-based framework of support. The Wakefield Attendance Flowchart combined with the toolkit can be used to help schools/settings/services navigate the different push and pull factors in relation to an absence case and determine whether the attendance difficulty is influenced by an underlying emotional need (such as anxiety), or if not, what other pathways should be tried and plan and implement appropriate support via the framework embedded within the toolkit. Schools are the lead professionals in these cases, and can feel reassured and empowered that the actions they undertake around Wakefield’s resources are research-driven and recognised as examples of good practice by The Anna Freud Centre.

¹⁰ [Mental health issues affecting a pupil’s attendance: guidance for schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-issues-affecting-a-pupil-s-attendance)

EBSA Core Offer

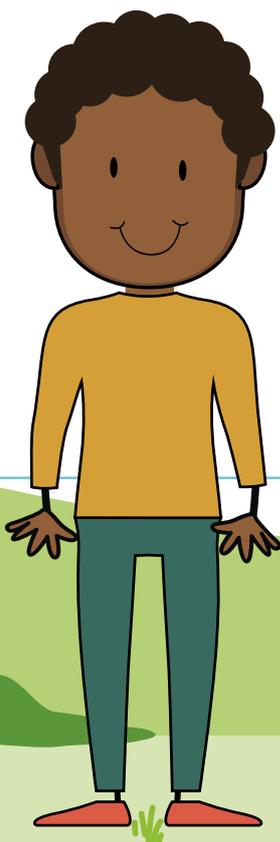
The core resources for EBSA are built around Wakefield's 'Assess, Plan, Do, Review' approach, with a comprehensive toolkit, detailing approaches for schools to use with children, young people and families and additional free resources included. In addition, 2 pilot programmes trialling a 4 session approach for assessment and intervention are also underway, one aimed at primary schools and one for secondary schools. The resulting resources will be free as part of the core offer to all schools/settings and services.

In addition, schools can purchase central training offered via WTS for schools and partners that can be accessed without the need for an SLA with EPS

EBSA further offers

For schools who wish to buy into further Wakefield Educational Psychology support, there will be additional provision for EBSA. This includes additional training, advice and support including the development of a coaching model. As a traded service, Wakefield EPS include discussions and support for EBSA as part of our traded offer to schools, this includes training for staff, casework (where appropriate) and consultation.

Resources and further details can be found on the Wakefield Traded Services Educational Psychology page¹¹.



EBSA areas for development:

1

The offers for EBSA and the associated resources are under review for September 2023, and will be reviewed and improved annually in response to unfolding research outcomes and identified needs. This includes projects undertaken in our local area.

2

Continue to increase EBSA awareness and training across the district including with our internal colleagues and partners.

Partnerships for People and Places

The Partnerships for People and Places Research Project has been underway in Castleford and Airedale throughout academic year 2022-23.

Initial research findings from this project have confirmed that cases of severe absence with elements of emotionally based school avoidance are often very complex and diverse, with no broad 'one size fits all' model. It is therefore essential that front line services, including schools, have excellent relationships with families, children and young people and that they capture their voices on attendance and recognise their individual barriers to attendance.

The second phase of this is now underway. Youth Services, Enrich AP Academy, Public Health and Third Sector partners are working with a group of young people with attendance issues, using the EBSA approach plus the voice of the family and young person, to fine-tune their actions. This will gather more data and information about the range of complexities experienced by children and young people with severe absence and other vulnerabilities, and test effective approaches. The findings of this will be fed into our annual action plans and improve our district-wide activities. Further details about our EBSA offer can be found in the previous section.

¹¹ [Wakefield Traded Services Educational Psychology](#)

Inclusion Panels and Permanent Exclusions

Wakefield's Inclusion Panels were co-produced by the Local Authority working in partnership with Headteachers across Wakefield. They aim to reduce permanent exclusions, and use a multi-agency cluster approach in line with Wakefield Families Together to identify the causes of challenging behaviour in schools and support the child and school to develop strategies to enable them to access their education and potential. Pupils who are permanently excluded or suspended do not have equal access with their contemporaries to mainstream education and have lower attendance rates overall. They also commonly have multiple vulnerabilities.

It is imperative that these young people and the settings supporting them get the very best attendance advice and support, as well as a high quality education tailored to their needs.

Inclusion Panel areas for development:

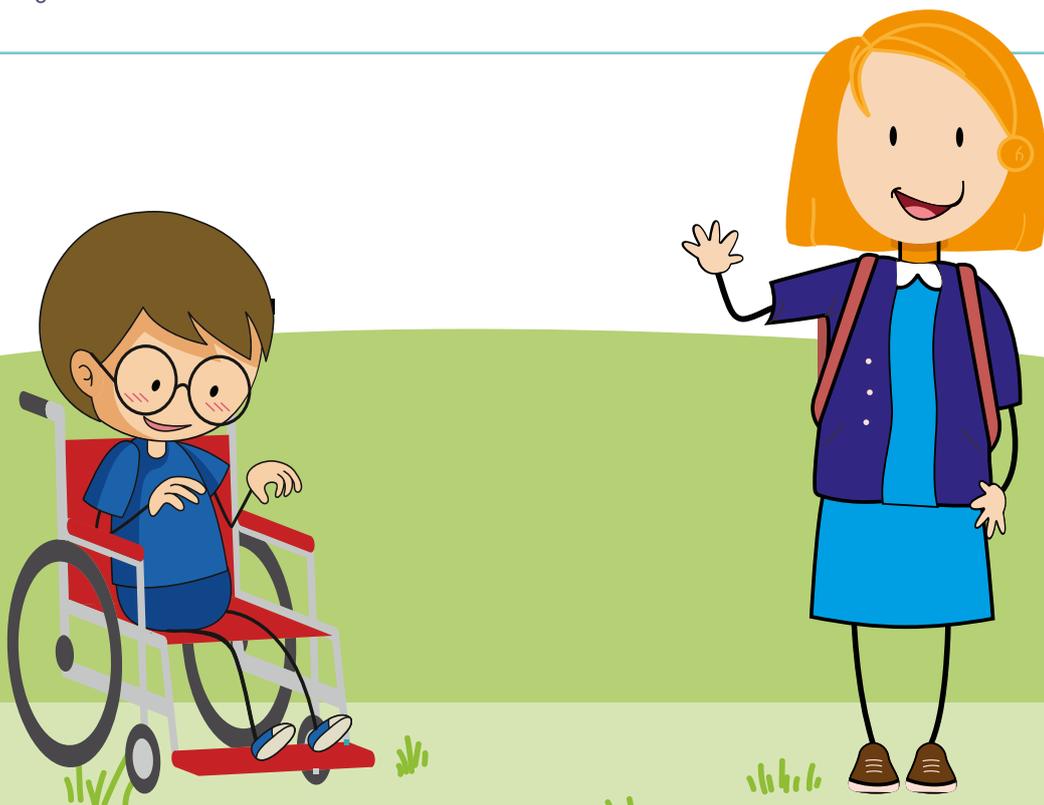
- Develop the Alternative Provision system strategically in partnership with Headteachers and schools, so that it has sufficiency and is appropriate to the needs of the children and young people in our district, with multiple 'pull' factors to improve attendance
- Create a role in Educational Welfare to liaise with the Alternative Provision Team, attend Inclusion Panels to give advice and support to schools and settings on cases which involve severe absence, and ensure we have strong link workers for our 2 main Alternative Provision settings.

'Hidden' issues which impact on attendance

From consultation and research, we recognise that some key barriers to attendance are more hidden than others. As well as the factors detailed in the previous section, we also acknowledge those additional areas where additional focus and discussion are required. These include:

- The state of the district's transport system
- Admissions for families with multiple siblings, and school place sufficiency
- Familial mental health and/or vulnerabilities such as domestic abuse
- Impact of social media
- Impact of smartphone and internet addiction
- Impact of gang culture and grooming

These areas may be themes for further exploration and development throughout the life of this strategy.



Working Together to Improve Attendance

Our strategy sets out our ambitions and areas of focus for the next 3 years.

This cannot be achieved without secure and effective joint ways of working. The majority of these improvements are detailed in the sections above. In addition to this we are committed to improving the following:

- Our Information Management systems will be upgraded to enable that internal partners can, as appropriate and as far as possible, access the most up to date relevant information for all areas, forming a complete picture of the child and their barriers to living a happy healthy life. This will include information on attendance and any actions undertaken to support this. At the time of writing, we are awaiting further information from the DfE regarding the information feed from schools on attendance, and will incorporate this into our plans as this information becomes available.
- 'Data warehousing' will enable much clearer sight of children and young people with multiple vulnerabilities including severe absence, which will inform further effective partnership working, at the right place and right time. This will enable mapping across the district of hotspots, both geographical and demographic.
- Working in localities enables careful consideration of the challenges and opportunities according to the local context and supports collective responsibility, underpinned by a sense of identity and place. Our Locality Working Model will be improved via the work of the AEC Trust Project as well as all partners, and improvements will be made to the locality attendance system as a result.
- We will work jointly with schools and families to identify gaps in our approach to attendance and develop cross-partnership approaches to solve these, as part of an annual programme of improvement
- We will review and improve our systems for multi-agency working utilising the strengths of our current Team Around the School model, to tackle the most complex cases effectively

Together, we can change attendance culture, and improve the lives of our children and young people, creating a better world for the future.

Wakefield Attendance Strategy 2023-2026

This document is also available as a short summary and in accessible formats.