

Annual Summary for School Attendance in Sheffield 2022/23

“Sheffield will be an inclusive city where we work together to ensure that all children and young people get the right support at the right time so that they can live a happy and fulfilled life”.

Sheffield Inclusion Strategy 2020-2025

School attendance is everyone’s business. In Sheffield our expectation is that every child will be supported to access a formal and full-time education where they attend on time, every day.

School is not only a factor that helps to ensure that children are safe, but it creates a sense of belonging and identity for a child in their local community and is an enabler to successfully move to adult life. Unfortunately, too many children are not offered or accessing a full-time education. The reasons for this are wide and varied. To improve attendance, we need to identify the reasons for absence and address them.

To achieve improvements in attendance all parties need to work together. This includes the Local Authority, schools, parents, young people and wider community and services such as health, police, and the voluntary sector. No single organisation can achieve improvements alone.

Over the last 5 years Sheffield has seen a steady decline in school attendance and a rise in persistent absence (attendance below 90%). Sheffield has remained near the bottom of local authority league tables for school attendance. In the Sheffield City Council One Year plan issued in 2021, the following commitment was made to address the challenge of absence from school:

Reduce exclusions in all forms:

- We will launch a city-wide drive to improve the attendance of our children and young people in early years, schools, and post-16 settings.
- Work with schools to reduce exclusion through tackling the causes and delivering rapid improvements to inclusion.

DATA AND THE CURRENT PICTURE IN SHEFFIELD

What the data tells us

Attendance is a challenge nationally post-pandemic with significant decrease in overall attendance and increase in persistent absence. Attendance in Sheffield has not declined at the same rate as other Local Authorities across the country. Of the 151 LA’s, in 2022/23, Sheffield has moved rank from 144th to 131st at primary level, and 145th to 124th at secondary level. In special schools, persistent absence has reduced by 1.4% and is now above the average for core cities, statistical neighbours and Yorkshire and the Humber.

In academic year 2022/23 for the first time, we set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for school attendance and Persistent absence on a citywide, locality and school-based level. These were set as an intent to see significant improvement in citywide attendance.

The following table shows these citywide KPIs and the current reportable attendance data for academic year compared to the previous year. To note that the current data for attendance shows 2 figures – the first is the data that the LA holds from schools who provide a direct attendance feed, the second is based on data provided by the DfE from a total of 136 schools. Full data for the year will be published by DfE in the new academic year.

	Attendance 2021/22	Attendance KPI 2022/23	Attendance 2022/23	National Attendance Estimate 2022/23	Severe Absence KPI 2022/23	Severe absence Actual 2022/23	
Primary	93.3%	96%	93.4% (93.3)	94%	750	200	1408
Secondary	90.7%	95%	89.9% (90.1)	90.7%		1083	
Special	83.9%	95%	86% (81.3)	86.9%		125	
	Persistent absence 2021/22	Persistent absence KPI 2022/23	Persistent absence 2022/23	National Persistent absence estimate 2022/23	Reduced timetable KPI 2022/23	Reduced timetable actual 2022/23	
Primary	20.1%	18%	19.8% (20.4)	17.2%	300	179	736
Secondary	27.3%	22%	28.8% (28.5)	28.3%		480	
Special	46.9%	22%	38.7% (42.4)	38.7%		77	

During termly attendance support meetings in 2022/23, specialist officers worked with schools to set realistic KPI's of 1.5% attendance increase, targets on reduced persistent absence, and attendance action plans. This has been recognised as good practice by the DFE through the pilot project working with a DFE Attendance Advisor.

This targeted work has supported schools to see the following success in improving attendance:

	Number of schools who have successfully managed to:			
	Improve their attendance	Improve their PA	Increase their attendance by 1.5%	Decrease their PA by 1%
Primary	76 of 136	68 of 136	12 of 136	54 of 136
Secondary	3 of 30	6 of 30	1 of 30	5 of 30
Special	3 of 10	5 of 10	1 of 10	4 of 10

We have specifically worked to improve attendance at transition points as this has historically been an area of challenge. We set a KPI for transition year groups (FS2 and Y7) to be in line with the whole phase attendance. The data shows us that:

- FS2 actual attendance is 91.8%, compared to 93.4% average for primary.
- Year 7 actual attendance is 91.8%, compared to 89.9% average for secondary.

Specific Schools data

The following provides data from 2022/23 across Sheffield schools:

- Attendance at primary schools' ranges from 84% to 97.1%.
- Attendance at secondary ranges from 79.4% to 96.5%.
- 54 primary schools have attendance below the city average with 7 of these having attendance below 90.5%.
- 13 secondary schools have attendance below the city average with 7 of these having attendance less than 88%.
- 2 special schools have attendance below 80%
- Persistent Absence at primary schools' ranges from 0.4% to 59.6%.
- Persistent Absence at secondary ranges from 7.8% to 59.6%.

- 59.6% of pupils with an EHCP at primary age are persistent absentees, with 56.7% at secondary.

Persistent Absence in Sheffield

Persistent Absence within the city remains higher than nationally at primary level. Last academic year PA at primary was 20.1%, secondary 27.3% and special 30.8%. At secondary and special school levels this was lower than core cities, statistical neighbours and Yorkshire and the Humber. Sheffield were 65th out of 151 authorities for secondary PA in 2021/22 which was a significant improvement.

Specific Cohorts of Concern

The predominant cohort of concern at both primary and secondary age is children with an EHCP. At primary age they have an average attendance of 85.7%, and at secondary age 74.2%. Those recorded as SEN support are the next key cohort, followed by those on reduced timetables, those who are severely absent and pupils of 'other white' ethnicity, particularly those from the Roma population.

Most Improved Schools (percentage point increase in overall attendance) in 2022/23

Archdale (4.5%), Norton Free (1.9%), Owlter Brook (1.8%), Bradfield Dungworth (1.8%), St Josephs (1.7%), Waterthorpe (1.7%), Meersbrook Bank (1.7%), Dobcroft Junior (1.7%), Meadowhead (1.6%)

Most Improved Schools (percentage point reduction in Persistent Absence) in 2022/23

Anns Grove (11.5%), Waterthorpe NI (10.7%), Owlter Brook (10.2%), Brunswick (10%), Whiteways (9.2%), Archdale (7%), Rainbow Forge (6.6%), Intake (6.2%), Wybourn (6.2%)

BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE

There is no single solution to the challenge of attendance in Sheffield as there is no single cause of absence. Whilst parents have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child accesses a suitable education, schools and services need to work together with families to identify the cause of absence and solutions to help a child to access that education.

The following are some of the barriers that have been identified as causes of poor school attendance:

Term Time Leave – currently double the national average, with no upper limit to the number of days of leave that can be taken, and fines of £60 per parent, though currently parents are only fined for 1 child in a family. In HT6 alone 2% of absence was due to term time leave.

Mental Health – The number of children unable to attend due to the mental health has increased significantly over the last 5 years. An increase in places at Chapel House (Medical Alternative Provision) has been commissioned. There has been an increase in the number GP letters received by schools and Chapel House stating children are unable to attend.

Educational Neglect – We are growing in our understanding of the number of children in the city who are impacted by educational neglect. This is evidenced in parents/carers of children who have not responded to the normal range of interventions and support seeking to promote a child's education.

Reduced Timetables – we have seen a significant increase in the use of reduced timetables across the city with over 700 this academic year with fewer than 1 in 10 going back to full time within the 8-week recommended timescale. Schools across the city continue to advise that they use RTT for

behaviour reasons even though the new attendance guidance advises this is not appropriate. The predominant reason provided for the RTT is 'SEND needs unable to be met in school'.

Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions – The number of children receiving suspensions and permanent exclusions has increased significantly throughout the last 2 years. Across the academic year 21,000 days of absence have been recorded due to suspension and exclusion.

Mobility – Mobility of children in and out of the city continues to be higher than the levels seen 5 years ago, with the majority not providing a forwarding address. This means that they are recorded as absent whilst investigations are made into their onward location.

Resilience – We are seeing a higher level of child absence from school due to fall out, incidents, or breakdown in relationship between parent and the school. This has resulted in children being absent whilst investigations take place around the concerns. Complaints relating to children out of school due to bullying not being addressed is increasing.

Medical Appointments – Medical recording on registers is currently double the national average. Children are often absent from school for the whole day to attend appointments.

Illness – Sheffield's authorised absence rate is much lower than national averages, and all other comparators. Sheffield is 5th out of 151 authorities for authorising absence. Secondary schools authorise very little absence. In the academic year 21-22 illness in Sheffield secondary schools was 1.86% lower than the national average, with unauthorised absence 1.95% above national average, Parents tell us that when schools do not authorise the absence, when they have contacted the school and provided a reason, they are less likely to contact in the future to provide a reason, therefore future absences are recorded as 'no reason provided' unauthorised absence.

Off-site direction – There is an increase across the city of schools using off site direction. Whilst the intervention is designed to bring around change to a child's behaviour the child/parent often refuse to attend the other school resulting in unauthorised absence, compared to reintegration back into the classroom.

Dual Registration / managed move – Managed move can be a successful intervention for many young people, however for others they find the move difficult and their attendance deteriorates towards the end of the move or the start of the reintegration back to their own school.

School places – The height of the birth rate in Sheffield is currently entering secondary education meaning that for those who entered Year 7 in September 2022 and during the academic year, significant numbers of children have been allocated school places outside of catchment area or parental preferences. Whilst sufficient places exist across the city for all children, those who did not apply for 3 places including their catchment or who are late arrivals to Sheffield after allocation day have often not been able to be provided a place that parents are happy with. The same issue is in place for those who will start year 7 in September 2023.

Unmet needs – Parents are citing where their child's special educational needs are not being met within the allocated school as a reason for absence. Data shows that children with SEN are more likely to be absent from school, with those with an EHCP one of the most concerning cohorts of absence.

HOW WE ARE ADDRESSING ABSENCE IN SHEFFIELD

Compliance with national guidance

The Department for Education launched new attendance guidance for September 2022, 'Working together to improve attendance' with the intent that it would become statutory during the academic year. To date legislation has not been passed to make it statutory. The guidance introduced the category of 'severely absent' pupils as those whose attendance is below 50%. Alongside an expectation for whole school and local area policies and strategic approach to be in place, it also placed several additional expectations in place on previous guidance. These included:

- All schools to have an 'attendance champion' who is part of the senior leadership team.
- Schools to work with local authorities to address barriers to attendance at whole school and child level.
- Schools to put additional support in place to remove barriers to absence.
- Local authorities to have a school attendance support team that works with all schools in their area (including independent schools) to remove area-wide barriers to attendance.
- Local authorities to hold a termly conversation with every school to identify, discuss and signpost or provide access to services for pupils who are persistently or severely absent or at risk of becoming so.
- A greater focus on supportive measures than punitive attendance legal measures.
- Creation of networking opportunities for schools and local areas to work together.

When the guidance was launched, Sheffield was in the fortunate position of having school attendance support already in place, including a recent investment in additional staffing. Unlike other local authorities, Sheffield had never moved to a traded service. As of September 2022, each locality within Sheffield has a dedicated Attendance Focused Inclusion and Attendance Specialist who hold the expected Termly Attendance Support Meetings and is the primary point of contact for schools. These officers are based within the Inclusion and Attendance Service and work alongside other officers in the service to support inclusion in education.

Sheffield has been successful in meeting the expectations of the new guidance at a higher rate than other local authorities:

- In Term 1 99% of schools had a Termly Attendance Support Meetings (TASM), 98% in Term 2 and 99% in Term 3.
- All bar 1 maintained school has allocated an attendance champion who is part of their senior leadership team.
- Citywide and Locality networking opportunities have been offered every half term with 93% of schools having attended at least 1 session.

Exclusions in all forms data

As part of our work to address 'reducing exclusions in all forms' we have developed a citywide data set that goes beyond raw attendance data and looks at all children who are missing out on education in some form. By placing a ring around all children who are missing out on an element of their education, either through absence or through a lack of offered provision, we have been able to see the full scope of where children are not accessing a full education and to intentionally target cohorts and areas within our discussions with schools. This data set includes the following criteria over the previous 12 months:

- Attendance below 90%.
- Children recorded as 'Child Missing Education'.
- Children on reduced timetables.
- Children in receipt of Education Other than at School (EOTAS).

- Children in receipt of Elective Home Education which is recorded as being unsuitable.
- Children who are provided alternative provision as they are too ill to attend school.
- Children who have been permanently excluded from their school.
- Children who have received a suspension from school for 10+ sessions /5+ days.
- Children recorded as unauthorised absence for 20+ sessions / 10+ days.
- Children recorded as educated away from the school site for 20+ sessions / 10+ days.
- Children recorded as ill for 30+ sessions / 15+ days.

This data set is used to discuss with schools' particular areas of concern. It is also used to identify challenges across specific cohorts such as children with SEN, children with a social worker and different ethnicity groupings.

It should be noted that there is no route for us to compare this with other local areas as this is a Sheffield specific model to help us to understand the breadth of challenges to accessing education.

Attendance Campaign

In the 21/22 school year we launched a school attendance communications campaign with the slogan 'every school day matters'. Visibility was the primary aim of the campaign to get a clear message out that Sheffield thinks that good school attendance is important, and that as a city, we will support families. The following actions have been taking place:

2021/22

School attendance charter co-produced by local anchor organisations; banners for school gates; back to school letter to all parents from Director of Education and Director of Public Health; School matters microsite; social media campaign; Clear Channel boards across the city centre; workshops with schools to explore the challenges of improving attendance; promotion and presentation to services within the local authority on how they can support improved school attendance. Developments led to the roll out of the communications campaign publicly from March 2022.

2022/23

Poster distribution to all schools; posters circulated to all GP surgeries and dental surgeries in Sheffield with additional information on how they can promote good school attendance; a back-to-school letter to all parents from Director of Education and Director of Public Health in September 2023 which included a reminder to parents to take up vaccinations in schools; promotion and presentation to services within the local authority on how they can support improved school attendance. A social media campaign was launched but was truncated due to the death of the queen leading to changes in local authority social media use at that time.

2023/24

Actions being taken are: refresh of school matters microsite, ask for charter co-signatories to pledge activity to promote improved school attendance – 'what three things..?'; engagement with services and teams within SCC to ask 'what three things can I do to promote school attendance?'; links into Sheffield Childrens Hospital, primary care networks and GP surgeries to provide clear guidance and reinforce messages on promoting good school attendance.

Attendance Charter

As part of the new attendance campaign, 'Every School Day Matters', we identified a need to work closer with key stakeholders to explore what they could do to work with us to create excellence in attendance. Since the charter was launched, we have worked with these key stakeholders to share

the importance of school attendance and explore what 3 things they could do to support young people attend school more often. Some of this work includes:

- Dental surgeries now checking the age of a child when a parent books a routine appointment and automatically offering after school or school holiday appointments.
- Housing services challenging when a child is at home during school hours and arranging appointments to allow school pick up and drop off.
- Foundry Medical Practice appointing a school link safeguarding officer to work with schools in locality B to ensure repeated illness is addressed.
- Sheffield Childrens Hospital offering appointments in the community, in the school or virtual.
- Sheffield Library Services questioning why children are in the library during school hours.
- South Yorkshire Police doing more 'stop and ask' challenges for children in the community.
- Attendance data and cohort meetings half termly with key stakeholders to consider children open to them, and their current attendance pattern.

Attendance of children with a social worker, caseworker, or keyworker

In September 2022, the DFE expectations around working together to improve attendance were shared through service away days with those who are considered caseworkers or keyworkers within children's services. The half day sessions focused on ensuring compliance with the DFE guidance, supporting young people to engage in education and the barriers to attendance. The expectations around capturing the child's voice, whole family working, attendance being a priority discussion at all meetings and home visits, and attendance on every plan were made clear to all staff. In May 2023 a joint audit was completed to consider whether the expectations were evident in practice. The results of the audit showed in most cases 'improving' or 'maintaining good attendance' was a key focus. Actions identified from the audit are being share and implemented.

Sheffield Inclusion model

Throughout 2022/23 work has been taking place via a multi-agency project group to develop a consistent and clear delivery model to improve inclusion. This model is building on practice happening across early help, locality working to manage SEND and citywide approaches to address the risk of exclusion. A strong focus has been on developing a relational model that enables system wide targeting of support. Specifically, it has sought to articulate and pilot practice at 'Team around the family', 'Team around the school', 'Team around the locality' and 'Team around the city' levels. The intent is to identify barriers to accessing learning at child, school and system level and seek to address this through a multi-disciplinary approach. The pilots have shown that this way of working can reduce absence and exclusion and build confidence across partnerships. Across 2023/24 we will seek to further roll out this way of working.

Other attendance Initiatives developed during 2022/23

MACE – Education in now presented at every multi agency child exploitation meeting, to consider the impact of the exploitation on attendance, education, post 16 opportunities, and exams.

EBSA – Sheffield has rolled out the use of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) strategies to support young people return to education through capturing the barriers from the child's voice and using graded exposure to return to school.

Educational Neglect Pathway – A group across Children's Services has come together to develop a clear pathway around educational neglect which has been shared with managers from across the service area and is being implemented to ensure escalation where families do not engage or require

extra help to engage with support measures. Educational neglect has been included within the new 'threshold of need' document for Sheffield.

Health – Relationships with GP practices, dentists, and the Integrated Care Board has improved this year with joint initiatives and communications to ensure we are working together to ensure children with health needs are able to attend.

Truancy – Working with South Yorkshire Police, City Centre Ambassadors, and the Meadowhall Security Team we have run truancy sweeps to explore the reasons young people of school age are not in school. Most of the reasons have been suspension, RTT or breakdown in relationship with the school although some general truancy was witnessed and addressed.

MHIS – Working with the mental health in schools (MHIS) teams we have identified strategies for school staff to work with young people at risk of not engaging with education due to their mental health.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Survey to schools

In Half Term 6 we consulted with schools about their experiences of implementing the new guidance and the support they have received from the Local Authority.

Early feedback suggests that schools have updated their policies and practice as a result of the new guidance. Schools have shared that they value the support and have described the benefits they've experienced from the termly targeted support meetings:

- *A chance to talk through strategies to support families. Celebrating successes. Sharing good practice.*
- *Reflecting on attendance data, having an additional agency give guidance and support, if I have any questions my link workers are super fast at responding to me and if they don't know the answer they search to find this for me.*
- *We present key pupils and discuss each one. It's good to gain immediate support and advice. The AISW has been able to implement key actions and advise the school as to our actions. We have taken on board advice to support families.*
- *To get me thinking about better / more efficient ways of monitoring attendance; To help me be aware of other agencies who can support; To get me to challenge myself and consider areas of current weakness or needs for development.*
- *Up-to-date data is shared, sharing of possible strategies, support throughout (not just at these meetings).*
- *Critical friend conversations are invaluable.*

Good Practice evidence by DfE attendance advisor

Due to the low level of attendance in Sheffield, we were allocated a DfE attendance advisor who worked with us from December 2021 to December 2022. This enabled a self-assessment of our position around attendance and plans to be put in place. The advisor helped us work through our improvement plan and particularly recognised the following work as areas of good practice that we have been developing both during the period of direct work and through communication since:

Attendance Charter - As part of the new attendance campaign, 'Every School Day Matters', we identified a need to work closer with key stakeholders to explore what they could do to work with us to create excellence in attendance. A charter was launched.

KPI's - As a Local Authority we set Key Performance Indicators on a citywide, locality and school-based level. School KPI's, targets and improvement plans are set during the Termly Meetings.

Compliance - Each locality within Sheffield has a dedicated Attendance Focused Inclusion and Attendance Specialist who hold the expected Termly Attendance Support Meetings. In Term 1 we were 99% compliant with the DFE expectations, Term 2 98% compliance and for this current term we are on track for 99% compliance again.

Networking - Citywide and Locality networking opportunities have been offered every half term with 93% of schools having attended at least 1 session.

Education Neglect – A group across Children's Services has come together to develop a clear pathway around educational neglect. Education is now presented at a variety of multi agency meetings, to consider the impact of attendance on other factors.

EBSA – Sheffield has rolled out the use of Emotionally Based School Avoidance strategies to support young people return to education through capturing the barriers from the child's voice.

Truancy – Working with South Yorkshire Police, City Centre Ambassadors and the Meadowhall Security Team we have run truancy sweeps to stop, explore and support children not in school.

Data improvements

The above data section of this report shows where improvements have been made across overall and school-based attendance.

FUTURE PRIORITIES AND PLAN

To improve school attendance, we need to continue to promote attendance as a key strategic aim for the city within our corporate plans and across Children's Services. We need to continue to recognise that attendance is everyone's business.

Within academic year 2023/24 we will seek to progress the following activity:

- Setting key performance across schools, localities, and the city for 2023/24.
- Further roll out of the attendance charter, and the "what 3 things' can you do' to create a citywide response from anchor organisations, including across SCC services.
- Further roll out of the attendance campaign through bus advertising and further targeted materials.
- Progress the roll out of the Inclusion Model to support schools as our delivery model to support better access to education.
- Relaunching the GP Protocol to ensure GPs are encouraging children to continue to engage in education and empowering parents to consider reasonable adjustments with the school.
- Further roll out of an EBSA strategy and pathway for the city working to ensure that children are identified at the earliest opportunity and supported appropriately.
- Further development of what constitutes educational neglect and how this can be addressed across all services.
- Further targeted work with schools to ensure that reduced timetables are reviewed and reduced.
- Work with LearnSheffield to develop school improvement activity related to attendance.
- Continue to strengthen the activity that takes place at child level to address absence, including more targeted use of attendance legal measures where there is evidence that all

support has been put in place and where it's assessed that legal measures can support change in behaviours.