

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Education & Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

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CONTACT OFFICER: Vikram Hansrani, Service Lead Inclusion
Jeannette Walker, Attendance Team Manager
(For all Enquiries) (01753) 787674 / 875256

WARD(S): All

PART I

FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

1. **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of the report is to provide the panel with up to date information about school attendance in Slough schools.

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Committee is requested to note the report and comment upon it.

3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

School attendance is linked to the LA's focus on the wider determinants of health such as education and training, housing, the economy and employment.

More young people should be able to leave education with the qualifications and skills they need to fulfil their aspirations.

3a. **Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

School attendance is linked to the LA's priority of protecting vulnerable children.

3b. **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful.

4. **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

There are no financial implications of proposed action.

(b) **Risk Management**

The report is for information so this does not apply.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

The report is for information so this does not apply.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

The report is for information so this does not apply.

5. **Supporting Information**

5.1 **Legal Background**

Parents have a legal responsibility under The Education Act to ensure that their children receive a suitable full-time education. This can be by regular attendance at school, at alternative provision, or otherwise (e.g. the parent can choose to educate their child at home).

Schools have a duty to monitor the attendance of all pupils on their roll and to take appropriate action when a child is not attending regularly. This could include contacting parents, arranging meetings with parents or sending warning letters. The Local Authority (LA) has a duty to enforce school attendance where it is identified the child is not attending school regularly.

The Department for Education categorises a child as a Persistent Absentee (PA) if they miss 10% or more of their possible sessions.

Slough Borough Council's Attendance Team is responsible for enforcement action for pupils of statutory school age and penalty notice's (fines) are an intervention available to promote better school attendance. Good attendance is essential to children's educational prospects.

5.2 **Absence Indicators**

School absence is monitored using 2 indicators

- (a) Overall Absence. This is the percentage of days lost to absence at a school or across a whole LA over a school year
- (b) Persistent Absence. This is the percentage of pupils at a school or across a whole LA who missed 10% or more of their possible sessions

5.3 **Issuing fines**

If a pupil has missed 5 days in a 12 week period and this was not authorised by the school, a fine warning can be issued to parents. If attendance does not improve then they will be fined £60 per parent per child. If it is not paid within 21 days this increases to £120. In the case of holidays during term time a fine is issued without a warning if they miss 5 consecutive days.

In 2017/18 there were 1535 fines issued in Slough. 89% of fines issued were for unauthorised family holiday and 11% for other unauthorised absence. 70% of fines issued were for primary aged pupils, 28% for secondary aged pupils and 2% for pupils attending special schools.

Fines are available to all authorities to use to address school attendance and in England 260,877 fines were issued during 2017/18.

Fines give parents an opportunity to discharge their liability for the offence committed by failing to ensure their child attends school regularly. Parents can be

prosecuted if they do not pay the fine. Decisions about prosecution are taken on a case by case basis.

The table below shows the growth in numbers of fines issued over the last 5 years;

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of fines issued	481	1112	1025	1274	1535

5.4 Prosecutions

If a pupil is missing more than 10% of their time at school, despite actions taken by the school, the case can be referred to the LA. The LA will initially contact the parent and if this does not result in an improvement within 6 weeks, recommend to the school that enforcement action is taken. In a minority of cases this leads to prosecution resulting in court imposed fines and a criminal record. In 2017/18 there were 47 prosecutions and all parents were found guilty.

5.5 Absence Statistics

Attendance across all LAs is monitored by the DfE. Absence data is published annually and the most recent national data for 2017/18 was published in March 2019.

The table below shows the overall, authorised, unauthorised and persistent absence rates in Slough for the last 5 years. The latest National data is also shown;

	Slough 2013/14	Slough 2014/15	Slough 2015/16 **	Slough 2016/17	Slough 2017/18	Latest available National Data 2017/18
Primary						
Overall	4.0	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.2
Authorised	3.1	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.2	3.0
Unauthorised	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.1
Persistent Absence	1.7	2.0	8.7	8.5	9.4	8.7
Secondary						
Overall	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.6	5.5
Authorised	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.9
Unauthorised	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.6
Persistent Absence	2.2	2.8	8.9	8.8	9.4	13.9
Special Schools						
Overall	10.6	10.7	11.0	10.9	11.4	10.2
Authorised	8.5	9.2	10.7	10.5	9.2	8.0
Unauthorised	2.1	1.5	0.3	0.4	2.3	2.2
Persistent Absence	17.9	17.3	33.0	32.4	34.2	29.6
All Schools - Primary, Secondary and Special Schools						
Overall	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.6	4.8
Authorised	3.2	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.5
Unauthorised	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.4
Persistent Absence	2.1	2.5	9.0	8.9	9.7	11.2

** In 2015/16 the PA threshold set by the DfE was reduced from 15% to 10% and a change in the methodology introduced.

Slough is above national average across the primary and special schools sector and below national average across the secondary sector.

A report published in March 2019 by the DfE shows nationally;

- An increase in overall absence since 2016/17 due to higher rates of both authorised and unauthorised absence.
- Absence in special schools has been increasing at a faster rate than primary or secondary schools
- The rises in unauthorised absence in recent years is most marked in special schools and primary schools.
- Persistent absentees account for almost a third (32.4%) of all authorised absence and more than half (54.1%) of all unauthorised absence

Actions are being taken to address the primary and special schools attendance in Slough with 70% of fines issued in 2017/18 for primary aged pupils and an increase in enforcement action across special schools.

An Attendance Guidance Pack published to all schools contains clear processes for making referrals to the Attendance Service. All schools have an allocated Attendance/CME Officer to work with.

5.6 The table below shows how Slough is ranked nationally (152 LAs) and against statistical neighbours (group of 11 LAs) in 2017/18;

	Overall absence % 2017/18	Slough's ranking with statistical neighbours (group of 11 LAs). The lower the ranking the higher the absence	Slough's ranking nationally (out of 152 LAs) The lower the ranking the higher the absence
Primary	4.4	7 th	110 th
Secondary	4.6	1 st	4 th
Special	11.4	6 th	122 nd
All Schools	4.6	3 rd	33 rd

5.7 The table below shows the reasons for overall absence for all Slough schools for the last 5 years;

Authorised Absence

Absence Code	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	Latest available National Data 2017/18
C (Other authorised)	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	6%
E (Exclusions)	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%
H Family Holidays (agreed)	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
I Illness	60%	61%	57%	55%	57%	55%
M (Medical/Dental Appt)	4%	5%	4%	5%	5%	6%
R (Religious Observance)	3%	3%	6%	5%	3%	1%
S (Study Leave)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
T (Traveller Absence)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Unauthorised Absence

Absence Code	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	Latest National Data 2017/18
G Family Holidays (not agreed)	8%	7%	7%	8%	8%	8%
N (No reason given)	3%	2%	2%	3%	2%	1%
O (other unauthorised)	16%	16%	16%	16%	16%	17%
U (Late after registers)	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%

Slough is either in line or lower than national average across most absence categories for 2017/18 with the exception of authorised “illness” and “religious observance” (2% higher) and unauthorised “no reason given” (1% higher).

Nationally, illness is the main driver for overall absence and unauthorised holiday absence has been increasing gradually since 2006/07 whilst authorised holiday absence is much lower.

From September 2013 a regulations amendment clarified that term time leave may only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

5.8 Unauthorised Absence in Slough

In 2017/18 the number of days lost to unauthorised absence in Slough were;

Primary	34390 days
Secondary	21280 days
Special Schools	1140 days

Around 30% of unauthorised absence is due to Family holidays (not agreed).

In Slough in 2017/18, 1083 pupils took between 5 and 9 days unauthorised holiday, and 501 pupils took 10 or more days of unauthorised holiday.

6. Comments of Other Committees

This report has not yet been seen by any other committees.

7. Conclusion

The Attendance Team’s current priorities are to:

- Work with special schools to improve attendance rates
- Improve attendance at primary and secondary schools where possible

8. Appendices

- ‘A’ - Penalty Notice Protocol
- ‘B’ - Attendance Guidance Pack for Schools