



Inclusion and engagement in education

Update for Children and Families Scrutiny Committee

February 2022

School Attendance

- Attendance rates for 2021/22 have been significantly impacted by the Coronavirus Pandemic and related factors.
- The most significant drop has been seen in secondary phase and is around 2.5% points below attendance levels in previous times.
- Most of the reduced rates can be linked to schools that have had 'outbreaks' and been working closely with Public Health to reduce the risk of transmission.
- In parallel, there are a number of children whose attendance is critically low and schools are asked to refer those cases through Early Help processes (Team Around the School) to ensure the barriers to engagement are identified and support from the most appropriate agency is secured.
- On occasions, as a last resort, cases are escalated through legal processes and have resulted in significant fines being issued in court.
- To support schools with individual cases, supportive initiatives have been developed, including:
 - Emotion-based school avoidance (EBSA) interventions – led by Educational Psychology Service
 - Coronavirus Attendance Interventions – delivered by Young Somerset and REACH through Inclusion Partnership areas



Exclusions & Suspensions

- The use of exclusions and suspensions has increased in the 2021/22 academic year and based on current data, numbers are set to exceed Somerset's highest ever annual total.
- Reasons mirror previous years with 'Persistent Disruptive Behaviour' being the most prevalent, followed by 'Verbal Abuse to Adult' and 'Physical Assault Against Pupil'.
- Suspensions and exclusions are two of the indicators reviewed under the School Attendance Monitoring Protocol and where thresholds are met, schools are contacted in order to discuss what additional support they might benefit from.
- Inclusion Partnership Boards are being further developed across Somerset with the aim of driving down exclusion and suspension and increasing attendance.
- A key activity of the Partnership Boards will be to redesign the offer of local intervention, outreach and support based on need and creating a forum to develop and share good practice in relation to Inclusion.
- The Boards, in their new format, will meet for the first time after Easter.



Supporting Inclusion

- Ensuring a consistent and inclusive offer for our children and young people is one of the key area priorities
- SENCos and School Leaders have a linked advisory teacher to support them with inclusive provision which meets the needs of their learners
- A new Graduated Response Tool will be launched in March detailing the provision expected and supporting schools to deliver this
- SENCo networking is facilitated and encouraged – Whole Education is also promoting peer support between schools
- Closer links between School Improvement, Advisory Services, Statutory SEND Team, Health, and Children's Social Care enable joint working towards improvements in early identification and intervention
- A data dashboard has been shared with schools so that they can see how they compare to their neighbouring schools, identify good practice, and learn from one another – this will be accessible by schools from Easter



Supporting the most Vulnerable

- The Virtual School has responsibility for promoting better educational outcomes for Children Looked After and Previously Looked After
- Children looked after have a named advisory teacher, who oversees their personal education plan on a termly basis
- The Virtual Head holds a budget for each child, and this is allocated to the school if additional funding is required to support better outcomes. The impact of funding and any other interventions are measured.
- Children looked after are tracked to ensure they are making sufficient progress towards their goals
- The remit has recently and temporarily been extended to encompass all children with a social worker. In Somerset, the Virtual School also works to promote better outcomes for children with SEND, and those open to the Youth Justice Service. We work with colleagues across Inclusion and Education to achieve these goals.
- Our work with these groups of children takes the form of advice and guidance for schools and partners and some casework in specific circumstances.
- There is also a package of training which is offered to schools and settings, as well as our partners across children's services.
- The Virtual School now has a team of specialist staff, who can offer support to schools and settings across a broad range of needs.





Key messages

- Work in progress – still a long way to go
- Impact of the pandemic
- What we are focusing on:
 - The right support offer – easy to access
 - A relationship-based approach – working with families and schools
 - A partnership approach – schools working together to support and challenge