

Children and Young People Select Committee

A meeting of the Children and Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 17 January 2024.

Present: Cllr Carol Clark (Chair), Cllr Barbara Inman (Vice-Chair), Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr David Reynard, Cllr Stephen Richardson, Cllr Paul Rowling, Cllr Emily Tate, Cllr Sally Ann Watson, Cllr Katie Weston

Officers: Eddie Huntington, Vanessa Housley (Ch'S), Judy Trainer (CS)

Also in attendance: Janet Bradley (Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees)

Apologies: None

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| 1 | Evacuation Procedure The evacuation procedure was noted. |
| 2 | Declarations of Interest There were no interests declared. |
| 3 | Minutes AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair. |
| 4 | Scrutiny Review of Narrowing the Gap in Educational Attainment The Select Committee received a copy of the draft Attendance Strategy 2023 – 2026 which provided context for the Select Committee’s review work. Key issues highlighted and discussed were as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attendance levels were broadly in line with the national picture with primary slightly above• Attendance seemed to become more of an issue following transition from secondary to college• Colleges were bound by the same legislation as schools but were perhaps less well equipped to deal with complex cases and engage with vulnerable young people• All schools had been invited to contribute to the draft strategy• The strategy reflected the need for a strong partnership approach to tackle the issue• With regard to the rise in absence levels for girls, discussion at Closing the Gap cluster meetings suggested that this might be attributed to period poverty or girls having caring responsibilities in the home• Members questioned whether strict toilet policies in schools also had an impact on attendance levels for girls. This reiterated the need for a strong pupil voice to understand the reasons for absence |

- Schools were able to submit data around school attendance through the DfE portal. The large majority of schools submitted data in this way
- Many schools demonstrated an inclusive culture. However, others adopted an approach of educating pupils only if they were ready to be educated. The reasons behind this difference were recognised by the Select Committee and the challenges for larger secondaries were noted, where staff/ pupil ratios were larger. Although attendance was still a line of enquiry in the new Ofsted framework, it was no longer a limiting factor
- Covid had impacted on attendance levels, especially in deprived areas
- Poor attendance directly often raised safeguarding concerns
- Absence due to family holidays remained an issue as the price differentials during term time and school holidays had never been addressed with holiday companies. It was acknowledged that a national agreement was needed
- Changing attitudes to technology also led to a belief among some parents that online learning was acceptable as an alternative to attending school
- If a child was being educated under special arrangements, on a reduced timetable, this would not be recorded as absence because this had been agreed with the school in advance. However, it was stressed a reduced timetable would only ever be for a short-term period and for a maximum of six months
- If a child was excluded from school, there would be no absence marked against them

The Select Committee also received a presentation setting out feedback from schools from pupil premium strategy statements on school websites. The feedback revealed increases in concerns in the following areas:

- Attendance
- Communication – oracy
- Cultural Capital
- Impacts of the costs of living crisis

Based on the feedback, the Select Committee agreed to amend the second strand of their review. The review would therefore focus on attendance and communication.

The Committee were advised that two workshop sessions had now been arranged with schools and other stakeholders on 8 and 22 March 2024. Ahead of the workshops, pupil and parent/carer interviews would be conducted in a range of Stockton primary and secondary schools and the feedback from these interviews would be available for the workshops. Discussions were also taking place regarding other engagement work that could be carried out to provide additional insight.

The Select Committee supported the change in focus of the scope and agreed that a further key question be added to the lines of enquiry for the communication strand:

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the impacts of low levels of communication/ language development for our students? <p>AGREED that the information be noted and a breakdown of school attendance be presented to the next meeting.</p> |
| 5 | Select Committee Work Programme AGREED that the Work Programme be noted. |