

# Persistent Absenteeism: Statutory School Age Children in Hillingdon



**A review by the Children, Families & Education Select Committee**

**Members of the Committee:**

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**2024/2025**

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## Chair's Foreword



Persistent absenteeism among statutory school-age children is a concern, both nationally and here in Hillingdon. It is a complex issue that touches on education, health, family life, and community wellbeing. Recognising the importance of this challenge, the Children, Families & Education Select Committee undertook a comprehensive review to better understand the causes, impacts, and potential solutions to persistent absence from school.

Throughout this review, we have listened carefully to the voices of young people, parents, carers, educators, and professionals. Their experiences and insights have been invaluable in shaping our understanding and informing our recommendations. We are particularly grateful to the young people who shared their personal stories with courage and honesty, and to the parents and carers who spoke candidly about the barriers they face.

The evidence we gathered paints a clear picture: persistent absenteeism is rarely the result of a single factor. It is often the outcome of overlapping factors – ranging from mental health challenges and special educational needs to housing instability, bullying, and the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these issues requires a coordinated and compassionate response from schools, the Council, and our wider community.

This report sets out a series of practical recommendations aimed at improving attendance and supporting families. These include strengthening parental engagement, enhancing mental health support, fostering inclusive school environments, and improving data monitoring and community collaboration. We believe these actions will help ensure that every child in Hillingdon has the opportunity to thrive in education.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank all those who contributed to this review. Your voices have helped shape a clearer path forward. We remain committed to working together to reduce persistent absenteeism and to ensure that every child in our borough receives the education they deserve.

**Councillor Heena Makwana**  
**Chair of the Children, Families & Education Select Committee**

## Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank all officers and witnesses for their valuable contributions to this important review:

- Alex Coman, Director for Children's Safeguarding and Care
- Ash Knight, Children's Participation Team Manager
- Donna Hugh, Safeguarding Manager
- Jayda Jones, Children's Rights & Participation Officer
- Karen Quantrell, Attendance Officer, Haydon School
- Kathryn Angelini, Assistant Director for Education
- Parents, carers and foster carers
- Sally Edwards, Attendance Officer
- Schools who took part in the survey
- Surjeet Johra, Headteacher, Wood End Primary School
- Young people & Youth Council

## Terms of Reference

The following Terms of Reference were agreed by the Committee from the outset of the review:

1. To identify the prevalence and patterns of persistent absenteeism in statutory school age children in Hillingdon, including a reference to primary planning areas.
2. To explore the root causes and contributing factors of persistent absenteeism in statutory school age children in Hillingdon.
3. To consider the impact of persistent absenteeism on academic outcomes of statutory school age children in Hillingdon.
4. To understand and explore the nature of partnership working in relation to persistent absenteeism in statutory school age children in Hillingdon, including parents/ carers, young people, teachers, officers and other stakeholders.
5. To review the effectiveness of existing interventions and policies in place for children and families struggling with persistent absenteeism in Hillingdon.
6. To explore the measures in place for child protection and safeguarding in relation to attendance.
7. To review and identify the trends and patterns of persistent absenteeism when considering demographic factors such as age, race, religion, wealth and disability, as well as considering differences between the North and South of the borough.
8. To review how other Local Authorities, including statistical neighbours, are tackling persistent absenteeism.
9. Subject to the Committee's findings, to make any conclusions, propose actions, service and policy recommendations to the decision-making Cabinet.

## Summary of recommendations to Cabinet

Through the witness sessions and evidence received during the detailed review, Members have agreed the following recommendations to Cabinet:

**1**

### **Parental Engagement and Support**

1. Officers to continue to work with schools, nurseries and early years centres to educate and inform parents and carers about the positive benefits of school attendance, both academic and social, as a means of early intervention.
2. Officers to investigate the use of the Learn Hillingdon service to educate and inform adult learners (who are parents) about the importance of school attendance.
3. The Council to support schools to deliver welcome programmes for families new to the borough.

**2**

### **Mental Health & Wellbeing**

4. The Council and schools to continue to work collaboratively, supporting those families with children and young people who are persistently absent due to poor mental health, and to signpost to alternative services such as CAMHS, KOOTH, Hillingdon Autistic Care & Support (HACS) and CNWL where appropriate.

**3**

### **School Environment & Culture**

5. Council to encourage Attendance cluster groups to share good practice among schools on a range of topics such as EBSNA, anti-bullying and trauma-informed practice.

**4**

### **Data & Monitoring**

6. Ask schools to explore how pupil attendance at after school clubs correlates with general pupil attendance within schools. What are the patterns and trends?

**5**

### **Collaboration & Community Involvement**

7. Council to continue to raise awareness and highlight the positive benefits of school attendance, both academic and social, within local community and local partnership groups. To include a poster campaign in schools, libraries, Council venues and Hillingdon People.

# Background to the review

## Aim of the review

Following its meeting on 15 November 2023, the Select Committee agreed to consider the issue of persistent absence among statutory school age children in Hillingdon, including how this has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is intended that the review will support the work of the Attendance Support service in helping to shape its ways of working, identifying areas of weakness and how overall engagement with key stakeholders can be improved.

## Context and Key Information

### What is Persistent Absenteeism?

A child is persistently absent if they miss 10% or more of their school sessions. Children persistently absent play catch-up with work, miss time with friends, and miss out on clubs and extra-curricular activities (Attendance Plus, n.d.).

Attendance	Days missed
100%	0 days missed
99%	1 day missed
98%	3 days missed
97%	1 week missed
96%	1 and a half weeks missed
94%	2 weeks missed
93%	2 and a half weeks missed
92%	3 weeks missed
90%	4 weeks missed
85%	4 and a half weeks missed
82%	Half a term missed
75%	7 weeks missed
<i>Table 1: Persistent absence, what is it?</i>	

### Impact of absence

Being in school is important to every child's achievement, wellbeing, and wider development.

Research found that pupils who performed better both at the end of primary and secondary school missed fewer days than those who did not perform as well (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk, 2022).

Also, pupils with higher Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 attainment in 2019 had lower levels of

absence over the key stage compared to those with lower attainment (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk, 2022).

Furthermore, schools can have a social benefit of facilitating positive peer relationships, which can contribute to better mental health and wellbeing. Attendance at school is also crucial in preparing young people for successful transition to adulthood, and to support their longer term economic and social participation in society (The Education Hub, 2023).

## **Contributory factors**

Persistent absenteeism can be impacted by a wide range of factors and challenges, including:

### **Health challenges**

- Children with long-term or chronic illnesses may face difficulties attending school regularly
- Incontinence can have a negative impact on young people's development, quality of life, and their experience of school – it can lead to bullying, stigma and poor self-image (Richardson, Randall and Lynden, 2019)
- Poor nutrition may result in decreased immunity and greater susceptibility to illness, which in turn can lead to increased levels of absence (Sorhaindo and Feinstein, 2006)
- Mental health challenges including anxiety and depression can contribute to school avoidance

### **Socio-economic factors**

- Poverty – families facing financial challenges may struggle to provide basic necessities, impacting children's ability to attend school consistently
- Housing instability or frequent relocations can disrupt a child's education

### **Family dynamics**

- Lack of parental engagement can contribute to absenteeism
- Family conflicts such as divorce or domestic violence can impact a child's well-being and attendance

### **School environment**

- Bullying at school may lead to a child avoiding attendance
- Unsupportive or unwelcoming school environments can negatively affect student engagement

### **Academic challenges**

- Undiagnosed or unaddressed learning difficulties can lead to frustration and school avoidance
- Young people may disengage if they find the curriculum irrelevant or not challenging enough



#### Transportation

- Limited access to reliable transportation can hinder regular school attendance

#### Peer influence

- Negative peer influence or the desire to fit in may contribute to absenteeism

#### Communication barriers

- Language barriers, particularly among families with limited English proficiency, can hinder communication between parents and schools

#### COVID-19

- Learning loss: The pandemic and associated restrictions have led to learning disruptions for children and young people. School closures, remote learning, and other challenges have contributed to gaps in education
- *It is important to note that the challenge of persistent absenteeism existed prior to the onset of the pandemic*

#### Holidays

- Some families struggle to afford holidays outside of term time, and parents can pay over 16 times more by sticking to school holidays (The Independent, 2024)
- In 2017, a petition signed by over 200,000 people urged the government to ban travel firms from increasing prices during school holidays (The Independent, 2017)

### Number of cases

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, persistent absence had been gradually decreasing since 2010. However, since the onset of the pandemic, the rate of persistent absence in schools in England has increased significantly. In 2018/19 the rate was 10.9%. In each year since, the rate has been higher (see table below).

It has been reported that some pupils stay home with parents on Fridays, contributing to the issue (BBC News, 2023a). Research also shows that if children miss more than a day in the first week of term, 55% of them go on to be persistently absent for the rest of the term (BBC News, 2023b).

The urgency of this crisis calls for concerted efforts to ensure that every child has access to education and support, regardless of the challenges they may be facing (Sky News, 2023).

Academic year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
<b>Overall</b>	11.2%	10.9%	-	12.1%	22.5%	21.2%	20.0%
<b>School type</b>							
Primary	8.7%	8.2%	-	8.8%	17.7%	16.2%	14.6%
Secondary	13.9%	13.7%	-	14.8%	27.7%	26.5%	25.6%
Special	29.6%	28.8%	-	48.9%	40.4%	38.3%	37.2%
<b>Free school meal (FSM)</b>							
Eligible	23.6%	22.8%	-	24.4%	37.2%	36.5%	34.8%
Not eligible	8.8%	8.3%	-	8.3%	17.5%	15.6%	14.1%
<b>Special Educational Need (SEN)</b>							
EHCP	25.1%	24.6%	-	42.3%	36.9%	36.0%	35.5%
SEN support	18.3%	17.9%	-	18.9%	32.0%	31.1%	30.1%
No SEN	9.4%	9.0%	-	9.3%	20.0%	18.4%	16.8%
<b>Gender</b>							
Female	10.9%	10.6%	-	11.7%	22.8%	21.4%	20.1%
Male	11.4%	11.1%	-	12.4%	22.2%	21.0%	19.8%
<p><i>Table 2: Persistent absence by demographic (Note: there is no data for 2019/20)</i>  <i>(Pupil absence in schools in England, academic year 2023/24, explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk, 2025)</i>  <i>Note: at the time of writing, the latest available data covered 2023/24, published 20 March 2025</i></p>							

From the above table, it can be seen that young people in Special Schools; Free School Meal recipients; and those with an EHCP have higher than average rates of persistent absenteeism.

## Government response

The Government's Education Select Committee is conducting an inquiry into this issue, recognising that COVID-19 has likely had a damaging effect on school attendance. The Committee is examining why disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are more likely to miss school than their peers (Committees.Parliament.uk, 2023).

## Repercussions

Local Councils and schools in the UK have legal powers to address situations where children are missing school without a valid reason. If a child is missing school, the following actions can be taken (GOV.UK, 2011):

### Parenting Order

This requires parents to attend a parenting class and to take steps to improve their child's school attendance.

### Education Supervision Order

Where cooperation is lacking, the Local Authority can apply for an Education Supervision

Order – a supervisor will be appointed to assist the parent in getting their child back into education. This can be issued instead of or as well as prosecution.

### School Attendance Order

If the Local Authority believes a child is not receiving an education, they issue a School Attendance Order. Parents have 15 days to provide evidence that the child is registered with the school listed in their order or is receiving home education. Failure to comply may result in prosecution or fines.

### Fines (Penalty Notices)

The Local Authority can issue a fine (or penalty notice) to parents. Under the new national framework (information available [here](#)), all schools will be required to consider a fine when a child has missed 10 or more sessions (equivalent to 5 days) for unauthorised reasons.

Effective from August 2024, the fine for school absence across the country will be £80 (up from £60, BBC News, 2024) if paid within 21 days, or £160 if paid within 28 days. Fines per parent will be capped at two fines within any three-year period. This change is part of a government initiative to restore attendance levels to pre-pandemic norms. Head teachers retain discretion over which cases to refer to the Council for potential fines and where additional support is needed.

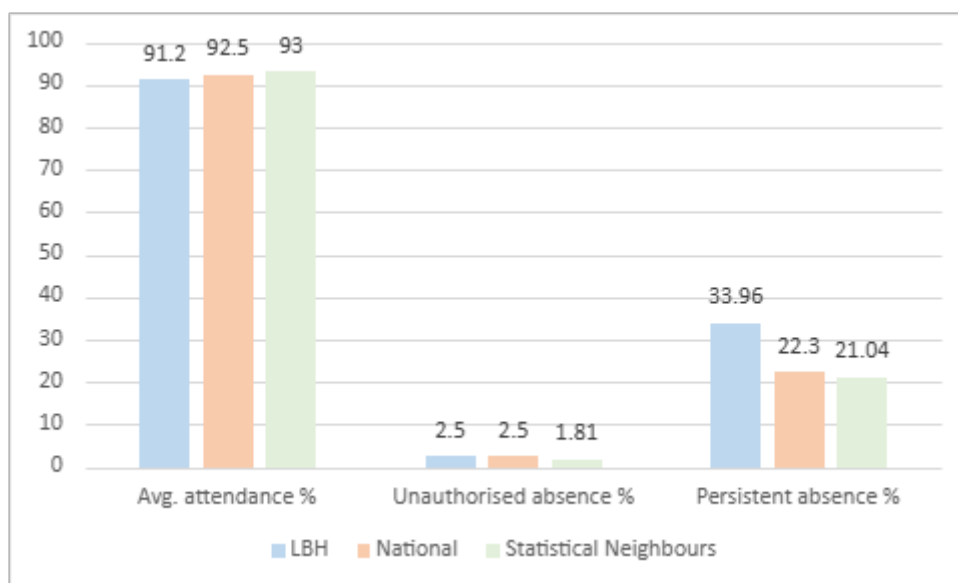
However, it has been suggested that fining parents whose child is persistently absent from school does not work and can make the problem worse, according to testimony given to MPs (BBC News, 2023c).

### Prosecution

In severe cases, parents could face a fine of up to £2,500, a community order, or a jail sentence of up to 3 months.

## Attendance in Hillingdon

The graph below shows Hillingdon's Statutory School Age attendance rates during 2022/23 compared to those nationally. (As the review started in November 2023, this was the latest available data at that time).



Graph 1: Data: Department for Education Aug 23

The data shows that whilst Hillingdon's overall attendance and rate of unauthorised absence was broadly in line with national figures, the rate of persistent absence was higher. (A child who only attends school for 90% or less of the time is classed as a persistent absentee).

## Plan moving forward

In May 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) published new guidance for attendance in schools called 'Working together to improve school attendance' (GOV.UK, 2022) which came into effect from September 2022. Broadly speaking, it highlighted:

- Improving attendance is everyone's business. Attendance is never 'solved' and is part of a continuous process
- The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent or carer to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school
- Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly

Moving forward, the expectations of schools and local authorities have changed considerably. Under the new guidance, all schools are now expected to:

- Develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance
- Have a clear school attendance policy which all staff, pupils and parents understand
- Accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence
- Regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place
- Build strong relationships with families, listen to and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them
- Share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities, and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe

Local authorities are now expected to:

- Provide all schools with a named contact in the Attendance Support Team. This includes independent and specialist settings
- Create networking opportunities to share effective practice
- Hold termly targeted support meetings with all schools
- Be part of multi-agency efforts to improve attendance borough-wide with schools and other partner agencies
- Provide formal support to schools, including parenting contracts and education supervision orders
- Initiate legal action including penalty notices, parenting orders and prosecution

In Hillingdon, we have already begun much of this work, and we have extensive plans for the academic year ahead. To date, we have:

- Rebranded our Participation service to Attendance Support
- Developed a new practice model to meet the revised guidelines from the DfE for allocated officers to use when conducting their termly meetings with schools. These meetings will focus on overall attendance and persistent and severe absence, as well as having a greater emphasis on the attendance of vulnerable cohorts and those children placed on part-time timetables or in alternative provisions
- Published revised guidance on attendance for all schools
- Published revised guidance on the use of part-time timetables
- Published revised guidance on alternative provision
- Successfully delivered a series of webinars and provided training and resources to all schools in the borough to support with the implementation of the Working Together to Improve Attendance guidance for this academic year
- Created a more robust system to track and process unauthorised exceptional leave
- Engaged with the parents and carers of pupils that had one day of absence in the first week of term in the last academic year or pupils where they have been previously recorded as persistent or severely absent to encourage parents to prepare them for the start of the new term
- Created and shared an attendance self-evaluation form for schools to utilise
- Taken part in refresher training with legal colleagues in the use of Education Supervision Orders

Over the coming year we have plans to:

- Publish a revised borough-wide protocol for the use of penalty notices
- Devise a three-year strategy for improving school attendance which utilises the support of statutory partners
- Work more closely with colleagues in the Virtual School to promote the importance of attendance of all children with a social worker
- Improve communication and advice with schools via virtual drop-in clinics for schools

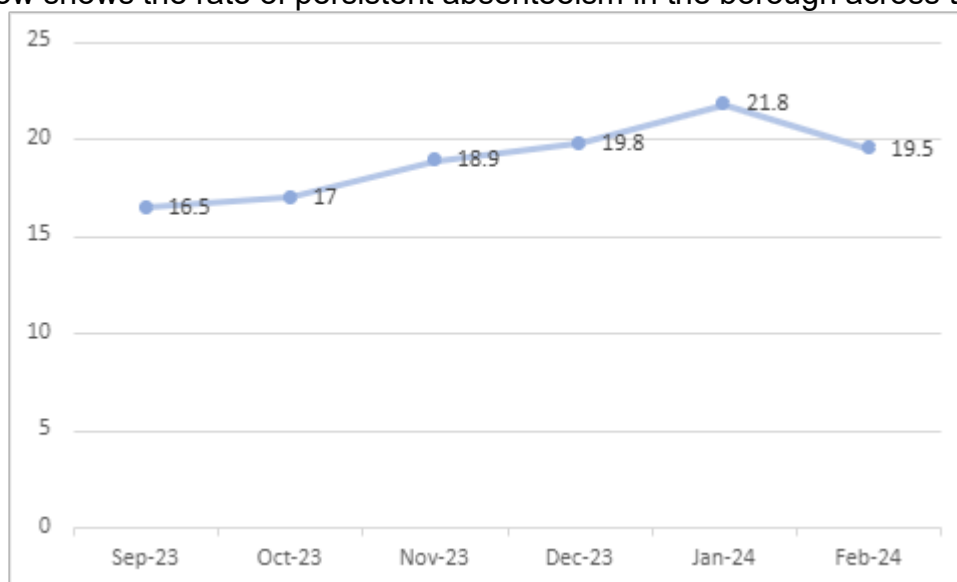
to attend to discuss any concerns regarding attendance. These clinics will be held fortnightly

- Invest in our Attendance Support service by providing increased training opportunities in key issues affecting attendance, such as Emotional Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA), working with children who have suffered complex trauma and working with families who have had negative experiences of education
- Develop attendance hubs in parts of the borough or with clusters of schools which may be struggling with particular aspects of attendance and to promote the sharing of good practice

## Update: March 2024

On 01 March 2024 the rate of persistent absenteeism in Hillingdon was 19.5% for the academic year. This compares favourably to the national average of 20.6% for the same period.

The chart below shows the rate of persistent absenteeism in the borough across the year:



Graph 2: Data: Department for Education 01 Mar 2024

With the exception of February where there has been a slight decrease, the rate of persistent absenteeism was growing by 1% on average month on month. If this trend were to continue, Hillingdon's rate of persistent absenteeism could reach 26-28% by the end of the academic year. Although this is lower than last year's rate of 33.9%, it highlights there is more work to be done to bring this number down even further.

Further preliminary data analysis has revealed:

- There is little difference in the rate of persistent absenteeism between the genders; the average rate for girls is 19.4% and boys 19.5%
- The rate of persistent absenteeism is highest in our special school settings (38%). The average rate in secondary schools is 22.5% and in primary schools is 16.2%

- The rate of persistent absenteeism in our vulnerable cohorts was:
  - All children with SEND: 28.4%
  - Children on an EHCP: 33%
  - Children in receipt of Free School Meals: 31.3%
  - Looked After Children: 27.1%
  - Children in Need: 59.6%
  - Children on a Child Protection Plan: 40%

## Progress to date

Since the last update was provided to the Committee, the Attendance Support team have made progress in the following areas:

- A revised borough-wide protocol has been published on the use of penalty notices
- Training on Emotional Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) has been undertaken by all team members and has been offered to key colleagues in all Hillingdon schools
- Four members of the Attendance Support team are undertaking training via the Virtual School in how to work with children who have suffered complex trauma
- Three attendance hubs have so far been held involving schools in the West Drayton, Hillingdon and Ruislip areas, with a further hub planned for Hayes before the end of the Spring term
- Commissioned a deep-dive analysis into attendance and absence for all children with a social worker being undertaken by the Virtual School Project Manager
- Recruitment is underway for an Education Project Manager (12-month role) to support with accelerating progress in attendance
- Planning for fortnightly virtual clinics is underway with a plan to launch in the summer term

## Update: March 2025

### Context and background

At the start of the Select Committee's review into persistent absenteeism, data showed that Hillingdon's rate of persistent absence was higher than the national average. Graph 1, (page 12) above, shows data for academic year 2022/23.

### Progress to date

At the start of the 2023/24 academic year, the Attendance Support team committed to a number of actions to support with changing the landscape of persistent absence in Hillingdon. The following outlines the progress made:

- **Publish a revised borough-wide protocol for the use of penalty notices:** This was revised and published following consultation with schools and partners in the police in September 2024. The policy will continue to be reviewed annually. As a result of this work, penalty notices referrals have reduced from 621 in 2023/24 to 380 in 2024/25 (figures for September to March each year).
- **Devise a three-year strategy for improving school attendance:** School attendance has been encompassed in the wider Education Strategy 2025-30 under Priority 3 (Addressing the issues of the decade). Once this strategy is published, the team will develop a more focused three-year strategy with associated action plan
- **Work more closely with colleagues in the Virtual School to promote the importance**



**of attendance of all children with a social worker:** The Attendance Support team is working in collaboration with the Virtual School on two initiatives across the borough; the Walking Bus and Breakfast Clubs. The Walking Bus initiative is aimed at supporting children to get into school in the mornings and is being piloted with Harefield Infant School, Harefield Junior School and St Martins. The Breakfast Club initiative focused on encouraging schools to offer this intervention or extend their current offer (at no extra cost) to provide a further incentive for children to attend school

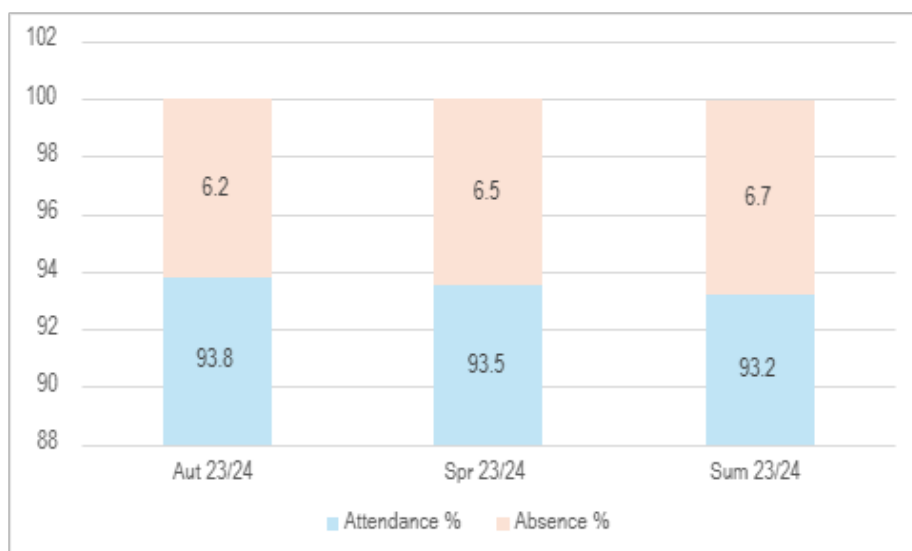
- **Improve communication and advice with schools via virtual drop-in clinics:** Established in summer term 2024 for professionals such as social workers to gain advice and guidance on issues relating to school attendance. In summer term 2025, this will be broadened to include professionals across the Safeguarding Partnership
- **Training opportunities in key issues affecting attendance:** EBSNA training has been completed by all Attendance staff alongside wider Education colleagues and seven members of the team have completed Attachment Lead training alongside colleagues in schools to upskill them in working with children who struggle to build attachments and those who have suffered from trauma and loss
- **Develop attendance hubs with clusters of schools:** These were developed in spring term 2024 and have successfully run termly thereafter. Hillingdon's attendance hubs are referred to as clusters and are locality-based. The clusters are hosted by volunteer schools, and all are attended by the entire Attendance Support team. The clusters typically involve discussions about common issues affecting school attendance, are an opportunity to share good practice and provide a forum for partner agencies to promote their services to schools and encourage more collaboration

In addition to this, the team has more recently gone through a full restructure to ensure it is more fit for purpose to deliver on the new DfE expectations regarding school attendance. This has included appointing a Team Manager who has strategic oversight of the whole team, two senior officers who are responsible for leading on legal interventions, children on part-time timetable and children attending a school commissioned Alternative Provision and an additional three officers.

As a result of the hard work done by our schools with the support of our Attendance Support team, the attendance picture in Hillingdon is changing.

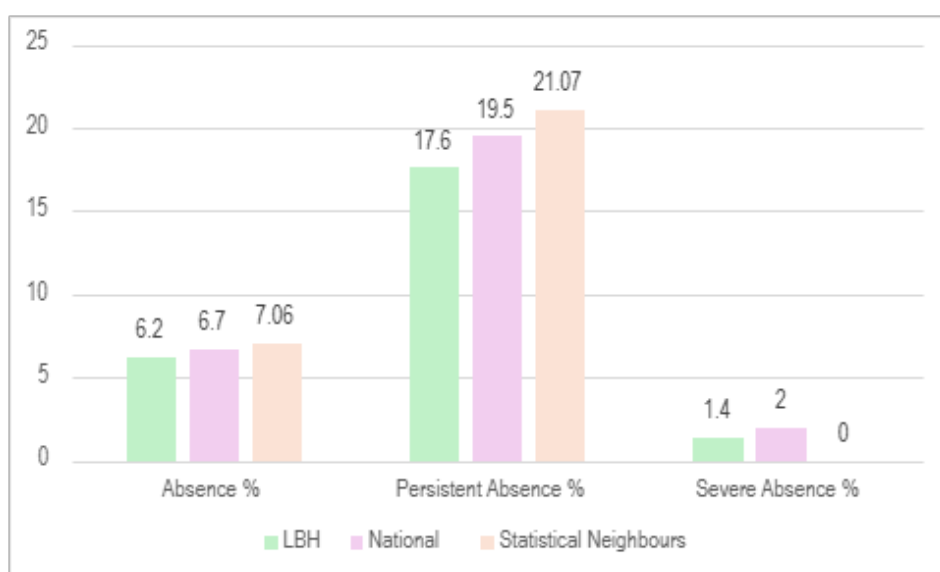
The graph below shows the rates of attendance and absence across the three terms of the last academic year (2023/24) and indicates the rates remained broadly consistent across the year:





Graph 3: Source: NCER January 2025

The graph below shows Hillingdon's Statutory School Age absence rates by the end of the last academic year (2023/24) compared to those nationally and against our statistical neighbours. Please note, the severely absent rate for our statistical neighbours is not currently available.



Graph 4: Source: NCER January 2025 & DfE March 2025

The data shows that great improvement has been made across all three metrics in Hillingdon and that the rate of absence for our children is lower than the national average in all categories.

## Update: June 2025

Mental health support workers are being trained and deployed to work in schools in Hillingdon. The role of mental health support workers is to provide 1-2-1 guided self-help interventions to young people and their parents/ carers, consultations, and whole school approach events. They also offer some specialist interventions.

## Relevant legislation

The relevant legislation relating to persistent absenteeism are below:

- [The Education Act 1996](#)
- [The Children Act 1989](#)
- [The Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)
- [The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)
- [The Education \(Parenting Contracts and Parenting Orders\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)
- [The Education \(Penalty Notices\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)

# Evidence & Witness Testimony

## Witness Sessions

In agreeing the review's Terms of Reference, the Committee sought to gain an in-depth understanding of persistent absenteeism. To do this, the Committee sought to structure its review with key themes. These themes allowed the Committee to hear testimonies from a range of important stakeholders. The evidence received through these witness sessions is outlined below.

Witness Session	Theme	Witnesses
Witness Session 1 – 14 March 2024	Setting the scene/ The Council's role	Assistant Director for Education Attendance Support Officer
Witness Session 2 – 18 April 2024	The Voice of Other Authorities	-
Witness Session 3 – 18 June 2024	The Voice of Schools	Principal, Wood End Park Academy Attendance Officer, Haydon School
Witness Session 4 – 14 August 2024	The Voice of Young People	Children's Participation Team Manager Children's Rights & Participation Officer Young people
Witness Session 5 – 17 July 2024	Child Protection/ Safeguarding	Director for Children's Safeguarding and Care Safeguarding Manager
Witness Session 6 – 06 November 2024	The Voice of Parents/ Carers	Parents/ carers/ foster carers
<i>Table 3: Witness sessions</i>		

For ease of reading, the detailed minutes and accounts of these witness sessions are available as background papers. They are briefly summarised below to provide a comprehensive understanding of the discussions and findings.

## Witness Session 1

During the first witness session, the Assistant Director for Education and Attendance Support Officer provided an update on persistent absenteeism, noting a current rate of 19.5%, which was slightly lower than the national average of 20.6%. However, while projections indicated that the rate could rise to 26-28% by the end of the year, this would still indicate an improvement from the previous year's nearly 34%.

Several initiatives had been undertaken since November to address absenteeism, including implementing a revised borough-wide protocol for penalty notices and EBSNA training for team

members. Four members of the Attendance Support team were undergoing training to work with children experiencing complex trauma. This training aimed to help officers support families dealing with adverse childhood experiences and intergenerational trauma, which were linked to persistent absenteeism. Attendance hubs, also known as clusters, were launched in West Drayton, Hillingdon, and Ruislip, with plans for an additional hub later in the academic year. These hubs involved clusters of schools discussing common issues and tackling them together.

A newly recruited 12-month project manager in the Virtual School was focusing on children with a social worker, and another project manager was being advertised to focus on attendance.

Penalty notices could be issued for holidays or non-attendance. This was a big part of the issue of persistent absenteeism as Hillingdon issued a lot of particularly holiday penalty notices. Penalty notice money was used to pay for the penalty notice officer's work. The decision to issue a penalty rested with the school's headteacher and the penalty is issued by the Local Authority. Appeals could be heard in some instances where parents presented mitigating circumstances or additional evidence. There was no use of debt collection, though legal prosecution was possible.

It was important to ensure that penalty notices did not penalise the most vulnerable children or families experiencing difficulties, and it was also important to consider the context around the child and family situation before issuing a penalty notice. Members highlighted the issue of parents taking their children out of school for cheaper holidays. Educating parents on the importance of school attendance was part of a wider government initiative and there needed to be a focus on working with schools to reiterate the importance of daily attendance.

The size of the attendance team had remained similar, but its functions had changed. The team was previously called the Participation Team and used to have other functions such as Children Missing Education and tracking children who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Over the past 18 months, some of these functions had been taken out of this team, which was now solely focused on attendance support.

Engagement with parents was individualised to each school and attendance panels were a supportive mechanism for addressing attendance issues. Members also discussed the need for more generalised support for vulnerable families and the importance of interrupting the intergenerational cycle of absenteeism.

Persistent absentees fell into two main cohorts: those absent for extended periods needing reintegration support, and those absent on ad hoc days that accumulate over time.

Schools can take children and their parents to the attendance panel process, where the Attendance Support Officer collaborates with the family and school to address issues and barriers, potentially involving external partners for additional support.

In summary, the key issues from this session included:

- At the time of the session, the rate of persistent absenteeism was 19.5% which was slightly lower than the national average

- Several initiatives had since been undertaken to tackle persistent absenteeism. These included implementing a revised borough-wide protocol for penalty notices, EBSNA training, and training the Attendance Support team to work with children experiencing complex trauma
- Attendance hubs had been launched in West Drayton, Hillingdon, and Ruislip, with plans for another hub later in the academic year

The full account of this session can be found in the meeting minutes [here](#).

## Witness Session 2

In the second witness session, the Committee reviewed documents from other local authorities tackling persistent absenteeism. Buckinghamshire County Council and the London Borough of Camden were undertaking similar reviews. The London Borough of Harrow's School Attendance Intervention Model (AIM) was commended as a helpful document that applied borough-wide so that schools did not have to do their own thing.

The session emphasised the need for prevention and engagement with schools and young people, suggesting the involvement of the Youth Council and different methods of engaging with young people in future witness sessions. Schools were also a crucial partner in tackling absenteeism and engaging with them would also be an important part of the review.

It was important to consider cultural and geographical contexts in persistent absenteeism. It may also be useful to break down absenteeism into categories, such as those who want to attend school but cannot due to health or religious reasons and those who do not want to attend.

It was suggested that information on the Hillingdon website could be presented in a more accessible way for multi-lingual families. The Hillingdon LEAP website also contained lots of information for schools and parents.

The session highlighted the importance of a strong attendance ethos and the need for a borough-wide approach.

It was noted that this review aligned with one by Central Government, which highlighted its importance.

In summary, the key issues from this session included:

- Other Local Authorities had conducted similar reviews
- The session highlighted the need to engage schools and young people
- It was important to focus on preventative measures

The full account of this session can be found in the meeting minutes [here](#).

## Witness Session 3

The third witness session was attended by representatives from Wood End Park Academy and Haydon School. Both schools have experienced issues with persistent absenteeism.

At Wood End Park Academy, absenteeism issues were evident even before children started school, with some parents not ensuring nursery attendance. Early intervention and partnership working with parents could help mitigate this. Vulnerable parents often had children more susceptible to absenteeism.

Haydon School also faced absenteeism issues, primarily due to a lack of parental engagement. Additionally, undiagnosed conditions like ASD (autism spectrum disorder) and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), along with mental health challenges, contributed to the problem.

### Rates of Absenteeism

Wood End Park Academy had seen a reduction in persistent absenteeism from 25% to around 18%, although it had risen significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Trust's collective efforts had contributed to this improvement.

Haydon School, with 1,675 students, had only one Attendance Officer, down from three. Current attendance rates were 92% in Year 7; 91% in Year 8; 89% in Years 9 and 10, with Year 11s on study leave.

### Current Methods

Wood End Park Academy incentivised attendance with extra playtime for whole classes, which had improved attendance. Effective Attendance Support Officers were crucial and consistency in staff was also important, though this was a national issue. Bonding with families before school starts could be helpful as a preventative measure. Schools with family support workers should have meetings with Council Attendance Officers before attendance issues arise. Early connections can signpost mental health support or identify undiagnosed conditions. There were times where parents would respond negatively to Attendance Panel meetings, but this meant that they were engaging, which was itself a positive, because they did not want to be in a position where Panel meetings were necessary. The school used a tracking sheet to categorise children into percentage bands for targeted interventions.

Haydon School followed up on absences and had considered using a school minibus to collect students. Discussing attendance in hours rather than percentages could be more effective. Panel meetings often lead to financial penalties, which may not be effective for parents with children with mental health challenges or undiagnosed special needs. Haydon School was implementing 'team around the child' meetings to include the safeguarding team, pastoral team, and SEN team to address these issues. Home visits, although not always possible, made a difference. The school had counsellors and mental health first aiders, but they faced capacity issues. They also sent out information online and gave out contact cards for mental health support. The school had introduced a new method for parents to report absences online and sent warning letters when attendance dropped below 95%. The school had also tightened the morning register closure time,

impacting overall attendance levels.

### SEND and Mental Health

From the primary school point of view, persistent absenteeism often involved parents struggling with children presenting with SEND or anxiety. Post-COVID, term-time leave had increased.

Persistent absence was time-consuming and often started with anxiety or undiagnosed SEND. The longer the child was absent, the more difficult it was to get them back into school. Haydon School's headteacher provided reports on students close to persistent absenteeism for one-to-one meetings.

The Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership team supported young people with mental health challenges. Workshops and literature in parent-friendly language were suggested. Mental health support and guidance for parents would be helpful as sometimes parents were not equipped to deal with these types of concerns and did not want to push their children if there were mental health concerns.

### Gender Differences

At Wood End Park Academy, male students with SEND tended to have lower attendance than female students with SEND. At Haydon School, the gender split was even.

### Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Alternative options to CAMHS like Right to Choose had been discussed in meetings with persistently absent students and their parents.

### Specific Cohorts

Some young people who were persistently absent were new to the country. Stronger partnerships with family support leads could help. Identifying families new into the community and holding a welcome meeting could make new families feel part of Hillingdon. Additionally, having literature from the Council including a contact number would be beneficial. Informal meetings with long-term residents could also improve attendance.

Unstable housing and disengaged parents also contributed to absenteeism. It was noted that children who were disengaged tended to be the children of parents who were also disengaged. Furthermore, some young people were having to travel from near Heathrow Airport in the south of the borough, while Haydon School is located in the north.

### Truancing Within School

At Haydon School, when persistent absentees returned to school, it was ensured that someone met with them to try to pre-empt any further problems arising. Discussions would be had with parents where patterns emerged, as parents may not always be aware of these specific details. Haydon School monitored CCTV to prevent truancing and had adjusted duty rotas to manage student movement.

### Interventions

Support for mid-year admissions was needed as existing issues may transfer from one school to the next. Haydon School inherited persistently absent students from other schools.

Programmes targeting primary and secondary children should consider parental responsibility differences.

### External Organisations

Haydon School promoted the Triple P programme, but it was families that you would like to engage who did not. A lot of parents did not take up Triple P. Those that did had good attendance and were using Triple P for other reasons.

### Remote Learning

Medical evidence was required for remote learning, which often took a long time. Alternative provisions and the Skills Hub were used where appropriate. COVID had demonstrated the feasibility of remote learning, but getting children back on-site was challenging.

### Attendance Hubs

Attendance Hubs allowed schools to share concerns and good practices. While Attendance Officers attended these meetings, this often meant afternoon registers would be left open, and this then relied on teachers to pick up absences.

### Central Government

Central Government were updating guidance and were trying to streamline the systems that schools used. They had given guidance on the letters that parents should be getting and what should be happening at each point. They also expected data to be collected more centrally which was helpful as it could lead to picking up on attendance patterns quicker. More funding would be helpful, especially where there were occasions of one Attendance Support Officer in a large school who was also having to make home visits.

Salaries for support staff in schools were not great. Hours were long and the nature of the work meant that there were instances of staff being signed off with stress. This greatly affected the day-to-day running of schools. Guidance from Central Government had been good and there had not been any additional pressure. Attendance was everybody's business in schools, however staffing levels were challenging.

### Support for Young People Returning from Long Absence

Haydon School provided pastoral support, counselling, and mentoring for returning students. Family support workers helped manage anxiety and mental health concerns.

### Reduced Timetables

Generally, across primary schools, children were not on part time timetables due to not being able to cope with school. Children who were on reduced timetables often had high level special needs, but this was not to do with them being persistently absent.



In summary, the key issues from this session included:

- Early intervention and parental engagement were key to improving attendance
- There were often links to mental health challenges including undiagnosed SEND
- Medical evidence was required for remote learning, which often took a long time

The full account of this session can be found in the meeting minutes [here](#).

Following this witness session, the Committee distributed a short survey to all providers in the Borough. 23 responses were received, and a summary is outlined as Appendix E (full results are available as a background paper).

## **Witness Session 4**

In the fourth witness session, young people shared their experiences with school attendance and absenteeism. The Committee would like to note their thanks to the young people for taking part in this review, and to officers for arranging, as it was vital for Members to hear directly from them to ensure that the voice of the child was captured.

The session aimed to understand the challenges young people face in attending school regularly. Five young people aged 16, 17, 19, 21, and 23 attended the session, sharing their personal stories and insights.

One young person discussed their experience with verbal bullying, which had led to a 10-month absence from school. They noted that no support was provided by the school, and their mother had attempted to withdraw them from school due to the bullying. When the young person returned to school, they were put back into the same classes that they were in before. There had been no support given by the school, and no support for the young person to receive an education when they were not in school.

Another young person shared their experience with physical bullying during mixed PE lessons and the lack of repercussions for the bullies. The school would hold assemblies on issues but there was no direct resolution to instances of bullying. The young person highlighted the importance of having a 'safe space' within the school and noted that if young people did not undertake work experience, they would be taught other skills such as life skills.

A third young person discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their mental health, which led to hospitalisation. They noted that the school was not equipped to deal with mental health concerns and that earlier implementation of a reduced timetable would have been helpful for them. During exams, young people with SEND were put in a room together, which made the young people feel segregated from their peers. The young person noted that they attended before- and after-school clubs every day, which should have been a sign to the school that there were issues, however the school did not pick up on this.

Another young person shared their experience of arriving in the UK at the age of 14 without speaking English. They noted that sports played a crucial role in their integration and that schools

often managed disruption rather than resolving issues.

The final young person who had attended multiple schools discussed their experiences in having issues with respecting authority, leading to involvement in crime and drugs. Positive role models were vital, and the young person noted that they looked up to the Participation Manager and her team and now wanted to be a social worker. The young person noted that behavioural challenges in school often started in the home. More engagement with professionals was needed from a younger age, for example to learn about the risks of exploitation and gangs. The young person also commended the Walking In Our Shoes training (which is delivered by young people to professionals).

The session concluded with discussions on the importance of addressing bullying; the need for schools to pick up on changes in young people's behaviour; and the challenges of transitioning from primary to secondary school. The young people emphasised the need for relatable role models and the importance of feeling safe and supported in school. Schools were not built for people who were not 'neuro-typical', and other methods of learning needed to be implemented – school was often a one-size-fits-all.

In summary, the key issues from this session included:

- Bullying can significantly affect school attendance
- Young people's mental health challenges affected attendance
- Positive role models were important

*As this was a private session, a full account is restricted to Members only.*

## Witness Session 5

For its fifth witness session, Members met with officers to discuss child protection and safeguarding of children who were persistently absent. In attendance were the Director for Children's Safeguarding and Care, and the Safeguarding Manager, who emphasised the importance of education as a safeguarding element, noting that school was often the safest place for young people. Sometimes there may not be an understanding among parents that school can be a safe place and can be a positive experience for their children.

Officers highlighted the importance of consistent relationships in schools and of giving young people a voice in their child protection plans. There were also mechanisms for engagement, for example if a child was non-verbal. Child protection plans were family plans in that the child and family were involved in contributing to the plan. This empowered families and children to know that their input was important.

The role of safeguarding in schools was recognised by the Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board. One of the priorities of the Board was around contextual safeguarding.

Officers discussed the collaboration with Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools and the role of the Virtual School in providing intensive support for children who are looked after. They noted

the importance of trauma-informed practice and the need for individualised plans for children. The session also highlighted the use of technology to monitor attendance and provide flexible learning options for children who are unable to attend school.

Quite often for children who are at risk of significant harm and therefore require a child protection plan, education, absence and exclusions are a factor in their lives, and this was why schools played a vital role.

There was a programme called Operation Encompass in partnership with the police. If the police were contacted overnight or at the weekend for a domestic abuse incident, they will notify the child's school. There was a domestic abuse advisor to schools within the service who would support the school with this. There were currently roughly four schools in the borough who were not part of Operation Encompass, and this was credit to the Domestic Abuse Education Officer for getting schools onboard.

In summary, the key issues from this session included:

- There was an important safeguarding aspect to school attendance
- Absence was often a factor in the lives of children who are at risk of significant harm
- Sometimes there may not be an understanding among parents that school can be a safe place for their children

The full account of this session can be found in the meeting minutes [here](#).

## Witness Session 6

**CAUTION: Although for publication, the witness session notes on the next page include references to sensitive topics including suicide and self-harm.**

In the sixth witness session, parents and carers shared their experiences with school attendance and absenteeism. The session aimed to understand the challenges faced by families and gather their views on how to improve attendance. Forty witnesses attended the session, although not all chose to speak.

One parent shared their experience of requesting leave for their child to attend a wedding and to watch Canada qualify for the World Cup. Although the request for one week's leave was denied, the parent took the child out of school citing the cultural and life experiences that could be gained.

Another parent discussed the challenges of having a neurodivergent child with SEND, autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, and anxiety. Government guidelines failed to understand the complexities of having a neurodivergent young person attend school. They highlighted the importance of mental health and the need for flexible provisions. Parents valued education, but mental health was very important. A long commute to school was also an issue.

A further parent spoke about the long waiting list for CAMHS. They had asked the school for a flexible option but was told by the school that they were not legally obligated to do so, and that they required an EHCP. Because of this, the young person was missing out as they were approaching their GCSEs. It felt like there was a lot of going back and forward, and no accountability.

Several parents shared their experiences of bullying, school refusal, and the lack of support from schools. Several parents also talked about their young person's experience of emotional based school non-attendance.

One parent noted that their child had attempted suicide due to bullying and that no support was offered by the school, while another parent discussed their child's experience of self-harm.

Several parents discussed the challenges of having a child with medical needs and the impact on school attendance. They suggested the need for a new attendance code for children recuperating from illness or medical procedures. Several parents noted that their child's health with prioritised over school attendance.

The session also highlighted the challenges of transport and the impact of strict attendance policies on families. Parents emphasised the importance of understanding individual circumstances and providing appropriate support for families. They noted the need for better communication between schools and families and the importance of addressing the root causes of absenteeism. Temporary accommodation also had an impact on school attendance.

The session concluded with discussions on the importance of mental health support; the need for flexible provisions for neurodivergent children; and the challenges of balancing school attendance with medical needs. Parents emphasised the need for a supportive and understanding approach from schools and the Council.

In summary, the key issues from this session included:

- There were a vast array of challenges faces by families in ensuring school attendance
- More support for mental health challenges were needed
- Bullying often had a strong negative impact on school attendance

*As this was a private session, the full account was restricted to Members only.*

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Challenges and barriers

Throughout the review, the Committee identified a number of challenges and barriers to regular attendance, including:

1. Parental influence and engagement
  - a. Some parents appeared not to understand the importance of regular school attendance
  - b. Challenges such as unstable housing, financial difficulties, and parents' own negative experiences with education can impact young people's attendance
  - c. Parents taking young people out of school for cheaper holidays is a recurring challenge
2. Mental health and SEND
  - a. Many absences were due to mental health challenges and potentially undiagnosed conditions such as ASD or ADHD
  - b. There were long waiting lists for CAMHS support
3. Illness
  - a. Young people with chronic illnesses or frequent medical appointments often missed school
4. Bullying
  - a. Bullying, both verbal and physical, was a significant barrier to attendance
  - b. Schools sometimes struggled to implement effective anti-bullying measures
5. Impact of COVID-19
  - a. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on school attendance, with some parents valuing education less and being more inclined to keep children at home
6. Transport
  - a. Long and difficult commutes, especially for young people in temporary housing or those who rely on public transportation, can be a barrier
7. School-specific challenges
  - a. Different schools had varying capacities to handle persistent absenteeism
  - b. There were often logistical challenges in monitoring absences, especially in larger schools

These challenges and barriers highlight the complex nature of persistent absenteeism and require a comprehensive and collaborative approach in order to address them effectively.

## Conclusions

Having heard from a variety of key stakeholders and having given due consideration to the evidence presented to them, the Committee reached the following key conclusions:

1. Parental influence and engagement
  - a. There is a need for better education for parents on the importance of regular school attendance
  - b. Engaging parents early in their young people's education can help improve attendance
  - c. Effective communication and collaboration between schools, parents, and the Council are crucial in addressing persistent absenteeism
2. Mental health and SEND
  - a. Signposting to mental health support services can help in supporting young people and their families
3. School initiatives and support
  - a. The establishment of attendance clusters hubs where schools collaborate to address common issues has shown some initial positive impact
4. Data and monitoring
  - a. There is a need for more detailed analysis of data such as after school clubs to identify vulnerable cohorts

These conclusions underline the complexity of addressing persistent absenteeism and the need for a multi-faceted approach and effective communication among all stakeholders.

## Recommendations

Further to the Committee's review, the Chair and Opposition Lead met with officers to work up the final recommendations detailed below.

### Parental Engagement and Support

The review highlighted the crucial importance of parental engagement in addressing persistent absenteeism, and that early intervention and education for parents would help to improve attendance by highlighting the academic and social benefits. The use of the Learn Hillingdon service could provide an additional avenue for this. On that basis, it is recommended:

**1**

#### **Parental Engagement and Support**

1. Officers to continue to work with schools, nurseries and early years centres to educate and inform parents and carers about the positive benefits of school attendance, both academic and social, as a means of early intervention.

2. Officers to investigate the use of the Learn Hillingdon service to educate and inform adult learners (who are parents) about the importance of school attendance.
3. The Council to support schools to deliver welcome programmes for families new to the borough.

### Mental Health & Wellbeing

The witness sessions also highlighted that impact that mental ill-health can have on school attendance. Therefore, signposting to mental health services could be beneficial. On that basis, it is recommended:

**2**

### **Mental Health & Wellbeing**

4. The Council and schools to continue to work collaboratively, supporting those families with children and young people who are persistently absent due to poor mental health, and to signpost to alternative services such as CAMHS, KOOTH, Hillingdon Autistic Care & Support (HACS) and CNWL where appropriate.

### School Environment & Culture

Creating a positive school environment and culture was identified as crucial for improving attendance. Existing attendance hubs are used to share best practise on topics including EBSNA, anti-bullying, and trauma-informed practice. More take-up of these hubs could therefore be beneficial. On that basis, it is recommended:

**3**

### **School Environment & Culture**

5. Council to encourage Attendance cluster groups to share good practice among schools on a range of topics such as EBSNA, anti-bullying and trauma-informed practice.

### Data & Monitoring

The review emphasised the need for effective data collection and monitoring to understand and address patterns of absenteeism. Witnesses discussed the importance of correlating pupil attendance at after-school clubs with general school attendance to identify trends and inform interventions. On that basis, it is recommended:

**4**

### **Data & Monitoring**

6. Ask schools to explore how pupil attendance at after school clubs correlates with general pupil attendance within schools. What are the patterns and trends?

### Collaboration & Community Involvement

The review also highlighted the importance of collaboration and community involvement in tackling persistent absenteeism and the need for raising awareness about the benefits of school



attendance within local communities. On that basis, it is recommended:

**5**

**Collaboration & Community Involvement**

7. Council to continue to raise awareness and highlight the positive benefits of school attendance, both academic and social, within local community and local partnership groups. To include a poster campaign in schools, libraries, Council venues and Hillingdon People.

## Background Papers

- [The Education Act 1996](#)
- [The Children Act 1989](#)
- [The Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)
- [The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)
- [The Education \(Parenting Contracts and Parenting Orders\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)
- [The Education \(Penalty Notices\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)
- [Working together to improve school attendance \(from 19 August 2024\)](#)
- Minutes of the witness sessions:
  - [Witness session 1: Setting the scene](#)
  - [Witness session 2: Other authorities](#)
  - [Witness session 3: The Voice of Schools](#)
  - Witness session 4: The Voice of Young People is restricted to Members only
  - [Witness session 5: Child protection/ Safeguarding](#)
  - Witness session 6: The Voice of Parents/ Carers is restricted to Members only
- Results of the school survey

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# Appendices

Appendix A – Glossary

Appendix B – Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance: Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities

Appendix C – Fines issued and paid

Appendix D – Common SEND needs and specific conditions

Appendix E – Summary of school survey results

## Appendix A – Glossary

AIM	Attendance Intervention Model
DfE	Department for Education
EBSNA	Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance
EHCP	Education Health & Care Plan
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
FSM	Free School Meal
IAP	Individualised action plan
HACS	Hillingdon Autistic Care & Support
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust
MP	Member of Parliament
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
Persistent absenteeism	When a child's attendance is at or below 90%
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
Statutory school age (Education Act 1996)	<p>(2) A person begins to be of compulsory school age—</p> <p>(a) when he attains the age of five, if he attains that age on a prescribed day, and</p> <p>(b) otherwise at the beginning of the prescribed day next following his attaining that age.</p> <p>(3) A person ceases to be of compulsory school age at the end of the day which is the school leaving date for any calendar year—</p> <p>(a) if he attains the age of 16 after that day but before the beginning of the school year next following,</p> <p>(b) if he attains that age on that day, or</p> <p>(c) (unless paragraph (a) applies) if that day is the school leaving date next following his attaining that age.</p>
TAF	Team around the family
Table 4: Glossary	

## Appendix B – Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance: Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities

Available [here](#)

### Pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent

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 to prevent the need for more formal support.</p>	<p>Proactively use data to identify pupils at risk of persistent absence.</p> <p>Work with each identified pupil and their parents to understand and address the reasons for absence, including any in-school barriers to attendance.</p> <p>Where out of school barriers are identified, signpost and support access to any required services in the first instance and act as lead practitioner if attendance is the only issue and/or the local threshold for formal early help is not met.</p> <p>If the issue persists, take an active part in the multi-agency effort with the local authority and other partners. If a case meets the local threshold for formal early help/family support, this includes conducting the early help assessment and acting as the lead practitioner where all partners agree that the school is the best placed lead service. Where the lead practitioner is outside of the school, continue to work with the local authority and partners.</p>	<p>Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.</p>	<p>Hold a regular 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.</p> <p>Where there are out of school barriers, provide each identified pupil and their family with access to services they need in the first instance.</p> <p>If the issue persists, and there are multiple needs consider whether the threshold for early help is met and facilitate access where it is. Regardless, take an active part in the multi-agency effort with the school and other partners. Provide the lead practitioner in cases where threshold is met and all partners agree that a local authority service is best placed to lead. Where the lead practitioner is outside of the local authority, continue to work with the school and partners.</p>

## Persistently absent pupils

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>Continue support as for pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent and:</p> <p>Where absence becomes persistent, put additional targeted support in place to remove any barriers. Where necessary this includes working with partners.</p> <p>Where there is a lack of engagement, hold more formal conversations with parents and be clear about the potential need for legal intervention in future. Where support is not working, being engaged with or appropriate, work with the local authority on legal intervention.</p> <p>Where there are safeguarding concerns, intensify support through a referral to statutory children's social care.</p> <p>Work with other schools in the local area, such as schools previously attended and the schools of any siblings</p>	<p>Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it</p>	<p>Continue support as for pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent and:</p> <p>Work jointly with the school to provide formal support options including attendance contracts and education supervision orders.</p> <p>Where there are safeguarding concerns, ensure joint working between the school, children's social care services and other statutory safeguarding partners.</p> <p>Where support is not working, being engaged with or appropriate, enforce attendance through legal intervention (including prosecution as a last resort)</p>



## Appendix C – Fines issued and paid

	<b><i>Total fines issued</i></b>
<b>2023/24</b>	1379
<b>2024/25</b> (As of May 2025)	807
<i>Table 5: Number of fines issued</i>	
<i>Note: these are fines issued for both holidays and attendance</i>	

	<b><i>% fines paid</i></b>	<b><i>% fines not paid</i></b>
<b>2023/24</b>	64.83% (894)	35.17% (485)
<b>2024/25</b> (As of May 2025)	84.13% (679)	15.98% (129)
<i>Table 6: Fines paid versus not paid</i>		
<i>Note: these are fines issued for both holidays and attendance</i>		

## Appendix D – Common SEND needs and specific conditions

Below is a list of common health and SEND conditions, with links to more information on the NHS website.

*Note: this list is not exhaustive and further information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).*

<a href="#">ADHD</a>	ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) is a condition where the brain works differently to most people. Children and young people with ADHD may have trouble with things like concentrating and sitting still. There are ways to help manage the symptoms of ADHD.
<a href="#">Asthma</a>	Asthma is a common condition that affects your breathing. It cannot currently be cured, but if it's well treated you should not have problems with symptoms.
<a href="#">Autism</a>	Autistic people may act in a different way to other people. Autistic people may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• find it hard to communicate and interact with other people</li> <li>• find it hard to understand how other people think or feel</li> <li>• find things like bright lights or loud noises overwhelming, stressful or uncomfortable</li> <li>• get anxious or upset about unfamiliar situations and social events</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Cerebral Palsy</a>	Cerebral palsy is the name for a group of lifelong conditions that affect movement and co-ordination. It's caused by a problem with the brain that develops before, during or soon after birth.
<a href="#">Depression</a>	Depression is a low mood that can last a long time or keep returning, affecting your everyday life.
<a href="#">Diabetes</a>	Diabetes is a condition that causes a person's blood sugar level to become too high. There are 2 main types of diabetes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">type 1 diabetes</a> – a lifelong condition where the body's immune system attacks and destroys the cells that produce insulin</li> <li>• <a href="#">type 2 diabetes</a> – where the body does not produce enough insulin, or the body's cells do not react to insulin properly</li> </ul> Type 2 diabetes is far more common than type 1. In the UK, over 90% of all adults with diabetes have type 2.
<a href="#">Down's Syndrome</a>	Down's syndrome is when you're born with an extra chromosome.
<a href="#">Dyslexia</a>	Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty that mainly causes problems with reading, writing and spelling.
<a href="#">Dyspraxia</a>	Developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD), also known as dyspraxia, is a condition affecting physical co-ordination. It causes a child to perform less well than expected in daily activities for their age, and appear to move clumsily.
<a href="#">Eating disorders</a>	Eating disorders, like anorexia nervosa (often called anorexia), are mental health conditions where unhealthy eating behaviours are used to cope with difficult feelings and issues.
<a href="#">Epilepsy</a>	Epilepsy is a condition that affects your brain and causes seizures (sometimes called fits). It cannot currently be cured, but treatment can often help manage it.
<a href="#">Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)</a>	Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is a common mental health condition where you often feel very anxious about lots of different things.
<a href="#">Health anxiety</a>	Health anxiety is when you spend so much time worrying you're ill, or going to get ill, that it starts to take over your life. It's related to obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).
<a href="#">Learning disabilities</a>	A learning disability affects the way a person learns new things throughout their life.  A learning disability is different for everyone. No two people are the same.
<a href="#">Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)</a>	Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is a mental health condition where a person has obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours.

	<p>OCD can affect men, women and children. People can start having symptoms from as early as 6 years old, but it often begins around puberty and early adulthood.</p> <p>OCD can be distressing and significantly interfere with your life, but treatment can help you keep it under control.</p>
<a href="#">Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)</a>	<p>Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that comes and goes in a seasonal pattern.</p> <p>SAD is sometimes known as "winter <a href="#">depression</a>" because the symptoms are usually more apparent and more severe during the winter.</p> <p>Some people with SAD may have symptoms during the summer and feel better during the winter.</p>
<a href="#">Social anxiety (social phobia)</a>	<p>Social anxiety disorder, also called social phobia, is a long-term and overwhelming fear of social situations.</p>

## Appendix E – Summary of school survey results

### **Q: WHAT IS YOUR SCHOOL'S CURRENT RATE OF PERSISTENT ABSENTEEISM?**

**A:** Answers varied between 3.5% and 27.47%

### **Q: WHAT METHODS DO YOU CURRENTLY HAVE IN PLACE TO TACKLE PERSISTENT ABSENTEEISM?**

**A:** Answers included: *acknowledging/ congratulating improvements in attendance; attendance contracts; attendance forum; certificates; emails; health plans; home visits; letters; meetings; opportunities to represent the school (i.e. clubs); panels; pastoral support/ mentoring; penalties; phone calls; referrals to stronger families; regular communication with families; requesting medical evidence; tracking*

### **Q: HAVE YOU PREVIOUSLY USED ANY METHODS THAT HAVE SUCCESSFULLY REDUCED PERSISTENT ABSENTEEISM (METHODS THAT COULD HELP OTHER SCHOOLS)?**

**A:** Answers included: *a strong family support system working with families; attendance as a topic in parent coffee mornings; attendance text messages; calling parents at 8.15am to establish the wellbeing of the child/ren and to ensure they attend school on time; close liaison with transport and supporting with therapy observations/ recommendations; engagement with parents, building relationships; home visits; HPNs; individualised targets; letters; offering breakfast club to remove stress from the home morning routine; parent meetings; talking about attendance as the amount of lesson time lost rather than as a percentage; talking to the children and getting an understanding of why they are reluctant to come into school along with open and honest conversations with parents if we have concerns.*

### **Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MAIN CAUSES OF PERSISTENT ABSENTEEISM WITHIN YOUR SCHOOL?**

**A:** Answers included: *absence of a sibling; academic challenges; covid hangover; distance from home to school; EBSA; family circumstances; holidays; illness/ medical reasons; inadequate housing; mental health; parental apathy/ non-engagement; peer influence; relocation and awaiting school places; send; social media; some families who prioritise 'wellbeing days' above school attendance and who will have time at home to recover from tiredness; transport (including pupils that are on local authority transport are very often suspended from transport due to behaviour and miss sometimes a whole week or 2 of school)*

### **Q: HOW CAN THE COUNCIL HELP YOUR SCHOOL TO TACKLE PERSISTENT ABSENTEEISM?**

**A:** Answers included: *attendance cluster meetings are helpful; better support from wider LA services including Stronger Families and SEN; clear escalation process; clear guidelines and separation of duties for fining schools from LA/ school, tightening the HPN process, and being more readily proactive in sharing HPN outcomes; earlier intervention; easier access to Key Workers; funding to enable the high levels of support currently in place to continue; improve accuracy of attendance data on Wonde; improved mental health provision; provision for EBSA*

*pupils; quicker response to transport requests; run parent classes; signposting to additional support for child and families*

Some responses indicated that a standard absence policy to apply borough-wide, while other responses noted that it was important not to impose a one-size-fits-all system, as each school is different.

Having Local Authority representatives meeting with families would have a greater impact, and returning to Education Welfare Officers (EWO) and having them conduct phone calls and meetings would be more impactful, as parents tend to take council officials more seriously than school staff. Implementing mandatory parent/ child groups for families with poor attendance where they agree to adhere to DfE guidelines could improve attendance.

The administrative burden on schools has increased significantly since they took over the organisation and planning of panel meetings, affecting the workload of school staff, particularly in schools where the Attendance officer has multiple responsibilities. Positive relationships with parents are harder to build when schools have to inform them of potential legal actions.

One school highlighted a number of ways in which the Council can assist:

- Policy Development and Implementation:
  - Clear Attendance Policies: Develop and enforce clear policies regarding attendance, including consequences for absenteeism and incentives for good attendance
  - Supportive Legislation: Advocate for and implement legislation that supports school attendance, such as compulsory attendance laws and truancy prevention programs
- Resource Allocation:
  - Funding for Support Programs: Provide funding for programs aimed at improving attendance, such as breakfast clubs, after-school programs, and transportation assistance
  - Access to Health Services: Ensure schools have access to mental health professionals, school nurses, and counsellors to address health-related absenteeism
- Family and Community Engagement:
  - Parent Workshops and Education: Organise workshops to educate parents about the importance of regular attendance and how they can support their children
  - Community Partnerships: Collaborate with local businesses, non-profits, and community organisations to provide resources and support for students and families
- Data and Monitoring:
  - Data Analysis Tools: Provide schools with tools and training to track and analyse attendance data effectively
  - Early Warning Systems: Implement systems to identify at-risk students early and intervene before absenteeism becomes chronic
- Intervention Programs:

- Mentorship Programs: Establish mentorship and peer support programs to engage students and provide positive role models
- Counselling and Support Services: Offer counselling services for students dealing with personal, social, or academic issues contributing to absenteeism
- Training and Professional Development:
  - Staff Training: Provide training for school staff on best practices for improving attendance, including strategies for engaging students and working with families
  - Professional Development: Offer ongoing professional development opportunities focused on addressing the root causes of absenteeism
- Legal and Social Support:
  - Legal Support: Work with local law enforcement and juvenile justice systems to address truancy issues in a supportive, non-punitive manner
  - Social Services Coordination: Coordinate with social services to support families in crisis and address barriers to attendance
- Recognition and Incentives:
  - Attendance Awards: Implement recognition programs to celebrate good attendance and progress in improving attendance
  - Incentives for Improvement: Provide incentives for students who show significant improvement in their attendance records
- A local authority attendance policy for all schools

**Q: IF YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, PLEASE NOTE THEM BELOW**

**A:** Answers included: *the new attendance forums are good and valuable in understand struggles other schools have what they have done to chance the attendance percentages; every school is different and if something is working at a school, it would be wrong to make schools with low persistence absence rates change; the school catchment is a huge factor, with families in and out of temporary accommodation/ homeless and many families with relatives whom they visit during term time; EWO's had far more 'deterrent factor' than school staff have.*


## Additional Resources

	<p>Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) provide community mental health services to children, young people up to the age of 18, registered with a GP in the borough, with complex mental health difficulties, and their families in a range of different ways depending on their needs</p>	<p><a href="https://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/camhs/our-services/specialist-camhs/hillingdon-camhs">https://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/camhs/our-services/specialist-camhs/hillingdon-camhs</a></p>
	<p>HACS are committed to raising awareness, knowledge and understanding of autism. Our mission is to improve quality of life by minimising disability and maximising ability</p>	<p><a href="https://www.hacs.org.uk/">https://www.hacs.org.uk/</a></p>
	<p>KOOTH offers free, safe, anonymous support for anyone aged 13+ who needs help with their mental health</p>	<p><a href="https://www.kooth.com/">https://www.kooth.com/</a></p>
	<p>LEAP (Local Education Area Partnership) is an information website for the education community within the London Borough of Hillingdon. It is designed to give access to wider education information to the education community and can also be used to advertise training and courses.</p> <p>LEAP is administered and managed by the Education Improvement and Partnerships Service at the London Borough of Hillingdon.</p> <p>The vision of the Service is for every child in the borough to be successful and fulfilled learners, reaching their potential and thriving within inspirational and outstanding educational settings.</p> <p>LEAP is our gateway to collaboration, improvement and opportunity for the children and young people of Hillingdon.</p>	<p><a href="https://leap.hillingdon.gov.uk/">https://leap.hillingdon.gov.uk/</a></p>
	<p>If you are based in England under the NHS you now have a legal right to choose your mental healthcare provider and your choice of mental healthcare team. This important right means that, for instance, should you decide the waiting time for your ADHD assessment is too long, then you</p>	<p><a href="https://adhduk.co.uk/right-to-choose/">https://adhduk.co.uk/right-to-choose/</a></p>



	<p><i>can choose alternative providers. The provider must supply the service to the NHS somewhere in England. The providers we are aware of are listed below and we update the list regularly.</i></p> <p><i>Right to Choose within mental health is a relatively new option (since 2018) and as such, not all patients, GPs or other clinicians are aware of it and how it works. We've got an explanation targeted for people going through the ADHD Assessment process below.</i></p> <p><i>For how Right to Choose fits into the diagnosis pathway <a href="#">please click here</a>. We've also got a <a href="#">downloadable support letter</a> for anyone who finds their GP has initially declined them.</i></p> <p><i>You will also find significant amounts of information via the NHS link on NHS choices below:</i>  <a href="https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/your-choices-in-the-nhs/">https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/your-choices-in-the-nhs/</a></p>	
 <p>Hillingdon <b>sendiass</b> Special Educational Needs Disability Information, Advice and Support Service</p>	<p>Hillingdon SENDIASS is a free, confidential and impartial support service for parents/ carers and children and young people (0 to 25-years-old) where the child or young person has, or may have, special educational needs.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.hillingdonseodiass.co.uk/">https://www.hillingdonseodiass.co.uk/</a></p>
 <p><b>The Skills Hub</b></p>	<p>The Skills Hub (TSH) is a co-educational Alternative Provision (AP) that caters for students in the London Borough of Hillingdon who cannot attend mainstream school for a variety of reasons, predominantly permanent exclusion.</p>	<p><a href="https://theskillshub.org/">https://theskillshub.org/</a></p>
 <p><b>sense</b></p>	<p><u>Our Services</u>  We're here for people with complex disabilities, including deafblindness.</p> <p><i>From the first weeks of life to the major milestones of adulthood, we'll use our knowledge and expertise to deliver personalised, creative and flexible support.</i></p> <p><i>Whether it's communicating with your child for the first time, learning to live more independently or finding friendship through our sports and arts activities – these are the moments that make a difference.</i></p> <p><u>Who are Sense's services for?</u></p>	<p><a href="https://www.sense.org.uk/">https://www.sense.org.uk/</a></p>



	<p><i>Sense is here to support people with <a href="#">complex disabilities</a>, including <a href="#">deafblindness</a>, to feel connected and included.</i></p> <p><i>People with complex disabilities tend to have two or more of the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Deafness or hearing impairment</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Blindness or vision impairment</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Learning disability</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Autism</i></li> </ul> <p><i><u>How much do Sense's services cost?</u></i></p> <p><i>Many of our services are free, while others require local authority funding.</i></p> <p><i>If you're not sure, <a href="#">get in touch with our information and advice service</a> to learn more.</i></p>	
	<p><i><u>What is Triple P?</u></i></p> <p><i>Triple P is a parenting programme, but it doesn't tell you how to be a parent. It's more like a toolbox of ideas. You choose the strategies you need. You choose the way you want to use them. It's all about making Triple P work for you.</i></p> <p><i><u>What does Triple P do?</u></i></p> <p><i>The three Ps in 'Triple P' stand for 'Positive Parenting Program' which means your family life is going to be much more enjoyable.</i></p> <p><i>Triple P helps you:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Raise happy, confident kids</i></li> <li>• <i>Manage misbehaviour so everyone in the family enjoys life more</i></li> <li>• <i>Set rules and routines that everyone respects and follows</i></li> <li>• <i>Encourage behaviour you like</i></li> <li>• <i>Take care of yourself as a parent</i></li> <li>• <i>Feel confident you're doing the right thing</i></li> </ul>	<p><a href="https://www.tripleparenting.uk.net/uk/triple-p/">https://www.tripleparenting.uk.net/uk/triple-p/</a></p>