

Minutes

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

18 June 2024



Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p>Committee Members Present: Councillor Heena Makwana (Chair), Councillor Becky Haggar OBE, Councillor Peter Smallwood, Councillor Kishan Bhatt, Councillor Tony Gill, Councillor Rita Judge, and Councillor Jan Sweeting (Opposition Lead)</p> <p>Co-Opted Member Present: Tony Little</p> <p>Officers Present: Ash Knight (Participation Manager) Ryan Dell (Democratic Services Officer)</p> <p>Also Present: Karen Quantrell (Attendance Officer from Haydon School) Surjeet Johra (Headteacher of Wood End Academy (Primary) School)</p>
3.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies were received from Councillor Rita Judge with Councillor Tony Burles substituting.</p>
4.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>
5.	<p>MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS DATED 18 APRIL 2024 (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>Members noted that they had some questions relating to the review item, which they would come back during that item.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed.</p>
6.	<p>MINUTES OF THE AGM (09 MAY 2024) (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the AGM be agreed.</p>
7.	<p>TO CONFIRM THAT THE ITEMS OF BUSINESS MARKED AS PART I WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT THE ITEMS MARKED AS PART II WILL BE</p>

	<p>CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee</p>
8.	<p>MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL (<i>Agenda Item 6</i>)</p> <p>Members highlighted the Local Offer; a follow-up on the Ofsted notice of need for improvement; and the tentative agreement regarding Council Tax for care experienced young people, and asked if updates could be received following the meeting. These would be looked into.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee</p>
9.	<p>MEMBERSHIP OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL 2024-25 (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>Members considered the report and confirmed the membership of the Corporate Parenting Panel for 2024-2025.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee</p>
10.	<p>PERSISTENT ABSENTEEISM REVIEW - WITNESS SESSION 3 (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>The Chair welcomed the witnesses and thanked them for giving up their time to contribute to the review. The Chair outlined that the Committee was undertaking a major review into the issue of persistent absenteeism, and the purpose of the witness session.</p> <p>Ms Surjeet Johra, Principal of Wood End Park Academy (primary school) addressed the Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood End Park Academy was part of a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) • Colleagues in other schools in the trust had all seen a rise in persistent absenteeism (this included schools in other boroughs) • Discussions had taken place between schools to try to find solutions to persistent absenteeism • Headteachers had found that issues were evident even before young people started school. There were instances where parents were not ensuring that their children attended nursery regularly, for example • Partnership working with parents from an earlier time in their children's education would be really helpful, so that parents can get a positive and well-rounded view of education and how useful it can be • Getting children registered to nursery was one thing, but ensuring regular attendance was another, as it was not statutory • Once parents were in the pattern of children being at home during nursery years, this pattern continued into reception and further to Year 6 • Earlier intervention would be helpful • In terms of the cohorts of children who may be more susceptible to persistent absenteeism, this was linked to parents who may be more vulnerable themselves • The use of family support workers to create connections between parents and school may be useful <p>Ms Karen Quantrell, Attendance Officer at Haydon (secondary) School, addressed the</p>

Committee:

- Haydon School was a large school with a vast catchment area
- Haydon School also had an issue with persistent absenteeism, mainly due to a lack of parental engagement
- There were also students with potentially undiagnosed ASD (autism spectrum disorder) or ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)
- There were lots of absences due to mental health
- It was very difficult to get a quick turnaround of getting students into school

Members thanked the witnesses for attending.

Members asked for the current rate of absenteeism in the witnesses' schools, and how this compared to last year and pre-COVID.

Ms Johra advised that:

- In Wood End Park Academy, the rate was currently about 18%.
- There had been a significant rise last year
- Fellow Principals in the Trust had noticed the impact of COVID
- Lockdowns had appeared to make parents value education slightly less than previously
- Parents had not been in the position before when they were able to have their children at home and not be penalised for it, so due to COVID there was a sharp rise in persistent absenteeism
- Wood End Park Academy's rate of persistent absenteeism was slightly above the national average and most schools in the Trust were at about 25%
- The Trust had worked collectively on this and the CEO had commissioned their own research and so now all schools in the Trust were seeing a reduction in persistent absentees
- Wood End Park Academy's rate of persistent absenteeism had reduced from 25% to 18%
- This had relied on staff and a full-time Attendance Officer and ensuring that they were making phone calls home very quickly. It was also reliant on involving the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), which may not happen in every school as they may not have the capacity to do this
- Wood End Park Academy had a tracking sheet where they had categorised children into percentage bands:
 - Students around 80% were working closely with the Family Support Worker and Attendance Officer; getting home visits; these were usually the vulnerable children
 - Students in the 85-90% band were those where SLT were in charge. They would check every day that these children were in school, and phone home if they were not. As this was a primary school, incentives such as stickers and gifts could be utilised
 - Those in the 90%+ band were tracked to ensure that they did not slip below this level
- These were all specific to the school and may not work universally

Ms Quantrell advised that:

- It was quite different in secondary schools
- Haydon School had 1,675 students currently on roll
- There was only one Attendance Officer working with all these children (there were formerly three)

- On a day-to-day basis, one officer picked up all the absence calls; undertook all home visits; responsible for Letter 1, Letter 2 and Letter 3s; encouraging parents to have parental meetings; meeting with Heads of Year and feeding back to SLT
- The school had just launched a new way for parents to report absences through their website
- No panel meetings had been undertaken
- Warning letters were sent out when attendance dropped below 95%, Letter 2s were sent at 90%
- Current rates of attendance were:
 - 92% in Year 7
 - 91% in Year 8
 - 89% in Year 9
 - 89% in Year 10
 - Year 11s had gone on study leave
- The school had tightened up on the time that registers were closed in the morning, where previously there had been some flexibility. This had had some impact on overall attendance levels
- Some young people were having to travel from near Heathrow Airport (Haydon School was located in the north of the Borough)

Members thanked the witnesses for attending and noted the importance of partnerships between the Council and schools.

Members asked what was currently working and not currently working.

Ms Johra noted that:

- The Council had rebranded the Participation Service to Attendance Support.
- It was helpful when these officers were making regular contact with schools, setting up regular meetings and ensuring that Panel meetings were happening.
- Having an effective Attendance Support Officer was important for schools. When there was a change in Attendance Support Officer, this cost a lot of time
- Wood End Park Academy currently had a very strong officer but did not at the start of the year. It was recognised that the Council wanted to help schools, but consistency of staff was a national issue
- One thing that could be better was trying to bond with families before they start school. This could be through early years centres or early years officers who could promote what the Council can offer in terms of quality education. Schools would be willing to support this. This could include using school venues for holiday camps or sports sessions – this was about getting children onto the school site before they start school and encouraging families to come along and familiarising themselves with the school setting. This would require the schools to have a partner within the Council to advise around, for example, catchment areas.
- Lots of schools had family support workers. It would be worthwhile finding out which schools have family support workers and having meetings with the relevant person from the Council such as Attendance Officers before issues with attendance arose. These meetings could take place at the start of the academic year to look at attendance levels of children of specific concern, and what could be done to prevent attendance dropping. This could also be used to signpost to, for example, mental health support or Sense if there were undiagnosed conditions. Sometimes these connections happen too late, when issues around attendance have already arisen. More prevention measures would be helpful. Good Attendance Officers were very important. Making sure that parents were

getting warning letters as soon as their child's attendance dropped below a certain percentage and ensuring Panel meetings were happening were important. There were times where parents would respond negatively to Panel meetings but this meant that they were engaging, which was positive, because they did not want to have to have Panel meetings.

Ms Quantrell noted:

- Often Panel meetings lead to financial penalties to the parents. It was often felt that there was no point to Panel meetings because most of the parents had children with mental health concerns or undiagnosed special needs. In these cases, financial penalties would not be useful and it may only alienate the family more by going to a Panel meeting
- The school were trying to introduce a 'team around the child' meeting after the Letter 2s, to include the safeguarding team, pastoral team, and SEN team to discuss what can be done for the child that was not already being done
- Time lost was a big issue. A recent issue with a MASH referral was that the referral was returned due to there not being grounds for support. A message had been received from the parent that their child was very anxious and would not be coming into school. The school had contacted CAMHS and were awaiting a response. Time lost was not helpful. It was often understood by parents that the next step may be a Panel meeting, but parents often felt they cannot force their child to go to school
- There had been occasions where a home visit had been undertaken where the parents had wanted the Attendance Officer to discipline their children in their own home. This would not aid in getting the child into school
- Medical evidence was required for online tuition to be implemented and with the waiting list for CAMHS this was extremely difficult to obtain
- There had been a large number of absence calls relating to mental health. An example of this would be that the parents would phone the school, saying that on a scale of 0-10 their child was at a 3 in terms of their mental health, and would try again tomorrow to get them into school. It was not possible to go a home visit on every occasion, however home visits did make a difference. There was only so much the school can do with the limited time that they have
- There were counsellors within the school, but these also had long waiting lists
- There were mental health first aiders, Ms Quantrell had done the training herself. Again, there was limited capacity for the sheer volume of children with mental health needs
- On the opposite side to this, parents sometimes called about absences such as blisters and nosebleeds
- Therefore, it was important to balance parents by being on-side but also not being too lenient

Members noted the importance of having received the practical experience of the witnesses.

Members asked for clarification on whether cases of SEND and mental health made up the majority of absence cases or whether they were the most time consuming.

Ms Johra noted:

- It was not necessarily cases of SEND/ mental health that were the majority of cases, it was more to do with parents
- From the primary school side, it may be where parents are presented with their child having SEND or anxiety, the child may not want to come to school and the

parents may not know how to deal with this, which may lead to the parents keeping the child at home

- In summary it was not necessarily those with SEND that made up the majority, it was more to do with parents and how they manage their children
- The other category of children that fell into persistent absentees in primary schools was leave in term time. This may decrease because parents always knew that they could not take their children out of school in term time and that this may result in fines. After COVID, it was noticeable that parents were taking their children out of school in term time for longer periods, or on several occasions, which had not happened prior to COVID. This may reduce in time as the post-COVID period progresses.

Ms Quantrell noted:

- Persistent absence was time consuming
- It usually presented as anxiety first, and so the parent would be called in and advised and there would be home visits
- There may then be undiagnosed SEND
- If there was a child who was self-harming, which often presented first as anxiety, the parent would not push the child to come into school because they were worried about what this may lead to
- There would be difficult conversations with parents
- The school would try reduced timetables and to be flexible
- The school would, when the child was in school, go through their timetable to see which lessons/ teachers were causing most anxiety
- People did not want to push the child for fear of making the situation worse
- The longer the child was at home, the more difficult it was to get them back into school
- Also, with the sheer number of children presenting with anxiety, it was difficult to manage
- Getting parents on board was often a challenge. There was a recent example where a home visit was conducted and the family had gone on holiday whilst being persistently absent
- The headteacher would give the Attendance Officer a report of students who were close to being persistently absent so that one-to-one meetings could take place

Members asked if there were any gender differences or if it were more evenly spread.

Ms Johra noted:

- Where a child was male and had SEND, they tended to have lower attendance than a girl with SEND
- Aside from this, it was quite evenly split on gender

Ms Quantrell noted:

- It was fairly evenly split
- Because Haydon had spaces, they had inherited a group of students who were persistently absent, who were also persistently absent at their previous secondary school

Members asked if there were particular groups of young people or parents that the Council could target.

Ms Johra noted:

- Early connections with parents would help
- Some young people who were persistently absent were new to the country
- Stronger partnerships with, for example, whoever was leading family support in a school would be good
- It could be possible for the Council to find out new families into the community and holding a form of welcome meeting. This may be difficult to implement due to the number of schools and the number of new families. A joint meeting held at one school on one evening could suffice with neighbouring schools coming together
- Also, having some literature from the Council including a contact number. It had been found that if a family did not see the value of school, having the Council involved lead to improvements, whether this was through fines or Panel meetings
- Being near Heathrow, there were a lot of families new to the country. There could be a practical way of networking with them
- For families who have been in the Borough long term and were not sending their children to school, an informal meeting could be held at the end of September with the parents to discuss their challenges. Having the parents know that someone is involved other than the school, may help them
- Networking with new families to make them feel part of Hillingdon was important

Ms Quantrell noted:

- There had been a few occasions where families had been moved out of the area
- Unstable housing caused issues
- There had been an occasion where a family had been placed in Milton Keynes
- There had been families moved from Ruislip to near Heathrow
- Some families were moved multiple times in a short time frame
- There were a few families from the Travelling community who were difficult to get into school all day every day
- Children who are disengaged tend to be the children of parents who were also disengaged and have a real dislike of school
- In these scenarios there would be attempts to break down barriers, but the children you want to reach are the ones whose parents you cannot reach

Members asked how schools balanced between being as accommodating as possible to encourage parents and young people to come into school whilst also abiding by their responsibilities.

Ms Johra noted:

- In primary school settings, children love stickers and small gifts
- Wood End Park Academy had implemented, whenever a whole class was in school, they would get a star and this would equate to a few extra minutes play time. These could be accumulated. Overall, this had improved attendance. However, the classes that were not getting stars had the children whose parents made it easier for them to stay at home
- Holding out a hand to the parents in partnership with the schools would be helpful

Ms Quantrell noted:

- The school followed up on absence calls to find out the specific reason for absence

- Home visits took place. On a recent home visit, the parent rang to say the young person would not get up, when visiting the house, the parent was on a Zoom call and directed the officer to the young person's bedroom
- The school had almost reached the point of considering using the school minibus to collect students
- The officer noted that they were firm but fair. For example, if a parent requested a full day of absence for a dentist appointment at 09:30, this would be challenged
- It was difficult to have conversations to explain that 90% attendance is persistently absent, whereas 90% on a test was quite good. It may be useful to discuss absence in terms of hours instead of percentages. If you tell someone that their attendance was 95% or 90%, they were generally quite happy with that

Members asked if students who were persistently absent truanted lessons regularly when they were in school.

Ms Quantrell noted:

- When persistent absentees returned, it was ensured that someone saw them and they would go through their timetable and try to pre-empt any problems arising
- The Attendance Officer had access to the school CCTV and there were a set of cameras linked to communal areas in the toilets. This was used to remove children who were loitering in the toilets. The school had changed its duty rotas so that someone would go into the toilets to move children on. It was noted that it could work the other way as well, where children who are truant become absent.

Members asked about whether the absences related to specific lessons

Ms Quantrell noted:

- Officers would go through timetables to find specific issues. If it were PE for example, arrangements could be made for the young person to get changed somewhere else. Discussions would be had with parents where patterns emerged, as parents may not always be aware of these specific details

Members noted logistics of having one Attendance Officer to go through all absences. It could take a very long time to go through them all, at which point half the day had passed.

Ms Quantrell noted:

- There were not as much truanting since she had started monitoring the CCTV.
- There had been a phase where students had attempted to leave the school site so the school had implemented duties on the school gates
- How the register was linked to which period it was would have an effect on attendance. A change had been made so that period 5 now linked to PM registration instead of form

Members noted the witness' comments about CAMHS and noted that the Health and Social Care Select Committee had recently conducted a review into CAMHS referral pathways. Members asked for any further information relating to CAMHS.

Ms Quantrell noted:

- A recent meeting with a persistently absent student, their parents and a GP had

discussed waiting lists for CAMHS

- Sometimes parents wanted a quick fix to get their child into school
- Others just wanted some support
- The GP mentioned the Right to Choose
- This could be available as an alternative to CAMHS

Members asked about how to engage with hard-to-reach pupils.

Ms Quantrell noted:

- They tried to move away from Panel meetings
- Fining for holidays every time would be explored
- The 'team around the child' meetings were going to be useful
- There were occasions where families moved and did not inform the school so it took a while to know that they are not there and then do a site visit to confirm that they were not there
- Parenting support for teenagers in particular would be helpful
- There was the Triple P programme which the school promoted, but it was families that you would like to engage who do not

Members asked about outreach, and if the Council could deliver workshops or programmes that can be offered to families or local community on mental health issues, self-harming or child management. Members further asked the witnesses if they were liaising with other schools or external organisations on developing these types of projects.

Ms Johra noted:

- In terms of supporting young people with mental health issues, the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership team was excellent
- They ran regular meetings with safeguarding leads, always updating them and signposting resources and ensuring contact with external resources
- External organisations would present to the school, ensuring up to date information
- This work was preventative, not reactive
- There were workshops, which Hillingdon were going to lead on, around educating younger children in making sure that they were keeping themselves safe. If young people were enduring anything at home this could also be a reason for absence
- The earlier that any outreach work can start with families and school, the better this would be
- Instead of promoting 90%, as parents might then think that 89% is acceptable and persistent absenteeism is a phrase that parents may not understand, the Council could create some literature in parent-friendly language. This could include research about how lower attendance affects grades
- An idea that could work as an incentive could be for young people with attendance at a certain level to be included in a raffle which could be linked to sponsorships for local organisations. This may not work for all schools but would work for Wood End Park Academy. This may also help with advertising the first day of school
- A good starting point would be literature in language that would help parents to understand, in partnership with the school, which could include the school logo

Ms Quantrell noted:

- She was due to attend a cluster meeting tomorrow, where several schools meet and share concerns, ideas and good practise
- Mental health support/ training/ advice/ 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
- The school worked with the Molly Rose Foundation and also recommended Kooth and Winston's Wish. These links had been developed over time. The Molly Rose Foundation ran mental health first aid training for schools in exchange for a small donation. These were useful
- In a previous role, Action for Children had run a resilience programme, which was funded by the Post Office. For example, a six-week programme with a group of core students would be very helpful
- The school had re-written the attendance section on the school website to be more focused around hours of missed learning and trying to veer away from percentages

Members referred to Triple P and asked how effective these courses were. Members noted that the parents who may need to engage were the ones who did not, and Members asked if there were reasons for this. Members further asked if these courses could be run online, noting the importance of building resilience and of prevention. Members noted differences in primary and secondary schools on this, citing more parental responsibility on primary aged children and getting them into school. Members further asked if there was anything that the Council could deliver on prevention.

Ms Johra noted:

- At lot of parents did not take up Triple P. Those that did tended to have good attendance and were using Triple P for other reasons
- All schools would have intake meetings when, for example, the child joins a nursery to welcome the parents and the child, and again for Reception
- These meetings tend to be well-attended
- Parents may not attend for many other things aside from intake days and sports days
- Signposting resources or even delivering resources (or a taster version) at intake days could be a good idea
- At Wood End Park Academy, there were a lot of parents who tended to believe their child over believing in themselves. Whereas parents can make their children feel more confident and more empowered and can help them to solve problems. It was often felt to be easier to, when a child was feeling upset, to keep them at home. Parents may not have, or not believe that they have, the strategies to deal with this. With this in mind, resources at intake days may be beneficial
- Parents may find this beneficial as they can be informed about resources and strategies for when their child does not want to come to school

Ms Quantrell noted:

- There was an issue around mid-year admissions. If there were problems at their previous school, students may have been home educated or educated abroad for a while which gave them a break in their education history. When they start at a new school, they may start with a blank slate and then previous issues start to arise again
- With this in mind, support for mid-year admissions would be helpful as schools often inherit young people who have had issues in their previous school
- It could be beneficial for schools to have a probationary period for mid-year

admissions

- Leaflets would be a good idea. The school did send out information online
- The school gave out contact cards for mental health support, and a similar thing for parents may be useful
- Parents that you would want to take up these things often did not and this was difficult
- Children were very quick to get their phones out and call their parents, despite phone restrictions in school and some parents would tell their children to leave, overriding what teachers say
- This can lead to difficulties in engaging because you do not want to create more barriers

Members raised the possibility of a short survey being sent to all schools to obtain their feedback regarding persistent absenteeism, what was working well and not so well. This could include an overview of the Committee's review and suggestions for recommendations that the Committee can include.

Members also highlighted the scoping report which listed some actions the Council had already taken and were planning to take in the year ahead. These included publishing a revised borough-wide protocol on the use of penalty notices and developing attendance hubs across the borough.

Ms Johra noted:

- Primary headteachers would welcome a short survey, but would likely want a quick response around next steps
- Everyone was trying to tackle issues around attendance
- At all headteacher's meetings, two main topics of discussion were SEND and attendance
- On the actions that had already been implemented, the school (based in central Hayes) could not say they had seen these in action/ the impact of these. Maybe communication of these could be better
- Sometimes 'over-communication' was required
- These changes could be communicated in the London Borough briefing sheets at half-termly primary forum meetings
- There had been a change in the school's Attendance Support Officer and this had led to improvements

Ms Quantrell noted:

- She referred to the Education Act to parents quite regularly if needed
- There was a lot of admin around attendance when there needed to be conversations with parents to build relationships
- A forum would be good
- On the LEAP portal, it took a while to navigate the website to find a referral form as it appeared to be a one-size-fits-all form and a lot of the questions were not relevant to all cases. It may be worthwhile looking into this. It may also be worthwhile adding links to more resources into the LEAP portal

Members referred to the attendance cluster hub meetings and asked if anyone from the Local Authority attended these. Ms Quantrell noted that several people from the Local Authority attend. The first meeting took place at Haydon Secondary School a few months previously, the one tomorrow was at Lady Bankes Primary School. Ms Quantrell was attending this, but this led to the challenges of having to leave the

afternoon registers open and having to rely on teacher to pick up absences. Therefore, there were often challenges in attending these meetings.

Members further highlighted the usefulness of the witnesses attending this session.

Members noted that persistent absenteeism was being reviewed by Central Government, and asked if they were providing any assistance.

Ms Johra noted:

- They were updating guidance and were trying to streamline the systems that schools use
- There was no particular extra pressure from them
- They had given guidance on the letters that parents should be getting and what should be happening at each point
- They 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

Ms Quantrell noted:

- 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 massively affected the day-to-day running of schools
- Guidance had been good
- There was not any extra pressure
- Attendance was everyone's business in a school. Headteachers needed to discuss it; any newsletters needed to refer to it
- Staffing levels at the school were challenging

Members asked about the capacity for remote sessions and remote learning, and the ability to enforce this, for students absent with mental health issues for example.

Ms Quantrell noted:

- There were quite a few students who would fall into this category, but there were issues in getting timely up-to-date medical evidence of a mental health condition that justified remote learning
- There was a requirement to get clinician-level confirmation that a child was unfit to attend school
- Getting an appointment with someone of this level can take a long time
- There were a couple of students where alternative provision had been looked at and the school did make use of the Skills Hub
- There were a couple of students who had social workers and some tuition had been set up
- The school had received an email from a parent today which noted that her child was not in a good place and requested that they study at home for a week and wanted to know their options or to arrange a home learning agreement. So some parents were pushing for more home education/ remote learning. COVID had demonstrated that it was possible to learn from home
- While the school wanted to implement remote learning where suitable, there were time delays, and some children would be at home with undiagnosed conditions not accessing any education as the school were unable to send work

home without medical evidence. Once remote tuition was started, it was difficult to get children back on site

- Where there was a medical confirmation of a child being unfit to attend school there was funding available, whereas schools were expected to fund different tuition

Members asked about support for young people when they returned from a long absence.

Ms Quantrell noted:

- They would meet with the young person
- Heads of Year/ Deputy Heads of Year would meet with the student
- They would have pastoral support
- They would coordinate about who would pick up the young person in the morning and have regular check-ins
- Young people often sought out teachers/ attendance officers anyway
- Counselling would be in place where necessary
- There was a mentor available
- Having a trusted adult for the young people was helpful
- Getting young people in in the first place was difficult
- There were few instances of long-term absence – the longest absences tended for be when parents took their children abroad
- If a young person was worried about returning to school through anxiety or mental health, there was a family support worker who would meeting with the parents and young person, agree a plan and ensure that the class teacher or learning support assistant was there to check in on them regularly

Members asked how many children were currently integrated, or not on a full timetable.

Ms Quantrell noted:

- Currently most students were either on-timetable or off-timetable
- Reduced timetables were difficult to manage, and the young people would find reasons as to why suggested reduced timetables did not work
- There had been difficulties in finding a safe space within the school where the young person can do some learning with a member of staff present. There were not sufficient resources available to do this
- There were cases where there were whole families of persistent absentees, and every new school year was like a reset where, if a child was heading towards a panel meeting, if this did not happen for any reason, September would come around and the school would have to send them the initial letter again. This caused frustrations. In some exceptional circumstances it would be beneficial to carry on the next year where you left off the previous year instead of having to start again

Ms Johra noted:

- Generally, across primary school children were not on part time timetables because they cannot cope with school. Children who did have part time timetables were those who had high level special needs, but this was not to do with them being persistently absent

Members asked about allowances for students who were also young carers, who may be responsible for getting their siblings to school.

Ms Quantrell noted:

- The school did have some young carers.
- Someone from the school's safeguarding team was responsible for young carers
- When it came to punctuality and detentions, considerations were made and support was in place for this

The Children's Participation Team Manager was in attendance and noted:

- While Hillingdon had re-branded its Participation Service to Attendance Support, their role was within social care, not education
- This did used to fall under Children's Participation
- Their role was around the voice of the child
- Rather than focusing on education, their service worked with children who were known to social services. This may be children who are looked after, care experienced young people, those who need child protection, and those known to the youth justice service more broadly
- They had been doing a lot of work with children and young people about being persistently absent from school and reasons for this
- Some of this had been explored through the Corporate Parenting Panel. For example, young people had delivered training to professionals and they were due to deliver training to Designated Safeguarding Leads on 03 July, and feedback could be obtained from young people on this

The Chair noted the Committee's appreciation to the three witnesses for attending the meeting.

In terms of the next witness session, a private session was planned with young people, to share their experiences and the challenges they face. It would be beneficial to hear from young people why they are unable to attend school or if they were struggling with their education. The voice of young people was very important for the review. It may also be possible to engage the Hillingdon Youth Council.

The review planning timetable noted that a second session with schools may be required. Officers clarified that there had been a number of contacts from schools who had noted their willingness to engage in the review but could not attend this session.

Members referred to the minutes of the previous meeting, which highlighted that Camden and Buckinghamshire Councils were conducting similar reviews; and that Buckinghamshire Council had asked for more funding from Central Government; and reference had been made of the attendance mentors programme which other Councils had taken part in. It was asked if Hillingdon was considering this. Furthermore, there was due to be an update concerning geographical and cultural data.

On the witness sessions, Members asked about different young groups who could maybe engage with the review. Officers noted that the Participation Team worked with young people from the ages of 6 to 25. Young people would be happy to share their voice.

RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee

11. **FORWARD PLAN** (*Agenda Item 9*)

Members considered the Forward Plan.

RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee noted the Cabinet Forward Plan.

12. **WORK PROGRAMME** (*Agenda Item 10*)

Officers provided an update on the Work Programme.

- On in-year admissions, there was a provisional date of September 2024
- On the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, there was a provisional date of September 2024. This would be added to the Forward Plan for a Cabinet Member Decision expected in October/ November 2024
- On a report into targeted services, this had been narrowed down into early help services and support for low-income families. There was a provisional date of July 2024 for this
- On alternative provision, this was confirmed for November 2024 to tie in with the update on the SEND Strategy
- On engagement with schools, this would require Members to narrow down specifically what they would like from this. There was an early provisional date of February 2025 for this
- On higher education, this would require Members to narrow down specifically what they would like from this. There was an early provisional date of February 2025 for this

On higher education, Members highlighted the Council's new Civic Partnership with Brunel University London. There were elements of this relating to health and well-being, economy and skills. There was also the possibility of discussing what further education colleges were providing, and partnerships between further education colleges, higher education settings and schools. Further topics could include accessing higher education, and support given to access higher education. Brunel could act as a gateway into higher education.

On engagement with schools, Members noted the difficulties in obtaining feedback from schools on the current and previous major review topics. A private item on engagement could focus on how the Council can improve or facilitate easier contact between itself and schools. It was noted that in the first instance the Committee could ask officers how they engage with schools via a briefing note which could help to develop an item on this. It was further noted that the potential audit of schools through the major review could also facilitate this.

Members raised the possibility of an item on helping young people with additional needs to access extra-curricular activities (for example sports or Scouts/ Guides groups). This could include working with local organisations to help to promote and access activities. This could focus on young people from low-income families or those with disabilities. The Chair noted that it may be worthwhile waiting until after the upcoming update on the Youth Offer and Delivery Model (which was provisionally scheduled for November 2024).

RESOLVED: That the Children, Families and Education Select Committee considered the report and agrees any amendments.

The meeting, which commenced at 7.00 pm, closed at 8.35 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Ryan Dell on rdell@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.