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# Briefing Note: Local Authority Statutory Duties Around Attendance

<b>Produced for:</b>	<i>Children &amp; Young People Scrutiny Committee</i>
<b>Requested by:</b>	<i>Children &amp; Young People Scrutiny Committee</i>
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## 1 Purpose of the Briefing

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Children’s Scrutiny with information on school attendance in West Berkshire. This report outlines how West Berkshire Council is meeting its statutory duties in relation to school attendance. It provides an overview of our strategic approach, operational delivery, and multi-agency collaboration to support children and families, with a focus on reducing persistent and severe absence. It draws on the approved Attendance Strategy 2025 and the Improving School Attendance Delivery Plan 2025–2026, demonstrating a strategic, multi-agency, and child-centred approach to improving attendance outcomes across the local area.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 The attendance data across West Berkshire and its statistical neighbours for the academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25 reveals consistent patterns that reinforce the need for a collaborative and proactive attendance strategy. West Berkshire maintains a strong attendance rate of 94.82% in 2024/25, slightly above the national average of 94%, and comparable to neighbouring areas such as Hampshire (94.9%) and Bracknell (94.65%). However, persistent absence remains a concern across all areas, with West Berkshire at 12.65%, closely aligned with Reading (12.3%), Bracknell (12.4%), and Buckinghamshire (12.2%). These figures suggest that while overall attendance is relatively stable, a significant proportion of pupils are missing substantial amounts of school.
- 2.2 Unauthorised absence rates have also seen a slight increase across the board, with West Berkshire rising from 1.05% to 1.2%, mirroring national and regional trends. This may reflect growing challenges related to disengagement, unmet needs, or family pressures. The data highlights the importance of early identification, emotional support, and inclusive education pathways—core pillars of the strategy—to address the underlying causes of absence and ensure every child is supported to attend and thrive. West Berkshire’s performance is encouraging—but we’re not complacent. We’re

committed to raising aspirations, removing barriers, and ensuring every child is supported to attend, thrive, and succeed

### **3 Current Status**

#### **3.1 General Duties – All Pupils**

##### **Statutory Responsibilities:**

- Develop a strategic approach to attendance.
- Make attendance a focus across council services.
- Maintain a School Attendance Support Team.
- Provide a named contact for each school.
- Facilitate the sharing of effective practice.

#### **3.2 West Berkshire Delivery:**

- The Attendance Strategy 2025 has been approved and aligns with the Council's priorities for inclusion, early help, and wellbeing. It is underpinned by the DfE's *Working Together to Improve School Attendance* framework.
- Attendance is embedded across council services, supported by the development of an Educational Neglect Policy and regular multi-agency forums.
- The Education Attendance Team (EAT) is fully operational and provides direct support to schools.
- Named Education Attendance Officers are assigned to all schools, including independent settings, with active engagement in training and networking.
- Best practice is shared through forums, newsletters, and expert-led sessions. The Attendance Working Group (AWG) is being established to oversee governance and delivery.

#### **3.3 Pupils At Risk of Becoming Persistently Absent**

##### **Statutory Responsibilities:**

- Review attendance data regularly.
- Hold conversations with schools to identify at-risk pupils.
- Provide access to services for families.
- Facilitate early help.
- Act as lead practitioner if agreed.
- Continue support even if another service leads.

##### **West Berkshire Delivery:**

- Attendance data is reviewed through Team Around the School Meetings (TSMs) and informs resource allocation. KPIs from the Attendance Strategy are monitored quarterly via Attendance Working Group and will be fed into Children's Scrutiny Board.
- Schools of concern receive tailored support, including improvement plans and drop-in sessions. A referral pathway is in place for escalated concerns.

- Families can access a wide range of services including Early Help, EBSA support, and Mental Health Services.
- The LA acts as Lead Professional where appropriate, with Early Help and Family Hubs often leading.
- Attendance is a key theme in multi-agency plans, and the LA is leading projects with BOB ICS and ICB Safeguarding to improve frontline understanding and support.

### **3.4 Persistently Absent Pupils**

#### **Statutory Responsibilities:**

- Continue support as above.
- Work with schools on formal support (e.g., attendance contracts).
- Ensure joint working with social care and safeguarding.
- Enforce attendance through legal intervention if needed.

#### **West Berkshire Delivery:**

- Schools are supported with Panel Days, a PA Toolkit, and training on attendance contracts and SMART targets. EAOs provide direct support.
- Joint working is embedded. The Virtual School supports Social Workers in using attendance as a safety factor in planning. Attendance is a theme in shared service days and CP/CIN plan audits.
- Safeguarding Officers are embedded in the EAT. West Berkshire leads the BWSCP priority on “Children Not in School,” developing shared protocols.
- Legal intervention is used as a last resort. A new portal is being developed to streamline Penalty Notices (10in10 and Holiday PNs).

### **3.5 Severely Absent Pupils**

#### **Statutory Responsibilities:**

- Continue support as above.
- Intensify support.
- Consider statutory children’s social care referrals if safeguarding concerns exist.

#### **West Berkshire Delivery:**

- A Complex Case Panel is being formalised, currently operating through multi-agency MDTs.
- CSC referrals are considered under educational neglect where safeguarding concerns exist. Safeguarding audits ensure robust practice at both individual and whole-school levels.
- SEN processes are being improved, including funding pathways and the Ordinarily Available Offer.
- SPAs from the previous year are being audited to assess gaps in CSC involvement.
- A graduated response is in place to intensify support and ensure transparency in decision-making.

## Strategic Alignment and Governance

- The Attendance Strategy aligns with the SEND & Inclusion Strategy 2024–2029 and the Council Strategy 2025–2027, promoting early identification, inclusive education, and collaborative working.
- Governance is provided through a Multi-Agency Attendance Board and the Attendance Working Group (AWG), ensuring strategic oversight and operational delivery.
- Monitoring includes monthly data dashboards, quarterly feedback from families, and an annual impact report.

3.6 The development of West Berkshire's Attendance Strategy has been shaped by a strong collaborative effort across internal teams and external partners. Over the past year, we have worked closely with the DfE Attendance Advisor, drawing on national guidance and best practice from other local authorities. Engagement has included a dedicated CSC away day and an external partner session, both focused on raising awareness, setting priorities, and securing pledges to support attendance improvement. Multiple versions of the strategy have been shared across Children's Services, with valuable input from managers and stakeholders. Individual consultations have further strengthened the strategy's relevance and alignment. This collective effort has laid the foundation for a shared vision, and we welcome continued feedback and support through the Attendance Working Group to ensure the strategy remains responsive, inclusive, and impactful

## 4 Implications and Impact

The implementation of the Attendance Strategy and Delivery Plan has significant implications for improving outcomes for children and young people in West Berkshire:

- Improved Attendance Outcomes: Early identification and targeted support are reducing persistent and severe absence.
- Enhanced Multi-Agency Collaboration: Stronger partnerships across education, health, and social care are enabling more coordinated responses.
- Increased Family Engagement: Empowering families through training, personalised plans, and practical support is fostering trust and shared responsibility.
- Safeguarding Strengthened: Attendance is now embedded as a safeguarding factor in planning and review processes.
- Systemic Change: The strategy is driving cultural change across services, promoting curiosity, compassion, and accountability.

## 5 Next Steps

### 5.1 Finalise Governance Structures:

- Launch the Attendance Working Group (AWG) and confirm membership.
- Establish regular reporting to the Multi-Agency Attendance Board.

## 5.2 **Embed Strategy Across Services:**

- Ensure all departments and partners are aware of their roles and responsibilities.
- Integrate attendance into existing planning and review frameworks.

## 5.3 **Monitor and Evaluate:**

- Implement monthly data dashboards and quarterly feedback loops.
- Publish an annual impact report with recommendations for refinement.

## 5.4 **Strengthen Legal and Digital Infrastructure:**

- Roll out the new Penalty Notice Portal to streamline enforcement.
- Continue to use legal intervention only as a last resort.

## 5.5 **Continue Training and Empowerment:**

- Deliver termly training for professionals and carers.
- Expand therapeutic and inclusive education practices.

# 6 **Conclusion**

West Berkshire is meeting its statutory duties around attendance through a robust strategy, a detailed delivery plan, and strong multi-agency collaboration. The approach is inclusive, proactive, and focused on improving outcomes for all children—particularly those at risk of persistent or severe absence.

# 7 **Appendices**

Appendix A – Local Area Attendance Strategy

Appendix B – Improving School Attendance Delivery Plan 2025-2028

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## **Background Papers:**

[Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674441/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance.pdf)

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