

FINAL REPORT OF THE EDUCATION TASK & FINISH WORKING GROUP

FOLLOWING ITS INQUIRY INTO: -

SCHOOL AGE EDUCATION PROVISION AND SPECIFICALLY:-

- (a) the rate of absenteeism in schools; consideration of the underlying reasoning for the rise in absence rates, and good practise to reverse this**
- (b) mental health support in secondary schools**

Date: 15TH April 2024

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE TASK & FINISH GROUP

On 11 July 2023, Full Council agreed the Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committees work programme for 2023/2024, which included a number of Task & Finish Groups to enable a number of enquiries, including pupil attendance and mental health support in secondary school education.

As agreed by the Task & Finish Group, the overall aims of the enquiry were:

With reference to secondary school age provision, to consider specifically.

- **the rate of absenteeism in schools**
consideration of the underlying reasoning for the rise in absence rates, and the good practise in place in schools currently to reverse this
- **mental health support available in schools**

Partnership engagement would include:

- Representative/s from Essex County Council education directorate in relation to school attendance/statutory compliance
- Representatives of Tendring secondary schools
- Assistant Director, Partnerships

The Task & Finish group met on the following dates:

11 October 2023
11 December 2023
15 April 2024

School visits were arranged between January 2024 and the end March 2024.

It is important to highlight that this report is written on the basis that the Council has no statutory role for Education, and has been prepared on the basis of influencing and bringing partners together as the Council's role as a Community Leader.

THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE INQUIRY

The inquiry supported the then Corporate plan themes of:

- Community Leadership Through Partnerships;
- Building sustainable communities for the Future and,
- Joined up public services for the benefit of our residents and businesses

MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK & FINISH WORKING GROUP

Cllr Terry Barrett (Chair)
Cllr Chris Griffiths
Cllr Carrie Doyle
Cllr Lynda McWilliams
Cllr Bill Davidson

OFFICER SUPPORT FOR THE TASK & FINISH WORKING GROUP

Bethany Jones, Committee Services Officer, Democratic Services
Anastasia Simpson, Assistant Director, Partnerships
Rebecca Morton, Executive Projects Manager, Partnerships

INVITEES AND PARTICIPANTS

External

Anita Patel Lingam, Statutory Education Compliance Manager, Specialist Education Services, Essex County Council

Participating Tending Secondary Schools:

Harwich & Dovercourt High School

Clacton County High School

Tending Technology College

Manningtree High School

Internal

Anastasia Simpson, Assistant Director, Partnerships

Rebecca Morton, Executive Projects Manager, Partnerships

Bethany Jones, Committee Services Officer, Democratic Services

EXPECTED OUTCOME(S) OF THE INQUIRY

To understand/consider the current status of pupil attendance levels and mental health support in Tending secondary schools.

ACTUAL OUTCOME(S) OF THE INQUIRY

The inquiry found that:-

- Schools are struggling to ensure that good attendance levels (95%) are being achieved by school cohorts. This challenge has increased considerably since the Covid pandemic.
- SEND and EHCP student attendance figures are weaker when compared to the general cohort.
- Schools are using a range of strategies to improve attendance figures. Most responses are in house and rely on school staff to ensure early intervention strategies are implemented.
- The main cause of absence other than physical illness is mental health.
- Fines are used for absence but mostly for holiday related absence.
- Main barriers when attempting to improve attendance are: a) extra cost for additional interventions b) resolving mental health issues c) external support is either too costly or not readily available.
- Mental health need in secondary schools across Tending is very high.
- Mental Health demand has increased since Covid and shows no signs of abating.
- The mental health needs of young people have become more complex and this has led to teaching staff referring more concerns to higher level professionals/organisations.
- Main support strategies are (a) In school staff support, Head of Year etc (b) School employed Counsellors (c) External referral agencies e.g. CAMHS.

- In school Mental Health support is very costly and schools are absorbing these costs while trying to balance ever tighter budgets.
- External waiting lists for Mental Health support are very long. CAMHS referrals currently stand at 9 months. A child's need is often immediate, but the professional support that is needed takes months to be delivered.
- The school GCSE curriculum is a contributing factor to some negative mental health issues. Pressure to achieve certain levels/grades and the absence of an alternative curriculum lead to mental health difficulties for some KS4 students.
- Schools report that GP referrals are slow and parental support is variable.
- No school appears to have data that tracks the number of parents that de-roll their children due to Mental Health issues.
- Our results suggest that the two issues investigated by the T&F Education group are linked. A significant contributing factor to increased absenteeism are the mental health issues faced by young people.
- Schools appear reluctant to share percentage data with the T&F group

RECOMMENDATION(S)

The School Age Education Provision Task & Finish Group recommends:-

- 1. Advocate and champion where possible local mental health support for young people.**
- 2. Seek funding opportunities, wherever possible, to provide mental health support for young people.**
- 3. Promote the suicide prevention training (free online learning package) to schools across Tendring.**
- 4. Support and have Officer attendance at the Tendring Education Strategic Board, Attendance sub-group.**
- 5. Champion and continue to work closely with Family Solutions.**
- 6. To continue to support the Primary Wellbeing hubs and cascade the evaluation from the University of Essex through the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board, Tendring Community Safety Partnership/Health and Wellbeing Board.**
- 7. To request an update from ECC Education colleagues regarding school attendance data:-**

The following requests to be submitted to ECC post January 2025 - (this will be the earliest opportunity for school data to be available under new reporting arrangements for schools. (Ref: Department for Education Guidance, "Working Together to Improve School Attendance," (update February 2024)):

- **Request attendance data relating to the autumn term of 2024/25 to show levels of persistent and severe absence within the district (for the**

Tendring area and broken down by school).

- **Number of alternative commissioning arrangements which have been commissioned by the LA (Education Access Team/SEND Team) for the Tendring district, including the reasons why such provision has been deemed necessary. This request should cover the autumn term 2024/25.**
- **Number of SEND children (SEN Support or EHCP) who have been removed from a Tendring school roll in favour of elective home education, during the autumn term (Tendring district data for the autumn term 2024/25, broken down by primary and secondary phases), where the reason provided suggests needs have not been met by the school.**

CHRONOLOGY

11 October 2023	Task & Finish Group Meeting
11 December 2023	Task & Finish Group Meeting
Jan – March 2024	Meetings with secondary schools
End March 2024	Findings collated/analysis
15 th April 2024	Meeting of Task & Finish Group – recommendations agreed
16 th - 19 th April 2024	Report drafted/agreed by Task & Finish Group

DETAILED FINDINGS OF THE INQUIRY

The findings of the review are set out below:-

Results from school visits

Questions	School A	School B	School C	School D
What % of students are persistently absent? (below 90%)	8.9%	Not provided	5-6%	Has been poor but a 60% improvement over the last year.
What % of students are severely absent (below 50%)	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided
What are attendance figures for SEN (a) and EHCP (b) students?	(a) = 90.4% (b) = 29%	Not provided	(a) 91.5%	Not provided
What measures do you implement to help these students		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily welfare telephone call. • Form Tutors first line of support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's work together document. • Let's talk document • EBSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular meetings. • Celebration letters. • Students track their own attendance. • Intervention

improve their attendance?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School based/funded EWO - Educational Welfare Officer. External knock on doors. Internal – talk to students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Emotionally Based School Avoidance) • Pastoral care – Head of Year • Alternative school provision NEECA (North East Essex Co-Operative Academy) • 1-2-1 tutoring support on site (at a cost to parent £673 per week) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategy if absence lasts longer than 3 days. • No holidays are authorised. • Prosecutions for absence occurred Feb 2024. • External agencies via the Trust are used.
What are the main reasons for student absence other than illness?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health issues. • Limited engagement from parents to help with Mental Health issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health issues. • Pressures from the curriculum, especially GCSE curriculum. • Drop in figures since Covid Pandemic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of culture in the school. • Lack of parental support with mental health. • More illness since Covid.
Do you fine parents for absence? If so is it for holidays or irregular attendance or both?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fines are issued. • Holidays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fines are issued • Holidays 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fines and prosecution. • Holidays
What are the main barriers for schools when attempting to improve attendance?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money! • County based EWO structure worked! Why remove it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative provision (NEECA) is full. • 1-2-1 tutor offer is too expensive for parents and school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health issues. • Lack of parental support.
What external support exists to help schools with improving attendance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastoral and welfare support 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essex schools info link. • Alternative Provision (NEECA) • EBSA - Emotionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance support through the Trust has been very good and effective.

			Based school Avoidance resources	
How many students are currently receiving mental health interventions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 per day. • Support is provided on a 1 to 1 basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No exact figure given but in the 100's. All support is saturated with long wait times for help/support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High demand and this is increasing. This is a concern. • School has 50 CLA (Children Looked After) Very high number. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 288 referrals since September 2023. • 40 students are on the waiting list for Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service CAMHS.
What strategies of support do you use to help students that are going through a mental health issue at your school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma perspective Practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Counsellor – 4-6 month wait. • MIND referral • NELFT (North East London Foundation Trust) support used • GP referrals through school & parent cooperation. • AVI robots? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) – currently has a 9 month waiting list. • On site Counsellor – delivering talking therapy. • Mental Health Nurse – referral needs to come from GP service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMHS. • Therapy dogs. • Triage system in place to prioritise support. • Pastoral leads – provide in house support but often needs a referral due to more complex needs.
Does the school employ a Counsellor?		Yes	Yes	
How effective are the strategies you implement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counsellor support very effective. • GP referral often leads to waiting list for support. • School support from staff – limited effectiveness – level of need higher than what teaching staff can provide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High demand and increasingly complex needs. • Services that are in place are struggling to match the demand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In house support often not adequate and needs a referral which comes with a very long wait.
What barriers exist that prevent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health support is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of employing a Counsellor is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support services cannot match 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMHS waiting list too long. Currently 40 students

schools making better progress with supporting students with mental health issues?	very costly. Therefore, cost is a limiting factor.	very high. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Media – root cause of most mental health issues. • Colchester – Crime on the increase and a lot of children getting involved – causing mental health issues. 	the need of the school. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCSE curriculum is a contributing factor to stress and anxiety of some students. Too much focus is placed on GCSE passes/levels. 	waiting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most mental health needs are complex and need specialist support. • GP referral process is too slow and complex. • Lack of parental engagement and response.
What external support exists to help schools with mental health support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIND and WARMS (Wellbeing Resilience Mental Health Service (previously named Mental Health Support Teams) – paid for out of the school budget. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIND • NELF – Northeast London Foundation Trust • GP referrals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMHS • GP referrals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMHS • GP referrals
How many parents have de-rolled their children due to mental health concerns?	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided
Transition from Primary to Secondary can be a time of great stress for children. How does your transition programme aim to make this as stress free as possible?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working very closely with Year 7. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work closely with feeder Primary schools • Led by member of SLT (senior leadership team) • Taster days for new students • Extra days for more vulnerable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction day • SEND (special educational needs/disabilities) & EHCP - (Education Health Care Plan) children receive extra support and further induction days. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding meetings with Primary schools are organised but info not always accurate.
Other information...		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School reluctant to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited training and 	

		<p>categorise Mental Health issues as a crisis but accepted the challenge was very high!</p>	<p>work experience opportunities. Students have to travel out of local area to access these.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All post 16 academic education is provided out of the area apart from NOVA in Oxford Rd Clacton. A real concern for SEND and EHCP students. • Race related incidents have increased while homophobic incidents have decreased. • The two mental health areas that have seen most increase is eating disorders & self-harm. 	
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BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL

Department for Education – Working Together to Improve School Attendance
[Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

APPENDICES

None

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