

REPORT TO: Education & Children's Services Committee

MEETING DATE: 18 March 2025

BY: Executive Director – Education & Children's Services

SUBJECT: Attendance Update

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update the Committee on work to support the school attendance of children and young people and progress towards closing gaps in attendance figures for vulnerable learners.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the initiatives in place to support children and young people to attend school and the impact of this work.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The National Improvement Framework (NIF) has seven strategic outcomes. These include the expectation that children and young people will experience the benefit of school and that there will be improved attendance with increased engagement in learning and a culture of dignity and respect for all. This aspiration is embedded in our approaches.
- 3.2 Contextually, it is important to note that there is a national concern about reduced levels of attendance in schools. This has been an issue particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. The reasons for this are multi-faceted but include the impact of poverty and increased anxiety amongst the school aged population.
- 3.3 Within this context it is incumbent on local authorities and schools to employ rigorous, creative and transformational approaches. It is also imperative that education works closely with partners from other services to provide appropriate supports, in line with GIRFEC principles.

- 3.4 A data informed approach to attendance is underpinned by monthly equity and inclusion trackers which provide schools with key attendance data. This supports early intervention. The *East Lothian Council Raising Attainment Strategy* sets out a stretch aim for each school to improve attendance.
- 3.5 Schools across East Lothian use a variety of strategies to promote good attendance and support those who are struggling to attend school. This includes whole school nurturing approaches and more targeted interventions including breakfast clubs, walking buses and bespoke timetabling. Expectations for tracking and monitoring attendance are outlined in our Attendance policy. This policy has been commended by Education Scotland and featured in their publication: *Improving Attendance: Understanding the Issues*.
- 3.6 Schools can also seek support from the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) for individual children and young people and to carry out action research, particularly in relation to emotional based school avoidance.
- 3.7 The new approaches to Additional Support Needs funding, which was approved by Committee on 19 November 2024 makes provision for children and young people struggling to attend school. This will take effect from August 2025.
- 3.8 Child Planning Framework–Locality Teams (CPF-LTs) are now established across all localities and an integral part of our approaches to GIRFEC. Almost all children and young people who are referred to CPF-LTs have, or are, experiencing degrees of difficulty with attending school. This forum promotes multi-agency solutions to support attendance and the wider attainment and achievement of children and young people.
- 3.9 Families Together East Lothian (FTEL) provides outreach support which directly and indirectly impacts on school attendance. This includes promoting effective bedtime and morning routines, managing a household and linking in with the school to support conversations with families and young people.
- 3.10 The Equity & Inclusion Education Outreach Service has now been established for six months. Children and young people can be referred to this service when support more bespoke than what school can traditionally offer is required. This may include children and young people who are struggling to attend school for reasons of mental or physical illness or who have experienced an interruption to their learning and need help to bridge this gap.

- 3.11 The table below provides attendance rates for specified groups of children and young people since 2022/23.

% Attendance Rates (August to January)

Cohort Type	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	24/25 +/- pp change on 23/24
All Pupils	89.7	90.3	92.2	+ 1.9 pp
ASN	85.3	86.7	89.5	+ 2.8 pp
FSM	82.6	83.1	85.8	+ 2.7 pp
Q1	85.3	86.6	87.7	+ 1.1 pp
Care Exp	83.8	84	88.8	+ 4.8 pp

MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 3.12 Comparative attendance data between periods August – January 2023/24 and August–January 2024/25 shows an increase of 1.8% for all children and young people and an increase of: 2.7% for those with additional support needs, 2% for those entitled to free school meals and 1.1% for those learners living in quintile 1.
- 3.13 The percentage of persistent absentees, which is defined as having 10% or more missed school sessions, is below the national average and has decreased 0.6% in session 2023/24 compared to 2022/23.
- 3.14 Since its inception the Equity & Inclusion Education Outreach Service has received 78 referrals for individual children and young people. Of these referrals, 79 National Qualifications have been achieved and a further 142 units contributing to National Qualifications have been achieved. The service has also worked in 23 different schools to provide additional support.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial - none
- 6.2 Personnel - none
- 6.3 Other - none

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None

AUTHOR'S NAME	Jennifer Boyle
DESIGNATION	Quality Improvement Manager for Equity and Inclusion
CONTACT INFO	E-mail – jboyle@eastlothian.gov.uk
DATE	18 March 2025