

TITLE	Children Missing Education
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 November 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY Presentation of Wokingham Borough's position and trends in relation to children who are missing education or who are permanently excluded from school
RECOMMENDATION For information.
SUMMARY OF REPORT The number of children who are defined as 'missing education' has been significantly reduced in recent years through collaborative working between schools, the LA's Admissions Service and the Education Welfare Service. Rates are below national averages and showing a positive trend. Rates of permanent exclusions are also below national averages. Whilst children with special educational needs and disabilities are disproportionately represented, there are plans in place and already underway to redress this at an early intervention level, through approaches that seek to tackle racial inequalities and also to more deeply embed a philosophy of inclusion within all schools across the Borough.

Background

Statutory guidance is in place which gives legal duty under section 436A of the Education Act 1996 for Local Authorities to make arrangements to identify, as far as it is possible to do so, children missing education (CME).

The legislation is particularly underpinned by:

- Section 436A of the Education Act 1996 (added by section 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006)
- Education Act 1996 (section 7, 8, 14 and 19)
- Education and Inspections Act 2006 (section 4 and 38)
- Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006
- Education (Pupil Registration) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2016

There is further statutory guidance around the permanent exclusion of pupils, which can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/921405/20170831_Exclusion_Stat_guidance_Web_version.pdf

Purpose

This paper is intended to address queries raised at the previous Overview and Scrutiny meeting, at which clarification was sought on the position across the Borough in respect of Children Missing Education, with further queries about permanent exclusion rates.

A notable caveat is the unsettled landscape within schools in recent months due to the Covid pandemic. Whilst the country was in lockdown on two occasions, schools were closed to all but key worker/vulnerable children. s444 of the Education Act was suspended and therefore so were the responsibilities on parents to ensure regular school attendance. Where school was not an option for most pupils, they were coded Y (Enforced school closure) or X (Attendance not required) in the register. '#' was used in the first lockdown to signal that school as closed to the majority of pupils (except those of key workers or those who were deemed to be vulnerable). Any COVID related absences were coded as authorised and therefore did not affect attendance percentages.

Schools were closed to all pupils except key worker/vulnerable pupils between 23 March 2020 – 1 September 2020 and 4 January 2021 - 8 March 2021. Schools offered remote learning during these times but engagement in this was recorded at a school level and not reflected in the overall percentage.

Schools have been fully open since 8 March 2021 and all statutory responsibilities reinstated in relation to attendance. COVID related absences are now either coded using the X (Attendance not required) or I (illness – authorised absence) code in accordance with guidance. Only the 'I' code affects attendance percentage.

Analysis of Issues

Children Missing Education (CME)

A child deemed to be 'missing education' is defined as ***“those who are not on a school roll or receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school”*** (DfE 2016).

Annex A of the Pupil Registration Regulations sets out the criteria by which a school may remove a child from their roll. Additionally, a child who is not on roll at any educational provision and who is not recorded as being electively home educated, is also considered to be 'missing education'. This should not be confused with those children who were not attending school during the pandemic, either due to Government directed school closures (exc. Key worker and vulnerable children) – in these cases all children remained on roll and schools were given specific guidance on the coding of such absences.

These figures offer the total number of pupils throughout the year that have been on either of the two CME criteria lists: (Criteria 1) those who are not on roll at any educational provision or (Criteria 2) a pupil who is on roll at a school but who has missed over 20 consecutive days of education.

CME Children		
2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
81	212	306

(*one child noted as missing education in 2020-21 is carried forward from 2019-20)

Note from the figures above that the increase from 18/19 compared to 19/20 and 20/21 was almost exclusively due to effects of the COVID pandemic (children not attending the provision provided by school or accessing/engaging with any alternative provision provided i.e: physical or remote learning) and pupils unable to return from abroad to COVID travel restrictions. By default, the pandemic restrictions brought about an unofficial 'criteria 3' in this area.

Despite this, collaborative working with schools, WBC Admissions Service and the Education Welfare Service had already been a principal focus in recent years. As a result, there have been significant successes in reducing the number of children in any one academic year who are deemed to be missing education. Through this approach, this partnership has reduced the number of children missing education in each academic year by the following:

Academic year 2018/19: 58 children re-engaged with education
Academic year 2019/20: 162 children re-engaged with education
Academic year 2020/21: 307 children re-engaged with education

With Covid restrictions now fully lifted, as at 21/10/2021, the current snapshot data of children missing education is therefore:

CME Criteria 1: 12 pupils (those who are not on roll at any educational provision)

CME Criteria 2: 21 pupils (a pupil who is on roll at a school but who has missed over 20 consecutive days of education)

This represents a more accurate picture of the number of children within the Borough who are typically missing education at any one single point of time.

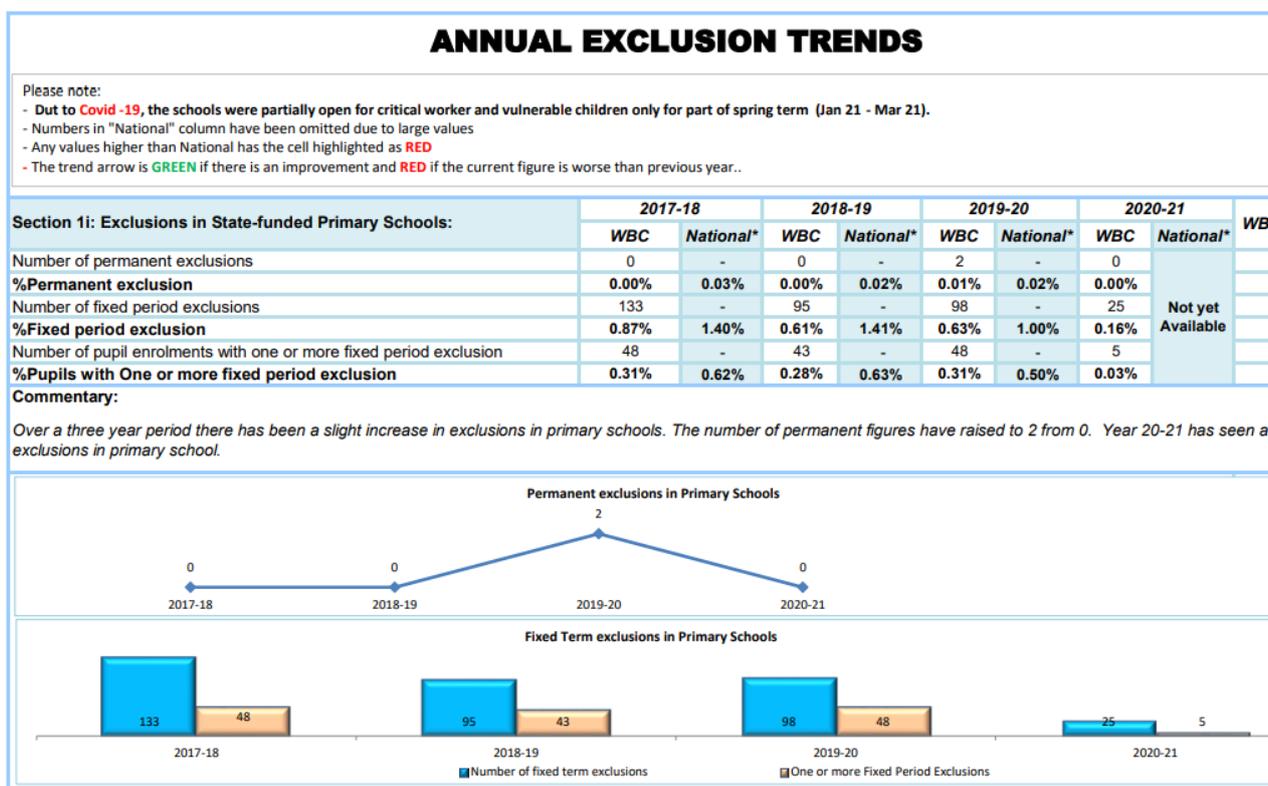
Permanent Exclusions (PEX)

Wokingham Borough currently fares favourably to the national picture. Rates of permanent exclusions overall are lower than national averages and are showing a decreasing trend. Whilst the rate slightly increased within Primary schools in 2019/20, rates have returned to typical levels in the subsequent year. Similarly, the number of pupils who have had more than one fixed-term exclusion – whilst below national average – is relatively high compared to statistical neighbours, but is showing a declining trend as a result of some of the strands of work taking place, as discussed below.

Inclusion work that is already underway comprises of supporting schools, governors, and parents through the legal process, contact to all families and schools where a pupil has been excluded on three or more occasions to offer support and guidance, training opportunities for schools, direct conversations with head teachers and behavioural leads, multi-agency work, and a fully informed website. Work with the youth offending service on a pre-exclusion package related to offending behaviours is also under development.

Current arrangements under our statutory duties are that at the point a child becomes excluded from their designated provision for a sixth day, pupil's education becomes the responsibility of the Local Authority. We meet this duty by commissioning arrangements with Foundry College, our Pupil Referral Unit. Current commissioning work with Foundry College will explore how schools can be better supported with pupils at risk of exclusion alongside the statutory duties of the LA.

Children with special educational need or disability are disproportionately represented however, whilst the percentage of children who have an EHCP being permanently excluded has shown a declining trend, this is not the case for children who are identified for SEN support – where rates are increasing. This is of concern and exclusion continues to be a focus of work for the Education Welfare Service and SEND – focussing on the newly published ‘Ordinarily Available Practice’ document, which seeks to ensure a good level of inclusivity across all educational establishments so that the risk of exclusion is prevented at the earliest opportunities.



No. of children with EHCPs	1	-	2	-	2	-	0	↓
% of children with EHCPs	0.14 %	0.16 %	0.27%	0.16%	0.24%	0.10%	0.00%	↓
No. of children with SEN support	3	-	8	-	1	-	7	↑
% of children with SEN support	0.14 %	0.34 %	0.36%	0.32%	0.04%	0.20%	0.30%	↑

The Education Welfare Service, in conjunction with other teams such as School Improvement, Admissions and SEND, are seeking to reduce the number of children experiencing permanent exclusions and/or those who are missing education, through two key strands of work. Work to promote racial equality is seeking to address issues of inclusion and racial disparity. Secondly, a ‘*Therapeutic Thinking*’ approach is being rolled out across all schools within the Borough with a view to embedding a philosophy that focusses on supporting children’s emotional well-being and mental health. This

evidenced-based approach helps professionals to develop an understanding of how to respond to those who are communicating needs through concerning behaviours. The ethos centres around an inclusive culture and where adopted in other Boroughs, the approach has had a positive impact on attendance, behaviour, reducing exclusion rates (both fixed-term and permanent) and an increased level of inclusivity within schools generally.

With these two significant pieces of work being rolled out in tandem, we anticipate seeing a further reduction in the number of children receiving fixed-term and permanent exclusions, as well as a reduction in the number of children who are missing education.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
N/A

Cross-Council Implications
N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
Please state clearly what the impact of the decision being made would be on the Council’s carbon neutral objective. N/A

List of Background Papers
N/A

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