

School attendance in the post pandemic era

Candy Holder
Assistant Director, Inclusion

National Context

Have you heard the news???

An urgent national crisis: The number of children missing school soars

Rise in school absences since Covid driven by anxiety and lack of support, say English councils

Tackle school absence crisis with better mental health and SEND support and urgent legislation, says Education Committee

Parents in England no longer see daily school attendance as vital, report finds

Everyone must obsess over full attendance from day one

One in five pupils in England were persistently absent in past school year

'I don't really care anymore': Parent apathy on attendance laid bare

Schools in England seeing more pupil absences on Fridays

Britain's schools attendance crisis: MPs call for tougher measures

Evidence to MPs claims parents more cautious about sending children to school with minor ailments

School absence post-pandemic – the national picture

- One of the most damaging national legacies of COVID-19 may yet prove to be the unprecedented closure of schools during the pandemic.
- While many argued this would be a one-off disruption and pupils would soon bounce back, data shows this is not the case, as a huge slice of the COVID generation have not got back into the habit of regularly attending school.
- The rise in absenteeism among pupils has been startling. During the autumn term of 2017/18, 4.4% of lessons were missed across state-maintained schools; during the autumn term of 2021/22, 7.9% of lessons were missed.
- Meanwhile there has been a significant increase in persistent absence. In 2017/18, 11.7 per cent of pupils missed 10 or more sessions; in 2021/22, 22.4 per cent of pupils missed 10 or more sessions.

Generation COVID: Emerging Work and Education inequalities

- Generation COVID has experienced worse labour market outcomes in terms of job loss, not working and earnings losses during and after lockdown.
- Those aged 16-25 were over twice as likely as older employees to have suffered job loss, with over one in ten losing their job, and just under six in ten seeing their earnings fall.
- Labour market losses are more pronounced for women, the self-employed and those who grew up in a poor family.
- University students from the lowest income backgrounds lost 52% of their normal teaching hours as a result of lockdown, but those from the highest income groups suffered a smaller loss of 40%
- Female students were far more likely than males to report that the pandemic had adversely affected their wellbeing
- During lockdown, nearly 75% of private school pupils benefitted from full school days - nearly twice the proportion of state school pupils (38%).
- 25% of pupils had no schooling or tutoring during lockdown.
- Overall, just under four in ten pupils benefitted from full schooling during full school closures due to lockdown.

Persistent Absence and deprivation factors

- Research by COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities study (COSMO) suggested the following:
 - Young people from lower occupational status backgrounds were more likely to miss school, with 21% of those from working class backgrounds missing more than 20 days, compared to 17% from higher managerial/professional backgrounds.
 - 37% of pupils at state schools said they had fallen behind their classmates – more than double the figure for independent school students.
 - Young people from ethnic minorities were more likely to be concerned they had fallen behind their classmates due to pandemic disruption.
 - In terms of catch-up, 27% of children took up the National Tutoring Programme. 9% of parents reported they had paid for their child to have private tuition. 52% of students in independent schools were offered tuition by their school.
- LSE research found that in 2017/18, the rate of PA was 24% greater in the most deprived areas. In the post-pandemic era, they saw no such difference when comparing the bottom and top deciles of areas by deprivation.

Why is absence from school rising?

- Reasons for the rising absences remain speculative but likely to be a result of multiple factors... increased anxiety, lack of mental health support, school budget pressures, unmet SEND, 'can't we just do it on-line?', changes in parental working schedules (leading to Friday 'awaydays').
- Others suggest more fundamental factors that were evident pre-pandemic: a breakdown in trust between parents and schools, increasing unhappiness with the narrow academic curricula schools are measured by; increased academic pressure to catch up, plus the feeling that enjoyable activities such as sport or music were being squeezed out of the curriculum, fostering disengagement...
- Evidence presented to MPs on the Commons education select committee on attendance also suggests parents are more cautious about sending their children to school with minor ailments post pandemic. Illness is the main reason given for absence in Islington

House of Commons Education Committee:

Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils

Recommendations:

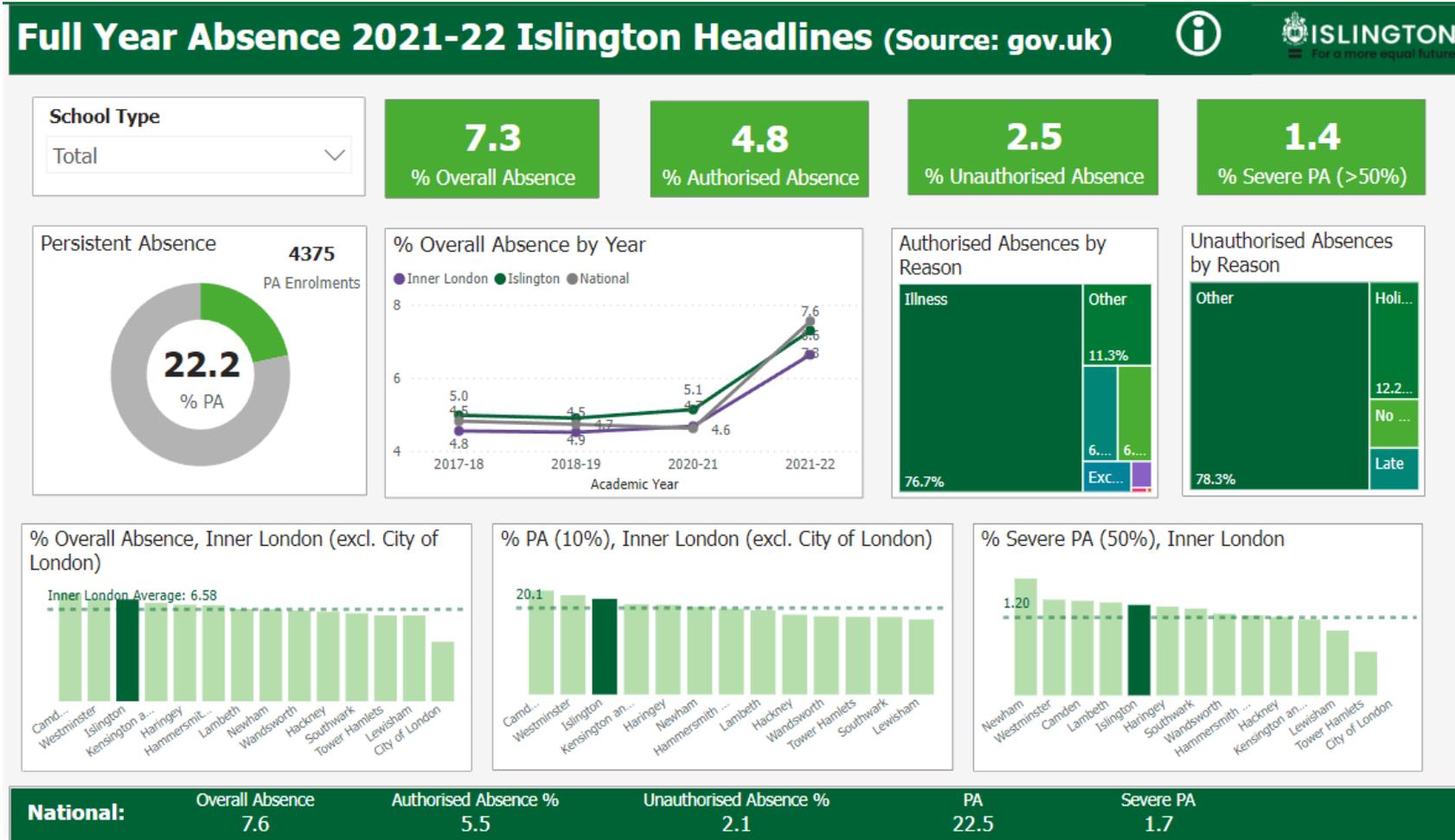
- Urge introduction of a register of children not in school for 2024/25
- Implement statutory guidance to be applicable from September 2024
- Audit of support provided by local authorities to tackle persistent absence
- Instruct schools and local authorities to explore methods of support for pupils and families before the use of fines or prosecution
- Roll out attendance interventions nationally (e.g., Attendance Mentors)
- Prioritise resource for inclusion and assessment in mainstream schools, to adequate support SEND pupils, and therefore improve their attendance rates
- A cross-government assessment of the scale of mental health difficulties amongst pupils and review of the current provision of support available in schools and outside of them
- Review support framework for low-income families in meeting costs of school attendance.

Local picture

Local Picture – published full-year data (2021-22)

Full Year absence - all schools			2021-22 (Published)		
	Overall Absence	Authorised	Unauthorised	PA	SA
Islington	7.3	4.8	2.5	22.2	1.4
Inner London	6.6	-	-	20.1	1.2
National	7.6	5.5	2.1	22.5	1.7
Full Year absence - Primary					
Islington	6.2	4.3	1.9	18.4	0.6
Inner London	5.9	-	-	17.5	0.7
National	6.3	4.8	1.5	17.7	0.6
Full Year absence - all schools					
Islington	8.6	5.1	3.5	26.5	2.3
Inner London	7.5	-	-	22.5	1.8
National	9.0	6.2	2.8	27.7	2.7

Local picture - Attendance Dashboard



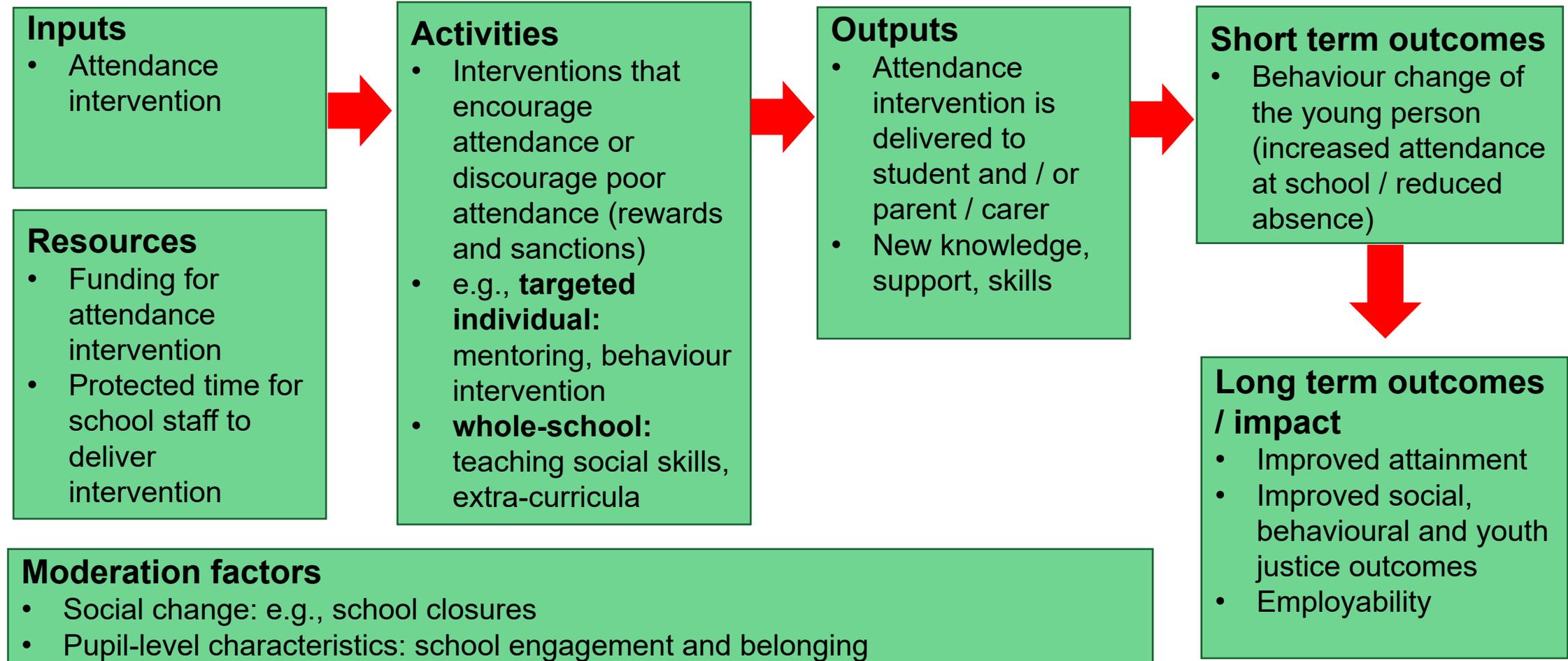
Attendance Dashboard
Power BI

Local data – latest picture

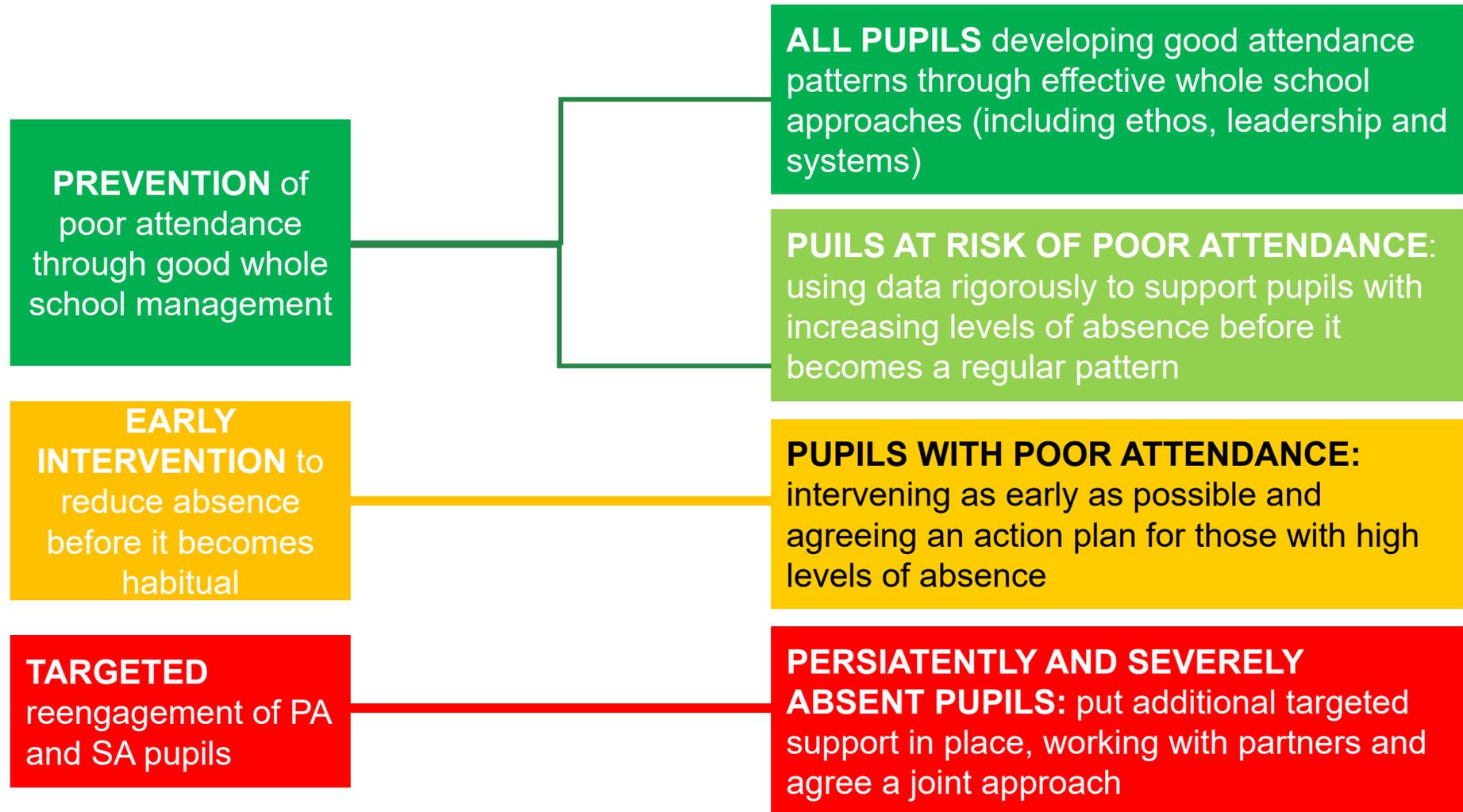
Autumn Term absence - all schools			2022-23 (Published)		
	Overall Absence	Authorised	Unauthorised	PA	SA
Islington	7.9	5.2	2.7	22.4	1.6
Inner London	7.2	-	-	23.8	1.4
National	7.5	5.4	2.1	24.2	1.7
Autumn Term absence - Primary					
Islington	7.0	5.0	2.0	24.5	1.0
Inner London	6.7	-	-	23.1	0.9
National	6.3	4.9	1.4	20.9	0.7
Autumn Term absence - Secondary					
Islington	8.8	5.2	3.6	28.0	2.3
Inner London	7.6	-	-	23.9	1.9
National	8.8	6.0	2.8	27.4	2.8

What can be done?

Improving Attendance – Theory of Change



Effective school attendance improvement and management



What works? Education Endowment Fund: Attendance Interventions, Rapid Evidence Assessment

- Education Endowment Fund undertook a [rapid review](#) of evidence in late 2022 to look at the most effective interventions for improving attendance.
- The report summarises findings from 72 studies, breaking them down into 8 topics as follows:
 - Mentoring
 - Parental engagement
 - Responsive and targeted approaches
 - Teaching of social and emotional skills
 - Behaviour interventions
 - Meal provision
 - Incentives and disincentives
 - Extracurricular activities



Action in Islington

Action in Islington

- Positive response from all agencies to ‘attendance is everyone’s business’, including ‘Targeting Support Meetings’
- Sharing effective practice – Locality Inclusion Hubs (pilot in South)
- Focus on severe absence, where pupils miss more than 50% of school sessions
- Focus on ‘at risk’ of poor attendance pupils through ‘inclusion pathway’
- Issued guidance on ‘School Attendance and Minor illness’ (and already received a request from Bromley LA to ‘borrow’)
- Rigorous tracking of data
- Multi-disciplinary support for families
- Legal intervention

Emotional Based School Avoidance – Islington Protocol

- [The Protocol](#) provides general guidance about Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), which is an umbrella term used to describe children and young people who have difficulty in attending school due to their emotional needs
- Identifies specific resources and services in Islington that schools can use including information on prevalence, causes, indicators and good practice for supporting successful integration
- It also includes a checklist for schools supporting ESBA and video links for schools, parents and young people, for example [Stress on the Brain](#), produced by students from New River College
- ‘Absence is a complex, many-headed hydra’

Working Together to Improve Attendance - Expectations of local authorities

- Rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools on which to provide support and focus its efforts on to unblock area wide barriers to attendance. **(Power BI tool)**
- Have a School Attendance Support Team which provides the following core functions free of charge to all schools (regardless of type):
 - Communication and advice: regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area. **(Locality Inclusion Hubs)**
 - Targeting Support Meetings: hold termly conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils. **(meetings taking place)**
 - Multi-disciplinary support for families: provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance. **(embedded through Bright Futures offer)**
 - Legal intervention: take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with. **(in place)**
- Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through their Virtual School.

Working together to improve attendance

'Consistent, persistent, insistent...'



Target Population

Children at highest risk of absenteeism / exclusion including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged (SEND, Ethnicity, CIN, CLA, FSM)

Phase 1: Centralisation of School Attendance Support

- Change manage to centralise School Attendance Support Team
- Review and standardise policy and practice expectations
- Communicate Attendance as a priority across all services
- Identify workforce skills and knowledge gaps
- Develop and deliver training

Phase 2: Needs-led interventions through categorisation

Categorise schools based on three levels of need using attendance and other contextual data

Below 93% (Pri) / 91% (Sec) – Serious Concern	Below inner London / National but above 93%	At / above National – 93.8%+ (Pri) / 91.4% (sec)	At / above Islington / inner London - 94.3% (Pri) / 93.2% (Sec)	Above 95%
---	---	--	---	-----------

Targeting Support Meetings

Coordinated multi-agency wrap around	Detailed case review Interventions against identified and targeted individuals and cohorts	Families engaged Barriers to high attendance identified Improvement targets	Praise and encouragement to become 100%	Termly 100% attendance certificates Assembly recognition Phone calls home to celebrate engagement
--------------------------------------	--	---	---	---

- Clear distribution of work and responsibility
- Accurate attendance data and measures to show progress

- Effective targeted support
- Improved attendance
- Improved parental engagement
- Improved evidence base ('what works') and strengthening theories with delivery model

- Reduction in children involved in crime / violence and into the justice / criminal system
- Reduction of the disadvantage gap
- Building and sharing of best practice and models of excellence

Activity

Output

Outcome

Impact

Communication

Standardisation

Accountability

Categorisation

DfE Attendance 'Deep Dive' : March 2023

'Overall, Islington has made excellent progress towards delivering against 'Working Together to Improve Attendance'. The requirements are understood, and the next steps are well planned. I agree with the self-assessment grades, and do not currently hold concerns about Islington delivery.'

Strengths:

- Attendance recognised as high strategic priority with a drive to deliver expectations and embedded within a number of different strategies including the Education Plan and the SEND Strategy .
- A 12-month action plan has good partnership sign up and a collaborative approach to further developments.
- Data is reviewed at DCS management team and attendance is also a focus for elected members via the Scrutiny Committee.

Potential Areas for development:

- Make live data more readily available to teams
- Consider use of parenting contracts
- Review Governor training