

# KNOWSLEY ATTENDANCE

## STRATEGY 2021-2024

A GRADUATED, PARTNERSHIP APPROACH  
TO IMPROVING ATTENDANCE

‘Every day counts’





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## Foreword

We would like to take this opportunity to recognise the tremendous efforts made by our children, families, schools and council teams during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain attendance at school. Our partnership work meant that some of our most vulnerable children and the children of our key workers could continue to attend school safely every day, continuing their learning and enjoying their friendships.

We are proud to say that, because of the joint work of professionals and families, our schools remained safe places and attendance throughout lockdown periods remained strong. We know the benefits that this will have brought to our children and families and we thank everyone involved for their efforts.

As a council, throughout the pandemic, we commissioned a number of surveys with children, families and schools. We listened carefully to the concerns about COVID-19 and attendance at school and we recognise the impact that COVID-19 has had on our community. We know that school is the best place for our children and the lifelong benefits 100% attendance brings to them; we want to make sure that as we look to recover from the pandemic, we provide all of our

children, families and our schools with the right support they need to keep daily attendance at school a priority for all. Every parent and carer has a legal duty to send their child to school and there is a range of powers that local authorities and schools have to enforce attendance where there is no valid reason for the absence.

This strategy is designed to build on our existing partnership arrangements, to work together from the earliest opportunities to help parents/carers meet this legal duty, secure in the knowledge that their child is understood and well supported.

When there are specific problems with attendance, the local authority and schools will work closely to support families and children. We will take a carefully managed approach and seek to understand, encourage and support children and young people to attend school every day. Future decisions about the need for enforcement measures will be made on a case-by-case basis, recognising individual circumstances and always seeking to reduce absenteeism and maximise opportunities to attend school.

We all have high aspirations for the children and young people of Knowsley – we want them to enjoy life in the borough and beyond, to achieve well and to thrive as part of a strong and inclusive community and economy. Good attendance at school is vital if they are to realise this ambition and reach their full potential.

By talking with local people, businesses and working closely with community groups, organisations and schools, we have been able to develop a clearer picture of life in the borough and establish what people's aspirations are for Knowsley by 2030.

This invaluable local insight allows us to develop shared aims for our future, establishing that by 2030, we all want Knowsley to be:

- A place with welcoming, vibrant, well-connected neighbourhoods and town centres;
- A place with a thriving, inclusive economy, with opportunities for people and business;
- A place where people are active and healthy, and have access to the support they need;
- A place where people of all ages are confident and can achieve their full potential;
- A place where strong and safe communities can shape their future.

To achieve these aims and ensure that everyone can share in Knowsley's future, there are some existing and new challenges which we will need to work together to address. Our Children and Families Plan 2021-2024 will help us tackle some of these issues and create a community in which our children and young people thrive.

A key element of the plan will be how we support children and young people to achieve well and live well. We know that securing good attendance at school is essential to improving life experiences and academic outcomes.

This strategy seeks to strengthen partnership arrangements so that all children attend school every day and reach their potential.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J Moss".

**Julie Moss**  
Executive Director of Children's Services



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Harvey".

**Cllr Margaret Harvey**  
Cabinet Member for Children's Services

We truly believe that by working together, we can do better for our children and our young people and we look forward to seeing all that they achieve.

## Introduction

Why is regular attendance at school important?

Evidence shows that securing excellent attendance at school is key to ensure positive outcomes for children and young people. Missing lessons leaves students vulnerable to falling behind, creating gaps in their learning, and diminishing their self-confidence.

Good attendance habits must start from the earliest stages of education. We know that children who regularly miss school in Reception class will most likely go on to have poor attendance at secondary school. Research by Universities UK indicates that children with poor attendance are 5 times less likely to achieve 5 strong passes at GCSE, preventing them from going on to Higher Education or into employment.

We also know that poor attendance at school can lead to poor emotional health and wellbeing. Children and young people who miss school, on a regular basis, can become socially isolated; they can lack confidence and have low self-esteem. Children can feel like they don't fit in with their peers and this can lead to loneliness. We also know that young people who regularly miss school are at greater risk of anti-social behaviour and are more likely to become victims of crime.

These are not the life outcomes and experiences we want for our children. School is not just about academic success and attainment; it is about learning about the world, about relationships and about ourselves. It is about trying new things, making new friends, and finding our place in the world. To miss school is to miss the many, many experiences that shape the choices we make, the opportunities we have and the quality of life that we lead.

There is a wide range of international evidence that tells us that children who attend school regularly go on to achieve better outcomes, to live healthier, wealthier and more enriched lives - and we want to make sure we are all doing everything that we can to make that happen for all of our children.

It is true that many children, families and schools in Knowsley have great attendance – we need to do more to celebrate that. We know that there are examples of great practice happening every day in our schools. We must do more to learn from that. We know that we have some strong partnership arrangements in place that we can strengthen, to really make a difference together.

We believe that by improving attendance we will:

- Ensure more children and young people have a happy and enriched life experience;
- Enable children and young people to achieve more at school academically, emotionally and socially;
- Overcome some of the challenges we have all faced during and after the pandemic;
- Help children build positive, long lasting friendships and lead happy lives;
- Improve mental health and wellbeing of children and families;
- Reduce child exploitation and abuse, anti-social behaviour and knife crime on our streets;
- Help children and families prosper socially and economically;
- Increase chances of success in further or higher education or apprenticeships;
- Improve employability of young people;

- Reduce the demand for support services;
- Improve lifestyles and better prepare our young people for adulthood and the world of work.

### What are our key issues?

Children, families, schools and council services have worked hard over recent years to improve attendance in Knowsley schools. Whilst there are many examples of children and young people attending on a daily basis and achieving well, too many students remain persistently absent from our schools. This means that they are missing lessons, enrichment activities and opportunities to build meaningful relationships with their peers and school staff.

Of particular concern is the high rate of persistent absenteeism; our most recent data shows that 11.3% of children in Knowsley primary schools were classed as persistent absentees (the national average was 8.2%); and in secondary schools the figures were 19.9% against the national average of 13.7%.

We know that some of our most vulnerable children with social workers and children with special educational needs are more likely to be absent from school, and we recognise that this is having a detrimental impact on their progress and attainment.

National and local research tells us that there is a strong correlation between poor attendance and under-attainment at school. Missing school for just a few days a month can seriously affect a student's chance of achieving well. In Knowsley too many young people leave secondary school without the qualifications they need to go on to higher education or employment, for some of these students this is a result of a long legacy of poor attendance at school.

National research indicates that children and young people with little to no absence are 1.3 times more likely to achieve a Level 4 or above at GCSE and 3.1 more likely to achieve a level 5 at GCSE. Of pupils with absence rates over 50% only 3% manage to achieve 5 or more GCSE passes.

The most recent (pre-pandemic) data shows that Knowsley's attendance figures for all schools is 94.4% compared with the national average of 95.3%. Increasing the attendance of all students will undoubtedly lead to improved attainment, narrowing the gap between Knowsley and national performance data.

## Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic created huge disruption for children, families, and educators. Attendance at school became more challenging for all. The disruption to learning created by the closure of schools and settings and the creation of remote learning packages is unprecedented. It is important that we work together to overcome the challenges created by the pandemic and make sure all our children are supported to return to school and catch up on learning.

We know that for some children and young people the return to school, following the pandemic and lockdown, will be an anxious time and it is important that we all work together to understand that and make sure the right support is in place.

Our Attendance Strategy covers the next three years from 2021 to 2024 and will direct our work in improving school attendance over that time. One of our guiding principles in developing this strategy has been to build on our existing partnership working with schools, academies, partners and stakeholders. This will ensure our local approach is not only in line with current government guidance and legislation, but that it recognises the needs of our community, post pandemic, and seeks to empower and support them. This will inspire confidence to attend school rather than exercising statutory powers to enforce it.

## What do we know already?

There are many reasons why a child or young person may be missing school. It is important that professionals working with families take the time to understand those reasons and work in a solution focused way to overcome barriers to regular attendance.

It is also important that when considering poor attendance, a holistic approach is taken. This should consider the emotional, social, economic, and academic reasons why a child or young person may be missing school and how, through the support of the school and/or other agencies, barriers to regular attendance may be reduced or removed.

We know that many schools and agencies do this work very effectively; however, our analysis tells us that there is more that we can do to make sure that this approach is consistently applied across the borough.

We believe that when teams and services come together, in a person-centred way, we are likely to use our resources more effectively and instigate long lasting change in behaviours and life experiences.

We know that there are lots of positive examples of good practice in schools, teams and organisations in relation to the management of attendance. However, this work is often not joined up enough to really make a difference for children and families.

We also know that we need to look strategically at the range of services available to schools to support attendance, to ensure that they are fit for the post pandemic world and to look for new and innovative ways to work with children and families differently.

We also know that sometimes attendance is impacted because of the capacity of others to provide the right level of care and support to children and young people; sometimes this relates to complex health needs or challenging social/family circumstances. It is important that teams working with families acknowledge this and work in a solution focused way to minimise absence from school.



## What are we going to do?

Through surveys and conversations with our community we have identified some key priorities to shape our work. Our schools and young people tell us to improve attendance for all students we need to develop:

- A person-centred approach to the identification and management of poor attendance
- A clear and well communicated graduated response built on early intervention: so that children and families get the help they need when they need it regardless of which setting they attend
- A multi-agency approach: so that children and families get help from the right person or service at the right time and that attendance isn't just seen as an issue for schools

## How are we going to do this?

- Develop model policies and proformas for schools to adopt to bring a consistent approach to managing attendance at school
- Work with children, families, schools and partners to find new ways to celebrate great attendance

- Introduce a handbook into our schools and partners that provides all practitioners with the resources they need to promote good attendance and intervene quickly when attendance is a cause for concern;
- Review our practice guidance in relation to early help and social care practices to make sure that a consistent approach is taken to the management of poor attendance;
- Encourage health providers to work to better support children and families with complex health needs;
- Review our SEND practices to ensure poor attendance and the reasons for it are considered at multi agency meetings; individual reviews and SEND assessments;
- Develop a training offer for school-based staff, headteachers, governors, health and care professionals and other key partners so that there is a common appreciation of what we mean by good attendance and how best to secure it;
- Develop a communications campaign that helps raise awareness of good attendance and why it is important;
- Review our existing service level agreements and refresh them so that they remain fit for purpose in a post pandemic world;
- Introduce a Social Worker in Schools programme to bring more capacity to school teams to manage attendance issues;

- Introduce a range of mental health workers to ensure that children and young people are supported well;
- Revise our safeguarding practices so we understand the risks associated with poor attendance and the escalation processes available when a child or young person is at risk;
- Seek to utilise the third sector and parental volunteers to re-establish networks to support good attendance, for example introducing a walking bus scheme;
- Ensure governance systems and processes are in place to manage key local issues such as the attendance of vulnerable students, and that where appropriate, alternative delivery models are secured to meet needs of children, families and schools. An example of this would be our Attendance of Vulnerable Children's Group.

### The graduated approach to good school attendance

The graduated approach is a framework of staged interventions. Interventions begin with effective whole-school approaches to managing the attendance of all children. School policies should promote good attendance, make clear what everyone's roles and responsibilities are and clearly outline what action is taken at each stage so that early intervention can take place. An effective whole-school approach will include regular monitoring and reviewing of practice.

The graduated approach enables the lead professional – often based within the school – to identify opportunities to work with other agencies as attendance becomes a concern. Rapid and efficient early intervention will help prevent long term absence from school.

The handbook outlines the 4 graduated levels of intervention and support:

**Level 1** refers to the variety of school-based interventions to celebrate and promote attendance and secure good attendance levels for all;

**Level 2** deals with early intervention and a family response to early challenges with children's attendance;

**Level 3** uses targeted intervention and brokering multi-agency support;

**Level 4** moves on to statutory intervention through the local authority.

The handbook provides guidance and resources to help schools move through the levels in a person-centred way; and seeks to make explicit the role of all other agencies in improving attendance. The local authority provides enhanced support for the non-statutory aspects of the graduated approach. As part of the new offer, we will be working with several teams to create one point of contact to support schools to work directly with families and address their individual needs.



A young boy with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue school sweater over a white collared shirt, is sitting at a desk and writing in a notebook with a yellow pencil. A teacher's hands are visible, pointing at the notebook. The background shows a classroom setting with lockers.

Whilst each partner has an important and distinct role in supporting the child or family, no one partner can do it on their own!

## What are our roles?

### The role of parents/carers and pupils

Parents/carers are responsible for ensuring their child attends school regularly. Parents/carers are expected to report their child's absence from school on the first day of absence and to confirm the reason in writing on their child's return to school.

Where there are concerns about a pupil's attendance, parents/carers are expected to work with school staff and other services to address them. Parents/carers are expected to support school attendance by avoiding family holidays during term time. Parents/ carers are also responsible for following any related Public Health England ( PHE) guidance and are required to inform school of any infectious illnesses including the requirement to inform school if their child needs to self-isolate or is displaying coronavirus symptoms.

Parents and carers are asked to:

- encourage and ensure that their children attend school regularly and punctually unless there is a valid reason for absence which is accepted by the school's headteacher;
- intervene promptly and work closely with the school and local authority to resolve any issues when attendance problems occur;
- comply with their roles and responsibilities as outlined in the school attendance policy;
- avoid term time holidays - a term time holiday may mean a pupil becomes a persistent absentee if they go on to have any further time away from school;
- discuss and resolve any issues surrounding their child's attendance with members of school staff - parents should not keep children away from school whilst they are resolving any issues;
- ensure that their child continues to attend their current school until a place is available at another school if a transfer has been requested.

Children and young people are asked to:

- attend school regularly and punctually in accordance with the agreed timetable;
- stay in school for the school day unless lunchtime arrangements are agreed with the school and put in writing;
- ensure they arrive at school in correct uniform and equipped for the school day;
- adhere to school rules;
- comply with the requirements of them as laid out in the school attendance policy.

## The role of schools and academies

Schools have a statutory duty under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This can only be fulfilled through effective registration systems and active, whole school monitoring of pupil absence, in order to support and promote regular school attendance.

While regular school attendance is predominantly the responsibility of parents and carers, schools play a central role in ensuring that children and young people attend school regularly. This includes taking a positive and proactive role in the promotion of regular school attendance, through strategies identified within their school attendance policy, that will engage families and ensure that there is a coherent and consistent approach to attendance across the school.

All schools and academies should have a whole school attendance policy, including a graduated response which sets out how attendance is managed and what monitoring systems are in place. The headteacher should take overall responsibility for this and drive the attendance agenda, actively supported by every member of staff and endorsed and monitored by the governing body.

Parents/carers should be informed of the school's staged response systems. The governing body should nominate a governor to take a monitoring responsibility for attendance issues. All schools and academies should operate first day absence procedures to ensure that parents are aware when their child is not in school. Schools and academies are responsible for actively monitoring the attendance of their pupils receiving alternative provision and will need to be able to explain how they do this as part of an Ofsted inspection.

Schools are asked to:

- Have a whole-school ethos which reinforces good attendance;
- Set annual targets for attendance and monitor progress towards them;
- Appoint a member of the Senior Leadership Team to take strategic responsibility for attendance matters and ensure all school staff are clear about their individual responsibilities and accountabilities in relation to school attendance;
- Ensure that staff receive adequate training and development opportunities in relation to attendance (e.g. they ensure that administrative staff are appropriately trained in using electronic attendance monitoring systems or all staff understand early help procedures);

- Comply with statutory registration and procedures in line with Children Missing Education statutory guidance for removing a child from roll;
- Submit attendance returns to the DfE and LA as required;
- regularly monitor the effectiveness of their registration system;
- Contact parents on the first day of absence;
- Take appropriate action and inform the LA when any pupil is absent for more than 10 days without contact or a reason being provided;
- Adhere to the LA guidance on Children Missing Education where a pupil ceases to attend and they fail to enrol at a new school and/or their whereabouts are unknown;
- Clearly communicate their attendance policy to all staff, pupils and parents;
- Ensure parents/carers are supported in promoting the regular and punctual attendance of their children;
- Provide easily accessible pastoral support to pupils who have become, or are at risk of becoming, disengaged from the education system and work with other partners and agencies to support pupils and families;
- Involve medical personnel (e.g. the school nurse) in relation to long-term medical absences, either consistent or intermittent;

- Ensure that that senior leaders regularly analyse and report school attendance data to the governing body and use it to inform planning to further improve attendance; where appropriate including it in school improvement plans;
- Implement a clear escalation process for managing attendance, prior to local authority involvement, with clarity about respective roles and responsibilities at each stage.

### The role of the local authority

The key principle which underpins the local authority's procedures for managing attendance is the belief that regular and punctual attendance is the key to academic and social development. This will in turn safeguard vulnerable young people and will improve their life chances.

Attendance and inclusion therefore are key priorities for our work with children, young people, families, partners and schools to embed the concept of early intervention and prevention and keep children and young people safe.

The local authority has a duty to ensure parents fulfil their legal responsibility in respect of their child's education. This is usually through ensuring attendance at school.

The Attendance Strategy has an early help and prevention approach at its heart. The introduction of the early help approach ensures that issues and difficulties faced by children and families are identified early and dealt with holistically and in a timely manner by services from across the local area, including schools.

The approach aims to build closer co-working relationships with families through early identification by schools and other services. Bespoke models of triage, screening and the delivery of a graduated response will better meet the needs of the children, families and schools in each area of Knowsley. We will ensure that promoting good school attendance has a high profile within our community and local services and that council services across the community understand that attendance is everyone's business. This will be particularly the case in our wider contextualised safeguarding work and within Children's Services generally. Critical to this work will be partnerships with community wardens, community leaders and housing providers.

The plan will be underpinned by a comprehensive communications strategy which will make good attendance high profile. The local authority will seek to work closely with communities across Knowsley in championing the needs of young people and promoting the importance of attendance and the benefits of a good education.

When appropriate, if support options provided to parents, have not succeeded, the School Attendance Service will take the lead role on behalf of any school in using legal powers as a last resort when this is necessary to address poor attendance. This statutory intervention is available to all schools.

The local authority will:

- Provide a traded offer for schools that provides support and guidance around attendance policy and practices;
- Provide traded officers to become an initial point of contact for families;
- Arrange multi-agency meetings and create action plans with relevant services and agencies eg. Health teams;
- Provide Early Help and Family First support workers to work with families to improve attendance where req;
- Ensure school attendance is a priority for families for children with social workers or support workers eg. YOS, Shield, MACE;
- SEND/Inclusion team will provide support and guidance to families with EHCP and SEND needs;
- For schools without a Service Level Agreement, the LA will provide support to ensure schools have enough evidence to move to statutory work where necessary;

- To identify children who are not receiving an education;
- Ensure our statutory duties for school attendance are fulfilled;
- Establish a communications campaign to raise the profile of school attendance;
- Engage with third sector and businesses to support school attendance;
- Continue to monitor and escalate the attendance of vulnerable children through the Attendance of Vulnerable Children Group meeting;
- Provide events throughout the year to raise and celebrate the profile of good attendance;
- Share good practice.

### The role of other agencies and stakeholders

The School Attendance Service works closely with a range of agencies to address school attendance issues. In addition, protocols with other local authority services and the health services help to identify any children or young people who do not have a school place and refer them on to the School Attendance Service. A wide range of children's and young people's services also identify school attendance issues and work collaboratively to actively resolve them.

### Early Years

Whilst attendance in early years settings before the age of 5 is not statutory, early years is where lifelong habits are established. Securing good early years attendance therefore is an important foundation on which children will go on to thrive throughout their school life and beyond.

Our early years team will provide advice, guidance and support to families and settings to help secure good attendance. The same person-centred approach and keen desire for early intervention will feature in all our practice and development work with settings. Support is available to all settings from the team.

### Children's Centres

Engagement with young children and their families through a local children's centre is a key opportunity to work with parents to ensure that they understand the importance of their role in ensuring good attendance at school. Staff working in these settings are well placed to support parents and to emphasise the crucial role parents play in their child's learning and development. Our children centre teams play a critical part in school readiness planning. When children start school, children's centre staff can support the transition, working with the school staff to ensure a positive start, which includes good attendance.

## Health Services

The school nursing service is available to all children in Knowsley schools. The school nurses support with health education in schools as well as providing support for both physical and mental health needs. Their role in attendance can often be key and the local authority engage with the services on a regular basis.

Health providers also support children with complex medical needs to attend school on a regular basis. The local authority recognise that many families rely on these services to maintain good levels of attendance.



## How will we know we have succeeded?

Good attendance leads to better outcomes for children. The local authority will have succeeded when the gap between Liverpool City Region attendance and National attendance and attendance rates in Knowsley reduces for all children, including the most vulnerable.

Improved school attendance will lead to better outcomes at GCSE and Level 3 provision and more children will remain in educational provision in the borough. Better attainment for all will mean more opportunities for our young people to thrive and succeed in the future. Stronger school attendance will lead to a reduction in anti-social behaviour and criminal activity which will benefit all Knowsley communities. A successful implementation of this strategy will mean increased social equity and children living happy and fulfilling lives.

