

Education Welfare Service

Impact of reduction of EWS staffing

Since the ending of the Education Services Grant, the Education Welfare Service (EWS) has been part funded by de-delegated funds as approved by Schools Forum. The annual amount requested is £122,000.

This report highlights the role of EWS, and, should funding not be agreed, the effect that the loss of officers would necessarily have on the ability of the EWS to support schools and families in relation to securing improvements in school attendance.

The loss of part or all of the “discretionary” aspect of the EWS could also negatively impact on pupil progress and attainment, due to decreased support to schools, and also Haringey’s ability to robustly safeguard children.

The EWS currently offers a comprehensive range of support to schools and families in order to assist with improving pupil attendance at school. EWS also offers support to home educating families and contributes significantly to safeguarding.

Statutory support is provided free of charge to all Haringey schools; this includes:

- Enforcement to improve attendance
- Identifying the whereabouts of missing children
- Identifying children not receiving education
- Child & chaperone licencing

Discretionary support is offered at a cost (and is detailed below).

The full range of EWS work is currently undertaken by:

7.0 EWOs (including 1 CME (children missing education) officer & 1 licencing officer)

0.6 EHE (elective home education) advisory teacher

1.0 Administrator (also supports other teams)

1.0 Manager

Loss of funding would necessitate a brutal restructure of the team, leading to a skeleton staff to cover solely statutory functions, a loss of experienced EW officers who are very familiar with our schools and our schools’ personnel, and would inevitably result in a significant reduction of support to schools and families. A staffing reduction will result in a greatly reduced service including:

- EWS will no longer be able to offer significant amounts of EWO time to schools for the purpose of improving pupil attendance.
- EWS will no longer be able to offer the full and varied range of support to schools, many of which link to services provided in other area including but

not limited to MASH (multi agency safeguarding hub), Early Help, Admissions, the police and social care.

- EWOs will no longer be able to accept current numbers of pupil referrals.
- EWS ability to intervene at an early stage to prevent poor attendance becoming entrenched will be much reduced.
- Referral criteria will change, only accepting referrals of poor attenders whose poor attendance may already be entrenched (e.g. referral criteria of less than 50% attendance rather than less than 90% at present) – this will undoubtedly impact on individual and borough wide attendance figures which are scrutinised by Ofsted at Section 5 and other inspections.
- Schools will have to manage a greater number of poor attendance concerns by themselves and without the expertise currently held by LA officers.
- School staff may be required to attend court to give live evidence where legal action is requested. At the current time much of the evidence provided in court is through a small number of EWOs who have become expert in being able to give appropriate and compelling evidence and who are wholly familiar with the court process. Inevitably this leads to more positive outcomes for our young people and their education attendance and therefore attainment.
- Schools' relationships with parents will be negatively affected if EWOs are less likely to be responsible for having "difficult" discussions with parents. Further, involvement from an agency (the LA) that sits outside of the school has proven to have a greater positive impact on parents/carers and young people leading to improved school attendance.
- Effective tracking of pupils whose families move away will be restricted as EWS ability to make multiple attempts to contact parents will be diminished if there are less officers available to carry out this function.
- EWS ability to manage the "School Safe" process may be affected (an email alert to all schools and relevant agencies advising of any concern in the geographical area immediately around any given school).
- A pattern of an increasing numbers of child licence applications (800+ in 2016-17 and 1000+ in 2017-18) will result in the officer spending more time processing this statutory duty, hence reducing the officer's ability to work with our schools.
- An increasing number of EHE referrals will result in more EWS resource being used to support EHE work. This work is critical for the LA to be able to reassure itself that the home education is taking place and that there are no safeguarding concerns that need to be referred. This also links to PREVENT work in the borough.

- EWS is expected to be reduced to an “advice only” service in many cases.
- EWS ability to link involved professionals will be restricted due to accepting fewer referrals.
- EWS ability to provide advice for parents in relation to bullying, social media, exclusions, complaints and effective engagement with schools will be negatively affected.

Should EWS receive funding for a further extended period, this will allow EWS to continue to support schools to improve attendance and to allow for planning to improve how the service works with schools.

EWS would be able to offer maintained schools an additional free service to the statutory offer. This would be a planned termly half day visit by an education welfare officer to either meet parents whose children’s attendance is becoming a concern, and to conduct a register and attendance “health check”.

It is proposed that further detail on this additional support is mapped out across a three year period so that schools can be reassured of the support to be provided and the LA can be held to account on this provision.

Statutory Provision

The Education Welfare Service (EWS) undertakes the Local Authority’s statutory duty to ensure children registered at our schools attend on a regular basis (as per sections 436 – 447 of the 1996 Education act and subsequent amendments). The EWS also fulfils the Local Authority’s child licencing duty. To expand, these duties are:

- Ensure pupils registered at Haringey’s schools attend school regularly. Statutorily, this is through case investigation (meeting parents and school attendance staff) prior to potential enforcement action (court and penalty notices) in cases where this is deemed to be appropriate. Where schools use EWS, casework and subsequent legal work is undertaken by EWOs.
- Investigate the whereabouts of pupils reported as missing to the Local Authority, as per the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, as amended (8(1)(h)). This is usually in relation to pupils who do not return to school as their families have moved away, or who fail to return to school following a holiday. Schools and the Local Authority must undertake reasonable enquiries prior to a decision to delete the pupil from school registers.

- A local authority must make arrangements to identify children not receiving education (section 436A, Education Act 1996). If a child is deemed not to be in receipt of a suitable education, the LA must send a written notice to the parent, followed by a school attendance order if they do not comply with the notice (section 437, Education Act 1996). This duty relates to both children missing education and home educated children whose parents have not satisfied the Local Authority that they are providing a full time education.
- Child employment, child entertainment and chaperone licencing. In order to ensure that children are safeguarded and are not exploited, and that school work and school attendance are not negatively affected, licences are processed, and a register kept of all licenced children and chaperones. Visits are also made to premises where children are working to ensure that licence terms and conditions are adhered to.

Discretionary (Traded) Provision

The service offers additional and discretionary casework with referred families and in a preventative capacity in order to improve school attendance at an early stage. The service also offers advice and guidance to maintained schools in order to provide support to ensure schools adhere to legislation in relation to school attendance.

The EWS traded offer to schools is essentially based on EWO time. EWS offers are:

Platinum (2 days/week EWO time)
 Gold (1 day/week EWO time)
 Silver (½ day/week EWO time)
 Bronze (1 or ½ day EWO time per half term)
 Daily or half daily rates

Schools can therefore choose which service offer best suits their attendance profile. Some schools' attendance is such that they do not require EWS service, but most Haringey schools use EWS. EWS offers to maintained schools are discounted compared to academies and out of borough schools. Traded income represents an important funding source for the EWS, but this would reduce given fewer EWOs.

The majority of recipients of the traded service are primary schools, but some secondary schools do use EWS. This is principally a reflection of the different sizes of the respective establishments, with secondary schools more likely to employ their own or absorb responsibilities for managing attendance within their staffing establishment. Currently 59 schools (49 primary schools, 4 secondary schools, 4 special schools, 1 out borough and Alternative Provision) buy discretionary services from EWS.

EWS has received increasing numbers of referrals (missing children, irregular attenders and EHE). Total number of referrals to EWS since September 2017 is 1434. Partly as a result of our work, pupil absence has decreased over recent years. The discretionary EWS work includes:

EWS work prior to referral:

- Whole school consultancy around attendance;
- Meeting with school attendance officers to identify irregular attenders, cohorts and trends;
- Provide advice and guidance to ensure improvements in attendance;
- Training of school staff;
- Speaking to parents and children during assemblies;
- “Late gate” duty to advise late-arriving parents in relation to punctuality;
- Pre-referral attendance clinics with parents whose children are beginning to accrue absences;
- Advising parents on their legal duty to ensure regular attendance at school;
- Working with school staff to identify the whereabouts of pupils who fail to return from school holidays during the early stages of absence.

Post referral:

- Casework with referred families to improve attendance;
- Progression of cases to consideration of legal action;
- Appearance in court to provide live evidence where required;
- Work with wider professional network to ensure referred pupils are safeguarded;
- Referral on to agencies/Local Authorities etc. where appropriate.

It should be noted that day-to-day attendance work would still be undertaken by attendance staff at school. This would include first day absence processes and work with non-referred families. The EWO meets with the attendance officer regularly (depending on the school’s requirements) in order to identify pupils of concern and agree actions and responsibilities. Once a pupil has been referred to the service, the EWO will lead on casework and actions.

EWS does not require parental agreement to make contact with families and attempt to work with them for the purposes of improving pupil attendance, as irregular attendance is potentially illegal. This means that even in cases where the parent refuses to engage, EWS can still make progress, ultimately instigating legal proceedings should this prove necessary.

Working in partnership with EWS, schools are able to maintain their relationship with “difficult” parents as EWS assist with the challenging aspects of the attendance role, through the issuing of warnings and enforcement action. EWS attempts to work with difficult to engage families, for example home educators, whose children would otherwise not be “seen” by professionals.

Wider Benefits

EWS works across professional partnerships in order to support families to improve school attendance and to support greater safeguarding of children. Examples include work with: Early Help, Social Care, Youth Justice. EWOs sit on numerous Local Authority panels and meetings as the education representative. These include MASH; Vulnerability Panel (Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, Girls and Gangs and Missing Children); MARAC (Domestic Violence Panel); Looked After Children Attendance and Attainment Panel.

EWS budget funds the LA’s Elective Home Education Advisory Teacher who assesses the quality of education of EHE children, and contributes significantly to safeguarding by ensuring that these children are “seen” and any concerns reported to Children’s Social Care. Withdrawal of funding will have a significant impact on our ability to safeguard this very vulnerable cohort. There are currently nearly 300 EHE open cases.

EWS operates “School Safe”. This is a process whereby schools inform EWS of any incidents which may represent a threat to Haringey school pupils, for example potential abductions, the taking of photographs of children, members of the public acting in a threatening manner etc. EWS collect evidence and liaise with the police, who will advise whether a “School Safe” alert should be implemented.

Appendices

Encomium

1.

Dear Serif,

I would like to thank you for your kind support in helping us with our poor attendance within our school.

The strategies you have implemented has enabled us to reduce our PA list from 49 seven months ago to 24 today, and still reducing.

Our attendance figure when I returned from a long sickness in February 2018 was 95% Yet today we have an average of 96.72 - 97%

Again we are so thankful and keep up the great work you are doing to in supporting schools.

2.

Hello Serif,

I know that you are doing a lot behind the scenes. You are very good at your job – best EWO that I have encountered in 20 years. I hope that your line manager realises this and appreciates what you do as much as I do.

You are making a difference to children’s lives.

Harris Academy Philip Lane

3.

West Green Primary would like to thank you and your team for all the support your service has provided us with over the past few years.

A special thank you from myself, who had been working alongside of your team to improve our school attendance and punctuality.

Your service has helped the school a great deal by pushing our attendance from 94% to 97.72%!

It makes a massive difference when parents are contacted to come into school for an attendance clinic where their issues are discussed and resolved with members of the school and an external member (EWO) too. Only then do they realise the seriousness of the matter!

Your team has always helped the parents by putting them through to other agencies that may be able to offer further advice and help and that has also helped make an impact on our improvement toward the attendance and punctuality of our pupils.

I understand how difficult it is to chase up missing children and also non attendees.

As we all know, this is a very time consuming task. I could never have been able to do this without you all.

Thanking and your team once again for all your support.

West Green Primary School

4.

Michael is always the 1st point for advice and answers queries promptly. He guides me on attendance issues regarding the law and supports me in court.

He attends termly Court Assessments Meetings in the school, deals with difficult parents and follows up any issue.

He arranges EWO Forum meeting for Haringey Schools this is very helpful and updates on any issue regarding attendance and discusses case issues.

Duke's Aldridge Academy

5.

Just wanted to add that without the help, support and advice that you and EWS give I would find it extremely difficult to do this job. Accompanying us in court is especially needed.

Greig City Academy

6.

In my new role as EWO based at Woodside High school, the support has been invaluable. It has been helpful to tap into the resources and knowledge of experienced staff. Mr Welton has provided ongoing training, assisted with Court Assessment Meetings, preparation and attendance at court.

Historical and background checks provided by the service have helped the school to gain a holistic view of families we work with and their circumstances therefore we have been able to better support the families to improve attendance.

Continuing Professional Development has been provided through coordinating the EWO forum events which is very informative and contributes to good practice around casework.

Having a first port of call to discuss next steps has ensured fair processes in how we work with our families.

Woodside High School

7.

The Education Welfare officer visits our school on a weekly basis and meets with the attendance team to discuss any student who are failing to attend school regularly; she support us in identifying and resolving attendance problems

She also inspects our registers to make sure they're being filled in properly (has spoken to staffs who fail to take their register consistently) and looks for patterns in pupils' absences that could indicate a problem.

She'll meet with parents and pupils at school or home to explain their legal responsibilities, as well as the importance of their child receiving a solid education maximising their educational opportunities. She'll put together a plan, which might include support from other agencies and monitor pupils' progress or lack of. She might also request information from other professionals involved with the family, such as social services, their GP or health visitor, to build a fuller picture of what's happening.

Unfortunately, at times she may need to take necessary action through the magistrates' court and this may break down the relationship with the parent. However, although it's important for parents not to see her as an enemy; as her role is to ensure our students are getting the education they need. This does however, allows the schools attendance team to keep the positive relationship with the parents and more than often the contact is continuous.

Some of her duties may include:

- Home visits – poor attendees or missing students i.e. moved home and not informed the school
- Meeting parents - exploring the reasons behind absence, challenging appropriately where they condone unnecessary absence and developing strategies they can use themselves to support their child's attendance. This includes holding difficult meetings which needs patience and her ability to remain calm in stressful situations is outstanding
- Having meeting at school with the students; highlighting concerns and encouraging good attendance; often discussing the importance of regular attendance to attain good GCSE's, but also post 16 opportunities
- Setting targets for students/parents, monitoring & reviewing regular
- Handling sensitive information appropriately
- Keeping detailed notes in case she needs to enforce attendance, using legal measure where necessary

- Supervise parenting contracts in relation to attendance
- Monitor compliance with relevant orders where necessary.

It's important for me to say; that our whole school attendance percentage would not have improved and be consistently great without the support of our Education Welfare Officer

Gladesmore School

8.

Education Welfare Officer, Iain Nicholson, works closely and effectively with key members of staff in the school to resolve attendance problems. As a school, we acknowledge that encouraging good attendance is one of the most powerful ways that we can prepare our pupils for success at school and in the future. Iain has always maintained a good working relationship with members of staff. He regularly meets with parents at school to explain the importance of good attendance and their legal responsibilities in this area. He is always respectful and informative when dealing with parents. Iain also supports the school in providing advice on other areas including school admissions, transfers and child employment licensing.

St Francis de Salles Federation

Number of referrals since September 2017:

EHE: 230

Poor Attendance: 614

CME: 590

Total new referrals since September 2017: 1434