

**Agenda Item
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Report Status

For information/note
For decision
For consultation & views

Report to Haringey Schools Forum – 12th January, 2023

Report Title: Haringey Education Welfare Service

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Purpose: To update Schools Forum

Recommendations: This report sets out the work of the Education Welfare Service in Haringey, including service improvements since 2019 and supports the recommendation in the associated paper on the dedicated schools grant and its request for the block transfer of £122k for a multi-year agreement to the Attendance and Welfare Service (known as the Education Welfare Service) in Haringey.

1. Education Welfare Service background

- 1.1 In terms of 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.
- 1.2 The Service also offers a discretionary (traded) provision which comprises of casework with referred families and in a preventative capacity to improve school attendance at an early stage. The service also offers advice and guidance to maintained schools to provide support to ensure schools adhere to legislation in relation to school attendance.

1.3 Prior to any case referral, within the traded service offer the EWS carries out the following:

- 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.

At the post referral stage, the EWS does the following:

- 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.

1.4 Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) meet with the school’s individual attendance officer regularly (depending on the school’s requirements) 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. (Please note this is a traded service offer)

1.5 EWS does not require parental agreement to make contact with families and attempt to collaborate 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, instigating legal proceedings should this prove necessary.

1.6 EWS works across professional partnerships 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.

2. Current position

2.1 Since the ending of the Education Services Grant, the Education Welfare Service (EWS) has been part funded by a block transfer as approved by Schools Forum. To date (January 23), 43 schools have signed up to the traded service offer with a possible 10 more this term. In 2019, this funding was agreed for 3 years. This agreement is now due for consideration and this paper asks, in conjunction with the DSG paper at this Forum, that this amount continues to be de-delegated to allow the above services to continue. The annual amount requested remains at £122,000 and has not increased. It is also important to note that with approximately 33,466 (Oct Census 2022) in Haringey schools, this funding represents a cost of circa £3.65 per child per year.

2.2 Statutory support by the service to all Haringey schools includes:

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

2.3 Data for the service's delivery sets out the critical role that has been played since 2019: during this period the EWS issued an increasing number of FPN:

Table 1: Number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued by EWS

Academic year	Number of FPNs issued
2018 – 19	140
2019 – 20	329
2020 – 21	83 (impacted by lockdown)
2021 – 22	330

2.4 There was also an increase in the number of poor attendance and non-returnee referrals during this period, which the service was able to comfortably action and support schools (note the impact of lockdown and periods where schools were open to only the most vulnerable and key children/young people):

Table 2: Number of Poor Attendance and Non-Returnee referrals

Academic year	Education welfare referrals
2018 – 19	932
2019 – 20	509
2020 – 21	348
2021 - 22	199 (Referrals dropped due to covid restrictions. In the absence of referrals from schools, we worked with schools to manage parental/pupils anxiety. We worked with schools around early intervention and preventative work.

2.5 The number of Elective Home Education (EHE) had also increase during this period and covid 19, also impacted on the number of referrals:

Table 3: Number of EHE referrals and their increase

Academic year	Number of EHE referrals
2018 – 19	273
2019 – 20	475
2020 - 21	359
2021 - 22	354

2.6 There has been an increasing number of child licence applications:

Table 4: Number of Child Licensing Applications

Academic year	Child license applications issued
2019 – 20	58
2020 – 21	387
2021 – 22	374

2.7 All the above shows a rise in work for the service, set against a backdrop of business efficiencies which have meant that the service has sought to save or divert money (i.e. to EHE) and that despite inflation and rising costs, the sum of money asked for from the DSG remains at £122k.

2.8 The new Department for Education (DfE) advice issued in May 2022 (Working together to Improve School Attendance)¹ and which seeks to do the following:

- All schools to be offered a termly attendance focused meeting
- Schools will be expected to carry out more attendance work themselves and to use data more effectively
- EWOs will continue to take on casework on a traded basis but their main function will be to act as attendance experts and to provide advice and guidance
- An expectation that Early Help and other teams within the LA are also involved in improving attendance

2.9 The above places a new and more nuanced focus on the role of education welfare in the LA. The sum of £122k would contribute towards ensuring that the change in emphasis and focus for the service, which extends to other services within the LA, remains at the centre of the EWS work.

¹ [Working together to improve school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/107111/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance.pdf)

3. Planned future work by the service

3.1 The service intends to focus on the following in the coming year:

- Attendance Strategy – as part of the National Attendance Strategy, the team will work with schools either individually or collectively to develop an attendance strategy to reduce persistent absenteeism. This will include an action plan for all schools receiving a free service. This would be planned half termly.
- Develop an Attendance campaign – Attendance is Everyone's Responsibility building on the work that schools are doing and engaging other partners including parents
- Develop and improve parental engagement – workshops for parents, parental leaflets, etc.
- EWS will continue to support schools to improve attendance and to allow for further effective planning, on how best to improve the service, when collaborating with schools.
- The EWS will work with school to provide regular feedback/evaluation on a half termly basis to ensure the required support is provided and gives an opportunity for ongoing feedback and improvement.
- Planned forums each term to support attendance officers.
- A training package to support schools develop their own attendance strategy.
- A review of the traded tiered offer system to allow for more flexible working with schools based on need.
- Develop an on duty rota to offer prompt response for queries and emergency cases.

4. Implications of any loss of DSG funding to EWS

4.1 If Schools Forum do not agree to the £122k allocation to EWS or if the level of funding agreed is reduced from £122k, there will be an undoubted impact on the role that the LA is able to play in safeguarding in respect of school attendance. Any loss of funding will result in:

- a restructure of the EWS team, which is likely to lead to:
 - a skeleton staff to cover statutory functions only,
 - the loss of experienced EWS officers who are currently very familiar with our schools and our schools' personnel, and:
 - would inevitably result in a significant reduction of support to schools and families.
- The service may be reduced to an 'advice only' service in many cases because of the reduction of staff.
- The process of restructure will impact our ability to put into place any improved service planning

- 4.2 The loss of officers will have the following effects:
- EWS will no longer be able to offer the current level of EWO time to schools for the purpose of improving pupil attendance, and, as a result, schools will have to allocate school staff to do this work.
 - 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 have difficulty in coping with the current numbers of pupil referrals.
 - EWS ability to intervene at an early stage to prevent poor attendance becoming entrenched, will be much reduced.
- 4.3 Research has shown that poor attendance and punctuality are indicators to deeper social issues that are affecting children and their families. EWOs do not require parental consent to meet/visit families and, because of their early intervention, can identify safeguarding concerns and escalate multi-agency working i.e. MASH referrals.
- 4.4 The referral criteria will necessarily have to change as a result of reduced officers, for example only accepting referrals of those poor attenders whose low level attendance may already be entrenched (e.g. referral criteria of less than 50% attendance rather than the less than 90% at present, and schools will have to manage the casework for these poor attendance pupils instead) – this will undoubtedly impact on both individual and borough wide attendance figures which are scrutinised by Ofsted at Section 5 and other inspections.
- 4.5 Schools will also 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 required. At the present time, this function is carried out by officers.
- 4.6 Taking school staff away from school sites is likely to impact on lessons and pastoral delivery as well as school budgets as supply cover will be needed to cover staff absences while they are attending court. Our EWOs are experts in being able to give appropriate and compelling evidence and are already wholly familiar with the court process. Inevitably, this leads to more positive outcomes, for our young people/families and for education attendance/attainment.
- 4.7 Effective tracking of pupils whose families move away will be restricted, as the EWS ability to make multiple attempts to contact parents will be diminished if there are less officers available to carry out this function.

- 4.8 The EWS ability to manage the current “School Safe” process may also be affected (an email alert to all schools and relevant agencies advising of any concern in the geographical area immediately around any given school).
- 4.9 The increasing number of elective home education (EHE) referrals is already resulting in more EWS resources being used to support EHE work. This work is critical for the LA to be able to reassure itself (and Ofsted) that appropriate home education is taking place where parents/carers have indicated that this is their choice and that there are no safeguarding concerns that need to be referred. This work also links to PREVENT work in the borough.
- 4.10 Finally, the current EWS ability to link involved professionals will be restricted if we are able to accept fewer referrals. The EWS’ advice for parents in relation to bullying, social media, exclusions, complaints and effective engagement with schools will also be negatively affected and is currently a strong role that EWOs play with our families.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The block transfer of £122k to the EWS has remained constant at £122k for a number of years and has not risen with inflation during that time. This report sets out a number of things including but not limited to:
- The role that the service plays in safeguarding our children
 - The low cost per school that the funding provides to ensure work on attendance and multi-agency work continues across the school and calendar year
 - The impact of a reduction in funding that there will be on:
 - The workload of schools, including those that do not currently buy into the service
 - Attendance figures for our children and young people
 - Support to our families across the school year
 - Broader safeguarding functions that the EWS currently provides within the system.
- 5.2 This report asks once again that this partial but very important funding is provided for the next three years so that the work of the EWS can continue and be developed to respond to the recent changes set out by DfE guidance, and to support our schools, families and our education attendance and attainment which is such an important and positive story for our borough.