

**ATTENDANCE AT KEY STAGE 1 AND RECEPTION REVIEW GROUP – FINAL  
REPORT**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To present the outcome and findings of the Task and Finish Review Group established by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise attendance at Key Stage 1 and Reception within schools in the borough of Darlington.

**Summary**

2. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2011, agreed to establish a Review Group to consider the attendance in schools of children in Key Stage 1 and Reception.
3. All Members of the Scrutiny Committee were invited in attend the meetings of the Review Group.
4. The Review Group met on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2011 and 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2011 with Officers and its final report is attached. (**Appendix A**).

**Recommendation**

5. It is recommended that Members approve the recommendations in the Final Report.

**Paul Wildsmith**  
**Director of Resources**

**Background Papers**

Final report of the Review Group  
Allison Hill : Ext: 2291

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	This report has implications to address Health and Well Being for the residents of Darlington.
Sustainability	There are no issues relating to Sustainability which this report needs to address.
Diversity	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address.
Wards Affected	This report does not impact on a particular Ward, but Darlington as a whole.
Groups Affected	This report impacts on Children and Young People within but Darlington.
Budget and Policy Framework	The MTFP, Budget and Council tax must all be agreed by full Council.
Key Decision	This is not a Key Decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an Urgent Decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The report contributes to the Sustainable Community Strategy in a number of ways through the involvement of Members in contributing to the delivery of the five themes.
Efficiency	This report does not identify specific efficiency savings.

**MAIN REPORT**

**Introduction**

1. This is the final report of the Task and Finish Review Group, established by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to examine attendance levels at Key Stage 1 and Reception within local schools.

**Background Information**

2. At the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2011 it was agreed to establish a Review Group and all Members of the Scrutiny were invited to participate in the Review.
3. A wide number of issues have been considered and discussed at two meetings of the Review Group held on 17<sup>th</sup> October and 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2011.

**Membership of the Review Group**

4. All Members of this Scrutiny Committee were invited to attend the meetings of this Review Group.

**Acknowledgements**

5. The Review Group acknowledges the support and assistance provided in the course of their investigation and would like to place on record their thanks to the following :-

Murray Rose, Director of People;  
Jenni Cooke, Assistant Director, Children, Families and Learning;  
Chris Archer, Lead Officer Early Years;  
Anita Hamer, Development and Commissioning Manager 12-19;  
Lynne Henderson, Development and Commissioning Manager 0-11;  
Deborah Archer, 0-19 Area 2 Service Co-ordinator;  
Lindsey Armstrong, Family Support Officer Area 3;  
Janine Lowther, Traveller Education Service; and  
Allison Hill, Democratic Officer.

**Aim**

6. The overall aim of the Review Group was to gain an understanding and overview of attendance in schools within the Borough and to scrutinise areas of concern and make recommendations to improve overall attendance at Key Stage 1 and Reception.

## **Methods of Investigation**

7. The Review Group met with Officers on 17<sup>th</sup> October and 6<sup>th</sup> December and the notes are attached as **Appendix 1**.
8. At the first meeting, Members agreed the Terms of Reference of the Review (attached as **Appendix 2**) and received an overview from the Head of Education to provide some background on the current legislation relating to school attendance; the importance of attendance; and how Darlington was fairing generally on attendance compared to its regional neighbours and the national average.
9. The Lead Officer for Early Years spoke to the Members on her role which covers the period of a child's life from birth to the end of Reception and gave details of the various settings a child may be in i.e. Private, Voluntary and Independent nursery places.
10. Members also undertook a simple mapping exercise to determine what effect different factors had on school attendance. During this exercise Members gave some suggestions for increasing attendance which included wider family liaison and school to home liaison; school policies to contact families if a child is not in school without an explanation by 10.00 a.m.; flexibility with 'Rising 5's' admission policy to Reception Class; and raising the age for school starters.
11. At the second meeting, Members met with the Development and Commissioning Manager 0-19; the Development and Commissioning Manager 12-19; 0-19 Area 2 Service Co-ordinator; the Family Support Officer Area 3; and an officer from the Traveller Education Service.
12. Members examined best practice within schools and heard how the Local Authority had tried to reshape services around attendance.
13. Councillor Taylor also wrote to all Primary School Heads to ascertain how they had tackled issues of non-attendance.
14. Members also questioned the Officer from the Traveller Education Service to ascertain whether low attendance at Reception and Key Stage 1 could be the result of the number of traveller families within the borough.

## **Financial Implications**

15. The recommendations have a financial consequence, however the Review Group recognises that the Council currently has limited resources and these spending aspirations will need to be reviewed within the overall competing priorities and service delivery pressures throughout the Council.

## **Conclusion**

16. At primary and secondary level, Darlington is comparable with regional neighbours and the national average, however at Key Stage 1 it is lower than regional neighbours

and the national average. However, it was noted that this is showing some slow improvement.

17. Members agreed that introducing a form of 'punishment' was not the solution but to encourage parents at Nursery stage on the importance of school attendance was the key to good attendance at Reception and Key Stage 1.
18. The Local Authority can give support and encouragement however it is the responsibility of the schools and parents do ensure good attendance.
19. There is a perception among some parents that at a young age children are only 'just playing' so there is a need for a campaign around the importance of learning from play.
20. Statistical information showed that attendance improved from Year 1 to Year 2 which could indicate that parents do not understand how important education is at a young age.
21. A recent piece of work showed that only 86% of eligible 3 and 4 year olds are accessing their Flexible Free Entitlement of 15 hours per week and less than 50 had not accessed any pre-school provision.
22. There is no evidence to show that the travelling families are having an adverse impact on attendance figures and generally the travelling community take up nursery provision.

### **Recommendation**

23. It is recommended :-
  - (a) That a publicity campaign, including leaflets and posters be introduced, as a low cost effective measure to raise awareness to parents of the importance of school attendance at Reception and Key Stage 1.
  - (b) Schools be advised to commence the rolling programme of school/parent education a lot earlier and to encourage the importance of attendance at an early age. This may have an impact on attendance and allay any doubts and fears parents may have in sending their young child to School.

### **Attendance at Key Stage 1 and Reception Review Group**