

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
3 NOVEMBER 2008**

SCHOOL ABSENCE FIGURES 2007-08

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update committee members on the levels of school absence and to inform them of the expansion of the persistent absentee agenda.

Summary

2. There has been a further decrease in our absence rates at both secondary and primary level for the last academic year, and our position nationally continues to improve. The Local Authority continues to use all sanctions available to them to try and improve on the level of absence across the town.
3. The Persistent Absentee (PA) Agenda is being rolled out across all schools in Darlington with support from the Education Welfare Service being allocated according to the number of PA pupils in each locality.
4. Local Authority Officers work together to continue to challenge schools over their individual levels of absence, and the reasons that children and young people give for their non-school attendance.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Committee Members note the content of this report.

**Murray Rose,
Director of Children's Services**

Background Papers

School Census data 2006/7 and 2007/8

DCSF official first statistical release figures for the Autumn and Spring Terms

Anita Hamer: Extension 2891

S17 Crime and Disorder	Reduction in school absence could have a positive impact on the reduction of crime and disorder
Health and Well Being	Individual young people could show improvements to their health and well being by attending their school community on a regular basis
Sustainability	Not applicable
Diversity	Not applicable
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	All children and young people
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no budget or policy implications

Key Decision	No key decisions are required
Urgent Decision	No urgent decisions are required
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This report contributes to the Aspiring Darlington theme of the Sustainable Community Strategy

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. Performance

The information in this report is based on the information that schools submit to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) through their termly census up to Easter 2008, including Eastbourne C of E Academy who share their absence information with the local authority.

7. Also included in the report is information supplied by the DCSF that illustrates the local authority's performance by ranking it against other authorities.
8. In March this year the DCSF published the national performance figures with individual rankings for the academic year 2006/7. The table below illustrates Darlington's performance.

	Darlington Performance	North East	National	Ranking
Primary Absence	5.18	4.97	5.18	71
Persistent Absentees	2.11	1.6	1.8	115
Primary Absence improvement	-1.08	-0.87	-0.58	7
Secondary Absence	8.43	7.86	7.86	119
Persistent absentees	8.06	7.10	6.70	123
Secondary Absence Improvement	-1.41	-0.57	-0.38	5
Improvement in the Percentage of PA	-3.0	-0.6	-0.4	3
Darlington	6.8	6.49	6.49	116

This shows that Darlington was the 7th most improved in the primary phase, 5th in the secondary phase and the 3rd most improved for the reduction in the percentage of persistent absentees in the secondary phase. This was an improvement over the position for the previous year.

9. The academic year 2007/8 has shown that the improvement seen during 2006/7 has continued, particularly in the secondary phase and the following table shows the performance and rankings for Darlington. The figures in brackets include Eastbourne C of E Academy.

	2006/7	Ranking	Autumn 2007/8	Ranking	Spring 2007/08	Ranking	2007/8 to Easter
Primary	5.2%	71	5.1%	56	5.1%	49	5.1%
Secondary	8.4%	119	6.3%(6.9%)	14	6.4% (6.9%)	17	6.4%(6.9%)
Darlington	6.7%	116	5.7%(6.1%)	19	5.7%(6.0%)	15	5.7%(6.0%)

10. Information for the whole of the academic year will not be available until the end of October following the census that takes place this month, National data will not be available until March 2009.
11. In 2005/6 the DCSF received pupil level absence data for the first time through the school census and this was for the secondary phase. On analysis of that data they decided to introduce the persistent absentee (PA) agenda as the majority of absence was caused by a minority of pupils who were persistent absentees. For the year 2006/7 they identified 500 schools nationally as PA schools, these were defined as having more than 10% of their school population as PAs. The definition of a PA is a pupil whose attendance is equal to or less than 80%. In Darlington we had three schools Branksome, Eastbourne Academy and Haughton and they received additional support both from the local authority and the DCSF through the National Strategies to improve their performance.
12. Last year Darlington was the third most improved authority for the reduction in the percentage of PA in the secondary phase. We now have Branksome and the Academy who meet the criteria for a PA school and the authority will continue to support the interventions that they have put in place.
13. The only target that the authority has to meet around school absence is that no more than 5% of its pupils are persistent absentees by 2011. Darlington is track to meet that target. All schools are still required during the target setting process with their school improvement partners to set targets for total absence and the secondary schools are required to set targets for the percentage of PA.
14. Government has had a long standing target for absence which was to reduce absence by 8% by 2008 from the baseline of 2002/03. For Darlington this meant:

Overall absence of 7.69% in 02/03 to reduce to 6.79% in 07/08.	Target 06/07	Performance 06/07	Target 07/08	Performance 07/08 to Easter
Secondary	8.62	8.43	8.39	6.4%
Primary	5.44	5.18	5.29	5.1%
Combined	6.98	6.8	6.79	5.7%

On top of these targets, the authority has agreed through the LAA stretch targets:

	06/07	07/08	08/09
Secondary	8.46	8.13	7.8
Primary	5.37	5.13	4.9

Our performance shows that we have met the original government targets and are on course to meet the LAA targets in the secondary phase.

15. The DCSF has realised how effective the interventions introduced with the PA agenda has been in reducing the levels of total absence in the PA schools and so has introduced the agenda into all schools including primaries and special schools. The Local Authority had already started to work with some primaries in this way and from September the agenda has been rolled out to all schools. Briefings to Joint Consultative Group, Governing Body Chairs and to the Primary Headteachers have taken place.

16. In order to support schools in this new agenda, the education welfare officers have been allocated to localities and according to the number of PAs in that locality.

17. Looked After Children

The local authority continues to monitor the daily attendance at school of the children in its care by using Welfare Call. The authority finds this offers its officers the ability to act immediately if there are problems with school attendance. Performance for our looked after children is illustrated in the table below, it is important to remember that in some cases the numbers are very small so the impact of one child on the percentages can be enormous.

	In Authority		Out of Authority	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
05/06	95.3%	83.9%	95.3%	86.5%
06/07	95.2%	91%	97%	95%
07/08	97.8%	91.7%	96.3%	89.2%

Outcome of Consultation

19. No consultation was required to in the preparation of this report.
