

ATTENDANCE UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To update members of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee on the local attendance landscape and provide information as to how children and young people are supported to increase their attendance at school.

2. Background

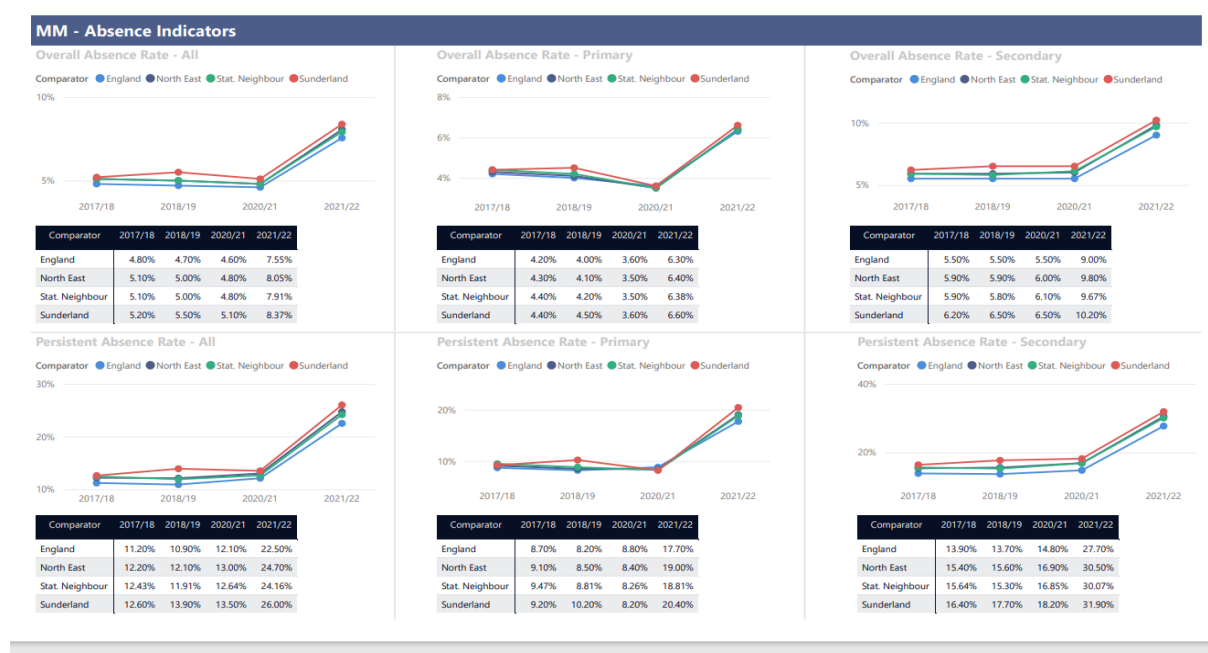
- 2.1 In addition to the DfE's guidance 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance', the DfE have also published guidance on how to support school attendance where there is a pupil experiencing social, emotional or mental health issues. This is shared with schools and parents to improve the barriers to attendance.
- 2.2 Some pupils find it harder than others to attend school and therefore at all stages of improving attendance, schools and partners should work with pupils and parents/carers to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place. Securing good attendance cannot therefore be seen in isolation, and effective practices for improvement will involve close interaction with schools' efforts on curriculum, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, pastoral and mental health and wellbeing, and effective use of resources, including pupil premium. It cannot solely be the preserve of a single member of staff, or organisation, it must be a concerted effort across all teaching and non-teaching staff in school, the trust or governing body, the local authority, and other local partners.
- 2.3 Persistent absence continues to be a national challenge recognised by the Government's introduction of Attendance Hubs and is one which Sunderland are continuing to robustly support.
- 2.4 The main contributing factors leading to persistent absence are the recovery from Covid, mental and physical health, disengagement from school, unmet special education need, and a breakdown in the parent/carer / school relationship. The impact of persistent absence on children and young people is nationally recognised as having the potential to lead to:
- Poor attainment
 - Substance misuse

- Crime and delinquency
- Unemployment
- Mental health problems

2.5 Pupils in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally are twice as likely to be persistently absent than their peers in the 10% least deprived, this statistic is also applicable in the local context.

3. Data

3.1 The table below provides the overall absences rates and persistent absence rates split between primary and secondary phases; in comparison to National, Northeast and statistical neighbours up to the year 21/22. The data for 22/23 is unpublished however the trends remain the same and is broken down further below.



2022/23* Data – Disadvantaged Cohort

3.2 Disadvantaged children and young people in relation to attendance data include those who are in receipt of pupil premium (free school meals or other additional funding). Absenteeism for **disadvantaged** cohort of 12,433 pupils includes;

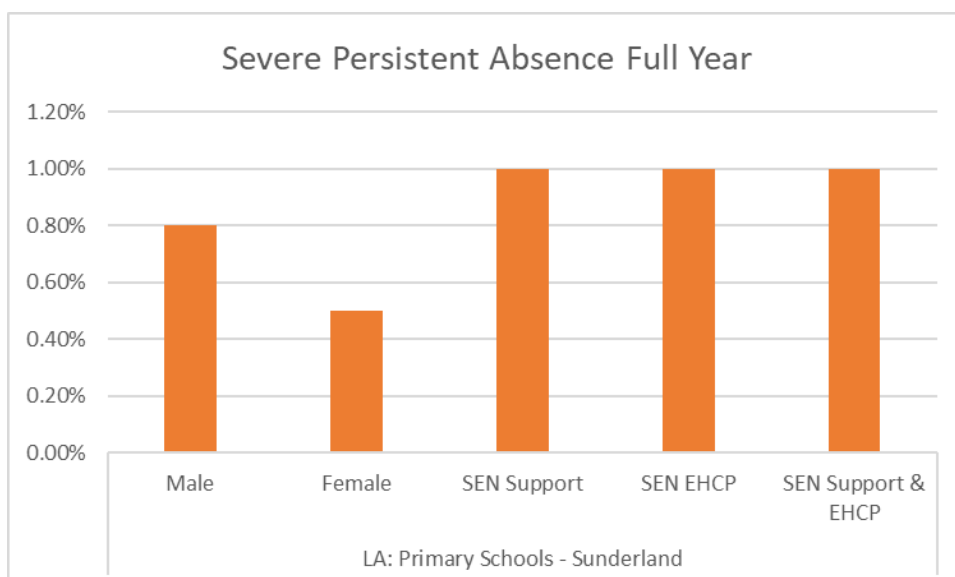
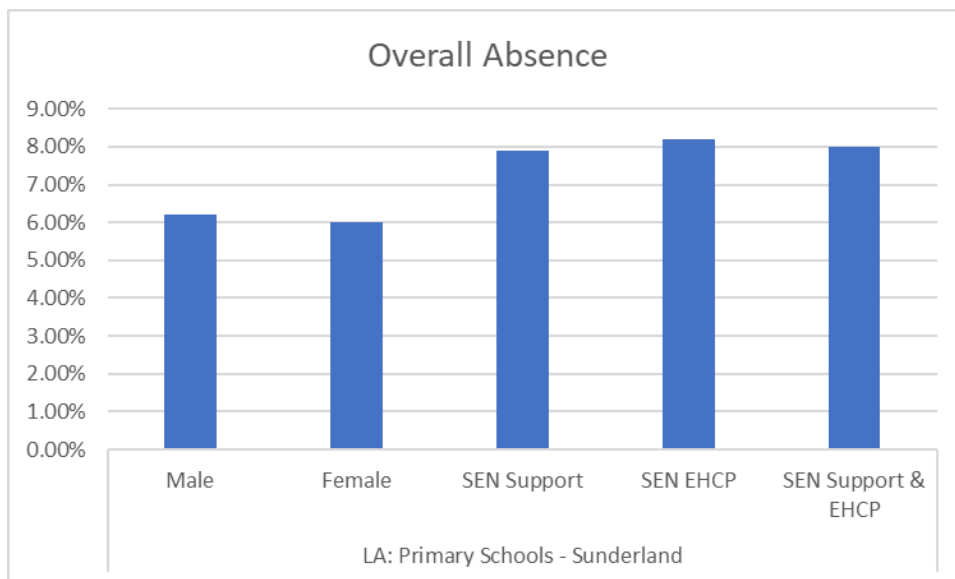
- Sunderland's disadvantaged pupil cohort **overall absence for 22/23** is at 11%. An increase of 0.9% from 21/22. Placing Sunderland 63rd percentile for overall absence when compared to other L.A.s.
- Sunderland's disadvantaged pupil cohort **persistent absence for 22/23** is at 37.8%. An increase of 2.6% from 21/22. Placing Sunderland 63rd percentile.

*(unpublished provision data from Sunderland Management Information System)

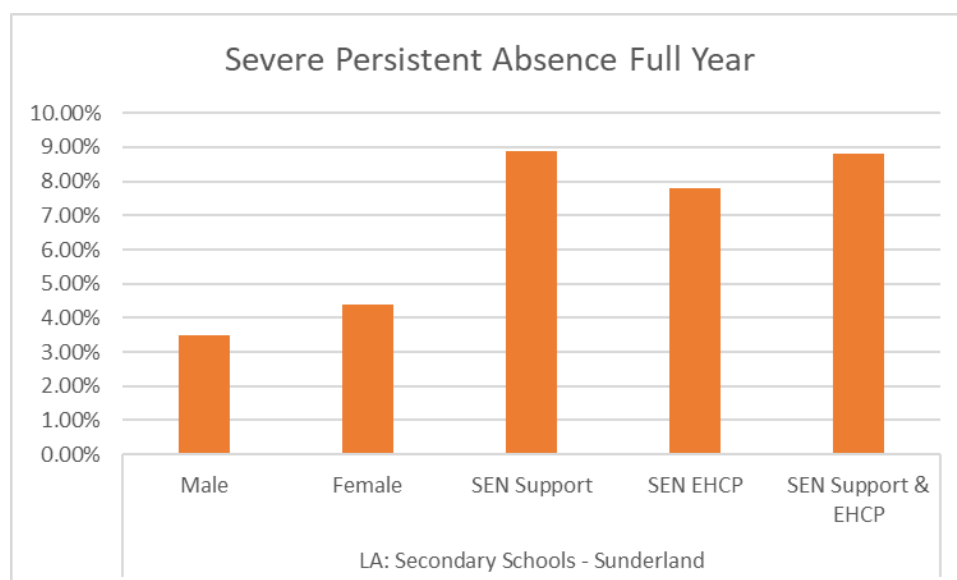
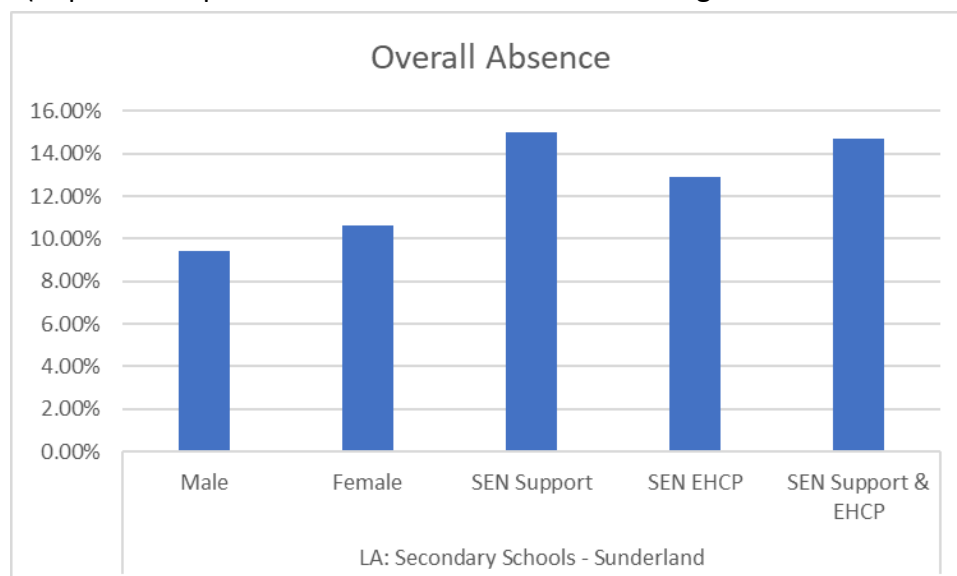
- Sunderland's disadvantaged pupil cohort **unauthorised absence for 22/23** is at 4.9%. An increase of 1.1% from 21/22. Placing Sunderland in 83rd percentile.

22/23 Data* – SEND Pupils

3.3 The tables below demonstrate the overall and persistent absence split by primary and secondary phases in respect of special education needs.



*(unpublished provision data from Sunderland Management Information System)



4. Support

4.1 The citywide attendance provision is delivered by 4 (3.8 FTE) Attendance Officers who support 127 schools led by a Senior Attendance Officer and Attendance Team Manager. Due to the increase in attendance support required, caseloads are extremely high therefore it is essential that referrals are triaged to ensure that support is timely and targeted for greatest impact.

4.2 The local authority, statutory safeguarding partners and other local partners have a crucial role in supporting pupils to overcome those barriers and ensuring all children can access the full-time education to which they are entitled. The

attendance officers have a multi-agency approach for those children with unmet special education needs to get the best outcomes for children.

- 4.3 Schools refer to the service when there are significant attendance concerns, particularly in relation to persistent absence. Once the referral is received and accepted an initial assessment is carried out to determine the most appropriate support. This may include, but is not limited to:
- Writing to parent/carer
 - Speaking with parents by telephone
 - Home visits
 - Meeting with the pupil in school
 - Meeting with the parents/carers in school
 - Drawing up a contract between school/Attendance Team/parents/pupil
 - Liaising with other services
 - A referral to Early help
 - Meeting with the parent/carer
 - Referral to another agency/service
- 4.4 Where there has been little or no improvement to the situation following Attendance Officer intervention and support the case is reviewed in supervision with the Senior Attendances Officer. Consideration will be given to enforcement strategies. These may include:
- Official Warning letter – Notice to Attend
 - Fixed Penalty Warning notice
 - Fixed Penalty Notice for UA absence
 - Fixed Penalty Notice for Term Time leave.
 - Final warning notice
 - Formal Attendance Review
 - Prosecution in magistrate's court
- 4.5 As detailed in the background context above successful outcomes are significantly more likely to be achieved where partners and schools build strong relationships with families, where concerns are listened to, and barriers to attendance are understood.
- 4.6 To support the governance of attendance all schools are required to have a clear school attendance policy which all leaders, staff, pupils, and parents understand, and that is available on the school website.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 The challenges that families in Sunderland face are likely to continue and, in some cases, become more challenging and complex. Many of the social, health and economic challenges of our families have the potential to impact on school attendance. As a city we recognise that school is more than a place of education but for a number of children and young people a place where they feel safe, and boundaries are consistent. The attendance team will therefore continue to adapt the vital support provided to schools to meet the changing needs of our children, young people and families in line with Government policy and best practice.
- 5.2 We will also continue to work in partnership with other services i.e. CAMHS/CYPS, Early Help, Social Care, NHS services, Targeted Youth Services and encourage our parents/carers to work with multi-agencies when additional support is required.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to consider and comment on the report.