

## **Midlothian Policy on Positive Approaches to Attendance**

**Report by Michelle Strong, Education Chief Operating Officer**

### **Report for Decision**

#### **1 Recommendations**

Cabinet is requested to note and approve the revised policy 'Positive Approaches to Attendance' that details the council strategic approach and the procedures that schools and settings must follow to protect and promote attendance.

#### **2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary**

Midlothian's attendance strategy and policy aims develop and strengthen a whole-system partnership approach that enables children to realise their right to an education and leads to increased and sustained attendance and engagement in education for all children and young people.

The refreshed policy maps out a staged approach to promoting and protecting attendance and a consistent approach to tracking and monitoring.

This report provides Cabinet with the context which informed the revised version of the attendance policy.

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### 3 Background/Main Body of Report

Increasing attendance and engagement at school and education is a key priority across Scotland. Education is a social and cultural right for all children and young people (see Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child) and is key to ensuring children and young people feel valued and connected to their communities, have networks of support, attain, and achieve outcomes that lead to positive destinations.

Attendance levels have not returned to their previous levels before the school closures related to Covid-19. This is being attributed to a range of complex and interacting factors including a cultural shift in attitudes towards school, poverty-related factors and higher levels of anxiety within families, children and young people leading to emotionally-based school non-attendance.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Target
<b>Primary School Attendance Rate</b>	<b>94.70%</b>	<b>94.04%</b>	<b>95.06%</b>	<b>92.00%</b>	<b>92.54%</b>	<b>95%</b>
<b>Secondary School Attendance Rate</b>	<b>89.20%</b>	<b>89.37%</b>	<b>90.99%</b>	<b>87.33%</b>	<b>87.35%</b>	<b>91.5%</b>

Midlothian has been proactively monitoring and tracking attendance and this policy will support our work to ensure children and young people's right to an education are pursued and realised. The newly developed data dashboard has enabled analysis of attendance patterns across schools on a weekly basis with data broken down by school, stage and characteristics including ASN and SIMD. This has highlighted the groups at risk of lower attendance and the need for more sustained, targeted support to improve and maintain engagement and attendance over time.

Partnerships with schools and support agencies have been established through a series of workshops focusing on the development of a shared framework and tools that help to deepen insight into issues and promote engagement with young people. Further project work is in process with young people as co-researchers to further deepen understanding of attendance in Midlothian, empower young people to support strategic planning and development.

There was a need to refresh our attendance policy in light of:

- the complexities in relation to non-attendance and the need for a robust, partnership approach that strengthens understanding and addresses the causes of non-attendance.
- the need for clear pathways that map out a staged approach to promoting attendance and supporting non-attendance.
- the increase in access to digital learning and the google workspace.
- the need for greater consistency and clarity in procedures in tracking and monitoring attendance.

## **4 Report Implications (Resource, Digital, Risk and Equalities)**

### **4.1 Resource**

The costs for schools to follow the procedures will be covered by existing budget. The actions mapped out in the staged approach seek to capture and strengthen good practice that exists already in Midlothian. Establishing greater consistency and clarity around pathways should lead to greater impact and efficiencies through joined up partnerships in localities.

### **4.2 Digital**

Digital technology is well established in Midlothian schools with each learner equipped with their own device. Google workspace will enable schools to maintain contact with learners and review learning.

### **4.3 Risk**

It is proposed that strengthening our approach to promoting and protecting attendance will lead to improved attendance and reduce the risks associated with non-attendance. These risks include:

- Reduced attainment and achievement and less chance of moving on to a positive destination.
- Reduced network of protection and support to safeguard children from harm.
- Increased risk of anti-social behaviours and involvement with youth justice.

### **4.4 Ensuring Equalities**

An IIA (Appendix C) has been completed for the report and suggests the revised policy will have a positive impact on children and people with protected characteristics and facing poverty-related challenges.

### **4.5 Additional Report Implications (See Appendix A)**

## **Appendices**

**Appendix A – Additional Report Implications**

**Appendix B – Positive Approaches to Attendance**

**Appendix C – Integrated Impact Assessment**

## **APPENDIX A – Additional Report Implications**

### **A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan**

The revised Attendance Policy is a part of the Single Midlothian Plan's key priorities to reduce the gap in learning outcomes. It promotes a preventative and early intervention approach to those children and young people, at risk of, or presenting with lower attendance including those living in poverty and those with Additional Support Needs.

### **A.2 Key Drivers for Change**

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- Holistic Working
- Hub and Spoke
- Modern
- Sustainable
- Transformational
- Preventative
- Asset-based
- Continuous Improvement
- One size fits one
- None of the above

### **A.3 Key Delivery Streams**

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- One Council Working with you, for you
- Preventative and Sustainable
- Efficient and Modern
- Innovative and Ambitious

### **A.4 Delivering Best Value**

The rationale for the revised policy is to promote greater awareness of the challenges impacting attendance, strengthen prevention and early intervention and to improve the pathways and partnerships to ensure actions are coherent and targeted in supporting children and young people presenting with low or persistent non-attendance levels.

### **A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders**

The attendance policy has been redrafted by a multi-agency workstream that reports to the Attendance Strategy Group. A series of engagement activities have taken place in revising the attendance policy:

- Focus groups with children and young people from primary and secondary schools and parents/carers in relation to the importance of attendance and what helps children and young people to attend.
- Engagement with Head teachers (primary), Deputies (secondary) and home school practitioners on what's working and issues to resolve in relation to attendance.
- Engagement with Children and Families leadership team.
- Circulation of the draft attendance policy to EEG for consideration at ASGs.

#### **A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes**

The policy will support the target of increasing attendance at primary schools to 95% and secondary schools to 91.5% and reduce the attendance gaps in relation to children from SIMD quintile 1, children with ASN and those who are care experienced.

#### **A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach**

The policy will ensure greater accuracy and analysis of data to inform preventative and targeted support. The policy will also increase engagement and accountability for children, young people, families, schools and partners and lead to clearer pathways of support and intervention.

#### **A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development**

Not applicable