

Attendance Update for Midlothian

Report by Michelle Strong, Education Chief Operating Officer

Report for Information

1 Recommendations

Cabinet are asked to note:

- The ongoing work of the attendance strategy group in building stronger processes to improve attendance at school.
- Acknowledge the ongoing work of schools to support children and families to attend school consistently.

2 Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to present a summary of attendance in Midlothian. The historic and current trends in attendance are presented alongside the ongoing work that is taking place across the authority and within schools to improve the outcomes of our young people.

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3 Background

- 3.1** The purpose of this report is to present the trend data and comparison to national and similar authorities for our attendance data. The report will also highlight the recent national developments in attendance information and present the work that has been ongoing with the Midlothian Attendance Strategy working group to improve attendance for all young people in schools.
- 3.2** There are a number of different sources of data for this report, the main source is taken from the recently published national dataset on Summary statistics for schools in Scotland 2022/23, which contains a breakdown for attendance and absence and can be found [here](#). Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic the Scottish Government were gathering data biennially on school pupil attendance and absence to produce National Statistics. However, during the pandemic the Scottish Government started collecting the data on a more frequent basis, up to daily information, as it was used as evidence that informed the Scottish Government, Scottish Ministers, CERG (etc.) throughout the pandemic in relation to the impact Covid-19 was having on school pupil attendance. This process reduced following full reopening of schools, and returned to the biannual publication of data, however they have continued with a fortnightly data collection as of August 2023 to enable the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to continue to monitor any residual impact Covid-19. This information is now being reported on every two weeks with summary of findings shared with each local authority and data presented on a publicly available online dashboard, which can be found [here](#). It should be noted that this data is extracted directly from the education management information system, SEEMiS, and presented without any quality assurance.
- 3.3** In a similar way to how the Scottish Government is continuing to monitor attendance and absence, Midlothian council has also continued to focus on this area of work as a key priority. There has been a strong emphasis as part of the education service plan, with significant improvements being made through the attendance strategy group. School and authority level attendance, absence and exclusion data is updated on a biweekly basis and shared internally through data dashboards. The purpose of this is to provide focused support where needed and reduced the risk through early intervention and prevention.

4 Attendance Summary

- 4.1** Appendix B for this report provides summary information for attendance in Midlothian in comparison to the national and comparator authorities. There are also extracts from the Midlothian data dashboard to provide context for how the attendance strategy group and schools are using this to drive improvement:

4.2 Attendance Context for Midlothian

- i. The trend of overall attendance in Midlothian is very similar to that of the national and comparator authorities. There has been a gradual decrease in attendance from 2012/13 to the last full session, 2022/23. Over this period there has been a -3.50% reduction nationally, -3.19% for the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) family group and -2.50% reduction for Midlothian. The recent trend data shows that attendance in Midlothian, which was previously lower than the national rate, is now higher than this, although slightly lower than the LGBF average. It is clear from the data that there has been an impact from the Covid-19 pandemic, with attendance for all authorities declining since schools reopened. Most notable

- however, the year-to-date attendance for Midlothian this session is higher than what it was in 2022/23.
- ii. The trend in attendance for all school pupils is very similar when examined by sector. There has been a gradual decrease in attendance from 2014/15, with the biggest decrease coming post-pandemic for both primary and secondary pupils. For primary school attendance the rate in Midlothian is higher than the national level, with the decrease from 2014/15 only -1.79% compared to -2.88% nationally and -2.54% for the LGBF family group average. In secondary it is a similar pattern with a -3.13% decrease in Midlothian compared to -4.06 nationally and -4.02% for the LGBF average. The attendance rate for secondary school pupils in Midlothian in 2022/23 however was lower than the national rate by 0.57%, but there has been a slight increase in attendance for this session year-to-date compared to 2022/23.
 - iii. The biweekly Scottish Government attendance dashboard that is shared online, highlights the comparisons and challenges in this area of work. There does need to be a level of caution with this data given that it is utilised in its raw format and not quality assured. The most recent information however for the two weeks up until 20th March show that Midlothian ranks 19th out of the 32 local authorities in primary attendance and 15th out of 32 for secondary attendance. For primary attendance Midlothian is slightly higher than the national and LGBF comparators, and in Secondary Midlothian is slightly below the national level but above the LGBF average. The level of attendance will vary from period to period, however the ranking of Midlothian has not changed dramatically since being published.
 - iv. Since the start of the session in 2022/23 the Midlothian Attendance strategy group and schools have had access to an internal data dashboard. This is updated biweekly to present trends on attendance and exclusions and allow targeted support to be implemented. The information can be drilled down to specific groups of young people and highlight where the challenges currently presented in schools can be supported through interventions and preventions. A select number of slides from the dashboard are shown in Appendix B, but this is only available internally to drive improvement and focused support.

4.3 Attendance Strategy

The overarching aim of the attendance strategy is to develop and strengthen a whole-system partnership approach that leads to increased and sustained attendance and engagement in education for all children and young people.

It is recognised that improving attendance and engagement is a particularly complex issue and a strong partnership approach is needed to deepen understanding and develop impactful and sustainable solutions. Key considerations include the impact of Covid and a shift in the perceived importance of attendance and the place of school, greater access to digital learning, the impacts of rising poverty and an increase in levels of anxiety and mental health concerns amongst children, young people and families.

The Attendance Strategy Group is made up of school leaders, central education team members, home school practitioners, Family Wellbeing Service, CLLE, health and 3rd sector colleagues. We are currently pursuing membership from parents/carers and are engaging with children and young people to develop systems to ensure they are active participants and influencing the activity and decision-making of the group.

Based on analysis of attendance data, engagement activities over time and a review of effective practice across the UK, the strategy is mapped out over the 4 levels below:

Level 1: Promote and protect attendance at universal whole school level

- Following significant engagement with stakeholders, the refreshed attendance policy was launched in January 2024. The policy details the positive approaches and partnerships to promote engagement and attendance in Midlothian and the procedures for responding to concerns around attendance.
- A school attendance self-evaluation tool is being developed to support school leaders to evaluate school systems and approaches against quality indicators of effective practice. This self-evaluation tool will be integrated into the quality improvement plans with schools.
- Midlothian-wide communications are to be personalised and delivered through ASGs to ensure consistent messages and commitments across the authority while promoting local relationships with communities.

Level 2: Reduce the risk of non-attendance through prevention and early intervention

- Tracking and monitoring systems are being streamlined across schools, ensuring detailed analysis of attendance levels and codes across different groups, and ensuring the impact of interventions can be tracked and gaps/areas for improvement identified.
- The data dashboards have enabled the tracking and monitoring of groups of children and young people at risk of low attendance, review effective use of PEF, and identify the impact of interventions. Analysis has been carried out on a whole school basis to identify schools that are making a positive difference and how to extend best practice.

Level 3: Strengthen effective early support to reduce signs of non-attendance

- The effectiveness of the refreshed procedure where attendance drops below 90% will be reviewed in June along with the impact of targeted communications and support strategies.
- A group of children and young people with attendance between 70 and 89% have been recruited as co-researchers to design and carry out research into the factors that influence attendance of young people across Midlothian at this level and ways of improving this.
- A toolkit has been developed to help deepen insight into attendance issues and promote effective support planning. This will be further developed with children and young people.

Level 4: Strengthen purpose, support and partnerships for young people presenting with persistent non-attendance

- Work is ongoing to strengthen curriculum progressions to ensure rich and purposeful learning opportunities enable learners to achieve and reach positive destinations with particular consideration of learners at 0-19% and 20-69% attendance and the role of the digital workspace in maintaining connection and engagement.
- The Attendance Partnership Network was formed this session, bringing partners together from Schools, EPs, Family wellbeing, home school practitioners and 3rd sector to deepen understanding of key issues and of roles, coordinate actions and problem solve issues together.

- From September, children and young people with attendance between 0 and 19% will be recruited as co-researchers to gain deeper insight into the factors that influence attendance at this level and ways of improving this.
- The attendance toolkit will be further developed to include support plans with children and young people at attendance between 0-19% and 20-69%.

The Attendance Strategy Group will continue to review and monitor the impact across the 4 levels and seek to build systemic capacity to make a positive and sustained difference over time.

5 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)

5.1 Resource

There are no resource implications for this report.

5.2 Digital

There continues to be improvements and developments of our data and digital technology in this specific area of work, which will continue to support the attendance strategy group, schools and priorities for the children of Midlothian. Improvements in this area will enable more targeted support and intervention.

5.3 Risk

Not applicable.

5.4 Ensuring Equalities (if required a separate IIA must be completed)

Not applicable.

5.5 Additional Report Implications (See Appendix A)

See Appendix A

Appendices

Appendix A – Additional Report Implications

Appendix B – Attendance Summary

APPENDIX A – Report Implications

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

This will work towards the key priority of Reducing the gap in learning outcomes.

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
- ☐ None of the above

A.4 Delivering Best Value

The delivery of this plan will assist the council in meeting its best value duties. Most notably in the following Best Value themes: Governance and Accountability; Effective use of resources and; Partnerships and collaborative working.

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

Not applicable.

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The content in this report and the continuous improvement to support improvement in attendance and attainment for all young people will assist in improving performance and outcomes for the council.

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Not applicable.

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not applicable.

APPENDIX B – Attendance Summary

1. Midlothian Comparison Context

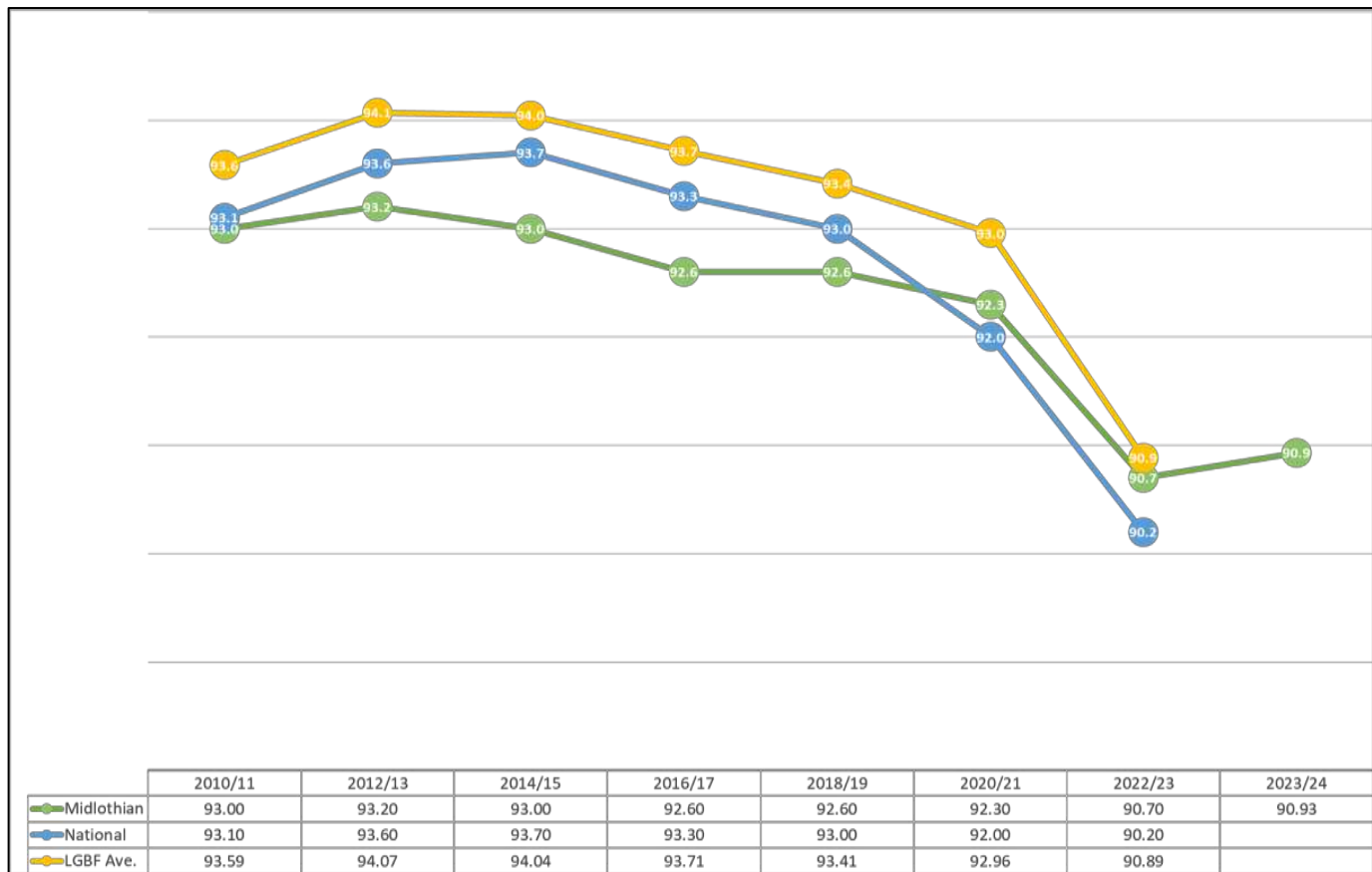


Figure 1 – Attendance rates as a percentage by academic year – all stages

Source: Scottish Government (2024)

* LGBF Ave. is the average figures for Midlothian's Local Government Benchmarking Framework family comparator group. This includes Angus, Argyll & Bute, East Lothian, Moray, Scottish Borders and Stirling.

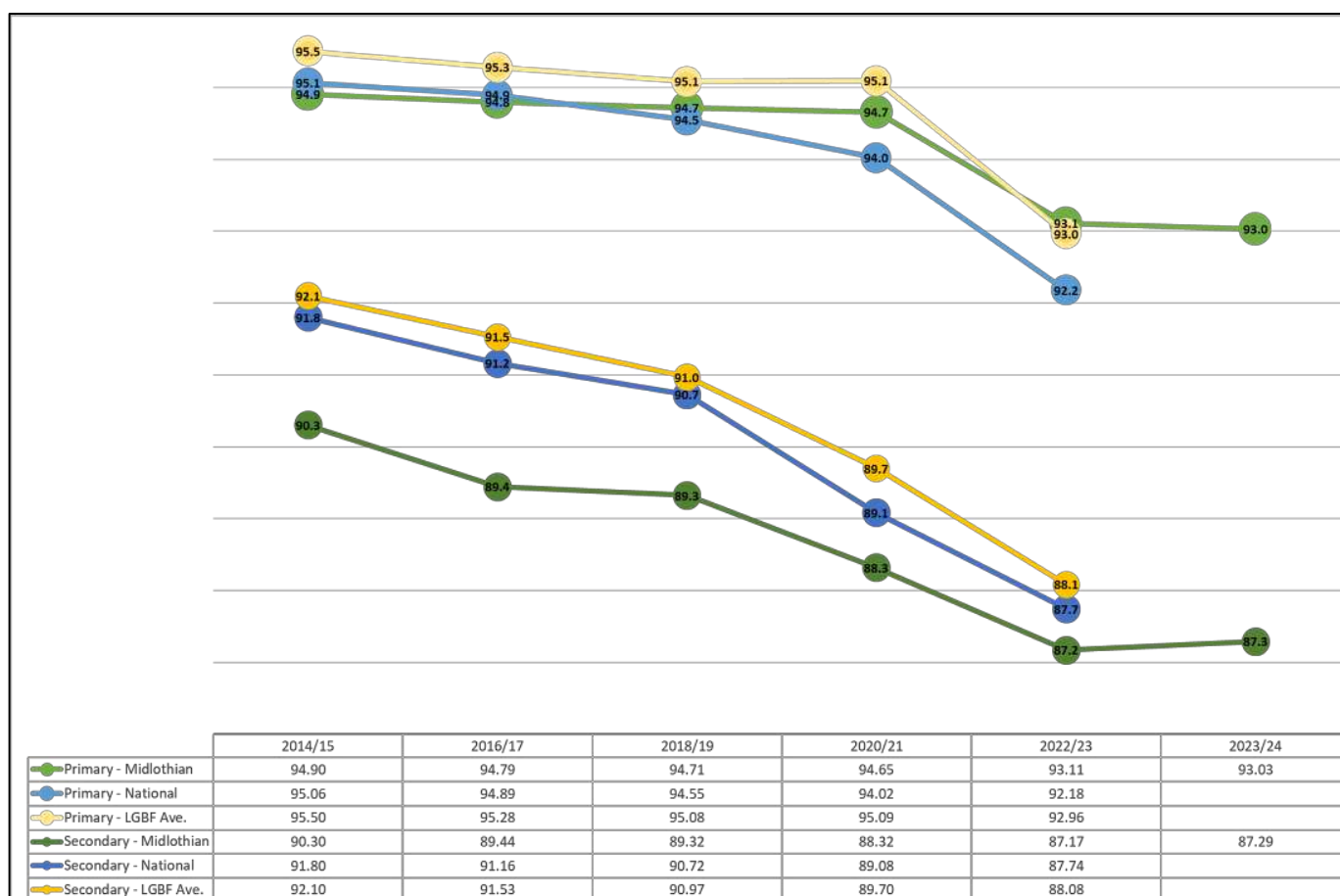


Figure 2 – Attendance rates as a percentage by academic year by sector

Source: Scottish Government (2024)

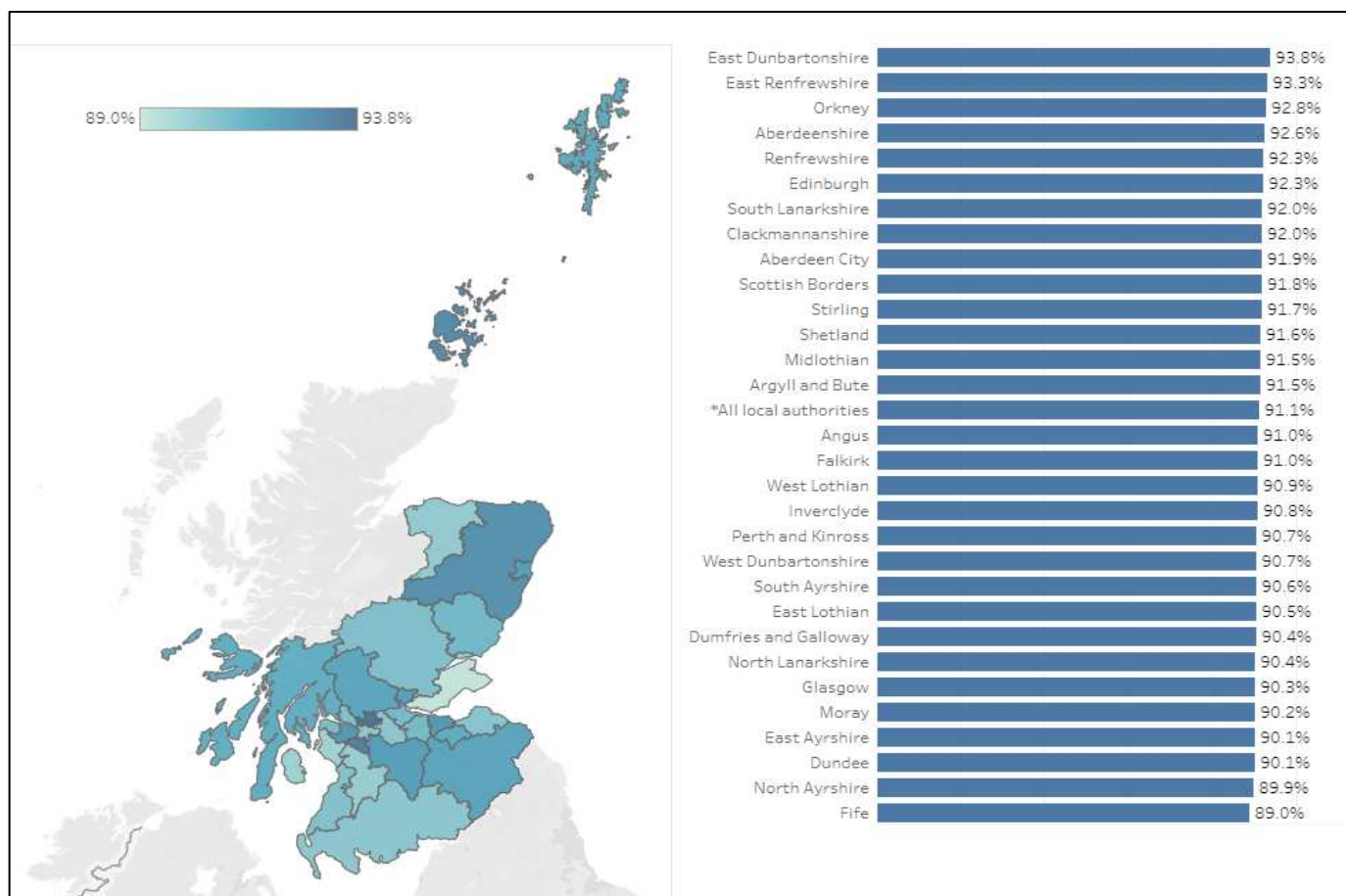


Figure 3 – Extract of Scottish Government Fortnightly School Attendance Dashboard

Source: Scottish Government (2024) – taken from 21.02.24

