
Executive Report

Children in Education Numbers on roll, attendance, and those missing education

Date of meeting: September 2023

Lead director/officer: Sophie Maltby

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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- Report version number: 1

1. Summary

- This report summarises a presentation of data on the known education provision for children in Leicester up to the end of 2022/23 academic year. It examines the trends of this data over time.
- It provides information about the number on roll of children in schools and the numbers of schools.
- Attendance and non-attendance and the issuing of penalty notices for persistent absence.
- Data is included about the number of children in independent schools and those who are electively home educated.
- An overview of exclusions and suspensions is also included.

2. Recommended actions/decision.

- To note the content of the report

3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

4. Background and options with supporting evidence

- 4.1 The data presented shows that the number of children on roll in Leicester schools has grown by 33% between 2005 and 2023 to 59903. There are a further 2200 pupils currently on roll in independent schools. The number in independent schools has not changed significantly since the pupil registration act 2012 which required such schools to inform the local authority about children on roll.

Comparator data is not available for the period between 2005 and 2015. Between 2015 to 2023 Leicester's school population increased by 15% compared to a of 8% nationally and 9% for the East Midlands. Amongst our statistical neighbours Wolverhampton, Peterborough and Slough increased by 20%, 16% and 19% respectively. However, these local authorities remain significantly smaller than Leicester. Leicester has the highest pupil population of all our statistical neighbours. (Listed at Appendix 1)

4.2 The number of state-maintained schools (not independent) in the city has also increased between 2010 and 2023 by 4 to 113. The significant change has been in the funding arrangements with 54 of the schools now being either academies or free schools and operating outside local authority control.

4.3 Parents are responsible for ensuring their child is in receipt of a suitable education. Some parents choose to Electively Home Educate (EHE). The number of children whose parents have chosen to do this has increased significantly since 2010 from 110 to 682 (snapshot figure). The pandemic added to this increase. The local authority has a responsibility to ensure that the education being provided by the parents is suitable however parents do not need to inform the local authority that they have chosen to Electively Home Educate.

During the year some parents will take their children off school roll with the view that they will home educate. However, some then choose to return their child to school and seek admission to either the same or a different school.

4.4 Children's attendance at school is closely monitored and the reasons for their absence are recorded. In Leicester the overall absence rate increased significantly in 2021/22 (the last available year with comparable data). However, the increase in Leicester was less than that for the East Midlands and nationally. Primary school overall absence was slightly less than these comparators for the first time in many years.

4.5 Persistent Absence is a measure of the proportion of children on roll who have been absent more than 10% of their possible sessions. This is the equivalent of having a morning or afternoon session off every week throughout the school year. There is significant national evidence that children who are persistently absent have poorer outcomes.

Primary school persistent absence rates in Leicester are higher than the rates for the East Midlands and nationally although the gap has narrowed in the last few years.

4.6 A significant proportion of absence is due to children having holidays or trips away during term time. This is at a higher rate than either the East Midlands or nationally.

The majority of schools do not authorise this type of absence as they should only authorise such time off in exceptional circumstances. Schools will ask the Local Authority to issue penalty notices for such absence. A penalty notice is a fine of £60 for each parent for each child. If this is not paid within 21 days, the fine doubles to £120. If this remains unpaid parents, then face prosecution in the Magistrates' Court; a fine of up to £2,500 or a community penalty could be imposed together with a Parenting Order.

4.7 Leicester ranks 17 highest out of the 150 local authorities with a rate 6.37 per 100 enrolments for issuing penalty notices for unauthorised holiday absence. The approach taken has improved the overall attendance because it focusses on the need for children to be in school. The rate of 6.37 per 100 is similar to both Blackburn with Darwen and Peterborough. However, it is significantly higher than the East Midlands and the national figure.

4.8 Whilst most schools are consistent in their approach and ask the local authority to issue penalty notices there are a small handful who do not. Attendance and the following up of holiday absence is considered during a school's Ofsted inspection.

4.9 There are children who are absent for more than 20% of their possible sessions. These children may have gone abroad with the intention that they will return but this

return is delayed, or the child never returns and can be removed from roll. The school remains responsible for safeguarding for all children on roll including those not attending. They will work with the Education Welfare Service to try to establish the whereabouts and timescale for the return of the child to school. It is important that parents are encouraged to return their child to school and not just to hold on to a school place. There are places that have been held by parents for a many weeks whilst they decide their intentions. A revised enforcement policy will be issued shortly to support this activity.

- 4.10 The local authority has a penalty notice code of conduct which explains that penalty notices may also be issued in relation to ongoing unauthorised absence. Ongoing unauthorised absence is more frequently addressed through court action.
- 4.11 The Education Welfare Service, with the Schools Data team, actively work to understand the number of children who are not in education and support their return to education. During the last year 226 children were known, at some point, to be in the city and were supported by the service to return to education. At any point during the year there are between 60 and 100 children being supported. 455 children have been investigated by EWS to determine their whereabouts. The DfE are now looking to collect this information, and the number of EHE, through a voluntary collection. This collection will become statutory alongside the new attendance responsibilities.
- 4.12 The permanent exclusion rate, suspension rate and the percentage of enrolments with 1 or more suspensions remain lower in the city than nationally or compared to the East Midlands.
- 4.13 Local data for 2022/23, which will be published next year, shows that there is a variation in the numbers of permanent exclusions and suspensions across different types of school.
- 4.14 This data also shows that there have been permanent exclusions for children with SEND including those with EHCP whilst there have been no permanent exclusions from city schools for children who are looked after.

There is a difference in the rate of incidents of either suspension or permanent exclusion across different ethnic groups. These rates continue to be higher for those children who are of Traveller or Gypsy Roma heritage and for those of Black Caribbean or Mixed White & Black Caribbean heritage and White British. This is one of the areas of focus of the Racial Literacy training currently being delivered to all secondary schools in Leicester by the Stephen Lawrence Research Centre.

5. Financial, legal and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.
Martin Judson, Head of Finance

5.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report.
Julia Slipper, Principal Lawyer

5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

There are no climate emergency implications arising from this report.

Duncan Bell, Change Manager (Climate Emergency). Ext. 37 2249.

5.4 Equalities Implications

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is a general duty that applies to schools, and other public bodies. It requires schools to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct, improve equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between different groups of people: those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful for any education provider, including a private or independent provider, to discriminate between pupils on grounds of disability, race, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sex.

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

It is important that home education doesn't result in children dropping off the radar and becoming vulnerable to poor standards of education or risks to their safety and wellbeing. Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. For the most vulnerable pupils, regular attendance is an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided. Collecting data helps local authorities understand the numbers of the known education provision for children in the city. 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 to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place. The school's attendance policy should be easily accessible to leaders, staff, pupils, and parents, including being published on the school's website.

Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

5.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

6. Background information and other papers:

7. Summary of appendices:

Children in Schools PowerPoint presentation

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

Yes/No

9. Is this a “key decision”? No

10. If a key decision please explain reason

Appendix 1

List of Statistical Neighbours

Leicester
Blackburn with
Darwen
Coventry
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Peterborough
Sandwell
Slough
Southampton
Walsall
Wolverhampton