

Learn Sheffield Insight Report: Attendance

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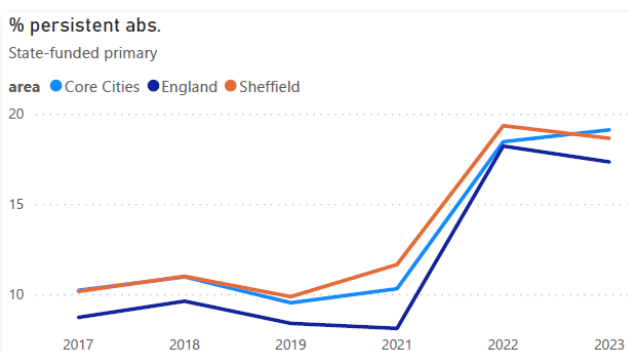
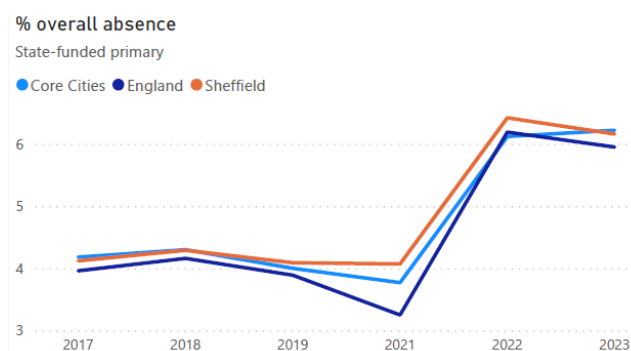
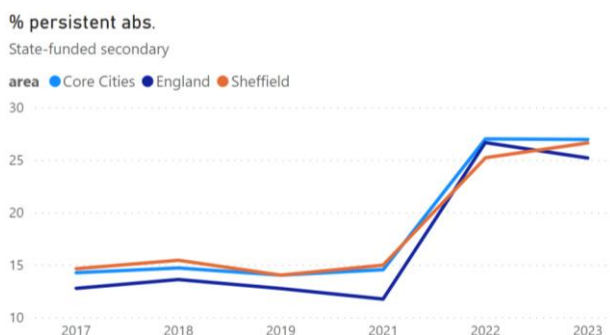
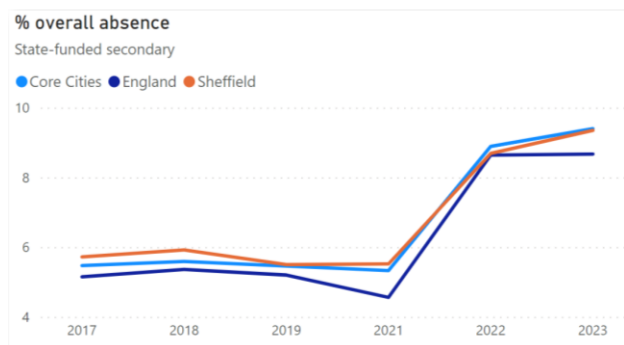
This is a first draft version of this Insight Report, to be shared with the Sheffield Strategic Partnership working group on Thursday 23 November 2023. The final report will be an appendix to the Learn Sheffield Evaluation (2015-23) which is planned for publication in January 2024.

The working group will also receive a presentation from Ben Bryant (ISOS) about the four pilot projects that are taking place with an attendance focus in the [Educating for the Future programme](#) (which Sheffield is involved in a different strand of).

The Public First report [Listening to, and learning from, parents in the attendance crisis](#) (Dr Sally Burtonshaw and Ed Dorrell – September 2023) has also been shared to support this discussion.

Attendance Insights:

- The level of absence and persistent absence has increased since the Covid pandemic, both in Sheffield and nationally. The sharp post-Covid climb in both overall and persistent absence in primary and secondary can be seen below.



Autumn and Spring data 2022/23

- The significant rise in absence and persistent absence is extremely concerning, and we must not lose the scale of this problem in analysing the finer details of it. When we consider the relative performance of Sheffield we should focus on overall absence (as what matters is whether a young person is in their setting or not) and the level of persistent absence. The table below demonstrates that almost 1 in 5 primary pupils and more than 1 in 4 secondary pupils nationally are persistently absent – and the position in Sheffield is slightly worse than this.

Overall Absence – Primary	Persistent Absence – Primary	Overall Absence – Secondary	Persistent Absence – Secondary
Sheffield 6.16%	Sheffield 18.64%	Sheffield 9.35%	Sheffield 26.62%
National 5.95%	National 17.33%	National 8.67%	National 25.18%
Gap 0.21% points	Gap 1.31% points	Gap 0.68% points	Gap 1.44% points
Trend (from same terms in 2021/22) of the gap to national–			
Narrowed by 0.02% points	Widened By 0.18% points	Widened by 0.63% points	Widened by 2.89% points

Autumn and Spring data 2022/23

- When Sheffield overall and persistent absence in primary and secondary is compared with (the 152) LAs nationally, the City is in the third quartile and broadly in line with deprivation rankings. Sheffield is also in the mid-range of Core Cities (4th or 5th of 8) across primary and secondary measures.

Attendance ranks and rank change (all LAs)			
year phase	2023 rank	rank change from 2016	rank change from 2019
State-funded secondary			
% overall absence	116	↑	1
% auth. absence	2	↑	7
% unauth. absence	147	↓	-5
% persistent abs.	104	↑	12
State-funded primary			
% overall absence	105	↑	14
% auth. absence	6	↑	16
% unauth. absence	146	↓	-4
% persistent abs.	106	↑	31
Special			
% overall absence	141	↓	-8
% auth. absence	144	↓	-7
% unauth. absence	120	↓	-9
% persistent abs.	130	↓	-8

Attendance ranks and rank change (Core Cities)			
year phase	2023 rank	rank change from 2016	rank change from 2019
State-funded secondary			
% overall absence	5	→	0
% auth. absence	1	↓	1
% unauth. absence	7	→	0
% persistent abs.	4	↓	1
State-funded primary			
% overall absence	5	↓	1
% auth. absence	2	↓	2
% unauth. absence	7	↓	-1
% persistent abs.	4	↓	2
Special			
% overall absence	7	↓	-1
% auth. absence	8	↓	-1
% unauth. absence	2	→	0
% persistent abs.	6	→	0

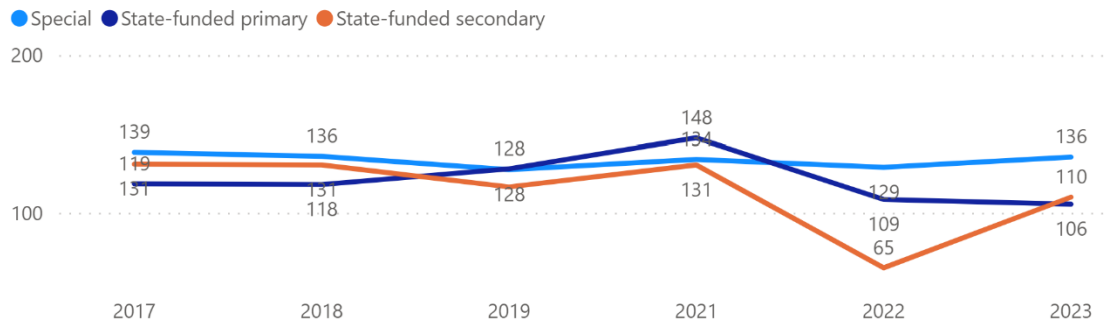
Autumn and Spring data 2022/23

- The data and LA ranking of Sheffield in relation to authorised absence (which is amongst the lowest in the country) and unauthorised absence (which is amongst the highest) should be considered, as this situation could only come about through advice about coding absence locally. The data suggests that the coding of holidays as unauthorised could be a key driver of this.

Does the extreme rankings of authorised and unauthorised absence reflect good practice?

- Sheffield’s special sector LA absence rankings (141 overall / 130 persistent) and Core City rankings (7 overall and 6 persistent) are lower. This is a consistent picture in recent years as shown in the graph below. We need to understand this better, given the variability of approaches to specialist provision (which would impact on attendance) across the country.

Average rank by phase (all LAs) (lower rank = better performance)



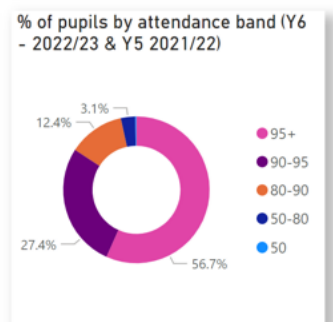
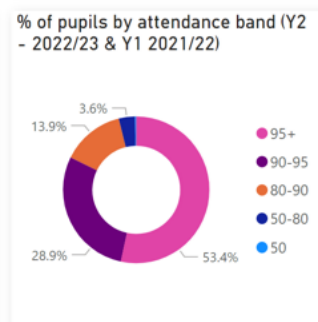
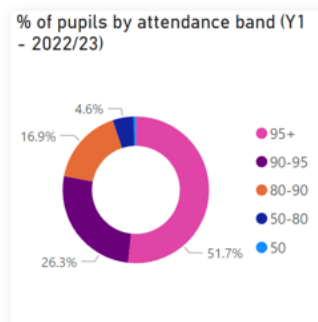
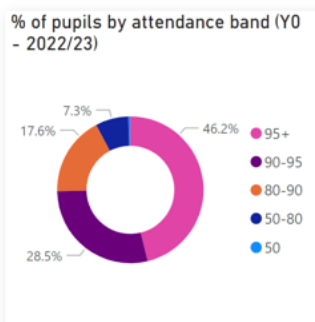
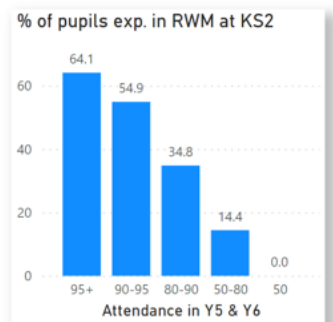
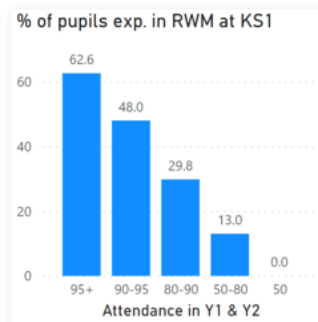
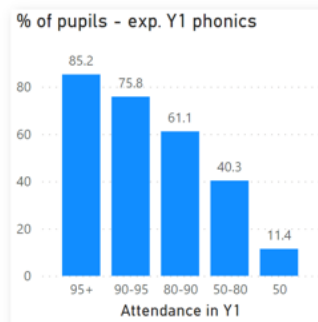
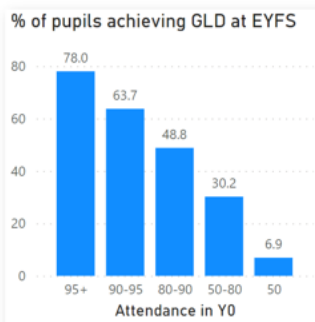
Autumn and Spring data 2022/23

Does the bottom quartile attendance in Sheffield special schools reflect the nature of provision and cohort or attendance practice?

- Sheffield is the second strongest Core City in relation to Ofsted outcomes (i.e., the proportion of all schools which are good or better). When we consider attainment, Sheffield is 5th ranked Core City in secondary (both for attainment 8 and progress 8) and 5th ranked Core City in primary (combined measure in KS2). When we consider attendance, Sheffield is the 5th Core City (overall absence in primary and secondary) or 4th Core City (persistent absence in primary and secondary).

If Sheffield was also the 2nd ranked Core City for attendance would that improvement lead to it being the 2nd ranked Core City for attainment?

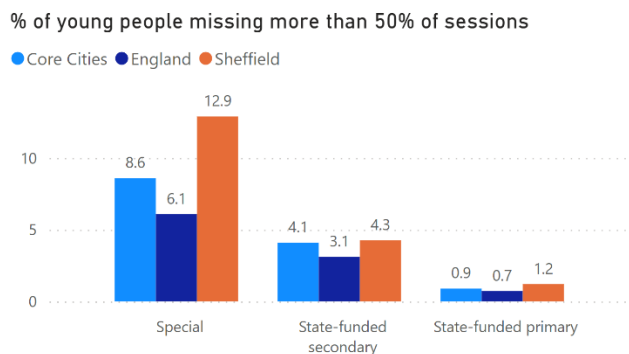
- When we analyse attainment by bands of attendance (see graphic below which covers the primary phase), we can see both the breakdown of each cohort by bands and the decreasing likelihood of reaching the required standard for each stage as the band of attendance reduces. The graphic also shows that the proportion of primary children with 95%+ attendance is lowest in the youngest age groups.



- Similarly, analysis of the factors which are determinants of lower attainment demonstrates that prior attainment and level of attendance are the two most significant factors. When controlling for other characteristics, we find that when a young person drops from 95%+ to the 90-95% attendance band their likelihood of achieving the expected standard for their age drops by approximately 50%.

When pupil level data becomes available for secondary – does the analysis of attendance bands and attainment in KS4 reflect the primary findings?

- The proportion of young people whose attendance is below 50% is significantly below both national and Core Cities in all sectors.



Autumn and Spring data 2022/23

Does deeper analysis of pupils with attendance below 50% tell us anything about policy or provision in the city, including how local practice in relation to removing young people from a school roll differs from practice elsewhere?

- Further analysis will shortly follow which analyses absence by pupil groups within the cohort. We will also reasons for absence, including the proportion of absences due to holidays.
- Further analysis would also be beneficial to understand the nature and scale of increased absence within the cohort, in particular whether the increased number of missed days comes from all attendance bands or is focused more specifically on particular bands.

Do the additional lost days (post Covid) come from pupils with already lower attendance being absent much more, or is the increased absence also coming from young people previously in higher bands of attendance?

What is the strategic impact of larger numbers of persistently absent pupils? If we know that granular approaches contribute to having the strongest impact on attendance – can these be delivered when the number of persistently absent pupils is so high?

Summary: We would consider attendance to be an obvious priority for Sheffield and suitable for a civic partnership response. This is because:

- The impact of improved attendance would lead to improved attainment and improved life chances for children and young people in Sheffield.
- This improvement requires a wider partnership response. Each partner (including education settings) can always improve their practice, but unless all partners contribute a significant improvement in attendance outcomes will not be realised.

The footprint of this work may also need to stretch beyond the City and include, for example, transport which is a significant barrier to attendance for some young people.