

MAXIMISING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BULLETIN

JANUARY 2024 – HALF TERM 3

Welcome to the half-term three bulletin, we hope you had a restful Christmas break and Happy New Year. Please remember to check Essex Schools Info (ESI) for supporting forms and documents you may find useful.

In this issue:

- DfE Data – Autumn Term 2023-24 findings
- South AST Pilot Initiative
- Targeted Support Meetings
- HT3 – Improve your attendance
- Attendance Specialist Team Training
- Education Access – reporting Part-time Timetables
- Year 11 Legal Referrals
- Electively Home Educated pupils – removal from roll
- The Education Hub
- Autism Portal
- Having difficult conversations – workshop opportunity

What is the DfE Pilot (indicative data)?

As we are sure most of you are already aware, DfE have been running a pilot data scheme for the last two academic years. DfE invited schools to share their daily headline attendance data so that an indicative average national figure could be calculated. From this information DfE produce fortnightly updates which they share with schools so that schools can compare their data with the national average. With over 80% of all schools nationwide signed up to the scheme this gives us a very reliable base line to work from.

If you are unsure of how the pilot works or would like more information on the advantages your school would have being included in this initiative, please see the link below:

Monitor your school attendance Webinar

Monitor your school attendance Webinar

The benefits to sharing your daily attendance data

Easily identify pupils requiring support and facilitate greater working together where barriers sit outside the school gates

- Functionality of existing school systems varies
- Timely data goes directly to LAs, aiding early support and providing a safety net for spotting vulnerable children

Identify trends across pupil groups, schools and geographical areas, enabling efforts and strategies to be targeted

- Pupil characteristic filters in sector reports
- School-level benchmarking tool
- LA, regional and national absence type and weekday trends in the public dashboard

Reports are free and can reduce burdens on schools, trusts and LAs

- Some LAs are reducing or stopping separate attendance data requests
- School-level benchmarking tool
- Helps DfE explore ambitions to reduce manual data collection burdens

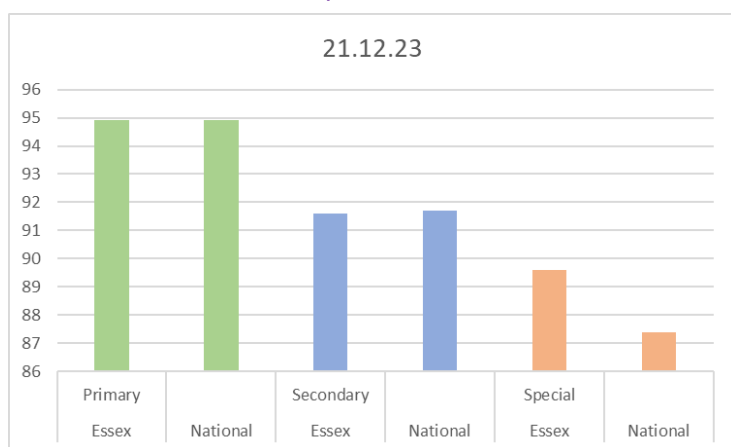
The DfE daily data tools can help schools, trustees and governors, and LAs to meet the expectations in the new [Working together to improve school attendance](#) guidance

Hi, we have recently made some substantial system improvements to improve the accuracy of your data. For schools that have agreed to share 'pupil leaving date', we have been able to remove pupils that have left the school. This may be why your total number has been reduced.

Moderator 11:05 AM
 Wonde - You can agree to share data by logging on to the Wonde Portal <https://edu.wonde.com/login> If you have any questions, contact the Wonde Support Team by email support@wonde.com Alternatively, you can send Wonde a message by visiting their website <https://www.wonde.com/> and selecting 'Contact us'.

Moderator 11:06 AM
 Restart in Progress 02:01:44

Autumn 2023 Data Update



The above represents the most recent DfE data release on 21st December 2023.

As we can see both primary and special schools' data indicates Essex schools have higher attendance on average than the national average. Secondary school data is very slightly lower than the national average for attendance. Essex special schools have very positive average attendances by comparison.

Having tracked all data releases throughout the autumn term, it is only in December that we saw Essex secondary attendance levels dip below the national average. Primary schools consistently maintained higher than national levels albeit Essex primary schools are trending a sharper decline in attendance when compared with national primary schools on average as the term progressed.

What we cannot ignore is the affect many of our schools suffered at the hands of RAAC. More schools in Essex than anywhere else in the country returned to school following the summer break with RAAC issues. Attendances were impacted by this unforeseeable challenge with many schools having to offer adjusted learning opportunities when face-to-face learning was not possible.

Written by the Attendance Specialist Team (AST) for schools

However, our main aim and focus must be to ensure Essex schools do not fall behind other schools in the country as a result and all efforts to maintain better than national averages are realised.

We are very proud of our schools in Essex and the continued dedicated and resolute focus on ensuring all our pupils in the county continue to attend school regularly.

With a determined approach to maximise all pupil's attendance in 2024 we are confident we can improve in all areas of school and create positive broad attendance gaps between Essex schools and those nationally.

How to sign up

Find out how to [access the service on this page](#), and [give access to your attendance leads](#).

South AST Pilot Initiative

****CHANGES TO WORKING PRACTICES OF THE SOUTH ATTENDANCE SPECIALIST TEAM (AST)****

The AST's main directive is to deliver strategic and effective support/guidance on matters relating to the day-to-day management and improvement of school attendance. As part of a new initiative to meet this crucial objective, and by way of a trial, the South AST will no longer be taking direct contact from parents from the start of the spring term 2024. All contact received from parents will be directed back to schools.

- **All parental contact received by LA teams in South relating to school attendance will be directed back to school and NOT the South AST**
- **If parents express dissatisfaction in the way schools may be dealing with their attendance concern, parents should be reminded of the school's escalation process and the school's complaints procedures**
- **Parents may be advised school will contact the AST should they require additional guidance**

Should this approach prove to be successful it will be rolled out countywide to all quadrants as the new working model for all AST's. In the meantime, Mid, West and the North-East will continue to take calls and emails from parents who have children on roll in their schools.

Targeting Support Meetings

The Attendance Specialist Team continue to support all schools across Essex by delivering Targeting Support Meetings (TSMs). If you would like to schedule a meeting with a member of your quadrant team, please see the appropriate contact details listed below.

Our TSMs are designed to review systems and processes in school, deep dive your attendance data with targeted areas of focus, trouble-shoot your case load with best guidance advice and generally offer strategic support to encourage improved attendance in your setting.

Improving attendance – half-term 3

The start of a New Year allows schools the opportunity for a 'new start' on attendance. With many minds turning to resolutions and fresh beginnings it is an ideal time to draw the line under worrying attendances of the autumn term and set new positive outlooks and aspirations for the spring term. Of course, we

cannot ignore previous poor attendance but through focussing on a positive restart to school, this may help to encourage improved attendances in many pupils and across many areas of school.

All schools are encouraged to relaunch the importance and profile of attendance with staff, pupils and parents. Focussed and dedicated work to amplify the significance of positive attendance should be adopted in all schools.

Some new term initiatives that schools should consider are:

- *Return to school with a positive outlook*
- *Set yourself challenging but achievable attendance goals*
- *Ensure attendance is an agenda item in all school meetings*
- *Hold assemblies specifically focussed on attendance*
- *Spread the positive message of attendance to staff, pupils and parents regularly*
- *Hold School Attendance Meetings asap with those families who were a concern in the autumn term*
- *Be proactive in your approach by anticipating and planning your attendance work*
- *Seek advice and guidance of your AST*

Attendance Specialist Team Training Workshops

The AST workshop sessions will continue to be held online via Teams and are free for schools. Sessions can be booked via [Education Essex Online Booking System](#). This link will take you to instructions on how to register an account for your school. If you already have an account, please click 'Register/Log In' to be able to browse full details and book your space. If you would like any support with creating an account or booking on training, please contact the Workforce Development team by emailing: workforcedevelopment@essex.gov.uk (03330 139 891)

Upcoming training

- How to make a successful referral for legal intervention – **24 January 2024, 11-12.30pm**
- Attendance Essentials – **6 March 2024, 1-2.30pm**

Education Access – Reporting Attendance

The start of the 2023-24 academic year saw the launch of a new reporting system for schools to notify the LA half-termly of their pupils accessing education on a part-time basis. Schools have between Thursday 4 January 2024 and Friday 26 January 2024 to submit their data. For more information, please visit the Education Access page on Essex Schools InfoLink

https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Education_Access/Pages/Provision.aspx

Attendance Compliance Team (ACT) referrals for Y11's

The ACT issued a statement to all schools in HT2 advising they would not be accepting 'automatic' referrals for Y11 students from the start of the spring term.

Schools are reminded should you have a Y11 attendance case you would like to be considered for legal action you must first speak with the ACT so that they may assess the case and advise the school accordingly.

Schools should maintain at all times their normal attendance processes for encouraging improved attendances and minimizing avoidable absence for students in Y11. As always, the AST are available to advise and guide schools in this regard.

Electively Home Educated (EHE) pupils

It has come to our attention through the DfE that unlawful and unnecessary delays are being experienced from the moment schools receive an instruction to remove a child from school roll for reasons of EHE and the time schools are processing this request.

It is imperative schools act immediately to remove a child from roll once an instruction has been received from parents advising it is their intention to EHE.

Whilst many schools may be adopting a practice of engaging parents first and ensuring dialogue is had before administering their request, this approach should not delay the actual process of removing from roll. It goes without saying schools should seek to ensure parents fully understand the full obligation they are entering into regarding their child's education but again this should not obstruct the parents' legal right to immediately remove their child from a school roll for this purpose.

Should you have any questions in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact the EHE Team for guidance:

Telephone: 0333 032 2962

Email: homeeducation@essex.gov.uk

The Education Hub

Stay connected to DfE updates and information regarding schools and pupils through The Education Hub:

<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/>

Essex Autism Portal

The purpose of the portal is to support school/setting staff and other practitioners, to support children and young people (CYP) who are autistic or have social communication needs. The portal provides a range of advice, guidance, resources, and training opportunities that we hope you will find useful:

https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Autism_Portal/Pages/default.aspx

Difficult Conversations

One area the AST is regularly being asked to support and give guidance on are those 'difficult' conversations schools need to have with parents. Being prepared and confident to engage parents in these conversations is key to a successful outcome.

The Essex Safeguarding Children Board are delivering workshops to professionals specifically targeting this area with the hope of improving skills and confidence to:

- *Being able to identify where a family/individual may be at in their own cycle of change and how to frame your conversations using this theory*
- *Using Motivational interviewing to engage a family/individual in change talk and planning*

