Victoria Academies Trust Attendance Project

Final Research Report

Understanding barriers to school attendance: practitioner led research

Executive Summary

This practitioner led action research took place across a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) and involved 8 primary schools. It aimed to investigate a range of practical interventions for tackling attitudes and actual attendance of identified groups of pupils in each school, and evaluate the impact of these approaches. As all settings involved were working within areas of significant deprivation, all schools also engaged in developing understanding of the impact of poverty and childhood trauma on attendance, and how these factors may affect children and families.

A number of strategies were investigated, informed by suggested methodologies identified in previous research, alongside questionnaire data generated from parental bodies across the schools. Some of these strategies demonstrated promising impacts on attitudes and actual attendance. These included:

- The use of Poverty Proofing audits to understand the impact of the cost of schooling and previously utilised strategies for targeting attendance on the actual attendance and attitudes of parents and learners.
- A focus on parents of nursery aged children (through the use of home visits and parental workshops) to develop greater parental understanding of the importance of attendance from an early age.
- The use of workshops involving parents, children and staff teams to provide learning, support and re-education regarding the importance of attendance.
- The broader use of home visits to reach a wider range of families, identifying support required to improve specific children's attendance.
- The use of mental health and well-being interventions at the start of the school day, designed to support anxieties regarding school attendance.
- Adaptations to the curriculum offered for identified pupils to remove academic barriers and offer more engaging opportunities for learning new skills (such as music)

Recommendations

Completion of this research has generated recommendations for continuation of practice within the settings involved, and as proposals to other settings and agencies involved in improving school attendance. A synopsis of these recommendations includes:

1. Further emphasis on supporting parental understanding of when health should and should affect attendance. This includes further offers from the school nursing team and health visitor teams to develop this approach with parents.

2. Continuous professional development for all staff to create the culture that 'attendance is everybody's business'.

3. All schools continuously tracking data of pupil's attendance and their circumstances, transitioning information from previous years.

4. Implementation of strategies that tackle attendance from early years teams, including nursery.

5. Review of the school-based curriculum in each setting, to ensure that learning is engaging, inspiring and purposeful; creating the effect that children want to come to school each day.

6. Wider and further use of Poverty Proofing audits and implementation of findings, to ensure that the cost of the school day does not affect pupils and families attendance

7. The use of collaborative working between pastoral teams, senior leaders, classroom teachers, office / administrative teams and the Education Welfare Officer to ensure all processes are in place for capturing of information of contextual circumstances, support implemented for pupils or families and tracking the effect of support on attendance.

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1. Introduction

Victoria Academies Trust is a school led Multi Academy Trust operating across the West Midlands. As of the start of the 2023/24 academic year, the Trust comprises of ten primary schools across five local authorities: Sandwell, Birmingham, Walsall, Staffordshire and Worcestershire. One of these schools is a special school for autistic children based in Sandwell. Only one of our sponsored schools now remains in an Ofsted category, with all other schools who have been graded under Ofsted are at least Good, although this was not always the case. Our schools operate in some of the most challenging and deprived communities in the West Midlands and England. Currently, 36% of our pupils across our trust qualify for Pupil Premium. 96% of our pupils attend schools in the 20% most deprived areas of the country (according to their IDACI indication). 50% of these pupils attend schools situated in areas that are classed as within the 10% most deprived. We therefore have an understanding of the challenges that schools and their communities face when transforming the life chances of our families.

For the purpose of this research, eight of the ten schools were directly involved in undertaking the practitioner-led action research projects. Our two most recently opened free schools did not lead their own project, due to staff capacity in opening schools that are yet to be full, thereby affecting the size of their staff team and their pupil numbers. Headteachers of these schools did actively engage in all design and development activities, as well as dissemination and strategic planning as a result of findings. Staff members from these schools were also involved in Trust wide training elements that were developed and undertaken as part of the project, including training on Trauma Informed Practices and Poverty Proofing training from Children North East.

The overall project involved different working layers of staff. Centrally, the project was held by a team within the Trust, made up of the Head of the lead school (Rowley Park), the CEO of the multi-academy trust and two members of the central team of the Trust. This team ensured that the individual action research questions in each school remained wholly connected to the core purpose of the research, and facilitated the ongoing sharing and learning across all settings in a central manner. Each school had a liaison member of the central research team to discuss challenges and updates with, again allowing for learning to be captured in an ongoing manner. Lastly, this team were responsible for ensuring that Trust wide CPD and approaches remained a constant thread throughout the project; this included the Poverty proofing training and audits, Trauma Informed training and CPD for Attendance leads and officers in schools. At an individual school level an identified team of staff, involving senior leaders, teaching staff and pastoral staff relevant to the project, were created for designing and undertaking the specific action

research question. This ensured that each investigation was shaped by and for the specific needs of that context, as a result of the baseline questionnaires completed in each setting.

Schools involved were broken into Phase 1 and Phase 2 categories, with staggered start points. Schools volunteered their involvement in Stage 1, based on capacity and the prioritisation of attendance in line with School Development Planning. The 2 stage approach allowed for manageability of the project for the central research team, and for effective learning and shaping of the second phase of action research, based on learning from schools involved in Phase 1. This 2 phased approach did however affect the depth of investigation that was able to be undertaken by those involved in the second phase; these findings have been considered in relation to possible early impacts or 'green shoots'.

The overall research question for this action research was set out as follows:

How might we develop innovative solutions to raising attendance so that pupils' chances of achieving better outcomes are increased?

In order to investigate these innovative approaches that may impact attendance (and associated attitudes), each setting utilised the key themes arising from their baseline questionnaire, alongside the main themes identified from the literature review, to form their own action research question to investigate.

The key themes identified were as follows:

1. Poverty Proofing – is there direct relationship between deprivation, how school is perceived and the effect on attendance?
2. Work with parents and families, through considering varying systematic or bespoke supportive relationships. This is likely to include aspects of tackling needs of parents and the barriers that affect their child's attendance. Three distinct approaches were identified: the use of parental workshops, the use of home visits, and the use of effective, regular communication with a key member of staff
3. The learning, curriculum and education experience that certain learners receive in school, and how this affects their engagement and attitudes regarding attending school
4. The support that is given to children to ensure that mental health does not become a barrier to attending school.

Although these aspects were specifically categorised, action or practitioner research is often not linear as areas of practice intermingle in their approach. Therefore, a number of projects crossed across more that one of these thematic areas. The action research questions can be seen in the following table:

Key theme	School	LA	Action Research question	Phase of involvement
Poverty Proofing	All schools (with a specific focus on Rowley Park Academy)	All Staffordshire	How does poverty proofing the school day impact attendance (and associated perceptions with school attendance)?	From commencement (note challenges with RPA original question)
Work with families / parental relationships through: ***Parental workshops*** ***Home visits***	Devonshire Infant Academy	Sandwell	How can we improve commitment and the attitudes of nursery parents towards attendance ?	Phase 1
	Devonshire Junior Academy	Sandwell	How can we identify warning signs for pupil attendance issues and use early intervention to create positive change?	Phase 1
	Victoria Park Academy	Sandwell	How does an increased workforce focus on home visits impact relationships with families and the attendance of pupils?	Phase 2
	Birchen Coppice Academy	Worcestershire	How can use of parental and child workshops improve associated attitudes to attendance?	Phase 2
	Northfield Manor Academy	Birmingham	How do we improve the attendance of persistent absentees within Early Years/ KS1 through the use of parental engagement opportunities?	Phase 2
Learning and curriculum	Fibbersley Park Academy	Walsall	How is learning and the curriculum experienced by identified children whose absence is an issue?	Phase 1
Mental health and well-being	Foley Park Academy	Worcestershire	How does supporting the mental health of learners enable their engagement and improve perceptions	Phase 2

			and attendance at school?	

Table 1: Action research questions across the project by school, relationship to themes of project, LA area and Phase of involvement.

Each of these questions were formed in relation to the parental surveys conducted by each school, identifying needs of the school community (Appendix 2), alongside the schools' own knowledge of their context, and use of an audit of current approaches to attendance, including analysis of their cost and associated impact (Appendix 4).

2. Literature review

A full review of literature was undertaken to help form the rationale for this project, to identify the main themes for shaping the action research questions, and to create the theoretical framework for analysing data against. This can be found in Appendix 1.

Literature recognises that the quality of evidence in tackling attendance, and associated perceptions regarding attendance, conducted in primary education is weak (Education Endowment Fund, 2022). Whilst the Department for Education makes several suggestions for how schools can tackle attendance, prior to commencing this project, these were all methods that schools were already utilising (Taylor, 2012; Department for Education, 2021). The combination of these findings suggest that tackling attendance is a complex matter, requiring specific investigation into a range of strategies that may work in the individual context of the school; there is not a 'one size fits all' approach, nor will single strategies alone make a tangible difference to attendance outcomes.

Within literature, the impact of work with families, through relationship building, workshops, and ongoing effective communication were found to have the most significant impact on attendance of all strategies (Sheldon, 2007; Lee, 1994; Epstein and Sheldon, 2010; EEF, 2022). As echoed within our schools' action research design, this is a preferred method of increasing positive attitudes to school attendance, as at a primary age, this is often reliant on parental engagement. The use of home visits as a strategy were found to make differences to chronic non-attenders, although not too all pupils who may struggle with school attendance (Epstein and Sheldon, 2010; Booth, 2023). This may however have been caused by lack of capacity for providing such services / support for all families, and perhaps needed considering in an alternative manner.

There were also specific examples where use of alternative curriculum design, such as supporting of reading, or ensuring that the curriculum is relevant and engaging for pupils, were found to have a positive impact on attendance and attitudes of school (Lee, 1994; Epstein and Sheldon, 2010;

Cunningham, Harvey and Waite, 2022). Limited evidence of impact was found into strategies of learning that encouraged positive mental health learning for whole class / school groups, yet interventions with specific children and families has a greater impact on attitude to attendance, for learners and their families (Cunningham, Harvey and Waite, 2022).

Recent research by Menzies, Yates and Husband-Thompson (2023) has proposed that pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) are less likely to report being motivated to learn, being able to concentrate in class, feeling safe in school, and having a strong sense of belonging at school. Although they do not specifically discuss the relationship with attendance in this research, these all contribute to learner's attitudes towards school which can affect their desire to attend.

3. Justification and rationale

The impact on attendance in schools operating in the most disadvantaged communities is especially challenging. The Centre for Social Justice (2023) found in their deep data analysis of national data that in the academic year 2021/22, children eligible for free school meals had a persistent absence rate which was more than double the rate for children who were not eligible for free school meals; 37.2% of all children eligible for free schools were severely absent, compared to 17.5% of children not eligible. Furthermore, 30.0% of children living in the most disadvantaged areas were persistently absent over the course of 2021/22. Across Victoria Academies Trust, 35% of our pupils qualify for Pupil Premium. 96% of our pupils attend schools in the 20% most deprived areas of the country (according to their IDACI indication). 50% of these pupils attend schools situated in areas that are classed as within the 10% most deprived.

Furthermore, our most vulnerable and deprived learners are also most likely to be our persistence absentees. There are currently 650 children across our trust (20% of our pupils) who are classed as Persistently Absent (PA). Of these, 304 are Pupil Premium. Whereas 35% of our pupils are Pupil Premium, 47% of our Persistently Absent (PA) pupils are Pupil Premium, evidencing the link between deprivation and likelihood of school absenteeism. While the figure of percentage Persistently Absent pupils who are also Pupil Premium (PP) is as low as 12% in one school, four of our schools have this figure as over 50%, with two of these four schools being over 70% of PA pupils also being PP. This data suggests that challenges regarding attendance may be more prominent for schools such as those within our Trust that are working in levels of higher deprivation, yet no specific investigation has been undertaken to prove tangible links between deprivation and attendance; hence our inclusion of the Poverty Proofing element of the project. It is also evident without our internal data that both attendance and deprivation impacts directly on pupil outcomes. This can be seen in the following graph:

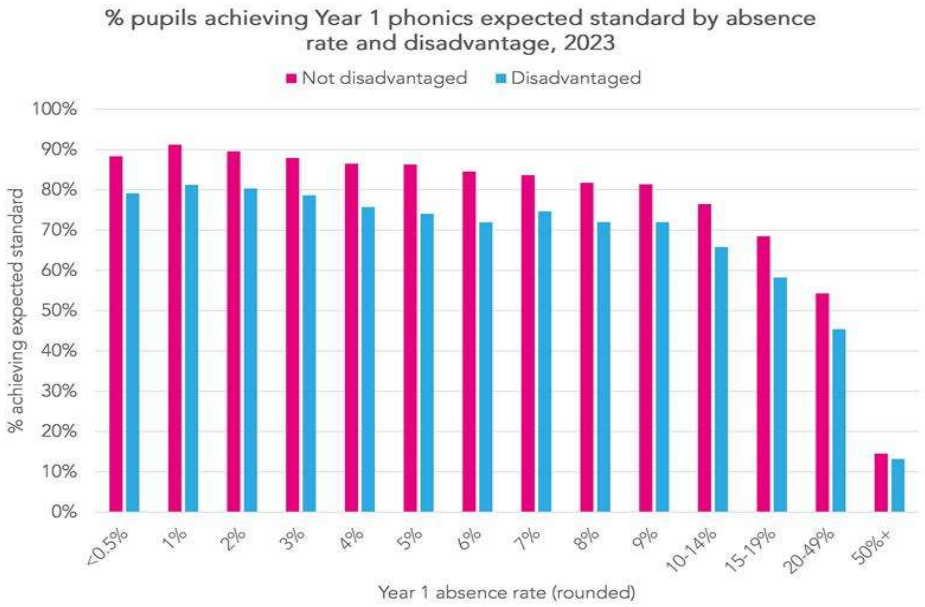

Figure 1: comparative data of deprivation indicators, absence and key stage 1 phonics scores for 2022/23 academic year

This picture is echoed within Key Stage 2 data, for those attaining expected in reading, writing and maths. Our three lowest performing schools at the end of Key Stage 2 are historically also our highest in terms of the percentage of PA children who are Pupil Premium.

Both of these sets of indicators created strong rationale for conducting this research, alongside a growing national interest in the challenges of engaging more children to attend school regularly. A recent article published in Schools Week (Booth, 2023) advocates the use of collaborative attendance hubs in Multi-Academy Trusts as an effective means for tackling attendance challenges, through joined up strategies; this research proceeded such findings, gathering positive impacts and barriers of varying strategies within the specific cases of Victoria Academies Trust schools.

4.Methodology and methods

The approach to research was to utilise practitioner research, as a form of action research. Although some argue that these forms of research are different, this project was felt to be a blend of both approaches. Teams of practitioners within each school were responsible for the enquiry within their specific context, addressing the questions that they had identified. Yet, the overall central team worked to hold this approach in an action research format, as each enquiry sat as part of the whole approach to investigating practice and changing this as a result of findings (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). As a result of the numerous action research questions undertaken, a mixed methodology was utilised to provide the best opportunity to address the research problems (Scott and Morrison, 2005). As each element of the project was focused upon the impact of strategies tested (both qualitative and

quantitative), a combination of methods was required to investigate whether such impacts had been made. The following table sets out the range of methods utilised for gathering data:

School	Qualitative methods	Quantitative methods
Rowley Park Academy	1:1 interviews with parents / guardians, pupils and teachers	Attendance data by class / group, comparison with previous year figure; Parental questionnaire data; pupil questionnaire data
Devonshire Infant Academy	Pen portraits of interactions with parents, Leaders logs of activities and reflections, Focus group interviews with parents	Questionnaires completed by parents; Attendance data tracking per child involved
Devonshire Junior Academy	Pen portraits of parental interactions	Data mining of previous attendance figured alongside other numerical data; Attendance data tracking per child involved; Parental questionnaire data
Victoria Park Academy	Pen portraits of parental interactions, records of home visits	Attendance data tracking per child involved; Parental questionnaire data
Birchen Coppice Academy	Observations of workshops, pen portraits of families, Parental questionnaire data	Parental questionnaire data; Attendance data tracking per child involved
Northfield Manor Academy	1:1 interviews with families / parents	Parental questionnaire data; Attendance data tracking per child involved
Fibbersley Park Academy	1:1 interviews with pupils involved, ethnographic observations of learners	Attendance data tracking per child involved; Parental questionnaire data
Foley Park Academy	Pupil 1:1 interviews, Parent 1:1 interviews	Parental questionnaire data; Attendance data tracking per child involved

Table 2: Qualitative and quantitative methods for data gathering by school

Due to the mixed methods approach utilised, this research combined inductive and deductive thinking, although predominately lent towards inductive approaches. Qualitative research was more dominantly used for gathering data such as pen portraits, interviews and observations of workshops, uncovering data through the practitioner enquiry led approach. However, the use of quantitive data from questionnaire was used when comparing parental attitudes, alongside attendance data or academic outcomes, providing elements of deductive investigation to the research.

All projects involved focused on identified groups of pupils / families rather than all pupils. Sampling for this project was selective over random, specifically targeting families and children whose attendance required intervention. Stratified sampling was undertaken in each school based on pupils whose attendance fell below 90% as an initial indicator and between 90-95% as a secondary indicator.

Further specific criteria were applied in schools, specific to their action research. These included:

- Specific challenges engaging with parents or family e.g. lack of completion of questionnaires, difficulty contacting via phone or email
- Pupil Premium / FSM data
- Behaviour referrals or challenges in school regarding mental health / anxiety
- Academic outcomes in correlation with attendance data

4.1 Action research interventions

Three of the schools involved in the project utilised parental workshops as a method for developing positive attitudes, behaviours and readiness for school, thereby increasing possibility of improved attendance. Each school utilised a different approach to parental workshops:

- DIA – workshops for new starters of nursery, in preparation for school readiness
- BCA – Parent and child collaborative workshops, focusing on barriers to attendance and relationship building.
- NMA – workshops supporting parents on academic and pastoral care of their children

Two of the schools involved utilised the use of Home Visits as an intervention for supporting attitudes and actual attendance. Again, these were undertaken as quite differing approaches:

- DIA – Undertook Home Visits for all children starting nursery prior to the start of the academic year
- VPA – Invested in an external partnership with an attendance specialist to undertake home visits for children identified for the study through their prior attendance history.

In contrast, DJA utilised a different approach to parental relationships that did not focus on a specific intervention, but instead prioritised teacher, pastoral and senior leadership time into building more regular and positive communication strategies with parents of identified children for the project. VPA also echoed elements of this, utilising the sending of postcards to create positive communications with parents and recognise attendance over rewarding attendance.

One school project (FPA) focused on an alternative curriculum approach for identified learners whose absence was particularly affecting their academic outcomes.

One school project (FoPa) focused the combined use of a curriculum intervention and a pastoral intervention within curriculum time, to look at the impact of greater focus on mental health and wellbeing to support attitudes regarding school attendance.

Lastly (due to challenges regarding staffing and capacity), RPA as the lead school focused their action research specifically on the tangible impacts of poverty proofing in relation to attitudes to attending school and actual attendance. This was an adaptation from their original project that also focused on the mental health and wellbeing of learners. As identified in the design of this project, the relationship between deprivation and attendance was affecting schools, yet with no tangible data was known regarding how and why this may be taking place. Poverty Proofing (PP) audits were used as a research tool across all schools to gather perceptions of staff, parents and pupils of the effect of deprivation and how this may be affecting perceptions of schools. Rowley Park as the lead school, then focused their action research measures on specifically implementing findings from the PP audits, looking at their impact as a result.

4.2 Assumptions

In the design and delivery of this research some assumptions were made; yet all of aspects that revealed themselves demonstrated the challenging and complex issues regarding tackling attendance.

- It was assumed that more parents / families would want to be involved in the project. This was an ongoing challenge for many of the school involved; even those who had indicated interest in workshops, home visits or their child's participation in specific activities as part of the questionnaire process then did not consent to involvement, or did consent and then withdrew from activity.
- It was assumed that there would be greater participation in the initial questionnaire process; in a number of settings, there was lower uptake than anticipated, and it was completed by the parent body that are generally well engaged. This therefore may have prevented some skewed data. This affected the need to specific target families to be involved in the project, as often these were harder to reach families who were struggling with attendance.
- It was assumed that Phase 2 schools research would build on the positive findings of Phase 1 schools – in fact, some Phase 2 schools found that a similar approach used in Phase 1 actually had little or no impact, or that the project could not have the impact it wanted due to parental

engagement. This demonstrated the contextual nature of such work, and how parent bodies can differ dramatically.

4.3 Limitations

This project had a specific time period and amount of resource available to it, as practitioner based action research is always constrained by time, capacity available in school, and the ongoing challenges of dealing with the educational climate. The scale and ambition of the project undertaken was quite large and complex; whilst this has generated a wide range of emerging threads and positive impacts for tackling attendance, it also meant that certain aspects were challenging to manage. This included aspects such as loss of staff vital to the action based research, which caused the need to adapt or change certain parts of the project.

Due to the practitioner led element of the research, this meant that a variety of different interventions were investigated. Whilst this was very positive for testing out a number of interventions and their possible impacts, it also meant a variety of approaches for data gathering were used. This was one of the most limiting factors to the study, as comparison of impacts were less able to be made. Furthermore, in some of the projects, there were smaller sample sizes of involvement than initially planned, as some families wished not to be involved on the study. This has meant that in is hard to find elements of conclusive evidence in some aspects of the study.

It has been important to remember that generalisability was not the aim of any aspects of the study, and transferability only works when considering the specific context. All findings within the study are context specific; it is not possible to say at this early stage whether approaches that were found to be successful in one setting would be cross applicable to other contexts. This is the result of running a large scale project on a limited time frame and budget, but also will become more evident over time. Approaches recognised to have had impact have been planned into strategic approach.

5. Ethical considerations

All consent and assent was obtained from any learners, family members and partners involved in the project. An information letter (Appendix 5) was issued to all parents, and consent forms were completed by all adult participants (Appendix 6). As all learners involved in the project were under the age of 18 years old were issued with their own information letter (Appendix 7). Their consent was completed by themselves and their parent / guardian (Appendix 8). Right to Withdrawal was clearly communicated to all participants, and this was up taken by some families who chose not to proceed in their involvement in the project. This involved the removal of their involvement from the project and destruction of their

data. Safe storage of data and information followed Data Protection guidelines in line with the Data Protection Act - GDPR (2018) and BERA (2018) ethical practices. All data gathered from participants was anonymised using pseudonyms.

6. Analytical approach

Each setting undertook their own data analysis of their own attendance figures based on sampling of families involved in the projects. Thematic analysis of qualitative data was undertaken by the lead research team, utilising the framework built from the literature review. It compared the success of findings from the varying projects in relation to theories identified from literature, and in comparison to the different pieces of action research undertaken within the project. Although this did not offer triangulation (due to the differences in approach within each school project), it allowed for commonalities and differences to be identified when testing out an approach within a specific context, with the successes and challenges identified as a result.

7. Findings and Data

7.1 Parental perception regarding attendance

The use of a questionnaire as undertaken by all schools within the project to gain initial baseline perceptions of parents regarding attendance. The format for this questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2, with quantitive data findings found in Appendix 3. There were some key themes that emerged from across all schools of interest in the project were as follows:

- At 84%, the majority of participants across schools felt that the most common reason for non-attendance at school was still health related (common colds and coughs or sickness. However due to small sample sizes of completion, this figure may be unrepresentative of the whole school population.
- Parents on the whole (less than 1%) felt that they did not want to speak to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) regarding attendance at their first point of call, but would prefer to build a relationship with class teachers and school staff (72%). Often intervention with the EWO suggests that attendance has become a more serious matter and requires a statutory intervention. This may be perceived more negatively by families.
- There were differing approaches preferred by parents for how best to support attendance; it was the influence of this data that helped shape schools' approaches to their intervention strategy, including the choice of appropriate intervention (e.g. using workshop, improved communication strategies, in school sessions for pupils or home visits)

7.2 Poverty Proofing

Across the Trust, although statistically, 36% of learners are identified as Pupil Premium, use of the audit tool actually told us at this figure is more likely to by 46%, with families living in hidden poverty. Uncovering this data has demonstrated the need to have a wider focus on families and children than we statistically previously knew, and that Poverty Proofing is a vital tool for understanding what is going on for families in regarding to school, including reasons for non-attendance. 15 members of staff from across the schools were trained by Children North East on how to conduct Poverty Proofing audits, and in the time period of the project, all schools were visited by 3 members of this team to have their audit conducted.

Findings from the Poverty proofing audits uncovered the following aspects, when implemented changes / interventions were made:

Behind friendships, the use of quality enrichment activities within the curriculum, or the use of quality after school clubs were perceived by pupils to have the most positive impact on attendance (72%). As a result of this data, the school have implemented a focus on ensuring that PP children have prioritisation to attending extracurricular activity, and 72% of after school club places are now filled by PP children. However, from a Poverty Proofing agenda, it is important that these were funded by the school budget, as otherwise these passed costs on to parents, which in turn affected absence rates. As a result of the Poverty Proofing audits, dressing up and charity days (as part of hooks / experiences) were removed, to investigate their impact on attendance. Questionnaire and interview data demonstrated that was negatively perceived by parents and pupils, in regards to finance and arrangement / organisation as barriers. With the removal of activities, data was compared on the same days of activities across three years:

Dress up days 2021	Dress up days 2022	Removal of dress up days 2023
91%	93%	97.2%

Table 3: Attendance data at RPA comparing the same date with changes in dressing up activity

This data shows that children are was more likely not to attend school on dressing up days; their removal, and change of emphasis to be more financially inclusive had a positive impact upon attendance data, and is thought of more positively amongst stakeholders:

"I particularly admire how the school have done away with all the dress up days that primary schools seem to insist on, which are so costly and if you can't afford £25 for an outfit your child will wear once, say for World Book day, you will feel guilty that your child is left out." (Parent A, Interview)

"I see the ongoing effort being made to support parents with costs e.g. dress up days and it makes me very proud of the school and the team running it" (Parent B, Interview)

"*Rowley Park is really working to be forward thinking for families with low income so that it's across the board and no child is left out"* (Parent C, Interview)

This data suggests that an ongoing focus on that whilst ensuring that the curriculum and extra-curricular activities are quality and engaging for learners has a positive impact, it is important that these do not incur costs for parents, thus ensuring that both stakeholders feel positive about school attendance and do not use this as a reason for non-attendance.

Secondly, based on perceptions of parents and pupils, use of attendance awards were removed. Analysis of Senior leader voice and questionnaire data found these to be costly, time consuming and perceived by only 68% of parents to be positive incentive. Attendance data was compared between the period of using Attendance Awards versus not using Attendance Awards:

Year / period	2021 – 2022 (Use of Attendance Awards)	2022 – 2023 (No use of attendance awards)
Whole school attendance	91.4%	92.5%

Table 4: Attendance data at RPA comparing yearly data with and without attendance awards

This data suggests that regarding attendance has no impact on the attendance of pupils – if anything attendance has marginally increased without them, although this increase may not be caused by this factor alone. Furthermore, pupils do not feel that rewarding attendance was important, with only 48% of children partaking in the end of project questionnaire believing that reward helped with attendance. One pupil reflected in pupil voice:

"I prefer it now that we don't reward attendance because everybody is welcome in our school – it doesn't matter who we are or what we have got. Everybody is kind and friendly." (Pupil 1, Interview)

The removal of attendance awards alone cannot be proven if its removal has had a positive impact on attendance, as this is one of the strategies implemented as a result of Poverty Proofing. However, it has brought less attention to the obvious relationship between deprivation and attendance in the eyes of pupils, where previously the 80% of PA children who were also PP would have been known by others as affected the class attendance figures and affecting chances of receiving awards.

The overall perception from staff around the impact that this has had has been seen as influencing positive relationships with parents, as seen in the following quote:

"Since beginning our learning and work around poverty proofing our school day, we have noticed a significant increase in the number of parents that approach teachers and even SLT on the gates, regarding support they need including payments for trips and lack of uniform. Parents are more willing to ask for help which is testament to the strong relationships. Before we used to have absences linked to things like this." (Staff member Z, Interview)

This concurs with findings by Cox (2005) and Epstein and Sheldon (2010) who found that where parents and school personnel engaged in two-way exchange of information were more effective at improving attitudes to attendance. It also concurs with recently published guidance from the DFE (2023a) on the importance of effective communication with parents, although a number of examples cited within this guidance propose more formal methods such as regular letters.

A closing questionnaire conducted with parents now shows that 97% of parents believe that the cost of the school day is not a contributing factor to attendance. At the start of the study this figure was 83%; this demonstrates the positive effect that Poverty Proofing has had on perceptions of attendance.

7.3 Working with parents

7.3.1 Utilising parental workshops to support attendance and associated attitudes

Intervention at DIA – undertake parental workshops for nursery children pre-starting and throughout the year, to build early relationships, expectations and to support attendance. Workshops focused upon School Readiness, Health and Education.

This new intervention focused on Nursery parents was an innovative approach, as statutory attendance in pre-school is not officially monitored and had previously not been seen as a priority. However, it was felt that commencing early habits would set expectations from commencing school, as well as create positive relationships between families and school staff. 43 out of 66 parents attended all of the workshops 65%, with 95% of parents giving positive feedback about the content, changes in understanding and how it helped children prepare for attending school regularly, such as in the examples below:

"The staff were very friendly and listened to our questions" (Parent D, Focus Group Interview)

"I didn't know they did work in Nursery, I thought they just played! Now I understand why it is important for them to attend" (Parent E, Focus Group Interview)

There are no existing pieces of research that focus on attendance of nursery aged children to compare the impact of this study to, suggesting that this approach has generated the start of some new

knowledge emerging. This will only become evident over a longer period of tracking improvements to attendance for new cohorts of early years parents, alongside how the attendance of these pupils from the intervention continues into their formal schooling years.

Staff logs were used as a data method for capturing ongoing observations and changes in behaviour regarding attendance, as English language was a barrier for many of the families involved. Alongside parents, nursery staff perceived the impact of the workshops to be positive and impactful:

"It has helped parents and staff to have open and honest conversations about the children" (Staff member Y).

"*The July workshops supported parents to prepare their children for Nursery, and as a result parents felt reassured."* (Staff member X)

Pen portraits told particular stories about how attending the workshops built positive attendance attitudes, behaviours and relationships between school staff and parents, with some resulting in good attendance as a result of interventions:

Child:	Workshop attendance:	Impact of relationship and attitude	Attendance end of 22/23
G	Nearly all attended	G very happy and settled at school. Parents have been very committed to bringing regularly.	94.7%
A	Some attended (approaching personally to remind her as seems forgetful).	Loves being at school. Very positive. Some medical appointments. Understood the importance of trying not to miss too much school.	95.5%
H	All attended	Some sickness in January. Mum values what school are doing to support her and son. Positive relationship about being invited in.	88.8%
A2	Tried to attend many as could but working for some.	Suffered a lot of illnesses, taken to the doctor repeatedly and they say she just has to build up her immunity. Spoke to Mum for parents evening she was shocked by how much learning had been lost. Present everyday since half term and seems happier and more confident for it.	77.1%
D	Attended most workshops, left one due to child being upset.	D loves to be in school and family seem to value her time here Dad's health seems very good at the moment and I think this is helping Dina to attend regularly	86.5%

Table 5: Workshop attendance and details of impact by family at DIA

Particular examples of tangible benefits of these workshops, including the support from the School Nursing and Health Visitor team were felt in specific incidences, when learning from the workshops

became apparent. New parental understanding of health and school attendance were able to be implemented in the following cases:

"At the door this morning 2 different parents have brought their children to school but said they were unwell, following conversations with staff the children have stayed and attended the full session. Very positive to see that our conversations are having a positive impact and parents are beginning to trust our judgement." (Staff log)

"Parent refusing to bring her child as she was worried about her child catching germs from the cups, or that her child wouldn't wash her hands enough. We talked with Mum and built a good relationship. Mum shared more of her personal circumstances with staff, this built the picture behind the situation. Staff worked with Mum to help ease her concerns. After conversations, they brought their children to Nursery even when the children were feeling a little unwell. The parents were delighted to see their children look happy when they picked them up from Nursery, and were feeling much better." (Staff log)

These findings suggest that preparing children for good attendance in nursery, taking the time to build positive relationships with parents, helping them develop understanding of when to and not to attend, and the use of ongoing relationships with parents that are struggling may all have positive repercussions on attendance on pupils. Although nursery attendance is not statuatory, these early interventions have potential to lead to further good behaviour and attitudes in regard to attendance; these same pupils will be tracked onwards in their attendance journey.

Intervention at BCA – undertake collaborative pastoral workshops (Dynamic Duos) between parents, staff and children to support attitudes to school and attendance

Based on questionnaire data from parents at BCA, interventions were designed to work with parents and children alongside each other, through family pastoral workshops over a 10 week period. Families were identified based on attendance, behaviour and deprivation indicators. With families wanting an opportunity to interact with class teachers in regard to attendance, it was ensured that each class teacher with children involved in the project came to at least one session, to build specific relationships with children and parents, and have some more specific discussion, supported by pastoral members of the project team. The triangulated approaches to this project meant that open and honest communication was a driving factor to improving attendance.

Content was perceived to be an important factor to these sessions by the team involved; rather than tackling attendance as the major focus points; communication, perseverance, positivity, confidence and love of learning were the key themes that drove activities, with the importance of school attendance

woven as a sub-plot throughout each session. This helped keep sessions interesting and engaging for parents and children, as well as generating an excitement for coming to the workshops, positively affecting attendance overall. These findings differ from Epstein and Sheldon (2010) who propose that workshops specifically targeting concepts of attendance increased average daily attendance and decreased chronic absenteeism. This difference demonstrated the importance of contextual awareness when shaping projects that work with families; understanding what the barriers are and shaping sessions that tackle these needs may be more effective in certain settings, especially where family circumstances are causing more complex issues.

The consistency of support and communication was vital to the success of this work, ensuring that regular communication with parents in a welcoming and supporting manner added to the positive effects through building trust and relationships (Cox, 2005; Epstein and Sheldon, 2010)

As a result of the ten weeks of workshops:

- Some pupils who have had historically poor attendance have had significantly improved attendance:

Targeted pupil / family	**Attendance first half of academic year**	**Attendance post workshops**
H	63.4%	94.1%
C	79%	100%
M	88.3%	86.9%
W	79%	75%
PW	86%	95.45%

Table 6: Attendance data at BCA pre and post family workshop interventions

- Improved attendance has led to less behaviour incidents for 4 out of the 6 targeted pupils.
- At the start of the project, many parents identified that school refusal was a barrier to attendance. Following the workshops, 86% of parents who took part in the group felt that the group had helped them to persevere when their child's behaviour is challenging.
- 100% of parents said they enjoyed coming into school to work with their child.
- 86% of parents said that that they felt their child's school attendance will improve as a result of attending the sessions.

Parental feedback gathered through qualitative questionnaire showed not only enjoyment of the project, but their understanding of the importance of attendance increased.

"*I didn't want the sessions to end, I really enjoyed the activities*." (Parent F, questionnaire)

"*I have learnt how difficult it is for my child to catch up if they aren't in school. We will try hard to get xxxxx to school every day*." (Parent G, questionnaire)

However, there was also an example of the importance of relationships between the parent body that came through this project:

'*It was lovely to get to know other parents who have the same difficulties getting the kids to school*.' (Parent H, questionnaire)

This suggests that there may exist feelings of isolation or individualisation that come from the challenges of school attendance; parents / guardians may feel levels of frustration or anxiety caused by the circumstance. By recognising that others face similar challenges and can be connected to through support may allow the situation to become more manageable.

Finally, this intervention demonstrated the close relationship that exists between attendance and safeguarding. Although this has been previously known, through further understanding the situations families are facing has allowed for support measures to be put in place earlier or allowing staff to respond more rapidly when required, as a result of gaining further insight into family circumstances.

Intervention at NMA – Parental workshops on learning

Although 2 pieces of action research found specific types of parental workshops to have positive impact on attendance, not all planned approaches to parental workshops had the same levels of engagement or success. At NMA, the planned intervention for the project was to use workshops to support parents on academic and pastoral care of their children, based on the successes of Phase 1 schools. 9 families were identified to be involved in the project based on attendance of between 70 and 90%. Although questionnaire data had shown positive interest in the attendance of Parental Workshops focusing on learning strategies would be the most preferential approach, engagement in workshops when planned was two low to go ahead in a planned format. 7 of the identified 9 families initially were happy to take part in the workshops, yet only 3 attended. 2 families withdrew consent from the project.

The small number of parents who did engage in greater activity and relationships with staff in school had changed perceptions about attendance and how they work with staff regarding tackling it, as shown in interview data:

"After spending time with (Name of member of staff), I think I will feel better in the future about talking to them, as I feel its ok to do now" (Parent H, Interview)

"*I am finding it better now that I feel like I can speak to the class teacher on the door daily*" (Parent J, Interview)

These examples both demonstrate the importance of staff members building relationships with parents, encouraging ongoing and open communication, and the importance of accessibility of staff for conversations (Cox, 2005; Epstein and Sheldon, 2010; DFE, 2023a)

Challenges of this project came from a number of possible areas. The main practitioner involved was a Pastoral member of staff; this failed to recognise that feedback from parents requested attendance matters to be dealt with via classroom teacher relationships. This became a challenge for the school due to capacity but may in fact have alienated parental involvement. Secondly, whilst the focus on these workshops responded to the feedback of parental questionnaires, it is likely that this was completed by parents who were not within the specific sampling. Interviews were later used to uncover more specific needs of the 3 families who chose to be involved; this approach would have been better prior to the organisation of workshops as the intervention. Lastly, the focus of these intervening workshops differed from the approaches of the 2 schools above. This could demonstrate that the content of workshops is more effective when either targeting parents and children together, or working with a specific cohort, such as early years starters.

7.3.2 Utilising home visits to support attendance and associated attitudes.

Intervention at DIA – Use of home visits pre-starting school for all children

This was utilised as an approach alongside the parental workshops and utilised as a means to building relationships with parents, as well as to help inform the content for the workshops. It allowed staff to more effectively understand the home contexts that children were starting school from, especially being aware of the effects of deprivation, home dynamics and school readiness, as explained by staff:

"*The home visits truly helped me to see some of the child's lived experiences at home*" (Staff log)

"*The home visits helped identify which children would need more support when entering nursery*" (Staff log)

The positivity of home visits was also reflected in feedback from parents, as can be seen in these examples:

"My child really liked his teacher coming to his house. He wanted to go to Nursery to see her again." (Parent K)

"My child talked about her teacher a lot after she had come to the house. It made her excited about school" (Parent L)

As the two interventions of home visits and workshops were ran together, it is difficult to gain a sense of whether home visits alone would have had the same impact on attitudes to attendance. From the qualitative data, home visits started an important relationship between staff and parents, allowing for personal connections to be made. It provided staff with valuable information regarding the home context of each child, informing how individual families should be supported regarding their attendance. It provided wider pictures of this context beyond attendance as a figure, and the opportunity for further sharing and dialogue to inform how attendance was supported as a result.

Intervention at VPA – Use of home visits by attendance specialist

This was a differing approach, where children and families were specifically targeted based on their attendance figures over time or within a specific incidence / period. Although home visits had previously been utilised within the setting, this intervention differed by increasing the capacity of how many home visits could be undertaken, as per Epstein and Sheldon (2010). Furthermore, systems were introduced to respond to findings from home visits such as the use of social contracting, whereby agreements were made between parents and staff regarding support for and commitment to attendance (demonstrating commitment to families in challenging circumstances or high levels of deprivation).

	2021/22	2022/23
Number of home visits:	15	200

Table 7: Number of home visits conducted at VPA pre and post intervention.

As a result of the increased focus on attendance and use of home visits, a number of actions were able to occur to support families that otherwise may not have accessed this, for instance 3 pupil referrals to CAMHS (Reflexions) and 6 Family Early help completions (14 children impacted) were made. This volume of home visits in an area of high-level deprivation did bring to the forefront some unexpected and challenging findings, where child protection interventions were required; demonstrating the complexity of tackling this field. However, it also resulted in support for particular families, as noted in the following pen portrait:

"2 children, new family to the school, suspected CP concerns, but little school interaction. Children both off for Eid (but not Muslim), both off on strike day, though only one class closed. Home visit conducted.

Mum confided with difficulties in bringing to school. Costs, illness, job loss and lack of food. Requested permission to share with DSL. DSL called mum, arranged a parcel of food and toiletries, dropped off, discussed options to support attendance back to school – relationships strengthened. Social contract in place to continue support and commitment to attendance. Not solved, still barriers, but we now have open, honest dialogue." (Pen portrait)

This is one example where families have been supported. A further example included a family whose sleeping arrangements were affecting school lateness and attendance, where the school sourced and built a bed to help with matter. These impacts were only possible due to the increased capacity for home visits and the use of social contracting as methods for becoming more aware of factors affecting attendance. Although they are interventions that may not equal improved attendance directly, the positive support and relationship with parents may continue to increase these outcomes.

7.3.3 Focusing on positive communication and relationship building with parents to affect attendance (and associated attitudes)

Intervention at DJA – Communication strategies and relationship building with parents, based on known data.

Rather than running specific interventions such as workshops or home visits, DJA trialled a strategy that did not require organisation of specific events but utilised known data to identified targeted families and use of 'key worker' relationships per family to focus on relationship building to tackle attendance. Data mining included utilising various indicators to identify pupils whose attendance may be an issue, had previously been an issue, or presented with possible factors that could cause issues regarding attendance. These data sets focused on:

- Attendance data from previous years (utilising data from the Infants school, which up until the point of this project was not utilised effectively for transition)
- Attendance data in the first week of the academic year
- Number of siblings
- Lateness to school
- Distance to school travelled.
- Disadvantage (PP or known disadvantage)
- SEND (Special Educational Needs or Disability) or SEMH (Social Emotional Mental Health)

Interestingly, distance to school travelled was not an influencing factor in this context, a surprising finding; many of the families identified were within short walking distances to school. Similarly, lateness

was not found to be a consistent pre-indicator to attendance. Number of siblings and disadvantage were both found to be influencing factors as were SEND of SEMH needs. Attendance data in the first week did not always correlate with data over previous years, which was found to be a more useful indicator. This presents differently from findings by Booth (2023), although some families taking extended breaks beyond the summer holidays were identified as pupils requiring intervention.

Building on feedback regarding communication strategies and a prioritisation of making sure attendance became 'everyone's business', each identified family had a nominated key worker from across the school team, whose priority became the regular and positive communication with the child and family, as identified in the following pen portrait:

"Child E: *Pupil joined Devonshire Junior Sept 22 after attending Dev infants previously. Data from when child was in Reception, Y1 and Y2 showed similar attendance figures for all three years - 88-89%. Pupil under assessment by inclusion support for SEMH. At the start of the first year in junior school (Y3), keyworker quickly made herself known to the family to offer any support to them. They continued this contact – presence on the playground at the start and end of the day, parent meetings – and if the child was ill, she was the person to call mum to see how they were and to talk through when to come back depending on the illness. By maintaining this contact, the keyworker was able to reassure parent and the parent knew that this person would always be the first point of contact in a friendly, non-threatening way. Attendance improved from 88/89% to 97% - as a result of the child being in school more, they had increased support / intervention than in previous years, needs were met and there was in improvement in behaviour. Far more settled in class."* (Pen portrait)

"Child R: *Pupil joined Devonshire Junior Sept 22 after attending Dev infants previously. Attendance had been averaging at 80% over the EYs KS1. Keyworker engaged with parent, making contact informally and maintaining the communication regularly especially when there were absences, encouraging parent to return to school promptly rather than take an extended recovery time. Attendance improved to 93%"* (Pen portrait)

Both of these cases demonstrate the effect of regularity of communication having positive effect, but also the effect of the 1:1 staff to family relationship. The opportunity to building positive relationships when tackling an important issue was relevant to this intervention; attendance issues were not being escalated to more official local authority proceedings but being dealt with in school in a supportive manner. This approach has had positive impact on the attendance of the identified pupils, demonstrating not only the value of the relationship building but benefit into the use of known data for targeting attendance:

Child	Indicators known from Data Mining							2021/22 Academic Year	2022/23 Academic Year
	KS1 below	PP?	Siblings?	+ 2 miles to	Lateness	SEND / SEMH?	First week absence		
R	X	X	2			X		88%	93%
E1	X	X	3		X			89%	96%
A1	X		2				X	79%	96%
A2	X	X	1			X	X	61%	72%
J	X	X	4					83%	91%
O	X		1					89%	94%
E2	X	X	1					86%	98%
S	X		2			X		84%	92%

Table 8: Attendance data and indicators at DJA including previous year and post intervention year.

7.4 Adapting the curriculum approach for identified pupils, to improve academic outcomes and attendance.

Intervention at FPA – tailoring the curriculum for identified pupils to target behaviour attitudes to school and attendance.

This intervention felt quite different from others within the research but generated some interesting findings regarding pupil's engagement at school, and the affect that this may have on their attendance. 8 pupils were involved in this in-depth study, utilising ethnographic, pupil voice and observation format, identified as a result of not only their attendance but their general attitude towards school. 3 pupils / families requested to withdraw from the project.

1:1 interviews were conducted with these participants; surprisingly, 4 of the children shared that they enjoy coming to school, with only 1 child stating that they disliked school. However, observations within the classroom undertaken by an external practitioner showed a lack of engagement in lessons, particularly when this was followed by a period of absence. This demonstrated the relationship between lack of attendance and challenges with academic learning; if children are missing classes within a sequence of learning, their ability to 'catch up' or make progress is affected (Department for Education, 2015; Department for Education, 2021; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Although in this particular example,

attitudes of school were not affected (most saw it as an enjoyable place to be), engagement in the classroom through observations often saw learners struggling with academic tasks, and more keen to support with 'teacher jobs'. This was reflected within the pupil 1:1 interviews, where all children ranked 'helping the teacher with jobs' in their top 3 areas for what they enjoy at school, over many academic subjects. Perceptions of reading came out as mixed, but in all but one pupil has significantly low levels of reading; this may have affected accessibility in the classroom, further compounded by the effect of missing learning with absence. This finding correlates with Ferguson et al (1986), where 8 year old pupils whose attendance rate fell below 90% had lower word recognition test scores than their peers. Pupils themselves did not feel that their reading challenges did not affect them wanting to attend school, but it is important to consider that this could still be a factor for not wanting to attend school.

The intervention involved learners involved in a regular (each week, every morning) differing curriculum approach to their peers in their class. They were taught in a small group approach (The Hive) focusing on core subjects of Maths and English to improve academic outcomes (investigating if academic outcomes affect attendance, as well as vice versa). Alongside this, an alternative curriculum offer brought in weekly teaching of guitar, PE and Forest school specifically for this group. Guitar teaching from a specialist music teacher allowed pupils to access a curriculum offer that they may not previously have been able to (due to deprivation levels as music tuition is paid for) and access to a professional outside school staff.

Some positive impacts were felt regarding this curriculum intervention in regard to academic outcomes and attendance, although they were inconsistent. 3 pupils within the intervention had 100% attendance on guitar days, demonstrating the benefit of more engaging curriculum opportunities; this correlates with the findings of Poverty Proofing in regard to quality curriculum affecting attendance positively. Furthermore, 3 pupils reading age progressed by 1-2 years as a result of the intervention, and 2 other pupils Maths age progressed by 2 years. Attendance over the period of the academic year where the Hive intervention was undertaken saw positive increases in attendance for some pupils, although this was inconsistent:

Name	**Autumn**	**Spring**	**Summer**	**Additional info**
OLA	73.24	94.4	88.9	No unauthorised absence summer term
CP	82.06	72.2	79.5	2 holidays taken
JP	94	97.6	91.7	100% attendance on guitar days Attendance dropped as structure changed – SATS, play rehearsals, staff absence

EM	94.7	97.2	98	100% attendance on guitar days
KB	97.5	95.1	95.5	6 unauthorised absences in autumn, only 1 in spring and summer
LB	73.5	79.1	68.4	Wide school issues
KJ	91.4	100	97.7	100% attendance on guitar days

Table 9: Attendance data at FPA by term including additional information.

Overall, however, the use of small group intervention offering an alternative curriculum did not produce consistent outcomes in regard to attendance. This may have been caused by challenges of this project, caused to staffing absence, at points affecting the regularity of sessions. Interestingly attendance was again affected in the summer term when the intervention was not run as consistently. This suggests that a targeted approach to small group teaching may positively affect attitudes to school attendance and engagement in learning, but only when delivered consistently and regularly. This brings its own challenges in regard to the resourcing and staffing of such work in schools, and whether pupil's curriculum offer becomes marginalised as a result of the small group approach. It also suggests that further investigation into the totality of the curriculum offer could require further research and investigation.

7.5 Supporting the mental health of targeted pupils to improve attitudes to school and attendance.

Intervention at FoPa – use of 2 specific interventions The West programme and the 'Get Up and Go intervention'. Both used to support the mental health and wellbeing of pupils struggling with school attendance.

Due to the capacity of external support of the West team as an external partner to the project and wanting to reach a greater number of children and families (especially with numbers identifying anxiety, mental health or unexpected circumstances as reasons for non-attendance), a second interventions were utilised. One was run by external professionals from the West Team, and the second was ran by the Pastoral team, trained by the West Team. The West Team focused specifically on worry management and thought challenging for learners, whereas Get Up and Go focused more on mental health through talk strategies and positive interactions with staff and peers.

Of the 14 children involved in the study, 6 of these saw increased attendance of between 2 and 4% over the period of the intervention. 4 of the participants attendance remained the same, and 4 participants attendance declined between 2 and 4%. This suggests interventions targeting pupils' mental health and wellbeing may have a positive impact on the attendance of some pupils, but does not consistently impact all pupils when considering quantitative data alone. However, these figures may not account for other factors that may have been at play such as illness.

Impact of the West Team was specifically felt by one pupil in regard to attendance:

"Seeing the WEST team has helped me a little with my anxiety and about talking aloud to people. I still have those anxieties but there are things I have learned that can help me – like – take your thought to court!" (Pupil 2, Interview)

"I can't thank you enough for the support you've given my children – things haven't always been easy for us, but they like coming to school now and feel safe here." (Parent M)

However, the qualitative data regarding the 'Get Up and Go' intervention demonstrated a more positive picture of the effect on learners, as well as demonstrating the complexity of scenarios that learners may have been dealing with in regard to perceptions of attending school:

"I like my time with you and Mrs XX, it helps me calm down with all my sad problems. It is good having people to talk to other than my friends. With Mrs XX we do crafts together because she knows that's what I liked to do with my nan. She's really nice, I like her. You help me if I am hungry, you make sure I am looked after, and you talk about things that make me feel happy. I feel happier when I see you, it makes me feel fresh from my worries and I always have a good start to my day." (Pupil 3, Interview)

"I don't like coming to school but 'Get Up and Go' helps me. The staff talk to me about my worries and how my day is. They are friendly and really easy to talk to…they make me want to come to school." (Pupil 4, interview)

"The retreat is a place where you can relax, play games and have a nice start to the day. It has definitely helped me want to come to school, without it I would be more reluctant." (Pupil 5, Interview)

"It's good to have Miss XX and you. I like coming to school but can't always come because my baby sister cries in the night and then we are all tired. It is good to have teachers that care about you and ask if you are ok. Sometimes I am not ok, but you make me feel better." (Pupil 6, interview)

Parental feedback gathered through 1:1 interviews concurred with perceptions of pupils involved in the intervention:

"It has definitely been successful in reducing the number of children clinging to parents at the gate/ refusing to come into school" (Parent N)

"Miss XX has been brilliant in helping XX to be happy in school." (Parent P)

"I really struggle with XX in the mornings – he doesn't want to leave me as he worries about me. The school staff have really helped to get him into school and help with his anxiety." (Parent Q)

The Get Up and Go team were able to run the intervention daily, and offer a more all-round support to families, whereas the West Team approach was a short intervention session once per week, focused on a specific topic. Through having breakfast with friends and talk through any worries with staff on a regular basis, there seemed to be great impact, with calmer starts to the day. This suggests that the regularity of intervention strategies for those finding attendance challenging, and a broader opportunity for adapting the content and focus for individuals' needs is important to the creating positive impact. This data concurs with findings generated in the study by Cunningham, Harvey and Waite (2022), who found that specific interventions for pupils requiring support around their social, emotional and mental health needs had a positive impact on attitudes to attending school and their actual attendance. Similarly, the EEF (2022) found that interventions utilising an individualised approach to children's needs were more likely to create positive impacts on attendance.

7.6 Investing in professional development for different staff to improve whole school and Trust focus on attendance.

One of the driving factors of this project was the development of staff practices, making attendance 'everybody's business'. As proven through the review of literature and knowledge in practice, it was vital to equip all staff with the impact of deprivation and adverse childhood experiences on families, and hoe attendance may be an indicator and symptom of challenging circumstances. Data was gathered via questionnaires regarding the impact of this professional development. Prior to the training only 31% of the participants felt that they adjusted their practise to consider a trauma informed approach, post training 87% of participants found that they were already making some adjustments that aligned with a trauma informed approach. 97% of the participants felt more confident that they were now be able to adjust practise to support a trauma informed approach. This approach was particularly vital for ensuring that classroom teachers felt equipped to have discussions with parents / guardians, whilst maintaining awareness of circumstances that may be presenting to them.

Professional development was also put in place (for the first time) between the Education Welfare Officer and all members of office / administrative staff focusing on attendance in schools. These front-line staff are often the first port of call for attendance when dealing with parents, yet questionnaire data showed that only 10% of parents wanted to discuss attendance issues with these staff across the schools. A focus group interview was conducted after this training to gain feedback:

"It was really interesting to gain perspective on how other schools have been working with families. Sometimes I am not always thinking about what might be going on at home when I am working through my list of calls" (Staff member V)

"*I was interested to hear those examples of when other office staff have challenged parents around illness or when to bring them back to school. I think sometimes children are staying off longer than they need to and its hard to know when to be supportive of this or when to question it. I liked hearing how XXXX used certain questions for checking on this."* (Staff member W)

"It was reassuring for staff dealing with attendance, personally, to know that other have similar issues with attendance/lates/PA, and that we can all work together to affect this positively" (EWO)

These quotes show that through providing networking opportunities for these staff, they were able to share effective strategies for conversations, finding the right balance between challenge and support. It also suggests that staff are remaining aware of the whole Trust approaches to Trama Informed behaviour support and Poverty Proofing. It allowed for a focus on relationship building between the EWO and administrative staff, with focus on tangible examples of how different family circumstances may be supported.

Understanding of the EWO also increased as a result of this project, connecting their statutory obligations and role to the new interventions:

"By checking what interventions have been offered or taken up, I have been able to emphasise in referrals what the school has put in place for the pupil/family. However, more importantly, I have been able to speak to the parents about the support that has been or can be offered and the importance of working with the school in this collaborative manner" (1:1 interview, Education Welfare Officer)

As early perceptions of interactions with the EWO regarding attendance were perceived to be less positive by parents, a further area of investigation over the next year will look to investigate whether interactions with the EWO are perceived by families to be less intimidating and of greater connection to the offer that schools are making in regard to attendance.

8. Conclusions

When drawing conclusions from these pieces of action research, it has been important to remember that each project has been contextual to its setting, and therefore future decisions regarding transferability from one setting to the next may not equate to another. This action research has also demonstrated the complexity of tackling attendance; the implementation of one intervention alone is

unlikely to shift perceptions of children or parents in regard to the importance of attending school. Previous literature utilised within this study offered much guidance on the ways in which attendance may or should be improved, but little in terms of practical strategies to implement beyond the approaches that were already being utilised. This study therefore attempted to trial practices beyond those previously implemented within the settings. We have therefore found some important findings and conclusions that can be drawn from data gathered within the projects, and where impact has been found. These have then been used to strategically plan steps moving forward.

- From across a variety of action research projects and questionnaire data gathered, it became clear that parents do not always know or understand what good attendance means. This is not just in regard to the percentage of achieving good attendance, but when children should attend school or not (in regard to illness) and also the amount of time missed, and how this impacts learning, even from a very young age. As common illnesses are still the most common occurrence of why absence occurs, and sits at 1.1 percentage point higher than pre-pandemic (Centre for Social Justice, 2022), this is still a priority area for schools to tackle.
- Quality curriculum and extra-curricular activities that engaging for learners can have a positive impact on attendance. However, it is important that these do not incur costs for parents; this ensures that stakeholders feel positive about school attendance, and do not use cost as a reason for non-attendance. Days associated with higher cost (such as requiring dressing up outfits) do have an adverse impact on attendance.
- The use of reward incentives does not seem to have actual impact on attendance, even when pupils or parents may believe they do. The removal of rewarding attendance has not tangibly made a difference to attendance and has positively affected the school budgets and capacity of senior leaders and staff.
- Communication and effective relationship building is vital to improving attendance. This is required to be regular and consistent, yet more informal conversations through discussions on the gate, door or phone calls were found to be preferable to parents over letters. In person conversations to build relationships and rapport initially made the likelihood on phone conversations as a secondary approach more likely. Parents picked up the phone to numbers and people they recognised as a key worker who held a relationship (DJA), compared to calls that were ignored (NMA) where the pre-existing relationship had not been formed. Furthermore, when communication can be undertaken with the class teacher or a trusted pastoral adult, rather than an office member of staff or the EWO, the impact on positive relationships are more likely to be felt.

- Although nursery attendance is not statutory, a focus on working with parents and children attending nursery is valuable for setting early expectations and supportive relationships. These interventions have potential to lead to further good behaviour and attitudes in regard to attendance, and these same pupils will be tracked onwards in their attendance journey.
- Whilst running workshops for supporting parents regarding attendance was perceived to be the most likely method for supporting attendance, the impact of this strategy was more mixed. Workshops that utilised a triangulated approach between staff, parents and pupils were perceived to be more supportive, and were more well attended than workshops targeting parents alone. Building workshop strategies as part of induction to schooling with early years parents were also successful for creating engagement.
- The use of home visits were beneficial for understanding the context that children are facing and why attendance may be (or could become) a barrier, especially in regard to deprivation. Home visits also highlighted distinct links between attendance, deprivation and possible child protection issues. Home visits were also the approach that requited the biggest investment in capacity from staff involvement, requiring releasing members of school team from the classroom (2 members per visit) or utilising funds to directly create capacity for this role.
- Targeted support interventions for pupils (and their families) who are struggling with mental health, well-being or anxiety have shown some emerging signs of positive impact of attitudes to school, particularly at drop off times. These are designed to support particular times of anxiety and emotional volitility (Cunningham, Harvey and Waite, 2022). However, further investigation is required to see if these have more consistent impacts on school attendance for these pupils.

9. Informing strategic planning and recommendations

Based on the data and practice generated in this study, there are a number of strategic and practical activities that schools within our Trust have elected to adopt into practice henceforth. These have been selected as a result of sharing and dissemination of findings internally; however, these can also act as recommendations to other schools or collaborations for how they may focus on their own attendance strategy. These have been split into 'Golden Nuggets' and 'Green Shoots'. Golden nuggets we believe to be activity or practice that is impactful and will be implemented into school and Trust strategies regarding attendance. Green shoots are activities that we believe to have some potential to impacting attendance and associated perceptions, but require further development and implementation, so as to further explore their act impact.

Golden Nuggets

1. All schools will place further emphasis on supporting parental understanding of when health should and should affect attendance. This aligns with the recently published letter from the DFE and Chief Medical Officer (DFE, 2023b). We would also recommend that the school nursing team and health visitor teams on the ground should further support this communication in person, working with parents. This was well received by parents when implemented from nursery, helping establish early understanding. However, it was very challenging to access this support, requiring long periods of organisation.
2. All schools commit to undertaken continuous professional development for all staff in regard to creating the culture that 'attendance is everybody's business'. This will include all schools allotting yearly staff meeting time to be aware of the attendance in their class, family circumstances and strategies for continuing to improve attendance across the school. At a Trust level, attendance will remain a standing item during termly updates and plans and is written as a KPI within the Trust strategic plan. It will also be considered during termly pupil progress meetings between leaders and class teachers.
3. All schools will continuously track the data of pupil's attendance and their circumstances, transitioning information from previous years (or schools in the case of infants to juniors) (Childrens Commissioner, 2022). This will ensure that prior knowledge is capitalised upon; not only will this stop the 'slate being wiped clean' in regard to attendance, it will also ensure a more holistic approach around each child and family is created, through awareness of circumstances and support. Schools will endeavour to take a proactive rather than reactive approach to tackling attendance.
4. All schools will commence support for families regarding attendance from their Early Years teams (either nursery or reception, dependent on school provision). This will include home visits for all families, and tailored workshops in response to findings of home visits. School readiness and the importance of school attendance will remain a consistent theme within these workshops.
5. All schools across the Trust will be involved in a curriculum review, commencing September 2023, to ensure that learning is engaging, inspiring and purposeful; creating the effect that children will want to come to school each day.
6. Further findings and results of the Poverty Proofing audits will be implemented across all schools, ensuring that the cost of the school day does not affect pupils and families attending. A whole Trust action plan will be developed and a further round of audits will be conducted within a 3-year period, gathering data on the effect of implemented changes.

7. Pastoral teams will work alongside senior leaders, classroom teachers, office / administrative teams and the Education Welfare Officer to ensure all processes are in place for capturing of information of contextual circumstances, support implemented for pupils or families and tracking the effect of support on attendance. This will ensure that families are well known. Regular, positive communication strategies will be utilised by all staff who 'wrap-around' the child.

Green Shoots

1. Use of the 'Get Up and Go' pastoral approach as an intervention for supporting children that struggle to come through the school gate will be utilised by more schools as an alternative methodology, working alongside breakfast club offers.
2. Where available, budget and capacity will be aligned to ensure that more regular home visits can be conducted to families where attendance is becoming an issue. This will allow further identification of required support, and intervention where appropriate.
3. Further exploration of specific curriculum offers for targeted groups of pupils struggling with attendance and academic engagement will be undertaken.

Strategies identified have also been broken down further to inform future planning, focusing not only on the Golden Nuggets that all schools will implement but considering the needs of identified families or pupils:

Some pupils / families will need…	**In very particular cases…**
Specific consideration of how their day starts e.g. provision of breakfast club, meet and greets from an identified key worker role	Adapted start or end times to the day to support attendance over a transitional period
Referrals to external agencies to support with deprivation indicators or SMHE challenges. Home visits for these families identified will help early indication of support required.	Particular bespoke support as identified through understanding family needs – including transport support, financial support or additional provision such as wrap around care.
The use of social contracts to identify how, when and why support will be offered from school, and the level of commitment that this will receive in return from children and family.	Clarity of statutory triggers and the procedures that will be implemented failing developing a more positive working relationship

The above strategies for all schools and all pupils, some families and particular cases has been built into the Trust Strategic document for Attendance, and will therefore be used to inform measurement of impact by Headteachers, the Executive Leadership team and the Board of Trustees. Materials developed

through the completion of action research such as plans for workshops, home visit templates, social contracting templates) have been gathered, ready to compile a Attendance toolkit to sit alongside this report.

This report and the toolkit will be disseminated in the following ways:

- Each school will place a copy of the report on their school website, and a copy will be placed on the Trust website.
- It will be sent to the Regional Delivery Team within the DFE, with the offer to work alongside any schools which may benefit from partnering with us.
- It will be shared with key partners within the Local Authorities which we currently work.
- Each school in their locality network will share a copy of the report with their Headteacher network and Safeguarding bodies.
- Executive leaders will share with their Trust leadership partners and networks.
- It will be shared with Children North East as our key partner on implementing the Poverty Proofing approach to the project.
- Through our Trust partnerships with Whole Education and Challenging Education, the report will be shared to networks of schools, with the opportunity of presenting findings through online webinars and conferences.

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11. Appendices

Appendix 1: Full literature review

To set the context behind this action research, a literature review into current empirical research and national policies was conducted. This has helped provide key themes in which to centre the action research around and to support with thematic analysis of qualitative data, in the format of a theoretical framework. It is important to note that surprisingly little research focuses on what schools can do to increase and sustain students' daily attendance, with many empirical studies into this field designed as literature reviews rather than analysis of specific interventions affecting attendance and associated attitudes (Epstein and Sheldon, 2010). For this reason, our literature review has included analysis of research studies produced by organisations including the EEF (Education Endowment Fund), The Centre for Social Justice and The Children's Commissioner; these studies are more recently focused upon quantitative and qualitative data from national studies of schools regarding attendance. They are also set within the recent context of national attendance, which has been further impacted since the Covid 19 pandemic, which has been found to have further impacted issues regarding pupil and parental mental health and challenges with illnesses due to children's lack of exposure to many childhood germs (Centre for Social Justice, 2022).

Evidence from across literature suggests that small improvements in attendance can lead to meaningful impacts for both educational outcomes and wellbeing of pupils by targeting attendance in different means (Education Endowment Fund, 2022). Yet across literature there exists limited examples within research that have been conducted on the positive effect of specific or innovative strategies for improving attendance in England. Through the planning of this research process and the undertaking of the literature review, we have identified 3 key themes emerging regarding how attendance can be tackled. Through action research, we were able to support schools to design specific practice-based inquiries that sat under these key headings, all that have been found as evident within literature:

1. The effect of poverty and deprivation on pupil's attendance at school
2. The learning, curriculum and education experience that learners receive in school and how this affects their engagement and attitudes regarding attending school
3. The support that is given to children to ensure that mental health does not become a barrier to attending school.
4. How relationship building work with parents and families, through considering varying systematic, bespoke and supportive interventions, can affect attendance of pupils

These four areas formed threads across the eight action research projects in their design, implementation and analysis of findings. The following sections will explore more specific data or examples in literature that set context around the four themes that have been identified for exploration.

Context – identifying issues regarding attendance at school in literature

Poor school attendance is a significant problem in the UK and many other countries across the world (Education Endowment Fund, 2022). It is proven by national data that there is a strong negative link between pupil absence and attainment (Department for Education, 2015; Department for Education, 2021; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Figures of persistent absence for children per term in schools is classed as anything below 90%; the challenges of ensuring that children are not classed as persistently absent since the global pandemic commenced and schools reopened to all pupils has never been greater. This is proven in a snapshot of national absence data: on the week of the 21st of October 2022, this figure sat at 88% (GOV.UK, 2021): thereby suggesting that many schools in the county at the end of the half term would have been categorised as falling below national expectations for data. In the autumn and spring term of academic year 2021-2022, 1.6 million children (22%) were persistently absent, meaning that they missed 10% or more of possible education sessions. Of these, 110,470 (1.5% of all pupils) were severely absent, meaning that they missed 50% or more of possible education sessions (Children's Commissioner, 2022). At a local level, Birmingham as an LEA ranked 8th highest nationally regarding persistent absence data in 2022, with 53,430 enrolled pupils persistently absent (31.2%) (Centre for Social Justice, 2023).

Contextually, schools are operating in a period post pandemic, which has brought a number of challenges regarding mental health and wellbeing of families. The impact of covid related lockdown on attainment concluded that there is significant negative impact of children who missed periods of school due to lockdowns (DFE, 2021). This infers that being absent from school negatively impact on pupils' academic attainment; learners who are persistently absent whilst their peers are in schools would result in a compounded negative impact (Department for Education - DfE, 2021b). Furthermore, attitudes regarding the importance of attending school daily may have changed as a result of home learning lockdowns. In a study titled 'Kids Can't Catch Up' (Centre for Social Justice, 2021), it was identified that nearly 100,000 children had become severely absent in Autumn 2020. In data gathered in Summer 2022, 140,000 children were severely absent. This represents a rise of 134 per cent since before the pandemic – or the equivalent of 137 entire schools where the children are mostly missing education (Centre for Social Justice, 2023). Of all data found to be published nationally, illness absences still make

up the majority of overall absences and have been 1.1 percentage point higher than pre-pandemic (Centre for Social Justice, 2022).

Absenteeism is a complex matter; the term does not always recognise the additional connotations that might be associated with a pupil being absent e.g. if a parent condones the absence. (Caroll, 2010). This can be a specific issue relevant to primary settings, compared to considering absence issues in all schools e.g. primary and secondary schools collectively.

The relationship between poverty and attendance

Some specific studies discuss the relationship between children living in poverty and how this affects their attendance in school. The Centre for Social Justice (2023) has found in their deep data analysis of national data that in the academic year 2021/22, children eligible for free schools meals had a persistent absence rate which was more than double the rate for children who were not eligible for free school meals; 37.2% of all children eligible for free schools were severely absent, compared to 17.5% of children not eligible. Furthermore, 30.0% of children living in the most disadvantaged areas were persistently absent over the course of 2021/22. For comparison, 14.3% of children living in the most affluent areas were persistently absent over the same period. The limitations of this study is that although it presents specific figures on this matter, it fails to offer the details and complexity in regard to why this might be the case. Furthermore, it fails to link data to the deprivation indicators (IDACI bands) within the locality e.g. there may be little difference in certain areas between the attendance of all pupils and those in receipt of free school meals. As such, it does not take into account that fact that many of the deprived families are not in receipt of free school meals due to their personal circumstances.

The learning, curriculum and education experience that learners receive in school and how this affects their engagement and attitudes regarding attending school

There are a number of specific studies that investigate the relationship between attendance and academic outcomes, as pupils with fewer opportunities to learn the curriculum materials in class will have less chance of succeeding when it comes to achieving end of year / key stage expectations (Epstein and Sheldon, 2010). As such, this can be a barrier for pupils wanting to attend school, as their underachievement affects their engagement. In Ferguson, Horwood and Shanon (1986) conducted a study in New Zealand with 8-year-olds with absentee rates greater than 10 percent, comparing these to pupils with less significant rates of absence. They found that pupils attending less than 90% school had significantly lower word recognition test scores. In Morrow and Young (1997), interventions were put

into place to increase children's reading achievement and interest in literacy, with the aim of removing this as a barrier to attendance. This study was implemented as a collaboration between parents, teachers, and children; demonstrating an example of not only considering the impact of the curriculum but also the need for working with parents. By using a school-based curriculum literacy program, along with a family literacy program, parents became more involved with their children's school and participated more in literacy activities at home. As a result of participation in the study, families and parents reported in interviews that they became more comfortable with their children's school (Cox, 2005).

It has been found that attendance patterns can be established (and identified) from as early in the first week of September (Children's Commissioner, 2022). In a study conducted in the local area of the Wirral, a pilot model regarding analysis of data for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 attendance data across 50,000 pupils has shown that a pupil's attendance in the first month of school can be used to forecast (and sets the tone without intervention) for what their attendance may be like for the rest of the academic year (Hollomby, 2023). Particular studies have therefore focused on how pupils are supported to want to come into school, by making the curriculum engaging, attractive and support learners to close gaps in their understanding. Cunningham, Harvey and Waite (2022) undertook a case study approach in a specific school, focused on the qualitative perceptions of how teachers and school staff focused on engaging learners in school through the curriculum. Teachers described their focus on trying to make lessons interactive and enjoyable so that children are more likely to want to go to school each day. However, this study did not discuss the extent to which pupils who were finding engagement in the school curriculum a challenge and a barrier to them want to come to school to have direct relationship with their academic achievements, or a relationship to their general attitude and behaviour in school. This was an area identified for further exploration in one specific action research project, where our school found there to be direct correlations between pupils' attendance, behaviour and academic achievements.

<u>The support that is given to children to ensure that mental health does not become a barrier to attending school.</u>

A further thematic arising within literature, and perhaps more increasingly mentioned in recent years, is the impact of pupil mental health as a barrier to attendance. Anxiety and mental health were investigated by the Centre for Social Justice (2023) where focus groups argued that anxiety is the biggest driver behind recent increases in absence. The report captured discussions of children and families who

struggle to leave the house, or anxiety of children being left for periods of time by their carers. The cohort of children who are in key stage 1 and lower key stage 2 currently grew up under school shutdowns caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, and this study found direct correlations between the attitudes of pupils, parents and their attendance because of these anxieties. In Cunningham, Harvey and Waite (2022), school staff perceive school non-attendance to be a complex issue that can be caused and maintained by multiple factors, related to the child (e.g., mental health or neurodevelopmental issues), the family (e.g., negative attitudes towards education and parental overprotection), and the school or learning environment (e.g., peer relationships or difficulties with schoolwork). They described how children who have difficulty attending school often struggle to get through the front door of the school building in the mornings, or children who complained of feeling unwell and wanting to go home, indicating anxiety around some aspect of school.

Certain studies have focused specifically on interventions to support pupil mental health. The EEF (2022) conducted a quantitative study into a range of responsive interventions for tackling attendance, one of which focused upon the impact whole class social and emotional learning. Impacts of whole class social emotional learning was found to have no direct impact on attendance, suggesting that interventions regarding mental health and wellbeing may require a more individualised approach (EEF, 2022). In their qualitative study, Cunningham, Harvey and Waite (2022) described more positive impacts on pupil mental health and their associated attitudes of school and attendance through adaptations to the curriculum for specific pupils rather than whole class approaches. Therapeutic interventions were described as offering children the chance to talk about any difficulties with professionals or their peers. This includes play therapy, counselling and drama therapy, 'nurture groups' and ready to learn programmes. This finding crosses over to the previously identified theme of curriculum, suggesting that some children may require a different style of curriculum offer as a means to create engagement in school, unlocking possible barriers to attendance.

<u>Work with parents and families, through considering varying systematic, bespoke and supportive relationships.</u>

Few studies explore how family and community partnerships may contribute to the goal of tackling attendance in the UK, although it is a very current topic within education and national news (Epstein and Sheldon, 2010). The Education Endowment Fund (EEF) (2022) conducted a review of literature on this topic, finding only 3 studies conducted in the UK. However, 17 international papers focused on parental engagement, finding that use of effective communication and targeted planning support to have the biggest impact of school attendance and associated attitudes in both learners and parents (EEF,

2022). More specifically, responsive interventions in which a member of staff or team used multiple interventions, specifically designed to meet the needs of individual pupils and families were found to be most effective (EEF, 2022). This concurs with findings from Cox (2005) and Epstein and Sheldon (2010) where the most effective interventions were those where parents and school personnel worked together to implement interventions and had a two-way exchange of information. Both of these pieces of research suggest that work with families' needs to be bespoke, collaborative and use a variety of strategies.

Studies tended to focus on two different approaches to working with parents through workshop style sessions: one approach focusing upon removing barriers to academic learning, and another focused more on support for parents regarding mentoring, dealing with behaviours or mental health, or general awareness of attendance policies. Sheldon (2007) found that running specific workshops for parents supporting learning goals of each year group found an increase in the percentage of students attending class, compared with similar schools that were not conducting these activities. Similarly, Lee (1994) and Epstein and Sheldon (2010) found that parent involvement in checking homework and reading with a child to create positive attitudes to learning at home were found to have a positive impact on attendance. However, Epstein and Sheldon (2010) also found that workshops on attendance and related matters were associated with increases in average daily attendance and decreases in chronic absenteeism.

Two further approaches tended to be utilised in previously conducted studies: the use of home visits, and the use of specific liaison relationships between home and school, with a specific contact for families to connect to within the school staff team. Both approaches were found to form more effective relationships between parents and the school (Epstein and Sheldon, 2010). However, when educators made home visits, schools reported decreases in the percentage of students who were chronically absent. However, the use of home visits did not appear to affect daily attendance rates, although it may be in such studies (and in practice) that educators only have the capacity to visit only the homes of students who have severe attendance problems.

Conclusions

Conducting this review has provided key themes by which to analyse the findings from action research across the 8 schools involved in this study. It has also demonstrated a breadth of factors that affect the attendance (and associated perceptions of school attendance) of pupils. This demonstrates the complexity of the matter at hand, and how any approaches used to tackle attendance must be multifaceted as well as bespoke to the needs of families, children and school context.

Appendix 2: Parental questionnaire

1.My child/children has good attendance

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

2.What aspects of school encourages your child to attend? Clubs, Wraparound, what they are learning about, in school events, their teacher

3.Reasons that impact my child's attendance (you can select more than one answer here)

- Common Illnesses (cold, cough, sore throat)
- Medical diagnosed condition
- Anxiety/Mental Health
- Irregular sleep patterns
- Not having the correct clothing/equipment
- Travel Costs
- Unexpected event / something has happened
- Being late (may lead to having the day off)
- Other

4.If you have answered others to Q4, please enter the reason here.

5. If your child did need support with attendance, who would you prefer to speak to about this:

- The front office staff
- The class teacher
- Pastoral support e.g. insert staff name
- Educational Welfare Officer

6. If extra support with attendance was needed, which approach would you prefer and be more likely to engage with? You can answer more than one.

- Pastoral support for the child
- A collaborative approach - child, parent and pastoral staff
- Conversations between parent and school staff
- Support workshops for parents to discuss strategies

7.Do you believe that children should be rewarded for having good attendance?

- Yes
- No

8.Which in school sessions would you be most likely to engage with?

- Workshops for parents - supporting curriculum/education
- Workshops for parents - supporting children's well-being
- Family activities
- School/Class Events
- In Classroom visits to work with your child

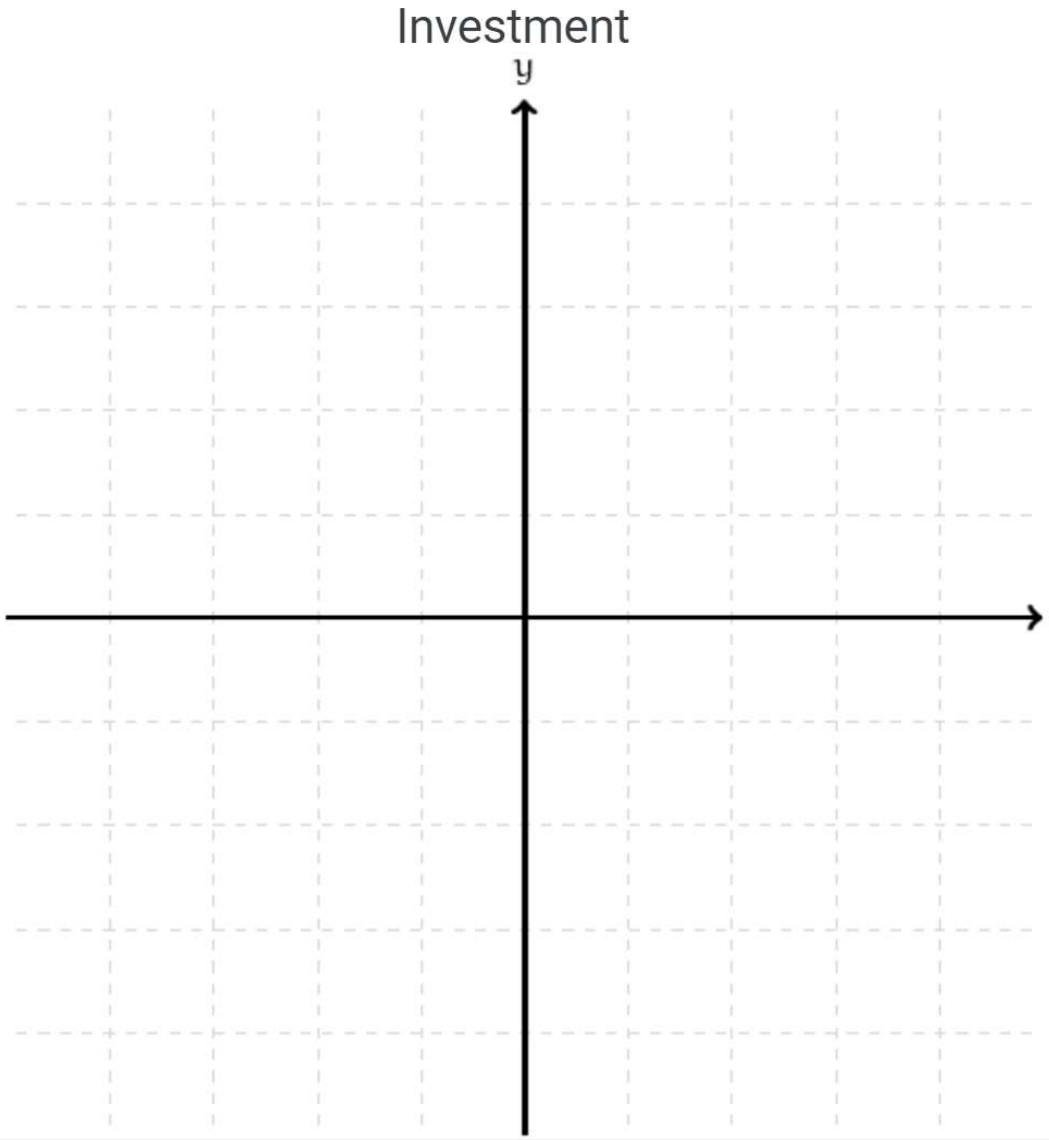
Appendix 3: Data analysis from Baseline Parental Questionnaire - Quantitative

Total number of participants	All schools	DIA	DJA	FPA	RPA	VPA	NMA	BCA	FoPA
	309	**20**	**52**	**44**	**60**	**31**	**33**	**35**	**34**
Does your child have good attendance at school?	Yes	16	47	38	53	26	33	30	30
	No	3	0	4	5	2	0	2	1
	I don't know	2	5	2	2	3	0	3	3
Reasons that may affect attendance	Common illness	20	36	42	46	25	29	32	31
	Medical diagnosed condition	3	4	5	8	5	7	2	1
	Anxiety / mental health	0	0	3	5	2	2	3	6
	Sleep	0	1	2	3	0	0	1	2
	Incorrect clothing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Costs	0	1	0	5	0	1	0	0
	Unexpected events	3	1	6	7	4	2	3	4
	Being late	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	0
	Other	2	13	3	5	6	5	3	4
If your child did need support with	Office staff	2	8	4	5	6	4	5	2
	Pastoral staff	2	3	7	12	2	6	6	6

attendance, who would you prefer to speak to about this?	Class teacher	16	41	34	37	20	22	26	26
	Education Welfare officer	0	0	3	2	0	1	0	0
If extra support with attendance was needed, which of the following would you be more likely to engage with?	Pastoral support for the child	3	9	14	13	6	3	12	6
	A joined approach - parent, child, pastoral support	8	15	12	27	11	14	20	15
	Conversation between parent and school staff	8	38	22	32	17	19	15	21
	Workshops for parents to discuss strategies	12	7	4	5	3	4	6	1
Do you believe that children's attendance should be rewarded?	Yes	-	51	20	48	20	25	24	22
	No	-	1	24	10	10	8	11	12
What type of support would you	Workshops – curriculum / learning	6	14	22	2	-	11	12	1

feel would be beneficial to engage with to support attendance?	Workshops – supporting wellbeing	4	6	7	4	-	7	15	4
	Family activities	10	6	8	9	-	4	16	6
	School / class events	5	18	29	18	-	4	12	10
	In school classroom visits	7	8	12	16	-	2	6	13
	Home visits	10	0	4	5	-	5	5	0

Appendix 4: Tool for analysis of attendance strategies (pre-action research question formation)



Pupil perspective
1. Rewards for attendance (class / 100% / best attendance for term)
2. Pupil voice on incentives
3. Assemblies for awards 4. Parental assemblies
5. I am top attender

Processes
5.5. First day calling
6. Follow up mobile call or text message
7. Home visits
8. Looking at RAGed tracker to follow up attendance
9. Good cop / bad cop calls

Parental work
10. Family meetings on attendance for targeted families
11. Parent voice
12. Parent evening or events discussions
13. Parent forum
14. Work with AC / Gov body 15. Work with families from Felise

Work with EWO
16. Heat map analysis
17. Discussing 93% list
18. Meetings to discuss targeted families and actions
19. Referral of families by EWO to LA
20. Home visits from EWO
21. Late gate targeted

Family liaison role
22. Intensive work with school refusal children
23. 1:1 and action plans with certain children
24. Home visits for specific families
25. Phone calls with specific families
26. Hope programme

Whole school
27. Investment in curriculum and high profile of happy engaging school
28. Poverty proofing work
29. Large scale celebrations for school attendance
31. Clubs

Appendix 5: Information letter for parents and carers

INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL
Information Leaflet for Parents and Carers

Our school, **INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL** is currently taking part in a piece of research, alongside the other schools in Victoria Academies Trust. We are looking to find out how we can support children and families to overcome the barriers that might be stopping children attending school. We are working with families and children to do this in a way that is supportive, but uses some different approaches to see if these help more children attend school more of the time.

Our particular school project will be looking at: **INSERT INFORMATION ABOUT RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR SPECIFIC SCHOOL**

Why are you contacting me?

As part of this research, we are looking to see how trying out this new approach to supporting attendance might have a positive or negative effect. In order to do this, we are asking some families to take part in the research. For some families, this might mean being involved in some activity such as workshops or sessions. For others, it might mean answering some questions at different points during the project, sharing with us how you feel about attendance. We would really like you and your family to be involved in this project if you would like to be!

What will I be taking part in as a parent or carer?

OUTLINE SPECIFICALLY FOR EACH SCHOOL PROJECT WHAT THEY MIGHT BE INVOLVED including data gathering methodology

What will happen to information that I share in the project? Is it confidential?

As part of our ethical considerations, we follow protocols for the safe storage of data and information, following Data Protection guidelines. All data gathered will be anonymised. All materials gathered will be destroyed once the research process is completed. In the process of gathering research, all materials will be stored safely with limited access to the materials to the team involved in the research.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you are happy to be involved in the project, please complete the attached form, giving your consent to take part in the project. We will be very excited to work with you to find out how we can help families with school attendance.

What if I decide that I do not want to take part now or at a later point?

If you do not wish to take part in the research project, you can of course let us know that this is the case.
At any point during the project, you may withdraw their permission for involvement. This is your right to withdraw. If you wish to withdraw, you can request destruction of any data gathered.

What if I have any questions?

You can start by contacting **INSERT NAME OF HEAD and SCHOOL LEAD on Project plus contact details.** If appropriate, they will put you in touch with Lisa Worgan who is the lead researcher on this project and can be contacted on lisa.worgan@victrust.org

Appendix 6: Consent form (Adult participants)

Victoria Academies Trust and Laurel Trust attendance project

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS / CARERS INVOLVED IN PROJECT ACTIVITY

Please read the attached information regarding this project before completing the below form.

Please indicate YES or NO for each of the questions below and return the completed form.

Have you read (or had read to you) the information about this project?	YES	NO
Has someone explained taking part in the project to you?	YES	NO
Do you understand what the project is about?	YES	NO
Have you asked all the questions you want?	YES	NO
Have you had your questions answered in a way you understand?	YES	NO
Do you understand that you can request to stop taking part in this project at any time?	YES	NO
Are you happy to take part?	YES	NO

If any answers are 'no' you can ask more questions. But if you **don't** want to take part, **don't** sign your name.

If you do want to take part, please write your name and today's date

Your name _____

Date _____

Appendix 7: Information leaflet for minors

INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL - Information Leaflet for Children or Young people (and their parents / carers)

Our school, INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL is currently taking part in a piece of research, alongside the other schools in Victoria Academies Trust. We are looking to find out how we can support children and families to overcome the barriers that might be stopping children attending school. We are working with families and children to do this in a way that is supportive and uses some different approaches to see if these help more children attend school more of the time.

Our school project will be looking at: INSERT INFORMATION ABOUT RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR SPECIFIC SCHOOL

Why have I been chosen?

As part of this research, we are looking to see how trying out this new approach to supporting attendance might have a positive or negative effect. In order to do this, we are asking some children to take part in the research. For some children, this might mean being involved in some activity such as workshops or sessions. For others, it might mean answering some questions at different points during the project, sharing with us how you feel about attendance. We would really like you to be involved in this project if you would like to be!

What will I be taking part in?

OUTLINE SPECIFICALLY FOR EACH SCHOOL PROJECT WHAT THEY MIGHT BE INVOLVED IN e.g. workshops, meetings, home visits. OUTLINE DATA METHOD for gathering data e.g. interviews, questionnaire

What will happen to information that I share in the project?

We will make sure your information is kept safely. If you take part, your name will not be written anywhere.

I would like to take part! What should I do?

If you are happy to be involved in the project, and your parent / carer is happy for you to be involved, please complete the attached form, giving your consent to take part in the project. We will be very excited to work with you to find out how we can help families with school attendance. It is important that both you and your parent / carer complete the form giving both of your consent for you to be involved.

I don't want to take part. What should I do?

If you do not wish to take part in the research project, you can of course let us know that this is the case. At any point during the project, you can say if you do not want to be involved anymore. This is your right to withdraw. If you wish to withdraw, anything you have been involved in will be deleted.

What if I have any questions?

You can start by contacting INSERT NAME OF HEAD and SCHOOL LEAD on Project plus contact details. If appropriate, they will put you in touch with Lisa Worgan who is the lead researcher on this project and can be contacted on lisa.worgan@victrust.org

Appendix 8: Consent and assent form for minors

Victoria Academies Trust and Laurel Trust attendance project

CONSENT FORM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN PROJECT ACTIVITY

(to be completed by the child/young person and, if under age 18, with and by their parent/carer)

Please indicate YES or NO for each of the questions below and return the completed form by **INSERT DATE** to the **LOCATION – School office** for the attention of **INSERT PERSON**

Dear Parent/Carer, if your child needs help, please read these questions to the child and complete the replies for them.

Has someone explained this project to you?	YES	NO
Has someone shared the information about this project to you?	YES	NO
Do you understand what the project is about?	YES	NO
Have you asked all the questions you want?	YES	NO
Did you understand the answers to your questions?	YES	NO
Do you understand it's OK to stop taking part in this project at any time?	YES	NO
Are you happy to take part?	YES	NO

If any answers are 'no' you can ask more questions. But if you **don't** want to take part, **don't** sign your name.

If you do want to take part, please write your name and today's date

Your name _____

Date _____

If the child is under 18, please could you as parent or carer write your name here too, if you are happy for your child to participate in the interview.

Print name _____

Sign _____

Date _____

Thank you for your help.