Improving school attendance in Portsmouth

2016
Our vision

The vision for education in Portsmouth is clear and consistent: to make education outcomes for all Portsmouth’s children the best they can possibly be. For this to happen children need to attend school regularly where they can access an education that is tailored to their needs.

This document sets out what we all need to do to achieve this vision. Our work will focus on four priorities. These are:

1. That parents meet their responsibilities to ensure their child(s) attend school regularly
2. That schools have effective leadership and management of attendance in place
3. That partners provide additional needs based support that contributes to improvements in attendance.
4. That a high profile of the key attendance messages is maintained in the community

Our aspiration is for Portsmouth children to attend school more regularly than their peers nationally.

Schools, parents, young people and partners have worked with us in the development of this document. By partners we include all those other than schools whose work directly or indirectly impacts on school attendance.
Executive summary

This strategy has been developed through the work of the Behaviour and Attendance Group (BAG) who have the remit for improving attendance across Portsmouth schools.

In recent years we have seen improvements in the attendance rates in Portsmouth schools which is most welcome. We understand that these have been achieved through hard work by schools, parents and partners. However, the fact is that Portsmouth pupils do not attend school as regularly as their peers nationally so there is still more work to be done.

By not attending school regularly children and young people are leaving themselves vulnerable to risks which can reduce their life chances. For example those who do not attend school regularly are more likely to:

- Leave school without any qualifications
- Leave themselves at risk of other poor outcomes such as:
  - Poverty
  - Long term unemployment
  - Criminal involvement
  - Alcohol and substance misuse
  - Social isolation and mental health problems

The work we need to do to improve school attendance is outlined in the Executive summary under the four following priority areas:

- That parents meet their responsibilities to ensure their child(s) attend school regularly
- That schools have effective leadership and management of attendance in place
- That partners work together to improve school attendance of children
- That a high profile of the key attendance message is maintained in the community
Priority one

That parents meet their responsibilities to ensure their child(ren) attend school regularly.

We know that parents have the greatest influence on their children’s lives and will want what is best for them. Therefore ensuring that children are school ready from the first day at school until they are ready to leave is part of being a parent. At times parents may need access to support to achieve this but equally may need to be challenged if they are not meeting their responsibility to ensure their child(s) attend school regularly.

Under this priority we will seek to ensure that all parents:

Understand the need to have high aspirations and expectations for their children

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that media messages regularly reinforce the link between good attendance and achievement at school and emphasise how this impacts positively on improving employment opportunities and other life outcomes
- Highlighting the risks that not going to school regularly can bring
- Ensuring that parents understand their responsibilities to send their child(ren) to school and the legal consequences if they do not

Understand the need for their child to be school ready

We will do this by:

- Ensuring parents know what we mean by ‘school ready’ and how this prepares young people for school, college, work and life. For example the importance of punctuality and reliability to employers
- Ensuring that schools and parents have access to information about recuperation timescales if their child is sick
- Ensuring that parents know who they can talk to at their child’s school if they have a concern about their child’s attendance
Priority two

That schools have effective management of attendance in place.

School Governing Bodies have to be confident that the school is doing all it can to encourage parents to send their children to school regularly. To do this they need to hold the head teacher and staff to account. It is only through a whole school approach to attendance that sustained improvements can be made. Therefore under this priority we will seek to ensure that schools:

**Understand what they need to do to improve attendance**

**We will do this by:**

- Ensuring governors have a good understanding of what is needed to improve school attendance
- Reviewing with schools where required improvements in attendance have not been made and putting a plan in place
- Ensuring that where improvements in attendance are not sustained, schools are challenged in line with the Local Authorities’ support and intervention framework
- Improving the School Attendance Team’s traded service offer to schools

**Have access to support and training to improve attendance**

**We will do this by:**

- Providing training on:
  » School attendance training for governors
  » Making best use of attendance data e.g. SIMS modules
  » Providing training on effective use of legal processes
- Providing high quality information:
  » At key transition points ensure that pupils with attendance concerns are highlighted through data reports
  » To enable school governors to ask the right questions about attendance
  » On health related absence for schools, parents and partners
  » On ‘what works’ to improve school attendance
Priority three

That partners provide additional needs based support that contributes to improvements in attendance.

To achieve the required improvements in attendance this strategy needs to inform and complement the partnerships work within the five priorities of the Children’s Trust Board. (See: Appendix 1). We know that some young people face a range of poor outcomes and barriers that make regular attendance at school only possible through effective partnership working and the use of Early Help Assessments. This is particularly true of those pupils who are chronic absentees who may need to access additional support from outside of the family and school.

So under this priority we will seek to ensure that:

**Schools identify at an early stage pupils who are at risk of becoming persistently absent**

We will do this by:

- Providing meaningful pupil and school level attendance data for schools that helps to identify those who are known to be vulnerable or at risk of poor outcomes e.g. NEET (Not in Employment Education or Training)

**School and partners put in place effective approaches, assessments and plans for pupils where attendance is a concern**

We will do this by:

- Ensuring that schools are supported in their approaches to prevent pupils becoming persistent absentees
- Ensuring that persistent absentees have appropriate plans in place to promote a return to regular attendance at school
- Ensuring that schools know how to access support from Multi Agency Teams so that every chronic non-attender has a plan in place to help them return to school
- Ensuring young people with attendance concerns do not miss out on accessing high quality careers and information advice so as to prevent them from becoming NEET
Priority four

That a high profile of the key attendance messages is maintained in the community.

Everyone needs to understand what it is that they can do to support improvements in schools attendance. Given the impact that good school attendance can have on a range of outcomes, different messages targeting different audiences will be needed. Our approach will use different forms of media to ensure that that we reach as many children, young people and parents as possible.

For children and young people

We will do this by:

• Giving messages that inspire young people to think about plans and goals and where they want to go with their life
• Identifying and raising the profile of role models in a range of occupations and careers that highlight the importance of a work ethic and working hard in whatever you do
• Ensure messages from local employers on what they value in future employees are known to young people
• Ensure young people know who they can talk to in school and out of school if they have a concern or want to discuss their future plans

For parents

We will do this by:

• Ensuring that it is clear what is meant by ‘school ready’ at all ages
• Ensuring information is available that shows how lost time at school can impact on attainment and future employment prospects
• Providing refreshed information on recuperation time so that parents know when their child should be well enough to return to school after an illness
Background

1. The majority of Portsmouth parents ensure that their child(ren) attend school regularly. They understand the benefits that school can bring to their child(ren) such as helping:
   - To ensure they are safe
   - To give them the opportunity to fulfil their potential
   - To allow them to enjoy and access all the opportunities that being at school offers

2. In recent years we have seen improvements in the level of schools attendance and a fall in the number of persistent absentees. This improvement is welcome but to meet our aspiration for Portsmouth pupils to attend school more often than their peers nationally there is more work to do. This is particularly true of those children who belong to vulnerable groups, for by being out of school it is more likely that that they will:
   - Leave school without qualifications
   - Not be in education, employment or training (NEET)
   - Be at risk of a range of other poor outcomes such as criminal activity or future mental health problems

3. We know that some children and young people are more likely to be absent from school because of factors beyond their control. For example this could be because they have caring responsibilities at home, social, emotional or health difficulties or have an unmet special educational need. So for some children and young people it may be complex as to why they cannot attend school regularly and may take time and support before they can.

Aspirations and Expectations

4. Portsmouth Communications Department worked with young people and teachers to see what they said about why some young people did not come to school. Young people said it was due to:
   - Overtiredness resulting in waking up late and attending late or not attending at all
• Feeling unsupported during lessons – therefore no point in going to school
• A lack of parental support or adult role models
• Low or a lack of life aspirations
• Being unaware of long term consequences of prolonged non-attendance

5. School staff said that this was due to:
• Parents who themselves had negative experiences of school
• Being part of families that do not work and so not having early morning routines in place
• Staying up too late which then impacts on concentration and motivation at school

6. We also know from work with young people that:
• They prefer to access information via websites and that posters and leaflets have minimal impact
• Most of all they like to have someone from outside the family to talk to
• When they are not in school they are usually at home and that their parents know where they are

How school attendance and attainment at school link together

7. The link between attending school regularly and doing well, whilst obvious, cannot be over stated as the DfE report on Improving Attendance and Behaviour reminds us:

“One of the most effective ways that schools can improve achievement is by improving attendance. Even the very best teachers struggle to raise the standards of children who are not in school regularly. Schools that relentlessly pursue good attendance also get better overall attainment and behaviour.” Charlie Taylor 2012.
8. In February 2015 the Department for Education (DfE) published a report on the link between absence and attainment in Key Stage (KS) 2 and KS4. In summary it was found that:

• For KS2 (Primary School pupils) the higher the percentage of sessions missed across the key stage the lower the likely level of attainment at the end of KS2
• For KS4, (Secondary School pupils) in general, the higher the percentage of sessions missed across the key stage, the lower the likely level of attainment at the end of the KS
• Specifically, pupils with no absence are 1.5 times more likely to achieve 5+ GCSEs A*-C or equivalent and 2.8 times more likely to achieve 5+ GCSEs A*-C or equivalent including English and mathematics than pupils missing between 15-20% of KS4 lessons
• Of pupils who miss more than 50% of school only 3% manage to achieve 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C including math’s and English
• It also highlights that 73% of pupils who have over 95% attendance achieve 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C

9. This confirms that improving school attendance is a school leadership and management issue.

The role of the Local Authority

10. The Local Authority has a role to ensure that all schools and partners are aware of the importance of regular school attendance and the link to educational and other life outcomes (see point 9 above).

11. The Local Authority has statutory duties as detailed in the 1996 Education Act and DfE Guidance on School Attendance and Children Missing Education. These are safeguarding responsibilities that the Local Authority must discharge and reports regularly to the Portsmouth Children’s Safeguarding Board.

12. The Behaviour and Attendance Group provides regular scrutiny of both individual school performance data and identifying best practice to improve school attendance. It regularly reviews thresholds to identify schools where attendance is a concern.
13. Where school attendance rates are a cause for concern, the Local Authority will formally write in the summer term to the Chair of Governors and head teacher requesting a response to explain how the school will address the concern.

14. Where there is insufficient progress, the appropriate Inclusion Service Officer(s) will visit the school to assure the Local Authority that the school are meeting their statutory responsibilities in respect of safeguarding pupils. Where appropriate and through discussions with schools, the Local Authority may seek to broker support for individual schools or clusters of schools where there is a need to focus on improving school attendance.

15. Portsmouth City Council will work with maintained schools and academies in the same way. Where the Local Authority believes it is necessary, it will raise any attendance concerns in the annual meeting with the appropriate academy provider.
Appendix one

Legal requirements for parents, schools and the Local Authority.

1. Parents of children of compulsory school age (aged between 5 and 15 at the start of the academic year) are by law, required to ensure that their children receive a suitable education through regular attendance at school or educate them otherwise. To this end, the Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure that pupils attend school or that they are notified that the parent will electively home educate.

2. Attendance registers are taken twice a day: once at the beginning of the school day and once during the afternoon. In the registers, schools are required to record whether pupils are present, engaged in an approved educational activity or absent.

Where a pupil is absent, schools must record in the register whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised. Schools should always have regard to the national set of codes when taking registers.

Authorised absence is absence with permission from the head teacher or other authorised member of school staff. This will include instances of absences for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided i.e. a genuine illness.

Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from the head teacher or other unauthorised member of staff. This will include all unexplained or unjustified absences i.e. a pupil having the day off to celebrate a birthday.

3. All schools have a legal requirement to inform the Local Authority of any pupil who fails to attend school regularly or, has been absent without school’s permission for a continuous period of 10 days or more. Pupil Attendance Review Meetings (PARMs) are held regularly between the school and the School Attendance Team to meet this statutory requirement.

4. There is also a requirement placed on schools to report on the number of pupils who are persistent absentees. From September 2015 any pupil who is absent for more than 10% (19 days) of the school year is referred to as a persistent absentee.
5. In Portsmouth we identify pupils who have levels of attendance below 50% and categorise them as chronic absentees. Identifying these vulnerable pupils allows us to ensure that any additional support to assist them getting back into learning is in place.

6. The strategic approach in Portsmouth to improve outcomes for all vulnerable young people is through the Children’s Trust Board’s five priorities. Therefore any work undertaken to improve attendance will need to support and complement the priorities of the Children’s Trust Board. These are:
   - Integrate support for children and families
   - Improve educational outcomes
   - Improve outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC) and care leavers
   - Reduce NEET and improve Post 16 progression
   - Improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND (special educational needs and disability) and their families
Appendix two

What do we know about absence from school in Portsmouth?

1. Those children and young people who are absent from school in Portsmouth are most likely to:
   - Be white British
   - Be eligible for free school meals (a proxy indicator for low income)
   - Have special educational needs
   - Have a history of absence from school
   - Have more absences as they get older

2. The absence codes also help to give an indication as to why children and young people are absent from school and these are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of all absence</th>
<th>Primary schools</th>
<th>Secondary schools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health reported absence including medical appointments.</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unauthorised absence</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave of absence (holidays in term time)</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateness</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other circumstances</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusions</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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</table>

3. What we do know is that there is a cumulative impact of absence on attainment that is not always understood. This can be demonstrated by the following key messages that emphasise the cumulative impact of absence on learning:
   - By being away for a 2 week holiday every year and having an average number of days off for sickness and appointments, by the time they leave school at 16 they will have missed a year of education
   - If you are 15 minutes late each day that will mean 10.3 teaching days are lost in a year
4. For our most vulnerable children and young people, school may be the only safe and consistent part of their lives, therefore it is particularly important for them to attend regularly. By vulnerable groups we include those who are:

- Looked After
- Known to Social Care
- On child protection plans
- Young carers
Appendix three

The law and the use of legal sanctions.

1. Schools have access to a range of strategies to support a return to school or improve attendance but when these are unsuccessful the use of legal sanctions against the parent(s) must be considered.

2. Any decision to prosecute an individual is a serious step. They have serious implications for all involved and therefore the Local Authority will seek to make fair and consistent decisions about the prosecution process.

3. Each prosecution case is unique and judged on its own facts and merits. The Local Authority must be satisfied that there is enough evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction and it is in the public interest to proceed. The School Attendance Team works closely with schools and parents before any prosecution is considered.

4. The fall in absence rates in both primary and secondary schools has been supported by an increase in the number of fixed penalty notices, school attendance panels and prosecutions. Schools are increasingly taking a zero tolerance approach to pupils with high levels of unauthorised absence and the Local Authority is supportive of this approach. This can be seen in the table below:

- The number of parents against whom legal proceedings have been taken has risen by 75% over the past three years
- There has been an increase in the use of penalty notices for leave of absence (holidays in term time) although fixed penalty notices for irregular attendance has remained consistent

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<tr>
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<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixed penalty notice for irregular attendance</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed penalty notice for leave of absence – unauthorised holiday</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Attendance Panels</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental prosecution for child’s non-attendance</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. What we do know from our information is that:
   - The majority of schools across the city use legal sanctions, however there are some inconsistencies between schools as to whether they use them and when they use them.
   - Early intervention and adopting robust systems that are consistently applied help to ensure that both pupils and parents understand the consequences of irregular attendance.
   - Magistrates have increasingly understood the link between irregular attendance, attainment and the criminal justice system.
   - Legal sanctions can make an impact on a pupil’s attendance if it is not left until the pupil’s absence has become entrenched. In the instance of pupils receiving a fixed penalty notice warning for irregular attendance approximately 60% improve and no further action is taken. All pupils are monitored 20 weeks post prosecution and our data show that for 80% of these pupils, attendance has improved from when they were first referred to the School Attendance Team.

6. It should be noted that the cost of legal sanctions to the Local Authority is rarely recouped, despite an increase in the amount the courts are willing to recompense the Local Authority.
Appendix four

School Attendance: What ‘good’ looks like

**Schools support parents by:**
- Promoting high expectations of what their children can achieve
- Ensuring parents understand that regular school attendance helps to keep their child safe
- Ensuring that parents have information on the impact of attendance on their child’s learning and life chances
- Ensuring parents are regularly reminded of their responsibilities
- Ensuring parents know the school’s first day of absence procedure
- Ensuring parents know who to speak to in school if they have a concern
- Encouraging parents to engage with the school community

**Schools improve attendance by the Governing Body ensuring that:**
- Regular attendance is a whole school approach
- They set aspirational but achievable targets for school attendance
- Attendance is regularly reviewed by the Governing Body
- Governors feel confident to be able to challenge and support the head teacher
- If attendance needs improvement that an action plan is in place
- The head teacher provides strong leadership and that the senior leaders are champions of school attendance

**Schools improve attendance by the Senior Leadership team ensuring that they:**
Use attendance data effectively to:
- Understand the links between attainment and attendance across the school
- Identify pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent
- Identify pupils who are persistently absent
✓ Promote good attendance at all opportunities such as assemblies, within the curriculum e.g. PSHE and other activities
✓ Identify the attendance of vulnerable groups and/or minority groups
✓ Identify approaches needed to improve attendance and how this impacts on reducing absence

Regularly review the effectiveness of:
✓ Strategies to reduce persistent absence from their school
✓ The use of rewards and sanctions
✓ Reintegration support following periods of absence
✓ How well their escalation process is understood by all from day one of absence
✓ How and when they request legal sanctions
✓ Their links at transition and transfer to feeder schools
✓ Procedures to remove pupils from roll in accordance with guidance
✓ Support for hard to reach pupils
✓ How allegations of bullying are managed, so as to minimise the impact on attendance

**Schools improve attendance by ensuring that pupils know:**
✓ The impact on attainment of absence from school
✓ Their attendance and as required have targets and steps for improvement
✓ Who they can speak to in school if they have a concern
✓ How they can contribute to help promote good attendance
✓ The importance of punctuality
✓ That regular attendance at school is valued by employers

**Schools improve attendance by ensuring that all staff:**
✓ Have high expectations that their pupils attend regularly
✓ Are trained to make the best use of data
✓ Understand the importance of regular attendance
✓ With specialist skills such as mediation and use of restorative justice approaches, are used to impact on attendance
✓ Know their pupils by having effective academic and pastoral systems

**Schools improve attendance where partners:**
✓ Provide support for persistent absentees
✓ Team around the Child arrangements address absence if required
✓ Ensure schools know how to access specialist services such as substance misuse
✓ Have activities that help to engage hard to reach pupils
✓ Are clear about how they can support schools to improve attendance
✓ Reinforce messages about the importance of regular school attendance and life chances
✓ Help to establish links with employers and training providers
✓ From Faith groups work with the school to ensure that regular attendance at school is understood by all in their community
Appendix five

Performance – How well are we doing?

1. A Department for Education report on Attendance and Behaviour (2012) noted that if an average sized secondary school manages to improve its attendance by one percentage point this would equate to an additional 1,300 pupil-days. Therefore small improvements in attendance rates represent significant changes in the number of young people at school and the time they spend at school.

2. Portsmouth Primary School performance provisional absence data for 2014/15 shows the following encouraging picture:
   - Improvements in reducing levels of overall absence to 0.2% above the national average for 2013/14
   - A fall in the level of persistent absence to 1.4% which is below the national average

### Primary school absence rates 2011 – 15

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<tr>
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<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Overall Absence</strong></td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Portsmouth Overall Absence</strong></td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National Persistent Absence</strong></td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Portsmouth Persistent Absence</strong></td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. Compared to similar Local Authorities, in 2013/14 Portsmouth primary schools were ranked 5th out of 10 statistical neighbours for levels of overall absence, unauthorised absence and persistent absence.

**Portsmouth Secondary school performance:**

4. Portsmouth secondary school performance provisional data for 2014/15 shows the following encouraging picture:
   - An improvement in reducing levels of overall absence to 0.9% above the national average for 2013/14
   - A reduction in the level of persistent absence by 3.1% to below the national average for 2013/14

![Secondary school absence rates 2011 – 15](image)

5. Special school absence data is available but national comparisons are difficult given the variation in the nature of special school provision. Within Portsmouth, the Harbour School has high levels of absence but these are comparable to similar schools that cater for some of the most vulnerable and challenging young people nationally.

6. Compared to similar Local Authorities, in 2013/14 Portsmouth secondary schools had the highest levels of overall absence, unauthorised absence and persistent absence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour and Attendance Task and finish group</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Andy Ames</td>
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<td>Team Manager, Health, Safety and Licensing, Public Health, Portsmouth City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucy Carroll</td>
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<td>Headteacher, Meredith Infant School</td>
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<td>Julie Cragg</td>
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<td>Head Teacher, Wimborne Infant School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simon Graham (Chair)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Headteacher, St Edmund’s School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Harvey</td>
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<td>Service Manager: Vulnerable Groups, Inclusion Service, Portsmouth City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tracey Houghton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance Officer, School Attendance Team, Inclusion Service, Portsmouth City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ashley Howard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Headteacher, Manor Infant School</td>
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<td>Moira Howorth</td>
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<td>Assistant Head Teacher, St Edmund’s School</td>
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<td>Julia Katherine</td>
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<td>Inclusion Commissioning Manager, Portsmouth City Council</td>
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<td>Sarah Lewis</td>
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<td>Donald McIntyre</td>
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<td>Team Leader, School Attendance Team, Inclusion Service, Portsmouth City Council</td>
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<td>Peter Newton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Head Teacher, King Richard School</td>
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<td>Krishna Purbhoo</td>
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<td>Headteacher, The Harbour School</td>
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<td>Fran Shaul</td>
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<td>Think Family Mentor, Families Moving Forward</td>
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<td>Natalie Shepperd</td>
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<td>Principal, Portsmouth Academy for Girls</td>
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<td>Neil Stevenson</td>
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<td>Service Manager: Admissions, Exclusions and Reintegration, Inclusion Service, Portsmouth City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicola Waterman</td>
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<td>Head of Troubled Families, Positive Family Steps, Portsmouth City Council</td>
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<td>Nicole Winchester</td>
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<td>Community Safety Project Officer, Portsmouth City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philip Winchester</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Support Officer, Health and Safety, Portsmouth City Council</td>
<td>Jan 2016</td>
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