



CYP Select Committee

Lewisham Attendance and Children Missing Education

Date: 21 November 2024

Key decision: No. For information only.

Class: Either Part 1 or Part 2.

Ward(s) affected: N/A

Contributors: Ruth Griffiths, Head of Access, Inclusion and Participation

Emma Stubbington, Attendance Manager

Outline and recommendations

Outline

As part of its work programme the Committee has requested a report on Lewisham's Attendance (Absence, Persistent Absence and Children Missing Education) performance indicators and outcomes. Officers produce this report annually as part of accountability and performance monitoring.

Recommendations

The Select Committee is asked to note the significant improvement in the work programme to support and safeguard our most vulnerable children and young people by:

- Improving levels of attendance of children and young people in Lewisham schools.
- Expectations for Lewisham because of the revised guidance which commences September 2024.
- Reviewing and evaluating Lewisham processes to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose in identifying and dealing with Children Missing Education in Lewisham.

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report sets out the context, legal framework and position in relation to attendance (absence, persistent absence and Children Missing Education) Lewisham. It also provides an analysis of Lewisham performance indicators and the actions that the local authority and Lewisham education providers are taking to effect progress.

The Department for Education (DfE) attendance data (absence and persistence absence) shows that Lewisham is performing better than national and London.

The roles and responsibilities for the Lewisham Attendance Service are underpinned by Lewisham's Corporate Strategy 2022-26 which includes: We will continue the fantastic work

of the last four years, supporting our schools to improve and increasing the opportunities for young people in Lewisham.

The Service's continued focus is on increasing primary and secondary schools' performance in all attendance measures and has been in line with the London averages which have been met for the last five years.

The Lewisham Attendance Service is also responsible for the local authority's statutory work in relation to Children Missing Education (CME).

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Select Committee is asked to note the significant improvement in the work programme to support and safeguard our most vulnerable children and young people by:

- Improving levels of attendance of children and young people in Lewisham schools and attending Lewisham Alternative Provision.
- Expectations for Lewisham because of the revised guidance which commences September 2024.
- Reviewing and evaluating Lewisham processes to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose in identifying and dealing with Children Missing Education in Lewisham.

3. Policy Context

The legal framework for the attendance and Children Missing Education (CME)

3.1 **What are the legal requirements on local authorities in relation to school attendance?**

The government expects schools and local authorities to:

- Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence;
- ensure every learner has access to full-time education to which they are entitled;
- act early to address patterns of absence;
- encourage parents to perform their legal duty by ensuring their children of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend regularly; and
- ensure all learners to be punctual to their lessons¹.

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

3.2 **The DfE statutory guidance – Working together to Improve School Attendance**¹
In March 2024 the Department for Education (DfE) announced the white paper 'Working together to Improve School Attendance' will become statutory from August 2024. This means all schools regardless of status will receive a core service from Lewisham attendance service.

As the DfE have prioritised the new duty above local authority traded services, Lewisham attendance service has had to consider how the new responsibilities can be delivered to schools within the current service capacity. Whilst there is an increase in responsibilities, there is no increase in central funding.

¹ [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

3.3 **Statutory definition of a Child Missing Education**

A Child Missing from Education is defined by the DfE as: “A child of compulsory school age who is not on a school roll, nor being educated otherwise (e.g. privately or in alternative provision) and who has been out of any educational provision for a substantial period of time (usually four weeks or more)”.

Children Missing Education statutory guidance for local authorities September 2016 states that: “All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to a full-time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have.”

Children Missing Education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of abuse, and being not in education, employment or training (NEET) later on in life.

Under Section 436A of the Education Act 1996 (amended – Education and Inspections Act 2006) Lewisham implements systems to establish the identities of children of statutory school age in Lewisham, as far as it is possible to do so, who are not registered learners at a school, and are not receiving “suitable education” otherwise than at school (EOTAS).

“Suitable education” means efficient full-time education suitable to the child’s age, ability and aptitude. CME should not be confused with:

- Children who are on roll at a school but are not attending regularly; in this case the individual’s school Attendance (Welfare if needed) Officer should be involved or a referral made to the Attendance Inclusion and Participation Service;
- Children who are Electively Home Educated (EHE); and
- Children whose parents have applied for a school place and the application is being managed through the admission procedures².

4. **Background – school attendance**

4.1 **Importance of regular school attendance**

Ensuring all children and young people (CYP) fulfil their potential requires regular school attendance to benefit from the developmental opportunities offered by schools. Missed learning opportunities increases the risks of falling behind academically and socially. Educational outcomes for CYP who have low levels of attendance are adversely affected as they are less likely to achieve during their school career and more likely to become NEET (neither in education, employment, or training) following compulsory education.

Nationally CYP who attend school regularly and punctually are less likely to be at risk, both in terms of engaging in anti-social behaviour and in terms of their own health, safety, and welfare. Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their CYP attend school regularly and punctually for them to obtain the most benefit from the opportunities available to them.

CYP in Lewisham come from diverse backgrounds and a range of life experiences. Most attend school regularly and on time and leave as young adults well equipped to enter further education, employment, or training (EET) and can contribute significantly to society. For a small minority, school is the only place of physical as well as emotional safety and may be the most secure aspect of their lives. The link between irregular school attendance and poor

2

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/921405/20170831_Exclusion_Stat_guide_Web_version.pdf

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

academic achievement and limited life outcomes has been established and well researched.

4.2 Attendance and Persistent Absence (PA) - national and Lewisham context

Lewisham attendance has continued to outperform regional and national outcomes in most areas of data comparison including local authorities with similar characteristics.

Pupil absence data for primary, secondary, and special schools along with Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are collected termly via the Department for Education (DfE) School Census data collection return and published in a Statistical First Release (SFR). Full-year attendance data for special schools is collected annually at the Autumn School Census

Since the mandating of data sharing introduced by the government this year, DfE are now publishing attendance data each term. The DfE published verified Attendance and Persistent Absence (PA) data year to date from the 11th of September 2023:

School type	National attendance %	London (L) attendance %	Lewisham Attendance %		National PA %	L PA %	Lewisham PA %	Comments for Lewisham
Primary	94.50	94.70	95.00		10.00	15.20	14.10	Better than both
Secondary	91.00	92.50	92.60		26.30	22.80	22.80	Better than both
Special	87.00	87.20	88.20		37.30	38.80	39.40	Better than both for attendance

In 2023-24 Lewisham schools continued to outperform inner London and national outcomes. Lewisham primary schools achieved 0.3% above inner London and 0.50% above national average and secondary schools achieved 0.10% above inner London and 1.60% above national attendance data. Lewisham special schools achieved 1.0% above inner London and 1.2% above national outcomes.

In 2023-24 Persistent absence continued to be better in Lewisham primary and secondary schools. In primary schools' persistent absence was 1.10% lower than inner London and 0.9% lower than national data. In secondary schools' persistent absence was the same as inner London and 3.23% lower than national data.

Special schools were slightly higher in Lewisham compared to both inner London and national outcomes. Lewisham expects to see improvement in the outcomes for persistent absence next year.

4.3 DfE published attendance and PA data for the full academic year 2022-23 and 2021-22

Lewisham was still the highest attended inner London Borough. In 2022/23 Lewisham primary schools achieved 0.08% above inner London and 0.49% above national average and secondary schools achieved 0.02% above inner London and 1.20% above national attendance data. Lewisham special schools achieved 2.1% above inner London and 1.6% above national outcomes.

School Phase	Data	National (2021/22) %	National (2022/23) %	Inner London (2021/22) %	Inner London (2022/23) %	Lewisham (2021-22) %	Lewisham (2022-23) %
Primary	Overall Attendance	93.74	94.01	94.07	93.7	94.54	94.50
	Persistent Absence	17.70	16.2	17.27	19.4	14.74	15
Secondary	Overall Attendance	91.01	91	92.96	92	93.05	92.2

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

	Persistent Absence	27.71	26.5	21.97	24.4	20.48	23.8
Special school	Overall Attendance	86.82	87	87.31	86.5	89.02	88.6
	Persistent Absence	40.36	38.3	40.19	42.4	36.81	37

In 2022-23 Persistent absence in Lewisham was also better. In primary schools' persistent absence was 0.08% lower than inner London and 1.2% lower than national data. In secondary schools' persistent absence was 0.6% lower than inner London and 2.70% lower than national data. Special schools also performed better with persistent absence 5% lower than inner London and 0.9% lower than national outcomes.

4.4 Summary of national and Lewisham attendance

Lewisham schools continue to exceed regional and national outcomes in both primary and secondary schools. Special schools achieved higher attendance outcomes, but persistent absence was slightly higher than national and inner London outcomes.

Furthermore, attendance data will assist our partner services where admissions, exclusions and deregistration not only affect attendance but contribute toward safeguarding concerns and pupil outcomes.

Next academic year any Lewisham school or academy, where severe absence is identified but no evident action plan is provided, will be referred to the 'multi-disciplinary support board' chaired by the Lewisham Attendance Manager. Where severe absence is high, the school / academy will be offered a 'Team Around the School' (TAS) meeting to enable conversation, advise and signposting to help address and improve attendance. Where schools / academies decline the offer of a TAS yet severe absence does not improve, a referral will be made to the schools allocated School Improvement Partner (Lewisham Learning) who will address the issue through the partnership meetings.

4.5 Lewisham Attendance Service response to DfE statutory guidance³

As a minimum all local authorities are expected to:

- 4.5.1 **Rigorously track local attendance data** to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools on which to provide support and focus its efforts on to unblock area wide barriers to attendance. This means all schools will allow the attendance service access to their data via Studybugs and WONDE. For schools that currently fail to share will be legal obliged to do so. Whilst the majority of schools in Lewisham already share data, this legal change will ensure all Lewisham schools can be monitored and supported.
- 4.5.2 Monitor and improve the **attendance of children with a social worker** through their Virtual School.
- 4.5.3 Provide **School Attendance Support Team** which provides the following core functions to all Lewisham schools and Academies:
- 4.5.4 **Communication and advice:** regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area.
 - **The Attendance Service Handbook** sets out local authority expectations based on the school responsibilities. It includes common practices e.g term time holidays and follow up for persistent lateness so that families. The handbook will be ready for circulation ready in September 2023.

³ [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance)

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

- **The Attendance Service website** provides a one stop shop for all schools to access swift information on attendance matters including links to other services such as Children Missing Education, Early Help and MASH. It also includes practical matters such as local and national data, example policies, development plans, forms for penalty notice, advice on legal intervention and litigation submissions and links to key resources local and national guidance.
- **Weekly attendance surgeries**, this academic year, allow nontraded schools to access to advice and guidance.
- **Attendance Network Meetings** happen every term and invites all schools to discuss common difficulties and to share good practice. These have proved extremely useful with schools sharing their experiences of OFSTED feedback and new initiatives that have improved school attendance.
- **An Attendance Service newsletter** was launched this year and all topics and themes, alongside contact details and links to other services. Schools and partner local authority are invited to provide positive stories, case studies share updated news and information regarding support and intervention.
- **Annual stakeholder feedback** is collated by online survey to enable school colleague's opportunity to provide views and opinions to help shape and develop the service each year. In addition to stakeholder feedback, the attendance service monitors trends and patterns of absence throughout the year and the reasons or causes are used to develop targeted areas and pathways of early intervention support.
- **Reports to schools** based on their attendance and persistent absence data provide the schools with advice and recommendations on how to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence. The reports have received excellent feedback from Headteachers and senior leaders and governors.

4.5.5 **Targeting Support Meetings:** hold termly conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils. The meeting is to agree actions to reduce absence, improve school attendance and agree support for particular pupils and cohorts using the local authority services.

The meetings are conversations between the Lewisham Attendance Service and the school and will include the following areas of review and discussion:

- Current position of the school compared to other schools in Lewisham, comparison with regional and national outcomes.
- Analysis of data for the most vulnerable groups within the school.
- Discussion of overall trends, patterns and issues in the school's data.
- Agreement of joint approaches for all severely absent pupils (under 50%) and for persistently absent pupils (90%) where they have barriers to attendance that require a multi-agency response to overcome them.
- A review the use of authorised and unauthorised register codes.
- A review of the schools 'support first' graduated approach including referral pathways to ensure pupils and families receive the right support.
- A review of attendance statutory processes leading to legal intervention.

The action plan provides a template for the delivery of the targeted meetings, ensures a uniformed approach across all schools and a copy of the plan is shared with the school as a record of the meeting.

4.5.6 **Multi-disciplinary support for families:** provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

- 4.5.7 **Legal intervention:** take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with.

4.6 Attendance team traded services with schools and academies

Academic Year	Number of Referred Cases	School Meetings	Home Visits	LA FAP (pre court meetings)	Court Warning	Witness Statements	Legal Hearings (Magistrate Court)
2023-24	635	446	25	99	278	18	17
2022-23	776	737	44	177	341	41	20
2021-22	660	574	64	128	334	38	34

The overall number of referrals received by the Attendance Service appears less than in previous years. However, the success of the attendance team in improving attendance for cases referred to the service is still evident from the outcomes achieved. From the 635 cases referred to the service:

- 30% of cases improved informally through written correspondence with parents and required no further action.
- 70% of cases required a school attendance meeting with parents.
- 38% of those cases improved attendance following the school meeting.
- 62% of cases requiring a court warning letter issued by the attendance service.
- Only 36% of cases who received a court warning letter required a pre court meeting
- Only 18% of those cases progressing to legal action.

Academic Year	Male	Female	FSM	Diagnosed Medical	EBSA	SEN Support	EHCP	Reduced Timetable
2023-24	342	293	331	48	36	103	19	24

There were more males referred to the attendance service than females. From the 635 pupils referred to the service:

- 52% were entitled to free school meals.
- 8% of pupils had a diagnosed medical condition.
- 6% were considered as having emotional based school avoidance (EBSA) although this is not a diagnosed medical condition.
- 16% of pupils were receiving SEN support.
- 3% had an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP).
- 4% of pupils were on a reduced timetable.

The Attendance Team work collaboratively with other services to ensure that where vulnerable children are referred, appropriate support and advice can be provided before the case is escalated through the statutory attendance process.

The Attendance Team Leader is a member of the Lewisham Autism support group, and both the Team Leader and Attendance Manager are members of the EBSA steering group. Closer work has been established this year between the attendance service and SEN colleagues to ensure children and young people with EHCP attend the school which is named on the plan.

We have also secured a wider membership for the attendance multi-disciplinary support board to ensure SEN, and health can provide support and advice in cases where pupils have severe absence (under 50%) from school. The data provided above will be shared at these forums to help promote the importance of attendance and explore how services can work together to improve attendance for all.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

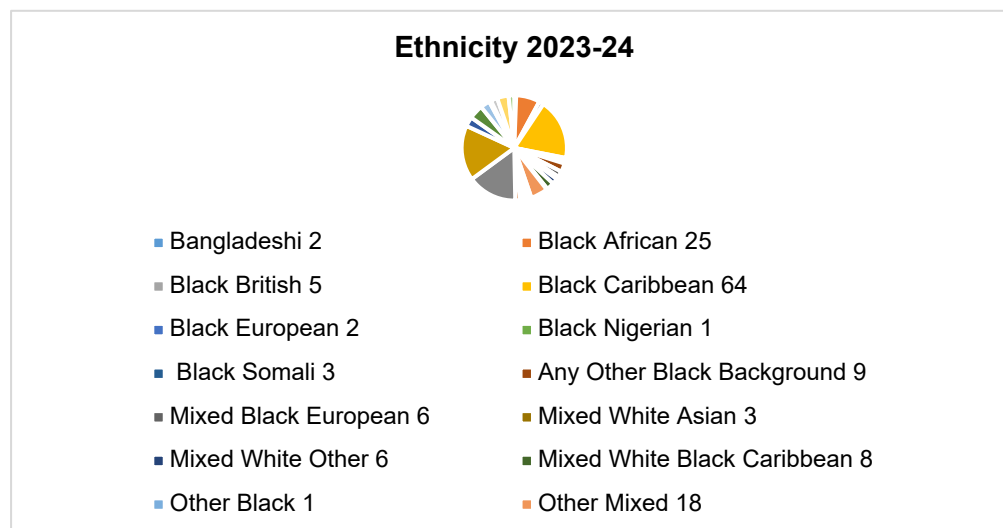
4.7 Ethnicity data

54% of cases referred to the attendance service provided the ethnicity of the pupil.

From those recorded:

- 32% of pupils were from a black background.
- 33% were from a white background.
- 30% were from a mixed background.
- 4% were from any other backgrounds.

Black background	White background	Mixed Background	Other background
110	114	104	14



To provide more information next academic year we will include the number of translated documents to help highlight the barriers parents of pupils from ethnic minorities may experience regarding communication related to school attendance.

4.8 Attendance traded service

This year the number of service level agreements purchased by schools decreased compared to previous years. This is due to the DfE statutory changes mentioned earlier in this report. Schools will now receive three termly targeted support meetings each year as part of the new free statutory core service. These changes naturally impacted the total revenue accrued compared to those purchased last year. Despite the changes the amount of service level agreements purchased through traded the attendance traded service remains higher than the total received in 2022-23.

Number of traded SLA	Primary schools	Secondary schools	Special schools (including AP)	Out borough Schools	Total revenue
2024-25	49	11	6	1	£200,376
2023-24	53	11	5	2	£224,140
2022-23	48	11	6	3	£192,005

4.9 Sir William Boreman's Foundation

The Sir William Boreman's Foundation provides funds from the proceeds of the 1684 Will of Sir William Boreman. The Drapers Company oversees these funds which acts to promote pupils' attendance and attainment specifically for those living in Lewisham and Greenwich. Lewisham's Attendance Service is responsible for the administration, accounting, and

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

distribution of these charitable funds within the borough.

The fund is a unique opportunity for Lewisham to assist parents that are unable to fulfil their responsibility to ensure school attendance because of difficulties that can be supported through financial support. The fund is small and so ring-fencing applications by way of threshold and criteria has been essential to prevent Boreman's being used for cases of general financial hardship. It is important therefore that schools understand there must be a direct link between attendance and a request for financial support.

The Drapers Company allocate £5,000 to Lewisham and the Attendance Manager attends three meetings each year to present a report on expenditure and provide case information detailing reasons for applications and impact on school attendance following funding support. Once approved, funds will be released either by:

- Reimbursement direct to schools who have provided uniform etc. from their own supplies or funds where this is a barrier to their regular school attendance or,
- Authorising payment direct to a local supplier.
- Funds are not issued directly to parents/carers.

This year then fund has been able to support 72 families. This has resulted in a total of £4969,79 allocated to families since March 2023 (per financial year) - July 2024:

Category of Application	Number of Applications Received	Number of Applications Approved	Total Expenditure
Travel	6	3	£437
Uniform Items	61	50	£4242.23
School Journey	2	1	£150
Essential Items	2	2	£140.56

4.10 **Statutory local authority attendance, enforcement and safeguarding for all Lewisham local authority-maintained schools and academies**

In addition to school attendance, the Service has responsibility for delivering other statutory duties on behalf Lewisham. These include the following areas:

- The investigation and implementation of statutory attendance enforcement
- The administration of Penalty Notices.
- Enforcing and licensing Child Employment and Performance.
- Tracking and preventing Children Missing from Education.

4.10.1 **The investigation and implementation of statutory attendance enforcement**

The attendance service will always attempt to work informally with families to address and overcome barriers to attendance either by direct support, advice or by sign posting and referring to support services within the local authority. The Attendance Service regularly work in partnership with agencies including Children's Social Care, Children with Complex Needs Service, the Lewisham Crime and Violence Reduction Panel (CVRP), Police and Youth Justice Service and Health professionals to ensure that children do not 'fall between the gaps'.

Where parents do not engage with the team or the support offered to them through the attendance process, legal intervention is used to enforce school attendance. In casework following a court warning letter, a Local Authority Final Attendance Panel (LA FAP) meeting, is convened when attendance remains below national expectations. An LA FAP is the equivalent of a pre-court meeting and is held when a pupil's attendance has not improved to satisfactory levels despite early intervention and statutory action being initiated.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

In 2023-24 the Attendance Service held less LA FAPs than the previous year. Whilst 130 requests were received, 31 meetings were subsequently cancelled. A total number of 99 meetings took place compared to 156 last year (38% less). From the 99 LA FAP meetings convened this academic year, 46.5% were requested by primary schools, 53.5% requested by secondary schools.

The outcome of the LA FAP is a six-week parent contract to allow parents to improve their child's attendance. 42% of cases placed on parent contracts improved at three weeks, with 74% of those cases closed at week six with no further legal action. 26% of cases were escalated for consideration of prosecution. 17 cases remain open and will be carried into the new academic year.

Academic year	No of cases referred to legal services	No of cases heard at court	No of fines imposed	No of Conditional Discharge	No of Parenting Orders	No of cases not submitted to legal	No of not guilty verdicts
2023-24	24	17	13	3	0	37	0
2022-23	56	20	8	3	2	20	0
2021-22	34	25	7	12	1	4	1

This shows a decrease of 57% in the number of cases submitted to legal service for prosecution in 2023-24. From the 24 cases escalated for consideration of prosecution, 71% were presented to court.

Of cases referred to court, 77% received financial penalties - an increase of 62% from 2022-23. This year cases escalated for prosecution were processed by independent solicitors who used the single justice process rather than court hearing. The increase in financial penalties appear to correlate with this change in process.

Only three conditional discharges were imposed and for the first time historically in Lewisham, a Community Order was imposed on a parent who was prosecuted under the more aggravated offence 4441A for the second time.

4.10.2 National framework for penalty notices

This year the government introduced a new national framework for penalty notices. The framework is to ensure that all schools across the country consider the use of penalty notices as part of their resources to address attendance and holidays taken during term time. There is no change for penalty notices issued to parents where children are found in public place whilst on a suspension or permanently excluded from school.

In Lewisham the responsibility for penalty notice process is undertaken by the Lewisham Council Attendance Service on behalf of all requests received from schools and partners in the borough. A new Lewisham Penalty Notice Code of Conduct has been devised after consultation with Headteachers and stakeholders will be published ready for the changes in September 2024.

The attendance service has established the new Code of Conduct and have made the changes necessary to the administration documents and we aim to implement the new process in September 2024.

4.10.3 The administration of Penalty Notices

Requests for penalty notices remained consistent with last year. A total number of 359 were issued compared to 354 last year. A difference of only one per cent. The

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

total income generated for penalty notices decreased this year by 1.4%.

Academic year	Total number penalty warning	Total number penalty notices	Poor school attendance %	Holidays in term time %	Total income from penalty notices
2023-24	102	359	49 (14%)	310 (86%)	£12,960
2022-23	55	354	24 (7%)	326 (92%)	£13,140
2021-22	118	189	43 (23%)	146 (77%)	£5,880

Schools use penalty notices predominantly to address absence that occurs when parents remove children from school for holidays in term time. Only 14% of penalty notices were used to address poor attendance. Poor attendance is seldom improved through the issuing of penalty notices given poor attendance is the symptom not the cause. Casework is much more effective to address the underlying barriers to attendance and requires support and intervention rather than financial penalty.

Penalty notices were requested by 198 primary schools and 161 secondary schools. A total number of 102 penalty warnings were issued this year, an increase of 54%. Penalty warnings should be considered alongside other resources to address poor attendance. A penalty warning must be issued before a penalty notice can be issued unless the notice is for a holiday in term time in which case no warning needs to be given. A breakdown of requests received from schools were as follows:

Name of notice	Number requested by primary school	Number requested by secondary school	Total number
Penalty Warning Letters	13	89	102
Penalty Notice-school attendance	6	43	49
Penalty Notice-holiday in term time	192	118	310
Total Penalty Notices	198	161	359

Next year the changes introduced by the new National Framework will be introduced through the Lewisham Code of Conduct. This includes replacing penalty warnings with Notice to Improve letters that schools will be able to issue directly to parents.

Penalty warnings are also used to address attendance in year 11 where it is likely any casework and prosecution would not be possible because of limitations on time before GCSE examinations in May of the same academic year.

4.10.4 Enforcing and licensing child employment and performance

Lewisham continues to reduce the timescales for performance licence applications without compromising the safeguarding element and local authority responsibility. The process in Lewisham includes a maximum seven-day response despite regulations allowing for at least 21 days' notice.

In addition, Lewisham have processed 14 BOPA applications (Body of Persons Approval) that require quick applications.

Although the amount of Performance Licences has decreased this year, the number of Chaperone Licences application has increased.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

Year	No licensing application received	No licenses processed	No licences declined	No licence exemptions	Chaperone licence renewals processed	New chaperone application processed	No DBS applications	No work permits processed
2023-24	379	377	2	19	14	46	55	21
2022-23	479	479	0	12	21	30	54	23
2021-22	414	418	0	15	24	38	56	14

4.10.5 School Attendance Orders

The Attendance Service is responsible for the implementation of school attendance orders where a child not on a school role is referred to the local authority. A School Attendance Order (SAO) gives a Local Authority (LA) power to help it ensure that children attend school. If it appears to the LA that a child of compulsory school age is not receiving a suitable education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, then they must begin procedures for issuing a School Attendance Order.

Such arrangements are set out in legislation under sections 437 to 444 of the Education Act 1996. A School Attendance Order ensures the LA fulfils its statutory duty regarding safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in accordance with Section 175 of the Education Act 2002.

The order will require the child's parents to register the child at a named school. A School Attendance Order continues in force until the child ceases to be of compulsory school age unless it is revoked by the LA, or a court directs it is to cease to be in force.

This year a school attendance order protocol was established and consulted with and agreed by Headteachers through at the Lewisham Fair Access Panel. To fulfil the attendance service statutory responsibility and the local authority safeguarding duty when a child either is reported as missing education or not being provided an education by parents who declare elective home education, school attendance orders are swiftly initiated.

This year there has been an increase in the number of orders than previous years:

Academic year	Number of SAO	Number closed	Number LA FAP Held	Number of court hearing
2023-24	44	23	11	3
2022-23	37	36	9	2

A breakdown of data evidence the following characteristics:

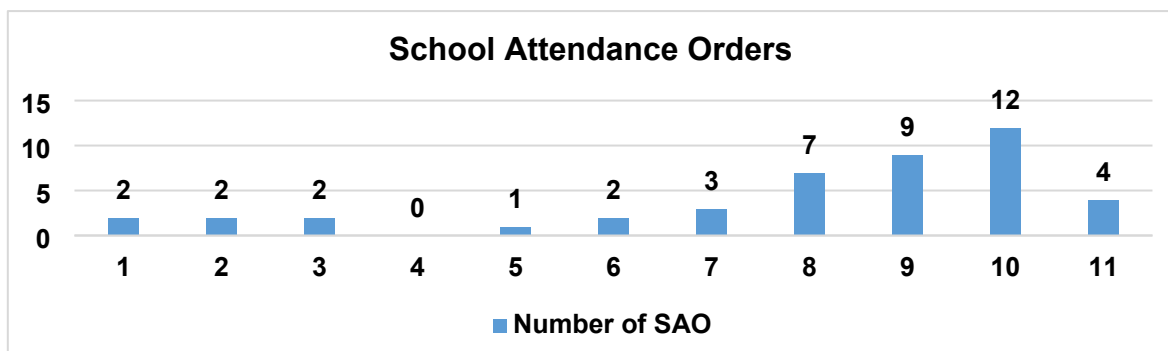
Academic year	Number of primary pupils	Number of secondary pupils	Number of EHCP pupils	Number of male pupils	Number of female pupils
2023-24	8	36	2	27	18

A breakdown of year groups are as follows:

Is this report easy to understand?

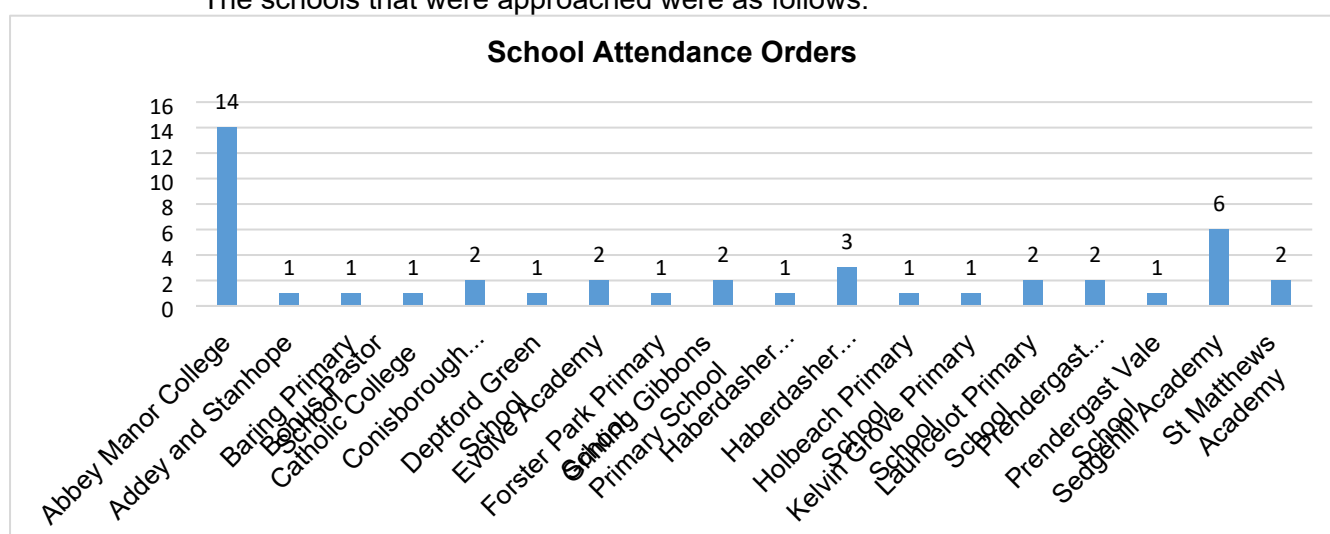
Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>



In all cases where parents made applications, the school attendance order continued until the child either started at the school parent had accepted or at the school named in the order.

The schools that were approached were as follows:



Most schools this year were requested to take between one and two pupils. Sedgehill Academy were requested to take six due to the limited availability of spaces in other schools local to the family home address. Where there has been previous challenging behaviour or suspensions applied to children and young people from previous schools, Abbey Manor College were requested to admit those pupils in the first instance for support and intervention. This equated to 14 school attendance orders naming Abbey Manor College.

It is accepted that when pupils have significant time away from mainstream schooling a return to onsite education can cause absence. To support Lewisham schools who accept pupils through the school attendance order process, the attendance service offers a fast-track approach through the statutory attendance process. This means that whole school attendance will not be unfairly impacted by pupils allocated through the school attendance order process.

4.11 Attendance Service achievements 2023-24

- Lewisham achieved above national and Inner London outcomes for attendance and lower persistent absence for primary and secondary schools this year. Lewisham special schools achieved above national and inner London outcomes for attendance, but persistent absence was slightly higher compared to both areas. Lewisham primary,

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

secondary and special schools achieved higher outcomes than inner and outer London local authorities with similar characteristics.

- Lewisham attendance service has successfully prepared for the statutory changes and responsibilities that will come in to effect from 19th of August 2024. This extensive work has been endorsed by the Lewisham DfE advisor who has met with the Attendance Manager and Head of AIP to audit and approve preparations.
- Lewisham attendance service has successfully prepared for the introduction of the new National Framework for Penalty Notices with the new Code of Conduct written, published, consulted, and approved and all associated administrative documents ready for use from 19th of August 2024.
- The number of traded Service Level Agreements purchased by schools and academies across the local authority remained high despite statutory changes offering free services to schools next year. The Lewisham traded service resulted in a generated income revenue of £200,376.
- From the 635 cases referred to the Lewisham attendance service only three per cent were escalated to prosecution. This evidence the excellent work of the attendance team who improve school attendance without the need for legal action in 97% of cases referred to the service.
- Lewisham secured its first Community Order where the parent was prosecuted twice under the more aggravated offence for failing to ensure their child's attendance (11%). This dispersal sends a clear message that school attendance is a priority in Lewisham and action will be taken where parents persist in failing in their legal duty to ensure children access education and all support and intervention available therein.
- 44 children identified not to have a school place were swiftly allocated school attendance orders securing access to education and a return to attendance at school.
- 21 from the respondents to the attendance survey, 76% of stakeholders regarded the service as 'extremely valuable' and 'valuable'.
- 72 families in Lewisham have received financial support through the Sir William Boremans charity managed by the attendance service. This has improved the attendance of children and young people in schools across Lewisham.
- Ethnicity data evidence the attendance service provides equal support to families regardless of background when applying statutory attendance processes to reduce absence from school.
- Training has been delivered to schools each term on the new statutory changes through virtual presentations and onsite delivery where requested.
- Training has been delivered to frontline services across the year on the new statutory changes through virtual presentations and at service team meetings where requested.
- The attendance website has been developed in to a one stop shop for schools and services to access local, regional, and national information, downloadable resources, templates, and other useful materials to use with staff, parents, and pupils.
- Lewisham attendance service has supported Tidemill Academy to establish the local authority attendance hub. This provides opportunity for other schools to join and share resources, best practice, and establish support to overcome common barriers and challenges.
- The Attendance Manager remains a member of the:
 - DfE action group ensuring Lewisham remains ahead of the curve for the implementation and delivery of statutory services next year.
 - Team around the School network providing advice, guidance, and a report to schools where persistent and severe absence is higher than the Lewisham average.
 - Lewisham Autism service and EBSA support group to ensure resources, advice and guidance can be used by the attendance team when referrals of poor attendance include these difficulties.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

- The Multi-Disciplinary Support Panel has been developed into a Support Board with an extension of members now including those from SEN, Housing and Health. The changes have joined practices between education and family services to ensure schools identified with high numbers of severe absence will be offered a Team around the School meeting and those who decline, but attendance does not improve, will be referred to School Improvement Partners.
- Alternative Provisions have received a presentation on changes and support available to them from the Lewisham attendance service.
- Improved collaborative working with colleagues from across local authority services has ensured holistic support for families to address difficulties leading to poor attendance. This has included joint working with legal, safeguarding, housing, family thrive, virtual school, children social care and outreach services to provide wrap around team around the child support in the most complex cases.
- Despite significant staffing challenges this year, the attendance team have provided excellent coverage to schools and helped them to achieve above national and regional outcomes for the 6th consecutive year.

4.12 **2024/25 - Attendance Service action plan**

- Ensure school attendance and persistent and severe absence across Lewisham continues to exceed national and inner London outcomes.
- Fulfil the new statutory duties as set within the DfE guidance 'Working together to Improve School Attendance' to all schools and academies across London Borough of Lewisham irrespective of status.
- Implement the core service to all schools across Lewisham in accordance with the new local authority responsibilities.
- Deliver the Targeted Support Meetings to all schools across Lewisham regardless of status or traded agreements. This includes dissemination of the Targeted Support Guide and meeting Record Template in readiness for the new year.
- Introduce the new National Framework for Penalty Notices ensuring all administrative documents replace existing resources no later than 19th of August 2024.
- Ensure all schools and academies are sharing attendance data as mandated by the DfE to enable the attendance service to oversee trends, patterns, and concerns so swift action can be taken as quickly as possible.
- Utilise Studybugs to replace the existing data workbooks to provide time capacity for the attendance team as they include more duties on top of their traded and statutory work, this change will also provide time efficiency to schools who will no longer be expected to send data that the attendance officers can access directly.
- Produce monthly attendance data return using Studybugs and share with schools through the Headteacher mailing and attendance website. Where DfE release verified data, this will be communicated through attendance network meetings and attendance newsletters.
- Increase parental engagement from the current 27% attendance at LA FAP meetings to target 60%. A review of current communication will take place in the autumn term.
- Update the Attendance Framework and Operational Handbook to ensure all new changes are included. This includes changes to the attendance codes and admission and deletion of pupils on school roll. Schools must apply a support first approach and a graduated response to case before statutory action. Examples of these have been created and will be included in the updated version.
- Update the Attendance Service 'WOW' guide to ensure all attendance team members work in a uniformed and consistent approach to service delivery and meet the standard of professionalism expected within the role.
- Replace the weekly 'Attendance Surgeries' with an advice line to ensure all schools and academies can regularly access advice and guidance on all matters related to school attendance.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

- Ensure the attendance team keep meticulous records of case work for each pupil so that characteristics, trends, and patterns can be identified, and the impact of support and intervention accurately measured.
- Establish timely DFE data submissions (Wonde) for schools and academies in preparation of targeted support termly meetings.
- Ensure service delivery maintains high quality of professionalism with stakeholder feedback exceeding 85% target.

5. Background – Children Missing Education (CME)

- 5.1 Lewisham is committed to ensure that its CME protocol is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose in identifying and dealing with its residents who are Children Missing Education.

CME can be vulnerable and at greater risk of significant harm. The Children Act 2004 places a duty on all agencies to work together to promote the welfare of children and to share information appropriately in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Lewisham adopts the London Good Practice Guidance for Safeguarding Children Missing from School which states that the principles should be adopted by all agencies, responsible for locating children who go missing from school. These principles include:

- The safety of the child is paramount.
- Parents are the custodians of the welfare and well-being of their children when they are not in school.
- The primary objective is for local authority and other agencies to work together to locate and return the child to a safe environment.
- Child protection procedures are triggered where there are any concerns that a child may be at risk of harm or suffering harm.
- Agency actions will link where appropriate with actions required under related protocols, such as the London Child Protection Procedures.
- Services will be put in place to ensure that when a child is found s/he receives the necessary ongoing support to enable him/her to live in a stable, safe environment and attend school.

- 5.2 During the **inspection of Lewisham local authority children’s services (December 2023)** CME was described as:

“Staff remain tenacious and proactive in tracking and following up on reported cases of children missing education. Leaders use a variety of information sources to track these children and, as a result, most are located.”

- 5.3 **Children Missing Out of Education:** In October 2023 the attendance service introduced a new Children Missing Education and Children Missing Out on Education Protocol to Lewisham. This brought together the importance of schools and local authority services identifying when children were either not on a school roll or were placed on reduced timetables for significant periods of time resulting in them not receiving their full entitlement of 25 hours education each week.

Since the introduction of the protocol a number of children and young people were identified by education services as not receiving their full education entitlement in primary and secondary schools across Lewisham.

- 5.4 **Guidance on reduced education plans:** A multi-disciplinary action group met in January 2024 to discuss the wider concerns of the use of reduced timetables and other reasons used by schools to prevent children and young people attending school full time. The action group

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

established a number of scenarios reported and using the information collated at the meeting, the attendance service wrote and introduced the Guidance to Schools on the Use of Reduced Education Plans (part-time and reduced timetables) The guidance provides specific guidance to schools when the use of reduced education is appropriate and when it is not. To ensure the use of reduced education is monitored, schools are requested to submit the total number of reduced education plans to the attendance service each term.

As the protocol was introduced in May 2024, the first submission of data from schools is expected in the autumn term 2024. Both the Children Missing Education and Missing Out on Education and the Guidance to Schools on Reduced Education Plans have been consulted with schools.

5.5 **Border Force:** The attendance service network meetings also host opportunity to update schools on changes to local and national guidance where children are missing education. This year to provide more support for the local authority enquiries for children, particularly those who travel abroad with little or no information provided to schools about their destination or date of return. A memorandum of understanding has been arranged with Border Force to allow checks to establish where children and young people may have travelled to ensure their safety and their return.

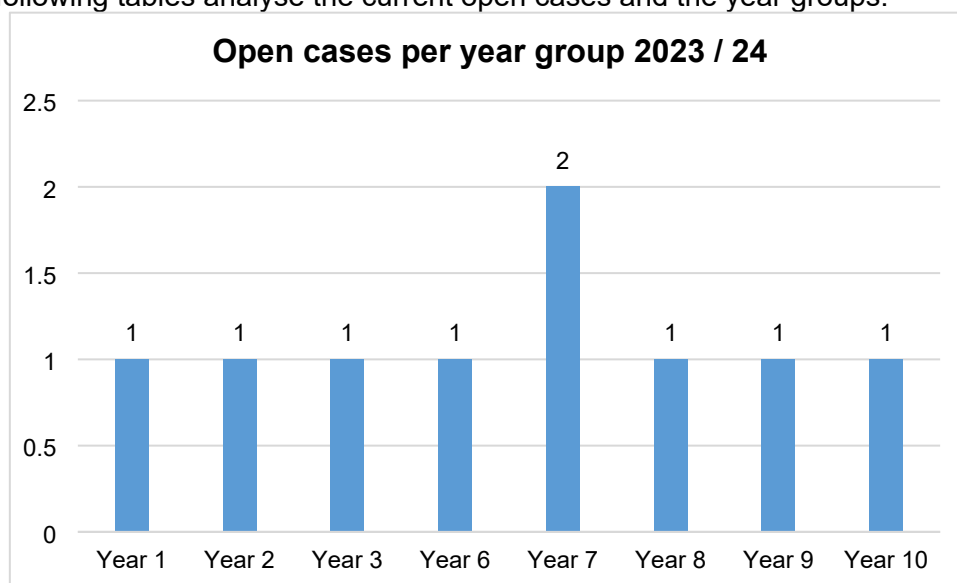
5.6 **Analysis of Lewisham CME referrals 2022/23**

Data is captured and recorded by the CME Officer and the following analysis is taken from the whole academic year August 2023 to end of July 2024 and comparable data is also included from the previous academic year.

There has been a total of **268** cases referred and **259** cases closed this academic year. This leaves **nine** cases remaining open at the beginning of August 2024.

The CME Service works closely with the Admissions Service to signpost referrals before they become CME. The few cases currently open are new to Lewisham's Attendance and Admissions Services and are awaiting placement.

The following tables analyse the current open cases and the year groups.



5.7 **Closed cases**

Of the 259 cases that the Attendance Service closed this year:

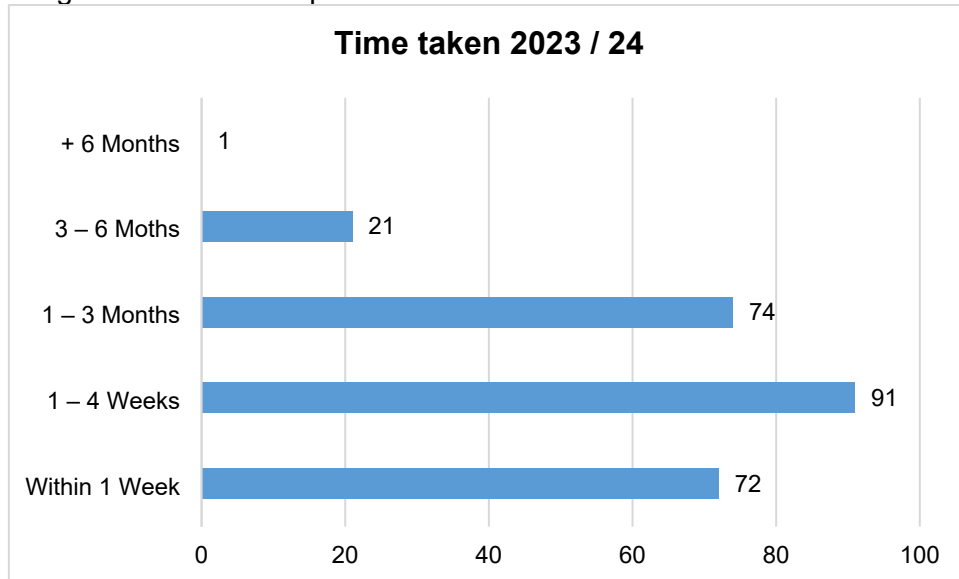
Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

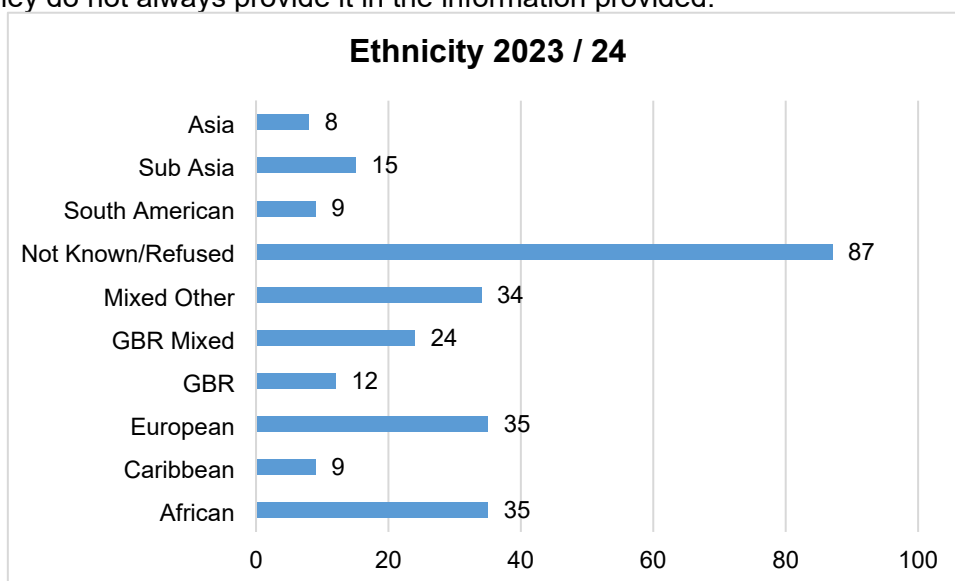
- 72 (28 per cent) were closed within one week and a slight increase from the previous year.
- A further 91 (35 per cent) were closed within a week to one month. Six per cent lower than last year.
- 74 (28.6 per cent) were closed within one month to three months and similar to last year.
- 21 (eight per cent) were closed within three to six months which presents and increase of five per cent .
- One (0.4 per cent) was closed after six months. The aim is zero.

The lack of consistency and cooperation from the National Boarder Force (NBF) continues to be an issue. Lewisham has recently been able to submit a signed memorandum of understanding which means the possible reinstatement of checks in the new academic year.



5.8 Referrals by ethnicity

The following table shows the 268 referrals by ethnicity. This shows that 32 per cent of referrals ethnicity is unknown / refused; with African and European backgrounds referrals are equal. The biggest increase is from mixed other. Schools are asked for the ethnicity data but they do not always provide it in the information provided.



5.9 Referrals by gender

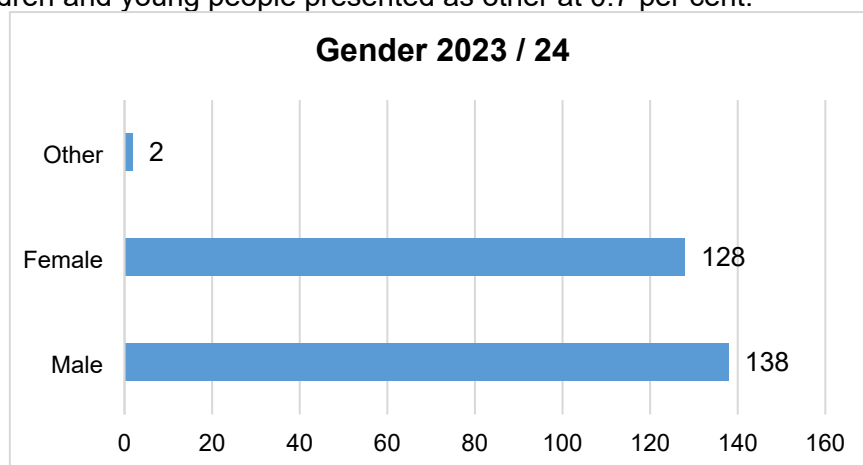
Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

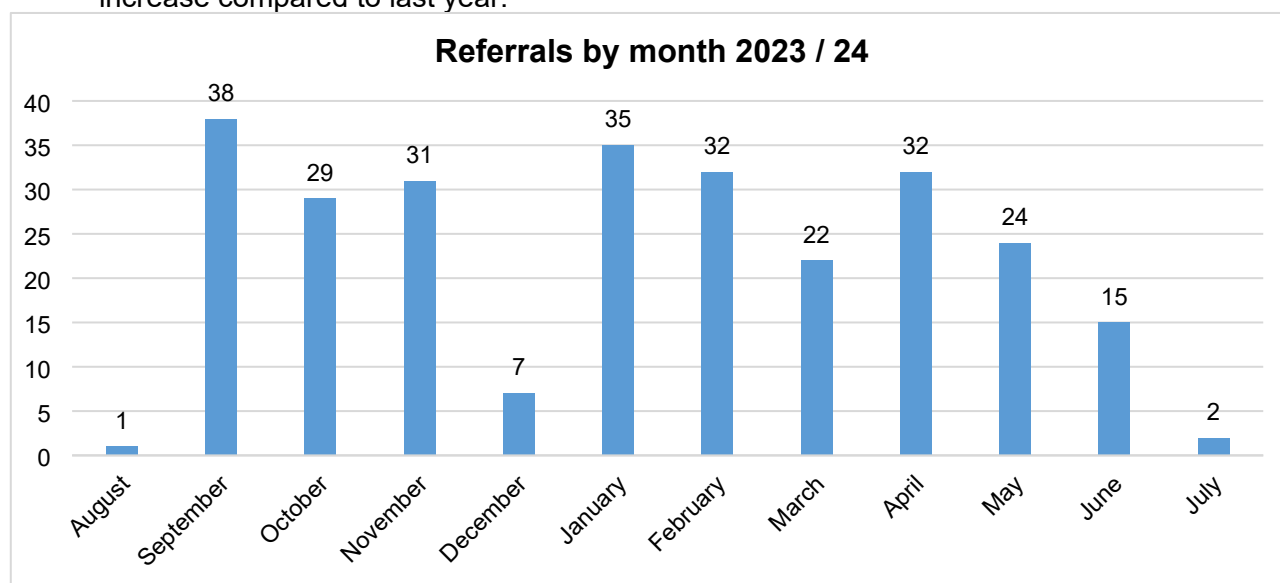
The 2023/24 male / female ratio is:

- Males at 138 (51.5 per cent). This shows a decline of 5.5 per cent from last year.
- Females at 128 (47.8 per cent). This shows an increase of 3.8 per cent from last year.
- Two children and young people presented as other at 0.7 per cent.



5.10 Referrals by month

The CME Service had **42** per cent of the referrals between in the autumn term. This is a slight decrease on the previous year at 48 per cent. January, February and April see an increase compared to last year.



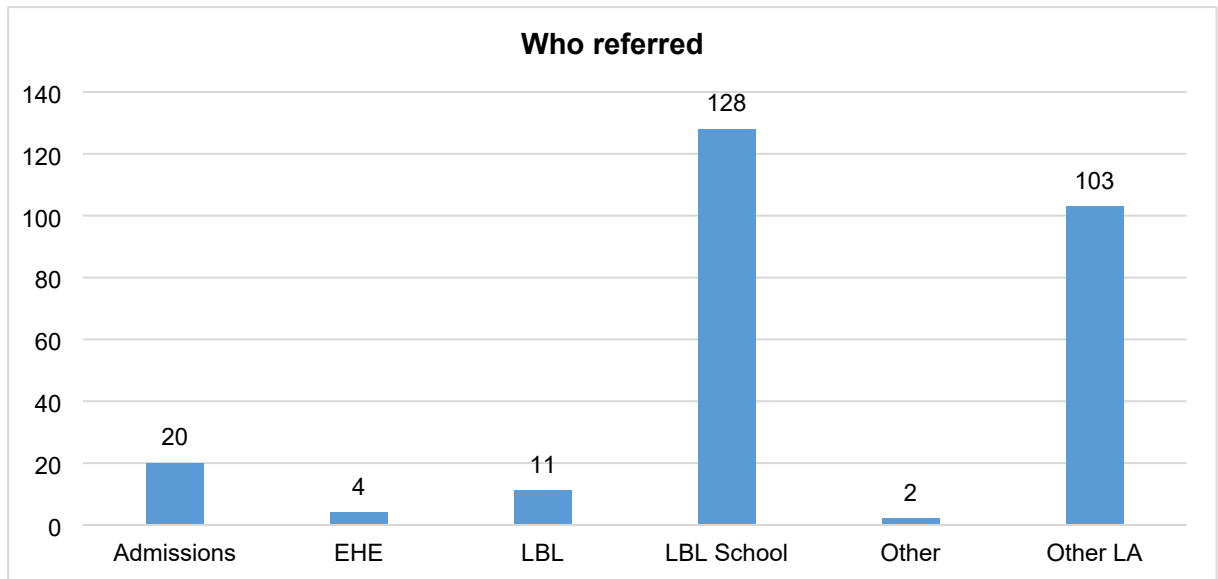
5.11 Who is referring?

The data shows the percentages of referrals from various agencies. The highest referrer is Lewisham Council and this includes Lewisham schools, the Admissions Service and other Lewisham departments. In total they are responsible for **61** per cent of all referrals. Other local authorities were the second highest referrer this year with **38** per cent. Lewisham has no referrals from CSC, this is due to the role of Assistant Headteacher within the Virtual School having good links with the Attendance and Admissions Services.

Is this report easy to understand?

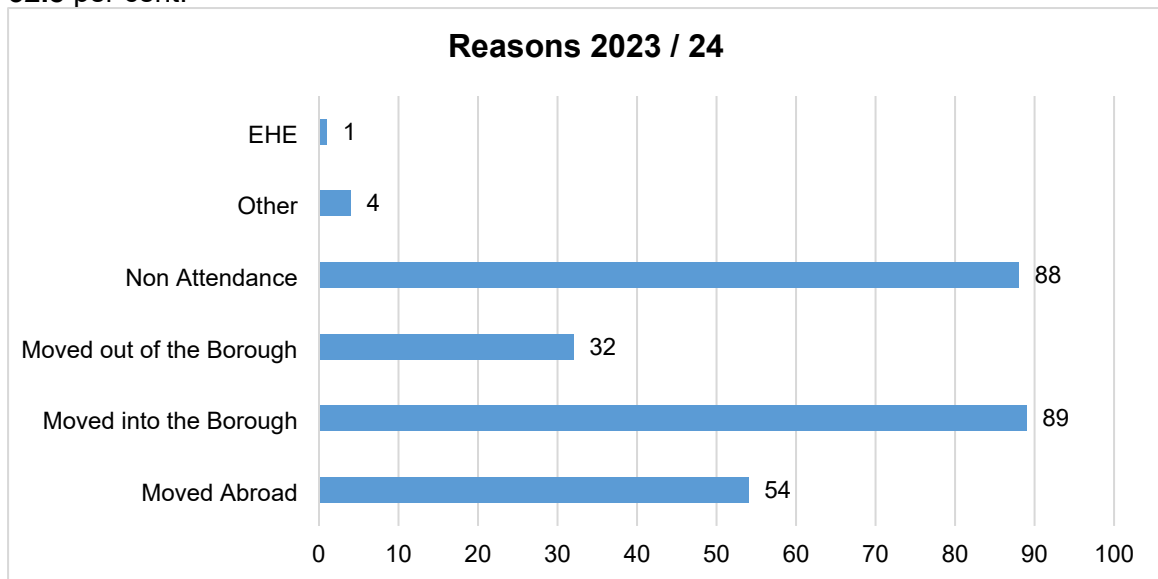
Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>



5.12 Reasons for referral

The data shows that the highest reason for a referral this year was due to **moved into borough** with **33** per cent but close behind and the highest increase is **non-attendance** at **32.8** per cent.



5.13 Reasons for closure

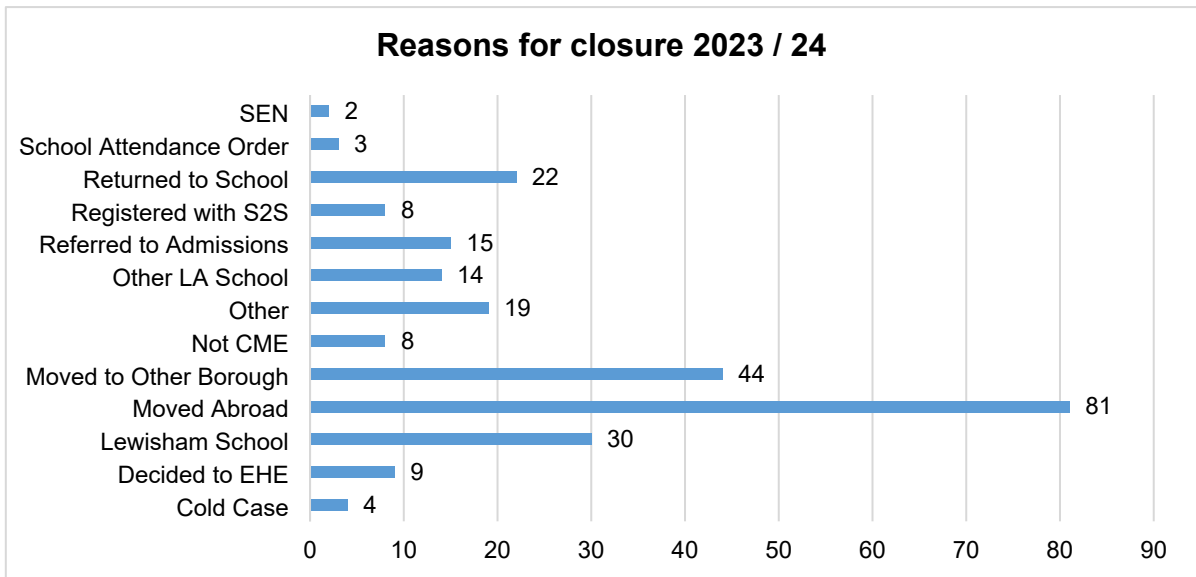
The data highlights the reasons for the 259 cases being closed. The highest reason confirmed is that the child or young person had moved abroad, although confirming this information is more difficult without boarder checks. The second highest was children and young people who moved to a new borough. This was via confirmation from schools abroad or another local authority. 48 per cent of the cases fell into this category. This is a two per cent increase from 2022/23.

There is again a slight increase in the number of parents who decided to electively home educate.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>



5.14 Referrals by year group

Of the **268** cases referred in 2023/24 there are some fluctuations in the year groups and in particular increases referrals for Year 8, 9 and 11. Historically Lewisham saw a higher numbers in Year 7 with families not being happy about their allocated school. Due to work undertaken by the Admissions Team, this no longer seems to be the case.



5.15 Summary of findings

One of the most significant findings in 2023/24 is that **65** per cent of referred cases are due to mobility. That is **175** referrals received as a family declaring that they were relocating.

The CME Service continues to reduce the time of closing cases within a three-month period, it is now at **99** per cent. The rise in “not known / refused” ethnicity is a concern which will need to be further investigated.

The Service has provided training to schools on the at Attendance Network meetings in 2023/24 and this will be continued into 2024/25.

Other inter-agency referrals have reduced as this is due to them being able to make contact with a named CME Officer who is able to answer questions quickly and effectively.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

The Service continues with the positive relationship with Lewisham Homes and the Virtual School (CP/CiN /LAC) that has helped the referrer understand the CME process.

5.16 **CME priorities for 2023/24**

- Continue utilising the data provided by StudyBugs^[1] so a deregistration is rarely missed and all children and young people taken off a school role have a destination confirmed
- Work to reduce the number of “not known / refused” ethnicity.
- Refinement of the Children Missing Education and off-rolling guidance for schools to be presented at the joint Secondary and Primary Network Meeting.
- Provision of training to schools who are unable to make the distinction between CME and non-attendance. Training is available three times a year via the Lewisham Safeguarding Partnership.
- Continue work to enhance casework to meet the target of closing 50 per cent of referrals within one month and 100 per cent of cases being closed within three months.
- To continue cross borough working that is established with neighbouring boroughs to help close CME cases quicker when only “soft” intelligence is available.
- Monitor the number of children missing out on education by recording the submission by schools of children and young people on reduced education plans across Lewisham (the attendance, CME and child employment admin officer is managing this)
- Monitor the number of children missing education cases that require school attendance orders to be initiated.

6. **Financial implications**

- 6.1 This is an information only report, as such there are no financial implications arising from this report.

7. **Legal implications**

- 7.1 The latest guidance: Working together to improve school attendance is to help schools, academy trusts, governing bodies and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance, including roles and responsibilities, August 2024⁴.

8. **Equalities implications**

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities are required to have due regard to equality impacts when making decisions in the exercise of their functions (Public Sector Equality Duty, PSED). In particular, public authorities are required to have due regard to the need to:
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The Equality Act 2010 identifies the following as protected characteristics for the purpose of the PSED:

- age
- disability

^[1] Studybugs helps local authorities coordinate across all parties – school attendance team, case workers, schools, trusts, parents, even neighbouring LAs – to take early, targeted action to tackle the underlying causes of poor attendance.

⁴ [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/90444/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance.pdf)

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race (including ethnicity)
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

9. Climate change and environmental implications

9.1 There are no climate change and environmental implications.

10. Health and wellbeing implications

10.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications.

11. Report author(s) and contact

11.1 Ruth Griffiths, Head of Access, Inclusion and Participation (ruth.griffiths@lewisham.gov.uk)
Emma Stubbington, Attendance Manager (emma.stubbington@lewisham.gov.uk)

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>