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## FOREWORD

As Chair of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I welcome the Task Group's findings on Secondary School Attendance.

This is an issue of great importance to the Borough. Improved attendance is a key requirement for driving up standards in our secondary schools. As this report shows, there is a clear link between attendance and attainment. Children who are absent from school do not feel the benefit of the considerable skill and effort that teachers put into their lessons.

Whilst primary responsibility for children's attendance must rest with parents, schools and the Local Authority also have a vital role to play. The Council and schools clearly work hard to try to ensure good attendance by pupils. However, this report highlights the main areas where greater focus is needed.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Task Group members and their advisors for their hard work. They have succeeded in producing what deserves to be an influential piece of Scrutiny.

*Councillor Suzette Nicholson*  
*Chair of the Education and Children's Services O&S Committee*





## INTRODUCTION

It gives me very great pleasure to introduce this report, which represents the findings and recommendations of what has proved a very valuable Scrutiny review. Improving Secondary School Attendance is a priority for the organisation and I am delighted that Scrutiny has been able to assist by undertaking this investigation.

This review has only been possible due to the very close support that the Task Group has received from both Warren Wilkinson and particularly from Dawn Stevens. They have given us considerable amounts of their time and expertise and I would like to thank them both for their assistance. I would also like to express my gratitude to Jean Gunning from the DfES for taking the time to meet with the Task Group.

May I also thank the schools and governors who returned questionnaires, as well as the parents who attended the focus group and who answered telephone interviews. This information has formed the backbone of the report and has been invaluable in assessing the topic.

Finally, I would like to place on record the gratitude of the Task Group to Alastair Round of Democratic Services. His contributions to discussion in the task group were gratefully appreciated and his perseverance and commitment has ensured a report that deserves the attention of all stakeholders in our services to the children of the Borough.

*Cllr Bob King*  
*Chair of the Secondary School Attendance Scrutiny Task Group*





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Task Group's terms of reference included encouraging a borough debate on attendance, understanding the main reasons for absence, drawing together examples of best practice and encouraging a debate on the distinction between unauthorised absence and truancy. The Task Group gathered information from key officers, secondary schools, secondary governors and parents. As a result of this work and the evidence it has gathered and heard, the Task Group came to the following findings and recommendations:

### INTRODUCTION

2. Legal responsibility for attendance rests with parents. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) is charged with improving attendance and has a number of powers at its disposal to achieve this. The Task Group heard that secondary attendance in the Borough is significantly worse than primary school attendance and that it was therefore a priority for the Council.
3. The Task Group heard that there was a clear link between attendance and attainment and that there was a consensus amongst nearly all secondary schools that even two weeks absence could have a negative effect on a child's education.
4. The report lists schools' responses on the reasons for absence (paragraph 35-41). One of these was for medical appointments. The Task Group recommends that posters be placed in doctors' and dentists' surgeries asking parents to make routine medical appointments outside of school hours (**Recommendations 1 – page 16**).
5. The report also lists schools' responses to the actions they are taking to improve attendance (paragraph 42-50). The Task Group recommends placing an article in Arcadia on the importance of school attendance and urging any schools not already doing so to make use of their newsletters to highlight the importance of attendance. (**Recommendations 2 and 3 – page 18**).



## THE RELATIONSHIP WITH NEIGHBOURING BOROUGHES

6. The Task Group heard that the absence of an agreed protocol with the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham had led to difficulties in progressing the cases of pupils who lived in that borough but were educated in Richmond upon Thames and vice-versa. The Task Group recommends that negotiations on establishing such a protocol occur, with progress to be reported back to the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee by its meeting on 20 November 2007. **(Recommendation 4 – page 19).**
7. The Task Group also heard that Richmond upon Thames received no deprivation grant funding, despite educating children who lived in boroughs that did. The Task Group felt this was unfair and recommended that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education highlight this inequity to the relevant bodies and political representatives **(Recommendation 5 – page 19).**

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EWS AND SCHOOLS

8. The views of schools on their relationship with the EWS and Local Authority generally are reported (paragraph 55-64). The Task Group heard that schools did not always consult the EWS on their attendance policies and a majority of school governors were not sure whether this had taken place. The Task Group recommends that schools consult the EWS before making any changes to their attendance policies and that they inform their governors of the EWS' comments. **(Recommendation 6 – page 21).**
9. Orleans Park was unhappy with the amount of information it received on attendance best practice from the EWS. The Task Group therefore recommends that the EWS contact Orleans Park to ascertain what further attendance best practice information it requires. **(Recommendation 7 – page 21).**



## GOVERNOR TRAINING

10. The Task Group recommends that all governors take up the attendance training offered by the EWS. **(Recommendation 8 – page 22).**

## COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS

11. The Task Group found that there was a need to strengthen cooperation between schools. It recommends that a termly newsletter is produced by EWS outlining successful attendance initiatives and is sent to schools and governors. It also recommends that termly meetings, arranged by the EWS, are held between secondary staff with responsibility for attendance and the EWS to share best practice information. **(Recommendations 9 & 10 – page 23).**

## TERM TIME HOLIDAYS

12. The Task Group found that there were significant differences in the way different secondary schools decided whether to authorise term time holidays. The Task Group feels that this inconsistency sends out mixed messages and partly undermines the Council's attempts to discourage term time holidays. It recommends that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education report back to the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee by 20 November 2007 with clear attendance guidance that includes a strategy for increasing consistency across secondary schools in authorising term time holidays **(Recommendation 11 – page 28).**

## STUDY LEAVE

The Group heard that new DfES guidance on how study leave is recorded could increase absence figures. The Group was also told that some secondary schools



granted study leave for mock examinations. It felt that this had an unnecessarily disruptive impact on a pupil's overall attendance and education. It therefore recommends that the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education issue clear guidance to schools that study leave should only be granted for GCSE examinations in the summer term and not for mock examinations. (**Recommendation 12 – page 30**).



## **PART I – ROLE AND FUNCTION OF THE TASK GROUP**

### **BACKGROUND TO THE TASK GROUP**

13. The Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee chose School Attendance as one of its priorities for the 2006/2007 Municipal Year at its meeting on 26 September 2006, and subsequently set up the School Attendance Scrutiny Task Group at its meeting on 30 October 2006. On 12 December 2006, at its third meeting, the Group agreed to focus solely on Secondary School Attendance and established the following terms of reference:
- i) To encourage a Borough debate amongst parents, teachers and governors about the impact of non-attendance.
  - ii) To understand the main reasons for absence, particularly unauthorised absence in secondary schools.
  - iii) To draw together some examples of national and local best practice in tackling low school attendance in secondary schools.
  - iv) To encourage debate regarding the distinction between truancy and unauthorised absence.
14. The Task Group agreed at later meetings to stress the link between attendance and attainment and to establish what all stakeholders were currently doing to reduce absence.
15. Although discovering the main reasons for absence was part of the Group's remit, this did not include an in-depth study of any sociological reasons for non-attendance at school.



## TASK GROUP MEMBERSHIP



Cllr Bob King –  
Task Group  
Chair



Cllr Geoff  
Acton



Mark Williams  
(Co-opted  
Member)

## METHODOLOGY

16. The Task Group initially agreed at its meeting on 12 December 2006 to undertake a survey of secondary governors and a focus group of parents, which would examine their knowledge of attendance issues and their attitudes towards attendance. On the 12 February 2007, it also agreed to send a questionnaire to all secondary schools in the Borough, which would examine their attitudes towards attendance and their views on the actions being taken to improve attendance. Due to difficulties experienced with the parents' focus group, the Chair of the Task Group decided in April 2007 that direct telephone interviews with parents should be undertaken.
17. The Task Group held a series of meetings with Dawn Stevens, Senior Education Welfare Officer, and Warren Wilkinson, Assistant Chief Inspector School Standards. The Group held a single meeting with Jean Gunning, Regional Advisor for Behaviour and Attendance from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) who has responsibility for overseeing Richmond's attendance. The Task Group received two submissions from Professor Robinson, a governor at Grey Court School. Office-based research was also undertaken.

## Governors' Questionnaire

18. The format of the questionnaire (appendix A) was agreed at the Group's meeting on 12 February 2007 and was sent by post to all secondary governors in March 2007. The Group received 73 completed questionnaires from the 143 secondary governors, a 51% response rate. However, the number of responses varied



between schools, with 13 responses received from Grey Court but only 3 received from Teddington. All governors were asked to state on their questionnaire which school they served but 13 responses were received where the school was not given.

## **Parents' Focus Group**

19. It was agreed at the meeting on 12 February 2007 that the focus group would recruit parents with children at Hampton Community College (HCC), Shene and Whitton schools. These schools were chosen as Whitton and Shene have been targeted for low attendance whilst HCC had recently seen an improvement in its attendance that led to it being removed from the targeted list in December 2006. The topic guide (appendix B) for discussion at the focus group was also approved at this meeting.
20. Difficulties were experienced in recruiting parents for the focus group and when it was held on 26 March 2007, only four parents attended. Two parents had children at HCC and the other two parents had children at Whitton School. There were no attendees with children at Shene School.

## **Parents' Telephone Questionnaire**

21. As a result of the problems experienced with the focus group, the Chair of the Task Group decided in April 2007 that direct telephone interviews would be undertaken with parents who had children at the three schools and these were conducted later that month. The same questions as approved for the focus group were used, although they were adapted into a questionnaire format (appendix C). There were twelve parents interviewed: three had children at Shene; four had children at HCC; and five had children at Whitton. The children of those interviewed had a mixture of attendance levels and these were not recorded.
22. The sample of parents was small and these interviews are not intended to be representative of parents whose children are educated in the Borough, or even parents whose children attend these three schools. The purpose of the interviews was to supplement the focus group and to elicit some views from parents about attendance.



## **Schools' Questionnaire**

23. The format of the questionnaire to secondary schools was agreed by Task Group members in February 2007 (appendix D) and was sent out by e-mail to schools in March 2007. Responses were received from six secondary schools.





## PART II – FINDINGS

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Responsibility for Attendance**

24. Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, parents are responsible for ensuring that children of compulsory school age receive full-time education. Parents are allowed to make arrangements for their children to receive education outside of school but this has to be efficient and suitable. If a child who is registered on a school roll fails to attend regularly at school then his or her parents are guilty of an offence.<sup>1</sup> Since March 2001,<sup>2</sup> parents commit a more serious offence if they know their child is not attending school regularly and fail, without reasonable justification, to make them attend.
25. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) is charged with improving attendance in the Borough's schools. It works closely with schools, pupils and parents by: providing attendance training to schools and governors; offering support and guidance to schools, parents and pupils; monitoring schools' overall attendance and that of pupils targeted for low attendance; and handling referrals by schools of pupils whose attendance is below 80%.
26. The Education Welfare Service have the following compulsory measures at their disposal: they can apply for an Education Supervision Order, which makes the Local Authority responsible for supervising a child and his or her parents; since April 2007, the Education Welfare Service has been able to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (£50, rising to £100 if not paid within 28 days) to parents for unauthorised absence from school under certain agreed criteria; and the EWS has the discretion to prosecute parents, a step which is only taken after extensive attempts have been made at other solutions and where it is felt prosecution may lead to an improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996

<sup>2</sup> Section 444 (1A) of the Education Act 1996 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Court Service Act 2000.



27. Schools are responsible for handling day-to-day contact with parents and pupils and implementing actions to try and tackle non-attendance. Head teachers have responsibility for determining whether a pupil's absence is authorised or unauthorised, although the Department for Education and Skills and the Borough's Education Welfare Service provide guidance on this.

### **The Divide Between Primary and Secondary Attendance in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames**

28. Richmond upon Thames came 28<sup>th</sup> out of the 32 London boroughs for secondary school attendance and was 17<sup>th</sup> out of the 19 Outer London boroughs during the 2005-2006 school year. Total absence in the Borough's secondary schools during 2005-2006 was 8.4%. Nationally, Richmond upon Thames is 117<sup>th</sup> out of 150 authorities.
29. The level of attendance in secondary schools is worrying, especially as it is in sharp contrast to that in primary schools. Richmond upon Thames had the best primary school attendance in London and the eleventh best nationally in 2005-2006. For this reason, the Task Group decided to focus the review on secondary school attendance.

### **Secondary School Attendance is a Priority for the Organisation**

30. Under the Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) for 2007/2008, Richmond upon Thames has been set a target for absence of 7% or below. The Council would stand to gain £27,101.90 from a Government grant if it meets that target in full. The Council would receive a percentage of that funding for absence levels up to 7.16%; this is the highest threshold for receiving any grant and would attract funding worth 60% of the overall amount, which is £16,261.14. The attendance figures for 2005/2006 were 1.4% above the LPSA target, which is quite a large gap to close.
31. The need to improve school attendance is highlighted by the Community Plan; a key aim outlined on page 29 is to "improve school attendance to maximise achievement for targeted children" and "reducing the percentage of half days missed by all children" is set as a target for the 2007/2008 financial year. Promoting school attendance is one of the actions highlighted for 2007 under



priority 2 of the Council's Corporate Plan. Furthermore, improving School Attendance is key priority 6 of the Borough's Children and Young People's Plan.

## **The Link Between Attendance and Attainment**

32. The link between attendance and attainment is clear. A comparison of national attendance and attainment for 2003-2004 showed that a significant fall in a school's overall attainment results from only a marginal decrease in overall attendance. The percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\*-C dropped from 75% to 35% when set against a decrease in a school's total attendance of just 3.5%.<sup>3</sup> Separate research undertaken by the Youth Cohort Study 2002 showed that only 13% of respondents who were persistent truants had achieved five or more GCSEs at grade A\*-C compared to 60% of non-truants.
33. With such a clear link between attendance and attainment, improving attendance is a key requirement for improving secondary school performance (the major focus of priority 2 in the Corporate Plan). Quite simply, children will not be able to benefit from the work being undertaken in schools to improve performance if they are not present.
34. There was strong feeling amongst the secondary schools that even two weeks absence could have a significant negative impact on a pupil's attainment. Hampton Community College (HCC), Orlean's Park, Teddington and Waldegrave stated that the work missed in two weeks was very difficult to make up and that the affect on attainment could be very negative. Whitton School stated that in general, two weeks absence could have a grievous affect on a child's attainment, although this depended on the child's individual circumstances. Shene School had a slightly different view, however. It felt that whilst all absences had the potential to be harmful, some could be "educational experiences in themselves" and could "bring 'broken' families together which could make unhappy children, happier, more content and more focussed on their school work."

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<sup>3</sup> Page 9 of the Primary National Strategy, Attendance and Punctuality.



## **Reasons for Absence**

35. Secondary schools were asked what they felt were the main reasons for absence from school. Not surprisingly, HCC, Orlean's Park, Teddington and Waldegrave all gave illness as a major reason for absence. Orleans Park stated that it tried to prioritise children who have a regular pattern of absence and give illness as a reason, because experience showed that they were not ill but had other reasons for non-attendance. Shene felt that there were increasing numbers of known truants going on long term absences for what it felt were "spurious medical reasons" given by medical professionals. It stated that it was trying to tackle this with two days EWS support per week. Teddington school stated that it received some letters explaining absence that it did not necessarily believe but did not have the resources to investigate.
36. HCC and Teddington both mentioned medical appointments as a main cause of absence. HCC stated that it was urging parents to make appointments outside of college time. The Task Group feels that all schools should ask parents to make routine and non-urgent medical appointments outside of school time.
37. Both Whitton and Shene mentioned parentally condoned absence as major reasons for absence. Shene stated that this was often for matters of family convenience and gave examples such as "buying shoes" or "slept at dads last night" as common reasons. Whitton stated that children's domestic responsibilities were sometimes "overtly paramount". Whitton and Shene also both cited a lack of regard amongst families for the value of education. Shene stated that these were deep-rooted sociological issues, which it tried to tackle by reinforcing the value of education to parents and by involving the EWS.
38. Whitton School stated that there was a lack of choice for some children beginning GCSEs. It felt that more vocational options were needed to keep children engaged with education.
39. Shene mentioned that many pupils had a lengthy travel time, which led to tiredness and disaffection. It stated it was trying to resolve this by seeking support for a school bus system. Shene also stated that parental failure to give reasons for their children's absence meant that it suffered high figures for unauthorised absence. It stated that the school tried to phone parents who had not provided reasons but that phone numbers changed quickly in many families and the



schools often did not have the right one. Both Teddington and Whitton stated that families and students knew the system well and exploited loopholes.

40. HCC also mentioned bereavement as a reason for absence. Orleans Park stated that it prioritised persistent lateness as it showed a poor attitude to school and often led to attendance problems later. Waldegrave mentioned term time holidays as a major cause of absence.
41. The Task Group heard evidence from Jean Gunning, Richmond's DfES advisor, that schools in the Borough were slow to analyse statistical absence information. She highlighted this as an important area for improvement.

***Recommendation 1:*** *That posters are displayed in doctors' and dentists' surgeries asking parents to make routine medical appointments outside of school hours.*

### **Actions taken to improve attendance**

42. The Borough's secondary schools have all taken measures to improve attendance. Set out below are the actions and initiatives that schools and the Education Welfare Service have highlighted to the Task Group. This is not intended as an exhaustive list.
43. All secondary schools have attendance policies, which have been approved by their governing bodies. All the schools have attendance officers, although some schools give this post other responsibility, such as for examinations. All the schools are encouraged to call parents on the first day of a pupil's absence, if it has not been authorised in advance. This is recognised attendance best practice. Orleans Park, Shene School and Teddington all made direct reference to this in their responses to the questionnaire, although Orleans Park stated that they targeted first day calling at pupils highlighted by the Head of Year. Shene School felt that first day calling prevented new children from "joining the pack" of truants but did not have much affect on long-term absentees. HCC also told the Task Group that it practices first day calling.



44. Schools are also encouraged to adopt a 'tiered letter system', whereby a letter is sent to parents when a child's attendance falls below 90%; a second letter is sent if the child's attendance reaches 85-87%; and a third letter is sent where a child's attendance falls below 82%, stating that absence will no longer be authorised. Orleans Park, HCC, Shene, Teddington and Waldegrave all stated that they used this system in their responses.
45. A Borough-wide attendance awareness week was held in February 2007, part of which involved a competition for pupils to design posters promoting attendance in school. HCC and Shene made direct reference to this in their questionnaire. The Education Welfare Service has also produced a PowerPoint presentation that highlights the impact of non-attendance. HCC and Shene both make reference to delivering the presentations in assemblies and HCC has uploaded the PowerPoint slides onto its website.
46. Hampton Community College, Shene and Whitton all reported involving governors in their efforts to improve attendance. Shene stated that they had included governors in their Fast Track to Prosecution panels; HCC reported the appointment of a trained governor with responsibility for attendance who would be a member of their fast track panel meetings; Whitton School reported setting up a panel, which includes governors, to decide whether to authorise absence for term-time holidays.
47. The use of reward schemes for excellent and improving attendance is recognised best practice. Orleans Park, Shene, Teddington, Waldegrave and Whitton all reported having some form of reward schemes for good and improving attendance, mostly involving certificates. Shene reported holding reward excursions for good attendance, Whitton stated that they held 100% attendance trips for Years 7 & 8 as well as holding a Year 7 attendance race for new entrants and holding a termly 100% attendance celebration day. Teddington stated that it held a termly draw for gift vouchers for those with good attendance. HCC also uses reward schemes; Years 7 and 8 celebrate attendance in weekly assemblies, with names and data placed on year notice boards. HCC also stated that 100% attendees from all year groups are photographed, letters are sent home to parents and the names and photos are featured in the college newsletter.
48. Orleans Park, HCC and Shene all reported displaying attendance figures on notice boards. HCC, Orleans Park and Teddington all stated that they regularly



sent attendance statistics home to parents. Teddington stated that it also sent praise postcards home to the parents of good attendees.

49. HCC and Waldegrave both mentioned liaising with external agencies on attendance. HCC, Orleans Park and Waldegrave all mentioned involving heads of year in attendance. Shene and Waldegrave stated that they held meetings with parents of low attendees. Teddington stated that it had four non-teaching pastoral managers who offered support to pupils on a range of issues, one of which was attendance. Waldegrave stated that it has a strict policy on truancy and utilises EWO support for children with attendance below 90%.
50. Whitton School reported benchmarking best practice from two other schools; appointing a Senior Administrative Assistant to lead on attendance; undertaking reviews of the roles of form tutors and the attendance officer; publicising a zero tolerance policy on term time holidays; publicising the new fixed penalty notices; improving ICT systems for attendance and punctuality; holding a termly meeting with parents for them to discuss attendance concerns and holding spot checks to reduce internal truancy during the school day.

**Recommendation 2:** *That an article on the importance of school attendance is placed in Arcadia.*

**Recommendation 3:** *That where not already done, schools use their newsletters to highlight the importance of attendance on a regular basis.*

## A. The Relationship with Neighbouring Boroughs

51. Forty per cent of pupils attending the Borough's secondary schools live outside Richmond upon Thames. These pupils have often attended primary schools outside the Borough. Responsibility for the attendance of these pupils lies with the educating authority, rather than the authority of residence. However, it is still extremely important that both authorities work together to progress cases and share information. The DfES advice entitled "Effective Attendance Practice at the Local Authority Level" calls for "good processes" to be in place between the Local Authorities concerned to ensure that such children are effectively managed.



52. The Task Group heard evidence from the Education Welfare Service (EWS) that although a protocol had been agreed with the London Borough of Wandsworth, and was in the process of being agreed with the London Borough of Hounslow, there are no agreed procedures with the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. These protocols were based on the pan-London agreement, which sets a format for relationships between London Boroughs on attendance. The Education Welfare Service told the Task Group that this had led to difficulties in progressing the cases of those cross-Borough pupils.
53. Shene School also stated in their questionnaire that the most serious hurdle to overcoming the high number of children with cultural and demographic issues from other boroughs was engaging effectively with other local authorities.
54. The Task Group feels it is extremely important that there are agreed procedures in place with the resident authority of any out of borough pupil referred to the EWS. The absence of such procedures has the potential to cause unnecessary uncertainty and delay in the handling of a case, which could have a negative impact on its outcome.
55. The Task Group is also concerned that, despite the fact that a significant number of the Borough's pupils live in Boroughs that receive Government grants for deprivation and are subject to many of the social issues that entails, Richmond upon Thames does not receive this. The Task Group feels that councils should receive funding on the basis of where their pupils live, rather than purely on the basis of their own location.

**Recommendation 4:** *That a protocol for cross-Borough attendance working, in the same format as the pan-London agreement, be negotiated with Hammersmith and Fulham and progress be reported back to the Education and Children's Services Committee by its meeting on 20 November 2007.*

**Recommendation 5:** *That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education write to London Councils, local MPs, the Assembly Member for South West London and the DfES to highlight the inequity of current arrangements for educational grant funding for deprivation.*





## **B. Relationship between the EWS and Schools**

56. All the schools were asked whether they felt the Local Authority and Schools could work together better. Orleans Park stated that they would like the LA to act on their requests, rather than basing referrals on strict criteria, which seemed to be the case at present. It also thought that the EWS should continue to work closely with year 11 pupils until they finish their exams.
57. Teddington stated that support from the EWS had been good, although it knew there had been problems recruiting EWOs. It stated that there was a need for schools to have a secure and regular EWO with time for home visits and meetings, because some families were in real need of help and support.
58. Shene School stated that it worked well with its attached EWO and was pleased that its EWO had recently been allocated more time with the school. Shene stated that they needed to allocate more time for their in-school attendance officer, which was an issue for their budget.
59. Whitton stated that there was need for a greater sense of working in partnership. It stated that because of the pressures related to the issue, there have sometimes been tensions between stakeholders, though it did not apportion blame for this. It stated that there was a need for a tightened core strategy on attendance.
60. HCC were unhappy that they had had four different EWOs in four years. A governor from HCC also expressed concerns to the Task Group about EWS provision at the college. HCC acknowledged that its own difficulties with data collection before December 2006 had hindered meetings between it and the EWS. It stated that communication between the two groups needed to be improved.
61. It is clear from these comments that the schools value the support offered by the EWS and feel it has a crucial role to play in improving school attendance. However, there were concerns aired by most of the schools, with varying degrees of strength, about the amount of support that the EWS is currently able to offer them. Shene school clearly valued the extra EWO support it had received recently.
62. Schools were also asked whether they received sufficient/appropriate information on local and national attendance best practice. All the schools, with the exception of Orleans Park, were happy with the amount of information they received.



Whitton stated that it had received information based upon best practice in other authorities and had held regular meetings with the DfES on improving its own practices. HCC praised the PowerPoint presentation that the EWS had produced. Shene School felt that sociological issues surrounding attendance needed to be tackled in primary schools and that there was a limit to what could be done at secondary level.

63. Orleans Park, however, stated that it had received very little information from the Local Authority on best practice. The Task Group therefore feels that the EWS should discuss with Orleans Park what further information they require.
64. The Task Group also heard from Dawn Stevens that schools did not always consult the EWS when they developed and reviewed their attendance policies. The majority of governors, 51%, were not sure whether the EWS had been consulted on their schools' attendance policies. The Task Group feels it is crucial that the EWS is always consulted on schools' attendance policies. This is because they have an important role in advising schools on attendance issues and are ultimately responsible for enforcing the policies through casework. It is also important that Governors are aware of the EWS' views when they are considering the policy.
65. The Task Group feels that relationships between schools and the EWS are generally positive. It would urge both schools and the EWS to continue to work together in the climate of mutual support and cooperation that already appears to exist in the majority of cases.

***Recommendation 6:*** *That the EWS is consulted before any changes are made to schools' attendance policies and that their comments are reported to governors.*

***Recommendation 7:*** *That the EWS contact Orleans Park to ascertain what further attendance best practice information they require.*

## C. Governor Training

66. The governor survey revealed that only 21% of governors responding to the questionnaire had received training on attendance issues. However, 62% of governors stated that they would welcome further information from the Local



Authority on attendance issues. However, it was noticeable that only one of the eight Waldegrave governors to respond wanted any further information from the Local Authority and under half of HCC governors wanted further information.

67. The Task Group would urge all governors to take up attendance training, particularly those governors who replied that they would welcome further information from the authority and have not done so.

**Recommendation 8:** *That all Governors be encouraged to take up attendance training offered by the EWS.*

## D. Cooperation Between Schools

68. It is clear that a significant amount of work is being done to improve attendance in the Borough. However, the approaches taken can differ quite significantly between schools. Whilst some difference is to be expected, as each school has its own priorities and circumstances, the results of the survey of schools and governors suggests that one reason for the difference is that communication and cooperation between schools could be better.
69. When asked to assess cooperation between local schools, Teddington replied that it was not aware of any cooperation between schools; Orleans Park said that there was little cooperation with other schools; Shene described the current situation as “fractured”; and Whitton stated that this was a “significant area for improvement”. Whitton also wrote in its questionnaire that there was a need to benchmark local practice in a more detailed fashion. HCC said that it tracked low attendees joining from primary schools and those moving from other schools during the year. Only Waldegrave thought that schools cooperated well to improve attendance. It felt that cooperation on policy was very helpful.
70. The governors’ survey revealed that there was a lack of knowledge amongst governors about other schools’ attendance policies. When asked how aware they were of other schools’ attendance policies, 58% replied they were “not very aware” or “not at all aware”.
71. Collaboration between local schools was highlighted by the National Audit Office in its report “Improving School Attendance in England” as being an important area



of good practice. Collaboration gives each school access to the experiences of the other local schools when reviewing its policies and initiatives. Better cooperation would lead to successes being shared and mistakes not being repeated.

72. The Education Welfare Service is best placed to facilitate the sharing of information but it obviously requires secondary schools to show commitment as well. The Task Group urges schools to increase communication and share information more effectively.

**Recommendation 9:** *That a termly newsletter is produced by EWS outlining successful initiatives for attendance and is sent to schools and governors.*

**Recommendation 10:** *That termly meetings, arranged by EWS, are held between secondary staff with responsibility for attendance and EWS to share best practice information.*

## E. Term Time Holidays

### The Impact

73. Term time holidays are a significant cause of absence from schools. A child who goes on a two-week term time holiday will only be able to achieve 95% attendance and that assumes no other period of absence in the year.
74. As stated above, the almost all the schools felt that two weeks absence was very disruptive. Orleans Park School specifically stated that when a pupil has a two week holiday, time is lost before they leave due to a lack of concentration, it is almost impossible for pupils to catch up on the work that has been missed and that the week of their return is almost wasted because the pupil has missed the work done in preparation for that week's lessons.
75. The only different response was from Shene. It stated that whilst all absences had the potential to negatively affect attainment, there might be a positive impact if the absence was an educational experience in itself or if it brought broken families together.



76. The Task Group devised four scenarios where parents applied for time off in term time and asked the schools, governors and parents for their views on them. The scenarios were drawn up in consultation with the EWS and are based on real situations.

### **Scenario 1**

77. The first of these scenarios was as follows:

“Parents from a low income family have saved vouchers from a national newspaper that will allow them to go on a low-cost holiday, but need to leave on a fixed date that falls within the school term. They say it is their only chance to afford a holiday that year.”

78. HCC stated that it did not authorise absence for term time holidays on the basis of a family’s income bracket. However, it said that the college did take into account the attitude and attendance of the pupil and considered authorising “one-off” days. It also said that if the school deemed a holiday to be educational, in rare circumstances it would consider marking the absence as “educated off site”.
79. Orleans Park stated that whilst they would be sympathetic to the family’s situation, they would not authorise absence. Teddington School stated that it would not authorise the absence even though it did not think this was an unreasonable request.
80. Shene stated that it would not authorise absence due to the availability of cheap holidays. However, it did state that the deputy head would consider authorising absence if the social needs of the family were excessive and the student had a hitherto excellent attendance record.
81. Waldegrave stated that they would not authorise the absence, unless they felt there were special circumstances that would have a positive impact on the child’s education.
82. Whitton stated that a Governors’ Panel had responsibility for authorising requests for term time holidays, which would always take individual circumstances into account. It stated that in this instance, it was highly improbable that absence would be authorised. However, it stated that issues surrounding illness or bereavement might be treated more sympathetically. Generally, Whitton has a



zero tolerance policy for term time holidays and only authorises them in exceptional circumstances.

83. However, Whitton's governors, who have responsibility for authorising term time holidays, gave a mixed response to this scenario. Whilst the majority, five, replied that they found the reason either "not very justifiable" or "not at all justifiable", three governors stated that they found the reason "quite justifiable".
84. Parental attitudes to this scenario were split. Of the 12 parents that were interviewed, five thought this was "quite justifiable", two thought it was "not very justifiable" and five thought it was "not at all justifiable". Two of attendees at the Focus Group felt that parents who took their children on term time holidays were irresponsible and that families should go without a holiday if they could not afford to go in school holidays, though they also felt that travel companies had to take responsibility for charging much higher prices then. The two other parents felt that this was quite understandable and were very sympathetic for parents in that situation.

## **Scenario 2**

85. The second scenario presented to schools was:
- "Parents would like to take a half-term skiing holiday, but their two children attend different schools, which hold their half term breaks on different weeks. They arrange the holiday to coincide with the half-term of one school, but this necessitates taking the other child out of school."
86. HCC stated that it would not be authorised and Orleans Park replied that it would not be authorised under any circumstances. Whitton replied that holiday times were published a year in advance and parents therefore had time to make "educationally prioritised choices". Therefore, it stated that it would not authorise the absence. Whitton's governors nearly all agreed with this assertion – seven governors stated that this was "not at all justifiable", although one did think it was "very justifiable".
87. Shene said it did not authorise holidays that overlapped with the beginning or end of term, although it might approve extended holidays in exceptional circumstances. However, it felt that a skiing holiday was a luxury and so would not have authorised it. Waldegrave stated that it would not authorise the absence unless it felt that there were special circumstances that would have a positive



impact on the child's education. Teddington was more sympathetic. It stated that it could justify either authorising the absence as "family circumstances" or not authorising it as a term time holiday.

88. Parents were again split on this scenario, although they were not quite as negative as in scenario one. Five parents felt that it was "quite a justifiable reason" for absence, five thought it was "not very justifiable" and five thought it was "not at all justifiable". The focus group were not very sympathetic to this scenario, because they felt that parents had a wide opportunity to find other more convenient dates.

### **Scenario 3**

89. The third scenario presented to schools was:

"Parents would like to take their child out of school to attend a family wedding being held abroad."

90. HCC stated that it would take into account the attitude and attendance of the pupil and would consider authorising "one-off" days – it stated that the length of absence would be very important. Orleans Park stated that it would use its discretion, taking into account the closeness of the relative and the attendance record of the pupil concerned. It stated that if it did decide to authorise the absence, it would only do so for a maximum of five days. Waldegrave reported that it would not authorise the absence unless the pupil's mother or father was getting married.
91. Shene stated that in principle it would not be authorised, though if the length of time was small, the pupil was able to catch-up, their exams were unaffected and they had an excellent attendance record, it might be authorised at the discretion of the Deputy Headteacher. Teddington stated that it would authorise the absence as "family circumstances".
92. Whitton said that it would consider authorising the absence if it was for a period of only one or two days and the student was a very high attendee. However, Whitton's governors were less sympathetic. Five stated that this was "not very justifiable" and one stated that it was "not at all justifiable" whereas only two thought it was "quite justifiable".
93. Parental attitudes were again split on this scenario. Four parents found this "quite justifiable", four thought it was "not very justifiable", three thought it was "not at all



justifiable” and one thought it was “neither justifiable nor unjustifiable.” Two of the parents felt that weddings were very important ceremonies, so this was acceptable, especially as many families lived far apart and it could be the only chance for the family to come together. The other two parents thought that it would be acceptable for a day or a long weekend but not for any longer period.

## **Scenario 4**

94. The fourth scenario presented to schools was:

“Parents would like to take their child on a family holiday. Because one of the parents is a member of the armed forces, they can only take leave at a specified time.”

95. Many of the schools were surprisingly strict on this scenario, even though it is given as an example of a special circumstance in the DfES guidance document, “Keeping Pupil Registers”.
96. HCC stated that it would take into account the attitude and attendance of the pupil and would consider authorising “one-off” days. Orleans Park stated that it would not authorise absence, although it was sympathetic to the situation. Waldegrave stated that it would not authorise absence, unless there were special circumstances which would have a positive impact on the student’s learning.
97. Whitton said that because of the constraints placed upon the parents/carers, it would consider authorising the absence if it was minimal and the student’s prior attendance percentage was 100%. Whitton’s governors were very split on this: two thought it was “very justifiable”, three thought it was “quite justifiable”, two thought it was “not very justifiable” and one thought it was “not at all justifiable.”
98. Teddington stated that it would authorise the absence as “family circumstances”. Shene stated that service personnel would receive up to ten days authorised absence, assuming the child had an excellent attendance record.
99. Parental attitudes were consistently favourable to this scenario, even though they were split on the other three. Four parents thought it was “very justifiable” and seven parents thought it was “quite justifiable”, whereas only one parent thought it was “not very justifiable”. The focus group attendees all thought that this was the most justifiable scenario, as the family had no choice over when to take their holiday.





## **Differing Approaches**

100. It is clear from the information provided above that there are significant differences in the way that different schools deal with the same cases. Whilst authorising absence is a matter for the schools' discretion and should always take individual circumstances into account, it is surprising that the policies of the schools seem to differ so significantly. This inconsistency sends out mixed messages across the Borough and partly undermines attempts by the Council to discourage term time holidays. It also seems unfair that parents are treated differently simply because of the school they attend. The Task Group feels that there is a need for greater consistency across schools in terms of policy.
101. Zero tolerance policies on term time holidays, except in exceptional circumstances, are to be welcomed, as they are consistent with DfES and local guidance and send out a firm message to parents and pupils of the school's position. Involving governors and holding formal panels to decide on applications for absence is also excellent. It shows that the whole school is behind the policy and highlights the importance that the school places on the issue. However, as stated above, governors need to be adequately trained and they need to have signed up to the school's attendance policy. The evidence from the governors' questionnaire suggests that Whitton governors, a school that holds these panels, were split on how they would handle the issues and sometimes differed from the approach of the school.

***Recommendation 11:*** *That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education report back to the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee by its meeting on 20 November 2007, with clear Borough Attendance Guidance, including a strategy for increasing consistency across secondary schools in authorising term time holidays.*



## **Are unauthorised term time holidays the same as truancy?**

102. All the schools were asked whether they thought there was any difference between unauthorised term time holidays and truancy. Orleans Park, Teddington, Waldegrave and Whitton stated that the difference was that all term-time holidays were parentally condoned. Teddington and Waldegrave stated that truancy was when a parent was not aware of an absence. Waldegrave informed the Group that it had a strict policy for truancy, whereby students make up the work missed in their own time and parents are informed. Whitton thought that parents sometimes robbed children of their own educational choices by taking them on unauthorised holidays. HCC stated that they thought parents sometimes took their child on holiday and then wrote in to say that they were sick. It stated that it had little opportunity to challenge this. Only Shene school stated that truancy and unauthorised term time holidays were the same.
103. The majority of the parents interviewed, seven, agreed that unauthorised term-time holidays were the same as truancy, with five of those strongly agreeing. Only three parents disagreed with the statement and two were unsure. Parents at the focus group stated that taking children on unauthorised term-time holidays was a very serious form of truancy as it is a choice made by the parent and sent out the wrong message to children. Governors were also presented with the same statement: 60% of governors either agreed or strongly agreed with it.

## **F. Study Leave**

104. The Task Group heard evidence from both the EWS and the DfES that changes to the way study leave is recorded could have a significant impact on absence figures. In the past, many schools had recorded study leave as “educated off site”, which did not count towards absence statistics. However, DfES guidance is now clear that this should be recorded under a specific study leave code, which counts as authorised absence and so affects a school’s attendance statistics. Government guidance suggests that schools seek alternatives to study leave, because evidence has shown that many children do not have the skills or inclination to make the best use of large amounts of unsupervised revision time.



105. The Task Group was told by the EWS that some Secondary schools grant study leave to pupils taking mock exams in Year 11. The Task Group feels that study leave at this time of year has an unnecessarily disruptive impact on a pupil's attendance and overall education. It feels that students should attend lessons around their mock exam timetables. It therefore calls on the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education to issue clear guidance to schools stating that study leave should only be granted for GCSE examinations in the summer term and not for mock examinations.

***Recommendation 12:*** *That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education issue clear guidance to schools stating that study leave should only be granted for GCSE examinations in the summer term and not for mock examinations.*



## CONCLUSION

106. Improving secondary school attendance is a key priority for the Council. With the link between attendance and attainment clear, it is crucial that all stakeholders work together to improve attendance, not only to meet Government targets, but also to improve the life chances of the children we educate. The Task Group hopes that this report will begin a debate about attendance in the Borough.
107. The Task Group found that whilst there was plenty of good work being done to improve secondary school attendance across the Borough, coordination and cooperation were areas that needed strengthening. This was particularly clear in terms of the lack of cooperation with the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, the need for significantly improved cooperation between schools and the need for greater coordination between schools and the Education Welfare Service in terms of a policy for authorising term time holidays.



## TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec. No.	Recommendation
1	<i>That posters are displayed in doctors' and dentists' surgeries asking parents to make routine medical appointments outside of school hours.</i>
2	<i>That an article on the importance of school attendance is placed in Arcadia.</i>
3	<i>That where not already done, schools use their newsletters to highlight the importance of attendance on a regular basis.</i>
4	<i>That a protocol for cross-Borough attendance working, in the same format as the pan-London agreement, be negotiated with Hammersmith and Fulham and progress be reported back to the Education and Children's Services Committee by its meeting on 20 November 2007.</i>
5	<i>That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education write to London Councils, local MPs, the Assembly Member for South West London and the DfES to highlight the inequity of current arrangements for educational grant funding for deprivation.</i>
6	<i>That the EWS is consulted before any changes are made to schools' attendance policies and that their comments are reported to governors.</i>
7	<i>That the EWS contact Orleans Park to ascertain what further attendance best practice information they require.</i>
8	<i>That all Governors be encouraged to take up attendance training offered by the EWS.</i>
9	<i>That a termly newsletter is produced by EWS outlining successful initiatives for attendance and is sent to schools and governors.</i>
10	<i>That termly meetings, arranged by EWS, are held between secondary staff with responsibility for attendance and EWS to share best practice information.</i>
11	<i>That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education report back to the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee by its meeting on 20 November 2007, with clear Borough Attendance Guidance, including a strategy for increasing consistency across secondary schools in authorising term time holidays.</i>
12	<i>That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education issue clear guidance to schools stating that study leave should only be granted for GCSE examinations in the summer term and not for mock examinations.</i>



## SELECTED READING

- <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolattendance>
- National Audit Office Report – “Improving School Attendance in England”
- DfES Guidance Document “Keeping Pupil Registers”
- DfES Guidance Document “Absence and Attendance Codes”
- DfES Guidance Document “Effective Practice at the Local Authority Level”.



## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

Authorised Absence	Absence with the prior or retrospective approval of the school.
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EWS	Education Welfare Service
LPSA	Local Public Service Agreement
O&S	Overview and Scrutiny (Committee)
Unauthorised Absence	Absence without the school's approval.



## **APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>Governors' Questionnaire (page 37)</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>Parents' Focus Group Topic Guide (page 41)</b>
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>Parents' Telephone Questionnaire (page 43)</b>
<b>Appendix D</b>	<b>Schools' Questionnaire (page 48)</b>





# APPENDIX A

## Questionnaire to Governors

### Part 1

Please read the following examples. How justifiable do you find each one as a reason for absence?

1. Parents from a low-income family have saved vouchers from a national newspaper that will allow them to go on a low cost holiday, but need to leave on a fixed date that falls within the school term. They say it is their only chance to afford a holiday that year.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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2. Parents would like to take a half-term skiing holiday, but their two children attend different schools, which hold their half-term breaks on different weeks. They arrange the holiday to coincide with the half-term of one school, but this necessitates taking the other child out of school.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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3. Parents would like to take their child out of school to attend a family wedding being held abroad.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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4. Parents would like to take their child on a family holiday. Because one of the parents is a member of the armed forces, they can only take leave at a specified time. This happens to fall within term time and so they want to take their child out of school.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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### Part 2

5. What sort of an impact do you think two weeks absence has on a child's overall attainment?

Very Positive	Fairly positive	No Impact	Fairly negative	Very negative	Don't know
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6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents taking their children on unauthorised holidays constitutes truancy?

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
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### **Part 3**

7. Does your school have an up to date attendance policy?

Yes	No	Don't know
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If yes, answer question 8. If no, go to question 9.

8. a. Has the attendance policy been approved by the governing body?

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

- b. Is it reviewed annually in line with experience?

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

- c. Is it reviewed annually in line with national and local best practice?

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

- d. Has the Education Welfare Service been involved in the development of the policy?

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

9. How aware are you of the attendance policies of other schools within the Borough?

1 Very aware	2 Fairly aware	3 Aware	4 Not very aware	5 Not at all aware
-----------------	-------------------	------------	---------------------	-----------------------

10. Have you attended training relating to attendance issues?

Yes	No
-----	----

11. Is attendance a standard item on the agenda for Governors' meetings?



Yes                      No                      Don't  
know

12. Do you know your own school's attendance figures?

Yes    No

13. DOES THE SCHOOL'S PROSPECTUS CLEARLY STATE THE VALUE  
PLACED ON HIGH LEVELS OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND THE  
SCHOOL'S EXPECTATIONS IN THIS RESPECT?

Yes                      No                      Don't  
know

14. Do the school's newsletters clearly state the value placed on high levels of  
school attendance and the school's expectations in this respect?

Yes                      No                      Don't  
know

15. Would you welcome further guidance on attendance best practice from the  
Local Authority?

Yes                      No                      Don't  
know

16. How much do you feel you know about the issues relating to school  
attendance

1                      2                      4                      5  
A great deal                      A fair                      Not a great                      Nothing at all  
amount                      deal

17. To what extent do you agree that responsibility for attendance lies with the  
following?

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Schools					
LA					
Parents					
Pupils					
Governors					



## APPENDIX B

### Focus Group of Parents

#### Introduction/Warm-up

How justifiable do you find the following reasons for absence?

18. Parents from a low-income family have saved vouchers from a national newspaper that will allow them to go on a low cost holiday, but need to leave on a fixed date that falls within the school term. They say it is their only chance to afford a holiday that year.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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19. Parents would like to take a half-term skiing holiday, but their two children attend different schools, which hold their half-term breaks on different weeks. They arrange the holiday to coincide with the half-term of one school, but this necessitates taking the other child out of school.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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20. Parents would like to take their child out of school to attend a family wedding being held abroad.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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21. Parents would like to take their child out of school for a family holiday, as one of the parents is a member of the armed forces and can only take leave at a specified time, which happens to fall within the school term.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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Would your answer change for any of the above if the pupil was in year 11?

Would your answer change for any of the above if the teacher felt that the pupil did not have satisfactory attainment?

What (other) reasons do you think are acceptable ones for a child missing school? (If illness, what kind of illness?)

What is an acceptable level of attendance?



(Then show them DfES attendance guidance to comment on)

### **Truancy**

- 22. What impact do you think two weeks absence has on a child's overall attainment?
- 23. What constitutes truancy? Is a parent taking their children on an unauthorised holiday the same as truancy? Try keep discussion as broad as possible
- 24. Show parents the LA's postcards and ask their views
- 25. Under what circumstances is it or isn't it acceptable for a child to be absent without a reason being provided to the school? Why do you think reasons are sometimes not provided?

### **Attendance policy**

- 26. Establish familiarity with child's school's attendance policy?  
(Ask parents to say what they think is in it, then show them the policy from their child's school to comment on)
- 27. How familiar are you with the work of the Education Welfare Service?
- 28. Where do you feel responsibility for attendance lies most?

Schools	LA	Parents	Pupils	Governors

### **Relationship between parent and school**

- 29. What is your relationship with the school?
- 30. Can you think of anything that would improve your relationship with the school?
- 31. What is your child's relationship with the school?
- 32. Can you think of anything that would improve your child's relationship with the school?

### **Improving attendance**

- 33. Thinking of non-attendance, what do you think are the main reasons/causes?  
(Prompt ... truancy, holiday, and sickness)
- 34. Improving attendance – what are the potential barriers?
- 35. What ways can you think of as a means to improve attendance?



36. Establish awareness of Fixed Penalty Notices – issued to parents whose children have been absent without prior authorisation. What are views on these? Will these improve attendance?
37. Establish awareness of Home/School agreements (documents parents are asked to sign which set out parents, teachers and pupils responsibilities, one of which could be attendance) –Will these improve attendance?



## APPENDIX C

### Telephone Questionnaire of Parents

**NAME OF SCHOOL:**

#### **Introduction**

"Hello. My name is Alastair Round and I am calling from Richmond Council. I am currently supporting some Cllrs who are reviewing secondary school attendance in the Borough. As part of this work, they would like to find out parents' views towards attendance and their knowledge of certain initiatives to try and improve attendance. If now is a convenient time, I would be very grateful if you could take about xxx minutes to answer a few questions. We will record what school your child attends but the questionnaire will be anonymous."

*If not a convenient time:* "Is there another time I could call which would be more convenient for you?"

#### **Part 1**

"Firstly, I am going to give you some reasons for children not attending school and I will ask you how justifiable you find them. There will be four answers to choose from: very justifiable, quite justifiable, not very justifiable and not at all justifiable.

38. Parents from a low-income family have saved vouchers from a national newspaper that will allow them to go on a low cost holiday, but need to leave on a fixed date that falls within the school term. They say it is their only chance to afford a holiday that year.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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39. Parents would like to take a half-term skiing holiday, but their two children attend different schools, which hold their half-term breaks on different weeks. They arrange the holiday to coincide with the half-term of one school, but this necessitates taking the other child out of school.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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40. Parents would like to take their child out of school to attend a family wedding being held abroad.

Very Justifiable	Quite Justifiable	Not very justifiable	Not at all justifiable
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41. Parents would like to take their child on a family holiday. Because one of the parents is a member of the armed forces, they can only take leave at a specified time. This happens to fall within term time and so they want to take their child out of school.

Very  
Justifiable

Quite  
Justifiable

Not very  
justifiable

Not at all  
justifiable

## **Part 2**

There are five possible answers to the next question:

42. What sort of an impact do you think two weeks absence has on a child's overall attainment?

Very  
Positive

Fairly  
positive

No Impact

Fairly  
negative

Very negative

Don't  
know

There are four possible answers to the next question:

43. To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents taking their children on unauthorised holidays constitutes truancy?

Strongly  
agree

Tend  
to  
agree

Tend to  
disagree

Strongly  
disagree

Don't  
know

There are four possible answers to the next question:

44. How effective is, in your opinion, the slogan "holidays are fine, but not in term time"?

Very  
effective

Quite  
effective

Not very  
effective

Not at all  
effective

Don't  
know

This question is left open for your views.

45. Under what circumstances do you think it is or is not acceptable for a child to be absent without a reason being provided to the school?





There are five possible answers for the next set of questions.

46. To what extent do you agree that responsibility for attendance lies with:

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Schools					
LA					
Parents					
Pupils					
Governors					

There are five possible answers for the next question.

47. How would you describe your relationship with the school?

Very good                      Good                      Neither  
good  
nor  
bad                      Bad                      Very Bad

This question is left open for your views.

48. Can you think of anything that could improve your relationship with the school?

There are five possible answers for the next set of questions.

49. How would you describe your child's relationship with the school?

Very good                      Good                      Neither  
good  
nor  
bad                      Bad                      Very Bad

This question is left open for your views.

50. Can you think of anything that could improve your child's relationship with the school?



### Part 3

There are four possible answers to the next question:

51. How familiar are you with your school's attendance policy?

Very Familiar	Quite Familiar	Not very familiar	Not at all familiar
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There are four possible answers to the next question:

52. How familiar are you with the work of the Education Welfare Service?

Very Familiar	Quite Familiar	Not very familiar	Not at all familiar
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### Part 4

The remaining questions are left open for your views.

53. What do you think are the main causes of absence?

54. Can you think of any ways that attendance could be improved?

55. What are the potential barriers to improving attendance?



56. Are you familiar with Fixed Penalty Notices? (*explain if necessary*) How effective do you think they will be at improving attendance?

57. Are you familiar with Home School Agreements? (*explain if necessary*) How effective do you think they will be at improving attendance?

Thank you for taking part. The information you have provided will be fed into a report into School Attendance. Would you like to receive a copy of that report?

Yes/No

Address:

Thank you again and good bye.”



## APPENDIX D

### **Secondary School Attendance Scrutiny Task Group** **Questionnaire for Schools**

#### **Part 1**

Please read the following examples. How justifiable do you find each one as a reason for absence? Please state the circumstances in which you would authorise absence?

58. Parents from a low-income family have saved vouchers from a national newspaper that will allow them to go on a low cost holiday, but need to leave on a fixed date that falls within the school term. They say it is their only chance to afford a holiday that year.

59. Parents would like to take a half-term skiing holiday, but their two children attend different schools, which hold their half-term breaks on different weeks. They arrange the holiday to coincide with the half-term of one school, but this necessitates taking the other child out of school.

60. Parents would like to take their child out of school to attend a family wedding being held abroad.

61. Parents would like to take their child on a family holiday. Because one of the parents is a member of the armed forces, they can only take leave at a specified time. This happens to fall within term time and so they want to take their child out of school.



## Part 2

62. What do you feel are the main reasons for absence? Which reasons for absence are the school prioritising and why?
63. Do you feel there is any difference between absence due to unauthorised term time holidays and truancy? Please explain your answer.
64. What effect do you feel two weeks absence has on a child's overall attainment?

## Part 3



65. Do you feel the Local Authority provides you with sufficient/appropriate information on local and national best practice relating to improving attendance?

66. To what extent is cooperation between local schools relevant to improving attendance? How would you describe the current situation?

67. What steps has your school taken to improve attendance? How successful have they been?



68. Do you feel your school and the Local Authority could work together better on attendance issues? If so, how?

69. How aware do you think parents and pupils are of the school's attendance policy? What steps does the school take to publicise it?

70. To what extent do you agree that responsibility for attendance lies with the following?

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents/Carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Pupils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Governors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments:

#### Part 4

Please use this space to add any further comments you wish to make.

