



South Tyneside Council

item 2

Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee 18 June 2026

Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee 12 March 2026

Present: Councillors: Proudlock (in the chair), S. Dean, Gynn, Hamilton, Kennedy, K. Maxwell, Porthouse, and R. Taylor.

Enid Fairbrother (Service Manager Education and Standards), Jonathan Lunness (Scrutiny and Democracy Support Officer), Karen Connolly (Democracy Officer).

There was 1 member of the press in attendance at the meeting.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2026

Agreed: That the minutes of the previous meeting be confirmed as a true record.

3. Attendance, Suspensions and Exclusions

Submitted: Report of Early Years and Primary Teaching and Learning

Enid Fairbrother, Service Manager for Education and Standards, provided a presentation to the Committee which gave data and information on attendance, suspensions and exclusions in South Tyneside schools.

The Officer explained that the fixed term suspension rate for 2025/2026 was 8.27%, with 33% of suspended pupils being female and 67% male. For those excluded 92.4% were in Secondary school and 7.6% were in Primary school. Of those children suspended 8.0% were children with an Educational Healthcare Plan and 41.9% had SEN support, 58.1% had no SEND needs. It was noted that 41 schools currently had at least one pupil suspended. 71.1% of those pupils suspended were in receipt of Free School Meals.

The data covered pupils from Reception to Year 11, and in the 2025/2026 school year, the highest suspension term was Autumn, during which 695 pupils were suspended. In 2023/24 South Tyneside's performance benchmarking score was 7.18, compared with the North East's overall benchmark of 18.42.

It was explained that a suspension from school was a temporary removal of a student from their regular classes and school activities as a form of discipline. This action is taken in response to a violation of the school's code of conduct. The number of days suspension often depends on why the pupil has been suspended. A permanent exclusion from school is where a pupil is removed from the school roll entirely. The Officer presented the data for fixed-term exclusions, which included the reasons for each exclusion, the number of pupils excluded against each reason and the year of the data. In 2025/26, the total number of fixed-term exclusions was 907, of which 227 were due to persistent disruptive behaviour. A graph was also provided showing gender comparisons, in 2025/26, 32.75% of excluded pupils were female and 67.25% male. Of those with fixed-term exclusions, 27.1% were SEN and 12.3% had an EHCP, 68.5% received free school meals and 40.20% were persistently absent.

The permanent exclusion rate for 2025/2026 in South Tyneside was 0.29, with 15.7% of permanently excluded pupils being female and 84.3% male. Secondary schools accounted for 76% of permanent exclusions, with primary schools accounting for the remaining 24%. Across the borough, 15 schools had permanently excluded pupils. 50% of all permanently excluded pupils were eligible for Free School Meals. A breakdown of the reasons for permanent exclusion was provided, with the highest category for 2025/26 recorded as "other". It was noted that 12.5% of permanently excluded pupils had an EHCP, 65.6% were receiving SEN Support, 50% were in receipt of Free school meals and 46.88% were persistently absent.

Statistics were also provided for Electively Home Educated (EHE) children. As of February 2026, there were 404 EHE pupils, 21 who had become electively home educated in the previous month. 51.24% were female and 48.76% male. One child was receiving social care involvement. Year 11 had the highest number of Early Help Episode pupils, with a total of 105. The top two reasons provided by parents for electively home educating were mental health (47 pupils) and lifestyle choice (46), although 221 parents had not given a reason.

As of 19 February 2026, there were 20,813 pupils attending school in South Tyneside with an overall attendance rate of 92.5%, an overall absence rate of 7.5% and an unauthorised absence rate of 2%. There were 4,430 persistently absent pupils (21.3%) and 476 severely absent pupils (2.3%). Benchmarking showed that South Tyneside's

attendance was in the green zone, while England overall was rated amber.

Overall attendance was also compared with figures from the previous year:

- Autumn term:
 - 2024/25: 92.8% attendance, 7.2% absence, 1.9% unauthorised absence;
 - 2025/26: 92.4% attendance, 7.6% absence, 2% unauthorised absence.
- Spring term:
 - 2024/25: 92.6% attendance, 7.4% absence, 2% unauthorised absence;
 - 2025/26: 92.6% attendance, 7.4% absence, 1.9% unauthorised absence.
- Summer term:
 - 2024/25: 89.5% attendance, 10.5% absence, 2.9% unauthorised absence;
 - No data was available yet for Summer 2025/26.

For 2025/26, primary school attendance was highest in Years 2 and 3, at 94.6%. For secondary schools, the highest attendance was in Year 7, at 92.6%. In Special Schools attendance was provided for 2024/25, the highest attendance was in Year 6, at 95.54%.

A Member questioned whether there was any link with the children on free school meals and attendance. The officer noted that 50% of those suspended were in receipt of free school meals, it is possible that there are gaps in learning due to the number of exclusions and hence lower attendance in this cohort of pupils. She asked what strategy the Council used to get children into school, the officer informed the Committee that a number of schools go and collect the children, noting that this was not efficient and a longer-term plan was needed to get families to take responsibility and get their children to school. The Councillor asked whether the attendance figures from nursery were passed to schools, the officer stated that many nurseries were not local authority maintained but for those that were the attendance was around 80%. The information was not available from private ran nurseries. It was agreed that if the correct messages and patterns were in place at the beginning from nursery school it would then be easier to continue into school.

Concerns were raised in relation to the changes in specifications and provisions for EHCP pupils. A Member raised how a lot of children with educational needs are not identified, the officer agreed. Some children who are excluded will have SEND needs, she questioned whether the staff were trained to check such behaviours. Support for SEND

children was discussed in relation to exclusions and how their SEND behaviour and circumstances might be considered.

A Member asked whether each school was allocated an attendance officer. The officer noted that there were different arrangements in each school, every school must have someone as the responsible officer for attendance. The Councillor pointed out that in some schools the attendance officer was also responsible for pastoral care and she felt that these tasks should be split. School attendance is lower than what you would want, there is a need to consider the strategies in place, look to the attendance hubs for support. The officer informed committee that the attendance hubs had been requested to each work with two schools this term to plan for improvements.

A Member raised concerns over the dip in attendance for year 6 children given the importance of this year and the transition to secondary school. She asked whether the families received any support following a fixed term exclusion. The officer stated that there was generally short-term support provided, the children were set work online.

Agreed: That the presentation be noted.

4. Work Programme 2025-26

Submitted: Report of the Director of Governance and Corporate Affairs

Members were advised that the work programme for the 2025-26 Municipal Year had been fulfilled and were asked to contact Democratic Services Officers with any further recommendations for the 2026-27 Municipal Year.

Agreed: That the Work Programme for 2025-26 be agreed.

5. Chair's Urgent Items

There were no Chair's Urgent Items.

6. Date and Time of Next Meeting

It was advised that the next date for the Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee would be determined and agreed at South Tyneside's Annual Meeting of Borough Council.