Meeting:	Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission
Date:	11th March
Title:	Background briefing for Commission (Absence Data)
Produced	Scrutiny officer.
Authorised:	Cllr Sophie Conway (Chair)

Introduction

1. The CYP Scrutiny Commission is assessing school absence and emotional based school avoidance (EBSA) at its next meeting on March 11th 2023. The aim of this scrutiny session is to:
    - Explore the nature and extent of school absence and EBSA in Hackney;
    - Understand the duties and responsibilities of both schools and the local authority in supporting children and families absent from school;
    - To assess the approach (policy and practice) of the local authority and schools in supporting pupils, their families and schools in addressing absence and EBSA;
    - To understand how local services (SEND, CAMHS, NHS, Schools) work in partnership in addressing school absence and EBSA.

2. A number of events are planned to support this scrutiny session, which include:
    - An informal information session with officers;
    - A focus group with parents of children who are avoiding schools (EBSA) (in association with Parent Carers Forum and Hackney Independent Parents Forum.
    - Outline briefing.

3. The following provides a brief overview of school attendance and school absence and EBSA together with national, regional and local data.

Attendance at School

4. Under section 7 of Education Act (1996), parents in England are responsible for ensuring that their child receives an appropriate full-time education. When a child is registered at school, parents are responsible for ensuring that their child is in *regular attendance*. Whilst absence can be authorised, most commonly for illness, absence for other reasons should only be in exceptional circumstances (at the discretion/policy of the individual school).

5. It is important to note that *only schools* can authorise absence, not parents. Head teachers have discretion to grant leave during school term-time, but this is not an

automatic entitlement. Rules were tightened up in 2013 via the Education (Pupil Registration in England Amendment). Under these regulations heads can only grant term-time leave for *exceptional circumstances*.

6. Under section 444 of the Education Act (1996) parents who fail to secure regular attendance are guilty of an offence. Local authorities can use a number of legal powers for unauthorised absence of pupils from school:
    -   *Parenting Order*: requires parents/ carers to attend parenting classes and comply with court ruling to improve their child's attendance at school;
    -   *Education Supervision Order;* A supervisor is appointed to support parents getting their child back into school (can be done instead or in conjunction with prosecution);
    -   *School Attendance Order*; If the local authority thinks that your child is not getting an appropriate education, a school attendance order can be issued, in which parents have 15 days to provide evidence that the child is registered with a named school (or providing elective home education). Failure to comply may lead to fine and or prosecution.
    -   *A fine (penalty notice)*; the local authority can give each parent a fine of £60, which rises to £120 each if you do not pay within 21 days. If you do not pay the fine after 28 days you may be prosecuted for your child's absence from school.
    -   *Prosecution***:** if the local authority decides to prosecute, the court may issue a fine of up to £2,500, a community order or a jail sentence up to 3 months (and parenting order, as above).

Concerns around growing levels of school absence
7. Since the relaxation of restrictions imposed on schools during the pandemic there has been growing concerns around school attendance, in particular for pupils missing a large number of education sessions. Prior to the pandemic the school absence rate had been falling, but has since increased significantly (unauthorised absence has doubled).

8. The table below provides national (England) data on authorised and unauthorised absence for pupils from 2016/17 to 2022/23 (excluding pandemic year). This data shows a rising number of authorised and unauthorised absences.

England	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Authorised Absence %	3.2	3.2	3.0	2.8	4.5	4.7
Unauthorised absence %	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.8	2.4

Total absence	4.4	4.5	4.3	3.8	6.4	6.8

9. The most recent data (5th February 2024) provides the most up to date snapshot of absence at schools in England:
   - Total absence of 6.3% in state-funded primary schools (4.7% authorised and 1.6% unauthorised)
   - Total absence of 10.1% in state-funded secondary schools (6.1% authorised and 4.0% unauthorised)
   - Total absence of 14.0% in state-funded special schools (10.7% authorised and 3.3% unauthorised)

10. Data on school absence is collated to two national benchmarks:
    - *Persistent Absence* - where pupils have missed 10% or more of educational sessions at their school;
    - *Severe Absence* - where pupils have missed 50% or more of educational sessions at their school.

11. A range of data on school absence, both persistent and severe is provided at the end of this briefing in relation to Hackney pupils:
    - Year group;
    - Gender;
    - FSM entitlement;
    - Ethnicity.

12. Comparative data is also provided in relation to the Hackney position for pupil absence with all inner London boroughs (and regional and national averages).

Drivers of school absence

13. The reasons that pupils may be avoiding school are multiple and complex with circumstances often unique to individual pupils. As has been demonstrated in the data, the pandemic has had a major impact on both pupil and parent behaviour which has contributed to significant increases in pupil attendance and absence.

14. The Children's Commissioner for England conducted an audit of school absence which indicated three primary reasons for pupil absence:
    - The pandemic led to disengagement among some pupils - with the 'social contract' between schools and parents having been irretrievably broken;
    - Children have unmet needs and are waiting for additional support from CAMHS or SEND or other health condition;
    - Children are, for a wide variety of reasons, struggling in their home environment (e.g. acting as a carer).

15. There are 3 interplaying factors which may impact a pupils attendance, the children's own circumstance, the family or home environment or the school environment.
- *Child* - dealing with anxiety, depression or mental health; dealing with the effects of trauma, low confidence or low self-esteem, SEND or disability;
- *Family / Home*: family stress (financial or DV), loss and bereavement, changes to home environment (housing), poor parental mental health;
- *School:* demanding academic environment, bullying, difficult staff relationships, limited social networks, transitions.

Emotional Based School Avoidance

16. Emotionally-based school avoidance (EBSA) is a term referring to reduced or non-attendance at school by a child or young person. Rather than the term 'school refusal', the term EBSA recognises that this avoidance has its root in emotional, mental health or wellbeing issues. EBSA should not be thought of as a deliberate act of defiance, but instead as a complex issue inextricably linked with mental health and wellbeing (Anna Freud Centre).

17. EBSA also doesn't just mean not attending school entirely as teachers may also observe pupils:
- not going to their classroom;
- not staying in class;
- not attending some lessons;
- avoiding some physical spaces or people.

18. The Anna Freud Centre has produced guidance in helping to support children and families where emotional based school avoidance may be an issue.

Policy context

19. The government has produced a range of guidance for schools, local authorities and other associated services to help improve pupil attendance at school.

20. The Schools Bill was introduced in Parliament in 2022. This was abandoned in autumn of 2023, but would have:
- Put attendance guidance on a statutory footing;
- Required local authorities to try to improve school attendance in their area, and that they have regard to any related guidance produced by the SoS;
- Required all schools in England to have an attendance policy;
- Allowed the SoS to make regulations to set out the circumstances in which authorised officers must consider giving a fixed penalty notice for school absence, and for coordination of these processes locally
- Extended the Secretary of State's power to regulate the granting of
- leaves of absence from school to include all academies.

21. [A Children Not in School](#) (Registers, Support and Orders) Bill. Private members bill progressing through parliament - second reading March 15th 2024.

22. [Working together to improve school attendance](#) (May 2022) sets out expectations for schools and local authorities in managing absence:
    - *Persistent absence*: schools and local authorities are expected to work together to put additional targeted support in place to remove any barriers to attendance and re-engage these pupils;
    - *Severe absence*: a concerted effort is needed across all relevant services to prioritise these pupils, which may include specific support with attendance or a whole family plan,consideration for an EHCP or an alternative form of educational provision.

23. It is known that mental health can be a significant factor in a pupil's attendance or absence from school. The DfE has provided [guidance](#) to set out local responsibilities where pupil mental health issues are affecting attendance. This report sets out what schools should be currently doing to support a pupils mental health, when it is appropriate to intervene and how to facilitate support to pupils and their families.

24. For children with poor attendance but who are experiencing mental health problems associated, a best practice guide has also been developed [Support for pupils where a mental health issue is affecting attendance](#). The guidance provides a number of case studies in supporting children who are experiencing anxiety and who may be EBSA, who have ASD and hearing and sight impairments.

25. In 2022, the Attendance Mentors Pilot was launched. This provided one-to-one mentoring support for 1,600 pupils who were persistently or severely absent from school and which aimed to address underlying causes such as bullying, mental health, anxiety of fear of being too far behind. This scheme was expanded in [January 2024](#)to support a further 1,000 children with an additional £15m. The expanded scheme focused on the Education Investment Areas and would cover local authority areas including Knowsley, Doncaster, Salford and Stoke on Trent (delivered by Barnardos). (Commentary [The Guardian 5/2/24](#))

26. In 2023, the government created [School Attendance Hubs](#). Attendance hubs are led by senior leaders in schools which have effective attendance policies and practice. Through attendance hubs, lead schools share their strategies and resources for improving attendance. There are 9 hub schools in London the closest primary (to Hackney) being Noel Park Primary in Wood Green (Haringey) and closest secondary being Mulberry Academy in Shoreditch (Tower Hamlets).

27. The Education Committee of the House of Commons has conducted an inquiry into Persistent absence and support for disadvantaged pupils. The Committee has completed evidence gathering and has produced a final report in September 2023. The report makes a number of recommendations including:
    - The need for a statutory register for children not in school;
    - Update guidance for attendance children absent from school;
    - Audit work that is supporting children who are persistently absent from school, and publish best practice'
    - Parental fines for not attending school should be a last resort;
    - Further research to test the link between breakfast clubs, FSM, and sports clubs and improved attendance;
    - Ensure a family support model is central to addressing long-term school absence;
    - That Alternative provision is a time-limited intervention to support pupils transition back to school;
    - Further support for a more coordinated approach to mental health support for pupils struggling with attendance.

28. The Attendance Action Alliance was formed by the central government in 2022. This is a committee of education system leaders chaired by the Secretary of State for Education. The aim of the group is to improve school attendance policy and practice.

School Attendance links to other policy considerations

29. There is data linking school attendance (and absence) to levels of attainment at all key stages of education: EYFS, KS2 and KS4. Whilst it is difficult to attribute absence as a *causal factor* to educational attainment given the intersection with other factors, data would suggest there is an *association*.

30. DfE have provided evidence to associate absence and attainment at KS2 and KS4 in May 2022 (using (2018/19 data).

31. Correlation between progress 8 attainment and school attendance has also been mapped by the Education Data Lab.

Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

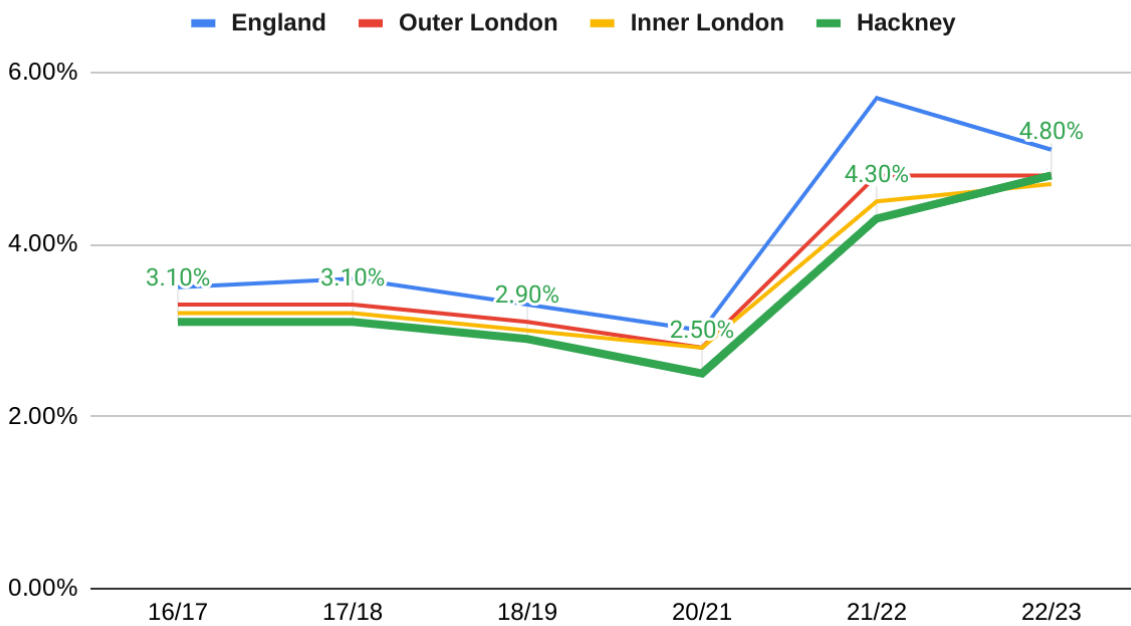## Chart A

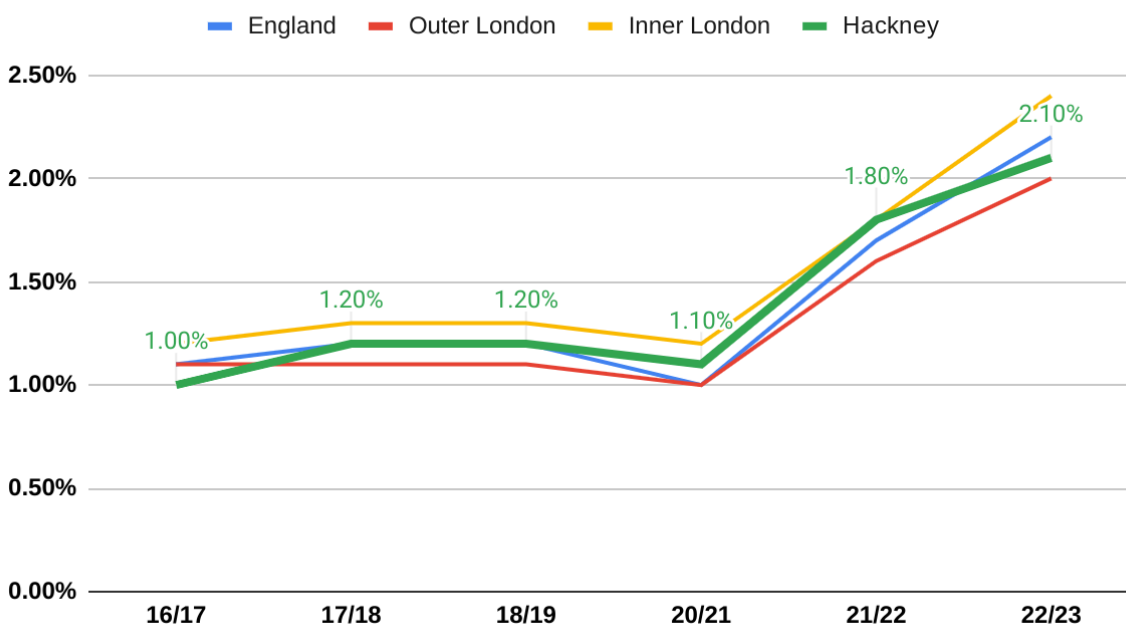**Authorised and Unauthorised (and total) absence rate in Hackney 2016/17 to 2022/23**
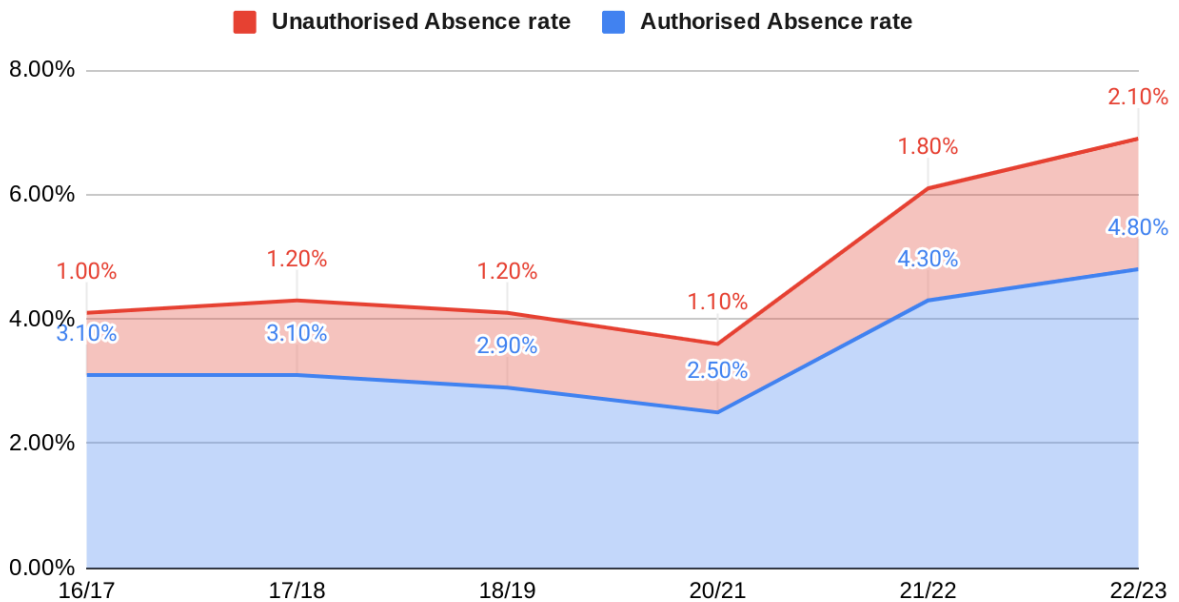
Chart B

Authorised absence rate 2016/7-2022/23 National, regional and local.

Chart C

Unauthorised absence rate 2016/17-2022/23 National, regional and local.

Chart D

Absence rates vary by local authority more than by region

2021/22 absence rate for any reason, state-funded schools

Region	Absence rate	Local Authority	Absence rate
National average	**8.5%**	**Highest absence rates:**	
South West	9.0%	Bradford	10.0%
North East	8.9%	Torbay	10.0%
West Midlands	8.8%	Knowsley	9.8%
Yorkshire and The Humber	8.8%	Plymouth	9.8%
East of England	8.7%	Newcastle upon Tyne	9.7%
South East	8.6%	**Lowest absence rates:**	
East Midlands	8.4%	City of London	4.3%
North West	8.4%	Isles of Scilly	6.6%
Inner London	7.6%	Brent	6.9%
Outer London	7.5%	Tower Hamlets	7.0%
		Lewisham	7.0%

Note: Absence expressed as a proportion of possible school sessions missed (two sessions per school day, morning and afternoon). Includes Covid-19 related absence – see Box 1 for definition.
Source: Department for Education, Pupil absence in schools in England: 2021/22, 16 March 2023

HOC, Briefing

Persistent Absence (missing 10% or more of educational sessions)

Chart 1

Percentage persistent absent (10%) Spring Autumn 16/17-2022/23 National, regional and Local trends.
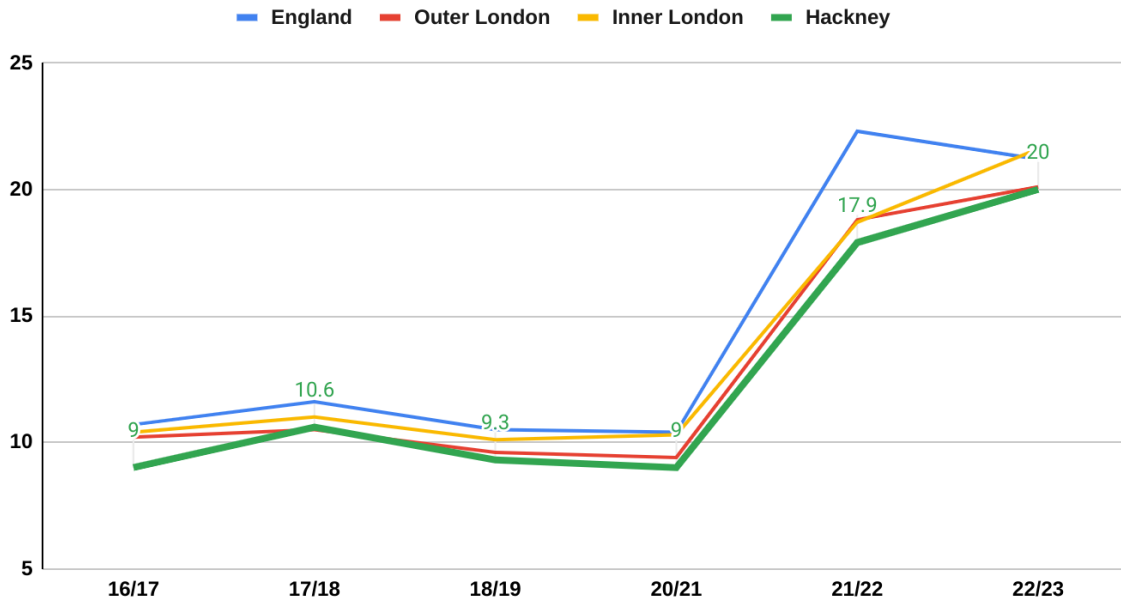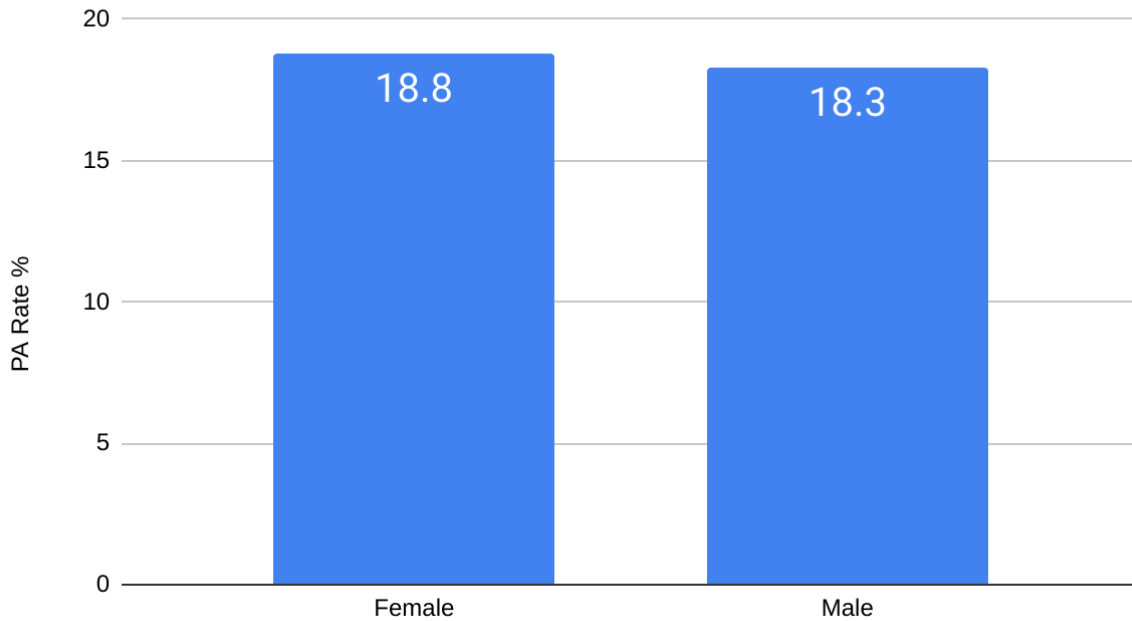

Chart 2

% Persistent Absence (by school type) 2018/19 to 2022/23 (Autumn/ Spring Term)
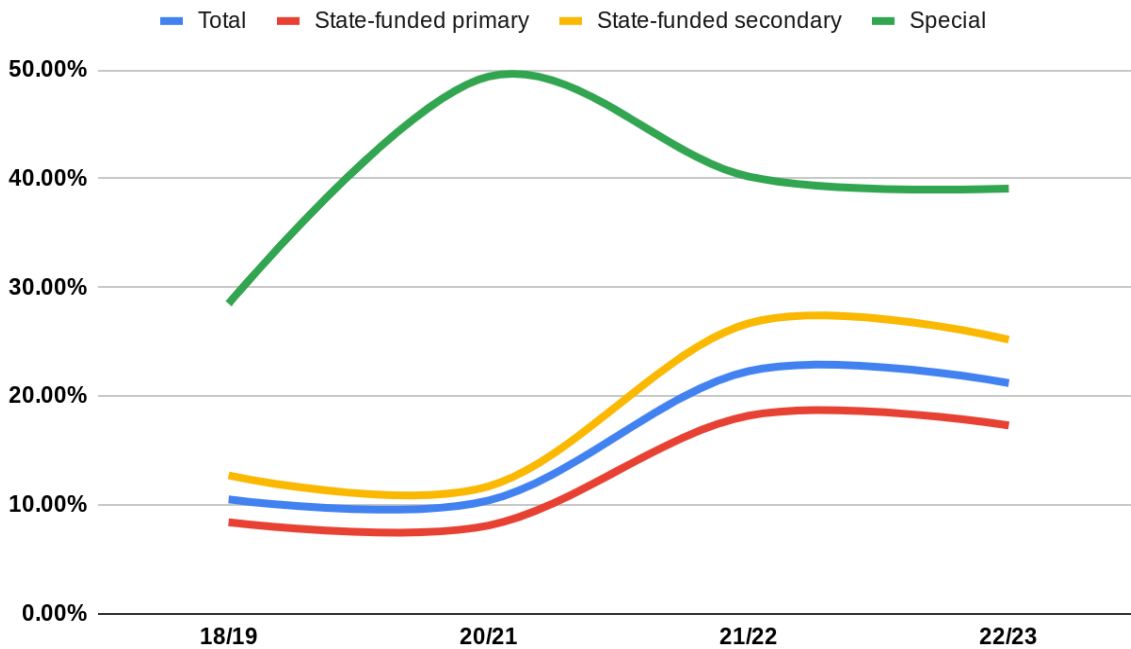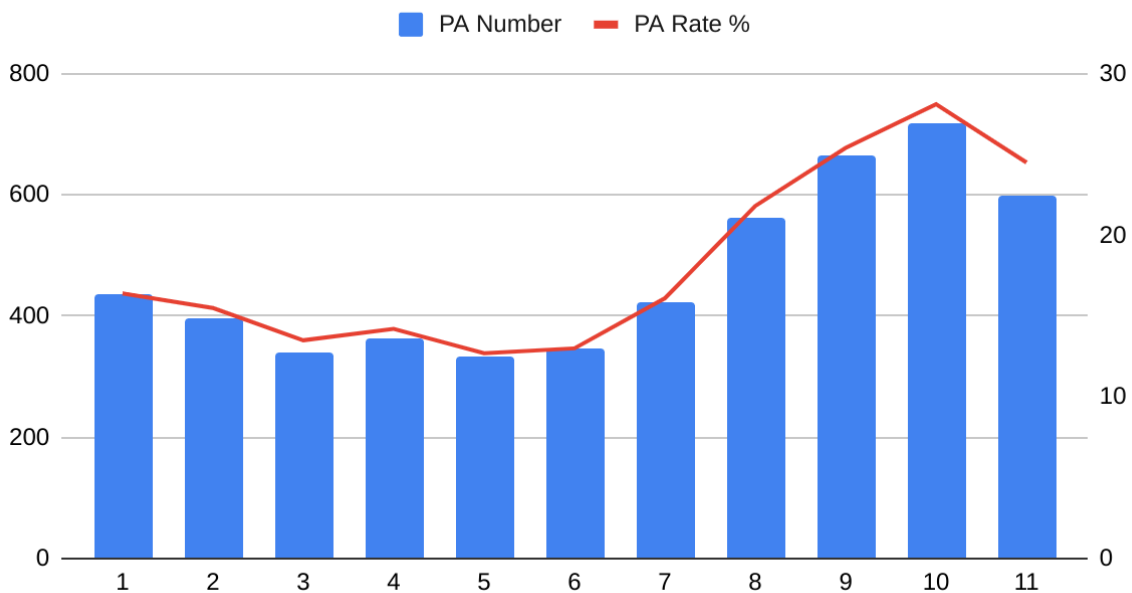
Chart 3

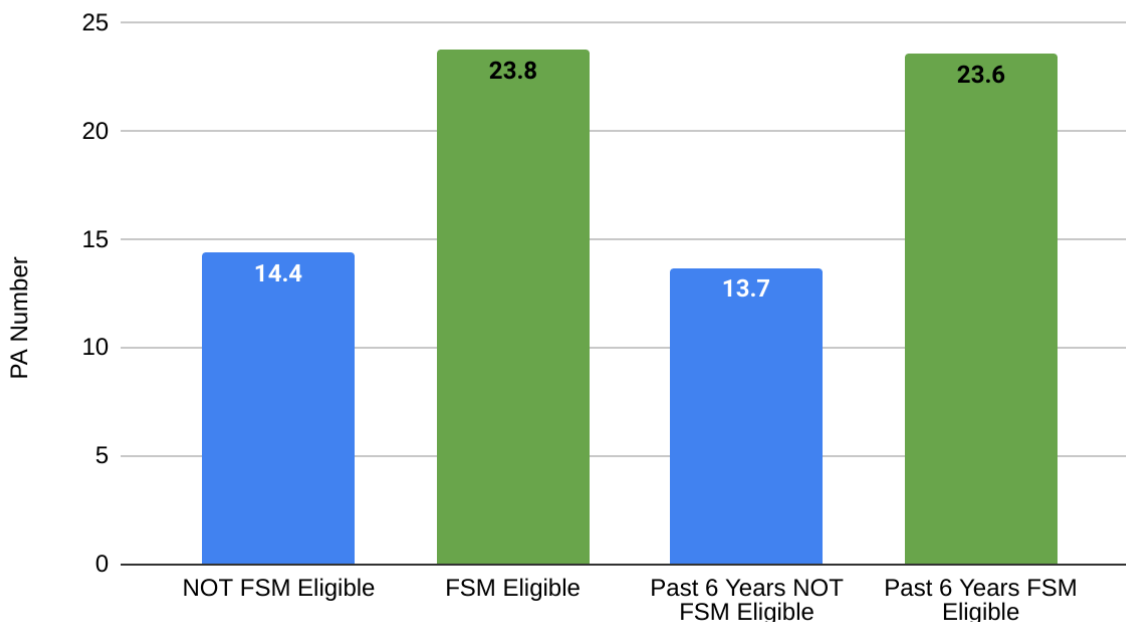### Gender and persistent absence (10%) rate in Hackney 2021/22

Chart 4

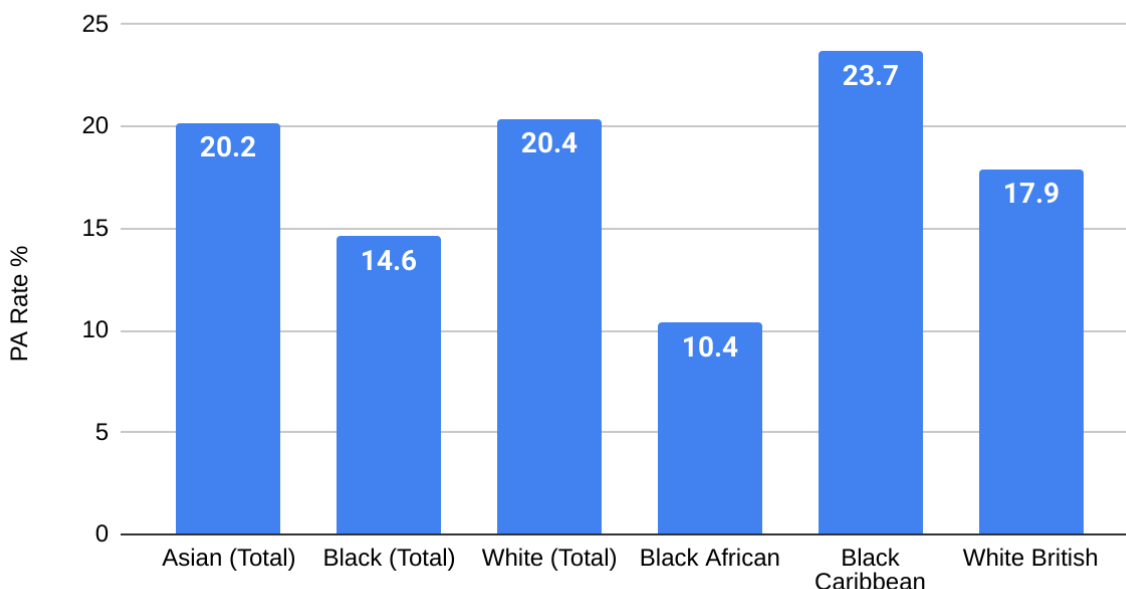### Number and Rate of Persistent Absence (10%) in Hackney 2021/22 by year group

Chart 5

FSM Eligibility and Persistent Absence (10%) Rate in Hackney 2021/22

Bar chart titled "PA Number" showing:
- NOT FSM Eligible: 14.4
- FSM Eligible: 23.8
- Past 6 Years NOT FSM Eligible: 13.7
- Past 6 Years FSM Eligible: 23.6

Chart 6

(Selected) Ethnic groups and persistent absence (10%) rate in Hackney 2021/22.

Bar chart titled "PA Rate %" showing:
- Asian (Total): 20.2
- Black (Total): 14.6
- White (Total): 20.4
- Black African: 10.4
- Black Caribbean: 23.7
- White British: 17.9

Other persistent absence (noting very small numbers)
Gypsy Roma: 56.7% Traveller Irish Heritage 80.7%

Chart 7

Number of Persistent Absence (10%) Spring/Autumn 2023 Inner London
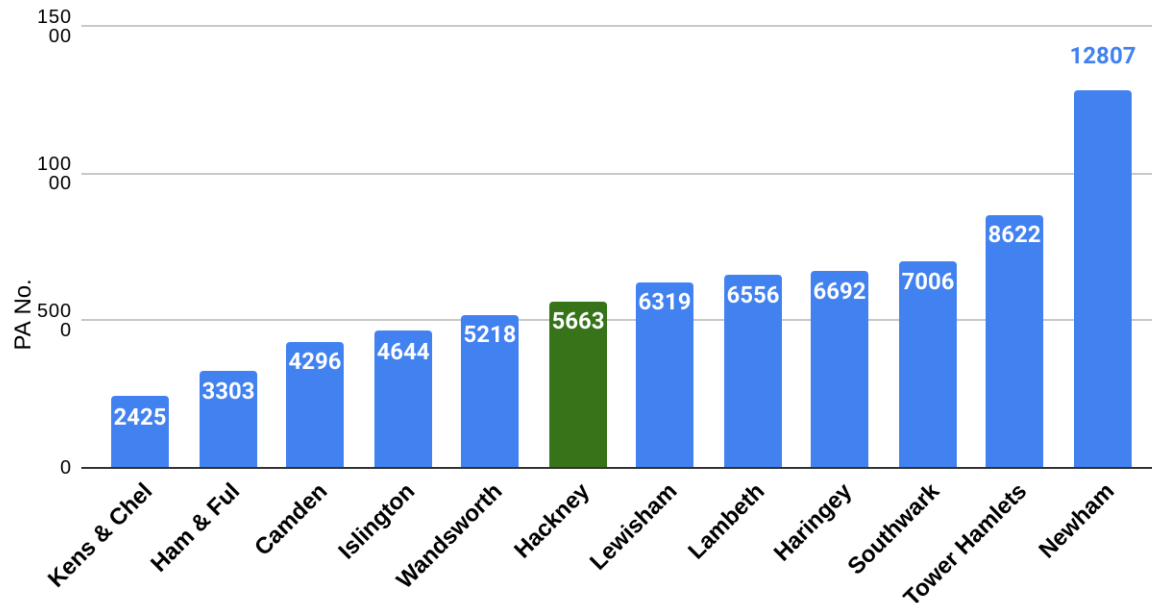
Chart 8

Percentage of Persistent Absence (10%) Spring /Autumn 2023 Inner London
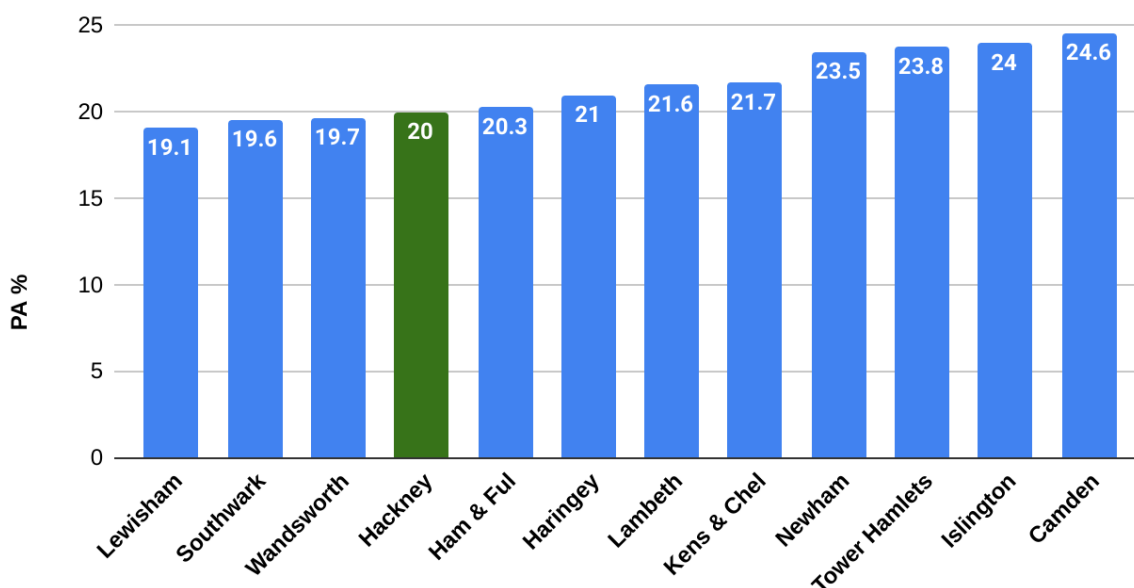
Secondary School Level Data - Severe and Persistent Absence (published data)
Persistent absence across Hackney Secondary Schools:

Persistent Absence (10%) rate in 2022/23 - range 9.1% to 32.3%

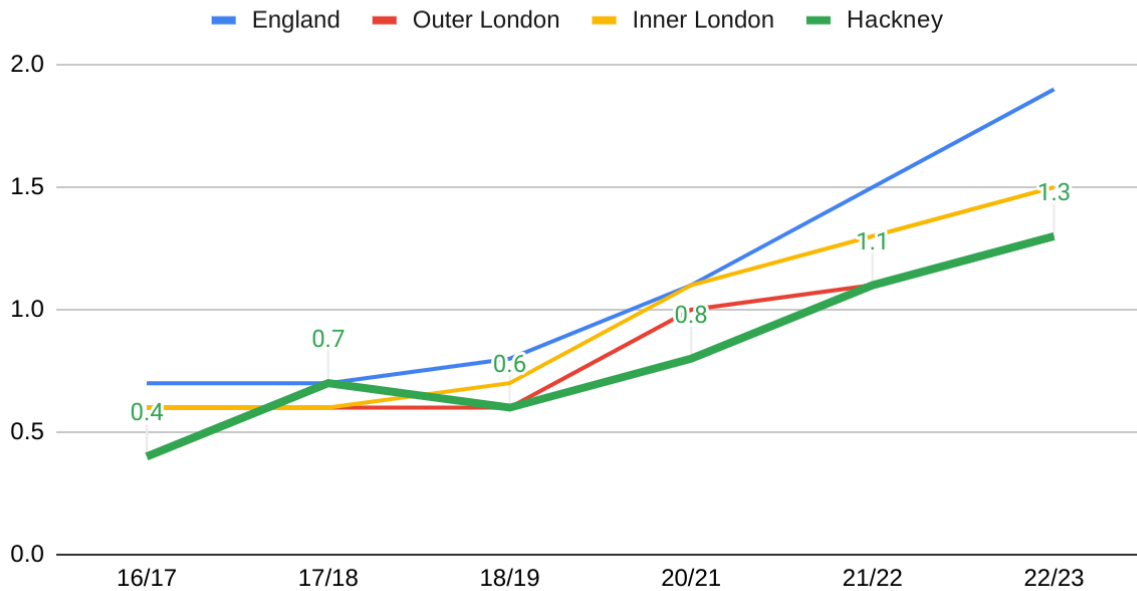**Persistent Absence (10%) number in 2022/23** - range 99 to 344 pupils

All persistent absence data across Hackney secondary school for 2020/21 to 2022/23 can be viewed via this link.

Severe Absence (50% of educational sessions missed)
Using Data from https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england
Chart 9

Percentage of severe absence Autumn/Spring 2016/17- National, regional and local

Chart 10

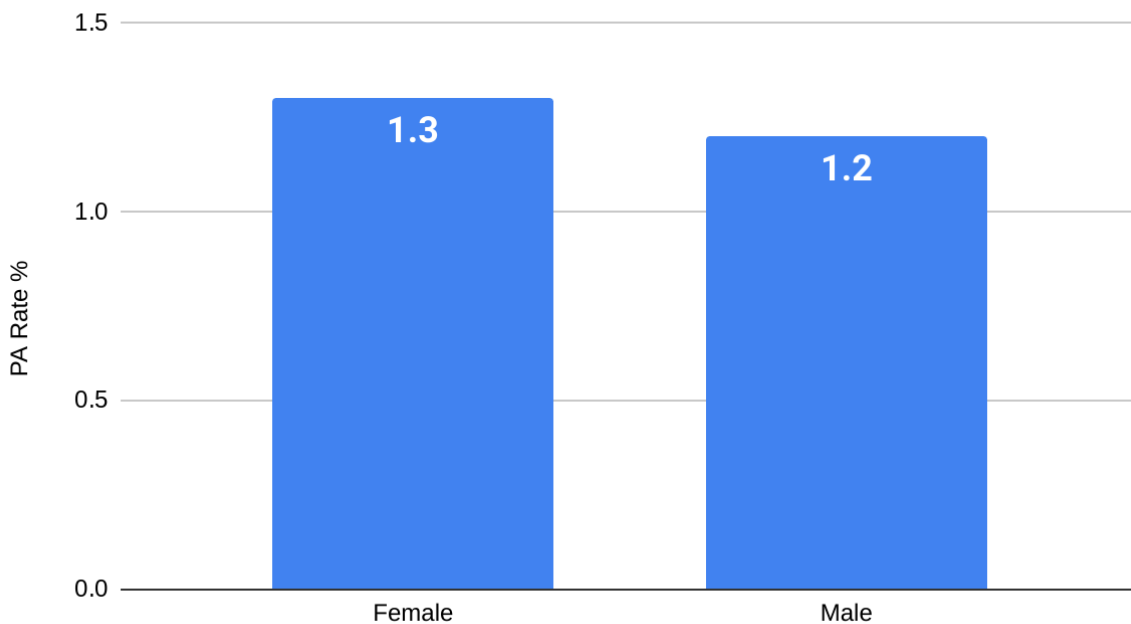**Gender and severe absence (50%) rate in Hackney 2021/22.**

Chart 11

Number and Rate of Severe Absence (50%) in Hackney 2021/22 by year group.
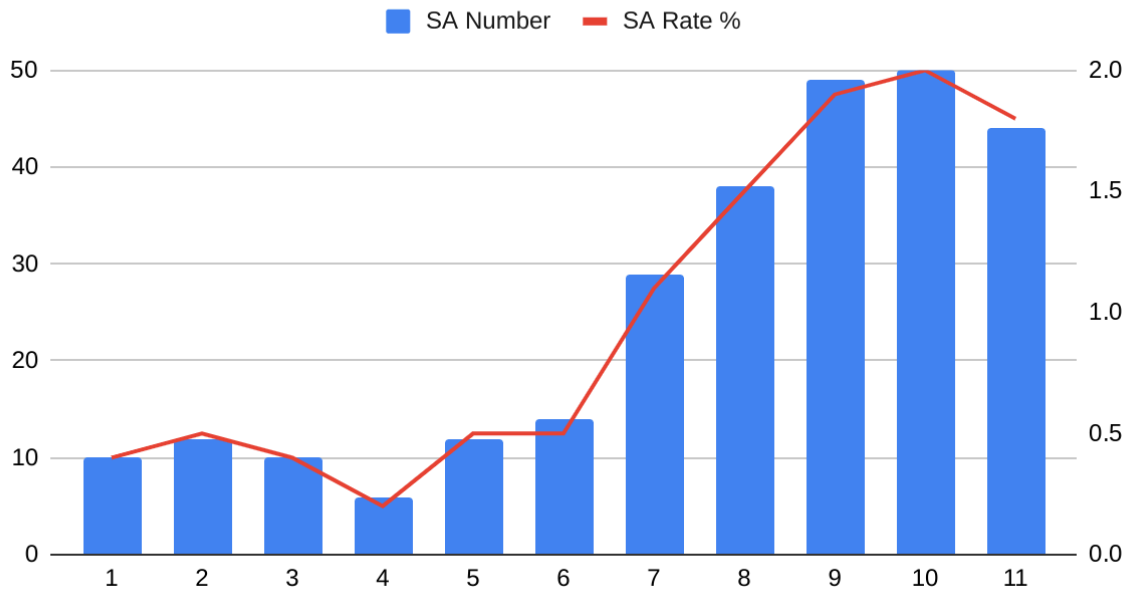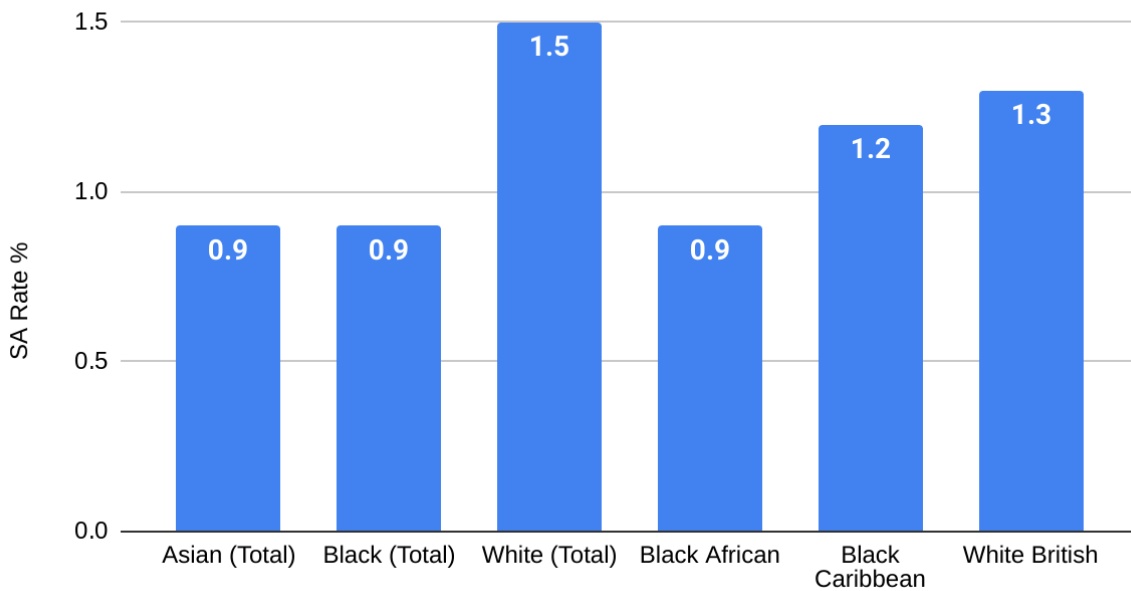

Chart 12

(Selected) ethnic groups and severe absence (50%) rate in Hackney 2021/22.

Other severe absence (noting very small numbers)
Gypsy Roma: 10%; Traveller Irish Heritage 5.9%

Chart 13

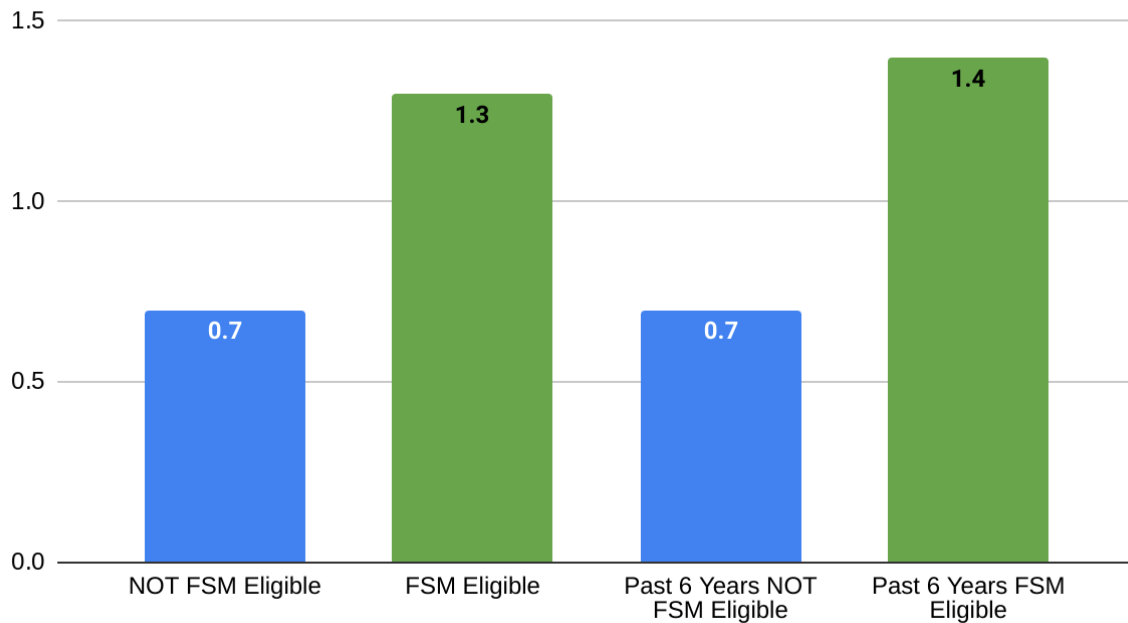**FSM Eligibility and Severe Absence (50%) rate in Hackney 2021/22.**

Chart 14

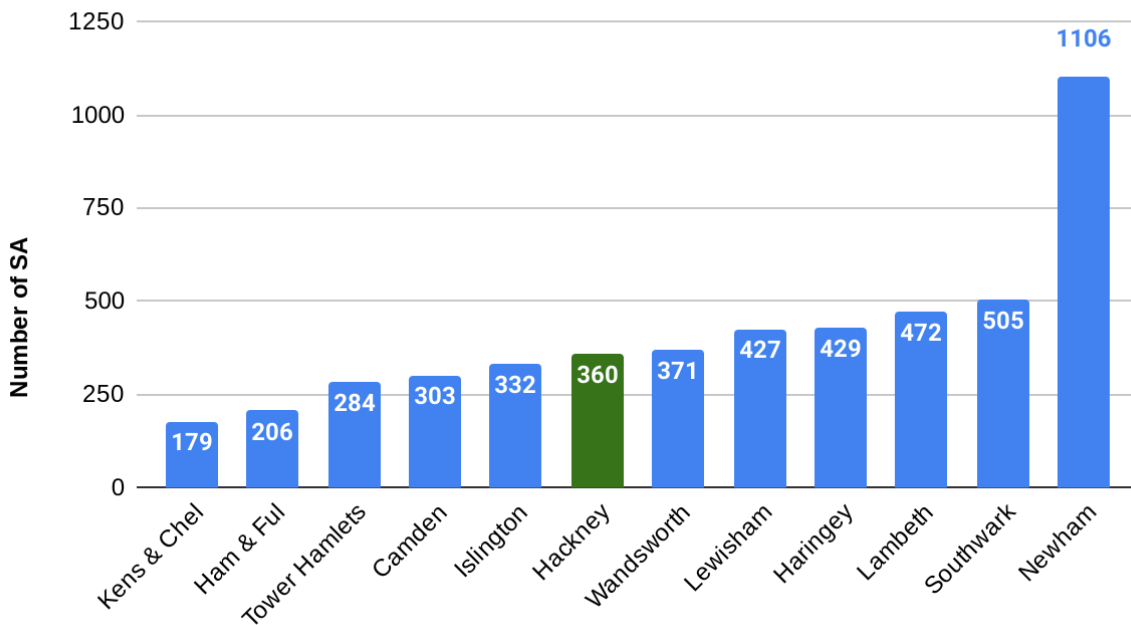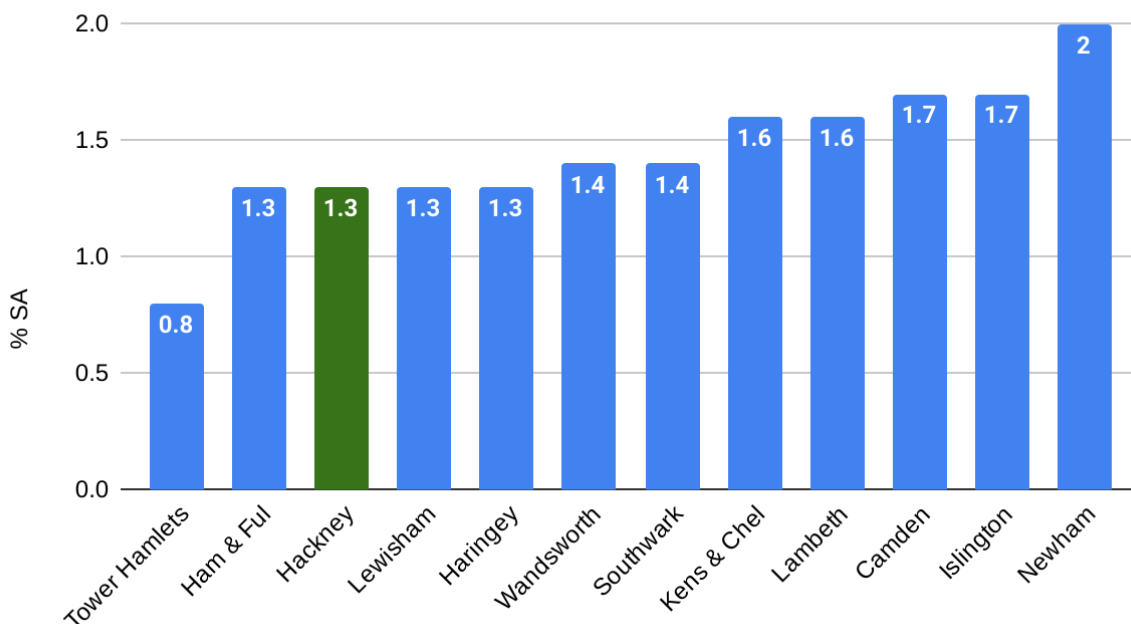**Number of Severe Absence (50%) Spring/Autumn 2023 Inner London**

Percentage of Severe Absence (50%) Spring /Autumn 2023 Inner London

Severe Absence Across Hackney Secondary Schools:

Severe Absence (50%) <u>rate in 2022/23</u>- range 0.9% - 3.3%

Severe Absence (50%) <u>number in 2022/23</u> - range 10 to 32 pupils in school

All severe absence data across Hackney secondary school for 2020/21 to 2022/23 can be viewed via this link.

National Persistent and Severe Absence demographics

table below provides additional detail.

On average, pupils eligible for FSM or with SEN have higher absence rates than their peers
England, state-funded schools, 2021/22

	Absence rate	% of pupils missing at least 10% of sessions	% of pupils missing at least 50% of sessions
National average	**7.6%**	**22.5%**	**1.7%**
Special educational needs (SEN)			
EHC plan	12.1%	36.9%	5.2%
SEN support	10.0%	32.0%	3.0%
No SEN	6.9%	20.0%	1.0%
Free school meals (FSM)			
FSM	10.8%	37.2%	3.0%
Not eligible for FSM	6.5%	17.5%	0.9%
Major ethnic group			
Mixed	7.7%	23.9%	1.7%
Asian	6.7%	21.0%	0.8%
White	7.9%	23.4%	1.8%
Traveller of Irish heritage	22.1%	71.7%	13.6%
Gypsy/Roma	17.8%	64.9%	8.3%
Black	5.1%	13.5%	1.0%
Chinese	3.6%	6.2%	0.4%
Gender			
Male	7.5%	22.2%	1.6%
Female	7.6%	22.8%	1.7%