



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 2ND JULY 2019

SUBJECT: IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND REDUCING EXCLUSIONS

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the progress being made in improving attendance and reducing exclusions in schools across the Local Authority.

2. SUMMARY

The information contained in the National Statistics First Release *Absenteeism from Secondary Schools in Wales, 2017/18*, published as SFR 74/2018 and *Absenteeism from Primary Schools in Wales, 2017/18*, published as SFR 122/2018, gives a national overview of school attendance and absence rates. The information provided in the National Statistics First Release Permanent and Fixed-term Exclusions from Schools in Wales, 2016/17 provides further information on national rates of exclusion. These documents can be accessed via www.statswales.gov.uk and the Welsh Government website.

The foci on raising pupil attendance and reducing exclusions remains a key priority for The Local Authority (LA) and is one of the key priorities in the Directorate Plan for 2018 -2023.

2.1 Attendance

Statistical data identifies that secondary attendance for 2017-18 was 93.4% - an increase of 0.1% on the previous year. The LA ranking improved from 21st to 18th.

Primary attendance for 2017-18 was 94.5% - a decrease of 0.2 on the previous year. However, the national decline was 0.4%. Therefore Caerphilly improved the LA rankings from 17th to 14th – the LA's highest ever ranking.

A persistent absentee is a pupil who has missed at least 20% of half day sessions. Analysis of secondary data relating to persistent absenteeism identifies a three year downward trend of 0.2 percentage points. This indicates that there are fewer pupils who are persistent absentees. This compares favourably against trends in performance in Wales which has an upward trend of 0.2 percentage points. Analysis of primary data relating to persistent absenteeism identifies a slight three year upward trend of 0.1 percentage points. However, this is in line with national trends.

2.2 Exclusions

Data identifies that the number of permanent exclusions issued in secondary schools has shown an increase between 2014/15 and 2017 /18. There has been one permanent exclusion issued in primary school in a six year period to date.

At the secondary phase, there has been an increase in the number of fixed term since 2014/15 (with a slight drop in 2015/16). The current level of fixed term exclusions show a decrease compared with 2017/18 although greater than in 2015/16.

At the primary phase, there has been an increase in the overall number of fixed term exclusions for the period from 2014 to 2017 although this trend was reversed in 2017/18.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Members are requested to note the content of the report.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Improving attendance and reducing exclusions is a priority at both a national and local level.

5. THE REPORT

5.1 The LA works with schools, parents, the EAS and other partners to ensure that a robust approach towards increasing attendance and reducing exclusions is taken.

5.2 Attendance

5.2.1 In addition to the information contained in the summary, analysis of secondary attendance for 2017-18 identifies an improving picture for individual schools.

7 out of the 13 schools were placed above the median position with 5 out of those 7 schools in benchmark quartile 1. This compares favourably to the 2016-17 performance of only 4 schools above the median. All schools maintained or improved on their benchmark position.

5.2.2 Unverified secondary data for 2018-19 indicates that pupil attendance continues to improve. Secondary attendance for 2018-19 was 93.9%. This is a 0.5% increase on the previous year (0.1% equates to 2894 teaching sessions). In 2018-19, 9 out of 12 schools improved their attendance (two of the schools had a small decline of 0.1%). Based on the previous year's benchmark data, this would place 10 out of 12 schools above the median benchmark.

5.2.3 As part of the Local Authority strategy to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment, the educational welfare service has taken an increasingly proactive stance on improving the attendance of pupils in receipt of free school meals. In 2018-19, the attendance of this group of vulnerable learners was 86.8%, an increase of 0.3pp. In addition, the attendance of 'Looked After Pupils' was 95.28%, an increase of 2.5pp.

5.2.4 Mid year analysis indicates that primary attendance has improved. At the end of February 2019, unverified primary data indicates 95.18%, an increase of 0.3pp on the previous year. The attendance of FSM pupils has also improved by 0.1pp to 92.64%

5.2.5 In 2017, the strategy for improving attendance was revised and modified. During this period, there has been a 0.6% improvement in secondary attendance. In line with the Service Improvement Plan, a number of regular, additional activities have taken place across the year to improve engagement with primary and secondary settings, facilitate training, share expertise and build overall capacity in schools. Activities have included:

- More effective targeting of schools demonstrating mid-year dips in attendance. This includes ten week intervention plans co-constructed between the school and the link EWO. This has resulted in an improvement in the school's attendance in a relatively short space time.

- Termly attendance meetings for school clerks, pastoral leads and family liaison officers. These meetings provide practical guidance in improving attendance. This includes case studies from schools, strategies for effective data collection and analysis and input from external agencies who can support with broader issues; e.g. Supporting Family Change.
- Liaise with schools to identify emerging issues for pupils at risk of dipping below 90%. Work with the family to support and identify solutions.
- Improved joined up approach across the Educational Welfare Service. On specific projects, officers work in pairs undertaking intensive support for schools a number of weeks. This raises the profile of attendance within the school community and provides additional training for key stakeholders; e.g. school clerks.

5.2.6 In order to further improve and maintain the upward trend in pupil attendance over time, the following actions will be put into place over the next twelve months:

- Improve tracking, monitoring of attendance data with reference to FSM and LAC pupils. Make effective use of the data to improve attendance of these vulnerable groups. Consider the comparison against the national average differential between FSM and non-FSM.
- Facilitate an action research project with all secondary school and targeted primary schools focusing on good practice to improve the attendance of pupils in receipt of free school meals.
- Increase engagement of stakeholders – specifically, pupils, parents and schools
- Increase opportunities for targeted intervention. Improve attendance in schools where there is a mid year dip in attendance.
- Continue to sharply monitor the progress of initiatives introduced over the last twelve months. Adapt as appropriate based on data collection and stakeholder feedback.
- Track the attendance of pupils with English as an additional language and boys. Increase scrutiny on improving the attendance of pupils receiving education other than at school.
- Consider strategies to collect attendance data relating to other vulnerable groups; e.g. young carers.
- Collaborate alongside the SEWC School Improvement Officers to implement the newly created regional strategy for attendance. Ensure that regional strategy impacts on levels of attendance across Caerphilly schools.

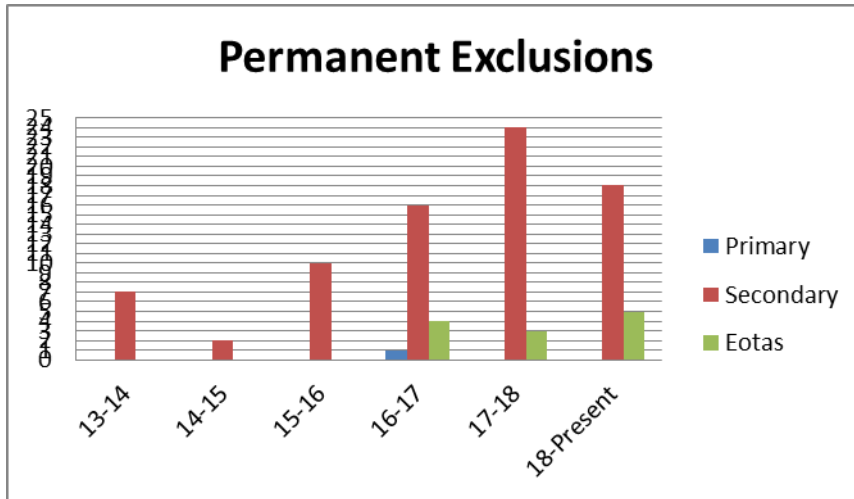
5.3 Exclusions

In 2017/2018 there were no permanent exclusions issued in 33% of secondary schools and 100% of primary schools. There were no fixed term exclusions issued in 45% of primary schools. 80% of primary schools issued exclusions of 5 or fewer exclusions.

5.4 In 2018/19 (to end May) 42% of secondary schools and 100% of primary schools have not issued permanent exclusions. There were no fixed term exclusions issued in 46% of primary schools. 85% of primary schools issued exclusions of 5 or fewer exclusions.

5.5 Figure 1 illustrates a fluctuating trend in the number of permanent exclusions issued in schools since 2013/14. The reasons for the permanent exclusions issued relate to: assault on a pupil, breach of school rules, possession of firearms or weapons, threatening/inappropriate behavior against a member of teaching staff, verbal abuse, theft, sexual remarks, racist abuse, vandalism and use of illegal substances.

Figure 1



5.6 Figure 2 shows the trend in the number of fixed term exclusions at the primary phase, there has been an increase in the overall number of fixed term exclusions for the period from 2014 to 2017 although this trend was reversed in 2017/18.

5.7 The overall number of days lost due to fixed term exclusions at primary has fluctuated with a slight decrease in 2017/18 and 2018/19 to date. The numbers of pupils receiving fixed term exclusions has decreased slightly at primary level since 2015/16.

5.8 At the secondary phase, there has been an increase in the number of fixed term since 2014 /15 (with a slight drop in 2015/16). The current level of fixed term exclusions show a decrease compared with 2017/18 although greater than in 2015/16. A similar trend can be seen with days lost and numbers of pupils with current figures indicating a decrease for 2018 /19 to date (figure 3 and 4).

5.9 The reasons for fixed term exclusions reflect similar themes to those for permanent exclusions, with the most prevalent being for assault and disruptive behaviour at primary and breach or school rules, disruptive behaviour, assault and verbal abuses at secondary.

Figure 2 – Fixed Term Exclusions – 6 year comparison

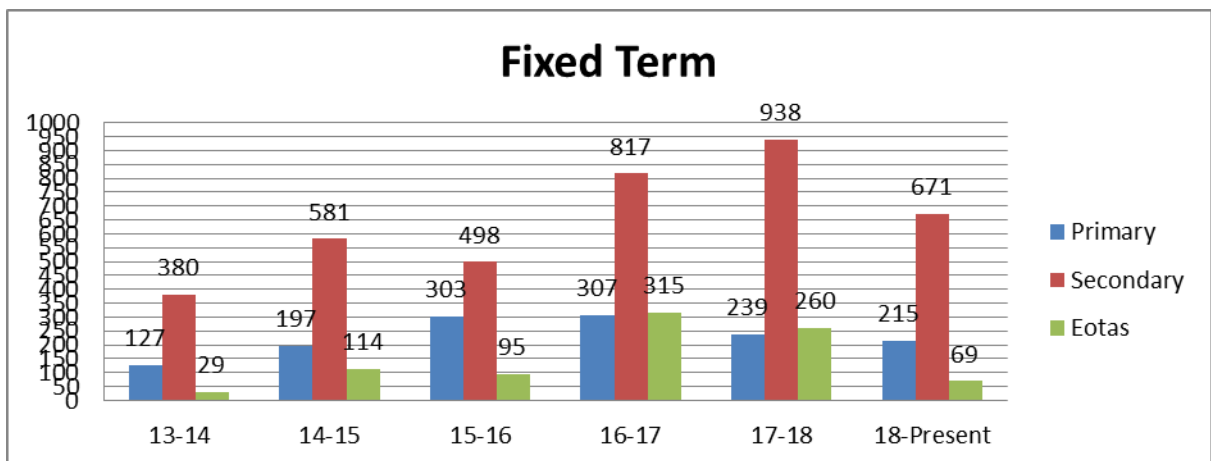


Figure 3 Days lost – 6 year comparison

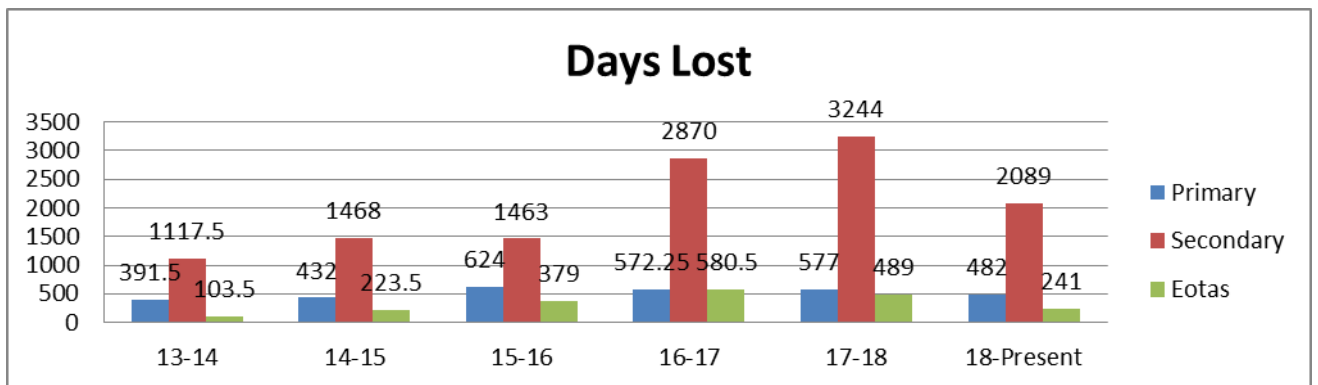
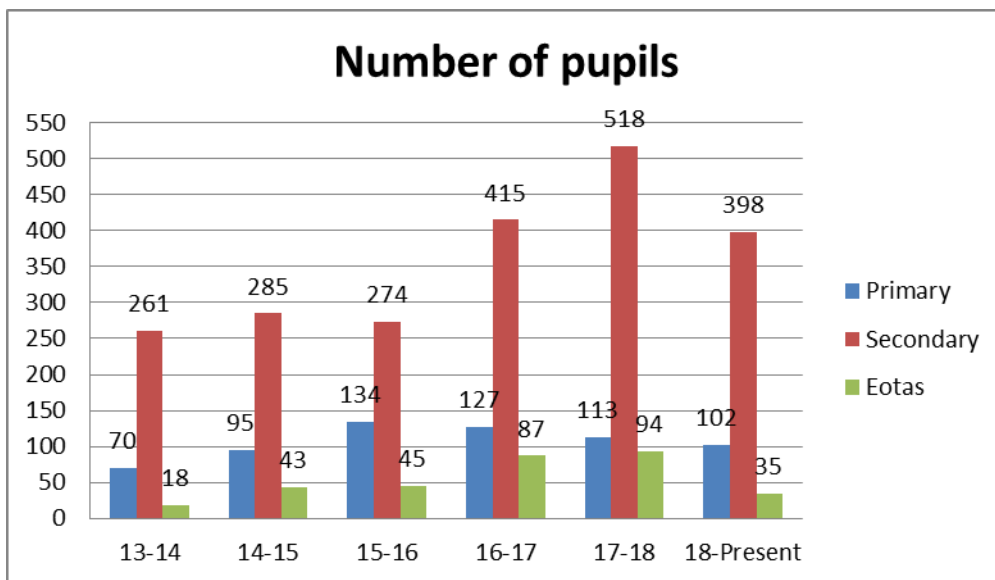


Figure 4 Number of pupils receiving fixed term exclusions – 6 year comparison



- 5.10 In relation to specific groups data indicates that there are more exclusions issued to boys compared with girls both in relation to permanent and fixed term exclusions. There were less exclusions issued to children who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) compared with those who were not eligible for FSMs in primary and secondary and shown in Appendix 1.
- 5.11 There were fewer exclusions issued to children in vulnerable groups including children who are Looked After and those with Statements of Special Educational Needs compared with those who were not in these groups as shown in Appendix 1.
- 5.12 As indicated there are examples where schools issue few or no exclusions and data indicates that the trend is beginning to show a reduction in indicators for fixed term exclusions. However reducing exclusions remains a priority within the LA as indicated within key plans with particular focus on those in vulnerable groups. In this respect the LA will continue to work with EAS and schools to support with interventions and provide appropriate challenge.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 No related assumptions have been felt to be necessary in relation to this report.

7. LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES

- 7.1 Corporate Council Plan 2018 - 2023: Well-being Objective 1 – Improve Education for all; Well being Objective 2 ‘Enabling Employment’; Well Being Objective 5 ‘Creating a county borough that supports a healthy lifestyle in accordance with the Sustainable Development Principle within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015’.
- 7.2 Education Service Improvement Plan 2019
- 7.3 LA Self Evaluation 2019
- 7.4 Shared Ambitions – Education Strategy

8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 8.1 This report identifies the Local Authorities commitment to the long-term health and well-being of children and young people within the county borough by ensuring they have the best start in life and opportunities to achieve success as a young person and as an adult.
- 8.2 Strategies identified within the plan are aimed at prevention – preventing young people from falling into trends related to poor attendance and attainment. The Education Welfare Service and Inclusion team aim to instil key messages and appropriate decision making skills in relation to promoting pupil attendance and reducing exclusions.
- 8.3 Collaboration with schools, Headteachers, and EAS colleagues will further assist us in driving up standards and securing progress in all of our priority objectives.
- 8.4 We actively involve children and young people in our decision making processes. Pupils have opportunities to contribute to policies and feedback on attendance strategies being implemented in schools.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 This report is for information purposes only, so the council’s full Equalities Impact Assessment process does not need to be applied.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no financial implications with respect to this report.

11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no personnel implications with respect to this report.

12. CONSULTATIONS

- 12.1 All responses from the consultations have been incorporated in the report.

13. STATUTORY POWER

- 13.1 ‘Shared Purpose: Shared Future, Statutory Guidance on the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015’, and in particular SPSF 3 – Annex B, which is issued in accordance with Section 17(3) of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 and applies to local authorities in respect of local well-being plans and whenever they take decisions which might affect children and young people.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Exclusion information for specific groups