



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10TH JANUARY 2017

SUBJECT: IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND REDUCING EXCLUSIONS

REPORT BY: CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To update Members on the progress made in improving attendance and reducing exclusions.

2. SUMMARY

Attendance

- 2.1 The information contained in the National Statistics First Release *Absenteeism from Secondary Schools in Wales, 2015/16*, published as SFR 111/2016, gives a national overview of school attendance and absence rates - (to view data please refer to www.statswales.gov.uk). The statistical release for the 2015/16 academic year for Primary schools is due for publication in December 2016.
- 2.2 During the academic year 2015/16 there was an increase of 0.7% in secondary school attendance in comparison with 2014/15; the primary school attendance data records a 0.1% improvement in comparison with 2014/15.
- 2.3 There remains evidence of a strong correlation between poor attendance and those children and young people eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) as indicated in the Secondary School Statistical release.
- 2.4 Collaborative work between the Local Authority (LA), schools, parents, South East Wales Consortium (SEWC) and the Education Achievement Service (EAS) will drive further improvements in attendance rates across schools within the LA

Exclusions

- 2.5 The information provided in the National Statistics First Release *Permanent and Fixed-term Exclusions from Schools in Wales, 2014/15* can be accessed via www.statswales.gov.uk.
- 2.6 The LA works with schools and other partners including SEWC to ensure a robust approach towards the reduction of exclusions. During 2011/12, the need to reduce exclusions became an urgent priority and has continued to be a focus in all key plans.
- 2.7 There have been no permanent exclusions issued in primary schools for five consecutive years. The number of permanent exclusions issued in secondary schools has fluctuated in the last 4 years, with an increase from 8 in 2014/2015 to 14 in 2015/16.
- 2.8 In 2015/2016, there were no fixed term exclusions issued in 30 out of 75 (40%) primary schools. At the primary phase, there has been an increase in the overall number of fixed term exclusions, the overall number of days lost due to fixed term exclusions and the number of

pupils receiving exclusions. In primary schools there have been decreases in the number of fixed term exclusions over 5 days and the number of days lost over 5 days.

- 2.9 At the secondary phase, there has been an increase in the number of fixed term exclusions over 5 days, the number of days lost over 5 days and the overall number of days lost. In secondary schools there have been decreases in the overall number of fixed term exclusions, the number of pupils receiving fixed term exclusions, the number of fixed term exclusions of 5 days or less and the number of days lost of 5 days or less.
- 2.10 During 2015/16, there were disproportionately more exclusions issued to boys compared with girls. This was more pronounced in primary schools. This follows the trend for 2014/2015. There were more exclusions issued to children who were eligible for free school meals (FSM) compared with those who were not eligible for FSMs in primary. The number of days lost was also greater for those eligible for FSMs. This is a different picture in secondary schools with disproportionately more exclusions issued to children who are not eligible for FSMs. The number of days lost was also more for those not eligible for FSMs. 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.
- 2.11 The implementation of the Revised Behaviour Strategy and the embedding of the outcomes from the ALN working groups across schools will be formally evaluated in the spring term of 2017.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Both the new Caerphilly Attendance Strategy and the revised Caerphilly Behaviour Strategy will contribute to the following Well-being Goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2016:
- *A prosperous Wales* – The revised Behaviour Strategy will aim to ensure that schools and other education providers support children and young people in relation to behaviour management. Reducing exclusions and improving attendance will have a positive impact on attainment and achievement. This will contribute to reducing the number of young people who become NEET. Additionally it will facilitate the development of a skilled and well-educated population in a growing economy giving employment and wealth.
 - *A resilient Wales* – this is not specifically mentioned within the Behaviour Strategy. However, schools will build eco schools into their curriculum.
 - *A healthier Wales* – The Attendance and Behaviour Strategies support schools and education providers to embed good practice across the settings in relation to understanding behaviour, making positive choices and developing mental wellbeing. These developments will also be supported by the new curriculum in Wales going forward. The Healthy schools scheme is embedded into practice in primary and secondary schools.
 - *A more equal Wales* – The Attendance and Behaviour Strategies support schools and other education providers to embed good practice ensuring that young people can fulfil their potential regardless of their circumstances. This includes strategies to reduce the impact of poverty on children and young people through various closing the gap initiatives.
 - *A Wales of cohesive communities* – The Attendance and Behaviour Strategies promote positive attendance, behaviour and well-being which links to the development of safe communities.
 - *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language* – this is not specifically mentioned within the Attendance and Behaviour Strategies.
 - *A globally responsible Wales* – The aim of the Attendance and Behaviour Strategies is to ensure there is a focus on wellbeing and that this is embedded in practice across schools and other education providers.

4. THE REPORT

4.1 The LA works with schools, parents, SEWC, the EAS and other partners to ensure that a robust approach towards the increase in attendance and the reduction of exclusions is taken. Improving attendance and reducing exclusions are urgent priorities within the Directorate and have continued to be a focus in all key plans.

Attendance

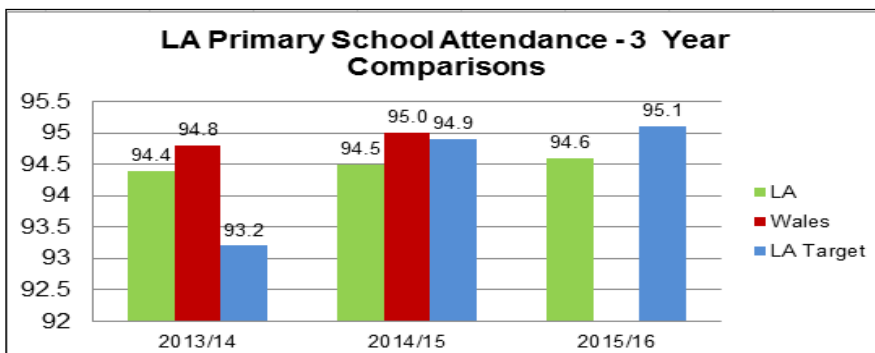
4.2 LA officers monitor attendance on a monthly basis and targeted interventions are agreed between the LA and the EAS. The impact of this accelerated approach has been effective in reducing absenteeism in the schools targeted.

4.3 Comparative data and a summary of Information in attendance in primary and secondary schools is given below.

4.4 Attendance within primary schools in Caerphilly has continued to improve. Figure 1 indicates that for the academic year 2015/16, there was an overall improvement of 0.1%.

Figure 1 – Primary School Attendance – 3 Year Comparison

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
LA	94.4	94.5	94.6
Wales	94.8	95.0	
LA Target	93.2	94.9	95.1



4.5 The primary school statistical release is due for publication in December 2016.

4.6 Local comparisons confirm that of the 75 primary schools:

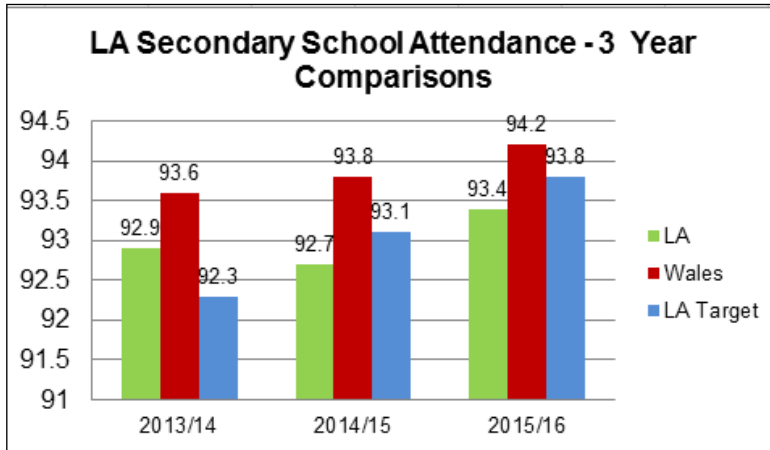
- 38 record improved attendance for 2015/16;
- 34 met or exceeded their set target;
- 26 met or exceeded the LA target of 95.1%;
- 29 report attendance of 95% or above, with one school recording attendance of 98%;
- 12 schools record improvements of 1% or more;
- There are many examples of good practice, whereby attendance rates have increased steadily over the past few years, for example: Hengoed and Fochriw.
- It should be noted that attendance rates do not reflect the robust processes in some schools. This is due to contagious illnesses such as hepatitis A, chicken pox, slapped cheek, scarlet fever and other viral infections which impact significantly on attendance rates.

4.7 A persistent absentee is a pupil who missed at least 20% of half day sessions. The national data is not due until December 2016. However, the number of persistent absentees in Caerphilly primary schools has been steadily decreasing. The All Wales core data set evidences that the numbers have reduced from 419, (3.4% of the pupil population) in 2011/12 to 191 (1.5% of the pupil population) in 2014/15, a total reduction of 228 pupils.

- 4.8 National and local data confirm that there has been an increase in attendance of 0.7% within Caerphilly secondary schools for the academic year 2015/16. It should be noted that data for the previous 3 years, records a steady improvement as indicated in figure 2 below.

Figure 2 – Secondary School Attendance – 3 Year Comparison

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
LA	92.9	92.7	93.4
Wales	93.6	93.8	94.2
LA Target	92.3	93.1	93.8



- 4.9 The secondary school statistical release, reports that 20 out of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales are recorded as having improved secondary school attendance for 2015/16 compared with 18 the previous year. The data also indicates that the LA was ranked 19th with Merthyr Tydfil in comparison with the position of 22nd in the previous year.
- 4.10 Local information indicates that:
- 11 secondary schools record improved attendance with only one school, Pontllanfraith exceeding the school target and 3 schools, Bedwas, Newbridge and St Martins, exceeding the Local Authority target of 93.8%;
 - The most improved secondary school is Heolddu recording a 2.5 % increase, followed by St Martins with a 1.9 % and Lewis Girls with a 1.6% increase;
 - The secondary school recording the highest attendance in Caerphilly is St Martins at 94.7%.
- 4.11 The 2015/16 statistical release **SFR 111/2016** provides a national overview of codes schools used to report pupil absences. The information below provides a summary of the local data relating to the use of absence codes. This shows that:

- 63547 days were lost that relate to medical and illness absences, which is 7868 days less than the 71415 days lost in 2014/15.
 - Study leave recorded by 1 school accounted for 1172.5 days lost and whilst this is an option for Headteachers, these are calculated within the absence figures. To address this, the Headteacher has been written to formally requesting that he considers only offering study leave for the academic year 2016/17, following the data capture which is after the May bank holiday and in line with Welsh Government guidance.
 - The total absences that relate to holidays equate to 6623.5 days, which is an increase of 276 days from the 6347.5 days in 2014/15.
 - The overall unauthorised absence figure for Caerphilly is reported as 1.7%
- 4.12 The individual school data on persistent absentees in secondary schools evidences that in Caerphilly, the numbers have been steadily decreasing. This shows that for the academic year 2015/16, 466 pupils, (4.6% of the pupil population) were reported as persistent absentees. This is a reduction from the 587 pupils (5.8% of the pupil population), recorded in

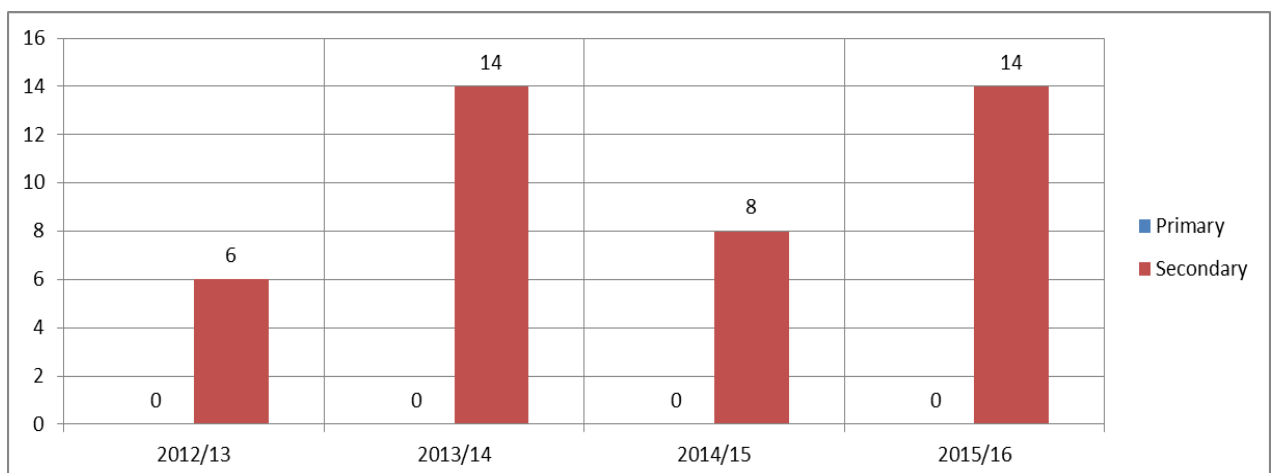
2014/15. The Statistical release highlights that the overall number of persistent absentees nationally has decreased from 7.2% in 2011/12 to 3.9% in 2015/16.

- 4.13 In order to strengthen approaches to inclusion and safeguarding, The Fixed Penalty Notice Regulations (The Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) Regulations 2013) came into force in September 2013. The scheme, introduced by the WG, made available to LAs an additional legal sanction in the form of Penalty Notice Fines.
- 4.14 Penalty Notices are one option amongst a wide range of interventions and support strategies available, to promote improved school attendance and children's educational prospects. Additionally, this strategy may help to avoid putting children and young people at risk of criminal or anti-social behaviour. The measures will also support LAs and schools in ensuring parents and carers fulfil their legal responsibilities to ensure their children regularly attend school.
- 4.15 CCBC's Local Code of Conduct has been developed to ensure that powers are applied consistently and fairly across the LA and sets out the procedures and protocols for the administration of the scheme.
- 4.16 The Fixed Penalty Notice Scheme is in the process of being implemented by LAs across Wales. The Welsh Government will collect returns annually however, a few years data will be necessary in order to measure the impact the penalty scheme has nationally.
- 4.17 Four secondary schools introduced the FPN scheme throughout 2015/16: Blackwood, Rhymney, St Martins and Ysgol Cwm Rhymney. Four more secondary schools are currently in the process of making arrangements to implement the scheme and four primary schools are in discussion with their Governing Body. In total, 75 penalty notices were issued during the academic year 2015/16. Out of this figure, 19 were unpaid and were subsequently referred to Magistrates Court.

Exclusions

- 4.18 The LA has supported secondary schools in the development of Learning Pathway Centres. This should facilitate the reduction of exclusions.
- 4.19 LA officers in consultation with the EAS, monitor exclusions on a monthly basis and contact schools to clarify any issues identified. This process is currently being developed within the context of the ALN Review.
- 4.20 The LA is co-constructing protocols, guidance and proposals for specialist behaviour provision with Headteachers and Pastoral Leaders.

Figure 3 – Number of permanent exclusions – 4 year comparison



4.21 There have been no permanent exclusions in primary schools for five consecutive years. Figure 3 illustrates a fluctuating trend in the number of permanent exclusions issued in secondary schools since 2012/13. In 2015/16, 6 of the 14 secondary schools issued permanent exclusions. During this period, there were no permanent exclusions issued in 8 of the 14 secondary schools. The reasons for the 14 permanent exclusions issued in 2015/16 relate to: assault on a pupil (3), breach of school rules (2), possession of firearms or weapons (1), threatening/inappropriate behavior against a member of teaching staff (6) and use of illegal substances (2).

4.22 There have been decreases in the following exclusion indicators:

- The number of fixed term exclusions over 5 days in primary schools
- The number of days lost over 5 days in primary schools
- The overall number of fixed term exclusions in secondary schools
- The number of pupils receiving fixed term exclusions in secondary schools
- The number of fixed term exclusions of 5 days or less in secondary schools
- The number of days lost of 5 days or less in secondary schools

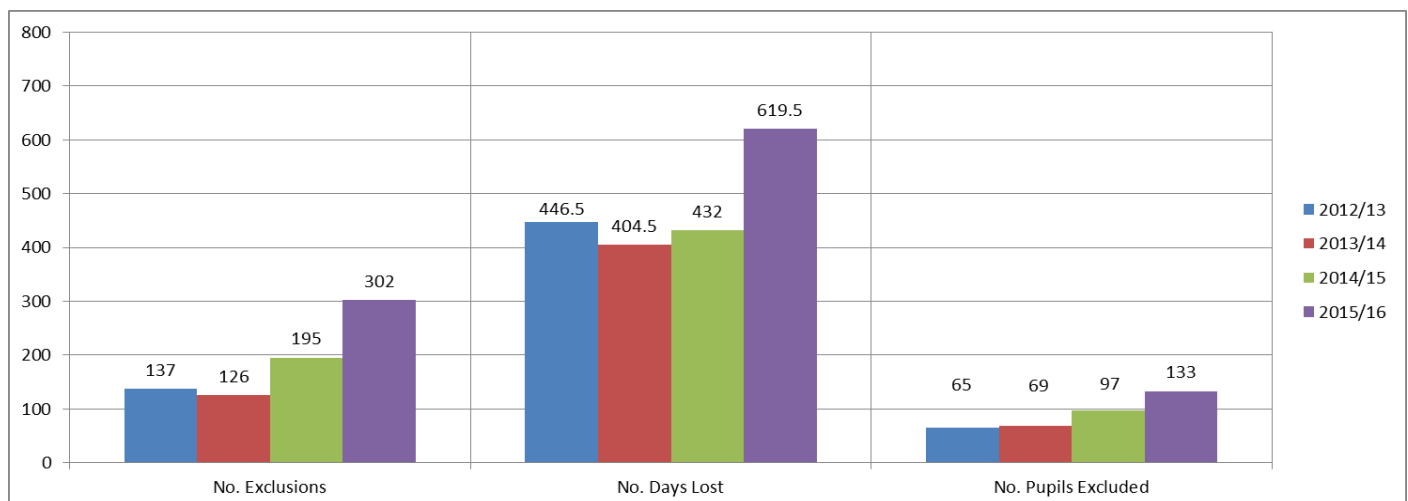
4.23 There have been increases in the following exclusion indicators:

- The overall number of fixed term exclusions in primary schools
- The overall number of days lost due to fixed term exclusions in primary and secondary schools
- The number of pupils receiving exclusions in primary schools
- The number of fixed term exclusions over 5 days in secondary schools
- The number of days lost over 5 days in secondary schools

4.24 The decrease in the number of fixed term exclusions over 5 days as well as the number of days lost due to exclusions over 5 days in primary schools is encouraging. However, the increase in the amount of education lost by children due to exclusions in general is a cause for concern and a priority for the LA.

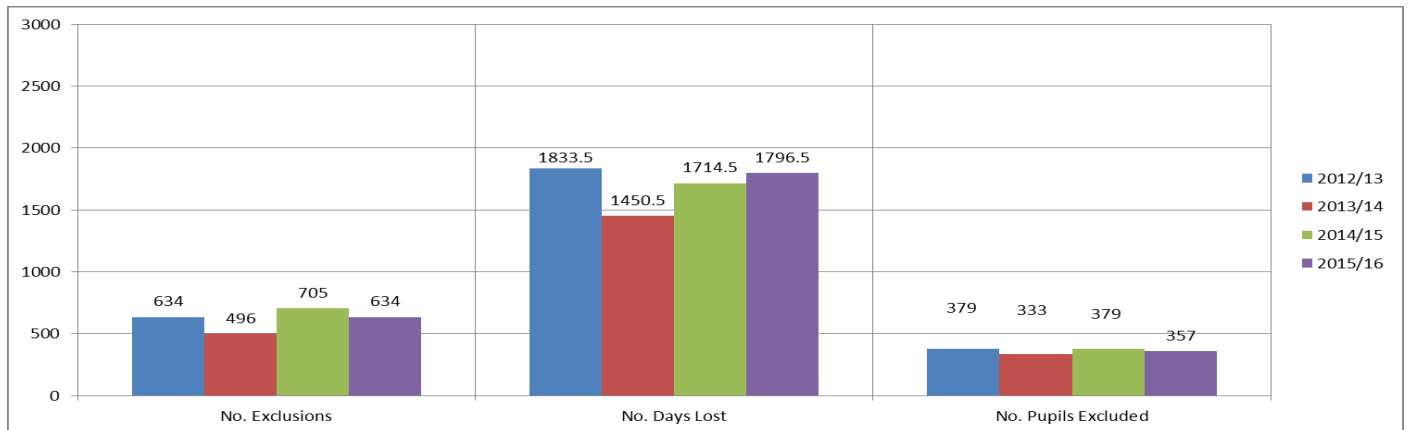
4.25 Figure 4 shows the trend in the number of fixed term exclusions, the number of days lost and the number of pupils being issued fixed term exclusions for 2015/16 compared with 2014/15, 2013/14 and 2012/13 in primary schools. As illustrated, there has been an upward trend in all 3 indicators.

Figure 4 – Fixed Term Exclusions in Primary Schools – 3 year comparison



4.26 Figure 5 below shows the trend in the number of fixed term exclusions, the number of days lost and the number of pupils being issued fixed term exclusions in the last 4 years in secondary schools. There has been a decrease in the overall number of fixed term exclusions and the number of pupils receiving exclusions in 2015/16 in comparison with 2014/15. There has, however, been an increase in the overall number of days lost due to exclusions in the past 3 years.

Figure 5 – Fixed Term Exclusions in Secondary Schools – 3 year comparison



4.27 Information provided in Appendix 1 shows the correlation between exclusions and gender; FSM; children who are Looked After and those with Statements of Special Educational Needs.

4.28 Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the strong correlation between exclusions and gender. More exclusions are issued to boys than girls. This is more pronounced in primary schools than in secondary schools.

4.29 Table 3 shows that more exclusions are issued to children who are eligible for FSM than those who are not eligible for FSM in primary schools. This is a different picture in secondary schools with disproportionately more exclusions issued to children who are not eligible for FSM (Table 4).

4.30 Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8 show that there are less exclusions issued to children who are Looked After and to those with Statements of Special Educational Needs compared with children who are not in these vulnerable groups.

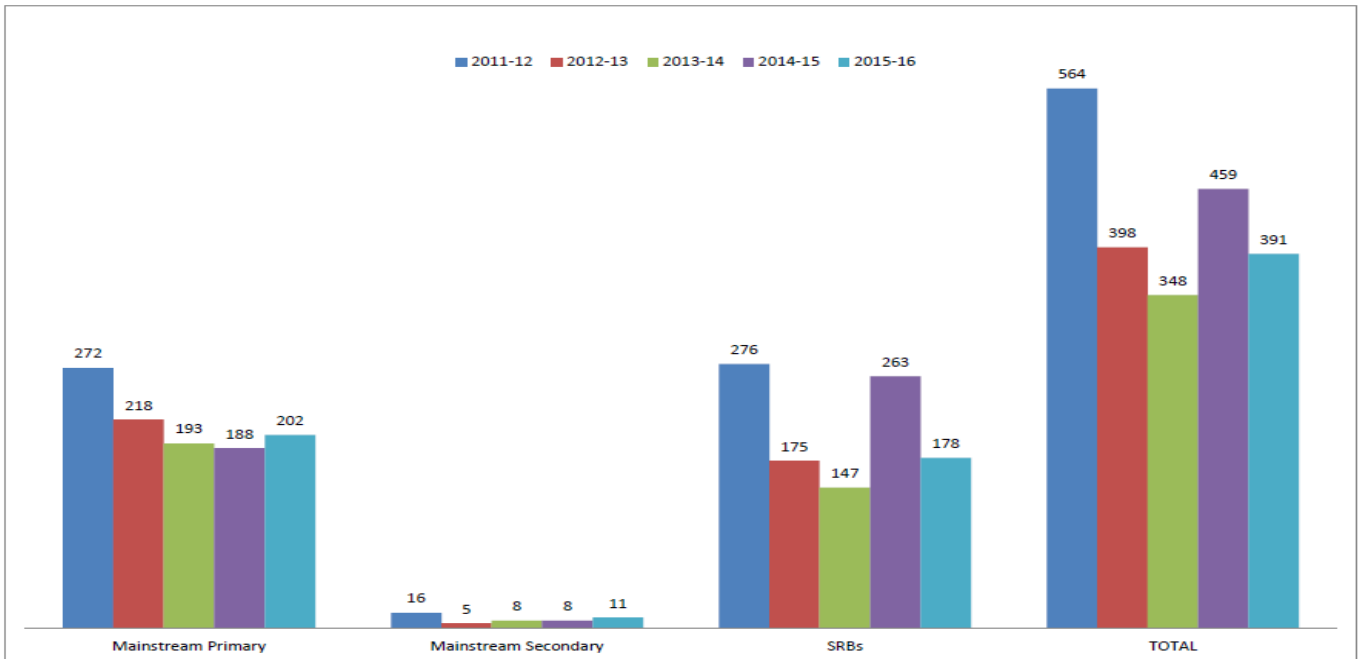
4.31 There are examples of good practice. It is important to note that no fixed term exclusions were issued by 30 out of 75 (40%) primary schools in 2015/16. During this period, 21 (28%) primary schools showed a reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions.

Llancaeath Junior School, Ysgol Penalltau and Waunfawr Primary School are amongst the lowest excluding schools and show significant improvements. Data highlights a significant reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions issued at Lewis School Pengam, Oakdale Comprehensive School and St Martins Comprehensive School.

4.32 Reducing exclusions remains a priority within the LA.

4.33 The LA promotes Team Teach as the model of de-escalation and effective behaviour management. Figure 6 below indicates that there has been a downward trend in the number of incidents of physical intervention in schools and specialist resource bases since 2011/12. There are robust monitoring arrangements in place with regard to the scrutiny of the physical intervention forms. This ensures that the LA exercises its duty of care in relation to pupils and staff members.

Figure 6 – Trends in the Use of Physical Intervention



5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 5.1 This report contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in 3 above. The implementation of the Revised Behaviour Strategy and the embedding of the outcomes from the ALN working groups across schools should facilitate the reductions in exclusions and have a positive impact on attainment and achievement
- 5.2 The Revised Behaviour Strategy is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act. It focuses on both the short term need to improve behaviour and reduce exclusions and on the longer term benefits in terms of improving outcomes.
- 5.3 Prevention is a key area with the Revised Behaviour Strategy. The focus is on early intervention and de-escalation, thereby improving educational attainment standards and preventing the cycle of poverty being repeated.
- 5.4 The implementation of the Revised Behaviour Strategy reflects a regional approach endorsing a coherent model of behaviour management and de-escalation across all schools.
- 5.5 Collaborative work between the LA, schools, parents, SEWC and the EAS will drive further progress in relation to attendance rates and exclusions.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The LA is committed to ensuring that all children and young people gain maximum benefit from their education by regular attendance at school or otherwise, regardless of the individual or family characteristics of those children and young people.
- 6.2 The discriminatory incident reporting system that all schools must complete termly, will help in the identification of possible causes of exclusions in minority groups.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no personnel implications.

9. CONSULTATIONS

9.1 All responses are reflected in the report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Members are requested to note the contents of this report.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 Reducing exclusions is a priority at both a national and local level.

12. STATUTORY POWER

12.1 Education Act 1996.

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Appendices:
Appendix 1 Exclusions and Gender, FSM, Children who are Looked After and Children who have Statements of Special Educational Needs