



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 12TH JANUARY 2016

SUBJECT: IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

REPORT BY: CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the progress being made in improving attendance in schools within the borough.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The information contained in the National Statistics First Release *Absenteeism from Secondary Schools in Wales, 2014/15*, published as SDR 135/15 and *Absenteeism from Primary Schools in Wales*, published as SDR 198/2015, gives a national overview of school attendance and absence rates - (to view data please refer to www.statswales.gov.uk)
- 2.2 During the academic year 2014/15 there was a decrease of 0.2% in secondary school attendance in comparison with 2013/14; the primary school attendance data records a 0.1% improvement in comparison with 2013/14.
- 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. Improving attendance remains a priority for the Local Authority (LA) and is a target in the Learning Education and Inclusion Service Improvement Plan.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 This report links directly with the NEETS Strategy, Single Integrated Plan, the Inclusion Strategy and Learning Education and Inclusion Service Improvement Plan.

4. THE REPORT

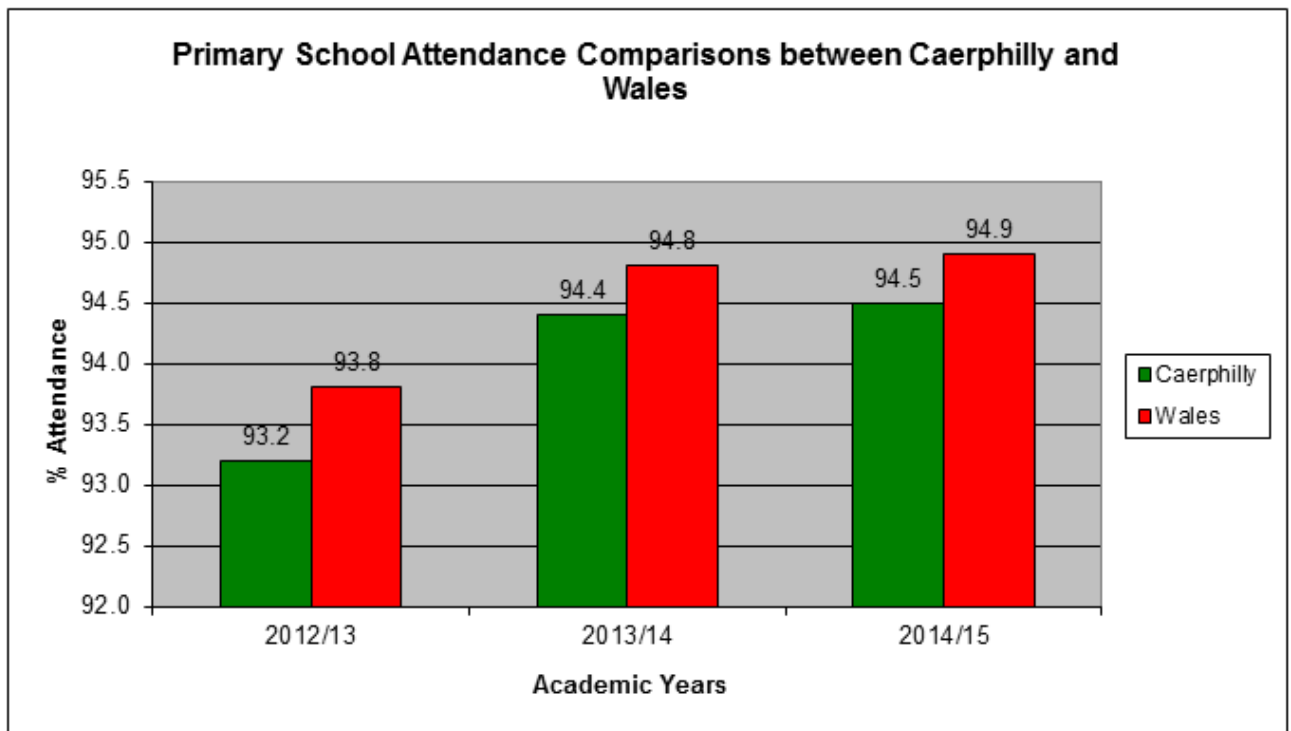
- 4.1 Attendance within primary schools in Caerphilly has continued to improve. Figure 1 provides indicates that for the academic year 2014/15, there was an overall improvement of 0.1%.

Figure 1

Primary School Attendance comparisons between CCBC and Wales

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Caerphilly	93.2	94.4	94.5
Wales	93.8	94.8	94.9

LA Target 2013/14 - 93.2%
LA Target 2014/15 - 94.9%
LA Target 2015/16 - 95.1%



4.1.1 The primary school statistical release, reports that 15 out of the 22 LAs in Wales are recorded as having improved primary school attendance for 2014/15 compared with 22 the previous year. The release also indicates that Caerphilly was ranked joint 19th with Blaenau Gwent and Newport, with Merthyr Tydfil reported as having the lowest attendance nationally. When interpreting the position of LAs in terms of attendance rates in 2014/15, caution should be exercised as many LAs reported the same figure.

4.1.2 Local comparisons confirm that:

- 41 of the 75 primary schools show improved attendance from the previous year;
- 27 schools showed a decrease in their attendance from the previous year;
- 7 schools report attendance of 96% and above;
- 25 of the 75 primary schools matched or exceeded the LA attendance target of 94.9%;
- 34 schools met or exceeded their set target;
- 10 schools exceeded the LAs expectations in terms of improvements of more than 1%.
- There are many examples of good practice, whereby attendance rates in primary schools have increased steadily over the past few years such as: Aberbargoed Primary, Cwm Glas Infants, Deri Primary and Tynwydd Primary.
- It should be noted that some schools that implement robust processes may not always

report improved attendance rates, due to the impact of contagious illnesses such as chicken pox.

- Attendance features within recommendations in Estyn Inspection Reports for schools

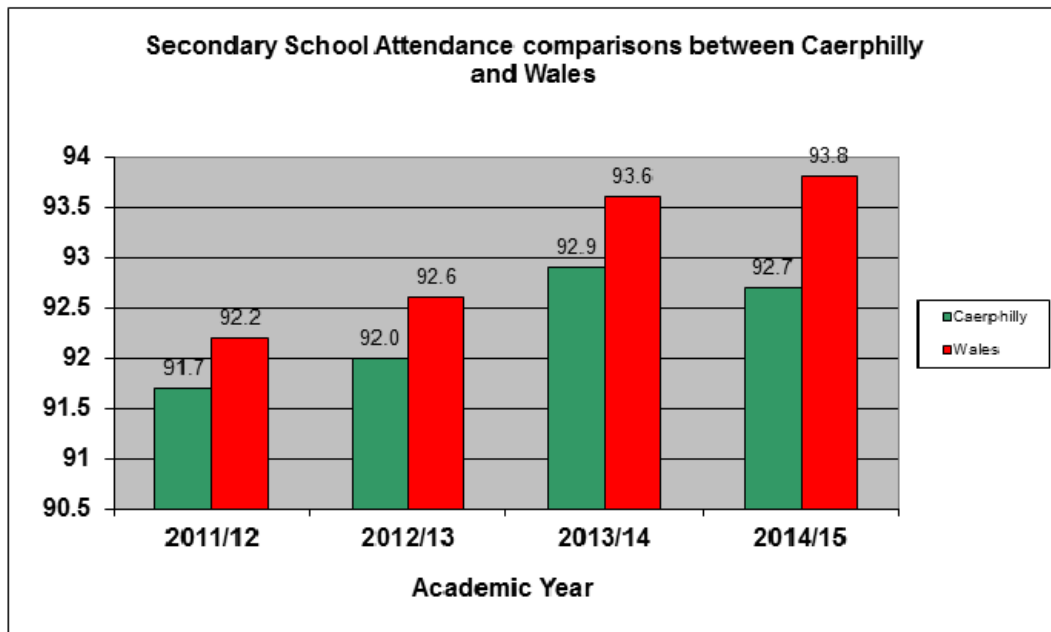
4.2 National and local data confirm that there has been a decrease in attendance of 0.2% within Caerphilly secondary schools for the academic year 2014/15. This equates to every secondary aged child being absent for just over half a session during 2014/15. It should be noted that data for the previous 3 years, records a steady improvement as indicated in figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Secondary School Attendance comparisons between CCBC and Wales

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Caerphilly	91.7	92.0	92.9	92.7
Wales	92.2	92.6	93.6	93.8

Secondary LA Targets	13/14	92.3%
	14/15	93.1%
	15/16	93.8%



4.2.1 The secondary school statistical release, reports that 18 out of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales are recorded as having improved secondary school attendance for 2014/15 compared with 21 the previous year. The data also indicates that the LA was ranked 22nd.

4.2.2 Local information indicates that:

- 6 out of 14 secondary schools show improved attendance from the previous year;
- 7 out of the 14 secondary schools showed a decrease in their attendance from the previous year;
- 4 schools matched or exceeded the LA attendance target of 93.1%.

4.2.3 The 2014/15 local information on pupil characteristics for secondary schools provides an overview of codes schools used to report a pupil absence. Table 6 in the statistical release, SDR 135/15, provides the national context. Appendix 1 is an extract of local information available and shows that:

- 71415 days were lost due to illness and medical reasons (I & M) which contributed to 4.6% of absences (consistent with the national picture);
- 4927 days were lost for leave of absence for a family holiday (H). Both the authorised and unauthorised absences contributed to 0.3% of the all absence rate;
- 7492.5 days were lost for other circumstances (C), which contributed to 0.4% of absences; examples of when this code would have been used include family bereavement, a phased return, part time timetable or a child licensed to perform;
- The information also shows that 9 schools had sessions marked for pupils being given study leave (S), which had an impact of 0.1% on the overall absence figures;
- The overall unauthorised absence figure for Caerphilly is reported as 1.7%. This placed Caerphilly. With regard to this indicator, the Local Authority was ranked joint 19th with Rhondda Cynon Taf.

4.3 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 LA's an additional legal sanction in the form of Penalty Notice Fines.

4.4 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.

4.5 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.

4.6 The Fixed Penalty Notice Scheme is in the process of being implemented by Local Authorities 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. Caerphilly did not issue any penalty notices during the academic year 2013/14, however the LA is working with Headteachers and Governors to further raise awareness of the need to employ this strategy when appropriate/necessary.

4.7 Bedwas High School have demonstrated good practice in relation to the management of attendance which is reflected in consistent improvements over the past few years.

4.8 The presentation of this report will be complimented by a presentation made by Matthew Sims, Headteacher, Heolddu Comprehensive School, regarding the challenges of raising attendance at Heolddu.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The LA is committed to ensuring that all children and young people gain maximum benefit from their education by regular attendance at school, regardless of the individual or family characteristics of those children and young people.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial implications.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no personnel implications.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 All responses are reflected in the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Improving attendance is a priority at both a national and local level.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Education Act 1996

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Appendix 1: Local Information – Secondary School Absence Codes.