



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 9TH JANUARY 2018

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, 2016/17*, published as SFR 97/2017 and *Absenteeism from Primary Schools in Wales, 2016/17*, published as SFR 183/2017, 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 2016/17 there was an decrease of 0.1% in secondary school attendance in comparison with 2015/6; the primary school attendance data has stayed the same as the previous year.
- 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.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The new Caerphilly Attendance strategy will contribute to the following Well-being Goals within the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2016:
 - *A prosperous Wales* – The Attendance Strategy aims to ensure that schools and education providers support children and young people to develop their level of attainment and skills through robust processes that relate to improving attendance rates. This contributes to reducing the number of young people that become NEET (not in education employment or training);
 - *A resilient Wales* – this is not specifically mentioned within the Attendance Strategy; however, schools will build eco schools into their curriculum;
 - *A healthier Wales* – The Attendance Strategy supports schools and education providers to embed good practice across the settings in relation to understanding factors that contribute to poor attendance and developing mental wellbeing. The Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme is embedded into practice in primary and secondary schools;

- *A more equal Wales* – The Attendance Strategy supports schools and other education providers to embed good practice, ensuring that young people can fulfil their potential regardless of 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 Strategy promotes positive attendance and wellbeing 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 Strategy;
- *A globally responsible Wales* – The aim of the Attendance Strategy 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 and other partners including South East Wales Consortium (SEWC) to ensure that a robust approach towards improving attendance is taken. Improving attendance remains a priority for the Local Authority (LA) and continues to be a focus in all key plans.
- 4.2 LA officers monitor attendance on a monthly basis and targeted interventions are agreed between the LA and the Education Achievement Service (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 provided below.
- 4.4 Attendance within primary schools in Caerphilly has stayed the same as the previous year, reporting an attendance percentage of 94.6% as indicated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
LA	94.5	94.6	94.6
Wales	94.9	94.9	94.9
LA Target	94.9	95.1	95.3

- 4.4.1 Local comparisons confirm that of the 75 primary schools:
- 42 schools report improved attendance for 2016/17;
 - 21 schools met or exceeded their set target;
 - 14 schools met or exceeded the LA target of **95.3%**;
 - 29 report attendance of 95% or above;
 - 10 schools report improvements of 1% or more;
 - It should be noted that attendance rates do not reflect the robust processes in some schools. This is due to contagious illnesses such as chicken pox and other viral infections alongside issues related to mental health which impact significantly on attendance rates.
- 4.4.2 A persistent absentee is a pupil who missed at least 20% of half day sessions. The national data for 2016/17 is not due until the end of autumn term 2017, however the number of persistent absentees in Caerphilly primary schools have been steadily decreasing. The All Wales Core Data Set evidences the numbers have reduced from 369, (3.0% of the pupil population) in 2012/13 to 209 (1.6% of the pupil population) in 2015/16, a total reduction of 160 pupils.

4.4.3 Attendance within secondary schools in Caerphilly has decreased slightly on the previous academic year by 0.1%, reporting an attendance percentage of 93.3% as indicated in figure 2 below.

Figure 2

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
LA	92.7	93.4	93.3
Wales	93.8	94.2	94.1
LA Target	93.1	93.8	94.0

4.4.4 The secondary school statistical release reports that 7 out of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales are recorded as having improved or maintained secondary school attendance for 2016/17 compared with all 22 the previous year. The data also indicates that the LA was ranked 21st within Wales in comparison with the position of 19th in the previous year.

4.4.5 Local information indicates that:

- 6 secondary schools record improved attendance with only one school exceeding the school target and 3 schools exceeding the Local Authority target of 94.0%;
- The most improved secondary school is Cwmcarn High School recording a 1.2% increase;
- The secondary school recording the highest attendance in Caerphilly is Newbridge School at 94.7%.

4.4.6 The 2016/17 statistical release 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:

- 57355 days were lost that relate to medical and illness absences, which is 6192 days less than the 63547 days lost in 2015/16.
- The total absences that relate to holidays equate to 7708.5 days, which is an increase of 1087.5 days from the 6621 days in 2015/16.
- The overall unauthorised absence figure for Caerphilly is reported as 2.2% which is an increase of 0.5% on the previous year.

4.4.7 The individual school data on persistent absentees in secondary schools shows that for the academic year 2016/17, 537 pupils, (5.4% of the pupil population) were reported as persistent absentees. This is an increase from the 466 pupils (4.6% of the pupil population) recorded in 2015/16. The Statistical Release highlights that the overall number of persistent absentees nationally has increased by 268 pupils from 6119 pupils in 2015/16 to 6387 in 2016/17.

4.5 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.

4.5.1 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 attendance. The measures will also support LAs and schools in ensuring parents and carers fulfil their legal responsibilities to ensure their children regularly attend school.

4.5.2 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.

- 4.5.3 The Welsh Government commissioned an external survey to measure the overall impact of Fixed Penalty Notices across Wales. This information is yet to be published by Welsh Government.
- 4.5.4 The high majority of secondary schools engaged in the FPN scheme in 2016/17. Two primary schools introduced the FPN scheme in 2016/17: St Helens RC and Pontllytyn Primary. In total, 117 penalty notices were issued during the academic year 2017/16. Out of this figure, 48 were unpaid and were subsequently referred to Magistrates Court.
- 4.6 The following actions have been implemented to address the lower than expected attendance rates across primary and secondary schools:
- Improve engagement of all primary and secondary schools with Local Authority attendance priorities. Activities to include:
 - Increased challenge to all Headteachers and senior leaders through meetings with Senior Educational Welfare Officer. Dialogue includes rigorous discussion on progress against attendance targets and effectiveness of ongoing strategies;
 - More effective targeting and intervention through school improvement plans, self-reviews, audits, target setting etc;
 - Schools monitor and review impact of initiatives and best practice case studies through Head teacher regional meetings and cluster meetings etc;
 - Targeted intervention and support to schools below the median benchmark;
 - Educational Welfare Service to track and, where appropriate, intervene with particular focus on Year 11 pupils.
 - Review and reshape the allocation of Educational Welfare Officers to provide more effective intervention and support to schools.
 - Provide more effective support for clusters of schools providing practical advice including training for the 'Callio' system of tracking and monitoring attendance rates;
 - Improve effective working relationships between Educational Welfare Officers and Inclusion services identifying vulnerable pupils and strategies for additional support.
 - 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.
 - Utilise data systems to support accurate and timely intervention to increase levels of attendance:
 - reduce persistent absenteeism;
 - support low performing schools;
 - identify and track vulnerable pupils by school, cluster and LA;
 - monitor and track attendance via benchmark quartile.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 5.1 This attendance strategy contributes to the Well-being Goals as set out in Links to Strategy above. It is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act:
- Long Term: The importance of balancing short-term issues of attendance in education settings alongside longer-term needs around the impact of attendance on educational attainment and economic wellbeing.
 - Prevention: A long term strategic attendance plan makes a contribution to public bodies meeting their wider objectives.
 - Integration: A purposeful, strategic attendance plan fully integrates into the Local Authority wellbeing objectives
 - Collaboration: The attendance strategy is reliant upon effective partnership with a range of stakeholders including schools, EOTAS settings, inclusion and medical specialists and safeguarding teams.

- Involvement: The attendance strategy relies on the involvement of pupils and other young people in achieving the identified objectives. This includes feedback on the impact of any proposed strategies to improve attendance.

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, regardless of the individual or family characteristics of those children and young people.

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 content of the report.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

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

12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 Education Act 1996.

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