

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Cabinet**

**13th November, 2024**

### **Report of the Head of Education Development - Chris Millis**

#### **Matter for monitoring**

**Wards Affected:** All

#### **PUPIL ATTENDANCE UPDATE**

##### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide Members with information and data in relation to Neath Port Talbot pupil attendance.

##### **Background**

2. This report provides Members with details of pupil attendance data for the academic year 2023/24 and information as to how schools are being supported to progress improvement further.

##### **Attendance Data**

###### **Academic Year 2023/24**

3. The primary sector attendance rate for the academic year was 90.97%, whilst the secondary sector attendance rate was 87.61%. [Note: for the purpose of statistical reporting, the data for Ysgol Bae Baglan, Ysgol Cwm Brombil and Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera - Bro Dur as all-through schools have been disaggregated into both the primary and secondary sectors.]
4. There was an improvement in attendance in both sectors up by 1.17% in the primary sector and 1.63% in the secondary sector from the previous 2022/23 academic year. Data relating to individual schools appears in Appendix A attached to this report.

5. Whilst the Wales national data for primary attendance is not yet available the national data released for secondary schools has shown a significant increase in the Neath Port Talbot ranking from 21st place in 2022/23 to 15th place in 2023/24. This is a seven-place improvement over two years and now places Neath Port Talbot less than half a percentage point short of the Welsh average.
6. There is a negligible difference in attendance between boys and girls in either the primary or secondary sectors. Similarly, between white British and non-white British pupils. However, there continues to be a large attendance gap between pupils who are categorised as eligible for free school meals and non-free school meals, and again between pupils designated as having SEN/ALN and those non-SEN/ALN. This is a pattern identified pre-Covid and areas where the local authority provides additional support in terms of identifying and intervening with vulnerable pupils and families at an earlier stage before persistent absence becomes an issue; working far closer with other service areas both within and external to the Council in order to provide a more cohesive and interconnected level of support, and acting as an advocate for pupils where there are issues between school and home preventing regular attendance.
7. It has been widely reported that some pupils have struggled to re-connect with school and return full-time since the pandemic, whilst others have detached from education altogether and are presenting as school refusers. There is no single reason for an increase in pupil absence rather a range of reasons including complex and multiple causes, anxiety, mental health and wellbeing issues. Some learners established a pattern of not attending school during the pandemic that they and their families have found difficult to revert from. Many of these challenges existed before the pandemic, but some have deepened since, and as a result some families have become harder to reach and engage.

### **Supporting the Improvement of Attendance**

8. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) supports parents and carers to fulfil their statutory responsibility in ensuring that children attend school regularly. The Education Welfare Service works in partnership with schools, parents and other professionals to reduce pupil absence and to raise achievement, enabling pupils to maximise their educational opportunities. The service works closely with schools and parents to identify the cause of individual pupil absence with the aim of early intervention when and where needed. Schools are encouraged to correctly code absences to allow for effective data tracking. Pupil

illnesses are monitored and challenged by Education Welfare Officers where there appears to be patterns of absence. Regular meetings are scheduled between Education Welfare Officers and key school staff to discuss individual pupil cases and provide advice, support and to determine appropriate course of actions. Education Welfare Officers will often attend at the home of the pupil to make enquiries as to the reason for the absence from school in an effort to assist and facilitate an early return to school and discuss with parents various strategies to encourage and improve regular attendance.

9. Recognising the national challenges the Welsh Government provided additional grant funding to local authorities 18 months ago to assist schools with the improvement of pupil attendance. From this grant four temporary Attendance Support Officers (ASOs) were recruited who have concentrated efforts on pupils at or near to becoming persistently absent (80-90% attendance as defined by Welsh Government). Their role involves daily contact with families enquiring after absent children to learn why they are not in school, likely length of absence and whether the school can support them better. In many cases the ASOs developed a frontline approach attempting to quell any further potential longer periods of absence.

Where support has been unsuccessful and all other avenues explored and attendance continues to be a concern, the Council has the available option of issuing parents with a fixed penalty notice or the commencement of prosecution via Court. During the 2023/24 academic year 97 parents were issued with a fixed penalty notice and 14 parents were prosecuted via Court action. With challenges from some parents/families in terms of non-engagement it is anticipated there will be an increase in the number of parents subject to either a fixed penalty notice or Court prosecution this year than last.

10. The Education Welfare Service has close links with local Police who together regularly carry out truancy patrols to discourage absence from school in both Neath and Port Talbot town centres. A number of pupils were identified as being absent from school without a valid reason and both pupils and parents appropriately warned.

## **Estyn**

11. Towards the end of the summer term the local authority was asked by Estyn to be part of a national three-day pilot of an extended local authority link inspection (LALI). There were two main focus areas selected by Estyn with pupil attendance being one of them. The formal feedback received from Estyn is attached to this report as Appendix B;

however, to summarise Estyn were very complimentary of the support the LA provides to our schools as we continue to improve our attendance journey. Estyn recognised the collaboration we have with our schools and the strength of approaches to improve attendance. They made particular reference to the good knowledge elected members have of the support the LA puts in place and how the cabinet member and the education scrutiny committee meet with officers regularly to consider the progress we make.

12. Members will continue to be provided with regular reports on pupil attendance and the work being undertaken to improve the operation of the Education Welfare Service.

### **Financial Impact**

13. There is no financial impact associated with this report.

### **Integrated Impact Assessment**

14. There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for information purposes only.

### **Valleys Communities Impacts**

15. The attendance data contained within this report and support provided by the Education Welfare Service covers all schools across Neath Port Talbot.

### **Workforce Impacts**

16. There are no workforce or staffing issues directly associated with this report.

### **Legal Impacts**

17. There is no legal impact associated with this report.

### **Risk Management**

18. There is no identified risk in relation to this report.

## **Consultation**

19. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external Consultation on this item.

## **Recommendations**

20. That Members note the update provided within this report.

## **Appendices**

21. Appendix A: Breakdown of individual school attendance rates.
22. Appendix B: Estyn outcome letter following extended LALI visit, June, 2024.

## **List of Background Papers**

23. None.

## **Officer Contact**

24. Chris Millis, Head of Education Development, [c.d.millis@npt.gov.uk](mailto:c.d.millis@npt.gov.uk)  
John Burge, Co-ordinator Child and Family Support Team,  
[j.burge@npt.gov.uk](mailto:j.burge@npt.gov.uk)

## Appendix A - Academic Year 2023/24 Individual School Year Data

Abbey Primary	92.22%	1.35%
Alderman Davies CIW	90.30%	0.55%
Alltwen Primary	93.22%	1.41%
Awel y Môr	89.85%	0.11%
Baglan Primary	91.33%	0.06%
Blaenbaglan Primary	92.77%	0.83%
Blaendulais Primary	89.21%	1.06%
Blaengwrach Primary	92.19%	0.77%
Blaenhonddan Primary	93.60%	0.43%
Bryncoch CIW Primary	93.78%	0.99%
Catwg Primary	92.43%	-0.20%
Central Primary	90.53%	0.85%
Cilffriw Primary	90.29%	0.54%
Coed Hirwaun Primary	90.46%	0.06%
Coedffranc Primary	90.35%	2.72%
Creunant Primary	92.44%	1.78%
Croeserw Primary	87.75%	1.66%
Crymlyn Primary	91.20%	-0.10%
Crynallt Primary	91.00%	1.39%
Cwmafan Primary	90.44%	1.92%
Cwmnedd Primary	88.78%	1.47%
Cymer Afan Primary	91.11%	1.20%
Eastern Primary	89.56%	3.51%
Glyncorrwg Primary	91.47%	-0.72%
Gnoll Primary	89.33%	1.00%
Godrergraig Primary	91.50%	0.62%
Llangiwig Primary	92.32%	0.45%
Maesmarchog Primary	87.70%	2.24%
Melin Primary	91.30%	1.54%
Penafan Primary	88.60%	1.39%
Rhos Primary	93.05%	0.86%
Rhydyfro Primary	90.32%	-0.14%
Sandfields Primary	87.85%	3.40%
St Joseph's Infant	91.16%	1.17%
St Joseph's Junior	92.03%	1.94%
St Joseph's Primary	91.56%	0.63%
St Therese's Primary	90.91%	2.69%
Tairgwaith Primary	91.84%	1.40%
Tonnau Primary	91.26%	1.56%
Tywyn Primary	89.25%	-0.12%
Wauanceirch Primary	91.17%	1.24%
YGG Blaendulais	92.54%	0.40%
YGG Castell-nedd	92.68%	1.36%
YGG Cwmllynfell	92.75%	-0.78%
YGG Cwmnedd	92.46%	1.30%
YGG GCG	90.20%	0.65%
YGG Pontardawe	92.25%	0.04%
YGG Rhosafan	92.11%	0.86%
YGG Trebannws	89.69%	-0.29%
YGG Tyle'r Ynn	93.09%	0.45%
YG Ystalyfera - Bro Dur	91.24%	2.76%
Ynysfach Primary	90.10%	-0.07%
Ysgol Bae Baglan	90.06%	2.11%
Ysgol Carreg Hir	88.78%	1.93%
Ysgol Cwm Brombil	91.40%	1.70%
Ysgol Maes Y Coed	88.24%	6.07%
Ysgol Hendrefelin	79.89%	14.50%

Cefn Saeson	85.89%	1.71%
Cwmtawe	89.85%	0.69%
Dwr y Felin	88.21%	2.31%
Llangatwg	86.25%	1.90%
St Joseph's RC	86.50%	3.63%
Ysgol Bae Baglan	85.37%	2.14%
Ysgol Cwm Brombil	87.28%	1.87%
YG Ystalyfera - Bro Dur	90.09%	1.11%
Ysgol Maes Y Coed	84.75%	0.77%
Ysgol Hendrefelin	76.00%	-0.94%

## **Appendix B: Estyn outcome letter following extended LALI visit, June, 2024.**

### **Area of focus 1: Attendance**

- You have set improving school attendance as a high priority and there is a detailed strategy in place to address this important area.
- Elected members have a good knowledge of the support you have put in place to improve attendance. The cabinet member and the education scrutiny committee meet with officers regularly to consider progress with improving attendance, and the factors that impact on this, including exclusions.
- Officers communicate their strategy well to schools, governing bodies and to the wider community through their high-profile media campaign, 'Miss School, Miss Out'.
- Elected members, schools and governing bodies value the professional learning and support that focuses on improving attendance.
- Officers at all levels articulate clearly the strategies and systems in place to address poor attendance in schools and with individual pupils and their families.
- The team uses a broad range of data to identify trends, and to sharpen their focus on distinct groups of pupils whose attendance is too low.
- Schools value the detailed analyses that you share with them, and this enables officers and school leaders to work collaboratively to strengthen approaches to improving attendance overall.
- The headteachers we met were positive about your 'task force' approach which helps to strengthen approaches to improve attendance.
- Education support officers (ESOs) also discuss attendance issues on their visits, including the appropriate use of reduced timetables.
- Attendance officers work with schools and groups of pupils to promote good attendance, for example presenting what good habits look like to Year 6 pupils before they transfer to secondary school.



- EWOs are also based in secondary schools, and work alongside them and their cluster primary schools. They monitor specific cases carefully; engage with families and adapt the support they provide to meet individual needs.
- When attendance is causing concern over time, the persistent absence team take on the cases and aim to tackle entrenched issues. This includes a helpful multiagency approach.
- Your attendance teams also hold regular and helpful 'solution circles' where officers can discuss individual, challenging cases in confidence, and can work together to suggest approaches that will encourage improved attendance.
- Attendance rates are beginning to improve in all sectors, but overall attendance rates remain lower than pre-pandemic levels.

### **Areas for consideration**

- Does professional learning support schools well enough to design the most beneficial personal support plans?
- How will you ensure that as 'task forces' are removed from schools, the practice remains sustainable?