

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Education, Skills and Culture Cabinet Board**

14th September, 2017

### **Report of the Head of Transformation – Andrew Thomas**

**Matter** for information

**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 covering the 2016/17 academic year.

### **Background**

2. This report provides Members with details of the latest available data for the 2016/17 academic year.

### **Attendance Data**

3. For the 2016/17 academic year the primary sector attendance rate was 94.67%, which saw a +0.14% increase compared to the 2015/16 year. However, comparing the same two school years, the secondary sector attendance rate was 93.03%, which saw a -0.13% decrease compared to the 2015/16 year.

4. During the year 34 primary schools increased their attendance compared with the previous academic year, with 25 reporting a decrease. In the secondary sector 5 schools increased their attendance with 6 reporting a decrease. [Note: for the purpose of statistical reporting, the data for Ysgol Bae Baglan as an all-through school has been disaggregated into both the primary and secondary sectors.] A list of the individual school data comparing the two academic years is provided in Appendix A to this report.
5. Following the decision by Members previously to implement a set of recommendations of a wide-scale review into inclusion, the 2016/17 academic year was the first full year where attendance figures for those pupils formerly registered centrally as EOTAS (educated other than at school) were included on individual schools rolls. Given the vulnerable nature of this group of pupils, particularly in the secondary and special school sectors, there has been a slight negative impact on overall attendance. However, it is worth noting that for the first time the published attendance figures for Neath Port Talbot now includes every registered pupil of compulsory school age.

## **Analysis**

6. It has been previously reported to Members earlier in the year that examining the data closely highlights that a significant number of schools across both sectors, particularly secondary, were affected quite significantly by illness during November and December. In December alone at one school illness accounted for almost 9% of possible pupil attendance, with the whole-school attendance rate being 89.55%. Recorded illness during the month of December across both the sectors was practically double that of recorded illness just two months previous during October. Whilst schools made great strides over the remainder of the year to recover from this period, the overall attendance figures were undoubtedly suppressed because of this.
7. On a wider level, reported illness amongst Neath Port Talbot pupils is one of the highest in Wales. At the beginning of the academic year (2016/17) having studied comparative data across Wales, schools were asked to concentrate efforts on reducing use of the illness ('I') code by not readily and always accepting at face value notification that a pupil is too unwell to attend school. It is accepted that on occasion pupils suffer illness; however, evidence available to us confirms that since schools have taken a tougher stance on the authorisation of holidays during term-time the number of pupils reporting as being ill has increased dramatically. As a measure to reduce the growing number of reported illness absences schools were asked to consider

challenging the reason for absence where there are patterns of similar absence i.e., regular Monday's or Friday's recorded as being ill or by asking for medical evidence for reasons of illness that are regular or recurring. This effort has seen a good reduction in the recording of illness amongst primary schools (3.13% down from 3.53% of possible attendance) and an excellent reduction from secondary schools (3.84% down from 4.42% of possible attendance). The Welsh average for 2016/17 is not yet currently available, however, the 2015/16 Welsh average for primary schools was 3.1% and for secondary schools it was 3.5%. By robustly challenging absence more, whilst maintaining a sympathetic and empathetic view on those genuinely presenting as being ill, it is hoped attendance can improve further.

8. Persistent absenteeism continues to improve year-on-year over the past 5 years. In 2012/13 it was running at 5.8% of pupils classed as persistent absentees, however, for the 2016/17 academic year it was down to 3.6% which is below the Welsh average of 3.9% for 2015/16 (Welsh average data for 2016/17 is not yet available).

### **Fixed Penalty Notices**

9. The Education Welfare Service continues to work closely with schools and parents to identify the cause of individual pupil absence with the aim of early intervention when and where needed. 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.
10. Where the examples described above have been unsuccessful the Council has the available option of issuing parents with a fixed penalty notice or the commencement of prosecution via Court. A fixed penalty notice currently stands at £60 if paid within the first 28 days rising to £120 afterwards.
11. Members of the former Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Committee previously asked officers what evidence existed that fixed penalty notices made a positive impact on raising attendance. Following a spot analysis at the time of 20 pupils who were issued with a fixed penalty notice it later reported to Scrutiny Committee that of the 20 pupils 17 had demonstrated an improvement in their attendance, 2 pupils had genuine reasons for not improving and 1 pupil's attendance had not improved. Subsequently and more recently this exercise has been repeated to include every pupil (72) that was issued with a fixed penalty notice during the autumn term 2016/17 and their attendance

was tracked on a monthly basis for the remainder of the academic year.

12. The result of this larger and longer term analysis has mirrored the earlier spot assessment that attendance rates of the majority of pupils increase as a result of the issuing of a fixed penalty notice. A breakdown of the results is given below:

Number of pupils initially issued with a FPN - 72

Unable to track (moved away/excluded/de-registered etc.) - 14 pupils

Increase in attendance - 39 pupils of 58 possible

Decrease in attendance - 19 pupils of 58 possible

13. This assessment demonstrated that exactly two-thirds of those pupils we were able to track through the year improved their attendance. Several pupils managed to achieve a 100% attendance rate for a number of successive months following the issuing of a penalty notice.
14. Having carried out a data tracking exercise to assess the impact of issuing fixed penalty notices to parents for non-attendance, there is clear evidence that fixed penalty notices have a material positive effect in the breadth of tools available to schools and the local authority for improving attendance. Some Members have previously expressed their concern at the issuing of a fixed penalty notice as an added financial pressure for parents. Whilst this is understandable, since the introduction of fixed penalty notices a significant number of parents have been offered this alternative method of penalty instead of being prosecuted through the courts system and handed a financial penalty of some ten-times the amount of the fixed penalty notice together with receiving a criminal record. The fixed penalty process introduced a new stage before the need to formally prosecute parents, but whilst recognises at the same time that other means of support appear to have failed.
15. The authority has a Code of Conduct on the issuing of fixed penalty notices and each case is considered on its own merits prior to a penalty notice being issued. The Code of Conduct is displayed on the Council's website.
16. A total of 122 penalty notices were issued during 2016/17. Of this 30 were unpaid and resulted in formal Court action being taken.

## **Holiday's During Term-time**

17. In Wales, regulations provide Headteacher's with the discretion to authorise up to 10 days absence for a family holiday during term-time. Each application will be considered on its own merit using the Headteacher's discretion whether to authorise the absence or not.
18. The position of the Authority remains firm that unless there are special circumstances warranting approval of a holiday during term-time Headteacher's are encouraged to reject all requests. There is no automatic right for parents to withdraw their child from school for a holiday.
19. Authorised absence for holiday's amongst Neath Port Talbot pupils currently stands at an all-time low at 0.06% absence in the primary sector for 2016/17 down from 1.52% in 2012/13 and 0.02% absence in the secondary sector for 2016/17 down from 0.62% in 2012/13.
20. 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**

21. There is no financial impact associated with this proposal.

## **Equality Impact Assessment**

22. Having considered the Council's screening assessment guidance produced to assist the Council in discharging its Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010 it has been determined that this report does not require an equalities impact assessment.

## **Workforce Impacts**

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

## **Legal Impacts**

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

## **Risk Management**

25. Members have previously determined that they wish to include the monitoring of pupil attendance as a regular activity within their on-going work programme. Such scrutiny maintains a high-level focus on attendance amongst schools within the County Borough whilst comparing internal pupil attendance with that of other authorities across Wales.

## **Consultation**

26. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

## **Recommendations**

27. That Members note the contents of this report.

## **Appendices**

28. Appendix A: List of schools with individual attendance rates.

## **List of Background Papers**

29. None.

## **Officer Contact**

30. John Burge, Manager of the School & Family Support Team

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## APPENDIX A

School	2016/17	2015/16	
Abbey Primary	94.10%	95.18%	-1.08%
Alderman Davies CIW	95.37%	95.29%	0.08%
Alltwen Primary	95.26%	95.00%	0.25%
Awel y Môr	94.86%	93.69%	1.17%
Baglan Primary	94.61%	94.05%	0.56%
Blaenbaglan Primary	95.18%	95.28%	-0.10%
Blaendulais Primary	94.49%	94.52%	-0.03%
Blaengwrach Primary	95.30%	95.05%	0.24%
Blaenhonddan Primary	94.87%	94.82%	0.05%
Bryncoch CIW Primary	94.87%	95.11%	-0.24%
Brynhafryd Primary	91.99%	93.15%	-1.16%
Catwg Primary	94.85%	95.21%	-0.35%
Central Primary	94.87%	93.96%	0.90%
Cilffriw Primary	94.85%	94.60%	0.25%
Coed Hirwaun Primary	95.83%	96.22%	-0.40%
Coedffranc Primary	95.02%	94.19%	0.84%
Creunant Primary	95.58%	94.47%	1.10%
Croeserw Primary	94.31%	93.75%	0.56%
Crymlyn Primary	95.82%	95.67%	0.15%
Crynallt Primary	94.39%	94.93%	-0.54%
Cwmafan Primary	93.64%	93.66%	-0.01%
Cwmnedd Primary	94.44%	95.03%	-0.59%
Cymer Afan Primary	95.16%	94.10%	1.05%
Eastern Primary	92.97%	93.44%	-0.46%
Glyncorrwg Primary	95.65%	94.93%	0.72%
Gnoll Primary	94.22%	94.93%	-0.71%
Godrergrraig Primary	94.57%	94.50%	0.07%
Groes Primary	94.19%	94.26%	-0.07%
Llangiwrwg Primary	94.54%	93.45%	1.09%
Llansawel Primary*	92.14%	92.20%	-0.06%
Maesmarchog Primary	96.20%	94.81%	1.39%
Melin Primary	93.57%	94.20%	-0.63%
Penafan Primary	93.64%	93.88%	-0.24%
Rhos Primary	94.88%	94.90%	-0.02%
Rhydyfro Primary	94.26%	93.55%	0.71%
Sandfields Primary	93.45%	93.76%	-0.31%
St Joseph's Infant	94.61%	95.51%	-0.90%
St Joseph's Junior	95.88%	95.39%	0.49%
St Joseph's Primary	94.17%	95.16%	-0.99%
St Therese's Primary	94.93%	94.95%	-0.02%
Tairgwaith Primary	95.07%	93.97%	1.10%
Tonnau Primary	94.53%	95.01%	-0.49%
Tywyn Primary	95.05%	94.22%	0.83%
Waunceirch Primary	94.50%	93.80%	0.70%
YGG Blaendulais	95.73%	95.40%	0.33%
YGG Castell-nedd	95.14%	94.87%	0.27%
YGG Cwmllynfell	94.91%	95.48%	-0.57%
YGG Cwmnedd	94.88%	94.74%	0.14%
YGG GCG	95.82%	95.93%	-0.11%
YGG Pontardawe	95.44%	94.67%	0.77%
YGG Rhosafan	94.64%	94.58%	0.06%
YGG Trebanws	95.76%	94.57%	1.19%
YGG Tyle'r Ynn	95.02%	94.87%	0.16%
YGG Y Wern	95.03%	94.95%	0.08%
Ynysfach Primary	94.88%	94.43%	0.45%
Ynysmaerdy Primary	95.23%	94.85%	0.38%
Ysgol Bae Baglan	93.58%	93.05%	0.53%
Ysgol Maes Y Coed	92.55%	91.65%	0.90%
Ysgol Hendrefelin	89.09%	89.90%	-0.81%

\*Includes Traveller Unit

School	2016/17	2015/16	
Cefn Saeson	93.33%	93.94%	-0.61%
Cwmtawe	94.09%	93.67%	0.42%
Cymer Afan	93.02%	91.99%	1.03%
Dwr y Felin	94.25%	94.01%	0.24%
Dyffryn School	93.38%	93.46%	-0.08%
Llangatwg	93.63%	93.35%	0.28%
St Joseph's RC	91.54%	92.60%	-1.06%
Ysgol Bae Baglan	91.18%	92.12%	-0.94%
Ystalyfera	94.59%	93.94%	0.65%
Ysgol Maes Y Coed	88.19%	90.08%	-1.90%
Ysgol Hendrefelin	81.88%	84.97%	-3.10%