

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Education, Skills and Culture Cabinet Board

19 January, 2022

**Report of the Head of Education Development –
Chris Millis**

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All Wards

Report Title: PUPIL ATTENDANCE UPDATE

Purpose of the Report:

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

Background:

Members regularly receive reports in relation to pupil attendance enabling them to monitor attendance both across Neath Port Talbot schools and compare whole authority data throughout Wales.

For the previous academic year, and again for the current 2021/22 academic year, Welsh Government have suspended the need for schools to set attendance targets and also for local authorities to formally report on attendance data. This temporary pause in reporting continues due to the ongoing presence of the Covid pandemic.

Neath Port Talbot Members have always expressed a keen interest in monitoring pupil attendance. This report provides Members with information and data on a non-statutory reporting basis for the autumn term 2021/22. Given the current volatility of attendance and continued need for individuals (pupils and staff) to self-isolate, attendance rates of individual schools have not been provided as part of this report.

Whilst the report provides Members with information regarding pupil attendance, a more detailed report will be provided at a future meeting of this Committee outlining some of the impacts and challenges Covid has had on pupils and the support provided in terms of wellbeing and mental health.

Pupil Attendance, Autumn Term 2021/22:

Primary sector attendance for the autumn term was 89.29% whilst the secondary sector attendance was 84.61%. As will be expected, both figures are lower than pre-Covid times with the primary sector around 4% points lower and the secondary sector around 7% points lower. The greater decline in the secondary sector reflecting the known intelligence that of school-aged pupils Covid has been more prevalent in the 10-19 year age bracket than younger primary aged pupils.

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.

For the reasons given above in this report, it is not possible to provide comparative data against other local authorities or against a Welsh average, however, informal discussions with colleagues in other local authorities are advising of similar reductions in attendance.

There was a negligible difference in attendance rates between boys and girls in both sectors with attendance being almost equal between the two. Likewise, there was no difference in attendance between

LAC and non-LAC pupils and pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) and non-EAL pupils.

Attendance amongst non-FSM pupils was higher than amongst FSM pupils in both sectors (5% points in primary and 9% points in secondary). A similar picture is seen between non-ALN pupils and those with a designated ALN (3% points in primary and 6% points in secondary). Members will be aware from previous attendance data reports the differential in both these categorisations has been apparent for some time rather than being anything new as a result of Covid. The variance between the groups of pupils is no greater as a result of Covid than pre-Covid. Work continues to narrow the gap.

At the end of the autumn term 2021 there were 133 pupils who had attendance rates of just 20% or less (23 of whom had no attendance). Whilst there are known genuine reasons for some pupil's long-term absences such as for serious health issues, a number of pupils were absent without the authorisation of the school. Such unauthorised absence reasons predominantly fall into two categories: school refusers and those sighting Covid concerns for not attending. Those categorised as school refusers were, in the main, known to the Education Welfare Service pre-Covid and were historically poor attenders. Those sighting Covid concerns are more complex and range from parents choosing to keep their child home until the pandemic has passed, to those with family members undergoing medical treatment for illnesses such as cancer and concerned about introducing the virus into the household.

The option for local authorities to issue fixed penalty notices to parents where attendance is a serious concern was paused by Welsh Government in March, 2020. This does add additional pressure with parents knowing our hands are somewhat tied, however, there remains provision to initiate Court action against parents in limited circumstances and this option is currently being considered in a small number of cases.

The Education Welfare Service has maintained and continues to provide schools, pupils and parents with a high quality service throughout the pandemic. This success was recognised with the service being nominated at the 2021 national APSE local government frontline service awards. In the autumn term alone some 400 house (or garden) visits were physically undertaken and more than 2,000 communications made with pupils and parents by EWO officers.

The focus of the Education Welfare Service shifted throughout the pandemic with the punitive element of the role moved to one side in place of a far greater emphasis on the welfare role. EWS staff regularly delivered food parcels; laptops; workbooks and stationary to pupils and kept in touch with some of our most vulnerable pupils during lockdowns ensuring they remained safe and well.

Officers within the service continue to work with pupils and families on bespoke attendance packages tailored to individual circumstances that aims to remove the barriers preventing pupils from attending school regularly. Such involvements have included guided tours of schools after school has finished for the day to reassure pupils and parents that schools have effective and safe measures in place to best protect users from Covid; negotiating the use of short-term reduced timetables to encourage pupils back into the school system whilst they build their confidence and re-engage with old friendships, and proactively bringing different agencies around the table for holistic involvements regarding pupils who are open to a number of different services to agree a unified joint approach to supporting pupils.

Whilst it is natural to focus on the negative impacts of available data, it is also worth mentioning that during the same period some 5,696 pupils achieved an attendance rate of 95% and above. 1,440 pupils obtaining 100% attendance despite the external challenges Covid has presented.

Financial Impacts:

No implications

Integrated Impact Assessment:

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

Valleys Communities Impacts:

All Neath Port Talbot schools are included within this report

Workforce Impacts:

No implications

Legal Impacts:

No implications

Risk Management Impacts:

No implications

Consultation:

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item

Recommendations:

That Members note the contents of this update report

Appendices:

None

List of Background Papers:**Officer Contact:**

John Burge, Manager of the School & Family Support Team,
Ext: 3599, j.burge@npt.gov.uk