

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Education, Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

14th March, 2024

Report of the Head of Education Development - Chris Millis

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.

Background

2. This report provides Members with details of pupil attendance data for the academic year 2022/23 and for the accumulative period of the current 2023/24 academic year to end of January '24.

Attendance Data

Academic Year 2022/23

3. The primary sector attendance rate for the academic year was 89.80%, whilst the secondary sector attendance rate was 85.98%. [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 from 89.23% in the primary sector and 85.52% in the secondary sector from

the previous 2021/22 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 for secondary schools has shown an increase in ranking from bottom (22nd) in 2021/22 to 20th in 2022/23.
6. There is a negligible difference in attendance between boys and girls in either the primary or secondary sectors with girls attending slightly more in the primary sector and boys attending slightly more in the secondary sector. Similarly between CLA and non-CLA pupils (Children Looked After) and again between white British and non-white British pupils. However, there is a significant 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.

Accumulative period September to end of January 2023/24

7. Attendance for the first half of the academic year has shown a good level of further progress in both sectors with primary schools increasing to 91.50% attendance and secondary schools to 88.09%. [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.]
8. Comparing like-for-like based on the autumn terms over the past two years there has been a significant increase in both sectors with the primary sector increasing by slightly more than 2% and the secondary sector increasing by just short of 2%. Data relating to individual schools appears in Appendix B attached to this report.
9. Nearly all schools across both sectors made an improvement with some schools achieving an improvement of almost 5%.

Post-Covid

10. Attendance currently remains concerningly lower than pre-Covid levels in both sectors by just over four percentage points each at the end of the 2022/23 academic year compared to 2018/19 which was the last full school year pre-Covid. Members will no doubt have seen in the various national press that reduced attendance rates are being mirrored at schools all over the country.
11. 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 and allegations of bullying. 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. A number of pupils were school refusers' pre-Covid and have continued with their poor attendance.
12. In January Estyn published a thematic report: Improving Attendance in Secondary Schools. A copy of the report can be found here: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2024-01/Improving%20attendance%20in%20secondary%20schools.pdf>. The report was undertaken in response to the concern that attendance rates across Wales have failed to return to pre-pandemic levels. Estyn reported that improving attendance was a recommendation in over a third of secondary school inspections since they had resumed inspections two years ago.
13. Amongst other things the report found that post-covid persistent absenteeism in most schools is significantly higher and that the attendance rates between FSM and non-FSM pupils grew wider.
14. Pre-covid the average attendance gap across Wales between FSM and non-FSM pupils in secondary schools was 5.2% difference. That doubled to 10.4% in 2022/23. The NPT attendance gap pre-covid was 5.17% rising to 11.06% in 2022/23. The gap has reduced significantly for the current academic year September to January '24 and stands at 8.70%.
15. The report gave 15 recommendations in total: 5 for schools, 3 for the LA, and 7 for Welsh Government.

16. Welsh Government have accepted all the recommendations and are currently drafting an action plan in response. The local authority continues to support schools to increase attendance and will weave the three recommendations for the LA into its routine practice.

Supporting the Improvement of Attendance

17. 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.
18. During the 2022/23 academic year Education Welfare Officers undertook 9,758 forms of communications with pupils and families (8,611 telephone calls/text messages/emails and 1,147 house visits).
19. Recognising the national challenges the Welsh Government provided additional grant funding to local authorities last summer to assist schools with the improvement of pupil attendance. From this grant three temporary Attendance Support Officers (ASOs) were recruited who have concentrated efforts on pupils at or near to becoming persistently absent (80% attendance as defined by Welsh Government). Their role involved daily contact with families enquiring after absent children to learn why they are not in school, likely length of absence and whether the school could support them better. In many cases the ASOs developed a frontline approach attempting to quell any further potential longer periods of absence.
20. During the Autumn term the local authority launched its 'Miss School, Miss Out' campaign to highlight to parents the importance of regular attendance. Involvements to date have included a photocall involving

pupils and the Cabinet Member for Education, the release of several messages via our social media channels, letters to every parent within Neath Port Talbot and school award ceremonies. The campaign is set to continue for a few more months and will include video messages involving pupils themselves.

21. Members will know from previous reports that Neath Port Talbot has invested in a dedicated post of Persistent Absenteeism EWO. Following an increasing success in this area a second Persistent Absenteeism Officer has subsequently been appointed. These Officers work exclusively with small numbers of pupils and families with very poor attendance for short periods of time (normally 6-8 weeks). Following this time successful cases are ordinarily stepped back to the school Education Welfare Officer for regular support or are escalated for consideration of prosecution.
22. 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. These options were paused throughout the pandemic, however, have subsequently been reintroduced. A number of parents have been issued with formal final warning notification letters and a growing number have been issued with a penalty notices. The Council's Legal Services Department are currently preparing to reintroduce prosecutions via Court proceedings which should commence in the next few weeks.
23. The Education Welfare Service has close links with local Police who together regularly carry out truancy patrols to discourage absence from school. These have successfully recommenced with a number of patrols in both Neath and Port Talbot town centres having been undertaken. A number of pupils were identified as being absent from school without a valid reason and both pupils and parents appropriately warned.
24. In terms of pupil de-registration; all local authorities across Wales have seen an increase in the number of pupils being electively home educated since the beginning of the Covid pandemic. There are a number of reasons for this including the success for some from the experience of home learning during the lockdown periods to the consequences of attempts towards others to re-engage and return to school. It is the latter where officers in Neath Port Talbot are experiencing the greater number of de-registrations.

25. 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

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

Integrated Impact Assessment

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

Valleys Communities Impacts

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

Workforce Impacts

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

Legal Impacts

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

Risk Management

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

Consultation

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

Recommendations

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

Appendices

34. Appendix A and B, please see below.

List of Background Papers

35. Estyn Thematic report on attendance, January, 2024:
<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2024-01/Improving%20attendance%20in%20secondary%20schools.pdf>

Officer Contact

36. Chris Millis, Head of Education Development, c.d.millis@npt.gov.uk
John Burge, Co-ordinator Child and Family Support Team,
j.burge@npt.gov.uk

Appendix A - Academic Year 2022/23 Individual School Year Data

Abbey Primary	90.87%	0.65%
Alderman Davies CIW	89.75%	-0.61%
Alltwen Primary	91.80%	1.52%
Awel y Môr	89.74%	1.45%
Baglan Primary	91.27%	1.11%
Blaenbaglan Primary	91.94%	0.54%
Blaendulais Primary	88.15%	6.13%
Blaengwrach Primary	91.41%	-0.46%
Blaenhonddan Primary	93.16%	0.18%
Bryncoch CIW Primary	92.78%	0.19%
Catwg Primary	92.63%	1.26%
Central Primary	89.68%	-0.76%
Cilffriw Primary	89.74%	4.21%
Coed Hirwaun Primary	90.40%	1.96%
Coedffranc Primary	87.63%	-1.27%
Creunant Primary	90.66%	0.11%
Croeserw Primary	86.09%	1.24%
Crymlyn Primary	91.30%	-0.98%
Crynalit Primary	89.61%	-0.01%
Cwmafan Primary	88.52%	0.56%
Cwmnedd Primary	87.30%	1.26%
Cymer Afan Primary	89.91%	-1.80%
Eastern Primary	86.04%	-0.93%
Glyncorwg Primary	92.19%	2.54%
Gnoll Primary	88.34%	1.35%
Godregraig Primary	90.88%	0.02%
Llangiwig Primary	91.87%	2.79%
Maesmarchog Primary	85.46%	-1.56%
Melin Primary	89.76%	1.35%
Penafan Primary	87.21%	1.56%
Rhos Primary	92.19%	1.63%
Rhydyfro Primary	90.46%	1.50%
Sandfields Primary	84.45%	-0.97%
St Joseph's Infant	89.99%	0.73%
St Joseph's Junior	90.08%	0.73%
St Joseph's Primary	90.93%	2.49%
St Therese's Primary	88.22%	1.49%
Tairgwaith Primary	90.45%	1.32%
Tonnau Primary	89.70%	1.71%
Tywyn Primary	89.38%	0.62%
Wauanceirch Primary	89.92%	1.11%
YGG Blaendulais	92.14%	-0.26%
YGG Castell-nedd	91.32%	0.49%
YGG Cwmllynfell	93.53%	3.19%
YGG Cwmnedd	91.16%	0.64%
YGG GCG	89.55%	0.34%
YGG Pontardawe	92.21%	0.58%
YGG Rhosafan	91.26%	0.25%
YGG Trebannws	89.98%	0.60%
YGG Tyle'r Ynn	92.64%	1.21%
YG Ystalyfera - Bro Dur	88.48%	1.22%
Ynysfach Primary	90.17%	-1.23%
Ysgol Bae Baglan	87.95%	-0.56%
Ysgol Carreg Hir	86.85%	-0.59%
Ysgol Cwm Brombil	89.70%	-0.89%
Ysgol Maes Y Coed	82.16%	4.58%
Ysgol Hendrefelin	65.39%	-1.20%

Cefn Saeson	82.67%	0.54%
Cwmtawe	89.13%	0.98%
Dwr y Felin	87.35%	-2.88%
Llangatwg	84.01%	3.50%
St Joseph's RC	83.19%	-0.03%
Ysgol Bae Baglan	84.39%	-1.60%
Ysgol Cwm Brombil	85.34%	-1.13%
YG Ystalyfera - Bro Dur	88.99%	-2.45%
Ysgol Maes Y Coed	83.35%	4.38%
Ysgol Hendrefelin	76.53%	0.29%

Appendix B - September-January '24 2023/24 Accumulative Individual School Data

Abbey Primary	90.39%	2.40%
Alderman Davies CIW	90.85%	0.05%
Alltwen Primary	90.06%	2.95%
Awel y Môr	89.07%	2.01%
Baglan Primary	91.32%	-0.34%
Blaenbaglan Primary	91.68%	1.21%
Blaendulais Primary	86.80%	3.69%
Blaengwrach Primary	92.93%	0.26%
Blaenhonddan Primary	92.97%	0.79%
Brynoch CIW Primary	92.50%	1.50%
Catwg Primary	92.25%	0.70%
Central Primary	90.13%	1.35%
Cilfrw Primary	89.87%	1.28%
Coed Hirwaun Primary	90.13%	1.34%
Coedffranc Primary	87.45%	3.29%
Creunant Primary	90.58%	3.40%
Croeserw Primary	86.90%	1.39%
Crymlyn Primary	90.48%	2.18%
Crynalit Primary	89.42%	2.05%
Cwmafan Primary	87.58%	3.58%
Cwmnedd Primary	86.22%	4.00%
Cymer Afan Primary	90.44%	1.42%
Eastern Primary	85.39%	4.49%
Glyncorwg Primary	92.88%	-1.05%
Gnoll Primary	87.97%	0.66%
Godregraig Primary	91.47%	1.11%
Llangiwr Primary	91.44%	0.85%
Maesmarchog Primary	84.68%	2.10%
Melin Primary	89.66%	1.92%
Penafan Primary	87.47%	2.73%
Rhos Primary	90.24%	4.18%
Rhydyfro Primary	89.00%	2.21%
Sandfields Primary	83.46%	3.45%
St Joseph's Infant	89.25%	2.65%
St Joseph's Junior	88.98%	2.80%
St Joseph's Primary	89.81%	3.69%
St Therese's Primary	87.37%	4.79%
Tairgwaith Primary	90.67%	1.97%
Tonnau Primary	89.05%	2.54%
Tywyn Primary	88.26%	2.17%
Wauanceirch Primary	89.99%	1.76%
YGG Blaendulais	90.66%	3.41%
YGG Castell-nedd	91.52%	1.48%
YGG Cwmllynfell	93.31%	-0.70%
YGG Cwmnedd	91.13%	2.20%
YGG GCG	89.61%	1.66%
YGG Pontardawe	91.90%	1.33%
YGG Rhosafan	90.50%	1.65%
YGG Trebannws	89.25%	1.30%
YGG Tyle'r Ynn	92.32%	1.79%
YG Ystalyfera - Bro Dur	87.91%	4.22%
Ynysfach Primary	90.01%	1.30%
Ysgol Bae Baglan	88.12%	2.04%
Ysgol Carreg Hir	86.55%	2.12%
Ysgol Cwm Brombil	88.63%	3.29%
Ysgol Maes Y Coed	80.58%	6.91%
Ysgol Hendrefelin	69.64%	12.23%

Cefn Saeson	87.43%	4.65%
Cwmtawe	89.88%	0.93%
Dwr y Felin	89.05%	1.23%
Llangatwg	86.56%	2.49%
St Joseph's RC	87.12%	3.21%
Ysgol Bae Baglan	85.65%	0.82%
Ysgol Cwm Brombil	88.53%	2.49%
YG Ystalyfera - Bro Dur	91.24%	1.86%
Ysgol Maes Y Coed	83.74%	-0.26%
Ysgol Hendrefelin	76.74%	0.43%