

EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 26 th September 2019
Report Subject	School Attendance and Exclusions
Cabinet Member	Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Education
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information on the attendance and exclusion levels across Flintshire schools, outlining the main reasons for pupil absence and exclusion. Information on attendance and exclusion was previously included with reports on learner outcomes; this is the first occasion where the information has been separated and it is proposed that this becomes an annual report.

This revised format will ensure that Members have the opportunity to consider and question the data. This will also support further monitoring of progress against the recent Estyn inspection recommendations relating to the areas of attendance and exclusion.

Attendance across Flintshire schools is showing a general trend of reduction, with illness accounting for the majority of absences. Levels of persistent absenteeism are comparatively high.

In line with national trends, levels of permanent and fixed-term exclusion are increasing, particularly in secondary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To consider and agree the content, format and proposed timing of an annual report on school attendance and exclusions.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND EXCLUSIONS
1.01	<p>School attendance data is published by Welsh Government (WG) retrospectively and in a number of different formats. For completeness, this report will reference data published under the Local Government Public Accountability Measures (PAMs) which measures attendance across mainstream schools only, and the WG Statistical Release which also includes data from special schools. The statistical releases on attendance are published in August (Secondary) and December (Primary) following the academic year and subsequent committee reports will be timetabled to fit in with that reporting schedule. For consistency, this report provides information on school attendance up to the academic year 2017/18 for both primary and secondary sectors.</p> <p>The WG statistical release on exclusion is published over 12 months in arrears, i.e. data for the academic year 2017/18 will be published in October 2019 and consequently the information included in these reports will be an academic year behind the attendance data.</p> <p>It is proposed that the report on Attendance and Exclusion is presented to Committee on an annual basis at either the February or March meeting when the validated data from WG will be available.</p>
1.02	<p>Table 1 in Appendix 1 provides the overview of pupil attendance across both primary and secondary schools (mainstream and special) for the last 3 academic years. Primary attendance has remained fairly static over the last 3 years and, despite a decrease of 0.2% in 2017/18, was above the Welsh average. Conversely, attendance in secondary schools dropped below the Welsh average in both 2016/17 and 2017/18. Table 2 provides attendance data for mainstream schools only; the benchmarking data in Table 4 relates to these figures.</p>
1.03	<p>The very low levels of unauthorised absence suggests that parents/carers are providing schools with acceptable reasons for absence and Table 5 provides the detail on the range of absences. It can be seen that illness accounts for the majority of pupil absences, with holidays in the primary sector accounting for the second highest percentage.</p>
1.04	<p>Parents/carers are ultimately responsible for ensuring that their children attend school. Headteachers understand the importance of attendance on pupil engagement and attainment and have in the main, developed a range of systems to encourage attendance and also seek timely information regarding pupil absence. The Council also employs a range of teams to support schools in their attempts to improve attendance. These include the Education Welfare Service (EWS) which has a statutory responsibility around attendance along with other teams such as Additional Learning Needs, Education Psychology, Young Person Counselling, Personal Support, TRAC, English as an Additional Language and Gypsy/Traveller</p>

	services which offer specialist support to schools, families and individual pupils to improve their engagement levels.
1.05	The EWS implements the legal challenge to parents/carers on behalf of the Council in collaboration with the legal team, ensuring that where appropriate/necessary, the full range of legal powers are used to support an improvement in attendance. Such challenges can only be applied in cases of unauthorised absences. Given that levels of this are extremely low, work needs to be undertaken with schools to review the levels of authorised absence to ensure that there is sufficient scrutiny and challenge of the information provided if we are to secure an improvement in attendance levels across our schools.
1.06	The main factor impacting on attendance is illness. Across the secondary sector, there is an increasing level of absence being attributed to mental illness; whilst the Council has a number of services which support children and young people with mental health needs, further work needs to be undertaken with health services to ensure that the range of support available can respond appropriately to this increasing need.
1.07	The level of fixed term and permanent exclusion across our schools is increasing, with the main reasons cited for exclusion being Physical assault against a pupil, Verbal/threatening behaviour against an adult, Persistent and disruptive behaviour and Other. As with attendance, central services work in partnership with individuals, schools and families to offer support and intervention to prevent exclusion however, the increasing complexity of need and wider contributing factors such as County Lines is making this increasingly difficult.
1.08	The need to support an improvement in attendance and a reduction in the level of exclusion has been identified as a priority within the Education & Youth Improvement Plan which outlines the action to be undertaken. A Headteacher conference focusing on these areas is planned for October 2019 to ensure awareness of the situation, along with agreement around the range of strategies to be implemented. Progress on the actions will be outlined in subsequent reports.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The increasing levels of disengagement and exclusion is having a financial impact on schools and the Council. This is due to the additional resources required to engage those with more complex needs, such as officer capacity and bespoke provision programmes. This is currently being funded via a combination of school budgets, grant funding and Council service budgets however, the increasing levels of need are impacting on the ability of these to match demand. This is particularly evident in the increasing levels of expenditure around non-maintained placements referred to as 'Out of

	County', where the expenditure against education and social care is exceeding the allocated budget.
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3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	None undertaken as a result of this report.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	There are a number of risks associated with increased levels of disengagement and pupil exclusion, including safeguarding, pupil wellbeing, pupil outcomes and financial expenditure. The regular monitoring of the Education & Youth Portfolio Business Plan along with the annual reports on attendance and exclusion to the Overview and Scrutiny committee will ensure that progress is checked and action taken to mitigate the identified risks.
4.02	Additional work and monitoring is also underway around the expenditure on Out of County placements to ensure that the financial risks are known and that activity is being undertaken to reduce the need for specialist external provision of this nature.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 - Attendance and Exclusion Data Appendix 2 - Attendance Codes

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>WG Statistical Release Primary Attendance WG Statistical Release Secondary Attendance WG All Wales Attendance Toolkit WG Statistical Release Exclusion WG Guidance - Exclusion from schools and pupil referral units</p> <p>Contact Officer: Jeanette Rock, Senior Manager Inclusion & Progression Telephone: 01352 704017 E-mail: jeanette.rock@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Authorised absence - an absence with permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes instances of absence for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided (e.g. illness, family bereavement or religious observance).</p> <p>Unauthorised absence - an absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences.</p> <p>Persistent absenteeism: absent for at least 20 per cent of the sessions that schools were open to pupils.</p> <p>County Lines: a term used when drug gangs from big cities expand their operations to smaller towns, often using violence to drive out local dealers and exploiting children and vulnerable people to sell drugs.</p> <p>Out of County Placements – provision that is not maintained by Flintshire county Council. This is usually highly specialist and is commissioned where the Council is not able to meet the pupil’s needs through its own internal provision.</p>