

## EDUCATION & YOUTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Thursday, 30 <sup>th</sup> January 2020
<b>Report Subject</b>	School Attendance
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Education
<b>Report Author</b>	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
<b>Type of Report</b>	Operational

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information on the attendance levels across Flintshire schools, outlining the main reasons for pupil absence.

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

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To consider the attendance data for Flintshire schools and the actions undertaken by officers to support schools to improve levels of engagement.
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## **REPORT DETAILS**

<b>1.00</b>	<b>SCHOOL ATTENDANCE</b>
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 committee reports are timetabled to fit in with that reporting schedule.</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 in 2017-18 it edged above the Welsh average. In 2018-19 primary attendance across Flintshire schools is in line with the Welsh average. Attendance across secondary schools dropped below the Welsh average in 2016/17 and has remained below with a noticeable gap in 2018-19. Table 2 provides attendance data for mainstream schools only; the benchmarking data in Table 4 also relates to mainstream schools only.</p>
1.03	<p>The 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. There has been an increase of 0.3% in levels of unauthorised absence in secondary schools however, this remains the fifth lowest level in Wales.</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 others teams such as Additional Learning Needs, Education Psychology, Young Person Counselling, Personal Support, TRAC, English as an Additional Language and Gypsy/Traveller services which offer specialist support to schools, families and individual pupils to improve their engagement levels.</p>
1.05	<p>The EWS continues to provide 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</p>

	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	These services have been enhanced through the addition of a Senior Learning Adviser within the Inclusion & Progression Service to oversee and support improvement in this area. The focus of the role is Engagement, with a priority to support schools to reduce levels of exclusion and improve levels of attendance, both of which were recommendations from the recent Estyn inspection. The successful candidate took up the post from 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2020 and brings considerable experience of attendance management systems in schools to the Council. The initial priority for the officer is to develop partnerships with Flintshire schools whilst appraising the current support services. Available data will be used to profile individual school approaches to attendance and exclusion and ultimately used to support an improvement in the levels of engagement across our schools.
1.07	Schools report that one of the most significant challenges they face is supporting young people with mental health difficulties to engage in the broad education offer. Officers are meeting with health colleagues from CAMHS to review the existing services and work collaboratively to develop a range of flexible services which can respond appropriately to complex needs of these young people and their families. Cross portfolio working is also evident between Education & Youth and Social services to make best use of the Transformation funding to support in this area of need.
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. One of the actions within the plan was to hold a Headteacher conference focusing on these areas; this took place in October 2019. The conference focused on raising awareness of the challenges facing schools, along with the risks associated with non-attendance. Headteachers were also asked to contribute to the decisions taken around the use of the WG Mental Health Support Grant which was allocated to local authorities in October 2019. Access to additional counselling and training for schools has been the main areas of spend.

<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>
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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<b>3.00</b>	<b>IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
3.01	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.
3.02	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.

<b>4.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT</b>
4.01	None undertaken as a result of this report.

<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	Appendix 1 - Attendance and Exclusion Data
5.02	Appendix 2 - Attendance Codes

<b>6.00</b>	<b>LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS</b>
6.01	<a href="#">WG Statistical Release Primary Attendance 2018-19</a> <a href="#">WG Statistical Release Secondary Attendance 2018-19</a> <a href="#">WG All Wales Attendance Toolkit</a>

<b>7.00</b>	<b>CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS</b>
7.01	<b>Contact Officer:</b> Jeanette Rock, Senior Manager Inclusion & Progression <b>Telephone:</b> 01352 704017 <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:jeanette.rock@flintshire.gov.uk">jeanette.rock@flintshire.gov.uk</a>

8.00	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
8.01	<p>(1) <b>Authorised absence</b> - 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>(2) <b>Unauthorised absence</b> - an absence without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences.</p> <p>(3) <b>Persistent absenteeism</b>: absent for at least 20 per cent of the sessions that schools were open to pupils.</p> <p>(4) <b>County Lines</b>: 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>(5) <b>Out of County Placements</b> – 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>

