

Report to:	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	8th September 2016
Lead Officer:	Head of Education and Children's Services
Report Author:	Education Social Work Team Leader
Title:	Primary and Secondary School Absenteeism

1. What is the report about?

Primary and secondary school absenteeism.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To provide information regarding the application of the county policy with respect to school attendance.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Members:

- 3.1 consider the policy and strategies to improve pupil attendance in schools; and
- 3.2 review the attendance rates of Denbighshire schools.

4. Report details

The attendance policy and procedures were rewritten to address the low attendance rates in schools and changes in legislation. The policy was developed after wide consultation with schools, school governors, agencies involved with schools and families. The attendance policy legal status and validity was verified by independent legal counsel in final draft format before publication.

All Head teachers received the final policy in September 2015 and were asked to adopt the policy and ratify this through the school governing body.

In the past year the attendance policy together with the implementation of the Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) Code of Conduct has raised the profile in schools and with families about improving school attendance. FPNs are issued where 10 unauthorised absences have occurred in a school term.

Denbighshire headteachers made the collective decision not to authorise term time holidays unless in exceptional circumstances. The decision to issue a FPN is the responsibility of the headteacher and not the local authority. To date 78 notices have been issued in 2015/16 all payments for these notices except for 8 have been paid,

these cases have been referred to legal services to address non-payment and non-attendance at school.

Since September to July 2015 /16 a total of 456 warning letters have been requested by schools to be issued to parents. A high proportion of the cases, 78%, have not recorded any further unauthorised absence in the school year.

The Welsh Government regulations provide headteachers with the discretion in exceptional circumstances to agree to up to 10 days absence during an academic year outside statutory school holiday dates. These regulations have been in place since 2011 part of the Welsh Government All Wales Attendance Framework.

Absenteeism can be affected by many factors, within the current school year 2015/16 recorded absences of illness which are unpredictable have been at levels of 7% compared to 4.5% in 2014/15. High levels of scarlet fever and chicken pox impacted on overall termly figures and specific schools in the county.

Parents taking holidays in term-time in the month of September 2015 were recorded at 126 cases. Many of these cases were not authorised by headteachers this in turn has a negative impact on the overall statistics and absenteeism on the county figures. The start of the school year is a vital time for pupils to be in school.

Verified data shows all 8 high schools improved attendance between 2014/15 and 2015 /16 current school year. Secondary attendance is collected up to the end of May each year comparative data is reported in September.

Persistent absenteeism has reduced from 7.0% of secondary pupils in 2014/15 to 6.2% in 2015/16 this needs to be considered with the increase this year of headteachers not authorising absences on a more regular basis which impacts on absenteeism rates.

Similarly primary unverified data shows persistent absenteeism has reduced this year by 0.4% on the previous year 2014/15.

The primary school data is yet to be verified for the current school year. This is collected in September and reported upon in December when comparative data is available.

The overall attendance in both Primary and Secondary schools has improved in 2015/16 to:

	Primary Attendance	Secondary Attendance
2015/16	95.1% (provisional)	93.8%
2014/15	94.7% (provisional)	92.5%

Registration codes that impact on school attendance performance for the school year Sept / May 2015 /16 are:

'O' Code	County Unauthorised absence	2.7%
'G' Code	Holiday absence Unauthorised	4.3%

The appendices attached provides an overview of the attendance and absenteeism figures for both primary and secondary schools since 2012 to present.

The current position is an improving trend in the last twelve months, even with the unauthorised absences increasing where schools have requested intervention through the Fixed Penalty Notice process.

This year attendance data is monitored termly, schools that are underperforming against the previous school year data receive notification in writing from the Head of Service. This outlines the action that needs to be taken with support from the Education Social Work (ESW) to develop an action plan to address the under-performance.

The nine schools that received letters in the summer term will be visited by an ESW this September to write and implement an attendance plan that will be monitored each term.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

School Attendance is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) which underpins many of the Council's school performance and improvement objectives.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and budget.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report

Every child has a right to attend school regularly. This report is fully compliant with the United Nations Rights of the Child.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The attendance policy and Fixed Penalty Code of Conduct have been consulted upon through workshops arranged across the county involving all stakeholders.

Independent legal Counsel has also verified the validity and content both policies.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

N/A

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

The risk is the unpredictable nature of illness/medical absence. This is closely monitored in the attendance policy with school health involvement. All counties are open to this area of risk with absenteeism from school.

11. Power to make the Decision

Section 7.4.2(b) of the Council's Constitution outlines Scrutiny's powers with respect of reviewing the Council's performance in relation to policy objectives and performance targets.

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