

Report to	Performance Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	25th January 2024
Lead Member / Officer	Gill German (Lead Member for Education, Children and Young People)
Head of Service	Geraint Davies (Head of Education)
Report author	Wayne Wheatley Education Social Work
Title	Promote School Attendance and Engagement in Education

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. The report provides the current position with regards to School attendance and engagement in education and the response taken to address matters when concern exists at individual pupil level in Denbighshire.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1. To provide information and explain the measures in place to support vulnerable pupils to re-engage with their education and deepen an understanding of the regional and national context in addressing the current level of concern nationally.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1 Scrutiny are invited to discuss the details of this report and to identify any matters raised that require further clarity or examination in the future.

4. Report details

Context

- 4.1 School attendance rates in 2018/19 pre- pandemic school year ended with primary schools achieving an overall figure of 94.8% and secondary schools 93.7%

- 4.2 The Welsh Government (WG) statistics for September 2022 to June 2023 demonstrate the drop in attendance over the last three years across Wales authorities is significant with an overall average across authorities achieving 88.9 % Primary/Secondary combined.
- 4.3 [Jeremy Miles MS](#) has also recently announced plans to bring Wales in line with England where persistent absence is defined as 10 per cent of half day sessions missed (30 sessions) rather than the current 20 per cent absence rate of persistent absence which equates to 60 half day sessions a year.
- 4.4 Denbighshire has received additional WG funding through the Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG) to address and support education and schools. We are developing cohesive community links in authorities to address this current trend and focus on community belonging and access to services which ensures children access their right to education but also receive services broader and wider than just education alone.
- 4.5 The recently published guidance from the WG replicates this focus within its title [Belonging, Engagement and Participation](#) .
- 4.6 The community and belonging terms are central to the government and LA position on tackling the low levels of re-engagement of pupils back to education.
- 4.7 The “terms” above are now the driving force for the recently published WG guidance to address the importance in promoting attendance and the difference this can make to children’s outcomes and opportunities beyond their statutory education.
- 4.8 This guidance will form part of the existing attendance procedures for schools in Denbighshire reflecting where necessary the key themes and expectations of actions by local authorities.
- 4.9 Denbighshire Education Department provide schools with a template Attendance Policy that ensures compliance, effective management and support. The policy can be found in **Appendix 1** with a summary of content in **Appendix 2**

Vision and Scope

There is no one solution, one group or one service that can address this issue.

- 4.10 The LA must look at how we utilise the recent reforms in the national curriculum, Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) (Wales) Act 2018, and the resources and connections both within the authority but also within its business and commerce sector to offer wider and connected links to broaden opportunities for our children in Denbighshire.
- 4.11 The scope of the above in turn addresses many issues children deal with daily apathy, despondency and more worrying mental health and well-being which has increased significantly since the pandemic. Most if not all referrals from schools to the Education Welfare Service have a repeating theme of the above issues and the question to be answered is how we collectively change this landscape and offer opportunity and a vision that is tangible.

Position Statement

- 4.12 Currently the overall performance of Denbighshire is 90.1%, the average across Wales from September to November 2023 is 91.3% . A more detailed analysis of our current position regarding Attendance and current support is available in **Appendix 3**

Good Practice

- 4.13 A whole school approach is common across Denbighshire schools where all staff regardless of role can make a difference to a child in a school setting that places the child central to all its work with a common interest of learning, care and well-being. Schools have in place pastoral teams and support staff working with pupils to improve learning outcomes but also understanding the care of our vulnerable learners who are subject to adverse childhood experiences, complex family's issues, poverty, disadvantage and increasing mental health anxiety and disengagement issues.
- 4.14 A series of guides have been created to support schools and families to understand the expectations around good attendance and also provide clarity through a series of frequently asked questions (FAQ's). Examples of these can be seen in **Appendices 4, 5 and 6.**

Fixed Penalty Notices

The fixed penalty notice code of conduct in Denbighshire enables the authority based on the school attendance evidence of a pupil to issue warning letters to a parent. This is an early notification to the parent after regular contact by school that poor attendance is an ongoing concern. Parents can receive a fine where these warnings are not acted upon within a reasonable amount of time.

These measures are taken as a last resort and in extreme cases only where all efforts to engage a parent have failed by school, this is in line with the current guidance from the WG and statement from Jeremy Miles Minister for Education and Welsh Language.

Action is also taken where non-payment of fine occurs and in these circumstances (43 days) a report written by the education welfare officer is referred through to legal services.

The matter reverts back to the original offence which is **“a parent is guilty of an offence if their child of compulsory school age, who is a registered pupil at a school, fails to attend regularly-** Section 444 (1) Education Act 1996.

Fixed Penalty Notices	School Year	Warning issued	Fines Issued
	2021/ 2022	42	7
	2022/2023	234	22
Current School Year	2023/2024	103	5

Please see **Appendix 7** for more information regarding FAQ on the Fixed Penalty Notice process.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

5.1 This area of work contributes towards making Denbighshire a place where young people want to live and work and have the skills to do so. It also contributes to make Denbighshire a place where young people can flourish and have the best start in life regardless of any issues or challenges they may be facing.

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

- 6.1 Currently the local authority (LA) is supported by external grants to address the current level of concern nationally and locally regarding the impact of poor attendance and the progress to regain and surpass the levels achieved in 2018/19.
- 6.2 If the funding were to reduce in the settlement from the WG in 2024/25 a review would need to be taken to look at the strategic direction of the county relating to the future investment to support this high priority area. Denbighshire has a clear understanding that WG current drive by the Minister for Education is to engage learners.
- 6.3 Future inspections of our schools by Estyn will prioritise this area of performance based on investment of grants and how schools address this area of work. The performance of the authority to develop opportunity for young people in Denbighshire will be scrutinised across many services.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1 There is no decision or proposal for change required and therefore a Well-being Impact Assessment is not required.

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

- 8.1. Discussions with headteachers recently (November 2023) discussed the current position and highlighted the recent WG guidance "Belonging, Engagement, Participation". There was recognition that schools must look at how they work with families focusing on a whole school approach that plans, supports and integrates the care of pupils to maintain and improve engagement with education.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1 Please see Section 6

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

10.1 The risks of not achieving the WG and LA strategic objective will potentially see a lower number of children accessing school regularly in Denbighshire thus impacting on their outcomes and futures.

11. Power to make the decision.

11.1 Education Act 1996 – Section 444

11.2 Scrutiny's powers in respect of this matter are detailed in Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and Section 7 of the Council's Constitution.