

Meeting of:	Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Thursday 12 th October, 2023
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Learning and Culture
Report Title:	Primary and Secondary School Attendance Update
Purpose of Report:	To raise Members' awareness of the current attendance rates in Vale of Glamorgan schools and the plans to improve
Report Owner:	Paula Ham, Director of Learning and Skills
Responsible Officer:	Susan Cowan, Inclusion Manager
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	<p>CLlr Rhiannon Birch, Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language</p> <p>Morwen Hudson, Head of Standards and Provision</p> <p>Martin Dacey, Lead Officer for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing</p>
Policy Framework:	The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and budget.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Vale of Glamorgan (VoG), like all Local Authorities (LAs) has longstanding obligations to ensure that all children of school age receive a suitable and full-time education at school or otherwise. • Improving attendance has been a consistent focus for the LA. The link between good attendance and learning is clear. Good attendance supports pupils in having the best possible chance in life and maximising their potential, both in terms of academic achievement, social/emotional development and future employability. • The VoG, along with all LAs in Wales, has seen a decline in the attendance figures at both Primary and Secondary Schools since the Covid-19 pandemic. The historic VoG attendance data below illustrates this trend when compared to the figures from the end of last academic year. 	

Type of School / End of Year	July 2015-16	July 2016 - 17	July 2017-18	July 2018-19	July 2022-23
Primary	95.3%	95.2%	94.7%	94.7%	91.6%
Secondary	95%	95.1%	94.6%	94.7%	84.6%

There was no Welsh Government comparative data for 2019/20, 2020/21 or 2021/22.

- There has been an increase in the percentage of persistent absenteeism (attendance below 80%) since the beginning of the COVID pandemic. This increase can be attributed to several things including anxiety in returning to school following lockdown.
- In response to this downward trend in attendance the VOG LA have identified a range of strategies to help support schools with the challenge of getting attendance figures back to pre-pandemic levels and beyond.
- At the end of 2022/23, Vale of Glamorgan was ranked joint 6th in Wales for overall school attendance with an attendance rate of 89%. The Welsh average for this year was 88.5%, and the LA in 1st position had an attendance rate of 90%.

Recommendations

1. That Members note the report.
2. That Scrutiny Committee (Learning and Culture) receives a further progress update report in 12 months (September 2024) in order to evaluate progress made in relation to the overall attendance levels and the impact of the #MissSchoolMissOut campaign, launch of the school attendance toolkit, the enhanced training and support for schools and any intervention pilot projects launched with schools.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. The Council has a strategic responsibility for implementing effective approaches and plans in order to optimise attendance levels.
2. To ensure that Members of the Scrutiny Committee (Learning and Culture) continue to have oversight of the work of the Inclusion Team and the impact on levels of attendance across the Vale of Glamorgan Schools.

1. Background

- 1.1 The aim of the Vale of Glamorgan Local Authority is to create an environment in which all children and young people can flourish as members of a happy, caring, and safe school and wider community. It is our goal that all our children and young people attend school regularly and on time, making the most of the opportunities available to them.
- 1.2 The Vale of Glamorgan (VOG) Inclusion Team aims to work in partnership with our schools to monitor and address a wide range of attendance issues to make the above a reality.
- 1.3 Schools in the VOG are supported in all matters relating to school attendance including Children Missing Education (CME), Elective Home Education (EHE) and the welfare of non-attending learners by the Inclusion team in collaboration with the Admissions' team and the Data support teams.
- 1.4 Inclusion team officers will advise on matters such as the need for referral to other Local Authority (LA) teams such as: Learning Links (previously known as Vulnerable Groups team), Additional Learning Needs (ALN), the Social Emotional and Mental Health Panel (SEMHP) or support from the Engagement Service (ES).
- 1.5 All references to roles and remits of the Education Welfare service (EWS) are, in the VOG since September 2021, functions carried out by the Inclusion Team officers as opposed to Education Welfare Officers (EWO) and EWS.
- 1.6 Our key attendance guidance is the Welsh Government guidance entitled: 'All Wales Attendance Framework' (November 2012). The document provides standards and guidance for practitioners to ensure greater consistency of practice

throughout Wales. It also aims to enable Councils and schools to deliver services that are consistent, accessible and of a high standard.

- 1.7** The Welsh Government has published the 'Belonging, Engaging and Participating' draft document for consultation which the VOG LA responded to in July 2023. We are awaiting feedback from WG.
- 1.8** This report seeks to make elected members aware of the current situation with regards to attendance levels across schools in the Vale of Glamorgan, and the plans in place to increase attendance to school, especially since the downward trend that has affected school attendance since the pandemic in 2020.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** The Inclusion team has recently been reconfigured to respond to the particular areas of need that have been identified following an analysis of attendance data for the last academic year and in consultation with schools. The team includes the following officers, some of whom have been appointed with a particular focus:
 - 1 x Inclusion Manger
 - 2 x Lead Inclusion Officers
 - 4 x Inclusion Officers
 - 3 x Engagement Officers (Persistent Absence (PA)), Elective Home Education (EHE) and Out of School Tuition (OOST) and engagement)
 - 1 x Data Officer
 - 1.5 x Admin Support
 - 2 x OOST Tutors
- 2.2** The work of the inclusion team is divided into universal, referral based, and targeted offers of casework, advice, support, and training.
- 2.3** There is a referral process for schools to follow before cases are taken on by the Inclusion Team, which are allocated via a triage process which aims to prioritise need.
- 2.4** The VOG Attendance Policy and Guidance notes have been reviewed for this academic year to provide clarity for Headteachers and Attendance Leads and consistency across schools in the VOG.
- 2.5** The documentation clarifies expectations and provides guidance on areas such as the law on school attendance and the right to a full-time education. It also provides:
 - Advice on how to promote good attendance;
 - Guidance around how to develop Governor links, cluster work/policy, attendance targets for schools;
 - Advice regarding data systems and recording procedures;
 - Information related to school-based interventions / referrals to LA Inclusion Team;

- Guidance concerning the implementation of penalties for non-attendance / fixed penalty notices (FPNs) / prosecutions;
 - Expectations regarding holidays during term time;
 - Procedural guidance with regards potential Children Missing in Education (CME);
 - Procedural guidance in relation to Elective Home Education (EHE) enquiries; and
 - Advice pertaining to the use and impact of reduced timetables / Pupil Support Plans (PSPs).
- 2.6** The VOG started an attendance campaign in May 2023. The key message of #MissSchoolMissOut was developed with young people from the VOG and has been promoted via banners, posters, radio adverts, a social media campaign and tools, digital adverts on bus shelters, decals on VOG vehicles, community adverts on billboards, roundabouts and other public buildings.
- 2.7** A VOG Attendance Toolkit/resource pack has been developed for schools and was launched in September 2023 to help support all schools with practical, useful tools in their work to improve attendance. The toolkit includes draft policies, examples of cluster approach work, model letters / emails / text messages for parents, examples of good practice in terms of graduated response from school with regards to improving attendance and supporting those young people who are persistent absentees, trackers to help schools analyse data, intervention trackers to monitor impact of interventions for individual students etc. The toolkit will be updated throughout the year in consultation with schools and will promote new strategies and support materials throughout the academic year. These will be promoted amongst schools via a termly newsletter.
- 2.8** The Inclusion Team are also exploring new and developing strategies and pilot projects with schools to improve attendance overall and especially reach those children and young people who have become persistent absentees (with attendance below 80%). This includes developing workshop sessions for children / young people to explore barriers to attendance and strategies to manage these challenges and build resilience. Materials for parental/carer workshops are also being developed by the Inclusion Team. Projects with schools, such as developing walking buses for primary-aged children are also being supported by the LA and piloted in some school clusters. The Inclusion Team are also working with Health and the Educational Psychology team to develop a shared approach to Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) which has had an impact on the attendance of many children and young people since the pandemic.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Wellbeing Objectives?

- 3.1** The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (“the 2015 Act”) requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities, and each other and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

- 3.2** Reducing the percentage of young people becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) is set out in the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) and the Welsh Government Child Poverty Strategy. Supporting schools to improve attendance also supports the objectives in these strategies, which include, creating pathways out of poverty, and supporting child and family wellbeing, including those with protected characteristics, and ensuring children, young people and their families are treated with dignity and respect by support services.
- 3.3** Supporting schools to improve attendance rates also helps support the national and local indicator of percentage of young people in education, employment, or training, under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015.
- 3.4** We work collaboratively with internal and external partners including agencies, education and training providers, Careers Wales, and Welsh Government, to help meet the wellbeing objective.
- 3.5** This report supports the objectives within the Service Plan for Standards and Provision 2023-2024.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** There are no climate change and nature implications resulting from this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** The Inclusion Team received £496,286 (£669,644 when Welsh Government Grants are included)

Confirmation on next year's grant is not expected until the end of the year.

Employment

- 5.2** Grant funding makes up 25.9% of the Inclusion Team budget and supports staffing costs for four roles within the team – Two Inclusion Officers and Two Engagement Officers, which are temporary posts.

We receive £67,696 linked to EHE work and £105,000 from the Welsh Government Attendance Grant this has helped to fund key roles within the service, fund the Attendance Campaign, and support training and the creation of pilot projects to support attendance work within school and in relation to parents and children and young people engagement.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.3** The Vale of Glamorgan Inclusion Team use of the ONE management information service ensures we monitor equality of targeted intervention that is being delivered. We work closely with the equalities team to monitor our cases and

identify training for staff in order to develop their awareness of working with vulnerable groups.

6. Background Papers

6.1 None.