

Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Venue:
Committee Room 1 – Senedd

Meeting date:
31 January 2013

Meeting time:
09:00

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



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Agenda

Pre-meeting (09.00 – 09.15)

1. Introductions, apologies and substitutions

2. Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour – Evidence session (09.15 – 10.15) (Pages 1 – 28)

Teaching Unions

David Evans, Welsh Secretary, NUT Cymru

Rex Phillips, NASUWT

David Healey, Deputy Head of Ysgol Friars, Bangor, ATL

Rolant Wynne, North Wales Field Officer, UCAC

Break (10.15 – 10.30)

3. Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour – Evidence session (10.30 – 11.30) (Pages 29 – 36)

Teaching unions

Anna Brychan, Director, NAHT Cymru

Mark Durbin, President and Headteacher of Henllys Church in Wales School, Torfaen, NAHT Cymru

Hugh Davies, President and Head of Olchfa School Swansea, ASCL Cymru

Tim Pratt, Past President and Head of Caerleon School, ASCL Cymru



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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE:

Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour

About NUT Cymru:

NUT Cymru represents primary and secondary school members and is the largest teaching union in Wales and the UK. We welcome the opportunity to contribute evidence to the Children and Young People's Committee's Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour.

For ease of reference the response is divided into the headings used in the Committee's invitation.

Strategies and Support in place to address Behaviour and Attendance:

We have no evidence that trainee teachers securing placements in schools are less well prepared in terms of managing pupil behaviour than they have been in the past. While some Headteachers report that the number of outstanding trainees has decreased, the overall standard remains good and possibly somewhat improved over the last decade.

Provision for pupils educated otherwise than in school vary significantly from Authority to Authority. In the worst cases, there is a very limited number of places available in one or two centres in a rural Authority which creates transport difficulties for the pupils and where placements are often opposed by parents. This is an area which requires further investment but given the

economies of scale of a number of local authorities, such investment is extremely unlikely.

The use of exclusion also varies significantly from school to school and Authority to Authority. We do not see the differences in policy are necessarily problematic, as it is for the Governing Body to establish the overall policy and ethos of the school, and the Senior Management Team led by the Headteacher in each individual school to implement the policy and operate it on a day to day basis. This will naturally give rise to different interpretations of situations and responses that are in keeping with the school's ethos and circumstances, the merit of the case and the needs of individual pupils rather than any attempt to adhere to local or nationally established criteria.

We do not believe that the achievement of complete consistency and approach is possible and seeking to impose a rigid framework at national or LEA level would not be supported. While exclusion statistics vary significantly from school to school, behavioural problems are sometimes masked by an excessive use of temporary or fixed term exclusions rather than seeking alternatives such as a managed move or ultimately the use of a permanent exclusion. We hear of instances where pupils receive up to 10 or 11 fixed term exclusions where it is quite clear after 3 or 4 that this is a strategy that is not likely to modify the pupils' behaviour. It is also quite possible for a school with a higher number of permanent exclusions to have a lower number of days lost to exclusion than others because schools either use repeated fixed term exclusions (see above) or extend for unnecessarily long periods.

We do not believe that there is extensive evidence of illegal exclusions or of parents being forced to withdraw their pupils from school as an unofficial alternative to a permanent exclusion. There are instances where parents either do not understand or will not co-operate with managed move policies and interpret this as an ultimatum to withdraw from school.

There is too much variation in the quality of Education Welfare Services. Where these are effective, they provide good support for youngsters and families but where they are ineffective, there is no evidence from school data of improvements to exclusion or attendance rates.

Schools increasingly report, even in the foundation phase, problems with youngsters who do not have the basic age-related social and interpersonal skills that would have been taken for granted a generation ago, with increasing number of youngsters joining infant/nursery schools who cannot use basic cutlery and feed themselves, have no experience of toys or picture books and do not appear to be able to play collaboratively. This problem is exacerbated by a small but growing minority of parents who do not share the values of the school and are unwilling to support them.

Teacher training and development needs to be part of initial teacher training and further training. The question is who will provide this training? If schools are more and more responsible for training teachers then they will train them in what is right for their school but not look at the wider issues. Once teachers are in post, who should be responsible for providing further training? Should it be a statutory right to continue to receive training? Should it be a wider issue with a whole school approach through LEA's etc?

Parental engagement is vital to ensuring pupils attend school while parental awareness of children's nutritional needs is vital if teachers are not to spend their time worrying about who has had breakfast and what pupils have for lunch. Issues raised about joint agency working need to be explored for all pupils not just those with additional needs.

Support for pupils with Additional Learning Needs in respect of Behaviour and Attendance:

This again varies too much from Local Authority to Local Authority. These services often suffer from diseconomies of scale arising from the preponderance of small Local Authorities, and the drive to increase delegation to schools, has led to a number of Authorities looking to delegate behaviour support funding to individual institutions. While in some respects, this is likely to be welcomed because it places control over funding directly in the hands of the school, it also comes with a number of difficulties including determining whether the funding is allocated on a per capita flat rate or a mixture of the two. An over emphasis on per capita funding can lead to small schools to have insufficient funding to make any significant additional staffing appointments, whereas reliance on flat rate or making flat rate a significant element of the delegated funding disadvantages larger institutions who therefore can appoint relatively few staff

or purchase additional resources compared with the scale of the problems they may face. We again believe that provision here is too varied and in many authorities, under resourced.

Collaborative Working Arrangements:

It is not entirely clear what is meant by this heading. Most schools have a good working relationship with their Authority but heavily dependent on the resources available from their Authority. Relationships between schools, particularly where collaborating on managed moves is concerned, remain too variable. We also have evidence of schools, in some cases supported by their Local Authority, refusing to admit pupils with behavioural difficulties even if they live in the Authority or within the catchment area and the school has not reached its standard number in that year group. It is unacceptable for young people to be placed in limbo by schools, actively or passively supported by their Authority, declining to carry out their statutory obligations.

Joint working with agencies is also variable. There is evidence of more youngsters with learning and behavioural difficulties and some research suggests a link to foetal alcohol syndrome. The hardest pressed services seem to be Education Psychology and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS). In the case of CAHMS in particular, in some Local Authorities there is an excessive waiting list with unacceptable delays between referrals being made and pupils being seen. Support from Social Services is also an issue. Schools often complain that the feedback they get from Social Services after referrals are made is late, inadequate or non-existent. There is, however, evidence of good practice where schools hold regular multi agency meetings to share ideas and good practice in relation to the provision for individual pupils. However, the success of meetings depends entirely on the commitment of individual agencies and services to consistently send the same member or members of staff to meetings.

Relationships with the police are generally good. Police Liaison Officers are generally welcomed in schools and make a positive contribution. There is, however, evidence in some cases of a different approach being taken by the police and Youth Justice Services, with the latter sometimes seen as too reluctant to act in cases where youngsters are clearly not co-operating with plans put in place.

Concluding comments:

If we are to improve attendance at compulsory school age then the work needs to be done before pupils start school, through playgroups, crèches, Health Visitor clinics, local play workers and teachers employed by LA's to promote positive attitudes towards school and education. Home school links between schools and playgroups are essential and funding to release teachers from class needs to be identified. These home school links need to be driven by teachers and staff working with pupils in school to build relationships with parents and children.

Positive attitudes towards education from parents always results in better attendance of pupils. If parents show respect and value education then their children will too. It is very difficult for a child to develop a positive attitude to school if they are in a family where the adults do not value education. It is essential parents treat school and staff with respect and have time to learn alongside the child.

This is where the health visitor role (or similar) is vital in supporting those families and children who, whilst not "at risk" or have some form of ALN, need additional time and support.

Despite periodic stories in the press and media suggesting that pupil behaviour is poor and that teenagers are the principal cause of the "broken society", we do not believe that the majority of young people behave in a less acceptable manner than they did 10, 20, or 30 years ago. Young people in many cases show far greater concern and awareness for those in society around them both locally and globally and often become more actively involved in charity and community work than might have been the case in the latter stages of the last century. They are better able to form reasoned opinion and to express it coherently and confidently with adults and the creation of School Councils has in many respects had a beneficial effect on schools ethos and environment, as

well as making young people feel that their views are valued. However, the downside of the above is that some pupils are more read to assert what they believe to be their rights even though they do not understand them and are also prepared to assert rights that they do not have. This leads a minority, but a growing minority, to challenge teachers' authority on the basis of what they believe teachers can and cannot do.

Such problems are exacerbated by parents who increasingly support their children against the school, even when their children are clearly in the wrong and who are prepared to challenge the school's policies and authority, even though they were aware of them when they sought admission for their child to the school and in the worst cases, schools have to deal with parents who do not appear to have any significant value system at all. Disproportionate amounts of time are spent on parents who are prepared to complain when they believe that their children have been treated unfairly but who are less willing to support the school in dealing with behavioural issues when the school can demonstrate that it has acted in accordance with its own agreed procedures.

Support from Local Authorities is too variable and too susceptible to diseconomies of scale. While we would oppose vigorously any attempt to fetter schools' right to exclude pupils either temporarily or permanently, we regard it as inappropriate that schools seek to avoid their statutory obligations through the use of unofficial exclusion. However, unless there is evidence that this is a widespread practice, then it should be dealt with on a school by school basis rather than tarring all institutions with the same brush.

Schools are increasingly susceptible to broader social problems and for some children are the only oasis of order and stability in their lives. Drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and poor parenting can have a catastrophic impact on the life chances of children and significantly increase the problems schools face. Schools also report growing problems with social media where there are not only instances of dispute arising between pupils on Facebook etc. but also disputes arising between pupils and other family members or members of other families. These often spill over into school and are not easy for schools to deal with.

The review does not appear to be looking at the link between good teaching and a suitable curriculum on pupil behaviour. Both should be at the heart of effective school provision. We are concerned, however, particularly in the 14-16 cohort, that the reduction in grants to 14-19 partnerships is likely to lead to the demise of a number of collaborative courses in FE Colleges which will be too expensive for schools to sustain. Schools report that it has been possible to retain a number of pupils on roll who are in danger of exclusion because it has been possible to tailor a curriculum for them with some vocational provision at a local FE College. This will be under threat if funding is cut.

The growing emphasis on School Performance Data, including banding and the initial assessment by ESTYN prior to inspecting a school, can lead to a curriculum and a range of qualifications which are skewed to suit the institution rather than the needs of individual pupils. There is evidence of numbers of pupils in a number of schools being entered for vocational qualifications in Year 9 simply to boost the school's performance position and the emphasis on those schools' performance thresholds is likely to lead to schools targeting more of their resources at those pupils whose performance in external examinations and assessments can be pushed above such thresholds rather than those individuals who may need additional support.

Also, it may be worth mentioning the successful NUT Supporting Behaviour CPD and the popularity/ high take up of these courses, indicating an on-going need in the profession to seek support in this matter, and the importance of such courses being made widely available to teachers at all stages of their careers, not just those in ITT, Induction or Early Career Development.

**The Children and Young People Committee
Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour
28 January 2013**

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour.
2. The NASUWT is the largest teachers' union in Wales and the UK representing teachers and school leaders.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The NASUWT has considerable experience in dealing with behaviour and attendance issues in schools through casework and collective disputes and has produced high-quality guidance and resources on this subject.
4. This material can be accessed through the NASUWT's website at www.nasuwt.org.uk. Among the literature and studies that may be germane to this inquiry are: NASUWT Position Statement on Pupil Behaviour; Behaviour Advice; Risk Assessment of Violent and Abusive Behaviour; Gangs and Schools Report; The Big Question Survey 2012; Sink or Swim? Learning Lessons from Newly Qualified and Recently Qualified Teachers; Reflections, Renewal and Reality: Teachers' Experience of Special educational Needs and Inclusion; and NASUWT principles for the curriculum.
5. Through the work that has been undertaken in this field, the Union has identified several key factors that contribute to poor pupil behaviour and

poor attendance. These include a lack of parental support, low aspirations of pupils and families, lack of readiness to learn, lack of enforcement of school rules, and a lack of engagement with the curriculum.

6. The NASUWT notes that this inquiry focuses on the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's strategies for tackling many of these issues and will offer, where possible, views on the specific points of inquiry later in this response.
7. There are, however, some important factors that the Union maintains the Committee should be mindful of when considering attendance and behaviour. These include:
 - the effectiveness and clarity of school behaviour management policies;
 - the degree to which school behaviour management policies are applied fairly and consistently;
 - the effect that a failure to tackle the incidence of low-level disruption by a minority of pupils in a school can have on well-being and engagement with learning of the majority of pupils;
 - the effects that external influences, over which a school has very limited control, have on the behaviour of pupils within school and on their attendance at school;
 - the effects of the pressure placed on pupils through the high-stakes accountability culture that has been introduced into the education system due to the misuse of international benchmarking data, the School Effectiveness Framework, the Banding system and other target driven initiatives;

- the effect that the narrowing of the curriculum and the forensic scrutiny of pupils' work that could result through the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework may have on pupil engagement;
- the effect that the continuing underinvestment in education has on the ability of local authorities to provide the support services and alternative education provision needed to assist in addressing poor pupil behaviour and poor attendance;
- the effect that underinvestment in education has on the ability of local authorities and schools to provide teachers and other practitioners with access to the high-quality training and development needed to assist in addressing poor pupil behaviour and poor attendance.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

8. The NASUWT offers the observations that follow in relation to the points of inquiry on which the Committee has sought assistance.
9. Strategies in place to address behaviour and attendance, for example:

Teacher training and development

The NASUWT has maintained for some considerable time that the training student teachers receive does not equip them adequately for dealing with the behavioural problems they may encounter.

Given the shortfalls in this area of initial teacher training, the Union decided to develop and offer a course in behaviour management, and ensured that a condensed version of the training was offered to Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) at the seminars that the Union runs each summer.

It may be of interest to the Committee to note that over the last two years it has become evident at these seminars that the training that student teachers are now receiving in the management of pupil behaviour has shown a marked improvement.

It is, however, clear from the attendees at the one day behaviour management courses, the NASUWT runs in Wales, that access to high-quality training and professional development is extremely limited.

Provision to pupils who are Educated Otherwise than in School (EOATS) including in pupil referral units

The NASUWT recognised the efforts made by the Welsh Government to reduce the number of children and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) through the implementation of the Youth and Employment Action Plan 2011.

The NASUWT support the view that pupils are entitled to inclusion in the education service and to have their educational needs met. However, for a small minority of pupils, inclusion in the mainstream is inappropriate and access to specialist, alternative provision, of the highest quality, must be made available. Regrettably, access to such provision has declined in Wales.

The NASUWT maintains that placement in specialist provision, such as pupil referral units, should be viewed as providing a valuable passport to learning and a pathway to work for those pupils who, for whatever reason, have become disaffected with main stream education.

Use of exclusions (including permanent/ fixed term/illegal exclusions)

There are times when, despite every effort made by a school, it is necessary to implement the exclusion procedure. Consequently, the

NASUWT maintains that headteachers must be empowered to exercise their professional judgement in the use of exclusion and, in the most severe cases, head teachers must be supported in excluding a pupil permanently.

Such decisions must balance the interests of the excluded pupil against the interests of all the other members of the school community.

The responsibility towards all permanently excluded pupils rests with local authorities to provide suitable full-time education and to reintegrate excluded pupils as quickly as possible into a suitable mainstream school.

The NASUWT is of the firm view that:

- the use of targets to limit or reduce the use of the exclusion sanction is unacceptable;
- Independent Appeals Panels should not direct the reinstatement of pupils where the disciplinary process has been carried correctly;
- the Welsh Government should ensure that a properly resourced national system of high-quality off-site placements is in place to assist schools to avoid permanent exclusion and to support pupils who are permanently excluded.

The NASUWT seeks clarification over the reference to 'illegal' exclusions.

Education Welfare

The NASUWT recognises the valuable contribution that Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) play in attempting to combat truancy but is concerned that the combination of economic restraint and the reorganisation of the education support services may have resulted in a reduction in the workforce that deals with education welfare.

Other general issues such as:

parental engagement - as stated previously, a lack of parental support was cited by just over half the teachers surveyed as the most significant factor for the cause of poor pupil behaviour^{1*};

behaviour support services – the NASUWT maintains that this is an area that has suffered, because of the requirement to increase delegation rates to schools and the restructuring of education support services, with specialist centrally employed staff who could be deployed to areas of need being made redundant;

the link between food consumption during the school day and behaviour – the NASUWT is aware that some foods can have affect the behaviour of some children but recognised the difficulties presented to school in attempting to control the dietary habits of pupils.

10. Support to pupils with Additional Learning Needs in respect of behaviour and attendance

As stated previously, the NASUWT support the view that pupils are entitled to inclusion in the education service and to have their educational needs met. However, for a small minority of pupils, inclusion in the mainstream is inappropriate and access to specialist, alternative provision, of the highest quality, must be made available.

The Union maintains that the decline in access to such provision can not only have a negative affect on the behaviour and attendance of those pupils who are deemed to be in need of such provision, but also on the mainstream pupils who and subjected to the indiscipline and disorder caused when such provision is unavailable.

¹ NASUWT Big Question Survey 2012

11. Collaborative working arrangements

Joint working between relevant agencies including, for example, education, social services, health, young offending teams, police, third sector organisations

The NASUWT recognises that collaboration between various agencies is essential to the development and provision of an appropriate system that identifies and meets the educational and social needs of children who become disruptive, disaffected or distanced from mainstream education.

Links to other relevant initiatives such as Families First, the School Effectiveness Framework, third sector initiatives

The NASUWT acknowledges fully the contribution that such initiatives can make in tackling poor attendance and poor behaviour and welcomes the integrated, early-intervention approach provided by the Families First programme, but warns against initiatives that are based on expectations and targets, rather than on need.

12. The NASUWT trusts that these views will assist the Committee in this Inquiry.



Rex Phillips

Wales Organiser

For further information on this written evidence contact Rex Phillips, Wales Organiser.

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The largest teachers' union in Wales and the UK

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ATL Cymru Submission to the Children and Young Peoples Committee Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)

ATL represents over 160,000 teachers, lecturers, head teachers, principals, and support staff across the UK in maintained and independent schools, further education colleges and sixth forms. It represents over 6,500 education staff in Wales. Our policy is formed by members, *the* professionals in education practice and experience. ATL welcomes this short inquiry into the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's policy and guidance to promote positive behaviour and attendance within education provision for pupils of compulsory school age.

We want to record at the outset our support for the work undertaken by Professor Ken Reid reflected in his NBAR report of 2008. We share his frustration that some recommendations are still awaiting implementation, such as initial teacher training and the training of the wider school workforce.

For ease we will refer to the Committee's headings in its request for evidence.

- **Strategies and support in place to address behaviour and attendance for example:**

- Teacher training and development

There is a perception amongst more experienced members of the profession that greater emphasis should be placed on behaviour management in ITT courses. This perception is strengthened by the fact that the most popular courses run by ATL for students and Newly Qualified staff are those which relate to behaviour management. We hope that the recently announced review of Initial Teacher Training will look in depth at this issue.

- Provision to pupils who are Educated Otherwise than in School (EOTAS) including in pupil referral units

We are disappointed that the Minister has delayed taking forward the legislative proposals for registering and monitoring home-based education in the current Education (Wales) Bill¹. We believe that this is a missed opportunity to ensure that learners are able to access appropriate education, including that related to behaviour.

We have no reason to dispute Estyn's recent survey that found that '*Staff in these PRUs are well trained and confident in using these techniques to defuse potentially confrontational situations. All PRU staff undertake safeguarding training*'.² We would however like to see more robust recording methods to monitor training undertaken, and Governing Bodies/Management committees helped in their governance role of PRUs.

- Use of exclusion (including permanent / fixed term / illegal exclusions)

We wish to emphasise that no school ever takes the decision to exercise any form of exclusion lightly. We are pleased to note that the latest statistics show that the numbers being permanently excluded are falling (In 2010/11 there were 158 permanent exclusions, a decrease of 27 from 2009/10)³, but are concerned that the majority of these were for assault or violence towards pupils and staff. Survey after survey of our members suggests that violence is still too common a threat to many staff. While we would wish to see permanent exclusions reduced to zero this cannot be at the cost of tolerating violent and threatening behaviour.

- Education Welfare Services;

By and large members valued the work undertaken by EWOs but reported that there was a need for more such officers in the field. Home visits and the like can be very time consuming.

¹ Written Statement - Consultation – Elective Home Education. 21 December 2012.

² A survey of the arrangements for pupils' wellbeing and behaviour management in pupil referral units Estyn 23 January 2012.

³ Welsh Government. Exclusions from Schools 2010/2011 dated 28 February 2012.

- Other general issues such as parental engagement; behaviour support services; the link between food consumed during the school day and behaviour;

Members report varying levels of parental engagement and support in disciplinary issues. Some note that a few parents are reluctant or even hostile to support the school in its behaviour and discipline policies. Such attitudes are not confined by any means to schools in more deprived areas: some articulate and well educated parents can make no secret of their disdain for certain members of staff, or their personal assessment of matters of school dress or other codes.

Some members also reported better behaviour, especially in regard to punctuality, which they believed attributable to the uptake of the Welsh Government's breakfast initiative.

We would encourage the committee to give serious consideration to the link between poverty and poor educational outcomes. Estyn have identified several examples of excellent practice in some schools that are effectively tackling poverty and disadvantage and they do so by improving the attendance, punctuality and behaviour of disadvantaged learners⁴.

- **Support to pupils with Additional Learning Needs in respect of behaviour and attendance;**

Schools require the specialist resources for children with ALN's to stimulate and engage learners. Some members report that their schools are not in a position to be able to provide specialist resources required. Some concern has been expressed that the drive to greater delegation of funding to schools, which we broadly welcome, should be sensitive in regard to its impact on ALN pupils.

Some members noted that More Able and Talented (MAT) children also require additional support. They were afraid that this additional support, such as musical

⁴ Effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools 13/11/2012

instrument teachers, specialist sport support, authors, etc was becoming prohibitively expensive and increasingly difficult for small schools to arrange.

- **Collaborative working arrangements:**

When responding to the Welsh Government on SEN in the summer of 2012 members were keen to stress that education should not necessarily be expected to lead on every matter, involving health & social services each time. ATL Cymru members, voice their concern that there are often difficulties in communicating with all the agencies that are (or should be) involved with the children in a schools care. We believe that Welsh Government policy should be a vehicle to benefit learners in gaining reassurance from external agencies that the duties imposed on those bodies will translate into support being made available for those children identified as requiring support.

Effective multi-agency working will be critical to success - all agencies will need to be involved & other service partners. This can be very time consuming and detrimental to learners. For teachers the balance between teaching and working with other agencies is as always challenging. We are happy to echo the words of the Minister who stated in March 2012 *'It is my view that teachers and Head Teachers simply cannot be as effective as you want to be, as I want you to be, without local authorities playing their part'*.⁵

Teachers and schools have high expectations and will have maximum success when it is forged as the culture of a school. That culture must also show respect for its pupils. For this reasons we believe that School Councils and pupil voice are also key parts of the agenda in

⁵ Keynote speech presented by Minister for Education and Skills, Leighton Andrews. 8 March 2012

tackling poor attendance and bad behaviour. Most pupils are eager to learn, don't want to be bullied, and resent the poor behaviour of others.

Finally we must register our concern over the recent proposals to fine parents for poor attendance. We believe that this will not produce the desired results and that the deterrent value of such an option has been greatly overstated. With attendance increasing overall we would argue that more forensic and particular attention needs to be paid to the hard core of parents who do not seemingly value education as highly as they ought. Challenging these attitudes more effectively will provide more sustainable success.

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Inquiry by the Children and Young People Committee of the National Assembly for Wales: Attendance and Behaviour

January 2013

UCAC | yr undeb sy'n diogelu athrawon a darlithwyr Cymru

Children and Young People Committee of the National Assembly for Wales

Inquiry into attendance and behaviour

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 UCAC welcomes this opportunity to submit evidence to the above Committee on two matters that have a significant effect on our members.
- 1.2 UCAC represents 5,000 teachers, heads and lecturers in every sector of education in Wales. The following comments are, therefore, based on evidence from teachers in classrooms and headteachers on matters relating to attendance and behaviour. Often, members contact the Union in relation to these matters when they are under a great deal of pressure and are feeling frustrated in trying to cope with difficult situations or unrealistic expectations.
- 1.3 The Union welcomed the Welsh Government's commitment in 2006 to undertake a National Behaviour and Attendance Review to '*develop the future approach to these challenging issues*'. While some developments on promoting positive behaviour and improving attendance have occurred, the fact that this further inquiry is being held in itself highlights the fact that the improvements were insufficient and piecemeal.
- 1.4 The main theme of the document **Behaving and Attending: Action Plan Responding to the National Behaviour and Attendance Review** (Dogfen 076/2009) is the unmistakeable link between educational achievement, behaviour and attendance. Even though common sense suggests that the higher the rate of attendance, the higher the level of achievement is likely to be, the statistics confirm that the correlation between these factors is striking. By the same token, having an unmanageable pupil in the classroom will obviously affect an individual's learning and that of the class, as well as the life and work of the teachers in question.
- 1.5 It is acknowledged that there is a clear link between some cases of challenging behaviour and the implications of that behaviour for attendance; for example, in cases of suspension or exclusion. However, linking the two has led to a concentration on this small cohort of pupils while ignoring those factors that affect attendance and behaviour as being completely separate issues. For the sake of clarity, therefore, we separate these two issues for the purposes of this submission.

2.0 Attendance

- 2.1 Over the past few years, several documents have been published, several steering groups have been appointed and several pilot schemes have been established and implemented with regard to attendance both on a county-wide basis and nationally. Many of the documents are repetitive and full of rhetoric, and have failed to successfully identify or get to grips with day-to-day situations in everyday language.
- 2.2 Establishing agreed national codes for recording absences was a valuable step towards ensuring clarity and consistency. These codes have facilitated the collection of data on every level and have led to increased consistency across Wales as intended. Since adopting the new guidance, however, too much of officials' time and energy on every level have been spent on reviewing and modifying these codes, to the detriment of giving due attention to the reasons for absences.
- 2.3 With regard to collecting statistics, '*putting in place new approaches and processes*' has become an entity in itself instead of being an instrument for improving attendance. The task of interpreting the statistics has, by now, become extreme and unreasonable. Including attendance rates as part of the equation when banding schools is based on the assumption that schools have total control over pupils' attendance levels.

2.4 Evidence shows that there has been no significant improvement on a national level in terms of the number of unauthorised absences since the new codes were introduced. This is despite the fact that schools, over the same period, have invested significant time and energy in establishing monitoring systems and recording attendance; these procedures have led to substantial costs with regard to establishing computerised systems, identifying staff who are required to make daily calls to the homes of absent children, staff time in terms of mentoring pupils and gathering and interpreting the data for internal discussions, which are fed into county and national databases. In smaller schools, these responsibilities are shouldered by Headteachers, which has taken up their teaching and management time and has also increased their workload.

2.1 What needs to be done to reduce authorised absences?

Suggestion 1

Improving Medical Support Services to ensure that they are available and are comparable in every part of Wales, while specifically:

- i.** Ensuring that schools have a School Nurse and School Doctor service. This service has been reduced regularly in past years and continues to be under threat, but it is indispensable in advising schools and parents on how to deal with chronic or long-term conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, skin complaints and epilepsy, which can be a barrier to pupils attending school.
- ii.** Provide clear and national leadership on common illnesses among children that affect their ability to attend school. At present, very mixed messages are given by schools and health service professionals with regard to when children should and should not attend school; for example, it could be clearly stated when children who have had specific illnesses, such as measles, chicken pox, mumps and so on, should return to school. Mixed messages are also given in relation to skin disorders such as impetigo, which spreads quickly through a class of infants. Publishing a booklet and sending it to every home, school, local authority surgery and library would be beneficial to everyone, and would ensure consistency in the messages that are given to parents and carers.
- iii.** Providing, in addition to this, clear and consistent advice and direction to parents on when it is appropriate to send their children to school and when it is more appropriate to keep them at home. Establishing a balanced and appropriate response to minor illnesses in primary years is likely to ensure appropriate behaviour at secondary school age and in the workplace. At the other extreme, children who have been vomiting or who have had diarrhoea throughout the night are arriving at school feeling faint the next morning and there is no-one there to look after them; by lunchtime, they have been ill and have infected the rest of their class and staff. Parents must realise that schools are not a childcare service.

Suggestion 2

Ensuring that sufficient funds are available to pay for support for a pupil who requires temporary practical support following an accident; for example, breaking a leg or arm, or surgery. The application processes for support of this kind are linked to Additional Educational Needs processes and are bureaucratic and long-winded. Members' experience is that these pupils have recovered, but that they have missed weeks of school, long before the application for support is heard by the relevant panel.

Suggestion 3

Making a clear statement in relation to taking pupils out of school to go on holidays/trips during the school term. There are two economic reasons why so many parents take their children out of school to go on family holidays during term time: one is the cost of the holiday, and one only has to look at any holiday

brochure to see that the cost more than doubles during usual school holidays; the other is the fact that tourism is an important industry in Wales and those who earn their living in this industry cannot afford to lose those earnings by going on holiday during peak periods. Some parents are under the impression that absences of this kind are a 'right' and that they do not have to ask permission for them.

2.2 What needs to be done to reduce unauthorised absences?

Suggestion 4

Improving Support Services and ensuring that they are available and comparable with those in every part of Wales by:

- i. Ensuring that every school has consistent and sufficient support by an Education Welfare Officer. Over the past few years, there have been cuts to this service and there is often little support available for schools, particularly primary schools. Research shows that early intervention is very fruitful. Breaking a cycle of regular absences early on in a child's education is likely to decrease the likelihood of such a pattern becoming established, which often intensifies as the pupil gets older. Our members have given evidence that this service is very beneficial when it is available, but that more situations are arising where school staff have to shoulder these kinds of responsibilities at the expense of time spent on teaching and management. The link that an Education Welfare Officer establishes with parents is often crucial in achieving improved attendance.
- ii. Sharing any good practice that has proved successful in some schools with other schools. Unfortunately, project work that has been successful in one place fails in other areas because the same input, with regard to money and leadership, is not offered in those other areas. Any new development must be sustainable in the long term to be of any genuine benefit.
- iii. Fostering a relationship between the school and parents who are less likely to feel that they are a part of the school community. The Family Learning Programme, which is funded by the Welsh Government, is very important in this regard and anecdotal evidence clearly shows that where parents have received the support to tackle their own literacy and numeracy issues and have had the opportunity to work with their children under supervision, they are much more likely to be involved in the school (for example, attending meetings of the Parent Teacher Association or parents' evenings) and children's attendance and achievement levels increase. There is general acknowledgement that the Programme is working. In the past, there has been insufficient tracking of the effect on parents and children to provide solid evidence. However, reports, such as those by NIACE, show the importance of working with parents. Solving some of the parents' problems can have an extremely positive effect on children and their attitude towards school and education.

3.0 Behaviour

Unfortunately, the number of cases in which members have faced situations where pupils have displayed challenging behaviour is increasing. A further factor that intensifies the crisis is the fact that an increasing number of cases are coming to our attention that involve the primary sector and the Early Years in particular. These cases may be categorised as follows:

i. Inappropriate Language and Verbal Threats

Cases of obscene language are very common but can become threatening, with pupils threatening a member of staff verbally... *'I'm going to... you'*. Often, the threat follows verbal chastisement or is made when a pupil does not get his or her own way.

ii. Physical Threats

It is becoming increasingly common for pupils to hit out when a staff member asks or compels them to do something. In some cases, pupils lose their temper to the extent that they turn over tables and chairs, throw things or break equipment, displays or school work – their own and that of other pupils. Sometimes this happens on a whim or as a reaction to something, and sometimes it is a targeted action.

Even though extreme behaviour of this kind is the exception, when it happens it has a significant effect on staff morale as well as on their safety. It also has a detrimental effect on the safety and learning of the class and can lead to an increase in absences. It can also undermine a teacher in the eyes of other pupils.

iii. Emotional challenges (Challenging authority/Refusing to conform)

In some cases, pupils will openly refuse to follow instructions or will do the opposite of what they are told in a deliberate attempt to anger staff and attract attention. Sometimes, a pupil will challenge a staff member with comments such as *'you can't force me to.../you don't have the right to...'* and so on.

iv. The use of new technology

Some pupils deliberately use new technology, such as mobile phones, to undermine teachers' authority; for example, by criticising a teacher/accusing a teacher in a public forum such as the *ratemyteacher* website. Other pupils use mobile phones to film an event (for example, when a teacher is challenged) and upload the footage to the internet. This secret filming, which leads to unfavourable publicity for the teacher, also affects the morale and status of the teacher and his or her relationship with the pupil/class.

We have come across examples of pupils making inappropriate use of Facebook to undermine and embarrass a teacher; for example, by creating an account in the teacher's name and uploading completely inappropriate content.

The use of e-technology in this manner has led to inquiries into behaviour, which not only endangers the status of the teacher in the short term but jeopardises his/her long-term career. It is an example of the cyber-bullying of teachers by pupils and is wholly unacceptable.

Teachers can face threatening behaviour of this kind from parents as well, including the use of obscene or threatening language, bullying, physical threat and cyber-bullying.

3.1 What needs to be done nationally?

Suggestion 5

The problem needs to be acknowledged; as does the size of the problem. Additionally, clear policies are needed at a national level – including a clear statement that challenging behaviour by pupils and their parents will not be tolerated in schools.

There also needs to be a clear and unequivocal statement that school staff do not have to suffer verbal or physical attacks. Schools have been very successful in integrating pupils with a wide range of needs, and UCAC supports every attempt to promote and encourage inclusivity in teaching and learning. However, there is a misconception that teachers have to cope with every situation because a pupil 'must be intergrated'. It has to be accepted that a point is sometimes reached when staff must refuse to teach a pupil because he or she is affecting the safety of fellow pupils and/or staff too much, or the pupil is having an unreasonable effect on other children's learning. Teachers' right to take action in situations of this kind must be protected, no matter how rarely that right is exercised.

Suggestion 6

Quality leadership and training must be ensured for school staff, be they teachers or support staff. Distributing the Booklet on Managing Behaviour to prospective teachers in Primary and Secondary sectors offers a beneficial resource to teachers at the beginning of their careers, but they also need interactive training in addition to printed guidance.

It is significant that schools have to set aside substantial periods of time to teach social skills and proficiency to young children and to help them to cope with their emotions. Programmes such as 'Ysgol Dina', Incredible Years, PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) and SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) schemes have all proved successful according to our members, especially when these programmes are introduced as part of a school-wide programme and include all staff at a school. These schemes offer a consistent and co-ordinated way of promoting good behaviour. Again, they are often funded either via project funding or specific grants, and with cuts to training budgets, for example the training budget of the Teaching Council, resources are not available for others, namely new teachers, to receive the same training.

Suggestion 7

In addition to this generic training that allows a teacher to deal successfully with low-level disruption on a daily basis, a more intensive and specific programme of support and training is needed for staff who face a challenging pupil. Often, when a school turns to external agencies for support, including turning to their union for leadership, they try to implement a host of strategies to deal with the case. The first step that is needed is intensive and immediate support to discover why the strategies that have been implemented have not worked and then to co-ordinate an intensive programme of intervention. Members' experience is that this kind of support is not available soon enough due to a lack of staff with the relevant expertise within Authorities; where qualified staff are available, their workload is so unreasonable that they are unable to devote sufficient time to schools.

When training is offered, there is a tendency for it to be offered to one person rather than to everyone who deals with the individual in question. To ensure consistency and successful intervention, everyone who comes into contact with the individual must receive the same guidance, including the parents if possible.

School staff need general and specific guidance on physical intervention. Research by individuals such as Heather Piper of Manchester Metropolitan University (The Case Against 'No Touch' Policies) shows that schools' 'No Touch' policies have been taken to an extreme. This has far-reaching implications when staff try to deal with a pupil who is physically threatening them and their fellow pupils and needs to be physically restrained. Even though UCAC does not recommend putting staff in situations in which they need to use reasonable force, when a pupil's behaviour makes such a situation likely and essential, staff must be fully trained. Our members' experience is that officials at county and national levels are unwilling to acknowledge this need and its legal implications. While these officials 'consider' what to do, staff and pupils face daily attacks, which affect the quality of the education that is offered as well as the welfare and morale of staff and pupils.

Suggestion 8

Resources need to be allocated to promote support and collaboration with parents.

The input and support of parents are crucial in dealing with challenging behaviour. Our members' experience is that parents' response varies from denying or challenging any suggestion that there is a problem to full co-operation and sympathy. Often, in the latter scenario, it is reported that parents are themselves crying out for support and are frustrated when no-one is available to help them, so they often turn to school staff for guidance. We also received information about situations in which there is an unwillingness to provide support across county boundaries and health boards; that is, where a pupil attends

a school that is outside the county in which he or she lives or is in the territory of a different health board. Such bureaucracy cannot be justified.

Suggestion 9

We must ensure that resources are available to promote collaboration across agencies. Our members' experience is that the majority of the work falls on schools, primarily due to a lack of resources. The usual pattern is to respond to situations that have reached a critical point rather than providing early and co-ordinated support through implementing strategies to prevent the situation from becoming critical. Situations involving 'controlled movement' have proved successful in some cases, especially when this is seen as a new opportunity for a pupil. We must accept that such movement will not be suitable in every situation and ensure that schools are not given more than their fair share of pupils who are moved in such circumstances. Again, our members report that much depends on the level of support that is available, to the pupil and the school, to cope with the move from staff at every agency.

Concluding Statements

Ultimately, there will be no significant improvement if sufficient resources are not directed to respond to this situation by tackling the **Suggestions** above. Manipulating the figures so that the situation 'appears' to be better must end. We must, rather, interpret the data to recognise the root causes behind absences and to respond to them.

As noted above, there is already a lack of people across Wales who can offer crucial support to schools to respond to their needs with regard to dealing with challenging behaviour. UCAC is genuinely concerned that the level and quality of support will be reduced further as we see a significant reduction in the number of support staff within Local Authorities following the establishment of the regional units that appear only to be undertaking the role of monitoring and challenging.



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Submission prepared for:

**The Children and Young People's Committee Review of school attendance
and behaviour prepared by NAHT Cymru and ASCL Cymru.**

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Introduction

1. Thank you for inviting us to submit evidence to this Review
2. ASCL and NAHT represent the majority of school leaders in Wales.
3. The evidence the Committee has already heard from Professor Ken Reid largely reflects school leaders' views; we too regret the delay in implementing some of the recommendations of the 2008 NBAR report, such as those related to initial teacher training and training of the wider school workforce.
4. We acknowledge that the Welsh Government's 'Making a Difference on Behaviour and Attendance Action Plan 2011-2013' provides a coherent and evidence-based framework within which to operate.
5. School leaders have provided us with details of their own experience which we believe are indicative of schools' determination to tackle attendance and behaviour issues. We hope Committee members find them helpful. What we found could not be described as a consistent, national plan of action as envisaged by Professor Reid however. Many school interventions are effective and sharing these would be beneficial; other policy decisions and local factors are less helpful. We have attempted to give some examples below.

Attendance:

6. Training of NQTs and the wider school workforce on attendance issues is considered a neglected area by school leaders. Some have sought to address this by using school in service training days (INSET) to allow EWOs (Education Welfare Officers) to lead whole school training on the issue. This has been useful.
7. Practical issues have been resolved in this way too; for example, the importance of the register as a legal document and the requirement to use the codes accurately. Inaccurate recording may lead to inappropriate responses by the school or a failure to trigger necessary EWO/ESO involvement. The Welsh Government proposes to use parental fines in cases of persistent absenteeism. Though we are sceptical about Government proposals to introduce parental fines in such cases, we would point out that unless training issues are tackled seriously in relation to the keeping of the register, attempts to fine parents may be subject to successful challenge of records can be shown to be inaccurate.
8. If there is likely to be a permanent exclusion because of the severity of a particular incident, the local authority must be notified. Usually in such cases the local authority suggests home tuition or a move to another school (if school and parental agreement can be secured); this

- can be a lengthy process). Such solutions are not included in the authority's permanent exclusion figures but do adversely affect the attendance figures at the original school.
9. There is a concern that this may lead schools to avoid permanent exclusions even where circumstances warrant such action. This may not be entirely helpful because if a child's behaviour warrants exclusion but there is no record of it, it is very difficult to persuade the local authority, (without robust evidence of significant school intervention and provision which has been ineffective), to assist the school with more substantial and expert provision. The statementing process and access to behaviour specialist provision may be compromised.
 10. Members value highly the termly register audit completed by EWOs but the time it takes for the work to be completed for all schools impacts significantly and negatively on EWOs' ability to interact directly with vulnerable families. This speaks to another of Professor Ken Reid's concerns; that we have too few dedicated EWOs/ESOs in Wales. Even where schools maintain excellent practice, attendance may deteriorate without the necessary capacity to liaise directly with the school and conduct home visits.
 11. School leaders support a practice where families routinely meet with EWOs/AOs when pupils with a poor attendance record transfer to a new school. This helps to ensure sure that parents understand the attendance expectations of the new school. It is important that such good practice is not confined to individual schools but represents a consistent local authority policy, supported by excellent liaison with all parties.
 12. EWO services have undoubtedly increased their focus on tackling absenteeism by pupils. Swansea LA for example has operated a policy of publicly naming parents taken to court for failing in their duty to ensure attendance of their child at school.
 13. We recognise that the greater emphasis on pupil tracking and more forensic examination of data promoted by the School Standards Unit has been helpful with regard to attendance data despite continuing concerns about consistency outlined below. A good tracking mechanism is essential in dealing with attendance issues.
 14. Members report that the pupil deprivation grant (PDG) and the school effectiveness grant (SEG) have been a particularly important contributor to increased attendance rates. As Professor Ken Reid points out, absenteeism affects pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds disproportionately; the pupil deprivation grant is of course specifically targeted at this group of pupils. One school whose percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is nearly 50% has reported a dramatic improvement (2011/2012: **88.1%**; 2012/2013: **93.2%**)

in attendance figures, a drop in exclusion rates and an overall improvement in behaviour.

The school used the PDG and SEG to employ additional support staff to implement intervention strategies for literacy, numeracy and emotional / nurture issues; some of the funding has been used to buy resources to run enriched curriculum and after school activities.

15. Another school reported that a £5000 grant from the local authority had helped the school employ a part-time attendance officer. Attendance jumped from 84% to 92% as a result in the period 2005/6 to 2009/10, a position maintained in subsequent years. In the same school, the introduction of a 'nurture room' in the school for an individual pupil saw that pupil's attendance improve from 32% to 90% over a two-year period.
16. There is real concern however about how schools will be able to maintain the impetus of these initiatives (which rely upon additional staffing) when the grant fund streams are withdrawn. It would be naïve to suppose that schools would be able to afford to continue to employ these staff without long-term additional funds, and this in turn will have a negative impact upon attendance.
17. Other schools, particularly in the primary sector report very positive effects from the introduction of awards for children who maintain a good attendance record (bronze award certificate for 100% attendance at Christmas; silver award certificate at Easter; gold award certificate and prize in the summer for example). Children engage very happily in this process; one school reported that it frequently exceeds its 95% attendance target by employing these strategies. Schools may involve EWOs/AOs (Attendance Officers) in 'attendance rewards assemblies'; they then become very well known to all the children and are seen in a more positive light.
18. These strategies are all supported by greater engagement with parents via letters, newsletters, meetings and very swift communication with parents in cases of unreported or unauthorised absences.
19. Government interventions such as the drafting of more robust guidance on the importance of avoiding school-time absences for holidays have also been useful, even though in some cases this has led to difficult conversations with parents.
20. We acknowledge too the impact of the inclusion of attendance data in banding judgements; we believe however that this too may lack national consistency because some doubt remains whether all schools and local authorities report absences to a common format. Until this is resolved, a reliable all-Wales picture will be difficult to achieve.

21. Some local authorities have also given better and more consistent support on attendance issues in particular. One school leader from Carmarthenshire detailed the change in culture there:
- Noticeable changes have included:
 - o Improved guidance from the local authority;
 - o Local authority visits to individual schools. This is much appreciated because individual school concerns can be tackled e.g. correct use of codes.
 - o The LEA has an Estyn target to improve attendance levels. This has been given high priority.
 - o Schools have a duty to respond to an 'attendance action plan'.
22. Less helpful in terms of determining the real nature of the attendance problem was a recent Government decision to reclassify study leave as 'authorised absence' rather than 'education elsewhere' and to advise that it should be limited to 15 days per annum. Study leave and five days illness would thus take a pupil into the category of pupils absent for 20.5 days or more. The justification for the decision, repeated in a recent communication to schools, is that some students are unable to make positive use of their time when their examinations have finished and would be better served by organised in-school activity. This is a classic case of affecting the majority because of issues affecting a minority. The experience of those schools that organised a programme of activities for the latter part of the summer term 2012 was that the majority of pupils voted with their feet and did not attend and thus decreased the school's attendance rates. In one case, a secondary school in south east Wales that attempted to follow the 'letter of the law' on study leave, found that other schools had exploited legitimate loopholes to maintain attendance rates; its own attendance figures were suddenly severely compromised, leading to a '4' classification in banding. This is a case of an unintended consequence that is at best unhelpful, and a worst grossly unfair.
23. Absentee figures can be affected by administrative decisions; when schools decide to close their register for example. Some schools do so earlier than others. Early closure of the register will identify persistent latecomers, triggering the involvement of an ESO/EWO and a formal record of an unauthorised absence; later closure may not do so though schools may make the decision for later closure for entirely legitimate practical reasons.

24. Anecdotal experience suggests that there has not been any noticeable change in the level of training in behaviour management for ITT trainees. Schools continue to address behaviour management 'on the job' via in-house professional studies programmes. This inevitably leads to variations across schools. That said, this is to be expected as each school would train its intake of ITT trainees in the systems that that school operates.
25. It is probably fair to state that the publication of the Handbook "Practical Approaches to Behaviour Management" has had minimal impact in schools. At 170 pages it is far too long to be a practical document for busy classroom teachers. Most schools will have made copies available to staff, but it is more than likely that the majority of copies are gathering dust on staffroom shelves. To make a real impact we would suggest that the Welsh Government consider a range of new approaches, as detailed below.
26. Many of the approaches suggested within the guidance are well thought through, and would have the complete support of school leaders. However, they need to be extracted from a lengthy and rather daunting formal document and distributed in digestible chunks to staff, possibly in the form of regular fliers which most schools could distribute as emails.
27. School leaders are often dismayed by the paucity of responses by newly qualified teachers at interview to questions about classroom. In response to questions about how to maintain order, the stock response is often 'to follow the school's discipline code', and further questioning frequently reveals a lack of real understanding. While school leaders will not expect NQTs to display great experience, we would suggest that this is an area to which teacher training institutions should devote greater resources.
28. If the Welsh Government views improving behaviour in schools as a priority, it needs to make financial resources available to schools to provide regular training for teachers and the wider school staff. In one school, the decision of the senior leadership team to devote a whole day to staff training on this issue involved hiring in an external speaker at a cost to the school in excess of £1,000. Whilst this is good use of resources, and works out at a cost of less than £80 per member of staff, it is easy to see that such an intervention may not continue to be possible in an environment where funds are under increasing pressure. A small financial incentive to the school to undertake regular training of this sort could have a major impact across the country.

29. One of the main concerns of classroom teachers with regard to behaviour is the increasing level of defiance shown by students, backed up by parents, when children are challenged about inappropriate comments or unacceptable disruption (often low-level) to lessons. Parents frequently refuse to support the school in the imposition of sanctions, and significant amounts of staff time are wasted having to attempt to negotiate with parents who are unwilling to accept that their child must recognise his/her responsibilities in this regard. Younger, less experienced members of staff find these situations particularly difficult; this can lead to significant stress. We do not have a 'magic bullet' to recommend, but feel it important to raise it as a major contributory factor that is of genuine concern in many schools.
30. There is still a lack of joined-up action between education professionals and others, particularly in relation to Looked-After children. Teachers frequently experience significant frustration about managing the behaviour of vulnerable children when professionals from social and mental health services are hard to contact and harder to persuade to take action. This is often due to a system where there is no one single point of contact tasked with dealing with all responses to specific schools. In a few cases in schools around Swansea, councils have set up systems that enable this, and it has proved to be very effective. However, in the majority of cases, teachers find that when they phone social services they speak to a different person each time, or get no further than a 'help-desk' which is frequently less than helpful. The person they eventually speak to probably has no knowledge of the case, and action is further delayed. There is a real case for requiring all social and mental health service providers to identify names officers to deal with, and build relationships with child protection officers at schools, so that personal, long-term relationships are established, and schools that have significant behavioural issues with very vulnerable children can have reliable contact with someone they know will understand the context of the individual child and their needs.
31. Arrangements for safeguarding are largely undertaken by Local Authorities on behalf of schools. This system allows schools to focus on their work of delivering education in the classroom, and is generally effective. Different LAs have different approaches to the matter of updating CRB checks, with most content that, once a member of staff has been cleared upon first being engaged for employment, this is sufficient. The current charges for CRB checking mean that both councils and individual schools are unwilling to spend the money to engage in three yearly checks in the current climate of limited financial resources.

32. With regard to students who are EOTAS (Educated Otherwise than at School), there are significant variations across LAs in rates of EOTAS pupils with Swansea having the highest rate at 4.3 per 1000. LAs, via the EWO service, have expressed concern at variations in the hours during which EOTAS pupils are expected to formally attend establishments, whilst officially remaining in full-time education. Ironically in the light of concerns about attendance, EOTAS students are recorded as having 100% attendance at their 'home school' as students who are being Educated Elsewhere'.

Support to pupils with ALN in respect of behaviour and attendance

33. The delegation of budgets to schools, as part of the move to 85% delegation, will have inevitably increased variation in how schools deploy resources, with many adopting the grouping of pupils with ALN (Additional Learning Needs), within mainstream settings, in order to maximise the efficacy of TA support. Budget delegation has not been universally supported by the parents of pupils with ALN.

Joint Working with Agencies

34. The major concern here would be on cuts to funding for proven programmes, with reduced capacity to benefit pupils. Certain programmes such as Exchange Counselling have been implemented in the last few years and appear to be contributing to wellbeing. However, other programmes such as Family Group Conferencing in Swansea have been highly effective in recent years, but face challenges in maintaining services in the face of funding cuts.

Conclusion

35. We hope that you find this information useful. We have attempted to describe the complexity of the issues; also schools' determination to tackle them effectively and sensitively. There is no consistent national approach to this. There are targets but concentrating solely on targets may not have the desired result; schools, local authorities and families need the support and intervention that reflect the needs of individual children. We need consistent reporting too and we are some way from achieving it; but problems affecting young people's lives will not be solved simply by recording their presence or absence at school.