

**Children, Young People and Education Committee**  
**Request for information on Pupil attendance & training for school governors**  
**Response from: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

I refer to your recent correspondence sent to the Managing Director on the 17th December regarding the work of the Local Authority relating to school pupil attendance. Firstly, I would like to make the point that this is a priority area of work within the Education Directorate and in particular the Education Welfare Service (EWS) are working closely with schools to improve pupils attendance. Some of the strategic approaches and activity that services are involved in to support pupil attendance includes:

- Since the initial COVID pandemic lockdown and the re-purposing of schools, extensive work has been done to encourage pupils to attend school and welfare visits made to check on wellbeing for both pupils and their families . Prior to schools reopening, following the first lockdown work was done with schools to identify which pupils were less likely to return and home visits were made by EWS officers to look at what support could be put in place and to offer assurances that schools were COVID safe, in line with national guidance and local risk assessments. During the Summer term 2020, when schools did return to face to face learning, the main focus the EWS service was on visiting the pupils that were identified as being more vulnerable and to support their families;
- During the 2020/2021 academic year, this work continued although as time has progressed a firmer approach has been taken with some families where there has been need to intervene. The attendance management system for schools (SIMS) is regularly checked for children with below 80% attendance. Visits are made where there has been 3 days of non-contact and re-integration packages are in place for some pupils that are struggling with the return to school. The Education Directorate also encourages pupils and families to work with other corporate services and professionals such as Families First etc.;
- In addition to the usual approaches, the EWS team are undergoing 'Trauma Informed' training and schools are being encouraged to use trauma informed practices. The EWS have also worked with Children and Mental Health Services (CAMHS) 'in-reach' services to develop trauma informed awareness governor training and the first session is being offered to school governors across Blaenau Gwent in

January 2022. The Education Directorate are also looking at how we can use emotionally based school avoidance strategies with pupils and schools;

- The Local Authority's support to governors is provided in partnership with the Education Achievement Service (EAS). Support is delivered through the EAS Service Level Agreement (SLA) with schools which includes both support and access to professional learning from both the Governor Support Team and colleagues across the service. Professional Learning activity for governors has been offered virtually since June 2020, including all Welsh Government mandated training. A high-level summary of the regional approach and future planned developments are attached as a Word document, along with the full regional programme for Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022. In addition to this regional programme the LA delivers professional learning to governors in areas such as: Safeguarding, Finance and HR processes. This additional LA specific programme is also attached. The 'live' versions are accessible here on the EAS area of the Hwb platform: Governor PL Programme;
- Regarding the promotion of any information for Governors from Estyn or any other organisation, this would be done in partnership with the EAS. Any request to share useful information or opportunities with governors, would be promoted through the EAS Supporting our schools Site - School Governance and where urgent, backed up with an email to the approximately 3,000 governors across the region. Similarly, where the EAS Governor Support Service had any enquiry from a Governor about the programme we would direct them to the Estyn page on the Lay Inspector role, which has more information: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/working-us/inspector-roles#layinspector>; and,
- Finally, regarding the Blaenau Gwent attendance data that was requested:
  - o there were a total of 3,719 pupils that did not return to school in the summer term 2020 - this figure also includes nursery and reception pupils.
  - o there were a total of 12 pupils that did not attend school during the 20/21 academic year - this figure also includes nursery and reception pupils.
  - o At the end of the autumn term this academic year there are 18 pupils that have not attended at all, 5 of those pupils have not been in since schools locked down initially, there are 51 pupils with below 20% attendance (have attended for less than 1 day per week), there are a further 209 pupils with between 20% and 50% attendance and 1,648 pupils with between 50% and 80% attendance (persistent absenteeism is considered as 80% and below in Wales).