

Children, Young People and Education Committee
Request for information on Pupil attendance & training for school governors
Response from: Rhondda Cynon Taf



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To: Jayne Bryant

Chair of the Children,
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Dyddiad: 19th January 2022
Date:

Dear Ms Bryant,

Thank you for your recent communication on behalf of the Children, Young People and Education committee, following the committee's review and scrutiny of Estyn's annual report for 2020-21.

In Rhondda Cynon Taf, we undertake a range of activities aimed at supporting schools, learners and their families to ensure good school attendance. This includes reintegrating learners following poor attendance related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as our standard response to poor attendance unrelated to the pandemic. Operationally, we have changed the way our Attendance and Wellbeing Service (AWS) delivers services since the onset of the pandemic in order to better support the increased number of learners who were absent from education. The AWS operate Wellbeing Response Visits where any child is absent without reason; where the reason is COVID-19 anxiety related; or where the reason provided is disputed by the school, is visited on the day of referral and the learner and the family are offered support and intelligence gathered so that the school, AWS or a referral agency can provide enhanced support aimed at a return to school.

From the first lockdown until the end of the 2020-21 academic year, these took place on a rota system where schools could refer every 3 days. This has been slightly reduced in the 2021-22 academic year, to once per week per school so that AWS staff can offer intensive support to long-term absentees alongside the Wellbeing Response Visits. Intensive support is currently aimed at learners who have attendance below 40% in the previous half-term.

Chris Bradshaw
Chief Executive / Prif Weithredwr



Each half-term, we provide all education settings with a detailed Attendance Monitoring Report from the LA. This is used as a tool for support and challenge and allows schools to work collaboratively and seek support and advice from schools with similar demographics where their performance is more positive. I have provided a breakdown of the report for your information:-

- Section 1 and 2 of these reports holds information on code usage for each school in numeric and percentage terms as well as cluster averages.
- Section 3 breaks down each school into their FSM band. This is provided for each half-term of the current year, as well as percentage comparisons for overall attendance for the last 3 years and LA averages. This allows schools to ascertain where they are in comparative terms to the LA average and other schools within their FSM band.
- Section 4 of the report is entitled 'Vulnerable Groups' and provides breakdowns of attendance for all pupils; FSM; non-FSM; CLA; EAL; SEN and persistent absence in terms of numbers of pupils in these categories and their average attendance. This section will show those who have failed to return following school closure periods and shows how the whole school figure may differ dependent on vulnerability and will support schools to target groups where necessary with additional resources and support.
- Section 5 is a comparative table of Key Absence Reasons.
- Section 6 provides LA attendance averages by school phase, gender and school year.

From these data reports we can see that in Autumn 1, primary school attendance in RCT was 90.5% with 2,640 pupils classified as persistent absentees (defined as attendance less than 80%). This cohort had an average attendance of 68.4%. In Autumn 1 in secondary schools, the attendance was 85.5% with 3,099 pupils classified as persistent absentees. The average attendance within this cohort was 64.1%. These figures do not include our through schools, special schools or PRU's which have an additional 1,352 persistent absentees.

Using data from these reports coupled with other data sources including the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, exclusion rates, etc. has led to RCT Cabinet investment in areas such as Step 4 provision and a pilot of Family Engagement Officers (FEOs) in 13 primary schools and 6 secondary/through schools in recent years which is ongoing. The aim of the FEO pilot in particular has been to support learners and their families with outcomes aimed at increasing attendance levels in some of our communities with high deprivation.

In relation to the second query and support for school governors, governors in Rhondda Cynon Taf have access to a team of governor support officers to provide advice and support when required. Central South Consortium (CSC) provides the mandatory training for governors. CSC also provides briefing session for governors in relation to school improvement, ALN and other relevant priorities, and the Director of Education and Inclusion Services convenes termly meetings with chair of governors.

RCT provides a very comprehensive training brochure on a termly basis, which includes additional training opportunities including safeguarding, attendance and wellbeing, human resources, dealing with complaints, finance, exclusions and health & safety.

The promotion of the Estyn Lay Inspector role will be included as part of the training promotion in the future.

We hope that this has provided some clarity around the queries raised and would be happy to provide further clarity or information where needed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Bradshaw', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Chris Bradshaw
Chief Executive