

## PA45 Newport City Council

Senedd Cymru

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Absenoldeb Disgyblion

Ymateb gan Cyngor Dinas Casnewydd

Welsh Parliament

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Pupil absence

Evidence from Newport City Council

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Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference, which have been grouped into 5 themes.

### 1. Reasons

Levels of persistent absence are higher than prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. A minority of children and young people became out of the habit of attending school regularly, because of the repeated need for school and year group closures and the implementation of distance and blended learning. In November 2021, Education Welfare Officers attended 75 school meetings and received 93 referrals in relation to the persistent absence of individual pupils, Education Welfare Officers completed 189 home visits. In 109 of these, Education Welfare Officers engaged with parents and pupils to discuss the reasons for non-attendance with the main reasons given for persistent absence this academic year to date being:

- Covid 19 positive cases
- Covid 19 self-isolation
- Covid 19 anxiety
- Other illnesses
- Mental health issues related to the child or their family
- Family holiday during term time.

Where levels of persistent absence are not related to Covid-19 it is noticeable that this often occurs in children and families with historic levels of high absence or where families have interpreted Covid-19 legislation in their own way, particularly where there were differences in published guidance, for example between Welsh Government and the Local Health Boards. Some families also view the repeated experience of multiple periods of distance and blended learning as legitimising absence from schools.

Higher levels of absence were evident in schools with high proportions of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children and families, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and families, and vulnerable children in Special Schools, because of concerns about the increased risks around infection. In Primary Schools in particular, high levels of absence were noted in children whose mothers, or family members were pregnant. There was also a reluctance to send children to schools where a member of the household was previously shielding. This position has seen some improvement in recent weeks.

### 2. Risks and consequences

Short term risks:

- Negative impact on health and well-being of children and young people
- Lack of opportunities for social contacts.

- Academic progress is affected for learners of all ages.
- Increase in number of families choosing to home educate their children.
- Lack of engagement in education and extra-curricular provision.
- Safeguarding risks.
- Increase in negative incidents related to social media, online harms, sharing nudes etc.
- Increase in the number of children missing in education, particularly those who travel to home countries and have not returned to school.

Long term risks:

- Increased number of NEETs.
- Increase in number of families choosing to home educate their children
- Long term mental health issues.
- Lack of engagement in community provision and risks to community cohesion.
- Safeguarding risks.

### 3. Impact

- Learner outcomes are affected impacting on future choices and opportunities. This position is unlikely to improve for up to 5 years.
- Children labelled part of the 'Covid generation' may not feel their qualifications are as legitimate as those of others. This view could also be held more widely in society and by employers.
- Lower baseline skills levels on entry; including self-care skills e.g., toileting.
- High levels of anxiety around examination practices.
- Increased numbers of electively home educated children.

### 4. Effectiveness of policies

In line with the response from WLGA and ADEW, it is felt guidance for parents around attendance has not always been clear throughout the pandemic and stronger messages from the Welsh Government to parents has been needed around the legality of ensuring children and young people attend school. At various times, WG guidance has weakened the position of LA interventions. For example, at the time of writing, the Minister's statement on 3rd May 2022 created ambiguity around the use of FPN's. The statement refers both to LAs using 'in only the most extreme cases' – an area normally reserved for prosecution cases and not FPN's - whilst simultaneously pointing to the immediate reintroduction of the 2013 guidance. The 2013 guidance states 'penalty notices will be most effective when issued for less entrenched attendance issues'. This has left LAs in an uncomfortable position knowing whether to press forward with the use of FPN's.

### 5. Other

The All Wales Attendance Framework, (2011) needs to be updated as a priority.

