

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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