

The Children and Young People Committee's Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour: Additional evidence by UCAC

- NUT Cymru say that some schools refuse to admit pupils with behavioural difficulties even if they reside within the catchment area. How common an occurrence is this?

We do not have evidence that this happens. We know of situations where Governors have noted that a pupil should not be accepted if the necessary support/provision is not available. This is for the benefit of the pupil, those who are teaching him and other pupils.

- Have schools placed an increased emphasis on attendance since its inclusion within the school banding data?

As was noted in the written evidence, there is now an obsession with data. Schools have found that the smallest change in their attendance percentages can move them from one band to another, and this is very frustrating in light of the fact that they have attempted to deal with the matter, but have found at the end of the day that some situations are beyond their control.

- The Welsh Government is currently consulting on proposals for the introduction of fixed penalty notices to address the issue of persistent unauthorised absence from school. What are your views on this approach?

UCAC has responded formally to the consultation. We believe that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children go to school and that they need to be accountable for that responsibility. However, we foresee that such a scheme would place more work and responsibility on the shoulders of headteachers and that it would be the families who are in financial difficulty who would be likely to receive such penalties. Therefore, this would not achieve a significant improvement.

- Members of the NAHT Cymru/ASCL report that the pupil deprivation grant and the school effectiveness grant have been a particularly important contributor to increased attendance rates. Should there be more direction on spending such grants on ways which can improve attendance and behaviour?

The Union welcomes any resources that schools can have to promote improved attendance or behaviour as long as this doesn't lead to extensive administrative work and bureaucracy. Occasionally, the administrative requirements that accompany grants for specific purposes can hinder efforts to make the best use of the funding; there must be an assurance that these requirements are commensurate to the sums of funding provided. We are concerned about the long-term sustainability of the services or support provided through grants; the danger is that the effect is brief and misleading.

- Has the delay in implementing the recommendations of the 2008 National Behaviour and Attendance Review had an impact on the work of your members?

Yes. In addition to this, there is an assumption that the new or amended advice/requirements/guidelines that are 'in the pipeline' have fettered developments at a county level. A tight schedule needs to be set for any changes that will be presented, and there is a need to ensure that everyone is aware of them and their consequences.

- What is the priority issue that the Welsh Government needs to take forward to improve the attendance and behaviour of pupils?

As noted in the written evidence:

- The main priority in terms of improving attendance should be ensuring that a sufficient Education Wellbeing service is available throughout Wales. Our members testify that such support is a way of ensuring early intervention, which ensures that a pattern of unauthorised absenteeism is not established. It also promotes collaboration between agencies and ensures that teaching staff do not spend too much of their time on matters that are not directly associated with learning and teaching.*
 - The main priority in terms of behaviour is to make an unambiguous statement that violent behaviour will not be tolerated in schools. This should be supported by comprehensive training for the staff on dealing with the growing number of pupils who come to our schools and strike out at staff and other pupils, which greatly affects safety and education at those schools.*
- In your opinion, is there a link between the food that is ate/not eaten and behaviour, and what can schools do about this?

There is enough research available that supports the view that there is a link between diet and behaviour. Schools do a great deal already to promote awareness of the importance of a healthy diet, but it is in the home and not at school that decisions are made about the majority of the food that a pupil eats. Schools have a role in teaching and promoting good practice (e.g. only allowing healthy snacks and drinks), but wider society has the same responsibility.

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