

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros
Addysg Cabinet Secretary for
Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA/LN/2730/25

Buffy Williams MS
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NQ

SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru

4 December 2025

Dear Buffy

Thank you for your letter of 15 August requesting further information following the Committee's reports on peer-on-peer sexual harassment and pupil absence, conducted in 2022. I am replying in relation to the request around pupil absence and have written separately in relation to the report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

You asked for information on the latest trends in relation to school absences. Overall, while attendance remains below the levels we saw before the Covid-19 pandemic, we are continuing to see improvements. Across the 2024/25 academic year our official statistics show that attendance in secondary schools rose to 89.1% from 88.0% on the previous year, overall absence fell from 12.0% to 10.9% and persistent absence dropped from 37.1% to 33.0%. Similarly, overall attendance in primary schools rose to 92.6, up from 92.1 in 2023/24, the percentage of half-day sessions missed by primary school-aged pupils decreased to 7.4% from 7.9% and persistent absence fell to 21.8% from 24.7% in 2023/24. These headline reductions are to be welcomed, but I am not complacent and continue to push for further improvement.

You will be aware that we also publish fortnightly attendance data for both Wales and our local authorities, enabling us to track progress. As we are mindful of the need to minimise burdens on schools, this regularly updated data is not quality assured as is the case for the official statistics. This means that missing data are not pursued, and schools are not expected to change existing working practices in relation to the recording of attendance data in their systems. However, data at the Wales level from this fortnightly collection has been shown to be reasonably consistent with the accredited official statistics published annually which does go through a more thorough quality assurance process.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Lynne.Neagle@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Lynne.Neagle@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The latest [published](#) figures for this academic year detail attendance between 2 September and 21 November. They show that:

- The average attendance for this academic year to date is 91.7%, unchanged compared with the same period in the 2024/25 academic year.
- The average attendance for this academic year to date for pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) is 86.3%, down from 86.4% over the same period in the 2024/25 academic year. For pupils not eligible for FSM the average attendance is 93.3%, unchanged from the same period in the 2024/25 academic year.
- The average attendance for this academic year to date for males is 91.8%, up from 91.7% over the same period in the 2024/25 academic year. For females the average attendance is 91.6%, unchanged compared with the same period in the 2024/25 academic year.
- The average attendance for this academic year to date is lowest amongst pupils in year 11 (88.3%) and highest amongst pupils in year 3 (93.6%). Attendance amongst year 11 pupils is 0.2 percentage points higher than it was in the same period in the 2024/25 academic year.

The most common reason for absence in this academic year to date is illness, accounting for 3.5% of sessions. This was also the most common reason in the same period of the 2024/25 academic year.

We are broadly similar levels of attendance this year than last across groups of learners and I hope we will see improvement overall, across the school year.

You also asked about other policy interventions introduced since your report. We issued updated attendance [guidance](#) in October 2023. You will also be aware that following your report and the thematic review Estyn undertook in 2023 we launched our National Attendance Taskforce. The Taskforce brought together expertise from across the education and health sectors, along with colleagues from local government, youthwork, schools and more. It met for a year, discussing the issues driving learner absence and various initiatives that have been tested in schools here and in elsewhere and in my [oral statement](#) to the Senedd in December 2024 I outlined the work they undertook.

I announced in that statement that I was investing £8.8 million in work to improve engagement and attendance, spread across the 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years. That included additional investment in the work of Family Engagement Officers; support for enrichment activities to tackle disaffection; increasing our investment in Community Focussed Schools; and additional funding for our School Holiday Enrichment Programme.

As I said at the time, Family Engagement Officers play a vital role within schools. They establish and foster good relationships with families of children and young people at the school; encourage and support parental involvement in the school and engagement in children's learning; and signpost to relevant support and services. This is increasingly important in supporting attendance and supporting learners struggling with high levels of absence. This need has not diminished in the last year, and I know from my conversations with teachers and school leaders how valued those roles are. I will be increasing this investment and seeking to do more to support their important work.

We are currently evaluating our work on Community Focussed Schools, and the evaluation report should be available next year. In addition to that you may be aware that Julie Morgan MS conducted a [review](#) of the School Holiday Enrichment Programme which further underlined the value it provides. The School Holiday Enrichment Programme celebrated its tenth anniversary this year, and has supported more children over the summer of 2025 than before. We expect the annual report to be available shortly.

With regards to the thematic report Estyn undertook, we accepted the following recommendations:

- The Welsh Government should consider how pupils living within the 3-mile radius who are not eligible for free transport could be better supported to attend school more regularly;
- The Welsh Government should consider how funding can be allocated more effectively to support schools to improve attendance;
- The Welsh Government should consider how reform of the school year might better support pupils to attend school more regularly.

We have reviewed the Learner Travel Measure and held a Learner Travel Summit, both of which are addressed in Annex A in relation to your recommendations. We have increased support for schools to tackle issues with poor attendance, including increasing our investment in Family Engagement Officers. I also made a statement to the Senedd about our proposals on reform of the school year.

We partially accepted the following recommendations:

- The Welsh Government should develop a national campaign to promote the importance of good attendance with parents, carers and pupils;
- The Welsh Government should publish core data sets for attendance twice a year, including regression analysis, residuals for persistent absenteeism and year group attendance to better support schools' own evaluation processes;
- The Welsh Government should continue to provide weekly analysis of school level attendance to provide more frequent information and improve the quality of this data;
- The Welsh Government should carry out research to identify the factors impacting on poor attendance and to discover the most effective methods of improving attendance.

I have provided information in relation to our approach to communications in Annex A, in response to the Committee's recommendation on this matter. I have also outlined already our approach to data collection and publication. Information on the research undertaken was provided in our response to the Committee in 2022, and we subsequently drew on the expertise of the National Attendance Taskforce.

I am sure you are aware that Estyn published a progress [update](#) in May 2025. We have updated our response to take account of the new information, including accepting an additional recommendation in the report related to the setting of targets on attendance: [Improving attendance in secondary schools: an update on progress | GOV.WALES](#)
We are currently considering how to implement those proposals in discussion with partners.

I hope this information is useful.

Yours sincerely,

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Update on the Recommendations made by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in November 2022

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government runs a national campaign to emphasise the positive impacts of regular school attendance. Alongside this, the Welsh Government should provide support to local authorities and schools to deliver similar, local positive campaigns about school attendance. The different campaigns should reinforce messages from the other campaigns.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept

We will be increasing communications to parents and carers addressing any concerns they still have and emphasising the importance of going to school. Community Focused Schools will play a key role in responding to this challenge. Family Engagement Officers are vital in ensuring that positive partnerships are created, and that bespoke support is offered.

Position as at October 2025

To date we have not run a national campaign in relation to school attendance, which we recognise will disappoint the Committee. This has not been a decision taken lightly, and we have worked with partners across the education sector, including children and young people, to inform our decisions around messaging and communications.

We have undertaken focus groups with learners who have had issues with attendance, looked at the communications campaigns run by local authorities on attendance and reviewed the broader evidence base. A number of factors emerged from the focus groups about issues affecting attendance. Children and young people do understand the potential impact of non-attendance on attainment, but were critical of the use of generic messaging. They wanted information that was tailored to their circumstances, and the situation in relation to their local area.

The engagement work we have done has also highlighted the importance of schools in re-engagement of learners, and engaging parents, and the approaches they use. This includes the role of broader support services, such as family engagement officers.

We recognise that messages are most effective when they are reinforced at national, local and school level, creating a consistent narrative that resonates with families. We are clear in all our communications that attendance at school is important, that regular or persistent absence impacts learners attainment, and that attendance at school is also important for supporting learners to develop critical social skills. We will continue to emphasise its importance nationally as well as developing a more specific support for schools and Local Authorities to ensure they have access to practical information to support with re-engaging learners and families and promoting the importance of school attendance.

Recommendation 2: The Welsh Government should commission an urgent study into how the cost of living crisis is impacting on pupils' ability to attend school. This should be done within two months following the Welsh Government's response to this report and made publicly available. The review should be supported by an action plan which details what work will be done to address any of the issues highlighted in the report.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept.

It will be challenging to commission this within the timescales referenced. However we are already in informal discussions with an LA about a research proposal they have been developing to take an in-depth look at attendance in secondary settings, with a focus on which approaches and interventions bring the most benefit to lower income families and their engagement with education.

Position as at October 2025

As noted, the timescales set out in the recommendation were challenging and it was not possible to meet them. Having then reviewed the position, rather than commission a single study into these important issues, we have taken forward these matters through our Poverty Proofing pilot, and the work to establish a Theory of Change looking at what works in tackling the barriers poverty can place in the way of attainment.

The Poverty Proofing pilot project directly supports schools to address educational disparities, stigma and social inclusion, as well as impacting pupil wellbeing and mental health, inequality of resources and opportunities, attendance and engagement. By embedding a 'poverty proofing' approach within school clusters, this project aims to ensure that all children, regardless of socio-economic background, can access and benefit from a supportive, cost-neutral educational experience. An evaluation is underway and will report next year.

We also recognise that the issues behind the poverty attainment gap are complex and we are committed to enhancing our understanding of these factors and where we can make a difference. We are developing a Theory of Change to ensure our policy and strategy to tackle the poverty attainment gap is clear, collaborative and evidence-informed. This will help us identify where interventions can be best targeted to have maximum impact and what more can be done to ensure every learner can achieve their potential, regardless of their socio-economic background.

We have also maintained our investment in our School Essentials Grant, which goes directly to families and children to help cover the costs of school uniform, school activities such as learning a musical instrument, sports kit and other equipment for after school activities as well as classroom essentials, including pens, pencils and school bags. The School Essentials Grant has made a huge difference to many lower-income families across Wales, helping to reduce the worry surrounding the purchase of school uniform and equipment and ensure every child has what they need to learn and ensures there are no barriers to attending school.

Recommendation 3: The Welsh Government should ensure that decisions on learner travel are driven by the individual and specific needs of children and young people. To support local authorities in taking this approach, the Welsh Government

should ensure that local authorities have sufficient funding to ensure all children and young people have access to appropriate transport options to get them to school safely. The current review should look to prioritising a learner-first solution and should be radical in looking for innovative solutions.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle.

Much has changed since the Learner Travel Measure came into force in 2008.

Our plan remains to undertake a further review but how we take forward any work coming out of that review is likely to take time and resource.

Home to school transport now accounts for a quarter of all local authority direct spending on education – this is a growing cost.

During 2020, we undertook a review of the existing Learner Travel Measure which involved gathering initial evidence. It found weaknesses in current networks and infrastructure that make implementing an expansion of provision difficult. We found there is inconsistency in provision across all of Wales.

Rather than tweaks, a long-term sustainable plan must be found.

The government has published a White Paper, One Network, One Timetable, One Ticket, which sets out an ambitious vision for transforming bus services in Wales.

The proposed bill will offer us a chance to look a fresh at bus service delivery across Wales, including the provision of school transport.

While the distance threshold to qualify for free school transport is a key issue, there are also other significant considerations. We are now looking at how we can take forward a wider programme of work to improve operator provision, and to better align transport with other wider policy aims, such as Welsh medium provision, support ALN pupils and consider provision to Further Education establishments.

As our aims are ambitious, these reforms will take time, but it is vital that we get this right in order to support learners and our wider reform programme. In the meantime, we will continue to work with Local Authorities to encourage a consistency in approach.

Enabling more children to walk, scoot and cycle to school is a key priority for the Welsh Government.

We are funding improvements to walking and cycling routes and facilities through our Active Travel Fund and the Safe Routes in Communities Grant each year.

All local authorities must plan networks of walking and cycling routes, shown on Active Travel Network Maps. We have made it a condition that all schools must be served by active travel routes, which can be walking and/ or cycling routes.

We furthermore are encouraging local authorities across Wales to introduce School Streets, which involve road closures around schools at the start and end of the school day, in order to improve conditions for walking and cycling, improve road safety and reduce air pollution. We have offered funding to all local authorities interested in

undertaking preparatory work for the implementation of school streets schemes, if they can demonstrate that they are committed to progressing schemes.

We are working with Sustrans to provide support to schools to develop Active Travel School Plans, which aim to identify and address barriers to active travel to school, and increase the number of pupils and staff walking, scooting or cycling regularly. A set of resources and approaches is currently being piloted with the intention to begin national roll-out in 2023. This complements our long-standing Active Journeys programme and cycling and child pedestrian training.

Position as at October 2025

The Learner Travel Measure has been subject to two reviews; one completed in 2021 and a further one published in March 2024.

The 2024 [Recommendations Report](#) and accompanying [Ministerial statement](#), outlines the reasons behind the Welsh Government's decision not to make any changes to the current legislation underpinning learner travel. The report did, however, recommend a comprehensive update to the statutory guidance documents to amplify and align to changes that have been made to wider legislation since the original guidance was first produced. It also highlighted the opportunity to share innovative practice across local authorities, schools and communities to maximise the limited resources available.

The guidance has been updated to reflect findings within the two reviews that have taken place in the past five years as well as the constructive conversation we began at the Learner Travel Summit held at the beginning of May, which I attended along with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales.

The Summit was an excellent forum to start to showcase some excellent practice taking place across Wales to support a diverse range of travel options for children and young people; and we want to harness and replicate some of this learning. We have identified a number of workstreams to take forward some of the ideas shared at the Summit and we hope to hold a follow up session before the end of this Senedd term. The workstreams focus on: updating guidance documentation, driving consistency and governance, implementing local authority interventions, improving post-16 transport planning, and delivering discounted fares for young people, as outlined in the [Learner Travel Summit Report](#)

The consultation on the revised Learner Travel Operational Guidance commenced on the 11 June and will run until 28 November.

Recommendation 4: That the Welsh Government outlines how they intend to take forward the work looking at the use of attendance data to support early interventions. In providing this detail, the Welsh Government should provide outline timeframes for the delivery of this work.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Our Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing (March 2021) highlights the need for schools to use the range of data sources available to them when considering the wellbeing needs of their community, both in terms

of universal provision and specific targeted support for those who need it. Schools collect a range of data and intelligence, which can be used to inform and understand the well-being, both of the learners and the school staff and includes information on absence rates and on exclusions. Following publication of the Framework we are working with stakeholders to support implementation and also consider how we measure impact.

As part of our forward work programme, we will consider how absence and exclusion data can be used to help inform how schools support the wellbeing of learners to prevent persistent absence and exclusion.

Position as at October 2025

The Welsh Government is committed to working with local authorities and school leaders to support effective use of data and information to support learning and improvement, and, to facilitate this, delivering reporting tools and digital solutions to enable meaningful interrogation of data to inform action.

The Welsh Government has engaged with local authorities to understand how they and schools are making the most of their own existing management information systems functionality and where there might be limitations. We are working with local authority information management system contacts and commercial software suppliers through the Software Development Forum (SDF) to discuss the recording and collection of information from schools to support and inform education policies. We have established an Attendance and Exclusions data Sub-Group to this forum, including Welsh Government officials, local authority representatives and commercial software suppliers, to discuss and explore options on attendance and exclusions data specifically.

Through the data workstream of the National Attendance Taskforce, chaired by Professor Ann John and concluded in December 2024, significant progress has been made in improving data collection and analysis to better understand and address attendance challenges.

Since 2020 we have been publishing attendance data for Wales at least every fortnight throughout the academic year. In recent years we have significantly expanded on the range of information we publish. Data is now published at the Wales level for overall absence by school sector, sex, year group, free school meals (FSM) eligibility and ethnic background and for persistent absence (using the 10% threshold) by sex, year group and FSM. This data is freely available to all schools and local authorities to use to set their own attendance and absence patterns into a national context. We regularly seek feedback on the content and frequency of this publication and refine our outputs accordingly. The publication is available here: [Attendance of pupils in maintained schools | GOV.WALES](#)

We are currently developing plans to expand on this publication by providing individual schools with a more bespoke and regular analysis of their attendance data, building upon the current annual All Wales Core Data Sets (AWCDS). In the Spring term 2026 we will be engaging with key stakeholders to establish the content, frequency and value of such an analysis, with the aim of delivering reports during the same calendar year.

We immediately updated the annual AWCDS, which the Welsh Government produces for each maintained school and local authority, to add analyses based on the new definition of persistent absence, providing schools with analyses of persistent absence levels over time, by learners with different characteristics and compared with contextually similar schools, helping schools to understand trends and areas to inform where intervention is likely to be needed.

Looking forward, as part of our ongoing commitment to improve the use of data in education, we have committed to explore options for new and refreshed national digital tools that can support effective, equitable, and transparent data use across the school system, to build on and modernise our existing reporting systems – the AWCDs and My Local School. We are procuring a supplier to undertake a comprehensive discovery exercise to inform the next steps. This will include looking at longer term options for making more effective availability and use of the weekly attendance data to support early interventions.

Recommendation 5: That the Welsh Government monitors educational outcomes and the links with attendance rates, and publishes this data on a regular basis.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle

A key principle behind the new curriculum is that all learners can progress along their own pathways to enable them to move confidently to their next steps in employment, education or training. This is deliberately and actively inclusive of disadvantaged learners, including socio-economically disadvantaged and those with ALN.

We recognise the link between attendance and educational attainment and would in principle support any policy which encourages learners to attend school.

The Government Social Research report developed by Arad Research, Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms, and the upcoming Social Finance report on the information needs of the school system, together set out how information about the school system could most constructively be used to support learner progress, school improvement, and published to describe educational outcomes at a national level. These reports will inform our approach to these issues. This will take time to develop. Publication of attendance data and qualifications data on My Local School was paused during the pandemic: these arrangements are considerations for the longer term as part of a broader information. Recommendation 5. That the Welsh Government monitors educational outcomes and the links with attendance rates and publishes this data on a regular basis. Page 44 landscape that promotes a focus on learner and teacher wellbeing, attainment at all levels, progress to next steps, and community and parental engagement.

Position as at October 2025

In December 2025 we will begin publishing an annual analysis comparing GCSE outcomes to attendance data. The data will be published at the link below:
[Examination results | GOV.WALES](#)

Recommendation 6: That the Welsh Government publishes more detailed data on the reasons for de-registration and for returning to schools after de-registration, alongside data on the support being provided to families. This data should be disaggregated by local authority and key demographics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and eligibility for free school meals.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept.

We are working with Data Cymru (WLGA) to improve the quality and level of data we currently capture in relation to de-registration and the key demographics of this cohort, including the reasons for de-registration.

With the expected implementation of the new EHE proposals in 2023, including the wider package of support, we plan to gather additional data to help us evaluate the impact on EHE learners.

Position as at October 2025

We currently publish an annual statistical release of pupils educated other than at school which includes details of rates of learners home educated the breakdown by age and gender across all 22 local authorities. There are a number of provisions relating to Children Not in School contained in the UK Governments Children Wellbeing and Schools Bill which will apply to Wales on enactment. As part of the work to take forward those provisions after enactment, further consideration will be given to the collation and publication of additional data fields.

We provide funding to local authorities to support home educating families. As part of the monitoring of this expenditure local authorities are required to submit annual returns to WG outlining the support they have provided.

Recommendation 7: That the Welsh Government, as part of its current review of school attendance policy and guidance, agrees and sets consistent trigger levels for intervention which apply across all local authorities in Wales.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept.

This will be actioned as part of development of revised guidance

Position as at October 2025

We amended the trigger for persistent absence from 20% to 10% to ensure earlier interventions in addressing persistent absence. Pupils are persistently absent if they have missed 10% of sessions or more of the total number of sessions in the academic year. For the threshold of 10% a primary aged pupil would be persistently absent if they missed 38 sessions or more. A secondary aged pupil would be persistently absent if they missed 30 sessions or more.

Historical data has shown that the first few weeks in September have the highest attendance of any week of the academic year and as such the year to date figures are likely to fall as the year progresses. Data on persistent absence is published following the autumn half-term break once there is sufficient data for the academic year.

Local authorities support schools on matters relating to learner engagement and attendance through their Education Welfare Service. For example, education welfare officers visit schools regularly to undertake a range of tasks, such as register consultations to discuss how they can best support the school in improving attendance and in reducing persistent absence