

Attendance awards

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 17 Ebrill 2018
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Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-807

Petition title: Review and change the guidance for attendance awards in Welsh schools

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to review any guidance it issues on school attendance awards in Wales.

Many children across Wales suffer with chronic illnesses that affect their school attendance. A child may miss school due to the illness itself or due to hospital appointments which they have to attend related to this illness.

Each year attendance awards are given out at school which many of these children miss out on. Not only is this unfair but it also discriminates against those children.

I would like to propose that the Welsh Government either makes allowances for those children or advises local authorities and schools that attendance awards should not be given.

Welsh Government guidance

Improving the attendance of pupils has been the subject of a range of national reviews, policies and initiatives by the Welsh Government over recent years. The foreword to the Welsh Government's [All-Wales Attendance Framework](#) (2011) states:

A child's success at school is likely to be affected negatively by poor attendance.

Section 3 of the All-Wales Attendance Framework, [Strategies for schools to improve attendance and manage lateness](#) (2011) states:

Research has shown that rewards are far more effective than punishment in motivating pupils. As well as encouraging and rewarding attendance, these schemes can also increase the profile of attendance, both within the school and in the wider community.

Letters to parents and carers and special privileges are amongst many particularly effective ways of demonstrating praise for good or improved attendance. A more formal reward system of credits,

merits and prizes can be used to recognise and congratulate pupils, some examples of which are detailed [in the guidance].

The Cabinet Secretary for Education's response to the Petition states that it is for schools to determine any criteria that they set if they have established attendance rewards schemes. The All-Wales Attendance Framework does not make specific suggestions about the ways in which reward schemes should operate or what issues should be taken in to consideration.

The Cabinet Secretary also mentions the Estyn report, [Effective practice in improving attendance in primary schools](#) (June 2015). This states:

Many schools recognise that it is important to encourage good attendance for all pupils, particularly those who may not be able to gain a certificate for a high percentage of attendance over a long period. In the best cases, these schools develop incentive systems that reward improved or full attendance over a rolling period, such as five weeks at a time. This allows all pupils to continue to aim for high attendance, because after any period of absence their target can be set again.

The Cabinet Secretary's response also highlights that schools must make reasonable adjustments for pupils (under the Equality Act 2010) and therefore schools should take this into account when establishing rewards schemes.

The Welsh Government's [Supporting Learners with Healthcare Needs](#) (March 2017) is more explicit stating that it is 'unacceptable practice' to:

penalise a learner for their attendance record if the absence is related to their healthcare needs. 'Authorised absences' including healthcare appointments, time to travel to hospital or appointment, and recovery time from treatment or illness should not be used to penalise a learner in any way. This includes, but is not limited to, participation in activities, trips or awards which are incentivised around attendance records.

The Cabinet Secretary states that the Welsh Government are reviewing the attendance guidance and rewards will be considered as part of this.

National Assembly for Wales action

The Children and Young People Committee (Fourth Assembly) undertook an [inquiry on behaviour and attendance](#) (August 2013). In evidence, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Children's Commissioner for Wales highlighted the benefits of introducing rewards for good attendance. However, the Committee did not offer any further comment or recommendation in respect of rewards.

Petitions in UK Parliament

There have been similar Petitions to the UK Government and Parliament, for example, [Stop medical appointments affecting school attendance](#) (closed in April 2017) which attracted 11,713 signatures. The UK Government's response was similar to that made by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills:

The Department [of Education] does not specify or influence how schools might choose to reward good attendance. However, any system should comply with schools' legal duties around disability and medical conditions.

A similar petition, [Ban attendance awards in schools](#) which attracted 2,602 signatures closed on 15 March 2018.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.