

# EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 14<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2016

## School Attendance

### To consider and comment on the following issues:

- In the ESTYN inspection of the authority's education services in March 2012, Carmarthenshire was rated as 'Good' with 'Good' prospects for improvement. However, attendance in schools was judged to require improvement. Concerns included:

*"When compared to similar schools on the free-school-meals benchmarks attendance is below average in primary and well below average in secondary."*

*'Attendance has not improved quickly enough in either primary or secondary schools. When compared to similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks in 2011 too many primary schools are in the bottom 25% and more than half are below average.'*

*'In secondary schools nearly three-quarters of schools are below average and nearly one half are in the bottom 25%.'*

One of the recommendations from the inspection was to: **(R2) Improve attendance in primary and secondary schools.**

- That the Committee recognises the improved level of attendance in 2014/15 in the majority of schools in Carmarthenshire and notes the current support provided by the Education Welfare Service.

### Reasons:

- To provide an opportunity for Members to keep school attendance under close review and to continue to inform future policy and practice.
- To review the progress made in respect of improving school attendance and to consider the views of elected members in respect of this important issue.

**To be referred to the Executive Board for decision: NO**

**Executive Board Member Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Gareth Jones (Education & Children)**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# EDUCATION & CHILDREN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 14<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2016

## School Attendance

Carmarthenshire County Council and its schools continue to emphasise the importance of school attendance and strive to increase awareness that regular school attendance benefits pupils in terms of attainment, wellbeing and life opportunities. The statistical links between attendance and achievement are very strong.

In response to the 2012 ESTYN recommendation officers, in partnership with Head teachers, agreed certain actions to address the attendance challenge. The Local Authority has asked all head teachers to monitor school attendance ensuring that the registers are kept fully up to date and that the correct codes are used.

While the parent is primarily responsible for ensuring their child attends their registered school regularly, where school attendance problems occur, the key to successfully resolving these problems is engaging the child through collaborative working between the parent, the school and the Local Authority. It is important to monitor absences closely and regularly so that any patterns of non-attendance are identified and early action is taken to address the underlying causes. Attendance problems are often a symptom of some underlying cause.

ESTYN's Annual Report for 2014-2015, published in January 2016, states the following in respect of attendance:

*Attendance rates in both primary and secondary schools continue to improve well. Over the last five years, attendance has increased in primary and secondary schools by 1.6 percentage points and 2.5 percentage points respectively. These increases mean that pupils attended school on average between approximately three and four days more in 2014-2015 than they did in 2010-2011.*

This reflects the Carmarthenshire position.

### Priorities for 2016/17

- Work closely with schools to maintain current attendance levels and work with the schools performing below their benchmark in order to secure further improvements.

- Work more closely with Challenge Advisors to support schools in meeting their identified attendance targets.
- Continue to build upon and extend the RAP delivery and group work with schools.
- Implement the revised Code of Conduct for Fixed Penalty Notices.
- Re-draft School Attendance leaflets based on recent changes.
- Raise further awareness with employers and performance companies in relation to child employment and performance regulations.
- The Education Welfare Service will develop clear information for professionals and families on their role and legal responsibilities in line with the new Social Services and Wellbeing Act.
- Develop standardised feedback forms for schools, pupils and families on the involvement of the Service.

**DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?**

**YES**

# IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Signed: Gareth Morgans Chief Education Officer

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
NONE	YES	YES	YES	NONE	YES	NONE

## 2. Legal

The legal requirements for school attendance are set out in the Educational Act 1996, Children Act 1989; Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Registration Regulations. Under s7, Education Act 1996, parents have a legal duty to ensure their children receive **efficient full time education that is suitable to their children's age, ability and aptitude, whether by regular attendance at school or otherwise**. Where there is sufficient evidence that parents are not fulfilling this legal duty, court proceedings may be instituted under Section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996.

**The Education (Pupil registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010**, identify the duty schools have to ensure that clear and efficient registration practices are in place, that are accessible to the Local Authority for monitoring purposes, as required. A school register is a legal document that may be required to be presented as court evidence in Local Authority prosecutions for non-attendance. It is an offence for schools not to maintain accurate registers.

Under section 437 of the Education Act 1996, the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that a child for whom they are responsible is receiving a suitable education whether by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Section 436A of the Education & Inspections Act 2006 which requires that Local Authorities must make arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children residing in their area who are not receiving a 'suitable education' It is the duty of the Local Authority to ensure that parents and schools carry out their responsibilities and this duty is devolved to the Attendance and Wellbeing Service.

The Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) Regulations 2013 requires that all LAs develop a Code of Conduct that defines the criteria for the issuing of a Fixed Penalty Notice. The regulations empower head teachers to issue penalty notices to parents.

## 3. Finance

Resources will need to be secured to improve attendance (e.g. training). This will be found from within current budgets.

#### 4. ICT

Schools in Carmarthenshire are required to use electronic registration systems at morning and afternoon sessions and individual teaching sessions where appropriate. Schools therefore need access to an appropriate ICT infrastructure in every classroom.

#### 6. Staffing Implications

The Education Welfare Service has been enhanced and remodelled in order that it becomes a more specialised and targeted service. The current staffing needs to be maintained to ensure further [progress and service development.

## CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below:

Signed: Gareth Morgans Chief Education Officer

1. Local Member(s) – N/A

2. Community / Town Council – N/A

3. Relevant Partners – Schools are advised of attendance progress.

4. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations – N/A

**Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information  
List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

**THESE ARE DETAILED BELOW:**

Title of Document	File Ref No. / Locations that the papers are available for public inspection
Welsh Government Inclusion and Pupil Support Guidance (Guidance document no: 203/2016, date of issue: March 2016)	<b>Cymraeg</b> <a href="http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/160318-inclusion-and-pupil-support-cy.pdf">http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/160318-inclusion-and-pupil-support-cy.pdf</a> <b>English</b> <a href="http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/160318-inclusion-and-pupil-support-en.pdf">http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/160318-inclusion-and-pupil-support-en.pdf</a>