

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2018-19

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item No. 3

20th March 2019

**REPORT OF:
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND
INCLUSION SERVICES**

**ANNUAL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE
PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE
ACADEMIC YEAR 2017/18**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an analysis of school attendance performance for the academic year 2017/18, together with a comparison of performance over the last three years (six years for attainment data comparison).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise and comment on the information contained within this report.
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report.

3. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

- 3.1 In previous years, this report has been brought to this committee in the autumn to provide provisional figures at an earlier point in the year. However, as comparative data has not been available at this time, it was agreed to defer this report until the spring to ensure all available data was included for a fully informed report for Members.

4. AN ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

- 4.1 The table below shows the overall primary school attendance rates, including the pupils of primary school age in special education provision, in RCT over the last three years and how our performance has compared to the all Wales average. It also provides details of the attendance gap year on year by identifying the percentage difference between the attendance rates of FSM/non-FSM pupils in RCT.

Academic Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	3 year Variance
% Attendance RCT	94.6%	94.6%	94.2%	-0.4%
All Wales Average	94.9%	94.9%	94.9%	0.0%

Academic Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	3 year Variance
FSM/ non FSM Gap RCT	2.6%	2.4%	2.3%	-0.3%
FSM/ non FSM Gap Wales	2.8%	2.7%	3.0%	+0.2%

Source: Stats Wales "First Release", Welsh Government (both RCT and All Wales figures include the attendance of pupils in Special Schools and SEN provision in mainstream schools)

- 4.2 The overall primary school attendance for 2017/18 is 94.2% compared to 94.6% in 2015/16, a decrease of 0.4%. Over the past three years, the variance in the rate has been below that of the All Wales average, which has remained static over the three year period at 94.9%. The gap between the attendance of FSM pupils and non FSM pupils has narrowed by -0.3% over the three years to only 2.3%. This figure is 0.7% narrower than the Welsh average, which has widened by 0.2% over the same period.
- 4.3 At 94.2%, primary school attendance stands below our ambitious 2017/18 Local Authority target of 95.4%.

5. AN ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

- 5.1 The table below shows the overall secondary school attendance rates, including the pupils of secondary school age in special education provision, in RCT over the last three years and how our performance has compared to the all Wales average. It also provides details of the attendance gap year on year by identifying the percentage difference between the attendance rates of FSM/non-FSM pupils in RCT.

Academic Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	3 year Variance
% Attendance RCT	93.9%	93.5%	92.9%	-1.0%
All Wales Average	94.2%	94.1%	93.8%	-0.5%
FSM/ non FSM Gap RCT	4.5%	5.0%	5.2%	+0.7%
FSM/ non FSM Gap Wales	4.8%	4.9%	5.1%	+0.3%

- 5.2 The overall secondary school attendance for 2017/18 is 92.9% compared to 93.9% in 2015/16, a decrease of 1.0%. Over the past three years, the variance in school attendance is -1.0%, which is twice the rate of decline of the All Wales average and -0.9% below the average national attendance level. The gap between the attendance of FSM pupils and non FSM pupils has widened by 0.7% since 2015/16, and is now 0.1% wider than the Welsh average, which has also increased by 0.3% since 2015/16.
- 5.3 At 92.9%, secondary school attendance stands significantly below our ambitious 2017/18 Local Authority target of 94.3%.
- 5.4 2017/18 attendance figures resulted in 3 schools (18%) being above their median for their free school meal group, with no schools being in quartile 1 and three in quartile 2. This is in stark contrast to 2015/16, when eight schools were above their FSM median for attendance, of which three were in quartile 1.

6. AN ANALYSIS OF PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT (PRU) ATTENDANCE

- 6.1 The table below shows the overall pupil referral unit (primary and secondary) attendance rate in RCT over the last three years; these figures include the

attendance of education other than at school learners (EOTAS), including those on home, group and individual tuition, who are some of the most vulnerable and hard to engage learners in RCT.

Academic Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	3 Year Variance
% Attendance RCT	82.6%	80.8%	80.2%	-2.4%

- 6.2 As this data is not collected by the Welsh Government and there is no statutory requirement for PRUs to submit annual attendance data, there is no national benchmarking data available against which to compare our performance with the performance of other local authorities or Central South Consortium.
- 6.3 The overall PRU attendance for 2017/18 is 80.2% compared to 82.6% in 2015/16, a decrease of 2.4%. This level of decline is in contrast to the efforts of the pupil referral units to raise the profile of attendance and work with the mainstream schools where the pupils remain on roll to reintegrate them back into education. However, it must be noted that this group of pupils often face complex, multiple barriers to school attendance, especially those receiving home, group or individual tuition, hence their involvement with this provision.

7. ATTENDANCE RATES OF VULNERABLE GROUPS IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

- 7.1 The attendance of children who are looked after (CLA) generally tends to be higher than those pupils who are not CLA. The main reason for this general trend is that the barriers to regular school attendance tend not to exist when children are placed away from their families because routines are adhered to and support for learning is provided by carers.
- 7.2 The table below shows the attendance of primary school CLA pupils compared to non CLA pupils between 2015/16 and 2017/18. *(Please note that this data should be treated as an indication only as the cohort of matched CLA pupils for this comparison is small and identified through January PLASC, so may differ from current cohort of CLA pupils.)*

CLA status	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	3 Year Variance
CLA pupils	95.9%	96.4%	96.3%	+0.4%
Non CLA pupils	94.6%	94.7%	94.2%	-0.4%

- 7.3 The table below shows the attendance of secondary school CLA pupils compared to non CLA pupils between 2015/16 and 2017/18. *(Please note that this data should be treated as an indication only as the cohort of matched CLA pupils for this comparison is small and identified through January PLASC, so may differ from current cohort of CLA pupils.)*

CLA status	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	3 Year Variance
CLA pupils	93.7%	93.9%	94.2%	+0.5%
Non CLA pupils	94.0%	93.6%	93.1%	-0.9%

- 7.4 It is pleasing that both primary and secondary children that are looked after have improved attendance in 2017/18, with improvement points of 0.4% and 0.5% respectively from 2015/16 academic year.

- 7.5 The table below shows attendance of primary school pupils between 2015/16 and 2017/18 by Special Educational Need (SEN) status.

SEN Code	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	3 year Variance
N – None	95.1%	95.2%	94.7%	-0.4%
A – School Action	93.7%	93.8%	93.4%	-0.4%
P – School Action Plus	93.4%	93.2%	92.6%	-0.8%
S - Statement	92.6%	92.0%	91.7%	-0.9%

- 7.6 The table below shows attendance of secondary school pupils between 2014/15 and 2016/17 by Special Educational Need (SEN) status.

SEN Code	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	3 year Variance
N – None	94.6%	94.3%	93.9%	-0.7%
A – School Action	92.7%	92.5%	92.0%	-0.7%
P – School Action Plus	90.3%	88.4%	87.3%	-3.0%
S - Statement	92.2%	92.4%	90.4%	-1.8%

- 7.7 Disappointingly, pupils with special education needs have shown a greater rate of decline in their attendance levels than their peers. This is an area that has been considered this academic year during support and challenge meetings with schools to ensure the cohort of learners are receiving adequate and appropriate focus and support.

- 7.8 The table below shows the overall attendance rates of pupils in primary schools split by the main ethnicity cohorts for the past three years.

Ethnicity	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	3 year Variance
White	94.6%	94.7%	94.2%	-0.4%
Asian/Asian British	95.4%	95.0%	94.5%	-0.9%
Black/Black British	96.1%	96.9%	95.7%	-0.4%
Chinese/Chinese British	97.1%	96.3%	94.6%	-2.5%
Mixed	95.5%	95.4%	94.7%	-0.8%
Other	94.7%	95.2%	94.4%	-0.3%
Unknown	93.1%	91.8%	93.3%	+0.2%

- 7.9 The primary cohorts categorised as 'Unknown' saw an increase in their school attendance over the three academic years as a whole, with an improvement of 0.2% over the three years. All other cohorts of learners saw a decline in attendance rates between 2015/16 and 2017/18 of at least 0.3%.

- 7.10 The table below illustrates the attendance rates of secondary aged pupils split by the main ethnicity cohorts for the past three years.

Ethnicity	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	3 year Variance
White	93.9%	93.6%	93.0%	-0.9%
Asian/Asian British	97.3%	97.0%	95.4%	-1.9%

Black/Black British	98.4%	98.0%	96.8%	-1.6%
Chinese/Chinese British	96.9%	97.7%	98.4%	+1.5%
Mixed	95.5%	95.2%	94.8%	-0.7%
Other	97.1%	96.5%	95.4%	-1.7%
Unknown	92.4%	92.4%	90.1%	-2.3%

7.11 The secondary cohort categorised as 'Chinese/Chinese British' improved by 1.5% during this three year period, and were the only group of learners to show an improvement at secondary phase.

8. RHONDDA CYNON TAF ATTENDANCE AND WELLBEING SERVICE

8.1 Under section 437 of the Education Act 1996, the local authority has a statutory legal duty to ensure that every child of compulsory school age is getting the education required by law, either at home or at school. In RCT this statutory legal duty is devolved to the Attendance and Wellbeing Service who act as the Council's enforcement agency in ensuring that parents/carers and schools carry out their legal responsibilities as set out in the following legislation:

- Education Act 1996;
- Children Act 1989;
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998;
- Registration Regulations, 2010;
- Education and Inspections Act 2006;
- Children and Young Person's Act 1963;
- Children (Performance) Regulations 2015.

8.2 The RCT Attendance and Wellbeing Service undertake the following statutory duties on behalf of the Council:

8.2.1 **Prosecution for non school attendance** - Where there is sufficient evidence that parents are not fulfilling their legal duty to ensure regular school attendance (section 7 of the Education Act 1996) court proceedings may be instituted under Section 444 (1) of the Education Act 1996.

This remains a 'last resort' option and will only be considered if a parent does not engage with the process. During 2017/18, 208 parents were prosecuted for not securing their child(ren)'s regular school attendance.

8.2.2 **Formal Register Inspections** – Duty to ensure clear and efficient registration practices are in place in all schools (the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010).

The service proactively inspects each school's register every term via a formal Registration Compliance Check process (369 per annum). These may result in action plans for schools to improve their practices, which are reviewed by the Attendance and Wellbeing Service's management team on a regular basis. If necessary, they will be fed into the School Improvement process.

- 8.2.3 **Education provision in place for vulnerable children** – Duty to ensure children the local authority are responsible for and Gypsy Travellers receive suitable education (section 437 of the Education Act 1996).

There are currently 26 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people that have declared their ethnicity status to the local authority residing in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This number of pupils has remained relatively consistent over recent years. Whilst the majority are engaging in mainstream education, three young people have opted to engage in a Traveller Education Programme delivered via the Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) team with the support of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service.

- 8.2.4 **Children Missing Education** – Duty to establish the identities of children not receiving suitable education by identifying, investigating, locating and tracking children (section 436A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006).

There were 123 'Children Missing Education' referrals made to the Attendance and Wellbeing Service during 2017/18. All children were located and where they resided in RCT, support was given to enrol the child into an appropriate education setting.

- 8.2.5 **Issuing entertainment licences and work permits** - Risk assess employers to protect children from being exploited and harmed and ensure their health and safety (Children and Young Person's Act 1963; Children (Performance) Regulations 2015).

During 2017/18, the Attendance and Wellbeing Service issued 228 child performance licences and 12 work permits for child of statutory school age. In addition, 10 chaperone have been licensed to accompany and support children and young people whilst performing.

- 8.2.6 **Tuancy** – Arrangement and co-ordination of formal truancy operations with Police and return them to school when truanting (section 16 Crime and Disorder Act, 1998).

During 2017/18, the service co-facilitated several truancy patrols across the Rhondda Cynon Taf area with the South Wales Police and the British Transport Police along the Valleys Lines. These have been particularly successful at raising awareness of the importance of school attendance around the Christmas period, when absence is known to rise.

- 8.3 The Attendance and Wellbeing Service provides support to schools, pupils and their families to address any difficulties that are affecting regular attendance at school. They work in partnership with a range of support services and agencies to provide an essential link between home and school to ensure that pupils benefit fully from the educational opportunities available to them. In 2017/18, the Attendance and Wellbeing Service staff undertook 4,346 home visits to provide support and assistance to families referred to the service.

- 8.4 During the academic year 2017/18 the Council's Attendance and Wellbeing Service has:

- 1,833 referrals received, of which 668 were pupil in receipt of free school meals;
- 1,348 cases were closed, of which 884 were closed because of a positive outcome;
- Prosecuted 208 parents for non-attendance of their children, 95 parents of open entrenched cases and 113 of parents who chose not to discharge their liability by means of a fixed penalty notice;
- Undertaken 21 Daily Absence Response Team (DART) initiatives to support the first day response procedures;
- Undertaken 38 Meet and Greet initiatives to tackle lateness;
- Provided 98 'Super Attender Challenge' Assemblies in primary schools and special schools.

8.5 The Attendance and Wellbeing Service provides a challenge and support function for schools, reviewing and analysing attendance code data to target specific schools that have the following features:

- those that have not achieved their target attendance levels for the past three years;
- those that are considerably below their attendance level of the same period the previously year;
- those that are below their group's benchmarking median for in terms of free-school-meal eligibility;
- those that have more than 5% of absence due to illness;
- those where there are high levels of unauthorised absence; or
- those where the local authority has concerns around the use of attendance codes.

8.6 During 2017/18, Attendance and Wellbeing Service management staff undertook 63 Data Response Visits, joint visits with School Improvement Challenge Advisors, and/or support and challenge meetings with schools where their performance data identified they were not performing at the expected level.

8.7 Analysing this data alongside head teachers and the Central South Consortium's Challenge Advisors ensures attendance remains a priority for the school and is given a very high profile with pupils and parents.

9. FIXED PENALTY NOTICES FOR NOT SECURING REGULAR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

9.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf continues to implement the Fixed Penalty Notice (FPNs) scheme for non school attendance in line with the local authority's Code of Conduct. Whilst it is the responsibility of schools to decide to request an FPN, legislation places the administration of FPNs within the remit of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service. The table below shows the number of warnings issued and FPN's issued during the academic year 2017/18:

9.2

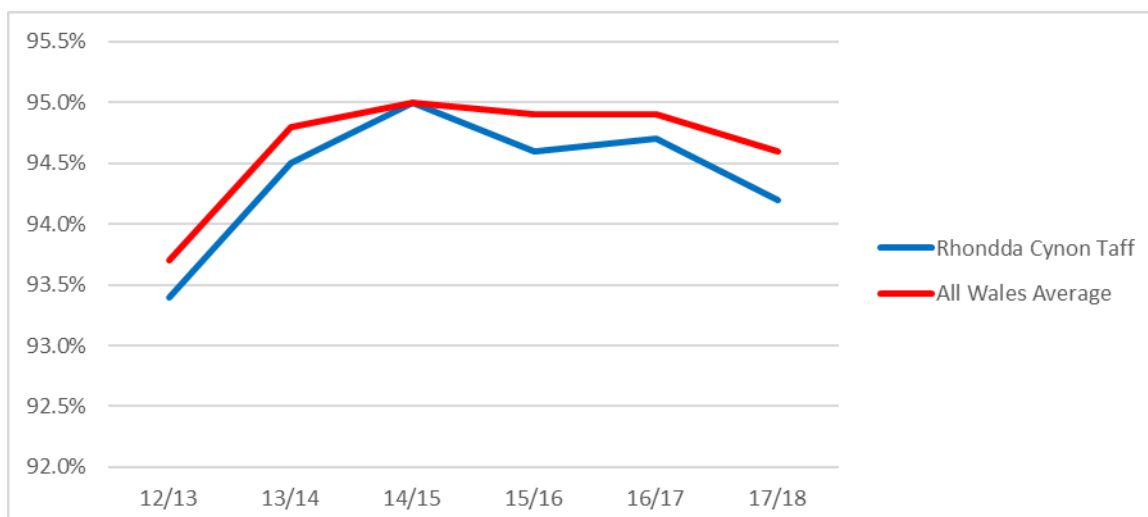
School Phase	PN REASON	FPN Issued and Paid	FPN Issued and Withdrawn	FPN Not Issued after Warning	FPN Not issued other reasons	FPN Paid Prosecution Withdrawn	FPN Request Rejected	Successful Prosecution	Total
Other	FPN 10+ Unauthorised Absences	2	1	5	0	0	1	2	11
	FPN Holidays in Term Time	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	5
	Total	2	4	5	0	0	3	2	16
Primary	FPN 10+ Unauthorised Absences	14	21	111	3	0	22	12	183
	FPN 10+ Unauthorised Lates	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	4
	FPN Holidays in Term Time	161	12	0	0	0	16	19	208
	Total	175	33	113	3	0	40	31	395
Secondary	FPN 10+ Unauthorised Absences	90	57	368	3	1	19	51	589
	FPN 10+ Unauthorised Lates	4	3	25	1	0	0	0	33
	FPN Holidays in Term Time	137	11	0	0	0	2	17	167
	FPN Parents Failure to Engage	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Total	231	71	394	4	1	21	68	790
Total		408	108	512	7	1	64	101	1201

Please Note: The table represents the number of outcomes between 1st September 2017 and 31st August 2018.

- 9.3 A total of 1201 FPN requests have received and processed by the local authority during this period with the vast majority having been issued for unauthorised absences of 10 or more O codes occurring in one term. In these instances, a warning letter is issued to the parent/carer informing them that the pattern of unauthorised absence has been brought to the local authority's attention and they are being given an opportunity of 15 school days for their child's attendance to improve. If, during this time, their child does not accrue an unauthorised absence, the matter will not be taken forward. However, if there is a period of unauthorised absence, matter will progress to a fixed penalty notice for not securing regular school attendance.
- 9.4 To date, there is an almost 70% success rate of these monitoring fixed penalty notices, with a 62% success rate in academic year 2017/18 alone.
- 9.5 108 fixed penalty notices have been withdrawn at various points of the process for various seasons. These include but are not limited to medical evidence being provided; social or support worker requesting withdrawal, stating that it would not be in the public interest to proceed; a change in family circumstances resulting in it not being appropriate to proceed or deciding that it would be more appropriate to transfer the case to an open case to the Attendance and Wellbeing Service for more intensive support. The individual circumstances will always be considered in line with the Code of Conduct.
- 9.6 Schools are considering the use of fixed penalty notices as part of their graduated response to tackling absence, where appropriate to do so.
- 9.7 A Scrutiny Committee Working Group has been established and will commence work reviewing the effectiveness and impact of fixed penalty notices on schools attendance levels, and recommendations for future revisions to the Code of Conduct.

10. IMPACT OF IMPROVED ATTENDANCE LEVELS ON EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

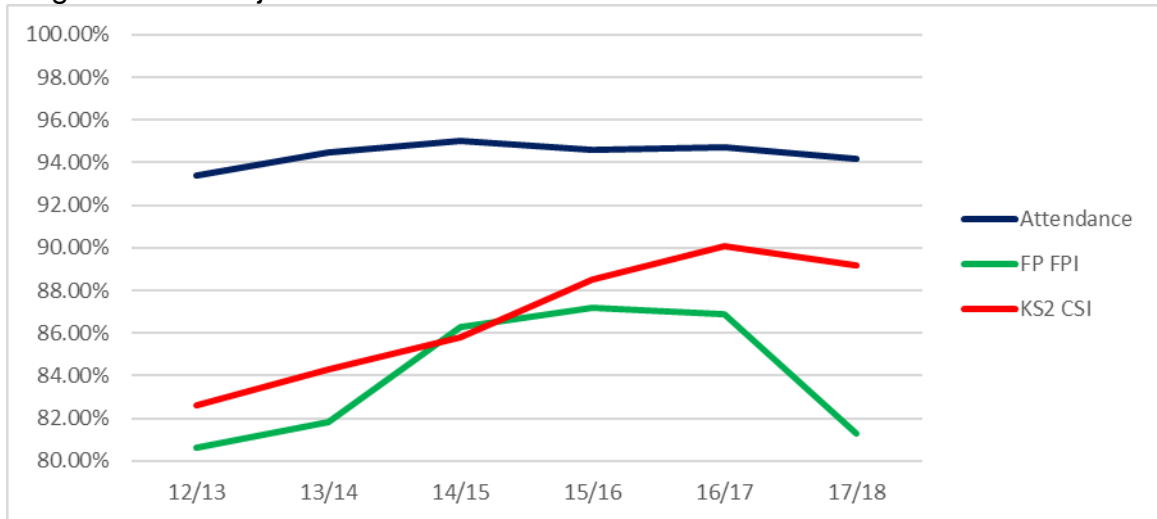
- 10.1 The table below shows the rate of improvement of school attendance in the primary phase (primary aged pupils in primary schools and special schools) in RCT between 2012/13 and 2017/18 compared to the All Wales average for the same period.



10.2 There was a significant improvement at local and national level between 2012/13 and 2013/14, which continued into 2014/15. However, this has since declined from 2015/16, as can be seen in the figures in section 4.

10.3 Whilst small percentage changes may appear trivial, they can have a considerable impact on a pupil's attainment outcome. This is illustrated in the data below that highlights the strong association between variations in school attendance rates and attainment rates over recent years.

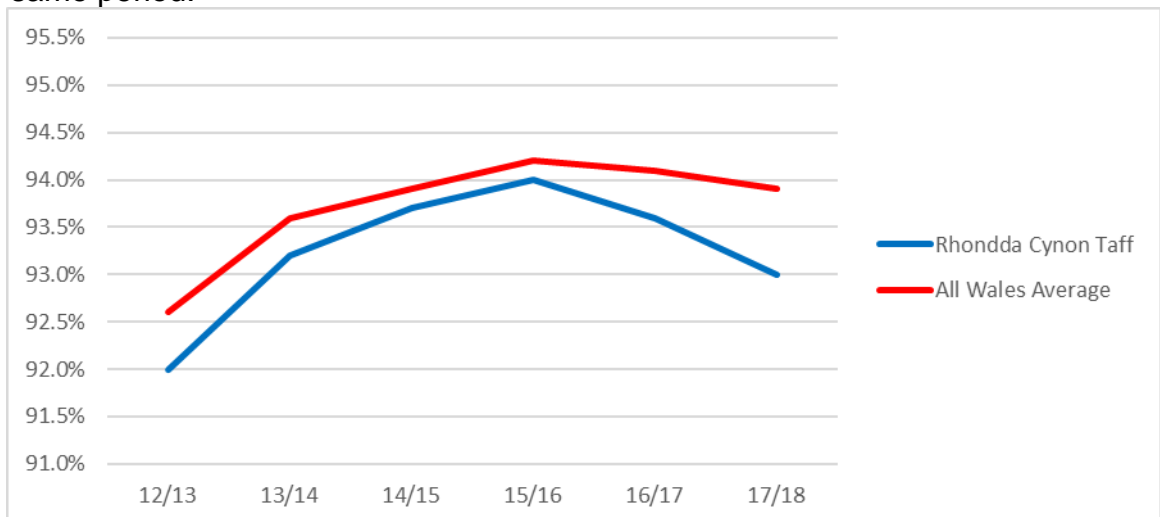
10.4 The following table shows the rate of improvement in primary school attendance rates alongside the rate of improvement in the Foundation Phase Indicator and Key Stage 2 Core Subject Indicator.



10.5 The Foundation Phase Indicator outcomes have improved by a rate of 6.6 points since their introduction in 2013 until 2016 to 87.2%, but dipped slightly in 2017 and again in 2018 by 0.3% and 5.6%, with 81.3% of pupils achieving their expected outcome in 2018. This was in line with the dip in attendance.

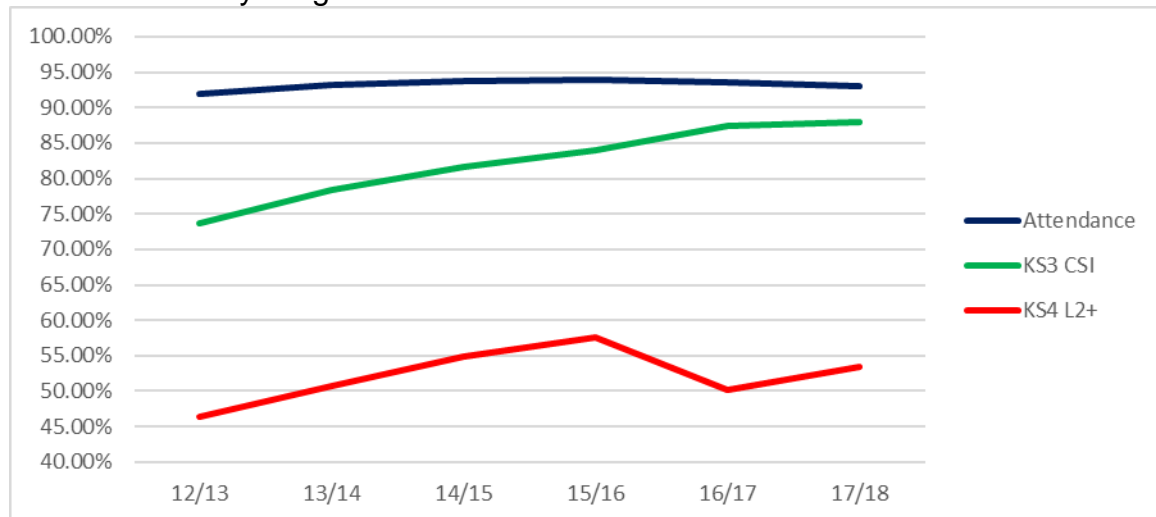
10.6 At Key Stage 2, primary pupils made significant progress resulting in 89.2% of pupils achieving the indicator threshold in 2018, 0.9% less than those in 2017.

10.7 The table below shows the rate of improvement in secondary school attendance levels in RCT between 2012/13 and 2017/18 compared to the All Wales average for the same period.



10.8 In contrast to the primary data, the changes in the attendance rates in the past two years do not equate to the improving trends in the Key Stage 3 and 4 outcome data during 2017/18. However, over the past six years, there has been an overall upwards trend on both secondary school attendance rates and well as attainment outcomes, suggesting a correlation between the two factors.

10.9 The following table shows that the rate of secondary school attendance has been indirectly proportionate to the rate of improvement in the Key Stage 3 Core Subject Indicator and Key Stage 4 Level 2+ threshold in 2017/18.



10.10 Over the period of six years, Key Stage 3 Core Subject Indicator outcomes have improved by 14.3 points (87.9%) and L2+ threshold outcomes have improved by 7.2 points (53.5%) whilst secondary school attendance has improved by 1.0% during the same period, demonstrating that good attendance is a key factor in raising attainment.

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required as the contents of this report are for information purposes only.

12. CONSULTATIONS

12.1 No consultation exercises have been undertaken.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no financial considerations in relation to this report.

14. LEGAL IMPLICATION OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

14.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

15. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP

15.1 Improving school attendance will have a significant impact on learner outcomes which in turn will help to address two key Council priorities relating to the Economy and People. These include building a strong economy and promoting independence

and positive lives for everyone by improving our schools and ensuring that our children and young people achieve the best that they can.

16. CONCLUSION

- 16.1 Cabinet and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee have continued to make improving school attendance a priority for the local authority and its schools. Whilst both primary and secondary school attendance have declined this year, the priority placed on improving attendance has enabled the local authority to regularly challenge and support underperforming schools to ensure that improvements are made. If the focus on attendance is sustained and coupled with the new strategies for improvement, it is likely that attendance will improve once again and have a positive impact on educational standards in the future.
- 16.2 Excellent school attendance is key to raising education outcomes as demonstrated above. In addition, schools play a pivotal role in safeguarding children and young people ensuring their positive social and emotional wellbeing, which would not be possible without their engagement in education.