

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019-20

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

26th FEBRUARY 2020

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

Agenda Item No. 7

**ANNUAL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE
PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE
ACADEMIC YEAR 2018/19**

Author: Daniel Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing
Tel: 01443 744298

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 2018/19, 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, up until the 2016/17 academic year, this report was brought to the 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	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
% Attendance RCT	94.6%	94.2%	94.3%	-0.3%
All Wales Average	94.9%	94.5%	94.6%	-0.3%
FSM/ non FSM Gap RCT	2.5%	2.8%	2.9%	+0.4%
FSM/ non FSM Gap Wales	2.7%	3.0%	3.2%	+0.5%

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). *FSM figures for 2018/19 taken from LA Data Pack as WG report not due until March 2020.

- 4.2 The overall primary school attendance for 2018/19 is 94.3% compared to 94.6% in 2016/17, a decrease of 0.3%. Over the past three years, the variance in the rate has been in line with that of the All Wales average, which has also declined by 0.3%. The gap between the attendance of FSM pupils and non FSM pupils has increased by 0.4% over the three years to 2.9%. This figure is 0.3% narrower than the Welsh average, which has widened by 0.5% over the same period.
- 4.3 At 94.3%, primary school attendance stands below our ambitious 2018/19 local authority target of 95.1%.
- 4.4 The table below shows the comparative attendance for boys and girls at primary level for RCT and all Wales for the past three academic years:

Academic Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
% Attendance RCT Boys	94.6%	94.1%	94.2%	-0.4%
% Attendance RCT Girls	94.8%	94.3%	94.5%	-0.3%
% Attendance Wales Boys	94.8%	94.5%	94.6%	-0.2%
% Attendance Wales Girls	94.9%	94.7%	94.7%	-0.2%

Source: LA Data Pack, these figures do not contain information on special schools.

- 4.5 In 2014/15 and 2015/16, boys attendance in RCT was higher than girls attendance but in the past three academic years, girls attendance has been consistently higher. The rate of decline in RCT has been higher than the all Wales figure at both levels but, encouragingly, boys attendance improved in 2018/19 when compared to 2017/18 in line with the All Wales improvement of 0.1% and where girls attendance remained the same at an All Wales level, in RCT this increased by 0.2%.

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	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
% Attendance RCT	93.5%	92.9%	92.8%	-0.7%
All Wales Average	94.1%	93.8%	93.8%	-0.3%
FSM/ non FSM Gap RCT	5.0%	5.3%	6.0%	+1.0%
FSM/ non FSM Gap Wales	4.9%	5.0%	5.2%	+0.3%

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). *FSM figures for 2018/19 taken from LA Data Pack as WG report not due until March 2020.

- 5.2 The overall secondary school attendance for 2018/19 is 92.8% compared to 93.5% in 2016/17, a decrease of 0.7%. Over the past three years, the variance in RCT secondary school attendance is over twice the rate of decline of the All Wales average and for 2018/19 is 1.0% below the average national attendance level. The gap between the attendance of FSM pupils and non FSM pupils has significantly increased since 2016/17, and is now 0.8% wider than the Welsh average, which has also increased by 0.3% since 2016/17.

- 5.3 At 92.8%, secondary school attendance stands significantly below our ambitious 2018/19 local authority target of 94.1%.
- 5.4 The table below shows the rates of boys and girls secondary attendance at RCT and All Wales level for the past three academic years:

Academic Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
% Attendance RCT Boys	93.6%	93.0%	92.7%	-0.9%
% Attendance RCT Girls	93.5%	93.1%	93.0%	-0.5%
% Attendance Wales Boys	94.2%	93.8%	93.8%	-0.4%
% Attendance Wales Girls	94.0%	93.9%	93.8%	-0.2%

Source: LA Data Pack, these figures do not contain information on special schools.

- 5.5 Across the last three academic years, boys attendance has decreased significantly by 0.9% and has now dropped below the level of girls attendance. Both levels of attendance have been consistently below the All Wales average and have reduced in the time period more than double the All Wales figure.

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	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
% Attendance RCT	80.8%	80.2%	76.3%	-4.8%

- 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 2018/19 is 76.3% compared to 80.8% in 2016/17, a decrease of 4.8%. This level of decline is in contrast to the efforts of the Education and Inclusion Services to raise the profile of attendance at PRU's where we continue to offer a high level of support. 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 and comparative data for secondary PRU pupils has shown that attendance actually increased for those attending Ty Gwyn Education Centre when compared to their attendance in mainstream schools.

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 2016/17 and 2018/19. *(Please note that this data should be treated as an indication only as CLA pupils are no longer required on PLASC returns. We therefore use internal information gathering for pupils residing in RCT and attending RCT schools. Figures of CLA pupils living outside RCT but attending RCT schools may not be entirely accurate.)*

CLA Status	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
CLA pupils	96.4%	96.3%	96.6%	+0.2%
Non CLA pupils	94.7%	94.2%	94.3%	-0.4%

- 7.3 The table below shows the attendance of secondary school CLA pupils compared to non CLA pupils between 2016/17 and 2018/19. *(As above, please note that this data should be treated as an indication only as CLA pupils are no longer required on PLASC returns. We therefore use internal information gathering for pupils residing in RCT and attending RCT schools. Figures of CLA pupils living outside RCT but attending RCT schools may not be entirely accurate.)*

CLA Status	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
CLA pupils	93.9%	94.2%	93.2%	-0.7%
Non CLA pupils	93.6%	93.1%	92.8%	-0.8%

- 7.4 Even with an overall 3 year downturn in attendance at primary level, CLA pupils actually increased their attendance level during this time by 0.2%. At secondary level CLA attendance declined but the rate of decline was not as high as non CLA pupils and the overall figure for 2018/19 places CLA pupils 0.4% above their counterparts.
- 7.5 The table below shows attendance of primary school pupils between 2016/17 and 2018/19 by Special Educational Need (SEN) status.

SEN Code	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
N – None	95.2%	94.7%	94.9%	-0.3%
A – School Action	93.8%	93.4%	93.4%	-0.4%
P – School Action Plus	93.2%	92.6%	92.7%	-0.5%
S - Statement	92.0%	91.7%	92.0%	0%

- 7.6 The rate of decline for School Action and School Action Plus pupils has seen a higher decrease than their peers in the 3 year comparison apart from pupils with statements at primary level whose attendance has remained the same. In contrast, pupil attendance from 2017/18 to 2018/19 has remained the same for School Action but increased in all other areas and we hope to build on this for the 2019/20 academic year.
- 7.7 The table below shows attendance of secondary school pupils between 2016/17 and 2018/19 by Special Educational Need (SEN) status.

SEN Code	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
N – None	94.3%	93.9%	93.9%	-0.4%
A – School Action	92.5%	92.0%	91.8%	-0.7%
P – School Action Plus	88.4%	87.3%	85.6%	-2.8%

S - Statement	92.4%	90.4%	90.8%	-1.6%
---------------	-------	-------	-------	-------

7.8 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.

7.9 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	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
White	94.7%	94.2%	94.3%	-0.4%
Asian/Asian British	95.0%	94.5%	94.6%	-0.4%
Black/Black British	96.9%	95.7%	96.2%	-0.7%
Chinese/Chinese British	96.3%	94.6%	95.8%	-0.5%
Mixed	95.3%	94.7%	94.8%	-0.5%
Other	95.2%	94.4%	95.0%	-0.2%
Unknown	91.0%	91.4%	90.3%	-0.7%

7.10 All cohorts of learners saw a decline in attendance rates between 2016/17 and 2018/19 of at least 0.2% but conversely, all groups except 'Unknown' saw an increase in attendance between 2017/18 and 2018/19.

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

Ethnicity	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	3 Year Variance
White	93.6%	93.0%	92.9%	-0.7%
Asian/Asian British	97.0%	95.4%	96.3%	-0.7%
Black/Black British	98.0%	96.8%	96.2%	-1.8%
Chinese/Chinese British	97.7%	98.4%	96.8%	-0.9%
Mixed	95.0%	94.3%	93.8%	-1.2%
Other	96.5%	95.4%	95.0%	-1.5%
Unknown	89.3%	87.8%	87.1%	-2.2%

7.12 The secondary cohort shows a reduction across ethnicities in terms of attendance which correlates with the reduction of overall attendance at 0.7% during this period.

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) and/or (1a) 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 2018/19, 173 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 (351 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 the local authority are responsible for Gypsy Traveller children receive suitable education (section 437 of the Education Act 1996).

There are currently 18 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.

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 163 'Children Missing Education' referrals made to the Attendance and Wellbeing Service during 2018/19. 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 2018/19, the Attendance and Wellbeing Service issued 255 child performance licences and 7 work permits for child of statutory school age. In addition, 18 chaperone have been licensed to accompany and support children and young people whilst performing.

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

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.

8.4 During the academic year 2018/19 the Council's Attendance and Wellbeing Service performance includes the following:

- 1,712 referrals received, of which 974 were pupils in receipt of free school meals;
- 1,314 cases were closed, of which 881 were closed because of a positive outcome;
- 5,495 home visits undertaken;
- Prosecuted 173 parents for non-attendance of their children, 64 parents of open entrenched cases and 109 parents who chose not to discharge their liability by means of a fixed penalty notice;
- Undertaken 22 Daily Absence Response Team (DART) initiatives to support the first day response procedures;
- Undertaken 19 Meet and Greet initiatives to tackle lateness;
- Provided 111 '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 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 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 following table shows the number of warnings issued and FPN's issued during the academic year 2018/19:

School Phase	PN REASON	FPN Issued and Paid	FPN Issued and Withdrawn	FPN Not Issued after Warning	FPN Not issued other reasons	FPN Request Rejected	Successful Prosecution	Total
Other	FPN 10+ Unauthorised Absences	2	3	4	0	1	0	10
	FPN Holidays in Term Time	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Total	2	3	5	0	1	0	11
Primary	FPN 10+ Unauthorised Absences	22	5	116	1	20	18	182
	FPN 10+ Unauthorised Lates	0	1	5	0	1	2	9
	FPN Holidays in Term Time	158	16	0	0	5	19	198
	Total	180	22	121	1	26	39	389
Secondary	FPN 10+ Unauthorised Absences	96	59	346	15	59	39	614
	FPN 10+ Unauthorised Lates	0	2	3	0	2	0	7
	FPN Holidays in Term Time	103	9	0	1	6	5	124
	Total	199	70	349	16	67	44	745
Total		381	95	475	17	94	83	1145

Please Note: The table represents the number of outcomes between 1st September 2018 and 31st August 2019.

- 9.2 A total of 1145 FPN requests were 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.
- 9.3 In the 2018/19 academic year, there was a 71% success rate with our monitoring letters where no unauthorised absences were recorded during the 15 school day monitoring period and therefore no FPN issued.
- 9.4 95 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.
- 9.5 Schools are considering the use of fixed penalty notices as part of their graduated response to tackling absence, where appropriate to do so.
- 9.6 A Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee Working Group has been established to ascertain the effectiveness of FPN's and findings and recommendations will be reported to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in March 2020.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 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 primary increased slightly this year, secondary school attendance has again declined. The priority placed on improving attendance has enabled the local authority to regularly challenge underperforming schools with the necessary emphasis. If this 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.
- 10.2 Excellent school attendance is key to raising education outcomes. 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.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee-

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Background Papers-

None