

BRIEFING NOTE

Agenda
Item No. 7

TO: Scrutiny Panel
DATE: 19 April 2012

RE: Absence Levels, Exclusions and Managed Moves

Purpose

To update the Scrutiny Panel on the work undertaken to support schools in addressing absence, exclusions and managed moves across the borough to ensure children's engagement with education.

1. Background

- 1.1 The majority of children and young people across Walsall are well supported by parents, carers and school staff to ensure good attendance and positive engagement in education. Where attendance or engagement is poor there are a range of strategies and support mechanisms which are put into place around the child and their family all of which seek to improve attendance or ensure re-engagement with education.
- 1.2 There is a direct correlation between attendance and attainment and national policy has long been to encourage schools to minimise the amount of teaching and learning time lost as a result of absence. Research shows that children who are absent from school for relatively short period of time may never catch up on the work they have missed.
- 1.3 Managing attendance is a school issue and responsibility for ensuring attendance rests with parents. Walsall Children's Services Serco provide a range of services to schools which support schools in dealing with absence, managing exclusions and tracking those children who do not appear on any school roll.

2. Absence and Exclusion

- 2.1 All schools receive support from the Access Team which comprises Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) and Attendance (Support) Officers. Every Walsall school receives a core service from EWO staff to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and this support is banded according to 'intensive', 'targeted' and 'universal' criteria.
- 2.2 The service provided by the Attendance Officers is fully traded and the importance attached by schools to attendance is reflected in the 'buy-back' of these services. Currently 88% of all secondary schools and 83% of all primary schools buy the service. The team deals with between 4,500 and 5,000 referrals a year.
- 2.3 There is no right to a leave of absence during term time and all schools are required to set absence targets to reduce overall absence. Absence has increasingly become a focus during Ofsted Inspections and schools who are deemed not to be focusing on challenging absence will find this reflected in their overall judgement.

- 2.4 Absence may be due to a number of factors including genuine ill health and religious observance. Unauthorised absence includes those children who have disengaged and those who are taking holiday during term time.
- 2.5 Members will recall that in 2009 a Scrutiny Working party examined the issue of holiday absence. Scrutiny endorsed the practices in place to address absence including the use of penalty notices for unauthorised absence. It also recommended that, through their governing bodies, head teachers should challenge all types of absence whether authorised or unauthorised.
- 2.6 Schools have full guidance on a 'zero tolerance' policy with regards to requests for holiday absences and penalty notices are issued where parents take their child out of school without authorisation. Over the last 2 years holiday absence across Walsall has reduced from 0.66% to 0.50% (33,131 days in 2008/09 to 23,716 days in 2010/11).
- 2.7 In the last 12 months the DfE have redefined the threshold for identifying a persistent absentee; this is now a child with 15% or more absence over 5 half terms. In real terms this means a child who has 23 days absence over 5 half terms.
- 2.8 Overall Absence in local authority maintained schools over the 3 yrs 2007 to 2010 is a changing measure as increasing numbers of schools become academies. The 2010/11 outturn was particularly impacted by the conversion of a number of outstanding secondary schools.

	2007-08		2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
	WAL	NAT	WAL	NAT	WAL	NAT	WAL	NAT
Primary	5.4	5.26	5.7	5.3	5.8	5.2	5.3	N/Av
Secondary	7.52	7.34	7.76	7.21	7.3	6.88	7.1	N/Av
Special	9.48	10.57	11.62	10.72	9.56	10.25	9.3	N/Av

N/Av = Data not yet available

- 2.9 The national targets to reduce secondary persistent attendance (5 yr trend) have been achieved at 4.9% in 2010-11. Compared to our Black Country comparators, Walsall is second best performing authority behind Wolverhampton and a 'stretch target' is included in the CYPP.
- 2.10 Whilst overall absence remains within the lowest quartile nationally at both secondary and primary phases, recently agreed education targets are set to achieve and sustain lower-middle quartile performance from 2012/13 outturn onwards. Current indicators are that primary overall absence (2010-11) has reduced and that the gap with national has closed to 0.39. Improvement has been achieved in the context of reorganised service provision and the introduction of traded services. The current strategic approach will be sustained with increasing emphasis on developing traded services with schools.
- 2.11 Permanent exclusions by % of school population show a decreasing trend for primary schools and Walsall's Special schools have not permanently excluded a pupil in the last 4 years. The secondary picture remains more volatile whilst performance of Walsall schools is currently above national average. No looked after children have been permanently excluded in the last 7 years. The low numbers of permanent exclusions across Walsall schools tend to impact adversely on fixed term exclusion figures which are relatively high (2009/10) with secondary exclusions within the lowest quartile nationally.

	2007-08		2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
	WAL	NAT	WAL	NAT	WAL	NAT	WAL	NAT
Primary PermX	0.05 (13)	0.02	0.03 (10)	0.02	X (4)	0.02	0.004 (1)	N/Av
Secondary PermX	0.21 (45)	0.21	0.29 (60)	0.17	0.13 (28)	0.15	0.23 (35)	N/Av
Special PermX	0	0.19	0	0.13	0	0.11	0	N/Av
LA Average	0.12	0.11	0.18 (E)	0.09	0.06	0.08	0.09	N/Av

E = Estimate

X = too few to register as a %

() = numbers of Walsall children

2.12 In all cases where children are at risk of exclusion, the Behaviour Support and Reintegration Services will work with schools, parents and the child/young person to avoid exclusion where possible. This will include considering a range of options including a managed move to another school, use of alternative provision and short term use of reduced time table.

2.13 In all cases where children and young people are ultimately excluded the Exclusion Officer works to ensure that child has an alternative provision in place by day 6 of their exclusion.

3. Managed Moves

3.1 Making a fresh start in a new school has been used for some time as a way to avoid permanent exclusion and address pupil difficulties in school. It can be particularly useful if the difficulties are perceived to relate to inappropriate peer relationships or if trust between pupil and/or parent and the school have broken down. Managed moves should only be considered when all other pastoral strategies have been exhausted.

3.2 A managed move can only be arranged with the cooperation and agreement of all the parties involved. This includes parents and governors. Schools are discouraged from exchanging pupils on a reciprocal basis unless such moves meet the needs of both pupils and meet with parental agreement.

3.3 There have been 39 managed moves in the 2011/12 school year so far which represents a 35% increase on those notified to the Admission team last year.

4. Children Missing Education

4.1 The Children Missing Education Panel (CME Panel) was established in 2004 with a remit to maintain a database of all children not on the roll of a school or suitable alternative provision and monitor them until the child's return to education. This includes children previously on a Walsall School roll who have not returned to school and children newly arrived in Walsall. The Panel meets monthly.

4.2 As of February 2012 there were 20 cases open to the Panel and a further 9 cases were due to be considered at March's meeting. This included 5 year 11 pupils who have recently moved into Walsall.

5. Recommendations

5.1 That Members note the contents of this briefing paper

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