

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

13 FEBRUARY 2020

CONSIDERATION FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT OFFICER ROLES

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES (COUNCILLOR MRS J ROSSER)

**Author: DANIEL WILLIAMS, HEAD OF ATTENDANCE AND WELLBEING SERVICE
(Tel: 01443 744298)**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this briefing is to consider the funding and consequent employment of Family Engagement Officers in six secondary/through schools to help tackle school attendance.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the information contained in the report.
- 2.2 Determine whether to agree to the funding and consequent employment of Family Engagement Officers in six secondary/through schools to help improve attendance.

3. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 In the academic year 2018/19, secondary school attendance (including special schools) in RCT declined 0.1% from the previous year to 92.8%. This is the lowest point since the 2012/13 academic year and placed RCT 22nd in the All Wales attendance table.
- 3.2 As a result of declining figures in recent years, attendance has been made an RCT priority. To ensure that the most vulnerable pupils are supported the Education and Inclusion Services Directorate has identified a model of best practice within our Primary Schools that we believe would be beneficial to supporting attendance as well as forming and enhancing relationships with parents in our lowest performing settings. This model is based around the role of Family Engagement Officers.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Family Engagement Officers provide an important link between the school, parents/carers and pupils and have been shown to provide an effective and valued role. Glenboi Primary School are one example where this role has worked extremely well. In the March 2019 inspection of the school by Estyn, under the 'Care, Support

and Guidance' element where the school was ranked excellent, the following comment was made:

'The family engagement officer is highly effective in engaging with parents and external agencies. She supports the delivery of highly successful programmes, which have a very positive impact on pupils' wellbeing, attendance and attitudes to learning...The family engagement officer monitors attendance carefully and liaises closely with parents and staff. She offers outstanding practical support to families who find it a struggle to send their children to school on time.'

- 4.2 The role was also highlighted under the Leadership and Management section of Estyn's report which was also deemed excellent. The role was provided as an example of how the school helps to reduce the effect of poverty and deprivation on vulnerable pupils.
- 4.3 Parental questionnaires at the time showed 100% of parents are satisfied with the school, 100% feel well informed about their child's progress and 99% felt the school communicates well with them.
- 4.4 For contextual purposes, Glenboi Primary School at the time had 65% of pupils eligible for free school meals which is well above the national average of 18.4%; 44% of pupils with additional learning needs and a social, emotional and behavioural difficulties unit on site. Glenboi Primary School ranks the 11th most deprived school in RCT in terms of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) with 77% of pupils living within the top 10% most deprived Lower Super Output Areas which rises to 90% of pupils when considering the top 20% most deprived areas.
- 4.5 We therefore feel this model has been shown to work in a challenging environment with some of our most vulnerable pupils and families.
- 4.6 In a wider context, Education Scotland¹ have created a toolkit for practitioners for home-school link workers. In this toolkit they identify 14 impacts of such as service which includes improved attendance, behaviour, attachment, language and communication as well as the development of stronger connections, community engagement and reduced isolation.

5. PROPOSAL FOR CONSIDERATION

- 5.1 To help foster the relationship between schools and families at secondary level and to help improve attendance, we are therefore requesting support to pilot the placement of Family Engagement Officers in 6 schools across the County Borough. These schools and their current school categorisation are:

Porth Community School (Red)
Aberdare Community School (Red)
Mountain Ash Comprehensive School (Amber)
Ferndale Community School (Amber)
Tonyrefail Community School (Yellow)

¹ Education Scotland, 'Engaging parents and families. A toolkit for practitioners. Section 9: Home-school link worker/service', March 2019

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiwzpuNiaTnAhWPuHUIHfiJAKoQFjAAegQIARAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Feducation.gov.scot%2Fimprovement%2FDocuments%2Fpar2-section9-mar19.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0y1Aul_J9uenV9zOmi_wrV

Ysgol Nantgwyn (Yellow)

- 5.2 The rationale for choosing these schools is that, discounting special schools, they were the lowest performing schools in terms of secondary attendance for the 2018/19 academic year ranging in attendance from 90.77% to 91.93% (see Appendix One). All six schools well below the RCT target we had set at 94.1%.
- 5.3 In the 2017/18 academic year, Aberdare, Mountain Ash, Tonypany Community College (predecessor to Ysgol Nantgwyn), Ferndale, and Porth County (predecessor to Porth Community School) were the five lowest performing schools at secondary level. Therefore, there is a historic pattern of poor attendance in these areas.
- 5.4 The breadth of schools across the categorisation criteria will provide us with comparative information to see how well these roles can help support varying aspects within schools and determine if they are needed across all secondary/through schools.
- 5.5 All but Porth Community School rank in the five most deprived secondary/through schools when looking at data sets from the WIMD. Porth Community School ranks 8th. The two schools falling in 6th and 7th place are Hawthorn High School and Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhondda. However, attendance at these schools was significantly higher in the 2018/19 academic year than Porth Community School as they achieved 92.59% and 93.27% respectively compared to Porth Community School's 90.80% in the same period.
- 5.6 As part of the job description for these posts, we would require work to be undertaken with feeder primary schools particularly Year 6 pupils and their families to enhance the support we offer for the transition period. We are confident this would help pupils and families entering Year 7 to have a focal point in their new school who could support with any queries or concerns and prevent these from becoming attendance issues.

6. MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING OF THE SCHEME

- 6.1 Family Engagement Officers would be line managed by the school in which they were placed but would work on priorities jointly agreed by the school and local authority. The local authority would be jointly involved in the interview process.
- 6.2 Schools will be requested to complete a self-evaluation audit of current practice around attendance at the start of the scheme.
- 6.3 The results of this audit will be discussed with the Attendance and Wellbeing Service and where appropriate school improvement officers, to agree an action plan for improving practice utilising the Family Engagement Officer role.
- 6.4 As the funding will be provided with a very clear remit for improving attendance, headteachers will be held accountable for delivering improved outcomes as a result of the investment. Clear performance targets aimed at improving rates of attendance and engagement will be set and written updates will be required against this action plan in School Improvement Forums/Progress Meetings in newly re-organised yellow schools, amber and red categorised schools. Alternatively, progress will be reviewed in Support and Challenge meetings as defined in the Graduated Response to Attendance and Exclusions Protocol.

- 6.5 As this role will be critical in providing the link between school, families and external agencies, schools will also be required to evidence effective partnership working between the Family Engagement Officer, parents/carers and external agencies such as the Attendance and Wellbeing Service, Inclusion Services, Resilient Families, Youth Engagement and Participation etc.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 No Equality Impact Assessment is required at the current time.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 There are no consultation implications arising from the content of the report.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Family Engagement Officers are employed at Grade 6 of the Pay Scale. We are initially looking to fund posts across a 17 month trial period from 1st April 2020 to 31st August 2021. To employ officers to cover six areas would equate to approximately £174,000 (including on costs) per annum. It is proposed that this cost will be met from within existing resources.
- 9.2 Regular performance reporting in relation to the funding will be required and outcomes closely monitored.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 10.1 None at present.

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

- 11.1 Educational performance has a clear link to the Council's priority of Building a Strong Economy. Improved educational performance will have a positive impact on this priority

12. CONCLUSION

- 12.1 We are seeking financial support and agreement to help tackle poor attendance at secondary level via the employment of Family Engagement Officers in six educational settings.
- 12.2 We will monitor the effectiveness of the pilot to ascertain whether further rollout is needed across all secondary settings.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee-

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Background Papers-

None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972
AS AMENDED BY
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET
13th FEBRUARY 2020

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES IN
DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR J ROSSER.**

Author: Daniel Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service

Background papers – None.

Officer to contact: Daniel Williams – 01443 744298

APPENDIX 1

Secondary Phase Attendance 2018/19 exc. Special Schools

ESTAB	SCHOOL NAME	No Of Pupils	Present		Authorised		Unauthorised		Poss_sess Sessions
			Sessions	%	Sessions	%	Sessions	%	
4106	Aberdare Community School	1187	325883	91.56	17552	4.93	12479	3.51	355914
4019	Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School	1068	300333	92.99	11812	3.66	10818	3.35	322963
4602	Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive School	777	213080	93.62	10310	4.53	4218	1.85	227608
4083	Ferndale Community School	605	166531	91.95	9044	4.99	5527	3.05	181102
4027	Hawthorn High School	656	182260	92.59	6697	3.40	7889	4.01	196846
4053	Mountain Ash Comprehensive School	872	235030	90.77	11541	4.46	12351	4.77	258922
4022	Pontypridd High School	791	224208	93.06	9399	3.90	7331	3.04	240938
5501	Porth Community School	722	192165	90.80	9621	4.55	9845	4.65	211631
4604	St John Baptist C in W High School	806	234587	94.67	10215	4.12	3001	1.21	247803
5503	Tonyrefail Community School	897	241536	90.89	12679	4.77	11544	4.34	265759
4081	Treorchy Comprehensive School	1306	370321	93.48	19736	4.98	6075	1.53	396132
4096	Y Pant Comprehensive School	1169	336292	94.79	13446	3.79	5022	1.42	354760
4097	Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhondda	623	175983	93.27	8428	4.47	4263	2.26	188674
4054	Ysgol Gyfun Garth Olwg	692	199229	93.71	9883	4.65	3500	1.65	212612
4105	Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun	861	247155	93.68	12476	4.73	4185	1.59	263816
5500	Ysgol Llanhari	451	130447	94.49	6325	4.58	1286	0.93	138058
5502	Ysgol Nantgwyn	593	159531	91.93	8744	5.04	5256	3.03	173531
	Total	13932	3934571	92.86	187908	4.43	114590	2.70	4237069

Family Engagement Officer Example Job Description**JOB DESCRIPTION & PERSON SPECIFICATION**

Department	Education & Lifelong Learning
School	
Post Title:	Pupil/Family Engagement Officer
Vision Post Number:	
Responsible to:	
Posts reporting:	
DBS Required Level:	Enhanced
Date of Description:	

Responsibilities

- Be aware of and comply with policies and procedures relating to child protection, health and safety and security, confidentiality and data protection, reporting all concerns to the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher or Senior Management team.
- Be aware and support difference and ensure equal opportunities.
- Contribute to the overall ethos / work / aims of the school.
- Appreciate and support the role of other professionals working in the school.
- Participate in training and other learning activities and performance development as required.
- Maintain a clean and tidy working environment including your surrounding area.
- Work collaboratively with feeder schools to build relationships with families prior to transition.

To carry out health and safety responsibilities in accordance with the Division's Health & Safety Responsibilities document.

To undertake such other duties and responsibilities commensurate with the grade, as may be reasonably required by the Headteacher, or as a mutually agreed development opportunity.

THE CONTENTS OF THE DOCUMENT WILL BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW FROM TIME TO TIME IN CONSULTATION WITH THE POST HOLDER. JOB DESCRIPTIONS MAY BE AMENDED TO REFLECT AND RECORD SUCH CHANGES.

Protecting Children and Vulnerable Adults is a core responsibility of all staff. Staff are expected to alert their line manager to any concerns they may have regarding the abuse or inappropriate treatment of a Child or Young Person, or Vulnerable Adults.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

The Person Specification sets out the knowledge and / or qualifications, past experience and personal competencies that would be ideal for this particular post.

The **Experience** section describes what is required in terms of what is needed to undertake this job.

The **Qualifications/Training** section describes the required standards needed to undertake this particular role.

The **Knowledge/Skills** section describes the kinds of non-technical skills, abilities and personal characteristics that the ideal person for this particular role would have.

	Essential	Desirable
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General clerical / administrative / SIMS experience 	
Qualification / Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good numeracy and literacy skills. • NVQ Level 2 [or equivalent] or experience in the relevant discipline. • EWC Registration 	
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of relevant policies, and codes of practice. • Understand school roles, responsibilities and your position within these. 	
Skills & Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective use of specialist ICT packages. • Use of relevant equipment / resources. • Good Keyboard skills • Ability to relate well to pupils, colleagues and outside agencies. • Work constructively and positively as part of a team. 	<p>Level 1 Welsh Language skills (Basic reading, writing, speaking and understanding) with the aim of improvement through CPD”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Reading – Can read some basic words and phrases with understanding ·Speaking – Can hold a basic conversation in welsh i.e. basic greetings ·Writing – Can write basic messages on everyday topics

		·Understanding – Can understand parts of a basic conversation
Personal Characteristics		