



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022-23**

**EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**14<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2023**

**SCHOOL ATTENDANCE DATA**

**Author(s): Daniel Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on school attendance data across the local authority and the actions of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service and wider Education and Inclusion Services to increase attendance levels.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the 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 within the report.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Prior to the pandemic, annual figures were brought before the committee ordinarily during Spring Term, however there were no reports that focused solely on this area between February 2020 and March 2023. The report brought in March 2023 focused on the need, as we move beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, to increase the focus on ensuring learners attend school when they can.
- 3.2 The Welsh Government revoked the School Performance and Absence Targets (Wales) Regulations 2011 (in force from 7<sup>th</sup> August 2020). As a result, there has been no statutory requirement for schools to set targets for future years or report on those previously set for 2019 to 2020 onwards. This arrangement continues for 2023 to 2024 although schools have been asked to set targets on a non-statutory basis. Annual statutory data collections were also halted during the pandemic but were reintroduced in the 2022/23 academic year.

#### 4. AN ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL PHASE ATTENDANCE

4.1 The tables below show the overall school attendance rates broken down by phase for the last four academic years. These figures are for statutory school age only across mainstream and special schools (pupil referral units are not included). Primary data is full academic year and secondary data is shown up to the end of Summer 1 in line with Welsh Government data collection dates even though this did not take place in all of these years as outlined in 3.2.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Primary Phase Attendance								
Academic Year	All Pupils	Non FSM	FSM	EAL	SEN	Persistent Absence	Gypsy, Roma and/or Traveller	Service Family
2019/20	93.0%	94.0%	90.1%	92.2%	90.1%	5.4%	86.8%	93.7%
2020/21	91.1%	93.1%	86.4%	92.1%	87.6%	11.7%	61.8%	93.3%
2021/22	89.8%	91.2%	85.4%	91.1%	85.6%	10.8%	69.0%	92.0%
2022/23	91.0%	92.3%	86.8%	91.2%	86.6%	9.3%	75.7%	92.8%

Rhondda Cynon Taf Secondary Phase Attendance								
Academic Year	All Pupils	Non FSM	FSM	EAL	SEN	Persistent Absence	Gypsy, Roma and/or Traveller	Service Family
2019/20	92.1%	93.4%	88.0%	95.1%	88.0%	7.9%	75.2%	95.3%
2020/21	85.5%	88.6%	76.7%	91.7%	81.8%	23.2%	53.3%	89.9%
2021/22	85.2%	87.6%	76.8%	91.5%	81.4%	22.3%	69.9%	88.1%
2022/23	85.8%	88.3%	77.0%	91.7%	82.4%	21.0%	67.1%	88.2%

Table 1. All data presented above is reflective of PLASC data taken during January of the academic year. Persistent Absence is the % of all learners who have below 80% attendance. SEN attendance does not currently include ALN.

4.2 As shown in the tables above, we can see the significant impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on attendance levels across RCT with a drop in primary attendance of 3.2 percentage points at primary phase between 2019/20 and 2021/22 and a 6.9 percentage point drop at secondary phase across the same timeframe. We have however seen encouraging signs at primary schools last year, with a 1.2 percentage point increase between 2021/22 and 2022/23 although still down 2 percentage points when compared to 2019/20; secondary schools with a 0.6 percentage point increase between 2021/22 and 2022/23 although still significantly below 2019/20 levels.

4.3 However, Table 1 must be taken into a wider context around attendance coding at this time. As a result of the pandemic, for the academic years 2020/21 and 2021/22 there were additional temporary attendance codes introduced by Welsh Government. These were for confirmed Covid cases and for those isolating/accessing remote

learning. The confirmed case code was statistically an authorised absence and mapped back to illness coding. However, the code for isolation/remote learning was statistically a 'not required to attend' mark and therefore does not appear in attendance data collection figures presented above. Similarly, the existing Y code usually reserved for partial or full closures of schools was also utilised during these years when cohorts were forced to isolate and again, these are also 'not required to attend' marks and do not appear in attendance data percentages as a result. Physical absence for these academic years is therefore higher than percentage figures alone would suggest which again provides some reassurance in the rising attendance marks in 2022/23 which is from a lower benchmark than the percentage figures alone may show.

- 4.4 From the data presented above, we can see that improvements have been made across all but one group of learners in 2022/23 compared to the previous academic year. However, there remains considerable challenge particularly at secondary phase and for eligible Free School Meal learners. Secondary phase attendance was 1.7% below the Welsh average of 87.5% in 2022/23 (gap was 1.0% in 2018/19), 21<sup>st</sup> position across Wales and therefore is a central focus for continued improvement.

#### **RCT and Welsh Government Comparisons**

(mainstream secondary only)

<b>Secondary</b>	<b>RCT</b>	<b>Welsh Average</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Overall Attendance	85.8%	87.5%	-1.7%
FSM	76.8%	79.4%	-2.6%
Non-FSM	88.3%	89.8%	-1.5%
FSM Gap	11.5%	10.4%	+1.1%

- 4.5 Although we do not yet have primary figures from Welsh Government, we can analyse some overall data from the regular Welsh Government data releases. The last release of the 2022/23 academic year (available here: [Attendance of pupils in maintained schools: 5 September 2022 to 24 July 2023 | GOV.WALES](#)) suggests the All Wales attendance rate is lowest at year 11 which is reflected in RCT, and the gap between learners aged 5-15 who are eligible for Free School Meals and those who are not was 7.3%. Our internal data suggests the gap in RCT was slightly wider at 7.7%.
- 4.6 Welsh Government continues to provide data on attendance at regular intervals although these are not classed as National Statistics or verified data. The latest figures at time of writing cover the current academic year and are available here [Attendance of pupils in maintained schools: 4 September to 10 November 2023 |](#)

[GOV.WALES](http://gov.wales). This data shows that currently RCT attendance for learners aged 5 - 15 is 90.8% (our own data for the same period last year shows attendance at 90.6%) which is 0.5 percentage points behind the Welsh average of 91.3%. This would place RCT as the 17<sup>th</sup> highest local authority attendance.

- 4.7 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. As this includes secondary pupil data, the parameters used are the same as secondary attendance in table 1 and include up to the end of Summer Term 1.

Academic Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
% Attendance RCT	68.8%	65.9%	69.0%	63.5%

Table 2. PRU Attendance across the last 4 academic years

- 4.8 PRU attendance has been separated from the data presented in Table 1 as Welsh Government has historically not held a statutory requirement for PRU attendance to be submitted. Across similar lines to mainstream and special school attendance, PRU and EOTAS attendance is stronger at primary phase than secondary phase (88.0% and 53.4% respectively in 2022/23) but the overall figure remains a concern particularly for some of our learners accessing EOTAS provision who can be heavily disengaged.

## **5. ATTENDANCE AND WELLBEING SERVICE**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 The RCT Attendance and Wellbeing Service undertake the following statutory duties on behalf of the Council:

- 5.2.1 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.

At the start of the pandemic, all prosecution cases were withdrawn but these were reintroduced during the 2021/22 academic year. This remains a 'last resort' option and will only be considered if a parent/carer does not effectively engage with the process to secure the learner's attendance. In the 2022/23 academic year 121 prosecutions were pursued (120 successfully). 91 of these formed part of the Single Justice Procedure as a result of escalation following non-payment of a fixed penalty notice (FPN). The remaining 30 were progressed following attendance referrals to the service. In total, 971 monitoring period were set in relation to FPNs for non-attendance. Of these 466 were not issued after the warning due to improved attendance. A further 161 were also not issued for other reasons. 207 FPN's were issued and paid.

- 5.2.2 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 (345 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. Escalation processes are in place for any school who continually perform poorly in this area.

- 5.2.3 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 12 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 consistent over recent years but may be underreported as we rely on notification from the family during school admission phases.

- 5.2.4 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 120 'Children Missing Education' referrals made to the Attendance and Wellbeing Service during 2022/23 compared to 104 in 2021/22. 111 children were located with 9 ongoing cases. Where the children resided in RCT, support was given to enrol the child into an appropriate education setting.

- 5.2.5 **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 2022/23, the Attendance and Wellbeing Service issued 201 child performance licences (up from 120 in 2021/22) and 5 work permits for child of statutory school age (up from 4 in 2021/22). In addition, 48 chaperones have been licensed to accompany and support children and young people whilst performing (up from 29 in 2021/22).

- 5.2.6 **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).

Truancy operations did not place throughout the pandemic but restarted in targeted areas in the 2022/23 academic year in line with the Attendance Strategy.

- 5.3 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.

- 5.4 During the academic year 2022/23 the Council's Attendance and Wellbeing Service performance includes the following:

- 978 Education Appraisals for families in receipt of support from the Resilient Families Service (942 in 2021/22).
- 773 new open case referrals received (841 in 2021/22).
- 7,135 Wellbeing Response Visits undertaken (6,802 in 2021/22) for 3,826 learners. 3,690 visits (51.7%) resulted in improved attendance when comparing the 40 days prior to visit, and 40 days afterwards.
- Prosecuted 30 parents for non-attendance of their children following open case work (28 in 2021/22).
- 18 schools received additional support for attendance via Progress Meetings, Team Around the School or single-agency response. 11 of the 18 (61.1%) have improved their attendance when comparing Autumn Term 1.

- 5.5 An attendance event for Headteachers and Attendance Leads was held in Hawthorn Leisure Centre in July 2023 with over 80 school representatives. The session covered LA expectations, Estyn processes and good practice sharing from RCT and out-of-county schools. A maintained focus on attendance practices and processes will continue in the 2023/24 academic year and beyond.
- 5.6 Additional support has also been provided to schools since early 2020 in the form of Family Engagement Officers. Funding has been provided via RCT Cabinet, and later through Welsh Government, with match-funding in 29 schools. These schools were identified through a combination of attendance and deprivation data in order to support some of the most vulnerable learners across RCT. Termly monitoring reports are submitted from each of these schools. More information on Family Engagement Officers was presented to Members as part of the Community Focused School and Child Poverty report on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2023.
- 5.7 Additional funding was received from Welsh Government for the 2022/23 financial year for Education Welfare services. RCT has utilised this funding to employ three additional temporary Attendance and Wellbeing Officers, a Targeted Support Officer, and Educational Psychology support for the service for the most difficult and entrenched cases and/or those with Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). This will be coupled with a pilot this academic year for multi-agency EBSA forums in secondary schools to discuss learners facing these difficulties and the support that can offered by school and partners.

## **6. WELSH GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE**

- 6.1 Additional attendance guidance was published by Welsh Government in October 2023 in the form of the 'Belonging, Engaging and Participating' guidance document which can be found here: [gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-10/improving-school-attendance-guidance\\_0.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-10/improving-school-attendance-guidance_0.pdf)
- 6.2 This guidance document will have implications for future reports to Scrutiny committee as well as implications for comparative data via the school half termly reports. Most notably the definition of persistent absence previously used in Wales, and used in this report in table 1, covered learners with absence over 20% (below 80% attendance). The latest guidance revises this figure to over 10% absence (below 90% attendance) and brings the Welsh definition of persistent absence in line with England.
- 6.3 The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing will also form part of the Welsh Government national attendance taskforce to look at the strategic

direction and priorities for driving further improvement in attendance and re-engaging learners.

- 6.4 On release of the guidance document outlined in 6.1, the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language also outlined activity underway to review exclusions guidance, the development of referred and commissioning guidance for EOTAS provision and to develop school behaviour guidance. We hope this documentation will also strengthen our approaches moving forward to enhance our support to learners across RCT.

## **7. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no Welsh Language implications as a result of the recommendations of this report

## **8. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT**

- 8.1 There has been no consultation to inform this report.

## **9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

- 9.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report

## **10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 10.1 There are no legal implications as a result of the recommendations set above

## **11. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES / THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

- 11.1 The Attendance Strategy is aimed at meeting the objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan for People by 'ensuring People are independent, healthy and successful' through improving services for children and young people as well as their families. It will also meet the Prosperity target by ensuring we have good schools with improved attendance, so all children have access to a great education.

- 11.2 The processes and interventions directed by AWS meet the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by fostering effective school and community relations via Cluster based officers to create a Wales of cohesive communities while improving the prosperity and resilience of our children, young people and families.

## **12. CONCLUSION**



- 12.1 Improving school attendance remains a priority for the local authority and its schools and formed part of one of the recommendations by Estyn following this year's LA inspection. Whilst the pandemic has had a considerable impact on attendance, there are some improvements in the 2022/23 academic year, and we are hopeful the Strategy and focus on attendance will support continued improvement in the coming years.
- 12.2 Excellent school attendance is key to raising educational 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. We will continue to liaise with all stakeholders to ensure that attendance remains a priority at local, regional, and national level. We will also continue to implement our Attendance Strategy to drive forward our ambitions to increase attendance via close working relationships with our schools and school communities.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EDUCATION & INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**14<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2023**

**SCHOOL ATTENDANCE DATA**

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