



# **Attendance & Punctuality at School Policy**

August, 2023



## **CONTENTS**

| <b>Title</b>                               | <b>Page number</b> |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Introduction                               | 3                  |
| Statutory requirements                     | 4                  |
| Role of the school                         | 5                  |
| School Policies and early prevention       | 5                  |
| Governing bodies                           | 8                  |
| Role Parent/Carer                          | 8                  |
| Family holidays                            | 11                 |
| Extended overseas trips                    | 11                 |
| Emigration                                 | 12                 |
| Religious Observation                      | 12                 |
| Bullying                                   | 12                 |
| Welfare checks                             | 13                 |
| Children Missing from Education            | 13                 |
| Addition Learning Needs                    | 14                 |
| Children Looked After                      | 14                 |
| Young Carers                               | 15                 |
| Pregnant School Girls                      | 15                 |
| Traveller and Ethnic minority              | 16                 |
| Service Children                           | 16                 |
| Local Authority/ Education Welfare Service | 17                 |

# **Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council**

## **Attendance & Punctuality Policy**

### **Introduction**

We are pleased to share our attendance and punctuality guidance which we hope will support parents/carers, young people, schools/governors and other professionals. Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council is committed to creating a learning environment, which encourages and supports high levels of achievement and outcomes for all our pupils.

An essential part of striving for excellence is through regular attendance at school, pupils who are absent from school lose valuable teaching and learning time, including valuable life skills. Therefore, we expect the highest attendance and punctuality from all our pupils, at all times.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, is therefore committed to improving levels of school attendance and punctuality. We aim to do this by; promoting the value and importance of regular school attendance; reducing all forms of unjustified absenteeism, especially levels of persistent absenteeism, and we will be proactive in our challenge to strive for excellence for all our pupils. Good regular attendance is 95% and above, however, we are continuously working towards our goal of 100% attendance and punctuality.

We believe it is vital that children and young people have access to appropriate and effective learning opportunities and provision, which will enable a pupil to reach their full potential, and help the early identification of any barriers to learning.

A child's success at school can be affected by poor attendance. In addition, research shows that children who are not in school are more vulnerable and can be easily drawn into crime, anti-social behaviour and be exploited. Poor attendance can impact a young person wellbeing, become socially isolated and increase the likelihood of not being in education, employment or training after leaving school. Early assessment, identification and intervention are key to a young person's success.

Regular attendance at school supports the wider development of pupils such as social skills and a sense of belonging. The Curriculum for Wales, is based on four purposes, which helps to develop the lifelong skills needed to become full and rounded members of the community. The significance of attendance at school must not be underestimated, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council believes that: all children and young people have a right to access, an education appropriate to their individual needs, maintaining the balance of rights and responsibilities between children and young people, parents, schools, other professionals and the wider community.

## **Statutory Responsibilities**

Under the Education Act (1996) Parents/Carers have the primary responsibility for ensuring their child(ren) of compulsory school age receive a suitable education, either by attendance at school or otherwise. Section 7, of the Act states: The parent/carer of every child of compulsory school age must ensure, their child receives an efficient, full time education, suitable to his/her age, aptitude and ability and any additional needs he/she may have, this can be achieved by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

Section 444 further states that:

If a child of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly at school, his parent/carer is guilty of an offence.

An offence is **not** committed if it can be demonstrated:

- The pupil was absent with leave (authorised absence).
- The pupil was medically ill or prevented from attending school by an unavoidable cause, to which we may ask for a letter from your GP/Consultant.
- The absence occurred on a day set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil or parents/carers belong.
- A limited defence is available to the parents of travelling children.

What does regular attendance at school mean? The Supreme Court has determined that the word 'regularly' in the context of section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996 means 'in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school'.

In practice, this means that a pupil (your child) should attend school each day that the school is open unless their absences has been authorised by the Head teacher. It is therefore, important that school policies on attendance and punctuality set out clear expectations with regard to attendance for their registered pupils and the actions, intervention and consequences that may follow should a pupil fail to attend school regularly.

The act also places a legal obligation on:

- The Local Authority to secure an efficient education, which is available to meet the needs of its population and to enforce attendance.
- Schools to mark the attendance register AM/PM each day and notify the Local Authority of a child's regular absence from school (Welsh Assembly circular 203/2016) and the Education (Pupil Registration) Amendment Regulations 2010. Or any welfare concerns relating to the absence.

- Under section 437 of the Education Act 1996, Local Authorities have a duty to ensure children and young people are receiving a suitable education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Further information can be found in Section 4 of the 'Inclusion and Pupil Support' guidance document.
- Section 436A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires local authorities to make arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children residing in their area who are not receiving a 'suitable education'. This legal requirement was integrated with the wide range of duties placed on Local Authorities, including the Children Act 2004 (sections 25-29).

### **Role of the school**

Schools have to be open to pupils 380 sessions each academic year and are responsible for supporting the attendance of all their pupils and for responding in a timely manner to barriers, which may lead to non-attendance. Schools who adopt a positive and proactive approach towards attendance concerns and encourage parents/carers to take an active role in the schooling of their children, will see the best outcomes, which includes attainment levels.

Schools are legally required to take an attendance register twice a day, and are required to publish information relating to levels of attendance and absenteeism. When attendance at school starts to show signs of concern, such as being persistently absent, schools need to follow the All Wales Attendance Framework, in a proactive and timely manner. The allocated Education Welfare Officer will meet with schools regularly to offer professional advice and guidance. The Local Authority recommend, absence from school should be unauthorised once 'school letter two' has been issued, unless there is medical evidence supporting the absence, this will help prevent absences becoming entrenched.

It is recommended that schools refer absences, of 10 days or more to their Education Welfare Officer, where all attempts to contact the parent/carer has failed. The Education Welfare Officer, will make a 'Welfare Visit', to ascertain if everything is okay at home, and make appropriate referrals where deemed necessary including triggering the Children Missing from Education (CME) Protocol.

### **School Policies and Early Interventions**

The importance of regular school attendance cannot be over/under estimated. Regular attendance is a pre-requisite to a good education and securing it must therefore be a high priority for schools, governors, LAs, parents and the pupils themselves. By failing to attend school regularly, pupils diminish the value of the education being provided for them.

It is important to ensure school attendance is seen as a priority for all, attendance at school is 'everyone business'. Excellent attendance is an essential factor of all

outstanding schools. All schools should have a clear escalation of intervention, which place exemplary attendance at its heart. Tackling persistent absence is, of course, a prerequisite, schools that perform the strongest have identified pupils at risk well before the threshold has been reached and know which of its vulnerable groups are disproportionately represented in its absence bands.

You can support effective attendance by:

- Demonstrating a strong attendance ethos;
- Be proactive in managing lateness;
- Early identification of absences and reporting this to the parent/carers;
- Effective first day responses to absences;
- Regularly inform parents/carers of their child's attendance/absences
- Having a clear policy on absence and punctuality, ensuring it is widely publicised in school receptions and webpages;
- Having an effective, non-bureaucratic system for monitoring attendance;
- Using attendance data and other information to improve school and pupil performance;
- Promoting the importance and legal requirements of regular attendance to pupils and parents;
- Holding multi-agency attendance panels;
- Intervening early when individual pupils give cause for concern;
- Have processes in place where a pupil can discuss any concerns they may have;
- Establish peer on peer mentors to help build positive relationships;
- Consider timetable options with the aim of obtaining pupil engagement;
- Timely and a consistent approach to following the All Wales Attendance Framework;
- Having support systems in place for vulnerable pupils;
- Creating a young person school council for attendance ensuring pupil voice;
- Rewarding and celebrating good and improved attendance; including the Local Authority awards for attendance, and
- Ensuring those with greatest need received additional support.
- Consider attendance problems which could be link to any unidentified additional learning need.

There needs to be a 'whole school' attendance policy, which consults with parents/carer/young people and needs to be aligned to the local authority 'Attendance and Punctuality' policy including statutory guidance's from the Welsh Government and Legislation. The policy needs to set out how attendance at your school will be addressed both in terms of individual pupils and following a timely graduated response and as a 'whole school' approach. Dealing with attendance issues on an individual pupil basis alone is not enough; the policy should reflect the

cohort and the community in which the school is located working in partnership with LA and agencies to enable best possible outcomes for all.

The school attendance policy should underpin all actions, which the school will take to promote and improve attendance. The policy should reflect;

- The systems for promoting attendance, recording attendance, absences and lateness;
- School attendance strategy and vision for improving attendance;
- The roles, responsibilities and contributions of the whole school community, Including staff, parents/carers and pupil voice;
- Ensure pupil participation and voice is integral part of the schools vision and ethos.  
School staff understand they have a key role in promoting school attendance and pupil engagement.
- Neath Port Talbot Council considers excellent attendance to be 95% or above.
- Arrangements for the monitoring of attendance and the measures that will be taken to tackle poor attendance, including the involvement of Local Authority and partner agencies;
- School attendance policies should also include information on: Parental responsibility for attendance and how the school will work with parent/carers and the pupil;
- The time the school open and closes;
- Procedure for parents/carers to notify the school when their child are absent;
- How and when schools will contact parents/carers as a follow up to school absence;

Schools could consider parents/carers to sign the school attendance policy or sign the home school agreement with reference to the school attendance policy upon enrolling their child at the school. In secondary schools, the young person could also sign an agreement they will engage with their learning through regular attendance at school.

The policy should make clear to parents/carers that unauthorised absences and poor attendance at school can have a negative impact on their child's education.

Schools must ensure that their policy also complies with the statutory requirements mentioned in this policy, including; Equality Act (2010) and the Human Rights Act (1998), Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales (2021)/Keeping Learners Safe (2022) and Children Act 1989/2004. Provide information that is accessible and understandable to all parents/carer, including translation and interpretation.

This is particularly important for parent/carers who are new to the country, which may not be aware of the importance of school attendance and of the law relating to attendance and punctuality at school.

Pupils returning to school after prolonged periods of absences need to feel supported and welcomed to ensure the return to school is successful. Schools can consider; Tailored praise and encouragement, time to catch up on their missed lessons to help build confidence in their learning, daily/weekly 'check in's' to discuss how the pupil is feeling, their progress, their wellbeing, contact the parents regularly to discuss progress and consider any targeted support that may be required.

### **Governing Bodies**

The role of the Governing Body in relation to attendance and punctuality is to support and challenge the school by asking questions about attendance data and school processes. Useful questions may be:

- How does the school use the data from the LA?
- Are we holding regular governor attendance meetings?
- How are authorised and unauthorised attendance examined?
- What does the school do to reward good and improving attendance?
- Are the strategies effective?
- Are all pupils attending school regularly?
- Does the school refer or ask for advice from the LA/EWO in a timely manner

The governing body may wish to appoint a governor with specific responsibility for pupil attendance. The pupil attendance governor is the link between the governing body and the school in relation to attendance and should meet the designated staff lead regularly, on a termly basis. The nominated governor should help the governing body ensure the statutory duties in relation to pupil attendance and punctuality are fulfilled and that staff and governors are appropriately trained.

### **Role of Parent/carers**

**A definition of a parent is set out in section 576 of the Education Act 1996 and includes;**

- **Any person, who, although not a parent, has parental responsibility (as defined in the Children Act 1989) for a child or young person and;**
- **Any person who has care of a child or young person.**

Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, the law states, parent/carers is responsible for ensuring that their child of compulsory school age receives efficient



full-time education that is suitable to their child's age, ability and aptitude and to any additional learning needs the child may have.

Parents can do a great deal to support the regular and punctual attendance of their children by:

- take an active interest in their child's school life and work;
- attend parents' evenings and other school events;
- ensure that their child completes his/her homework
- ensure all gaming consoles/social media platforms are switched off at an appropriate time;
- Regular/appropriate bedtime routine;
- be aware of letters from school which their child brings home;
- ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day;
- ensure that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness or days of religious observance;
- always notify the school as soon as possible - preferably on the first morning - of any absence;
- confirm this in writing when the child returns to school;
- not book family holidays during term-time;
- talk to the school/education welfare service if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to attend.

Parents should be reminded that **it is only the school who may decide whether an absence is to be authorised or unauthorised**. A letter, email, telephone call or text message does not authorise an absence; only the school's acceptance of the explanation offered authorises the absence. It is important to clarify precisely what constitutes authorised or unauthorised absence. The school policy should ensure that there should be no misunderstanding or ambiguity on this point. Examples could be given, such as:

**Authorised Absences** are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason such as an illness or other unavoidable causes (e.g. bereavement). Where possible, medical appointments should be booked outside of the school day, however if this is not possible then absences can be recorded as authorised if proof of the appointment is provided.

Parents should be aware that unless there is a valid medical reason backed with medical evidence such as a GP letter, stating that your child should not return to school following such appointments, your child's absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. Repeated absences as a result of illness will also require GP/Consultant letter and if applicable a report if your child is to have continued to be authorised.

When the absence is authorised, schools will use the appropriate code to record the absence. It is essential that there is consistency in the way that schools record

absences so that data provided to the Local Authority and Welsh Government is correct.

Absence from school will be authorised if it is for the following reasons:

- Sickness, unless medical evidence has been requested.
- Unavoidable medical/dental appointments (Medical evidence such as a consultant/GP letter may be requested).
- Days of religious observance, in line with those published yearly by Welsh Government.
- Exceptional family circumstances, such as bereavement.

**Unauthorised Absences** are those which the Local Authority does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave of absence' has been agreed by the School. These include:

Absence from school should not be authorised for the following reasons:

- Shopping
- Haircuts
- Missed bus.
- Sleeping late
- No uniform
- Looking after brothers or sisters
- Minding the home
- Birthdays
- Holidays during school time
- Parents keeping children of school unnecessarily, e.g. for company
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Children who arrive at school too late to get a mark
- Repeat absences linked to illness without medical evidence

All children should be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for absence is unavoidable. We acknowledge that sometimes children are reluctant to attend school; if there are any problems please speak to your school. If your child is reluctant to attend, it is inappropriate to conceal this absence or to give into pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and in fact will only make the situation worse. Permitting absence from school without a good reason is an offence by the parent.

**Below is a breakdown on the number of lessons missed linked to your child's percentage of attendance.**

| Attendance during one school year | Equals to number of days absent | Which is approximately this many weeks absent | Which means this number of lessons missed |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 95%                               | 9 days                          | 2 weeks                                       | 50 lessons                                |
| 90%                               | 19 days                         | 4 weeks                                       | 100 lessons                               |
| 85%                               | 29 days                         | 6 weeks                                       | 150 lessons                               |
| 80%                               | 38 days                         | 8 weeks                                       | 200 lessons                               |

### **Other reasons for absences**

#### **Family Holidays during term time**

The Pupil Registration (Wales) Regulations 2010 gives schools discretionary power to grant ten days leave for the purpose of an annual family holiday during term time. In exceptional circumstances a school may authorise a holiday of more than ten days.

Parents do not have the automatic right to withdraw their child (ren) from school for a holiday, and in law, have to apply for permissions in advance. There is no guarantee your holiday will be authorised and you may be faced with a 'Fixed Penalty Notice', if more than one holiday is taken during an academic year.

#### **Extended Overseas Trips**

The school should only agreed to the absence, where schools have taken into full account the school & and local authority attendance policy, the Attendance and Progression Framework by the Welsh Government and individual circumstances. Parents should be advised of the impact such a lengthy absence will have upon their child(ren) education and be encouraged, where possible to take their holiday to coincide with school closure and parents need to be encouraged to plan for trips during the 13 weeks available to them, when schools close.

An agreed date of return should be made with the school prior to the trip, failure to return on the agreed date, can result in your child(ren) being taken off roll and reported as a child missing from education.

Parents should be advised that their child's name will be removed from the school register if he/she has not returned to school 10 days after expected day of return. In these circumstances the parents would need to make an application for re-admission on their return to UK/Neath Port Talbot and you may not be guaranteed the school of their choice, if all available places within the school/year group are full. Therefore, a change of school would then be required. In these circumstances schools should make contact with the Education Welfare Service, prior to the removal from roll.

## **Emigration**

If a child / family emigrate and the school are aware of the destination and there are no safeguarding concerns the child name can be removed from the school roll with appropriate notification to the Headteacher and the Education Welfare Service. If there are concerns or destination remains unknown, please follow the Children Missing in Education & Safeguarding procedures.

In all cases, schools are expected to obtain as much information as possible, such as; new school details, new address and where applicable confirmation of travel to ensure effective safeguarding procedures are followed and a child does not go missing from education.

## **Religious Observance**

Absences linked to religious observation, should be authorised, the dates linked to 'Western Christian Festivals and Holy Days' often fall in term-time and during the school days. The religious observation dates are available via the Welsh Government website each academic year, the dates of religious observations will be contained within the guidance. Only the dates within this guidance can be authorised using the 'R' code granting a leave absence.

## **Bullying**

A young person may not attend school because they are afraid of/are being 'bullied' or experience a behaviour, which may frighten or alarm them. This emotional impact can increase truancy rates and encourage premature school dropouts.

In 2019 the Welsh Government launched Rights, Respect, Equality; statutory guidance which all schools/Local Authorities have to follow and use as a tool kit to tackling bullying. The work of the Education Welfare Service is ensure learners have access to appropriate education provision (Page 21 Rights, Respect, Equality; statutory guidance for Local Authorities) and the main area of support is attendance and school including advising on the welfare of the child or young person.

Schools should work with the young person and their parent/carer to resolve the issue of non-attendance at school and put measures in place to help engagement back into school.

## **Welfare Checks**

The Education Welfare Service will attempt to ascertain the whereabouts of a child once they have been absent without contact for 10 days, sooner if there are safeguarding concerns. This is NOT a referral, the purpose of a visit, is to check the welfare/safeguarding of pupils who may be vulnerable or if there has been poor contact with parents.

This is intended to be a short visit and a firm reminder to a parent to contact school with regard to absence. In a small number of cases, the Education Welfare Officer may ask for a member of school staff, known agencies connected to the family/young person or the Police to accompany them for safeguarding reasons. The Education Welfare Officer will follow all safeguarding, health and safety, lone working protocols.

### **Children Missing from Education (CME)**

Children have the right to education under UK law, which is underpinned by the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. All children missing education are vulnerable. If a school becomes aware of any of its pupils are moving from a Neath Port Talbot school to a new Local Authority area, the school must, obtain the new school and address (if applicable) from the parent/carer.

When this has been received the school must contact the new Local Authority to confirm they have located the application for a new school place. Once this has been given in writing to the school, the school must contact the manager of the education welfare service who will confirm, the removal of the young person from the attendance register. If the receiving Local Authority has received no acknowledgement of the young person, the school must urgently refer the young person as CME to their EWO/manager of education welfare service.

*“Schools must undertake immediate actions to try and identify the whereabouts of the child/children. A record of their efforts made to trace the child should be recorded using “Children Missing Education School Checklist”. This includes recording of First day calling, third day calling, a letter home regarding unauthorised absence and querying the status of the child and then if the parent has not made any contact with the school, notification to the relevant Education Welfare Officer to undertake a welfare check. This should be done after three working days of non- contact. If there are safeguarding concerns, the child protection policy should be followed”.*

### **Role of the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCO) - Procedures and arrangements for children with statements/IDP who become non-attenders**

Should a child with a statement/IDP experience difficulties attending school, you will need to liaise with your ALNCO, Local Authority ALN advisor or Educational Psychologist and include your Education Welfare Office. It may be appropriate to consider a review of the IDP/Placement.

If the young person is in the correct identified provision and as a school you can meet the needs identified, the All Wales Attendance Framework must be followed to help prevent absences becoming entrenched.

If from the review meeting, it has been identified the young person needs another additional learning provision, the LA ALNST/EP service will provide support/advice and guidance.

### **Children Looked After (CLA)**

The Council recognises that children looked after are a recognised group of pupils who are liable to underachieve and we are determined to address this situation. Officers within Neath Port Talbot Council will work together to ensure that the targets for improving the educational attainment of looked after children are met, which includes regular attendance at school.

The CLA Education Officer has lead responsibility for ensuring that looked after children receive appropriate and co-ordinated educational support, who will liaise with the allocated social worker and, where relevant, the education welfare officer.

All schools must nominate a designated teacher for children looked after. This teacher will have a key co-ordinating and monitoring role with regard to the attendance of looked after children at his or her school.

### **Safeguarding and Child Protection**

All schools and the local authority have statutory duties to promote the safeguarding and wellbeing of all pupils. Absence from school is a potential safeguarding concern, tracking and monitoring attendance has a crucial safeguarding role. Attendance concerns can be a possible signal towards wellbeing concerns, concerns at home or exploitation, as mentioned in the 'Keeping Learners Safe' Guidance. The school should regularly review their data to identify and respond to those at risk. Safeguarding concerns should be reported to the schools designated safeguarding officer, the local authority education safeguarding lead and social services.

## **Young Carers**

The Council recognises that a number of children may be late to or absent from school because of their responsibilities in relation to their caring responsibilities. Schools should respond sympathetically to the needs of young carers but should combine this with a recognition that these children are nevertheless fully entitled to participate in all educational activities. Flexibility in regards to a school start time can be grant to support the young person and their caring responsibilities.

## **Pregnant School Girls**

When a school becomes aware that a pupil on their roll is pregnant, they should follow any concerns via their safeguarding protocol. The school must also make sure that the pupil is made aware of local services and how to access them.

The head teacher will ensure that the pupil is able to continue with their education and that teachers and other pupils deal with the pregnancy sensitively. A meeting should be arranged in school to complete a risk assessment, to develop a pre- and post-natal plan and look at what multi-agency support might be needed. This may include counselling if the young mum wants to talk about her situation and options. Awareness is needed of the reaction of other pupils to the pregnancy and the support structure that may be needed for the young mum regarding this. Childcare arrangements should form part of the meeting. The risk assessment will need to be reviewed every trimester.

It is good practice for schools to identify a designated person to have responsibility for school age parents so that they can oversee the young person's educational and pastoral support needs. This could be the Designated Officer for Safeguarding in the setting. The school should inform the school's Education Welfare Officer so that appropriate support can be put in place.

The pregnant schoolgirl is expected to attend school as regularly and punctually as her pregnancy allows as she is still a child of compulsory school age. Where necessary the pupil should be allowed out of class to rest during the day. Pregnant schoolgirls and expectant young fathers are entitled to attend ante-natal classes. These absences should be authorised, and code 'C' must be used for registration purposes.

A schoolgirl who becomes pregnant is entitled to up to 18 weeks authorised absence to cover the time immediately before and after the birth. It would also be reasonable to authorise two weeks' paternity leave for the expectant father following the birth. Code 'C' must be used for registration purposes for both young mum and dad. The

school should consider how they can best support the pupil's education during the period of maternity leave.

### **Traveller Children and Children from Ethnic Minorities**

Staff from the Vulnerable Learners Service work closely with EWOs to develop an appropriate and consistent school attendance strategy for ethnic minority pupils.

Depending upon the needs of the school, support may be involved with school staff and other support services in the following strategies to support regular attendance of children from ethnic minorities:

- advice and support to mainstream staff on extended holidays to country of origin;
- teachers and EWOs' liaison between Traveller parents and schools to encourage admittance and attendance of primary and secondary age pupils;
- pupils at risk may receive specialist help from service support staff and be involved in a mentoring programme;
- EWOs' support children and parents in situations where racism is presenting a barrier to educational inclusion;
- EWOs' regularly make home visits to support children's attendance and ensure parents are aware of school procedures;

### **Service Children**

The definition of a Service Child is one who has one or both parents currently serving in the armed forces; a child whose parent/s have served in the armed forces within the last six years (Veteran); or a child whose parent/s are currently serving as Reservists.

Information and tailored toolkits are available to help Service Children as they move into the region with their parents. Details can be found on the [SSCE Cymru :: Supporting Service Children in Education Wales website](#)

For further information/advice please contact the Vulnerable Learner Service, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Neath Port Talbot Civic Centre, SA13 1PJ

### **The Role of the Local Authority**



Local Authorities have a statutory duty to ensure all children, young people attend school or education other at school provision regularly and that young people are receiving a suitable, age ability and aptitude. They must also ensure arrangements to establish the identities of children residing in the area who are not registered at a school and not receiving a suitable education. On behalf of the local authority, the Education Welfare Service provides support for schools, pupils and parents/carers to help address the barriers to engagement linking to attendance at school, working in partnership with other agencies where a need has been identified.

### **Education Welfare Service**

The Education Welfare Service aim is to provide professional, quality support to schools, pupils, parent/carers. As a service, we support good regular attendance at schools with high standards of pupil welfare, we can also support schools create a culture to support and encourage attendance.

As a service we will use strategies to ensure that registered pupils of compulsory school age attend school regularly and punctually;

- as authorised representatives of the Council, we will monitoring attendance through the regular inspection of registers and liaison with school staff;
- support schools to develop a whole school approach to managing attendance, and addressing potential wellbeing and safeguarding concerns that could be affecting attendance at school and the young person punctuality;
- undertaking individual casework with non-attending pupils and their parents;
- refer and work with other agencies to provide an holistic approach;
- collate and interpret data on issues relating to attendance;
- Offer strategic advice, support and challenge to enable schools to develop improved systems and practices for managing attendance.
- Undertake house visits, which may be unannounced
- Work in partnership to provide a holistic support where needed
- Undertake welfare visits.
- We will investigate the reasons behind the school absence, offer information, guidance and interventions/strategies.

As a service, we believe that all children and young people have the right to their education, have equal opportunities regardless of their learning needs, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, religious beliefs or non-belief, language or nationality.

In addition to the above, the Education Welfare Service will work closely with the Police in order to ensure that Truancy Sweeps are carried out when necessary, this is to help prevent/minimise truancy from school. The dates/times will be agreed with the police and we will liaise with the schools in advance.

### **Making a referral to the Education Welfare Service**

The Education Welfare service plays a dual role; we provide a service to a school and as a mentor between home and school. Each school will have a named Education Welfare Officer.

School must follow the All Wales Attendance Framework, before a referral can be made to the service, they must outline all support offered to the pupil and parent/carer and actions taken to address the barriers to engagement. A significant proportion of the pupil's absence must be unauthorised before a referral will be accepted; all referrals are sent to the Manager, Education Welfare Service.

Referrals may be made when;-

- a pattern of irregular attendance has developed;
- a period of entrenched non-attendance has begun;
- communication by the school to the parents has met with little or no response;
- there is evidence of a lack of parental co-operation in ensuring a child's regular attendance;
- a pattern of post-registration truancy is persisting despite the school's efforts to prevent it;
- a parent withdraws a pupil from school having expressed an intention to educate him or her otherwise than at school (Elective Home Education);
- a pupil is withdrawn from school by the parents who are moving to another area and the school does not have a confirmed destination school/provider where the child will resume his or her education. Such pupils will be treated as "children missing education";

- a pattern of persistent lateness has continued after pastoral intervention;
- there are specific and identifiable welfare issues which are preventing a pupil from accessing education.

### **Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Procedures on Punitive Measures**

If a pupil who is registered at a school fails to attend that school regularly and attempts by the EWO and the school fail to ensure that the pupil returns to regular attendance the Council will, ordinarily first consider issuing the parent with a fixed penalty notice (please refer to separate policy regarding Fixed Penalty Notices). Unless there are known mitigating circumstances, the Council will consider taking legal action by issuing a summons against the parents to appear before the Magistrates Court under Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act. In deciding whether or not to take legal action, the EWO must be satisfied that:-

- there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction; it must consider what the defence case may be and how this is likely to affect the prosecution case;
- it is in the public interest to prosecute; in cases of any seriousness, a prosecution will usually take place unless there are public interest factors pointing against prosecution, which clearly outweigh those in favour;
- any action which it takes complies with the terms of the Human Rights Act.

If after legal action has been taken the pupil still fails to attend school regularly, the EWO will, if deemed appropriate, take further legal action.

### **Education Supervision Orders**

Before initiating a prosecution under section 444 of the 1996 Education Act an EWO will consider whether it is appropriate to apply for an Education Supervision Order (ESO) under section 36 of the 1989 Children Act. The purpose of an ESO is to place a child who is not being properly educated under the supervision of the Local Authority. An ESO aims to ensure that the child receives full time education and that he or she and the parents receive intensive support, advice and guidance from a Supervising Officer who is required “*to advise, assist and befriend*”.

An application for an ESO will only be made when one or more of the following apply:-

- all other attempts to improve the pupil's attendance have failed and prosecution of the parents is deemed inappropriate;
- the parents appear likely to co-operate with a structured programme of work prepared by the supervising officer;
- there is support from Social Services for the ESO;
- a Magistrates Court hearing has directed the Local Authority to apply for an ESO;
- the EWO is of the opinion that the order will have a significant impact upon the pupil's non-attendance.

### **School Attendance orders**

An EWO will serve a School Attendance Order (SAO) (under Sections 437-439 of the 1996 Education Act) on the parents of a child of compulsory school age if the parents have failed to demonstrate that the child is in receipt of suitable education and if the Local Authority believes that the child should attend school.

The SAO will specify the school which the child should attend. Should the parents fail to comply with the SAO the EWO will initiate legal proceedings under Section 443 of the 1996 Education Act, unless the parents can prove that the child is in receipt of suitable education.

All legal action taken by EWOs will be monitored and reviewed.

### **Parenting Orders**

EWOs will when necessary liaise with the Youth Offending Service and with Social Care staff when the courts, in relation to a non-attendance case, impose or recommend a Parenting Order. An EWO will act as the responsible officer for such an order.

### **Suspending Casework**

Ideally an EWO will only close a case when a pupil returns to regular attendance or ceases to be of compulsory school age. There are some exceptional cases, in which the concerns are so severe that the work of the EWO is not appropriate, for example; medical evidence has been received. In these circumstances, the EWO will carefully consider whether it is appropriate to suspend further active casework.

Suspending active casework will only be considered when all options and strategies have been tried and been found to have been unsuccessful. Should active casework be suspended this will only be done after full consultation between the EWO and the Manager of the Education Welfare Service.

In circumstances when active casework is suspended the situation will continue to be monitored and any necessary liaison/consultation with other services/agencies will take place. Active casework will recommence if there is a change in circumstances which suggests that further EWO casework may be appropriate.

### **Questions/concerns relating to attendance?**

Please speak to your school in the first instance, if your child has been referred to the Education Welfare Service, please speak to your schools Education Welfare Officer.

Hayley Thomas – Manager Education Welfare Service

[h.thomas@npt.gov.uk](mailto:h.thomas@npt.gov.uk) or [EWS@npt.gov.uk](mailto:EWS@npt.gov.uk) (01639) 686042 / 07929 852205

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Civic Centre, Neath, SA13 1PJ

Everyone (Local Authority, Governing Body's, School Staff, Parents, Children & Young People) has a responsibility to promote the attendance of all children and young people within the Neath Port Talbot Schools!