



Committee report

Committee	CABINET
Date	TUESDAY, 21 AUGUST 2012
Title	PERSISTENT ABSENCE AND EXCLUSIONS IN THE NEW SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVIDERS: ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT
Report of	CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Attendance has long been recognised as being fundamental to attainment. Studies have shown that for every 5% of absence a child or young person has, s/he will drop one grade at GCSE. A young person who is classed as a persistent absentee (i.e. absent for more than 15% of school days in 2011-12) will be at significant risk of falling behind with their studies and of not achieving the 5 A*- C grades including English and Mathematics threshold at GCSE.
2. Attendance at school also plays an important role in safeguarding children and young people and promoting their wellbeing. Attendance patterns such as sudden or a gradual alteration can indicate a safeguarding issue. Children or young people who are not attending school regularly may be placing themselves at greater risk of harm, offending behaviour or becoming the victims of exploitation or offending by others.
3. Exclusion from school means children are unable to access educational opportunities and contributes to social isolation and to poor attendance rates. Whilst there are occasions when exclusions are needed to reinforce a providers' discipline policies, it is important that exclusion should be used as a last resort when all other options have been exhausted. Ofsted research shows that exclusion for more than three days makes it much less likely that children and young people will successfully re-engage with education. The Isle of Wight council, in partnership with its schools, has been successful in reducing the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions in recent years. In September 2011 a number of new providers took responsibility for secondary education and it is clear that they wished to establish a very clear message regarding acceptable behaviour and so there was some expectation that exclusion rates might rise in the short term.
4. For a small but significant number of children poor school attendance is a direct cause of their social exclusion and underachievement.

5. Children and young people should attend school regularly and punctually because school is where they learn and school is where they are safe. Attendance is therefore a key whole-island improvement issue with the Council committed to ensuring the highest levels of attendance at school.

It aims to do this by:

- a. promoting the value and importance of regular school attendance;
 - b. ensuring schools have appropriate attendance and behaviour policies in place and
 - c. by promoting active partnerships with schools, parents, pupils and other agencies.
6. This paper provides information on the persistent absence rate and permanent exclusions in the secondary age sector in the academic year 2011/12.

BACKGROUND

7. If children attend school regularly and punctually they will be able to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them and gain the skills to enable them to participate fully in further education, training or employment. High rates of attendance are closely related to success in public examinations. In schools with unsatisfactory or poor examination results, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) has found “a strong correlation with low attendance rates is discernible.”
8. For many years national and local government have asked schools to set targets for overall attendance and which aimed to ensure no school had more than 5% of its pupils, who were persistent absentees, a term used for those children and young people whose attendance rate was below 80%. From January 2012, this figure has been raised so that children with attendance rates below 85% will be classed as persistently absent.

Persistence absence rates(percentage)

9. The persistence absence rate in secondary schools for the census period 1 September 2011 to 31 May 2012 was 13% and for primary schools over the same period the rate was 3.1%.
10. As the definition of persistent absence changed in January 2012 direct comparison with previous years is not possible. The rise in primary persistent absence from 1.2% to 3.1% (2.58 times more). The rise in secondary persistent absence from 6.3% to 13% (or 2.06 times more) implying the rate of increase is greater in primary than secondary. However, based on the data for 2010/11 the persistent absence rate across all sectors would be 8.2% so initial analysis may suggest that the rise in secondary schools is higher than expected. Further work will be undertaken by council staff in liaison with the secondary providers to understand this figure. It is proposed that when the secondary school providers attend the Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel in the autumn they provide further detail and share their plans to reduce this figure.

Permanent Exclusions

11. The number of secondary age pupils confirmed as being permanently excluded is 16. The increase is the result of a number of factors including a renewed focus on behaviour and expectation within the secondary sectors as indicated in the previous report (October 2011). Four were excluded from primary schools.
12. The council has agreed with the secondary providers a Fair Access policy which should enable schools to consider more effective use of 'managed moves' (in effect giving a student a fresh start at a different school). There were 13 'managed moves' during the year with all the providers, who confirmed a permanent exclusion, accepting at least one 'managed move' in return. Seven recommendations for permanent exclusions were reduced by governors' panel to fixed term exclusions and two recommendations were overturned. There will be a continued need, through the accountability framework between the Local Authority and the secondary school providers, to reinforce a shared understanding of inclusion across all schools to enable greater consistency in the curriculum provision, the quality teaching and learning and support that is available to all pupils in all schools and settings.
13. Schools do make use of other provision such as the Fire and Rescue Service Life Programme, Challenge and Adventure programmes and the Island Youth Water Activities Centre courses to prevent exclusion. A recent, successful pilot offered the opportunity for all secondary schools to work together with the pupil referral unit in providing a half-term programme of alternative activities for groups of young people in year 7 and in year 10.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

14. A priority within the Corporate Plan (2011-13) is raising educational standards. Improving attendance and reducing exclusions will impact positively on children and young people's achievement.

CONSULTATION

15. There has been regular ongoing consultation with schools in relation to attendance and exclusion processes and procedures. In particular, regular monthly consultation about the needs of individual young people takes place through the secondary behaviour partnership.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

16. The actions impact on the service delivery model of the Education Welfare Service, the Behaviour Support Team and Alternative Provision teams including the Pupil Referral Units. On average it costs about three times as much to educate a student outside mainstream education. The Government did consider making schools, that permanently excluded pupils, liable for the whole cost of the alternative provision, however, this has not been enacted. The council currently removes the equivalent proportion of the age weighted pupil allowance and the same proportion of the delegated special needs funding from the school's budget. If the child is entitled to free school meals, a proportion of the Pupil Premium Grant is also removed. The Education Funding Reforms, which will be implemented from April 2013, will require

local authorities to calculate delegated budgets for Alternative Provision settings and for schools to contribute the first £6k towards the cost of providing an education for any child with High Needs. From April 2013 the council will be required to remove £4,000 from the school's budget for each pupil excluded.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

17. Under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996, the parent is responsible for making sure that their child of compulsory school age (5-16) receives efficient full-time education that is suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs the child may have. This can be by regular attendance at school or by elective home education i.e. the parent can choose to educate their child at home. If it appears to the Local Authority that a child of compulsory school age is not receiving a suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, the authority can apply for a School Attendance Order under Section 437 of the Education Act 1996.
18. The Educational Welfare Service (EWS) on behalf of the Isle of Wight Council has the power to take legal action against parents / carers either in the Magistrates Court or the Family Proceedings Court if their children do not attend school regularly and all interventions to improve attendance have been unsuccessful. In addition under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, the EWS can impose Fixed Penalty Notices and Parenting Orders. Parenting Contracts are recommended as a means of supporting parents and avoiding the need for legal action.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

19. The council as a public body is required to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equal opportunities between people from different groups and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
20. As we only have the overall data at this stage more analysis will be undertaken to identify if particular groups are more at risk of persistent absence or exclusion. This information will be available when this topic is considered by the Children & Young People's scrutiny panel.

SECTION 17 CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

21. Persistent disruptive behaviour, physical assault and verbal abuse are the three main reasons for exclusions from schools. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some of the issues caused between students lead to anti-social behaviour between individuals, families and groups within the community in the medium and longer term.
22. Pupils who are registered at a school and who are failing to attend regularly are more likely to be involved in crime. A number of young people who are persistent absentees and who have received repeated exclusions are known to the Youth Offending Team locally.

OPTIONS

23. Option 1 – To invite the Children & Young People scrutiny panel to explore with the secondary providers and governing bodies the issues raised in this report

Option 2 - To ask officers to explore in detail with the principals of each school / college the issues identified in this report and provide further information to Cabinet in the autumn

RISK MANAGEMENT

24. Failure to gain active engagement with schools and through them with parents means that children and young people are unlikely to achieve the expected levels. Pupils out of school for reason of persistent absence or exclusion pose a draw on the council's resources in terms of staff time and alternative education provision.

EVALUATION

25. Option 1 will provide an opportunity for the secondary school providers to explain their approach and identify their planned actions to address issues identified. This will enable them to make a commitment to the council at a meeting held in public thus demonstrating the accountability that was agreed as part of the original competition process.
26. Option 2 will enable council officers to have more detailed information and to report to Cabinet but it does not enable scrutiny, at a meeting held in public, of each of the providers.

RECOMMENDATION

27. Option 1 - To invite the Children & Young People scrutiny panel to explore with the secondary providers and governing bodies the issues raised in this report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Committee Report to Cabinet 11 October 2011 Exclusions and Attendance

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