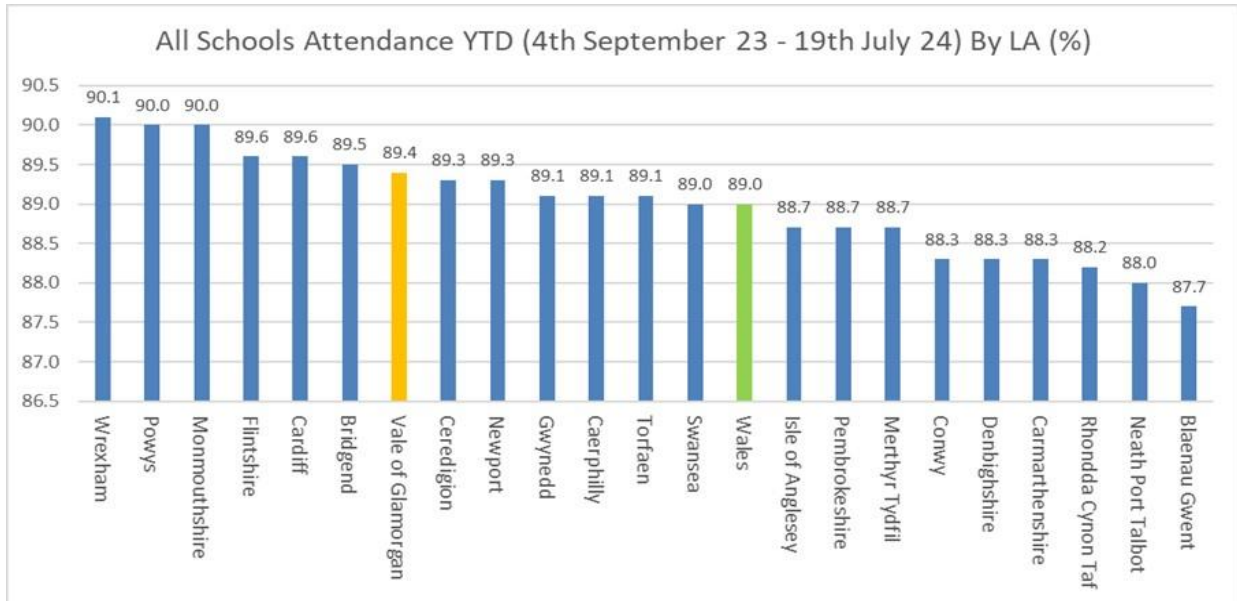
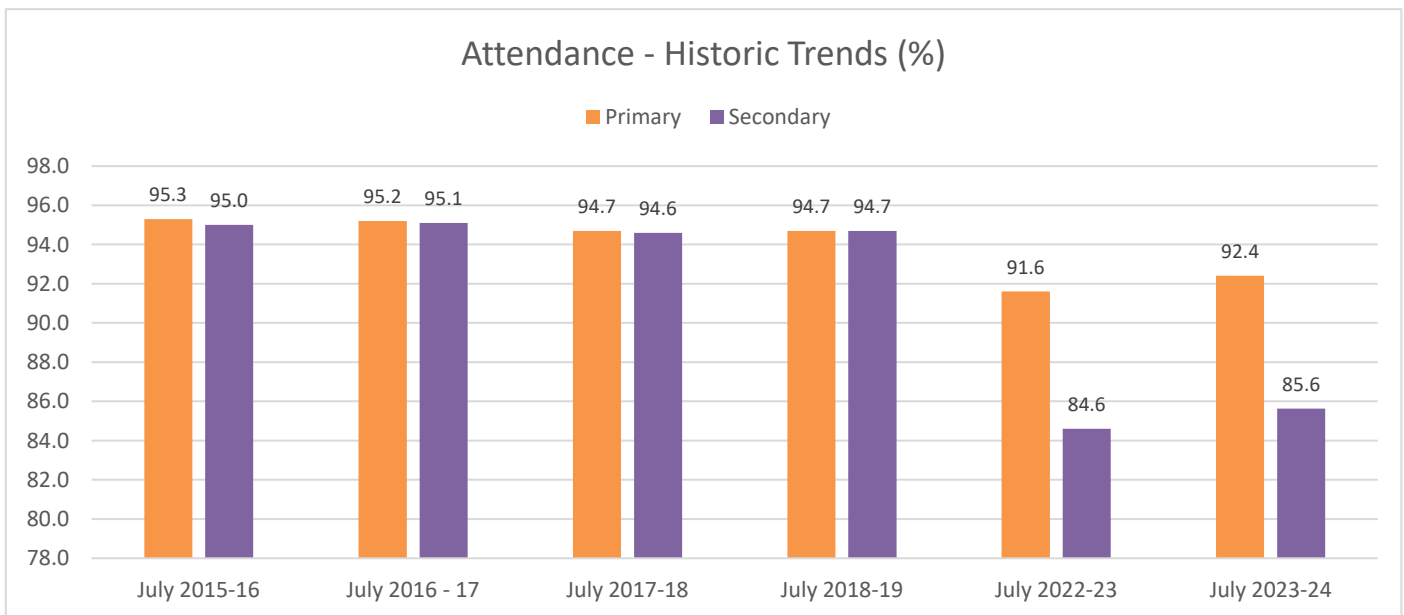


Meeting of:	<b>Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	Monday 7 <sup>th</sup> October, 2024
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Learning and Culture
Report Title:	Primary and Secondary School Attendance Update
Purpose of Report:	To raise Members' awareness of the current attendance rates in Vale of Glamorgan schools and the plans to improve
Report Owner:	Amanda Geddes – Inclusion Manager (acting)
Responsible Officer:	Liz Jones, Director of Learning and Skills
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	<p>Clr Rhiannon Birch, Cabinet Member for Education, Arts and the Welsh Language</p> <p>Morwen Hudson, Head of Standards and Provision</p> <p>Martin Dacey, Lead Officer for Social Inclusion</p>
Policy Framework:	The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and budget.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Vale of Glamorgan (VoG), like all Local Authorities (LAs) has longstanding obligations to ensure that all children of school age receive a suitable and full-time education at school or otherwise.</li> <li>• Improving attendance has been a consistent focus for the LA. The link between good attendance and learning is clear. Good attendance supports pupils in having the best possible chance in life and maximising their potential, both in terms of academic achievement, social/emotional development and future employability.</li> <li>• The VoG, along with all LAs in Wales, has seen a decline in the attendance figures at both Primary and Secondary Schools since the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been an upward trend from last year within all LA's including the VOG as illustrated below.</li> </ul>	



Type of School / End of Year	July 2015-16	July 2016 - 17	July 2017-18	July 2018-19	July 2022-23	July 2023-24
Primary	95.3%	95.2%	94.7%	94.7%	91.6%	92.4%
Secondary	95%	95.1%	94.6%	94.7%	84.6%	85.6%

*There was no Welsh Government comparative data for 2019/20, 2020/21 or 2021/22.*



- In October 2023, the Welsh Government altered the threshold for persistent absenteeism from 80% to 90%. This change has inevitably seen an increase in the number of persistent absentees but

the number of learners under 80% has also not decreased significantly due to the ongoing impact of disengagement following the reopening of schools after the lockdowns.

- In response to this downward trend in attendance the LA has continued to implement a range of strategies alongside a number of new approaches to help support schools with the challenge of getting attendance figures back to pre-pandemic levels and beyond.
- Year to date (YTD) attendance for secondaries is 85.63%, Last year (22-23) the total secondary attendance was 84.6% so this represents a year on year increase.
- YTD attendance for primaries is 92.4 %, last year (22-23) this was 91.6 % so this represents a year on year increase.
- There is a 6.8% difference between primary and secondary attendance. However there has been bigger increase at 1% for secondary schools from last year with an increase in primary schools at 0.8%.
- At the end of 2023/2024, the Vale of Glamorgan was ranked 7th in Wales for overall school attendance with an attendance rate of 89.4%. The Welsh average for this year was 89.0%, and the LA in 1<sup>st</sup> position had an attendance rate of 90%.

## **Recommendations**

1. That Members note the report.
2. That Scrutiny Committee (Learning and Culture) receives a further progress update report in 12 months (September 2024) in order to evaluate progress made in relation to the overall attendance levels and the impact of the #MissSchoolMissOut campaign, the launch of the school attendance toolkit, the enhanced training and support for schools and any intervention pilot projects launched with schools.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

1. The Council has a strategic responsibility for implementing effective approaches and plans in order to optimise attendance levels.
2. To ensure that Members of the Scrutiny Committee (Learning and Culture) continue to have oversight of the work of the Inclusion Team and the impact on levels of attendance across the Vale of Glamorgan Schools.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The aim of the Vale of Glamorgan Local Authority is to create an environment in which all children and young people can flourish as members of a happy, caring, and safe school and wider community. It is our goal that all our children and young people attend school regularly and on time, making the most of the opportunities available to them.
- 1.2 The Vale of Glamorgan (VOG) Inclusion Team aims to work in partnership with our schools to monitor and address a wide range of attendance issues to make the above a reality.
- 1.3 Schools in the VOG are supported in all matters relating to school attendance including Children Missing Education (CME), Elective Home Education (EHE) and the welfare of non-attending learners by the Inclusion Team in collaboration with the Admissions' Team and the Data teams.
- 1.4 Inclusion Team officers will advise schools on matters related to improving attendance.
- 1.5 All references to roles and remits of the Education Welfare service (EWS) are, in the VOG since September 2021, functions carried out by the Inclusion Team.
- 1.6 The Welsh Government Guidance 'Belonging, Engaging and Participating' (2023) was published in October 2023 with a focus on improving learner engagement and attendance. It sets out approaches and resources that can be used by schools, PRU's, and EOTAS settings to help ensure high levels of learner engagement and attendance.
- 1.7 Another key attendance guidance is the Welsh Government guidance entitled: 'All Wales Attendance Framework' (November 2012). The document provides standards and guidance for practitioners to ensure greater consistency of practice

throughout Wales. It also aims to enable Councils and schools to deliver services that are consistent, accessible and of a high standard.

- 1.8** This report seeks to make elected members aware of the current situation with regards to attendance levels across schools in the Vale of Glamorgan, and the plans in place to increase attendance to school, especially since the national downward trend that has affected school attendance since the pandemic in 2020.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1** The work of the Inclusion Team around raising attendance is divided into universal, referral based, and targeted offers of casework, advice, support, and training.
- 2.2** There is a referral process for schools to follow before cases are taken on by the Inclusion Team, which are allocated via a triage process which aims to prioritise need.
- 2.3** The VOG Attendance Policy and Guidance notes have been sent to all schools this academic year to provide clarity for Headteachers and Attendance Leads and consistency across schools in the VOG.
- 2.4** The documentation clarifies expectations and provides guidance on areas such as the law on school attendance and the right to a full-time education. It also provides:
- Advice on how to promote good attendance;
  - Guidance around how to develop Governor links, cluster work/policy, attendance targets for schools;
  - Advice regarding data systems and recording procedures;
  - Information related to school-based interventions / referrals to LA Inclusion Team;
  - Guidance concerning the implementation of penalties for non-attendance / fixed penalty notices (FPNs) / prosecutions;
  - Expectations regarding holidays during term time;
  - Procedural guidance with regards potential Children Missing in Education (CME);
  - Procedural guidance in relation to Elective Home Education (EHE) enquiries; and
  - Advice pertaining to the use and impact of reduced timetables / Pupil Support Plans (PSPs).
- 2.5** The PSP and reduced timetables protocol has been updated in draft form to reflect the new guidance in the Belonging document regarding behaviour and flexi-schooling.
- 2.6** The VOG started an attendance campaign in May 2023. The key message of #MissSchoolMissOut was developed with young people from the VOG and has been promoted via banners, posters, radio adverts, a social media campaign and tools, digital adverts on bus shelters, decals on VOG vehicles, community adverts on billboards, roundabouts and other public buildings. This has been updated this

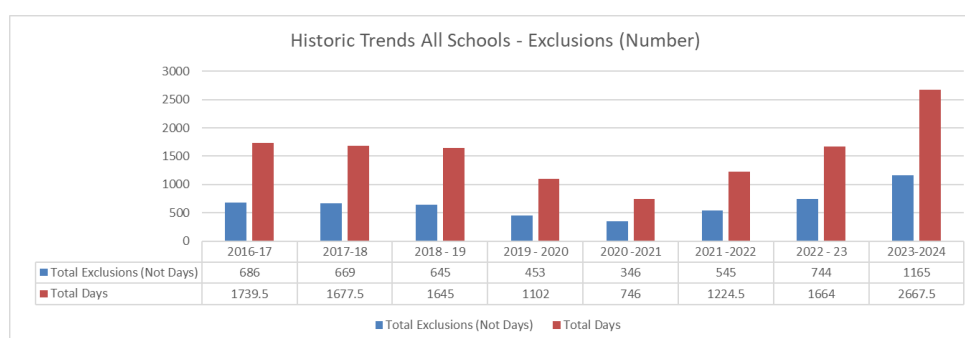
summer with new banners to reflect the wider aspects of schools such as sport and play.

- 2.7** A VOG Attendance Toolkit/resource pack was developed for schools and was launched in September 2023 to help support all schools with practical, useful tools in their work to improve attendance. The toolkit includes draft policies, examples of cluster approach work, model letters / emails / text messages for parents. It contains examples of good practice in terms of graduated response from school with regards to improving attendance and supporting those young people who are persistent absentees, trackers to help schools analyse data, intervention trackers to monitor impact of interventions for individual students. This toolkit has been updated to reflect updated guidelines and in consultation with schools. Added documents include a family friendly leaflet outlining the role of the Inclusion service and a welcome back to school letter from the LA.
- 2.8** The Inclusion Team continually explores new and developing strategies with schools to improve attendance overall and especially reach those children and young people who have become persistent absentees (with attendance below 90%). Workshop sessions for primary age children / young people were set up to explore barriers to attendance and strategies to manage these challenges and build resilience. The Inclusion Team have worked with Health and the Educational Psychology team to develop a shared approach to Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) and are developing a joint Wellbeing and Attendance Forum that will replace the separate forums held last year.
- 2.9** The Inclusion Team have worked to develop a clear, graduated response to help support children at the time of need allowing for a preventive approach. Accessible policies are being drafted to allow children and families to understand processes.
- 2.10** Links continue to be strong with other key services to ensure a joined-up approach with the key message that school attendance is everyone's business.
- 2.11** A successful pilot project took place in two secondary schools whereby the Enforcement Team undertook home visit on behalf of schools to warn families of risk of penal measures if there continued to be non-attendance and non-engagement. The Inclusion Team are also continuing the clear message that non engagement of support offered to help improve low attendance may result in the LA issuing penal measures.
- 2.12** The issue of learners being absent for 50% or more of their schooling is particularly acute within the secondary sector, with those who have Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and those who are eligible for free school meals (EFSM). This helps guide our approaches to focus on additional support and collaborative working within these areas.
- 2.13** With such low attendance figures within one secondary school in particular, there has been a targeted approach to offering support. This includes a dedicated team to prioritise cases, oversee cases and liaise with staff and families, in addition to regular meetings with SLT and lead officers to look at cluster attendance concerns, strategies within school and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH)

concerns. We have also provided additional, bespoke training to staff and governors. This support package will continue in 24-25 with regular reviews with HT and SLT to ensure we can measure impact.

**2.14** Another area of targeted approach is Llantwit Major School. They have a 6.8% drop in attendance from pre covid figures and there has been an increased number of fixed term exclusions and permanent exclusions. Additional support has been provided with regular clinics held, training and a lead officer who can support with identifying key areas of concerns.

**2.15** Another impact to attendance has been the escalation of fixed term exclusions (FTE) in 23-24. There has been an additional 1003.5 days lost to exclusions in comparison to last year. There are significantly more in secondary schools although there has been an increase in primary FTE. There has also been an increase in permanent exclusions; 12 were issued and upheld this year.



### 3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Wellbeing Objectives?

**3.1** The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (“the 2015 Act”) requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities, and each other and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

**3.2** Reducing the percentage of young people becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) is set out in the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) and the Welsh Government Child Poverty Strategy. Supporting schools to improve attendance also supports the objectives in these strategies, which include, creating pathways out of poverty, and supporting child and family wellbeing, including those with protected characteristics, and ensuring children, young people and their families are treated with dignity and respect by support services.

**3.3** Supporting schools to improve attendance rates also helps support the national and local indicator of percentage of young people in education, employment, or training, under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015.

- 3.4 We work collaboratively with internal and external partners including agencies, education and training providers, Careers Wales, and Welsh Government, to help meet the wellbeing objective.
- 3.5 This report supports the objectives within the Service Plan for Standards and Provision 2024-2025.

## 4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1 There are no climate change and nature implications resulting from this report.

## 5. Resources and Legal Considerations

### Financial

- 5.1 The Inclusion Team received £496,286 base budget plus Welsh Government Grants of £173,358. A one off in-year allocation of £34,098 was also received from the Central South Consortium. This gave a total budget of £703,742 for 23/24. In 24/25 the base budget is £508,454 with grants from Welsh Government totalling £176,650 giving a total budget for 24/25 of £685,104

### Employment

- 5.2 Welsh Government Grant funding made up 25.9% of the Inclusion Team budget in 23/24 and 25.78% of the budget in 24/25.
- 5.3 The grant funding for both financial years was ring-fenced for Elective Home Education and the Education Welfare Service. This was partly utilised to raise attendance including funding key roles within the service, the updated Attendance Campaign and to support training. The funding has made it possible to employ additional Inclusion Officers and Engagement Officers on a temporary basis.

### Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.4 The Vale of Glamorgan Inclusion Team use of the ONE management information service ensures we monitor equality of targeted intervention that is being delivered. We work closely with the equalities team to monitor our cases and identify training for staff in order to develop their awareness of working with vulnerable groups.

## 6. Background Papers

- 6.1 None.