

Bridgend County Borough Council

School Attendance Strategy

2014 - 2017

‘Success Starts at School’

1. Vision and aims

- 1.1. Bridgend County Borough Council's Corporate Plan confirms our six improvement priorities for the next three years which aim to help us achieve our vision of:-

Working together to improve lives across the county borough.

- 1.2. The key outcomes we want to achieve by 2017 are:-

- *People in Bridgend County Borough are healthier.*
- *People in Bridgend County Borough benefit from a stronger and more prosperous economy.*
- *People in Bridgend County Borough are engaged and empowered to achieve their own potential.*
- *Bridgend County Borough is a great place to live, work and visit.*

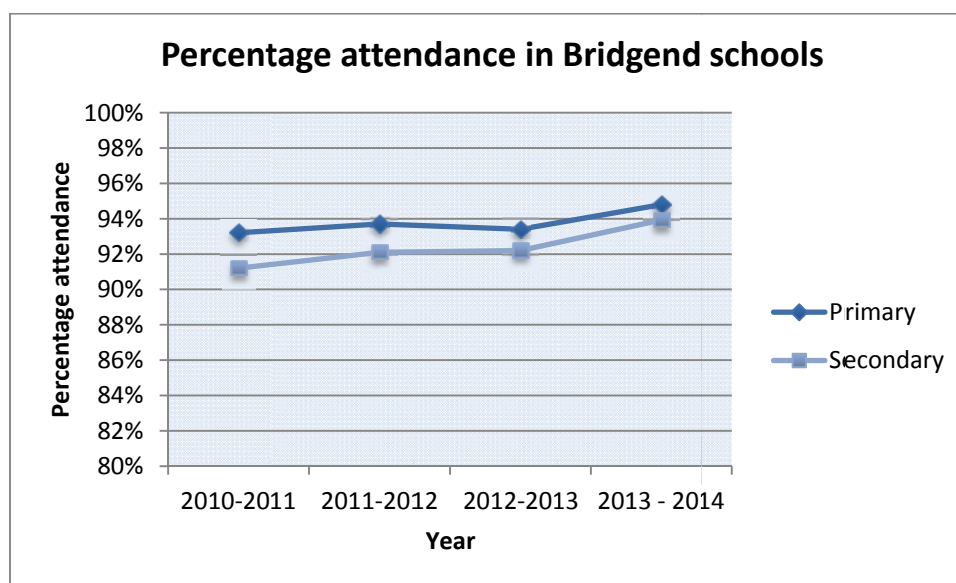
- 1.3. We see a future for people of all ages where they can fulfil their dreams and achieve their full potential. They will continue to learn and develop throughout their lives, becoming healthy, creative, responsible and caring adults.

- 1.4. We believe that at the foundation of this is good education for all our children and regular attendance and punctuality at school are key drivers in ensuring children of school age are properly engaged in education. The Local Authority and schools will take the necessary steps to improve school attendance and ensure that all welfare needs of school-aged children are addressed. Bridgend County Borough Council's Education Welfare service works collaboratively with partner agencies to address barriers to learning and social inclusion and promote school attendance.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. BCBC currently has 17,282 compulsory school age pupils on roll at schools across the County. At present, the standards being attained by our pupils are below the Welsh average and the gap is widening. A high level of school attendance is essential for children to ensure they thrive academically, so we need to ensure that all children of statutory school age regularly attend school.
- 2.2. School attendance rates have risen annually to 93.7% for Primary schools and 92% in secondary schools for 2013-14, as shown in Figure 1 below. This is clearly a positive step forward. However we must ensure that this trend continues.

Figure 1 – School attendance in Bridgend Schools 2010-11 to 2013-14



Source: Pupils Attendance record, Stats Wales – First Release, Welsh Government.

3. National context

3.1. The policy document ‘Every Child Matters’ was introduced by national government in 2003 and sets out the following outcomes for children and young people:

- *stay safe*
- *be healthy*
- *enjoy and achieve*
- *make a positive contribution*
- *achieve economic wellbeing*

3.2. Evidence suggests that there is a clear link between good educational attainment and high school attendance. Poor attendance at school has a detrimental effect on a child’s learning and can have a huge impact on their wellbeing. We consider that positive attendance at school is the key to raising standards of achievement.

3.3. Wales has seen an alarming decline in international PISA results (Programme for International Student Assessment) in all subjects. Welsh Government is committed in improving educational attainment and standards across the board.

4. Local context

- 4.1. Bridgend County Borough Council is committed to maintaining consistently high levels of pupil attendance at school and recognises that improving attendance is a crucial factor in maintaining standards of pupil performance and achievement and will ensure equality of educational opportunity for all pupils.
- 4.2. Bridgend County Borough Council's attendance figures were 92.2% at Secondary and 93.4% at Primary Level during the academic year 2012-2013. Whilst they are continuing to improve they need to be in line with the Government's targets of 95% and our good work needs to continue with schools and the Council's Education Welfare Service.
- 4.3. Regular school attendance is vital for all children and young people. Failure to attend school increases the risk of leaving school without qualifications and allows greater opportunity for young people to be drawn into crime and antisocial behaviour. It can also leave some young people vulnerable to harm by adults.

5. Key principles

5.1. Our attendance strategy has been developed with the following key principles at its heart:-

- *Pupils' achievements and progress are directly influenced by attendance.*
- *Poor attendance can lead to reduced motivation and involvement in education.*
- *Schools play a critical role in attendance and the actions of school staff are significant factors in influencing pupil behaviour and attitudes, in particular those relating to attendance.*
- *Pupils should feel supported and have their attendance valued and rewarded.*
- *Our starting point is an assumption that most pupils want to attend school to learn and to achieve their full potential but may not always be able to do so for reasons beyond their control. The school plays a critical role in the early identification of the barriers to education for all pupils.*
- *All pupils have the right of equal access to a good education and should not be deprived of opportunity by non-attendance at school.*
- *Pupils, parents and carers have clear responsibilities to ensure good attendance. These should be made clear to them by the school through good communication.*
- *Pupils are more likely to respond positively, to learn and to attend, where they are treated equally, rewarded and supported.*
- *The start and end to the school day, and procedures for registration, have a substantial influence on pupils' attitudes and attendance. Good punctuality and robust systems for ensuring pupils are punctual are a significant factor in promoting attendance.*
- *Pupils are less likely to be poor attendees when attendance is monitored and followed up swiftly.*
- *Robust systems for identifying and responding to the needs of different pupils reasons for absence are critical.*

- *The engagement of pupils in ensuring good attendance is important. Pupils are likely to respond more positively when their views are sought, they are listened to and there is an appropriate response to their needs and opinions.*

6. The legal context

- 6.1. The legal framework governing attendance is established in various Education Acts and their associated regulations.

The Education Act 1996 places a legal obligation on:-

- *the Local Authority to provide and enforce attendance;*
- *schools to register attendance and notify the LA of a child's absence from school.*

Section 7 of the above Act states that:-

- 6.2. 'The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient, full time education suitable to his/her age, aptitude and ability and to any special educational needs he/she may have either by regular attendance at school or otherwise'.

Section 444 further states that:-

- 6.3. 'The parent of a child of compulsory school age registered at school and failing to attend regularly is guilty of an offence punishable in law'.

An offence is not committed if it can be demonstrated that:-

- *the pupil was absent with leave (authorised absence);*
- *the pupil was ill or prevented from attending by unavoidable cause;*
- *the absence occurred on a day set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil/parents belong;*
- *the pupil's catchment school is not within the prescribed walking distance of the child's home and no suitable transport arrangements have been made by the Local Authority; and*
- *a limited defence is available to the parents of traveller children.*

- 6.4. While the parent is primarily responsible for ensuring their child attends their registered school regularly, where school attendance problems occur, the key to resolving these problems is engaging the child through collaborative working between the parent, the school and the LA.

7. The role of Local Authority

- 7.1. The focus for the Local Authority will be on early intervention and prevention, working in a more targeted way with pupils and their families. Schools will be supported to identify children where there are early signs of poor attendance. We will work with families through the Joint Assessment Family Framework approach (JAFF) and Team around the Family (TAF)

process to address issues. The lead in this respect will be BCBC's Educational Welfare Service.

- 7.2. The Local Authority will support schools in taking a rigorous line in reducing absence. Whilst the main focus is always to build strong positive relationships with parents and schools, the Local Authority will progress prosecutions where it considers this appropriate.
- 7.3. Parents and carers will be encouraged to participate in the JAFF process, however, where there is non engagement and/or no improvement in attendance, the Local Authority will pursue prosecutions.

Multi-agency working

- 7.4. Within BCBC the Communities First Programme along with Families First Programmes provide services to the people of Bridgend by supporting them in various areas of need. Education Welfare officers work in conjunction with Family Support Workers (FSWs) and Family Engagement Officers (FEOs) in efforts to raise attendance and attainment levels. This is done collaboratively by working together in schools and delivering attendance workshops with pupils with attendance issues. Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) also work jointly with FSWs supporting families through the JAFF and TAF.
- 7.5. EWOs regularly visit Primary schools on a three weekly basis. This is to ensure that schools and EWOs identify vulnerable pupils at the earliest stage and early. With EWOs working in Community hubs in co-located areas of the County Borough, this provides a holistic approach in ensuring appropriate support is available for pupils and families. Multi-agency working is the key to ensuring families receive the support based on need. Community hubs consist of EWOs, FEOs, behaviour support teachers, additional learning needs professionals, social workers and youth workers.
- 7.6. Regular truancy patrols are undertaken and the EWS works closely with the local Police. The Youth Offending Service, health services, housing association, and voluntary organisations are also actively involved in working with the EWS in assisting in resolving non-school attendance of pupils and supporting families.

Targeted interventions

- 7.7. In addition to Bridgend County Borough Council's service level agreement with schools and the EWS, the Education Welfare Service can offer additional support to schools on a need basis in order to improve attendance. This will form part of a 'team around the school approach' which entails the Senior EWO and schools discussing the individual need and arranging an appropriate plan for improving attendance. This is an intensive intervention approach and involves the community teams working together around the school and community to improve attendance levels. This could consist of a range of initiatives, for example attendance panels including governor involvement, parents, pupils, EWS and school staff. Attendance is discussed in a formal setting and sets out the importance of regular school attendance and the consequences if attendance fails to improve. Home visits are completed by EWS and school staff is another example. Homes are visited to those pupils not in school without good reason and targeting those with persistent absence.

Fixed penalty notices

7.8. Fixed Penalty Notices will allow schools to issue FPNs to the parents of children and young people who have unauthorised absences from school. FPNs came into force in September 2014 as a result of new legislation i.e., The Education (Penalty Notice) (Wales) Regulations 2013. A Code of Conduct has been devised by BCBC. The issuing of the FPNs will lie with the Education Welfare Service in response to requests from Headteachers, nominated deputies or Police Officers. Fixed Penalty Notices have been widely used in England for a number of years. It is anticipated that FPN will be used to improve attendance and prevent unnecessary absences from school in the following circumstances:-

- *Minimum of 10 unauthorised absences in the current term.*
- *Minimum of 10 sessions of lateness after close of registration.*
- *Unauthorised absence due to a term time holiday*
- *Pupil regularly coming to the attention of the police during school hours with justified reason.*
- *Parents/carers have failed to engage with schools/EWS but where court sanctions have not been instigated.*

7.9. The EWS and the school will take into account the following in considering whether a FPN can be issued:-

- *Level of absence;*
- *Any equalities considerations;*
- *Statement of Special Educational Needs;*
- *History of Attendance;*
- *Defences which may be available;*
- *Level of parental engagement; and*
- *Any adverse effect a fine will have on the welfare of the family.*

7.10. The withdrawal of a penalty notice may only be revoked where it is proven that:-

- *The notice has been issued to the wrong person to an incorrect address.*
- *The notice did not conform to code of conduct.*
- *Evidence demonstrates that the notice should not have been issued. e.g., medical evidence provided.*
- *Circumstances warrant its withdrawal.*

7.11. The legislation governing the implementation of FPN is outlined in:-

- *Sections 444A and 444B of the Education Act 1996,*
- *The Education and Inspections Act 2006*
- *The Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) regulations 2013*
- *Rights of children and young persons Measure 2011*
- *United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (the right to an education).*

7.12. A Penalty notice is £60 if paid within 28 days of receipt of the notice, rising to £120 if paid after 28 days. If the penalty is not paid in full by the end of the 42 days the local authority must either prosecute parents/carers for the offence or withdraw the notice.

Term-time holidays

- 7.13. BCBC recognises the effect that absence from school has on educational attainment and that under the Education (Pupil Registration)(Wales) regulations 2010 Headteachers have the discretionary power to authorise up to 10 days for a holiday in a given school year. However there is no automatic right to withdraw pupils from school for a holiday and in law parents must apply to the school for permission in advance. The Regulations state that only in exceptional circumstances should a pupil be granted more than 10 days leave for a holiday.

8. The Education Welfare Service (EWS)

- 8.1. The Education Welfare Service has the responsibility of implementing the statutory duties in relation to securing school attendance. The EWS has a key function in working with schools, families, pupils, agencies, statutory and voluntary in order to promote regular school attendance.
- 8.2. The EWS will continue to take the lead role for the local authority in supporting school attendance and meet with school staff on a weekly basis. The EWS works with children and families, other agencies and continue to support schools. The EWS is managed and funded centrally and Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) time is allocated on a needs basis. The Local Authority has a service level agreement with every school and sets clear responsibilities.
- 8.3. The EWS consists of a Lead EWO and a team of EWO's. Each EWO is based within Community hubs in co-located areas, North, East and West. Each EWO has a designated secondary school and its associate feeder primary schools.

9. The role of parents

- 9.1. Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school regularly. Parents are expected to report their child's absence from school on the first day of absence and on the return provide a written explanation. Parents are requested to avoid taking family holidays during term time, and work with schools and relevant agencies when pupils have attendance issues.
- 9.2. In addition to attendance, punctuality is equally important. If a pupil continually arrives to school 5 minutes late, this will amount to losing 3 days each year. If a pupil arrives after the closure of the register then this will count as an unauthorised absence which if deemed appropriate may lead to a referral to the EWS.
- 9.3. Absence can also make children vulnerable to involvement with crime and anti- social behaviour.
- 9.4. The report 'Improving attendance at school' carried out by the DfE in 2010, explains there is a clear link between poor attendance at school and lower academic achievement of pupils who miss more than 50% of school, 3% manage to achieve 5 or more GCSE at Grade A*-C including Maths and English. It highlights that 73% of pupils who have over 95% attendance achieve 5 or more GCSE at Grades A*-C.

9.5. Not only is school attendance and attainment important, thus also it enables young people to maintain positive friendships, promotes wellbeing and provides them with good grounding for their future.

9.6. Parents/carers can support the regular and punctual attendance of their children by:-

- *ensuring that their child arrives at school on time each day;*
- *ensuring that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness or days of religious observance;*
- *notifying the school as soon as possible of any absence and confirm this in writing when the child returns to school;*
- *not booking family holidays during term-time;*
- *talking to the school if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to attend.*

10. The responsibility of schools

- 10.1. Schools have a statutory duty of care to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Schools should have a clear attendance policy which sets out how attendance is managed and monitored. All school staff should be trained on attendance and made aware of the schools attendance policy.
- 10.2. Schools should communicate all attendance and welfare concerns to their nominated EWO. A nominated governor should have the lead responsibility for attendance. All schools should adopt a first day absence procedures to ensure and safeguard pupils and to ensure all parents are made aware when their child is not in school.
- 10.3. All schools should adopt the Central South Consortiums 'Callio' attendance system (or equivalent).

11. Data collection, attendance targets and auditing

- 11.1. Schools supply attendance data through their schools Information Management System (SIMS). Data is reported to the Central South Consortium (CSC), acting on behalf of the LA as a commissioned service with the responsibility for school improvement. Attendance data is also provided to Welsh Government and is used to inform national performance indicators. The Local Authority has access to data shared on a cluster basis. Attendance targets for schools are set by School Governing bodies and CSC Challenge Advisors.
- 11.2. Attendance audits will be undertaken for all schools. Senior EWO distributes an Attendance Audit Toolkit for schools in order to identify strengths and weaknesses of attendance processes in each school, and also to devise an action plan for improvements from these. Key features will include:-

- *examining existing procedures;*
- *inspecting attendance information;*
- *related documentation and school policies;*
- *assessing the type and levels of communication with parents;*
- *interviewing staff and pupils;*
- *analysing attendance data;*
- *considering school strategies used to promote attendance and sharing good practice; and*
- *evaluating the effectiveness of early intervention and support services.*

12. Training and support

- 12.1. All staff with responsibility for attendance in schools should receive appropriate training including the proper use of codes, appropriate challenge to parents, accurate input of data, exporting data and also full usage and knowledge of SIMS.
- 12.2. BCBC's Education Welfare Service will offer support to all schools covering such issues as:-
- *strategies for promoting regular attendance;*
 - *strategies for addressing persistent absenteeism;*
 - *improving communication with parents;*
 - *good practice in monitoring punctuality;*
 - *developing a whole-school attendance policy; and*
 - *rewards and incentives.*

13. Celebrating good and improved attendance

- 13.1. Schools are encouraged to promote good attendance using a range of initiatives at a whole school, year group, class or individual pupil level.
- 13.2. This can include certificates, pens or prizes such as books. Achievements that are congratulated in assemblies are considered to be particularly effective. All schools should display their attendance marketing materials appropriately in foyers, classrooms, walls and banners can be used on the periphery of the school estate. This helps raise awareness and the importance of good attendance for pupils, teachers, parents and visitors to schools.

14. Traveller children

- 14.1. We will work closely with the families of traveller children to ensure they are attending school. The Council's Equalities and Engagement Officer will be able to provide advice and guidance to schools to ensure the regular attendance of children from traveller communities. Schools are particularly encouraged to:-

- *create an inclusive culture which promotes equality and recognises cultural diversity and difference;*
- *show high expectations of attendance with all registered pupils;*
- *respond promptly to absences through immediate telephone or other enquiries;*
- *refer any continuing or repeated absence to the EWS;*
- *develop strategies to support pupils with literacy or learning difficulties;*
- *support educational continuity while children are travelling;*
- *give additional support if needed on entry to school for traveller children;*
- *ensure adequate support during transition e.g., from KS2 to KS3; and*
- *seek appropriate advice from the LA if necessary.*

15. Supporting the attendance of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

- 15.1. BCBC recognises that children with SEN, regardless of whether this has been formally diagnosed, may prevent some children from attending school. The EWS and educational psychology service in particular, will work with headteachers, the school Special Educational Need Coordinator (SeNCO) and other school staff to address pupil's poor attendance. which may be related to unidentified or unmet SEN.

16. Supporting the attendance of pupils who may have been bullied

- 16.1. BCBC recognises that bullying is an issue which prevents some children from attending school or from achieving their full potential when they do attend.
- 16.2. Our more recent approach has been 'Bridgend says End Bullying' (BSEB). This has raised awareness of bullying issues and the consequences to the recipients of such treatment. The project examined causes of bullying and attempts to change attitudes towards it by addressing such behaviour and treatment.
- 16.3. BCBC will, through the team around the family approach, continue to offer support to pupils whose attendance is being affected by actual or perceived bullying.

17. Supporting the attendance of vulnerable groups

- 17.1. BCBC will respond appropriately to support school attendance of pupils considered vulnerable. The Inclusion Service will play a key role in supporting such pupils. Such groups might include:-
- *pregnant school girls and teenage mothers;*
 - *children transferring school;*
 - *children entering school outside the normal year of entry.*

- *young offenders*
- *children from families under stress;*
- *young carers; and*
- *school phobics.*

18. Action Planning

- 18.1. The EWS will work with schools to develop action plans to improve attendance at whole school level. This will rely on individual schools' analysis of data and of its attendance profile. Schools should work closely with the EWS to develop action plans for school level action as well as developing individual pupil level action plans.
- 18.2. Schools with highest levels of absence will receive additional EWS support. A condition of that support will be an agreed school action plan to improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism.
- 18.3. The main areas that should be covered in the whole school action plan are as follows:-
- *Improved senior leadership response to attendance*
 - *Robust recording and monitoring systems*
 - *Improved tracking and monitoring arrangements*
 - *Targeted additional support*
 - *Improve support and challenge for parents*
 - *Targeted support to vulnerable groups*
 - *Working with partners to support parents to reduce illness related absence*
 - *Target specific work with parents of children in Early Years settings to ensure good attendance habits are developed early and parents understand their responsibilities*
 - *Workforce Development*
- 18.4. The action plan template below is an example only. Each individual school may wish to utilise its own format. What is more important, is that schools actively plan to address poor attendance and adjust their strategy accordingly.

Example School Action Plan 2014/15

All school attendance target _____

Parental challenge				
What	How	Who	When	Outcome/output
Greater challenge of parents/pupils who attendance falls short of target.	Interview parents of all pupils whose attendance is <85%	School senior managers and EWS team member	Autumn term 2014	Pupils increase attendance to at least 95% by end of current term and are actively seeking to improve their own attendance.
Senior leadership response				
Improved senior leadership control and ownership of attendance	Improved leadership with a designated member of senior staff responsible for attendance.	Deputy Headteacher	Termly	Attendance being regularly discussed and challenged by the Senior Management Team and Board of Governors.