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Monday, 12 February 2024

Notice of Reports Received following Publication of Agenda.

Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 20th February, 2024 at 10.00 am,
Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK

Attached are reports that the committee will consider as part of the original agenda but were submitted to democratic services following publication of the agenda.

Item No	Item	Pages
6.	School Attendance - Scrutiny of the latest school attendance data. (Updated report)	1 - 16

Paul Matthews
Chief Executive

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SUBJECT: EVALUATION OF ATTENDANCE IN ALL SCHOOLS FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2022 2023

MEETING: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

DATE: 20 FEBRUARY 2024

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1.1 To provide Members with information about the role and impact of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) in work directly contributing to improve school attendance and exclusion which removes barriers to learning.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1. Members receive the report for information.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The last academic year, 2022/23, is the first year since 2018/19 when schools operated without closures and restrictions due to Covid-19. As a result, levels of attendance in the intervening years cannot be compared with attendance data in 2018/19 and 2022/23.
- 3.2 Whilst schools remained open during the last full academic year, the impact of Covid-19 continues to have an impact on attendance and is likely to do so for some time to come, particularly in secondary schools where levels of anxiety and mental health are much higher than before and while there is an increased demand on services providing support and intervention in these areas.
- 3.3 Overall attendance in Monmouthshire primary schools has recovered well after the pandemic, with many schools reaching or exceeding pre-pandemic levels by the end of the term 2023. The attendance of FSM pupils is at least 90% in many primary schools and only in a very few schools is it below 85%. Where this occurs, the number of FSM pupils is very small, and the percentage is variable.
- 3.4 Although positive improvements are noted in two of our secondary schools, attendance at the end of the autumn term 2023 remains well below pre-pandemic levels across Monmouthshire as a whole. Generally, attendance in secondary schools, has been slower to recover, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups such as FSM pupils. The picture in Monmouthshire reflects the trend across Wales which shows an increase in the number of

pupil related absence in years 7 to 11, particularly in relation to anxiety and mental health.

- 3.5 In November 2023, Welsh Government published 'Belonging, engaging and participating' guidance to improve pupil engagement and attendance. As part of this guidance, the level for persistent absence (PA) in Wales has been raised from 80% to 90%, to align with the PA level in England. This means that there is likely be more PA pupils across Wales and within Monmouthshire going forward.
- 3.6 Monmouthshire's EWS service offers a holistic supportive/wellbeing approach to improve attendance. As a result, it is very rare that prosecution processes are used as a measure of attendance improvement. The work of the EWS team focuses on finding the underlying root cause of non-attendance or engagement, building relationships between home and school, and establishing links with other agencies where appropriate.
- 3.7 Welsh Government Grant funding has been allocated to local authorities for Education Welfare Service (EWS) to enhance capacity to manage additional pressures arising from the pandemic and to increase support to schools, pupils, and families and to improve attendance and engagement. This has enabled us to employ an additional full time Education Welfare Officer (0.6 EWO/0.2 EHE Support) to increase the capacity of the EWS team.

4. REASONS:

- 4.1. The local authority has a duty to support schools, pupils, and parents to secure regular attendance, address issues relating to absenteeism and improve engagement in education.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1. There are two posts within the EWS team that are currently grant funded. A reduction in the grant allocation in the future would limit the support available to schools, pupils, and parents.

6. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

- 6.1. Attendance and engagement in education is a right for all pupils and key to improving life chances for all, particularly for those from vulnerable groups. The Local Authority has a role to play in working with pupils, parents and schools to identify and address barriers that limit attendance and prevent engagement and participation in education.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Belonging, engaging, and participating Guidance on improving learner engagement and attendance 2023

[Belonging, engaging and participating: Guidance on improving learner engagement and attendance \(gov.wales\)](#)

8. **AUTHOR:**

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Monmouthshire LA Monitoring and Evaluation Report

Focus: Education Welfare Service (EWS) - Attendance

Date of Monitoring Report: November 2023

Purpose of report

- To provide Members with information about progress in our area of work directly contributing to improved school attendance and exclusion which removes barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils.
- Consider recently published comparative performance against other Local Authorities in Wales.
- Assess effectiveness of LA intervention to sustain (where attendance is high) or improve attendance rates across primary and secondary schools.

1. How do the EWS LA provide support to schools to improve attendance?

The EWS provides support to schools, pupils, and parents to ensure regular attendance, and address issues relating to absenteeism. The Service liaises with other agencies and provides an important link between home and school to help parents and teachers to work in partnership so that pupils benefit from the educational opportunities available locally.

The EWS acts on behalf of the local authority in enforcing a parent's duty to provide access to an appropriate education. The main function of the EWS is to improve overall attendance and reduce persistent absence in all schools and alternative education provision. However, the EWS also has a role to undertake other related duties, which include:

- Attending MARAC (Multi-agency risk assessment conferences) due to domestic abuse issues
- MIRAF liaison- ensuring that when pupils are missing relevant information is forwarded to schools and return to Gwent Missing Children's Team
- Elective home Education- Ensuring that visits are undertaken in line with WG Guidance and LA Policy
- Processing of Entertainment Licenses- Processing of applications
- Processing of Chaperone Applications- Facilitating training and Processing of application
- Processing of Work Permits- Processing of applications
- Tracking of Children Missing Education- Ensuring that any potential missing children are uploaded to national data base and viewing national data base to ascertain if any children at risk of missing education have moved in to be resident in Monmouthshire.
- Data- tracking of attendance data for all schools

The current staffing position of the EWS is as follows:

Post	Full time/Part time
Head of Service: Achievement & Extended Attainment and Achievement	Full time
Senior Education Welfare Officer	Full time – Secondment to March 2025
Education Welfare Officers (EWO's) x 5	3 Full time 1 part time (0.6) 1 full time split role 0.8 EWS – EHE/CME (Welsh Government Grant funded to March 2024)
Elective Home Education Support Officer	Full time – (Welsh Government Grant funded) Temporary 1 x 0.2 EHE support (Welsh Government Grant funded to March 2024)

Monmouthshire's EWS service offers a holistic supportive/wellbeing approach to improve attendance. As a result, it is very rare that prosecution processes are used as a measure of attendance improvement. Cases are managed by Education Welfare Officers (EWO's) on a Primary & Secondary cluster basis. The work of the EWO team focuses on finding the underlying root cause of non-attendance or engagement, building relationships between home and school, and establishing links with other agencies where appropriate. The EWS has a well-established referral process and schools can make referrals to the EWS through a panel discussion every two weeks. The panel is made up of Head of Service, Senior EWO lead, EWOs and a legal representative.

The EWO's meet regularly with schools to discuss attendance and maintain a detailed record of consultation. Schools provide information to the EWS about their school procedures for tracking, monitoring, and early intervention strategies for pupils they follow where there is a drop of attendance. Using strategic and robust monitoring systems, schools identify pupils who require early intervention support within school and those where support may be required from external agencies. The EWS provide advice and guidance to schools on support services available that could be beneficial.

Following the global pandemic there has been a decline in attendance throughout Wales. Welsh Government produced an independent report providing an analysis of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for school attendance. (Attendance review – implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for school attendance - Meilyr Rowlands – February 2022). This review identified a wide range of reasons for non-attendance and suggested many different educational interventions that could contribute to improving pupil attendance. It concluded that will not be easy to estimate how long the process of Improving attendance in schools would take following the pandemic.

In October 2023, Welsh Government released new guidance 'Belonging, Engaging and Participating' on improving learner engagement and attendance. The EWS team are updating the Monmouthshire policy for attendance following the release of this guidance and providing training for governors and school leaders. The team will continue to support schools in implementing their own school-based strategies/plans to improve learner engagement and attendance during the implementation of the guidance and framework. There is a strong focus on community focused and trauma informed approaches within the guidance. This enables schools to adopt a range of strategies effectively to support learners prior to the involvement of the EWS.

As part of the new guidance the level of persistent absentee (PA) in Wales has been brought in line with England by amending it to 90%, from the existing 80%. This higher threshold will increase the number of PA pupils in all schools and will have an impact on the capacity of school staff and local authority officers in supporting the number of pupils below this threshold.

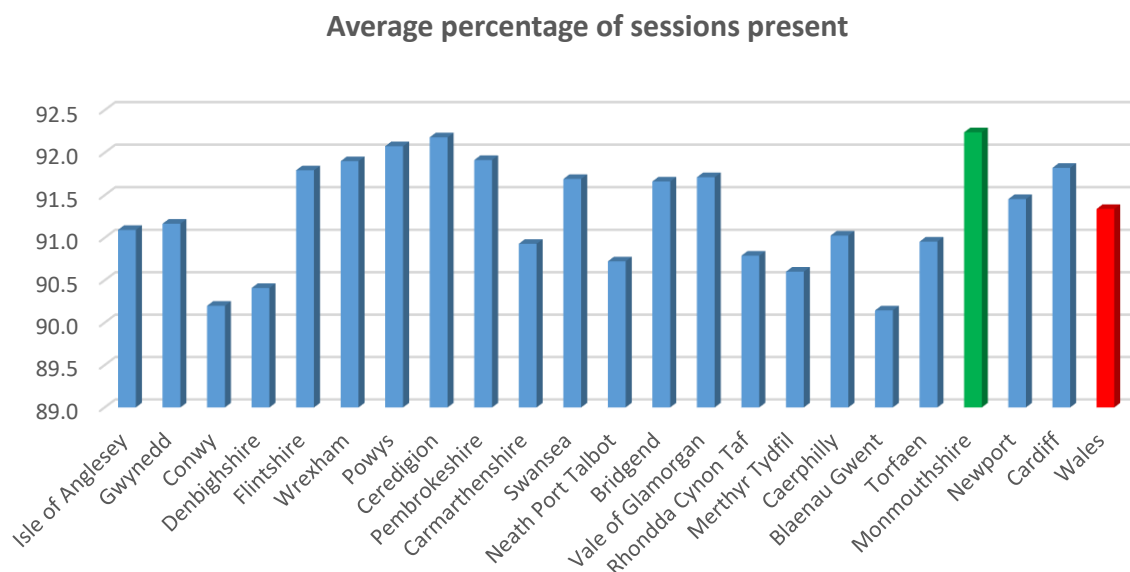
Welsh Government Grant funding has been allocated to local authorities for Education Welfare Service (EWS) to enhance capacity to manage additional pressures arising from the pandemic and to increase support to schools, pupils, and families and to improve attendance and engagement. This year, this grant enabled Monmouthshire to appoint an additional full time Education Welfare Officer (0.6 EWO/0.2 EHE Support) which has increased the capacity of the EWS team and provided additional time for the Senior EWO to implement the new guidance.

As part of this work the Senior EWO has engaged with the SIMS development team to develop a more efficient data recording system within SIMS using PowerBi. This programme gathers attendance data in real time and be customised to create reports that the service use in data analysis. Initially this appeared to be successful in giving easy EWO access to all schools, individual schools, and pupil dashboards for attendance data. However, the system has experienced some issues that needed to be rectified and this is having an impact on workload.

2. What is the current attendance in Monmouthshire (Academic year 2022-23) and how does it compare the national picture?

Attendance in Monmouthshire shows an improving trend in both primary and secondary schools post pandemic. The improvement in our primary schools is strong and is moving well towards pre-pandemic levels. However, school attendance in secondary schools is much slower to recover and as a result the gap between pre-pandemic and current levels is not closing as quickly. This can be accounted to a higher-than-expected increase in pupil related absence for varying reasons in years 7 to 11 post-pandemic. For example, anxiety and mental health of young people has shown to have had an impact and this has increased the demand for supporting services e.g., CAMHS, Health and Educational Psychology.

Table 2: Current position - Attendance of pupils in maintained schools in Wales, pupils aged 5 to 15, by day, 4 September 2023 to 10th November 2023



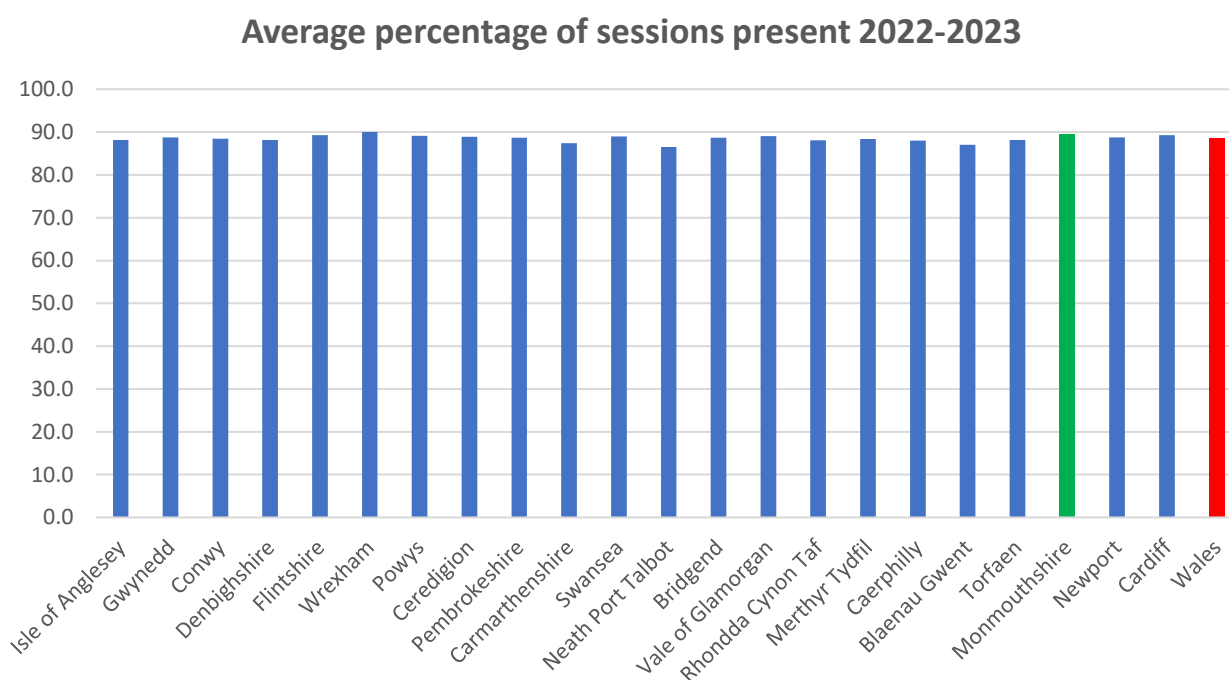
Welsh Government Attendance Data for 2022-2023

Across Wales, the average attendance for the academic year 2022-2023 was 88.5%. During this period, attendance in Monmouthshire was second in Wales at 89.5% and above all Wales average.

In the academic year 2022-23, the attendance rate for pupils not eligible for free school meals is 90.4% compared to eFSM pupils at 83.1%, a difference of 7.3pp. Attendance of eFSM pupils during the same period was 85.4% in Monmouthshire.

Across Wales the most common reason for absence for the academic year was illness, with 42.7% of sessions missed for this reason and this was reflected in Monmouthshire's attendance figures.

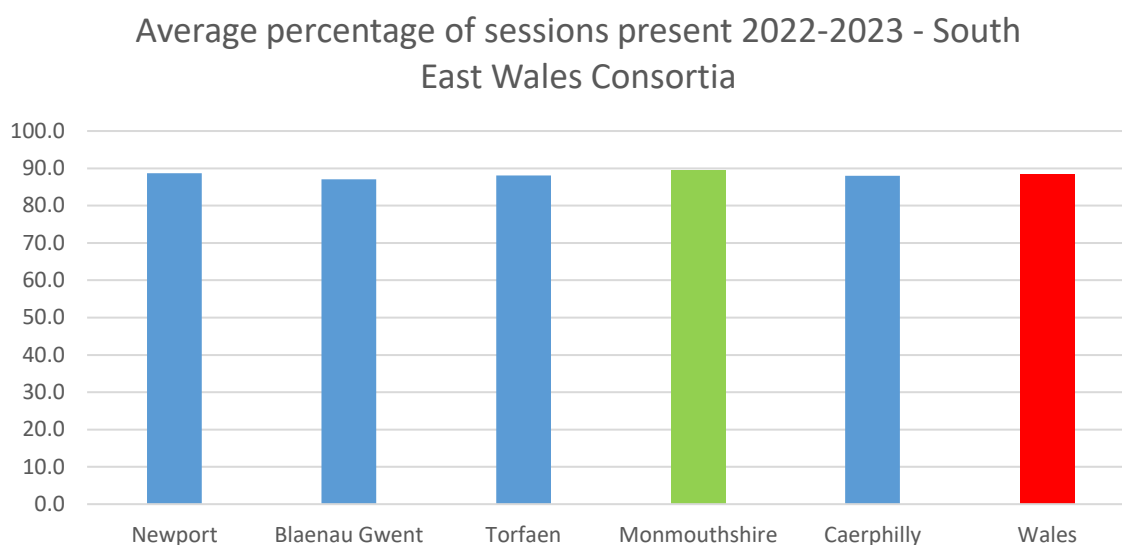
Table 3: Attendance of pupils in maintained schools in Wales, pupils aged 5 to 15, by local authority, for the 2022/23 academic year 05.09.22 – 24.07.23.



SEWC Region Attendance Data for 2022-2023

Overall, attendance in Monmouthshire is the highest compared to other local authorities in the SEWC region, continuing the pre-pandemic trend.

Table 4: Monmouthshire in relation to East Wales Consortia school attendance from WG data 2022-2023:



Despite the drop in overall attendance levels during the pandemic, attendance in Monmouthshire has remained amongst the highest in Wales, significantly above the region and the average across Wales as a whole.

Monmouthshire Primary & Secondary Attendance data to the end of the academic year 2022 – 2023

Table 6: Monmouthshire – 2022-2023 - Primary & Secondary Schools: Data Source PowerBi

Primary & Secondary (Years 1 - 11)	
Attendance	FSM
91.00%	85.40%

Primary (Years 1-6)			
Attendance	FSM	EAL	LAC
92.90%	89.30%	85.50%	92.00%

Secondary (Years 7-11)			
Attendance	FSM	EAL	LAC
88.10%	78.70%	87.29%	80.70%

Within the four Secondary Schools, one school has developed good processes in place to secure high levels of pupil attendance, two schools are working towards implementing additional strategies to improve tracking, monitoring, and supporting pupil attendance and one

school is receiving support to develop consistent processes to improve pupil attendance. Two of the Secondary schools have had ESTYN visits 2022 – 2023. Attendance in Monmouth School was noted as good overall, but the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) was identified as in need of improvement and in King Henry VIII School one of the recommendations identifies * FSM and punctuality & Lateness of Pupils.

Whilst there is a small improvement in eFSM attendance data, the rate of recovery for this group is slower than for non eFSM pupils, particularly in secondary schools, and it is not where we would like it to be across all schools in Monmouthshire. However, we recognise that there are other underlying factors, particularly in secondary schools, which can impact on this vulnerable group where they are more likely to fall into a wider area of need and support. For example, EOTAS provision, Dalen Newydd In-reach school support, reintegration timetables, or pastoral support plans (PSPs) for supporting ALN/Health needs.

Attendance of Primary & Secondary from 2018 to Autumn Term 2023

Table 5 below shows the attendance across schools in Monmouthshire pre-pandemic and in relation to targets in our Corporate and Community Plan.

Primary schools collectively have improved attendance more rapidly than expected and as a result, are at the 26/27 target. However, whilst there has been improvement in the attendance for eFSM pupils remains 3.1pp below target at the end of the autumn Term 2023.

Whilst the picture in secondary schools shows some improvement in the attendance of all pupils, it remains 4.8pp below the 26/27 target at the end of the autumn term 2023. However, attendance of eFSM pupils is not signs of recovering and remains 10.0pp below pre-pandemic levels and 15.0pp below the 26/27 target.

Table 5: Corporate and Community Plan Targets

Measure	2018-2019	2022-2023	(Autumn Half term 27.10.23)	Autumn end of term 23.12.23	26/27 Target
Percentage pupil attendance at Primary level (figure for those eligible for free school meals shown in brackets)	95.4% (FSM 95%)	92.9% (FSM 89.3%)	94.5% (FSM 91.6%)	94.0% (FSM 90.9%)	94 % (FSM cohort to be within 2%)
Percentage pupil attendance at Secondary level (figure those eligible for free school meals shown in brackets)	95.1% (FSM 90.8%)	88.1% (FSM 78.7%)	89.2% (FSM 80.8%)	88.4% (FSM 79.0%)	94% (FSM cohort to be within 2%)
Overall attendance Primary & Secondary		91.0% (FSM 85.4%)	92.2% (FSM 86.8%)	91.6% (FSM 85.7%)	94% (FSM cohort to be within 2%)

Welsh Government have not reintroduced statutory attendance targets since the pandemic. However, for the academic year 2023-3024, schools are encouraged to be working towards

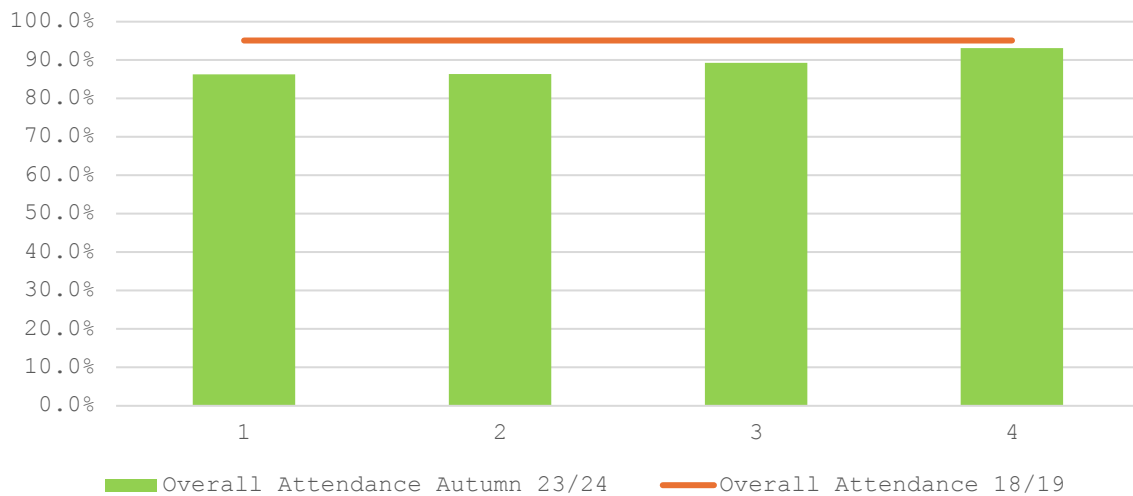
aspirational individual school targets to ensure attendance of all groups of pupils returns to pre-pandemic levels.

Monmouthshire School Attendance Data Autumn Term 2023.

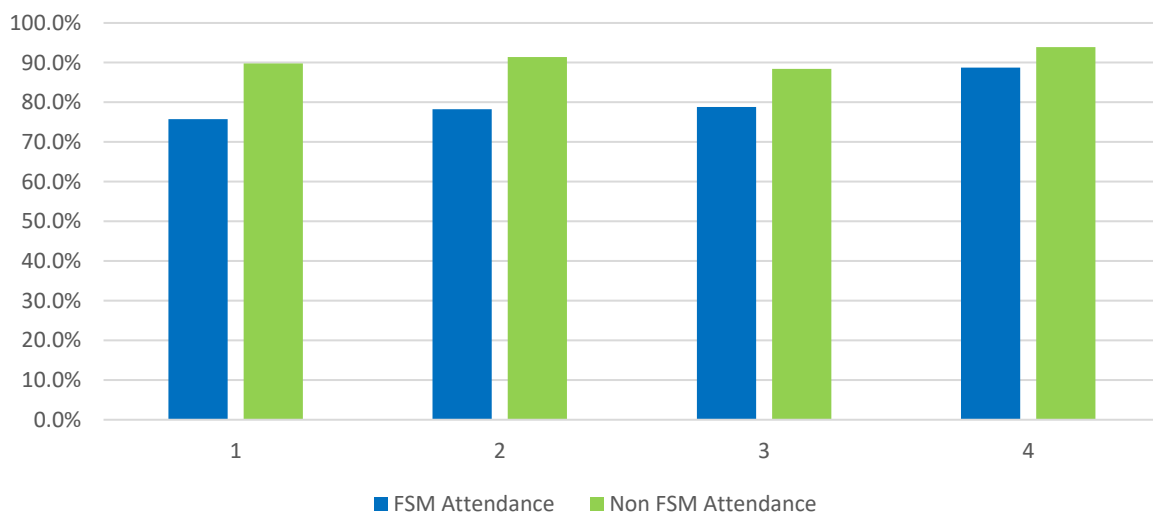
The following data is based only on recorded attendance during the autumn term 2023 and whilst it gives an indication of school attendance trends, it does not guarantee that attendance will remain at this level throughout the year.

Secondary School Attendance

Secondary Attendance by School Autumn 2023



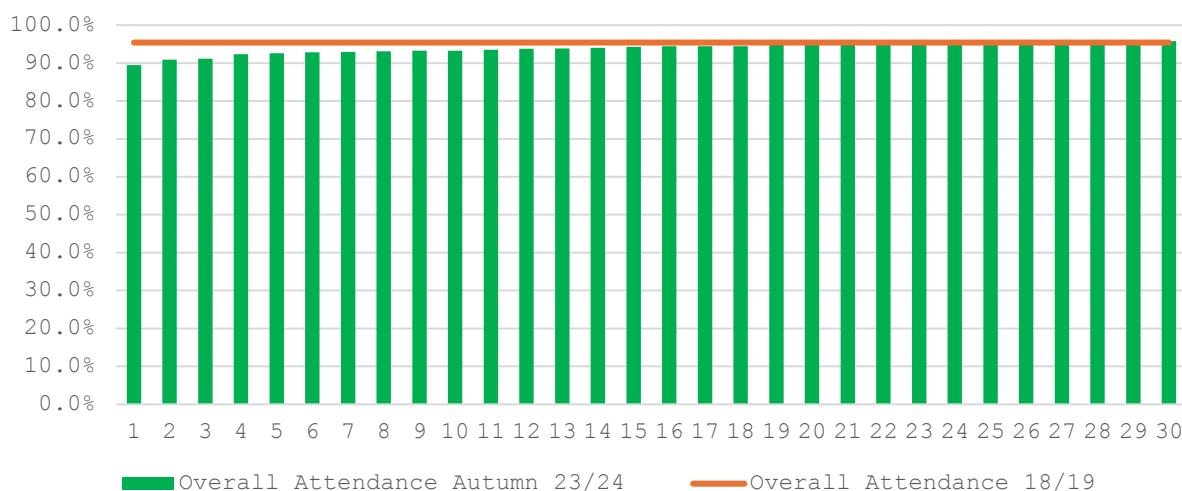
Secondary Attendance by School Autumn 2023 FSM/Non-FSM



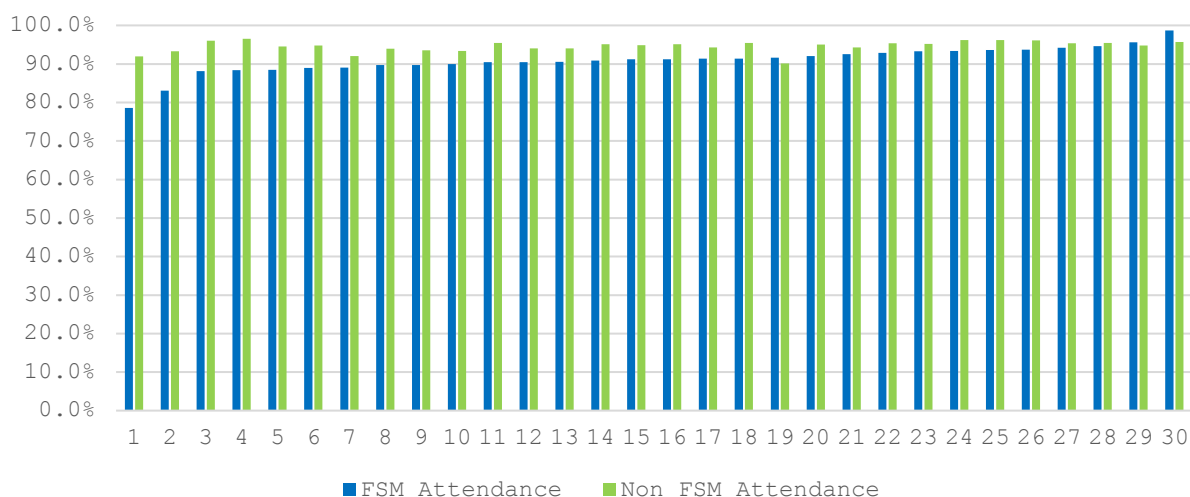
Although positive improvements are noted in two of our secondary schools, attendance at the end of the autumn term 2023 remains well below pre-pandemic levels overall. Generally, attendance in secondary schools, has been slower to recover, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups such as FSM pupils. Consequently, the gap between pre-pandemic and current attendance for FSM pupils has almost doubled to 9.4pp at the end of the autumn term 2023, and the gap is not closing quickly enough. The picture in Monmouthshire reflects the trend across Wales which shows an increase in the number of pupil related absence in years 7 to 11, particularly in relation to anxiety and mental health.

Primary School Attendance

Primary Attendance by School Autumn Term 2023



Primary Attendance by School Autumn 2023 FSM/Non-FSM



Attendance of all pupils during the autumn term 2023, has returned to pre-pandemic levels in a third of primary schools. FSM attendance is at or over 90% in 21 primary schools and above 85% in 7 primary schools. In the remaining schools, the number of FSM pupils is small and therefore the overall percentage is subject to variation.

3. Professional learning and practice worth sharing

Training sessions have been attended by the EWS team on Trauma informed Schools (TIS) and Community Focused Schools in 2023.

Continued professional development of the EWS team is a key part of developing the teams own professional and specialist knowledge. The training opportunities which have been attended this year by team members in 2022-2023 include:

- National Educational Show, Cardiff
- Suicide Awareness
- Domestic Violence
- All Wales General Meetings
- All Wales CME Meetings
- All Wales EHE Meetings
- EWS/EWO Good practice sharing Day run by RCT Local Authority (July 2023)
- ILM Level 5 Business Management Apprenticeship – Senior Lead

The senior lead for the EWS team was a member of the Welsh Government consultation group who developed the new Belonging, Engaging & Participating guidance. They are also involved in consultations with relating to update the All-Wales Attendance Framework.

Up to date training for the team is essential to the EWS role to ensure a robust approach to safeguarding and Level 2 Safeguarding training is obtained by team members. All EWOs ensure that have up to date knowledge to ensure they signpost the most appropriate services available to pupils and their families.

4. Children Missing in Education

Welsh Government are developing a database in each local authority to record Children Missing Education (CME) This will include those pupils where they are missing education due to:

- Movement in/out of area
- EHE – where the LA is not satisfied that there is a suitable full-time education in place.
- Pupils who have returned to their home country.
- Pupil who may have eloped.
- Pupils who may be CLA
- Pupils who may not have a suitable school placement.

Monmouthshire have agreed to work with Welsh Government on the CME Pilot to develop the database. The first meeting took place in November 2023 with the Senior Lead and Lead Education Welfare Officer for CME. In preparation, the Senior Lead completed an Audit of the LA's current processes and outlined areas that require development in meeting the needs of the pilot. Welsh Government will begin consultation on this project in December 2023 for a period for 12 weeks. Monmouthshire will continue to work with WG over the next academic year on strengthening processes and implementing any changes required before the pilot commences in 2025 ready for implementation in 2027.

5. Finance – Value for Money

Staffing Costs	Outcomes
Senior Education Welfare Officer	Temporary Secondment until March 2023. Demands of the role have shown that the role needs to be expanded to a management-based role at a more strategic level.
Welsh Government Grant Funding	Welsh Government Grant funding has been used to appoint a full time EWO to increase EWO capacity in the team and support Welsh Government priorities EHE and CME
Central team	EWS team member has returned from maternity on a 0.6 contract which is now a permanent change after 4 years of previous agreed flexible working.
EHE Support Worker Welsh Government Grant Funded	The post is currently in place with WG funding, and this is an essential role required by the EWS to continue due to rising numbers and EHE caseload. Post dependant at present on WG funding which is in place until March 2024. Welsh Government funding grant has also enabled part cost of an EWO post of 0.2 to support in this area due to increasing numbers.

6. Effectiveness:

Education Welfare Officers within Monmouthshire work using a holistic approach to address underlying issues, which may prove a barrier to learning and impact upon attendance. This ensures that their work is multi-disciplinary and emphasises a solution-focussed approach to re-engage families and young people, rather than use a punitive approach based upon imposition of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) and Prosecution. Consequently, Education Welfare Officers work closely with School Health Nurses, GPs, Police Liaison Officers, Llamau Mediation, Children's Services colleagues, Drug and Alcohol Support Services, CAMHS, Monmouthshire Housing, COMPASS etc.

Working proactively in a multi-disciplinary approach, enables the Education Welfare Service to forge effective multi-agency partnerships. This enables the root causes of non-attendance and non-engagement to be addressed via attendance at, CP or core group meetings of vulnerable pupils and meetings with parents and schools.

Actions arising from the above:

- Ascertain parent and pupil views and reasons for absence.
- Continue to work together with agencies to provide support to action plans in place with Children's Services
- Provide advice and support to schools on strategies to support pupils back into school.
- Continue to provide clarity to Headteachers about the use of register codes.
- Continue to provide support and challenge to schools as appropriate.

7. Estyn 2022-2023

Judgements made by Estyn linked to attendance.

School	Date	ESTYN Commentary - Attendance	Local Authority Support
Dewstow	May 2022	Nearly all pupils feel safe at the school and understand the importance of regular attendance.	EWO attendance data meeting half-termly. Additional EWO allocation to review systems and processes.
St Mary's	June 2022	Leaders monitor pupils' attendance appropriately and have sound strategies in place to ensure good rates of pupil attendance. These include rewards for pupils, regular monitoring of individual pupils' attendance and close communication with parents.	EWO attendance data meeting half-termly. Contact with families where attendance is a concern. Support with attendance systems and processes as required.
The Dell	June 2022	The school monitors pupils' attendance closely. It works well with external partners such as the Educational Welfare Officer to engage with pupils and their families to support good rates of attendance. This is robustly monitored.	EWO attendance data meeting half-termly. Contact with families where attendance is a concern. Support with attendance systems and processes as required.
Gilwern	October 2022	Arrangements to monitor patterns of attendance in pupils with additional learning needs are effective. This is a strength of the school, and, as a result, further support has been put in place to raise the attendance of individuals. Arrangements to analyse and support the attendance of all pupils are effective	EWO attendance data meeting half-termly. Contact with families where attendance is a concern. Support with attendance systems and processes as required.
King Henry VIII	November 2022	R4 Strengthen approaches to promoting positive behaviour, punctuality, and attendance	Senior EWO support to strengthen approaches to attendance (PIAP)
Castle Park	December 2022	Processes to promote positive rates of pupils' attendance are effective.	EWO attendance data meeting half-termly. Contact with families where attendance is a concern. Support with attendance systems and processes as required.
Llanfoist	January 2023	The school robustly monitors attendance, including the attendance of vulnerable	EWO attendance data meeting half-termly.

		groups. There are well-established procedures in place to promote good levels of attendance.	Contact with families where attendance is a concern. Support with attendance systems and processes as required.
Llanvihangel	January 2023	The school robustly monitors attendance, including the attendance of vulnerable groups. There are well-established procedures in place to promote good levels of attendance.	
Monmouth	February 2023	R1 Strengthen processes to raise attendance of pupils eligible for FSM.	Additional support from Senior EWO to review and embed effective systems and processes.
Cantref	April 2023	The school monitors pupils' attendance effectively and, as a result, pupils' attendance rates are good.	EWO attendance data meeting half-termly. Contact with families where attendance is a concern. Support with attendance systems and processes as required.
Undy	May 2023	The school monitors pupils' attendance robustly. This has a positive impact on improving attendance rates for pupils.	EWO attendance data meeting half-termly. Contact with families where attendance is a concern. Support with attendance systems and processes as required.

8. Self-Evaluation: Good

Considering the above evaluative evidence, the above judgement applies:

Self-evaluation judgement:	<p>EWS work to support attendance is good overall.</p> <p>The strong features of practice include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cluster working EWO's. • Holistic approach to supporting pupils, families, and schools to improve attendance. • Good engagement with schools • Team commitment • Robust use of data recording and analysis in school consultations • Effective partnerships exist with primary schools, Access/Admissions, Children's Services, Police, School Health Nurse Team, Housing, and other LA's. • Recording and reporting of information is effective and informs support well.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking of vulnerable pupils and persistent absentees is effective. • Effective EWS panel meetings supported by legal representation ensure fair access to enhance support. • Lead areas are managed well, particularly given the increased workload
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9. Follow Up Actions

- To increase the EWS team to manage the increase in pressure on the service using WG grant funding and Community Focused Schools funding. Funding currently only until March 2024 and this is impacting on the recruitment process.
- Continue to robustly monitor attendance in all schools and prioritise schools who may have a post inspection plan where attendance has been raised.
- EWS to revise MCC Attendance Policy and EHE Policy due to new EHE Guidance and, new Belonging, Engaging & Participating guidance (Nov 23).
- To look at continuity of support for schools by rotating EWO's to different cluster areas.
- To support secondary schools in improving attendance to bring back in line with pre-pandemic attendance levels.
- To set up electronic systems to process Chaperone Licenses applications and deliver safeguarding training to comply with regulations. Evaluate the suitability of NSPCC Chaperone and entertainment training for applicants as part of the application process. This will decrease team time spent in issuing of the licences by MCC.
- MCC to work with Welsh Government on CME Pilot work.

Report completed by: Michelle Kear – Senior Education Welfare Officer

Date: November 2023