

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **26th November 2018**

Report Subject: **School Attendance**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Clive Meredith, Executive Member for Education**

Report Submitted by: **Lynette Jones, Corporate Director of Education**

Report Written by: **Lisa Adams, Senior Education Welfare Officer**

Reporting Pathway									
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder	Committee Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
24.10.18	06.11.18	14.11.18				26.11.18			

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide opportunity for members to scrutinise attendance data for Blaenau Gwent at Primary and Secondary school level for the academic year 2017-18 noting areas of strength and where further improvement is required, and to seek assurance from officers that areas requiring improvement will be addressed.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 *Historically attendance and exclusions have been reported on in the same report. However, given the need to provide a full picture in both areas the Attendance & Exclusion Report has been split into two reports and in future, separate reports will be provided to Scrutiny on attendance and exclusions.*
- 2.2 This report relates only to attendance and will provide:
- The context in terms of legal requirements and responsibilities relating to attendance
 - National data
 - Local data
 - Evaluation and what we are doing

2.3 Context

The key Attendance Guidance is the Welsh Government Guidance entitled: 'All Wales Attendance Framework' (November 2012). The resulting document provides standards and guidance for practitioners to ensure greater consistency of practice throughout Wales. It also aims to enable the EWS and schools to deliver services that are consistent, accessible and of a high standard. Most importantly it is intended to be a practical resource toolkit for use by staff working within the Education Welfare Service.

- 2.4 Parental responsibilities - By law under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, the parent 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 special educational needs the child may have. This can be by regular attendance at school, alternative provision or by elective home education (the parent can choose to provide education for their child).
- 2.5 School responsibilities - Schools are required under the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 to take an attendance register twice a day; at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. The accuracy of the register is important in order to support any statutory interventions that may be required. It should be noted that it is an offence not to maintain accurate registers.
- 2.6 Local Authority responsibilities - By law under section 437 of the Education Act 1996, LAs have a duty to ensure that a child for whom they are responsible is receiving a suitable education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.
- 2.7 In September 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government commenced Section 436A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 which requires that local authorities must 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'.
- 2.8 Implementation of the duty under section 436A should be integrated with the wider range of duties placed on local authorities, including the Children's Act 2004 (sections 25-29) and the Welsh Assembly Government's Safeguarding Children Working Together under the Children's Act 2004 that aims to improve outcomes, and safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- 2.9 In order to fulfil its statutory duty, in December 2015, Blaenau Gwent revised its School Attendance Policy to make it fully compliant with legislation and incorporate the 'Callio' strategy, which had been introduced the previous academic year.
- 2.10 Throughout 2017/18, the Education Welfare Service continued to work closely with schools to promote the need for regular school attendance and to embed new working practices.
- 2.11 In January 2018, the registration audits were undertaken in all secondary schools and the River Centre and recommendations made to the schools. The recommendations made were to ensure that registers are marked consistently throughout Blaenau Gwent and to ensure that pupils educated off site are safeguarded appropriately. The findings have been shared with Education DMT.

2.12 In April 2018 reducing persistent absenteeism was made a corporate priority and a plan is in place to address this.

2.13 **Evaluation**

2.14 **Secondary Attendance**

There has been a steady decline in secondary attendance from 94.0% to 92.9% over the last 3 years. The gap between Blaenau Gwent and the Welsh Average is increasing at a concerning rate, from -0.2pp gap down to -0.9pp gap.

2.15 When comparing Blaenau Gwent secondary attendance data with its family of local authorities it is ranked joint 3rd in 2017/18. In 2015/16, Blaenau Gwent was ranked 1st out of 5 (where 1st is the highest performing LA). In 2017/18, within our family of local authorities (Merthyr, RCT, Neath Port Talbot and Caerphilly) Blaenau Gwent was ranked joint 3rd out of 5 for Secondary school attendance.

2.16 Processes to reduce unauthorised absence have been ineffective and the gap between Blaenau Gwent and Wales has increased from 0.0pp to -0.2pp in 2017/18 i.e. unauthorised absence figures for Blaenau Gwent are now higher than the all-Wales mean.

2.17 No progress has also been made to reduce persistent absenteeism; at the end of 2016/17 the percentage of Secondary pupils who were persistent absentees was 4.6% compared to 3.4% last year. This makes BG 1st compared to our family of local authorities, 3rd in the SEWC and above the Welsh Average of 4%. There is no update on this available until March 2019.

2.18 **Primary attendance**

Limited progress has been made regarding primary school attendance over the last three years, but that is a reflection of the National picture. Over the last three years Blaenau Gwent has consistently been 3rd out of 5 when compared with its family of local authorities.

2.19 The number of schools in Q3 and Q4 has increased.

2.20 Whilst there has been a decrease in persistent absenteeism over the last three, progress has been unsatisfactory and BG is still above the Welsh Average.

2.21 Effective processes are in place to reduce unauthorised absence and Blaenau Gwent is just above the Welsh average.

2.22 **What we are doing**

Continue to support schools to improve attendance, especially those that are in Q3 and Q4 for attendance. This will be done by monitoring pupils below 90% and auditing registration practises. With regards to schools in Q1 and Q2, 'Callio' will continue to be used, the EWS will continue with statutory intervention and also give appropriate advice to schools regarding issues as they arise.

- 2.23 Continue to analyse attendance data fortnightly to identify current trends along with areas of strengths and weaknesses and direct the work of schools and support agencies. The EWS will continue to work with WG colleagues to look at illnesses as this is a common theme across Wales. With regards to medical appointments the EWS and schools will continue to encourage parents to make appointments after school where possible.
- 2.24 Improve Child Missing Education (CME) procedures and in-house transfers so pupils are out of school for shorter periods. The Children Missing Education Policy has been revised and is currently going through the formal adoption process. Once adopted this will ask schools to notify the EWS in a timelier manner where pupils move without notifying the school. The EWS are also now monitoring removals from roll on a monthly basis. The SEWO and Admissions have also been looking closely at the time it takes for pupils to be placed on school roll after the admission has been processed. This will be discussed with the schools admission forum to put a timeframe in place.
- 2.25 Decrease the number of pupils on reduced time-tables by monitoring vulnerable pupils and exclusions on a monthly basis. Following each monthly analysis a meeting will be held with Inspire to Achieve to see what additional support can be put in place. This closer monitoring and earlier intervention should reduce the need for reduced time tables.
- 2.26 Revise behaviour strategy/toolkit and support to schools to reduce the number of exclusions which impact on attendance.
- 2.27 Look at EOTAS provisions that are accessed by schools in the LA to ensure that the attendance is reflected correctly in the school registers. In line with Estyn's recommendations we also need to ensure that all children who offend are only placed in alternative provisions that have proven good outcomes.
- 2.28 Correspondence with parents to advise them of HPA guidance and to encourage medical appointments to be made outside of school hours.
- 2.29 A database of persistent absentees will be maintained with monthly tracking in place and audits of individual pupil files.

- 2.30 Where the SEWO attends multi-agency meetings for individual pupils (i.e. ASB, YOS, etc.), a tracking system will be put in place to look at whether the support has been successful and also whether there are any attendance concerns or exclusions coming through.
- 2.31 Case reviews with a sample of pupils that are currently with YOS or involved in the ASB process will be undertaken to identify the learning that is needed then implement the changes to make sure that weak practice is eliminated.

3. Options for Recommendation

- 3.1 The options for Scrutiny to consider are:

Option 1: Consider the information contained in the report and provide challenge and/or further action for consideration to make improvements.

Option 2: Accept the information in the report.

4. Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

4.1 *Corporate Plan Priorities*

To improve pupil outcomes, progress and well-being, for all our pupils particularly for our more able and our most vulnerable learners.

4.2 *Statutory Responsibilities*

To ensure that all pupils of compulsory school age attend school regularly and punctually in accordance with the 1996 Education Act and 1989 Children Act.

4.3 *Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan*

To forge new pathways to prosperity - good school attendance enables pupils to maximise their potential and obtain the highest possible outcomes. This is a fundamental pre-requisite of ensuring future local and national prosperity through the provision of an informed and well-educated workforce and society.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 *Impacts on Budget*

There are no financial implications for the local authority.

5.2 *Risk*

There is an ongoing need to improve school attendance so that pupils are attending school on a regular basis and are able to maximise their potential.

5.2.1 Failure to ensure that there is robust monitoring of attendance in schools and of the quality of Council services to support school improvement carries with it a number of significant risks:

- Undetected and unaddressed decline in school performance and the quality of provision;
- Students do not achieve to acceptable levels;
- Lack of overall improvement in schools' performance; and
- Negative impact on the reputation of the Council.

5.2.2 Similarly, ineffective monitoring of Council Services also poses a range of risks including:

- Reducing standards and quality of provision in schools;
- Poor value for money;
- Ineffective support for schools which hinders their improvement; and
- Negative impact on the reputation of the Council.

5.3 **Legal**

To ensure that all pupils of compulsory school age attend school regularly and punctually in accordance with the 1996 Education Act and 1989 Children Act.

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no direct workforce implications for the local authority by adopting the revised Policy.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Since reporting to Scrutiny in January 2018 Welsh Government has released the statistical data for primary school attendance in 2016/17 and secondary attendance in 2017/18. The statistical data for primary school attendance in 2017/18 will be released in January 2019.

6.2 **Secondary Attendance**

Blaenau Gwent's Secondary attendance over the last three years.

	Target	Actual	Family	Wales
2015/16	93.5%	94.0%	93.6%	94.2%
2016/17	94.5%	93.7%	93.4%	94.1%
2017/18	94.3%	92.9%	93.0%	93.8%

Blaenau Gwent has not met its target this year and the gap between BG and Wales has increased by 0.7% over the last three years. There has been a steady decline in Blaenau Gwent over the last three years.

There has also been a 1.1% decline between 2016 and 2018 in attendance in Secondary Schools (from 94.0% to 92.9%). The rate of decrease is higher than the all Wales average between 2016 and 2018 which decreased by 0.4% from 94.2% to 93.8%.

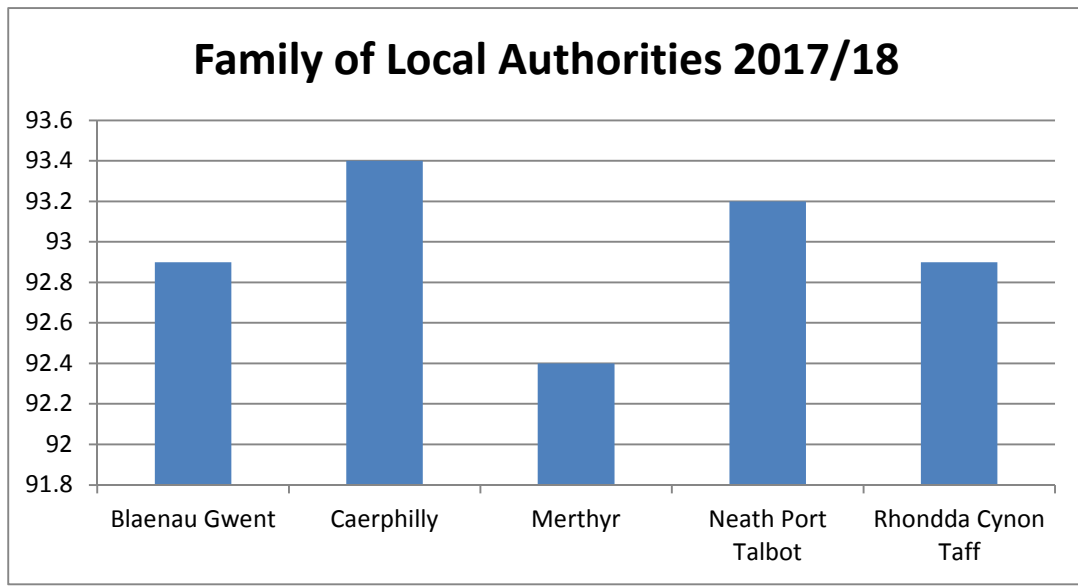
6.3 Blaenau Gwent’s Secondary attendance compared to the other 21 Welsh local authorities.

2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
14th	Joint 15th	Joint 20th

During 2017/18 overall attendance in Blaenau Gwent secondary schools was 92.9%. This represents a decrease of 0.8% on the previous year and placed Blaenau Gwent joint 20th (joint 15th in 2016/17) when compared with the attendance of all Welsh local authorities.

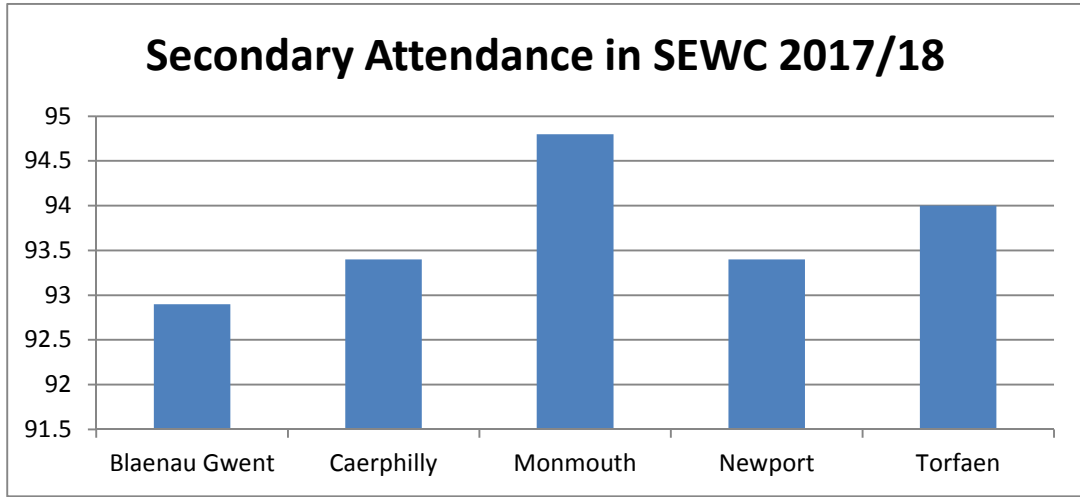
6.4 Family of Local Authorities

In 2015/16, Blaenau Gwent was ranked 1st out of 5 (where 1st is the highest performing LA). In 2017/18, within our family of local authorities (Merthyr, RCT, Neath Port Talbot and Caerphilly) Blaenau Gwent was ranked joint 3rd out of 5 for Secondary school attendance.



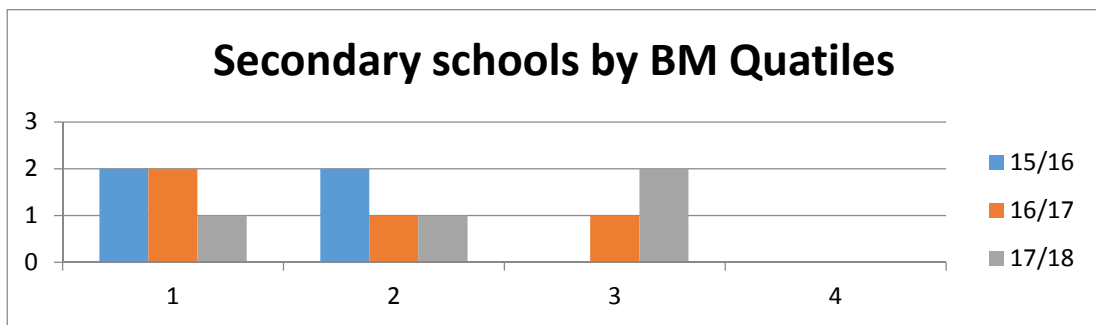
6.5 SEWC Comparisons

When compared to other authorities within SEWC we were ranked 5th out of 5 for Secondary school attendance (where 1st is the highest performing LA) compared to joint 2nd out of 5 the previous year.



6.6 Attendance Benchmarking

The below table shows the distribution of Secondary schools by quartile



When compared to their family of schools, in 2017/18 1 school was in Quarter (Q) 1 for attendance, 1 school in Q2, and 2 schools in Q3. This was a decline on the previous year when 2 schools were in Q1 for attendance, 1 school in Q2 and 1 in Q3.

6.7 Blaenau Gwent's Secondary unauthorised absences over the last three years.

	Actual	Wales
2015/16	1.3%	1.3%
2016/17	1.5%	1.4%
2017/18	1.8%	1.6%

Unauthorised absence in Secondary schools has increased over the last 3 years from 1.3% to 1.8% which takes us just above the Welsh average of 1.6%. Although the increase has been greater in Blaenau Gwent, it is reflective of the national picture.

When comparing our data with other local authorities Blaenau Gwent is 1st in our family of L.A.s and 3rd in the SEWC (1st having the least unauthorised absence).

6.8 Individual school data for 2017/18

	Present Boys	Present Girls	Present Total	Auth Boys	Auth Girls	Auth Total	Unauth Boys	Unauth Girls	Unauth Total
School A	91.2%	91.4%	91.3%	6.8%	6.6%	6.7%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
School B	92.7%	93.4%	93.1%	4.5%	4.4%	4.4%	2.8%	2.2%	2.5%
School C	93.8%	94.2%	93.9%	4.9%	4.7%	4.8%	1.3%	1.1%	1.2%
School D	93.2%	94.9%	94.0%	5.6%	4.0%	4.8%	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%

There is a mixed picture across the schools when attendance is broken down to gender as you can see from the above table. As a local authority, girls' attendance is much higher than boys' (B – 92.7%) (G – 93.5%).

Authorised absence for the local authority was 5.2%. When split into gender boys' authorised absence was 5.5% compared to girls' with 4.9% authorised absence.

Unauthorised absence for the local authority was 1.7%. When split into gender boys' unauthorised absence was 1.8% compared to girls with 1.6% authorised absence.

6.9 Absences in order of highest to lowest

ILLNESS (CODE I)	4.3%
TRUANCY (CODE O)	1.4%
OTHER AUTHORISED ABSENCES (CODE C)	0.5%
MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS	0.4%
UNAUTHORISED HOLIDAYS IN TERM TIME (G)	0.3%
EXCLUSIONS (E)	0.2%

6.10 Primary Attendance

Blaenau Gwent's primary attendance over the last three years.

	Target	Actual	Family	Wales
2015/16	94.6%	94.5%	94.5%	94.9%
2016/17	94.9%	94.5%	94.5%	94.9%
2017/18	95.2%	94.4%		

Blaenau Gwent has not meet its target over the last three years and the gap between BG and Wales has remained at 0.4% Whilst there appears to be little progress across Blaenau Gwent this has been the picture across Wales for the last two years.

There has been +0.1% improvement between 2014 and 2017 in attendance in Primary Schools (from 94.4% to 94.5% unpublished). This compares with all Wales attendance between 2014 and 2017 of 94.8% to 94.9%.

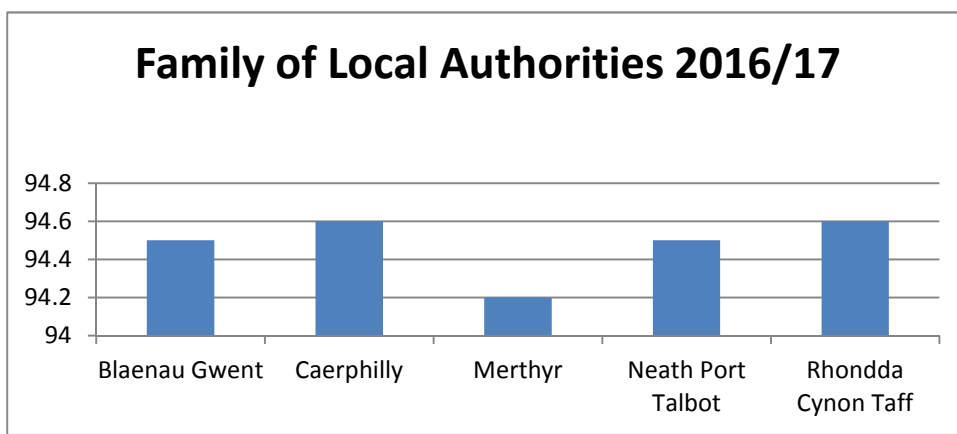
6.11 **Blaenau Gwent's primary attendance compared to the other 21 Welsh local authorities.**

2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Joint 18th	Joint 20th	Joint 19th	Joint 19th

During 2017/18 overall attendance in Blaenau Gwent primary schools was 94.4% (unverified data). This is slightly down on the previous year, which was 94.5% as the previous year and placed Blaenau Gwent joint 19th when compared with the attendance of all Welsh local authorities.

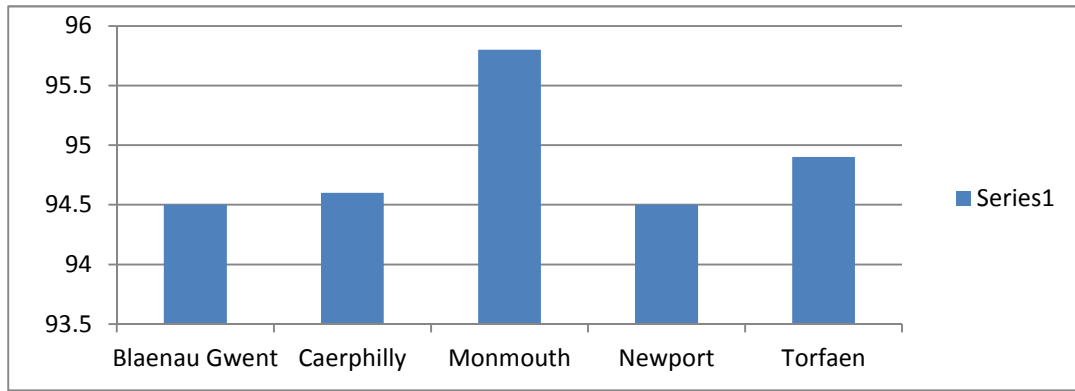
6.12 **Family of Local Authorities**

In 2015/16, Blaenau Gwent was ranked 4th out of 5 (where 1st is the highest performing LA). In 2016/17, within our family of local authorities (Merthyr, RCT, Neath Port Talbot and Caerphilly) Blaenau Gwent was ranked joint 3rd out of 5 for primary school attendance.



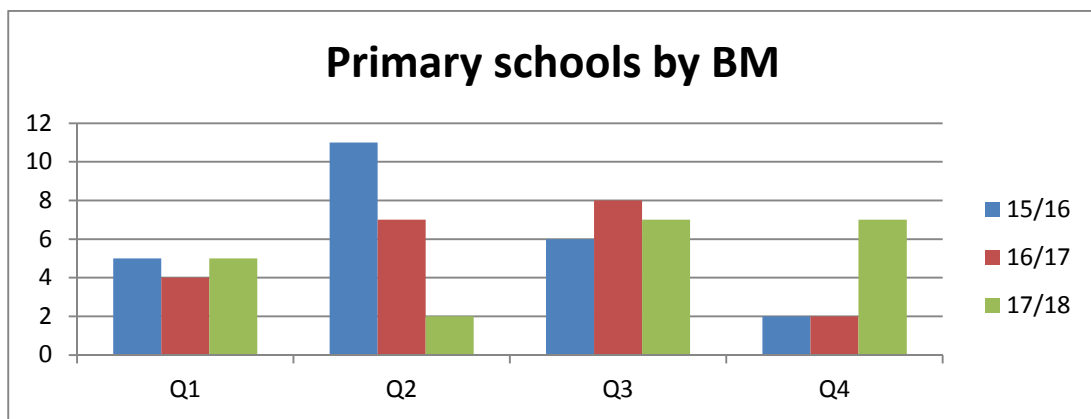
6.13 SEWC Comparisons

When compared to other authorities within SEWC we were ranked joint 4th out of 5 for primary school attendance (where 1st is the highest performing LA) compared to 4th out of 5 the previous year.



6.14 Attendance Benchmarking

The below table shows the distribution of primary schools by quartile based on 16/17 benchmarking data (this is subject to change in January 2019)



When compared to their family of schools in 2017/18, 5 Blaenau Gwent schools were in Q1 for attendance, 2 schools in Q2, 7 schools in Q3 and 7 schools in Q4.

This is a declining picture compared to 2016/17 when there were 4 schools in Quarter 1, 7 schools in Quarter 2, 8 schools in Q3 and 2 schools in Q4 and a concern that only 33.3% of schools in 2017/18 were in Q1 and Q2 compared to 66.6% in 2015/16.

As of 6th October 2018, attendance within primary schools has slightly decreased compared to the same period last year, from 95.9% to 95.6%.

6.15 **Blaenau Gwent's Primary unauthorised absences over the last three years.**

	Actual	Wales
2014/15	1.2%	1.0%
2015/16	1.1%	1.1%
2016/17	1.2%	1.1%

Unauthorised absence in primary schools has remained at 1.2% over the last 3 years. This makes us 2nd in our family of L.A.s, joint 3rd in the SEWC and above the Welsh Average of 1.1%.

6.16 **Individual school data for 2017/18**

School 2017/18	/	\	B	D	J	L	P	V	W	%
School 1	45.89	46.73	0.13	0.23	0	1.055	0.03	0.20 3	0	94.2
School 2	45.76	46.81	0	0	0	1.147	0.02	0	0	93.6
School 3	46.89	47.15	0	0	0	0.36	0	0	0	94.4
School 4	45.23	46.12	0.01	0.28	0	0.987	0	0.28	0	92.9
School 5	47.18	47.54	0	0	0	0.559	0.03	0.16 8	0	95.5
School 6	45.32	45.98	0	0.33	0	0.955	0.01	0.86 5	0	93.4
School 7	47.14	47.58	0	0	0	0.532	0	0	0	95.3
School 8	45.25	46.41	0.84	0.61	0	1.085	0.03	0.44 7	0	94.6
School 9	46.24	47.03	0.07	0.33	0	0.953	0.03	0.44 6	0	95.0
School 10	46.9	47.3	0.01	0	0	0.628	0	0	0	94.8
School 11	46.82	47.36	0	0	0	0.62	0	0	0	95.0
School 12	46.16	47.09	0.03	0	0	1.168	0.05	0.17 6	0	94.7
School 13	45.64	46.71	0.05	0	0	1.185	0.07	0.08 8	0	93.7
School 14	46.48	47.03	0.01	0.56	0	0.538	0.09	0.35 5	0	95.1
School 15	46.2	46.5	0.9	0.48	0	0.49	0.02	0.06 3	0	94.7
School 16	46.25	47.48	0	0	0	1.21	0	0	0	94.8
School 17	46.37	47.03	0.86	0	0	0.815	0.01	0	0	95.1
School 18	46.62	46.85	0	0	0	0.273	0.03	0.25	0	94.0
School 19	46.09	46.65	0.1	0.03	0	0.681	0	0.57 3	0	94.1
School 20	46.65	47.07	0	0	0	0.591	0	0.61 9	0	94.9
School 21	45.65	46.51	0.01	0.66	0	1.015	0	0	0	93.8

6.17 Absences in order of highest to lowest

ILLNESS (CODE I)	3.2%
UNAUTHORISED HOLIDAYS IN TERM TIME (G)	0.7%
AUTHORISED HOLIDAYS IN TERM TIME	0.5%
TRUANCY (CODE O)	0.4%
MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS (CODE M)	0.2%
OTHER AUTHORISED ABSENCES (CODE C)	0.2%
NO REASON YET PROVIDED (CODE N)	0.2%
TRAVELLING (T)	0.1%
MISSING MARKS	0.1%

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

There are less young people out of education which has immediate implications for the public with regards to ensuring young people are better safeguarded but also long term implications as it is widely researched that young people out of education cost health, police and other agencies more financial implications in later years than young people in full time education.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

Attendance data is regularly shared with schools; improved attendance will have a positive impact on the community with regards to well-being.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

Improved attendance levels will have no negative impact in the long term. It will, however, ensure that young people attend school more often to improve attainment of young people which in the long term improve their life chances.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

Routine monitoring of attendance and exclusions will keep the focus on the need for regular school attendance and improved behaviour in schools. Improved attendance and reductions in exclusions will prevent young people from becoming NEET.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

A regional approach to improving attendance is ongoing, involving the EAS and the five regional LAs.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

There is no direct impact in relation to an integrated approach however improvements in school attendance rates will prepare pupils for transition to adulthood reducing the effects of truancy.

6.8 ***EqlA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***
An equality impact assessment has been completed and there have no adverse impacts in relation to the data contained in this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 This will be monitored termly through Education DMT and an annual report will also be provided.

8. **Background Documents / Electronic Links**

<https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/all-wales-attendance-framework.pdf>

REF: SA.164