RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019-20

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	**Agenda Item No.**
16ᵗʰ October 2019	
REPORT OF: **DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING**	**UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE STRATEGY FOR 2018 - 2021**

Author: Daniel Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service
Tel: 01443 744298

UPDATE ON THE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE STRATEGY FOR 2018 – 2021
"MISS SCHOOL, MISS OUT"

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the implementation of the School Attendance Strategy, 2018 – 2021, including the action plan implemented to raise the awareness of good school attendance and improve the current attendance rates across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

2.1 Scrutinise and comment on the information contained within this report.

2.2 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report.

3. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

3.1 Since 2016, attendance rates in Rhondda Cynon Taf have started to decline. Primary attendance (inc. special schools) dropped from 94.6% in 2015/16 to 94.2% in 2017/18. With Secondary attendance (inc. special schools) declining from 93.9% to 92.9% over the same period. This evidenced the need for a revision of the School Attendance Strategy to address the key issues contributing to the reduced attendance rates. The revised School Attendance Strategy was presented to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in September 2018 with an annual update scheduled for review and challenge.

3.2 Unauthorised absence had also increased during this period, especially in secondary schools where it had risen from 1.8% to 2.3%. This resulted in a greater number of referrals from schools being received by the Attendance and Wellbeing Service in an attempt to tackle the absenteeism:

3.3   The Attendance and Wellbeing Service was restructured in April 2018 to account for the changes in attendance experienced in schools and the evolving needs of the service user.

3.4   The new service is more focused on delivering a tailored package of support to the pupils and their families that are referred by the school, with a clear expectation on schools to manage their internal processes more effectively. The sharing of good practice, support and challenge meetings and regular registration compliance checks are all part of the support that has been offered to schools to improve their management of school attendance.

3.5   The strategy aims to further strengthen the focus on intervention, support and awareness raising of the wider school population, either prior or in addition to the support being provided to the pupils open to the Attendance and Wellbeing Service. A yearly action plan underpins the aims of the strategy (Appendix One).

4.   KEY PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS TAKEN IN THE FIRST YEAR

4.1   The strategy focuses on six key priorities, which if achieved effectively, should have a positive impact on school attendance across the County Borough:

- Improve pupil, parent, public and school awareness of school attendance issue by developing a whole authority approach to promoting and improving attendance;
- Review, evaluate and further develop the use of data, its analysis and the reporting mechanisms to inform service improvement both at local authority and school level;
- To further develop a robust and sustainable challenge and support system for improving school attendance, linking with other key priorities that impact on and are impacted by absenteeism;
- To develop an efficient and self-sustainable mechanism for sharing good practice and information on a timely basis that can be accessed independently by schools at any time;
- To review, evaluate and re-launch key initiatives and interventions to support good attendance and tackle absenteeism;
- Further develop partnership working to ensure the key objective of improving school attendance is embedded across internal and external agencies.

Priority 1: Improve pupil, parent, public and school awareness of school attendance issue by developing a whole authority approach to promoting and improving attendance

4.2   The overarching slogan of the strategy is "Miss School, Miss Out". Under this umbrella, the primary phase is branded as Super Attender, whilst the secondary phase links attendance to attainment, hence "Attend Today, Achieve Tomorrow".

4.3   The corporate website and social media accounts have been used as the main platforms for disseminating the messages of the campaign. The social media posts and new RCT Attendance webpages contain imagery of the general messages

noted in 4.2, but also focus on some of the more prevalent 'excuses' for non-attendance that RCT will not condone.

4.4   Schools can link their own social media accounts and websites to the corporate posts/tweets/pages to emphasise their involvement and backing of the local authority's attendance strategy. An information pack has been sent to schools to encourage this link.

4.5   The 'Super Attender' brand was refreshed and re-launched in Primary Schools (see Appendix Two). Super Attender sets the challenge at the beginning of the year and highlights the importance of good school attendance at all times. In the 2018/19 academic year, 103 assembles were held. In 19/20 academic year, 83 assemblies have already taken place with further assemblies planned. Rewards in the form of coloured "I'm a Super Attender" wristbands will be provided to the schools on a termly basis for the following achievements:

- 97% or above attendance in the term period;
- the most improved attendance (identified by the school); and,
- the individual who has overcome the most to attend (chosen by the school).

4.6   The Super Attender and Attend Today, Achieve Tomorrow campaigns have also been developed into new banners which were distributed across all schools in the Authority. Secondary schools receiving two banners (one image with two males, one image with two females).

4.7   The Attendance and Wellbeing Service has been present at school events over the past year and during community events such as the Teddy Bears' Picnic promoting the benefits of good school attendance. We are currently looking to revamp marketing material for added impact at future events.

Priority 2: Review, evaluate and further develop the use of data, its analysis and the reporting mechanisms to inform service improvement both at local authority and school level

4.8   Attendance data reports have been realigned to the Estyn framework, ensuring that schools receive information they require to monitor their performance and identify areas for improvement. This includes vulnerable group data (non-identifiable) and trend data over the past three years split by half term.

4.9   Methods for the dissemination of the data were reviewed with schools. Reports are now sent to all Headteachers, Secondary Attendance Leads and placed on the RCT Source for Schools approximately two weeks after the end of each half term.

4.10   For the 2019/20 academic year, we are also aligning the Attendance data reports with the School Exclusion reports to provide a more timely, robust and effective data sharing process for schools to scrutinise and implement actions against.

Priority 3: To further develop a robust and sustainable challenge and support system for improving school attendance, linking with other key priorities that impact on and are impacted by absenteeism

4.11   For the 2018/19 academic year, a revised challenge and support framework was established. This is currently being further developed to include a staged Graduated Response model, that sits alongside a similar model for Exclusions, and reviewed by a select number of Headteachers prior to wider circulation and implementation.

4.12   The framework and graduated response consists of registration compliance checks that are undertaken by Attendance Support/Engagement Officers in every school on a termly basis. Coding anomalies and basic practice concerns are raised with the head teacher/attendance lead during these sessions and an action plan devised to rectify/improve the identified areas ensuring accuracy of registers across all schools in the Authority.

4.13   Any significant coding and/or process concerns are escalated to the team leader for primary settings or the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing for secondary settings who will facilitate a data response visit (DRV) with the head teacher/ attendance lead to undertake a more through audit of the processes and practices within the school, highlighting areas for improvement and good practice. A formal action plan with timescales for completion is generated as part of the initial meeting. The review meeting will revisit the actions to determine if they have been met and their impact.

4.14   For schools causing significant concern based on consecutive concerning data terms/years or where there has been little improvement in previous actions plans, a timely data-led senior meetings with head teachers will be held with the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing, Head of Achievement (Primary or Secondary), and the Challenge Advisor. These schools will be those whose practices do not appear to be effective in improving and sustaining attendance levels. Support will be offered to self-evaluate the school's current position in comparison to 3 year trends, and develop a subsequent improvement plan to address these issues.

4.15   Where there is still little or no improvement, a meeting with the Director of Education and Inclusion Services will be made alongside the parties mentioned previously.

Priority 4: To develop an efficient and self-sustainable mechanism for sharing good practice and information on a timely basis that can be accessed independently by schools at any time

4.16   A School Attendance Toolkit was disseminated to all schools in 2018 with template policies, self-evaluation framework and interventions to raise attendance within school prior to reaching the threshold for a referral to the Attendance and Wellbeing Service. This toolkit has been reviewed and amended for the Autumn Term 2019. These prevention activities, if implemented fully, could reduce the number of pupils becoming entrenched absentees.

4.17   Good practice is an ever-evolving process and we wish to ensure it is shared at appropriate opportunities. At the outset of the School Attendance Strategy, the Source for Schools was initially identified as the platform to share information and resources electronically. This was updated early in the 2018/19 academic year with information from key strategy areas, such as, communication with pupils, communication with parents, data and evaluation, graduated response and interventions, school attendance policy, link with Governing Body, tackling persistent absenteeism, closing the gap, etc.

4.18   The use of the Source for Schools platform was reviewed in the 2018/19 summer term where a number of issues were presented in school feedback including lack of understanding of the platform from school staff (the platform requires a separate username and password), lack of updates from other service areas and therefore low usage across our schools. We are therefore working with Data Systems colleagues to source an alternative, open-access platform in order to share good practice.

4.19   Wellbeing days for senior school staff at secondary level have been held which offered school-to-school support for a sustainable improvement model. These meetings helped to identify good practice, presented by the relevant school to others in the County Borough. Discussion sessions and workshops were facilitated to improve schools' knowledge and expertise base, with key areas including Attendance and Wellbeing, Positive Psychology Models, use of systems such as Class Charts and Behaviour Systems.

4.20   Over the next year, we aim to look at Wellbeing Events for all schools to share good practice including at primary level and libking with the Wellbeing Strategy being compiled by Access and Inclusion.

Priority 5: To review, evaluate and re-launch key initiatives and interventions to support good attendance and tackle absenteeism

4.21   Whilst the number of pupils in public places during the school day has reduced in recent years, there is still a need to tackle truancy.

4.22   'Truancy Watch' was implemented in 2018/19, where the Attendance and Wellbeing Service visited areas of known truancy using local knowledge from schools. Plans are currently in motion to widen the scope of Truancy Watch and incorporate partnership working with local PCSOs for regular patrols following a registration period in towns.

4.23   The feasibility of 'Truancy-Free Zones' has been scoped. As an initial pilot of the scheme, two strands were undertaken.

4.24   The first strand of the pilot was working with our Library Service and implementing a County Wide initiative for Library staff to challenge and record potential truants using library buildings during the day. To date, there has been no reports of truants accessing these services. Electively Home Educated young people do use library buildings and library staff ask for parental evidence of this before allowing pupils to enter during school hours.

4.25   The second strand of the pilot involved members of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service visiting small businesses in the Mountain Ash, Abercynon and Aberdare areas where they spoke to owners about truancy and Child Licensing. Initial feedback from the business owners was varied including some who do not allow school aged children to enter during the day to other businesses wary of turning away school aged children due to the loss of income and perception that this may result in anti-social behaviour.

4.26   The potential for a 'Child Missing Education (CME) Hotline' was also part of the feasibility scope. It was found any 'hotline' would come at an additional cost to the Service and would still need to be staffed by the Service. It was therefore decided to be more prudent to ask members of the public to contact the existing Attendance and

Wellbeing Service phone number. As part of our Service marketing materials re-design, we are requesting these phone calls be made.

4.27   School-based initiatives, delivered by the Attendance and Wellbeing Service, were reviewed and effective initiatives introduced. The balance between case work and initiatives is constantly overseen to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils are not being overlooked at the expense of other initiatives. Types of initiatives run in the past year include:

- Super Attender Challenge (see 4.5)
- Target groups (6 weeks) aimed at 86%-90% attendees – 2 groups, total 19 children. Average attendance increase 4.0%.
- Meet and Greet sessions – 18 sessions held with 145 pupils engaged
- Daily Absence Response Teams (DARTs) – 22 sessions held with 297 pupils engaged
- Truancy Patrols – 9 sessions held with 11 students found and returned to school

4.28   As a result of the success of some of last year's initiatives, there has been further roll out across the Service. All Attendance Support/Engagement Officers will be required going forward to run a target group in one school each term following successful shadowing of staff already familiar with the process which will result in 20 target groups per term. The schools involved will also be requested to allow a member of staff to support the target group so that the school can effectively continue these when Attendance and Wellbeing Service support has ended. Other initiative dates for the year are also in the planning stage with schools reflecting analysis of data of those most in need of improvement and at times which reflect spikes in the levels of poor attendance. These include 13 DARTs scheduled and 5 Meet and Greets.

Priority 6: Further develop partnership working to ensure the key objective of improving school attendance is embedded across internal and external agencies

4.29   The strategy requires all service areas throughout the authority taking a shared responsibility for improving attendance at school. Working links with internal service will need to be established and/or further developed to ensure that school attendance be given consideration when planning support for children and their families.

4.30   A key development has been the establishment of triangular meetings between schools, the Attendance and Wellbeing Service and Educational Psychologists to ensure that schools are prioritising learners for the appropriate support from support services to assist them to reengage in their education. Although in the early stages, initial meeting have focused on severe, persistent absentees with attendance below 60%. Consultation meetings have been established to strengthen the school-based graduated response adopted for learners with persistently poor attendance and Education directorate support. At this time, we are focused on meeting half termly with our secondary schools with the most concerning attendance data and termly with all other secondary schools.

4.31   Further development is needed to include learner voice initiatives to gather information from the current cohort of pupils on the challenges they face regarding school attendance.

4.32   Further work is also needed to ensure similar working links are established with key external partners that work with children, young people and their families and ensure that school attendance is a priority for them in their business plans and individual action/support plans for the pupils they work with. An initial meeting has been held in September 2019 with the Youth Offending Service, Youth Engagement and Participation Service, Access and Inclusion and Attendance and Wellbeing Service to develop this collaborative approach.

5.   **MONITORING AND REVIEW**

5.1   The strategy has been developed for the period September 2018 to August 2021 (three academic years) with the aim of preventing further reductions in school attendance rates. The strategy is underpinned by four key performance indicators. Results for the first academic year of implementation are as follows.

5.2   The first two indicators surround secondary and primary school attendance against target. Secondary school attendance (inc. special schools) dropped from 92.9% in 2017/18 to 92.8% in 2018/19 falling well short of the ambitious 94.1% target. Primary school attendance (inc. special schools) increased from 94.2% to 94.3% in the same period but also fell below the RCT-wide target of 95.1%. Although disappointing that secondary attendance has decreased, the rate of decline has reduced and we have seen improvements at primary level although not too the high standard we set our target against.

	Academic Year			
	2015/16	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2018/19**
Number of referrals received by AWS	1195	1663	1686	1706

5.3   The number of referrals into the service has continued to increase. Although we would like to see this figure reduce in line with improving attendance, it shows that schools are utilising the service well where needed. For 2018/19 schools were asked to complete, on referral, the steps they had taken within school as part of a graduated response to non-attendance. For 2019/20 this has also been included for our Wellbeing referrals to ensure there is a clear expectation on schools to manage internal processes more effectively and provide support to pupils in line with the needs they present.

5.4   To ensure that schools are undertaking this graduated response and undertake timely referrals, all Attendance Support/Engagement Officers will meet a senior member of school staff on a half-termly basis to discuss open cases, potential referrals and school processes. This is in addition to the registration compliance checks and Support and Challenge protocols.

5.5   Outlined in 3.3 was the restructure the Service undertook. Since this point and due to feedback from schools and to improve working arrangements two significant changes have been made. Attendance Support/Engagement Officers have since been realigned and allocated on a school basis rather than a geographical basis to improve relationships with schools. Team Leaders have also been realigned to a Rhondda, Cynon and Taff basis to ensure they can operate effective challenge and

support where previously they operated on three strands - Wellbeing for the whole of RCT; Attendance East and Attendance West.

5.6   The final two key performance indicators surround FSM gaps in primary and secondary phase. In 2018/19, we achieved a 2.3% gap at primary level which is equal to that set in 2017/18. At secondary level, the gap was reduced from the 2017/18 figure of 5.2% to 4.8% in 2018/19. All Wales data has not yet been released but for comparative purposes, the All Wales average in 2017/18 was 3.0% at Primary and 5.1% at Secondary phases. These steps to reduce the gap between our FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils are extremely positive. The aim over the next two years of the strategy is to reduce these gaps further to ensure FSM pupils are able to achieve their potential.

5.7   Regular updates on the progress against the action plan will continue to be provided by the Head of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service and reviewed by the Director of Education on a quarterly basis.

5.8   Annual updates will be presented to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee for review and challenge.

6.   **CONCLUSION**

6.1   In the first year of the Strategy, a number of areas have been scoped with those initiatives, partnership work and interventions that have proven successful continuing to operate.

6.2   All six priority areas must be achieved if the strategy is to be effective and achieve maximum results. Where actions beneath these priority areas have not proved as successful as hoped, new actions have been embedded in this year's plan.

6.3   The improvement of school attendance does not rest with one service or organisation, and efforts to ensure a multi-partnership approach will be a key area of focus this year.

6.4   Future service improvements within Education will need to consider school attendance and evidence how they will contribute to the improving attendance agenda.

APPENDIX 1

IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE ACTION PLAN 2019/20

What difference will this action plan make to service users / residents of RCT	• Improved attendance rates across both school phases; • Reduced attendance gap between FSM and nFSM pupils; • Improved educational outcomes for children and young people; • Improved wellbeing of pupils to improve engagement in learning.			
How will we measure our progress	*Performance Indicators, where applicable, or other measures e.g. survey feedback.*		**Data 2018/19 academic year**	**Target 2019/20 academic year**
	1	% of pupil attendance in primary schools (annual)	94.3%	tbc
	2	% of pupil attendance in secondary schools (annual)	92.8%	94.1%
	3	% gap between FSM and nFSM pupils - primary	2.3%	<2.3%
	4	% gap between FSM and nFSM pupils - secondary	4.8%	<4.8%

What are we trying to achieve			PRIORITY 1. __Improve pupil, parent, public and school awareness of school attendance issues by developing a whole authority approach to promoting and improving school attendance__		
Critical Actions	**Priority Actions**		**Key Milestones**	**Delivery Date**	**Responsible Officer**

	1.	Further develop the marketing campaign to raise the profile of school attendance and expectations of parents and pupils	• Continue to embed "Super Attender" and "Attend Today, Achieve Tomorrow" messages across social media and encourage improved links with schools to help promote the message
			• To link school attendance with academic attainment/outcomes from RCT local data instead of reliance on Welsh level data and effectively promote this
			• Continue the focus of the strategy on:
			  o Highlighting the main 'excuses' for absence that will not be authorised/accepted
			  o Communicate the expectations of parents/carers in terms of good school attendance
			  o Communicate the potential consequences of unauthorised absence
			  o Raise awareness of the link between attendance and attainment
				Ongoing
				
				December 2019
				
				Ongoing
					DW
					
					DW
					
					DW

			• Use effective initiatives, ie. Super Attender assemblies, in video case studies, photo opportunities and promote via social media	October 2019	DW
			• Publish these short videos on the corporate Facebook and Twitter, as well as embedding them in the AWS pages of the corporate website	November 2019	ST
			• Post/tweet these posts on a pre-planned schedule in line with the key absence periods, with a URL to the webpage for further information on the subject	Ongoing	ST
			• Scope the need to look at alternative social media avenues due to the changing use of platforms	December 2019	DW
			• Launch the new corporate Attendance and Wellbeing Service webpage ensuring its kept up to date and has information relevant to the needs of parents/carers and pupils	June 2019	DW
			• Undertake Pupil Voice activity looking at alternative branding aimed at Year 5 and Year 6 pupils	January 2020	DW
			• Link with primary schools to look at the need for a female Super Attender	January 2020	DW
			• Promote the expectations required of a parent and the possible consequences they could face if the expectations are not met on social media, websites and letters to parents	June 2019	DW

	2.	Roll out a public awareness campaign of the possible consequences for non-school attendance	• Ensure there is public awareness of RCT's use of Section 444 1(a) of the Education Act 1996, which allows courts to consider a custodial sentence to parents of repeat offenders by publicising on the website by publishing the consequences on the corporate website and via social media posts	June 2019	DW
			• Communicate the current use of fixed penalty notices for tackling absenteeism in RCT and re-publish a link to the Code of Conduct for Issuing Fixed Penalty Notices for unauthorised absence via press releases	June 2019	DW
			• Publish monthly Court outcomes for both open cases and FPNs in press releases	December 2019	DW
	3.	Raising the awareness of good school attendance with pupils	• Communicate the 'unacceptable reasons' for absence throughout the school via school banners, posters.	May 2019	DW
			• Roll out of Focus Groups with Attendance Support/Engagement Officers undertaking one group each per term	September 2019	ASOs/AEOs
			• Reaffirm the reasons for pursuing good school attendance, i.e. link to attainment/outcomes and future prospects via target group sessions and on social media	November 2019	DW
			• Encourage schools to utilise their own networks to promote good school attendance to parents/carers (e.g. Class Dojo, ParentMail etc)	Ongoing	DW
	4.	Raising the awareness of good school attendance with school staff	• Look at the feasibility of wider attendance training to compliment SIMS training for school staff	January 2020	DW
			• Inform schools of developments with school attendance in termly head teacher meetings	Ongoing	DW
			• Encourage an all school approach to attendance to clearly define each member of staff's role/responsibility in managing and promoting attendance	May 2019	All staff

	5.	Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign	• Collate quantitative data:
			   o Website hits
			   o Facebook insights
			   o Increase in school attendance
				Quarterly	DW

			• Collate qualitative data:
			   o Complaints received
			   o Feedback from school
			   o Learner voice events
				Quarterly	DW

			• Present findings to the Director of Education on a quarterly basis for service improvement decisions	Quarterly	DW
			• Present findings to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis for further improvement discussions.	Annually	DW

What are we trying to achieve			PRIORITY 2. <u>Review, evaluate and further develop the use of data, its analysis and the reporting mechanisms to inform service improvement both at local authority and school level</u>		
Critical Actions	**Priority Actions**		**Key Milestones**	**Delivery Date**	**Responsible Officer**
	1.	Develop attendance reports for effective usage by schools	• Develop the current half termly attendance reports to also contain pertinent information in relation to exclusions	October 2019	DW/CJ
			• Work alongside the Data and Systems team to scope the need to include additional groups of pupils not currently included in data reports e.g. service children	October 2019	DW/LH
			• Restructure the reports to account for changes in schools, including a standalone cluster for the four through schools but also including their primary and secondary phase data alongside primary and secondary schools for wider comparisons	September 2019	DW/LH
	2.	Review the current process of dissemination of data to schools and improve as required	• Ensure that schools report on a timely basis the member of staff responsible for receiving and analysing the mid-year data reports	Ongoing	DW
			• Review the central e-repository for the data reports, providing data as and when schools require it	Ongoing	DW
	3.	Challenge and support the development of school-based provision for raising school attendance by ensuring effective use of data to deploy resources, inform changes and re-focus on priority objectives	• Review the way school utilise the data packs provided to them via a task and finish group	Ongoing	DW
			• Ensure school clerks, school attendance officers and family engagement officers utilise SIMS fully for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating school attendance offering advice and support on school's graduated response	December 2019	DW
			• Work with schools to review key points found in their Attendance Self Evaluation	Ongoing	DW
			• Review the quality of self evaluation as a mechanism in improving school attendance including sharing best practice models	Ongoing	DW

	4.	Strengthen the performance management of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service and all schools via effective use of data	• Develop the role of the Data, Compliance and Management Information System Officer (DCMISO) role within the Attendance and Wellbeing Service (AWS) to offer bespoke support to schools where needed and support the analysis of school data including anomalies	June 2019	DW/CE
			• Continue to monitor schools' code usage to ensure it is correct/appropriate and tackle it timely with schools, providing guidance as required (link with Priority 3)	Ongoing	DW/CJ/EH/ KBJ
			• Analyse and evaluate in-year school data, using comparisons with similar schools to challenge code usage and level of unauthorised/authorised absence, to determine schools in need of additional support, resources and challenge (link with Priority 3)	Ongoing	DW/CJ/EH/ KBJ

			• Use data stated above to inform appropriate deployment of AWS resources for:
			   o Initiatives (Priority 5)
			   o Additional in-school support (Priority 5)
			   o Challenge and Support Meetings (Priority 3)
				Ongoing	DW/CJ/EH/ KBJ

			• Timetable reports to effectively manage the case work of the AWS officers, including:
			   o Timely progression of cases in line with service workflows
			   o Monitor and challenge the outcomes of cases to ensure that emphasis is on achieving positive outcomes
			   o Evaluate impact of support on attendance outcomes
			   o Use service performance data to challenge current practice and inform service improvement
				June 2019	DW/LH

			• Encourage wider use of parental feedback surveys to develop the Service in line with family needs	Ongoing	DW/CJ/EH/ KBJ

What are we trying to achieve			PRIORITY 3. <u>**To further develop a robust and sustainable challenge and support system for improving school attendance, linking with other key priorities that impact on and are impacted by absenteeism**</u>		
Critical Actions	**Priority Actions**		**Key Milestones**	**Delivery Date**	**Responsible Officer**
	1.	Consolidate the support and challenge framework, for a clear escalation process for schools causing concern	• Continue to undertake termly registration compliance checks in all RCT schools, led by the link officer to ensure effective code usage and challenge/amend coding anomalies. Continue to colour code schools (red or green) based on the outcomes of the checks to inform the data analysis process	Ongoing	AWS Officers
			• Continue to work with partners across the Education Directorate and Central South Consortium to look at all schools categorisation	Ongoing	DW
			• Escalate significant coding anomalies and internal practice concerns to the AWS team leaders/head of service for Data Response Visits (DRV) in the schools causing concern	Ongoing	CJ/EH/KBJ
			• Undertake joint visits with Challenge Advisor if the poor outcome of the DRV is based on the leadership within the school	Ongoing	DW/CJ/EH/ KBJ
			• Identify the schools causing the greatest concern and follow the staged process of escalation	Ongoing	DW/CJ/EH/ KBJ
			• Where needed, undertake Challenge and Support or School Improvement meetings with the Director of Education, Senior Challenge Advisors and Head of AWS. Schools identified for this intervention will be those whose current practices and processes are not effective at bringing about significant change. Schools will be supported to self-evaluate their current and historical position and develop an improvement plan to address the issues with the support of the LA if necessary	Ongoing	DW/BW/TB /GD/SC

	2	Coordinate appropriate forums for school-based attendance staff to further develop their knowledge and skills to manage attendance more effectively	• Continue to deliver Secondary Wellbeing Days for Attendance Leads • Introduce Primary Wellbeing Days for head teachers and/or leads for attendance to facilitate the sharing of good practice, discussion of data to place own school in context and consult on new initiative ideas • Introduce small Innovation and Task and Finish Groups to review key topic areas and facilitate inter-school working which should be self-sustaining	Termly December 2019 December 2019	BW/SC/ DW TB/DW DW

What are we trying to achieve			PRIORITY 4. **To develop an efficient and self-sustainable mechanism for sharing good practice and information on a timely basis that can be accessed independently by schools at any time.**		
Critical Actions	**Priority Actions**		**Key Milestones**	**Delivery Date**	**Responsible Officer**
	1.	Revise the resources that are provided to schools to ensure they remain fit for purpose	• Revise the School Attendance Toolkit to account for the changes within the AWS, national developments and requests for information received from school. Re-issue to schools bilingually	September 2019	DW
			• Provide schools with a template school attendance policy	September 2019	DW

			• Devise a model strategy framework for schools to adopt when attendance is a priority. To include:
			  o Self-evaluation document
			  o Template school attendance improvement plan
			  o Communication plan
				September 2019	DW

	2.	Facilitate the sharing of good practice across schools	• Develop an open-access platform to use as the main e-repository for all good practice documents/information across the Education Directorate	January 2020	CE

			• Collate all current good practice by key strategy areas:
			  o Communication with parents
			  o Data and evaluation
			  o Coding requirements
			  o Methods for collecting supporting evidence
			  o Graduated response and interventions
			  o School attendance policy
			  o Links with Governing Body
			  o Closing the gap
			  o Persistent absenteeism interventions
				June 2019	DW/CJ/EH/KBJ

What are we trying to achieve			PRIORITY 5. **To review, evaluate and re-launch key initiatives and interventions to support good attendance and tackle absenteeism**		
Critical Actions	**Priority Actions**		**Key Milestones**	**Delivery Date**	**Responsible Officer**
	1.	Enhance procedures for tackling outdoor truancy	• Re-establish links for truancy patrols at key seasonal times with South Wales Police (SWP) and British Transport Police (BTP)	October 2019	DW
			• Continue to monitor and develop 'Truancy-Free Zones' throughout RCT, in line with frequent evaluation of their effectiveness	Ongoing	DW
			• Development of marketing materials to encourage any member of the council or public to report pupils in the community truanting during the school day	September 2019	DW

	2.	Review and re-launch school-based initiatives as 'added value' activities	• Continually monitor the capacity of the AWS undertake additional 'added value' activities in addition to case work ensuring vulnerable pupils are not disadvantaged through initiative work	Ongoing	DW/CJ/EH/K BJ
			• Re-launch the 'Super Attender Challenge' and wristband rewards in all primary settings (mainstream and special schools) to set the challenge for pupils throughout the coming academic year	September 2019	AWS Staff
			• Roll out of focus groups (across all settings) for those above the threshold for referral to service but where attendance is starting to be identified as a concern. Facilitated by AWS staff via restorative circle time, but managed by the school (e.g. room availability, identifying appropriate pupils, receiving consent from parents/carers, ensuring they are present at the session, evaluating the impact on the participants' attendance)	September 2019	AWS Sraff
			• Increased offer of Daily Absence Response Team activities in schools with high levels of unauthorised absence where parents/carers do not contact the school. These will be offered according to the data, where there is the greatest need	April 2019	DW/CJ/EH/ KBJ
			• Continue to offer Meet and Greet activities in schools identified as having an issue with punctuality. Offer these are a set of activities to monitor any repeat offenders and escalate as appropriate. School to lead on these activities, ensuring that school staff are present alongside AWS officers, up-skilling school staff to continue to undertake these when AWS are not present. Support schools to follow up the discussion with parents with letters, meetings etc. to support parents to improve	Ongoing	DW/CJ/EH/ KBJ
			• AWS to attend school and community events to promote the need for good school attendance, reiterate parents' responsibilities for their child's attendance	Ongoing	AWS Team
			• Super Attender to attend community events to raise the profile of the brand outside of the school setting,	Ongoing	AWS Team

What are we trying to achieve			PRIORITY 6. Further develop partnership working to ensure the key objective of improving school attendance is embedded across internal and external agencies		
Critical Actions	**Priority Actions**		**Key Milestones**	**Delivery Date**	**Responsible Officer**
	1	Further develop working links with internal services to ensure a shared objective to improve school attendance	• Improve communication via briefing notes and team meetings with other service areas to raise the profile of good school attendance and ensure that the objective is included in all plans where appropriate	Ongoing	DW
			• Encourage referrals of children and young people missing from education where these internal partners are made aware that they are not receiving an education or have moved out of county	Ongoing	All AWS
			• Invite service areas to present to the AWS and head teachers so they are aware of the support opportunities these service can offer disengaged children and young people	Ongoing	DW
			• Introduce and develop forums for schools, educational psychologists and AWS to tackle persistent absentees and ensure that schools are prioritising learners for the appropriate support to assist them to reengage in education	September 2019	DW/HJ
			• Ensure all future policies and procedures developed with the Education Directorate are underpinned by this strategy	Ongoing	GD/DW

	2	Establish and/or further develop working links with external agencies to ensure a shared objective to improve school attendance	• Improve communication meetings with external agencies to raise the profile of good school attendance and ensure that the objective is included in all individual plans where appropriate	Ongoing	DW
			• Encourage referrals of children and young people missing from education where these internal partners are made aware that they are not receiving an education or have moved out of county	Ongoing	All AWS
			• Invite external agencies to present to the AWS so they are aware of the support opportunities these service can offer disengaged children and young people	Termly	DW

APPENDIX 2

<<School logo>>

Dear parent/carer,

Super Attender's Challenge

Good attendance at school is essential for all pupils as it increases a child's chances of achieving their full potential. For this reason, it is a key priority for Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and is why we have developed a new School Attendance Strategy. To support the aims of the strategy, Rhondda Cynon Taf's Super Attender has launched his own challenge to encourage all primary aged pupils to be in school every day when they are well enough to do so. Super Attender will recognise the good attendance of pupils at the end of each term period, with individual pupils being recognised for their achievements using official data, overseen by the Attendance and Wellbeing Service.

Prizes will be awarded to individual pupils who have achieved:
- 97% or above attendance in the term period;
- the most improved attendance (identified by the school); and,
- the individual who has overcome the most to attend (chosen by the school).

We are inviting all primary aged pupils from every Rhondda Cynon Taf school to take part and have a chance to be recognised as part of Super Attender's Challenge.

Ways your child can rise to Super Attender's challenge include:
- Attend school on their birthday and celebrate with their friends and teachers;
- Make sure you set an alarm clock so that they're at school in plenty of time for the first bell;
- Attend non-urgent doctor and dentist appointments outside of school time;
- Take time to spend with family during holiday times rather than term time.

These few ideas can make a big difference to your child's attendance and have a positive impact on their educational outcomes.

We welcome your support with this challenge and hope that the incentive of your child reaching their potential will encourage you both to build upon their previous attendance level.

If you have any queries relating to this initiative, please contact your local school or the Attendance and Wellbeing Service at aws@rctcbc.gov.uk. For more information about school attendance, please see www.rctcbc.gov.uk/attendance

Yours faithfully,

<<Head Teacher>>