

PA7 Senior Leader, Primary School

Senedd Cymru

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Absenoldeb Disgyblion

Ymateb gan Uwch-arweinydd, Ysgol Gynradd I

Welsh Parliament

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Pupil absence

Evidence from Senior Leader, Primary School

Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference, which have been grouped into 5 themes.

1. Reasons

Our non-covid related absence is slightly higher. I believe reasons for this are that parents are more cautious about sending their children to school with other minor ailments than they were pre-pandemic, particularly those with low attendance pre-pandemic. Also, some families are aware that there are no meaningful consequences Eg fines if their child misses school. We have also seen an increase in holidays since travel has been allowed as we are a very diverse and multi-cultural school and families are travelling abroad to see family members that they have not been able to see throughout the pandemic or are having family holidays as they have not been able to for so long. Some groups of pupils have higher levels of persistent absenteeism, this is often where parents don't value education and this could be as a result of cultural or social influences Eg lots of our Eastern European children have lower attendance than their counter-parts and some of the families that I work with to improve attendance either had bad schooling experiences themselves or are from poorer socio-economic backgrounds where aspirations are low and qualifications and career prospects are not valued.

2. Risks and consequences

Short term risks are missed learning so there are gaps in a child's skills or knowledge and they may find it hard to pick back up where they left off when they return to school. Where a child is struggling academically, it can be difficult to identify if there is a specific learning need or if low levels of progress are a direct result of attendance. Children with persistent absenteeism also sometimes struggle socially and with maintaining friendships as they feel 'out of the loop' with their peer group as friendships evolve and move on in their absence.

Longer term risks include reduced progress and children not reaching their full potential. Over time some children who were previously confident and making good progress doubt their own ability and lack confidence or find their learning difficult as they become overwhelmed with the task of catching up with their peers or do not have the foundation blocks in place to tackle the current learning that the class are undertaking and therefore become disengaged with learning. Not having regular routines and positive attitudes towards attendance and punctuality can sometimes impact children later in life when they enter further/higher education or the world of work. It is essential for good habits and attitudes to be introduced and maintained from a young age. There is a danger that children who did not attend school regularly become adults who do not value education and will repeat this cycle with their own children.

3. Impact

Poor attendance is well-documented to have an impact on learning, progress and attainment and this is evident in our school - see my comments above.

We have previously had children who have been removed from school to be home educated when their attendance levels become low and they are being contacted by school or the School Attendance Officer. They often re-enter the school after a period of time but the cycle often repeats.

4. Effectiveness of policies

The policy and systems in place work for the majority of our families and we work hard in a supportive capacity with our families. However, there are a small minority of families with persistent absenteeism who seem to 'challenge the system' and I don't feel that the current system and policies allow for them to be escalated in a timely fashion. For example when a family does not engage with school or with the School Attendance Officer, their attendance must be below 70% and the SAO must have undertaken a number of visits before Education Welfare will take on the case. This is too late as 70% attendance is very low and damage to progress and attitudes/habits has already been caused and takes far more input to rectify.

5. Other

N/A

