

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

15 MAY 2018

REPORT OF THE INTERIM CORPORATE DIRECTOR - EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE STRATEGY

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek formal approval and adoption of the local authority's School Attendance Strategy for 2018-2021. The revised strategy is attached at Appendix 1.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/other corporate priorities

- 2.1 The report relates to the following priorities:

- Supporting a successful economy
- Helping people to become more self-reliant
- Making smarter use of resources

3. Background

- 3.1 There is a clear link between good educational attainment and high levels of attendance. Poor attendance and also late arrival at school has a detrimental effect on a child's learning and can have a significant impact on their wellbeing. Even a relatively small drop in attendance has been shown to impact negatively on end of key stage 4 outcomes.
- 3.2 The local authority's school attendance strategy was last approved and adopted by Cabinet in 2015 and has been reviewed and updated to take into account national guidance and good practice.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 Over the academic years 2013-2016, school attendance rates have seen an overall improvement, however there has been a slight decline in 2016-2017. In 2016-2017, primary school attendance was 95.1%, and ranked 5th in Wales. Secondary school attendance for the same period was reported at 94.2%, ranking 7th in Wales. Whilst attendance has seen a slight decline during the 2016-2017 academic year it remains above the Wales and Central South Consortium averages.
- 4.2 Support and guidance is provided to all schools by the Education Welfare Service (EWS) and other supportive agencies within Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC). Attendance panels continue to be implemented in order to share good practice in schools, however further work needs to be done to ensure consistency across all schools within the local authority.

4.3 Individual school attendance rates, school targets, and persistent absence are monitored by the EWS on a termly basis and this information is shared with schools, school improvement senior managers within the Council and the regional consortium.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There is no effect on the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no equality implications directly arising from this report or strategy.

7. Financial implications

7.1 The strategy has been developed and will be implemented within existing resources.

8. Recommendation

8.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- formally approves and adopts the local authority's school attendance policy for 2018-2021.

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Background documents

Appendix 1 – School Attendance Strategy

Appendix 1 – School Attendance Strategy

Bridgend County Borough Council
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr

 www.bridgend.gov.uk



Bridgend County Borough Council

School Attendance Strategy 2018 - 2021

‘Success Starts at School’

1. Vision and priorities

- 1.1. Bridgend County Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2022 identifies our vision of:

'One Council working together to improve lives'

- 1.2. The key priorities we want to achieve are:

- Supporting a successful economy
- Helping people to become more self-reliant
- Making smarter use of resources.

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

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

2. Introduction

- 2.1. Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) as of spring term 2017, has 17,433 compulsory school age pupils on roll at schools across the County. At present, the standards being attained by our pupils are below the all-Wales average and the gap is widening. Where children are in formal education, a high level of school attendance is essential for children to ensure they thrive academically and socially. Children who miss school for unauthorised reasons often miss critical parts of the curriculum which then can also increase the risk of falling behind and disengagement with education by the child. Children can also become socially isolated when they miss out on shared learning and social experiences with their peers in school on a regular basis. Therefore, it is critically important that we ensure that all children in Bridgend schools are making the most of their learning opportunities through regular attendance. Accessing education is identified under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in articles 28 and 29.

- 2.2. Over the past three academic years, school attendance rates have seen an overall improvement, however there has been a slight decline in 2016-2017 to 95.1% for primary schools, and 94.2% in secondary schools as shown in figures 1 and 2 below. Whilst attendance has seen a slight decline during the 2016-2017 academic year we must continue to strive to improve attendance levels, and to revert to the positive trends seen between 2013-2016.

Figure 1 Primary school attendance in Bridgend schools 2014-2015 to 2016-2017

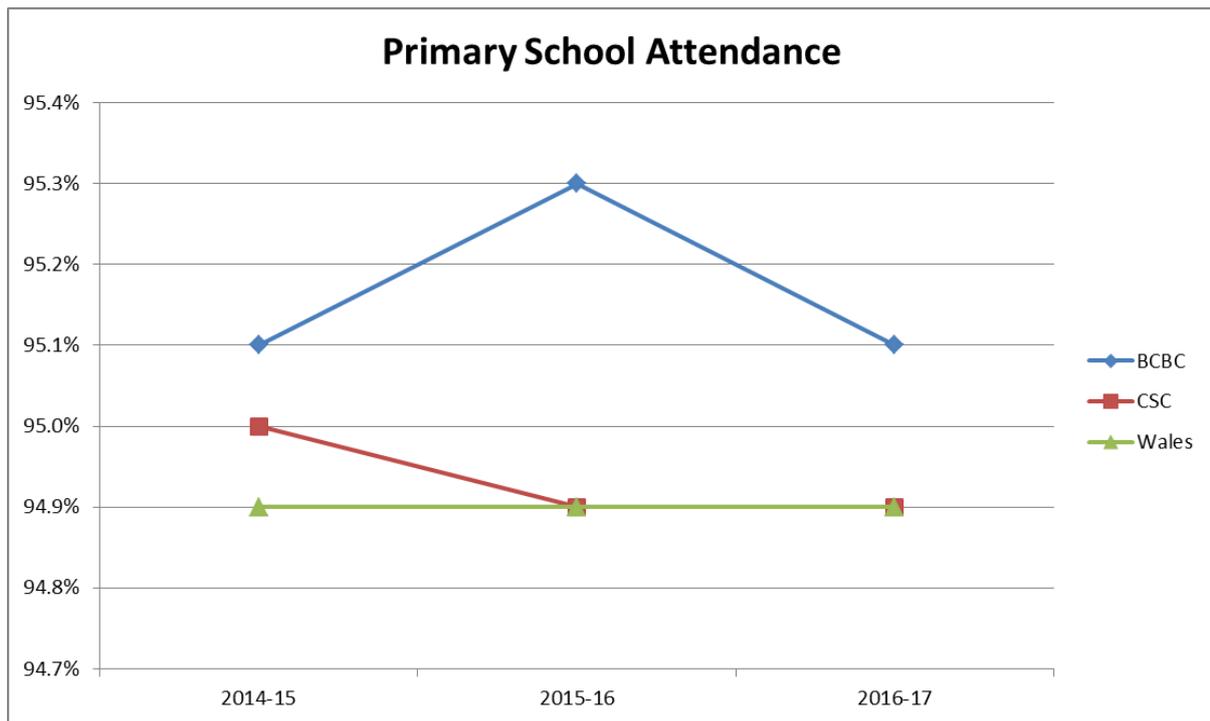
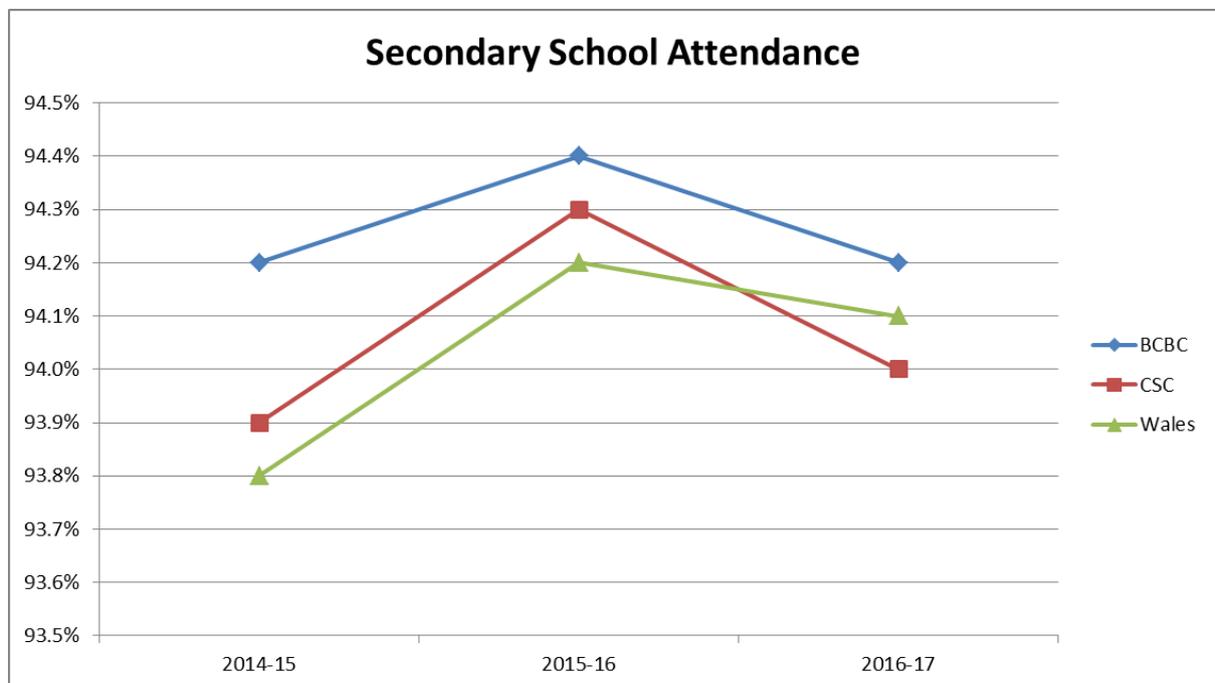


Figure 2 Secondary school attendance in Bridgend schools 2014-2015 to 2016-2017



3. National context

3.1. The policy document 'Every Child Matters' was introduced by national government in 2003 which was partly in response to the death of Victoria Climbié. This sets out the following outcomes for children and young people:

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

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

3.3. Wales has seen a decline in international Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results. This major study of educational performance is undertaken by 15-year-olds in 72 countries every three years. Wales was the lowest of the UK nations in science, reading and mathematics in 2016 test results. Welsh Government is committed to improving educational attainment and standards across the board.

Source: Every Child Matters – ECM

4. Local context

4.1. Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) is committed to maintaining consistently high levels of pupil attendance at school and recognises that improving attendance is a crucial factor in maintaining standards of pupil performance and achievement. BCBC will strive to ensure equality of educational opportunity for all pupils.

4.2. Attendance rates still need to be in line with the Welsh Government and Central South Consortium's (CSC) targets of 95% and our good work needs to continue with schools and the the Early Help service to achieve this and to ensure continuous improvement.

4.3. It is not a legal requirement that pupils be educated at a school. The legal requirements on parents in relation to the education of their children are set out in section 7 of Education Act (EA) 1996. That section provides that every parent of every child of compulsory school age must ensure that he or she receives efficient full-time education at a school or otherwise.

4.4. Parents may satisfy their duty under this section by providing efficient full-time education, suitable to the child (within the meaning of section 7), otherwise than at a school. The term 'otherwise than at a school' is broad enough to encompass education at home.

4.5. Section 10 of EA 1996 places the Welsh Ministers under a general duty to promote the education of the people of Wales.

- 4.6. BCBC believes that for most children their educational needs will be best met within the school system, and that, where this is the route selected by parents, that this requires a commitment to regular school attendance.
- 4.7. Regular school attendance is vital for pupils. Failure of pupils, to attend school increases the risk of leaving school without qualifications and allows greater opportunity for young people to be drawn into crime and antisocial behaviour. It can also leave some young people vulnerable to harm by adults.

5. Key principles

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

6. The legal context

- 6.1 While the parent is primarily responsible for ensuring their child attends their registered school regularly, where school attendance problems occur, the key to resolving these problems is engaging the child through collaborative working between the parent, the school and the local authority. There is, however, a legal framework for the role of the school and of the local authority which sets out their responsibilities in this sphere.

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

The Education Act 1996 places a legal obligation on:

- the local authority to provide schools and enforce attendance; and
- schools to register attendance and notify the local authority of a child's absence from school.

Section 7 of the above Act states that:

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

Section 444 further states that:

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

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

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

Section 437 of the Education Act 1996 states

6.5 2(1) If it appears to a local authority that a child of compulsory school age in their area is not receiving suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, they shall serve a notice in writing on the parent requiring him to satisfy them within the period specified in the notice that the child is receiving such education."

Where a parent on whom a notice has been served fails to satisfy the local authority, within the period specified in the notice, that the child is receiving suitable education, and in the opinion of the local authority, it is expedient that the child should attend school, the authority shall serve on the parent a "school attendance order" in such form as may be prescribed, requiring him to cause the child to become a registered pupil at a school named in the order.

7. The role of the local authority

- 7.1 The focus for the local authority is that of early intervention and prevention, working in a more targeted way with pupils and their families. Schools are supported to identify children where there are early signs of poor attendance. The local authority works with families through the Joint Assessment Family Framework approach (JAFF) and Team around the Family (TAF) process to address issues which will be multi agency led.
- 7.2 The local authority will support schools in taking a rigorous line in reducing absence. While the main focus is always to build strong positive relationships with parents and schools, the local authority will progress prosecutions where it considers this is appropriate and where it has a legal obligation to do so. For electively home educated pupils, if the local authority is not satisfied that the child is receiving a suitable education, the local authority can serve a school attendance order notice on the parent(s) requiring them to satisfy the local authority within the period specified in the notice that the child is receiving such education.
- 7.3 Parents and carers will be encouraged to work closely with education welfare officers (EWOs) and other services, however, where there is non-engagement and/or no improvement in attendance, the local authority will pursue prosecutions. In some situations, failure to meet a child's educational needs can become a cause for referral to other agencies by virtue of the duty to report under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 (SSWBA).

Multi-agency working

- 7.4 EWOs regularly visit primary schools on a three-weekly basis. This is to ensure that schools and EWOs identify vulnerable pupils at the earliest stage. With EWOs working within early help teams in community hubs, in co-located areas of the County Borough they are able to provide a holistic approach in ensuring appropriate support is available for pupils and families. Multi-agency working is the key to ensuring families receive the support based on need. Community hubs consist of EWOs, family engagement officers (FEOs), behaviour support teachers, inclusion officers, social workers and youth workers.
- 7.5 Regular truancy patrols are undertaken and the EWO's work closely with the local Police. The Western Bay Youth Justice Service (WBYJES), health services, housing associations, and voluntary organisations are also actively involved in working with the EWOs in assisting in resolving non-school attendance of pupils and supporting families.

Targeted interventions

- 7.6 The EWS can offer additional support to schools on a needs-led basis in order to improve attendance. This will form part of a 'team around the school approach' which entails the Lead EWO and schools discussing the individual need and arranging an appropriate plan for improving attendance. This is an intensive intervention approach and involves the community teams working together around the school and community to improve attendance levels. This could consist of a range of initiatives, for example attendance panels including governor involvement,

parents, pupils, EWS and school staff. Attendance is discussed in a formal setting and sets out the importance of regular school attendance and the consequences if attendance fails to improve. Homes are visited to those pupils not in school without good reason and targeting those with persistent absence.

Fixed penalty notices

7.7 Fixed penalty notices (FPNs) will allow schools to issue FPNs to the parents of children and young people who have unauthorised absences from school. FPNs came into force in September 2014 as a result of new legislation (ie the Education (Penalty Notice) (Wales) Regulations 2013). A Code of Conduct has been devised by BCBC. The issuing of the FPNs will rest with the EWS in response to requests from headteachers, nominated representatives or police officers. FPNs have been widely used in England for several years. It is anticipated that FPNs will be used to improve attendance and prevent unnecessary absences from school in the following circumstances:

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

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

- level of absence;
- any equalities considerations;
- statement of special educational needs;
- history of attendance;
- defences which may be available;
- level of parental engagement; and
- any adverse effect a fine will have on the welfare of the family.

7.9 The withdrawal of a FPN may only be revoked where it is proven that:

- the notice has been issued to the wrong person to an incorrect address;
- the notice did not conform to code of conduct;
- evidence demonstrates that the notice should not have been issued (eg medical evidence provided); and
- circumstances warrant its withdrawal.

7.10 The legislation governing the implementation of FPN is outlined in:

- Sections 444A and 444B of the Education Act 1996
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) Regulations 2013
- Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure 2011

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (the right to an education)

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

Term-time holidays

7.12 BCBC recognises the effect that absence from school has on educational attainment. Headteachers have the discretion of authorising up to 10 days under the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010. Parents do not have an automatic right to withdraw pupils from school for a holiday, and in law, must apply for permission in advance.

8. The education welfare officer

8.1 The education welfare officer (EWO) has the responsibility of implementing the statutory duties in relation to securing school attendance. The EWO has a key function in working with schools, families, pupils, agencies, statutory and voluntary in order to promote regular school attendance.

8.2 The EWO will continue to take the lead role for the local authority in supporting school attendance and meet with school staff on a weekly basis. The EWO works with children and families, other agencies and continue to support schools. The EWO is managed and funded centrally and EWO time is allocated on a needs-led basis.

8.3 The local authority consists of a Lead EWO and a team of EWOs. Each EWO is based within early help teams across community hubs in co-located areas, North, East and West. Each EWO has a designated secondary school and its associate feeder primary schools.

9. The role of parents

9.1 Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school regularly. Parents are expected to report their child's absence from school on the first day of absence and on the return provide a written explanation. Parents are requested to avoid taking family holidays during term time, and work with schools and relevant agencies when pupils have attendance issues.

9.2 In addition to attendance, punctuality is equally important. If a pupil continually arrives to school five minutes late, this will amount to losing three days each year. If a pupil arrives after the closure of the register, then this will count as an unauthorised absence which if deemed appropriate may lead to a referral to the EWO.

9.3 Absence can also make children vulnerable to involvement with crime and anti-social behaviour.

- 9.4 The report 'Improving attendance at school' carried out by the Department of Education in England in 2010, explains there is a clear link between poor attendance at school and lower academic achievement of pupils who miss more than 50% of school, 3% manage to achieve 5 or more GCSE at Grade A*-C including Mathematics and English. It highlights that 73% of pupils who have over 95% attendance achieve 5 or more GCSE at Grades A*-C.
- 9.5 Not only is school attendance and attainment important, it also enables young people to maintain positive friendships, promotes wellbeing and provides them with good grounding for their future.
- 9.6 Parents/carers can support the regular and punctual attendance of their children by:
- ensuring that their child arrives at school on time each day
 - ensuring that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness or days of religious observance
 - notifying the school as soon as possible of any absence and confirm this in writing when the child returns to school
 - not booking family holidays during term-time
 - talking to the school if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to attend

10. The responsibility of schools

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

11. Data collection, attendance targets and auditing

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

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

12. Training and support

12.1 All staff with responsibility for attendance in schools should receive appropriate training including the correct use of codes, appropriate challenge to parents, accurate input of data, exporting data and also full usage and knowledge of SIMS.

12.2 BCBC's EWOs will offer support to all schools covering such issues as:

- strategies for promoting regular attendance;
- strategies for addressing persistent absenteeism;
- improving communication with parents;
- good practice in monitoring punctuality;
- developing a whole-school attendance policy; and
- rewards and incentives.

13. Celebrating good and improved attendance

13.1 Schools are encouraged to promote good attendance using a range of initiatives at a whole school, year group, class or individual pupil level.

13.2 This can include certificates, pens or prizes such as books. Achievements that are congratulated in assemblies are considered to be particularly effective. All schools should display their attendance marketing materials appropriately in foyers, school websites, classrooms, walls and banners can be used on the periphery of the school estate. This helps raise awareness and the importance of good attendance for pupils, teachers, parents and visitors to schools.

14. Traveller children

14.1 We will work closely with the families of Traveller children to ensure they are attending school. The local authority equalities and engagement officer will be able to provide advice and guidance to schools to ensure the regular attendance of children from Traveller communities. Schools are particularly encouraged to:

- create an inclusive culture which promotes equality and recognises cultural diversity and difference;
- show high expectations of attendance with all registered pupils;
- respond promptly to absences through immediate telephone or other enquiries;
- refer any continuing or repeated absence to the EWS;

- develop strategies to support pupils with literacy or learning difficulties;
- support educational continuity while children are travelling;
- give additional support if needed on entry to school for traveller children;
- ensure adequate support during transition (eg from key stage 2 to key stage 3; and
- seek appropriate advice from the local authority if necessary.

15. Supporting the attendance of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN)

15.1 BCBC recognises that children with ALN or SEN (special educational needs), regardless of whether this has been formally diagnosed, may prevent some children from attending school. The EWO and educational psychology service, will work with headteachers, the school additional learning needs coordinator (ALNCO) and other school staff to address pupil's poor attendance which may be related to unidentified or unmet SEN.

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

16.1 BCBC recognises that bullying is an issue which prevents some children from attending school or from achieving their full potential when they do attend.

16.2 BCBC will, in partnership with schools, continue to offer support to pupils where attendance is being affected by actual or perceived bullying.

17. Supporting the attendance of vulnerable groups

17.1 BCBC will respond appropriately to support school attendance of pupils considered vulnerable. The Inclusion Service will play a key role in supporting such pupils. Such groups might include:

- pregnant school girls and teenage mothers;
- children transferring school;
- children entering school outside the normal year of entry;
- young offenders;
- children from families under stress;
- young carers;
- school phobics;
- looked after children;
- those eligible for free school meals;
- children with special educational needs; and
- pupils whose parents are actively considering deregistration from school to become EHE (electively home educated).

The EWS will work closely with the BCBC Vulnerable Groups Team to support these groups identified by Estyn as potentially vulnerable.

18. Action planning

18.1 The EWO will work with schools to develop action plans to improve attendance at whole school level. This will rely on individual schools' analysis of data and of its

attendance profile. Schools should work closely with the EWO to develop action plans for school level action as well as developing individual pupil level action plans.

18.2 Schools with concerning levels of absence will be encouraged to develop an agreed school action plan to improve attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism.

18.3 The main areas that should be covered in the whole school action plan are as follows:

- improved senior leadership response to attendance;
- robust recording and monitoring systems;
- improved tracking and monitoring arrangements;
- targeted additional support;
- Improve support and challenge for parents
- targeted support to vulnerable groups;
- working with partners to support parents to reduce illness related absence;
- target specific work with parents of children in early years settings to ensure good attendance habits are developed early and parents understand their responsibilities; and
- workforce development.