



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	19 th November 2018
Report Author	Sarah Bowen
Service Area	Inclusion
Committee Date	14 th January 2019

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Executive Summary – Performance Report

Appendix G – Attendance and Exclusions

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Progress made in respect of Attendance and Exclusions during the academic year 2017/18.
- 1.2 In order to bring about improvements the focus is on:-
- Enabling schools to improve rates of attendance and exclusions;
 - Increasing provision for pupils with Social Emotional Behaviour Difficulties (SEBD);
 - Developing a marketing campaign for attendance;
 - Enabling schools to improve levels of parental engagement.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 The contents of this report are discussed and noted.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This report provides an update on:
- the outcomes for attendance and exclusions in 2016/17;
 - the outcomes for attendance and exclusions in 2017/18;
 - progress against targets; and
 - key issues that need to be addressed.
- 3.2 There has been a decrease in primary and secondary attendance rates when comparing that of 2016/17 with 2017/18. There has also been an increase in exclusion rates for five days or fewer for both primary and secondary. However, there were no permanent exclusions in 2017/18; there was one in 2016/17.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

4.1 At the end of academic year 2016/17 (**Appendix 1**)

- The rate of fixed term exclusions for 5 days or fewer in secondary schools was 47.8 as compared with 40.0 in 2015/16;
- The rate of fixed term exclusions for 5 days or fewer in primary schools was 14.8 as compared with 7.0 in 2015/16;
- The rate of fixed term exclusions for 6 days or more in secondary schools was 0.4 as compared with 0.0 in 2015/16;
- The rate of fixed term exclusions for 6 days or more in primary schools was 0.7 as compared with 1.0 in 2015/16;
- There was one permanent exclusion;
- The average length for an exclusion in secondary schools increased to 1.6 days in 2016/17 from 1.5 days in 2015/16;
- The average length for an exclusion in primary schools decreased to 1.7 days in 2016/17 from 3.2 days in 2015/16;
- Secondary attendance decreased from 93.40% in 2015/16 to 93.00% in 2016/17;
- Primary attendance increased from 94.21% in 2015/16 to 94.29% in 2016/17;

5.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

5.1 Our ambition is to be in line with Welsh averages. The WA for secondary in 2017/18 is 93.8%. The WA for primary in 2017/18 was 94.5%. In order to achieve this, the performance of all pupils in respect of attendance and behaviour needs to improve.

5.2 Actions taken by the LA:

- Provided attendance profiles outlining areas of strength and those for improvement for Headteachers, Chair of Governors and Challenge Advisers.
- Meetings with schools to confirm approaches for improvement in relation to attendance.
- Provided behaviour profiles outlining areas of strength and those for improvement for Headteachers, Chair of Governors and Challenge Advisers.
- Provided training opportunities and guidance for behaviour.
- Made changes to the activities within the Education Welfare Service Level Agreement 2015/16. This was to ensure that work undertaken by the officers was directed by the school to where most required. Following a review of the service during August-September 2015 it was agreed that the service should be restructured. This was to ensure that schools exercise their autonomy and responsibility around key decisions and activities. Some schools have chosen to use the funding to directly employ staff to address the attendance needs of the school. Twelve schools bought into the SLA for 2016/17 and this has increased to fifteen in 2017/18. There are two core funded posts to deliver the statutory functions. The statutory role of the Education Inclusion Service within the local authority covers school attendance, child welfare, pupil exclusions and regulating child employment/performance licenses.
- Resources, advice and guidance for wellbeing are shared via the Inclusion Manager with schools and colleagues.
- The Learning & LAESCYP Scrutiny Committee established a Task and Finish Group (T&FG) to undertake a review of attendance within primary & secondary schools across the County Borough area, to determine whether low

rates of attendance were contributing to a corresponding level of attainment within our schools. (**Appendix 2**)

6.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

6.1 Attendance- 2017/18 (Appendix 3)

- The attendance across primary schools is 94.03%, compared with 94.29% in 2016/17;
- The attendance across secondary schools is 92.49% compared with 93.0% in 2016/17;
- This ranks Merthyr Tydfil 22nd for secondary attendance and 21st for primary attendance.

6.2 Exclusions- 2017/18 (Appendix 4)

Secondary schools

- There has been an **increase** in the total number of incidents resulting in an exclusion from 137 in 2016/17 to 348 in 2017/18.
- There has been an **increase** in the number of incidents resulting in exclusion for 5 days or fewer from 136 in 2016/17 to 347 in 2017/18.
- The number of incidents resulting in exclusion for 6 days or more **remains constant** at 1 for this comparative period.
- There have been **no permanent exclusions** for this period.
- The total number of days lost due to all exclusions has **increased** from 197 days to 521 for the comparative period.

There continues to be a reduction in the use of the lengthier period i.e. for six days or more which has resulted in an overall reduction in the average length of exclusion in secondary schools.

- There has been an **increase** in the total number of incidents resulting in an exclusion from 90 in 2016/17 to 124 in 2017/18.
- There has been an **increase** in the number of incidents resulting in exclusion for 5 days or fewer from 132 in 2016/17 to 223.5 in 2017/18.
- There has been an **increase** in the number of incidents resulting in exclusion for 6 days or more from 4 in 2016/17 to 5 in 2017/18.
- There have been **no permanent exclusions** for this period.
- The total number of days lost due to all exclusions has **increased** from 165.5 days to 261 for the comparative period.

6.3 Attendance and Exclusions 2018/19

- In October 2018, attendance across primary schools is 0.55 lower than in the 2017/18 academic year. (95.55% in 2017/18, 94.99% in 2018/19)
- In October 2018, attendance at secondary schools is 0.32 lower than the equivalent period in the previous academic year. (93.77% in 2017/18, 93.45% in 2018/19)
- In October 2018 in secondary schools, there has been a **decrease** in the total number of incidents resulting in an exclusion from 34 in 2017/18 to 22 in 2018/19.
- In October 2018 in primary schools, there has been an **increase** in the total number of incidents resulting in an exclusion from 17 in 2017/18 to 18 in 2018/19.

6.4 The Attendance campaign “Miss School Miss Out” was launched by the Leader of the Party, Councillor Kevin O’Neil, at the Student Conference on November 15th. This involved the production of a few short videos that have been posted on social media involving pupils regarding school attendance. Schools have been encouraged to share these films and to tweet all of their good news stories in respect of attendance, as well as re-iterating key messages around the importance of regular punctual attendance via cross curricular activities.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

7.1 The strategies for further improvement will focus on (Appendix 5) :

- developing increased accountability of schools for attendance and behaviour;
- delivering training to ensure a consistent and challenging approach to matters of non-attendance;
- increasing engagement with the prosecution process;
- increasing awareness of the correlation between attainment and attendance;
- re-instating termly Truancy Patrols in conjunction with the Police;
- re-establishing termly Attendance meetings with schools in order to focus on areas for improvement;
- delivering “Wellbeing” groups in schools for those identified with a need;
- ensuring that attendance is a priority across the council;
- extending the Early Identification Toolkit (EIT) into primary schools in order to identify vulnerability from an earlier age;
- building capacity in schools to for effective classroom management;
- improving support for pupils with ALN including SEBD;
- increasing levels of parental engagement in pupil learning;
- continuing to develop the marketing campaign to raise awareness of the importance of attendance and parental engagement with further films involving secondary aged pupils and of the role of the Education Inclusion Officer and the school Family Liaison Officer;
- engagement with children and young people on how best to improve wellbeing;
- ensuring that prevention and early intervention strategies for all pupils are well established ; and
- targeting support by using data effectively.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

8.1 There is a strong relationship between Wellbeing and Attainment.

Best start to life: Children and young people get the best start to life and are equipped with the skills they need to be successful learners and confident individuals

SUE WALKER
CHIEF OFFICER, LEARNING

COUNCILLOR Lisa Mytton
PORTFOLIO MEMBER FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council’s Constitution?		No

Appendix 1

Progress to date	Outcomes 2015/16	Outcomes 2016/17	Ranking 2016/17	Outcomes 2017/18	Ranking 2017/18
Primary school attendance	94.21	94.29	22	94.03	21
Secondary school attendance	94.25	93.00	22	92.49	22
Secondary school attendance EOTAS	74.3	66.9		56.2	
Primary absence rates persistent absentees	1.9	1.1		1.08	
Secondary absence rates persistent absentees	4.9	6.01		5	
Primary fixed-term 5 days or fewer ¹	7	14.8		21.1	
Primary fixed-term 6 days or more	1	0.7		0.9	
Primary permanent exclusions	0	1		0	
Secondary fixed-term 5 days or fewer	40	47.8		120.2	
Secondary fixed-term 6 days or more	0	0.4		0.3	
Secondary permanent exclusions	4	0		0	
Secondary exclusions EOTAS	21	10		18	
Secondary average length of exclusion (days)	1.5	1.6		1.5	
Primary average length of exclusion (days)	3.2	1.7		2.1	

¹ Rate per 1,000 pupils



CABINET REPORT

Date Written	21 st June 2018
Report Author	Learning & LAESCYP T&FG
Committee Division	Scrutiny
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	25 th July 2018

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Scrutiny Report - Review of Attendance & Attainment in Primary & Secondary Schools

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Learning & LAESCYP Scrutiny Committee established a Task and Finish Group (T&FG) to undertake a review of attendance within primary & secondary schools across the County Borough area, to determine whether low rates of attendance were contributing to a corresponding level of attainment within our schools.
- 1.2 Attending school regularly has a positive impact on learning. Good attendance is key to helping pupils have the best possible chance in life and maximise their potential, both in terms of academic achievement and future employability.
- 1.3 The T&FG decided to analyse recent and meaningful attendance data rather than outdated historical data and consequently the review included in depth analysis of primary and secondary school data covering the two year period 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- 1.4 In terms of Primary School attendance, Merthyr Tydfil CBC was ranked 22nd out of 22 Welsh Local Authorities in 2015/16 and 2016/17. The overall attendance level within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's twenty two primary schools was 94.21% in 2015/16 and 94.29% in 2016/17. The effect of these levels of attendance was that during the two year period analysed, on average each primary school pupil across the County Borough would have missed the equivalent of just under 11 days of school in both 2015/16 and 2016/17. This would equate to just under 50 lessons being missed per pupil per year, which is a considerable amount of education to lose.
- 1.5 In terms of overall attendance for Secondary Schools, MTCBC has been occupying bottom position within the Central South Consortium since 2013/14. Evidence shows

that in 2015/16 MTCBC was placed 19th out of 22 Local Authorities in Wales, and 22nd out of 22 in 2016/17.

- 1.6 Average attendance in Secondary schools throughout the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council area has declined over the past two years. During 2015/16 average overall attendance of the four secondary schools was 93.39% and in 2016/17 it was 93%. These percentage figures fell short of the Welsh Government attendance target of 95% set in 2011.
- 1.7 In 2016/17 all four of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough's Secondary schools failed to achieve their attendance targets, which each school set in conjunction with Central South Consortium Challenge Advisors. The 2016/17 overall target for Merthyr Tydfil CBC was 94.50%.
- 1.8 Persistent absence appears to be a major problem within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Secondary schools. The percentage of persistent absentees for Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Secondary Schools is 6.01% (target for 2015/16 was 3.00%). Therefore, the 6.01% achieved and reported on above is over twice the target set for 2015/16. The table also shows that the all Wales average for persistent absentees was 3.90%.
- 1.9 An analysis of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) during the period September 2016 – July 2017 shows that there is a lack of consistency in the way that regulations governing the criteria for issuing FPN's are being implemented by MTCBC schools and the Local Authority. This lack of consistency needs to change if meaningful improvements in the present levels of unauthorised absences are to materialise.
- 1.10 If the Authority's stated ambition to be ranked within the top 10 performing Local Authorities in Wales by 2020 is to be achieved, then attendance levels need to improve significantly.
- 1.11 The T&FG supports the Inclusion Manager's closing statement to this review i.e. *"School Leadership is key to driving further improvement. Should there continue to be no, or poor improvement with regards to attendance, then Schools and Governing Bodies will be held to account through case conferences."*
- 1.12 The T&FG has decided not to include recommendations within this report which are intended to secure improvements to the poor attendance levels identified within many of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough's schools. This decision was made as action is already being taken by the Inclusion Manager aimed at improving the attendance issues that had existed for some time. Section 13.0 of this report "IMPROVED ATTENDANCE LEVELS WITHIN OUR SCHOOLS - THE WAY FORWARD" reflects those actions developed and implemented by the Education Department.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that

- 2.1 The contents of this report are noted.
- 2.2 Regular updates on the actions as listed at "13.3 Actions Developed and Implemented by the Inclusion Manager" be reported to the Learning & LAESCYP Scrutiny Committee and as such included in the Committees annual work programme.

Page	Contents	Para
4	Background	3.0
4	Introduction	4.0
5	An Outline of Primary School Attendance Levels in Merthyr Tydfil CBC	5.0
5	Analysis of Attendance covering the periods 2015/16 and 2016/17	6.0
6	Group 1	6.2
6	Group 2	6.3
8	Group 3	6.4
9	Range of Primary School Attendance Levels	6.5
10	The Overall Effect of Poor Attendance in Primary Schools	6.6
11	Analysis of Primary Outcomes covering the periods 2015/16 & 2016/17	7.0
11	Group 1	7.1
12	Group 2	7.2
13	Group 3	7.3
14	Conclusions Reached by Task & Finish Group – Primary Schools	8.0
16	A Brief Analysis of specific areas associated with Attendance in Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Primary Schools	9.0
16	Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals (FSM's)	9.2
21	Authorised and Unauthorised Absence	9.3
24	Persistent Absence Primary Schools	9.4
25	Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's)	9.5
26	Analysis of Secondary Schools Attendance covering the two year period 2015/16 and 2016/17.	10.0
29	Analysis of Secondary Schools Outcomes covering the two year period 2015/16 and 2016/17.	11.0
31	Conclusions Reached by Task & Finish Group – Secondary Schools	12.0
32	Improved Attendance Levels within our Schools - The Way Forward	13.0

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 At a meeting of the Learning & LAESCYP Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 4 September 2017, members of the Committee agreed that a Task & Finish Group (T&FG) be convened to undertake a review of attendance within primary & secondary schools across the County Borough area, to determine whether low rates of attendance were contributing to a corresponding level of attainment within our schools. It was further agreed that membership of the T&FG should be Councillors Harvey Jones, Chris Davies and Sherelle Jago; and that members of this group would provide a verbal update to Committee members at each subsequent Scrutiny meeting, prior to the final report being produced.

4.0 INTRODUCTION

4.1 Attending school regularly has a positive impact on learning. Good attendance is key to helping pupils have the best possible chance in life and maximise their

potential, both in terms of academic achievement and future employability. It goes without saying that if students are not in school, they are not learning. If they are not genuinely ill they should be in school and working their hardest to achieve their best, no matter what year group they are in. The process of education is life-long and we build on what we already know. If students miss school they are damaging their future.

- 4.2 Welsh Government set a target for attendance of 95% back in 2011. In the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Annual Performance Report 2016/17, included on the Full Council agenda dated 27 September 2017, the former Chief Officer for Learning, Dorothy Haines, makes an important observation at page 127 when reporting on the Local Authority improvement objectives for 2013 to 2017. With regard to Priority Area 1 – Raising Standards of Attainment, she states: - *“The judgement for outcomes overall is no better than adequate **because rates of attendance remain too low**”*. In a Scrutiny (Learning & LAESCYP) Report dated 23 October 2017 at page 56, the Inclusion Manager, Sarah Bowen reinforces the low attendance issue:- *“Rates of attendance in primary and secondary schools vary and **remain low overall** despite support, advice and guidance. Different actions are needed to hold schools to account where necessary”*.
- 4.3 Therefore, it is the responsibility of everyone in our schools – staff, governors, pupils and parents, as well as senior officers within the Learning Department itself, to ensure that every effort is made to achieve the Welsh Government target of 95% attendance at school and to subsequently progress towards achieving the attendance target set by each school in conjunction with Central South Consortium Challenge Advisors, who are assigned to each school in the Local Authority area. The significance of this statement becomes even more apparent when one considers the following situation:-

“Based on the statutory number of 190 school days per annum, a pupil with 90% attendance will have missed 19 days of schooling during that year. Between entering primary school in the reception class, to the end of primary education in year 6, a pupil with an average attendance of 90% will have missed 133 full days of school. This is over half a year of learning.” (Estyn publication June 2015, “Effective practice in improving attendance in primary schools”)

At the commencement of the review, the T&FG members decided to review primary school attendance before moving on to consider secondary school attendance.

5.0 AN OUTLINE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE LEVELS IN MERTHYR TYDFIL CBC.

- 5.1 For the purpose of this review, members of the T&FG decided to analyse recent and meaningful attendance data rather than outdated historical data, as it was felt that within the limited time available to complete this review, no useful purpose would be served by considering past rather than present data. Consequently, the review will include in depth analysis of primary school data covering at the most, the two year period 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- 5.2 Attendance in primary schools throughout the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council area has improved overall over the past five years, albeit from a low base. During the most recent two year period, average attendance in 2015/2016 was 94.21% and

in 2016/17 was 94.29%. However, these figures fell short of the Welsh Government attendance target of 95% set in 2011. In 2016/17 all of Merthyr Tydfil CBC's twenty two primary schools failed to achieve their school attendance targets, which each school set in conjunction with Central South Consortium Challenge Advisors.

- 5.3 Of the five local authorities comprising the Central South Consortium (CSC), in terms of attendance Merthyr Tydfil CBC was placed 5th in 2015/16 (CSC average attendance 2015/16 was 94.90%) In 2016/17 the Local Authority was again placed in 5th position (CSC average attendance 2016/17 was 94.90%)
- 5.4 The average Primary school attendance level of 94.21% saw Merthyr Tydfil CBC's primary schools placed 22nd out of 22 Welsh Local Authorities in 2015/16 (Wales average attendance 2015/16 was 94.90%). The Local Authority was again placed 22nd in 2016/17 with an average school attendance level of 94.29% against a Wales average attendance level of once again 94.90%.

6.0 ANALYSIS OF ATTENDANCE COVERING THE PERIODS 2015/16 AND 2016/17

- 6.1 For ease of understanding, The T&FG decided to place all twenty two primary schools into three specific groups (1-3) based on the level of attendance achieved by each school over the two year period of the analysis. Group 1 Table (1) below shows Attendance of the first group, which includes those schools that exceeded the Welsh Government attendance target of 95% in 2015/16 and 2016/17.

6.2 Group 1 - Table (1)

Primary School	Attendance %age 2015/16	Attendance %age 2016/17	FSM Group
Cyfarthfa Park	95.45	95.82	2
Heolgerrig	95.70	95.71	2
Troedyrhiw	95.11	95.28	3
Ysgol Santes Tudful	94.94	95.25	2
MTCBC Average	94.21	94.29	
Wales Average	94.90	94.90	
CSC Average	94.90	94.90	

Table (1A)

Primary School	School Target Attendance %age 2016/17	School Target Attendance %age 2017/18
Cyfarthfa Park	96.00	95.50
Heolgerrig	96.00	95.50
Troedyrhiw	95.50	95.50
Ysgol Santes Tudful	95.30	95.50

- 6.2.1 Analysis of the attendance data in Table 1 above shows that three primary schools in the Merthyr Tydfil CBC area, exceeded the Welsh Government attendance target of 95% in 2015/16. One primary school narrowly missed the Welsh Government target in 2015/16 but exceeded the target in 2016/17. This meant that all four primary schools featured in Table 1, exceeded the Welsh Government target of 95% in

2016/17. It can also be seen in Table 1 that all four primary schools exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Consortium average attendance levels for 2015/16 and 2016/17.

6.2.2 However, Table 1A above shows that all four primary schools failed to reach the school attendance target in 2016/17 set by each school in conjunction with the Central South Consortium Challenge Advisors. Updated school attendance targets have been agreed for 2017/18

6.2.3 Three of the four primary schools included in Table 1 above, that exceeded the Welsh Government target of 95% are in FSM Group 2. One school is in FSM Group 3.

6.3 **Group 2 – Table 2**

6.3.1 The second group of schools to be analysed, included seven primary schools that achieved an attendance level of between 93.65% and 94.93% over the two year period. Most were close to achieving the Welsh Government attendance target of 95%, particularly in 2016/17.

Table (2)

Primary School	Attendance %age 2015/16	Attendance %age 2016/17	FSM Group
Abercanaid	94.74	94.93	2
Caedraw	94.38	94.61	3
Gwaunfarren	94.75	94.69	3
Trelewis	94.48	94.70	3
Dowlais	93.65	94.17	3
St Aloysius RC	93.77	94.53	4
St Mary's RC	93.67	94.29	2

MTCBC Average	94.21	94.29	
Wales Average	94.90	94.90	
CSC Average	94.90	94.90	

Table (2A)

Primary School	School Target Attendance %age 2016/17	School Target Attendance %age 2017/18
Abercanaid	96.00	95.50
Caedraw	95.50	95.50
Gwaunfarren	95.50	95.50
Trelewis	95.30	95.50
Dowlais	95.50	95.50
St Aloysius RC	95.30	95.50
St Mary's RC	95.10	95.50

6.3.2 Table (2) above includes four primary schools in the Merthyr Tydfil CBC area, that in 2015/16 were close to achieving the Welsh Government attendance target of 95%, by achieving an attendance percentage ranging between 94.38% and 94.75%. The

Table also shows that in 2016/17 all seven primary schools were close to achieving the Welsh Government target of 95% when each school achieved over 94% attendance.

- 6.3.3 It can also be seen in Table 2 that all seven primary schools failed to achieve the Wales and Consortium average attendance levels for 2015/16. However, all seven primary schools exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC average attendance performance in 2015/16.
- 6.3.4 Only one school in the group exceeded the Wales & Central South Consortium average attendance levels in 2016/17. All but two of the seven schools exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC average attendance performance in 2016/17.
- 6.3.5 Two of the seven primary schools included in Table 2 are in FSM Group 2; four are in FSM Group 3 and one is in FSM Group 4.
- 6.3.6 Table 2A above shows that all seven primary schools failed to reach the school attendance target in 2016/17 set by each school in conjunction with the Central South Consortium Challenge Advisors. Updated school attendance targets have been agreed for 2017/18.

6.4 **Group 3 – Table 3**

- 6.4.1 This is the third and final group, which includes eleven of the twenty two primary schools in the Merthyr Tydfil CBC area.

Table (3)

Primary School	Attendance % age 2015/16	Attendance % age 2016/17	FSM Group
Bedlinog	93.76	93.69	3
Edwardsville	93.06	92.80	3
Goetre	93.97	93.89	5
Pantysgallog	93.47	93.59	3
Twynyrodyn	93.69	93.57	3
Ynysowen	93.54	93.84	4
Coed y Dderwen	93.56	93.48	4
Ysgol y Graig	93.51	93.97	3
Gellifaelog	94.31	93.10	4
St Illtyds	94.14	93.89	4
Rhyd – Y- Grug	94.32	93.89	2
MTCBC Average	94.21	94.29	
Wales Average	94.90	94.90	
CSC Average	94.90	94.90	

Table (3A)

Primary School	School Target Attendance % age 2016/17	School Target Attendance % age 2017/18
Bedlinog	94.50	95.50
Edwardsville	95.00	95.50
Goetre	95.00	95.50
Pantysgallog	95.00	95.50
Twynyrodyn	95.60	95.50
Ynysowen	95.20	95.50
Coed y Dderwen	95.00	95.50
Ysgol y Graig	95.30	95.50
Gellifaelog	95.10	95.50
St Illtyds	95.30	95.50
Rhyd – Y- Grug	95.00	95.50

6.4.2 Table (3) above shows that at eight of the eleven primary schools, attendance levels were below 94% in 2015/16. Three schools exceeded 94% attendance in 2015/16. In 2016/17 all eleven schools were below 94% attendance. Table 3 also shows that in 2015/16 attendance levels at nine of the eleven primary schools were below the average attendance level for primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil. (94.21%) In 2016/17 attendance levels at all eleven primary schools were below the average attendance level for primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil. (94.29%)

6.4.3 It can also be seen in Table 3 that within this group of eleven primary schools, no school exceeded the Wales or Central South Consortium average attendance levels for 2015/16. All eleven schools failed to exceed the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Central South Consortium and Wales average attendance levels in 2016/17. It is also evident that not one of the eleven schools reached the Welsh Government attendance target of 95%.

6.4.4 Of the eleven primary schools included in Table 3 above, one is in FSM Group 2, five are in FSM Group 3, four schools are in FSM Group 4 and one is in FSM Group 5.

6.4.5 Table 3A above shows that all eleven primary schools failed to reach the school attendance target in 2016/17 set by each school in conjunction with the Central South Consortium Challenge Advisors. Updated school attendance targets have been agreed for 2017/18.

6.5 **Range of Primary School Attendance Levels**

6.5.1 (a) Group 1, Table 1 (4 Primary Schools)
 The Attendance Range for this group of four primary schools was as follows:-
2015/16 : 94.94% - 95.70%
2016/17: 95.25% – 95.82%
 Comment:- Upward trend in 2016/17 that exceeded the Welsh Government target of 95% for the second consecutive year.

- (b) Group 2, Table 2 (7 Primary Schools)
 The Attendance Range for this group of seven primary schools was as follows:-
2015/16: 93.65% - 94.75%
2016/17: 94.17% – 94.93%
 Comment:- Upward trend in 2016/17 that is close to the Welsh Government target of 95%
- (c) Group 3, Table 3 (11 Primary Schools)
 The Attendance Range for this group of 11 primary schools was as follows:-
2015/16 : 93.06% – 94.32%
2016/17 : 92.80% – 93.97%
 Comment:- Downward trend in 2016/17 that falls far short of the Welsh Government target of 95%

6.6 The Overall Effect of Poor Attendance in Primary Schools

- 6.6.1 As part of the introduction associated with this assessment, a quotation was included from a previous Estyn report, that is well worth repeating because of its significant importance in helping one understand the effects of poor attendance within primary schools:-

“Based on the statutory number of 190 school days per annum, a pupil with 90% attendance will have missed 19 days of schooling during that year. Between entering primary school in the reception class, to the end of primary education in year 6, a pupil with an average attendance of 90% will have missed 133 full days of school. This is over half a year of learning.” (Estyn publication June 2015, “Effective practice in improving attendance in primary schools”)

- 6.6.2 Table 4 overleaf contains a list of Annual Attendance rates together with the effects of these rates in terms of days missed from school and the corresponding lessons missed by pupils. This information hopefully forms a useful guide when assessing the effects of attendance at any of the 22 primary schools included in Tables 1, 2 and 3 above.

Table 4.

Annual Attendance		Result for the whole academic year
Green	100%	Not missing any lessons
	99%	Missing around 10 lessons
	98%	Missing around 20 lessons
	97%	Missing around 30 lessons
	96%	Missing about 8 days of school. This equates up to 40 lessons.

Amber	95%	Missing about 10 days of school. This equates up to 45 lessons
	94%	Missing about 12 days of school. This equates up to 50 lessons
	93%	Missing about 14 days of school. A significant amount of education to lose.
Red	90-92%	Missing more than 3 weeks of school. A significant amount of education to lose.
	86-89%	Missing between 4 and 6 weeks. A serious loss of learning which is likely to have a detrimental effect on achievement and life chances 95 Lessons missed
	81 -85%	Missing between 6 and 8 weeks. A serious loss of learning which is likely to have a detrimental effect on achievement and life chances 145 Lessons missed
	80% and below	Missing more than 8 weeks. A serious loss of learning which is likely to have a detrimental effect on achievement and life chances 190 Lessons missed

7.0 ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY OUTCOMES COVERING THE PERIODS 2015/16 & 2016

7.1 Group 1 (Outcomes covering the periods 2015/16 and 2016/17)

7.1.1 In Table (1) above, the analysis identified a group of four primary schools, (Group 1) that exceeded the Welsh Government attendance target of 95%. In the table produced below, we show the outcomes associated with the same group of schools.

Table (5)

Primary School	Foundation Phase Percentage achieving FPOI		Key Stage 2 Percentage achieving CSI		FSM Group
	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17	
Cyfarthfa Park	96.36	95.00	97.62	94.55	2
Heolgerrig	100.00	100.00	92.59	100.00	2
Troedyrhiw	90.48	90.00	86.21	92.31	3
Ysgol Santes Tudful	92.50	93.90	94.12	98.28	2

MTCBC Average	89.06	88.10	89.20	90.20	
Wales Average	86.98	87.30	88.60	89.50	
CSC Average	88.60	88.60	89.50	90.20	

7.1.2 Analysis of Outcomes

Examination of the data for all four primary schools included in Table 5 above shows that in 2015/16 **and** 2016/17, at Foundation Phase the proportion of pupils aged between 5 and 7 years, who achieved the expected level of Outcome 5 or above for the Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator (FPOI), was above the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Consortium average outcome performances.

Table 5 also shows that at Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils aged between 7 and 11 years old achieving at least the expected level (Level 4 or above) for the Core Subject Indicator (CSI) was also above the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Consortium average performances in three of the four primary schools in 2015/16 (75%) and all four primary schools (100%) in 2016/17.

7.2 Group 2 (Outcomes covering the periods 2015/16 and 2016/17)

7.2.1 In table (2) above, the analysis identified a group of seven primary schools, (Group 2) where attendance was close to achieving the Welsh Government attendance target of 95%. In the table produced below, we show the outcomes associated with the same group of schools.

Table (6)

Primary School	Foundation Phase Percentage achieving FP01		Key Stage 2 Percentage achieving CSI		FSM Group
	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17	
Abercanaid	91.67	78.95	92.86	96.67	2
Caedraw	84.00	86.67	95.00	89.66	3
Gwaunfarren	86.96	86.21	87.88	97.14	3
Trelewis	92.31	86.67	93.55	100.00	3
Dowlais	89.74	94.70	78.57	78.79	3
St Aloysius RC	91.67	94.44	89.47	89.47	4
St Mary's RC	94.74	95.83	96.67	95.00	2
MTCBC Average	89.06	88.10	89.20	90.20	
Wales Average	86.98	87.30	88.60	89.50	
CSC Average	88.60	88.60	89.50	90.20	

7.2.2 Analysis of Outcomes

Examination of the outcomes for all seven primary schools included in Table 6 above shows that in 2015/16 at Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator (FPOI), five of the seven primary schools (71.42%) achieved above the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Consortium average outcome performances. However in 2016/17 the data shows that only three of the seven primary schools (42.85%) exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Consortium average outcome performances.

Table 6 also shows that at Key Stage 2, the proportion of pupils aged between 7 and 11 years old achieving at least the expected level (Level 4 or above) for the Core Subject Indicator (CSI) was above the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Consortium average performances in four of the seven primary schools (57.15%) in 2015/16 and again in 2016/17.

7.3 Group 3 (Outcomes covering the periods 2015/16 and 2016/17)

7.3.1 In table (3) above, the analysis identified a group of eleven primary schools (Group 3) where attendance levels were below the Welsh Government attendance target of 95%. In fact the attendance level achieved by most of this group of primary schools was below 94% in 2015/16 and 2016/17. In the table produced below, we show the outcomes associated with the same group of schools.

Table (7)

Primary School	FP Percentage achieving FPOI		KS 2 Percentage achieving CSI		FSM Group
	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17	
Bedlinog	100.00	54.55	80.00	84.62	3
Edwardsville	76.74	76.19	90.70	88.46	3
Goetre	82.98	89.83	80.70	88.60	5
Pantysgallog	96.55	92.59	100.00	89.29	3
Twynyrodyn	94.00	93.02	97.73	81.24	3
Ynysowen	73.33	80.00	82.35	92.59	4
Coed y Dderwen	80.65	81.82	83.33	88.89	4
Ysgol y Graig	87.50	94.44	89.19	77.78	3
Gellifaelog	97.14	93.33	90.91	84.21	4
St Illtyds	86.96	85.71	86.36	88.24	4
Rhyd – Y- Grug	95.12	91.67	93.75	100.00	2
MTCBC Average	89.06	88.10	89.20	90.20	
Wales Average	86.98	87.30	88.60	89.50	
CSC Average	88.60	88.60	89.50	90.20	

7.3.3 Analysis of Outcomes

Examination of the data included in Table 7 above shows that in 2015/16 at Foundation Phase, five of the eleven primary schools (45.45%) achieved above the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Consortium average outcome performances. In 2016/17 the data shows that six of the eleven primary schools (54.55%) exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Consortium average outcome performances.

Analysis of the data included in Table 7 above also shows that at KS2 (CSI) in 2015/16, five of the eleven primary schools (45.45%) exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Consortium average outcome performances. In 2016/17, only two of the eleven primary schools (18.18%) exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Consortium average performances.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS REACHED BY TASK & FINISH GROUP

The following conclusions are provided following the Task & Finish Group's review of attendance within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Primary Schools for the two year period 2015/16 and 2016/17:-

8.1 In terms of Primary School attendance, Merthyr Tydfil CBC was ranked 22nd out of 22 Welsh Local Authorities in 2015/16 and 2016/17. The overall attendance level within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's twenty two primary schools was 94.21% in 2015/16 and 94.29% in 2016/17. The effect of these levels of attendance was that during the two year period analysed, on average each primary school pupil across the County Borough would have missed the equivalent of just under 11 days of school in both 2015/16 and 2016/17. This would equate to just under 50 lessons being missed per pupil per year, which is a considerable amount of education to lose.

8.2 The conclusion reached for the four schools included in Group 1, as a result of analysing the data in Tables 1 and 5, plus the resulting comments provided above is that in 2015/16 and 2016/17 this Group of schools produced the best attendance levels of all twenty two primary schools within the Merthyr Tydfil CBC area. All four schools exceeded the Welsh Government attendance target of 95% as well as the Wales, Central South Consortium and Merthyr Tydfil CBC average attendance levels.

The attendance achievements had a positive effect on outcomes at all four schools, with each school exceeding the Wales, Central South Consortium and Merthyr Tydfil CBC average outcome performances at FPOI and KS2 (CSI)

8.3 For the seven schools included in Group 2, as a result of analysing the data provided in Tables 2 and 6 above and the ensuing comments also provided above, the conclusion reached is that attendance and attainment are both lower than those schools included in Groups 1 above. Nevertheless, improvements in attendance resulted in these particular schools just missing the Welsh Government attendance target of 95% in 2016/17; all seven schools exceeded the Merthyr CBC average attendance level in 2015/16 and five of the seven schools in the Group exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC average attendance level in 2016/17. However, all seven schools failed to achieve the Wales and Central South Consortium average attendance levels in 2015/16 and only one school in the Group exceeded the Wales and Central South Consortium average attendance levels in 2016/17.

In terms of outcomes, in 2015/16 five of the seven schools in the Group (71.43%) achieved above the average for Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Central South Consortium at Foundation Phase (FPOI). In 2016/17 this decreased to three of the seven schools (42.86%) exceeding the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Central South Consortium average outcomes. At KS2 (CSI) in both 2015/16 and 2016/17 four of the seven schools (57.14%) achieved above the Merthyr CBC, Wales and Central South Consortium average outcomes.

8.4 For the eleven schools included in Group 3, as a result of analysing the data provided in Tables 3 and 7 above plus the follow - on comments, the conclusion reached is that attendance and attainment are both lower than all those schools included in Groups 1 and 2 above.

In 2015/16 attendance levels at nine of the eleven primary schools in this Group were below the average attendance levels for primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil CBC. For 2016/17 all eleven schools were below the average attendance level for primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil CBC.

In 2015/16 and 2016/17 no school in this Group exceeded the Wales or Central South Consortium average attendance levels. Also, no school within the Group got close to achieving the Welsh Government attendance target of 95%.

In terms of outcomes, in 2015/16 five of the eleven schools (45.45%) achieved above the average for Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Central South Consortium at Foundation Phase (FPOI). In 2016/17 six of the eleven schools (54.55%) exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Central South Consortium average outcomes. At KS2 (CSI) in 2015/16 five of the eleven schools (45.45%) achieved above the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, Wales and Central South Consortium average outcomes.

In 2016/17 this decreased to only two of the eleven schools (18.18%) within the Group.

- 8.5 The analysis of the available data included above has led to the conclusion that as overall absence levels within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's primary schools increase, the average percentage of primary school pupils achieving attainment at the end of Foundation Phase (FPO1) and Key Stage 2 (CSI) decreases.
- 8.6 The analysis and resulting conclusions have therefore shown conclusively, that there is a strong link between overall absence and attainment within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Primary schools. These conclusions are also supported by an abundance of evidence confirming the strong link that exists between overall absence and attainment; obtained as a result of research undertaken throughout the UK into the subject of attendance and corresponding outcomes within primary schools.
- 8.7 And finally, statements of the former Chief Officer for Learning and the Inclusion Manager included at paragraph 2 of the Introduction to this report, show both officers expressing their deep concerns at the low levels of attendance in Merthyr Tydfil CBC's schools. In fact the issue of low attendance levels within our schools extends even further than the two year analysis undertaken by the T&FG, included at the start of these conclusions, which shows MTCBC ranked 22nd out of 22 Welsh Local Authorities in 2015/16 and 2016/17. Back in 2014/15 primary school attendance was again ranked 22nd out of 22 Welsh Local Authorities.
- 8.8 With the Authority's stated ambition to be ranked within the top 10 Local Authorities in Wales by 2020, the attendance levels within the majority of our schools need to improve significantly, if this stated ambition is to stand any chance of becoming a reality.
- 8.9 Reflecting on the attendance review description provided in the opening paragraphs, members of the Task & Finish Group are satisfied with the analysis methodology used and the conclusions reached in Section 8 of this report. However, the Group members considered whether any advantage would be gained from briefly extending their deliberations to include some of the other vital areas within the overall attendance framework. Following discussion with the Inclusion Manager, it was agreed that members of the Task & Finish Group would briefly pursue this course of action. However, due to the limited time available, it was agreed that the T&FG would confine the analysis to the twenty two primary schools.

9.0 A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF SPECIFIC AREAS ASSOCIATED WITH ATTENDANCE IN MERTHYR TYDFIL CBC'S PRIMARY SCHOOLS

9.1 Members of the Task & Finish Group decided to briefly examine those areas identified below covering the period September 2016 to July 2017.

- Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals (FSM's) ; (see 9.2)
- Authorised and Unauthorised absence 2016/17 (see 9.3)
- Persistent absence from school; (see 9.4)
- Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's). (see 9.5)

9.2 Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals (FSM's)

9.2.1 As part of their assessment, members of the T&FG referred to a Welsh Government publication (Academic Achievement Free School Meals, Welsh Government 2017) which showed that attainment of primary pupils across Wales eligible for FSM's, had continually improved between 2010 and 2017. However, the evidence also revealed that attainment of those pupils eligible for FSM's still lagged behind their non eligible counterparts.

9.2.2 So, why the variation in attainment between those pupils eligible and those pupils not eligible for FSM's? This question led the T&FG to analyse data appropriate to Merthyr Tydfil CBC's twenty two primary schools, to establish whether pupil absence could possibly have contributed to the difference in attainment, between those pupils eligible for FSM's and those pupils not eligible for FSM's.

9.2.3 The academic year selected for the analysis was September 2016 to July 2017. The T&FG commenced its analysis by examining attendance data. This was followed by an analysis of attainment, before finally providing some resulting conclusions. For consistency the primary schools included in each of the Tables that follow, are identical to those schools included in the opening Tables of this review.

9.2.4 Analysis of Attendance Data 2016/17

Group 1 Table (8)

Primary School/ FSM Group	Attendance %age (all statutory pupils) 2016/17	Pupils Not Eligible for FSM's	Pupils Eligible for FSM's
		Attendance %age 2016/17	Attendance %age 2016/17
Cyfarthfa Park 2	95.82	95.85	95.55
Heolgerrig 2	95.71	95.82	94.87
Troedyrhiw 3	95.28	95.65	93.57
Ysgol Santes Tudful 2	95.25	95.50	92.80
MTCBC Average	94.29	94.63	93.03

Other relevant data

Total pupils within schools included in Table 8 = 797

No. of pupils not eligible for FSM's = 699 (87.70%)

No. of pupils eligible for FSM's = 98 (12.30%)

Group 2 Table (9)

Primary School / FSM Group	Attendance %age (all statutory pupils) 2016/17	Primary Pupils Not Eligible for FSM's Attendance %age 2016/17	Primary Pupils Eligible for FSM's Attendance %age 2016/17	
Abercanaid	2	94.93	95.11	93.10
Caedraw	3	94.61	94.67	94.40
Gwaunfarren	3	94.69	95.10	93.76
Trelewis	3	94.70	94.95	93.20
Dowlais	3	94.17	94.48	92.87
St Aloysius RC	4	94.53	94.65	94.27
St Mary's RC	2	94.29	94.34	94.17
MTCBC Average		94.29	94.63	93.03

Other relevant data

Total pupils within schools included in Table 9 =1037

No. of pupils not eligible for FSM's = 862 (83.12%)

No. of pupils eligible for FSM's = 175 (16.88%)

Group 3 Table (10)

Primary School / FSM Group	Attendance %age (all statutory pupils) 2016/17	Primary Pupils Not Eligible for FSM's Attendance % age 2016/17	Primary Pupils Eligible for FSM's Attendance %age 2016/17	
Bedlinog	3	93.69	93.61	94.09
Edwardsville	3	92.80	93.23	90.50
Goetre	5	93.89	94.56	93.29
Pantysgallog	3	93.59	94.23	91.10
Twynnyrodyn	3	93.57	93.76	92.37
Ynysowen	4	93.84	94.04	93.37
Coed y Dderwen	4	93.48	93.98	91.99
Ysgol y Graig	3	93.97	94.88	91.27
Gellifaelog	4	93.10	93.78	91.67
St Illtyds	4	93.89	94.07	93.29
Rhyd - Y- Grug	2	93.89	94.00	93.19
MTCBC Average		94.29	94.63	93.03

Other relevant data:-

Total pupils within schools included in Table 10.= 1868

No. of pupils not eligible for FSM = 1408 (75.38%)

No. of pupils eligible for FSM = 460 (24.62%)

Other relevant data:-

No. of Statutory pupils within MTCBC's 22 primary schools included in Tables 8, 9 and 10 above = 3702

Total No. of pupils not eligible for FSM's = 2969 (80.20%)

Total No. of pupils eligible for FSM's = 733 (19.80%)

9.2.5 Findings – Attendance Data

Analysis of attendance data for 2016/17 contained in Tables 8, 9 and 10 above, shows that the average attendance of those pupils not eligible for FSM's in Merthyr Tydfil CBC's 22 primary schools was 94.63%, while the average attendance of those pupils eligible for FSM's was lower at 93.03%, illustrating a difference of - 1.60% in the Merthyr Tydfil CBC average attendance for those pupils eligible for FSM's.

In the only school that did not follow the attendance pattern for those pupils eligible for FSM's (1/22) the suggested reason for this minor inconsistency is that the school in question is extremely limited in terms of pupil numbers (48).

It is interesting to note that in 2015/16 the average attendance of those pupils not eligible for FSM's in Merthyr Tydfil CBC's 22 primary schools was 94.62%, while the average attendance of those pupils eligible for FSM's was again lower at 92.80%, illustrating a difference of - 1.82 %. One can see that this trend was similar to that evidenced in the 2016/17 analysis highlighted in the previous paragraph.

9.2.6 Attainment of pupils eligible for FSM's compared against pupils not eligible for FSM's, within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's primary schools

In the absence of specific data for each of the 22 primary schools, showing attainment of those primary pupils eligible for FSM's and those primary pupils not eligible for FSM's, members of the T&FG decided to use a combination of available local data, Welsh Government data, plus other appropriate information, all of which could assist members in establishing a meaningful assessment of attainment in terms of the two specific groups of pupils within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's primary schools.

(a) Foundation Phase

Table 11 below provides the All Wales average attainment data for 2016/17, which is representative of the Foundation Phase Outcome Indicator (FPOI). It shows the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected outcome (outcome 5). Also, for comparison purposes, data applicable to an earlier three academic years is provided.

Table (11)

Year	Percentage of all pupils achieving FPOI	Percentage of pupils <u>not eligible for FSM's</u> achieving FPOI	Percentage of pupils <u>eligible for FSM's</u> achieving FPOI
2016/17	87.30	90.10	75.90
2015/16	87.00	90.00	75.70
2014/15	86.80	90.00	75.10
2013/14	85.20	88.60	72.40

Source of data: Welsh Government Academic Achievement by Free School Meals (FSM's) published 2017.

(b) Key Stage 2 Core Subject Indicator (KS2 CSI)

Table 12 below provides the All Wales average attainment data, representative of the Key Stage 2 Core Subject Indicator (KS2 CSI). It shows the percentage of pupils achieving at least the expected outcome (level 4). As indicated at (a) in the previous paragraph, for comparison purposes, the T&FG also decided to include data in Table 12 below applicable to an earlier three academic years.

Table (12)

Year	Percentage of all pupils achieving KS2 (CSI)	Percentage of pupils <u>not eligible</u> for FSM's achieving KS2 (CSI)	Percentage of pupils <u>eligible</u> for FSM's achieving KS2 (CSI)
2016/17	89.50	92.30	77.20
2015/16	88.60	91.40	77.10
2014/15	87.70	90.80	75.10
2013/14	86.10	89.60	71.90

Source of data: Welsh Government Academic Achievement by Free School Meals (FSM's) published 2017.

9.2.7 Findings - Levels of Attainment

It is evident from the assessment of data contained in Tables 11 and 12 above that for the academic year 2016/17, at Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2, the levels of attainment of those pupils eligible for FSM's were significantly lower than the levels of attainment of those pupils not eligible for FSM's.

These findings are appropriately supported by further evidence covering the three earlier academic years viz. 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, where the evidence showed that within these three academic years, at Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 the levels of attainment of those pupils eligible for FSM's were again significantly lower than the levels of attainment of those pupils not eligible for FSM's.

9.2.8 Conclusions – Attendance and Attainment of Primary Pupils Eligible for FSM's

So, what could be the underlying reason (or reasons) for the variations in attainment between these two specific groups of pupils? Members of the T&FG firmly believe that the attendance data included in Tables 8, 9 and 10 above, provides sufficient evidence to support their view, that the lower attendance rates of those primary pupils eligible for FSM's, identified in all three of these Tables is one of the fundamental reasons for the corresponding lower levels of attainment.

In the earlier analysis regarding the correlation between attendance and outcomes in Merthyr Tydfil CBC's twenty two primary schools, the conclusions provided at Section 8.6 pages 15. showed inter alia, that there was a strong link between overall absence and attainment. This means that when the overall absence level within our primary schools increases, the average percentage of pupils achieving Foundation Phase (FPO1 outcome 5) and Key Stage 2 Level 4 (CSI) invariably decreases.

Therefore, those conclusions contained in section 8 of this report, together with the findings of the attendance data analysis of primary school pupils eligible for FSM's, as highlighted in Tables 8, 9 and 10 above plus the associated findings, led members of the T&FG to conclude that the effects of higher absenteeism recorded

against those pupils eligible for FSM's, does in fact extend to have a significant adverse effect on average attainment of pupils eligible for FSM's at both Foundation Phase (FPOI outcome 5) and Key Stage 2 Level 4 (CSI). This was confirmed following analysis of the Welsh Government publication (2017) - *Academic Achievement by Free School Meals (FSM's)*, which shows the all Wales primary schools (including Merthyr Tydfil CBC) attainment data, of pupils eligible for FSM's as highlighted in Tables 11 and 12 above. These Tables are accompanied by the section headed "*Findings – Levels of Attainment*" So, the overall analysis of attendance and attainment data of those primary school pupils in Merthyr Tydfil CBC eligible for FSM's, confirms that pupil attainment is related to school attendance.

However, as part of this particular analysis – (Attendance and Attainment of Primary Pupils Eligible for FSM's,) members of the T&FG recorded an important finding in the very first paragraph that is repeated here:- "*that the lower attendance rates of those primary pupils eligible for FSM's, identified in all three of these Tables is one of the fundamental reasons for the corresponding lower levels of attainment*". *Importantly, this statement relates to "one of the fundamental reasons"*. Therefore it goes without saying that there could be another fundamental reason or reasons for the lower attendance rates of those primary pupils eligible for FSM's.

In the Estyn Annual Report 2013 at page 11, it is stated that :- "*The statistical link between poverty and low educational attainment is well attested. At all key stages in Wales, learners who are entitled to free school meals perform significantly less than those not entitled to free school meals against a range of attainment performance indicators. The gap between the performance of children from richer and poorer backgrounds widens during schooling.*"

So, we can now see that there's not only a link between low attendance rates and educational attainment; Estyn advances "*poverty*" as another reason for low educational attainment of those pupils eligible for free school meals..

In a research document "*Poverty and Low Educational Achievement*" published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2013, Professor David Egan of Cardiff Metropolitan University confirms the Estyn findings. Professor Egan claims:- "*Living in poverty has a major impact upon levels of educational achievement in Wales. The most widely used but not exclusive measure of the number of children who live in relative poverty in Wales, is the percentage receiving free school meals. On average, this is about 17%. The educational performance of these children compared with those who come from more prosperous backgrounds, provides clear evidence of the effect of poverty on educational achievement. Studies have found that under achievement of children in Wales receiving free school meals may be a significant problem from nursery class onwards*".

Further research findings generally show that despite the extra resources that have been allocated over the years to areas of high need to tackle social deprivation; family circumstances such as parental condoned absence, parental lack of interest/attitudes to education and various other domestic problems, accounted for significantly more of the variation in pupils achievement than school factors alone. Therefore, encouraging improved attendance of many primary school pupils eligible for FSM's without changing some of the other characteristics of social disadvantage referred to above, may not result in significantly improved attainment.

9.3 Authorised and Unauthorised Absence 2016/17.

9.3.1 All (or overall) absence comprise those which are authorised or unauthorised.

- An **authorised absence** is an absence with permission of a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes instances of absence for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided (eg illness, family bereavement or religious observance)
- An **unauthorised absence** is an absence without permission of a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences.

Group 1 - Table (13)

Primary School	Attendance %age 2016/17	Authorised Absence %age	Unauthorised Absence %age
Cyfarthfa Park	95.82	3.20	0.98
Heolgerrig	95.71	2.92	1.37
Troedyrhiw	95.28	3.20	1.52
Ysgol Santes Tudful	95.25	4.71	0.04
MTCBC Average	94.29	4.22	1.49
Wales Average	94.90	4.00	1.10

Group 2 - Table (14)

Primary School	Attendance %age 2016/17	Authorised Absence %age	Unauthorised Absence %age
Abercanaid	94.93	4.45	0.62
Caedraw	94.61	4.06	1.33
Gwaunfarren	94.69	3.52	1.79
Trelewis	94.70	4.83	0.47
Dowlais	94.17	3.83	2.00
St Aloysius RC	94.53	3.60	1.86
St Mary's RC	94.29	4.70	1.01
MTCBC Average	94.29	4.22	1.49
Wales Average	94.90	4.00	1.10

Group 3 - Table (15)

Primary School	Attendance % age 2016/17	Authorised Absence %age	Unauthorised Absence %age
Bedlinog	93.69	5.57	0.74
Edwardsville	92.80	5.30	1.90
Goetre	93.89	4.26	1.85
Pantysgallog	93.59	3.90	2.51
Twynnyrolyn	93.57	3.80	2.63
Ynysowen	93.84	4.27	1.89
Coed y Dderwen	93.48	3.91	2.60
Ysgol y Graig	93.97	4.24	1.80

Gellifaelog	93.10	5.28	1.62
St Illtyds	93.89	5.82	0.30
Rhyd – Y- Grug	93.89	4.69	1.43
MTCBC Average	94.29	4.22	1.49
Wales Average	94.90	4.00	1.10

9.3.2 Analysis of Authorised Absence 2016/17

The analysis of authorised absences associated with those primary schools included in Tables 13, 14 and 15 above, highlighted that the most common reasons for absences were illness, that accounted for over 80% of all authorised absences; medical/dental appointments, that accounted for over 6% ; and agreed family holidays that accounted for nearly 8% of all authorised absences. A combination of “other reasons” made up the remaining 5% of the authorised absences across Merthyr Tydfil CBC’s primary schools.

The analysis also showed that pupils at sixteen of the twenty two primary schools were granted permission to attend family holidays during term time.

9.3.3 Analysis of Unauthorised Absence 2016/17

Family holidays without permission of the school, was established as the main reason, for the unauthorised absence, with an average of 0.89% being recorded for absences due to family holidays without permission. This figure represents nearly 60% of the overall unauthorised absence across Merthyr Tydfil CBC’s primary schools of 1.49%. The analysis showed that pupils at all but one of the twenty two primary schools, missed school without permission to attend family holidays.

Absence where no satisfactory explanation was provided to the school by parents, was identified as another main reason that contributed to Merthyr Tydfil CBC’s overall unauthorised absence rate of 1.49%. The Merthyr Tydfil CBC average of 0.59% for no satisfactory explanation being provided by parents, represents almost 40% of the overall unauthorised absence rate of 1.49%.

Table 16 that follows identifies the eleven primary schools that exceeded the overall Merthyr Tydfil CBC average unauthorised absence of 1.49%.

Table (16)

Primary School	Group No.	Unauthorised Absence %age 2016/17
Troedyrhiw	1	1.52
Gwaunfarren	2	1.79
Dowlais	2	2.00
St Aloysius RC	2	1.86
Edwardsville	3	1.90
Goetre	3	1.85
Pantysgallog	3	2.51
Twynyrodyn	3	2.63
Ynysowen	3	1.89

Coed y Dderwen	3	2.60
Ysgol y Graig	3	1.80
MTCBC Average		1.49

The percentages inserted alongside all eleven primary schools featured in Table 16 above, includes unauthorised absence associated with those pupils who missed school to attend family holidays without permission of the relevant head teachers. The level of this category of absence ranged between 0.54% and 1.74% among all eleven schools.

Seven of the eleven Primary schools included in Table 16 above, also exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC overall average of 0.89%, for pupils missing school to attend family holidays without permission.

9.4 **Persistent Absence within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Primary Schools September 2016 – July 2017.**

Meaning of the term - Welsh Government defines **persistent absence** as pupils whose absence level is more than 20% (80% attendance). (*Welsh Government Statistical Bulletin published 30 March 2017*)

In terms of primary schools a persistent absentee is a pupil of compulsory school age who is absent for at least 20% of the total number of half day sessions that schools are open to pupils in any one academic year. Analysis of the number of half day sessions that arise in any one academic year, calculated over a 7 year period provided an average of 375 sessions. Twenty percent of this figure equates to a persistent absentee missing a minimum of 75 half day sessions per year.

During the period analysed, the number of persistent absentees within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's 22 primary schools was 40. This was from a total of 3702 pupils of statutory school age, which equates to 1.08% of the total.

Twelve of the 22 primary schools were identified as including at least one pupil who was a persistent absentee. Of these twelve schools, seven exceeded the MTCBC average of 1.08% highlighted in the previous paragraph. Table 17 below provides data appropriate to the number of persistent absentees at these seven schools.

Table (17)

Primary School	No of statutory school age pupils	No of persistent absentees	Percentage of persistent absentees	Minimum No. of half day sessions missed p.a. (persistent absentees)
Gellifaelog	163	3	1.84	225
Pantyscallog	140	3	2.14	225
Trelewis	156	2	1.28	150
Twynirodyn	295	12	4.07	900
Ynysowen	156	5	3.21	375
Coed y Dderwen	136	4	2.94	300
Ysgol y Graig	126	4	3.17	300

The total persistent absentees in Table 17 is 33 (out of an overall total of 40) 20 were not in receipt of free school meals, 13 were in receipt of free school meals.

In 2016/17 with the exception of one primary school, overall attendances at those schools featured in Table 17 above were amongst the lowest of all 22 primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil CBC. (see Table 3)

The 33 Persistent absentees included in the seven schools shown in Table 17 above, between them missed a minimum of 2,525 half day sessions between September 2016 and July 2017.

9.5 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) September 2016 – July 2017.

The Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) Regulations, came into force in September 2013 and set out a framework for the operation of the penalty notice scheme.

The key consideration in deciding to request the issue of a penalty notice for unauthorised absences would be whether it would be an effective tool, in helping the pupil to improve attendance which is likely to be sustained.

The following information is provided as part of the analysis undertaken of unauthorised absence, specifically absence that led to 170 FPN's being issued between September 2016 and July 2017, for those pupils that missed school to attend family holidays without permission of the relevant head teachers. Members of the T&FG decided not to include the names of those schools that decided to issue, or not issue Fixed Penalty Notices.

Of the twenty two Primary Schools:-

Ten did not issue any FPN's, despite records showing that pupils attended family holidays without permission of the relevant head teachers at eight of the ten schools.

One issued 1 FPN;
Three issued 3 FPN's;
One issued 5 FPN's;
One issued 8 FPN's;
One issued 9 FPN's;
One issued 11 FPN's;
One issued 27 FPN's;
One issued 29 FPN's;
One issued 34 FPN's;
One issued 37 FPN's.

Overall Total of FPN's issued 2016/17 = 170

Therefore, based on the data applicable to the number of FPN's issued as set out above, there appears to be a lack of consistency in the way that the Welsh Government Regulations governing the criteria for issuing FPN's are being implemented by Merthyr Tydfil CBC's schools and Local Authority.

The following statement made by Hugh Lewis a former Minister responsible for Education at the Welsh Government on 11 December 2014, is produced to clarify any misunderstanding regarding the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices.

“The criteria for issuing FPN’s which may differ between Local Authorities, is set out in each Authorities Code of Conduct. Before issuing a FPN, each Local Authority must have its Code of Conduct in place. The code sets out how the FPN system operates and the measures in place to ensure consistency, fairness and transparency in the way they are applied”

Conclusion

The FPN process has provided the Head teachers of Merthyr Tydfil CBC’s schools with an additional means to address unauthorised absences. There appears to be a lack of consistency in the issuing of FPN’s by Merthyr Tydfil CBC’s schools and the Local Authority. This lack of consistency needs to change, if meaningful improvements in the present levels of unauthorised absences are to materialise.

10.0 ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS ATTENDANCE COVERING THE TWO YEAR PERIOD 2015/16 AND 2016/17.

- 10.1 Tables 1-3 below provide the results of the Analysis of Attendance Data for the 2 year period 2015/16 and 2016/17 relevant to the four Merthyr Tydfil CBC High Schools – Afon Taf, Bishop Hedley, Cyfarthfa and Pen-y-dre.

Table (1) – 2015/16 and 2016/17 Comparative Attendance Percentages

The table shown below contains the overall attendance percentages for the four Secondary schools within the County Borough for 2015/16 and 2016 /2017.

Secondary School	FSM Group	Attendance %age 2015/16	Attendance %age 2016/17
Afon Taf High	4	93.30	92.20
Bishop Hedley High	4	94.00	94.10
Cyfarthfa High	2	94.00	93.60
Penydre High	5	91.70	91.60

Table (2)

Average Attendance	2015/16	2016/17
Merthyr Tydfil CBC	93.39	93.00
CSC	94.29	94.04
Wales	94.16	94.07

Table 2 above shows the average percentage attendance of Merthyr Tydfil CBC’s Secondary schools. This percentage when compared against the overall Central South Consortium average, shows Merthyr Tydfil CBC’s overall average as 0.90% below the CSC in 2015/16 and 1.04% below the CSC in 2016/17. Merthyr Tydfil CBC’s secondary schools were 0.77% below the all Wales average attendance in 2015/16 and 1.07% below the all Wales average attendance in 2016/17. However, in 2016/17 Bishop Hedley High School exceeded the Merthyr Tydfil CBC, the CSC and the Wales average attendance percentages.

Table (3)

Local Authority within CSC	Attendance Position 2015/16	Attendance Position 2016/17
Merthyr Tydfil CBC	19	22
Bridgend	8	10
Vale of Glamorgan	2	3
Rhondda Cynon Taf	15	19
Cardiff	9	11

Table 3 above shows the ranking of each local authority within the Central South Consortium, against all other local authorities in Wales.

- 10.2 Average attendance in Secondary schools throughout the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council area has declined over the past two years. During 2015/16 average overall attendance of the four schools was 93.39% and in 2016/17 it was 93%. These percentage figures fell short of the Welsh Government attendance target of 95% set in 2011.
- 10.3 In 2016/17 all four of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough's Secondary schools failed to achieve their attendance targets, which each school set in conjunction with Central South Consortium Challenge Advisors. The 2016/17 overall target for Merthyr Tydfil CBC was 94.50%.
- 10.4 Of the five local authorities that make up the Central South Consortium (CSC); in terms of attendance Merthyr Tydfil CBC was placed 5th in 2015/16 (CSC average attendance 2015/16 was 94.29%). In 2016/17 Merthyr Tydfil CBC was again placed in 5th position (CSC average attendance 2016/17 was 94.04%) In fact, the position is even more concerning than that illustrated above as can be seen from the following table which shows absenteeism levels for all members of the Central South Consortium between 2013/14 and 2016/17.

Table (4)

CSC	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Bridgend	6.4	6.1	5.7	6.0
Vale of Glam	6.2	5.8	5.6	5.8
RCT	6.9	6.4	6.1	6.5
MTCBC	7.1	6.9	6.6	7.0
Cardiff	6.2	6.2	5.6	5.9
Wales	6.4	6.2	5.8	5.9

Source of Evidence: Pupils Attendance Record (Welsh Government)

- 10.5 The average attendance level of 93.39% saw Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Secondary schools placed 19th out of 22 Welsh Local Authorities in 2015/16 (Wales average attendance 2015/16 was 94.16%) The Local Authority was placed 22nd out of 22 Local Authorities in 2016/17 with an average school attendance level of 93% against a Wales average attendance level of 94.07%.

10.6 Persistent Absence.

Persistent absence appears to be a major problem within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Secondary schools. We saw earlier that the Welsh Government defines ***persistent absence as those pupils whose absence level is at least 20% of half day sessions that schools are open, not including inset days.***

During the two year period analysed the following results were obtained:-

In 2015/16 the number of persistent absences within the four High Schools was 119.

In 2016/17 this figure had increased to 129 as can be seen from detail provided in the following table.

All Secondary School Pupils 2016/17				Merthyr Tydfil CBC Target 3.00%
High School	Total Pupils	No. of Persistent absentees (exceeding 20% absence)	Percentage of Persistent Absentees	
Afon Taf High	534	38	7.12 %	
Bishop Hedley High	NA	NA	NA	
Cyfarthfa High	1142	56	4.90%	
Penydre High	470	35	7.45%	
Merthyr CBC	2148	129	6.01%	
Wales 2015/16			3.90%	

In the table above which includes Persistent absentee data for 2016/17, one can see that the percentage of persistent absentees for Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Secondary Schools is 6.01%. The Merthyr Tydfil CBC target for persistent absentees set for 2015/16 was 3.00%. Therefore, the 6.01% achieved and reported on above, is over twice the target set for 2015/16. The table also shows that the all Wales average for persistent absentees was 3.90%. This highlights Merthyr Tydfil CBC persistent absentee achievement of 6.01% for 2016/17 as exceeding the all Wales average of 3.90% by over 64%.

Further analysis of the data appropriate to 2015/16 and 2016/17 revealed that persistent absentees accounted for over 17per cent of all absences in Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Secondary schools.

Put another way, 80% absence per pupil equates to:-

- 1 day absence per week;
- 6 days absence per half term;
- 12 days absence every term;
- 36 days absence every year;
- 180 days absence in 5 years;
- Nearly one year of secondary schooling lost through absence.

11.0 ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS OUTCOMES COVERING THE TWO YEAR PERIOD 2015/16 AND 2016/17.

11.1 The tables contained below show the percentage of pupils who have achieved the Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and Maths. This provides the final results of external examinations taken by pupils in Year 11 ("Key Stage 4") or pupils aged 17 at the start of the academic year. The Level 2 threshold, is the volume of qualifications equivalent to 5 GCSEs at Grade A*-C including one in English or Welsh first language and one in Mathematics.

Comparisons between 2017 and earlier years should be made with caution due to changes in the definitions of this indicator.

School	2014/15 KS4 L2+		2015/2016 KS4 L2+		2016/17* KS4 L2+	
Afon Taf High Total	48.2%		58.1%		41.7%	
FSM	16.1%		46.4%		24.0%	
Non FSM	55.5%		60.8%		46.7%	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
	29.8%	66.7%	60.9%	54.1%	39.7%	44.7%
Bishop Hedley High	64.0%		60.7%		48.4%	
FSM	54.2%		36.4%		20.0%	
Non FSM	56.4%		61.2%		48.6%	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
	66.7%	62.3%	57.1%	63.3%	48.9%	47.8%
Cyfarthfa High	60.2%		61.6%		50.2%	
FSM	41.2%		50.0%		33.3%	
Non FSM	63.7%		63.4%		53.3%	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	
	49.6%	73.7%	52.3%	73.5%	48.8%	
Penydre High	39.1%		52.60%		32.6%	
FSM	24.4%		28.6%		17.1%	
Non FSM	47.3%		62.3%		43.1%	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
	31.1%	48.1%	50.0%	54.5%	36.8%	29.2%

KS4 Level 2+	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17*
Merthyr Tydfil CBC Attainment	51.9%	53.9%	42.4%
FSM	32.1%	41.2%	23.5%
Non FSM	59.0%	62.6%	50.8%

KS4 Level 2+	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17*
Wales – Attainment	57.9%	60.3%	54.6%
FSM	31.6%	35.6%	28.6%
Non FSM	64.1%	66.8%	61.0%

11.2 Key Findings

- L2+ for Merthyr Tydfil in 2016/17 was 42.2%, compared to CSC 54.5% and the Welsh Average of 54.6%.
- Whilst direct year on year comparisons should be made with caution due to the GCSE changes in 2016/17, the outcomes at Key Stage 4 are lower across the region and are particularly low in all 4 High Schools within Merthyr Tydfil.
- Cyfarthfa High School has the highest percentage of pupils achieving L2+ however still 4.4% lower than the Welsh average.
- Pen-Y-Dre High School has the lowest percentage of pupils achieving L2+ which takes them 12% below the Welsh average.
- In 2016/17 Merthyr Tydfil was ranked 21st out of 22 authorities in Wales for the overall L2+ performance rates at Key Stage 4 with an attainment level of 42.4%. (Blaenau Gwent had the lowest % at 41.4 with Monmouthshire 1st with 67.0%. The Wales Average was 54.6).
- The top 10 local authorities achieved 55.5% or higher in 2016/17.
- Girls outperform boys in all KS4 performance measures.
- Boys within Merthyr Tydfil performed 7.1 percentage points lower at the Level 2 threshold and 9.5 percentage points lower at the Level 2+ threshold.
- Girls within Merthyr Tydfil performed 9.1 percentage points lower at the Level 2 threshold and 15.0 percentage points lower at the Level 2+ threshold.
- The gender gap is lower than the gender gap nationally at both Level 2 and Level 2+ thresholds due to the underperformance of girls,
- Pupils not entitled to FSM outperform pupils eligible for FSM at all KS4 performance measures.
- 20.9% of pupils eligible for FSM achieved the Level 2+ threshold indicator compared with 49.2% of pupils not entitled to FSM.
- The performance of pupils eligible for FSM within Merthyr Tydfil was 7.7 percentage points lower at the Level 2+ threshold than pupils eligible for FSM nationally.

12.0 CONCLUSIONS REACHED BY TASK & FINISH GROUP – SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The following conclusions are provided following the Task & Finish Group's review of attendance within Merthyr Tydfil CBC's Secondary Schools for the two year period 2015/16 and 2016/17:-

- 12.1 In terms of overall attendance, MTCBC has been occupying bottom position within the Central South Consortium since 2013/14. Evidence in support of this is included in Table 4 above. Evidence relevant to attendance also shows that in 2015/16 MTCBC was placed 19th out of 22 Local Authorities in Wales and 22nd out of 22 in 2016/17.
- 12.2 Notwithstanding the Outcome Key Findings included at the end of Section 11 above; in terms of MTCBC's Secondary School Key Stage 4 performance, significant changes have taken place, which make comparison with previous performances difficult. It is evident from analysis of outcomes at Key Stage 4, that they are lower across the region **and particularly low in Merthyr Tydfil CBC's four High schools**. Consequently, arrangements are in place to support schools during this academic year, in improving Key Stage 4 outcomes.
- 12.3 The analysis and resulting conclusions have shown that there is a strong link between overall absence and attainment within the four High Schools within Merthyr Tydfil CBC. Statements of the former Chief Officer for Learning and the Inclusion Manager, included at paragraph 2 of the Introduction to this report, show both officers expressing their deep concerns at the low levels of attendance in Merthyr Tydfil CBC's schools.
- 12.4 It goes without saying that with the Authority's stated ambition to be ranked within the top 10 performing Local Authorities in Wales by 2020, (see paragraph 6, page 16 Scrutiny: LEARNING & LAESCYP Report 16th April 2018) the attendance levels within our Secondary schools need to improve significantly, if this stated ambition is to stand any chance of becoming a reality within the next two years.

13.0 IMPROVED ATTENDANCE LEVELS WITHIN OUR SCHOOLS - THE WAY FORWARD

- 13.1 Prior to finalising the report contained in the pages included above, members of the T&FG decided not to include recommendations intended to secure improvements to the poor attendance levels identified within many of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough's schools.
- 13.2 This was because action had already been taken by the Inclusion Manager Sarah Bowen, aimed at improving the attendance issues that had existed for some time. The paragraphs that follow include a brief description of those actions developed and implemented by the Inclusion Manager.
- 13.3 **Actions Developed and Implemented by the Inclusion Manager.**
 - 13.3.1 The analysis of attendance data is ongoing on a monthly basis. Schools, Chairs of Governors, the Education Inclusion Service (EIS) colleagues and Challenge

Advisers are provided with detailed monthly analysis with accompanying narrative and strategies to trial. At the end of 2016/17, having undertaken further analysis, it was evident that there was a high level of **authorised** absences in schools, especially in those schools that performed least well.

13.3.2 *“The decision taken by the school to authorise an absence or not is of critical importance in determining the level of involvement of the EWS. If the school has authorised a pupil’s absence, it has in effect given leave, therefore there is no case in law for the parents to answer.”* (All Wales Attendance Framework)

13.3.3 In other words when an absence is authorised, this means that the school approves of the absence and therefore the EIS cannot engage with this family, nor can the prosecution process be instigated. As a result of this the following actions were implemented:-

- Reviewed the Attendance Handbook. The purpose of this handbook is to promote a consistent message that attendance at school is a key priority in Merthyr Tydfil. The Handbook:-
 - outlines the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in promoting attendance at school;
 - provides advice and guidance to schools on effective practices and strategies to improve attendance;
 - enables schools to better challenge reasons for non-attendance;
 - clarifies the role of the Education Inclusion Officer in tackling attendance issues, including case management and prosecution processes;
 - clearly identifies links to other policies.
- Raised the prosecution threshold from 85% to 90% as agreed with Legal, and updated the Prosecution guidance.
- Reviewed the Fixed Penalty Notice Code of Conduct.
- Provided monthly data on the use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) and authorised absences data in order for the comparisons to be clear. This is now provided on a monthly basis and has more recently been amended on a cluster basis to further ensure that there is a consistent approach to the usage of FPNs.
- Provided schools with guidance on managing sickness absence and incubation periods to disseminate as appropriate.
- Provided schools and EWS colleagues with a flow chart and suite of letters for use to enable an earlier engagement in the prosecution process where required.
- Developed training for Education Inclusion Officers to ensure an effective and efficient service delivery.
- Requested the annual completion of Attendance Self-evaluation reports in order to identify strengths and weaknesses and provide advice and guidance.

- Approached Welsh Government to raise the threshold for persistent absentees from 80% to 90% during 2016/17 as is the case in England. In recent discussions with WG the threshold of 85% is being considered.

13.3.4 Finally, the Inclusion Manager provides an excellent closing statement to this Review of Attendance & Attainment within our Schools, which is fully supported by members of the Task & Finish Group: -

“School Leadership is key to driving further improvement. Should there continue to be no, or poor improvement with regards to attendance and outcomes, then Schools and Governing Bodies will be held to account through case conferences.”

13.3.5 Following on from the above actions, plans are in place to enable further improvements. These are shown as follows:-

- School to school support has been encouraged within clusters.
- Good practice has been shared with all schools having received Attendance audits from schools.
- Reminding schools to unauthorise absences when dissatisfied with the reason provided for the absence, in order to allow for earlier engagement with the FPN and prosecution process. More timely intervention could reduce the number of persistent absentees and overall absence.
- Provide a bespoke service to schools as part of the SLA.
- Meet with the Challenge Advisors on a termly basis to make them aware of any issues in respect of absence.
- Training to be delivered by the Senior Education Welfare Officer for Head teachers and school staff (including EOTAS staff) with responsibility for attendance on 24 May 2018. This will cover:-
 - attendance procedures,
 - prosecution and fixed penalty notice procedures,
 - appropriate use of codes,
 - good practice.

14.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

14.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report. This report is a scrutiny report to Cabinet. Any recommendations or actions emanating as a result of this report will be subject to separate reporting by the Education department/.

15.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

15.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form has been prepared for the purpose of this report. It has been found that a full assessment is not required at this time. The form can be accessed on the Council’s website/intranet via the ‘Equality Impact Assessment’ link.

Members of the Learning & LAESCYP Scrutiny Committee Task & Finish Group

**Councillor Harvey
Jones**

**(Chair of Learning &
LAESCYP Scrutiny
Committee)**

Councillor Chris Davies

**(Vice Chair of Learning
& LAESCYP Scrutiny
Committee)**

**Councillor Sherelle
Jago**

**(Member of Learning &
LAESCYP Scrutiny
Committee)**

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
As per report comments		
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.

Appendix 3

	Outcomes 2015-16	Outcomes 2016-17	Wales Average 2016-17	Targets 2016-17	Actual performance July 2017-18	Targets 2017-18	Targets 2018-19
Primary Schools Attendance	94.21%	94.29%	94.9%	95. 5%	94.03%	95.5%	96%
Secondary Schools Attendance	93.40%	92.34%	94.2%	95. 5%	91.76%	95.5%	96%
Attendance for pupils eligible for FSM- primary	92.78%	93.03%		95%	92.31%	95%	95.5%
Attendance for pupils non FSM- primary	94.62%	94.63%		95.50%	94.46%	95.50%	96%
Attendance for pupils eligible for FSM secondary	90.26%	88.56%		92%	88.03%	92%	92.50%
Attendance for pupils non FSM secondary	94.27%	93.18%		95%	92.77%	95%	96%
The percentage of overall attendance for boys in primary school	94.17%	94.20%		95. 5%	93.93%	95.5%	96%
The percentage of overall attendance for girls in primary school	94.26%	94.38%		95. 5%	94.14%	95.5%	96%
The percentage of overall attendance for boys in secondary school	93.36%	92.18%		95.50%	91.12%	95.50%	96%
The percentage of overall attendance for girls in secondary school	93.45%	92.21%		95.50%	92.44%	95.50%	96%
The percentage of overall persistent absenteeism in secondary school	4.46%	6.01%		2.0%	6.26%	2.0%	
The percentage of overall persistent absenteeism in	0.94%	1.08%		0.5%	1.78%	0.5%	

Appendix 4

	Outcomes 2012-13	Outcomes 2013-14	Outcomes 2014-15	Outcomes 2015-16	Outcomes 2016-17	Actual performance July 2018	Targets 2017-18	Targets 2018-19
Primary schools permanent exclusions	0	0	1	0	1	0 (5046)	0	0
Secondary schools permanent exclusions	0	1	1	4	0	0 (2880)	0	0
Secondary schools fixed term exclusions 5 days or fewer (Rate per 1,000 pupils)	51.9 (3059)	36.8 (3151)	36.2 (2903)	40 (2903)	47.8 (2848)	120.2 (2880)	18	16
Secondary schools fixed term exclusions 6 days or more (Rate per 1,000 pupils)	3.9 (3059)	1 (3151)	2.4 (2903)	0 (2903)	0.4 (2848)	0.3 (2880)	0	0
Primary schools fixed term exclusions 5 days or fewer (Rate per 1,000 pupils)	7.7 (5,300)	8.6 (4787)	9.6 (4988)	7.0 (4988)	14.8 (5750)	21.1 (5046)	10	8
Primary schools fixed term exclusions 6 days or more (Rate per 1,000 pupils)	0.9 (5,300)	1 (4787)	1.2 (4988)	1 (4988)	0.7 (5750)	0.9 (5046)	0	0
Average length of an exclusion (secondary)	2.7 days	2.5 days	2.2days	1.5 days	1.6 days	1.5 (2880)	1 day	1 day
Average length of an exclusion (primary)	2.7 days	3.3 days	3.2days	3.2 days	1.7 days	2.1 (5046)	1 day	1 day

Secondary Schools	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Afon Taf High School	92.96	93.3	92.2	92.90
Bishop Hedley High School	93.63	94	94.10	93.50
Cyfarthfa High School	93.76	94	94.10	92.30
Pen y Dre High School	91.43	91.7	91.6	91.70
Merthyr total	93.11	93.4	93	92.49
Greenfield Special School			91.42	90.04

Appendix 5

Attendance Action Plan 2018/19

	Action	Lead Officer	Timeframe		Measures	Outcome/Impact	Financial Implications
1	Attendance Audit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure completion of the Attendance Audit by all schools and share good practice 	SB	Oct 26 th 2018	A	To be completed by 100% of schools	2017/18 92.8% of schools completed (minus 2 primaries)	
2	Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For all schools, including EOTAS staff, to attend a Training event facilitated by EWS 	SB/AS	May & Oct 2018	A	To be attended by 75% of schools	60.71% of schools have attended., (17 schools). Two presentations delivered, May and October 2018. 12 evaluations received, 100% of evaluations gave 'good' and 'excellent' feedback with positive comments of very informative, and good sharing of information. 1 school asked for more information on 'good practice'.	
3	Truancy Patrols <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reinstate Truancy Patrols on a termly basis in conjunction with the Police. One held in the Summer Term in 2017/18 	AS	Termly Nov 20 th 2018	G	Reduction in truancy/unauthorised absence.	2017/18- 13 pupils stopped out of school. (10 pupils were with parents), resulting in 7 reasons as being illness, 2 reasons as family crisis/bereavement, 2 reasons medical, and 2 with no reasons/unauthorised. (1 pupil was out of county and was taken to the school in question). 3 home visits undertaken. Next Truancy patrol 20 th November 2018.	
4	Meetings with Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify key actions for schools Schools to complete Attendance Profile and return by Oct 25th 	SB	Sec- Sept 27 th 2018 JHTs- Oct 11 th	A	Monitor monthly data for improved attendance	Dates set for Spring and Summer term	
4	Marketing Campaign <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop a campaign to 	Corp Comms	Oct 2018	G	Monitor monthly data	Film footage for the "Miss School Miss Out" Attendance Campaign made of	

	Action	Lead Officer	Timeframe		Measures	Outcome/Impact	Financial Implications
	<p>increase school attendance across the county borough, 'Miss School. Miss Out'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Communications attendance marketing campaign-'Miss school Miss out'- to be launched at the Student Conference Attendance Week 'Miss school Miss out'- This will involve the production of a few short videos that could be posted on social media involving pupils regarding school attendance. The role of the EIO and the school based FLO would be explained in one of the videos. Different messages are to be shared via different platforms for different audiences. Possible posters and banners to be produced. 	/SB	<p>Launch Nov 15th</p> <p>Nov 19th- 23rd</p>		for improved attendance	primary aged pupils was launched at the Student Conference on Nov 15 th ; footage of secondary aged pupils needs to be made.	
5	<p>Action Plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Individual Pupil 	SB/AS	Oct half-term	A	Improved attendance all schools and pupils (primary)	Schools identified for individual action plans and EIO's to liaise with the schools concerned to put in place. Improved attendance in 6 schools in October 2018.	
6	<p>FPN data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> % authorised % unauthorised # of FPNs To reduce rates of authorised 	SB/AS	Monthly analysis	G	Monitor monthly data for improved attendance	To reduce rates to 4.5% in line with Wales average; MTCBC- 4.63% Sept 2018 Prim- 3.13% Sept 2018 Sec- 3.59%	

	Action	Lead Officer	Timeframe		Measures	Outcome/Impact	Financial Implications
	absences in secondary schools in order to allow for an earlier engagement with the FPN and prosecution process.						
7	Wellbeing Groups in schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> % of attendance for group at start and end 	AS/EIOs	Half-termly	R	Improved attendance for individual schools and pupils (primary)	One primary school engaged	
8	Early Identification Toolkit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extended to primary 	SB	Autumn Term 2018	A	Improved attendance	Sec- 92.49% in 2017/18 Prim- 94.03% in 2017/18 Pilot to commence in spring term 2019 with 6 primaries including the 2 federated schools.	
9	LRB review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEBD provision 	SB	Monthly analysis	G	Reduction in exclusions		
10	Reduced timetable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	SB	Monthly analysis	G	Reduction in exclusions		
11	Corporate Strategy for Parental Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing Campaign- website/graphics/films/leaflets Campaign Launch 	SB	Autumn Term 2018	A	Improved Attendance	Launch Dec 5 th	