



**To:**  
**Councillor Robert Smith**  
**Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

**BY EMAIL**

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*Date* 24 July 2023  
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**Summary:** This is a letter from the Education Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning following the meeting of the Panel on 13 July 2023, where the Panel looked at managing and improving school attendance and exclusions.

Dear Cllr Smith,

### **Education Scrutiny Performance Panel – 13 July 2023**

We would like to thank you and Helen Morgan Rees (Director of Education) for attending the meeting and providing information for the Panel. We are writing to you to reflect on what we learnt from the discussion and to share the views of the Panel.

We thanked the Team Manager Pupil Support and the Head of Vulnerable Learners for attending and taking us through the reports on managing both school attendance and school exclusions.

### **Managing and improving school attendance**

We heard that Swansea Council is committed to providing an 'excellent education for all by working together' recognising that regular school attendance has a positive effect on children and young people and a strong impact on learner outcomes and their progression. We were told that traditionally attendance percentages in the five-year average before Covid were above 93% but following Covid in 2021/2022 the attendance at Swansea primary schools was 90.1% and secondary school average was 86.6%. We were pleased to hear that this has improved slightly in the current academic year to date to 91.2% for primary schools and 88.4% for secondary. We also heard this is still below where schools need to be and that the council and schools are working to address this.

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We heard the Education Directorate recognises the approach to promoting attendance needs to change and respond to the new challenges. An updated attendance policy has been drafted and all stakeholders have had the opportunity to consider its content. A head teacher's pack is in development to complement the policy and to ensure consistency of practise throughout Swansea.

We asked whether the available data on school attendance was showing any trends in, for example, year groups like those going through transition years at the time of the pandemic. We heard that data locally has been looked at and it does not show any discernible evidence of patterns in low attendance in particular year groups. The Director of Education did tell us the data does show a direct correlation within our most socio-economically challenged areas and that resources to target this are being directed to those areas. However, we did also hear that low attendance in schools is a national picture, for a few learners the barriers they have may have exacerbated since the pandemic, in some cases previous habits of good attendance may have not been re-established and more casual attitudes to school has increased. We were interested to hear if there were any studies or research available into the reasons for non-attendance, including for example young carers. We were told that a Welsh Government report has recently been published on this subject. Officers agreed to circulate a link to this document to the Panel.

We asked whether the numbers of elective home educated children had increased since the pandemic and heard that they have only increased very slightly on pre pandemic levels.

We were encouraged to see the slight improvement in the school attendance figures, so far in this academic year and would expect this to continue with the introduction of the new absence policy and the securing of the right support and interventions.

### **Managing and improving school exclusions**

We heard that exclusion rates had almost doubled since the pre pandemic period, however, these rates are in line with national trends. We were told that a few schools have not followed this trend, having fixed term exclusion rates lower than any year in the last 5 years.

We did ask what those schools are doing to reduce or buck the trend in relation to school fixed term exclusions. We heard early intervention and pastoral support for pupils was strong in those schools. We would be keen to see any good practice in this area shared across schools.

We asked whether each school in Swansea had its own pastoral support in place or whether it was provided centrally. We were told that schools do have their own pastoral support but we do also have some central teams who can help. For example, there is the pupil engagement team and the education welfare service who are all have roles in terms of working with schools, supporting relationships, sometimes being that bridge between home and school.

We recognised the importance of Local Area Co-ordinators working in communities and asked how they may be involved in both improving school attendance and reducing school exclusion, for example, in their role talking to parents/families. We

heard that a meeting took place recently that included the Local Area Co-ordinators and other people working within communities to look at what we can do to support children as part of their community. I would be grateful if you could let us know how Local Area Co-ordinators will engage with this process.

### **Your Response**

We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised in this letter but would ask for your formal written response to the following issue by 13 August 2023.

- How do you envisage Local Area Co-ordinators engaging with families, relating in particular to the issues of school attendance and exclusions?

Yours sincerely

**COUNCILLOR LYNDON JONES**

Convener, Education Scrutiny Performance Panel

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