

minutes



Meeting SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND SUPPORT SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 7 April 2008 (commencing at 2.00 pm)

Membership

Persons absent are marked with 'A'

COUNCILLORS

Edward Llewellyn-Jones (Chair)

Brian Wombwell (Vice Chair)

A John Carter
S Fielding
A Haynes
P Lally

P Owen
M Suthers
A L Sykes

STATUTORY CO-OPTED MEMBERS

A Mr E Hayes (Diocese of Nottingham)
A Mr D Richards (Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham)
Mrs I Wooding (Parent Governor)
Vacancy (Parent Governor)

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

The appointment by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 February 2008 of Councillor Edward Llewellyn-Jones as Chair of the Select Committee was noted. Councillor Brian Wombwell was nominated as Vice-Chair of the Select Committee.

MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the Committee, as set out above, was noted.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Councillors John Carter

“ L Sykes,
“ Mr E Hayes
“ Mr D Richards

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

None

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND SUPPORT

Councillor Llewellyn-Jones welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Select Committee. In doing so, he explained that there were 3 aspects to the review; absences, exclusion and support. The focus of this meeting was on absences. Rob Lancaster, Head of Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) and Brian Isham, Principal Education Welfare Officer, Children and Young Persons Department (CYPD) had been invited to discuss and present information on:-

- The level of attendance in Nottinghamshire schools, including data on current absent levels.
- Data on persistent absence priority secondary schools.
- How attendance data was collected.
- Details of enforcement action taken and outcomes.
- Truancy patrols.
- Children Missing Education.

The Select Committee heard about the level of attendance in Nottinghamshire schools compared with the English national average. Guidance had recently been issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) on authorised absences. Guidance on school holidays was that Head Teachers and school Governing Bodies should give discretion when accepting reasons to accept. Young carers were not seen as an acceptable reason for a child not to attend school.

In terms of primary schools, Mr Isham pointed out that attendance at primary level was generally in line with the national average. The DCSF had published data for the first time in autumn 2006/7 on persistent absence in primary schools. The County was found to be slightly better than the national average. Spring data would be available after 30 May. Cllr Llewellyn-Jones wondered how Nottinghamshire compared with its statistical neighbours. Mr Isham would provide data on the statistical neighbours for the last 3 years.

The number of authorised absences in Nottinghamshire secondary schools was slightly higher than the national average. Data on Persistent Absences had shown the County at 1.1% higher than national average. Autumn term data had shown an improvement in both authorised and unauthorised absence.

The Select Committee heard about County's priority secondary schools first identified by the DCSF in 2006/7. 16 secondary schools had been identified as having a significant number of pupils with high levels of absence. Since being published 6 of the schools had made significant progress and had been removed from the list, 3 had been added.

There was discussion on the ways in which data was collected. Priority Schools' data were collected separately by the Children and Young Persons Department for checking and submission to the DCFS. Members commented on the geographical connection of

the priority schools and asked why some areas were doing better than others. Mr Isham said that there were schools in similar areas that were not on the list. There were no clear indicators as to why this might be. Members requested a breakdown of absence data on all schools including year group and gender.

Cllr Llewellyn-Jones asked what work was being done on primary schools with absence problems, in particular, to avoid the problem transferring on to secondary level. It was explained that Education Welfare Assistants (EWA's) worked in primary schools to improve absences. Annual data was used to identify those that required their help. The Select Committee asked for a list of the feeder primary schools that EWA's were working with.

The Select Committee wondered why the data for authorised absences was much higher than the figures nationally in Nottinghamshire. 97.4% primary schools were granting requests compared with the national figure of 90% and 94.99% of secondary schools compared to 90% national average. Mr Isham commented that since this data had not been collected before schools would probably be surprised at the results. The Select Committee asked for information on the number of requests being made in all schools.

In response to a question on enforcement, Mr Isham pointed out that not all cases were appropriate for court action. Court action was sometimes used on parents who would not and did not engage in the process of getting their child to school. The latest data reported where court action was appropriate in 2006/07 was 230, following which attendance had improved by 40% of cases. The Select Committee asked for further enforcement information on the number of penalty notices that resulted in court action and the process and criteria undertaken for a decision to go to court.

In terms of truancy patrols, Mr Isham explained that Education Welfare Officers worked closely with the Police who carried out annual patrols. Work was designated and agreed by local Area Commanders in areas identified on the youth crime database. There were issues with consistency due to patrols having to be cancelled. This was due to other work taking priority. Work was also being developed with key stakeholders to pick up youngsters. It was agreed that the Police be invited to give their perspective on patrols across the County.

It was agreed that the following information be made available to the Select Committee:-

- Appendix 2 – actual pupil numbers. School attendance data on statistical neighbours for the last 3 academic years.
- Appendix 4b –data for each school and to include year group and gender.
- Appendix 4a – persistent absentee data on all secondary schools.
- Information on the feeder primary schools connected to the priority schools.
- Information relating to court hearings, the reasons for not wanting to use court action, number of penalty notices that have resulted in court action.

- Information on the process and criteria for issuing penalty notices and the reasons for them proceeding to court action.

It was also agreed that:

1. The police are invited to a future meeting of the Select Committee to give their perspective on truancy patrol across the County.
2. The Select Committee meet on the following dates (all at 2.00pm):-
28 April, 2 June and 7 July.

The meeting closed at 3.35pm.

CHAIR