



meeting	EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING SELECT COMMITTEE		
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## REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

### **Annual report on the attendance and support work of the Education Welfare Service**

#### **Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Select Committee with information about the work of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) during the 2003/04 academic year, and to provide data on the level of reported attendance in Nottinghamshire schools.

#### **Information and Advice**

##### **Background**

2. Under delegated powers the EWS carries out on behalf of the County Council the statutory duty to enforce school attendance and to license and monitor the employment of children.
3. The EWS is organised into three teams that each serves a designated area of Nottinghamshire. One team is based in Arnold and works with schools in the Gedling, Rushcliffe and Broxtowe areas. A second team is based in Mansfield and works with schools in the Ashfield and Mansfield areas. A third team is also based in Mansfield and works with schools in the Bassetlaw and Newark areas. The head of service (Principal Education Welfare Officer) is also based in Mansfield. **Appendix A** shows the structure and deployment of staff across the EWS.
4. In addition to Education Welfare Officers (EWOs), the EWS also has six Education Welfare Assistants (EWAs) who work specifically in primary schools. Their role is to work with schools and pupils in a creative way to promote and improve the level of attendance of young children in the hope that they will sustain this improvement when they move to the secondary phase. Examples of the types of initiatives the EWAs have used are shown in a later section of this report.

5. The EWS also employs 3 specialist workers (EWO (Looked After)) to work with children in public care. These are among the most vulnerable children and the specialist workers' role is to ensure they have access to their educational entitlement. They work with colleagues from schools, the Social Services Department and the Education Department to achieve this. The number of looked after young people that the EWOs (Looked After) have worked with during the year is shown in **Appendix B** of this report.

### **School attendance**

6. The primary role undertaken by the EWS is to support schools in promoting and improving levels of attendance by pupils. A named EWO is allocated to each school at the start of the school year. This allocation is determined at the secondary phase using a formula that ensures that an appropriate level of support is allocated where the need is the greatest. The EWO will visit the school and work with designated pastoral staff to identify children who do not attend regularly and to agree what action is necessary to tackle the absence. The action may consist of further work by the school, a home visit by the EWO to speak with the parents or a referral to another agency. The EWO may also undertake support work with individual pupils.
7. The EWS carries out a termly class attendance register check at each secondary school and an annual register check in all other schools. The purpose is to check that schools are marking the register in accordance with the Registration Regulations, and to ensure appropriate action is being taken for all children whose attendance is at an unacceptable level.
8. The EWS has a service level agreement (SLA) with all schools, which is reviewed annually. The SLA sets out the action that both the school and the EWS will take and also identifies the level of support that will be provided. A termly report is provided to all secondary schools and an annual report to all schools. The report provides data on the number of referrals made and provides comparative data on the level of attendance. A copy of the annual report is also sent to the chair of governors at each school.

### **Truancy patrols**

9. The Crime and Disorder Act introduced joint truancy patrols involving the Police and the EWS. In Nottinghamshire we have been proactive in using this legislation as part of the strategy to improve the level of attendance in schools. An annual programme of patrols is organised and a patrol takes place in each district of the county each half-term. The patrols usually last for half a day and take place in an area designated by the local Police Commander. At our patrols we have found that 54% of children who were stopped are with their parent or another responsible adult. This is consistent with experience in most other parts of the country. Parents and children who are stopped are reminded of the importance of regular school attendance.

## **Legal action**

10. The legal responsibility to ensure a child attends school regularly lies with the parents. Where a parent fails to fulfil this responsibility the EWS will consider whether legal action through the Magistrates Court is appropriate using the powers set out in the Education Act 2002. Nottinghamshire EWS takes legal action in appropriate cases in all the courts across the county. In 2003/04 the EWS piloted the use of a “fast track” process for all Year 11 pupils who did not attend school regularly at the beginning of the autumn term 2003. This resulted in 76 additional cases reaching the courts and the impact was such that the exercise is being repeated again in 2004/05. In the school year 2003/04 the number of parents who were prosecuted was 161. The impact of legal action varies from case to case and the EWS is currently developing a monitoring system to measure the effectiveness of each prosecution. The EWS has also been developing, in conjunction with the County Council Legal Services Division, a process to enable the use of prosecutions that could result in a parent being imprisoned for failure to ensure their child attends school regularly. It is anticipated that the first case using this process will reach court during the 2004/05 academic year.

## **Child employment**

11. National legislation and local bye-laws govern the part- time employment of children. On 28 November 2002 the County Council approved a revised set of local bye-laws which bring Nottinghamshire into line with the most recent legislation. The EWS licenses the part-time employment of children in Nottinghamshire and monitors this employment by providing information to employers, children and schools and by visiting employers where necessary. In the 2003/04 school year a total of 1,066 work permits were issued. A detailed report on this function was taken to the Planning and Licensing Committee on 2 November 2004 and further annual reports will be taken to that committee.
12. In addition the EWS oversees the licensing of children who take part in entertainment in Nottinghamshire. This includes the approval and appointment of matrons who look after children while they are involved in entertainment. During the 2003/04 school year a total of 411 licences were issued. There are currently 65 matrons who have been approved by Nottinghamshire to look after children while they are involved in entertainment activity.

## **Attendance in Nottinghamshire schools**

13. Each year, during June and July, the DfES collects data about the level of attendance direct from schools. This data is collated by the DfES and is published during October each year. The data for the 2003/04 school year indicates the level of attendance in Nottinghamshire as being:

	<b>Authorised Absence</b>	<b>Unauthorised Absence</b>	<b>Overall Attendance</b>
<b>Primary</b>			
Nottinghamshire	5.04% (5.55%)	0.35% (0.39%)	94.61% (94.06%)
England Average	5.08% (5.38%)	0.41% (0.43%)	94.51% (94.19%)

	<b>Authorised Absence</b>	<b>Unauthorised Absence</b>	<b>Overall Attendance</b>
<b>Secondary</b>			
Nottinghamshire	7.05% (7.02%)	1.75% (1.49%)	91.21% (91.49%)
England Average	6.92% (7.21%)	1.14% (1.07%)	91.94% (91.72%)

(The figures shown in brackets is the data for 2002/03)

14. The level of reported attendance at the primary level for 2003/04 shows that we have made good progress this year. The overall level of attendance in Nottinghamshire schools is now better than the national average. The work of the EWAs has played a significant role in the improvement that has been achieved. At secondary level, however, the data is disappointing. Unauthorised absence has worsened and overall attendance has fallen. Nottinghamshire is now 0.73% below the national average for overall attendance. The reasons for this are still being investigated although we do know that more schools are recording holidays taken during term time as unauthorised absence, that the introduction of electronic registration systems has not been as effective as was hoped and that the data does not compare like with like as a result of school closures and the failure of two schools to submit data for the 2002/03 academic year.

### **New initiatives**

15. The EWS continues to introduce new initiatives to support the promotion and continued improvement in levels of attendance. Those used by the EWAs and targeted at primary schools have included:
  - a) 'Early Bird Week' – involving 75 schools in the Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe areas - when all children who attend every day and on time receive a certificate and at the end of the week each school holds a prize draw. A larger prize draw was held on local radio
  - b) 'Late Gates' – EWAs, school staff and the local Community Police Officer stop all children who are late, and their parents, to explain the importance of regular and punctual attendance
  - c) presenting at school assemblies about attendance and organising class-based competitions to encourage full- time attendance
  - d) regular class attendance register audits to identify absent children and follow up this absence with parents

- e) transition work with Year 6 pupils to prepare them for transfer to secondary school
- f) displays in schools to promote regular school attendance
- g) tracking charts for individual pupils to monitor attendance levels
- h) presentation of attendance certificates
- i) first day contact with the parents/carers of absent children.

### **Future developments**

16. The DfES continues to introduce new initiatives and to produce new guidance and to raise the profile of regular school attendance. The work of the EWS is very much influenced by any new initiatives. The initiatives already introduced for 2004/05 include:
- a) attendance target setting with all schools for a three year period
  - b) termly attendance data collection by the DfES direct from schools starting in January 2005
  - c) a new PSA target for the LEA to reduce absence by 8% by 2008 from the level reported in 2002/03
  - d) penalty notices
  - e) parenting contracts for school attendance
  - f) more frequent monitoring of attendance at the worst performing schools.

These will be reported on in the next annual report to the Select Committee.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

17. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, Crime and Disorder and those using the service. Where such implications are material, they have been described in the text of the report. Members' attention is however drawn to the following:-

#### **Equal Opportunities Implications**

18. Intervention by the EWS enables vulnerable pupils to access the education that schools provide. Targeted support is made available to pupils in public care, provided by the three specialist EWOs (Looked After).

## **Crime and Disorder Implications**

19. Research has provided evidence that a significant proportion of young offenders play truant from school. Improving pupils' attendance at school reduces the risk of pupils being drawn into criminal and anti-social behaviour.

## **Financial Implications**

20. The EWS expenditure budget is currently £1.435 million (at 2004/05 prices). This includes base and administrative and strategic overhead costs. The service has an income budget of £32,103 in 2004/05, most of which is derived from the Standards Fund (Vulnerable Children) Grant. Current data indicates that Nottinghamshire spends £9 per pupil on the EWS. This compares with the English County LEA average of £10 per pupil and £14 per pupil for all LEAs in England.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

21. That the Committee note the report and consider whether there are any issues they wish to identify for further scrutiny.

### **PAM TULLEY**

Director of Education

## **Director of Resources' Financial Comments (PWH)**

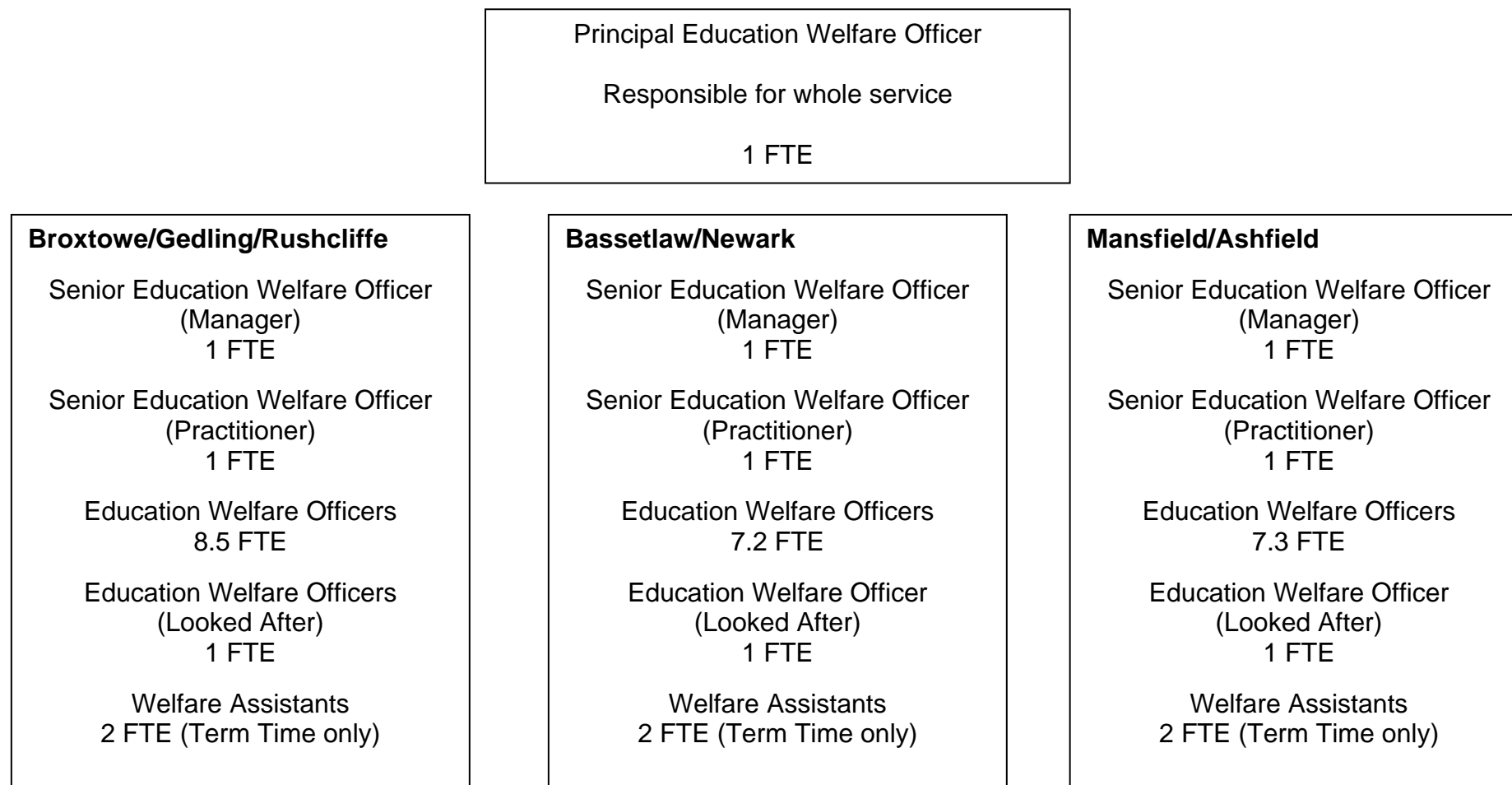
The costs of the Education Welfare Service are set out in paragraph 20 of the report.

## **Background Papers Available for Inspection**

The DfES published analysis of attendance data for 2003/04  
Report to the Planning and Licensing Committee, dated 2 November 2004.

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## EWS MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



## Appendix B

**The number of Looked After Children where the EWO (Looked After) was involved in delivering support was:**

Ashfield	18
Bassetlaw	42
Broxtowe	4
Gedling	10
Mansfield	27
Newark	4
Rushcliffe	5
City children (resident in County)	3
Out of county children (resident in County)	10
<b>Total:</b>	<b>123</b>

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