

Minutes



Meeting MANAGING ATTENDANCE IN SCHOOLS SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 13 October 2008 (commencing at 2.00 pm)

Membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

COUNCILLORS

Edward Llewellyn-Jones (Chair)
A Brian Wombwell (Vice Chair)

A	John Carter	P Owen
A	S Fielding	M Suthers
	A Haynes	L Sykes
A	P Lally	

STATUTORY CO-OPTED MEMBERS

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

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

The appointment by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 September 2008 of Councillor Edward Llewellyn-Jones as Chair and Councillor Brian Wombwell as Vice-Chair of the Select Committee was noted.

MEMBERSHIP

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

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Councillors John Carter
P Lally
S Fielding
Brian Wombwell

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor Edward Llewellyn-Jones declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 Managing Attendance in Schools – Scoping and Work Programme.

MANAGING ATTENDANCE IN SCHOOLS SELECT COMMITTEE SCOPE AND WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Llewellyn-Jones welcomed everyone to the meeting. He referred to the objectives of the review and explained that the Select Committee would be examining measures undertaken by schools in Nottinghamshire to encourage attendance and prevent absence prior to referral to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO). It was intended to consider the policies and procedures currently used and consider the effectiveness of current early intervention programmes.

Ms. Baxter, Senior Education Welfare Officer (EWO) Manager talked to members about early intervention programmes used to manage attendance in schools. The local authority expected schools to maintain accurate registers, have contact with parents, staff members to have clear roles in dealing with attendance and for referrals to be done promptly. These expectations were communicated through service level agreements, regular meetings with the EWO, guidance on persistent absence and the Education Welfare Service (EWS) attendance toolkit. These meetings provided evidence as to whether or not the school was meeting its requirements. Ms. Baxter said that there was also a register used to identify pupils that needed support. It was important to note that the data did not always reflect the level of practise that was going on in schools.

It was explained that local authority support was provided in a number of ways. Additional support was also offered to develop attendance practice; to persistent absence schools, schools with attendance identified as a key issue in OFSTED inspections and those seen as being off trajectory with overall absence. Schools were encouraged to use systems such as a practise audit to offer insight into what areas might need to be developed. The EWS could offer resources for schools to embed into their practice.

Ms Baxter also talked in detail about how the Education Welfare Service (EWS) organised itself to support schools. In response to a question from Mr Richards, it was pointed out that there was one EWO to two or three secondary schools who could carry up to 60 cases at one time, although not all being active at one time. In terms of primary schools, it was expected that an issue would be seen by a EWO within 5 working days. Councillor Suthers wondered how the service dealt with less active cases and their keenness to move on. It was pointed out that this was an issue in which they tried to enable schools to do more for themselves. Although resources were targeted on schools with the greatest needs, it was pointed out that support was still provided across the county.

The Select Committee heard from Louise Regan head teacher Hillocks Primary and Nursery School, Mark Watson Morven Park Primary School, Lynn Parkes head teacher Kirkby College and Sarah Barrett assistant head teacher Garibaldi Maths and Computing College on their school's attendance practice. Ms Baxter

pointed out that they had been asked to attend due to their good attendance practice and because they had developed systems that worked for the school.

Some of the main findings from their input to members included:-

- The importance of a whole school approach
- To have senior staff involved
- To develop a system that worked for your own school
- To promote a positive school ethos to encourage children to come to school every day

Ms Regan said that the local authority was outstanding and that she had regular contact with the EWO. Mr Watson said that a large amount work took place in school before the EWO became involved.

A significant issue for these schools was getting parents on board, in particular trying to engage with those who did not encourage their child to attend school. Where this occurred at primary level some schools carried out home visits, and tried to make the school a much friendlier site.

Despite the sustained efforts made by some schools, including rewards for 100% attendance, they shared the view that, it was very difficult to improve the overall attendance level due to an ingrained culture. The importance for families of schools to work together was acknowledged, for example when authorising or not authorising holidays. Members expressed concern about the difference in the closure time for registers. Ms Baxter said that the DCSF guidance stated closure should take place within 30 minutes of the start of the school and that schools had discretion within that period.

Rob Lancaster, Head of Education Otherwise than at School indicated that the development of Joint Access Teams working across clusters of schools would identify children and young people who need additional support. He also referred to work that was underway in Mansfield to look at alternatives to exclusion that involved the tracking of children to keep them in school. If this proved to be successful it would be rolled out across the county.

The Chair thanked officers for sharing their views and experiences with members and for providing a foundation for them to take on the forthcoming school visits. Members views were sought on how they might like to approach the school visits, following which it was agreed that:-

Two member groups are formed to carry out visits to primary and secondary schools on the morning of Monday, 3rd November and all day on Monday, 17th November. The visits would also include schools in Derbyshire.

The meeting closed at 3.20pm.

CHAIR