# Neath Port Talbot

# County Borough Council

**PROMOTING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

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**INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF INTENT**

Neath Port Talbot recognises that punctual and regular school attendance is an essential precondition of social inclusion and a prerequisite to effective learning. It notes that for a small but significant number of children poor school attendance is a direct cause of their social exclusion and underachievement. It is also concerned that children who are registered at a school and fail to attend that school regularly are placing themselves at greater risk of either offending or of becoming the victims of offending by others. The Council believes that children should attend school regularly and punctually because school is where they learn and school is where they are safe. (The Council recognises that some parents\* may choose to home educate their children rather than send them to school.) (\*Where parents are referred to in this document this should be taken to include carers/guardians.)

Neath Port Talbot is therefore committed to improving levels of school attendance and punctuality. It aims to do this by:-

1. promoting the value and importance of regular school attendance;
2. reducing all forms of unjustified absenteeism, especially levels of persistent absenteeism. (A child may be classified as being a persistent absentee if he/she has an absence rate of 20% or more).

The Council supports schools to set their own individual targets for attendance. The Council believes that success in achieving these targets will be best achieved if principles of active and meaningful partnership (with schools, parents, pupils and other agencies and services) inform all Neath Port Talbot activities.

In order to improve levels of school attendance and punctuality Neath Port Talbot will employ five key strategies:-

1. the provision of support and challenge to all schools, focusing resources on those schools with the most clearly identifiable needs;
2. the provision of support to pupils who experience difficulties in attending school regularly;
3. the provision of consistent and equitable support to parents, ensuring, through an appropriate balance of assistance and insistence that all parents are able to meet their legal responsibilities in relation to school attendance;
4. the development of effective multi-agency working practices in order to facilitate early intervention and the delivery of a seamless service;
5. the development of a range of relevant performance indicators and the subsequent setting of realistic yet challenging targets.

In developing its policy and practice for promoting school attendance the Council will endeavour to ensure that the need to recognise the national context and Welsh Government’s priorities is balanced by the need to respond to the local context and particular priorities within Neath Port Talbot.

The officer with responsibility for leading on the development of school attendance policy and practice will be the Manager of the Education Welfare Service.

**RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOLS**

Schools are responsible for supporting the attendance of their pupils and for responding to difficulties and issues which might lead to non-attendance.

Schools which adopt a positive and proactive approach towards attendance matters and encourage parents to take an active role in the schooling of their children, can play a major role in improving levels of attendance and punctuality and in reducing absenteeism.

It is a legal requirement that schools will:-

1. be open to all pupils for 380 sessions each school year;
2. maintain attendance registers in accordance with the relevant regulations;
3. accurately record and monitor all absenteeism and lateness;
4. clearly distinguish between absence which is authorised and absence which is unauthorised according to criteria laid down by the Welsh Government (schools should remind parents that it is the decision of the headteacher as to whether or not an absence will be authorised);
5. publish information relating to levels of attendance and absence and include details of these in the school’s prospectus and annual report to parents;
6. set annual targets to reduce absence, agreed with the governing body, and submit these targets to the local authority and published within the school’s prospectus and annual report to parents.

Schools are required to put in place a whole school policy on attendance in discussion with staff, governors, parents and pupils taking account of relevant guidance issued by the Welsh Government and good practice identified by Neath Port Talbot Council. This policy should:

1. give a high priority and value to attendance and punctuality and ensure that specific strategies are in place in order to achieve this;
2. identify a key senior member of staff with overall responsibility for attendance, who will receive regular attendance data;
3. ensure compliance with all relevant statutory requirements (particularly with regard to the maintenance of attendance registers and the setting of targets);
4. ensure that all parents are aware that Neath Port Talbot schools do not favour absence for family holidays in term time;
5. reflect the attendance priorities identified by the local authority and schools including national initiatives, equality and inclusion priorities;
6. ensure that clear attendance information is regularly communicated to parents through the school brochure, through newsletters, through parents’ evenings or through other media; (parents should be specifically reminded of their legal responsibilities for ensuring their children’s regular and punctual attendance);
7. collect and make effective use of attendance data to monitor progress/trends and set targets for improvement – for individuals, classes, year groups and the whole school;
8. provide clear guidance to staff on the practice of registration and on such connected issues as the appropriate categorisation of absence;
9. identify clear procedures to identify and follow up all absence and lateness (allocating individual staff roles and responsibilities);
10. recognise the crucial importance of early intervention and provide appropriate strategies;
11. make provision for first-day of absence contact for all pupils and particularly in relation to pupils who are known to be poor attenders or who might otherwise be considered to be at risk;
12. monitor post-registration truancy through the taking of class registers and spot checks and ensure that the parents of any post-registration truants are promptly informed and where necessary actively involved;
13. be alert to critical times e.g. transition;
14. identify a range of both proactive and reactive strategies to promote attendance and address absenteeism, especially persistent absenteeism;
15. provide for a clear and unambiguous hierarchy of sanctions;
16. develop attendance incentive schemes which recognise pupils’ attendance achievements;
17. set up effective networks for liaising with other involved agencies and services such as Education Welfare Officers (EWOs), Team Around the Family, Social Services, the Police, Health, etc.;
18. establish procedures for reintegrating long-term absentees and pupils who may, for specific reasons, have been on a reduced timetable;
19. identify an interesting, flexible, and accessible curriculum which encourages regular attendance;
20. provide for regular structured meetings between school staff and the EWO;
21. ensure that reasonable steps are taken by the school before a referral is made to the EWO;
22. stress to parents the importance of continuity of learning, particularly in relation to family holidays during term-time (schools should grant leave for term-time holidays only under exceptional circumstances);
23. liaise with the police and the EWO when truancy sweeps are undertaken locally;
24. involve and identify a role for governors including the provision of accurate national and local data, including school data against year groups, gender, key stage etc.;
25. ensure that good practice is identified and disseminated;
26. be regularly monitored and reviewed;
27. help create an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance, addressing school-based causes of poor attendance such as bullying, racism, an inappropriate curriculum, etc.

**RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS**

Parents are responsible in law for ensuring that their children attend the school at which they are registered regularly, on time, properly dressed and in a fit condition to learn. Parents are also responsible for ensuring that their children stay at school once they have registered.

Parents can do a great deal to support the regular and punctual attendance of their children. Parents should:-

1. take an active interest in their child’s school life and work;
2. attend parents’ evenings and other school events;
3. ensure that their child completes his/her homework and goes to bed at an appropriate time;
4. be aware of letters from school which their child brings home;
5. ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day;
6. ensure that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness or days of religious observance;
7. always notify the school as soon as possible - preferably on the first morning - of any absence;
8. confirm this in writing when the child returns to school;
9. not book family holidays during term-time;
10. talk to the school if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to attend.

**RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY**

There are four key areas of activity regarding local authority support and challenge for schools, pupils and parents:-

1. the work of locality-based EWOs;
2. the work of the Education Development Service;
3. the development of multi-agency networks and partnerships,;
4. work with key partners to develop a quality alternative curriculum for Key Stage 4 pupils who are unable to engage in the current national curriculum and are at risk of exclusion.

**COUNCIL SUPPORT – THE ROLE OF EDUCATION WELFARE OFFICERS**

The fundamental purpose of EWOs is to maximise attendance rates, which will include a pupil welfare role, for individual pupils, individual schools and for Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council as a whole and to discharge the Council’s legal duty to ensure that all pupils of compulsory school age are in receipt of suitable education. EWOs will also assist in removing barriers which may prevent a child receiving education.

EWOs will employ three main interconnected and interdependent strategies to ensure that registered pupils of compulsory school age attend school regularly and punctually:-

1. as authorised representatives of the Council, monitoring attendance through the regular inspection of registers and liaison with school staff;
2. undertaking individual casework with non-attending pupils and their parents;
3. offering strategic advice, support and challenge to enable schools to develop improved systems and practices for managing attendance.

**EWO Casework**

When a pupil with attendance difficulties is referred to an EWO he or she will engage in individual casework. EWO casework is undertaken with pupils and their parents in order to bring about a pupil’s return to regular attendance. The EWO will recognise and take account of individual circumstances and will respond accordingly. The speedy return of the pupil to regular attendance will, however, always be the prime concern. The EWO will employ a range of practices and strategies in his or her casework and will, when necessary, combine assistance with insistence.

All EWO casework will involve the setting of targets for improvement and will be time-limited and subject to regular review. In some instances EWO intervention may be limited to a single EWO home visit in order to remind parents of their legal responsibilities or to help resolve a particular and identified difficulty. In other instances there may be complex and deep-seated reasons why the pupil is not attending. In such situations the EWO may negotiate a plan of support; this might involve referral on to, or the involvement of, other agencies, convening a multi-agency meeting and so on.

All EWO casework will involve close and continuous liaison with the pupil’s school. EWOs will ensure that schools receive regular, written feedback on pupils with whom work is being undertaken. In cases where the main causes of the non-attendance may be school-related e.g. alleged bullying or racism, peer pressure, difficulties with a particular lesson or teacher, the EWO will discuss these with the school in order to develop strategies to overcome these difficulties.

**EWO Referrals**

Referrals to EWOs are usually made by schools. There are, however, occasions when other agencies/services or parents may make a referral.

Before accepting a referral from a school an EWO will expect the school to have first undertaken a number of steps to address the pupil’s non-attendance. These would include:-

1. action by the class teacher/form teacher;
2. action by the Head of Year (secondary)/ Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher (primary);
3. contact with parents; including the use of letters of concern to the parents before formally involving the EWO.

The overwhelming majority of referrals to EWOs are made on the basis of non-attendance. Referrals are occasionally taken in relation to child protection concerns, transport or school age employment issues.

Referrals may be made when:-

1. a pattern of irregular attendance has developed;
2. a period of entrenched non-attendance has begun;
3. communication by the school to the parents has met with little or no response;
4. there is evidence of a lack of parental co-operation in ensuring a child’s regular attendance;
5. a pattern of post-registration truancy is persisting despite the school’s efforts to prevent it;
6. a parent withdraws a pupil from school having expressed an intention to educate him or her otherwise than at school (Elective Home Education);
7. a pupil is withdrawn from school by the parents who are moving to another area and the school does not have a confirmed destination school/provider where the child will resume his or her education. Such pupils will be treated as “children missing education”;
8. a pattern of persistent lateness has continued after pastoral intervention;
9. there are specific and identifiable welfare issues which are preventing a pupil from accessing education.

All referrals to EWOs are recorded on the central database. This database is used in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

##### EWO Visits to Schools

Referrals are generally made to EWOs during the pre-planned agreed meetings. The frequency of these visits will be in accordance with the partnership Agreement. A school which may have occasion to be dissatisfied with the level or quality of service provided by its EWO should contact, in the first instance, the Manager of the Education Welfare Service.

**NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL PROCEDURE ON PROSECUTION**

If a pupil who is registered at a school fails to attend that school regularly and attempts by the EWO and the school fail to ensure that the pupil returns to regular attendance the Council will, ordinarily first consider issuing the parent with a fixed penalty notice (please refer to separate policy regarding Fixed Penalty Notices). Unless there are known mitigating circumstances, the Council will consider taking legal action by issuing a summons against the parents to appear before the Magistrates Court under Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act. In deciding whether or not to take legal action, the EWO must be satisfied that:-

1. there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction; it must consider what the defence case may be and how this is likely to affect the prosecution case;
2. it is in the public interest to prosecute; in cases of any seriousness, a prosecution will usually take place unless there are public interest factors pointing against prosecution, which clearly outweigh those in favour;
3. any action which it takes complies with the terms of the Human Rights Act.

If after legal action has been taken the pupil still fails to attend school regularly, the EWO will, if deemed appropriate, take further legal action.

**NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL’S PROCEDURE ON THE USE OF EDUCATION SUPERVISION ORDERS**

Before initiating a prosecution under section 444 of the 1996 Education Act an EWO will consider whether it is appropriate to apply for an Education Supervision Order (ESO) under section 36 of the 1989 Children Act. The purpose of an ESO is to place a child who is not being properly educated under the supervision of the Local Authority. An ESO aims to ensure that the child receives full time education and that he or she and the parents receive intensive support, advice and guidance from a Supervising Officer who is required “*to advise, assist and befriend”.*

An application for an ESO will only be made when one or more of the following apply:-

1. all other attempts to improve the pupil’s attendance have failed and prosecution of the parents is deemed inappropriate;
2. the parents appear likely to co-operate with a structured programme of work prepared by the supervising officer;
3. there is support from Social Services for the ESO;
4. a Magistrates Court hearing has directed the Local Authority to apply for an ESO;
5. the EWO is of the opinion that the order will have a significant impact upon the pupil’s non-attendance.

**NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNCIL’S PROCEDURE ON THE USE OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE ORDERS**

An EWO will serve a School Attendance Order (SAO) (under Sections 437-439 of the 1996 Education Act) on the parents of a child of compulsory school age if the parents have failed to demonstrate that the child is in receipt of suitable education and if the Local Authority believes that the child should attend school.

The SAO will specify the school which the child should attend. Should the parents fail to comply with the SAO the EWO will initiate legal proceedings under Section 443 of the 1996 Education Act, unless the parents can prove that the child is in receipt of suitable education.

All legal action taken by EWOs will be monitored and reviewed.

**PARENTING ORDERS**

EWOs will when necessary liaise with the Youth Offending Service and with Social Care staff when the courts, in relation to a non-attendance case, impose or recommend a Parenting Order. An EWO will act as the responsible officer for such an order.

**EWO POLICY ON SUSPENDING CASEWORK**

Ideally an EWO will only close a case when a pupil returns to regular attendance or ceases to be of compulsory school age. There are some exceptional cases, however, in which the problems are so severe and entrenched that the work of the EWO is having no impact on changing the pupil’s behaviour and returning him or her to regular attendance. In such circumstances the EWO will carefully consider whether it is appropriate to suspend further active casework.

Suspending active casework is a very rare occurrence and will only be considered when all options and strategies have been tried and been found to have been unsuccessful. Should active casework be suspended this will only be done after full consultation between the EWO and the Manager of the Education Welfare Service.

In circumstances when active casework is suspended the situation will continue to be monitored and any necessary liaison/consultation with other services/agencies will take place. Active casework will recommence if there is a change in circumstances which suggests that further EWO casework may be appropriate.

**OTHER EWO SERVICES**

As well as undertaking casework with individual pupils EWOs will offer strategic support and challenge to schools by working with school management teams on policies and procedures. EWOs will promote improvements in schools' management of attendance through the strategies listed below.

**ATTENDANCE AUDITS**

Attendance Audits are offered to all schools. Key features of these audits are:-

* examining existing procedures;
* inspecting attendance-related documentation;
* assessing communication with parents;
* interviewing staff and pupils;
* analysing attendance data;
* considering strategies used to promote attendance
* evaluating the effectiveness of EWO support.
* the provision of data for presentation to the governing body

**PASTORAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES**

EWOs will when appropriate support schools in the development and implementation of Pastoral Support Programmes (PSPs). PSPs will be used when a pupil is deemed to be at risk of not attending and a long-term programme of intervention is seen as being a means of helping to prevent him or her from dropping out of school altogether.

Other Council services will assist in the use of school-based PSPs. PSPs are used within the special educational needs assessment process.

**PARENTING CONTRACTS**

EWOs will consider the use of Parenting Contracts in appropriate cases.

**SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Support is offered by EWOs to all schools, covering such issues as:

* good practice on the keeping of registers;
* the potential IT solutions to registration;
* strategies for promoting regular attendance;
* strategies for addressing persistent absenteeism;
* communication with parents;
* good practice in monitoring punctuality;
* addressing post-registration truancy;
* reintegrating long-term absentees;
* developing a whole-school attendance policy;
* rewards and incentives;
* first-day of absence contact;
* primary-secondary transfer.

**CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION**

EWOs have a clear role to play in helping to trace children who go missing from schools in Neath Port Talbot or who go missing from schools from other authorities and who may have moved into the area. Neath Port Talbot’s Children Missing Education procedures incorporate the S2S (school-to-school) missing pupil database and the local authority’s own database. Schools are strongly urged to follow corresponding procedures in relation to those pupils who are removed from school by their parents without a named-school destination being provided and confirmed.

**TRUANCY SWEEPS**

EWOs work closely with the Police in order to ensure that Truancy Sweeps are carried out when necessary according to the agreed Police – Local Authority protocol. EWOs will liaise with local schools regarding Truancy Sweeps as and when necessary.

**COUNCIL SUPPORT – OTHER COUNCIL SERVICES**

**Children who refuse to attend school pre-key stage 4**

In some cases it is difficult to distinguish clearly between a child who is psychologically traumatised by the prospect of attending school and a child who simply does not want to go to school. It is clear, however, that in such circumstances the longer the child remains out of education the more difficult it will be to secure a return to regular attendance at school. When a referral is made to and accepted by the EWO, and after the EWO has pursued all other strategies to secure a return to school, it may be appropriate to hold a multi-agency meeting involving all relevant services. If it is decided that an immediate return to school is not a realistic option then a referral for alternative education provision may be made by the pupil’s school. Any such alternative education provision will be on a time-limited basis with a view to the pupil returning to school using dual registration where this is appropriate.

**Role of the Additional Learning Needs Support Teach (ALNST) - Procedures and arrangements for children with statements of SEN who become non-attenders**

Should a child with a statement experience difficulties attending school a referral should be made to the EWO. The EWO will pursue a range of strategies to secure regular attendance including use of legal measures when appropriate. If the non-attendance persists and proves impossible to resolve using these strategies the EWO will notify ALNST so that the difficulty can be considered as part of the review of the statement. Part of that review may consider whether the placement of the pupil in the original educational establishment is still appropriate.

**Role of Education Development and Inclusion Service (EDIS) – Challenge Advisers**

EDIS, will offer challenge and support to schools in matters of attendance. As part of their regular school visits and particularly as an area of focus during their visits. Challenge Advisers will:

1. consider a school’s attendance data and compare this with comparative benchmark data in order to assess performance;
2. assess progress achieved towards the meeting of attendance (and PA) targets;
3. consider the attendance performance of identified pupil cohorts;
4. analyse any links between attendance and attainment;
5. offer support and challenge to the school to ensure that the curriculum offered supports good attendance;
6. liaise with relevant support services accordingly.

**Behaviour Support Teachers, deployed and managed by EDIS, will:**

1. liaise with EWOs and other council support staff in order to ensure that coordinated and consistent support and challenge is offered to all secondary schools;
2. ensure that this support and challenge is aligned with and reflects the key priorities of the local authority and the national agenda;
3. provide core training to all schools as appropriate;
4. work individually as consultants with targeted schools;
5. work with colleagues from the EDIS to support improved access to teaching and learning.

**Role of the Governor Support Service (School and Family Support Team):**

The Governor Support Service will:-

1. organise training for governors which ensures that they are made aware of the responsibilities of schools for securing regular attendance;
2. publish information on governors’ responsibilities for securing regular attendance at school

**Role of the Data Service**

The Data Service provides support across the central directorate and all schools providing detailed data relating to attendance/absence issues and will assist in the analysis and interrogation of this data.

**MULTI-AGENCY NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS**

The Council recognises that the reasons for non-school attendance are such that no single service or agency can expect on its own successfully to address the issue. Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council strives to develop a multi-agency, cross-service, inter-disciplinary approach which is characterised by the delivery of a child-centred, seamless, co-ordinated and effective response.

**SUPPORTING THE ATTENDANCE OF VULNERABLE PUPILS OR PUPILS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS**

**Policy and Arrangements for Supporting Looked After Children (LAC)**

The Council recognises that looked after children are a recognised group of pupils who are liable to underachieve and is determined to address this situation.

Officers within Neath Port Talbot will work together to ensure that the targets for improving the educational attainment of looked after children are met.

The LAC Education Officer has lead responsibility for ensuring that looked after children receive appropriate and co-ordinated educational support.

The LAC Education Officer will liaise with a looked-after child's social worker and, where relevant, with his or her EWO.

All schools must nominate a designated teacher for looked after children. This teacher will have a key co-ordinating and monitoring role with regard to the attendance of looked after children at his or her school.

The Data Team will collect and monitor the attendance data of all looked after children throughout Neath Port Talbot and will use this data to inform the planning of future educational support for looked after children.

**Procedures and Arrangements for Supporting Young Carers**

The Council recognises that a number of children may be late to or absent from school as a consequence of their responsibilities in relation to caring for a sick or disabled parent or sibling.

Schools should respond sympathetically to the needs of young carers but should combine this with a recognition that these children are nevertheless fully entitled to participate in all educational activities.

Referral of young carers to outside agencies should be done sensitively, recognising any feelings of guilt which the individual child may be experiencing.

Schools may consider designating a teacher to have responsibility for young carers. This member of staff may be able to access local schemes of support.

**Arrangements for supporting the attendance of Traveller Children and Children from Ethnic Minorities**

Staff from the Traveller Unit and (Minority Ethnic Achievement Service) MEAS work closely with EWOs to develop an appropriate and consistent school attendance strategy for ethnic minority pupils.

Depending upon the needs of the school, support may be involved with school staff and other support services in the following strategies to support regular attendance of children from ethnic minorities:

* advice and support to mainstream staff on extended holidays to country of origin;
* teachers and EWOs’ liaise between Traveller parents and schools to encourage admittance and attendance of primary and secondary age pupils;
* pupils at risk may receive specialist help from service support staff and be involved in a mentoring programme;
* EWOs’ support children and parents in situations where racism is presenting a barrier to educational inclusion;
* EWOs’ regularly make home visits to support children’s attendance and ensure parents are aware of school procedures;
* EWO’s are involved in the exclusion process and the re-introduction of pupils into school. This may include liaising with the parents, school and other support services.

**Procedure and arrangements for supporting the attendance of pupils who have or may have Additional Learning Needs**

Neath Port Talbot Council recognises that Additional Learning Needs, including unidentified or unmet SEN, can prevent some children from attending school. EWOs, Educational Psychologists and other authority support staff work with SENCOs, other school staff and with the pupil when there are concerns that a pupil’s poor attendance may be related to unidentified or unmet ALN.

**Procedure and arrangements for supporting the attendance of pupils who may have been bullied**

Neath Port Talbot Council recognises that bullying is an issue which prevents some children from attending school or from achieving their full potential when they do attend. A guidance document on bullying for all Neath Port Talbot Schools is available from the Anti–bullying Partnership. An information leaflet for parents is also available.

EWOs will offer support to pupils whose attendance is being affected by actual or perceived bullying by liaising with the school.

Other Neath Port Talbot staff (Educational Psychologists, School and Family Support Team, Behaviour Support Teachers, Safeguarding Officer, Education Officers and Challenge Advisers) will provide additional support, advice and assistance when necessary.

**Policy and arrangements for supporting the attendance of other Vulnerable Groups**

The Council will endeavour to respond energetically to support the school attendance of any group of children who may be vulnerable. Such groups might include:

1. children from families under stress;
2. pregnant school girls and teenage mothers;
3. children transferring school;
4. children entering school outside the normal year of entry.