

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



EDUCATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

ATTENDANCE UPDATE

REPORT BY HEADS OF EDUCATION

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides an update of the actions which have been taken this session to improve attendance across Primary and Secondary schools.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the panel notes the actions that have been taken to improve attendance across Primary and Secondary schools and the planned next steps.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Caring and Compassionate Open, Honest and Accountable Collaborate, Inclusive and Adaptive
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. Improving attendance is part of Raising Educational Attainment which is a key strategic objective of West Lothian Council.
III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None
IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators	Improving attendance as part of The Raising Educational Attainment Strategy will have a positive impact on performance indicators including those relating to attainment and positive destinations.
V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	The Raising Educational Attainment Strategy will have a positive impact on performance indicators including those relating to attainment and positive destinations.
VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	The Raising Educational Attainment Strategy (including attendance improvements) will be delivered within agreed central education, Strategic Equity Funding and devolved school budgets.

VII Consideration at PDSP	Underway
VIII Other consultations	Stakeholders including pupils, parents/carers, headteachers, staff and other partners were consulted on the Raising Educational Attainment Strategy. The Scottish Attainment Challenge partners group is also involved in discussions around improvements required in attendance.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D1 Background

In support of the council's Corporate Plan 2023/28, the Raising Educational Attainment Strategy will directly influence and impact on the delivery of the Council's priority of raising educational attainment. West Lothian Council is committed to improving attainment for all in line with the National Improvement Framework and through the effective delivery of Curriculum for Excellence and Senior Phase pathways.

Outcome 2 of the Raising Educational Attainment Strategy has a focus on wellbeing, inclusion and attendance for all children and young people, promoting confidence, independent thinking and resilience. Fundamental to this is working with families and partners to support the highest possible levels of engagement and equity for all.

Cumulative school attendance (combined primary and secondary) in Session 2022/23 fell to 89.48% from pre-pandemic levels of 92.48% (Session 2018/19). The development and implementation of a West Lothian Attendance approach was therefore identified as a priority in order to seek to improve attendance universally as well as for targeted groups.

D2 The West Lothian Approach

The West Lothian approach comprises of an attendance plan which focuses on improving attendance universally in line with Scottish Attainment Challenge stretch aims. There is a particular focus on ethos and relationships, targeted interventions, effective partnerships and robust policy, procedures, and data analysis.

In order to achieve improvements in whole school attendance across all West Lothian education settings, a clear, consistent approach to improvement was required. Five strands were identified:

- Universal support
- Targeted Support
- Enhanced Support
- Partnerships
- Policy, Procedures & Data Analysis

Quality Improvement officers developed and implemented the approach and worked with all schools/establishments with a focus on the following:

1. To promote a shared language & self-evaluation for wellbeing, inclusion & equality to improve attendance and engagement using reliable data to inform improvements.
2. To build capacity within schools to improve attendance and engagement, whilst removing barriers for all through the expansion of robust systems, processes and interventions.
3. To implement a staged intervention model of excellence for improving attendance & engagement which aligns with the existing West Lothian attendance policy.
4. To raise awareness & practical application of creative, flexible solutions to inclusive timetabling, curriculum design and partnership supports which meet the needs of young people facing barriers to school attendance & engagement.

D3 Interrupted Learner Service

An 'Interrupted Learner Service' team has been established, comprising a principal teacher (PT) and a class teacher (CT). Working with colleagues from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and social policy ensured a partnership approach to engage with identified children and young people (primary and secondary), who were unable to attend school due to a range of mental health and emotional barriers.

D4 Family Link Workers

Almost all secondary schools appointed family link workers (FLW) during session 2022/2023 in order to provide intensive, targeted support to improve the attendance of identified young people and this post has continued into 2023/24.

Of the 271 supported students who had below 90% attendance, 144 (53%) have shown sustained week on week improvements in their attendance.

D5 Actions

- A self-evaluation toolkit has been developed to support individual school approaches to ensuring 'Wellbeing, Equality and Inclusion which schools are now engaging with as they seek to improve attendance and engagement through a range of universal and targeted approaches.
- An extensive programme of professional learning opportunities has been provided for school staff, in addition to advice and guidance, support and challenge regarding improvement in the capacity of schools with regards to attendance and engagement.
- A West Lothian Staged Intervention approach to improving attendance and engagement has been developed and implemented across all sectors. This has included the introduction of the Interrupted Learner Service and the Authority Attendance Screening Group. It aligns with the West Lothian Attendance and Engagement at School: Policy and Operational Procedures.
- A range of approaches have been adopted in order to raise awareness of the impact of high levels of school attendance and engagement on educational attainment and achievement.

D6 Attendance Data

- Primary school attendance is currently 92.8% compared to the previous year of 92.3%. re-pandemic levels of 94.5%. Secondary school attendance is currently 86.2% compared to 86.0% the previous year.
- Further analysis of this shows that 6 secondary schools have shown an improvement in pupil attendance from the 2022/23 session with one school achieving a 2% increase in cumulative attendance.
- Quality Improvement visits to secondary schools have highlighted that there was a relentless weekly focus upon attendance using Power BI (data analysis tool) attendance reports.
- It can be difficult to see any real improvements in attendance when just viewing cumulative attendance overall. Tracking and monitoring of attendance in bands in secondary schools has been used as part of our marginal gains approach.

E. CONCLUSION

The 2023/28 Raising Educational Attainment Strategy aims to ensure that children and young people are well placed to move into adult life, and employment or further/higher education. There is an expectation by West Lothian Council that improved health and wellbeing, attendance and effective learning throughout each young person's school experience enables them to maximise their potential. Actions taken to improve attendance are in place however work still needs to continue in order to demonstrate sufficient improvements.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

Raising Educational Attainment Strategy 2023/28
https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/10796/Raising-Educational-Attainment-Strategy-2023-28/pdf/Raising_Educational_Attainment_Strategy_2023-28.pdf

Appendices/Attachments: None

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