

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SCHOOL ABSENCE – UPDATE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To report progress on the actions undertaken in response to the recommendations of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel Report on School Absence in North Lincolnshire.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Early 2010, the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel undertook a review of School Absence and the subsequent recommendations were developed into a School Absence Action Plan. This report introduces the progress on those recommendations and actions.
- 2.2 Good school attendance is crucial to the effective education of children and young people and for improving their life chances. Children who are not in school regularly are at risk on many levels and can be highly vulnerable. Good and excellent attendance is about partnership working. As part of this, parents have the responsibility to ensure that their child attends school and schools are responsible for the recording and following-up any absences of pupils. The Local Authority has a responsibility to support and challenge parents and schools in reducing school 'absence'. This role is undertaken by the Education Welfare Service (EWS).

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 The Local Authority, working with key partners and schools, has made progress against the Scrutiny Panel recommendations and Action Plan.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 Progress against the Action Plan has been reported.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 5.1 Progress against the Action Plan relies upon input from all parties.

6. **OTHER INFORMATION (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, OTHER)**

6.1 None

7. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

7.1 The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel consulted widely when formulating the recommendations, including consultation with schools and families. There has been subsequent consultation with the Behaviour and Attendance Partnership and this group was supportive of the recommendations and the partnership approach to school absence.

8. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 That Cabinet notes and supports the progress on actions in relation to the School Absence Action Plan.

8.2 That Cabinet supports that all reasonable steps be taken to successfully complete actions that are currently in progress.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report;
School Absence Action Plan.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL – SCHOOL ABSENCE IN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE

| RECOMMENDATIONS | | ACTION | LEAD | TIMESCALE | COMMENTS |
|-----------------|--|--|--|---|--|
| 1. | That effective use of communications and media by the Local Authority (LA) and schools is used throughout the year to send a strong message on attendance to the wider community and parents/carers. Publicising the consequences of failing to maintain the school attendance of their child. | Press release supplied to local press when national statistics are released. | Principal Education Welfare Service Strategic Manager. | Upon release from DCSF. March 2010 for academic year 08/09. | Completed. 2008/09 academic year Persistent Absence (PA) rate was 4.3%. Better than near neighbour authorities and national average. Target for LAs 2011 is to be 5% or less. |
| | | A series of new posters/letters and leaflets, publicising school attendance, punctuality and possible legal action commissioned for distribution to schools, parents and wider community. Website refreshed. | Production – Education Welfare Service (EWS). Schools to display / distribute. | Summer Term 2010. Autumn Term 2010. | Completed. In progress – distribution. |
| | | A series of additional posters/letters and leaflets in other languages to be commissioned. | EWS. | August 2010. | Completed. |
| | | Further truancy sweeps and late gate patrols to be publicised. | EWS / Schools. | From summer term, 2010. | In progress. |
| | | Attendance Policy to be refreshed and disseminated to schools for their adaptation and | Principal Education Welfare Service Strategic Manager. | September 2010. | Completed. |

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| | | use. | | | |
| 2. | That an in depth yearly reminder be sent to all parents/carers at the beginning of term reminding them of school opening times, registration time, and at what time a pupil will be registered late. Also, to provide them with term time dates, a full explanation of authorised and unauthorised absence, attending medical appointments and the legalities of term-time holidays. | Schools to produce an appropriate letter to parents for use at beginning of autumn term and for all new pupils. Letter for adaptation by schools is included in the Attendance Policy. EWS to re-distribute to schools pack containing holiday, attendance, punctuality information, example letters and referral forms for use. | Schools – following EWS guidance (schools' information pack). EWS. | Autumn 2010. Rolling programme to commence July 2010. | In progress. Completed and ongoing. |
| 3. | That consideration should be given to standardising the closure of registers across the Authority as outlined in the DCSF guidelines. | Agenda item on both primary and secondary head teacher consortia meetings. | Chairs of the primary and secondary Head Teachers' Consortia. | Autumn 2010. | In progress / ongoing discussion. NB. DCSF guidance allows up to 30 minutes before registration is closed from the beginning of the school day. This is in Attendance Policy. |
| 4. | That the LA examine the possibility of negotiating with travel agencies a North Lincolnshire wide holiday discount scheme for trips involving children during school holidays. | An approach will be made to travel companies. | Principal Education Welfare Service Strategic Manager. | October 2010. | There are some holidays available at discounted rates for families during school holidays. Discussions have started with travel agents. |
| 5. | That the provision of more opportunities to share and celebrate examples of good practice around the reduction of absence rates be introduced by the LA / schools and disseminated. Along with continuous training to be provided by the authority | EWS to approach Graduate Teacher Training Programme / Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) Programme in order to offer training to raise awareness of | Principal Education Welfare Service Strategic | July 2010. | Next programme slot agreed - December 2010. |

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| | on all aspects of absences to teachers. | <p>school attendance and good practice.</p> <p>EWS to approach lead officer for corporate induction of new Head Teachers / teachers / school staff in order to offer training to raise awareness of school attendance and good practice.</p> <p>EWS to organise a training day for all attendance administration staff.</p> | Manager / EWS / Advisers / Schools. | <p>July 2010.</p> <p>December 2010.</p> | <p>In progress.</p> <p>Completed. Scheduled in for Spring Term.</p> |
| 6. | That further communication with the police authority be sought as a priority in order to get the truancy patrols reinstated as soon as possible, especially with the help of the PCSO's who are designated to spend time in individual schools. | See recommendation 1. | EWS / Police / Schools. | July 2010. | <p>Latest truancy sweep to take place was in May 2010.</p> <p>Schedule in place for 2010 / 2011.</p> |
| 7. | That all schools consider using the text messaging service to alert parents / carers to when their child is late or absent from school without explanation. | EWS to encourage schools to look into the possibility of adopting the text messaging system. | EWS / Schools / ICT Support. | Autumn 2010 | There are cost /resource implications with this system that individual schools will need to consider / make decisions about. |
| 8. | That schools / the LA intensify steps to identify pupils who truant frequently and for extended periods, and focus effort and resources on tackling the underlying causes of their absenteeism. | <p>EWS to work closely with all schools in order to improve the quality of data available to them and the analysis of this data.</p> <p>Data reports available within the LA are currently being updated and will further</p> | Principal Education Welfare Service Strategic Manager / EWS / Schools / Other Support | <p>Ongoing.</p> <p>Ongoing.</p> | The EWS prioritises those pupils who are Persistent Absentees (PAs). This is in line with national guidance. Early identification of these pupils is key to the process. Schools manage |

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| | | enhance identification of vulnerable pupils (Version 4 enhancement). | Agencies. | | <p>their own resources to support attendance issues, including their responsibility to challenge parents on absences. The EWS cannot take action on absences that are authorised by schools.</p> <p>Common Assessment is also used to support an holistic / multi-agency approach to tackling underlying causes.</p> |
| 9. | That the panel welcome the introduction of the SIMS system to most schools, however, they would like to ask that other schools be encouraged to use the same system to ensure the Education Welfare Officers can easily collect and assess all attendance figures, which in turn would help them provide earlier support and assistance when required. | EWS to liaise with IT manager regarding developments. | EWS / Schools ICT Manager / Schools. | Autumn 2010. | <p>In progress.</p> <p>Currently there are 4 schools not using SIMS and possibly by September 2010 there may only be 2. All schools will be moving to using the same system during the next school year.</p> |
| 10. | That the authority's Code of Conduct and DCSF guidance are issued to all schools immediately for implementation, and that training be provided where necessary. | EWS redistribute this information to all schools (electronically). | <p>Principal Education Welfare Service Strategic Manager / EWS / Schools.</p> <p>(Supported by Legal Services).</p> | June 2010 | <p>Completed.</p> <p>EWS / Schools have ongoing dialogue with regard to training needs.</p> |

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| 11. | That the authority investigates the difficulties caused by non attendance of children from the transient community, and strategies to be implemented for schools to be able to account for these situations. | EWS to continue to work with schools in order to ensure appropriate referral to the service. EWS to continue to work closely with the Diversity Service. | Principal Education Welfare Service Strategic Manager / EWS / Diversity Service / Schools. | Ongoing. | The EWS works closely with the Diversity Service on transient community issues. The EWS and schools work well with the transient community but these parents are often hard to reach. EWS support schools with data analysis. |
| 12. | That the 'request for absence' form for term time holidays be revised asking for details of other children within the family who are attending a different school within the area. This will enable the Head Teachers to converse and agree on the same decision. | 'Request for Absence' form to be re-issued to school as per recommendation 2. | Principal Education Welfare Service Strategic Manager / EWS / Schools. | Autumn 2010. | Completed. |
| 13. | That the LA gives strong, consistent and timely support to all schools by the appropriate use of sanctions such as penalty notices and prosecutions especially in relation to persistent absences. | Referrals received from school to be supported via casework, the appropriate use of CAF and legal sanctions where appropriate. EWS to continue to place the emphasis upon prevention and support where possible. EWS to undertake supervision of casework to ensure timely legal intervention. | Principal Education Welfare Service Strategic Manager / EWS / Schools. | Ongoing. Ongoing. Ongoing. | Schools are encouraged to continually challenge parents on absence from school. The EWS cannot take legal action on authorised absences. |
| 14. | That the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People monitors closely and regularly the data for schools and reviews local strategies to ensure | Performance data to be regularly reported to the | Principal Education Welfare | Ongoing. | 2008/09 PA figure of 4.3% indicates that the strategies being |

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| | that resources are directed to those schools needing to improve. | <p>Cabinet Member for scrutiny.</p> <p>Attendance and related information to be shared regularly within the LA to monitor progress, set targets and review performance.</p> <p>Reporting mechanism to be considered in the context of the development of the Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships and the reporting requirements of the Children's Trust.</p> | <p>Service Strategic Manager / Team Leader.</p> <p>Behaviour & Attendance Lead.</p> | Autumn 2010. | <p>employed are working.</p> <p>NB. Guidance on school behaviour and attendance partnerships – March 2010. DCSF</p> |
| 15. | That this review be re-visited in 12 months time. | | | Date to be advised by Scrutiny Committee. | |