Estyn

Improving attendance in secondary schools

The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- ⋏ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities
- ⋏ primary schools
- ⋏ secondary schools
- ⋏ special schools
- ⋏ pupil referral units
- ⋏ all-age schools
- ⋏ independent schools
- ⋏ further education
- ⋏ independent specialist colleges
- ⋏ adult learning in the community partnerships
- ⋏ local government education services
- ⋏ teacher education and training
- ⋏ Welsh for adults
- ⋏ work-based learning
- ⋏ learning in the justice sector

Estyn also:

- ⋏ reports to Senedd Cymru and provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the Welsh Government and others
- ⋏ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence

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Executive summary

This report focuses on attendance in secondary schools since the removal of the restrictions in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on engagement with a sample of 41 schools, all local authorities, and evidence from our secondary inspection and follow-up findings since February 2022. It also includes analysis of the recently published national attendance data.

Across Wales, attendance in secondary schools has declined since the return to school and has been slow to improve. The attendance of those pupils who are eligible for free school meals is notably lower than that of those pupils who are not eligible for free school meals. Attendance rates across Wales remain a concern and the rates of persistent absenteeism have increased substantially (Welsh Government, 2023a; 2023b). School leaders reported a substantial increase in the number of pupils not attending school due to mental health and anxiety challenges. As a result, schools have increased their support for pupils' emotional well-being through targeted intervention and universal provision.

Findings indicate that, where leaders were most effective in bringing about improvements in attendance, they had a relentless focus on improvement, evaluated the impact of their work effectively, used data rigorously and secured a strong culture of high expectations regarding pupils' attendance. In addition, leaders in these schools had a strong focus on high quality teaching and on creating a stimulating curriculum that provided engaging learning experiences to help encourage pupils to continue to attend. Where these processes were less effective, leaders did not create a culture of high expectations for attendance, were not proactive enough in responding to early signs of poor attendance, and did not use data regularly or rigorously enough to evaluate the impact of their work.

We have identified a number of important barriers that schools faced when tackling poor attendance. These included parental perceptions of the importance of good attendance, increasing costs associated with school transport, the lack of dedicated funding from the Welsh Government to improve attendance, including the short term nature of it, and the variation in the impact of support that schools received. This makes it difficult for schools to target resources, create capacity to support pupils and their families or to plan strategically to improve attendance.

It is clear that, although schools have an important role in improving attendance, they cannot tackle this issue alone. Improving attendance will require a multi-agency and cross service approach alongside support from the Welsh Government. To support improvements, we have identified 15 recommendations intended to support the Welsh Government, local authorities and schools to respond the national challenge of improving attendance.

Introduction

This report focuses on the strategies and actions that secondary schools were employing in order to improve pupils' attendance. It also considers the support provided by local authorities. The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in practice and the barriers school leaders identified to pupils attending school and therefore improving attendance. It also includes cameos and case studies of effective practice.

Since the pandemic, pupils' attendance rates, particularly in secondary school, have declined and remain a concern. This report aims to identify common national issues and challenges as well as identifying effective methods that school leaders are using to bring about improvements in attendance.

Background

Improving attendance was a recommendation in just over a third of secondary school and a third of all-age school inspections since we resumed inspection in February 2022, following periods of lockdown as a result of the pandemic. In half of cases, the recommendation included reference to the attendance of those pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

Prior to the pandemic, pupils' attendance was improving gradually and only around two in ten inspected secondary schools had a recommendation to improve attendance in our inspections since 2017. During the pandemic, pupils' attendance rates declined rapidly and, in many cases, schools had difficulty re-engaging a minority of pupils. As a result, attendance figures across Wales have not recovered quickly enough to pre-pandemic levels. In particular, there has been a sharp rise in the number of pupils who are persistently absent. This rate has tripled since 2018 (Welsh Government, 2023a). Research suggests that those pupils who are persistently absent are 'disproportionately more likely to come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds' (Education Endowment Foundation, 2023).

The Welsh Government recently released national data for 2022-2023 on absenteeism in secondary schools. The main findings from this analysis were:

- The percentage of half-day sessions missed by secondary school-aged pupils had doubled to 12.5% between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023. This means, on average, that a pupil misses around one day a fortnight.
- Secondary school-aged pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) missed 20.6% of half-day sessions in 2022-2023, while secondary school-aged pupils who are not eligible for free school meals missed 10.2% of half-day sessions. Both of

these figures were approximately double the rates of absences during 2018-2019.

- The attendance of all ethnic groups deteriorated between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023. The decreases in attendance of most ethnic groups were generally of a similar level to those seen nationally.
- Fifteen point five per cent of half-day sessions were missed by Year 11 pupils, compared with 9.4% of half-day sessions missed by Year 7 pupils, in 2022-2023.
- The percentage of secondary school-aged pupils that were persistently absent has tripled to 16.3% between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023.
- Thirty-five point six per cent of secondary school-aged pupils eligible for free school meals were persistently absent in 2022-2023, compared with 11.2% of secondary school-aged pupils ineligible for FSM.
- Twenty-two point four per cent of Year 11 pupils were persistently absent, compared with 10.2% of Year 7 pupils, in 2022-2023. (Welsh Government, 2023a)

The variation in attendance between schools is a notable concern. Attendance rates across secondary schools range from 75% to 95%. Pre-pandemic attendance rates range from 88.6% to 97.1%. In addition, the difference in attendance between pupils eligible for free school meals and those who are not eligible varies substantially across schools. When considering the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent from school, this varies from 2.7% to 42.6% of pupils in schools across Wales.

Since the pandemic, the Welsh Government has published weekly attendance information. While this was helpful, the overall range of attendance data was not comprehensive enough to support schools and local authorities or help government officials to identify challenges early on. This is because it only provides national data, rather than including a breakdown of attendance for groups of pupils in different types of schools. For example, it does not provide the attendance of secondary and primary pupils separately for different groups of pupils.

Research tells us that 'school absenteeism is detrimental to learning, academic achievement and outcomes' (Keppens, 2023). Keppens also stated that:

> absent students receive fewer hours of instruction, miss out on student teacher, peer-to-peer and any other relevant interaction and activities that could stimulate their academic and psycho-social development, leading to negative consequences on the short and long term (2023, p.1).

In addition, the Education Endowment Foundation found that poor attendance is:

> linked to poor academic attainment across all stages as well as anti-social characteristics, delinquent activity and negative behavioural outcomes (2023, p.1).

This research, along with national data on attendance, indicates a concerning picture and highlights an urgent need to rapidly improve secondary school age attendance across Wales.

In November 2022, the Children, Young People and Education Committee in the Welsh Parliament published a report as a result of their inquiry into pupil absence. This report notes "long standing concerns about pupil absence" and provides a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government (Welsh Parliament, 2022). Some of the recommendations are similar to the recommendations in this report.

In response to this and the national concerns around pupil attendance, the Welsh Government has recently established an attendance task force to work together to identify ways in which the system can work together to improve pupil attendance rates (Welsh Government, 2023c). Alongside this, it published updated guidance on improving learning engagement and attendance (Welsh Government, 2023d). This guidance aims to outline suggested good practice and signposts further guidance and resources available to schools and settings. As part of this, the Welsh Government also changed the threshold for a pupil being persistently absent from previously being any pupils whose attendance was below 80% to those whose attendance is below 90% (Welsh Government, 2023d). This increased expectation underlines the importance of regular school attendance. The data for persistent absence in this report is based on when the Welsh Government threshold was for attendance below 80%?

Whilst recently there has been an increase in research around improving pupils' attendance, the overall quality of evidence on attendance is weak; there is limited high quality evidence on approaches to support attendance and the majority of studies have taken place in the USA (Education Endowment Foundation, 2023).

Main findings

- Prior to the pandemic, overall attendance in secondary and all-age schools was gradually improving across all pupils as well as for those eligible for free school meals. During this time, the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent from school was reducing, although it remained too high.

- Since 2020, there has been a notable increase in the percentage of pupils who are absent from school. Both authorised and unauthorised absence has increased rapidly and there has only been limited improvement in 2022-2023.

- Whilst core data sets shared with schools are helpful, it would be helpful to include additional information in order to allow schools to evaluate more robustly.

- Most schools and many local authorities understood the importance of improving pupils' attendance. However, the work to improve attendance had not had enough impact over the past two years.

- Where schools were beginning to bring about improvements in attendance, leaders had high expectations, monitored and analysed attendance rates rigorously and had effective processes to evaluate the impact of their work.

- Where schools were having difficulty improving attendance, leaders tended to believe that they were doing all they could, despite not having sufficient impact, and did not use the broad range of information available to them to track, monitor or intervene with poor attendance.

- Many schools have improved their approaches to gathering pupils' views on how they can work to improve attendance. However, these views are mainly gathered from pupils who are attending school more regularly so do not give leaders enough information about the barriers to those pupils who do not attend school well enough.

- In the most effective cases, leaders in schools have a strong focus on improving teaching and their curriculum offer to support pupils to engage effectively when they were in school.

- Overall, local authority support for improving attendance has had limited impact over the past two years. School improvement officers did not challenge or support school leaders well enough to improve this aspect of their work and, when pupils were referred to local authority services, officers did not build well enough on the work already carried out by schools. In the most effective cases, local authorities and schools worked closely together to plan and target support.

- Current financial challenges, along with the decrease in pupils' attendance, had reduced the capacity of support staff to respond to concerns. In addition,

resources to support schools to improve attendance were not always prioritised effectively.

- There were a number of barriers to improving pupils' attendance, which were increasingly difficult for schools to address. These included a decline in parental perception about the importance of good attendance, the capacity of schools to respond given the increased number of targeted pupils, and the timing of school terms and holidays.

- A particular challenge was the fact that pupils are only eligible for free transport if they live beyond a three-mile radius. School leaders had identified, that during months where there is increased rainfall and darker mornings and evenings, pupils who usually walk to school, especially those who are eligible for free school meals, generally did not attend as often.

- Over the previous two years, schools had increased their capacity to provide targeted support to improve pupils' attendance. Given the current pressures on school budgets, school leaders were concerned about the sustainability of this work. Schools would welcome longer-term, ring-fenced funding to address this important national priority.

- The school year presented additional challenges to improving pupils' attendance. School leaders noted that when terms were long, for example the autumn term lasting until late in December, pupils' attendance declined in the last few weeks of term.

- There is limited research evidence about the most effective approaches for improving attendance or to the factors that influence pupils' attendance.

- At the time of writing this report, attendance remains a concern across Wales and there is a large variation in attendance rates in individual schools across Wales.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- Strengthen planning to strategically improve attendance, including making effective use of data to identify trends and in planning long term approaches to improving pupils' attendance
- Strengthen their approach to monitoring, evaluating and improving attendance
- Strengthen their work with parents/carers to explain why good attendance is important
- Develop more effective methods to gather the views of pupils who do not attend school regularly
- Ensure that teaching and the curriculum offer engages pupils in learning

Local authorities should:

- Provide schools with regular and effective challenge and support to improve pupils' attendance and help evaluate the impact of their work
- Ensure that local authority interventions build on work already carried out by schools
- Work with schools to support them to work with parents/carers to understand the importance of good attendance

The Welsh Government should:

- Develop a national campaign to promote the importance of good attendance with parents/carers and pupils
- Consider how pupils living within the three-mile radius who are not eligible for free transport could be better supported to attend school more regularly
- Publish core data sets for attendance twice a year, including regression analysis, residuals for persistent absenteeism and year group attendance to better support schools' own evaluation processes
- Continue to provide weekly analysis of school level attendance to provide more frequent information and improve the quality of this data
- Consider how funding can be allocated more effectively to support schools to improve attendance
- Consider how reform of the school year might better support pupils to attend school more regularly
- Carry out research to identify the factors impacting on poor attendance and to discover the most effective methods of improving attendance

Data summary

Pre-pandemic attendance

In 2009, the rate of attendance in secondary schools in Wales was 91.0% (Welsh Government, 2023e). This was seen at the time by the Welsh Government as being unacceptable and improving attendance became a national priority. Improving the attendance of pupils was the subject of a range of national reviews, policies and initiatives in the following years. These included:

- National Behaviour and Attendance Review (NBAR) Report (Reid, 2008) and resulting NBAR action plan (Welsh Government, 2009)
- Minister for Education's 'Teaching Makes a Difference Address' (Institute for Welsh Affairs, 2011)
- Revised behaviour and attendance action plan (Welsh Government, 2011a)
- Secondary school banding (Welsh Government, 2011b)
- All Wales Attendance Analysis Framework (Welsh Government, 2012)
- Consortia Attendance Grant (Welsh Government, 2013a)
- National Assembly for Wales Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into Behaviour and Attendance (Welsh Parliament, 2013) and Welsh Government's response (Welsh Government, 2013b)
- Guidance on penalty notices for regular non-attendance at school (Welsh Government, 2013c)

More detail on these initiatives is available in appendix 2 of Estyn's previous thematic report on attendance (Estyn, 2014, p. 26-29).

In 2009, the Welsh Government began publishing secondary school level attendance data in the form of the All-Wales Core Data Sets. These core data sets contain a range of different graphs, charts and tables that allow schools and other stakeholders to compare the attendance of a school with that of schools that have a similar context.

Attendance featured prominently in Estyn's 2010 Common Inspection Framework and, in the following three years, improving attendance was a recommendation in nearly a third of secondary school inspections in Wales. Attendance rates did start to improve up to 2019 (Welsh Government, 2023e).

Figure 1: Attendance at secondary schools 2007/08 to 2022/23
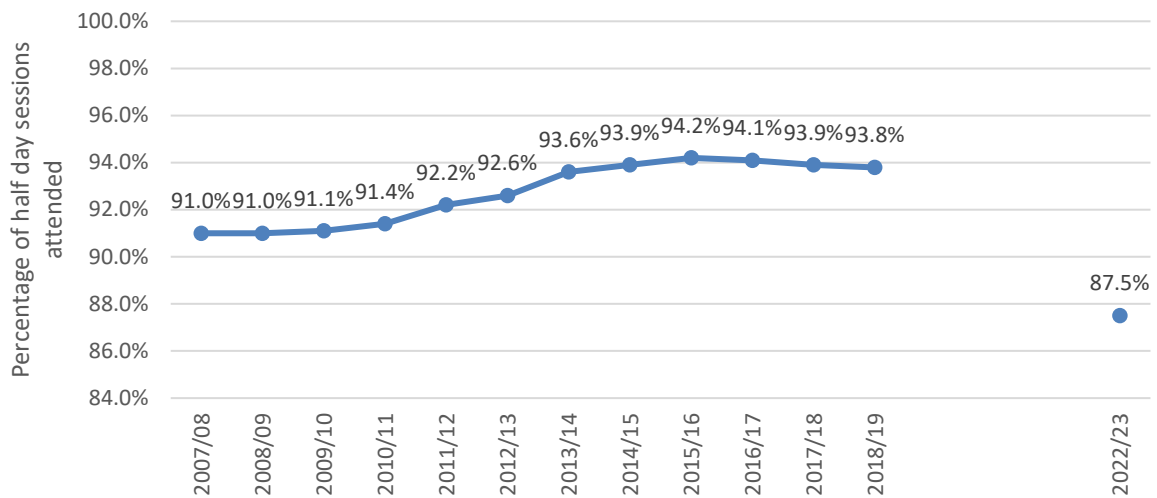
Source: Welsh Government, 2023e

Figure 1 shows attendance rates of pupils in Wales between 2007-2008 and 2022/23. In the four years between 2010-2011 and 2014-2015, the rates of attendance of secondary aged pupils increased by 2.5 percentage points. These improvements were sustained in the years following 2014-2015 with the national average consistently around 94%. Following the pandemic, the first academic year for which verified attendance was published by the Welsh Government was 2022-2023. The data shows that rates of attendance for secondary schools fell substantially following the pandemic from 93.8% to 87.5%, a decrease of 6.3 percentage points. This equates to the average pupil missing 12 more school days in an academic year. This is reflected in the increase in the number of recommendations for improving attendance that Estyn included in their reports on secondary schools in the academic year 2022-2023. In these reports, around half of schools inspected received a recommendation to improve attendance.

Since the return to school following the pandemic, attendance rates have declined and have not improved back to pre-pandemic levels.

The main findings from the recent publication of attendance for 2022-2023 were:

- The attendance of secondary school-aged pupils had declined rapidly compared to pre-pandemic rates
- The attendance of those pupils who were eligible for free school meals was notably below those of pupils who were not eligible for free school meals
- As pupils got older, their attendance generally got worse
- The rate of persistent absence had increased substantially, particularly for those pupils who were eligible for free school meals (Welsh Government, 2023a)

School approaches to improving attendance

Most schools we engaged with recognised the importance of improving attendance and many had it as a whole-school priority. However, only a very few had improved attendance so that rates had returned to close to pre-pandemic levels. A minority of schools had a strong focus on improving attendance and were prioritising resources carefully with the aim of bringing about improvements. However, the impact of schools' strategies to improve attendance was too variable.

It was clear that there was not one specific approach that reliably improved attendance and interventions that worked for some pupils did not work for others. However, it is also clear that, in the most effective schools, leaders at all levels had a relentless focus on improving attendance and set high expectations in relation to rates of attendance.

Where schools were effective in improving attendance, leaders:

- created a strong culture of improving attendance where all staff knew their role in achieving this important aim
- had high expectations of all pupils' attendance and communicated these explicitly with the whole school community
- focused well on rewarding individual pupils with notable improvements in their attendance
- worked closely with parents and carers to promote positive/improving attendance
- planned, monitored and evaluated their processes for improving attendance closely and regularly
- analysed attendance data forensically and carefully considered the attendance of all groups of pupils
- used their analysis effectively to target the best support for individuals and groups of pupils to improve their attendance
- involved pupils and parents/carers in developing the most effective support to improve individual pupils' attendance
- ensured that staff at all levels took responsibility for monitoring and improving pupils' attendance
- challenged and supported parents/carers when their children did not attend regularly, and made clear their expectations of what good attendance looks like
- promoted good attendance and helped pupils and parents/carers to understand the importance of attendance and its impact on attainment
- understood the importance of strong teaching and curriculum in order to engage pupils in school
- continually planned for improvement in attendance
- used resources effectively to target and improve attendance, for example through employing staff whose main role was to target and support pupils to improve their attendance
- worked closely with their cluster primary schools to target and support vulnerable pupils through the transition to secondary school

In the most effective schools, leaders had established a strong culture of positive attendance and engagement in learning. Leaders in these schools did not accept that they were 'doing all they can' but consistently considered the impact of their work on pupils' attendance. They celebrated the attendance of pupils who were starting to attend more frequently but also recognised that national attendance rates were low and, even if their school compared favourably with similar schools, they continued to strive to improve attendance further and to work towards pre-pandemic levels.

In these schools, leaders used their processes well to challenge and tackle poor attendance and worked regularly with pupils, parents and carers and the school community to identify and reduce any barriers to attending school. Many leaders noted an increase in the impact of mental health related issues on rates of attendance. Where schools were responding to this effectively, leaders considered the challenges facing individual pupils closely and put in place effective strategies to alleviate concerns and support pupils to return to school. They worked well with specialist services to provide tailored support to individual pupils.

Cameo: St Teilo's Church in Wales High School – whole-school approach to supporting attendance

St Teilo's Church in Wales High School developed a clear and structured approach to responding to any concerns about pupils' attendance. Leaders had high expectations of all pupils' attendance and, despite the fact they were performing well when compared with similar schools, leaders were clear that attendance rates were still 'not good enough'. To help them make more effective use of resources, leaders developed clear criteria, including boundaries of attendance for identifying different support needs when analysing pupils' attendance. These were adapted throughout the year to ensure that expectations remained high. As part of this process, staff identified the type of intervention needed for each individual pupil and allocated a case worker for them.

Leaders analysed data rigorously to identify trends in attendance, including considering groups, year groups and individuals on a regular basis. Relevant staff had access to data, monitored it closely and considered the impact of interventions regularly.

Leaders had developed helpful guidance for case workers, which provided clear instructions for engaging with pupils and their families. This helped to secure consistent approaches but also helped to develop a clear graduated response to dealing with poor attendance. Staff at all levels took responsibility for pupils' attendance, and pastoral and senior leaders analysed attendance data rigorously and regularly. As a result, the school's attendance was beginning to improve, although leaders recognised that attendance across the school remained below pre-pandemic levels.

Where schools were not improving attendance quickly enough, leaders:

- did not prioritise improving pupils' attendance well enough or ensure that all staff saw this as their responsibility

- did not have a clear enough understanding of the trends in attendance because they did not use or analyse attendance data effectively enough
- did not evaluate the impact of their strategies and so did not have a clear enough understanding of which are most effective or are not having any impact
- did not plan or adapt their curriculum well enough to support pupils to improve their attendance
- were not pro-active enough in responding to early signs of poor attendance, which can lead to pupils quickly becoming persistently absent from school
- put pupils on part-time timetables that were not planned or reviewed regularly enough and did not support them to return to good attendance levels
- used fixed-term exclusions too frequently with pupils who already have poor attendance, rather than addressing any underlying issues to support positive behaviour
- in a very few cases, had introduced asymmetric school weeks and not evaluated the impact of this on pupils' attendance or engagement in learning closely enough
- used the same approach for all pupils rather than considering individual circumstances when developing strategies to improve attendance
- allowed a culture to develop where poor attendance is too readily tolerated
- did not ensure that roles and responsibilities are organised in a way that provided leaders with sufficient capacity to tackle attendance issues, for example by giving heads of year sole responsibility rather than developing a shared approach to securing improvement

Challenges / barriers to improving secondary pupils' attendance

Parental perception

Overall, schools noted a decline in parents' and carers' perception of the importance of good attendance since the pandemic. School leaders recognised that the development of online learning during the pandemic has meant that in a number of cases, parents/carers state that they would prefer work to be set online and for pupils not to attend school in person. A recent study found that:

> "there has been a seismic shift in parental attitudes to school attendance". (Burtonshaw and Dorrell, 2023)

In addition, this study found that there has been a 'fundamental breakdown in the relationship between the school system and parents/carers across the socio-economic spectrum' (p. 12) with those parents/carers from low-income households expressing a 'fundamental mistrust of schools,' (p. 20). This has led to parents/carers no longer feeling that 'every day matters' in relation to attendance (p. 12). This perception is particularly difficult for schools to address, and leaders would welcome additional resource and support from local authorities and the Welsh Government to tackle this issue.

In the most successful cases, leaders had re-established effective links with their school community and had worked successfully with parents and carers to address any misconceptions about school, rebuild relationships and promote positive attendance. Leaders in these schools had a strong understanding of the needs of their communities and put everything possible in place to reduce any barriers to pupils attending school.

Many school leaders had recognised that in some cases parents'/carers' anxieties about their children attending the school have increased since the pandemic. This has led to more parents/carers keeping pupils home from school when they show even very mild symptoms of illness.

> **Cameo: Coedcae School – Engaging with families to evaluate and improve provision**
>
> Building strong and positive relationships with families was at the heart of Coedcae School's work. Staff invested heavily in getting to know individual families and had developed a strong culture where parents/carers were positive about visiting the school.
>
> Leaders had strong approaches to evaluation and improvement, and this included a daily analysis of data to identify any pupils that may require targeted support. This helped the school to intervene at an early stage and to engage with parents/carers in a productive way.
>
> The school had introduced structured home visits, carried out by a member of staff who had built strong relationships with specific families. This targeted work often led to individual mentoring and support for pupils and their families.
>
> Leaders regularly reviewed their curriculum and considered how adaptions may lead to help pupils attend more regularly. Alongside this, leaders had a strong focus on improving teaching to ensure that they promoted positive attitudes to learning throughout the school.
>
> The school had also introduced attendance questionnaires where they worked with 'hard to reach' families to identify any barriers to non-attendance. Leaders used this information well to inform their approaches and improvement planning processes and to build family engagement with the school.
>
> The school's attendance had improved steadily over the past two years.

Promoting positive attendance

Communicating the importance of good attendance with pupils, parents and carers is an important aspect of improving attendance overall. Since the pandemic, school leaders feel that the perception of parents, carers and pupils about the importance of regularly attending school has decreased. While many schools and some local authorities were working on promoting positive attendance, there had not been a strong enough focus on this across Wales. Many school leaders said that they would welcome support from the Welsh Government to promote the importance of regularly

attending school nationally. This would also help to promote the need for pupils to attend regularly.

Cameo: The Bishop of Llandaff High School – communicating high expectations

Leaders at the Bishop of Llandaff High School created a culture of high expectations in relation to pupils' attendance. They communicated these regularly and explicitly with parents/carers and had a clear graduated response to intervening when a pupil's attendance caused them concern. Staff at all levels had responsibility for monitoring attendance and communicating high expectations with pupils and their parents/carers.

Leaders developed a campaign to promote the need to attend school regularly, which included sharing the importance of punctuality through the "5 minutes late to every lesson equates to losing 30 minutes of learning a day campaign".

All reports to parents/carers included pupils' attendance rates and staff regularly highlighted any concerns. As a result of this work, attendance had improved over the past two years.

Pontarddulais Comprehensive School – Supporting pupils to want to attend school

Staff worked pro-actively with the school community to ensure that all pupils and their families were aware of the importance of attending school daily as well as being ready to learn. Leaders ensured that their curriculum offer and the quality of teaching inspired pupils to engage in school and that learning experiences stimulate them so that they do not want to 'miss out' on any time in school. Leaders monitor attendance robustly and use an extensive range of helpful interventions to support pupils with low attendance to improve. There is a strong team of support staff who work with families to encourage engagement. As a result of this work, between the academic years 2018-2019 and 2022-2023, the school's rate of attendance fell by a notably smaller amount than that seen nationally. Last year it was substantially above that of similar schools, although it remains slightly below pre-pandemic levels. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above the national average.

Cameo: St Alban's Roman Catholic School – promoting positive attendance

Leaders and staff regularly communicated the importance of good attendance to pupils and their families. This began, as part of the school's transition processes, when they met the Year 6 parents and carers. The school provided details of each individual pupil's attendance and made relevant links to their learning, for example highlighting what the impact of 90% attendance is on pupils' progress. The school was steadfast in its belief that developing a positive and supportive relationship with families is key to improving attendance.

The school had robust systems to ensure that it communicated effectively and sensitively to all parents/carers from the first day in school. This included a welcome email from the pupil's form tutor, early phone calls from the Welfare and Engagement Officer to support parents/carers where a pupil's attendance was starting to be a concern, and regular home visits from the well-being team.

There was a strong focus on improving attendance at all levels. Clear lines of communication were developed to ensure that form tutors, heads of year, senior leaders, the welfare engagement team and governors had a thorough understanding of attendance data and their role in improving pupils' attendance. Heads of year had weekly meetings to evaluate the impact of targeted work and line manager meetings were used to monitor progress and evaluate and amend strategies where necessary.

Travel

An important challenge identified by almost all school leaders we met with as part of this thematic report was the cost of public transport, particularly for those pupils from low income households. According to school leaders, the fact that free transport is only provided from outside of the three-mile limit was a common reason why pupils, particularly those frorm low-income households, did not attend school. Whilst three miles is considered walkable, many school leaders indicated that this would take pupils more than 45 minutes each way. During the winter months, this is particularly challenging. The cost of a return journey is often beyond the means of families whose children are eligible for free school meals. The majority of headteachers reported that, during periods of increased rainfall or storms, pupils, particularly those who are living in poverty, were less likely to attend school because parents/carers did not want them walking for prolonged periods in poor weather.

Whilst in some cases parents or carers do have the option of paying for public transport, this has a notable impact on the cost of the school day. Whilst schools were doing what they could to reduce the cost of the school day, leaders felt that pupils from low-income households tended to attend less well, particularly during winter months. Attendance rates remained lower for those pupils who are eligible for free school meals and school leaders felt this aspect made a notable contribution.

Cameo: Cefn Hengoed Community School – Removing barriers to attendance

Staff at Cefn Hengoed had worked closely with their community councillors and a local bus service to introduce a bus service for pupils within the three-mile radius at a reduced cost.

The school identified a particular challenge for pupils within this three-mile radius in attending school during poor weather and dark mornings or evenings. The average cost of a standard return bus journey would be £4. This was a notable cost, particularly for those pupils who are eligible for free school meals. The school and a local bus company had worked to offer a bus that costs £1 each way. This had helped to reduce the cost of the school day for these pupils and their families.

Alongside this work, the school had introduced a clear approach to emotionally-based school avoidance to target and support its most vulnerable learners. It introduced a helpful approach to mentoring and self-reflection to help pupils consider the importance of attending regularly. The school's 'attendance package' supported pupils to work with a trusted member of staff to self-reflect and understand why they are not attending.

This work had helped to improve attendance well over the past two years.

Funding

Many school leaders were concerned that the current pressures on budgets were making it more difficult to prioritise resources to support improvements in attendance. Whilst they recognise that the Welsh Government is providing additional grants for this work, they would welcome a proportion of this being ring-fenced to support school staffing. The most effective attendance strategies are generally costly as they involve staff working with individual pupils and their families.

In the most effective schools, leaders had prioritised resources by appointing engagement officers who work directly with families. However, with current budget pressures, schools were increasingly concerned about the sustainability of these arrangements, even though they were having a positive impact.

Most targeted funding for this aspect of schools' work was allocated through grant funding. School leaders were finding it increasingly difficult to plan strategically or sustainably for their work to improve attendance because funding was for one financial year at a time. In addition, leaders report receiving funding late in the year with only a few months to allocate and spend. This often means that they had to be reactive rather than planning for long-term impact. It also made it difficult for schools to recruit suitable staff, particularly where the employment market was competitive, as these were often temporary roles. It would be helpful for the Welsh Government to allocate ring-fenced funding over a longer period of time so that schools could increase their capacity to respond to the more challenging post-pandemic landscape.

Cluster working

Only in a few cases had secondary schools worked effectively with their cluster primary school to specifically improve attendance. In these cases, schools had collaborated to identify how they can jointly support families where siblings from both primary and secondary schools have poor attendance. This had helped to reduce duplication of work and increased the capacity to support and challenge poor attendance. However, much of this work was in the very early stages of development.

Cameo: Bassaleg School – working in partnership with cluster schools

Bassaleg School had worked well with its cluster of schools to develop and agree a cluster attendance policy. This had helped to secure a common approach to improving attendance. This meant that parents/carers had similar experiences as their children moved between primary and secondary school.

The Bassaleg Cluster employed a whole-school approach to improving attendance with class teachers, tutors, well-being teams, school support/attendance officers, designated leadership and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) all fully involved in monitoring student attendance.

Strong attendance was given a high profile across these schools with a clear aim to ensure that the pupils attended regularly and were punctual. Where this was not the case, staff followed a staged procedure designed to encourage consistent attendance.

All schools used the agreed attendance policy. This included challenging parents and carers about regular or intermittent absence and keeping them informed of any attendance-related issues. There was also an emphasis on registering pupils accurately, keeping up-to-date records, completing accurate and timely referrals and using a wide range of attendance support strategies. Working with consistent systems and principles across the cluster was helping to slowly improve pupils' attendance.

Cameo: Bishop Vaughan

The Bishop Vaughan cluster had recently employed a member of staff to work across the cluster to provide support for pupils with low attendance. This was helping to avoid duplication of work where more than one pupil from the same family requires support. Although there were signs of improving attendance, it was too early to fully measure the impact of this approach.

School holidays

Schools identified that, in particular, the late finish for Christmas and the long autumn term often meant that pupils miss more school, particularly in the weeks just before the Christmas holidays. School leaders noted an increasing decline in pupils' attendance when terms were longer than usual and where holidays were later. In

addition, attendance levels in the winter months were becoming increasingly challenging, particularly for those pupils from low-income households. School leaders were trying to ensure that these weeks at the end of term were purposeful and engaging so that pupils were encouraged to attend. However, parents/carers often reported that they did not want their children to be ill during school holidays so kept them home at the very end of term.

In addition, school leaders identified that, where the start or end of term is a short week of one or two days, generally attendance rates were low.

Other factors influencing school's ability to improve pupils' attendance

Capacity

In the most effective examples, schools had increased their capacity to respond and improve pupils' attendance. Staffing and leadership structures had been adapted to enable a proportionate number of staff to monitor, support and challenge poor attendance. Schools noted that the number of pupils they needed to support had increased substantially over the past two years and this was making it more difficult to respond effectively and in a timely way. Where strategies had the greatest impact, schools generally had designated staff with no teaching commitments so that they had sufficient time to monitor and intervene with pupils' attendance.

Where schools were having a positive impact, staff at all levels took responsibility for improving attendance. An engagement or attendance officer employed directly by the school can add important capacity to dealing with the most challenging cases. In some secondary schools, leaders had introduced well-being officers to support pastoral leaders to identify trends and respond to poor attendance. This had helped these schools to respond and intervene at an early stage to improve pupils' attendance.

Evaluation attendance and the use of data

In the most effective cases, leaders rigorously and regularly analysed attendance rates of individuals, groups of pupils, year groups and the whole school. They used this information robustly to target, challenge and support those pupils with declining or poor attendance. Senior leaders held middle leaders to account effectively, and these schools used their evaluations to support the strategic planning for improving pupils' attendance. However, the quality of evaluation and improvement related to attendance was far too variable across Wales. Often, leaders did not make effective enough use of data and information and did not have a clear enough understanding of the strategies that were having the least and most impact. Overall, the support to improve approaches to evaluation was not having enough impact.

Pupil voice

Schools were making increasing use of pupil voice to involve pupils fully in the development of strategies and to identify the types of support that may help improve attendance. However, too often this work was carried out with pupils that are in school and therefore leaders did not always gather feedback from pupils with the weakest attendance. A few schools were beginning to develop approaches to engage with pupils with lower attendance rates but generally this work was in the early stages of development.

In addition, the information gathered from pupils was not used well enough by some schools to plan for improvements.

Cameo: Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd – supporting pupils to return to school

Leaders had clear processes for identifying and targeting pupils with low attendance. After gathering pupils' views about how best they could be supported to return to school, leaders introduced a helpful approach to support pupils with poor attendance to reintegrate into school life.

Pupils with low attendance were reintroduced to school through 'Canolfan Llannerch' (the school's provision for vulnerable pupils) for a short time period, before they were reintroduced to mainstream lessons. Staff developed a detailed understanding of pupils' individual needs and provided initial well-being interventions before slowly reintroducing curriculum content. This helped pupils to build their knowledge and understanding of subjects gradually so that they felt more confident when engaging in school life.

Staff in this provision regularly reviewed pupils' progress and the school's data systems supported this well. All staff were fully aware of the progress pupils had made as they returned to mainstream lessons. This provided staff with useful information on pupil progress and reduced levels of anxiety for pupils as they returned to lessons. This had helped a number of pupils to re-engage in school well and attendance rates in Ysgol Llangynwyd had improved over the past two years.

Fixed penalty notices

During the past 12 months, schools, supported by local authorities, have begun to make more timely and targeted use of warning notices and fixed penalty notices. School leaders reported that, although a last resort, warning notices had had a positive impact in a few cases to improve attendance. However, for pupils who were persistently absent these did not always bring about the desired improvements rapidly enough.

Local authority support for improving attendance

Improving attendance was a priority in nearly all local authorities across Wales. Many had plans in place to support and challenge schools to improve attendance. Overall, however, these plans had not had enough impact. Since we resumed on-site inspection of local authorities in February 2022, we have given improving attendance as a recommendation in four of the five local authorities we have inspected at the time of this report.

In the most helpful cases, local authorities allocated Educational Welfare Officers to individual schools or clusters to work alongside school leaders to identify need and plan intervention. This helped schools and officers to jointly provide graduated support to individual pupils and their families and to ensure a joined-up approach to improving attendance.

Where local authorities were beginning to support improvements in attendance, they:

- made effective use of a broad range of data to identify trends and target support
- monitored the attendance in their schools and of groups of pupils
- had regular contact with schools and worked alongside school systems, adapting support to suit individual needs
- provided helpful support to schools to engage with families and the community
- shared effective practice regularly across their own and other local authorities
- provided helpful support and guidance to schools about the use of FPNs and warning notices

Where this work was less effective, local authorities:

- did not have effective enough systems to gather up-to-date information about pupils' attendance
- did not use attendance data rigorously enough, including considering the attendance of different groups of pupils
- did not provide timely or regular enough support to schools
- did not evaluate the impact of their work or identify priorities for improvement quickly enough
- did not ensure that school improvement officers challenged and supported school leaders sufficiently to improve pupils' attendance
- had reduced thresholds for local authority engagement, which made it difficult for schools to escalate cases at an early enough stage
- did not engage schools and settings well enough in developing their approached to improving attendance

Generally, schools appreciated the support of Educational Welfare teams, particularly in identifying individual pupils and families that required support. However, the majority felt that, when they referred cases to local authority officers for support, they often restarted interventions that schools had already used with these pupils. School leaders felt that local authorities should work with them to develop graduated

responses. In addition, many school leaders did not feel that their school improvement officers provided sufficient support or challenge about improving attendance and said they would welcome a stronger focus on this aspect of their work.

Questions to support schools when evaluating their work to improve pupils' attendance

Questions when considering rates of attendance:

- How well do pupils attend in our school? What about when compared to similar schools?
- What trends can we see in our pupils' attendance? For example, are there trends relating to the time of day, day of the week or time of year?
- How does the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals compare to that of other pupils?
- How does the attendance of pupils with additional learning needs compare to that of other pupils?
- Are there any Year groups where attendance is particularly strong or weak?
- Are there any other groups of pupils for whom attendance is a concern?

Questions for considering the support for improving pupils' attendance:

- How well do we record and analyse attendance data, and identify areas for improvement?
- How well do we promote good attendance?
- How well do we work with families and the community to support pupils with low attendance?
- How well do we respond where pupils are absent because their well-being is adversely affected when they attend school?
- How effective is our work with other agencies to support pupils with low attendance?
- If any pupils are on a reduced timetable for school attendance, are the arrangements for their education appropriate and monitored closely?

Questions when considering the impact of leadership on improving pupils' attendance:

- Do leaders have a good overview of attendance, including areas for improvement?
- How well do we as leaders plan for improvement in attendance?
- How well is the school using its resources to support good attendance?
- What impact has our work had in improving pupils' attendance?
- How accurate and robust is our analysis of attendance data?

Next steps

To improve attendance across Wales

Welsh Government	Schools	Local Authorities	Estyn
Set high expectations of attendance			
Provide more regular information to schools and local authorities to support the evaluation and improvement of attendance	Evaluate rates of attendance regularly and robustly	Support schools to improve their approaches to the evaluation of rates of attendance	Continue to promote a strong focus on attendance during inspection and follow up
Develop a national media campaign to promote the benefits of positive attendance	Strengthen communication with parents / carers to promote the importance of good attendance	Improve the levels of challenge and support to school leaders around attendance	Capture and promote effective practice in relation to attendance
Consider how funding can be better targeted to support improvements in attendance, for example exploring ways to support pupils from low income households	Improve processes to gather the views of parents / carers and pupils who do not attend regularly	Ensure that schools use funding well	
		Ensure approaches to improving attendance build effectively on schools' work	

## Detailed data analysis of attendance rates following the pandemic

Due to the pandemic, the Welsh Government did not publish verified attendance data for the academic years 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. In order to provide some information on attendance, they collected attendance from school management information systems on a weekly basis, although this data did not go through the usual quality checks (Welsh Government, 2023b). However, when the verified data for 2022-2023 was compared with this data for the academic year 2022-2023 it was found to be largely accurate. The data collected from school management information systems shows that attendance for compulsory age secondary pupils (those in school Years 7-11) for the academic year 2021-2022 was 85.2%. If this figure is compared with the official figure for 2022-2023 of 87.5% (Welsh Government, 2023a), it shows that attendance at secondary schools in Wales increased by 1.5 percentage points between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 (albeit this is a comparison of verified with unverified data).

The data from the Welsh Government's unverified weekly attendance collections suggests that this increase has not been maintained in the current academic year to date. The attendance rate for compulsory aged pupils at secondary schools during the first half term of 2023-2024 was 89.3%, which is 0.3 percentage points lower than the corresponding figure for the same period last year of 89.6% (Welsh Government, 2023b). Although we are still in the first term of the school year, normally rates of attendance are better at the start of the year and this suggests that rates of attendance have not improved this year and have remained stubbornly low. The attendance rate for the first half term this year was lower for all school years than during the corresponding period last year.

In contrast, the weekly attendance data for pupils in the primary sector showed an improving trend. In the first half term of 2022-2023, the attendance rate for pupils in Years 1 to 6 was 92.7% (Welsh Government, 2023b). During the same period this academic year, the rate had increased by 1.4% points to 93.2% (Welsh Government, 2023b).

Figure 2 shows that the rates of both authorised absence and unauthorised absence have increased substantially in 2022-2023, and that the growth in overall absence was down to the growth in both of these rates.

Figure 2: Percentage of half-day sessions of absence between 2014/15 to 2022/23

■ Percentage of half-day sessions missed for unauthorised absence
■ Percentage of half-day sessions missed for authorised absence
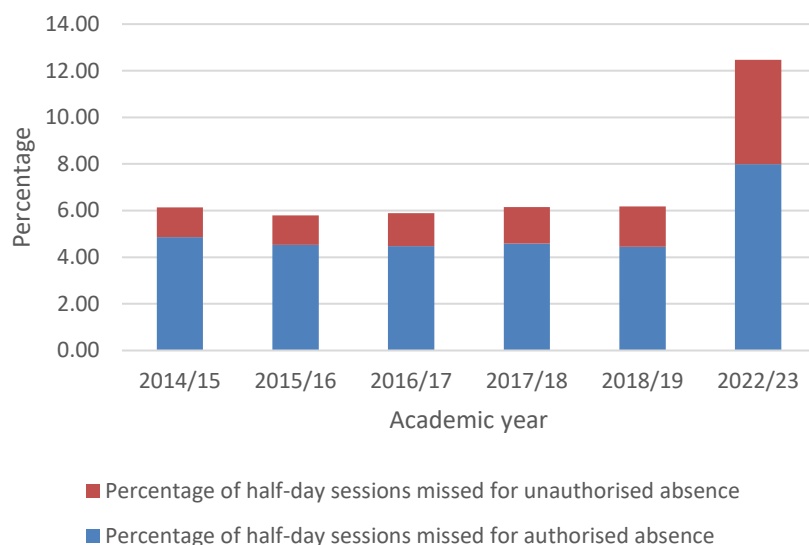
Source: Welsh Government, 2023a

The attendance of groups of pupils

Attendance by school year

Figure 3 shows the difference between the attendance of secondary school year groups in 2018-2019 and 2022-2023. The data shows that the deterioration in the attendance of secondary age pupils was markedly worse for older pupils in the secondary sector. The decrease in the rate of attendance of pupils in Year 11 is double that for pupils in Year 7.

Figure 3: Attendance of pupils by year group, 2018-2019 and 2022-2023

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
2018-2019	95.0	94.1	93.4	93.4	93.2
2022-2023	90.6	88.4	87.2	86.6	84.5
Difference	-4.4	-5.7	-6.2	-6.8	-8.7

Source: Welsh Government, 2023a

Attendance by gender

Before the pandemic, there were only small differences between the attendance of secondary age boys and girls. The difference between the genders was at most 0.3 percentage points, and in 2018-2019 there was no difference (Welsh Government, 2023a). However, Figure 4 shows that, in 2022-2023, the attendance of secondary age boys was one percentage point higher than that of girls.

Figure 4: Percentage of half-day sessions attended by gender, 2014/15 to 2022/23
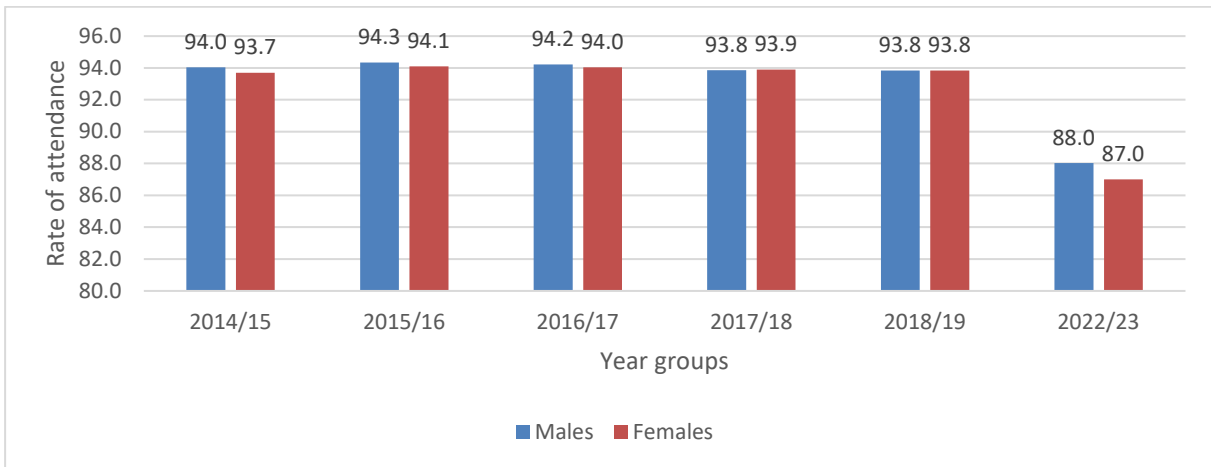
Source: Welsh Government, 2023a

When this data is broken down by school year, Figure 5 shows that, as pupils get older, boys have higher attendance rates than girls. The data shows that this is also the case in 2022-2023, but that the gender gaps have grown substantially with the gender gap in attendance in Year 10 and Year 11 at +1.7 percentage points for 2022-2023.

Figure 5: Percentage point gap between the percentage of half day sessions attended between males and females by year group between 2017/18 and 2022/23

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
2017/18	-0.6	-0.5	-0.1	0.4	0.4
2018/19	-0.5	-0.4	0.0	0.3	0.5
2022/23	-0.3	0.6	1.4	1.8	1.7
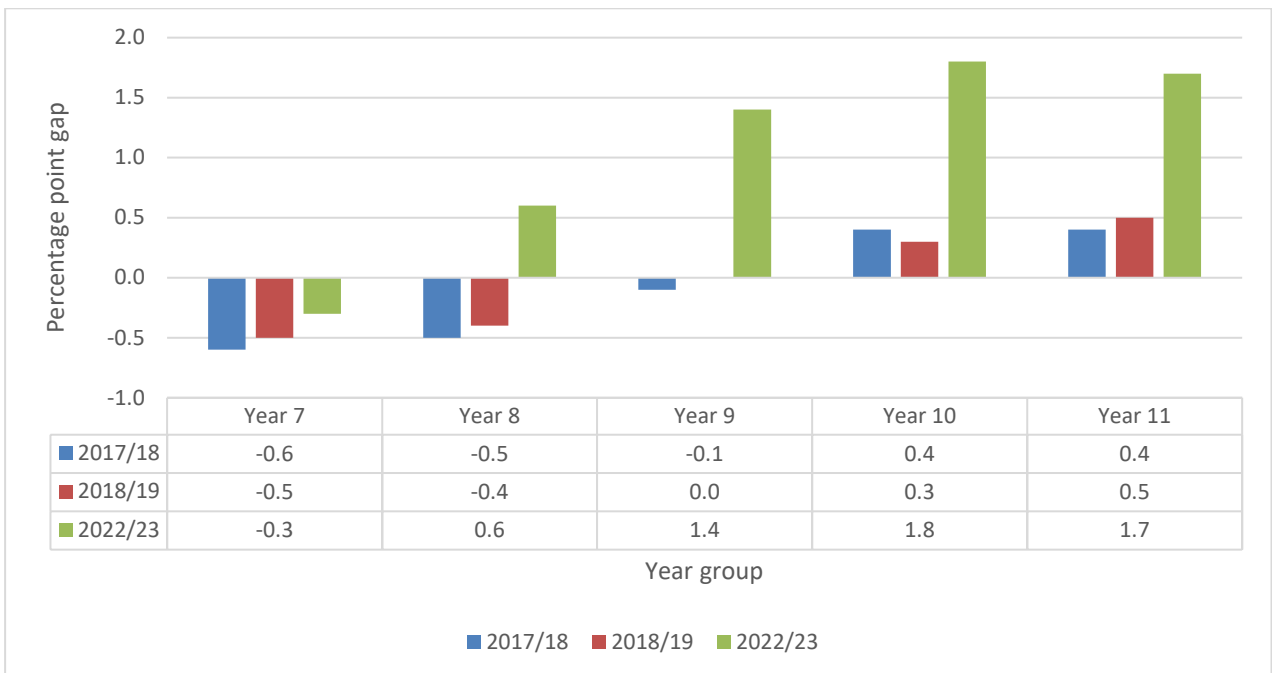
Source: Welsh Government, 2023a

Attendance by eligibility for free school meals (FSM)

In January 2023, 20.9% of compulsory aged secondary pupils were eligible for free school meals (Welsh Government, 2023f). Before the pandemic, rates of attendance for pupils eligible for free school meals remained fairly constant at around 89 to 90%, with the gap between the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers also remaining fairly consistent at around five percentage points. However, the pandemic period has had a far greater negative effect on the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. The gap between the attendance of this group and their peers has grown to over ten percentage points. In addition, the rate of attendance for these pupils has fallen below 80%. This equates to pupils eligible for free school meals missing on average one day per week or one half-term of lessons each year.

Figure 6: Attendance of pupils by FSM eligibility, 2013/14 to 2022/23

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2022/23
Eligible for FSM	89.3	89.7	90.2	90.1	89.6	89.5	79.4
Not eligible for FSM	94.5	94.7	95.0	94.9	94.7	94.7	89.8
Difference	-5.2	-5.0	-4.8	-4.9	-5.0	-5.2	-10.4

Source: Welsh Government, 2023a

Attendance by additional learning needs (ALN).

Between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023, there have been significant changes in the area of special educational needs (SEN) with the introduction of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 ('the ALNET Act') . It would therefore be difficult to compare the attendance of those pupils who had SEN in 2018-2019 with those that have ALN or SEN in 2022-2023. In 2022-2023, the attendance of pupils who had ALN or SEN was 82.5% compared with 88.5% for pupils who did not have ALN (Welsh Government, 2023a). This gap of 5.9 percentage points is bigger than the gap seen in 2018-2019 of 3.5 percentage points. This suggests that attendance of pupils who have ALN may have been affected more than their counterparts.

Attendance by ethnicity

The attendance of all ethnic groups deteriorated between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023. The decreases in attendance of most ethnic groups were generally of a similar level to those seen nationally. However, the attendance of two ethnic groups has deteriorated considerably. The attendance of Gypsy pupils decreased by 12.4 percentage points to 70.6% and that of Traveller pupils decreased by 21.9 percentage points to 63.3% (Welsh Government, 2023a).

Persistent absenteeism

Up to 2023, pupils were considered to be persistently absent if they were absent from school for at least 20% of the half-day sessions that schools were open, not including INSET days. This equated to pupils missing one day per week of their education. From 2023 pupils will now be considered persistently absent if they are absent for at least 10% of half-day sessions (Welsh Government, 2023g).

Between 2007-2008 and 2013-2014, the proportion of pupils who were persistently absent more than halved. This improvement was then sustained until 2018-2019. Figure 7 shows that the decrease in the percentage of pupils who were persistently absent followed a similar trend to the rate of overall absence. However, it can be seen that the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent has increased substantially following the pandemic. In 2022-2023, just under one in six pupils were absent for more than 20% of their education. To compound this, the average attendance in 2022-2023 for this one sixth of the cohort was 60.7%, which equates to being absent for two days in every week.

Figure 7: Overall absence and persistent absence of pupils, 2007/08 to 2022/23

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2022/23
Percentage of half-day sessions missed	9.0	9.0	8.9	8.6	7.8	7.4	6.4	6.1	5.8	5.9	6.1	6.2	12.5
Percentage of pupils persistently absent	10.0	9.3	8.9	8.7	7.2	6.2	5.0	4.4	3.9	4.0	4.1	4.6	16.3

■ Percentage of half-day sessions missed   ■ Percentage of pupils persistently absent
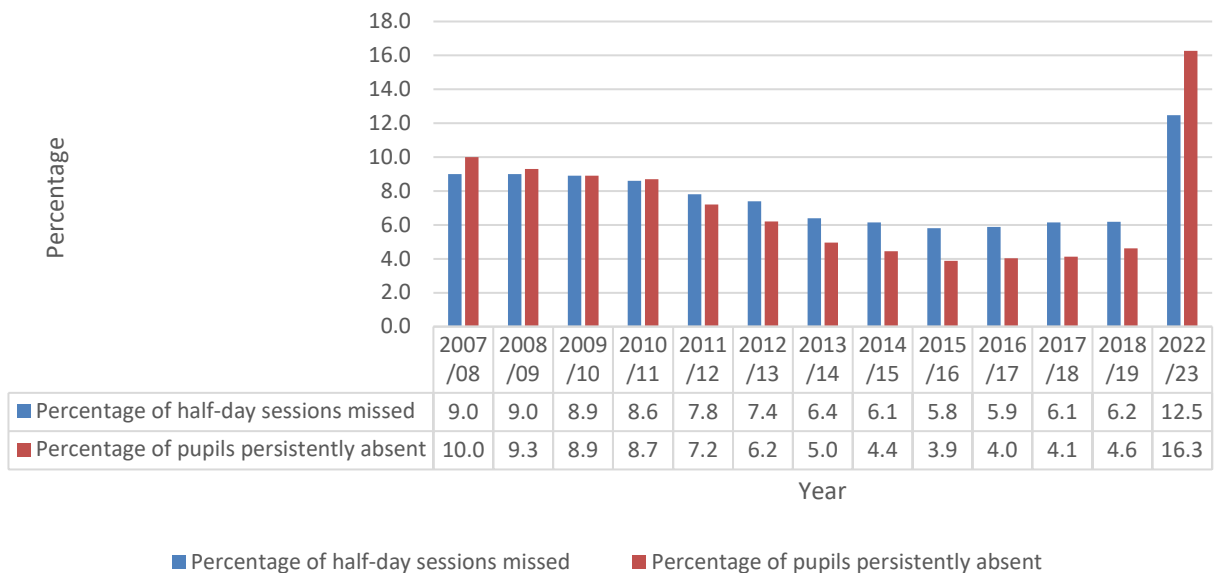
Source: Welsh Government, 2023e

Figure 8 shows that, before the pandemic, around one in eight pupils who were eligible for free school meals were absent for at least 20% of their education, compared with around 1 one in every 33 pupils who were not eligible. Both figures have deteriorated substantially following the pandemic. In 2022-2023, over a third of pupils who were eligible for free school meals missed at least 20% of their education.

Figure 8: Percentage of pupils persistently absent, by FSM eligibility, 2013/14 to 2022/23

FSM Eligibility	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2022/23
Eligible for FSM	13.7	12.4	11.1	11.5	11.8	12.7	35.6
Not eligible for FSM	3.1	2.8	2.4	2.5	2.6	3.0	11.2

Source: Welsh Government, 2023e

Variation in the effect of the pandemic on the attendance rates at different schools

Overall, attendance in Wales fell by 6.3 percentage points between 2018-2019 and 2022-2023. However, there is substantial variation in how much change there has been to the attendance of individual secondary schools in Wales. In one secondary school in Wales, the attendance rate only decreased by 1.3 percentage points, while in the school that saw the biggest fall, attendance fell by nearly 18 percentage points. Similarly, there is a large variation in the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent at different secondary schools. The lowest rate is 2.7% while it is over 40% in the school where this is highest.

In 2018-2019, the attendance rates of many schools in Wales wereclose to the national average with nearly 80% of schools within 1.5 percentage points of this figure. In 2022-2023, only around 40% of schools were within 1.5 percentage points of the national average. In 2018-2019, the difference between the school with the highest attendance in Wales and the school with the lowest attendance in Wales was 8.5 percentage points. The corresponding figure in 2022-2023 was 19.7 percentage points. The school with the lowest attendance had an attendance rate of 75.1%. Pupils at this school were, on average, absent for a quarter of their education.

Figure 9: Variation in school attendance rates, 2017/18, 2018/19, 2022/23

	2017/18	2018/19	2022/23
Percentage of schools within 1% of the national average	56.8	58.8	28.3
Percentage of schools within 1.5% of the national average	80.9	77.9	40.5
Standard deviation of the attendance rates of schools	1.4	1.4	2.9
Range of the attendance rates of schools	8.8	8.5	19.7

Note: Figures in this table are derived from schools that were operational as of the year 2022/23 and had attendance data available.
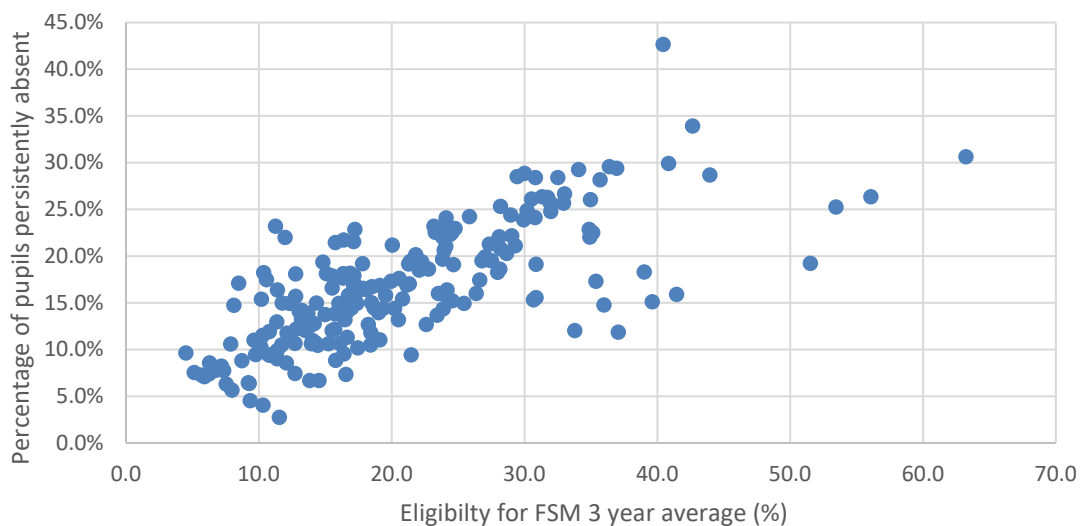
Source: Welsh Government, 2023a

Correlation between the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals and persistent absence

The core data packs that the Welsh Government publish include residuals for attendance. They signify how well the school's rate of attendance compares with the expected level of attendance for a school that has that level of eligibility for free school meals. There is a strong correlation between the three-year average percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals and the rate of attendance, so the residuals provide a robust measure of a school's attendance, which takes the school's context into account.

However, the Welsh Government does not currently produce residuals in a similar way for the percentage of pupils who are persistently absent, which means that schools do not have a robust measure against which to judge their effectiveness in tackling persistent absenteeism. Figure 10 suggests that there is a positive correlation between these factors.

Figure 10: Percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals 3 year average against percentage of pupils persistently absent, 2022/23

Source: Welsh Government, 2023a

In 2018-2019, levels of persistent absenteeism were low. However, the notable increase in these rates in 2022-2023 shows that schools need to carry out rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of their provision to tackle persistent absenteeism, which includes the analysis of comparative data. There is, therefore, currently a need for more comparative data in this area.

Methods and evidence base

The report draws on evidence from discussions with 40 school leaders, 22 local authorities and an analysis of inspection reports since we resumed inspection in February 2022. Secondary schools were selected to form part of the sample where they were not in follow-up, had not been inspected in the last six months and were not due to be inspected in the next six months. Those secondary schools that had recently participated in a thematic review were also ruled out. All discussions took place online during the autumn term 2023. The report was also informed by an open questionnaire to which 18 secondary schools responded (survey questions included below).

We also conducted a detailed analysis of the national data published in November 2023. This helped to inform discussion and identify effective practice.

Estyn would like to thank the following for their participation in this thematic review:

School	Phase	Local Authority
Eirias High School	Secondary	Conwy
Monmouth Comprehensive School	Secondary	Monmouthshire
Blackwood Comprehensive School	Secondary	Caerphilly
Coedcae	Secondary	Carmarthenshire
Ysgol Llangefni	Secondary	Anglesey
St Joseph's Catholic and Anglican High	Secondary	Wrexham
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf	Secondary	Cardiff
Chepstow Comprehensive School	Secondary	Monmouthshire
Ysgol Bryn Alyn	Secondary	Wrexham
St. Albans R.C. High School	Secondary	Torfaen
Y Pant Comprehensive	Secondary	Rhondda Cynon Taf
Haverfordwest High VC School	Secondary	Pembrokeshire
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd	Secondary	Bridgend
Bassaleg School	Secondary	Newport
Bishop Vaughan School	Secondary	Swansea
Flint High School	Secondary	Flintshire
Cefn Hengoed	Secondary	Swansea
Ysgol Y Creuddyn	Secondary	Conwy
Prestatyn High School	Secondary	Denbighshire
St Teilo's C-in-W High School	Secondary	Cardiff
Stanwell School	Secondary	Vale of Glamorgan
Ysgol Uwchradd Aberteifi	Secondary	Ceredigion
Heolddu Comprehensive	Secondary	Caerphilly

School		
Pen-y-Dre High School	Secondary	Merthyr Tydfil
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Bro Edern	Secondary	Cardiff
Tredegar Comprehensive School	Secondary	Blaenau Gwent
Mountain Ash Comprehensive School	Secondary	Rhondda Cynon Taf
Ysgol Dyffryn Aman	Secondary	Carmarthenshire
Ysgol Maesydderwen	Secondary	Powys
Ysgol Eifionydd	Secondary	Gwynedd
Caldicot School	Secondary	Monmouthshire
St Joseph's RC School and 6th Form Centre	Secondary	Neath Port Talbot
St Joseph's Roman Catholic High School	Secondary	Newport
St Joseph's Catholic & Anglican High School	Secondary	Wrexham
Ysgol Ardudwy	Secondary	Gwynedd
Maesteg Comprehensive School	Secondary	Bridgend
Lliswerry High School	Secondary	Newport
Ysgol David Hughes	Secondary	Anglesey
Penweddig school	Secondary	Ceredigion
Ysgol Y Strade	Secondary	Carmarthenshire
Greenhill School	Secondary	Pembrokeshire
Ysgol Bro Dinefwr	Secondary	Carmarthenshire
Ysgol Emlyn	Secondary	Carmarthenshire

Survey Questions

1. Please select your school from the drop-down list:

2. Please select your local authority from the drop-down list:

3. Please select your role from the list below:

Headteacher

Deputy/assistant headteacher

Attendance officer

Other (please specify):

4. Which three strategies have you found to be the most effective in improving attendance? Please outline briefly why.

5. Which of the following are the biggest factors that contribute to poor attendance in your school? Please rank the factors in order of impact, with 1 being the biggest factor.

Emotional health issues

Lack of access to transport

Lack of interest in school

Curriculum related issues

Socio-economic factors

Bullying or harassment

Physical health issues

Family issues

Other (please specify):

6. **What do you perceive to be the main barriers to improving attendance?**

7. **Are you satisfied with the support you receive as a school for improving attendance?**

    Very satisfied
    Satisfied
    Unsure/no opinion
    Dissatisfied
    Very dissatisfied

Please explain why?

8. Are you satisfied with the support available to families to improve attendance?

Very satisfied
Satisfied
Unsure/no opinion
Dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied

Please explain why?

9. Is there additional support you would like to receive?

10. Would you like to take part in future research on attendance, such as interviews or focus groups? If so, please provide your name and email address below.

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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