

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

REVIEW OF SCHOOL ABSENCE IN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To consider the conclusions and recommendations of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel in relation to a Review of School Absence in North Lincolnshire.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 At its meeting held on 17 March 2010, the council considered a report of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel in relation to a Review of School Absence in North Lincolnshire.
- 2.2 The report was approved by council and referred to cabinet for consideration of the recommendations with a view to the preparation of an action plan.
- 2.3 The panel completed its review in February 2010. It was carried out with a brief -
- To explore good practice relevant to improving and maintaining school attendance across North Lincolnshire.

The objectives of the review were to -

- Increase awareness and understanding of issues pertinent to school attendance.
- Ensure the policies and procedures currently in place are working effectively with regard to authorised absence and to reduce unauthorised absence.
- Explore the trends in school attendance data in North Lincolnshire as evidenced by the increased awareness of the local work being undertaken to improve attendance.

- Produce recommendations to support the work in North Lincolnshire to continue to progress and maintain improvements in school attendance.

2.4 Following its review the panel made 17 detailed recommendations. A copy of the conclusions and recommendations are attached as an appendix to the report.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 There are no options associated with this report.

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

4.1 There may be some resource implications associated with the recommendations when they are implemented.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

5.1 There may be other implications associated with the implementation of the recommendations which will be highlighted in any action plan.

6. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

6.1 The panel consulted widely with other scrutiny members and officers and other organisations and individuals in relation to the preparation of the original report.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That the report and recommendations be approved and adopted.

7.2 That the Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services prepare an action plan in response to the recommendations of the report for submission to a future meeting of cabinet.

SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - Report of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel

THE PANEL'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence presented during this investigation, as detailed in the panel's findings and considerations, the conclusions and recommendations of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel are as follows: -

LATENESS, REGISTRATION AND TERM TIME HOLIDAYS

The panel supports the view that developing and encouraging student and parental aspirations will improve attendance and attainment. The panel found some good examples of this where schools effectively promote the importance and legal requirement of good punctual attendance to pupils and their parents/carers. A few minutes late every day, or one term time holiday can have a detrimental effect on a pupils learning as seen in the findings. It was also evident that schools were implementing different time/reasons for late registration across the authority.

RECOMMENDATION 1

That effective use of communications and media by the Local Authority 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.

RECOMMENDATION 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 attendance, procedures for attending medical appointments and the legalities of term-time holidays.

RECOMMENDATION 3

That consideration should be given to standardising the closure of registers across the authority as outlined in the DCSF guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION 4

That the local authority examine the possibility of negotiating with travel agencies a North Lincolnshire wide holiday discount scheme for trips involving children during school holidays.

GOOD PRACTICE

The panel has seen evidence of some effective procedures to improve attendance, including School Attendance Officers, PCSOs on school sites, ongoing involvement of the EWS, the input from the PFSS, and the effective use of non-bureaucratic systems for monitoring attendance and this should be built upon and maintained.

RECOMMENDATION 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 local authority and provided to all schools, along with continuous training to be provided by the authority on all aspects of absences to all teachers.

RECOMMENDATION 6

That further communication with Humberside Police be sought as a priority in order to reinstate the truancy patrols reinstated as soon as possible, especially with the help of the PCSOs who are designated to spend time in individual schools.

RECOMMENDATION 7

That all schools consider using the text messaging service to alert parents/carers when their child is late or absent from school without explanation.

RECOMMENDATION 8

That the local authority 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.

RECOMMENDATION 9

That future funding and resources be investigated in order to increase the support and usage of the PFSS.

ELECTRONIC SYSTEM

The panel was impressed with the outcomes and mechanisms of the Capita SIMS system used within the majority of North Lincolnshire's schools.

It enabled the EWOs to monitor figures and provide relevant support where and when required. Unfortunately, as described in this report not all schools are using the same information system and this has therefore caused difficulties for the EWS when collecting data.

RECOMMENDATION 10

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 EWO's can easily collect and assess all attendance figures, which in turn would help them provide earlier support and assistance when required.

POLICY AND GUIDANCE

The local authority sets particularly challenging targets to reduce absenteeism and improve attendance and continues to make good progress. However the panel heard recurring evidence throughout this review for the requirement for blanket policies/guidance to be provided to schools on all aspects of absenteeism.

RECOMMENDATION 11

That the local authority's draft Code of Conduct and the DCSF guidance are issued to all schools immediately for implementation, and that training be provided where necessary.

RECOMMENDATION 12

That the local authority investigates the difficulties caused by non-attendance of children from the travelling community, and strategies be implemented for schools to be able to account for these situations.

RECOMMENDATION 13

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 respective Head teachers to converse and agree on the same decision.

GENERALLY

Overall, the panel felt that this was a very important and interesting review. The panel welcomes the local authority commitment to raising the attendance levels of pupils in North Lincolnshire and would like to emphasise that identified priorities should be properly funded and resourced in order to ensure the continuum of improvement is maintained.

RECOMMENDATION 14

That the local authority 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 and truancy.

RECOMMENDATION 15

That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services monitors closely and regularly the data for schools and reviews local strategies to ensure that resources are directed to those schools needing to improve.

RECOMMENDATION 16

That this review be re-visited in 12 months time.

RECOMMENDATION 17

That everyone involved throughout this review be thanked for their participation and contributions.