

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 13 FEBRUARY 2009

ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCE 2007/08

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To advise Governance and Scrutiny Committee Members of school pupil attendance and absence in East Ayrshire schools.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. On an annual basis the Scottish Government publishes the Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools report. This document contains the results of the attendance and absence survey for 2007/08. Information relates to local authority and mainstream grant aided schools only.
- 2.2. This Governance and Scrutiny paper summarises the findings of the Scottish government report in relation to East Ayrshire. Appendix 1 sets out a number of qualifications in the interpretation of this data.

3. PERFORMANCE IN EAST AYRSHIRE SCHOOLS - ATTENDANCE

- 3.1. In East Ayrshire the overall rate of attendance was reported at 92.9 per cent, virtually unchanged from 93.0 per cent in 2006/07 and above the 92.6 per cent reported in 2005/06. The overall Scottish rate of attendance was 93.2 per cent, compared to 93.3 per cent in 2006/07.
- 3.2. Nationally, the range in attendance rates varies between 91.1 per cent in Glasgow to 95.6 per cent in East Renfrewshire. East Ayrshire is placed seventh bottom if every authority is ranked.
- 3.3. When compared against similar local authorities East Ayrshire has the second lowest attendance rate in the comparator family.

	% Attendance			
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	Variance
Clackmannanshire	93.6	93.8	93.8	0.0
Falkirk	92.2	93.1	93.4	0.3
North Ayrshire	92.5	92.8	93.0	0.2
North Lanarkshire	91.9	91.9	92.1	0.2
West Lothian	93.5	93.7	93.7	0.0
East Ayrshire	92.6	93	92.9	-0.1

- 3.4. Nationally, the rate of attendance for primary schools has decreased slightly from 95.3 in 2006/07 to 95.1 per cent in 2007/08.

- 3.5 In East Ayrshire the overall primary attendance rate has increased from 94.6 per cent in 2006/07 to 95.0 per cent in 2007/08.
- 3.6 Nationally, the range in attendance rates varies between 93.1 per cent in Glasgow to 95.5 per cent in East Renfrewshire. East Ayrshire is placed eighth bottom if every authority is ranked.
- 3.7 When compared against similar local authorities, East Ayrshire has the fourth highest attendance rate in the comparator family.

	% Attendance - Primary		
	2006/07	2007/08	Variance
Clackmannanshire	94.6	95.4	0.8
Falkirk	95.1	95.4	0.3
North Ayrshire	94.1	94.8	0.7
North Lanarkshire	94.0	94.6	0.6
West Lothian	94.6	95.4	0.8
East Ayrshire	94.6	95.0	0.4

- 3.8 Nationally, the rate of attendance for secondary schools has increased from 90.6 per cent in 2006/07 to 90.9 per cent in 2007/08.
- 3.9 In East Ayrshire, the overall secondary attendance rate was 90.4 per cent up significantly from 87.2 per cent in 2006/07.
- 3.10 Nationally, the range in secondary attendance rates varies between 88.4 per cent in Glasgow to 94.4 per cent in East Renfrewshire. East Ayrshire is placed sixth bottom if every authority is ranked.
- 3.11 When compared against similar local authorities, East Ayrshire is second bottom in the comparator family.

	% Attendance - Secondary		
	2006/07	2007/08	Variance
Clackmannanshire	88.3	91.5	3.2
Falkirk	87.2	90.8	3.6
North Ayrshire	85.9	90.7	4.8
North Lanarkshire	85.7	89.0	3.3
West Lothian	88.4	91.5	3.1
East Ayrshire	87.2	90.4	3.2

4. PERFORMANCE IN EAST AYRSHIRE SCHOOLS – ABSENCE

- 4.1 The overall absence rate in East Ayrshire has remained consistent at 7.0 per cent in 2007/08 (6.9% in 2006/07). East Ayrshire has the seventh highest absence rate in Scotland.

- 4.2 East Ayrshire has the second highest absence rate in the comparator range (minimum 6.0% and maximum 7.8%).
- 4.3 Within the overall East Ayrshire absence rate of 7.0 per cent, 3.5 per cent of days were recorded as sickness.
- 4.4 The second most commonly reported reason for absence in East Ayrshire continues to be “attending but late”, which accounted for 0.7 per cent of days. This is followed by “other authorised absence” at 0.6 per cent.
- 4.5 Of days were lost in East Ayrshire 0.5 per cent were due to unauthorised absence. This is consistent with 2006/07 and remains below both the national and comparator family average.

5. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE IN SCHOOLS

- 5.1 The Education Service has made a commitment to Improved Attendance and Levels of Inclusion as set out in Priority to Improvement 2007-2010. Fundamentally, for children to learn effectively, they need to attend education on a full-time basis. Ensuring good attendance requires more than efficient registration processes. The Department priorities are to establish, through the Curriculum for Excellence, an interest in learning from pupils of all abilities. The aim is to ensure the curriculum is relevant and accessible for all pupils, irrespective of ability or interest. Such a programme which meets learners needs encourages school attendance and motivates pupils to succeed. These programmes capitalise on curriculum flexibility, vocational based college courses, Princes Trust XL programmes, enterprising education, cultural and sporting activities and work experience. These activities will continue and further develop across the authority.
- 5.2 In addition to 5.1 schools need clear guidelines to assist them to manage attendance. An updated robust policy which identifies the responsibilities of schools and core support teams (Social Work will assist in this) is essential. The Pathways to Inclusion Group has recently established a short-life attendance working group with a range of educational and social services officers, head teachers and psychologists to prepare such guidelines for schools. These will be ready by Easter and communicated to schools for a roll-out in the third term. The success of these initiatives in further raising attendance levels across our schools will be closely tracked.

6. POLICY/LEGAL/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Nil.

7. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This report is linked to the following Community Planning Indicators:

- Promoting Community Learning
- Improving Opportunities
- Improving Community Safety

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Nil.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (i) Invite the Executive Director to continue to report annually on attendance and absence; and
- (ii) otherwise, note the contents of the report.

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Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

KMcK
January 2009

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

Members wishing further information should contact Kenneth McKinlay, Principal,
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IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER

Kenneth McKinlay, Principal, Quality Improvement

Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools 2007/08

1. The data in this publication reports the recorded information on pupils' attendance and absence. However, these records are affected by ongoing differences in recording procedures across local authorities and over time. This effects all previous years' data and means that comparisons between local authorities and over time for certain absence reasons; sickness and truancy in particular, are not reliable. However comparisons of overall attendance, combined authorised and unauthorised absence and temporary exclusions are still comparable across local authorities and over time.
2. The data suggest that several local authorities use "other authorised absence" as the initial default for absence, with the resulting danger that unexplained absence goes unrecorded. In 2007/08 there were still four authorities (Argyll and Bute, Glasgow City, Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire) who reported high rates of "other authorised absence", where analysis of the data suggests that much of this absence is likely to be either sickness or truancy.
3. Due to these ongoing concerns over the quality and consistency in the recording of the reasons for absence, the information on absence has been amalgamated so that only overall absence rates are shown in the main publication. Tables showing the breakdowns by absence reason have been included but are not considered to be of National Statistics quality and should be treated with caution and provided for information only.
4. Furthermore, individual local authorities may have progressively implemented the guidance on the recording of reasons for absence creating a further problem with year on year comparisons of absence reasons on national level as well as comparisons between local authorities.
5. The Scottish Government guidance also states that family holidays during term time should only be authorised under exceptional circumstances. Although there are still a large number of authorised holidays some local authorities have made noticeable improvements in their implementation of the guidance.