

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE - 6 FEBRUARY 2001

ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCE OF SCHOOL PUPILS 1997/98 TO 1999/2000

Report by Director of Educational & Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To inform Members of Education Committee of the main contents of the Scottish Executive report "Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools 1997/98 to 1999/2000".

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Scottish Executive report "Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools 1994/95 to 1996/97" was issued recently by the Quality Standards and Audit Division of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI). It is one of the "Information for Parents" series which forms part of the HMI Audit Division's drive to collect and issue statistical data in relation to the school sector of Scottish Education.
- 2.2** Other, similar reports dealing with the issue of attendance have been the subject of separate reports to Committee.

3. CONTENTS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1** The Scottish Executive report deals with three main areas of data covering the last three academic years:
- Attendance
 - Authorised absence
 - Unauthorised absence

Attached as Appendix 1 is a statement on the definitions relating to each of these categories; together with the legal position on attendance.

- 3.2** The figures provided by the report cover primary and secondary schools together with summary statistics for East Ayrshire and Scotland. This information is supplemented by a basic analysis accompanied by simple graphs.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 The main results of the report for East Ayrshire are:

For Primary Schools:

- 5.3% authorised absence for the last 3 years
- a level of authorised absence directly comparable with the national average
- 0% unauthorised absence for the last 3 years
- a level of unauthorised absence better than the national average
- in 1999/2000 9.5 days absence per pupil on average
- authorised absence ranged between 3% and 8%
- This represents an improvement on figures for the previous 3 years.

For Secondary Schools

- 10% authorised absence in 1999/2000 (11% in 1998/99, 11% in 1997/98)
- authorised absence 1% above the national average in 1999/2000
- 1% unauthorised absence for the last 3 years
- a level of unauthorised absence directly comparable with the national average
- in 1999/2000, 19.5 days authorised absence per pupil plus 1.5 day unauthorised absence per pupil
- authorised absence ranged between 7% and 12%
- This represents a significant improvement on figures for the previous 3 years.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 On the whole, East Ayrshire statistics are in-line with the national average. The figures over the last 3 years indicate improvements in both primary and secondary schools, however, there is no room for complacency in attendance, and this issue is subject to constant review by the department in partnership with headteachers.

6. FINANCIAL/LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Nil

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that Member of the Education Committee:

- (i) note the contents of this report

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services

GS/SB
15 January 2001

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPER

1. Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools 1997/98 to 1999/2000,
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE 2000

Members requiring further information should contact Graham Short, Head of Schools (Tel: 01563 576089).

Appendix 1

Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools: 1997/98 to 1999/2000

1. The law and attendance

What the law says about attendance and absence is set out in Section 30 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. It places a duty on **parents** of school age children to provide education for their children either by attendance at a public school or by other means. The responsibilities of parents are highlighted further in *The Parents' Charter in Scotland* (1995) which explains parents' responsibilities to ensure that their children attend school regularly.

The responsibilities of **schools** for arrangements to ensure attendance are set out in regulations. They require day schools to keep attendance registers and to record the absence of pupils for each morning and afternoon school session and require education authorities to record the authorised and unauthorised absence of pupils for all stages from P1 to S5.

Education authorities have powers to enforce the statutory requirements on school attendance by making attendance orders, by referring children whose attendance is unsatisfactory to the Reporter to the Children's Panel or by reporting parents of children who do not attend to the Procurator Fiscal with a view to prosecution. Education authorities use a range of strategies to try to avoid absence reaching the point where such measures are necessary .

2. Recording attendance and absence

2.1 *Categories of absence*

The SOED Circular 1/95 and SOEID Circular 10/95 gave specific guidance to schools and education authorities. These circulars defined attendance, and specified the two categories for the recording of absence in school handbooks: authorised and unauthorised.

Attendance was defined as:

participation in the programme of educational activities arranged by the school.

In addition to actual attendance within the school premises, it covered:

- work experience;
- educational visits;
- day and residential visits to outdoor centres;
- college/consortium school study;
- interviews and visits relating to further and/or higher education;
- debates, sports, musical or theatrical productions etc. arranged by, or in conjunction
- with, the school ;
- activities in connection with psychological services;
- school medical examinations off-site;
- hospital tuition

Appendix 1 (continued)

Authorised absence was defined as:

- sickness;
- medical and dental treatment;
- bereavement;
- domestic circumstances relating to exceptional hardship at home;
- no school within walking distance and no transport arrangements;
- study leave;
- religious observance;
- family holidays where attendance is otherwise satisfactory;
- meetings prior to, and in, court;
- attendance at, or in connection with, a Child Care Review;
- attendance at, or in connection with, a Children's Hearing; D weddings of immediate family;
- certified debates, sports, musical or theatrical productions not arranged by, or in conjunction with, the school;
- extended visits overseas to relatives;
- sanctioned, extended absence in relation to children of travelling families.

Unauthorised absence was defined as:

- temporary exclusions arising from incidents in or out of class;
- truancy, an application having been made to the education authority in relation to an attendance order;
- truancy, an appeal having been made to the Sheriff in relation to an attendance order;
- family holidays where attendance is otherwise unsatisfactory;
- truancy, defined as unauthorised absence from school, for any period, as a result of premeditated or spontaneous action on the part of the pupil, parent or both
- unexplained absence.

Returns were sought from education authorities on authorised absence and unauthorised absence, in terms of the number of half days pupils were absent according to the categorisation above. Returns on exclusions were sought in terms of the total number of pupils excluded/removed from the register of a school and in terms of the number of half days pupils were temporarily excluded. Where pupils were excluded/removed from the register of school, their absence arising from the exclusion was not taken into account in calculating the school's attendance and absence rate.

Appendix 1 (continued)

2.2 CALCULATION OF FIGURES IN THIS REPORT

The total number of possible attendances for a school is calculated by totalling the possible attendances for all pupils while they were on the school register.

The advantage of having figures for attendance and absence for the whole year is that they are less likely to be distorted by seasonal factors, such as study leave and examinations.

The figures for education authority attendance and absence and the figures for absence in schools are given as percentages. They have been rounded up or down for clarity. As a result they may not add up to 100%. For example, 88.3% becomes 88% and 94.9% becomes 95%.

The average number of half days absence for each pupil in the education authority tables and in the school information assumed 380 half days in the school session, except where indicated. This average figure was for guidance and obviously the situation was more complex than this because some pupils were absent more than this number of half days and others were absent for fewer half days.

2.3 NATIONAL AND EDUCATION AUTHORITY AVERAGES

The national and education authorities' average percentages in primary schools and secondary schools for attendance, authorised absence and unauthorised absence and figures for half days absence include in the calculations all education authority primary and secondary schools, grantaided schools and self governing schools in Scotland.

Points to remember

- *Each morning and afternoon of each school day counts as a separate possible attendance.*
- *All percentages in the report relate to the total number of possible attendances.*
- *The figures are averaged over the whole year so they are less likely to be distorted by seasonal factors.*
- *The percentage figures have been rounded for clarity of presentation and as a result they may not add up to 100%.*
- *All education authority primary and secondary schools, grantaided schools and self governing schools are included in the national and education authority information.*

Information on attendance and school costs is also published in school handbooks.

AGENDA