

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

EVERY CHILD EVERY DAY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE STRATEGY 2014 - 2017

MAY 2014



STRONG HERITAGE | STRONG FUTURE
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
TREFTADAETH GADARN | DYFODOL SICR

Contents

1. Introduction	P.3
Who is responsible for school attendance?	P.4
What is the role of schools?	P.4
What is the role of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service?	P.6
What is the role of the Youth Engagement and Participation Service?	P.7
What is the role of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service?	P.8
2. Context	P.9
Policy context	P.9
Attendance rates in Rhondda Cynon Taf	P.10
3. Delivering the Strategy	P.11
4. Monitoring the Strategy	P.14
5. Conclusion	P.16

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This strategy is founded on the ethos of the original School Attendance Strategy 2011-13, with consideration for the developments that have been made since its launch. This document sets out the current situation regarding school attendance levels in Rhondda Cynon Taf, together with the steps the Council will take, in partnership with school governing bodies, head teachers, parents, local businesses and community groups to improve school attendance rates over the next three years.
- 1.2 This strategy is intended to build upon the existing framework for continuous improvement in school attendance and attainment in all educational establishments in Rhondda Cynon Taf, whilst accounting for developments that are underway within the Central South Consortium and its remit in supporting improvements in attendance levels across the wider region.
- 1.3 In addition, the introduction of the new Youth Engagement and Participation Service will further add to the range of intervention available to pupils who are experiencing barriers to accessing their education and learning entitlements.
- 1.4 Together, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and the Central South Consortium are committed to working with schools and wider partners to improve school attendance and punctuality across the five Local Authorities. Underpinning this commitment is the collective understanding that unless children and young people attend school regularly and punctually, they will not be able to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them and will not achieve to their true potential.
- 1.5 Building upon the foundations set by the 2011-2013 strategy, it is essential that school attendance be a shared priority across wider partners if it is to make the significant changes that are required. Therefore, the vision for the coming three years is to engage with additional partners, both within the Local Authority and beyond to ensure this priority is reflected in their own plans and objectives.
- 1.6 Ensuring the wellbeing and safeguarding of all pupils requires cohesive local partnerships to achieve positive results for young people, with the Consortium, Local Authority, Schools and partners being focused on providing the most appropriate opportunities for every young person to fulfil their potential. The Local Authority must ensure that such opportunities are made available to all young people through the effective deployment of services and continued and sustained improvements in attendance levels year on year.
- 1.7 The added focus of the Consortium on attendance matters will ensure that there is a collaborative approach across all five Local Authorities, providing consistent and coherent communication to schools, pupils and parents, regardless of their geographical location.

Who is responsible for school attendance?

- 1.8 The legal requirements for school attendance are set out in the Education Act 1996; Children Act 1989; Crime and Disorder Act 1998; and Registration Regulations.
- 1.9 Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, **parents** have a legal duty to ensure their children receive efficient full time education that is suitable to their children's age, ability and aptitude, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Where there is sufficient evidence that parents are not fulfilling this legal duty, court proceedings may be instituted under Section 444 (1) and/or (1A) of the Education Act 1996.
- 1.10 The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010, identify the duty **schools** have to ensure that clear and efficient registration processes and practices are in place and that those practices are accessible to the Local Authority for monitoring purposes, when required. A school register is a legal document that may be required to be presented as court evidence in Local Authority prosecutions for non-attendance. **It is an offence for schools not to maintain accurate registers.**
- 1.11 Under section 437 of the Education Act 1996, the **Local Authority** has a duty to ensure that a child for whom they are responsible is receiving a suitable education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Section 436A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires that Local Authorities must make arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the identities of children residing in their area who are not receiving a 'suitable education'.
- 1.12 It is the duty of the **Local Authority** to ensure that parents and schools carry out their responsibilities and this duty is devolved to the Attendance and Wellbeing Service.
- 1.13 Whilst the legal responsibilities for ensuring registered pupils attend school regularly rests with schools and the Local Authority, the Welsh Assembly expects a strong Consortium approach to delivering improved and sustained levels of schools attendance with funding in place to August 2014 to initiate a strong collaborative framework.

What is the role of schools?

- 1.14 Schools have a statutory duty under section 175 Education Act 2002 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Estyn inspection framework places a high expectation on the wellbeing element of school responsibilities which is closely linked and had direct links to effective registration systems and active, whole school monitoring of pupil absence in order to challenge, support and promote regular school attendance as well as promote a culture of safety through the school .
- 1.15 In addition to current national legislation and Estyn guidance, RCT commissioned an external review (November 2013) of school practices and an internal audit (July 2013) of school registers. Recommendations from this commissioned work resulted in a number of expectations on schools. These recommendations include, but are not limited to the following:

- All secondary schools are to nominate a Senior Attendance Lead with responsibility for the strategic management of attendance within the school. Their role should include compliance management of registration practices, analysis of attendance data both at whole school and cohort level to identify the areas for improvement/action, and, act as the initial point of contact with the school's Governing Body and Local Authority for high level attendance matters;
- Improve the quality of strategic decision making in terms of improving attendance with more robust self evaluation and subsequent action planning practices in place to drive the priority forward;
- Strengthen the links with the Governing Body, ensuring information is effectively disseminated upon which strategic decisions can be made.

- 1.16 School Improvement Plans should highlight attendance as a priority, reflecting the commitment to reducing absence levels using a whole school approach across the wider school management structure. The School Improvement Service will, through improved working practices with the Attendance and Wellbeing Service, be able to take more informed challenges to schools which are not highlighting attendance as a priority, and monitor school progress to targets. Being included in the SIP will ensure that attendance maintains a high profile as a standing item on the SLT meeting agenda.
- 1.17 To support the objectives in the SIP, all schools should have a whole school attendance policy, which sets out how attendance is managed and what monitoring systems are in place. This should be actively supported by every member of staff and endorsed and monitored by the governing body. The Attendance Policy should clearly outline individual staff responsibilities be readily available to newly appointed staff and used as part of the induction process.
- 1.18 A child/young person version of the policy should be developed in conjunction with pupils to ensure it is meaningful, fit for purpose and understood by all individuals and their parents/guardians to promote the benefits of attending school.
- 1.19 Schools should operate an efficient First Day absence procedure to ensure that parents are aware when their child is not in school and have a standardised system for initiating and maintaining contact with parents regarding matters of absence and punctuality.
- 1.20 Regular monitoring of attendance data across the whole school, key stages, year groups and classes is essential for a school to understand attendance issues, as is the monitoring of the attendance of particular vulnerable groups (e.g. Looked After Children, children on the Child Protection Register, excluded pupils, those with special educational needs, young offenders, young carers etc). Only upon analysing the attendance information can a school determine where it needs to improve and, therefore, direct resources accordingly and inform service changes. Schools are actively encouraged to provide appropriate intervention for all pupils and not rely on the limited resources of the AWS to intervene once a pupil has fallen below the 86% threshold.
- 1.21 All schools should be able to provide data on:
- Overall and persistent absence levels for all pupils, year groups and other significant cohorts;

- Individual pupils' attendance, unauthorised and authorised absence (by code), exclusions, lateness, and dual registration;
- School and cohort level attendance data by code.

What is the role of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service?

- 1.22 The Attendance and Wellbeing Service (AWS) provides support to schools, pupils and parents to ensure regular attendance and address problems relating to absenteeism. The Attendance and Wellbeing Officers (AWO's) liaise with other agencies and provide an important link between home and school helping parents and teachers to work in partnership in order that pupils benefit from the educational opportunities available locally.
- 1.23 The principle role of the AWS is to contribute to the Local Authority and schools' drive for school effectiveness by ensuring:
- Attendance is integral to school systems and processes;
 - Mechanisms are in place to monitor the accuracy of schools' registration practices;
 - Schools are challenged on the use of registration codes, where applicable;
 - Accurate and complete attendance data is provided to the Consortium by agreed deadlines;
 - Challenging yet realistic annual attendance targets are set in conjunction with System Leaders, schools and governing bodies;
 - All work is in partnership with schools, pupils, parents and communities to provide appropriate educational entitlement and regular attendance;
 - Links are developed with a network of agencies providing education, health and social services to individuals with specific needs.
- 1.24 This will be achieved through:
- promoting and supporting whole school attendance policies;
 - providing advice on proven good practice;
 - working together with school staff, pupils, parents and relevant others on programmes designed to improve attendance level;
 - undertaking individual work with pupils;
 - undertaking family centred work;
 - developing group work with pupils and parents; and
 - initiating statutory proceedings on behalf of the LA.
- 1.25 The purpose of the AWS is to assist parents, schools and the local authority to meet the duties placed on them by relevant legislation.
- 1.26 The AWS is the enforcement agency within the local authority with the responsibility to undertake, if deemed appropriate, court action for persistent school absence. The prime responsibility for ensuring regular attendance lies with the parents/carers and the implementation of legal proceedings to address issues of non-attendance are dealt with on an individual basis.

- 1.27 The AWS is also responsible for the processing and monitoring the requests for child employment and performance licences. The reason the responsibility rests with the service is to ensure that any requests for absence during a child's school career will not have a detrimental affect on his/her education. In addition, the AWS is responsible for ensuring that any employment of a young person below 16 years is in a safe and appropriate environment. Risk assessments will be conducted when an application is received from a new employer prior to the licence being granted.
- 1.28 In addition to the statutory duties of the AWS, the service has widened its remit over the past two years to incorporate the supporting engagement in education, employment and training agenda. This complementary sub section of the service adds capacity to support young people who have become disengaged from education by assisting them to reintegrate with learning or training after leaving statutory education. It is anticipated that the role of this team and the way in which it works will progress and extend its support in working alongside AWOs through the development of the Youth Engagement and Progression framework. For further information on this, refer to the Supporting Engagement in Education, Employment and Training Strategy 2013-2016.

What is the role of the Youth Engagement and Participation Service?

- 1.29 The Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPS) has been introduced within Rhondda Cynon Taf to provide specialist and independent support for young people aged 11 – 25 years. Provision offered by the service will ensure that young people have full access to their entitlements, as set out in Welsh Government's 'Extending Entitlement' policy. The ten entitlements are:
- Education/Training - education, training and work experience - tailored to their needs
 - Basic Skills - basic skills that open doors to a full life and promote social inclusion
 - Volunteering - a wide and varied range of opportunities to participate in volunteering and active citizenship
 - Quality Services - high quality, responsive and accessible services and facilities
 - Careers Advice - independent, specialist careers advice and guidance and student support and counselling services.
 - Personal Support - personal support and advice - where and when needed and in appropriate formats - with clear ground rules on confidentiality
 - Issues Advice - advice on health, housing benefits and other issues provided in accessible and welcoming settings
 - Recreation - recreational and social opportunities in a safe and accessible environment
 - Develop Talents - sporting, musical and outdoor experience to develop talents, broaden horizons and promote rounded perspectives including both national and international contexts
 - Participation - the right to be consulted, to participate in decision-making, and to be heard, on all matters that concern them or have an impact of their lives.
- 1.30 In order to provide these services and support the priorities of the local authority, YEPS officers will have a shared responsibility to promote good school attendance, assisting

young people to tackle their barriers to learning and reengage them with education when absence levels start to rise.

- 1.31 In conjunction with the Attendance and Wellbeing Officers and the Transitional Support Workers, the Youth Engagement and Participation Service officers will provide wrap around support for young people during the school day, evening, weekends and holiday periods, ensuring support is available at the most vulnerable times in a young person's life.

What is the role of the Central South Consortium Joint Education Service?

- 1.28 The Central South Consortium Joint Education Service was established in 2012 with the aim of developing regional working to:
- Provide better value for money through economies of scale and efficiencies, enabling greater devolution of funding to schools.
 - Generate more opportunities to share good practice between local authorities and break down silo-working;
 - Enable the best leaders of education to influence and support schools across a wider geographical area;
 - Facilitate schools to support the improvement of other schools.
- (Source: ISOS Partnership, "School improvement consortia: an early assessment of their readiness to deliver", November 2012)
- 1.29 The CSC school improvement strategy, Achieving Excellence Together, sets high levels of ambition and explains how it will work with pupils, parents, schools, Local Authorities and wider partners to achieve the improvements which are needed if children and young people are to succeed in the region.
- 1.26 Improving school attendance was identified as one of the key priority areas for the Consortium and whilst it is managed under the auspice of 'wellbeing', tackling absenteeism is an action area in its own right.
- 1.30 A strategic network group was established in 2013, with representatives from each of the five Local Authorities' Education Welfare Services. Grant funding from Welsh Government has provided the Consortium with the opportunity to introduce a regional approach to improving school attendance.
- 1.31 A Consortium School Attendance Strategy has been developed in collaboration with each Local Authority partner which sets out the commitment to improving school attendance by 2016, in line with the wider Consortium Strategy. The document outlines the role of the School Improvement Service in raising school attendance levels, alongside schools and the Local Authorities.
- 1.32 The key principles of the Consortium strategy align with the existing identified areas for investment in Rhondda Cynon Taf, complementing the positive outcomes of the AWS to date and challenging both the service and partners to continue to achieve results over the coming years. These principles will therefore remain as the pillars of the RCT strategy, whilst allowing for local political and customer-need fluctuations.

1.33 To achieve the Consortium strategy and aid the success of this plan, the CSC will:

- Ensure that attendance is a standing item on school improvement meeting agendas;
- Monitor each school's whole-school strategic approach;
- Use code level data to track attendance progress and challenge schools on their levels and code usage, where applicable;
- Undertake an attendance audit by using the approved toolkit and ensure the outcomes are shared with the AWS;
- Develop the expertise of school staff to meet the demands of raising school attendance targets;
- Facilitate the sharing of good practice using the Portal as the means of disseminating the information.

2. CONTEXT

What is the policy context?

- 2.1 The Welsh Government's All Wales Attendance Framework provides standards and guidance for schools and Education Welfare Services to ensure they deliver services that are consistent, accessible and of a high standard.
- 2.2 Complementing the framework, the Attendance Coding System ensures schools record the reason for school absence, allowing analysis to be conducted across various cohorts for use in determining trends and informing service development. Whilst the introduction of these codes proved challenging in certain areas, the information available as a result of code analysis is key to informing changes at operational levels for both schools and the Local Authority, and in turn has informed this strategy.
- 2.3 The findings of the Council's Estyn Inspection of Education Services for Children and Young People in March 2012, identified the improvement of attendance in schools as the second key recommendation for improvement.
- 2.4 Supplementing the Education Act 1996 Section 444A, the Education (Penalty Notices)(Wales) Regulations 2013 gives Local Authorities the power to issue fixed penalty notices for non attendance. Evidence supports that this enforcement measure is a deterrent for parents, demonstrating improvements in attendance levels following their introduction. Rhondda Cynon Taf aims to introduce Fixed Penalty Notice for specific circumstances of unauthorised absence from September 2014, following a comprehensive consultation period with stakeholders.
- 2.5 With the recent drive for Welsh Consortia to take a more active role in tackling school absenteeism, it is likely that developments within CSC will have an impact on the AWS and its practices over the life of this strategy. However, it is not possible to determine the type or level of this impact at this point.

Attendance rates in Rhondda Cynon Taf

- 2.6 School attendance rates in RCT are consistently poor. Despite increases in both primary and secondary schools over the past two academic years, more still needs to be achieved. Table 1 below sets out the school attendance percentages for primary and secondary pupils in Rhondda Cynon Taf over the past three years compared to the Welsh Average and ranks our performance against the other 21 local authorities.

Attendance	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Primary			
RCT	92.3%	93.1%	93.4%
All Wales Average	93.3%	93.8%	93.7%
RCT ranking out of 22 LAs	22 nd	18 th	16 th
Secondary			
RCT	90.6%	90.6%	91.9%
All Wales Average	91.4%	92.2%	92.6%
RCT ranking out of 22 LAs	20 th	21 st	21 st

- 2.7 The impact attendance has on the performance indicator Level 2 threshold (5 A*-C or equivalent) including English/Welsh and Maths (a measure which judges how many children have the key skills of literacy and numeracy and a good breadth of knowledge) is stark. A child in Rhondda Cynon Taf that has an attendance rate of greater or equal to 94% is:
- **94%** more likely to achieve the threshold than a child who has an attendance of at most 90% - the equivalent of missing one day a fortnight (compared to the Welsh average of 53% more likely);
 - **321%** more likely to achieve the threshold than a child who has an attendance of at most 80% - the equivalent of missing one day a week (compared to the Welsh average of 207% more likely);
 - **1124%** more likely to achieve the threshold than a child who has an attendance of at most 70% - the equivalent of missing three days a fortnight (compared to the Welsh average of 592% more likely).
- 2.8 Similarly to two years ago, local research continues to indicate that the single biggest issue facing us in terms of poor school attendance is the culture of parents condoning pupil absence, which includes removing children from school for family holidays in term time. The Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 2010 give schools discretionary power to authorise absence for the purpose of family holidays and Welsh Assembly Government Guidance (2011) sets an 'acceptable' limit of 10 days in a 12 month period.
- 2.9 For pupils taking the 'acceptable' number of days off school per year, their maximum attendance level is capped at 94.8%, which does not account for any period of absence due to illness or attendance at medical appointments in school hours. 10 days lost to holidays in term time alone equates to almost 6 months lost over a pupil's school career. This is a national trend and presents an issue for all Local Authorities seeking to improve school attendance levels.

- 2.10 For academic year 2013/14, a revised target setting process was implemented to ensure the most appropriate target was applied to each school based upon their individual circumstances and needs. Local knowledge, previous performance, benchmarking groups and availability for support for improvement were all key considerations in setting each target, thereby allowing for the AWS to focus its efforts where most needed. The figures were ratified by senior managers and schools and systems leaders were consulted to ensure a equitable process and allow opportunity for challenge. Official figures were provided to all schools during the first half term of the year for maximum opportunity for success.
- 2.11 There are many examples of good practice within our schools; however the rigor with which schools apply systems to identify, address and monitor attendance levels at an individual and school level continues to vary greatly across Rhondda Cynon Taf. Much work has begun to standardise systems across the county borough, including common registration periods, the piloting of shared paperwork and centrally coordinated initiatives such as Daily Absence Response Teams and reward schemes.

3. DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

- 3.1 Due to the introduction of the Supporting Engagement in Education, Employment and Training and the Youth Support Services Strategies, this School Attendance Strategy must reflect those developments that have been made both within the service and across the wider Education directorate. Both new strategies will have a significant impact on the way in which the existing attendance service is developed in the future and, therefore, must be accounted for when determining implementation methods for this strategy.
- 3.2 The 2011-2013 strategy outlined the key areas for improvement, which, since being implemented have had a positive impact on school attendance in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The three key areas focused on over the past two years have resulted in the attendance in primary and secondary schools rising by 1.1% and 1.3% respectively. Such marked improvements evidence the effectiveness of the interventions introduced.
- 3.3 Whilst attendance rates have improved in both primary and secondary sectors, further improvements need to be made and sustained in coming years. It is essential that the proven success of the 2011-2013 strategy remains the backbone of the 2014-2016 School Attendance Strategy in order to continue to build upon the foundations that have been established.
- 3.4 It is prudent that the principle aims of both the local RCT and regional CSC attendance strategies complement each other.
- 3.5 As such, the four key aims of RCT's School Attendance Strategy 2014-2016 are:
- Improve parent, pupil and public awareness of school attendance issues by developing a whole authority approach to promoting and improving school attendance;

- Coordinate a consistent approach to responding to absenteeism and the provision of support services to prevent poor attendance and support the re-engagement of pupils who do not attend school;
- Ensure attendance data is used more effectively to identify and address issues and monitor outcomes;
- Continue to efficiently and consistently discharge the statutory duties of the AWS in relation to school attendance as set out by legislation.

Improve parent, pupil and public awareness of school attendance issues by developing a whole authority approach to promoting and improving school attendance

- 3.6 Raising the awareness of school attendance is a critical action area in raising attendance levels. All activities undertaken by the Consortium, Local Authorities and schools must be visible to all key stakeholders.
- 3.7 A consistent and hard hitting public message must be developed to disseminate the message that absence from school is a significant factor in low educational attainment and a negative influence on social and emotional wellbeing.
- 3.8 Key actions areas include:
- Consortium-endorsed marketing campaigns;
 - Media support for celebrating success stories and reporting on statutory interventions;
 - Establishing what is and sharing good practice across schools and authorities;
 - Coordinating Local Authority and school level initiatives;
 - Establishing links with wider community partners;
 - Exploring potential methods of measuring the effectiveness of interventions.

Coordinate a consistent approach to responding to absenteeism and the provision of support services to prevent poor attendance and support the re-engagement of pupils who do not attend school.

- 3.9 Partnership working is fundamental to the success of this strategy and therefore, securing the support of the School Improvement Service is essential in engaging schools to view improvement in attendance rates as the basis for improvements in attainment.
- 3.10 The reasons for disengaging from education varies making it necessary for schools and the Local Authority to identify the signs and indicators of withdrawing from school early in order to respond in the most appropriate way. A multi-agency approach is often best for those with complex needs and challenging personal circumstances but more high profile events and whole school preventative activities are generally more influential when dealing with low level persistent absence.
- 3.11 Whilst a clear and coordinated partnership approach is pivotal, it is important to avoid duplication by ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of individual service roles and

responsibilities. Different approaches to tackling the range of attendance concerns are essential when operational duties are rationalised to streamline current practices.

- 3.12 Joint working arrangements with the Youth Engagement and Participation Service will ensure that each young person is referred to the most appropriate practitioner for their needs, offering a greater capacity to schools to tackle absenteeism by providing earlier intervention (raising attendance referral threshold to the service).
- 3.13 Improving the support for pupils at significant points between key stages will be critical to the long term success of this strategy and this includes the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 as well as the transition to post statutory training/learning opportunities as supported by the SEET team.
- 3.14 Improvement areas will include:
 - Challenge and support (based upon data);
 - Service Level Agreements;
 - Agreeing effective methods of communication between all parties;
 - Building on the improvements to referral processes;
 - Working links with System Leaders;
 - Working links with schools;
 - Embedding the shared paperwork processes;
 - Establishing what is and sharing good practice.

Ensure attendance data is used more effectively to identify and address issues and monitor outcomes

- 3.15 Improving management information systems and standardising procedures will allow for the timely capture and analysis of data, which in turn will allow attendance support services and schools to implement a more proactive approach to the prevention of and management of poor school attendance.
- 3.16 Local Authorities must have the relevant information systems to capture, collate and report on attendance information at both school and pupil level on a timely basis if they are going to be able to respond to individual needs effectively.
- 3.17 In order to provide appropriate challenge and support to schools to improve their attendance levels, a robust target setting process has now been established. This revised process considers local knowledge of the school and community, whilst taking account of previous targets and actual attendance figures. This process will be reviewed throughout the life of this strategy to ensure it remains fit for purpose in achieving the appropriate balance of challenging yet realistic targets.
- 3.18 The key areas for improvement include:
 - Data systems;
 - Data analysis;

- Dissemination routes;
- Quality assurance of data and processes;
- Reporting needs;
- Target setting procedures;
- Evaluation and sharing of the effectiveness of initiatives/sharing good practice;
- Analysis of Education Welfare Service performance data;
- More robust tracking and monitoring of pupil transfers between schools.

Continue to efficiently and consistently discharge the statutory duties of the AWS in relation to school attendance as set out by legislation

- 3.19 At present, there are no national occupational standards for Education Welfare Staff in Wales and as such, RCT's Attendance and Wellbeing Officers have little professional support or recognition outside of the immediate team.
- 3.20 As a statutory service area, the AWS needs support to undertake its duties professionally and effectively and to encourage its development and modernisation. Safeguarding is a key responsibility for the service and as such, staff must be equipped to manage cases appropriately.
- 3.21 Alongside this strategy and in association with the Central South Consortium, the aim will be to:
- Support the introduction of the Welsh Government Induction Pack for Education Welfare Services and consequently influence the programme of national occupational standards for AWS staff;
 - Establish what is and share good practice within attendance services, both within RCT and CSC region;
 - Establish effective Consortium mechanisms for formally engaging with wider partners for maximum impact;
 - Explore regional requirements for safe and effective practice and a regional competency framework;
 - Establish a Consortium package for continuous professional development;
 - Actively engage with the Welsh Government to influence future service developments.

4. MONITORING THE STRATEGY

- 4.1 Improving school attendance is a high priority for RCT and as such it is being closely monitored and scrutinised by a range of internal and external partners.
- 4.2 Education and Lifelong Learning (E&LL) Scrutiny Committee receives regular updates regarding the achievements and effectiveness of the AWS, challenging the service

where/when necessary to ensure it continues to deliver the outcomes it aims to accomplish.

- 4.3 A Secondary Head Steering Group has been established which consists of three head teachers and is used as a two-way communication channel between the AWS and schools with the views of the collective head teacher group being fed to senior AWS staff and new AWS ideas and initiatives being sounded with the schools for their thoughts prior to roll out. Key elements of the strategy will be included as standing agenda items for the group to discuss with feedback to and from the wider head teacher forum.
- 4.4 Central South Consortium Joint Education Service is responsible for delivering the School Improvement Service to all five Local Authorities, and as such has a role in ensuring RCT delivers the aims as set out in this strategy. System Leaders will challenged schools on their attendance figures and the processes, systems and interventions they utilise to reduce absence levels, as outlines in the responsibilities set out in this strategy. System Leaders will also ensure that the service supports the needs of the pupils and their families within each of the schools they represent.
- 4.5 In addition to the School Improvement Service, Heads of Achievement within E&LL are responsible for ensuring the AWS's aims and objectives are in line with the needs of the county and that they deliver their outcomes in a collaborative manner with other service areas. Whilst historically much of the focus has been on schools' attainment figures, Heads of Achievement are keen to promote attendance as the basis upon which wider school improvements can be made.
- 4.6 As school attendance is a shared priority across the Council and amongst external partners, the Local Service Board will require regular updates on the outcomes of the AWS and the impact the service is having on wider issues. This will be monitored via the Prosperity Board, as one of three areas for improvement identified in the Single Integrated Plan.
- 4.7 With the challenge and scrutiny of the above committees, groups and partners, the AWS will continue to work towards improved and sustained attendance levels across all schools. Whilst basic attendance data can be used to determine the effectiveness of the service, there are additional measures that need to be accounted for to ensure a holistic approach to reducing absenteeism is embedded across all stakeholders. Therefore, the effectiveness of the strategy will be seen from the following key outcomes:
- Attendance targets in place during the first half term of a new academic year and agreed annually with all schools and the Consortium;
 - Sustained improvements in attendance;
 - Reduced absence due to holidays in term time;
 - Reduced numbers of pupils missing for unauthorised absence;
 - All schools with meaningful whole school attendance policies in place;
 - All schools operating effective procedures for managing absence;
 - All schools providing accurate timely attendance data;
 - All pupils who have been legally removed from school registers in RCT without a known destination being identified and tracked on the national missing pupil database;

- 4.8 The impact of the strategy will be evaluated annually against the key outcomes and the targets set. Comprehensive Wales Plan for Improvement (WPI) key performance indicators and Outcome Agreement measures relating to increased school attendance levels hold RCT accountable for delivering marked improvements across the county. Local Authority as well as school level annual attendance targets have been set and will be used to determine whether the rate of improvement has been sustained. In addition, All Wales rankings will be used to compare the impact of the strategy against other Local Authorities, whilst RCT schools will be ranked against each other to show the level of improvements made.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This strategy sets out how the Local Authority, working in partnership with the Central South Consortium, schools and other public, private and voluntary sector partners, seeks to continue to improve and maintain improvements in school attendance levels in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- 5.2 This is an ambitious strategy; it strives to build on and continue the improvements that began in 2011, but with fewer resources and the additional pressure for success. The 'quick wins' have been achieved in most instances, leaving the more challenging areas from where to secure the improvements. To influence positive changes to parental attitude to school attendance will take creativity and effort if we are to see longer term gains for pupils in RCT and the CSC.
- 5.3 As with the previous strategy, the innovation lies in how we continue to adapt our approach to tackling the issues in a coordinated and meaningful manner. With the introduction of the CSCJES, a new dimension has been added to the school attendance campaign and with it additional opportunities for developments and success.
- 5.4 Further impact will be made if the principles are adopted and implemented across all five Local Authorities in the CSC region. Addressing the identified four areas for improvement across the Central South will allow for a visible, long term and effective regional response to tackling school absence.