



Promoting and developing high quality school governance

Inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour

- 1.0 Governors Wales promotes the effective governance of schools in Wales and provides support to individual governors, local governors associations, fora and other groupings. Governors Wales is committed to the promotion and effective management of quality provision in schools in Wales.
- 1.2 There are approximately 23,000 school governors in Wales. They give their time, skills and expertise in a voluntary capacity, to help their schools provide children with the best possible education.
- 1.3 Governors Wales recognises that governing bodies are accountable for the strategic direction of their school and for the quality of education provided.
- 1.4 Governors Wales' role, therefore is to support governors by:
 - Encouraging effective and efficient governance of schools;
 - Providing advice and guidance to governors and governing bodies;
 - Identifying their training needs;
 - Promoting their entitlement to training;
 - Identifying and disseminating best practice;
 - Raising their profile and status;
 - Helping governors to focus on the consequences of their work for children;
 - Representing the views, concerns and aspirations of governors to policy makers.
- 1.5 Governors Wales welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Children and Young People Committee inquiry into Attendance and Behaviour and to discuss further on 13th March 2013. Please find below general comments on some of the key areas:

2.0 Strategies and support in place to address behaviour and attendance

- 2.1 In accordance with Section 88 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006¹, governing bodies must ensure "that policies designed to promote good behaviour and discipline on the part of its pupils are pursued at the school". In particular, it also requires governing bodies to:
 - “(a) ... make, and from time to time review, a written statement of general principles to which the head teacher is to have regard in determining any measures under section 89(1), and
 - (b) where they consider it desirable that any particular measures should be so determined by the head teacher or that he should have regard to any particular matters—
 - (i) shall notify him of those measures or matters, and
 - (ii) may give him such guidance as they consider appropriate.”

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents>

- 2.2 The governing body must have regard to Welsh Government guidance in carrying out these functions, and must consult with the headteacher, parents of registered pupils at the school, pupils, and “such other persons who work at the school (whether or not for payment)”², before making or revising the written statement of general principles.
- 2.3 The governing body must also ensure that the school has clear protocols and procedures in place for any exclusions. Governors must review certain fixed period exclusions and all permanent exclusions and may be expected to represent the school before an independent appeal panel.
- 2.4 It is essential therefore that governing bodies are clear about their responsibilities in these areas and should attend appropriate and relevant training. This is something that should be referenced in the mandatory training programme for governors, due to come into effect in September 2013.
- 2.5 The National Behaviour and Attendance Review (NBAR) report published in 2008 comments that “the governing body of a school should be actively engaged in the development of the school’s behaviour policy. It provides key voices for and within the community that help to set the climate of expectation as to what the school can achieve academically and what it contributes to the overall development of its pupils.”³
- 2.6 The report continues by emphasising the importance of “active engagement” of governing bodies in developing school behaviour policies but stresses that governors need to “know and understand the reasons why some pupils struggle to manage behaviour; ways in which schools can achieve change in pupils’ behaviour using their own resources; and ways in which schools can achieve change in pupils’ behaviour through the involvement of other agencies.”
- 2.7 Poor behaviour and non-attendance may be linked to challenges and circumstances that learners may be facing. Governing bodies need to be aware of any impact this may have for individual pupils or groups of pupils and their learning and how this can be addressed. Some governing bodies will have set up committees, e.g. Teaching and Learning or Curriculum Committees, to look at behaviour and attendance and review strategies etc., in greater detail.
- 2.8 In addition, some governing bodies may also have area link governors in place with specific responsibility for attendance and behaviour or for pupil participation. Link governors can play a significant role in not only developing the effectiveness of the governing body but in raising standards.
- 2.9 The NBAR report further recommends the publication of a guide for governors on key issues to support this particular role. Governors Wales would also endorse this. Governors always welcome having access to user friendly guidance on their roles and responsibilities which signpost key points and further information etc.
- 2.10 The guidance provided by Welsh Government on both attendance and behaviour (“Inclusion and Pupil Support”⁴ and “All Wales Attendance Framework”⁵) is very detailed and helpful. Whilst there is plenty of useful practice both at school, LA and Regional levels to promote high levels of attendance and good behaviour, we are mindful however, that sustained investment is continually

² The Education and Inspections Act 2006. Part 7, Chapter 1, Section 88 (3)

³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/nbarreview/?lang=en> - Paragraph 6.3.1

⁴ <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/pupilsupport/inclusionpupilsupportguidance/?lang=en>

⁵ <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/pupilsupport/framework/?lang=en>

needed by Local Authorities / Regional Consortia in their Education Welfare Services to fully support schools to fulfil their roles effectively.

- 2.11 A properly funded professional Education Social Work Service, possibly integrated with Childrens' Services so that families may be helped as a whole, with the multiplicity of agencies would greatly assist school attendance. We recognise that this is a very complex area with different categories of problem but this needs a proper focus.
- 2.12 We are aware that schools / Local Authorities will often provide INSET training for staff on managing behaviour, sometimes involving governors. This is an effective way of ensuring that all are up-to-date with the latest strategies and information.
- 2.13 As the Guide to the Law for School Governors states “a school behaviour and attendance policy shapes the school ethos and makes a statement about how the school values and includes all the people in it”.⁶ Governors Wales believes that where policies are applied consistently, reviewed on a regular basis and clear, consistent expectations are outlined with regards to attendance and behaviour, that this has a positive impact on the school environment. Equally, where parental engagement is effective, this too will impact greatly on improving children and young people’s capacity to learn.
- 2.14 In addition, clear advice and guidance from the governing body, which feeds directly into the behaviour policy is essential. Governors need to ensure that they monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of attendance and behaviour policies, on a rolling basis.
- 2.15 Furthermore, governors should be familiar with their school’s agreed attendance targets and should monitor the progress the school is making towards it.
- 2.16 Governors need to ask key questions, in relation to strategies and intervention that the school uses to improve behaviour and attendance, examples include:
- a) Does the school have an up-to-date strategy for managing and improving behaviour that learners and staff understand and apply?
 - b) Does the governing body receive analysis information on behaviour and attendance, i.e. comparing authorised and unauthorised absences to both national and local data?
 - c) How is the impact of these interventions / strategies reviewed and measured?
- 2.17 When governors consider school performance data, they should look at the performance of all groups of learners, e.g. gender comparisons; performance of learners entitled to free school meals; ALN and attendance etc⁷. Governors should analyse, for example, how many pupils at their school have poor attendance, and if there is any relation to gender, entitlement to FSM etc. The school needs to clearly identify pupils and their achievements in the various aspects of the curriculum; this can then allow for specific support/mentoring for pupils at greatest risk of failure. For example, there is some evidence that secondary school breakfast clubs have improved punctuality and attendance and subsequently the attainment of those pupils entitled to free school meals.

⁶ <http://www.governorswales.org.uk/law/> - Paragraph 1, Chapter 15

⁷ Governor Guide on Using Performance Data

- 2.18 Curriculum and teaching and learning issues for pupils are very important in tackling behaviour and attendance concerns. Pupils who are performing well are less likely to be absent or misbehave. The balance of responses in relation to behaviour and attendance should be about pupils being successful and therefore being rewarded for their compliance.
- 2.19 If there is too much national and local emphasis on pupils' and schools' achievements at key academic benchmarks which, by definition, all learners may not be able to achieve; this could potentially distance some learners. The curriculum, particularly, but not only, at 14-19 needs to offer learners the opportunity to engage fully and to achieve their potential, via a variety of subject choices, both academic and vocational.
- 2.10 We are aware of anecdotal evidence that where there are well developed School Councils, where pupils feel their voice is taken seriously, and responded to, then pupil engagement with the school improves. In secondary schools, where this pupil voice is represented comprehensively at governors meetings through Associate Pupil Governors, the impact can be even stronger.

3.0 Collaborative working arrangements

- 3.1 There are schools / governing bodies where good practice is shared with school clusters and beyond. Estyn's website also provides useful case study material. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) will be the way forward to further develop, share and discuss effective behaviour and attendance strategies.
- 3.2 We recognise that collaboration between all agencies / stakeholders is crucial to provide sufficient levels of support to tackle attendance and behaviour issues. This however, needs to be resourced adequately to provide high quality, timely support and advice to schools / governing bodies as and when required.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 Lastly, whilst the above paper provides a general overview, to some extent, of the governing bodies responsibility in relation to attendance and behaviour, we hope that you will find this information of assistance. All stakeholders working together, with consistent support and intervention strategies resourced properly, along with effective whole school approaches, is crucial to improve overall school attendance and behaviour.