

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 25TH JULY, 2016

REFERENCE FROM LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
18TH JULY, 2016

“ REVISED SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY (REF) –
(Urgent by reason of the need to consider the report so that the Council's School Attendance Policy can take effect from September 2016) –

Cabinet had referred the School Attendance Policy to the Committee for consideration following its meeting on 11th July, 2016. It was noted that in December 2015 the Minister for Education and Schools wrote to all Local Authorities in Wales reminding them of their responsibilities in relation to Pupil Registration (Wales) Regulations 2010 and the Education (Penalty Notice) (Wales) Regulations 2013. The Minister was concerned that some Local Authority guidance indicated that Headteachers should not exercise their discretion but should instead refuse all requests for term time absence as a matter of course regardless of the particular circumstances leading to such a request. This being contrary to the Regulations which allowed a margin of discretion for the school in such matters.

The Director of Learning and Skills in presenting the report advised that in the Vale of Glamorgan model policy that was recommended to schools, Governing Bodies were advised that they should not authorise any holiday requests during term time unless there were exceptional and extenuating circumstances. It was suggested that these should normally be limited to family holiday requests from parents employed by the Ministry of Defence and family requests for holidays due to religious beliefs. The current model policy had been adopted by the majority of schools and since this time attendance rates had increased and in 2014/15 secondary attendance was ranked the highest in Wales. However, in light of the Ministerial intervention, the advice to schools now needed to be reviewed and updated.

In the reviewed and updated Vale of Glamorgan Revised School Attendance Policy 2016, attached at Appendix A to the report, the Vale of Glamorgan Council would now advise all Governing Bodies that parents still needed to request permission from the Headteacher to take their children on holiday during term time and that this permission might be granted in accordance with the arrangements that had been agreed by the Governing Body.

The Policy would also advise Governing Bodies not to authorise any holiday requests of more than 10 days in an academic year during term time except where there were exceptional and extenuating circumstances.

The updated advice also stated that the school should carefully explore with parents why such a leave of absence was necessary. If the Headteacher considered there were exceptional circumstances, this could result in the school agreeing with the

request and authorising the absence accordingly. The Director also informed Members that the Council had seen encouraging performance in the improvement of attendance in secondary schools in the Vale during 2015/16 which now averaged 95.1% with particular reference being made to progress by Bryn Hafren and Barry Comprehensive School and Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Morgannwg. Other schools were also prioritising attendance. In response to a query regarding the Welsh National average, the Director agreed to obtain the information and forward it to Members of the Committee. [Secondary attendance Wales 2014/15 93.9%.]

The Vice-Chairman took the opportunity to congratulate all the schools on the attendance results with this being corroborated by all Members. Following a query as to how many fixed penalty notices had been served on parents, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Education, with permission to speak, advised that the figure for the Vale was around 20 and confirmed that none of these related to holidays.

The Chairman in conclusion stated that the Committee had discussed and endorsed the previous policy in considerable detail whereas the current policy in his view now gave parents an allowable ten days which worried him. He stressed that in his view children should be in school at every possible opportunity. However, recognising that the policy required to be amended he stated that he had no intention of not supporting the revised policy report and would expect the Committee to continue to monitor attendance.

Having considered the report, it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T Cabinet be informed of the Committee’s support for the revised policy to be adopted and note that the Committee will continue to monitor the performance of school attendance.

Reason for recommendation

In order that formal approval can be agreed so that the policy can take effect from September 2016.”