

**REPORT TO: DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL EDUCATION COMMITTEE -
16 OCTOBER 2000**

REPORT ON: REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE INITIATIVE

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

REPORT NO: 657-2000

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report reviews the operation of the School Attendance Initiative pilot and draws the attention of the Education Committee to the policy document which will underpin the future of the Initiative (copy in Members' Lounge).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Committee is recommended to:

- i) note the review of the School Attendance Initiative
- ii) approve the policy document

and

- iii) remit the Director of Education to continue to monitor the success of the Attendance Initiative and report back to the Education Committee in no more than two years' time

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The financial implications of this project were detailed in Report Number 192/1998 approved by the Education Committee at its meeting on 16 March 1998.

3.2 The cost of the Authorised Absence passes described in para. 8.8 is set at £3237.00 in Year 1 and £2666.00 in Year 2, and can be met from within the Education Revenue budget 2000-2001 provision for Support for Learning.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The initiative will facilitate access to the skills, knowledge and information needed to enable everyone to play a full part in society.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This initiative will improve equality of access to educational opportunity, and therefore of educational and life chances for the pupils.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 At its meeting on 16 March 1998, Education Committee approved a proposal to establish an initiative to improve attendance in schools.

It was proposed that this would be achieved through:

- undertaking a review of current registration procedures and investigating information technology systems for recording, monitoring and disseminating information on attendance
- improving response and chase-up rate on a daily basis for absentees
- improving next stage follow-up for persistent absentees and engaging parents in supporting pupil attendance

6.2 A pilot project was approved, incorporating an additional 0.5 clerical support staff for each secondary school cluster for the purpose of the speedy collation of registration information and to facilitate immediate telephone chase-up of absentees. In addition HSSS staffing was enhanced to provide for the deployment of 0.5 Education Welfare Officer for each secondary school cluster to support the Attendance Initiative.

6.3 A progress report on the process of implementation of the Attendance Initiative was made to Education Committee on 21 September 1998. The Initiative commenced in all Dundee schools in October 1998 when leaflets were distributed to all parents informing them of the process of speedy follow-up to all non-notified absences.

7.0 REVIEW OF PROGRESS

7.1 The following have been implemented as part of the pilot programme:

- 0.5 Education Welfare Officer support and 0.5 clerical support have been appointed to each secondary school cluster
- attendance targets have been agreed with all Dundee schools; the average attendance target for primary schools has been set at 95%, and at 92% for secondary schools
- attendance Review Groups have been established in all secondary school clusters

7.2 There has been ongoing monitoring of the operational processes of the Initiative by the Home School Support Service, Head Teachers and Attendance Co-ordinators in secondary schools. In addition there has been a meeting with the Sub-Committee on School Attendance. This evaluation has found the following:

- the pilot initiative has made a significant impact on attendance within secondary schools, where attendance levels have already risen on average from 86% to 87.8%; primary schools are already averaging 93.5% and are confident of attaining their target figure of 95%
- the pilot has resulted in a large number of “casual” non-attenders resuming regular attendance; it has also provided a timely reminder to parents to ensure that their children attend school regularly and that they should contact the school at the commencement of a legitimate absence

- the method of recording and the coding of non-attendance currently varies from school to school and has created difficulties in the consistency of statistical data
- the role of the School Attendance Sub-Committee requires clarification to ensure that legitimate referrals are made, and that they are effectively dealt with
- there remains a significant number of long-term chronic non-attenders who are not responding to the current focus of the Initiative

8.0 PROPOSALS

8.1 The School Attendance Initiative will continue on the basis of the existing staffing levels. This position will be kept under review.

8.2 The Initiative will operate within the parameters of a comprehensive policy document, a copy of which is in the Members' Lounge. The policy contains the following areas:

- introductory foreword and statement
- roles and responsibilities
- success criteria
- in-school procedures for non-attendance
- role of the School Attendance Sub Committee
- principles of good practice

8.3 The use of information technology to gather baseline data, and to monitor and evaluate the Attendance Initiative, will continue to be central to demonstrating success. From August 2000 the 'Phoenix Gold' software management system will be operational in all secondary schools, and the process of implementation has begun in primary schools. A new software package, 'Referral Administration System for Children at Local Schools' (RASCALS) will be piloted in two secondary schools. These packages will improve the speed and efficiency of recording, monitoring and disseminating information on pupil attendance.

8.4 Revised Absence Codes have been approved by Attendance Co-ordinators. These will ensure consistent and proper recording of attendance, authorised absence and unauthorised absence, in line with national requirements.

8.5 The role, remit and operation of the Attendance Review Group will continue to be reviewed, giving particular attention to the number and type of referrals, and to the range of actions and outcomes available to the Group.

8.6 The role, remit and operation of the School Attendance Sub-Committee will be reviewed, to ensure that only appropriate referrals are made and that they are effectively handled. In particular consideration will be given to the use of Attendance Orders and onward referrals to the Reporter.

8.7 The work of the Education Welfare Officers will re-focus on long-term absentees to try to re-establish meaningful attendance patterns.

8.8 A system of authorised absence passes will be introduced in all secondary schools. Those requiring to be out of school temporarily will be issued with a pass which is

handed back to the school on the pupil's return. This will ensure the consistent, central recording and monitoring of authorised absence.

8.9 In-service training will be provided for Head Teachers and appropriate staff, in which will be included opportunities to share good practice across schools.

8.10 Strategies will be explored for extended community involvement in supporting attendance.

8.11 Attendance Co-ordinators will continue to meet as a standing consultative group, and will have a crucial role in monitoring and evaluating the ongoing work of the Initiative.

9.0 CONSULTATION

9.1 This report has been the subject of consultation with the Director of Support Services and the Director of Finance.

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

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Director of Education

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Date