

REPORT TO: EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 26 JUNE 2006

REPORT ON: PUPIL ABSENCE MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

REPORT NO: 148-2006

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This Report reviews the strategy and arrangements for working with cases of sustained absence from school.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Education Committee is recommended to:

- i. note this review;
- ii. delegate to the Director of Education or her nominee the functions of the Education Authority under Section 35 – 43 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (except the appointment of a person to institute proceedings in terms of Section 43 (2)), being consideration of cases of School Attendance Default including the power to impose an Attendance Order or to decide that the parent/carer be prosecuted, for a pilot period of one year;
- iii. approve the temporary cessation of the work of the School Attendance Sub-Committee during the pilot period referred to in paragraph 2.1.ii above; and
- iv. remit the Director of Education to monitor the implementation of the proposals, to evaluate their effectiveness and to report again to Committee not later than June 2007.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications arising from this Report.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 These proposals will facilitate educational and social inclusion in respect of those pupils disadvantaged by non-attendance at school.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This Report will improve equality of access to educational and vocational placements for those who fail to attend school.

6.0 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 At its meeting on 4th March 1996 the Education Committee approved the establishment of a number of sub-committees, including a School Attendance Sub-Committee with power to impose Attendance Orders and to instruct that parents/carers be prosecuted for non-attendance.
- 6.2 At its meeting on 16th March 1998 the Education Committee approved a proposal to establish an initiative to improve attendance in schools (Report No. 192/1998 refers). Following a pilot project the initiative began in October 1998. It was subsequently reviewed by the Education Committee in October 2000 (Report No. 657-2000 refers).
- 6.3 All schools are proactive in following up cases of non-attendance, and in pursuing robustly pupils with a sustained and entrenched pattern of absence. Close links are established between home and school to ensure as far as possible the cooperation of parents/carers, and the assistance of other Council departments and external agencies is sought where appropriate.
- 6.4 There is an Attendance Review Group in each secondary school, to which serious non-attendance cases are referred. The ARG comprises a member of the school senior management team, Guidance staff and Home School Support Service workers. There is also a primary school representative since referrals also come from the cluster of primary schools associated with the secondary school.
- 6.5 Until recently cases that could not be resolved quickly at ARG level have been referred on to the School Attendance Sub-Committee, comprising two School Board members (one of whom chairs the Committee) and three elected members of the City Council. The Attendance Co-ordinator attends to advise the Committee, and there is also a Solicitor from the Support Services Department and a Committee Services Officer who deals with all administrative matters. The Committee has a number of disposal options available, including decisions to take no action, warning parents/carers, imposing Attendance Orders, referral to the Reporter to the Children's Panel, and prosecution of parents/carers.
- 6.6 An Attendance Management Group (AMG) was established in January 2005 to take referrals from the school Attendance Review Group. The AMG presently comprises the Attendance Co-ordinator, a member of the Leisure & Communities Department, the Better Neighbourhood Services Fund (Support for Young People) Co-ordinator and the School Health Co-ordinator. Depending on the nature of the problems presented, a representative from the Antisocial Behaviour Team might also be in attendance.
- 6.7 Where the school Attendance Review Group has failed to resolve persistent attendance difficulties, the case is referred to the AMG which leads and directs intensive work with individual young persons and their parents/carers, and monitors progress carefully for signs of improvement or lapses. The AMG will consider in depth the reasons for continuing absence, and what further support can be given to promote and sustain attendance – the dedicated support of a key professional from the Education Department or another department or agency, discussion of the appropriateness of the curriculum, consideration of a work experience or work shadowing programme, consideration of alternative education provision, etc.
- 6.8 Since the establishment of the AMG, more cases have been resolved at an earlier stage and no cases have been referred to the School Attendance Sub-Committee since September 2005.

7.0 PROPOSALS

- 7.1 In order to support the process of intensive working with young persons and their parents/carers, it is proposed that for a pilot period of one year, the Director of Education or nominee should have the authority to decide to impose an Attendance Order or to decide to prosecute, if considered appropriate. No case will be submitted to the School Attendance Sub-Committee during the pilot year.
- 7.2 The AMG will continue its intensive work with young persons and their parents/carers. If the AMG ultimately considers that there has been a failure to attend school without reasonable excuse, the parents/carers will be formally required to explain the reason for the absence from school to the Director of Education or her nominee. Before deciding what action to take, the Director of Education or nominee will hear representations from the parents/carers. This will involve giving full consideration to the case, including taking account of the views of the parents/carers, and considering whether the parents/carers have a reasonable excuse for their child's failure to attend school.
- 7.3 It will be possible to halt the process of prosecution if there is evidence of co-operation by the parents/carers.

8.0 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 This Report has been subject to consultation with the Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and the Depute Chief Executive (Finance).

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 None.

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Director of Education

19 June 2006

JC/DD