



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

**Response to the Estyn thematic review on  
effective management of  
school workforce attendance  
in primary schools**

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.



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**Report title:**

Effective management of school workforce attendance in primary schools.

**Report details:**

In July 2015, the Welsh Government published the guidance document '*Effective management of school workforce attendance*'. This guidance document was prepared following a recommendation of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in their report '*Managing Teacher Absence*' (May 2014). The PAC report also recommended that Estyn undertake a thematic review to evaluate the impact of the Welsh Government guidance in primary schools. This advice was commissioned by the Workforce Strategy Unit within the Education Directorate as part of the annual remit letter to Estyn in 2015-16. It considers how well primary schools, local authorities and regional consortia have implemented the guidance and the effect that it has had on the management of teacher and headteacher absence.

**Summary of main findings:**

The main messages and findings arising from Estyn's report into the impact of the guidance include:

- The majority of headteachers surveyed are aware of the guidance, but only a minority have read and acted on the document's recommendations.
- Nearly all schools have robust systems in place to track and monitor staff absence due to illness, in line with their management of attendance policy. However, very few schools or local authorities hold data on how often class teachers are absent for other reasons, such as training or other school-based duties.
- Around half of headteachers have received training within the last three years on managing staff attendance however around half of these do not fully understand or apply all aspects of their local authority's absence management procedures.
- Many headteachers report on staff attendance to their school's governing body regularly, but only a very few schools include information on staff attendance in their school development plans or set targets for its improvement.
- When arranging planned cover for class teachers, the main factors considered by school leaders are the quality of teaching, the quality of behaviour management, and whether the cover personnel are known to the school. When arranging unplanned cover, the main factors considered are how quickly a person can arrive at the school and the cost.
- Nearly all schools have experienced difficulty in arranging suitable cover for absent teachers. In Welsh-medium primary schools, schools are often restricted in the choice and quality of supply teachers available.
- For planned absences, most teachers leave work and planning documents for the supply teacher. In only around half of schools is the

work at the same level as pupils would normally receive.

- For unplanned absences, in the majority of schools supply teachers use the classroom teacher's planning documents to provide some context for their lesson planning. However, when this information is not available supply teachers plan their own work for pupils without guidance. Often this means that they focus on keeping children busy, rather than building on what pupils already know and can do.
- In most schools, teachers provide some kind of feedback on the performance of supply teachers to school leaders and supply agencies. However very few schools feed back to the supply teacher themselves. Only a very few schools undertake any formal performance management of supply staff, unless they are employed at the school for a term or more.
- Although the guidance document provides schools with useful guidance on managing teacher absence, it does not provide schools, governing bodies or local authorities with guidance on managing headteacher absence. The majority of schools do not have a plan in place on how best to arrange to cover a headteacher's absence.
- In nearly all schools, during a period of short-term headteacher absence, the deputy headteacher assumes the role of headteacher. In nearly all schools, during a long-term absence of the headteacher, the local authority liaises with the chair of governors or full governing body to arrange suitable cover. This cover is also most often provided by the deputy headteacher.
- If the deputy headteacher is not the most appropriate person to lead the school when a headteacher is absent, local authorities use a variety of alternative cover solutions. In the best practice, local authorities keep a register of senior leaders from other schools who could provide suitable leadership cover in these circumstances.

### **Recommendations for Welsh Government and response:**

The Welsh Government should:

- R1 - promote the 'Effective Management of School Workforce attendance' document more widely.
- R2 – Provide schools and local authorities with guidance on monitoring, recording and evaluating the impact of staff absence due to activities other than illness, such as training, conferences and school-to-school support.
- R3 – Produce guidance on the effective management of headteacher absence.
- R4 – Ensure that the provision of supply cover in the Welsh-medium sector is addressed when reviewing the teacher workforce strategy.

**Welsh Government response:**

We accept these recommendations.

Work is currently underway to review and update the guidance document as part of a planned refresh of content and to additionally take into consideration the relevant findings of the Supply Model Taskforce, when their Report is published early in 2017. The revised document will encompass guidance on the effective management of headteacher absence, as highlighted in R3 and highlight best practice on the effective monitoring, recording and evaluation of all staff absences, as highlighted under R2.

Officials intend to bring the revised guidance to the attention of schools directly through the Dysg newsletters to the sector and by writing to Local Authorities, Consortia and Governors Wales.

In respect of R4, further consideration will be given to addressing this recommendation in line with the Welsh Government commitment to develop a workforce and leadership strategy for education - building upon existing plans for education in Wales and to support education reform.

**Recommendations for local authorities and Welsh Government response:**

Local authorities should:

- R5 – Ensure that training on managing workforce attendance is available for all headteachers and forms part of an induction package for all newly appointed headteachers.
- R6 – Provide schools with regular benchmarking data on staff attendance in line with Welsh Government guidance.

Welsh Government response:

These recommendations are for local authorities and we broadly agree with their content.

In respect of R5, the Cabinet Secretary for Education recently announced the approach to the establishment of the National Academy for Educational Leadership with the appointment of Ann Keane as chair of the initial phase of work. It will be part of the role of the National Academy to determine the requirements for training and development for all levels of leadership moving forward. We will consider the recommendation and make the National Academy for Educational Leadership aware of the issue in order that they can consider how best this can be achieved, in the context of their wider role in brokering and quality assuring a range of leadership development provision for the Welsh Education System. In the meantime we will work with Local Authorities to provide advice, guidance and training to existing headteachers and promote good practice.

In respect of R6, in 2016 the Welsh Government published data at a local authority level for the first time with the aim of helping to improve transparency to improve standards across Wales. Further detail on this data collection can be accessed at <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Staff-and-Governors>

Officials will be looking in detail at the data and continue to work with all local authorities across Wales to identify where good practice exists. We are developing a comprehensive school workforce data collection, which will include sickness absence, to ensure consistency in how sickness absence is collected and reported.

The Welsh Government will work with Education HR colleagues across Wales to explore the options for developing an all-Wales management of attendance policy, based on the good practice that currently exists in many schools in Wales, and officials will bring this recommendation to their attention.

#### **Recommendations for schools and Welsh Government response:**

Schools should:

- R7 – Monitor the work of supply teachers regularly and ensure that all pupils continue to make appropriate progress when their usual classroom teacher is absent.
- R8 – Provide supply teachers with feedback on their performance.
- R9 – Ensure that supply teachers can always access teacher planning documents.

Welsh Government response:

These recommendations are for schools and we agree with their content.

In relation to these recommendations, we would expect that these highlighted practices already form part of the systems in place when using supply cover, in line with schools individual management of attendance policies. However, officials will take steps to ensure that the revised guidance document addresses and emphasises the points covered in R7-R9, as demonstrating effective good practice when utilising supply cover for school workforce absences.

It is also our intention to highlight these examples of good practice in relation to the use of supply cover to schools directly, through regular communication with the sector via Dysg newsletters.

#### **Publication details:**

The report was published on 5 January 2017 and may be accessed via Estyn's website at [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk).