

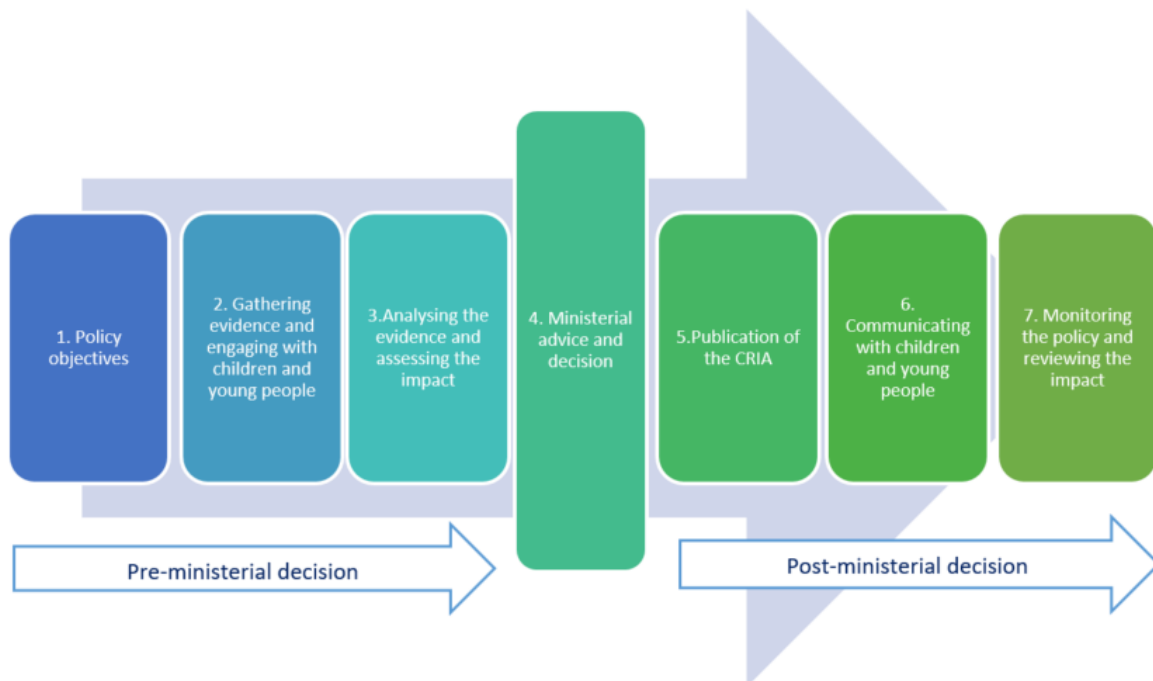
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENT

All completed Children's Rights Impact Assessments must be sent to the CRIA@gov.wales mailbox

The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 places a duty on the Welsh Ministers to pay due regard to the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) and its [Optional Protocols](#) when exercising any of their functions.

The CRIA process is the agreed mechanism officials should use to support Ministers to meet this duty and ensure they give balanced consideration to children's rights in their decision making. A CRIA should be used to inform ministerial advice and must be completed prior to a ministerial decision being made. Once a decision has been reached, your CRIA must also be published.

Please note we have an established Children's Rights Advisory Group (CRAG), comprising the Children's Commissioner for Wales's office, UNICEF, the Wales Observatory on Human Rights of Children and Young People, and Children in Wales, who can be used to discuss or test your draft CRIA. Please contact the Children's Branch CRIA@gov.wales for further information.



1. Policy objectives

What decision are you impact assessing?

The Welsh Government's guidance – Belonging Engaging and Participating, which has been developed to support maintained schools, PRUs, parents/carers and local authorities with improving learner engagement and attendance. It sets out approaches that can be used by schools, PRUs and EOTAS settings to help improve learner engagement and attendance, and by local authority services and other partners when attendance issues escalate. The approaches should be adopted, developed and built upon so that they are aligned to the needs of children and parents/carers.

There is no change in specific education policies, rather this guidance document aims to outline suggested good practice in terms of approaches to improving learner engagement and attendance, and to signpost to further guidance and resources.

Why this guidance is needed.

There has always been a broad range of complex and often interlinked number of factors that contribute to a child's non-attendance at school. Some of those factors pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic itself has introduced factors and more complexities and attendance has not improved as we had hoped.

Regular school attendance has a positive effect on children and young people and a strong impact on learner outcomes, standards and progression. Within this, regular attendance supports the development of literacy and numeracy skills, and on the conceptual understanding needed for further study and success in the workplace. [Analysis](#) shows that examination outcomes link strongly to attendance rates, for example, where a modest increase in absence can lower outcomes. Lessons missed can mean missing key information, skills and ideas.

Good attendance also has a positive effect on emotional and physical wellbeing. Establishing good attendance patterns from an early age is vital for social development. For example, the more time a child spends with other children in the classroom and as part of broader school-organised activities, the more chance they have of making friends, of feeling included, and of developing social skills, confidence and self-esteem.

2. Gathering evidence and engaging with children and young People

What existing research and data on children and young people is available to inform your specific policy?

Children, Young People and Education Inquiry

The inquiry found that a broad range of complex and often interlinked factors that contribute to sustained absence. Some of the factors pre-date the pandemic, but the pandemic has also introduced new factors.

Pre-existing factors compounded by the pandemic include: Poverty, disadvantage; Special educational learning needs; cultural issues; parental influence and families with complex and multiple needs; anxiety, mental health, wellbeing and disengagement issues.

New pandemic related reasons for absence: COVID-19 as an illness, self-isolation and school directed absences; anxiety, mental health and wellbeing issues (relating to health and education concerns).

The Committee were concerned that there is a lack of consistency across Wales in terms of support for learners grappling with mental health challenges, or those learners with additional learning needs. They acknowledged the importance of being able to tailor support to individual needs and local contexts, but this should not be at the expense of guaranteeing parity of support across Wales.

The Committee found a link between the pandemic induced school closures and restrictions and a more accepting attitude to school absence for some families. It concluded that it is essential that schools, local authorities, and the Welsh Government work together to reinforce messaging about the importance of school attendance.

The inquiry also found that some groups of children and young people face additional barriers to sustaining regular attendance at school, many of which they do not have control over. The Committee highlighted the importance of schools being mindful of a child's individual circumstances, and how these may impact on attendance and engagement with school. They were particularly conscious of the barriers faced by young carers and children and young people with medical conditions or long-term illnesses.

They acknowledged that some of the innovations that have arisen from the pandemic, such as blended learning may provide an effective option to help these groups of learners sustain attendance and engagement. The committee also stressed the importance of early intervention to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Having considered the evidence received, the committee concluded that they were content with the current definition of persistent absence, however, noted the need for consistent application of the definition and trigger levels for intervention across Wales.

[Attendance review – implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for school attendance](#)

The review did not find any major gaps at a strategic policy level, and the main answers to improving attendance seem therefore to lie in the re-establishment, extension and better coordination of existing best practice and policies. However, the review found that extra workload issues and capacity challenges mean that there are no easy or quick solutions to improving attendance.

Common themes around what strategies would further help the system work more coherently emerged from the review. The importance of following these strategic principles was consistently stressed by a wide range of those consulted. Most of these common themes represent continuities or natural developments of current policy, including continuing with the current curriculum and ALN reform agendas, taking a whole system approach, focusing on learner and staff wellbeing, with a particular focus on taking a more learner-centred or personalised approach to learning, including introducing more ‘blended’ or distance learning opportunities, particularly for older learners where appropriate.

In addition, this report suggests that family engagement, and a ‘community school’ approach to achieving this engagement, has the potential of becoming an important unifying policy and a key part of a long-term vision for tackling the underlying causes of educational underperformance that have been exacerbated by the pandemic. In practice, the ways in which schools try to improve this connectivity is by building trusting relationships, by engagement and communication, consulting actively, seeking and acting on feedback, providing responsive and relevant learning opportunities, and crucially, understanding and trying to help families overcome the socioeconomic and other barriers to learning, by working in liaison with a range of external support services and agencies.

[Understanding pupil absence in schools in Wales - Parentkind Survey](#)

Parents were asked whether or not their child has any barriers to attending school regularly. Whilst 64% of parents said no, more than a quarter (27%) of parents said that they do, with 19% saying they have worsened since the pandemic, 6% saying they are as they were before the pandemic and 2% saying the situation has improved since the pandemic.

Parents described a range of barriers that influenced their child attending school, with just over half of respondents citing illness as a key factor, one in three that their child refuses to go to school and around one in five whose children have unmet needs.

A few responses related to issues around the child being unhappy at the school or with the school environment. While bullying by other pupils was mentioned, some of this also related to the behaviour of teachers and broader issues, including some related to school policies that were ultimately having a negative impact on attendance, such as restricting toilet breaks during lessons leading to difficult situations with pupils going through menstruation.

Some responses raised issues related to getting to and from school, with about two thirds directly related to issues around transportation and the remaining third around difficulties experienced by the parent (typically disabilities or illness) that impacted their ability to get their children to school.

The survey explored to what extent parents experience of these barriers had changed following the pandemic, in order to understand what might be driving the increase in absence reported in Wales. Speaking generally, amongst parents of children with attendance issues who reported experiencing specific barriers, 4% said the situation had improved since the pandemic, 19% said that things had stayed broadly the same and 77% that the situation had deteriorated since the pandemic.

Different timetables came out strongly in terms of the support interventions offered to children with attendance issues, with just over a fifth of parents (21%) said the school had suggested a different timetable to support their child to return to school.

Parents with a child with ALN or at secondary school are more likely to have had the suggestion of a different timetable from their child's school.

Almost one in five (19%) parents with a child with attendance issues said their child's school has suggested referring them to other agencies who may be able to provide them with support to help their child attend school. Parents with a child with ALN, at secondary school or from an urban location are more likely to be referred than other parents.

When asked what support their Local Authority Education Welfare Service had offered these parents the largest response was none. This was followed by details of negative experiences for some, including letters explaining the consequences of absences whereas other parents said they were supportive, including facilitating referrals or returns to school (or in a few cases to a different school), offering advice, meetings and regular check ins, and giving support to help relations with school.

When asked what support, if any, their family have found most useful, many parents with a child with attendance issues shared qualitative feedback. Excluding those parents answering none, the most popular theme by some margin was supportive/understanding staff following by good communications/easily contactable, a different timetable, and having access to a mental health/wellbeing team.

When asked what other ways the school could provide support the hundreds of responses fall into a number of themes. Being more understanding and better communications/easier to contact both receive the most mentions, followed by earlier diagnosis/intervention, for the school to listen to the child directly, being able to do schoolwork at home, for concerns to be listened to and better support, including ALN support.

Several parents asked for some absences to be recategorised whilst a few parents said they would rather their child's school stops rewarding 100% attendance.

Only a fairly small number of parents specifically mentioned new issues directly relating to the pandemic; in most cases it appears the increase in absence is occurring amongst pupils that already had unresolved absence issues during the pandemic or would have had experienced emerging issues with absence in any case.

Your policy objective may impact on other policy areas – discussions with other policy teams will be an important part of the impact assessment process ensuring you have gathered a range of information and evidence.

There is no change in the Welsh Government policy around attendance. Rather the guidance supports delivery of existing policy and points to best practice.

There are however a number of specific policy areas that this guidance references and policy leads were asked to contribute to ensure the guidance aligns with these policies.

Whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing

It is well established that poor attendance patterns are often related to learner mental health or wellbeing issues. Poor mental health in particular has been linked to poor school attendance, with anxiety often identified as a key factor.

There is a widespread acknowledgement of the importance of learner health and wellbeing, particularly of emotional and mental wellbeing, for all aspects of education and learning. The [Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing](#) is important in the context of improving engagement and attendance. Ensuring that all our children and young people are healthy, confident individuals is also one of the mandatory [four purposes](#) of the Curriculum for Wales.

Transport

Lack of home to school transport or affordability of public transport is often raised as a barrier to children attending school. The guidance therefore reiterates the powers available to local authorities to make any arrangement they think fit to facilitate the travel of learners to and from a place where they receive education or training.

ALN

There is a statistical correlation between poverty and having additional learning needs and increased absence rates. Therefore, the guidance outlines the importance of person-centred planning, to ensure that all learners needs are met.

When considering the attendance rates of learners with ALN, it is important to consider factors such as illness (associated with conditions) and appointments (medical, therapeutic). With learners who have emotional or behavioural difficulties, it is more important to consider their improved attendance over time. In many cases, these learners will have a poor attendance history, and may have attended several different schools.

Community Focussed Schools

By working collaboratively across school, home and the community we can support our children and young people more effectively. Family engagement is one of the key pillars of the Welsh Governments [Community Focused Schools model](#) , and is shown to have a positive impact on children and young people's attainment, behaviour, attendance and aspirations.

Within a Community Focused School approach, families are made to feel welcomed, listened to and valued. Their strengths, skills and the role that they have in supporting their child's learning and development is acknowledged and valued. Schools should be proactive in building relationships with families and take the time to understand how best they can engage with them.

Curriculum

The [Curriculum for Wales](#) is based on four purposes that demonstrate the breadth of the academic, wellbeing and social benefits that learners gain by attending school. Because of the well-established links between attendance and attainment, wellbeing and citizenship, improving attendance has long been an important policy aim for governments, local authorities and individual school.

The guidance highlights that attendance will improve if learners actively want to come to school and if they find what is offered engaging, interesting and relevant to them. The development of the Curriculum for Wales, and the agency and local flexibility it affords schools to meet the needs of their learners, is expected to play an important role in learner engagement. Schools that have increased attendance have typically carefully designed their curriculum offer and improved pedagogy through professional development and research-informed practice.

Using this research, how do you anticipate your policy will affect different groups¹ of children and young people, both positively and negatively? Please remember policies focused on adults can impact children and young people too.

There is no change in the Welsh Government policy around support for attendance. The guidance supports delivery of current policy by statutory bodies and points to best practice.

It is clear that some groups of children and young people face additional barriers to sustaining regular attendance at school, many of which they do not have control over. This guidance stresses the importance that schools/practitioners recognise and take account of these and are mindful of a child's individual circumstances, and how these may impact on attendance and engagement with school. The delivery of informed, sympathetic, and tailored support for learners should have a positive impact on children and young people, as well as their families. The new guidance 'has been produced to help combat poor attendance at school'. It is anticipated that this guidance will have a positive affect across children of all ages from all groups.

¹ You may, for instance, consider how your policy would affect the following groups of children and young people differently: early years, primary, secondary, young adults; children with additional learning needs; disabled children; children living in poverty; Black, Asian and minority ethnic children; Gypsies, Roma and Travellers; migrants; asylum seekers; refugees; Welsh-language speakers; care experienced children; LGBTQ+ children. Please note that this is a non-exhaustive list and within these cohorts there will not be one homogenous experience.

What participatory work with children and young people have you used to inform your policy? If you have not engaged with children and young people, please explain why.

During June and July 2023 [Young Wales](#) conducted consultations on behalf of Welsh Government on the new attendance guidance. In total 175 children and young people aged 6 – 17 years old participated across six schools across Wales.

Through interactive sessions, pupils were encouraged to share their thoughts, concerns and suggestions on the draft guidance. The consultation process involved introductions, an ice breaker, a statement exercise and group discussions with rotating questions to facilitate comprehensive feedback collection. The sessions were also planned to ensure inclusivity and engagement for all participating. The consultations took place in the school settings for an hour with 10 pupils in the same year groups.

Pupils from all six schools highlighted poverty as a significant issue affecting children and young people. They recognised that the draft guidance outlined by the Welsh Government emphasised the importance of all children and young people having a flying start in life (page 13) However they noted that poverty remains a barrier to achieving this goal. Young people voiced their concerns that poverty related factors could hinder their attendance and education. They highlighted that some students had to pay for travel expenses, school uniform and school dinners which posed as financial challenges especially with the rise in cost of living. They felt that these additional costs created barriers for certain individuals to attend school regularly, thus impacting their rights to education.

The young people emphasised the need for more support in areas related to poverty. They believe that addressing financial burdens, such as providing assistance for travel expenses, school uniforms and meals would alleviate barriers to attendance and support their rights to education. Additionally, one school mentioned a case of a young person's attendance and eventually leaving due to bullying related to their differences, indicating a need for more education on diversity and acceptance.

Year 10 pupils specifically highlighted the potential negative impact on mental health when individuals who are unable to attend school due to circumstances beyond their control are not eligible for attendance rewards. They felt that considerations should be given to young people with mental well-being to avoid exclusion or stigma.

Overall the feedback we received from the pupils have been invaluable, offering us deep insights into their perspectives and needs.

In addition to this engagement, focus group discussions with Learners facilitated by Children in Wales, were held as part of the aforementioned [attendance review](#) . The views expressed in these sessions, went on to inform the recommendations arising from the review, which then went on to directly inform the new attendance guidance.

3. Analysing the evidence and assessing the impact

Using the evidence you have gathered, what impact is your policy likely to have on children and young people? What steps will you take to mitigate and/or reduce any negative effects?

This guidance should have a positive impact on the children young people and their families and we do not foresee any negative impacts which require mitigation. This guidance aims to provide support to education practitioners and settings to meet the varied needs of children and young people and their families and eradicate barriers to education.

The guidance aims to assist education providers' understanding of the different reasons behind learner absence, which can sometime originate at home, and suggests ways to support different learner needs, ensuring interventions are tailored.

How does your proposal enhance or challenge children's rights, as stipulated by the UNCRC articles and its Optional Protocols?

UNCRC Articles or Optional Protocol	Enhances (X)	Challenges (X)	Explanation
Article 2 – <i>The UN convention applies to everyone whatever their race, religion, abilities, whatever they think or say and whatever type of family they come from</i>	X		<p>The guidance acknowledges there are many contributing factors to non-attendance including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children who are looked after • children who have previously been excluded • young carers • some children from ethnic minority communities and children with English or Welsh as an additional language • Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and children of transient parents

			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• asylum seekers, refugees, new migrants and children of migrant workers• transgender, non-binary or gender-questioning children• children in the youth justice system or with parents in the justice system• children with long-term medical or mental health issues• children who have experienced trauma and/or had adverse childhood experiences• children of service parents and armed forces parents• children and young people who are at risk of forced marriage• children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation, including children who have been trafficked• children and young people of homeless parents living in temporary accommodation, houses of multiple occupancy or bed and breakfasts• children of parents fleeing domestic violence or living in women's refuges• children and young people who are privately fostered• young parents and pregnant young women• children who are on the child protection register.
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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children experiencing severe period pain or other period related health issues
<p>Article 3 – <i>All organisations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child</i></p>	X		<p>This guidance is aimed at maintained schools, PRUs, EOTAS settings, parents/carers and local authorities. It is a practical document for leaders, teachers and other practitioners which sets out the approaches and resources that can be used by schools, PRUs and EOTAS settings to help ensure high levels of learner engagement and attendance.</p> <p>The guidance also acknowledges that attendance cannot be considered in isolation and that many organisations have a part to play in addressing the barriers to attendance. The guidance outlines the importance of schools having strong multi-agency working arrangements to support all learners.</p>
<p>Article 12 - <i>Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life</i></p>	X		<p>The guidance emphasises that a learners' sense of belonging and self-worth depends on the extent to which they feel staff care about them, listen to their views and take time to get to know them. Positive relationships between staff and learners are a key factor in whether learners want to attend school. A personalised, empathetic and flexible approach that is tailored to each learner and recognises their individuality is most likely to succeed.</p> <p>The guidance outlines the importance of schools having mechanisms for capturing pupil voice on a wide range</p>

			of issues relating to school improvement. It emphasises the need for staff to take the views of pupils seriously and act on them and for leaders to be able to demonstrate the impact of participation on school improvement planning.
<i>Article 18</i> - Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must support parents by creating support services for children and giving parents the help they need to raise their children.	X		The guidance emphasises the importance of establishing positive and trusting relationships with parents and families in improving learner engagement with school life, and in turn in improving their attendance and participation. The guidance outlines the need to meaningfully involve parents and families in the school community to help them understand the benefits of education and the need for good attendance at school, as well as helping them know how best to negotiate the education options available to their child.
<i>Article 19</i> - Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.	X		Absence from school is a potential safeguarding risk and tracking and monitoring attendance has a crucial safeguarding role

<p><i>Article 28</i> - Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free and different forms of secondary education must be available to every child. Discipline in schools must respect children’s dignity and their rights. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>The guidance provides advice and signposts to good practice on how to support learners to engage in their education. It sets out and raises awareness of a number of challenges which learners can face in attending school regularly, and how to support learners and families to overcome the barriers they face and enable children to reach their full potential.</p>
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4. Communicating with Children and Young People

If you have sought children and young people’s views on your proposal, how will you inform them of the outcome?

An ‘Easy Read’ version of the guidance will be produced.

We are also working with Children in Wales/Young Wales to arrange follow up engagement sessions with children and young people to inform them how their feedback has been addressed and how their input can continue to inform policy.

5. Monitoring and Review

Please outline what monitoring and review mechanism you will put in place to review this CRIA.

Using existing networks the impact and implementation of the guidance will be discussed with schools and local authorities. Feedback from this engagement will go on to inform any further iterations of the guidance and the CRIA.

Following this review, are there any revisions required to the policy or its implementation?

Not applicable at this time