

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>DATE</b>	<b>14 September, 2023</b>
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Pupil's attendance and behaviour in Gwynedd Schools</b>
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<b>CABINET MEMBER</b>	<b>Beca Brown</b>

### **Why does it need to be scrutinised?**

Significant changes in pupil's attendance and behaviour following the Covid-19 pandemic which persists. The need to consider the data and the Education Dept's Provision in response to the demand.

### **Summary**

The report aims to provide information about attendance and exclusion levels across Gwynedd schools, including an outline of the main reasons for the absences and exclusions.

The impact of the pandemic affects our ability to accurately compare data over the past three years and prevents us from comparing Gwynedd data and national trends from previous years in a meaningful manner.

Attendance across the county indicates a general trend of reduction with illness highlighted as the main reason for this and persistent absence levels remain relatively high. Also, permanent, and fixed-term exclusion levels tend to be on the increase, especially in secondary schools and in five schools in the county in particular.

A continuous work programme is in place, which reviews the service and provision with the aim of increasing attendance and reducing the number of exclusions in the county.

Particular attention will be given to:

- Attendance and exclusions data
- Persistent absence
- Analysis of exclusions' data
- Attendance and promotion of good behaviour action plan

### **Recommendations**

Scrutiny committee members to consider whether any other aspect of attendance and exclusions needs to be scrutinised, along with the impact of the provision offered to encourage improvement in attendance and the behaviour of Gwynedd pupils.

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Schools must ensure that they have policies and procedures in place that promote good attendance, behaviour and prevent poor behaviour. School behaviour and attendance policy

should be considered as an integral part of the curriculum as all schools teach values as well as skills and knowledge. The policies must be based on clear values such as respect, fairness, and inclusion, which will also be reflected in the school's general aims and its social, moral, and religious education programmes. These values should be behind the principles that form the basis of the school's behaviour and attendance policy.

### **Attendance**

Key attendance guidelines are the Wales Attendance Framework (November 2012). This document provides standards and guidance to ensure consistency across Wales and aims to enable schools to provide a service that is consistent, accessible and of a high standard.

### **Exclusions**

Guidance on 'Exclusion from schools and pupil referral units' (November 2019) is the document that provides guidelines on exclusions and appeal procedures for mainstream schools and pupil referral units.

Focusing on improving attendance and reducing exclusions is a priority by the Education Department and there has been regular focus in recent years, especially as we came to the end of the pandemic. The link between good attendance, behaviour and learning is clear. Good attendance and behaviour guides and support pupils to receive the best possible opportunity in life and to make the most of their potential for academic achievement and future employability.

Substantial work is undertaken to improve attendance and behaviour of pupils in Gwynedd schools and the Raising aspirations, raising standards strategy draws attention to the need to ensure a clear focus on this.

However, although there has been an improvement in attendance over the past year, considerable work needs to be done to further close the gap and to reinforce improvements in the positive attendance trend, which includes a reduction in persistent absences.

Despite the reduction in exclusions during the pandemic, the LA recognises that there was a concerning trend of increased permanent and fixed-term exclusions over the past academic year. The inclusion team implements a range of strategies that have been planned to nurture schools' ability to tackle the behavioural and well-being needs of pupils so that they can provide specialist interventions for those pupils who have the most complex needs, which include promoting the sharing of good practice among schools.

Attendance and exclusions data is published by the Welsh Government (WG) retrospectively and in a range of formats.

## **The Support**

Within the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion Service (ALN&I), there is a range of teams to support the efforts of schools, including welfare officers (who have statutory responsibility in terms of school attendance matters) and one for each secondary school catchment area, welfare and inclusion officer (who supports in exclusion cases), behaviour support and outreach team, education psychologists, counselling and English as an additional language support service. More recently, following WG grant funding, a team of family and community support officers (in some schools) was established.

These services had substantial roles to play during lockdown and they adapted their support methods in response to the situation. A number of these methods remain in place, and they have been shared with our schools to continue with this support.

In order to support and provide for the most vulnerable and challenging learner, there is specialist provision, which includes a rotation unit for pupils in years 4/5/6/7 and 8. This provision is under the ALN&I Service and provides a placement for a specific period of up to 12 weeks from a specialist team in the behaviour support field. Beyond this, the Education Department has commissioned two secondary schools to provide an education hub for year 10 and 11 pupils who have been identified as individuals in need of an alternative education package for the rest of their educational pathway.

## ATTENDANCE

### Where are we now? -

After schools fully reopened in April '21 following the pandemic, attendance percentage was significantly lower than before the pandemic.

As a result of the pandemic, the Welsh Government did not have comparative data for 2019/20, 2020/21 or 2021/22.

At the end of the 2019/20 academic year (up to lockdown), persistent absences were improving. COVID conditions have affected figures during and after lockdown.  
Persistent absence for 22/23 is 13.48%

The attendance situation continues to be affected by the pandemic.

	<b>September 20/September 21</b>	<b>September 21- September 22</b>	<b>September 22-23</b>
	<b>77.6% (Wales 80.75 %)</b>	<b>82.3% (Wales 83.2%)</b>	<b>88% (Wales 88.5%)</b>

As already noted, the pandemic continues to affect attendance as well as the high number of authorised and unauthorised absences.

### Persistent Absences

As noted above, there has been an increase in the percentage of persistent absences since the beginning of the pandemic. This increase can be attributed to several matters, including concern when returning to school after lockdown.

Across the Secondary sector, levels of persistent absences are reported because of individuals' emotional well-being issues. Within ALN&I, substantial investment has been made in training packages to support these individuals by means of Emotional Literacy programmes, nurture groups within schools, trauma informed schools and also the educational psychologist service is reintroducing a programme to support the individuals that are identified as EBSA (Individuals who avoid school as a result of emotional well-being).

As a result of this increase, an attendance improvement plan with dedicated action plans has been drawn up to support schools to focus on this. As part of this, the school staff and welfare officer will monitor regularly where they will be expected to monitor the progress of these pupils by analysing persistent absences data and against actions.

Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) were reintroduced for lack of school attendance during 22/23 and there is no change in the current attendance code of conduct, which was implemented pre-pandemic. Schools need to remind parents/guardians through their attendance policy where it is intended to use (FPN) and to also convey the important message of good attendance at the beginning of every term.

#### **Attendance Grant**

The Welsh Government's Attendance Grant has enabled us to support various activities that have the aim of improving attendance. These include extending the welfare service staffing structure by increasing the number of officers, appointing a team that will specifically focus on targeted work and creating a team of officers who support vulnerable pupils and families to provide additional support.

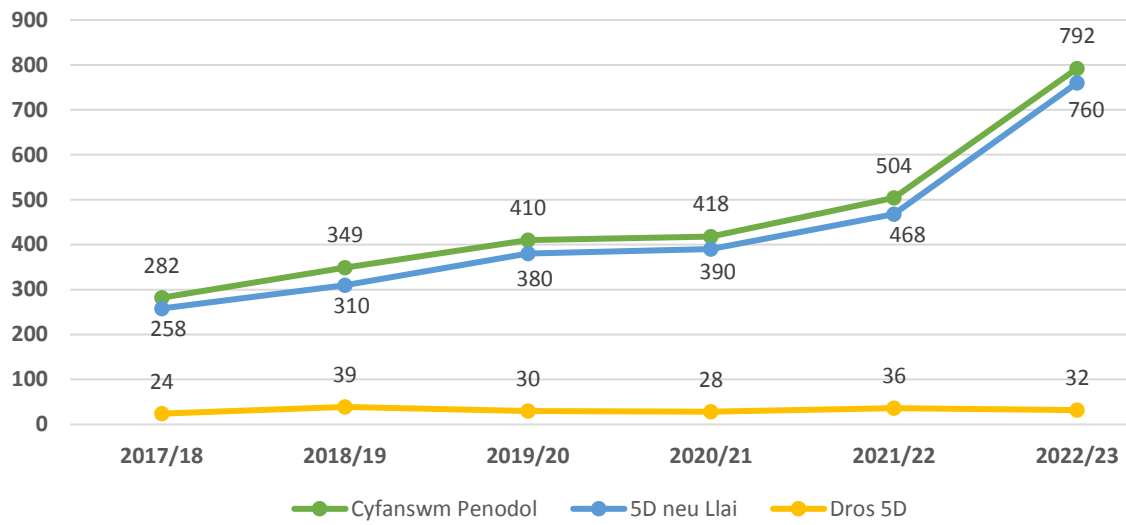
#### **Exclusions**

The level of fixed-term and permanent exclusions across the county has been on the increase and even more substantially over the past year. The main reasons noted for the exclusions are threatening and violent behaviours against other pupils, threatening behaviour against an adult, persistent disruptive behaviour, and an increase in the number of drug use cases at school. In terms of the support available for attendance, there is a team within ALN&I that supports schools in relation to challenging behaviour and which seeks to reduce situations of exclusions. Particularly in the secondary sector, we experience increasing complexity and broader external factors, e.g., social conflict, individuals who are exploited, over-sexualised behaviour and concern about drug dealing make the situation increasingly difficult.

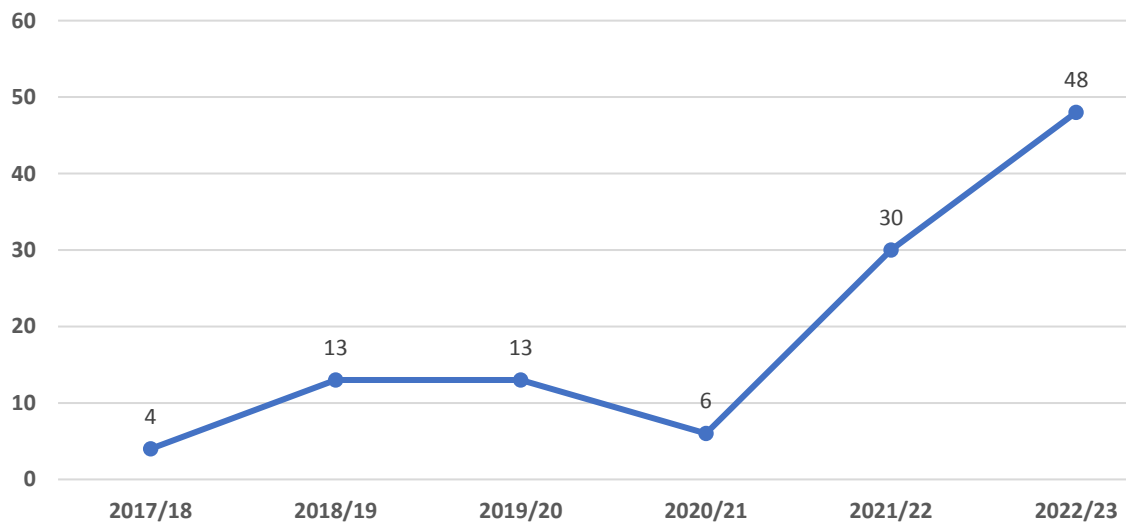
To recognise the complex nature of the behavioural difficulties of many pupils and the link between the well-being of pupils and presentation of challenging behaviour, there is an action plan that supports the implementation of the Welsh Government's statutory guidelines 'Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being'. A range of support and training is currently provided, and a range of support, training and intervention is currently provided to schools via the LA's strategic method of improving well-being and behaviour, such as trauma-based training, better training and support for ELSA and motivational training. Although initial feedback is in its initial stages, it shows that the above is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and staff morale. We have developed a revised method to analyse exclusion data to enable us to target pro-actively rather than reactively.

To improve attendance, working towards the aim of reducing exclusions has been noted as a priority and the Education Department has commissioned an external investigation into inclusion funding in schools, as well as the impact of hubs (which is an additional provision for individuals who cannot cope in mainstream education) to improve consistency and accountability.

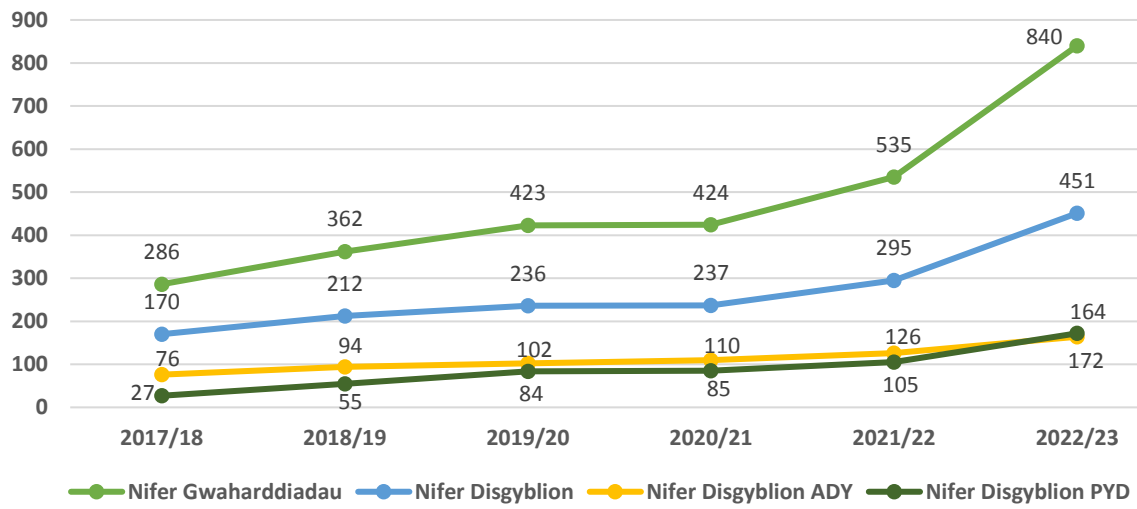
### Secondary - Fixed term exclusions , total number,5 days or less and 5 days and over



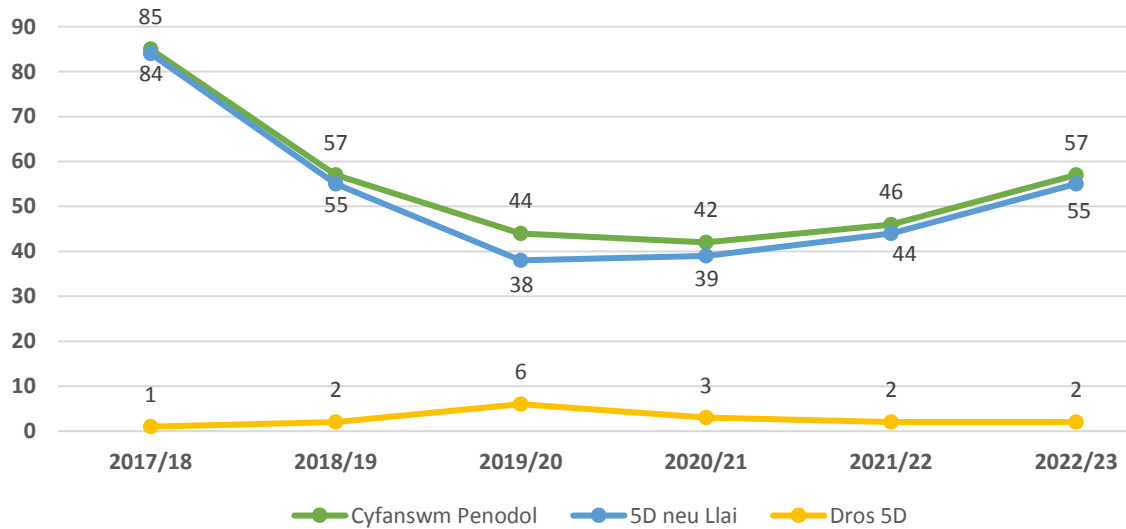
### Secondary - Number of permanent exclusions

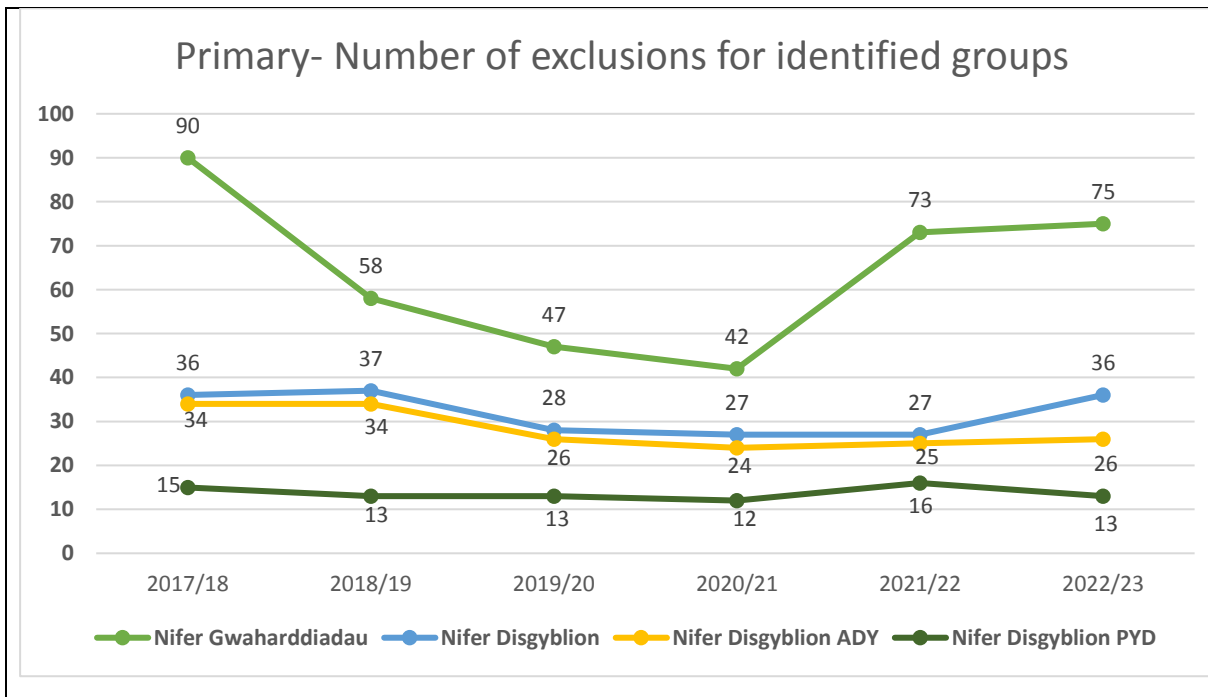
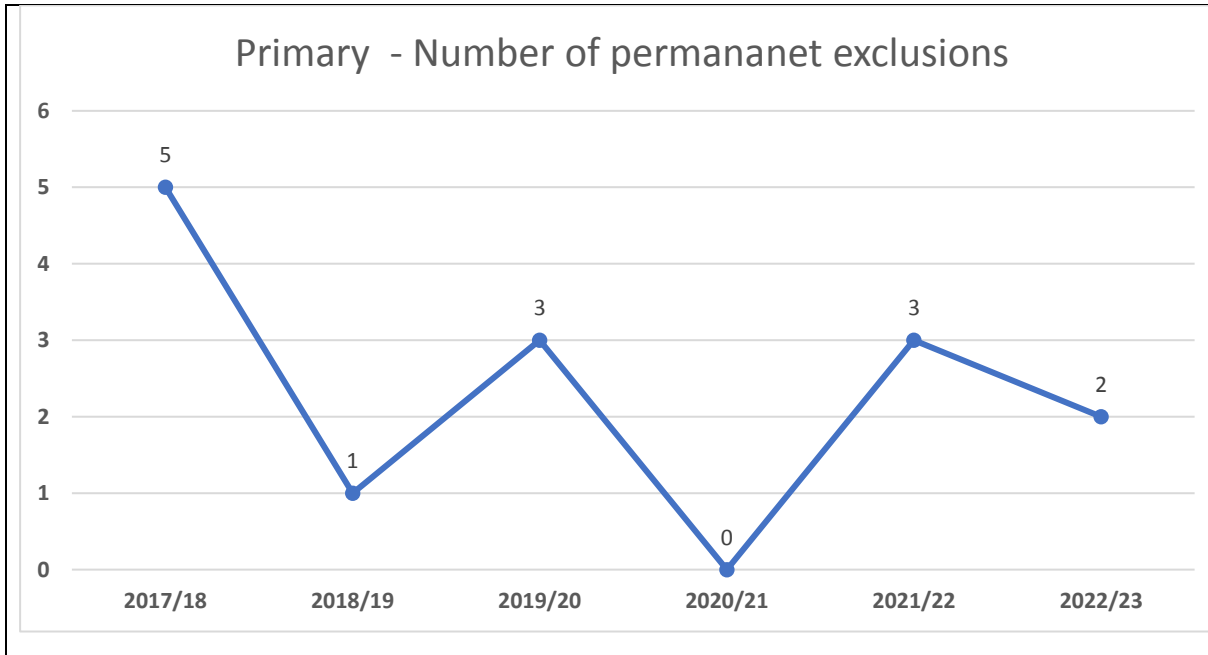


### Secondary - Number of exclusions for identified groups



### Primary- Number of fixed term exclusions, 5 days or less, 5 days and over





#### RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The increasing levels of disengagement and exclusions affect the ALN&I service and schools as there is more demand for services and additional resources that are required to support and provide for those with more complex needs, such as officers' capacity and dedicated provision programmes.

## IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

A number of risks are linked to higher levels of disengagement and exclusions, which include safeguarding, pupils' well-being, outcomes, and financial expenditure. By means of the business plan and reporting on indicators, data is shared and ensures that the Council's senior team, the Education management team and the ALN&I management board have an overview of the situation and that actions are regularly monitored to mitigate the risks.

In addition, moderation panels are held monthly where schools submit applications for additional resources (whether it be funding, a resource from a specific team or placement in the rotation Centre or Hub).

Additional work to improve data analysis and to profile statutory services also continues. Inclusion forums with a revised structure are currently being implemented to address the increasing demand for packages and support for children with mental health, anxiety, poor behaviour, and de-registration. Panels meet regularly to discuss profound and complex needs pupils to ensure that they contact or engage with them. These activities ensure that the safeguarding of vulnerable pupils is important.

## ACTION PLAN

### What has been achieved?

- Improvement in scrutinising data by receiving a weekly report on the attendance/exclusion data of each school by the data officer.
- Better collaboration within other departments within the Council
- Improvement in lines of accountability with schools
- Stability as every member of the welfare team is now on a permanent contract.
- Two schools purchase additional time from the welfare officer.
- Better use of the Welfare and Inclusion Officer's time

### To do

What?	How?	Who?	By when?
Scrutinise attendance/Exclusions and registers of all Schools	Ensure that the range of data is used effectively by Verifying registers Challenging missing marks Pupils who move schools Pupils who are frequently excluded but do not come to the attention of the Authority. Evidence of reasons for absences/Exclusions Use of the Welfare Officer/Welfare and Inclusion Officer's time	Welfare Officers Welfare and Inclusion Officer Data officers Inclusion Manager	Ongoing



Review attendance policy	Review and undertake any amendments. Adopt the revised policy	Inclusion Manager Senior Welfare Officer Safeguarding Officer Education Officers	September 2023
Inform schools that cause concern	Prioritise support	Senior Welfare Officer Welfare and Inclusion Officer Education Officers Inclusion Manager	Ongoing
Challenge schools to raise expectations and ensure accuracy on identifying attendance/Exclusions outcomes	Every school is aware and has adopted an attendance policy. School has nominated governors to be responsible for monitoring attendance	Senior Welfare Officer School Welfare Officer Education Officers Schools Governing Body	Ongoing
Standardise attendance/exclusions of specific group of pupils	Headteachers, all teaching staff and the Governing Bodies of all schools accepting their responsibility to insist on high expectations in maintaining high attendance.  Welfare officers standardising the attendance of vulnerable pupils.	All	Ongoing
Training for new headteachers and Governing body	Entire education workforce is aware and confident of their statutory responsibility to ensure that the attendance policy and processes of keeping a register are accurate and in operation within their class.  Appropriate progress has been made to increase the attendance of all children and the outcome of most target group pupils has increased. Exclusions' designated governors have a clear recognition of the responsibilities of the	Inclusion Manager Senior Welfare Officer Education Officers	Autumn Term 2024

	disciplinary panel and of the need to scrutinise schools' exclusions data.		
Schools Reporting Board	Individual schools brought to the attention of the Monitoring Group.  Report on any substantial concern	Inclusion Manager	Ongoing
School cluster method	Consistency in the school cluster to encourage collaboration on attendance/Exclusions matters.	Welfare Officers	Ongoing

### Our vision

- Gwynedd Schools' attendance to be in accordance with the Wales average.
- Exclusions' levels reducing significantly.
- The performance of each pupil in relation to attendance and exclusions improving
- Use of additional funding from the WG making a real difference
- Using data to support strategic and operational responses.
- Reduce the levels of persistent absences.
- Mature and pragmatic working partnership between the schools and the welfare service
- Regular methods of timely engagement to reduce the number of FPN.

### Conclusion

On average, the number of permanent exclusions across secondary schools is too high and fixed-term exclusion rates and the number of days lost are also too high.

The number of learners in vulnerable groups who are excluded and have a low attendance level is a cause of concern.

LA officers will continue to collaborate with Secondary Headteachers on reconciling exclusions and revisiting the system of managed moves and to develop methods of addressing needs in relation to learners' behaviour and well-being with the aim of having an impact on exclusion rates and improving attendance.

The external investigation into inclusion funding in secondary schools, along with the impact of education hubs on the most vulnerable learners, will further scrutinise the methods used by schools and the impact on engagement outcomes and attitudes towards learning.

Further work is needed to develop an assessment centre to ensure that pupils' needs are appropriately noted, and that the intervention in place gets to grips with the needs of working in partnership, which is an important focus when moving forward.