



Internal Audit Report
Education & Children's Services
Schools Attendance Management
14-03
August 2014

Final Report

Chief Executive's Service
Finance Division
Perth & Kinross Council
2 High Street
Perth PH1 5PH

Background and Introduction

This audit was carried out as part of the audit plan for 2014/15, which was approved by the Audit Committee on 2 April 2014.

The audit included visits to Kinross High School, Perth Academy, Oakbank Primary School, Portmoak Primary School and Blackford Primary School.

Education and Children's Services require schools to closely monitor the attendance of all children and young people. Revised and updated Attendance Recording, Management Guidance and Operational Procedures were approved at the Lifelong Learning Committee on 14 August 2013 and subsequently issued to all schools.

The revised Operational Procedures take into account wellbeing indicators as described in 'Getting It Right for Every Child', in order to encourage and enable attendance at school whilst recognising that children and young people have different experiences in their lives outwith school. These procedures aim to empower schools and the Council to act more quickly when children and young people do not attend school regularly with no reasonable excuse. It is the responsibility of all staff in schools, and support services, to work with pupils and their families to ensure that pupils attend regularly and punctually.

Perth & Kinross Council is required to provide clear, up to date information for parents regarding their responsibilities to inform schools of any non-attendance and to require the parent/carer to provide reasons for their child's absence from school. Continued non-authorised absence could lead to a requirement to attend a meeting of the Attendance Sub-Committee to explain the absence(s).

Acknowledgements

Internal Audit acknowledges with thanks the co-operation of all staff involved within the schools visited during this audit.

Control Objectives and Opinions

This section describes the purpose of the audit and summarises the results. A 'control objective' is a management objective that requires the maintenance of adequate and effective internal controls to ensure that it is achieved. Each control objective has been given a rating describing, on the basis of the audit work done, the actual strength of the internal controls found to be in place. Areas of good or poor practice are described where appropriate.

Control Objective: To ensure that the procedures in place are adequate to monitor and manage school attendance.
Auditor's Comments: Approved and up to date procedures reflecting the current requirements and practices for the effective monitoring and management of school attendance were found to be in place and adhered to by the schools visited. The schools were

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found to be actively encouraging good attendance. Unexplained absences and continued non-attendance are dealt with in accordance with approved procedures, with adequate emphasis being placed on the cause of absences.

However, there is scope to improve the adequacy of arrangements for recording class attendance in secondary schools and for improving the reliability of the SEEMIS attendance recording system.

There was evidence to demonstrate that parents are provided with comprehensive up to date guidance and information with regards to their responsibility to inform schools of absenteeism.

Management information produced regarding the monitoring of school attendance was adequate, made available to the relevant staff/committee and subsequently acted on accordingly.

In addition, it is noted that the Lifelong Learning Committee requires the Service to report back on the effectiveness of the Operational Procedures by December 2014 and comments received from schools during the course of this audit have been shared with the Service to inform this report.

Strength of Internal Controls:	Moderately Strong
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Management Action and Follow-Up

Responsibility for the maintenance of adequate and effective internal controls rests with management.

Where the audit has identified areas where a response by management is required, these are listed in Appendix 1, along with an indication of the importance of each 'action point'. Appendix 2 describes these action points in more detail, and records the action plan that has been developed by management in response to each point. In addition, Appendix 3 highlights areas raised during the course of the audit which will inform the Service's future reporting to the Lifelong Learning Committee on the subject of School Attendance Management.

It is management's responsibility to ensure that the action plan presented in this report is achievable and appropriate to the circumstances. Where a decision is taken not to act in response to this report, it is the responsibility of management to assess and accept the risks arising from non-implementation.

Achievement of the action plan is monitored through Internal Audit's 'follow up' arrangements.

Management should ensure that the relevant risk profiles are reviewed and updated where necessary to take account of the contents of Internal Audit reports. The completeness of risk profiles will be examined as part of Internal Audit's normal planned work.

Feedback

Internal Audit welcomes feedback from management, in connection with this audit or with the Internal Audit service in general.

Distribution

This report has been distributed to:

B Malone, Chief Executive

J Fyffe, Executive Director (Education & Children's Services)

P McAvoy, Head of Education (Secondary & Inclusion)

S Devlin, Head of Education (Early Years & Primary)

J Symon, Head of Finance

G Boland Senior Business & Resources Manager

K Robertson, Service Manager, Business Services

F Graham, Quality Improvement Officer

G Taylor, Head of Democratic Services

P Dickson, Complaints & Governance Officer

External Audit

Authorisation

The auditor for this assignment was J O'Connor. The supervising auditor was M Morrison.

This report is authorised for issue:

Jacqueline Clark
Chief Internal Auditor
Date:

Appendix 1: Summary of Action Points

No.	Action Point	Risk/Importance
1	Registration Process - Secondary Schools	Medium
2	Pupil Support /Physical Education – Secondary Schools	Low
3	SEEMIS	Medium

Appendix 2: Action Plan

Action Point 1 - Registration Process – Secondary Schools

All schools are required to keep an attendance register for every pupil. Attendance and absences are recorded per half-day session within primary schools, while secondary schools record period-by period registration. There are procedures in place for monitoring and recording lateness.

However, within secondary schools the registering of attendance was not always carried out properly by teachers on a period-by-period basis. As a result, there was evidence of inaccurate class attendance being logged and consequent duplication of work.

Management Action Plan

The Quality Improvement Officer will remind Headteachers of their responsibility to ensure all staff are accurately recording attendance, as per the operational guidelines.

Importance:	Medium
Responsible Officer:	F Graham, Quality Improvement Officer
Lead Service:	Education & Children's Services
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	September 2014
Required Evidence of Completion:	Copy of reminder issued to Headteachers.

Auditor's Comments

Satisfactory

Action Point 2 - Pupil Support/ Physical Education – Secondary Schools

There is scope to improve the adequacy of arrangements in place for recording the attendance of children and young people attending pupil support and physical education in secondary schools.

In some instances inaccurate class absences were being logged on SEEMIS, resulting in additional work for office staff in locating pupils.

Management Action Plan

The Quality Improvement Officer will assess the adequacy of arrangements in place for the recording of pupils' attendance to Pupil Support and Physical Education and ascertain whether a wider review is required.

Importance:	Low
Responsible Officer:	F Graham, Quality Improvement Officer
Lead Service:	Education & Children's Services
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	February 2015
Required Evidence of Completion:	Minutes of relevant meetings held referring to the outcome of the review.

Auditor's Comments

Satisfactory

Action Point 3 - SEEMIS

SEEMIS is used to record the presence or absence of children and young people in schools. Audit testing revealed that SEEMIS is subject to intermittent failures and there is no uniform alternative process in place.

Management Action Plan

The issue of both the reliability of SEEMIS and any alternative process will be investigated with the IT Team Leader (SEEMIS).

Importance:	Medium
Responsible Officer:	F Graham, Quality Improvement Officer
Lead Service:	Education & Children's Services
Date for Completion (Month / Year):	December 2014
Required Evidence of Completion:	Minutes of relevant meetings held referring to the outcome of the investigation.

Auditor's Comments

Satisfactory

Appendix 3:

Outstanding Lifelong Learning Committee Action

Whilst interviewing staff involved in the attendance management process in schools, it became apparent that there is scope for improving some areas of the guidance; e.g. the logical flow of the documented process to be followed in the event of pupil non-attendance, and version control. However, it was noted that, at the Lifelong Learning Committee meeting on 14 August 2013, the Executive Director (Education & Children's Services) was instructed to undertake a review of the effectiveness of the Operational Procedures and report back to Committee on the findings by December 2014.

The outcomes from these interviews have been shared with the Service Managers to inform this process.

