



**FALKIRK COUNCIL** – Education Services

**EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE**

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# *NON-ATTENDANCE IN FALKIRK COUNCIL RESEARCH REPORT*

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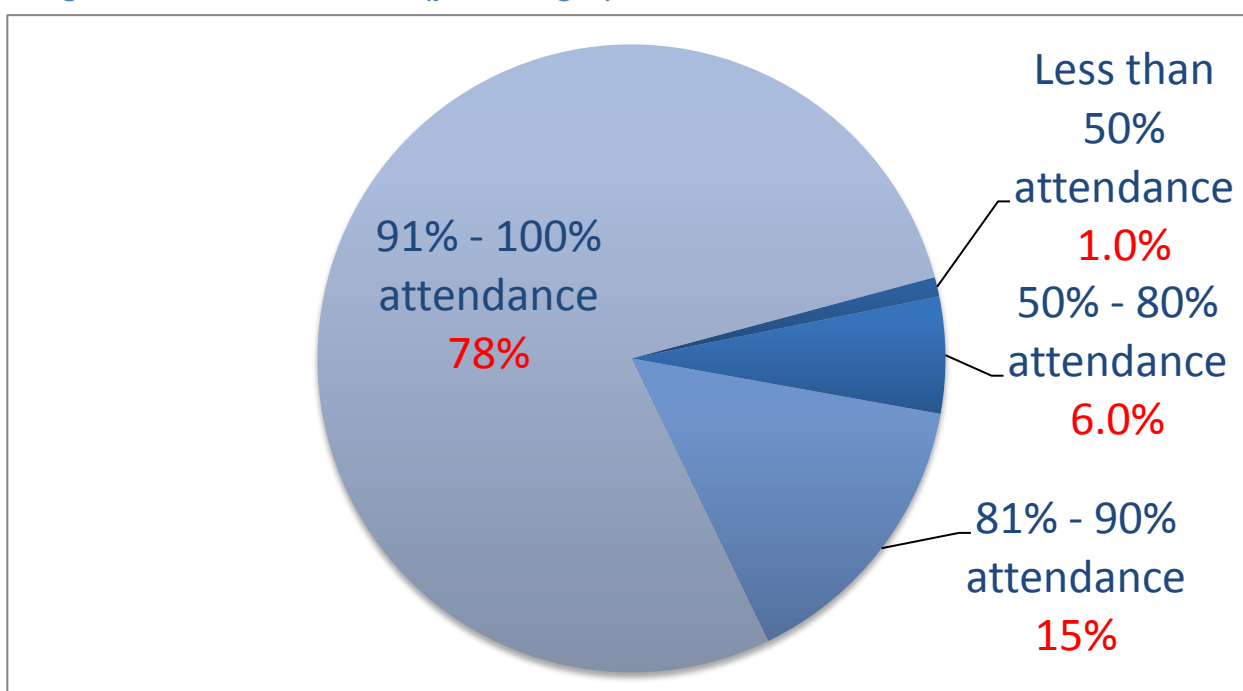
## **Introduction**

Falkirk Council Education Services has committed to promoting achievement for all pupils as its number 1 priority. This is articulated through the policy Learning to Achieve. In order for pupils to achieve, attendance at school is a priority. The Council has identified promoting attendance in school as a priority for action within the Service plan. The school pupil attendance rate was 93.6% over session 2010 - 2011.

There was a growing concern regarding pupils with high levels of non-attendance as identified through social work Looked After Reviews, referral to the Joint Child Care and Resource Allocation Group and individual schools.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of pupils whose attendance is within the bands of 91-100%, 81-90%, 61-80% or below 50%. This indicates that while the majority of pupils have high levels of attendance, there are substantial numbers of pupils whose attendance is below 80% (total of 7%).

**Figure 1. Attendance levels (percentages) across all Falkirk schools**



Given that attendance remains an area of concern within Falkirk, JCCRAG commissioned this research report to further explore the extent of non-attendance and identify recommendations as to the types of interventions, policy and practice that could be implemented in order to promote school attendance. Within the parameters of this research 5 key questions were identified that would considerably help Falkirk to move forward:

1. What is the range of non-attendance in Falkirk?
2. What is the extent of pervasive non-attendance in Falkirk?
3. What are the intervention approaches we use in Falkirk and how effective are these?
4. What does the research literature tell us of evidence-based effective interventions?
5. What do we need to do now in Falkirk?

## Executive Summary

1. 6% of children in Falkirk Schools have less than 80% attendance with 1% having less than 50%.
2. Approximately 340 pupils per year have attendance less than 60%.
3. Education staff were familiar with the procedures as outlined in the existing policy, although there was some confusion between the attendance panel and attendance committee, this was not always the case for other agencies.
4. 2 children were referred to the Children's Committee in the last three years with the decision being to prosecute
5. Letters home were found to have a low impact
6. Meetings with parents could have a medium impact
7. The attendance Panels can have little impact on improving non-attendance but may also have a high impact.
8. There was recognition that response to and intervening in non-attendance is not a single agency issue.
9. Other measures are seen to have little or no impact such as supervision orders, in improving attendance
10. The children's hearing system can have a high impact, but the longer term benefit is not often evident.
11. Early intervention can be effective and often include: building meaningful partnerships with parents, seeking to understand the underlying needs and responding flexibly to individual needs
12. Non-attendance is often a symptom of wider issues that affect children and there are different causal or contributory factors
13. Non-attendance is a significant barrier to children progressing in education,
14. Aspects of the current practices in Falkirk are not working as effectively as people would like,
15. There were areas for improvement and there were aspects of effective practice that could be built upon for the future.
16. Early identification, clear assessment and targeted intervention was required.
17. A positive effect was that of the key teacher being someone that the young person would engage with.
18. The second most effective approach was seen to be one where the family are supported to implement positive routines
19. Meetings and regular communication were seen to be more effective than formal communication, such as letters home.
20. The effectiveness of individual intervention is often not known
21. There still requires some careful consideration around the focus of intervention as, for some children, the causal or contributory factors are such that intervention with the parents or at school or community level is required rather than the children themselves.
22. The evidence base supports the view that within-child deficit model is outdated
  - a. parents of pupils with attendance issues generally think the problems lie with teachers, bullying or peer pressure and view attendance as less important
  - b. parents of non-attenders do not think there is a link between attainment/qualifications and attendance
  - c. Non-attenders at Secondary school more commonly attribute their non-attendance to school related rather than home related factors

- d. young people that do not attend are unaware of the possible consequences of doing so
  - e. causes of non-attendance are complex and therefore it is unlikely to be resolved using a single approach early intervention
  - f. to prevent young people developing the habit of non –attendance would be beneficial
  - g. Due to the complexity of non-attendance it is important that a multi-agency approach is taken and that schools might have to be more flexible in developing individualised and alternative curriculums and promoting a positive ethos within the school community
23. Community based responses and ethos or environmental factors have not been clearly identified as successful for tackling non-attendance in large part due to the multiplicity of the maintaining or causal factors

## Recommendations

The research project highlighted 5 key recommendations for making progress in tackling non-attendance in Falkirk.

1. Early and Effective intervention should be encouraged.
  - This would be achieved by all schools considering their ethos, relationships with parents and being able to talk constructively with parents at an early stage.
  - Ethos and engagement are crucial to the successful re-integration or improved attendance of those at risk of pervasive non-attendance
  - School buildings to be reviewed to ensure that the entrance presents as a welcoming place
  - Additional Proactive measures to promote good attendance
2. A whole scale review of the Attendance policy. This should include:
  - recognition that non-attendance is a multi-factorial issue, with different interventions appropriate for different contributory or causal factors
  - A focus on what is demonstrably effective.
  - Social work and other agency collaboration in the revision to the process of revising the procedures to promote understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities.
  - Clear emphasis on the support strategies as well as the consequences for parents and children
  - Review the procedure of Panels and Committee and discuss the review with Panel and committee members, Councillors and relevant stakeholders
  - update associated documents e.g. letters to parents, guidance on recording non-attendance.
3. Improve practice though: through publishing practice guidance, training and briefings in the following areas:
  - Attendance is, in principle, no different from any other factor giving rise to a pupil being deemed to have additional support needs: Getting it Right for Every Child practice, including the introduction and formal review of Form 4 plans should be followed for each individual pupil whose attendance records trigger intervention.
  - Schools recording attendance, non-attendance and truancy in a consistent cross-authority manner is required.
  - Role of support agencies in promoting attendance across different causal or contributory factors
  - Assessment and Planning for intervention needs to demonstrate the area of intervention, including work directed at the family or school level and with clarity on the causal or contributory factors being addressed
  - Sharing and disseminating good practice needs to be encouraged and fostered, particularly where a team around a child has success with a 'creative package' or high impact practice.
4. Publish guidance for all agencies that promotes evidence informed intervention approaches to be used for different causes, circumstances or contributory factors and which may include:
  - Effective intervention with pupils, parents, schools and communities at different stages or levels of intervention

- Different approaches to non-attendance at different threshold levels, recognising that professional judgement is also required
  - The role of home visits and the parameters for this as a course of intervention needs to be defined with responsibilities and expectations clearly identified. Consideration may need to be given to recruitment of an education welfare officer role or assigning this responsibility to an existing staff group.
5. Commission phase 2 of the project, involving:
- A multi-agency team to produce guidance document and review the policy (action on recommendations 1-4).
  - Exploration of the effectiveness of Attendance Panels and Committees.
  - Consideration given to commissioning additional research into parental and pupil attitudes to learning and engagement.

### **Research Methodology and Results**

In order to answer the key questions a multi-modal methodology was employed. This consisted of:

1. Analysis of authority level data on non-attendance
2. Review of policy and practice in Falkirk
3. Survey to practitioners on policy and practice in Falkirk
4. Multi-agency focus groups on the effectiveness of interventions within Falkirk
5. Comparison with the research evidence base

#### What is the range of non-attendance in Falkirk?

While there are 6% of pupils whose attendance is below 80% across the authority, this picture is markedly different for secondary schools compared to primary schools:

**Table 1 – Non-attendance in Falkirk by school type**

<b>Percent of attendance (bands)</b>	<b>% of Primary pupils</b>	<b>% of Secondary pupils</b>
91-100%	86	68
81-90%	11	19
50-80%	2	10
Less than 50%	0.1	2

Appendix 1 contains data tables for the last three years of Falkirk Schools. This indicates that there has been an increase from 1146 pupils whose attendance was below 80% in 2008/9 to 1354 pupils in 2010/11. This trend is across primary 202 to 257) and secondary sectors (944 to 1074).

The year groups where there are the greatest numbers of children who attend at levels below 80% across the three years are S3, S4 and S5, although there has been only a modest increase in the numbers of pupils (662 to 691 when taking the three year groups as a whole).

S1 and S2 have seen an increase in the last three years (85 to 107 and 115 to 167 respectively).

There has been a relatively similar number of children with attendance below 80% in the P7 year across these three years (40 in 2008/9 and 38 in 2010/11) whilst there has been an increase for P1 and P2 (25 to 47 and 28 to 42 respectively).

#### What is the extent of pervasive non-attendance in Falkirk?

While the initial figures reported used a cut-off of below 50 % attendance for the purposes of this research exercise all children with attendance below 60% were considered to have pervasive non-attendance.

The numbers of children in Falkirk in this category has seen a modest increase from 327 in 2008/9 to 343 in 2010/11. There has been a decrease by 6 pupils to 24 in the primary sector and an increase by 23 in the secondary sector to 319 pupils.

This group of children are smaller in number but they require targeted individualised supports or interventions and this requires time by members of staff in schools and from other agencies external to the school.



What are the intervention approaches we use in Falkirk and how effective are these?  
Falkirk Council Education Services Policy on Attendance in school is described in “Non-Attendance and Truancy: Guidelines and Procedures”, 2011 (Service Circular 29).

The main procedures can be summarised as:

1. First Day Safety Alert by **telephone/SMS text** system to parent/carer
2. Where a pupil is deemed to be vulnerable or at risk, the concerns must be **raised with Social Work**
3. Where there is not any reason to believe that there is a high-level of risk to the pupil, schools must continue to attempt to **contact the parent/carer**.
4. In all other cases where there is believed to be a high-level of risk and no contact has been made with any of the above, enquiries should be made to the **police**.
5. **Letters**
  - a. Letter (i) - after three days (six openings) - Appendix 3(a)
  - b. Letter (ii) - after six days (twelve openings) - Appendix 3(b)
  - c. Letter (iii) - after nine days (eighteen openings) - Appendix 3(c)
6. **Multi-agency approach**
  - a. Locality MAG
  - b. Psychological Service
  - c. Social Work
  - d. Other agencies
7. Education Services **Attendance Panel**
8. Referred to the **Children's Reporter**
9. **Attendance Committee** (made by the Education Services Attendance Panel)
  - a. Make an **Attendance Order** under Section 38 of the Act, where, if the parent fails to comply with the Attendance Order, they will be guilty of an offence unless they satisfy the court that they have a reasonable excuse.
  - b. Instruct the parent to be **prosecuted** forthwith under Section 43 of the Act (refer to **Sherriff Court**).

The procedures follow a broad hierarchical sequence as outlined above although do allow for professional judgment. Procedures 5, 6 and 7 are not sequential, but are followed depending on the professional judgement of the key professional within school.

In addition, schools discuss the children for whom there are concerns relating to attendance with their QIO in Support and Challenge Meetings.

There have been 2 references to the Attendance Committee in the last 3 years (2 children from same family) and the decision was to prosecute. In the 3 years prior to this, 16 references were made, where the decision was to prosecute the parents of 3 children (2 families).

“Whilst the attendance panels appear to offer an effective solution in particular instances, there are some indications that the effect of referral may be variable or

temporary in effecting positive outcomes. This requires a closer look. More early and effective intervention through information sharing and support within the localities may provide a solution to the current limitations of the Attendance Panels”

### Education Service Self Evaluation on Child Protection 2011.

#### Results of rapid response survey

Social Work Services identified a number of children for whom there were significant long term issues of pervasive non-attendance. An email was sent out by the QI team asking the key worker in the school to identify:

- Barriers to attendance
- Overcoming the barriers

The responses identified that barriers ranged from **individual child** needs, needs within the **family**, needs within the **school**. Overcoming these barriers was consistently viewed as requiring a co-ordinated approach to identify the barriers for each child in their context and clear responsibility for intervening in the different domains.

### **Summary of Questionnaire Results**

#### Method

The link to an online questionnaire was distributed via email to Head teachers, Children and Family Social Work teams, Senior Family Support Workers, Cluaran and various professionals within Education Services including representation from Educational Psychology, Quality Improvement and Additional Support for Learning.

#### Respondents

There were 54 responses to the questionnaire. Responses were made from a range of education settings as well as Social Work and the Voluntary Sector (Figure 1). There was good representation across all localities (Figure 2).

#### Thresholds for non – attendance

Respondents were asked at what level they would consider non-attendance to be an issue. 54% of respondents felt that if attendance dropped below 95% or 90% then it was an issue. As illustrated in Figure 3 (See Appendix 2), the responses were wide ranging. 6% felt that anything below 100% was an issue and 2% felt it was only an issue once it had fallen below 60%.

When asked at what level non attendance would be considered ‘persistent’ or ‘chronic’, 31% of respondents felt this would be once it had dipped below 80%. Again, however, responses were wide ranging as shown in Figure 4 (See Appendix 2). This varied from 2% of respondents who considered that anything below 95% was chronic and at the other extreme, 2% who considered non attendance only to be persistent when it fell below 40%.

#### Is non- attendance an issue for your service?

53% of respondents felt that non-attendance was a significant issue for their service or school, with 37% saying it is somewhat of an issue and 10% saying it is not an issue. The 10% of respondents who felt it was not an issue for their service were education staff based in nursery and primary schools.

Further comments from respondents outline that:

- There are enhanced patterns of non-attendance within some families whose family history impacts significantly on young people's attitudes towards learning and school
- There are different 'types' of non-attendance arising from different underlying factors
- Family holidays significantly affect young people's attendance rates
- Young people not attending school need to be offered flexible, appropriate education packages of support

Indicators that young people are at risk of non – attendance

Respondents were provided with a list of possible sources of information which may indicate risks of non-attendance. The percentage of respondents who agreed they use these as indicators is shown in Chart 1. Other suggested indicators included:

- Substance misuse
- Resilience
- Behavioural difficulties
- Domestic Violence
- Additional learning needs
- Travelling families

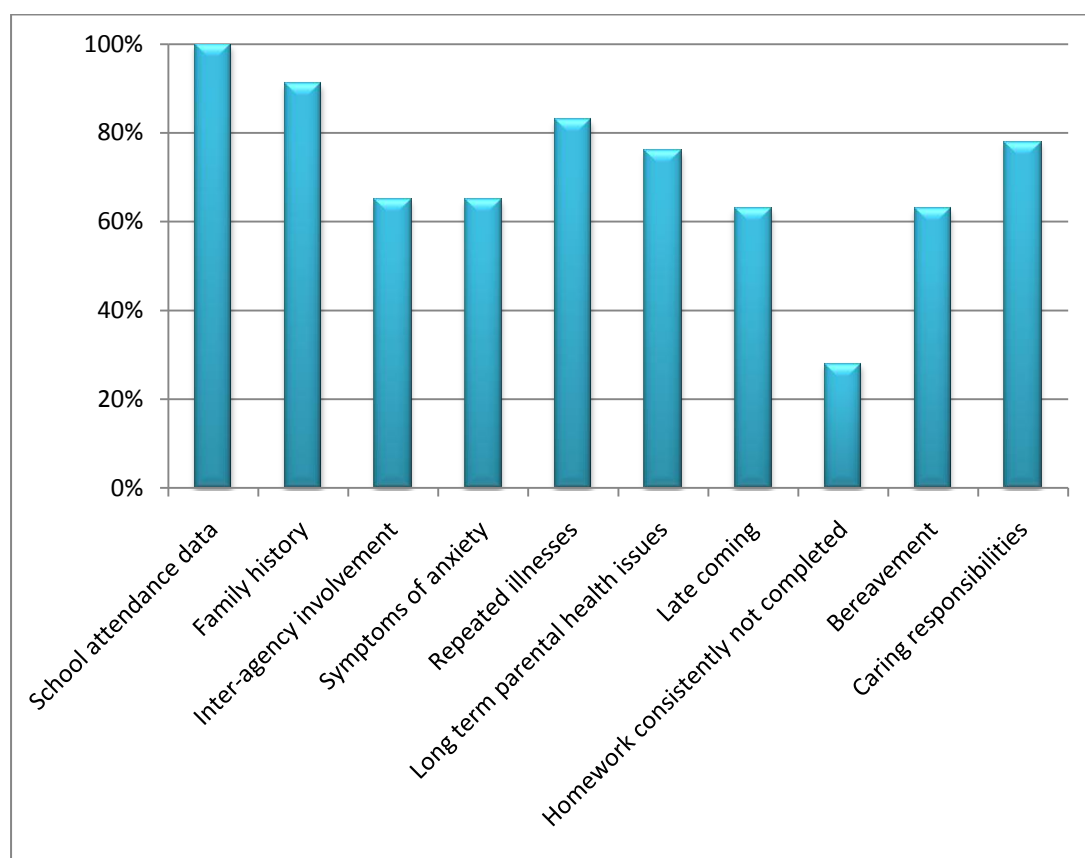
Approaches underpinning practice in supporting attendance

Respondents were provided with a list (see Table 2) of approaches in supporting attendance. For each of the approaches listed, over 70% of respondents felt it was an approach they employed. The approaches most commonly employed were: ***building meaningful partnerships with parents, seeking to understand the underlying needs and responding flexibly to individual need.***

Barriers to applying these approaches were noted as:

- Earlier intervention processes are yet to be established / developed.
- Education and social work staff can have differing expectations and stances in relation to roles and responsibilities.
- Some young people are unable to access existing resources because parents / carers cannot, or will not, engage. They do not want to be seen as 'open books'.

**Chart 1. What information would you use to determine that a young person may be at risk of school non-attendance?**



**Table 2 – approaches used by respondents to survey**

<b>Approach</b>	<b>% response</b>
Maintaining a positive attitude to change	70%
Building meaningful partnerships with young people	87%
Building meaningful partnerships with parents	<b>96%</b>
Building meaningful partnerships amongst professionals	85%
Being consistent in your approach	83%
Seeking to understand the underlying needs	<b>96%</b>
Ensuring the curriculum is relevant to young people	76%
Ensuring young people are valued and welcome in school	87%
Sharing information effectively	80%
Responding flexibly to individual need	<b>91%</b>
Ensuring there are good mechanisms in place to support transitions	85%

**Awareness of formal procedures**

34% of respondents were unaware of Education Service Circular No. 29, Non-attendance and Truancy Guidelines and Procedures. This 34% comprised mainly Social Work and Voluntary Sector Staff.

### Impact of Formal Procedures

Table 3 shows the perceived impact of the procedures outlined in Education Service Circular No. 29, Non- attendance and Truancy Guidelines and Procedures.

Respondents further outlined that:

- Professional engagement and relationships are crucial in 'making a difference'.
  - Attendance councils and committees exist and require to be fully utilised
  - Young people's needs are individualised
  - Early intervention approaches are required to plan and achieve positive outcomes
- Definitions of 'meaningful' partnerships and effective meetings / decision matching processes need to be clarified and understood

**Table 1: Perceived impact of formal procedures**

<b>What do you consider to be the impact of these procedures?</b>	<b>High Impact</b>	<b>Medium Impact</b>	<b>Low Impact</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
School sending a letter home	9.1%	31.8%	<b>54.5%</b>	4.5%
School sending further letters home	6.8%	34.1%	<b>56.8%</b>	2.3%
School meeting with parents	43.2%	<b>47.7%</b>	9.1%	0.0%
School involving other agencies	44.2%	<b>48.8%</b>	4.7%	2.3%
Multi-agency meetings	41.9%	<b>53.5%</b>	2.3%	2.3%
Referral to MAG	38.6%	<b>43.2%</b>	4.5%	13.6%
Referral to Attendance Panel	<b>40.5%</b>	26.2%	23.8%	9.5%
Referral to Attendance Committee <sup>1</sup>	36.6%	24.4%	24.4%	14.6%
Referral to Children's Reporter	<b>47.6%</b>	28.6%	21.4%	2.4%
Children's Hearing	<b>52.4%</b>	23.8%	19.0%	4.8%

### Impact of early intervention approaches

Respondents were asked what interventions have worked in the early stages of supporting attendance where non-attendance has started to emerge as an issue.

Table 4 shows perceived effectiveness of known early interventions.

Participants suggested that introducing Education Welfare Officers would have effective outcomes. Others suggested that it is the quality of the home school partnership which makes a difference. Ways forward in intervening early were suggested as:

- Targeted and realistic allocation of resources
- Working with families to encourage ownership of a plan to maximise school attendance
- Pro active approaches to encourage motivation

<sup>1</sup> This is likely to have been over-reported due to confusion between the Attendance Committee and the Attendance Panel. Practitioners cannot refer to the Attendance Committee; this can only be done by the attendance Panel.

- Procedural letters to parents / carers must be relevant and updated

**Table 4 – Effectiveness of early intervention approaches**

	<i>Have you used this approach</i>	<i>How effective do you think it is?</i>			
		<b>Effective</b>	<b>Somewhat effective</b>	<b>Not effective</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
School sending a letter home	63%	15%	49%	32%	5%
School meeting with parents and child/young person	78%	50%	43%	5%	2%
Groupcall	58%	13%	41%	31%	15%
Attendance cards	32%	13%	42%	3%	42%
Making expectations of attendance explicit	76%	36%	48%	12%	5%
Regular communication with parents	95%	61%	37%	2%	0%
Multi-agency meeting (Team Around the child)	56%	46%	46%	0%	8%
Referral to MAG	52%	31%	46%	3%	21%

**Table 5 – effectiveness of intervention in later stages of non-attendance**

	<i>Have you used this approach?</i>	<i>How effective do you think it is?</i>			
		<b>Effective</b>	<b>Effect unknown</b>	<b>Not effective</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
Having a Key Teacher	46%	32%	55%	0%	13%
Ensuring the Key Teacher is someone the young person wants to engage with	54%	63%	28%	0%	9%
Supporting the family to develop positive routines	85%	50%	47%	0%	3%
Reintroducing the concept of learning as a positive experience	56%	33%	42%	3%	21%
Attendance cards	28%	10%	38%	21%	31%
Creating tailored timetables/ programmes	64%	35%	53%	0%	12%
Alternative Education Programmes (e.g. Recycle-a-bike)	46%	41%	31%	0%	28%
Focused group work support	26%	22%	37%	4%	37%
Focused individual support	64%	42%	42%	0%	16%
Home visits	59%	25%	52%	3%	19%

## Responding to Non-Attendance in the Later Stages

Respondents were asked what interventions have been effective where non-attendance has become persistent/ chronic. Table 5 shows perceived effectiveness of such interventions.

Respondents further commented on other approaches at this stage:

- Home visiting is a 'powerful and productive method' of engaging with families and developing working relationships.
- Developing creative packages within the curriculum.
- Effective assessments of need are required to establish action plans and develop shared outcomes.
- Non attendance at school should not be sole reason for becoming LAAH.

### Supporting professional practice

Finally, respondents were asked what could be done to support their practice in meeting the needs of young people who are not attending school. Key points arising from the responses included:

- Partnership working between Cluaran and Community Learning and Development Services.
- The development of alternative education arrangements
- A single formatted report form
- Further development of communication systems
- Positive interface between Education and Social Work Services
- Support for Parenting in the form of groups, courses and programmes

### **Multi-Agency focus groups**

#### Method

Four focus groups involving education, social work and voluntary sector practitioners with high level of experience in tackling non-attendance were conducted. The interview focused on 6 key questions with supplementary follow up questions to be used depending on the discussion (see Appendix 3). These are summarised as:

1. What Early Intervention approaches are most effective and in what circumstances these can be effectively deployed?
2. Describe some examples of creative or alternative intervention approaches and why these were effective?
3. Describe when children becoming Looked After has been an effective approach and what the limitations to this approach can be?
  - a. What could be reasonable alternative approaches?
4. What examples can you describe of group/school or Community level intervention that can promote attendance and how do you know they have been effective?
5. What approaches do we need to consider most for different underlying needs?
  - a. Examples include: school based factors, family factors, social emotional and developmental factors, medical (including mental health and wellbeing) factors
6. What may we consider most appropriate for different Vulnerable groups?
  - a. E.g. Young carers, children with parents who have mental health difficulties, children on the child protection register (current or previously), Looked After Children

The discussion was recorded in note form, typed and then then analysed using a thematic analysis by two independent raters. The raters then came together and devised a single set of common themes.

### Participants

There were 25 participants in group sizes ranging from 3 to 8. Approximately 2 thirds of participants were education (Headteachers) and 1 third from voluntary sector, social work or coordinated children's services.

### Results of Focus group

The themes identified are contained within the Data Table in Appendix 4. The key findings were:

1. Early intervention approaches are the most effective and include relationships with parents at the very core. These often can start in Nursery, but persist throughout education. Education staff need to be in a position to use the communication tools at their disposal, both informal, chats and the formal communications within the policy flexibly to be able to honestly communicate on the child's needs and to do this within an ethos of welcome and positive partnership. It can be that a high degree of persistence is required to encourage parents to work in partnership and see the value in education. Early identification of those at risk of pervasive non-attendance is required with early intervention including signposting for additional help or services.
2. At times it can be useful to try creative and innovative approaches for individual children or groups of children. These need to be targeted for the individual child and their needs and work best when at their core they engage the pupils. Evidence based practice can be helpful in identify what is likely to work and schools and the partner agencies need to be in a position to be able to test these out and evaluate the effectiveness on the outcomes for the child. Benefits to the authority will accrue if there are forums to share practice and have clear and consistent support from all the partner agencies who tackle non-attendance.
3. Looked after Children can be particularly vulnerable. There was a sense that at times children who are not attending as a symptom of other difficulties within the family and therefore intervention on non-attendance by making children looked after was not in itself helpful but only in the context of wider needs. At times support and or intervention with families is required, although it was recognised that there can be barriers to this being effective. It was stated that a more coordinated approach to assessment and intervention would be helpful, using an integrated assessment framework. The practical suggestions included **parenting classes, coaching** parents and **direct support** to help the parent implement boundaries and routines.

In addition there can be very small low key practical barriers, such as transporting the child to school which can be particularly challenging and the flexibility to be able to implement low key practical interventions is viewed as helpful. There was recognition that there appear to be significant numbers of Looked After Children for whom the current system is not working effectively.



It was also recommended that there may need to be a change to how services engage and disengage with children and families as there was a sense that all too often services were withdrawn when the situation had not improved as they were seen to not be working. While it is important not to repeatedly undertake activity that is not effective it is important that at the point where an intervention approach or service is to be stopped something else that is likely to be more effective is in place.

4. In the experience of the participants, while there were some examples of group or community based approaches that had had some limited success these were often unsuccessful due to the different underlying causal or contributory factors to the non-attendance. Examples included summer programmes or transition programmes, which catered for children with a wide variety of difficulties and needs rather than just non-attendance. It was thought helpful to engage communities in a positive response but the participants were not clear on what would be most effective in this area.
5. There was wide recognition across the participants that non-attendance, particularly pervasive non-attendance may have multiple causes that differ for each child and their set of circumstances. What was thought to be helpful included taking a risk factors approach, clear assessment of the contributory/causal factors and then targeted intervention on the identified risks, causes or contributory factors. It was recognised that the kinds of responses available to practitioners, particularly in the multi-agency context can vary. It was thought helpful if a guide to intervention based on different factors or causes could be provided to guide practitioners.
6. The vulnerable groups that were raised were identified within the Falkirk Community Health partnership as requiring specific monitoring or support. In relation to non-attendance the issues that affect this group are both not markedly different and markedly different as they pertain to the individual children and their circumstances. Therefore what was seen to be required was similar to the issues described above, of integrated assessment to identify the causal or contributory factors and coordinated intervention targeting the areas of need. Where this could be linked to curricular intervention was also seen to be most effective.

### Summary

Within the three phases of the research the common themes that have emerged are that non-attendance is a significant barrier to children progressing in education, that aspects of the current practices in Falkirk are not working as effectively as people would like, and that although there were areas for improvement there were aspects of effective practice that could be built upon for the future. Early identification, clear assessment and targeted intervention was required. This can start from fairly informal interventions such as having positive school and parental relationships. The effectiveness that this can bring to bear on tackling emergent non-attendance nor the effort required to maintain this should not be underestimated. In addition, the formal response to non-attendance needs to be able to be deployed flexibly using professional judgement. It needs to be stated that the effectiveness of individual intervention is often not known. The only one that was consistently viewed as having

a positive effect was that of the key teacher being someone that the young person would engage with. The second most effective approach was seen to be one where the family are supported to implement positive routines.

Meetings and regular communication were seen to be more effective than formal communication, such as letters home. The letters that are provided as part of the Falkirk Council policy were felt to either require tailoring to individual circumstances or were considered to have a low impact.

It was not possible to evaluate the impact of higher levels of intervention within the Falkirk Council policy such as Attendance Panels and Committees. There have been few cases within the last few years of children and their parents being referred to the attendance Committee, with it very rarely being agreed that it is appropriate to prosecute. The most common event is that it is referred to the Children's reporter, or for further medical or other agency advice.

The combination of regular communication, multiagency assessment and intervention was viewed largely positively, although the effectiveness of this was still rated as somewhat effective by 46% of those that responded. The Integrated Assessment Framework may provide a framework from within which individual needs can be more clearly identified and intervention targeted more effectively. There still requires some careful consideration around the area with whom the intervention is being targeted as for some children the casual or contributory factors are such that intervention with the parents is required rather than the children themselves. What does the research literature tell us of evidence-based effective interventions?

### ***Legislative, policy and evidence review***

#### ***Legal Position***

The Education Act (Scotland) (1980) states that children have a right to education. Further to this it states that parents have a responsibility for providing their child with an education and they could be found guilty if no reasonable excuse is provided for absences. The legislation highlights that education is compulsory for all children, however school is not.

Included, Engaged and Involved (Scottish Government, 2007) highlights the importance of supporting young people to become successful in their learning, emotionally resilient and confident.

#### ***Definition of Non-Attendance***

There are various definitions provided within the literature in relation to non-attendance. In order to establish a working definition for this research consideration has been given to different definitions for attendance and non-attendance within legislation and literature. Attendance is defined by the Scottish Executive (2007) as "participation in a programme of educational activities arranged by the school". This definition allows for attendance to include work experience, college placements out with the school building. Truancy is defined by the Scottish Executive (2007) as "absence for any period as a result of premeditated or spontaneous actions on the part of the pupil, parent or both". The Education Act (Scotland) (1980) defined non-attendance as "failing without reasonable excuse to attend regularly". Reasonable excuse was defined as illness, local authority not providing appropriate arrangement

and other circumstances. Non-attendance can be an indicator of issues or difficulties for the young person and can significantly increase the likelihood of young people leaving education and not achieving positive destinations (Scottish Executive, 2007).

Taking consideration of the available legislation and literature “extended school non-attendance” has been developed as a working definition for this piece of work.

### Types of Non-Attendance

Reid (1999) identifies three categories of truants/non-attenders:

1. Traditional/typical truant
2. Psychological truant
3. Institutional truant

A traditional truant is described as being isolated with shy tendencies, low self-concepts and often introverted. They are further described as being unsupported at home and being victims of their social circumstances. The psychological truant is described as someone who does not attend school due to psychological difficulties. This may be young people with school phobia, for example. The institutional truant is described as someone that does not attend school due to educational and school factors. Similarly to traditional truants they are likely to have an unsupportive home environment. Reid suggests that there is a further category referred to as the generic truant that may experience a variety of different reason for truanting at different times. Interviews with young people that truant suggest that they wanted lessons to be more fun, have less pressure at school and have more flexibility with their choices.

### School Phobia

School phobia is a complex condition which can involve characteristics of separation anxiety, agoraphobia and social phobia. However, school phobia is centred on the school. Usually young people experiencing school phobia are anxious about leaving the secure environment of home. Some literature refers to school phobia as school refusal or school avoidance. Young people experiencing school phobia will experience anxiety related to school and will avoid attending to avoid the anxiety. It is suggested that there are two types of school phobia: separation anxiety and social anxiety (Csoti, 2003).

### Aetiology

It is suggested that there is no single cause for non-attendance. It could be due to social, psychological or educational factors. However, there is usually an incident that acts as a trigger point for non-attendance. Additionally, it is suggested that there is a clear link between social disadvantage and truancy (Reid, 1999). There may be school based factors contributing to non-attendance such as bullying, streaming of classes, formal relationships between staff and pupils, specific areas such as toilets or corridors (Lauchlan, 2010). Generally, larger schools have a greater difficulty with non-attendance. Similarly schools with strict boundaries, poor relationships between staff and pupils, poor home school links have a greater difficulty with non attendance (Reynolds et al, 1980). Further to this, it is suggested that the second two years of Primary school and years one and three of Secondary school are the times when attendance is most problematic (Hallam & Rogers, 2008).

Reid (1999) highlights that curriculum, poor teaching, poor teacher- pupil relationships and peer group relationships are the main reason for non-attendance. Further information suggests that the majority of pupils (56%) report the reason for non-attendance as institutional reasons (i.e. bullying, curriculum, rules, teachers and desire to leave). Whilst some pupils (28%) report that their non-attendance is due to social reasons (i.e. domestic circumstances, peer pressure, level of enjoyment and out of school employment). The remaining pupils (16%) suggest that their non-attendance is due to psychological reasons (i.e. illness and psychosomatic symptoms).

There are many different types of absence and generally there is an increase in non-attendance following a transfer from one stage of education to another, such as Primary to Secondary school. If a pupil does not attend at Primary school it is likely that they will not attend at Secondary school. Furthermore, there is generally a higher incidence of non-attendance at Secondary school. Any changes in routines can have an impact on attendance and children with additional support needs and looked after children are more at risk of non-attendance (Hallam & Rogers, 2008).

*The Scottish Executive (2007) reports that looked after children “perform less well at school; when compared to the general school population their attendance rates are lower, their exclusion rates are higher and their academic attainment is lower”. Additionally, it is reported that looked after children are over represented in the figures for exclusions and truancy and are generally more at risk. It is suggested that 1 in 4 looked after children over the age of 14 are non-attenders (McCarthy et al., 2004). In Scotland, looked after children are 5 times more likely to be excluded from school compared to their peers (Scottish Executive, 2005).*

Absence from school disrupts learning, whatever the cause (Scottish Executive, 2006). The importance of promoting good attendance is highlighted by concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children who are not at school. Non-attendance in education may indicate a child at risk (Scottish Executive, 2006).

### Impact of Non-Attendance

The Scottish Government recognises that attending and engaging with education is important in developing the 4 capacities set out in the Curriculum for Excellence: successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens (Scottish Government, 2010). Additionally, in relation to future outcomes it is suggested that young people who are persistently absent are at risk of not being in employment, further education or training when they leave school. (Scottish Executive, 2006).

Non-attendance at school can lead to poorer attainment and underachievement (Reid, 1999; Malcolm et al, 2003). Malcolm et al (2003) suggested that young people that do not attend generally underachieve. Further to this it is suggested that teachers may not be able to provide the support required for the young person to catch up. They also suggest that it leads to social isolation and lower confidence.

The consequences of non-attendance cross from individual factors concerning attainment, to school ethos and the whole community. It is suggested that many teachers have little sympathy for truants. Reid highlights that it is important to remember that non-attendance is a multi-causal problem and that all non-attenders

are unique and therefore there are no easy solutions. He further suggests that teachers have reported that they have limited understanding of non-attendance and have little training on the topic (Reid, 1999).

Research has revealed that as levels of truancy increase the level of Standard Grade award decreases, this is experienced across a variety of subjects including English and Maths (Malcolm, Thorpe, Lowden, 1996).

### Perceptions of Non-Attendance

#### Teachers Perceptions of Non-Attendance

Malcolm et al (2003) suggests that all Local Education Authorities (England and Wales) and teachers believed that attendance was important because it related to attainment, disruptive behaviour and children's safety. Some Local Education Authorities felt that schools were keen to accept reasons for absence and authorise absence in an attempt to keep their attendance figures high.

Furthermore, teachers reported that managing attendance was complex and could be time consuming. It was also reported that there was not a consistent approach. Teachers were primarily concerned with the number of term-time holidays and highlighted a need for more training on attendance related issues. Teachers also highlighted the increase of social problems as a factor and a growth in the perceived number of dysfunctional families. Further to this it was suggested that the rigidity of the national curriculum (England and Wales) and the lack of alternative options within the curriculum was an important factor in non-attendance. Teachers reported that they had concerns about a rise in parental condoning of non-attendance. Additionally, they felt that the punishment for non-attendance needed to be more severe (Reid, 2006).

#### Parents Perceptions of Non-Attendance

Malcolm et al (2003) report that the majority of parents felt that it was important to attend school as this meant they did well at their school work. It was felt by parents that the main reasons for truancy was bullying, teacher problems and pressures from peers to be absent. Additionally the parents of non-attenders felt that regular attendance was less important than parents of pupils that attend. Furthermore, it is suggested that most parents think children need to attend school to get good qualifications but that occasionally missing school is not a problem. However, parents of pupils with attendance issues generally think the problems lie with teachers, bullying or peer pressure and view attendance as less important. Furthermore, it is suggested that parents of non-attenders do not think there is a link between attainment/qualifications and attendance.

#### Pupils Perceptions of Non-Attendance

Malcolm et al (2003) stated that many non-attenders reported that the reason they stayed off school was boredom, and most reported that they were sorry following their non-attendance. Further to this most truants felt that their parents would be angry if they knew they had not attended school.

Non-attenders at Secondary school more commonly attribute their non-attendance to school related rather than home related factors.

It is suggested in some research that the young people that do not attend are unaware of the possible consequences of doing so. However, they do accept that they could fall behind in class or receive lower marks and most of the young people were uneasy about this (Malcolm, Thorpe & Lowden, 1996).

#### Interventions for Non-Attendance

The longer that children and young people are out of the school the harder it becomes for them to return to school. It is important that the teachers are involved in the planning of the young person's return to ensure that they are aware of the circumstances and strategies being used to support their return to school (Hallam & Roger, 2004).

Interventions are successful when the teachers are included in the programme. This will allow for a smoother transition back into school (Lauchlan, 2010). Peer supports and buddy systems can work well to re-integrate pupils into school and create a safe environment. Allowing pupils to have special classroom responsibilities can help the process of re-engaging young people in education. It is suggested by Lauchlan (2010) that several things should be taken into consideration when planning for a return to school. These are: academic related concerns, peer related concerns, teacher related concerns and whole school related concerns. It is suggested by some that a contract/agreement designed by the school and young person could assist the transition back into education.

It is suggested that the causes of non-attendance are complex and therefore it is unlikely to be resolved using a single approach. Additionally, it is suggested that early intervention to prevent young people developing the habit of non-attendance would be beneficial. Due to the complexity of non-attendance it is important that a multi-agency approach is taken and that schools might have to be more flexible in developing individualised and alternative curricula and promoting a positive ethos within the school community (Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson & Kirk, 2003).

#### Whole School Approaches

Due to the complex nature of non-attendance interventions require time and commitment from all the professionals involved. Similarly due to the complex nature of non-attendance it is important to work collaboratively within a multi-agency team (Hallam & Rogers, 2004). It is suggested that interventions need to consider 'children's need for safety, a one-to-one relationship with a caring adult, developing marketable skills and a chance to give back to the community'.

When considering whole school approaches to non-attendance it is important for the school to consider the causes of non-attendance and use this as a starting point for developing initiatives for promoting attendance and engagement. It is important that there is consistency across the school and that the profile of non-attendance is high within the school community. Furthermore, it is suggested that it is important to develop a positive school ethos, which creates a positive and respectful environment. It is suggested that the social climate is key and that promoting positive behaviour within the school supports engagement. Furthermore, it is suggested that providing relevant and flexible curriculum support engagement. It is also suggested that allowing pupils the opportunity to catch up with work they have missed can help to reintegrate and sustain their attendance at school (Hallam & Rogers, 2004).

Many whole school approaches within Scottish schools are working in a proactive way to develop relationships and communication to promote a trusting ethos within the school. It is suggested that using restorative approaches can be beneficial in supporting and repairing relationships. Furthermore, solution oriented approaches can work effectively to build collaborative working within the school to promote engagement (Scottish Executive, 2006). There are additional reasons why some pupils may not attend school, such as mental or emotional difficulties, family circumstances, trauma, anxiety, living in foster/residential care, experience of abuse/neglect (Scottish Executive, 2006). Further to this Hallam & Rogers (2004) suggest that having supportive teachers are a key element in promoting school engagement.

### Group Approaches

Group approaches often involve the young people identifying social situations that can cause anxiety or be problematic and then within the groups the young people can role-play and practice coping strategies. This can be successful and can work well alongside gradual exposure to anxiety-provoking situations. A study by Hallam et al (2006) involved Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and a school mentor working with small groups to develop social and positive behavioural skills. The research suggested that this involvement had a positive impact on school attendance. Lauchlan (2010) suggests that training in social skills can support young people to reduce their anxiety which can support pupils to reintegrate with their peers and avoid isolation.

Training for teachers and parents can be useful in supporting them to provide information and support their understanding of non-attendance, particularly in relation to strategies to promote attendance and engagement at school (Lauchlan, 2010; Hallam & Roger, 2004). It is suggested that in some cases parents of non-attenders do not have the behaviour management skills to tackle their child's non-attendance. Information about how to provide clear instructions to their children, gaining their attention and giving praise when appropriate can be provided to help parents to support their children. Research has suggested that parent strategies can be effective in supporting young people to re-engage with education (Lauchlan, 2010; Hallam & Roger, 2004; Pellegrini, 2007).

### Individual Approaches Supporting a Return to School

When supporting a return to school it is suggested that due to the complex nature and variety of reasons for non-attendance it is important to create individualised plans for each young person. Hallam & Rogers (2004) suggest that it is important to establish the cause of non-attendance, work within a multi-agency team, create a personalised plan and ensure good communication between all professionals and school and home. Furthermore, they suggest that for social causes of non-attendance social skills programmes can be beneficial. Additionally, support at break and lunchtimes within school, individual counselling or therapeutic work and restorative approaches can be beneficial for some young people. Furthermore, identifying a key worker or mentor within school for the young person can be beneficial in providing support throughout the process of reintegration with school.

If the difficulties have been related to learning difficulties Hallam & Rogers (2004) suggest modified timetables, additional support in class, use of a support base, work

experience schemes, part-time timetables can support young people back in to education. Hallam & Rogers (2004) highlight important adaptations that could be made to support reintegration of non-attenders. These strategies include providing a place for independent study, part time timetables, a focus on the core areas of the curriculum, promotion of parental support, allocation of a key worker/mentor within school and allocation of a buddy for peer support.

If the non-attendance is in relation to anxiety support can be provided in a number of ways such as through techniques such as flooding, systematic desensitisation and relaxation training.

Relaxation training can be used to support the young person to learn how to relax their bodies during anxiety-provoking situations. This can be done through mental imagery of anxiety-provoking situations or through *in vivo* techniques which involves the young person practicing relaxation techniques within the anxiety-provoking setting. Young people may progress from the mental imagery to the *in vivo* process (Hallam & Rogers, 2004; Lauchlan, 2010; Pellegrini, 2007). Cognitive restructuring can be used to challenge the young people to analyse self-statements about the reasons they are not attending school, following this strategies are discussed to consider how to cope with and the reasons behind their non-attendance (Lauchlan, 2010). Through this process the young people are encouraged to say their thoughts out loud. This may be facilitated by the identification of a key person or teacher to speak to the child.

A gradual return to school (systematic desensitisation) could be used to slowly support a young person back into education. This may involve the pupil starting by going to the school gates and gradually building up to being inside the building (Lauchlan, 2010; Hallam & Rogers, 2004).

Flooding involves a rapid return to school for the young person. This is controversial technique and can be distressing for the individual, family and school (Hallam & Rogers, 2004; Lauchlan, 2010; Pellegrini, 2007).

It is suggested by Hallam & Rogers (2004) that, in general, interventions that work are based on the individual needs of young people and work across individual, school and family levels.

### **Discussion**

Discourse on extended school non-attendance traditionally favoured a clinical, child pathology paradigm, largely framing the problem in terms of (a) truancy associated with conduct disorder and/or (b) so-called school phobia (or refusal) associated with attachment disorder (eg Berg et al, 1969; Galloway, 1983; King et al, 1998; Lachlan 2003)

Growing recognition of the limitations of the application of a pathological model to assessment and intervention led to a move towards functional analysis of risk and maintenance factors (Kearney et al, 1990, 1997). This in turn led to recognition of the combination of underlying factors maintaining chronic non-attendance behaviour is likely to be different for different children and young people, and the knowledge that



no single strategy has been found to be effective for all<sup>2</sup> (Elliott and Place, 1998; Lachlan, op.cit.).

At the same time, the new discourse explicitly introduced school/environmental dimensions to our understanding of extended school non-attendance (Kearney and Silverman, 1990; Kelly et al, 1991; King et al, op. cit.). This explicit acceptance of the influence of social context paves the way for a collaborative problem-solving approach to assessment and intervention based on social constructivist and ecological theories of child development and learning (Bruner, 1963, 1971; Brofenbrenner, 1979; Schaffer, 1996; Burden, 1996, 1999; Kelly et al, op.cit.).

The paradigm shift away from a child deficit model of the problem (ie child pathology) to regarding non-attendance and assessment of a child within their social context (ie. social constructivism) and the importance of systemic dimensions lends itself well to current perspectives in educational and multi-agency thinking and practice with its focus on collaborative, staged assessment and intervention at levels which include, and also go beyond, the level of the individual child such as the My World Triangle (King et al, 1995; Kelly et al, op. cit.; Pellegrini, 2007; Scottish Government, 2007, 2008, Childrens Bill)

It also fits with Scottish Government legislation on identifying, assessing and providing for the additional support needs of each individual child and young person (Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, amended 2009), and is entirely consistent with Falkirk Council's staged assessment and intervention practice framework for supporting children and young people who have additional support needs or whose needs may be addressed through the Integrated Assessment framework.

More recent discourse has taken things further, explicitly emphasising the value of systemic, contextual assessment of risk and maintenance factors in and out of school (eg Lachlan 2003; Pellegrini, 2007). Such assessment can and should be proactive: Pellegrini specifically refers to reducing precipitative risk factors.

In other words, it is possible to reduce the need for reactive assessment and intervention at individual pupil level by incorporating proactive measures in to our schools and wider collaborative systems: we have the knowledge to design proactive systems to improve attendance.

### **Conclusion**

The literature supports the view that there are multiple causes or contributory factors involved in a child who does not attend school. An assessment of these factors as they pertain to the child, their family context and their wider social context, is viewed as the best approach to considering intervention most effectively. Multiagency intervention around an individual child can work. intervention targeted at groups of children is not always effective but can be effective when the children have a common underlying causal or contributory factor or problem solving methodology is deployed that does not dwell on the causal factors. The staged intervention approach and using an integrated assessment framework has the potential to be

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<sup>2</sup> See Kearney & Silverman (1993), Pellegrini (2007) and Lauchlan (2003) for summary contextual A & I

able to support the individual assessment and intervention for individual children. Community based responses and ethos or environmental factors have not been clearly identified as successful for tackling non-attendance in large part due to the multiplicity of the maintaining or causal factors.

There is little evidence that the final sanctions systems deployed by councils have an impact on improving attendance.

### ***Recommendations***

The research project highlighted 5 key recommendations for making progress in tackling non-attendance in Falkirk.

1. Early and Effective intervention should be encouraged.
  - This would be achieved by all schools considering their ethos, relationships with parents and being able to talk constructively with parents at an early stage.
  - Ethos and engagement are crucial to the successful re-integration or improved attendance of those at risk of pervasive non-attendance
  - School buildings to be reviewed to ensure that the entrance presents as a welcoming place
  - Additional Proactive measures to promote good attendance
2. A whole scale review of the Attendance policy. This should include:
  - recognition that non-attendance is a multi-factorial issue, with different interventions appropriate for different contributory or causal factors
  - A focus on what is demonstrably effective.
  - Social work and other agency collaboration in the revision to the process of revising the procedures to promote understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities.
  - Clear emphasis on the support strategies as well as the consequences for parents and children
  - Review the procedure of Panels and Committee and discuss the review with Panel and committee members, Councillors and relevant stakeholders
  - update associated documents e.g. letters to parents, guidance on recording non-attendance.
3. Improve practice though: through publishing practice guidance, training and briefings in the following areas:
  - Attendance is, in principle, no different from any other factor giving rise to a pupil being deemed to have additional support needs: Getting it Right for Every Child practice, including the introduction and formal review of Form 4 plans should be followed for each individual pupil whose attendance records trigger intervention.
  - Schools recording attendance, non-attendance and truancy in a consistent cross-authority manner is required.
  - Role of support agencies in promoting attendance across different causal or contributory factors
  - Assessment and Planning for intervention needs to demonstrate the area of intervention, including work directed at the family or school level and with clarity on the causal or contributory factors being addressed

- Sharing and disseminating good practice needs to be encouraged and fostered, particularly where a team around a child has success with a 'creative package' or high impact practice.
4. Publish guidance for all agencies that promotes evidence informed intervention approaches to be used for different causes, circumstances or contributory factors and which may include:
- Effective intervention with pupils, parents, schools and communities at different stages or levels of intervention
  - Different approaches to non-attendance at different threshold levels, recognising that professional judgement is also required
  - The role of home visits and the parameters for this as a course of intervention needs to be defined with responsibilities and expectations clearly identified. Consideration may need to be given to recruitment of an education welfare officer role or assigning this responsibility to an existing staff group.
5. Commission phase 2 of the project, involving:
- A multi-agency team to produce guidance document and review the policy (action on recommendations 1-4).
  - Exploration of the effectiveness of Attendance Panels and Committees.
  - Consideration given to commissioning additional research into parental and pupil attitudes to learning and engagement.

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21 February 2013

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**Appendix 1. Data tables indicating attendance and absence**

**Table 6. Number of pupils by deciles of attendance below 80% authority figures**

	<b>2008-9</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>
70-79%	573	610	737
60-69%	246	236	274
50-59%	101	108	127
40-49%	82	83	74
30-39%	37	52	51
20-29%	29	28	29
10-19%	24	30	22
0-9%	54	47	40
<b>Below 80%</b>	<b>1146</b>	<b>1194</b>	<b>1354</b>
<b>60-80%</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>846</b>	<b>1011</b>
<b>Below 60%</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>343</b>

**Table 7. Number of pupils by deciles of attendance below 80% authority figures by year group, 2008-9**

<b>2008-9</b>															
	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>	<b>P7</b>	<b>total</b>	<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>	<b>total</b>
70-79%	11	18	22	19	12	21	27	<b>130</b>	47	53	99	98	91	51	<b>439</b>
60-69%	9	6	5	4	4	8	6	<b>42</b>	16	29	56	48	50	10	<b>209</b>
50-59%	0	2	1	1	1	0	3	<b>8</b>	7	15	16	30	18	6	<b>92</b>
40-49%	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	<b>5</b>	6	9	18	13	27	4	<b>77</b>
30-39%	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	<b>3</b>	1	3	8	11	9	2	<b>34</b>
20-29%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>	2	2	8	8	8	1	<b>29</b>
10-19%	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	<b>3</b>	2	1	4	6	8	0	<b>21</b>
0-9%	2	1	1	1	3	1	2	<b>11</b>	4	3	6	2	20	8	<b>43</b>
<b>Below 80%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>944</b>
<b>60-80%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>648</b>
<b>Below 60%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>296</b>

7 Pupils with 0% attendance p1-p5,

**Table 8. Number of pupils by deciles of attendance below 80% authority figures by year group, 2009-10**

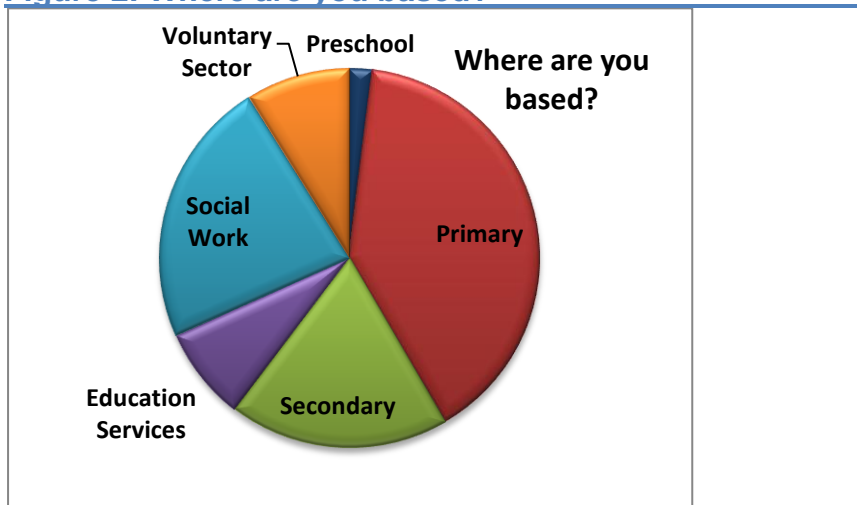
<b>2009-10</b>																
	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>	<b>P7</b>	<b>total</b>		<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>	<b>total</b>
70-79%	26	19	20	20	15	18	27	145		42	82	87	140	73	41	465
60-69%	8	3	7	6	4	6	6	40		24	28	37	53	36	19	197
50-59%	5	1	1	1	0	0	2	10		8	15	16	31	18	9	97
40-49%	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	6		8	12	12	27	15	3	77
30-39%	1	0	0	1	0	2	2	6		5	9	9	8	7	8	46
20-29%	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2		0	3	2	5	10	5	25
10-19%	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2		1	4	5	7	9	2	28
0-9%	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	4		1	5	5	5	20	7	43
<b>Below 80%</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>215</b>		<b>89</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>978</b>
<b>60-80%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>185</b>		<b>66</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>662</b>
<b>Below 60%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>30</b>		<b>23</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>316</b>

**Table 9. Number of pupils by deciles of attendance below 80% authority figures by year group, 2010-11**

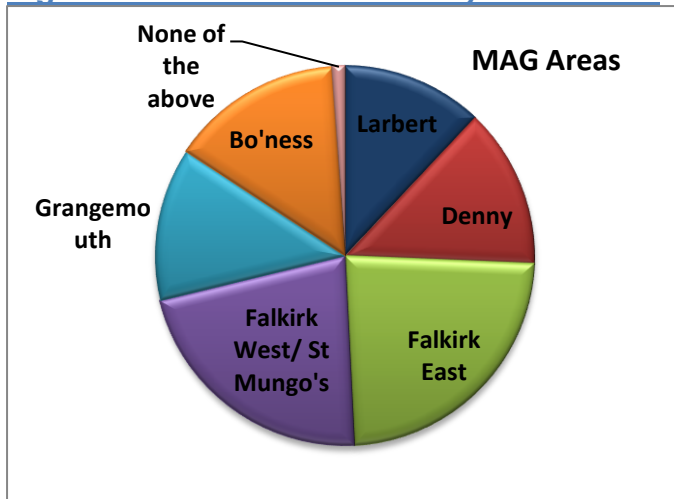
<b>2010-11</b>																
	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>	<b>P7</b>	<b>total</b>		<b>S1</b>	<b>S2</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S4</b>	<b>S5</b>	<b>S6</b>	<b>total</b>
70-79%	30	33	24	24	19	26	28	184		67	89	115	107	106	50	534
60-69%	9	6	4	7	5	14	4	49		16	28	57	39	57	24	221
50-59%	4	1	1	0	1	2	3	12		8	22	21	22	23	18	114
40-49%	3	1	0	0	0	0	2	6		4	9	21	9	15	10	68
30-39%	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	3		5	5	13	15	8	2	48
20-29%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1		4	2	6	8	7	2	29
10-19%	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1		2	4	8	2	5	0	21
0-9%	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1		1	8	8	4	15	3	39
<b>Below 80%</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>257</b>		<b>107</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>1074</b>
<b>60-80%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>233</b>		<b>83</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>755</b>
<b>Below 60%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>24</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>319</b>

**Appendix 2 – Survey charts and data tables**

**Figure 2: Where are you based?**

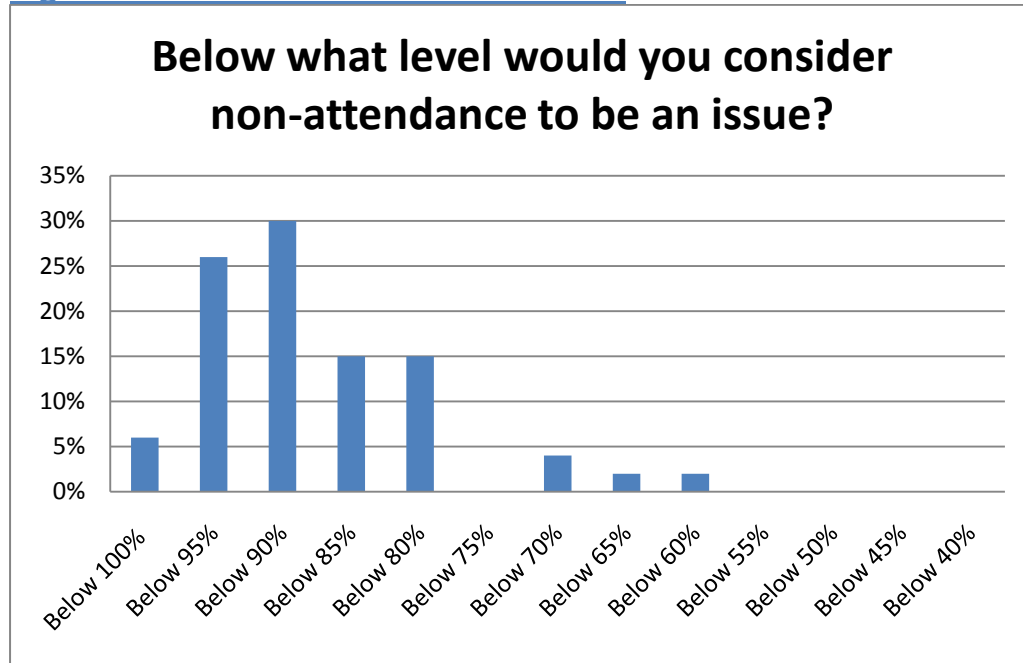


**Figure 3: Which MAG area do you work in?**

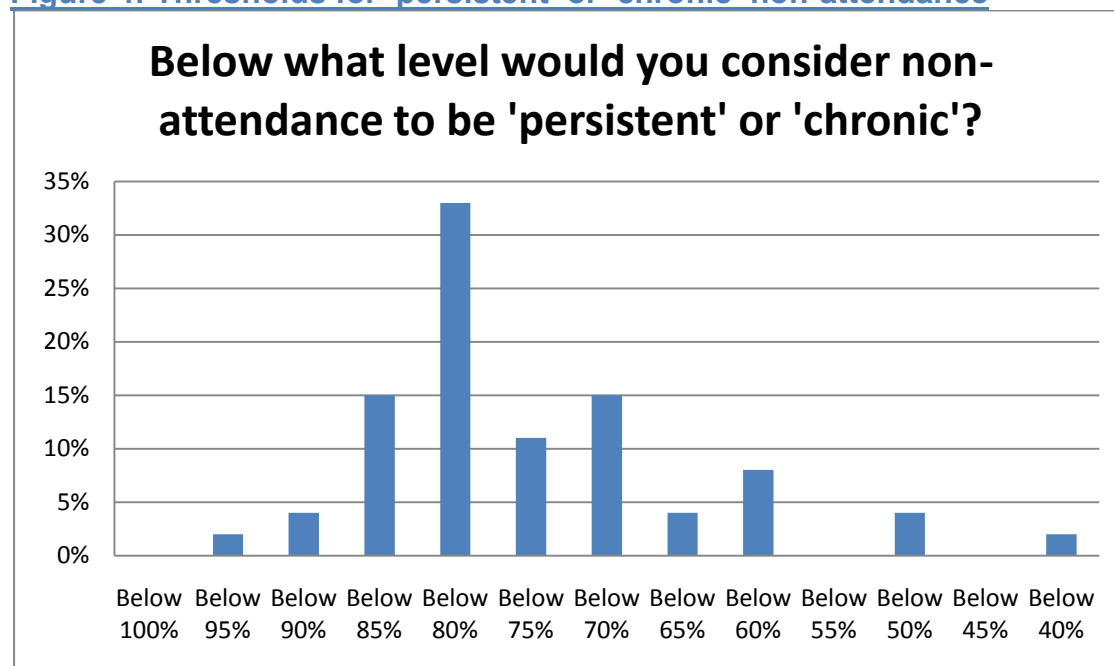




**Figure 3: Thresholds for non-attendance**



**Figure 4: Thresholds for 'persistent' or 'chronic' non-attendance**



### **Appendix 3 – focus group questions**

#### Questions

The initial analysis of our survey has indicated that many people view the stages of intervention as having an impact within Falkirk. However many respondents were not convinced of the impact of the early intervention. (see chart)

1. Please discuss what Early Intervention approaches are most effective and in what circumstances these can be effectively deployed?

In our survey many respondents had identified that a rich source of intervention that could be effective were more creative or alternative education packages.

2. Describe some examples of creative or alternative intervention approaches and why these were effective?

Some of the literature and professionals raised concerns around the effectiveness of the interface with the Looked After system. The responses from the survey did not clarify what circumstances children becoming Looked After, where non-attendance was a presenting concern could be effective and what circumstances was it less effective.

3. From your experience can you describe when children becoming Looked After has been an effective approach and what the limitations to this approach can be?
  - a. What could be reasonable alternative approaches?

We have a range of evidence that there can be other more effective methods for intervening in non-attendance rather than on an individual child basis (or family basis). However, some group based approaches to intervening in non-attendance are found to be less effective as the underlying needs vary.

4. What examples can you describe of group/school or Community level intervention that can promote attendance and how do you know they have been effective?

A number of respondents have raised the issue that Non-attendance is not a simplistic issue and that the presenting concern may have a number of different underlying causes or needs and affect different vulnerable populations of children differently.

5. What approaches do we need to consider most for different underlying needs?
  - a. Examples include: school based factors, family factors, social emotional and developmental factors, medical (including mental health and wellbeing) factors

6. What may we consider most appropriate for different Vulnerable groups?

- b. E.g. Young carers, children with parents who have mental health difficulties, children on the child protection register (current or previously), Looked After Children

**Appendix 4 – Thematic analysis Data table of Focus Group Interviews. (Jan/Feb 2012)**

Question	Theme
<p><b>1. Early Intervention Approaches that are effective</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethos – school level approaches/consistency/welcoming</li> <li>• Relationships and communication</li> <li>• Early identification and early intervention strategies</li> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Signposting</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Creative or Alternative Approaches</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging pupils</li> <li>• Evidenced based approaches from research or from evaluation locally</li> <li>• Sharing Practice</li> <li>• Involving partner agencies to support programmes</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Looked After Children</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention with parents and families effective e.g.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parenting skills training</li> <li>• coaching</li> <li>• implementing boundaries</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Practical responses to support attendance e.g.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• transport</li> </ul> </li> <li>• targeted use of interventions in school               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flexible timetable</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Integrated assessment and intervention – coordinated MA approach</li> <li>• on area of need and effecting change</li> <li>• Lots to indicate current practices are not working effectively or as effectively as we would like</li> <li>• Differential with LAC@Home and LAC AFH</li> <li>• Things get withdrawn as not effective rather than moving things on to something more likely to be effective.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change to way services involved change their approaches rather than withdraw</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Group/School or Community Interventions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging communities</li> <li>• transition/summer programmes</li> <li>• Evidenced based/systemic responses</li> <li>• More work in this area required as wide array of factors in play and group based approaches are not always effective due to different underlying causes of non-attendance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Different Approaches for underlying needs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need a Risk Factors Approach</li> <li>• Clear assessment of contributing factors or causal factors</li> <li>• Intervention targeted to these areas in priority approach</li> <li>• Accessibility of services/programmes an issue.</li> <li>• Intervention guide based on causal factors and evidence based interventions would be helpful</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. What else do we consider for Vulnerable Groups</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approaches are similar for vulnerable groups as with other children not in children in vulnerable groups</li> <li>• Inter agency working/links to curriculum</li> <li>• Identification of causal/contributory factors and then targeted intervention</li> </ul>