# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Estyn Report on improving attendance in Secondary Schools** |
| **DATE**  | **28 February 2024** |
| **BY** | **Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and Welsh Language**  |

I welcome Estyn’s report on attendance rates in Secondary Schools since the removal of restrictions in place as a result of the pandemic, and its publication in January.

We know how important regular school attendance is in terms of learner outcomes, standards, and progression. I’m pleased therefore, that this report coincides with an improvement in average attendance rates for this school year to date which now stands at 90.5%, up from 88.3% over the same period last year.

While this improvement is very welcome, I am not suggesting that this is the extent of our ambition or that there is not room to improve further. I remain committed to ensuring there is a relentless focus on continuing to improve attendance. This is particularly so for learners who we know are more likely to be absent, such as those who are eligible for free school meals. That is why we will continue to work with parents, children, local authorities and schools to remove barriers to attendance and drive sustained improvement.

Estyn’s report also sets out some concerning trends, such as the large variation in attendance rates in individual schools. We are already considering, along with the National Attendance Taskforce, what additional data analysis is required to understand geographical trends as well as exploring cluster development to support schools in sharing best practice and maximising the support and services available within individual areas.

Another concerning finding was the use of part-time timetables in ways that were not planned or reviewed regularly enough to provide pupils with more support to return to good attendance levels.

I have previously outlined my concerns about the use of part-time timetables. As part of a formal plan, such as a reintegration plan, part-time timetables can help learners re-integrate into a school after a long absence; or be a means of preventing greater absence; but it can also have a negative impact on learner progress and wellbeing, placing further pressures on families and lead to further disengagement from education. The [Belonging, engaging and participating guidance](https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2023-10/improving-school-attendance-guidance_0.pdf)  provides clarity in relation to the use of part-time timetables in schools but we intend to publish separate guidance about the use of part-time timetables, that will include further detail about the use of part-time timetables for EOTAS pupils and pupils with additional learning needs.

Welsh Government’s response to the recommendations can be found [here](https://www.gov.wales/improving-attendance-secondary-schools-government-response-html)