# Torfaen shifts strategy to boost school attendance amid mild illness



Local education officials in Torfaen are navigating a challenging landscape as they encourage parents to send their children to school even when they have mild symptoms like a cough or sniffle. This advice marks a significant departure from the cautionary stance taken during the Covid-19 pandemic, where the prevailing message was to isolate in the face of any illness. The drive to increase attendance is partly in response to ongoing struggles with school enrolment and attendance figures that have yet to fully rebound to pre-pandemic levels.

Before the pandemic, attendance rates in Torfaen were robust, with primary school attendance recorded at 94.8% in the 2019/20 academic year. However, the disruption caused by prolonged lockdowns saw this figure plummet to a low of 90.81% in 2021/22. Despite recent improvements—April 2023 saw primary school attendance rise to 93.12%—the recovery remains fragile. Secondary schools have experienced a similar trend, with attendance improving from a low of 83.78% to 89.21% in the same timeframe.

The council has recognised the impact of seasonal illnesses, such as norovirus, on attendance, which has reportedly caused disruptions in schools since February. Andy Rothwell, the council’s head of learning and achievement, highlighted how even minor viral outbreaks can significantly affect school attendance. This is particularly concerning as the council strives to promote its ‘Not In Miss Out’ campaign, which encourages attendance at school despite minor ailments, asserting that if children are only slightly unwell, they should still attend.

This campaign and its messages resonate with broader trends observed across Wales, where school attendance has been a focal point for educational recovery efforts. Recent data reveals that Torfaen has witnessed a commendable increase in attendance rates, with primary and secondary schools reporting an average attendance of 93%, placing the borough third highest in the country. Councillor Richard Clark has emphasised the direct correlation between regular attendance and academic success, highlighting the added benefits of social interaction and engagement in school activities.

Addressing persistent absenteeism remains a key priority. In light of the declines seen during the pandemic, the council has prioritised reintegrating children into the educational fold, with strategies extending beyond simple attendance monitoring. Initiatives launched in previous years have sought to mitigate this issue through comprehensive support involving schools, parents, and local agencies.

Schools like Llantarnam Community School have been at the forefront of this effort, with headteacher Laura Perrett noting a concerted push to restore attendance to pre-pandemic levels. The school has been proactive, reintroducing trips and promoting healthier transport options to school, further highlighting the community's commitment to enhanced student engagement.

However, despite these efforts, the challenge of absenteeism, particularly among younger students, remains pressing. As the educational landscape continues to adapt following the disruptions of recent years, the integration of health considerations and attendance initiatives will be vital. With fluctuating attendance still a concern, education officials in Torfaen are keenly aware that fostering a culture that values attendance is essential, not just for immediate educational outcomes, but for the long-term prospects of their students.

As schools work to balance public health advice with the need for consistent attendance, the nuances of parental encouragement and community support will play a critical role in shaping the future landscape of education in Torfaen.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
2. Paragraphs 3, 4
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 6
5. Paragraphs 4, 5, 7
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraph 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25151572.torfaen-schools-hit-norovirus-outbreak-early-2025/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/News/2024/October/9-Increase-in-school-attendance-rates.aspx> - In October 2024, Torfaen County Borough Council reported a 3% increase in average school attendance for primary and secondary schools compared to the previous year, reaching 93%. This improvement positioned Torfaen as having the third-highest average attendance in Wales, marking a significant recovery from the declines experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Councillor Richard Clark emphasized the link between good attendance and academic achievement, highlighting the benefits of regular school attendance, including developing friendships and participating in extracurricular activities.
3. <https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/News/2023/July/27-Increases-in-average-school-attendance-rates.aspx> - In July 2023, Torfaen County Borough Council announced improvements in school attendance rates for the 2022/23 academic year. Provisional data indicated a 1% increase in primary school attendance and a 3% increase in secondary school attendance compared to the previous year. Additionally, there was a reduction in the number of pupils classified as persistently absent, defined as having attendance rates below 80%. Councillor Richard Clark attributed these improvements to the collaborative efforts of schools, the Education Welfare Service, and families.
4. <https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/News/2023/May/12-Pupils-strive-for-95.aspx> - In May 2023, Llantarnam Community School in Torfaen aimed to return to an average attendance rate of 95%, a level maintained before the pandemic. The school reported an average attendance of around 92% post-pandemic. Headteacher Laura Perrett emphasized the importance of regular attendance for effective education and highlighted the school's efforts to support children and families in improving attendance, including reintroducing school trips and promoting active travel to school.
5. <https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/News/2022/November/10-New-school-attendance-campaign.aspx> - In November 2022, Torfaen County Borough Council launched the #NotInMissOut campaign to encourage regular school attendance following declines during the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign aimed to highlight the benefits of daily school attendance, such as quality education, extracurricular activities, and social interactions. Councillor Richard Clark emphasized the risks of term-time holidays and the importance of consistent attendance for children's educational progress and future opportunities.
6. <https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/News/2022/November/School-attendance-drive.aspx> - In November 2022, Torfaen County Borough Council discussed a report on improving school attendance through a partnership approach. The report highlighted a decrease in attendance rates post-pandemic, with primary school attendance dropping to 92% and secondary school attendance to 88%. The council emphasized a multi-agency approach to support children, families, and schools in addressing persistent absenteeism, which is defined as attendance below 80%. The #NotInMissOut campaign was also launched to promote the benefits of regular school attendance.
7. <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/schools-wales-getting-tough-parents-26188365> - In February 2023, Wales Online reported on the challenges schools in Wales faced with persistent absenteeism, a trend that began during the COVID-19 pandemic. Headteachers expressed concerns about the long-term impact of absenteeism on students' futures and the need for years to address the issue. The article highlighted the importance of consistent school attendance for students' mental health, academic achievement, and future opportunities, emphasizing the need for positive approaches to bring children back to school.