

Pupils skipping school to earn money to help at home

The cost of living crisis has seen some school pupils in Midlothian take on 'almost full-time' jobs and skip classes to earn money to help their families, it has been revealed.

A report on education has revealed attendance rates, particularly among high school students, have failed to return to pre pandemic levels with more than one in ten not turning up.

And a meeting of Midlothian Council's cabinet heard that pupils as young as S3 are already worrying about finding a job to support their family with older students already in employment.

Responding to a question from Cllr Dianne Alexander, who asked if the cost of living crisis was affecting pupils' attendance, Michelle Strong, chief operating officer education, said it was beginning to take its toll.

She said: "a recent visit to one school where there had been 'significant concern' about S6 pupils not attending classes, found some were instead working.

She said: "A recent visit to a high school which had indicated significant concern around S6 attendance at school found part of that was around some of our sixth years holding down almost full time jobs as well as continuing in their education.

“So I think the cost of living crisis we are currently in is beginning to show impact in terms of patterns of behaviour.”

However she added each school was different and the department was looking at a range of different reasons for a fall in attendance and ways to support them.

The meeting was told that attendance rates at primary schools in Midlothian was at 93 per cent while in secondary schools it was 87 per cent.

Ms Strong said the figure was below pre pandemic rates and reasons behind it were complex with anxiety about coming back to school after lockdowns also playing a role in the absences.

She said: “Attendance at school is complex and that is why it is important to look at each individual case.

“For those children where there is anxiety we are working with families where there are barriers and working on how we can engage them in learning.”

She added there were ways for pupils to take part in learning remotely but said: “there is no substitute for actually being in a school building and engaging face to face with teachers”.

Cllr Kelly Parry, council leader said: “I think it is incredibly sad to see those figures around S6s and the impact of the cost of living.

“It is the first time I can recall as a councillor seeing this drop, particularly in S6 where pupils are normally quite focused on academia.

“Even young people I have spoke to recently in third and fourth year are concerned about getting a job and helping their family and I think that should inform our work.”

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter

