



Guidelines on Managing and Promoting Pupil Attendance in Secondary Schools

1.0 Legislation

1.1 The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 states:

'It shall be the right of every child of school age to be provided with school education by, or by virtue of arrangements made, or entered into, by, an education authority.'

This right is also defined in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The *Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)* Practice Model aims to ensure that every child and young person can access appropriate and timely support in order to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

All Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services employees have a responsibility to promote high levels of attendance. In addition schools must ensure that systems to monitor absence are used consistently and effectively to allow early intervention when attendance rates drop below the agreed acceptable rate of 90%.

1.2 Attendance is defined as participation in a programme of educational activities arranged and agreed by the school including:

- Attendance at school;
- Learning outwith the school provided by a college, off-site unit or other learning provider while still on the roll of the school;
- Educational visits, day and residential visits to outdoor centres;
- Interviews and visits relating to further and higher education or careers events;
- Debates, sports, musical or drama activities in conjunction with the school;
- Study leave for pupils participating in national exams, if arranged by the school during the period of the national examination timetable;
- Activities in connection with psychological services, learning or behaviour support;
- Receiving tuition via hospital or outreach teaching services;
- Work Experience.

2.0 Recording of Attendance

2.1 All Aberdeenshire Council Education and Children's Services establishments will use SEEMiS to record data relating to pupil attendance.

2.2 In Secondary Schools, attendance must be recorded during each period of the day.

Completing an attendance register is the responsibility of the class teacher. This includes visiting specialist teachers, supply teachers and 'cover' teachers.

Registration should be completed within the first 10 minutes of the period to allow for early follow up of missing pupils.

In areas of the school where computer access is not possible, a paper register should be completed and sent to the school office within the first 10 minutes of a lesson. Under no circumstances should registers be projected onto white boards, and the computer screen in use should face away from pupils in order to comply with Data Protection Legislation.

- 2.3 Training in the completion of registration using SEEMiS is available to all Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services Staff via ALDO, and is also available on the SEEMiS website. All staff are required to complete SEEMIS training.

A list of the SEEMiS codes and definitions can be found in the practice materials (G1).

- 2.4 Care should be taken to ensure that good attendance is recognised and promoted. This can be done in a range of ways, including:
- Reinforced at whole school level;
 - Awards ceremony;
 - House competitions;
 - Class competitions;
 - Individual targets and awards;
 - Praise points.

3.0 Terminology

- 3.1 The following definitions apply throughout this guidance note:

Parent

For the purposes of this policy, the definition of 'parent' is as in section 135(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, and includes a guardian or any other person who is liable to maintain, or has parental responsibilities (within the meaning of section 1(3) of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995) in relation to, or has care of, the child or young person. In the case of Looked After Children and those in kinship care, the term parent should also be understood to include carers.

Child

As in section 135(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, 'child' means a person who has not reached the age to leave school (16 years).

Young person

As in section 135(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, a 'young person' means a person who has reached their statutory school leaving date but who has not yet turned 18 years old. For the purposes of this policy "young person" includes all pupils accessing school based education.

Vulnerable Pupils

Vulnerable pupils by definition include those who are:

- Currently on the Child Protection register;
- Subject to ongoing (or recent) Child Protection investigation(s);
- Looked after children;
- At risk of conducting themselves in a manner that may have a serious impact on their own health, safety and/or development and that of others.

Schools must maintain a list of vulnerable pupils and the list of vulnerable pupils should be updated as changes occur.

The Named Person

The Named Person is the first point of contact for a child or young person and their family. The Named Person will support children, young people and their families to access the help that they need in order to promote positive development and wellbeing.

In order to comply with legislation, the Named Person for every child in Aberdeenshire is as follows:

Age	Named Person
Pre Birth - P1	Health Visitor
P1 Onwards	Senior Member of School Staff
Gypsy Traveller Children	Gypsy Traveller Officer
Home Schooled Children	Quality Improvement Officer

Lead Professional

When two or more agencies need to work together to help a child or young person and family, there will be a Lead Professional to co-ordinate that help.

4.0 Managing Absence

At times, pupils are absent from school for a range of reasons.

At enrolment, parents should be issued with a leaflet (**G2**) explaining the importance of good attendance. Parents should be reminded regularly that advance notification of any absence is preferred.

Should a pupil have to leave school during the day (e.g. to attend a hospital appointment), they must provide an explanation to ensure that the school knows the time that they will be collected, who they will be collected by, and at what time they are due to return. If the parent wishes for the child or young person to travel unaccompanied to the appointment, this should be explained in the note. Explanations can take the form of a written note, email, text or telephone call. Where concerns exist about the authenticity of explanations received schools may insist on written confirmation.

Each school should develop a clear system of signing in and signing out of pupils to ensure that staff know who is present in the building at any one time.

Each school must ensure that their current emergency evacuation procedure is aligned to the SEEMiS attendance module to allow for all pupils to be

accurately accounted for in the case of an unplanned evacuation of the building.

Clear guidance is given in 'Included, Engaged and Involved - Part 1: Attendance in Scottish Schools' on managing authorised and unauthorised absence. This should be referred to by Head Teachers to assist in deciding whether to authorise an absence request. Standard letters Authorised Absence Request Letter (C9) and Unauthorised Absence Request Letter (C10) should be used when communicating with parents.

4.1 Responding to First Day Unexplained Absence

The process of responding to absences is summarised in the Flowchart on First Day Unexplained Absence (G3)

- 4.2 When a pupil is marked absent at any registration point during the day, and if no advance notification of a reason for absence has been received, attempts to make contact with home will be made by text or telephone.

A designated member of staff will check the text message system regularly for responses. Information gained through text messages or phone calls will be used to code the absence appropriately.

Should a message raise an issue which requires further investigation, this should be passed to the Named Person for follow up.

- 4.3 Phone calls (in place of text messages) should be made to ascertain the whereabouts of any pupil considered to be vulnerable. If no explanation is available for a vulnerable pupil by 10.00am the school should telephone emergency contacts. Should no contact be made, the issue should be referred to the Child Protection Co-ordinator who will advise on the appropriate course of action. If concerns exist surrounding the welfare and immediate wellbeing of the pupil and no contact can be made, Child Protection procedures should be considered.

- 4.4 Should a pupil fail to return after lunch or go missing at any point in the school day then contact should be made with the parent or carer immediately. If no contact is made then advice should be sought from the Child Protection Co-ordinator.

5.0 Responding to Unexplained Absence of More than One Day

- 5.1 If any child (for which there are no existing concerns) remains absent for a second day and contact still cannot be made, discussion must take place involving the Child Protection Co-ordinator and members of staff who know the pupil well in deciding the next appropriate steps. Actions may include:

- Telephoning named emergency contacts;
- Seeking advice/updates from other agencies;
- Requesting a home visit by another agency.

IF CONCERN ARISES AT ANY POINT FOR THE SAFETY OR WELFARE OF ANY PUPIL, CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES SHOULD BE INITIATED.

6.0 Following up on Any Unexplained Absence

Schools should make clear through communications with parents (e.g. school handbook, school policy, school website) that an explanation is required for each day of absence. It should be encouraged that notification is received in advance, although it is understood that this is not always possible.

- 6.1 Parents should be asked to provide an explanation on the first day the pupil returns to school following any period of absence, unless notification of the reason for the absence was received in advance or in response to a text message or phone call.
- 6.2 When a pupil returns from a period of absence and no explanation has been received, the register teacher should ask for a note. Should this not be provided the pupil will be handed a pre signed absence enquiry form **(C2)**. If this is not returned, another copy should be sent home at the end of that week.
- 6.3 Attendance of all pupils must be monitored on a fortnightly basis by the Named Person or senior manager. If an absence has been coded as TBC, a follow up letter should be sent. This will state clearly that the absence coding will change to unexplained/unauthorised (UNA/U) if an explanation is not provided within five school days. **(C3)**
- 6.4 After fortnightly monitoring schools must ensure that all TBC absences are changed to UNA when enquiry letters have been issued but not responded to, and conversely that all explanations given have been recorded within SEEMIS.

7.0 Tracking Persistent Non Attendance

- 7.1 The average attendance rate for Aberdeenshire school pupils is approximately 95%.

It is accepted that improving attendance has a direct correlation to improving achievement. The attendance of all pupils with an attendance rate of **90% or less** will be subject to close monitoring until such time as appropriate improvements are made.

- 7.2 A report is available on SEEMIS which captures all pupils who have an absence rate of 90% and less for the reasons categorised below. This will be the starting point for fortnightly attendance monitoring.
 - self certified illness (SEL/D)
 - unauthorised absence (UNA)
 - truancy (UNA)
 - exceptional domestic circumstances (DCA / Q)
 - unexplained or still to be explained absence (TBC/T)

Attendance reports must be run fortnightly and issued to the Named Person. The Named Person will review this information and identify appropriate actions for each pupil.

7.3 Vulnerable pupils should be subject to more regular attendance monitoring in accordance with school procedures relating to support and child protection.

8.0 Dealing with Persistent Non-Attendance (see flowchart G4)

8.1 Unless accounted for by a single period of certificated absence, when a young person's attendance deteriorates to 90% for the first time the school should carry out a Single Agency Assessment and associated action planning. This will ensure that regular focus is given to this young person's attendance, and that structured intervention is implemented. In many cases, the reasons for non-attendance can be addressed in this way and attendance rates will improve.

8.2 Where there is no improvement in attendance, consideration should be made to initiating a Multi-Agency Assessment and Action Planning.

8.3 It is important that timescales in action plans are clearly identified and are made clear during meetings. Six school weeks is considered to be an appropriate time period for cases relating to non-attendance.

8.4 It must be made clear to pupils and parents that if a young person chooses not to commit to improving attendance that other actions will be taken (e.g. referral to Truancy Sub-Committee or Scottish Children's Reporter Administration).

9.0 Area School Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee

Aberdeenshire Council's scheme of delegation provides for Area School Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committees to be set up. This is devolved to each Area Committee.

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 makes provision for the education authority to deal with failure of parents to provide education for their children. The function of the Area School Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee is to investigate matters which have led to the non-attendance of the child or young person, and to decide whether the parent is liable to prosecution in terms of Section 30 and/or Section 35 of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1980.

Section 35 provides that if a child fails to attend school regularly, without reasonable excuse, the parent is guilty of an offence.

Section 36 imposes a duty on the education authority, if they consider that an offence has been committed under section 35, to serve a notice on the parent requiring the parent to appear before the authority to explain the reason for the absence of the child from school. The notice must be served on the parent at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting and the meeting must take place within 7 days of the notice. The Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee has delegated authority to fulfil this function.

If the parent does not satisfy the authority that there is a reasonable excuse for the child's non-attendance at school, the authority can :-

- a) Take no action
- b) Prosecute the parent
- c) Warn the parent and postpone the decision on whether to prosecute for up to 6 weeks - effectively, to give the parent a chance to ensure more regular attendance
- d) Refer the child to the Reporter to the Children's Hearing

If the Sub-Committee agree to postpone the decision to prosecute, they can make an Attendance Order in respect of the child, requiring them to attend a specific school. Breach of an Attendance Order is a separate offence.

It is a reasonable excuse to fail to attend if :-

- a) There is no school within reasonable walking distance and the education authority has not provided transport to another school
- b) The child has been prevented from attending school through sickness
- c) There are other circumstances which in the opinion of the education authority or the Court, offer a reasonable excuse

If the child is prevented from attending the school through sickness, the authority can require the child to be examined by a medical officer of the local Health Board.

In the event of a conviction following prosecution a fine of up to £1000, a sentence of imprisonment for one month, or both can be imposed.

Where multi-agency action planning has been unsuccessful, consideration should be given to making a referral to the Area School Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee. Referral to an Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee is a serious measure and it is hoped that by working in partnership through the Multi-Agency Action Planning framework, few cases will reach this stage.

10.0 Lateness

Lateness is a problem which causes significant disruption to the learning of children and young people. A variety of approaches to tackling lateness to school are required in order to be effective.

These should include:

- An explanation of the importance of and value placed on good timekeeping;
- The promotion and modelling of punctuality by all school staff;
- Engagement with the wider school community to generate support and enthusiasm;
- Sharing information on the importance of quality sleep during development, and advice on how to promote this.

A consistent approach to responding to instances of late coming across all Education and Children's Services establishments is required. This will help to ensure that pupils and parents feel fairly treated.

11.0 Tracking Persistent Lateness

When a pupil arrives late, this should be coded in SEEMIS. SEEMIS will calculate whether the coding is late 1 or late 2 based on the time of arrival in Secondary Schools.

- 11.1 If a pupil has a medical issue which routinely impacts on punctuality, this should be referred to the Named Person.
- 11.2 For young people who require a more flexible approach to the timing of their education, this must be built into their individual plans and support packages. Clear and appropriate boundaries should be negotiated in accordance with need. Young people in this category (e.g. Young Carers) should not be punished for unavoidable late arrival.
- 11.3 Attendance patterns should be entered into SEEMIS using the planned patterns function. The only codes used for this purpose should be SNA or OAT.
- 11.4 Schools should decide and publish the time at which all pupils are expected to be in their registration classes.
- 11.5 Pupils arriving late to school should report to one central point to sign in. The class teacher should mark them as late to class.

Schools should develop a system to monitor the time between signing in and arriving in class as suits their local arrangements.

- 11.6 **At 5 instances of lateness** a letter will be issued. (C6)

At 10 instances of lateness, contact to be made with home by the Named Person. (C7)

At 15 instances of lateness, a second letter will be issued, reminding parents of their legal responsibilities relating to attendance, and asking them to assist their child in making improvements to timekeeping immediately. (C8)

Beyond this point if concerns or support needs are identified at any point a single agency assessment should take place, with a plan of support being developed.

- 11.7 Individual schools retain the right to make decisions about sanctions for lateness. Schools should refer to **Better Relationships Better Learning Better Behaviour** and involve service users and partners in the learning community when developing school based policy.

12.0 Children Missing from Education

Children and young people may disappear from view of schools and Local Authorities for many reasons. Children have a right to Education, and Local Authorities have a duty to provide Education for all Children in their area, and to plan and provide support for vulnerable children.

- 12.1 Schools must implement authority guidelines on Children Missing from Education where concerns exist (see G7).

- 12.2 When pupils move between school, the pupil should remain on the register until the pupil's PPR is sent to the receiving school or until such time as the school is authorised to remove the pupil from the school register by a Quality Improvement Officer. The school should retain the PPR in all cases, including where a pupil moves overseas, until asked to send the PPR onwards.
- 12.3 Until the child is removed from the register, non-attendance should be registered as Exceptional Domestic Circumstances (unauthorised) - DCU. Once the date of enrolment at a receiving school is confirmed the child's removal from the school register should be backdated to that date.

Practice Notes

1 General Housekeeping

- a. If transport is not operating, SNA should be used.

If transport is late or it is not safe to travel, ABS should be used.

The use of ABS has no negative impact on pupils' attendance as they are categorised as authorised. SNA does not have a negative impact because there is no attendance expected; the openings expected for the pupil are reduced.

- b. Children from travelling families have a base school where it is expected that most of their education will take place. The code ABS should be used for the period of time that they are away from their base school.
- c. If a pupil arrives in class but has previously been marked as absent (for any reason), class teachers must change SEEMIS to show that the pupil is now present.
- d. If a parent advises the school that diarrhoea or vomiting is the reason for absence, they should be reminded that the pupil must remain absent for 48 hours in order to prevent relapse and potential spread of illness.
- e. It is good practice for Nursery providers to flag any concern (including those relating to attendance) to health visitors. Multi-agency input at this early age can be very effective in challenging patterns before they become established, and the development of effective parenting skills can be supported.
- f. It is good practice for concerns surrounding attendance to be flagged at any transition point, e.g. nursery - primary, primary - secondary, and between schools/local authorities at any point.
- g. Should a pupil need to attend alternative provision (e.g. a support base or unit) for a period of time, the base school should copy the pupils' record to the school providing alternative provision. In a secondary school, this may be to accommodate a student's subject choice (e.g. pupil attending a different school for one column per week).

Whilst the 'copied to' school may mark attendance for the pupil, this does not count to their ScotXed AAE Return. The base school remains responsible for the pupils' attendance. If a pupil does not attend the 'copied to' provision, the base school must be advised of this so that attendance can be updated.

- h. Pupils who are absent for a longer period of time due for medical reasons are entitled to Educational Provision. Guidance from the Scottish Government stipulates that:

'... there should be an automatic referral by schools for education outwith school after 15 working days of continuous, or 20 working days of intermittent absence for verifiable medical reasons. Where, however,

absence for verifiable medical reasons is known, or is reasonably thought, in advance of that period to be likely to extend to or beyond 15 or 20 days, then referral should proceed immediately.'

The education outwith school should be planned for through the GIRFEC assessment process. Provision may consist of 1-1 time with a tutor (at home, or in hospital), or may include 1-1 time with a member of teaching staff at a suitable location. This would include offsite provision, e.g. within a community centre.

Pupil provision organised in this manner should be coded as SEP for the duration of the time that this arrangement is in place as an alternative to full time education.

In the case that a student is undertaking a phased return to full time education e.g. attends for mornings only, the morning should be marked as attendance, and the afternoon as SEP.

For schools using the new SEEMiS attendance module, the system will calculate the code for the opening. If there are discrepancies, administrative staff should enter the correct codes in accordance with the guidance above.

Where provision is arranged through a multi-agency approach, and an alternative pattern of attendance has been negotiated, SNA should be used to code the time that the pupil is not in school. OAT should be used for the occasions where the pupil is attending an alternative experience, e.g. Riding for the Disabled, or working with other services as part of the planned support for the pupil. These codes should be inserted using the Planned Patterns facility.

- i When parents/carers provide an absence note, the information provided should be used to code the absence. The note/letter provided should be kept in a secure file alongside the pupils' PPR.

2. Children's Hearings Scotland

- a Children and young people are referred to Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) for a variety of reasons, any of which indicate that an aspect of their life is giving cause for concern.
- b Children's Reporters are employed by SCRA. The Children's Reporter is the person who will decide if a child or young person needs to be referred to a children's hearing.
- c There are many different grounds (reasons) which may lead to a child or young person having to go to a children's hearing. The grounds or legal reasons for bringing a child or young person to a hearing are set down in section 67(2) of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011. The grounds include that the child or young person:
 - is likely to suffer serious harm to health or development through lack of parental care;

- has been the victim of a schedule 1 offence*, is likely to have a close connection with someone who has committed such an offence or is likely to become a member of the same household as another child who has been the victim of a schedule 1 offence;
- is or is likely to be exposed to persons whose conduct may mean that the child or young person is abused or harmed or their health, safety or development will be seriously adversely affected;
- has or is likely to have, a close connection with a person who has carried out domestic abuse;
- has or is likely to have, a close connection with a person who has committed an offence under the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009;
- is accommodated by a local authority or is the subject of a permanence order and special measures are needed to support them;
- has committed an offence;
- is misusing drugs or alcohol has behaved in a way that has had or is likely to have, a serious adverse effect on the health, safety or development of themselves or another person;
- is beyond the control of parents or carers;
- is not attending school regularly without a reasonable excuse;
- has been, is being, or is likely to be, forced into a marriage or civil partnership, or is, or is likely to become, a member of the same household as such a child.

* A schedule 1 offence is a physical, emotional or sexual offence against a child. These offences are called 'schedule 1 offences' because they are listed in Schedule 1 to the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995.

- d Should the child or young person not be making sufficient progress in working towards agreed targets from their MAAPM meetings, the Named Person or Lead Professional should contact the Local Scottish Children's Reporter Administration office to discuss the case.

SCRA
The Exchange No 2
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Telephone: 0300 200 2181
Email: AberdeenshireMailbox@scra.gsi.gov.uk

This email address should only be used to submit Education Reports and not for general correspondence or enquiry.

The Reporter will advise if there looks to be evidence of sufficient grounds for referral. The Education Report can be used to submit a referral following this initial telephone conversation (C21).

3 Attendance & Truancy Sub-Committees

Aberdeenshire Council's scheme of delegation provides for Area School Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committees to be set up. This is devolved to each Area Committee.

The function of this forum is to investigate matters which have led to the non-attendance of the child or young person, and to decide whether the parent is liable to prosecution in terms of Section 30 and/or Section 35 of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1980.

Referral to an Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee should only take place if it can be shown that single agency or multi-agency planning has not led to improvement. Referrals should be made using the standard form provided (C22).