Promoting and Managing Pupil Attendance in Secondary Schools Guidance, 2022

June 2022

Policy and Guidance Statement

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting and promoting Children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2009) requires Authorities to reduce barriers to learning. Aberdeenshire Council is obliged to meet the requirements of The Equality Act (2010) equalities legislation, which protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society.

This Promoting and Managing Pupil Attendance Policy and Guidance has been developed by the Promoting and Managing Pupil Attendance Working Group, representing colleagues from Primary Headteachers' Council (PHTC), Aberdeenshire's Secondary Depute Head Teachers with a Pastoral Care remit and Educational Psychology.

The documents have been informed by: Education (Scotland) Act 1980, 2016; Standards in Scotland's Schools, etc. Act 2000; Equality Act 2010; The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014) and has been shaped by the national Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) strategy (2008).

The guidance documents also aim to meet the recommendations made by the Scottish Government in Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1: A Positive Approach to the Promotion and Management of Attendance in Scottish Schools, 2019

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1. Scope

This policy replaces previous attendance guidance, policies and procedures adopted by Aberdeenshire Council, and those developed by individual establishments and extends to all learning establishments.

2. Context, Purpose and Principles

2.1 Context

The Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) approach to improving outcomes for children and young people, takes a holistic approach to the wellbeing of the child or young person. GIRFEC advocates preventative work and early intervention to support children, young people and their families through the provision of strong universal services, and partnership working with other services when needed. The approach supports children and young people's rights and involves children and young people in any decision that affect them in line with the core principles of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

GIRFEC emphasises that while children and young people will have different experiences in their lives, all of them have the right to expect appropriate support from adults to allow them to grow and develop and to reach their full potential.

2.2 Purpose

Following the updating of *Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1: A Positive Approach to the Promotion and Management of Attendance in Scottish Schools* by The Scottish Government in June 2019, it was recognised that the previous policy predates this National guidance.

The purpose of this 2022 policy and guidance is to define a clear and consistent protocol that schools are to follow when managing pupil attendance, including the monitoring and promotion of attendance. Absence from school, whatever the cause, disrupts learning and this policy and guidance sign-posts schools to resources to support them in addressing wider issues related to non-attendance, reducing and preventing absence.

2.3 Principles

This policy and guidance are based on the following key principles:

- All children and young people have a right to education; and education authorities have a duty to provide education.
- All children and young people have the right to get the support they need to benefit fully from their education and fulfil their potential.
- All children and young people need to be included, engaged and involved in their learning. Children and young people should be given opportunities to fully engage and participate in the life of their school in order to encourage good attendance.
- Schools should actively engage with parents to try to ensure that any barriers to good attendance are removed.
- Schools and partners should work collaboratively to promote and support good attendance.
- The foundation for schools, learning establishments and education authorities is a focus on positive relationships and an inclusive ethos and culture that promotes good attendance. Attendance should not be considered in isolation.

3   Attendance

3.1   Importance of good attendance

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

- Attendance at school
- Learning out with the school provided by a college 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
- Receiving tuition via hospital or outreach teaching services
- Work experience

Schools should seek to ensure that children and young people attend school or another learning environment for the recommended 25 hrs in primary and 27.5 hrs for secondary schools. [Aberdeenshire - use of part-time timetable guidance](#)

3.2   Impact of poor attendance

The causes and impact of poor attendance are known to be complex and multifaceted. Research demonstrates the potential impact that poor attendance can have.
Poor attendance has been linked to:

- poor peer relationships
- emotional and behavioural difficulties
- poorer employment opportunities
- lower levels of attainment

3.3   Promoting good attendance

Children and young people are more likely to be motivated to attend school when they feel fully included and engaged in the wider life of the school. Families are also likely to encourage full attendance where they feel part of the school community and where schools work alongside them as equal partners. Promoting good attendance is a multifaceted task that requires schools to promote positive relationships within an inclusive ethos and culture. Schools should engage positively with parents to ensure good learning, teaching and assessment with a key focus on supporting additional support needs. They should also work with community partners to ensure that children and young people and their families are supported. Pastoral care staff play a key role in supporting good attendance.

A positive culture and ethos are key in promoting good attendance. Alongside [Aberdeenshire's Relationships, Learning and Behaviour Policy and Guidance](#) and [Aberdeenshire's Promoting Inclusion and Reducing Exclusions in Educational Establishments Guidance, 2022](#), there are a range of whole school approaches which promote inclusion and enable attendance:

- Dyslexia Friendly
- Autism Friendly

- Restorative Approaches
- Solution Focused Approaches
- Nurturing Approaches
- Trauma Informed Practice
- Differentiation
- Total Communication

4   Supporting Attendance

4.1   Parental Engagement

Parental engagement is key to ensuring good attendance. Schools should ensure that they have regular contact with parents through various channels of communication. Parents are key partners in their child's education, and it is particularly important that they are aware of their responsibilities and are encouraged and supported to enable their child to attend school. Parents have a legal responsibility to provide efficient education to their child until he or she reaches school leaving age, which they may meet by ensuring that their child attends school regularly (section 30 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980).

Parents should be given clear information, updated on a regular basis, regarding their responsibility to inform the school if their child will be absent, and to provide current emergency contact information.

4.2   Staff with Pastoral Care Responsibilities

All staff in school have a role to play in promoting good attendance and helping to reduce absence from school.
Staff with a pastoral care responsibility should:

- be aware of early signs or concerns which may cause absence, to allow support plans to be arranged and adaptations and plans to be drawn up as appropriate

- ensure absence does not become a pattern or habit following a specific issue

- develop positive and trusting relationships with pupils and parents to prevent difficulties arising and to ensure difficulties are discussed and resolved when they do take place

- respond quickly to absence, to ensure children and young people are safe and well

- follow up on absence, to enable the school and its partners to make an effective response

- support reintegration into learning on returning from absence

Pastoral care staff have a key role in monitoring, assessing and supporting attendance. They should, where possible, identify patterns and underlying causes for absence in order that these can be addressed as quickly as possible.

4.3   Curriculum Flexibility

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) promotes flexibility in the curriculum and allows schools to personalise learner journeys to meet the needs of all children and young people, thus supporting good attendance.

Developing the Young Workforce builds on the foundations already in place through CfE and encourages schools to offer a flexible programme of skills development and vocational experiences, in partnership with other agencies such as careers services, colleges and local businesses to meet individual pupil needs and ensure young people are fully engaged and supporting attendance.

4.4   Staged Intervention

Many issues relating to poor attendance in school, can be dealt with quickly and promptly by school supports and by ensuring that there are positive relationships in place to support children and young people and their families.

There may however be occasions when absence from school becomes a more significant cause for concern. Children and young people may be absent for complex reasons. Every child and young person is unique and while they will all share core needs, they may at different times have different needs reflecting their individual circumstances. Identifying the possible reasons for absence can help the school to determine appropriate supports to put in place.

Whilst individuals never fit neatly into frameworks three broad levels of need can be identified.
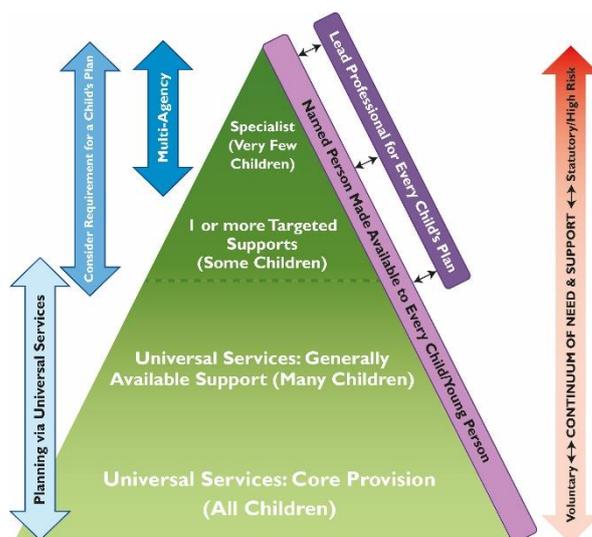
Working with parents, children / young people and partner services through the single or multi-agency GIRFEC Child Planning process can help identify and find solutions to difficulties before situations escalate. Comprehensive assessment informed by information gathered using the national practice model and robust planning are particularly important.

Effective collaborative working should facilitate appropriate and proportionate sharing of information about a child's situation and new factors in their lives which have the potential to impact on school attendance. The GIRFEC Child Planning process should result in a clear shared understanding of appropriate strategies and supports and provide a mechanism for reviewing and evaluating them over time.

When attendance does not improve through positive strategies in the learning environment, it is important to gain a better understanding of the underlying drivers for this lack of

attendance. The Educational Psychology Services can offer support and advice in helping to understand possible reasons for non-attendance, particularly where there is emotionally based non-attendance.

4.5 Emotionally Based Non-Attendance

Emotionally based non-attendance is a 'broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school' (West Sussex Guidance, 2018).

The term 'non-attendance' is used rather than 'refusal' or 'avoidance', as children and young people in this situation often have a desire to attend and aren't refusing or avoiding, they simply feel as though they can't attend. The children and young people concerned often experience emotional upset or dysregulation and may feel overwhelmed. In these instances the easiest way to cope is to avoid school - this is defined as a maladaptive coping strategy.

It is important to understand the reasons behind Emotionally Based School Avoidance, which will be different for each individual. Through robust assessment and information gathering, bespoke support plans can be created to support the young person to attend school.

4.6 Providing for pupils during long term illness

Education authorities are required to make arrangements to support the learning of children or young people with prolonged ill-health (Section 14 Education (Scotland) Act 1980). Within the GIRFEC framework, there should be ongoing assessment by relevant professionals in health and education of the most appropriate education provision to optimise the child's wellbeing in close conjunction with the child or young person and their family. Further guidance can be found in Guidance on education for children and young people unable to attend school due to prolonged ill health.

5 Managing and Recording Absence

5.1 Managing Authorised Absence

Schools may authorise absence when they are satisfied by the reason provided. Reasons for authorised absence can include:

- Illness where no learning provision is made (including ongoing mental health concerns)
- Medical and dental appointments
- Meetings prior to, and during court appearances and other legal processes
- Attendance at, or in connection with, a Children's Hearing or Care Review, or appointment with another service provider, e.g. social worker
- Religious observance
- Bereavement
- Weddings or funerals of close friends and family

- Participation in non-school debates, sports, musical or drama activities agreed by the school Lack of transport – including due to bad weather
- Family recovery from exceptional domestic circumstances or trauma
- Period of exclusion (to be recorded in a separate category)
- Extended leave with parental consent including some young carer activities
- Temporary part-time timetables [Aberdeenshire - use of part-time timetable guidance](#)
- Agreed flexi-schooling arrangements [Aberdeenshire flexi-schooling guidance](#)

5.2 Gypsy/Traveller Communities

Children and young people who are part of a gypsy or travelling family may travel as part of their tradition, their absence should be authorised by their school. Where data highlights poor attendance which cannot be explained by family mobility, as with any other pupil schools should explore the reasons behind the attendance pattern with the pupil and their parent/carer. Once the causes are understood, schools can work with the pupil and their family to support improved attendance and address any other concerns.

Further information on supporting Gypsy/Traveller Communities can be found [here](#)

5.3 Managing Unauthorised Absence

Schools should record absence as unauthorised when they perceive that there is no valid reason for the absence provided.

These absences can be categorised as:

- Absence with parental awareness in specific circumstances
- Family holidays during term time
- Occasional absence without parental awareness
- Longer term absence – school, home and wider community issues
- Absence relating to substance and alcohol misuse

5.4 Following up on absence

If a child or young person's absence is authorised through parental contact, then an expected date of return to school, or further advice from parents, should be noted. If discussions between the parent, pupil and member of staff responsible for pastoral care are required to resolve any issues, then these should be arranged as soon as possible and should not wait for the child or young person to return to school, especially if there is a concern for which additional support may be required.

If a child or young person returns to school, but a pattern of absence is noted, then it is important that the school continue to work alongside parents to resolve any issues and build positive and trusting relationships between the home and school. GIRFEC processes should underpin any work that is necessary to improve attendance and in turn attainment and achievement.

5.5   Recording Attendance and lateness

Secondary schools should record attendance on SEEMIS during every period of the school day. Class registers must be completed within the first 10 minutes of each lesson by class teachers. This includes supply and 'cover' teachers.

Where a child or young person arrives in school at a point later in the day, SEEMIS will automatically convert this to the appropriate 'Late' which is determined by when in that morning or afternoon session they arrived, i.e. If they arrive during the first half of the morning or afternoon session this will converted to an overall L1 code for the opening. If they arrive in school during the second half of the opening (morning or afternoon session), this will be converted to L2.

Schools should monitor persistent late coming and seek to identify any patterns. This should be linked to other relevant information and be used to inform appropriate intervention.

6   Managing Daily Absence (*see Appendix 1*)

6.1   Contact with parent/carer

If a child or young person does not attend school, the absence should be checked against details of contacts made by parents/carers. If a parent has not advised the school their child will be absent, then it must be assumed that they are unaware of the absence and that the pupil is either missing or absent without parental awareness. This should be recorded as unauthorised absence (to be confirmed – tbc), until an explanation is received from the parent or carer.

6.2   "Pupils of Concern"

Each school will have pupils that should they be absent/missing it would be of great concern and there is a need to follow this up immediately, due to their vulnerability. Individual schools will agree who should be on this list which may include vulnerable pupils who are; currently on the Child Protection Register or subject to ongoing (or recent) Child Protection investigation(s), looked after children, young people who are 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 or known significant vulnerabilities within the family.

To ensure that an immediate response happens for these young people, Pastoral Care staff must provide office staff with an up to date "Pupils of Concern" list.

6.3   Daily Absence Procedures

Registers must be cross-checked against the "Pupils of Concern" list within 20 minutes of the start of day and start of the afternoon session. If a pupil on this list is absent, then the appropriate member of senior staff should be informed immediately and procedures followed as per *Appendix 1*.

If a pupil is subject to ongoing child protection procedures, Social Work must be contacted without delay when there is an unexplained absence.

For all other absent pupils who are not listed as a "Pupil of Concern", a text message should be sent via GroupCall to the main parent contact to inform them of this absence. These messages must be sent no later than 10am and 30 minutes after the start of the afternoon session.

In most circumstances, this message will result in the parent/carer contacting the school to explain the absence, either by responding to the text message or calling the school absence line.

This process should be repeated for the afternoon opening of the school, with the following timescales:

- "Pupils of Concern" list cross-checked with absent pupils within 20 minutes of start of afternoon session. The appropriate member of senior staff should be informed immediately of any "new" pupil absence – procedures followed as per *Appendix 1*

- Procedures as per *Appendix 1* should be followed for all other unexplained pupil absences (including those since start of day)

If the school receives no response to the absence text message by the end of day, an email should be sent to the main contact parent/carer at the end of day following up this absence (*Appendix 4a*).

Where appropriate it is important that parents are made fully aware of the importance of informing the school if there is to be a planned absence.

It is important that unexplained absences are followed up by pastoral care staff to identify the reasons for absence and also if any support is required for that child/young person. As part of a fortnightly Attendance Monitoring procedure, all outstanding absences, i.e. those where no explanation for absence has been given, should be collated and an email sent to the parent/carer requesting reason/s for the absence/s (*Appendix 4d*).

6.4   Pupils missing from class having attended school that day (*Appendix 2*)

The name of the missing pupil should be cross-checked with the "Pupils of Concern" list. When the missing pupil is a "Pupil of Concern" then the appropriate member of senior staff should be informed immediately. This member of staff will attempt to locate the pupil through knowledge of any current situation for that child/young person. If the pupil cannot be located, the pupil's parent/carer should be contacted by telephone and next steps planned.

If it is not possible to make contact with the parent/carer or emergency contacts, the child protection coordinator is to be informed and a risk assessment undertaken. The child protection coordinator will consider the information in light of known attendance issues, support needs and the current concerns about the child or young person. This member of staff will be responsible for determining what further action is required, which may include following Child Protection procedures.

Pupils not on the "Pupils of Concern" list

When a pupil not on the "Pupils of Concern" list is missing from class and cannot be located, a text message is sent to the parent/carer via Groupcall, (*Appendix 4b*). If this pupil fails to attend their next period class and there has been no response from the parent/carer or it is the last period of the day, the child protection coordinator must be informed who will consider the information in light of known attendance issues and support needs. This person will be responsible for determining what further action is required.

If the pupil returns to their next period class but there has been no response received from the parent/carer by the end of day, an email is to be sent to the parent/carer confirming the absence and asking them to make contact with pastoral care staff as soon as possible (***Appendix 4c***).

This absence will be followed up by the appropriate member of staff on the pupil's return to school.

7   Attendance Monitoring - Fortnightly

7.1   Unexplained absences

On a two-weekly basis, any unexplained absences for a child/young person should be collated and an email sent to the parent/carer requesting an explanation for the absence/s (***Appendix 4d***).

7.2   Attendance Concerns

SEEMIS Attendance Reports should be generated on a two-weekly basis to enable monitoring of changes in attendance which are concerning. Close monitoring on a fortnightly basis must take place of all "Looked After Children".

A concern in attendance may include the following, please note this list is not exhaustive:

- Overall attendance dropping below 90% (attendance rates need careful consideration during Term 1 of a session as a 2-3 day absence can have a significant impact on overall attendance rate)
- Gradual drop in attendance over a period of time
- Sudden drop in attendance
- Patterns of non-attendance, e.g. every Tuesday

When an Attendance Concern is identified, an Attendance Monitoring and Intervention Record should be opened. This record is used to plan support and log interventions. Within Latest Pastoral Notes the 'Attendance' drop-down should be used to log this information. A hardcopy Attendance Monitoring and Intervention Record (***Appendices 5a & 5b***) can be used as an alternative and held within the child/young person's PPR.

7.3   Persistent Non-Attendance

Where there is a continuation of a decrease in attendance then steps must be taken to support the child/young person to attend school. This support may initially be on single agency basis, but there may be a requirement for it to progress to multi-agency should there be no improvement in attendance (***Appendix 3***).

Schools will understand and take into consideration the individual circumstances when making decisions on the most appropriate steps to support individuals. This policy guidance and supporting documents provide the structure to support schools when required.

7.4   Further support documents

GIRFEC Guidance Link