

Promoting Good Attendance

A Borough Policy

School attendance is a priority for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and London Borough of Westminster. Good attendance can contribute to achieving all five outcomes listed in *Every Child Matters*. Regular attendance also enables teaching staff to monitor pupils' welfare, thus contributing to the safeguarding agenda.

This policy aims to provide guidance to schools on promoting good attendance, and to outline practices and procedures that have been found to support this goal. There is also an account of the statutory responsibilities of the local authority (LA) and schools in ensuring attendance.

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1.0 Introduction

Promoting good attendance is a priority for all schools and is achieved most effectively in situations where there is emphasis on developing good relationships with pupils and a responsiveness to their needs.

- 1.2 LA and school policies and practice can have a substantial impact on improving rates of attendance when there is determined attention to those features of school that encourage and motivate pupils to attend, and swift follow up action when attendance is poor. Success is more likely when attendance is part of whole school processes for managing pupils' welfare. Sensitive awareness of pupils' home backgrounds and community values, good communication with parents or carers, coupled with expectations that pupils will make high achievements and the offer of an effective curriculum, need to be considered when developing a school policy on attendance. Successful practice is characterised by close links between approaches to attendance and other key school policies such as behaviour, pastoral care and special educational needs.
- 1.3 Pupils' perceptions and experience of school are also a key to any approach to promoting good attendance. Developing school ethos and relationships, the involvement of pupils and the attitudes of teachers, are important aspects of school policy. As in other areas of school life the expectations of teachers and how those expectations are communicated to pupils are critical for improving attendance.
- 1.4 Pupils' achievement is seriously affected by poor attendance. The National Curriculum is designed to be delivered in a way that offers good continuity and progression in pupils' learning. Absence from school will adversely affect the pupils' ability to participate and benefit from the learning programme. Absenteeism by some pupils is also disruptive for the progress of others. There is concern in many schools that low achievement in GCSE is the result of poor attendance and failure to complete coursework. This will also feature in pupils' assessment at each Key Stage of the National Curriculum. For some pupils, poor attendance at school creates difficulties that result in disruptive behaviour which, in turn, damages the opportunities available to other pupils.
- 1.5 Regular attendance at school is therefore a prerequisite for pupils' achievement. Where attendance fails, either with long-term absence or frequent occasional absences, a pupil's attainment suffers through missed lessons and experiences, and this, together with the lack of opportunity to form social relationships with his/her peers, leads to an increased pattern of non-attendance.

2.0 Features of Schools That Promote Good Attendance

- 2.1 Attendance is a priority
- 2.2 The Headteacher regularly monitors and comments on attendance.
- 2.3 All teachers regularly monitor, comment on and follow up attendance issues.
- 2.4 Pupils individually and as groups are rewarded for good attendance.
- 2.5 Obstacles to pupils' attendance are investigated.
- 2.6 Pupils are invited to comment on features of the school that do not support their learning and attendance.
- 2.7 A climate of achievement, success and praise is consciously promoted.
- 2.8 Individuals and groups of pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern are targeted for support, monitoring and counselling.
- 2.9 There are planned re-entry strategies for pupils whose attendance is poor.
- 2.10 Attendance data is collected, analysed, published and used to focus and motivate teachers, pupils and parents or carers.
- 2.11 The school sets attendance targets and uses strategies to achieve them.
- 2.12 Non-attendance is always followed up promptly, reasons established for absence and parents or carers are involved.
- 2.13 The school will have different strategies for different age groups, gender and groups of pupils whose non-attendance may have different causes.
- 2.14 Teachers do not view non-attendance as simply the problem of individual pupils and their characteristics but will consider features of home and community life and aspects of the school.
- 2.15 The beginning of the school day is marked, pupils are welcomed, the school as a community is emphasised and registration is given formal importance.
- 2.16 Teachers' attendance and punctuality are used to convey a message about the

importance attached to these features by the school.

- 2.17 Registers are completed fully accurately and consistently, and are monitored regularly.
- 2.18 Attendance data is used to show improvements for individuals and groups, as well as to identify trends.
- 2.19 Parents or carers are informed regularly about attendance and punctuality and are aware of school procedures and criteria for authorising absence.
- 2.20 There is a nominated governor with an attendance remit and governors are informed regularly about attendance and punctuality through a head teacher's report and are aware of the strategies used to maintain and improve them.
- 2.21 Home visiting is used for some pupils as a positive and supportive intervention.
- 2.22 Referrals are made to external agencies and used to support identified individuals and groups who are having difficulty in maintaining a good attendance.
- 2.23 Teachers are sensitive to the needs of pupils who have been absent and adapt the work programme for them as appropriate.
- 2.25 Schools which are effective in promoting good attendance are also likely to have good special needs provision and good pastoral support. Pupils who have difficulty with school and who feel unsupported are frequently those who choose not to attend. Tackling attendance is therefore the responsibility of all teachers and is influenced by the whole curriculum and teachers' awareness of pupils' responses to it.
- 2.26 Attendance is closely related to behaviour, and both should be tackled using the staged approach to intervention. In particular, bullying and other forms of disruptive behaviour can lead to poor attendance from some pupils. Effective approaches to promoting and maintaining good rates of attendance, therefore, also include good behaviour management based on clear boundaries and a balance of sanctions and rewards. Developing a policy on attendance should also be accompanied by a whole-school behaviour policy.

3.0 Developing School Policy

3.1 A school policy has a significant part to play in communicating school values and expectations as well as outlining good practice and procedures for promoting attendance.

3.2 Like other school policies, an attendance policy is part of a larger framework of policies for managing and organising the school. It will relate to and include aspects of special educational needs, liaison with home, and pastoral role of teachers, teaching and learning, and curriculum, policies and documentation such as the staff handbook and school prospectus. The development of an attendance policy and strategies to improve attendance will also be managed and implemented within the framework of the school's self-assessment and whole-school development plans.

3.3 It is clear that the nature of attendance issues requires the involvement of parents or carers, pupils, teachers and support staff, as well as external agencies, in the process of developing an effective school policy.

3.4 Effective school attendance policies include the following:

- Clear aims and principles
- Roles and responsibilities
- Involvement of parents or carers
- Procedures for registration
- Collection and use of attendance data
- Authorised and unauthorised absence
- First-day-of-absence initiatives
- Following up non-attendance
- Induction of new pupils and staff
- Re-entry strategies for absentees
- Rewards and sanctions

- Attendance targets
 - Removal of pupils from school roll
- 3.5 The policy should give clear guidance on practice and be easily communicated to parents or carers, pupils and staff.

4.0 Key Principles

- 4.1 LA and school policy should be underpinned by a number of key principles that communicate values and guide action.
- 4.2 The following are principles for the tri-borough attendance policy:
- 4.2.1 The ethos of the school and the actions of the Headteacher and staff are significant factors influencing pupils' behaviour and attitudes, including attendance.
 - 4.2.2 Attendance is influenced more by school organisation and procedures, curriculum and relationships, than by the characteristics of individual pupils.
 - 4.2.3 Pupils need to feel supported, to have their attendance valued, noted, and rewarded, and to be helped by the school to participate successfully.
 - 4.2.4 The majority of pupils want to attend school to learn and to achieve and may not be able to do so for reasons beyond their control, which the school needs to identify and investigate.
 - 4.2.5 Pupils have the right of equal access to the curriculum and should not be deprived of opportunity by their own or others' non-attendance.
 - 4.2.6 Pupils and parents or carers have responsibilities to the school, as well as rights, which should be made clear to them.
 - 4.2.7 Pupils are more likely to respond positively, to learn and to attend, where they are rewarded and supported.
 - 4.2.8 Good communication with home is a fundamental ingredient in the school's success generally and in promoting good attendance and punctuality.
 - 4.2.9 The start and end to the school day, and procedures for registration, have a substantial influence on pupils' attitudes and attendance. Good punctuality and school systems for ensuring pupils are punctual are a significant factor in promoting attendance.

- 4.2.10 Pupils are less likely to be poor attendees when attendance is monitored and followed up swiftly and when the school has systems for identifying and responding to the needs of different pupils reasons for absence.
- 4.2.11 The school is more likely to influence pupils when their views are sought, they are listened to and there is an appropriate response to their needs and opinions.
- 4.2.12 Pupils' achievements and progress are directly influenced by attendance, motivation and involvement and suffer when these are unsatisfactory.

5.0 Practices To Support Key Principles

Schools should also develop clear procedures and practices in order to ensure the promotion of good attendance. These will include:

- identifying a senior member of staff with oversight and responsibility for attendance
 - establishing clear lines of responsibility
 - ensuring good communication within the school and between schools
 - integrating attendance within the pastoral policy of the school
 - clear links between attendance and attainment
- 5.1 The Headteacher frequently comments on and communicates about attendance and punctuality to pupils, parents or carers and staff
- 5.2 Teachers are punctual and have good attendance and frequently comment on and praise these behaviours.
- 5.3 Pupils who are late or have been absent are told they have been missed and what it means for them and others.
- 5.4 Merits and rewards are used frequently for good attendance and punctuality.
- 5.5 The views of pupils are sought through questionnaires, discussion, and a school council, suggestions about improving the school are acted on and pupils are given responsibilities.
- 5.6 Attendance data is collected and analysed daily, weekly and longer term to identify

attendance patterns and the needs and characteristics of individuals and groups of pupils, by age, gender and other factors. In most schools the system is computerised for greater efficiency. This data is acted on to set or revise targets for improvement.

- 5.7 Pupils who are absent will have work adapted to help them to catch up and to minimise problems on return to school.
- 5.8 The school knows what features of its organisation and practice contribute to some pupils' poor attendance, which it is attempting to change.
- 5.9 The school communicates frequently with parents or carers about positive achievements and improvements and in ways which emphasise the responsibility and role of parents or carers in partnership with the school.
- 5.10 There is frequent feedback to pupils on their progress by tutors and teachers in which reference is made to attendance when appropriate.
- 5.11 The curriculum is differentiated so that pupils can learn at different rates and can make some choices and that absentees are less disadvantaged.
- 5.12 The school provides extended day, extra tutorial and homework provisions so that pupils can catch up and have more individual or small group attention from teachers.
- 5.13 The school is aware of, and plans for, cultural and religious events and occasions when particular pupils are likely to be absent.
- 5.14 Appropriate school staff sometimes visit homes when that will improve communication and help to improve pupils' achievement and attendance.
- 5.15 The school has developed procedures for welcoming and inducting new parents or carers and pupils, and using constructively any information on the needs and backgrounds of pupils.
- 5.16 Parents or carers are made welcome and can gain easy access to the Headteacher and other staff.
- 5.17.1 Bullying is identified and tackled, sometimes using confidential and anonymous means for pupils to identify problems.
- 5.17.2 If a pupil has been absent for some time, a plan is drawn up to facilitate his or her reintegration into the school.

6.0 General Features of the School Environment That Contribute To Good Attendance

6.1 The following are aspects of the physical environment and resources that have been found to influence pupil attitudes and attendance.

6.1.1 There are social areas and facilities for pupils.

6.1.2 There are planned games and provision of leisure and play facilities during breaks.

6.1.3 Pupils are given responsibility for decorating and maintaining spaces in the school.

6.1.4 There is a parents or carers' room.

6.1.5 The school has an inviting entrance area.

6.1.6 The school publishes attendance figures and displays work and photographs of pupils' achievements.

6.1.7 There is a good level of adult supervision and presence around the school at all times, with positive interaction, which has a powerful influence on pupils, especially as they enter and leave the school.

7.0 School Procedures

7.1 In addition to the preceding aspects of principle and practice the following guidance is given on basic procedures for maintaining and monitoring school attendance.

7.2 Registration

An accurate and consistent registration system throughout the school to monitor absence and lateness is essential in order to enable absenteeism to be tackled. It is important to ensure that pupils are aware that registration is taking place and is significant. The following practices should be adopted:

7.2.1 Registration must be completed 10 minutes after the start of each morning and afternoon session.

7.2.2 Absences need to be shown as authorised or unauthorised. Head teachers should carefully monitor the use of authorisation.

7.2.3 Lateness should be clearly indicated if a child arrives ten minutes after the start of registration, using appropriate authorised or unauthorised absence codes.

7.2.4 Lateness of more than ten minutes should be recorded by the time of arrival.

7.2.5 The class registers should accurately reflect the enrolment register.

7.2.6 It is essential that records are completed fully and correctly.

7.3 **Collection and use of registration data**

7.3.1 Many schools have changed to using SIMS for admission and registration data. This allows information to be quickly collected and produced in order to enable action to be taken and strategies adopted. Where registration continues to be monitored manually, it is expected that schools will still be able to take action in relation to absence speedily and effectively, and provide accurate and up-to-date information as required. Data arising from registration is needed to:

- monitor absences or lateness of individual pupils so that the appropriate action can be taken

- monitor patterns of lateness and absence across the school to identify trends in relation to:
 - gender
 - ethnicity
 - Traveller/refugee/asylum-seeker
 - looked-after pupils
 - pupils who are young carers
 - year groups
 - seasonal patterns
 - patterns and nature of authorised absences, e.g. health, religion
 - individual pupils

7.3.2 This information needs to be easily available to the appropriate person(s) in the school (e.g. Headteacher, pastoral heads) and to the Authority in order to plan effective responses and the set targets for improvements. Schools should also make attendance

data available to their Governing Body termly in order that they can work with the school in planning and setting targets for the improvement of attendance rates.

7.3.3 Information concerning each pupil's last year of attendance should be passed on from a primary school to a secondary school in order that the latter can work positively with the pupil at the beginning of his/her secondary education. Such information might include successful strategies a school has used to improve attendance with the pupil. However, schools should not pass on this information - which is confidential - until the pupil has a confirmed place at the secondary school. Pupils should also have access to their attendance data.

7.3.4 Schools should also publish data in relation to the levels of absenteeism, annually in the school prospectus and in the Governors' report to parents or carers.

7.4 **Lateness**

Persistent lateness can often precede poor attendance, and also presents a problem for the pupil in fully achieving at school. Schools should make it clear to parents, carers and pupils the times when sessions begin and their expectations regarding prompt attendance. Lateness should be recorded (this will be after registration has been completed), and if a pupil arrives later than half way through a session, this should be recorded as an absence. Where lateness is the result of, for example, a medical appointment, this will be recorded as authorised. Patterns of lateness need to be monitored in order to identify how this is having an effect on pupils' lost time at school, which may amount to serious non-attendance, and on their access to the curriculum.

7.5 **Authorised and unauthorised absence**

Current regulations enable schools to approve absences as authorised where they accept that there is a reason for a pupil to be absent. It is the head teacher or head teacher's delegated representatives, not the parents or carers or the LA, who decide whether or not to authorise. Authorisation may include reasons such as medical appointments and work experience. It may also include sickness, which is accounted for by a parent through a written communication. Telephone calls or verbal communications must be recorded by the school and placed on the pupil's file. The headteacher can authorise absences through ill-health, but is not obliged to and should not do so when there is any doubt about the reason for the absence and further investigation might be necessary. Authorisation can be given retrospectively when a child returns after a short absence and there is a written explanation for the absence. It is essential that the school has systems to manage this consistently.

The LA is actively encouraging head teachers to reduce the number of days lost through authorised leave in term time, such authorisation remains at head teachers' discretion and should be granted, only, in exceptional circumstances.

Schools should also include as "present" in their attendance returns pupils who are engaged in educational activities away from the school, although it should be clear for the purpose of fire-drills that such pupils are off-site. Such educational activities include field-trips and sports but not work experience or study leave, as these are not supervised by teachers. Working/studying at home cannot be counted as an attendance.

7.6 Follow-up registration data

7.6.1 Schools should respond in any of the following situations:

- unexplained absence on the first day of absence, if no message has been received from home

- continued unexplained absences

- persistent lateness

7.6.2 Action will be taken by the teacher, Head teacher or Year Head, and in the first instance this will be to contact the parents or carers to establish the reason for the absence or to ensure that parents or carers are aware of the absences or lateness. Such action should always be recorded, and the results noted. Further contact will need to be established with parents or carers if lateness or absence persists, or there is doubt regarding authorised absence.

7.7 Parents

7.7.1 Parents and carers have a legal duty to ensure their child goes to school or receives an appropriate education. To help parents or carers in this, schools should make clear the times for the beginning of each session and their expectations regarding lateness and absence. They should also make clear to them in writing the school term dates, and any additional days when a pupil is not expected to attend school (e.g. professional training days or examination study days). If no contact has been recorded on the first day and a pupil is absent, parents or carers should be informed quickly by telephone with follow-up letters, as necessary.

7.7.2 Parents or carers should inform the school when their child is not attending school on the first day and let the school know in writing why a pupil was absent when he/she returns, or

before if the absence is to be for longer than five days. In cases of persistent absence, the parents or carers' cooperation should be enlisted in order to tackle this. Schools should ensure that they have identified all people with parental responsibility and should have a first-day-of-absence follow-up procedure in place.

7.8 The school roll - removals

7.8.1 Pupils should be taken off-roll after an unexplained absence 20 continuous days or more *only* when the school has received confirmation of the pupils' move to another school or another locality and when appropriate reasonable enquiries have been carried out by the Local Authority and school staff.

7.8.3 A pupil attending a school must be on the school roll. There cannot be any temporary trial placements where a pupil is not formally on the roll of a school, or is still on the roll of another school, although dual registration is possible in exceptional circumstances, such as Traveller pupils. Pupils are admitted formally, and if the placement breaks down, then the usual exclusion procedures should be followed or alternative provisions should be sought in liaison with parents or carers and the LA. At the same time a pupil may be attending an off-site unit part-time, in which case he/she should not be removed from the roll of the school and placed on the roll of the unit. However, communication between unit and school should make sure that any breakdown in attendance is swiftly followed up.

7.8.4 Additional action to be taken by the school to help good attendance

7.8.5 Schools should make use of the Authority's support in relation to poor attendance. This includes the Attendance Officer, currently based with the Admissions and Access to Education Team, which can advise schools on policy and procedure and the Family Support Localities Service (FSLs) who work with pupils and families.

8.0 LA Responsibilities and Resources

8.1 The LA has a duty to ensure that individual pupils attend school regularly, and also to help schools in relation to the overall levels of absence and lateness. The LA will regularly collect and publish attendance data, and provide updated guidelines to schools. The LA Attendance Officer can make formal checks, recorded and dated, of all registers, to help identify areas of concern in relation to attendance registration.

8.2 After the school has made contact with parents or carers and invited them into the school, but no significant improvement has resulted, if the pupil is still absent without a proper explanation, school staff can refer to Locality /Early Help services for support. If the FSLs accepts the request they will work with the family to achieve an improved pattern of

attendance and to address the issues which lie behind the non-attendance.

- 8.3 The LA will also assist the schools in collecting borough-wide data on attendance - including the school's own information and the termly attendance survey - and will analyse and assess this data.

8.4 **Training**

In order to help schools in relation to their duties for recording, monitoring and responding to all aspects of attendance and lateness, training can be arranged by the LA. This will be aimed at ensuring effective monitoring and recording procedures, and the ways in which these can be used to inform practice and implement strategies for promoting good attendance. Schools should also provide their own training for teachers on attendance issues, through induction for new staff and through on-going staff development and support for teachers and tutors by those with a senior pastoral responsibility.

9.0 **Developing and reviewing your school's attendance policy**

- 9.1 All schools are recommended to do the following on a regular cyclical basis:

- Analyse the attendance situation in your school.
- Create a high profile on attendance and punctuality and raise awareness with all staff and pupils.
- Establish procedures for involving staff and making decisions about new policy or amendments to existing policy.
- Monitor and evaluate existing procedures to improve school practices.
- Set attendance targets and produce detailed and useful attendance data.
- Identify ways in which attendance can be usefully linked to the development of other aspects of the school, especially pupils' welfare, behaviour and achievement.
- Analyse pupil attainment and exam results by reference to attendance data and trends.

- 9.2 To ensure that equal opportunities policies are effective, schools are advised to monitor pupils' attendance by ethnic group and use such data to set specific targets for improving

attendance of underachieving groups.

10.0 Conclusion

- 10.1 Schools' success in improving attendance depends on continual attention to detail, consistent application of agreed procedures and most of all the provision of a stimulating and appropriate curriculum for the needs of all pupils. Attempts to maintain pupils' regular attendance are an important equal opportunity issue for schools and the LA in ensuring justice and equal rights and access for all pupils. Approaches to promoting good attendance are one of the ways in which schools act to deliver these objectives.

- 10.2 Attention to the school environment, early intervention, the development of structured activity during breaks, the closer involvement of parents or carers, attempts to highlight the start and end of the school day, more detailed monitoring of attendance and careful targeting of individual pupils both pastorally and in the classroom make a significant difference to attendance and punctuality. This policy is based on the belief that a committed and consistent approach by schools will make that difference.