

# Included, Engaged and Involved

## Part 1: A Positive Approach to the Promotion and Management of Attendance in Scottish Schools



Fairness

Equality

Participation

Inclusion



Smarter  
Scotland  
Scottish  
Government



## **ASPEP**

**The Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists**



## MINISTERIAL FOREWORD



Our aim is to make Scotland the best place to grow up and our policies are designed to give all our children the best possible start in life. Combined with the defining mission of this Government to deliver excellence and equity in Scottish education, I am certain we can work together to raise the bar for all our children and young people and close the attainment gap.

Every child has the right to grow up fully included in their learning experience and to be treated with respect. A positive school ethos and culture is essential to developing good relationships and positive behaviour in the classroom, playground and wider community. If we are to see improvements for children and young people then we must all work together to promote positive relationships and to foster a strong ethos in every school in Scotland. In order to create this environment for effective learning and teaching there should be a shared understanding of wellbeing, underpinned by children's rights, and a focus on positive relationships across the whole school community.

We know that lower levels of attendance can have an adverse impact on a young person's level of participation, attainment and ultimately future opportunities; it is therefore vital that schools do all they can to promote and ensure good attendance for all of our children and young people.

For every child or young person to achieve their potential, all schools should consider each pupil's positive engagement with learning and their level of involvement in the school community. The Scottish policy context allows greater flexibility for professionals to develop creative approaches to enthusing and engaging learners, and for developing effective responses to the learning needs of their pupils.

This refreshed guidance gives a stronger focus on approaches that can be used to ensure that attendance at school is clearly linked to the overall approaches to promoting positive relationships and behaviour and ensuring all children and young people are included, engaged and involved in their education.

In the 11 years since *Included, Engaged and Involved: Part 1* was published, we now understand more about the importance of schools working with children and young people and their families and the measures that can be taken to ensure our children and young people can attend school, and ultimately realise their full potential.

In updating this guidance we have worked closely with key partners and stakeholders, many of whom work directly with our young people to ensure that the key messages in this guidance are both up to date and relevant and I hope this guidance will be a useful and practical resource for teachers and practitioners working with children and young people. Its importance should be recognised in the context of our shared ambition to raise attainment for all, close the attainment gap and ensure that the focus on children and young people's wellbeing is given the importance it deserves. None of this can be achieved without good attendance at school.

**John Swinney MSP**

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Government aims to promote good attendance at school. Absence from school, whatever the cause, disrupts learning. This guidance replaces 'Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1: Attendance in Scottish Schools' originally published in 2007. It draws together advice on good practice and establishes requirements regarding classifying and recording attendance and absence.

In addition to the classification of attendance and absence, this guidance seeks to explore and address wider issues around the promotion and management of good attendance and the prevention and reduction of absence. This guidance seeks to make stronger links between absence and the protection of children. Attendance is one of the five key drivers for raising attainment as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge<sup>1</sup>, alongside attainment, exclusion, engagement and participation.

This guidance also updates the language around attendance and absence to reflect the current thinking around supporting attendance and managing absence. Terms such as 'truancy' and 'parental condoned absence' are not used in this guidance.

This guidance is for schools and education authority staff. It makes general references to law and legislation but is not an authoritative statement of the law. Interpretation of the law is a matter for legal advisers and ultimately the courts. Education authorities may wish to take legal advice regarding any particular set of circumstances. Education authorities and schools also have a responsibility to ensure all staff are aware of this guidance.

There is an expectation that education authorities and schools will use this guidance to revise and review existing policies and procedures on attendance, taking account of local circumstances and involving all partners in the development of the new policy. Education authorities and schools should ensure that their policies are set against a framework within which schools, children and young people and parents can encourage and maintain a focus on wellbeing and an ethos of mutual respect and trust, in order to promote inclusion and a whole school ethos based on positive relationships.

Staff in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings may also find this guidance useful as an indicator of good practice in the promotion of attendance and the prevention and reduction of absence.

Throughout this document the term parent(s) will be used to apply to anyone with parental responsibility, those providing a foster or residential placement, or the local authority where full parental responsibility rests with them. In the case of care experienced children and young people and those in kinship care, this is also taken to mean 'carer'.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/policies/schools/pupil-attainment/>

## 1.2 Guiding 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.

## 1.3 Current Policy Context

This section provides a brief summary of the policy context in which ‘Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1: A positive approach to the promotion and management of attendance in Scottish Schools is set. Since the last publication of ‘Included Engaged and Involved Part 1’ in December 2007, the policy and legislative landscape has changed and continues to increasingly emphasise the importance of wellbeing and relationships in shaping positive outcomes for children and young people. There is also an increasing emphasis on the promotion of children’s rights in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>2</sup>. The following policies support schools, children and young people and their families and partners to implement practices that will encourage good attendance.

Getting it right for every child<sup>3</sup> is the national approach to improving outcomes for children and young people and takes a holistic approach to the wellbeing of the child or young person. Getting it right for every child 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 UNCRC.

Getting it right for every child 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.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>

There is increasing awareness that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)<sup>4</sup> can impact on the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. Such adversity can influence their actions and behaviour. The potential for this, alongside their needs and rights, should be taken into account by schools when developing policies and approaches to supporting good attendance.

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) promotes health and wellbeing in educational settings, recognising that positive relationships are the building blocks to developing children and young people's resilience.

Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy<sup>5</sup> aims to ensure that there is a work relevant education experience on offer for all our young people and that a rich blend of learning, including vocational education, is valued.

The National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education<sup>6</sup> aims to deliver excellence and equity and drive improvements in learning for individual children. As well as a focus on literacy and numeracy, it will also bring together greater focus to improvements in the health and wellbeing of children and young people. One of the key priorities within the National Improvement Framework is the closing of the poverty related attainment gap which is supported through the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

Giving every child and young person a strong start in life includes meeting the needs of children and young people who need more choices and chances, and who are more at risk of not engaging with or benefiting from compulsory education. Risks could relate to missing education for genuine reasons such as illness or through disengagement from education. The Scottish Government has prioritised supporting vulnerable children and families. A focus on children and young people who are looked after will be maintained as will a focus on children and young people living in disadvantaged areas.

There are particular responsibilities for local authorities as corporate parents of looked after children, whether looked after and accommodated (i.e. in foster care or residential care) or looked after at home (i.e. with birth parents or in kinship care). As corporate parents local authorities have a statutory responsibility to ensure that children and young people receive an education which is directed towards achieving their full potential (section 2(1) Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000)<sup>7</sup>.

4 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/adverse-childhood-experiences/>

5 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/developing-young-workforce-scotlands-youth-employment-strategy/>

6 <https://www.gov.scot/policies/schools/national-improvement-framework/>

7 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2000/6/section/2>

Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (Third Edition, 2017)<sup>8</sup> provides a framework for assessing children's needs and helping them overcome barriers to learning by planning and collaborating to provide support. This must be used alongside the wellbeing indicators<sup>9</sup> and the national practice model<sup>10</sup>.

The National Child Protection Guidance 2014<sup>11</sup> indicates that all agencies that work with children and their families have a shared responsibility for protecting children and promoting, supporting and safeguarding their wellbeing. The importance of promoting good attendance at school is highlighted by concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children who are not at school. Child protection is of paramount importance and absence from school may indicate a child is at risk.

For every child or young person to achieve their potential, all schools should consider each pupil's positive engagement with learning and their level of involvement in the school community. Attendance at school should be clearly linked to school's overall approaches to promoting positive relationships and behaviour. Staged intervention structures and school's ethos, cultures and values are fundamental to promoting positive relationships and behaviour.

8 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland/>

9 <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/wellbeing-indicators-shanarri/>

10 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/girfec-national-practice-model/>

11 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland/>

## 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD ATTENDANCE

### 2.1 Attendance

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 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 (see 4.3)
- Work experience

Schools should seek to ensure that children and young people attend school or another learning environment for the recommended 25 hours in primary schools and 27.5 hours for secondary schools.

### 2.2 The impact of poor attendance

Whilst both the causes and the 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 lower levels of attainment; peer relationships; emotional and behavioural difficulties and poorer employment opportunities. This was found to be the case even when prior attainment and pupil characteristics were taken into account (DfE, 2016). Some initial studies have indicated that missing 10% of schooling (equivalent of 4 weeks) over the course of a year can impact on attainment. Low levels of attendance can also be linked to how connected children and young people feel to their school community. Lack of school connectedness has been linked to a range of poorer outcomes including attainment, wellbeing and involvement in offending behaviours. Attendance and participation with school can also be considered as protective factors for children and young people experiencing adversity or trauma and can support early intervention. While recognising that the links between attendance and these factors are not straightforward, there is still a clear case for demonstrating the importance of promoting good attendance in schools.

### 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 also play a key role in supporting good attendance.

#### 3.1 Approaches to promoting positive relationships and developing a positive whole school ethos and culture

A culture where children and young people feel included, respected, safe and secure, where their achievements and contributions are valued and celebrated is essential to the development of good relationships. In order to create this environment for effective learning and teaching there should be a shared understanding of wellbeing underpinned by Children's Rights and a focus on positive relationships across the whole school community.

Climate and ethos are key determinants in promoting social and emotional wellbeing and positive mental health for everyone within the school community. The implementation of social and emotional programmes and initiatives as a whole school, with a universal approach can have a significant impact on school ethos and culture which can in turn impact positively on both school attainment and attendance (Banerjee et al, 2014<sup>12</sup>; Freeman et al, 2016<sup>13</sup>) School attendance issues cannot easily be separated from the relationships, behaviours and wellbeing of the pupils and wider school community and it is important that schools view the promotion of attendance in this context.

There are a range of strategies, programmes and approaches which schools can and do use to improve relationships and behaviour and subsequently attendance. These include relationship based whole school approaches such as solution oriented approaches, restorative approaches and rights based learning. Schools have also found that the implementation of nurturing approaches based on nurturing principles, including nurture groups can improve the overall ethos and culture of a school and support pupils to feel more connected and engaged. Schools are increasingly recognising the impact that early adversity or trauma can have on children and young people and their families and are adapting their approaches to offer more nurturing and trauma informed supports which can help children and young people feel more included within their school environment.

12 Banerjee R, Weare K, Farr W. Working with "Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning" (SEAL): Associations with School Ethos, Pupil Social Experiences, Attendance, and Attainment. *British Educational Research Journal* 2014 08/01;40(4):718-742

13 Freeman J, Simonsen B, McCoach DB, Sugai G, Lombardi A, Horner R. Relationship between School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and Academic, Attendance, and Behavior Outcomes in High Schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions* 2016 01/01;18(1):41-51

A positive culture and ethos are key determinants in promoting good attendance for all<sup>14</sup>.

The development of an anti-bullying approach based on the framework for anti-bullying Respect for All<sup>15</sup> is also a helpful contributor in preventing absence as it has been found that some children and young people's attendance can be impacted upon by bullying.

A rights based approach which takes account of the UNCRC and encourages children and young people's participation in their learning is also likely to ensure children are included, engaged and involved in their school and community, and therefore more likely to be motivated to attend.

Ongoing absence from school is likely to be related to a range of factors and, therefore, any approach to promoting attendance requires a multilevel ecologically based intervention model which takes account of the school's unique circumstances (Sugme, 2016).

### 3.2 Parental engagement

Parental engagement is key to ensuring good attendance. Positive relationships within education start in the early years through the informal, casual contact when parents drop younger children off and collect them. Capitalising on these early opportunities can lead to positive long term relationships based on trust and mutual respect. These positive relationships can continue throughout a child or young person's school career. Clear transition arrangements in place at all stages would support positive relationships. These arrangements should start as early as possible and include families and all appropriate support.

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)<sup>16</sup>. Working in partnership with parents to ensure positive and trusting relationships are in place to promote the benefits of regular attendance and reduce any barriers is vital.

In discussing attendance with parents it is important to maintain a practical focus that recognises the challenges that can be part of family life, such as balancing work commitments; or dealing with financial challenges that may occur. Schools should work with partners to ensure that any barriers for families are supported and overcome as early as possible. Some schools have found that breakfast clubs improved attendance as

14 <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/developing-positive-whole-school-ethos-culture-relationships-learning-behaviour/>

15 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/respect-national-approach-anti-bullying-scotlands-children-young-people/>

16 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/44/section/30>

these are a practical help to parents and pupils. Other schools have found that initiatives such as the 'Cost of the school day'<sup>17</sup> has helped raise awareness of the financial barriers for families that might impact on them coming to school. It should be clear to parents and children and young people that consequences for lateness will be respectful and considerate towards any family circumstances and that when school staff become aware of any difficulties they will do what they can to help in partnership with other services.

When care experienced children and young people are moving placement, they may have to travel longer distances or adjust to new routes. The designated senior manager for care experienced children and young people in the school should ensure that support is in place at as early a stage as possible to ensure continuity.

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. It is helpful for schools to have an answering machine to receive communications from parents outwith school opening hours.

In order to promote good attendance, schools should engage with their wider parent body to gain a better understanding of any potential barriers that may exist locally. This should include engagement with families from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible. The Parent Council can also have a role in supporting engagement with the wider parent body around attendance issues. The Parent Council can be involved in developing and implementing initiatives with the wider parent body to encourage regular school attendance.

Information for parents on school attendance and absence is available on Parentzone<sup>18</sup>.

### 3.3 Pastoral Care

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

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2213/evaluability-assessment-of-cost-of-the-school-day-oct18-english.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone>

Pastoral care staff should establish links with partner agencies to strengthen support to children and young people and parents. Education authorities can support school-based teams by having appropriate structures for centralised support to schools. Continuous Professional Development for all staff around areas such as promoting positive relationships; parental engagement; and learner participation can help schools to develop practice that will support good attendance. Professional development which explores systems and processes to monitor and improve attendance can also be helpful. There should also be a focus on the underlying reasons for absence (which may include mental health) particularly for those who may be working more directly in this area, such as home-school link workers or family support workers.

Pastoral care staff have a key role in monitoring, assessing and supporting absence. They should, where possible, identify patterns and underlying causes for absence in order that these can be addressed as quickly as possible. Other school staff and agencies may also contribute to this assessment.

### **3.4 Additional Support for Learning**

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004<sup>19</sup> requires education authorities and other agencies to make provision for all pupils who require additional support to overcome barriers to their learning. Additional support may be required to overcome needs arising from their learning environment; disability or health; family circumstances or social and emotional factors which would include mental health concerns. Under the Act, every looked after child is presumed to have an additional support need, unless an assessment concludes otherwise.

Providing additional support may help children and young people to engage more fully with school and promote good attendance. Schools should recognise that poor attendance can often be related to, or be an indication of, an additional support need and they should use their staged intervention processes to ensure that any barriers to learning are identified and appropriate support is provided.

A Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP) may be required when a child or young person requires significant long term additional support from an education authority as well as from another agency, such as health or social work services for example. The CSP sets out the educational objectives to be achieved, together with the additional support that requires to be co-ordinated to enable the child or young person to achieve these.

Guidance on planning to meet additional support needs is available from the Supporting Children's Learning – Code of Practice<sup>20</sup>.

19 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/4/contents>

20 <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland/>

### 3.5 Curriculum flexibility and Developing the Young Workforce

CfE promotes flexibility in the curriculum and allows schools to personalise learner journeys to meet the needs of all children and young people, and to reduce pressure on those in the Senior Phase. Children and young people should be encouraged to participate fully in their learning and the wider life of the school throughout the broad general education and when making subject choices as they move into the Senior Phase. Self-evaluation through 'How Good is Our School? 4'<sup>21</sup> can help schools to identify how effective their approaches to school improvement are across the range of quality indicators. Schools should seek to develop a strong culture of learner participation and engagement.

Developing the Young Workforce; Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy builds on the foundations already in place through CfE and encourages schools to offer a flexible programme of skills development and vocational experiences to meet individual needs. Schools may develop programmes of learning with vocational and work experience elements, in partnership with other agencies such as careers services, colleges and local businesses to ensure young people are fully engaged. It is also important that schools support young people to develop a range of skills that will prepare them for the world of work, including regular attendance at school.

Schools can support children and young people's attendance through offering a range of wider achievement programmes and access to apprenticeships.

As a result of an appropriate assessment, establishments may consider the use of individualised, planned packages of support in order to promote good attendance. Partners from within and outwith the education authority should, where possible, support schools in providing packages of support to engage children and young people across all sectors.

### 3.6 Raising the profile of attendance and setting clear thresholds and expectations

In addition to co-production of policies and procedures, schools and education authorities can encourage good attendance by raising the profile of attendance and absence within school communities and in school documents such as the School Handbook.

Many schools link incentive schemes with good attendance. Engagement with children and young people can help to establish whether it is felt that such incentive schemes are helpful and what incentives, if any, are appropriate. Schools should also be sensitive to using incentive schemes to support attendance and recognise that often poor attendance is something that is not under a child or young person's control. Using incentive schemes in an inappropriate way can often demotivate and in some cases may cause distress to children and young people who have been unable to attend school for complex reasons.

21 [https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Frameworks\\_SelfEvaluation/FRWK2\\_NIHeditHGIOS/FRWK2\\_HGIOS4.pdf](https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Frameworks_SelfEvaluation/FRWK2_NIHeditHGIOS/FRWK2_HGIOS4.pdf)

Promotion of good attendance at school can occur on an authority wide basis. Key figures such as elected members, senior managers from the wider local authority and community groups should be involved in raising the profile of the benefits of good attendance. The promotion of good attendance and recognising improvements in attendance can also help to convey positive messages about young people to the wider community. Education authority quality assurance processes should enable key senior managers to develop an overview of attendance across their schools and support schools to develop good practice in promoting attendance and responding effectively to absence.

Schools should have a clear vision and strategic plan to promote and manage attendance. This should include identified personnel and systems to support the tracking and monitoring of attendance. Schools may consider setting realistic and specific targets around overall attendance. Improvement methodologies can be helpful in supporting schools to achieve these targets. Schools should consider evaluating the effectiveness of any approaches to supporting attendance. This may include using the Improvement Methodology supported by the Children and Young Peoples Improvement Collaborative<sup>22</sup>. Schools may also consider working with other schools in locality groupings within the education authority or within their Regional Improvement Collaborative area to share and develop effective practice around the promotion of good attendance.

Education authorities and schools may also choose to set thresholds which determine at what level appropriate intervention to support attendance should take place. This is likely to vary across education authorities as it will be linked to their particular context and the data they have which provides a clearer picture of attendance and absence within the education authority. When attendance falls below the level set by the education authority, there should be clear processes in place to ensure parents and partners are informed and appropriate support is put in place.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/policies/improving-public-services/children-and-young-people-improvement-collaborative/>

## 4. SUPPORTING ATTENDANCE AND MANAGING ABSENCE

### 4.1 School policies and procedures

Education authorities should have clear guidance on supporting attendance and managing absence. They should ensure that all schools have in place policies that promote good attendance and outline procedures to support the recording and management of attendance. This should be linked where possible to their relationships and behaviour policy. While there may be scope for local variation in processes and internal systems, consistency of approach helps children and young people and parents to understand expectations. The key messages in this document should be reflected in local policies and procedures.

Involving children and young people and their parents in developing policy encourages a sense of ownership. Regular reviews of policies and procedures with key stakeholders helps to reaffirm expectations and ensure local policies are updated in line with any new national guidance.

Children and young people can learn in a variety of settings, which may be provided by other agencies or providers in partnership with schools. The school's policies and procedures for supporting attendance and managing absence should be agreed with every service involved in supporting children and young people. A system should be in place to enable centralised recording of attendance and absence for each child or young person, by the school in which the pupil is registered. If this is not collated by the school on a daily basis, then any action or follow up usually taken by the school when there is absence should be taken on by the partner provider.

Where a child or young person is accessing support from another provider and absence continues to be a concern, then this element of the support plan should be reviewed and consideration given to finding another placement that meets their needs.

### 4.2 Assessment of long term absence

Children and young people may be absent for complex reasons. Schools should undertake a comprehensive assessment involving relevant partners, including the team around the child. This should be linked to existing staged intervention procedures. Schools should take into account the underlying reasons for absence, including family circumstances, school factors or potential mental health factors. For example, some children and young people may display signs of anxiety about attending school due to worries about their family or other factors. Identifying the possible reasons for absence can help the school to determine appropriate supports to put in place.

### 4.3 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 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980) through outreach teaching or other special provision such as hospital education services. Education authorities may also use technology to support the education of children and young people who are absent through long term illness. Where appropriate provision is in place, schools should record this as attendance. Where it is not in place, this is still categorised as authorised absence. However, the education authority must actively make alternative arrangements to ensure that children or young people can access their entitlement to education.

Where schools maintain contact with children and young people and parents and make arrangements to support learning during absence because of ill health, this can make a positive difference in enabling a child or young person to settle in and make progress on their return to school. Further guidance is available in ‘Guidance on education of children absent from school through ill-health’<sup>23</sup>.

### 4.4 Children and young people who are home educated

Parents have a duty to provide efficient and suitable education for their children under section 30 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980). Most parents fulfil their responsibility to provide efficient and suitable education by sending their children to an education authority school. Some parents choose to provide home-based education. Home education must be efficient education and suitable to the age, ability and aptitude of the child or young person. Section 35 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 provides that parents whose children have attended a local authority school must seek the education authority’s consent before withdrawing their child. Section 35 also provides that the education authority must not unreasonably withhold consent. Parents are not required to seek the consent of the education authority in order to home educate their child if:

- their child has never attended a public school,
- their child has never attended a public school in that authority’s area,
- their child is being withdrawn from an independent school,
- their child has finished primary education in one school but has not started secondary education, or
- the school their child has been attending has closed.

More information is available in ‘Home Education Guidance’<sup>24</sup>.

23 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/158331/0042883.pdf>

24 <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/home-education-guidance/>

## 4.5 Registration and recording lateness

Recording of attendance should take place at least twice a day to enable the school to note attendance and absence for each morning and afternoon session.

A number of schools continue to have a registration period in the morning. In addition to noting attendance and absence, staff have the opportunity to get to know the children and young people and to become aware of any concerns regarding their health and wellbeing. Persistent lateness, lack of preparedness, distracted and distressed behaviour observed during registration and lessons may be signs of difficulty and may impact on attendance. This information should be shared with other staff as appropriate to enable support to be provided. Some secondary schools have allocated a block of 'tutor group' time on a weekly basis, with tutors following groups throughout their school career, which provides an opportunity for a higher level of personal knowledge of pupils. The Personal and Social Education Review (2019)<sup>25</sup> recommends that tutor periods are reviewed to evaluate their effectiveness and ensure they support the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Schools should seek to maximise opportunities for staff to get to know pupils well. In the case of looked after children the designated senior manager within the school should be aware of any particular issues which may impact on attendance and find ways of supporting the child or young person.

Some secondary schools have opted for attendance monitoring to take place in every lesson. This can provide useful management information, helping schools to monitor and manage absences effectively.

However attendance and absence are recorded, it is important that the information is used to inform immediate follow-up action so that developing patterns of attendance and absence inform strategic intervention where necessary. Delays between class-level recording and further action should be minimised by the efficient transfer of information.

Attendance and absence should be recorded at least per half-day session, but there also needs to be a method of recording the attendance of children and young people who are late. Timing and circumstances behind lateness should always be considered. If a child or young person arrives late, but during the first half of the session, this should be recorded differently to those who arrive during the second half of the morning or afternoon session. In data returns to the Scottish Government these are termed 'Late 1' (L1) and 'Late 2' (L2).

For secondary schools using period-by-period registration, where a child or young person is late but registers in any registration in periods beginning in the first half of the opening, this will be converted to an overall L1 code for the opening (even if a later period is missed). If the first registration is in the second half of the opening, this will be converted to an overall L2 code for the opening (even if a later period is subsequently missed).

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/schools-personal-and-social-education-review/>

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.

#### 4.6 Immediate action when an absence is noted

If a child or young person does not attend school, the absence should be checked against details of contacts made by parents, including expected date of return to school. **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** (see 6.1 Unauthorised absence). This should be recorded as unauthorised absence until an explanation is received by the school.

Parents should be contacted when a child or young person has not arrived in school, using automated call/text systems when available. If attempts to contact the parent are not successful, then emergency contact numbers, such as those of other family members, should be used.

In most circumstances, contact with the parent will result in an explanation for the absence and/or the child or young person returning to school. However, in rare incidents there have been more serious or tragic reasons why children or young people have not registered at school. Schools cannot be complacent about children and young people's safety. If the school has been unable to establish contact with the parents, action must be taken to satisfy the school and the education authority that the child or young person is safe and well.

If the parent cannot be contacted to confirm the whereabouts of the child or young person, the record of absence should be passed to a member of staff with responsibility for attendance (most often a member of the school's senior manager or pastoral care within secondary or home-school link worker where available) to consider the information in the light of known attendance issues, support needs or current concerns about the child or young person. This member of staff will be responsible for determining what further action is required, taking into account the age of the pupil; the implications for additional support to resolve any difficulties; and, if necessary, contacting the school's child protection co-ordinator.

In the case of looked after or vulnerable children, when the child or young person does not attend school this should always be followed up immediately. To enable swift action to be taken it is vitally important that the school has an up to date and accurate record of the key contact information for the parent and social worker where relevant. In the case of children or young people who are looked after at home, then the social worker should also be contacted.

Automated call/text systems are often used by education authorities to provide information about school closures, transport disruption or severe weather arrangements. Where schools are closed, children and young people should be marked as attending. Some schools have used these systems to communicate positive messages about attendance to parents about individual children or young people.

#### 4.7 Children or young people missing from education for extended periods

There may be occasions where a child or young person goes missing from education for an extended period of time and the education authority has made extensive unsuccessful attempts to make contact with a family. In these circumstances, school staff should refer to their local child protection guidance.

There are many complex reasons why a family cannot be contacted. Often, staff in schools are aware of individual circumstances and family connections which will enable them to find children or young people quickly. Children or young people may simply have moved schools or have moved homes, and when the new school is contacted, information can be transferred to help the child or young person settle quickly.

Particular sensitivity should be given to children or young people in Gypsy/Traveller families – please see 5.4 diverse school communities for further information.

There are other circumstances which might lead to children or young people being missing from education for an extended period. These might include female genital mutilation<sup>26</sup>, forced marriage<sup>27</sup> and child sexual exploitation<sup>28</sup>, in cases where awareness has been raised of factors that might lead schools to believe this could be a concern for particular children and young people<sup>29</sup>.

There are a range of other reasons why children might be missing from education for an extended period of time, many of which are explored in greater detail in section 6.

#### 4.8 Follow 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.

26 <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/violence-against-women-and-girls/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

27 <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/violence-against-women-and-girls/forced-marriage/>

28 <http://csethesigns.scot/>

29 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland/>

Parents have a key role to play in promoting and supporting good attendance, and schools should work in partnership with parents to ensure that there is good communication about any issues relating to attendance. 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.

Parents should be kept up to date with levels of attendance through the school's tracking and monitoring system for attendance and advised when attendance has fallen below the threshold set by the school. Where written communication is used, contact details should be provided of the member of staff who can support the child or young person and parent to improve attendance, as well as where further support may be available. Parents should also be advised of any local parent support initiatives, and of any advocacy service in their area, where a representative ensures the parent's views are provided and understood. Any communication should take into account the differing needs parents may have, such as those arising from a disability, or communication and language barriers. In the case of children and young people who are looked after, their social worker should be copied into any communication.

Where concern about attendance is ongoing, home visits may help to build relationships between parents and the school. They can also help to consider whether the family has particular needs that they may not have shared with the school, and consider whether support should be offered via local multi-agency planning groups.

#### **4.9 Attendance beyond school leaving age**

Young people who choose to stay on at school beyond school leaving age, usually 16 years of age, and their parents, should be strongly encouraged to consider their continued commitment to full attendance. Some schools develop a learning agreement outlining these expectations. There should also be ongoing support and encouragement for young people to ensure their sustained commitment and engagement. Attendance must also be monitored to ensure proper entitlement to the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The EMA is a weekly payment, paid directly to children or young people who stay on at school, and is designed to help overcome financial barriers which otherwise may prevent them from staying on.

Education providers will be required to record attendance of EMA recipients on days when the place of learning is open to young people. Where the place of learning is closed on days when it would normally be open, for example due to public holidays, extreme bad weather, polling days, in-service days, young people should be treated as having attended for the purpose of the EMA. Similarly, any medical or dental appointments should be recorded for EMA purposes as authorised absence as long as an appointment card or note is provided.

Where there is a shortened week at the start or end of an official school holiday, young people will be eligible for the weekly payment if the number of days the school is “open” is 3 or more (including the above exceptions) and where the young person has fulfilled 100% attendance when the school was open.

#### 4.10 Staged Intervention

Many issues relating to absence in school can be dealt with quickly and promptly by within school supports and by ensuring that there are positive relationships in place to support children and young people and their families. However, there may be occasions when absence from school becomes a more significant cause for concern. It is important that schools ensure that they have staged intervention processes in place to support attendance. These can include:

- High quality pastoral care systems for early response to absence and signs of difficulty (see section 3.3);
- Effective approaches to assessment and planning for additional support needs to address any barriers to learning that might be impacting on attendance (see section 3.4);
- Creating a Child Support Plan which clearly outlines the supports and structures that require to be in place to support any wellbeing or additional support needs;
- Flexible pathways and consideration of approaches to include and engage pupils more fully in their learning (see Section 3.1 and 3.5);
- Collaboration with a range of agencies through multi-agency planning groups (e.g. Pupil Support Group; School Liaison Group, Team around the child or young person) to ensure effective child and family support;
- Involvement by the education authority in formal referral to local attendance committees, other agencies or consideration of alternative pathways;
- Recourse to measures for compulsory compliance by parents or children or young people, through attendance orders or referral to the Children’s Reporter.

## 5. MANAGING AUTHORISED ABSENCE

### 5.1 Authorised absence

School staff are best placed to decide the school's most appropriate response to requests for absence to be authorised. Schools may authorise absence when they are satisfied by the reason provided, usually by the parent (via a note, email or phone call), self-certified or sometimes may be provided by another service provider. Reasons for authorised absence can include:

- Illness where no learning provision is made (including ongoing mental health concerns)
- Medical and dental appointments to be recorded in separate category (see section 5.3)
- 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
- Arranged absence in relation to children in Gypsy/Traveller families (see section 5.4)
- 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

### 5.2 Ensuring support for children with ongoing authorised absence

Some children or young people will have a high degree of interaction with a range of services and with other systems, such as children's hearings, courts or involvement with social workers for supervision or care planning. While absences for these reasons may be recorded as authorised absence, it is important for agencies to recognise that education can act as a protective factor and that continuity of schooling, stability and consistency are crucial to vulnerable children and young people. This should all be set within the education authority's approach to 'Getting it right for every child'.

Schools may authorise absence where families are experiencing exceptional domestic circumstances or traumatic events such as family bereavement. However, authorising absence should not delay the process of considering how the school and other partners can plan to support the child or young person and family, helping to minimise longer term absence. For children and young people who are care experienced, the authorisation of absence for exceptional domestic circumstances should be considered

carefully with multi-agency partners to consider whether absence from school is in fact beneficial. The school and partners should ensure that appropriate supports are in place.

Some children and young people may have experienced a range of adversities alongside other factors which can impact their attendance. Erratic attendance at school may be due to circumstances affecting a family, such as domestic abuse, parental involvement in substance misuse, or a child or young person having carer responsibilities. It may be challenging for a child or young person living in these circumstances to attend school. It is important for a school to maintain a positive and trusting relationship with children and young people as this can be an important source of consistent and long term support. All staff within schools should recognise that they have an additional responsibility for looked after children and young people where the education authority has a statutory obligation as a “Corporate Parent” in terms of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

### **5.3 Medical and dental appointments**

Parents and children and young people should continue to be encouraged to arrange such appointments, whenever possible, outside of school hours. On occasion, it may be necessary to attend medical, dental and other health related appointments such as hospital appointments during school hours, which schools should record within a Medical and Dental category in ‘authorised absence’.

In remote areas, keeping health appointments may require significant travel and cause more disruption to school attendance. Education authorities should use their partnership with child health services to ensure that there is a flexible approach to appointments to avoid disruption for children and young people during critical times, such as during exam periods. In some circumstances, education authorities and schools may arrange for medical and dental services to be provided on site within schools.

### **5.4 Diverse school communities**

Some groups of children and young people may require authorised absence because of their religious or cultural practices or family’s mobility:

- children and young people of all faiths may take authorised absence to enable them to participate in religious observance
- in some cultures, family weddings or funerals are major events which may require children or young people to travel (e.g. overseas) or participate in extended preparations. If this lasts for more than four weeks the school would normally have the right to remove the child or young person from the roll in order not to be penalised in terms of its attendance record. However, in these circumstances, children or young people should be considered as “Extended leave with parental consent”, which allows them to remain on the school register ready for their return, but without the school being penalised.

- some families may travel as part of their tradition, for family connections or work commitments. Further information on supporting inclusive educational approaches for children and young people from travelling cultures, including culturally sensitive approaches to managing attendance, is available in the Scottish Government guidance 'Improving educational outcomes for children and young people from travelling cultures'<sup>30</sup>. Children and young people can be registered on SEEMiS with two schools at the same time. For example, some families arrange for their children to enrol in a 'base school' (school they attend for most of the year) for part of the year and take authorised 'Extended Leave with Parental Consent' for periods of travel. The children may temporarily enrol in other schools as they travel, and these schools provide attendance and other data to the 'base school', to ensure completeness of data.

## 5.5 Exclusion from school

Exclusion from school is recorded as a separate category in attendance statistics to enable education authorities and the Scottish Government to monitor the number of days lost to exclusion in schools, and to monitor the extent of provision made for learning for excluded pupils.

A means by which schools, learning establishments and education authorities can seek to reduce exclusion is by establishing a whole school ethos of prevention, early intervention and support against a background which promotes positive relationships, learning and behaviour.

Exclusion from school should only be used as a last resort, and should be a proportionate response where there is no alternative. Exclusion should never be used as a punitive measure to respond to unauthorised absence. It is important that the views of the child or young person and their parents are taken into account. Schools should carefully consider all of the facts and circumstances surrounding the incidents leading to the exclusion, as well as the wellbeing and safety of the whole school community. The time during and after any exclusion period should be used constructively to resolve the situation and ensure that positive and appropriate support is in place.

Further information on school exclusion policy can be found in Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: A Positive Approach to Preventing and Managing Exclusions<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-educational-outcomes-children-young-people-travelling-cultures/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/06/8877>

## 6. MANAGING UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

### 6.1 Unauthorised absence

Schools should record absence as unauthorised when they perceive that there is no valid reason for the absence provided. Such absence can be categorised as:

- Absence with parental awareness in specific circumstances (see 6.2 below)
- Family holidays during term time
- Occasional absence without parental awareness
- Longer term absence – school related issues
- Longer term absence – home and wider community
- Absence relating to substance and alcohol misuse

### 6.2 Absence with parental awareness in specific circumstances

Parents generally act in the best interests of their children. On occasion, parents allow absence because they genuinely believe that their child will benefit from an alternative activity (e.g. trip, family related activities). In these circumstances, clear school and education authority policies and regular communication of expectations will help school staff respond appropriately.

Sometimes, parents allow absence because they believe the school is failing to act in the best interests of the child or young person, for example, by failing to address conflict between the child or young person, fellow pupils or a particular teacher. A parent may also be in dispute with a school following a period of exclusion, if for instance they don't agree with the school's management of the incident. In these circumstances, early contact with the parent through home-school link or family support workers, or a key member of staff responsible for pastoral care, to build relationships and restore trust is important. Arrangements to ensure the child or young person's attendance at school should be the first priority, to help ensure that absence from school does not become a habitual response to difficulties. Plans should also be in place to resolve any ongoing difficulties.

Some parents and family members may have had their own negative experiences of school, which may lead to a lack of confidence and trust in the education system. The key to building relationships is regular contact, both informal and formal, and encouragement to parents to see the school as a source of support and practical help.

In some instances, parents may appear to allow pupil absence but are experiencing difficulties in supporting their child to attend school. In such instances, schools may wish to enlist the support of home support workers, relevant pastoral staff or other agencies where appropriate. Specific relational approaches to support parents should be considered.

### 6.3 Family holidays during term time

Absence from school, whatever the cause, disrupts learning. It is important that parents encourage their children or young people to attend school and that parents arrange family holidays during the holiday period. Family holidays should not be recorded as authorised absence, other than in exceptional circumstances, where a parent's employment is of a nature where school-holiday leave cannot be accommodated. Such employment may include armed services, emergency services, professions where parents are required to work away from the family for prolonged periods of time. It is for education authorities and schools to determine their own context and assess when these circumstances apply and authorise absence accordingly. However, the majority of family holidays, if taken during term time, should be recorded as unauthorised.

The categorisation of most term-time holidays as unauthorised absence is an on-going contentious issue due to the higher cost of holidays during school holiday periods. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of family holidays but has no control over the pricing decisions of holiday companies or flight operators. Attendance is one of the five key drivers for raising attainment as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Our main focus is therefore to encourage parents and children and young people to recognise the value of learning and the potential impact of disrupting learning for the child or young person and the wider school community.

### 6.4 Occasional absence without parental awareness

Addressing occasional absence without parental awareness requires a multifaceted response including the promotion of positive relationships and a range of approaches to including and engaging children and young people in their learning. There are a number of possible reasons for occasional absence without parental awareness – these can be school or home related (this is explored further in 6.5 and 6.6.) However, schools should give clear messages to children and young people that occasional absence is unacceptable. There should also be a vigilant and quick response from staff that includes contacting parents to notify them that their child is absent from school. At secondary school some young people who are considering occasional absence without parental awareness may present themselves for registration and then absent themselves for specific lessons. This can be minimised by effective supervision with an eye on entrances/exits to the school grounds; effective monitoring of lesson-by-lesson attendance and use of this information to manage absence hotspots. Schools may be able to identify children and young people who are at risk of occasional absence and take preventative action at an early stage if they do not arrive in lessons (i.e. immediate notification to the school office for action by the member of staff responsible for managing absence and notifying parents).

In order to maximise the number of children and young people staying in school grounds at breaks and lunch times, it may be beneficial to work in partnership with them to improve the areas within the school grounds where they can gather, to make

this environment more welcoming and attractive. This might include providing healthy snacks and drinks for purchase and allowing music, games or activities to encourage young people to stay within the school.<sup>32</sup> Some children or young people may find some parts of the school environment threatening and unsafe at times and it can be helpful to ensure that there are safe spaces for them to go to when they need to.

A number of children or young people may not attend school as a result of peer influence. Schools should work with children and young people to help them to understand that occasional absence is not in their best interests and to develop knowledge and skills which allows them to make their own choices. For children and young people who are particularly vulnerable to peer influence and may not attend school to gain standing with peers, buddying and mentoring during break times and even during class changeover can provide the positive influences that helps them stay within school.

More rarely, occasional absences are organised and planned in advance, and involve groups of young people, for example in gang-related or territorial activity, or in preparation for parties or weekends. In schools where staff have positive and trusting relationships with children and young people they may be more aware of such plans. Local police and youth work staff should also be encouraged to share information where appropriate and collaborate on a joint response. As well as preventing occasional absence, this approach can help prevent children and young people coming to more serious harm. In some circumstances schools may consider consequences following incidences of occasional absence. However, they should be carefully explored and discussed in order to ensure the needs of the child or young person are being met.

### **6.5 Longer term absence – school related issues**

Children and young people may be absent from school for a number of reasons. For some, it is an expression of unhappiness with life in school, which may have a number of causes:

- Struggling with learning or specific lessons
- Conflict with, or fear of, a teacher or teachers
- Conflict with, or fear of, another child or young person
- Bullying
- Issues relating to social media
- Social and emotional needs and concerns relating to mental health
- Anxiety about school
- Unhappy with course choices after S3

<sup>32</sup> Snacks and drinks should comply with any healthy eating guidelines used within the local authority. All food in schools, including snacks and drinks, must comply with national nutritional regulations in line with the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007.

- Feeling stigmatised by the school's attempts to provide support
- Feeling stigmatised by insensitive sharing of personal details
- Feeling stigmatised by insensitive handling of appointments or involvement with other services (e.g. social work) during school time

It is essential to identify any underlying causes of absence and to take action to resolve these. Pastoral care and additional support staff should work together with other staff and partners to identify and support individual needs. Schools which convey a positive, caring ethos help children and young people to feel that they can approach staff within the school to express their views, discuss their concerns and seek help. Approaches which support the development of a whole school positive culture and ethos can be found in section 3.

### **6.6 Longer term absence – home and wider community issues**

For some children and young people, their unhappiness may be linked to other issues, such as:

- Challenging family circumstances, including domestic abuse
- Coping with adversity and trauma
- Worries about parents, siblings or people close to them
- Experience of care
- Experience of abuse or neglect
- Anxiety/mental health issues
- Involvement in territorial activity/gang activity/drug supply/courier activity
- Substance or alcohol misuse

A child or young person may suffer from extreme anxiety and mental health issues which make it very difficult for them to attend school. Schools should consider developing a whole school approach to reducing stigma and provide support for mental health. In some circumstances other agencies and supports may be required, e.g. school counsellors or educational psychologists.

Many of the children and young people who are absent from school may be extremely anxious about circumstances at home and be worried about leaving a parent or a sibling if they feel that they are unsafe, e.g. in circumstances of domestic abuse or substance misuse. In such circumstances, schools should work with the child or young person and family to provide support where needed and offer reassurance to the child or young person through regular contact with the parent/sibling or by confirming they can speak with a trusted adult about their concerns.

Schools should be aware of the impact that early adversity and trauma can have on children and young people. Any approach to promoting and supporting attendance should be sensitive to the child or young person's needs and background. Care experienced children and young people are more likely to have experienced early adversity and trauma at some stage in their life and this may be ongoing.

Staff should use their knowledge of the child or young person and the family to determine the most appropriate response. The consistency of adult and peer relationships, planned support and opportunities to achieve provided by schools are a key part of enabling the child or young person to work towards positive outcomes.

Peer group influence can be an important factor in attitudes to school. They can be constructive or negative, but either way are likely to be important to every child or young person, as these friendships often represent to the child or young person a sense of belonging to the school and community.

As they grow older, some children or young people may have friends (or partners) no longer attending school. Supervision and monitoring of entrances/exits can help deter former pupils from hanging around in the vicinity of the school (see also Absence relating to substance and alcohol misuse at section 6.7). School staff should consider whether there is coercion or any risk to the pupil for which child protection concerns may arise (particularly in the case of a child or young person who is involved in a relationship with someone older).

On some occasions community issues can spill over into the school. Conflict between families or gangs and territorial issues can cause children and young people to avoid school in order to avoid each other. It is helpful to involve partner agencies such as the police, community learning and development services and youth work, to consider a collaborative approach to resolve this, both within school and in the community, and to ensure that where there is conflict in the community, all children and young people feel safe at school.

Schools should provide opportunities to enable more vulnerable children and young people to become attached to positive peer groups and to be exposed to positive role models through buddying and mentoring. For some, the opportunity to be a buddy or mentor to others has a similarly positive effect on their own behaviour as well as that of the children or young people they mentor. Peer mentor programmes such as Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme<sup>33</sup> can support children and young people to become part of the school community and challenge attitudes.

Some schools use additional support staff to deliver break time and after-school activities that provide a focal point for children and young people having difficulty forging positive peer relationships.

<sup>33</sup> <http://mvpsotland.org.uk/>

## 6.7 Absence relating to substance and alcohol misuse

The use of drugs and alcohol by children and young people can affect school attendance in a number of ways:

- Being intoxicated or leaving school to become intoxicated
- Being hungover
- Being unable to function without using substances (addiction)
- Trying to avoid others who may be involved in the supply of substances and alcohol

All staff should be aware of signs for concern, of which absence may be the initial trigger of investigation. Substance use may be a reaction to unhappiness caused by other issues, and may have become a longer term addiction. Absence may be a response to avoiding others associated with substance use including 'dealers' or those in the supply chain, or because they themselves have become involved in such a supply chain. In such instances, schools should be aware of how to ensure the safety for all children and young people.

Our alcohol and drug strategy, published in 2019, has an emphasis on prevention and early intervention for young people and for those most at risk of becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs<sup>34</sup>.

Many schools have counsellors and work with community groups or the third sector to support children and young people with these needs. Collaboration with other agencies such as the police, drugs services and youth services can lead to better sharing of information and more effective prevention activity. Substance misuse education work is being taken forward in our schools through CfE. Educating children and young people about alcohol and drugs, and the impact these can have on life and health, will hopefully prevent them from making unhealthy choices now and safeguard their health for the future.

Similarly it is also crucial that children and young people affected by a family member's substance misuse problem are correctly supported. Understanding and addressing the impact of this on the child or young person is critical to safeguarding their health and wellbeing.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/rights-respect-recovery/>

## 7. MEASURES FOR COMPULSORY COMPLIANCE

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that efforts to improve outcomes for children are progressed quickly and involve an appropriate and proportionate level of intervention. Measures for compulsion are expensive processes which are time consuming and can lead to further unnecessary interventions into family life. Measures for compulsion can be used when efforts to engage children and families in voluntary measures to improve attendance have failed.

Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school until he or she reaches school leaving age (section 30 Education (Scotland) Act 1980). There is no clear evidence that legal sanctions improve school attendance.

Parents who have enrolled their child at a public school at any time are then required to ensure their child attends, unless the education authority has consented to the withdrawal of their child from education (section 35 Education (Scotland) Act 1980).

Further details of measures can be found at Appendix 1.

## 8. ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCE DATA RECORDING AND MANAGEMENT

### 8.1 Using data effectively

The most purposeful use of data is to inform whole school developments to improve attendance and plan to meet individual children and young people's needs.

Most schools which have succeeded in improving attendance significantly have focused on school data for periods of concerted effort in monitoring absence in order to ensure coding is correct. Support should be targeted at children and young people where attendance is just above, or below, an agreed threshold in order to plan for improved attendance at individual level, or to address issues identified in classes or departments. Schools should consider this along with other information and data relating to the child or young person.

Class and whole-school monitoring can contribute to schools' quality assurance and improvement planning processes.

At individual level, many schools set a threshold for attendance, triggering specific responses when a pupil falls below this (see section 3.6 for further detail). Monitoring of individual patterns of attendance and absence can help staff, pupils and parents identify support needs or isolate causes of concern. Absence may reflect other patterns in school or home life. Schools should consider this data alongside wider tracking and monitoring information, including wellbeing assessments.

### 8.2 Recording and coding information

The information in Appendix 2 is taken from SEEMIS guidance on recording attendance and absence.

## 9. RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

This section contains links to other sources of information referenced within this guidance.

**Adverse Childhood Experiences: Action to prevent adverse childhood experiences where we can, and tackle their impact**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/adverse-childhood-experiences/>

**Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research 2016**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/behaviour-scottish-schools-research-2016/pages/10/>

**Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative**

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/improving-public-services/children-and-young-people-improvement-collaborative/>

**CSE the signs – child sexual exploitation**

<http://csethesigns.scot/>

**Developing a positive whole school ethos and culture: relationships, learning and behaviour**

<https://beta.gov.scot/publications/developing-positive-whole-school-ethos-culture-relationships-learning-behaviour/>

**Developing the Young Workforce**

[https://education.gov.scot/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/Developing%20the%20Young%20Workforce%20\(DYW\)](https://education.gov.scot/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/Developing%20the%20Young%20Workforce%20(DYW))

**Getting it right for every child**

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>

**Home Education Guidance – Guidance for parents and local authorities on home education**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/home-education-guidance/>

**Improving educational outcomes for children and young people from travelling cultures**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-educational-outcomes-children-young-people-travelling-cultures/>

**Included, Engaged and Involved Part 2: A Positive Approach to Preventing and Managing School Exclusions**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/included-engaged-involved-part-2-positive-approach-preventing-managing-school/>

**Mental Health strategy – CAHMS**

[https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/by-discipline/psychology/multiprofessional-psychology/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-\(camhs\).aspx](https://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/by-discipline/psychology/multiprofessional-psychology/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-(camhs).aspx)

### **National guidance for child protection in Scotland**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-guidance-child-protection-scotland/>

### **National Improvement Framework**

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/schools/national-improvement-framework/>

### **Parentzone**

<https://education.gov.scot/parentzone>

### **Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/respect-national-approach-anti-bullying-scotlands-children-young-people/>

### **Scottish Attainment Challenge**

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/schools/pupil-attainment/>

### **Support Children's Learning**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland/>

### **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

### **Violence Against Women and Girls - forced marriage**

<https://beta.gov.scot/policies/violence-against-women-and-girls/forced-marriage/>

### **Violence Against Women and Girls - genital mutilation**

<https://beta.gov.scot/policies/violence-against-women-and-girls/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

## APPENDIX 1

### Measures for compulsory compliance

#### Attendance orders

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 allows for an education authority to require a parent to provide an explanation for non-attendance, if it believes there is not a reasonable excuse for non-attendance (section 36). The education authority notifies the parent that a meeting or hearing is required, and that an explanation for non-attendance must be provided to the authority. To allow the parent to prepare for the meeting, it will not be held within two days of the notification but not later than seven days after the notification.

#### The process

If the parent fails to satisfy the authority that there was a reasonable excuse for the pupil's non-attendance the authority may:

- proceed to prosecution through the sheriff court, or
- report the circumstances to the procurator fiscal, or
- warn the parent and postpone the decision to report for a maximum of six weeks.

In the circumstance where the education authority decides to postpone the decision it may, if the child or young person is of school age (5-16), make an attendance order. An attendance order requires the parent to ensure the child or young person attends the school which he or she has been attending or another local school (a school attended by children or young people residing in the same neighbourhood).

An attendance order:

- Requires the parent to ensure the attendance of the child or young person at a school named in the order.
- Requires that the views of the parent on which school should be named should be considered by the authority.
- May name a public school, or other school which is willing to receive the child or young person. A school at which the parent will be required to pay fees will not be named within the order unless at the request of the parent.
- Shall not name a special school unless the child or young person has additional support needs requiring specialist support.

A copy of the attendance order will be served upon the parent and will place them under a duty to ensure the child or young person's regular attendance at the named school.

## Right of appeal

If parents are unhappy, they may, within 14 days of being served with the order, appeal to the sheriff. The sheriff is able to amend, confirm or annul the order. The decision of the sheriff is final.

Parents may wish to seek legal representation when making an appeal to the sheriff. Legal aid may be available for advice and representation, subject to certain criteria for eligibility. Further information is available from the Scottish Legal Aid Board<sup>35</sup>.

## Amending an attendance order

If the attendance order is later amended (e.g. a different school is named), the education authority should inform the parent of the proposed amendments and allow the parent 14 days to make objections. If objections are made and not upheld by the authority, the parent can appeal to the sheriff as above.

## Moving between authority areas

A child or young person who is the subject of an attendance order may move from his or her home authority to a new authority area. In this case, the new authority may notify the parent of their intention to amend the attendance order by updating the school named in the order to a school which is in the family's new catchment area.

Where a child or young person is attending a school in another authority area and the education authority providing education believes that a parent should explain the non-attendance of a child or young person at school, the authority in which the child or young person resides would be responsible for arranging a meeting or hearing and serving notice on the parent to attend the meeting or hearing for an explanation to be provided.

## Prosecution

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 states that if a parent has not complied with an attendance order, an application may be made to the sheriff court for prosecution (either by the education authority or Procurator Fiscal). If convicted, a parent may be:

- fined (not exceeding Standard scale level 3, currently not exceeding £1000),
- imprisoned for up to one month, or
- both fined and imprisoned.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.slab.org.uk/>

## Attendance orders and links to other systems

The education authority, may also make a referral to the reporter, if compulsory measures are required to support the child. (See 9.4)

## Home educated children

Scottish Government guidance on the circumstances in which parents may choose to educate their children at home, and the associated procedures are available from the Scottish Government website<sup>36</sup>.

## Individual circumstances

### Family separation

In the case of a child or young person whose parents are separated, education authorities should consider the most appropriate means of communicating the process of making an attendance order to parents.

It is likely that by the time an attendance order is being considered, there will have been difficulties in the relationship between the school/education authority and the parent. Advocacy or mediation services, where both parties meet voluntarily to discuss their concerns and agree a mutual solution with an independent third party, should be used to ensure that the parent understands the process and has support to express views or appeal. Further disengagement or conflict during the attendance order process will make positive outcomes for the child difficult to achieve.

### Additional Support Needs

Children who have sufficient understanding of the process and who are judged to have sufficient legal capacity (this is presumed from age 12 unless the child does not have a sufficient understanding of the matter being considered) should be kept informed of the process. They may attend meetings or hearings with their parent. Such children should be consulted with the parent on the named school or subsequent amendments. However, the action is clearly being taken against the parent who has legal responsibility for ensuring the child attends school and it is for the parent to appeal, not the young person (a child of legal capacity may appeal in the case of exclusion, see Circular 8/03 *Right of appeal against the decision to exclude* – paragraph 37).

The attendance order should be regarded as a stage in an ongoing process. The child may attend school following an attendance order, but support arrangements and long term monitoring of attendance and support needs will be required.

<sup>36</sup> <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/home-education-guidance/>

## Parenting orders

Local authorities also have powers to apply to the sheriff for a parenting order under the Antisocial Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004. These orders are for one year, and require parents to participate in programmes designed to improve their parenting by receiving support services which previously the parent has refused, and for their compliance to be monitored by a named officer.

The local authority must consult with other agencies in a multi-agency planning process, and consult with the reporter to the children's panel, before considering with its legal advisors whether an application for a parenting order should be made.

If the procurator fiscal raises criminal proceedings in respect of an alleged breach of an order and the parent is found guilty or pleads guilty, he or she will be liable to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale (currently £1,000). If the fine is not paid a court must impose a supervised attendance order (SAO). An SAO is a community-based alternative to imprisonment for fine default. For this type of offence the court can only impose a sentence of imprisonment for the fine default where an SAO has been breached.

Guidance for authorities on parenting orders is available from Guidance on Parenting Orders: Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004<sup>37</sup>.

## Referral to the Reporter

Referral to the Reporter may be an option considered by an education authority in conjunction with other approaches above, or usually separately, as an important stage in engaging the child or young person and the parent in compulsory interventions to improve outcomes for the child. Referral would usually only be made after appropriate measures at a local level have been exhausted.

Where a child is failing to attend school regularly without reasonable excuse, a referral to the Reporter can be made under section 67(o) of the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011. However, non-attendance may be a factor considered alongside other grounds for referral where there are a range of concerns about the child or young person. Where the Reporter considers that compulsory measures of supervision are necessary, the matter will be referred to a Children's Hearing. The Children's Hearing will make the decision on whether compulsory measures are necessary and if so, what those measures should be.

It is helpful for education authorities and Reporters to work together to make the Children's Hearing aware of the range of approaches that schools and education authorities may have already tried, to improve a child or young person's school attendance. It is also helpful to consider with other services, which may provide interventions recommended by the Children's Hearing, how reintegration into school can be planned for during their work with the child or young person.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/04/22133503/35042>

## **Anti-social behaviour orders, Intensive Support and Monitoring Services (ISMS)**

An Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC) or Acceptable Behaviour Agreement is a written agreement between a person who has been involved in anti-social behaviour and one or more agencies whose role it is to prevent further anti-social behaviour i.e. a housing association, local authority, police or school etc.

They are generally used for young people, but can also be used for adults, and may be used with parents in relation to the behaviour of their children.

A local authority may also apply for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) under the Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004. In these circumstances, a child or young person is likely to already have been involved in the hearings system and will be well known to children's services. The child or young person will be considered to be at risk of persistent anti-social behaviour.

Non-attendance at school is not anti-social behaviour in itself, but clearly while a young person is not at school, his or her activities may be part of their involvement in anti-social behaviour, causing significant disruption to the community. Improving school attendance may be made a condition of an ABC or ASBO, and services should work together to ensure that the conditions applied enhance the potential for a young person to be engaged in learning, whether in school or in the community.

Education authorities and schools can make a significant difference to outcomes for children and young people on the cusp of persistent and serious offending by working in partnership with other services to devise flexible and creative approaches to learning opportunities.

Children or young people on Intensive Support and Monitoring Services (ISMS) i.e. young people who are tagged, will be subject to highly intensive support. Some education authorities have used this as a positive opportunity to construct a wide ranging programme of opportunities, including national qualification exam study, for the young people involved.

## APPENDIX 2 SEEMIS codes

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised absence
Extended leave with parental consent	02	<p>Extended leave with parental consent is not to be considered the same as a family holiday. Extended leave with parental consent should be recorded separately outside the figures for attendance and absence, and includes circumstances such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• extended overseas educational trips not organised by the school</li> <li>• short-term parental placement abroad</li> <li>• family returning to its country of origin (to care for relative, or for cultural reasons)</li> </ul> <p>See 5.5 Diverse school communities for further information.</p> <p><i>This will not be included within the Attendance and Absence statistics calculations, either in the numerator or denominator.</i></p>	
Attendance	10	<p>Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance at school</li> <li>• Learning outwith the school provided by a college or other learning provider while still on the roll of the school</li> <li>• Educational visits, day and residential visits to outdoor centres</li> <li>• Interviews and visits relating to further and higher education or careers events</li> <li>• Debates, sports, musical or drama activities in conjunction with the school</li> <li>• Study leave for pupils participating in national exams, if arranged by the school during the period of the national examination timetable</li> </ul> <p>Receiving tuition via hospital or outreach teaching services.</p>	Attendance
Late 1: Arrives before 50% of opening	11	<p>Where a child or young person has arrived late but during the first half of the opening, this will be marked as late (L1). This is regardless of whether the lateness is for a valid reason.</p> <p>See 4.5 Registration and recording lateness for further information.</p>	Attendance

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised absence
Work experience	12	Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work experience, arranged or agreed by the school</li> <li>• Volunteering, arranged or agreed by the school</li> </ul>	Attendance
Sickness with educational provision	13	This may include time spent on sick leave or maternity leave, with parental confirmation or medical certificate, and where adequate educational provision has been made.  Guidance on Education of Children Absent from school through Ill-health. <a href="https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/06/6846">https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/06/6846</a>  See 4.3 Providing for pupils during long term illness for further information.	Attendance
Sickness with no education provision	20	This would include any time where a pupil is off sick, with parental confirmation or medical certificate, and section 14 of Education (Scotland) Act 1980 is not applicable. See <i>Guidance on Education of Children Absent from school through Ill-health</i> . <a href="https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/06/6846">https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/06/6846</a>	Authorised
Late 2: Arrives after 50% of opening	21	Where a child or young person has arrived late but during the second half of the opening, then this will be marked as Late (L2). This recording is regardless of whether the lateness is for a valid reason.  For schools using period-by-period registration, any registration in periods beginning in the second half of the opening, without any registration in periods beginning in the first half of the opening, will be converted to an overall L2 code for the opening (even if a later period is subsequently missed).  See 4.4 for further information.	Authorised

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised absence
Family holidays authorised by school	22	<p>Under exceptional circumstances schools can authorise a family holiday during term time. Such circumstances may include exceptional domestic circumstances, where a parent's employment is of a nature where school-holiday leave cannot be accommodated (e.g. armed services, emergency services, professions where parents are required to work away from the family for prolonged periods of time).</p> <p>A family holiday classified under the "authorised absence" category should not include reasons such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The availability of cheap holidays</li> <li>• The availability of desired accommodation</li> <li>• Poor weather experienced during school holidays</li> <li>• Holidays which overlap the beginning or end of term</li> <li>• Parental difficulty in obtaining leave</li> </ul> <p>See 6.3 Family holidays during term time for further information.</p>	Authorised
Exceptional domestic circumstances (authorised)	23	<p>This relates to short-term exceptional domestic circumstances. Absences related to short-term exceptional domestic circumstances can be classified as either authorised or unauthorised absence. Authorised absence under this heading covers situations such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the period immediately after an accident or illness</li> <li>• a period of serious or critical illness of a close relative</li> <li>• a domestic crisis which causes serious disruption to the family home, causing temporary relocation</li> </ul> <p>See 5.2 for further information.</p>	Authorised

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised absence
Other authorised absence	24	<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate family weddings</li> <li>• Bereavements</li> <li>• Religious observances</li> <li>• Attendance at court</li> <li>• Attendance at childcare review</li> <li>• Attendance at children’s hearing</li> <li>• Lack of transport – including due to bad weather</li> <li>• Sporting &amp; cultural events not arranged by the school, but approved by them.</li> </ul> <p>See 5.1 for further information.</p>	Authorised
Medical and dental	25	<p>Attendance at medical and dental appointments.</p> <p>See 5.3 Medical and Dental appointments. For those recording period by period, any opening that contains at least 1 session of attendance will be converted to ‘attendance’ for statistical purposes. For schools with one registration per opening, a medical and dental recording should be recorded as ‘attendance’ if the child or young person attends for any part of the opening, for statistical purposes.</p> <p>It is assumed that the school will note the fact that the child or young person was not in attendance for the full opening, for legal purposes.</p>	Authorised

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised absence
Family holidays not authorised by school	30	<p>Family holidays should not be recorded as authorised absence, other than in exceptional circumstances, where a parent’s employment is of a nature where school-holiday leave cannot be accommodated.</p> <p>A family holiday classified under the “authorised absence” category should not include reasons such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The availability of cheap holidays</li> <li>• The availability of desired accommodation</li> <li>• Poor weather experienced during school holidays</li> <li>• Holidays which overlap the beginning or end of term</li> <li>• Parental difficulty in obtaining leave</li> </ul> <p>See 6.3 Family holidays during term time for further information.</p>	Unauthorised
Truancy, including unexplained absence  Occasional absence without parental awareness	31	<p>Include all absence for which no adequate explanation has been provided.</p> <p>See 6 for further information.</p>	Unauthorised

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised absence
Exceptional domestic circumstances (unauthorised)	32	<p>Under section 14 of the 1980 Act, education authorities must make special arrangements to ensure young people with care responsibilities do not miss out on their entitlement to an education.</p> <p>If a pupil is unable to attend school due to care responsibilities, there is an expectation that additional support services will be assessed to support the pupil, and their absence from education will not be long-term and therefore categorised as authorised absence.</p> <p>However, where additional services have not been accessed by the pupil and care responsibilities become long term, the absence should be categorised as unauthorised absence.</p> <p>See 4.8 Long-term domestic circumstances for further information.</p>	Unauthorised
Other unauthorised absence	33	<p>Include any other reasons for unauthorised absence: e.g. where a parent is refusing to send their child to school following a dispute with school.</p> <p>See 6.2 for further information.</p>	Unauthorised
Temporary exclusion	40	<p>Include all pupils excluded from school.</p> <p>Where a decision has been taken to remove a pupil from the register following an exclusion, the school is not expected to continue to mark the pupil as absent.</p> <p>For further clarification please refer to the ScotXed Advice Note <b>SXD04/2006</b> - "Accurate recording of absence of pupils who are excluded from school for a period of time on a 'temporary' basis."</p> <p>See 3.7 Exclusion from School for further information.</p>	Separate category of absence



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