

THE 5 STEP APPROACH TO MANAGING ATTENDANCE

In order to achieve our shared goal, of improving attendance and welfare for all children, young people and families a good working relationship between the EWS and the school is vital. The EWS will work with the designated person who is responsible for initiating the ‘in school’ action, and making referrals in accordance with the 5 Step Approach.

Step 1: School Based Interventions

This step focuses on school based approaches to supporting and improving attendance for all pupils.

Every school should have policies and procedures in place designed to ensure its pupils attend regularly. There should be a consistent and whole school approach, where all members of the school community are clear about their role. In summary, they should:

- Demonstrate a strong attendance ethos;
- Have a clear policy on absence, stating how it will be managed;
- Apply the policy fairly and consistently to all pupils;
- Shared the policy with all parents/carers at the time of admission to the school and regularly draw it to their attention;
- Have a named member of their management team with lead responsibility for attendance;
- Re-enforce and communicate positive attendance messages throughout the year;
- Have effective systems for monitoring attendance, including first day calling, analysis of data and follow up by form tutors when pupils return from absence;
- Have efficient systems of registration which encourage children and parents to account promptly for any absences, which are in accordance with legal requirements and which show a consistent approach to the classification of absences as either authorised and unauthorised;
- Set and monitor an annual absence target;
- Nominate a school governor with a specific attendance remit;
- Ensure all relevant staff receive training about attendance issues;
- Ensure regular training for staff with registration responsibilities and monitor of practice to ensure high standards by class teachers and others with key responsibilities;
- Promote the importance and legal requirements of good attendance to pupils and parents;
- Intervene early when individual pupil absence gives cause for concern
- Reward and celebrate good and improved attendance;
- Make best use of additional support for pupils and parents with the greatest need;
- When absence problems do not respond to interventions from class teacher/form tutor or Learning Manager; refer appropriately to the School Attendance Officer.

Research has shown that schools’ success in improving attendance depends on continual attention to detail, consistent application of agreed procedures and most of all the provision of a stimulating and appropriate curriculum for the needs of all pupils.

Step 1

- ❖ Regular monitoring of registers.
- ❖ Phoning/texting home on the 1st day of unauthorised absence.
- ❖ A referral will be made to the EWO on the 4th consecutive day of unauthorised absence.
- ❖ Liaison with other school staff.
- ❖ Keeping records of actions/contacts regarding each case

Step 2: Advice and Consultation

- Parent/guardian(s) should be encouraged to visit school to discuss attendance and strategies for improvement. The parent and pupil should be given achievable target(s) to improve attendance. A date should be set for review.
- If attendance has not improved the Class Teacher, Learning Manager or Attendance Officer should prioritise the list of pupils to be referred to the SAO.
- There should be regular formal advice meetings between Education Welfare staff and the Learning Managers / Headteacher to identify pupils who are experiencing attendance difficulties. This should include regular examination of attendance registers. The frequency of which will vary according to mutually agreed need. These should take place in both Secondary and Primary schools as appropriate. The Senior Lead for Attendance should attend these meetings at agreed intervals.
- The SAO and EWO will discuss and agree actions which needs to be taken; when and by whom.
- Commitment required from all parties to undertake agreed actions by the next scheduled meeting.
- Discussions, advice and actions to be recorded, with a copy kept by both the EWS and school at the end of each consultation and other appropriate feedback as agreed with school staff.
- EWS will provide advice and support to the school on issues relating to attendance, access to education, welfare and safeguarding, exclusion or related matters in order that future action can be agreed.
- SAO's to keep accurate & up-to-date electronic casework records of any contact and communication with parents/guardians/pupils/other agencies.
- The EWS will feedback information in relation to work which has been undertaken on cases open to EWS.
- An early referral and subsequent involvement of both SAO/EWO may help to prevent a child going missing, or prevent truancy and other social problems from becoming entrenched. Delay in making an appropriate referral is often detrimental to the interests of the child involved and once truancy becomes entrenched it can be very difficult to bring about a return to regular school attendance

Schools may wish to consider using a formal 'Attendance agreement' which outlines expectations, actions and responsibilities for the pupil and their parent(s) for improved attendance, which they must agree and sign together with the school staff.

PROPOSED AGENDA FOR MEETING WITH LINK EWO

It is best practice to plan for regular meetings with the School's link EWO.

The EWS suggest the Schools' Attendance Officer and the lead person with responsibility for attendance are part of these meetings.

- **General Preventative** – to discuss, agree and review procedures and short-term strategies or projects to improve general punctuality and attendance in the year group/whole school.
- **Early Intervention** – to identify, discuss and review individual pupils with emerging punctuality or attendance problems. Decide what school-based or other actions could be used to address concerns.
- **New Referrals to EWS for support** – to identify, discuss and make formal referrals to the EWS of those pupils that have a level of unauthorised absence where EWS intervention is needed over and above school's actions to address attendance concerns.
- **Reviewing Cases** – EWO and school to provide feedback and share information about progress with existing referred cases via return of the referral or email.

Step 3: Referral to the Education Welfare Service

- Referrals should be made only after appropriate strategies have been explored by the school and undertaken at step 2.
- The referral will only be accepted if there is evidence of work completed by the school and School Attendance Officer.
- The referral will only be accepted if the School Attendance Officer has undertaken the non-attendance process, sent appropriate letters and met with parents/carers to seek improvement/address any difficulties.
- Referrals to EWS can only be made if there are unauthorised absences and must be made using formal SAO and EWS referral forms.
- An up to date print out of the registration certificate should accompany the referral.
- Once the case has been formally referred to the EWS, the case will be monitored by the SAO and the EWO and joint working will ensure consistency of support for the pupil.
- At the outset of casework by the EWO, the Local Authority EWS process will begin and the EWO will maintain communication on cases until the attendance improves, the support necessary is implemented or the case goes to prosecution.

Mandatory Practice

If there are concerns that the pupil's family have moved out of the area, without leaving a forwarding address/name of new school, the School Attendance Officer must follow the Local Authority Children Missing Education (CME) protocol and make every effort to find the pupil by all means necessary before forwarding the case to the EWS for further tracking.

Good Practice

Before accepting a referral from a School Attendance Officer, the EWS will expect the school to have first undertaken a number of steps to address the pupil's non-attendance. These would include:

- action by the class teacher/form teacher;
- action by the Learning Manager (secondary) or Head or Deputy Head (primary)
- contact with parents; including the school sending a sequence of letters of concern to the parents before formally involving the SAO;
- Inviting parents to a meeting in school ensuring that this is correctly documented.
- Offering help and support in the first instance;
- Challenging the outcome if not satisfactory – i.e. if absences for illness continue to be covered by notes – advise parents that medical confirmation is required.
- Undertaking a minimum of 1 face to face meeting and speaking to the parents about making improvements/addressing attendance difficulties

Step 4: Case Review and Assessment

When there is no progress at Steps 1, 2 & 3. The EWO will undertake a range of actions and interventions aimed at facilitating the pupil's return to regular school attendance.

Casework will be based on an assessment of needs and action planned appropriate to the individual circumstances of each case, but may include:

- Home visits in order to assess the situation and agree a way forward. Arranging meetings between the school, parents and pupil in school or elsewhere.
- A range of interventions which could include liaison and joint working with other professionals. All casework will involve close and continuous liaison with the pupil's school. Regular reviews and feedback to schools through a variety of methods which may include face to face consultation, phone, and written communication on work undertaken.
- In cases where the main causes of non-attendance may be school-related (e.g. alleged bullying, peer pressure, difficulties with a particular lesson or teacher) the EWO will discuss these with the school in order to develop strategies to overcome these difficulties.
- Keeping accurate casework records detailing all EWS involvement and interventions.
- Ensuring that parents are fully aware of their legal responsibilities and subsequent actions if attendance does not improve.

Step 5: Statutory Action

The Education Welfare Service will ensure that all parties are fully aware of the legal processes with regards to penalty notices or prosecution for regular non-attendance under the Education Act 1996.

Sample Statement

Parental request for term-time absence for holidays.

The Local Authority is fully supportive of the national drive to raise school attendance, recognising the crucial link between attendance and attainment. Great strides have been made in Swansea and across Wales to ensure that excellent attendance is a priority.

Whilst considering each request on its merits, head teachers do play an important role in scrutinising term time absence and should properly apply any discretion based upon their knowledge of the pupil and their family. Where possible and in appropriate circumstances the taking of an absence during term time should be actively discouraged.

Parents should be advised to avoid term time disruption and reminded of the link between attainment and attendance.

Head teachers should carefully consider before granting a leave of absence:-

- Age of the child
- Time of year of the proposed trip
- Length and purpose of the holiday
- Impact on continuity of learning
- Circumstances of the family
- Benefits to the child
- Wishes of the parents
- Overall attendance pattern
- The stage of education
- The child's progress
- Any cultural issues
- Any guidance or clarifications issued by Welsh Government or Ministers

For term time holidays approval must be sought in advance with a request submitted ideally two school weeks in advance to enable sufficient time for consideration. Head teachers cannot by law authorise a term time holiday after the event and in such cases the absence will be marked as unauthorised.

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