

# **Children, Schools & Families**

## **POLICY ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

**Published by  
Children, Schools & Families  
CSF0136**



**Children, Schools & Families**

**DOCUMENT ID NUMBER:**

**CSF0136**

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**PUBLICATION DATE:**

**JUNE 2009**

**ISSUE NO:**

**ISSUE No.5**

**PUBLISHED BY Hertfordshire Children, Schools and Families**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Hertfordshire County Council is committed to achieving excellent levels of attendance for individual children, individual schools and for Hertfordshire as a whole. Underpinning this commitment is the belief that if children attend school regularly and punctually they will be best able to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them.
- 1.2 This Attendance Policy is intended to guide, assist and empower schools to meet their responsibilities and to provide an agreed framework within which consistent practices and procedures can be applied.

## **2. Statement of Intent**

- 2.1 Hertfordshire County Council expects the Children, Schools and Families Service and all schools to work closely together in partnership with parents in order to achieve excellent levels of school attendance and punctuality for all pupils.

## **3. Responsibilities – Parents and Carers**

- 3.1 Parents are responsible in law for ensuring that their children of compulsory school age receive an efficient education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that they may have. Most parents fulfil this responsibility by registering their children at a school.
- 3.2 Parents whose children are registered at a school are responsible for ensuring that their children attend and stay at school.
- 3.3 Parents should:-
- ensure that their children arrive at school on time, properly dressed and ready to learn
  - instil in their children an appreciation of the importance of attending school regularly
  - impress upon their children the need to observe the school's code of conduct.
  - take an active interest in their children's school career, praising and encouraging good work and behaviour and attending parents' evenings and other relevant meetings
  - work in partnership with their children's school to resolve issues which may lead to non-attendance
  - ensure that they are aware of the attendance policy of their children's school
  - notify their child's school if he/she is absent. This should be done as soon as possible - preferably on the first day of absence. They should also provide an explanation for the absence. This explanation should be confirmed - preferably in writing - when the child returns to school
  - avoid arranging medical/dental appointments during school hours

- avoid booking holidays during term time

#### **4. Responsibilities - Schools**

- 4.1 Schools are responsible for supporting the attendance of their pupils and for dealing with problems that may lead to non-attendance.
- 4.2 Schools are required to call attendance registers at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session and to record whether pupils are present, absent or on an approved educational activity (see section 7).
- 4.3 For pupils of compulsory school age, schools are required to differentiate in the registers between absence that is authorised and absence that is unauthorised (see Section 7).
- 4.4 Schools should:-
- work actively to maximise attendance rates - both in relation to individual pupils and for the pupil body as a whole - as one of their key tasks
  - support parents in ensuring the regular and punctual attendance of pupils and promptly respond to any issue which may lead to non-attendance
  - be sensitive to the needs of individual parents and this should be reflected in the way in which attendance issues are addressed. Schools should recognise that some parents have difficulty understanding written communications. They should also recognise the reluctance of some parents to come into school.
  - produce school attendance policies which are consistently applied and clearly communicated to all parents, pupils and staff.

A school attendance policy should:-

- ensure that legal requirements are met
- give a high priority to attendance and punctuality
- name the SMT member with overall responsibility for attendance
- identify clear channels of communication with parents
- ensure that up-to-date attendance data is available
- identify what is considered as authorised/unauthorised absence
- make provision for first-day of absence contact
- contain clear procedures to identify and follow up all absence
- prioritise the importance of early intervention
- identify a range of strategies to deal with absenteeism (e.g. PSPs)
- be alert to critical times ( e.g. secondary transfer )
- be sensitive to individual pupils' needs
- promote the setting of targets for individual pupils, form groups etc.
- establish systems for rewarding good/improved attendance
- establish procedures for re-integrating long-term absentees
- provide for regular meetings between the school and its allocated Attendance Improvement Officer
- establish clear lines of communication with outside agencies

- ensure that all staff adopt a consistent approach in dealing with absence and lateness
- provide for effective primary-secondary liaison
- inform and involve governors
- ensure that good practice is identified and disseminated
- explain how attendance information will be shared with parents (newsletters etc)
- be reviewed at regular intervals
- make clear to parents that it is the school - not the parent - which authorises an absence.
- make clear to parents what is, and is not, acceptable as reasons for absence
- state how lateness, both before and after closure of registers, is recorded and monitored
- make clear that leave for holidays during term time is granted only in exceptional circumstances
- address attendance from a whole school perspective. The link between attendance and achievement should be actively promoted
- encourage all staff - including ancillary and administrative staff - to see attendance as part of their responsibility
- actively address all issues - such as bullying – which may lead to non-attendance
- explain that their allocated Attendance Improvement Officer (AIO) will be notified of any pupil of compulsory school age who fails to attend school regularly

## **5. Responsibilities – Attendance and Pupil Support Service**

- 5.1 The Attendance and Pupil Support Service fulfils the statutory duty of the County Council in enforcing regular school attendance. In doing so it enables schools and parents to meet their respective responsibilities.
- 5.2 Each maintained school in Hertfordshire will be allocated an Attendance Improvement Officer who will work in close partnership with the school.
- 5.4 In working closely with schools the Attendance Improvement Officer will offer the following services:-

### Consultation Visits

Consultation visits by the AIO will be allocated according to need. Need will be identified using the school annual DCSF Absence data. The purpose of the consultation visit will be to:-

- identify pupils who are experiencing attendance difficulties. This will include the regular examination of attendance registers
- agree on focused, time-limited action which needs to be taken by the school and/or the AIO. (Before accepting a referral the AIO will expect school staff to have first undertaken some preliminary work themselves, eg action by the class teacher or year head, contact with parents, etc)
- feed back and exchange information in relation to work which has been undertaken by the AIO and/or the school
- identify areas of concern and of good practice in relation to attendance matters

- advise the school on strategies for improving attendance

### Casework

AIOs may undertake pre-referral work prior to a case being accepted. This may include the following:

- telephoning or writing to the parents about their child's absences or lateness
- attending a meeting with parents arranged by the school to emphasise the need for good attendance and the possibility that, if there is no improvement, the AIO will become formally involved.

Once a referral has been agreed, the AIO will undertake casework with pupils and their parents. This can include:

- arranging meetings between the school, parents and pupils
- making home visits to assess the situation and determine what action needs to be taken
- offering specific support to parents and individual pupils, either at school or elsewhere
- facilitating case conferences and other meetings
- enabling the pupil and parents to access appropriate support from other services and agencies through the use of Integrated Practice/Common Assessment process

The AIO may also arrange for the pupil to receive specialist support such as counselling or group work.

Attendance Improvement Officers will usually work with children whose absences have not been authorised. However, AIOs may work with children whose absences have been authorised (see appendix 1)

### In-service training for school staff

Attendance Improvement Officers will offer, or assist with, INSET sessions on a range of subjects related to the attendance or welfare of pupils, including:-

- the promotion of regular school attendance
- approaches to dealing with bullying
- working effectively with the AIO

## **6. The Use of Legal Action**

- 6.1 If a parent fails to register a child of compulsory school age at a school (and he/she does not intend to educate the child otherwise than at school). The LA will serve a School Attendance Order under Sections 437 - 439 of the Education Act 1996.
- 6.2 If a pupil who is registered at a school, fails to attend that school regularly without a legitimate reason and attempts by the Attendance Improvement Officer and the school fail to secure that pupil's return to regular attendance, the County Council will take legal action. A complaint may be laid against the parents in the Magistrates' Court under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, or an Education Supervision Order relating to the pupil under Section 36 of the Children Act 1989 will be applied for. Any exceptional mitigating circumstances relating to the pupil's absence will be taken into

account, when considering legal action. ('Exceptional mitigating circumstances' will be determined by the Head of Attendance and Pupil Support). If 'exceptional mitigating circumstances' are not deemed to exist then cases which remain open for more than 24 weeks will be referred for legal action. Legal action will, however, be taken earlier when appropriate.

- 6.3 If, after legal action has been taken, the child still fails to attend school regularly the AIO will keep the case open and will, if appropriate, take further legal action at a subsequent date.
- 6.4 In cases where parents wilfully withhold a pupil from school, or persistently refuse to co-operate with efforts aimed at affecting a return to satisfactory school attendance, the Attendance and Pupil Support Team will promptly begin legal proceedings on the grounds that no other course of action is available.
- 6.5 The Head of Attendance and Pupil Support will give approval before legal proceedings are commenced.
- 6.6 The Attendance and Pupil Support Team will consider applying for an Education Supervision Order when a parent finds it difficult to exercise an effective influence over a child who has developed a pattern of poor attendance. Education Supervision Orders will not usually be applied for in relation to pupils in Years 10 or 11.
- 6.7 Before an application is made for an Education Supervision Order:
- other possible means of dealing with the pupil's poor attendance will be explored
  - the attitudes of the parent and pupil towards the poor attendance, and their wishes as to how it should be dealt with, will be noted
  - the AIO will be of the view that the Order will have a significant effect on the pupil's attendance at school

## **6.8 Penalty Notices for Parents of Truants:**

Subsection (1) of section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 adds two new sections (444A and 444B) to section 444 of the Education Act 1996. These new sections introduce penalty notices as an alternative to prosecution and enable parents to discharge potential liability for conviction for that offence by paying a penalty.

A penalty notice is a suitable intervention in circumstances of parentally condoned truancy, where the parent is judged capable of securing their child's regular attendance but is not willing to take responsibility for doing so. For example it could be used where a parent has failed to engage in any supportive measures. It will be particularly useful as a sanction at an early stage before attendance problems become entrenched and where the Local Authority considers that a prosecution would not be appropriate as a first action.

Further information on penalty notices is available from the Attendance & Pupil Support Service.

## **7. Attendance Registers**

- 7.1 Attendance registers are legal documents that may be required as evidence in court cases.

- 7.2 Registers must be taken at the beginning of each morning and once during the afternoon session. If the register is called at the end of the afternoon session schools should ensure that adequate arrangements are in place to ensure that pupils do not leave school between registrations. They should ensure that pupils can be accounted for in an emergency and that a pupil removed from the school at lunchtime will not go unnoticed.
- 7.3 Registers must record whether each pupil is present, absent or engaged in an approved educational activity. In the case of a pupil of compulsory school age who is absent the register must also indicate whether the absence has been authorised by the school.
- 7.4 Registers should open and close at regular, set times. They should not be kept open for longer than 30 minutes.
- 7.5 When calling the register the appropriate mark and/or symbol should be placed against each pupil's name - gaps should not be left so that entries can be made later. In marking registers, schools must use the national set of symbols as required by the DCSF (see Appendix 2.)
- 7.6 When the reason for a pupil's absence cannot be established at the beginning of a session, the absence should be recorded as unauthorised and any subsequent correction to the register made as soon as practicable after the reason for the absence has been established.
- 7.7 Entries in manual registers should be written in red or black ink and any correction made in such a manner that the original entry and the correction are both clearly distinguishable (tippex should not be used).
- 7.8 In order to reduce the possibility of post registration truancy secondary schools are encouraged to take class registers in each lesson and/or carry out regular spot checks.
- 7.9 Schools are required to notify their AIO of any pupil of compulsory school age who fails to attend school regularly, or who has been absent for a continuous period of more than 10 school days, without a legitimate reason. In Hertfordshire this is achieved through the regular consultation visits of the AIO. Primary schools who do not have regular consultation visits should notify their attached AIO.
- 7.10 A pupil's name may not be deleted from the attendance register unless it has also been deleted from the admissions register.
- 7.11 A pupil of compulsory school age shall have his/her name deleted from the admissions register when:
- the pupil is registered at the school in accordance with the requirements of a School Attendance Order and another school is substituted by the LA for that named in the Order or the Order is revoked
  - the pupil has been registered at another school. (Schools can register Traveller children even if they are on the roll of another school. The school the child normally attends is the base school; the other registration is temporary)

- the school has received written notification from the parent that they are educating the pupil themselves. (Elective Home Education)
- the pupil has ceased to attend the school and no longer lives within a reasonable distance of the school
- in the case of a pupil granted leave of absence exceeding 10 days for the purpose of a holiday, the pupil has failed to attend the school within the 10 school days immediately following the last day of absence which was granted and the school is not satisfied that the pupil is unable to attend the school by reason of sickness or any unavoidable cause
- the pupil is certified by the School Medical Officer as unlikely to be in a fit state of health to attend school before ceasing to be of compulsory school age
- the pupil has been continuously absent from school for a period of not less than 20 school days and both the school and the AIO have failed, after reasonable enquiry, to locate him/her. In such cases the school should ensure that form **EWN1** is sent to the Attendance and Pupil Support Team in the local area office in order that efforts can be made to trace the pupil. This may involve contacting other relevant agencies and Authorities that may be able to provide further information (see 7.12).
- the pupil has died
- the pupil will cease to be of compulsory school age before the school next meets and intends to cease to attend. (All registered pupils are required to remain at school until the leaving date - last Friday in June. "At school" includes for these purposes approved educational activities undertaken off site, including work experience).
- the pupil has been permanently excluded and the exclusion has been upheld
- the pupil has been admitted to the school to receive nursery education and has not on completing such education transferred to a reception class at the school
- the pupil attends a special school and the LA gives consent for his/her name to be removed

**7.12** If a school is told that a pupil is leaving to attend another school, staff at the school of departure should establish the pupil's new address, the name and address of the new school and the date the pupil will start there. Confirmation should then be sought from the receiving school. When this information has been obtained, the school should complete form EWN1 and return it to the local Attendance and Pupil Support Team office. Whenever a pupil leaves a school a Common Transfer File (CTF) must be completed. If a school is concerned about any aspect of a transfer or if a pupil has "disappeared" the matter should be drawn without delay to the attention of the Children Missing Education Officer. E mail xxx.xxx@xxxxxxxx.xxx.xx

**7.13** When a pupil's name is removed from the admissions register the school should notify the Children, Schools & Families Pupil Support Team.

**7.14** If the allocated AIO is concerned that a school's registers have not been kept in accordance with the requirements of the relevant regulations he/she will:

- notify the headteacher of the concern and suggest that the matter is addressed
- if no appropriate action is taken by the school, and the AIO remains concerned, the Attendance and Pupil Support Team Manager will address the concern with the Headteacher
- if the matter still remains unresolved, the Team Manager will write to the Headteacher formally noting the concern. A copy of this letter will be sent to the Head of Attendance and Pupil Support

7.15 When a pupil is jointly registered at an Education Support Centre and at a mainstream school the name of that pupil should not be removed from the register of either the school or the Centre without the consent of headteacher.

7.16 Registers should be made available for inspection by Attendance Improvement Officers when requested.

7.17 Registers should be kept in a secure place for a period of not less than 3 years.

7.18 When computerised registration systems are used a print-out of the register should be made not less than once a month. A print-out of the register relating to a particular school year should be bound in a single volume and retained for a period of not less than 3 years.

## **8. Punctuality**

8.1 Schools should take steps to actively encourage excellent levels of punctuality. Lateness should be monitored and followed up.

8.2 School policies and brochures should clearly state the time at which each school session begins and finishes, including the time at which registers open and close. In recognition of local circumstances (for example, a special school at which most pupils arrive by taxi or public transport) registers may be kept open for a reasonable period (DCSF guidance state no longer than 30 minutes ).

8.3 When a pupil arrives late and the register is still open he/she should be marked as 'late' but counted as present for that session.

8.4 When a pupil arrives after the register has closed and provides a satisfactory explanation, he/she should be marked as 'authorised absent' for that session.

8.5 When a pupil arrives after the register has closed and fails to provide a satisfactory explanation, he/she should be marked as 'unauthorised absent' for that session.

8.6 When a pupil arrives late having missed registration, his/her presence on site should be noted in a book in the school office for purposes of emergency evacuation, etc.

## **9. Authorising Absence and Approved Educational Activity**

9.1 Only the school can authorise an absence. The fact that a parent has provided a note or other explanation (telephone call or personal contact) in relation to a particular absence does not, of itself, oblige the school to accept it if the school does not accept the explanation offered as a valid reason for absence. If, after further investigation

doubt remains about the explanation offered - or when no explanation is forthcoming at all - the absence should be treated as unauthorised.

9.2 Schools should communicate to parents their policies with regard to the notification and categorisation of absence. Some parents, such as those whose first language is not English or who do not read or write may experience difficulty in providing notes. In such cases schools should seek to make alternative arrangements.

9.3 Schools are encouraged to keep all absence notes for at least a term and when a pupil's absence is a cause for concern to retain the notes until there is no longer a concern.

9.4 Absence should be authorised if:

- the pupil is absent with leave (defined as 'leave granted by any person authorised to do so by the governing body or proprietor of the school')
- the pupil is ill or prevented from attending by any unavoidable cause
- the absence occurs on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parent belongs
- the school at which the child is a registered pupil is not within walking distance of the child's home; and no suitable arrangements have been made by the LA for any of the following:
  - i) the child's transport to and from school
  - ii) boarding accommodation for the child at or near the school
  - iii) enabling the child to become a registered pupil at a school nearer to his/her home
- the pupil is the child of Traveller parents who temporarily leave the area giving reasonable indication of their intention to return
- there is a family bereavement
- a Year 11 pupil is granted study leave (this should not normally exceed 10 school days)
- leave of absence is granted by the school for a family holiday of no more than 10 school days (or in 'exceptional circumstances' for more than 10 school days). Parents should be reminded that they cannot expect, as of right, that the school will agree to a family holiday during term time

9.5 Absence should be unauthorised if no explanation is forthcoming from the parents or if the school is dissatisfied with the explanation.

9.6 Pupils who are engaged in off-site educational activities should be recorded as approved educational activity. For statistical purposes such pupils are counted as present even though they are physically absent. A pupil should be recorded as approved educational activity if he/she is on:

- an approved work experience placement
- a field trip or educational visit

- an approved sporting activity
- a link course
- the pupil is attending an interview with a prospective employer
- or for a place at university, college, or a place at another school
- receiving special tuition at another school (or at an ESC)

(Note: If a pupil is attending an ESC under dual registration procedures the base school should always confirm that he/she is actually attending the ESC before marking him/her as 'approved educational activity'. Also it should only mark the pupil as 'approved educational activity' on those days when he/she is due to attend the ESC; on days when he/she is not due to attend the ESC he/she (unless attending the base school) should be marked as 'authorised absent').

The key features of approved educational activity are that they are:

- i) educational and directly linked to the school's programme
- ii) approved by the school
- iii) supervised by the school or someone authorised by the school

(Study leave is not an approved educational activity.)

Schools should ensure that in the event of a fire drill or other emergency evacuation they are able to carry out an immediate headcount as to the number of pupils physically present on-site.

## **10. Family Holidays and Extended Trips Overseas During Term Time\***

10.1 Schools should:

- regularly communicate to parents their policies regarding term-time holidays
- actively discourage parents from arranging term-time holidays
- remind parents that they cannot expect leave of absence for the purpose of a holiday to be
- granted as of right ( schools do have a discretionary power to grant up to 10 school days in any school year)
- grant more than 10 days only in 'exceptional circumstances'

*\* Guidance on family holidays and extended trips overseas during term-time is available from the Attendance & Pupil Support Service.*

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Policy for Attendance Improvement Officers working with children whose absence has been authorised**

- if the AIO becomes concerned (through checking the attendance register) that a pupil has accumulated significant amounts of authorised absence this will be discussed with the relevant member of school staff
- if it is agreed that there is a concern about the pupil's attendance the school should share this concern with the parents
- if concerns about the pupil's attendance remain, the AIO will consider accepting the referral in accordance with the Attendance and Pupil Support Service referral procedures
- if the AIO, after making contact with the parents, is of the opinion that the absence is in fact unjustified he/she will advise the school to discontinue authorising the absence
- AIO will give priority to those cases when the absence has been unauthorised

(Note: if a pupil's absence has been authorised by the school the LA cannot cite that absence as evidence of non attendance under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.)

## ATTENDANCE CODES, DESCRIPTIONS AND MEANINGS

CODE	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
/	Present (AM)	Present
\	Present (PM)	Present
B	Educated off site (NOT Dual registration)	Approved Education Activity
C	Other Authorised Circumstances (not covered by another appropriate code/description)	Authorised absence
D	Dual registration (i.e. pupil attending other establishment)	Approved Education Activity
E	Excluded (no alternative provision made)	Authorised absence
F	Extended family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
G	Family holiday (NOT agreed <u>or</u> days in excess of agreement)	Unauthorised absence
H	Family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
I	Illness (NOT medical or dental etc. appointments)	Authorised absence
J	Interview	Approved Education Activity
L	Late (before registers closed)	Present
M	Medical/Dental appointments	Authorised absence
N	No reason yet provided for absence	Unauthorised absence
O	Unauthorised absence (not covered by any other code/description)	Unauthorised absence
P	Approved sporting activity	Approved Education Activity
R	Religious observance	Authorised absence
S	Study leave	Authorised absence
T	Traveller absence	Authorised absence
U	Late (after registers closed)	Unauthorised absence
V	Educational visit or trip	Approved Education Activity
W	Work experience	Approved Education Activity
X	School closed to pupils	Not counted in possible attendances
Y	Enforced closure	Not counted in possible attendances
Z	Do not use	Not counted in possible attendances
I	Non- compulsory school age absence	Not counted in possible attendances
#	School closed to pupils & staff	Not counted in possible attendances
*	Pupil not on roll	Not counted in possible attendances
-	All should attend/No mark recorded	Not counted in possible attendances

Further information on the correct use of these symbols can be found at : [www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolattendance/otherinitiatives/absence.cfm](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolattendance/otherinitiatives/absence.cfm) from which a Word document entitled Guidance for Absence Codes can be downloaded.

