



Policy for Improving School Attendance

Statement of Purpose

In accordance with the Ceredigion Inclusion Service Strategy for Improving School Attendance, the Governing Body aims to:

- Promote and support excellent school attendance by direct work with schools, pupils & their families.
- Adopt appropriate school procedures to improve attendance and set a target for attendance in line with Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and Local Education Authority (LEA) targets in the Autumn Term full Governing Body meeting. (See Appendix 1)

The importance of regular attendance cannot be overestimated. Regular attendance is a prerequisite to a good education and securing it must therefore be a high priority for schools and their Governing Bodies, as well as for parents and the pupils themselves. By failing to attend regularly, pupils diminish the value of the education provided for them. They may also damage the learning of others because fluctuations in the size of pupil groups may restrict the scope for effective teaching.

The approach to attendance relates to a wide range of other issues, including punctuality, rewards and incentives, re-integration of long-term absentees, curricular differentiation, home-school links and the role of the Local Education Authority (LEA).

At Plascrug, the Headteacher will have overall responsibility for attendance. It will be coordinated and monitored by the Deputy Headteacher, who will provide regular reports to the Governing Body.

Legal Responsibilities

The legal framework governing attendance is set by the Education Acts and their associated regulations (which relate to schools and Pupil Referral Units).

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states that “..... *the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive full-time education suitable to his/her age, aptitude and ability and to any special education needs he/she may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise*”

Section 444 further states that “... *the parent of a child of compulsory school age registered at school and failing to attend regularly is guilty of an offence punishable in law*”

An offence is not committed if it can be demonstrated that:

- the pupil was absent with leave (authorised absence);

- the pupil was ill or prevented from attending by unavoidable cause;
- the absence occurred on a day set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil/parents belong;
- the school is not within the prescribed walking distance of the child's home and suitable transport arrangements have not been made by the LEA. The law relating to 'walking distance' effectively is defined as two miles for pupils under eight and three miles for all other pupils. Distances will be measured by nearest available walking route;
- a limited defence is available to the parents of travelling children

The Act also places a legal obligation on:

- The LEA to provide and enforce attendance;
- Schools to register attendance and notify the LEA of a child's absence from school.

Procedures

Registration

The school will keep accurate registers. The register is a legal document and must be kept accurately and neatly. Ceredigion Education Inclusion Officers may examine electronic registers at any time. The register may also be requested in a court of law as evidence in a prosecution for non-attendance

They will adopt the registration codes that should be used by Ceredigion schools in line with the guidance issued by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). (See School Attendance Procedures for codes).

Authorising Absence

Only a Headteacher can authorise an absence. Parents and the LEA do not have the power to authorise absences.

"Unauthorised absence" is absence without approval from the Headteacher of the school and includes all unexplained absences. Thus, the decision taken by the Headteacher to give, or withhold, authorisation for an absence, is a critical factor in determining the LEA's approach to any attendance case; for ultimately, If a child is absent with the approval of the Headteacher, for whatever reasons, no offence is deemed to have been committed and there can be no consideration given to prosecuting parents.

Lateness

Persistent lateness can be as damaging to a pupil's career as persistent absence. Pupils who arrive late disrupt not only their own education but also that of others and being persistently late may also lead to truancy. The law

treats persistent lateness in the same way as irregular attendance and parents can be prosecuted if late arrival is not resolved. The school and Ceredigion LEA is committed to using the legal process if necessary in order to ensure that parents get their child to school on time. The school will keep accurate records of pupils arriving late and mark the register accordingly in order for the LEA is to effectively address this issue should the need arise.

Where a situation at home makes it difficult for a pupil to arrive on time, consideration will be given to an appropriate referral to an outside agency or voluntary service. The schools can request advice from EIOs on the issue and will refer pupils who are persistently late to the LEA if they are unsuccessful in improving the situation themselves.

Family holidays during term time

Parents do not have an automatic right to withdraw pupils from school for a holiday and, in law, have to apply for permission in advance. Only the Headteacher can grant such permission and only in exceptional circumstances may the amount of leave granted exceed (in total) more than ten days in any one year. The school actively discourages holidays in term time and will be supported by the Governing Body and the LEA in the procedures taken to discourage this trend.

Support from the LEA

The school's role in dealing with non-attendance is vital and schools are expected to undertake the initial work. The school works closely with the EIO's who will give guidance on strategies that promote good attendance. Meetings with primary schools will take place as required and will follow:

- a formal request for "referral for investigation"
- or
- analysis of data from the electronic system where patterns of poor attendance have been identified.

The school will refer to the "Good Practice Guide" produced by the LEA to assist in implementing its attendance policy.

Referral to the LEA and its Education Inclusion Service (EIS)

The school will access LEA criteria for "referral for investigation" if the initial efforts to resolve the problem have failed. The school can refer to the EIS on the appropriate Inclusion Request form. The school will inform the parents/carers that this referral has taken place.

Referral will happen *only* where the school has been unable – despite its own investigations – to clarify the situation for itself. Cases where school is currently authorising a child's absence will not normally be accepted.

Support can be accessed from the EIO's to assist the school in its work if there is a problem in ascertaining the genuineness of medical reasons for school absence.

Extended Casework

In all cases of "investigation" the EIS will study the case and report their analysis to the school within 10 working days. On the basis of the "investigation", a decision will be made in conjunction with the school whether to deliver the extended service and undertake casework intervention. The extent and timing of any intervention on each case will be dependant upon existing caseload.

In undertaking casework the EIS will aim to:

- maintain records of the case, to include details of agreed actions and records of meetings/visits.
- listen to the views and perceptions of the pupil about attendance and provide appropriate advice and support to him/her and his/her parents/guardians
- liase with other support services within the LEA and/or external agencies, making onward referral when necessary
- provide regular feedback to schools on progress in the case
- issue standard letters
- liase with the County medical team as required
- liase with legal department as necessary and compile evidence when required
- give evidence and assist in prosecution in court when required

Pastoral Support Plans

EIOs will attend Pastoral Support Plan (PSP) meetings wherever possible when:

- the EIO is actively working on the case
- or
- the EIO is likely to receive a "referral for investigation" as a result of the PSP

Legal action

Where necessary, the LEA is prepared to use legal action to enforce school attendance.

The service will always consider the use of an Education Supervision Order (ESO) before instigating prosecution proceedings.

The service will work with the legal department to implement a School Attendance Order (SAO) in cases where the school has brought to the department's attention that the child is not on the school roll and is not receiving a suitable education.

Monitoring, Review & Evaluation

Target setting

The school governing body will agree targets which are in line with generic county targets and the requirements of the Welsh Assembly Government. These targets will be both realistic and sufficiently challenging in order to raise school attendance at Plascrug.

The governing body will set a target for attendance. These targets are taken from an analysis of the generic termly data that is collected from the school together with the generic targets for Ceredigion. Target setting on total absence levels in both primary and secondary schools is now statutory and targets should be returned to the department on an annual basis by the 31st December in any year.

School Attendance Monitoring Procedures and Rewards Systems

At the beginning of each school all Parents will receive an information leaflet outlining the School's Attendance Policy and monitoring procedures. It will include information stressing the parental responsibility for providing the school with a satisfactory reason for any absences. It will also inform parents that by law, the Headteacher is the **only** person that can authorise absences from school.

The school will encourage full attendance at all times and will strive to meet the target percentage attendance figures set by the Governing Body through a series of incentives and rewards.

Analysis of Attendance Data

Information is kept with regard to the number of attendance cases that are referred to the LEA from the school. This data will determine the amount of time that the EIOs devote to the schools. If the school does not refer appropriate cases of poor attendance to the EIS it will be asked to give an explanation for that particular action. From September 2007 the introduction of electronic registration will enable officers to monitor patterns of attendance in the school more closely.

All data kept in relation to attendance will be in accordance with The Data Protection Act 1998.

Partnerships

The school will work closely with LEA Education Inclusion Officers who in turn will liaise with both the Education Psychology Service and the Special Needs Advisory Service to tackle specific cause of non-attendance specialist cases e.g. Looked after Children are regularly monitored by the school SENCO. .

Child Protection

All staff will adhere to the county's policy on Child Protection, and any specific child protection concerns should be referred as soon as possible to the Coordinator for Inclusion and Child Protection.

This policy has been agreed by the Governing Body on 4th March 2008 and will be reviewed in March 2009

Signed: *J. Harrington* (Chair of Governors)
 Rhian Rowe (Head Teacher)