

Trellech Primary School
Attendance Policy
In line with...



Monmouthshire Local Authority Attendance Policy

Education Welfare Service

September 2019
(Reviewed June 2023)



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Monmouthshire Local Authority Attendance Policy

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1. Why is good attendance important?

Establishing good attendance patterns from an early age can help children later on in life. Evidence suggests that children who attend school more regularly achieve better educational outcomes than those with poor attendance.

In addition to missing academic work, children with poor attendance will also miss the social side of school life. This, especially in the first few years of education, can affect their ability to make and maintain friendships.

If regular attendance patterns are not established, research has indicated that some young people who regularly miss school for no good reason may be drawn into anti-social behaviour or crime.

By law, all children of compulsory school age (between 5 and 16) must receive a suitable, full-time education, at school or otherwise. As a parent you are responsible for making sure this happens.

Parents are responsible for making sure that if registered their children attend school regularly.

- a) Full-time education - Inclusion and Pupil Support 47/2006 defines full time education as:
- Key Stage 1: 21 hours
 - Key Stage 2: 23.5 hours
 - Key Stage 3 / 4 (Including Year 10 only): 24 hours
 - Key Stage 4 (Year 11): 25 hours

3. School Attendance Register

Schools are required under The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010, to take an attendance register twice a day; at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. The register may be requested in a court of law as evidence in a prosecution for non-attendance. It may also contribute information to pupils' end-of-term reports, records of achievement and leavers' references. An accurate and consistent registration system is crucial if poor attendance and punctuality within a school are to be tackled. It is vital that pupils are aware that registration is a significant part of the school day.

All staff involved with the registration process should be made aware that the law is specific regarding the keeping of registers. Marking and keeping the register is of the utmost importance.

Unauthorised absence is absence without approval from an authorised representative of the school and includes all unexplained absences. The decision taken by the school to give or withhold authorisation for an absence is a critical factor in determining the local authority's decision to prosecute parents as prosecution is only possible for unauthorised absences. There will be occasions when the school may authorise a pupil's absence and hence no offence is deemed to have been committed.

It is important that schools exercise caution in the authorisation of absence. If they are suspicious of the explanation given by parents, the absence should be further investigated and left unauthorised until the matter has been clarified to the satisfaction of the school. The decision taken by the school to authorise absence or not, is of critical importance in determining the level of involvement of the EWS. If the school has authorised a pupil's absence they have, in effect, given leave, therefore there is no case in law for the parents to answer.

NB: Where this policy states parents this refers to parents, carers or guardians

2. Promoting effective attendance via robust target setting

The Local Authority encourages schools to set robust attendance targets using benchmark quartile data and their own school's previous attendance rates. The Local Authority believes that all targets should be set above the medium benchmark quartile. The Local Authority will suggest targets but recognises that schools will need to agree their own targets and secure agreement from their Governing Body.

3. Recording attendance - Coding on registers

When recording attendance on school registers, schools should adhere to the Welsh Government definitions of the use of attendance codes. Headteachers or their designated nominee need to determine an appropriate coding if a child is not present in school. Parents should provide a reason for any absence and the school will need to decide whether the absence will be authorised or unauthorised. If the school has reason to question the validity of an absence then the code should signify that the absence is unauthorised. If the school decide to authorise an absence it makes it difficult for the Education Welfare Service to take any formal action.

Where a school uses a code which signifies that a child is present, (i.e. a B or a D code- either in school or engaged in an approved educational activity), then the statistical meaning of this code is that the child is present, engaged in provision, supervised by an appropriately qualified member of staff and is safe. Hence, the schools need to ensure that they are confident that their pastoral support plans reflect any supervision arrangements, which safeguard children who gave bespoke packages.

Where pupils are being reintegrated or have a bespoke timetable then any sessions where they are not engaged in provision or that are not supervised by an appropriately qualified member of staff should be coded using the C code.

4. Lateness

Parents play a significant role in promoting attendance and engagement by ensuring that their child arrives at school on time. Arriving late at school can be disruptive for the child, the teacher and other children in the class. If a child is late for registration then they will be coded with a late mark. In line with Welsh Government Guidance, the Local Authority advises that registers remain open for 30 minutes in both morning and afternoon sessions.

If a child arrives after the register closes the child's absence should be recorded as an unauthorised absence for that session.

In Trellech Primary School the registers open at 9.00am and close at 9.30am.

If parents are having difficulty in getting their child to school, it is essential that they contact the child's Headteacher or appropriate school point of contact in the first instance; e.g. School Attendance Officer, Form tutor, Wellbeing lead, Head of Year.

5. There are 2 types of absence from school:-

Authorised absence:

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from schools for illness or unavoidable causes e.g. bereavement. When children are too ill to attend school, parents should be advised to contact the school on the first morning of absence and keep the school informed if the absence continues for more than a day. It would be good practice for a parent to write a note to school informing them of reasons for absence that the child could submit to school on their return.

Children may also have to attend medical or dental appointments in school time. However schools should encourage parents to make every attempt to make routine appointments, such as dental check-ups after school or during the school holidays.

This is not a definitive list and schools should advise that if parents are requesting that their child have time off for other reasons that parents contact the Headteacher as only the Headteacher can authorise absences during school time.

The Local Authority advise that birthdays and shopping trips are not acceptable reasons for absence and should not be authorised. The Local Authority advise that if a child is absent for any reason, then parents must contact the school.

Where an absence is authorised, schools will use the appropriate and recognised codes to record the absence.

Only a Head teacher can authorise an absence. Parents and the Local Authority do not have the power to authorise absences.

The key points head teachers should consider when deciding to authorise absence are:

- It is a legal requirement that registered pupils of compulsory school age attend school regularly and punctually

- Schools are not obliged to accept a parental explanation for pupil absence where there is doubt as to the validity of that explanation
- Parents should be aware that only **the head teacher** has the right to agree to a pupil's absence for family holidays in term time. Each application for leave should be considered in view of the specific circumstances of the family
- Schools should always expect regular and punctual attendance, even when the school is aware of family difficulties
- An explanation is required for every absence. If one is not forthcoming the absence will be treated as unauthorised
- Where absence is authorised, schools should remain vigilant to emerging patterns of non-attendance
- Lateness should be actively discouraged and persistent lateness treated in the same way as irregular attendance

Unauthorised absence

The Local Authority would advise that the following absences are not authorised by the school. These can include:-

- Children who arrive at school after registers have closed (This is 30 minutes after the start of the school day)
- Absences which have never been properly explained to the school
- Parents keeping their child off school unnecessarily
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Holidays during term time (schools will decide on the circumstances of each case)

6. Holidays during term time

Parents can support engagement with education by taking holidays in the published holiday periods. **The Local Authority strongly discourages the taking of holidays in term time and advises Headteachers to consider any requests on an individual pupil basis.** The Pupil Registration (Wales) Regulations 2010 gives Headteachers *discretionary* power to grant up to ten days leave for the purpose of an annual family holiday during term time. In exceptional circumstances a school may authorise a holiday of more than ten days.

This is not an automatic right for parents or pupils. Headteachers should take into consideration pupils' previous attendance records when considering parental requests for holidays in term time and the impact of the holiday request upon their attendance for the current academic year.

If parents are considering booking a holiday in term time they are strongly advised to contact the Headteacher before confirming any booking. Term dates can be obtained from the school either verbally, in writing or on a school's website.

If parents are considering taking their child on a family holiday during school term time, there are certain things they should take into account:

- Do they really need to take a holiday in term time or can they take the holiday during school holidays?
- Have they considered the disruption to their child's education?

If they feel that they must take the holiday during school term, they will need to complete a request form which is available from their child's school. As with any request for absence, they should make the application as far in advance as possible.

Headteachers cannot legally authorise more than 10 school days of holiday per school year unless, in the view of the Headteacher, there are 'exceptional circumstances'. The Local Authority would advise that if this request is viewed as being exceptional, (e.g. Service Families having to take leave as directed) then the Headteacher should determine the impact of the absence request on the child's attendance. It is essential that parents speak to the Headteacher before booking any holiday.

Trellech Primary School will not authorise any term time holiday if:

- A pupil's attendance is below that of the school target (See term time Absence Request form)
- A pupil will miss National Assessments (see Spring Term Calendar)
- The family has already taken up to 10 days absence for holidays in the current academic year

Holidays taken without the Headteacher's permission will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. If Headteachers decide not to authorise the request for a holiday and the subsequent time off is in excess of 10 sessions in a term then potentially the school could request that a Fixed Penalty Notice is issued. It is important to stress that Fixed Penalty Notices are not automatically served if a pupil goes on holiday, they can only be served if the holiday is unauthorised and the pupils' total unauthorised absence that term is in excess of 10 sessions.(5 days)

All requests for holiday during term time should be in writing, which should be made by a parent / carer of the child even if they are not going on holiday with them. If the parent with whom the child lives does not give consent to the holiday, leave cannot be given lawfully by the school except by a court order.

Where the school is experiencing difficulties with unauthorised absence during term time, we may wish to:

- issue a letter on the matter to parents, requesting a meeting to discuss further; or
- contact the school EWO for advice and support.

7. Extended Overseas Trips

These should only be agreed where Schools have taken into full account the National Assembly guidance and individual circumstances. Again this is not an automatic right for parents or pupils. Headteachers should take into consideration pupils' previous attendance records when considering parental requests for holidays in term time and the impact of the holiday request upon their attendance for the current academic year.

Parents should be advised of the impact such a lengthy absence will have upon their child and be encouraged, where possible to take their holiday to coincide with school closure. Trips overseas are the same as family holidays. Parents need to be encouraged to plan for trips in the 13 weeks available to them outside term times.

Parents should be advised that their child's name will be removed from the school register if he/she has not returned to school on the expected day of return. Legally, a child can be taken off a school register if they have not attended for 4 weeks (because of parental action). In these circumstances the parents would need to make an application for re-admission on their return to UK and may not be guaranteed the school of their choice, as all available places could be taken and a change of school may be required.

8. Monitoring attendance

The Local Authority expects that schools analyse their attendance data on a regular basis. This allows schools to monitor attendance patterns on a whole school basis, or by gender, area of vulnerability and year group. This will allow schools to identify pupils whose attendance is of concern, prioritise these pupils for school-based interventions and if necessary discuss these concerns in a formal basis with the Education Welfare Service.

Engaging and Working with Parents

Parentally condoned absence is, in many ways, more difficult to identify than any other form of pupil absence. This form of absence is equally as damaging to the pupil's educational experience as any other form of absence. The parents, in many cases, perceive that they are keeping their child away from school for legitimate reasons. They may feel that they are protecting their child/children. It is essential when school staff feel that a pattern of non-attendance is emerging, they work closely with education, social and health support services to ensure the most appropriate and effective intervention is available to the pupil and parents.

Effective engagement is the bedrock on which all work with parents is built. Engagement should be underpinned by the values and principles that guide the work of the EWS. Key to this is respecting parents' rights and supporting them in meeting their responsibilities.

Parents of children from different cultures may feel that the school is not a safe or proper environment for their child. It is vital that schools investigate and endeavour to recognise cultural issues that may prevent a pupil from attending school. There are support services that will assist and advise schools and parents on ways forward when these difficulties arise.

A pupil's punctuality is a legal requirement and the parents / carers of a pupil who is persistently late are guilty of an offence. The law treats persistent lateness (after the close of the Register) in the same way as irregular attendance and parents can be prosecuted if late arrival is not resolved.

Parents can do a great deal to support the regular and punctual attendance of their children. In Monmouthshire we are committed to working with our parents and schools to support and encourage them to:

- take an active interest in their child's school life and work;
- attend, when possible, parents' evenings and other school events;
- ensure that their child completes his / her homework and goes to bed at an appropriate time;
- be aware of letters from school which their child brings home;
- ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day;
- ensure that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness or days of religious observance;
- always notify the school as soon as possible - preferably on the first morning of any absence;
- confirm this in writing when the child returns to school;
- to ensure family holidays do not take place during term-time; and
- talk to the school if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to go to school.

9. School responses to non-attendance

The Local Authority expects that schools have a first day response process and follows up all absences to determine reasons for absence (if one has not already been provided by parents). If schools have concerns about attendance then these should be followed up by telephone and by inviting parents into school to discuss the absences. If the school feel that there are issues which are impacting upon a child's attendance then the school may need to refer to other agencies for appropriate advice and intervention and support.

If all the above have been exhausted then schools may make a referral to Education Welfare Service via a completed referral form, which will be discussed by a panel.

10. Pupil Attendance and the Role of the Education Welfare Service

The main aim of the Education Welfare Service is to improve school attendance to ensure that all pupils are able to access and engage with all opportunities available to them.

The Education Welfare Service works closely in partnership with schools, other Local Authorities and all agencies to promote both the attendance and engagement of pupils of referred pupils.

The Education Welfare Service plays a critical role in supporting the well-being of young people. All staff within the Education Welfare Service adhere to the principles of confidentiality and follow the All Wales Child Protection Processes and the Local Safeguarding Policy. If supportive intervention does not impact positively upon the attendance of the pupil then the Education Welfare Service can progress formal processes in line with provision in the Education Act 1996 (Section 444 and 444A).

Referrals to the Education Welfare Service need to be sent to the Education Welfare Service which will be operating a referral panel process from September 2019. The panel will operate on a fortnightly basis. Once a referral is accepted by the panel, actions will be identified for each individual Education Welfare Officer.

11. Fixed Penalty Notices

The Welsh Government has published Guidance on the use of Fixed Penalty Notices, Circular 116/2013. This requires each Local Authority to develop a Code of Conduct for the imposition of Fixed Penalty Notices. Monmouthshire has developed a Code of Conduct and this allied to the Local Authority Attendance Policy enables schools to request the imposition of a Fixed Penalty Notice.

The Welsh Government Guidance allows each Local Authority to impose a Fixed Penalty Notice if a child's unauthorised absence is in excess of 10 sessions per term. A session is defined as half a day. Hence it is vital that parents inform schools of reasons behind their child's absence. It is then up to the Headteacher who will decide whether to authorise the child's absence or not.

12. Legal Processes

The Local Authority would need to follow the guidance as contained in Section 444 and 444A of the Education Act 1996. The Local Authority would issue a First Warning Notice and if there were no improvement, a Final Warning Notice would be issued.

After issuing a Final Warning Notice and there was no improvement, a statement would be sent to Monmouthshire's Legal Department, highlighting interventions and actions undertaken by the Education Welfare Officer as evidence towards a prosecution.

It is vitally important that registers are accurate and the coding reflects the child's engagement with any provision provided as schools could be called to give evidence in court.

13. Impact of attendance processes across the Local Authority

Attendance rates in Monmouthshire Schools continue to be very good. The latest Welsh Government Data shows that Primary Attendance was 95.2% for the academic year 2017/2018 resulting in Monmouthshire having the best attendance rate in Wales. Similarly the latest Welsh Government Data shows that Secondary

Attendance was 95.0% in 2018/19 resulting in Monmouthshire having the best attendance rate in Wales.

14. Further information and advice

If you require any further information, please contact **Education Welfare Officer:**

Monmouth Cluster Lead Education Welfare Officer Michelle Kear 07816
176 980