

ATTENDANCE POLICY FOR ALL WIRRAL SCHOOLS

(Updated: November 2021)

Version 2

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1. Introduction

We believe that regular school attendance is central to raising standards in education and to improving the life chances of all children. Regular attendance at school enables children to gain maximum benefit from the range of educational and wider opportunities available to them. This Policy sets out the framework for how the council, parents, carers, local schools (including academies, free schools, independent schools and alternative provision establishments), governors, and partner services can work together to help all children within Wirral to achieve the highest possible levels of attendance.

Schools and Local Authorities are expected to work together to:

- *Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence;*
- *Ensure every pupil has access to the appropriate full-time education to which they are entitled; and*
- *Act early to address patterns of absence*

1.1 Regular School Attendance

The need for **regular school attendance** is given a high priority by all Wirral schools.

The Supreme Court ruled in April 2017 (Platt v Isle of Wight) that **regular** attendance is ‘**in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school**’. In Wirral Schools, this is interpreted as **every day that the school requires a child to attend, unless the absence has been approved by the Headteacher.**

Unsurprisingly, children who are absent from school or who are persistently late, can soon fall behind with their learning. Research conducted by the Department for Education (DfE 2016) confirmed that, as the level of overall pupil absence increases, the likelihood of pupils achieving what they are capable of decreases.

Parents of children of compulsory school age are, by law, required to ensure that their children receive a suitable education through regular attendance at school or otherwise.

1.2 Definition of ‘Parent’

For the purposes of this policy and other education related issues, a **parent** is as defined under section 576 of the Education Act 1996:

- all natural parents, whether they are married or not;
- any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility (as defined in the Children Act 1989) for a child or young person;
- any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person.

Having care of a child or young person means that a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of their relationship with the child, is considered to be a parent in education law.

1.3 Attendance in Early Years

Children must start full-time education once they reach compulsory school age. This is on 31 December, 31 March, or 31 August following their fifth birthday - whichever comes first. If a child's fifth birthday is on one of those dates, then they reach compulsory school age on that date.

Absence data in respect of four and five year olds who are not of compulsory school age is collected and reported upon separately at national level. Data relates only to an overall absence percentage, as children not of compulsory school age cannot technically accrue unauthorised absence. However, it is established good practice for schools to use nationally prescribed

registration codes for all sessions that a non-compulsory school aged child is required to attend, as to do so will help staff to monitor attendance and to be alert to any emerging patterns of absence that may be an indicator of wider concern. There should be high expectations in place for this cohort of children in terms of attendance, so that good habits are established from the outset of a child's school career.

2. Expectations to ensure delivery of this Policy across all Wirral Schools

2.1 Responsibilities & Expectations of Parents and Carers:

- ✓ To ensure that their child attends school every day that the school is open, unless there is a genuine and unavoidable reason that prevents them from so doing;
- ✓ To ensure that their child arrives at school on time (8.55am). A reason should be offered for any lateness;
- ✓ To inform school as soon as possible, by 'phone or in person, if their child is unable to attend on any day, together with the reason for absence. (0151 677 2830)
- ✓ To trust that school staff will contact them during the school day if a child is ill in school and needs to go home;
- ✓ To ensure that school has at least two sets of full contact details, and that these are kept updated;
- ✓ To make all medical appointments outside school hours whenever possible, and to inform school in advance of any medical appointments that cannot be scheduled out of school time. For absence to be authorised as a medical absence, schools do require evidence, such as an appointment card or letter;
- ✓ In the case of a primary school child, to ensure that their child is collected on time at the end of the school day;
- ✓ To take family holidays during school holiday periods, and to be aware that there is no entitlement to withdraw children for authorised leave of absence during term time. Any requests for leave of absence during term time should be made in writing and in advance to the head teacher; (*form available from school office and on the website*)
- ✓ To be aware of curriculum requirements and to be especially vigilant with regards to attendance during particularly important times such as SATs and other exam periods;
- ✓ To provide evidence and advice from a health professional when needed to enable school to gain a greater understanding of their child's health issues;
- ✓ To talk to school staff as soon as possible should their child be reluctant to come to school for any reason, or if there are any other issues impacting on school attendance. This is so that any problems can be quickly identified and overcome.

Absence Procedures:

- ✓ It is important that parents / carers keep in touch with school about all absences. This information is used to help determine whether children's absence is recorded in the register as authorised or unauthorised. The head teacher has the ultimate authority to determine whether absences are authorised or unauthorised. If parents do not communicate with school, and staff are unable to establish contact, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised.

2.2 Medical Evidence:

The most common reason for children being persistently absent from school is illness. When pupils are having repeat absences due to reported illness, schools may need more evidence and advice to help decide whether or not the absence should be authorised, and to see whether any additional support is required. Children can be reluctant to attend school from time to time, or there may be other issues affecting attendance. It is never advisable for parents to 'cover' for their absence or to give-in to pressure to excuse them from attending. Covering up gives the impression that attendance does not matter, and usually makes things worse. It is always better to get in touch with school, to share concerns, and to plan a way forward.

Schools can accept the following as medical evidence:

- ✓ GP certificate
- ✓ Letter from health professional
- ✓ Appointment card / letter (dated)
- ✓ Prescription / Medication in the name of the child
- ✓ Text message from GP or NHS confirming an appointment
- ✓ Care of the chemist – date stamped slip to show medical advice has been sought

In situations where a child's attendance record is of concern, usual practice would be for parents / carers to be invited into school to meet with a member of staff. This provides an opportunity for concerns from both home and school to be shared, and for an agreed plan of action to be put in place to address any identified difficulties.

Please remember that parents and carers are encouraged to contact school at an early point should they have any concerns that are impacting on their child's school attendance.

We acknowledge that children are at a higher risk of missing school if they have issues around their emotional wellbeing and mental health. This can then lead to further problems in terms of children falling behind with work, and of feelings of social isolation. It is particularly important in these circumstances that parents / carers work together with school to ensure that appropriate help and support is offered to respond to concerns as they arise. Early Help means taking action to support a child, young person, or/and their family as soon as a problem emerges. School may also seek advice about sources of help and support from the Authority's Vulnerable Children's Panel in cases where concerns about a child's unauthorised absence are ongoing.

2.3 Responsibilities of School:

- ✓ To demonstrate a strong and inclusive whole school attendance ethos that helps pupils feel that they 'belong';
- ✓ To promote the importance of good attendance to pupils and their parents/carers at every opportunity (via newsletters, assemblies, and any other communications between school and home);
- ✓ To establish effective procedures that enable staff to record, identify, and address concerns around overall pupil absence;
- ✓ To consistently record authorised and unauthorised absences using the correct DfE prescribed registration code. This duty also extends to ensuring that N (no reason yet provided) coded absences are resolved in a timely manner. Parents should be made aware that if school cannot establish an acceptable reason for their child's absence, the missed sessions will be recorded as unauthorised absence;
- ✓ To have sensitive support systems in place for vulnerable pupils which recognise the complexity of children's lives and family circumstances;
- ✓ To inform the local authority of any part-time or flexible education arrangements in place for individual pupils, together with plans for tracking and review;
- ✓ To identify a senior leader who has overall responsibility for attendance, and who is also responsible for the achievement and wellbeing of all children who are on the school roll, but not accessing education in the usual way, such as those pupils in alternative provision placements;
- ✓ To encourage open communication channels and partnership working between home and school to improve attendance and punctuality. This will include meetings with parents and carers in school, where any support needs can be identified and addressed, together with the joint formulation of realistic plans for improving individual pupils' attendance;
- ✓ To develop procedures for the reintegration of long term absentees;
- ✓ To have support plans in place to ease pupils' transition between each phase of education when there is a change of school, with particular reference to the needs of more vulnerable children;

- ✓ To seek advice from the Authority's designated Locality Attendance Officer (LAO) both in respect of the management of whole school attendance matters, and of individual children whose attendance gives cause concern;
- ✓ To have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the school and other support agencies in relation to the provision of additional support for pupils whose attendance difficulties are symptomatic of wider family issues or / and indicative of safeguarding concerns where a multi-agency response is required;
- ✓ To refer children into the Authority's Vulnerable Children's Panel for advice and support in situations where parents are reluctant to engage voluntarily with early help, and concerns about unauthorised absence are ongoing. Parents should be made aware that this will be the case;
- ✓ To engage in partnership working with the Authority's Attendance Service to ensure appropriate use of legal sanctions in order to reinforce parental responsibility for securing regular attendance;
- ✓ To analyse and evaluate a range of accurate attendance data to improve individual pupil and whole school performance, and to identify any vulnerable groups of pupils whose attendance is below what would be expected. There should be robust tracking procedures in place with respect to the attendance of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, children in receipt of Pupil Premium, and children who are Looked After by the Authority or have an allocated Social Worker;
- ✓ To incentivise, reward and celebrate good and improved attendance on an individual, group, and whole school level – creating a positive culture in which good and improved attendance is highly valued. School can encourage ownership of their attendance reward schemes by seeking and acting on pupils' views in this respect;
- ✓ To provide governors with sufficient data and information about pupils who are not attending regularly or accessing education in the usual way, so that they can evaluate and challenge the effectiveness of school's arrangements;
- ✓ To refer children who are, or who are at risk of becoming, Children Missing from Education (CME) to the Local Authority in accordance with Wirral Policy;
- ✓ To notify the Local Authority of any child whose name is deleted from roll at parental request in order to pursue elective home education.

2.4 Expectations of School Staff:

First Day Contact

Parents should be encouraged to contact school on each morning that their child is absent. If a child is absent, and no contact from parent has been received by school:

- ✓ School will endeavour to telephone parents/carers to ascertain a reason for absence in accordance with 'first day contact' procedures.
- ✓ School may also telephone any other persons on the pupil's contact list if they are unable to make contact with the parent.
- ✓ Home welfare visits may also be undertaken in connection with concerns around a child's absence (particularly when parents do not respond to requests for contact from school staff).
- ✓ Priority tracking should take place where safeguarding is a known issue. School's Designated Safeguarding Lead / Children Looked After Lead should be alerted should there be any concerns in respect of the absence of children subject of Child In Need arrangements or Child Protection Plans, or children Looked After by the Local Authority.

The Attendance Clerk is responsible for:

- ✓ Collating and recording registration and attendance information.
- ✓ Taking and recording messages from parents regarding absence.
- ✓ Making first day response calls to parents of absent children where no contact has been received.

- ✓ Informing the Attendance Lead / Designated Safeguarding Lead of any cases where the explanation for absence gives potential cause for concern, and where additional support or intervention may be required.
- ✓ Recording details of children who arrive late.
- ✓ Sending out letters and emails to parents regarding attendance concerns.
- ✓ Administration work around school Attendance Panels (which can also involve the Authority's Locality Attendance Officer).
- ✓ Reporting daily and weekly attendance figures.
- ✓ Keeping an overview of whole school, class, and individual attendance rates, looking particularly at overall absence, levels of unauthorised absence, and patterns of absence.

Link with Safeguarding / Education Neglect

- ✓ Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility.
- ✓ Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined as: protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children's health or development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.
- ✓ Schools have a key role in ensuring children and young people are kept safe. School staff are particularly important as they are in a position to identify concerns early, provide help for children, and prevent concerns from escalating.
- ✓ Every school has a designated safeguarding lead who will provide support to staff members to carry out their safeguarding duties and can liaise closely with other services such as children's social care and early help services.
- ✓ Schools should be alert to unauthorised absence as being a potential indicator of educational or wider neglect. Neglect is the most common reason for a child to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan in the UK.
- ✓ **Working Together 2018** identifies neglect as:
'The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.'

2.5 Stepped Interventions

The following are examples of interventions which may be considered by schools to support the promotion of regular attendance:

Attendance Rate	Absence Rate	Action
100%-95%	0%-5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificates Given. • When absent a message from school to confirm absence, if not already informed.
95%-90%	5%-10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we have concerns regarding absence the classteacher will discuss these with the parent and support given where needed.
90%-85%	10%-15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A meeeting with the parent and Headteacher will be arranged and support offered. • The Educational Social Welfare Officer will be informed and a meeting arranged to discuss the issues regarding absence. • No improvement could trigger a Fixed Penalty Notice.
85% and below	15% +	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Futher Intervention from the Education Social Welfare Officer. • Possible referral for prosecution.

Unauthorised attendance that falls below 75% can be an underlying risk factor and indicative of a safeguarding concern. All of the above will be underpinned by the offer of ongoing support to address identified difficulties.

The table below shows the absence rate, number of days missed, number of lessons missed and consequences for children and their parents. This information is shared with parents on a regular basis throughout the year.

Attendance Rate	95%	92%	90%	88%	85%
Absence Rate	5%	8%	10%	12%	15%
Days Missed	4.5	7	9	11	13
Lessons Missed	22.5	35	45	55	65

2.6 Lateness

Regular and punctual attendance at school is a legal requirement. When children arrive late and miss the start of the school day, they can miss work and vital information for the day. Late arriving pupils also disrupt lessons, and this can be embarrassing and upsetting for the child. Lateness can also encourage absence, as some pupils would rather not attend school at all, than arrive late.

- ✓ Registers are marked by 9.15 a.m. If children arrive in class after this time, they will receive a late mark in the register (code L).
- ✓ In line with recommendations from the Department for Education (DfE), registers will close at 9.30 a.m. If children arrive after this time, they will be recorded as having arrived after closure of registers (code U). This counts as an unauthorised absence for that session.
- ✓ Any pupil arriving late should enter the school through the main entrance and be signed-in in accordance with school's procedures.
- ✓ If a primary school child arrives late and is unaccompanied by a parent/carers, school will make contact to establish the reason for lateness.
- ✓ If lateness becomes a regular occurrence, it will be treated in the same way as unauthorised absence, with parents/carers being contacted and invited into school to discuss the situation.

2.7 Children with Medical Needs

- ✓ School's Governing Body must ensure that arrangements are in place to support pupils with medical conditions in school. Individual healthcare plans should be in place, and these should provide clarity about what needs to be done, when, and by whom in order to ensure that children with medical needs may access and enjoy the same opportunities at school as any other child (see DfE statutory guidance issued in April 2014: 'Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions').
- ✓ The primary aim of educating children and young people who have medical needs is to minimise, as far as possible, the disruption to their normal schooling by allowing them to continue their education and to progress as much as their medical needs allow. 'Medical needs' encompass both physical health and mental / emotional health issues.

In circumstances where a child has complex health needs and is medically unfit to attend school, referral may be made to The Home Education Service which is a local authority service based on the Hilbre High School Humanities College site. Medical referrals to the Home Education Service must come jointly from both school and paediatrician, NHS specialist consultant, CAMHS psychiatrist or senior CAMHS therapist/psychologist.

2.8 Children on Part-Time Timetables

All pupils of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. There may, however, be exceptional circumstances where a part-time timetable is needed as a time-limited intervention to respond to a child's individual needs. Schools are asked to submit information about such arrangements to Wirral Attendance Service with a Part-Time Timetable Agreement Form.

2.9 Celebrating Good Attendance

It is important that schools recognise and celebrate good and improved attendance. This can be done in a variety of ways, and some ideas are listed below:

- Attendance has a high profile in whole school assemblies each week
- Class attendance reported in the school newsletter
- Weekly trophies
- Extra Play time

Locality Attendance Officers from the Authority's Attendance Service are happy to send positive letters to parents to recognise and reinforce progress made in terms of securing their child's attendance. School can also invite Locality Attendance Officers to be involved in celebration assemblies.

2.10 Expectations of Pupils

Pupils are encouraged to participate fully in the life of the school and to obtain maximum benefit from the range of educational and other opportunities available to them.

Pupils are expected:

- To do all they can to attend school regularly and on time;
- To talk with a trusted adult about any issues that are making it difficult for them to come to school, or that are affecting their wellbeing in school;
- To be aware of their attendance targets, and to work towards achieving them.

2.11 Expectations of the Local Authority and Wirral Attendance Service

The Local Authority is expected:

- To promote regular school attendance of children in schools across the Authority, and to work towards breaking the cycle of poor attendance, reduced attainment, and social disadvantage.
- To help schools in their work to reduce overall and persistent pupil absence. This involves working with school staff, parents / carers, children, and various partner agencies to develop and implement practices which can help raise and sustain individual pupils' attendance levels.
- To carry out statutory duties in relation to the enforcement of school attendance.
- To carry out statutory duties in respect of the identification and tracking of children known to be, or at risk of becoming, missing from education (CME).

2.12 Persistent Absenteeism (PA)

Pupils are classified as 'persistently absent' if they miss 10% or more of school due to authorised or/and unauthorised absence. This equates to missing at least 19 days of their schooling across the full school year. Absence at this level is of significant concern. Schools will have monitoring

systems in place to identify children who are at risk of falling into this category, and will involve parents / carers in formulating specific plans to prevent deterioration and to build-back attendance levels.

3. Holidays in Term Time

Changes in Government Regulations mean that, as of 1st September 2013, there is no entitlement for parents to withdraw their children for authorised leave of absence in term time. Head teachers can only grant leave of absence during term-time if there are **'exceptional circumstances'** surrounding the request, **and** parents have made **an application in advance**. If a Headteacher is satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to warrant the granting of leave of absence, the Headteacher will then determine the number of school days a child can be away from school.

The principles for defining exceptional are: 'rare, significant, unavoidable and short', with 'unavoidable' meaning an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time.

Taking leave of absence in term time does affect child's educational progress, and parents are strongly discouraged from withdrawing their child from school during term time.

All applications for leave of absence must be made in advance to school. Request forms are available at the school office and on the school website.

Any period of leave taken without the agreement of the school, or in excess of the agreed number of days, will be classed as unauthorised absence, and may result in the issue of Education Penalty Notices by the Local Authority (see Appendix 2).

4. The Legal Framework

Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children of compulsory school age receive a suitable, full-time education. This can be by regular attendance at school, at alternative provision, or by elective home education.

The Local Authority has a range of legal powers to promote and enforce regular school attendance:

- Penalty Notices (Section 444A Education Act 1996)
- Prosecution of Parents / Carers in Magistrates' Court (Section 444 (1) / Section 444(1A) Education Act 1996)
- Application to the Family Court for an Education Supervision Order in respect of the child (Children Act 1989)
- School Attendance Order (Section 437 Education Act 1996)
- Parenting Order (Section 8 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

Each case is considered on an individual basis, but the circumstances in which a Penalty Notice for non-attendance may be issued by the Local Authority include:

- Unauthorised absence from school
- Unauthorised leave of absence during term time
- Unwarranted delayed return from authorised leave of absence, e.g. in excess of the agreed number of days
- Persistent late arrival at school after the register has closed.

Head teachers can submit written requests to the Authority's Attendance Service asking for a formal Warning Letter to be issued to parents in respect of their child's unauthorised absence, and

for an Education Penalty Notice to be subsequently served should there be no immediate improvement in the situation.

A minimum evidential requirement of ten (10) school sessions lost to unauthorised absence by any pupil in any one term, or across two half terms, is required to trigger the Penalty Notice process. A session is a half-day.

Where the Local Authority is of the opinion that a pupil's level of attendance is so low that initiating prosecution proceedings in the Magistrates' Court would be more appropriate, the Authority reserves the right not to issue a penalty notice.

4.1 Education Penalty Notices

The Authority issues Education Penalty Notices by post. Payment of an Education Penalty Notice is £60 if paid within 21 days, rising to £120 if paid after this time, but within 28 days. Education Penalty Notices are issued separately to each parent in respect of each child. A possible exception to this would be where parents are separated, and one parent has taken a child on unauthorised leave of absence without the knowledge / consent of the other parent.

The Local Authority retains any revenue from the Education Penalty Notices to cover enforcement costs.

Non-payment of an Education Penalty Notice will result in the withdrawal of the Notice, and would normally trigger prosecution proceedings at Magistrates Court under Section 444 Education Act 1996. There is no right of appeal by parents/carers against an Education Penalty Notice.

5. Deletion from Roll

Schools can only lawfully remove a child from their school roll under certain circumstances in accordance with Government Regulations. Schools are required to inform the Local Authority of the details of all children who are removed from roll at non-standard transition times.

6. Elective Home Education

One of the grounds under which a child can lawfully be removed from a school roll is if a parent notifies the Headteacher in writing that they are withdrawing their child from school in order to take full responsibility for provision of the child's education. School must notify the Local Authority, as the Authority will then have responsibility for assessing the suitability of education that is being provided for the child. The Authority must first consent to elective home education when a child has special educational needs and is placed in specialist provision.

Schools and the Authority respect that it is a parental right to pursue elective home education. It is, however, important that when parents opt to home educate, this is a positive choice and in the best interests of the child, rather than the option of last resort. Parents should be aware that elective home education is not a route to obtaining a place in a school of their choice which may have previously been declined, or a way of accessing alternative provision.

7. Children Looked After (CLA)

The attendance of children in the care of the Local Authority is also monitored by the Headteacher and Governors of the Virtual School. Use of the B and C codes should be agreed with the Headteacher of the Virtual School. The use of the N registration code for looked after children should be rare, as reasons for any absence should be obtained as a matter of priority. It is essential that contact is made with a child's social worker and the Authority's LACES team as soon as attendance concerns emerge. Attendance staff should routinely inform school's designated teacher for looked after children of their looked after children's attendance rates.

8. Pupils Attending Off-Site Educational Provision

Any pupil who is attending off-site educational provision should be marked using registration code D or B by their main school (according to the circumstances of the individual placement).

Code B should be used when pupils are present at off-site educational provision that has been approved by school. School is ultimately responsible for the safeguarding of pupils educated off-site, and use of the B code signifies that the education is supervised and measures are in place to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of the pupil.

School must ensure that the B codes reflect the daily attendance of the pupil at the off-site provision. For example, if a pupil misses a day due to illness, then the main school attendance register will show this day as an I and not a B.

It is important for agreement and clarity to be reached between school and the off-site provision with respect to arrangements for daily tracking and follow-up of any absence. There should be daily communication between school and the off-site provision in respect of individual pupils' absence.

The law allows for dual registration of pupils at more than one school. The D code is used to signify that the pupil was not expected to attend the session because they were scheduled to attend the other school at which they are registered. Again, an agreement must be in place with respect to who has responsibility for the daily tracking of attendance and absence.

9. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed annually by School and the Local Authority and updated in accordance with any new legislation or guidance, or changes to any other relevant procedures or documents. This policy should also be read in conjunction with the Authority's policies on Enforcement Procedures, Children Missing from Education, and Elective Home Education.

Signed:

Date: 2nd December 2021

Date to be reviewed: 2nd December 2022