



Guidelines on School Attendance

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Legal Background

The statutory position regarding attendance at school is defined in the following Acts and Regulations:

- The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Sections 30-44.
- The Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Amendment, etc. Regulations 1993.

Under this legislation, it is the parent or carer's duty to ensure that a child attends school regularly. The legislation details the action to be taken by the authority where a child does not attend school.

1.2 Information on attendance and absence

The authority is required to provide parents with information regarding their child's attendance.

The authority is also required to provide the Scottish Government with information on attendance and absence in schools on an annual basis.

1.3 Education, Communities and Economy Policy

The legislation allows the local authority to prescribe other rules in addition to these statutory requirements. The rules prescribed by Midlothian Council Education, Communities and Economy which are applicable to all schools are set out in Appendix 1.

2.0 Register of Admission and Withdrawal

A register of admission and withdrawal must be kept at every school in respect of each school year. This should be maintained on the Education, Communities and Economy - Management Information System for schools.

2.1 Admission

Where a pupil has been admitted to a school, the full name, date of birth and pupil details should be entered into the Education, Communities and Economy Management Information System for schools. The receiving school should contact the enrolling pupil's current school in order to arrange for the electronic transfer of pupil data. The receiving school should also request the transfer of the Pupil Profile Record folder.

2.2 Withdrawal

Where a pupil has been withdrawn from the school, the register should be updated with the reason for withdrawal from the school roll.

A pupil's record should be archived in the following circumstances.

- The pupil is known to be attending a new school. Notification in writing by the new school should normally be accepted as enough to remove the pupil's name from the register. In certain circumstances, the Head Teacher may wish to ask the Education Welfare Officer to investigate and confirm that the family has moved. Where no letter is received, the pupil's name should not be removed from the register until confirmation is obtained.
- * **Pupils can only be withdrawn from the roll and the record archived with the prior approval of the Director, Education, Communities and Economy or the Head of Education, in the following circumstances.**
- A child or young person of school age who has been withdrawn from the school with the consent of the authority i.e. to be educated at home. **prior approval required**
- A pupil who has been excluded from one school by the authority and transferred to another school or establishment. **prior approval required**
- A pupil for whom a specific arrangement has been made by the authority, so that the pupil will receive his/her education elsewhere, at a place other than an educational establishment. **prior approval required**
- A pupil who is attending college with no expectation that he/she will return to his/her base school i.e. a Christmas Leaver. **prior approval required**
- A pupil who starts a college course in August or September, with the expectation of qualifying after he/she has reached the school leaving age. In such cases, the pupil should be withdrawn from the school roll from the starting date of the college course. **prior approval required**

2.3 Children Missing from Education

If a child has been absent for four consecutive weeks, and the family cannot be traced, the Education Welfare Officer will assist in tracing the pupil, using procedures outlined in "Children Missing from Education", in the Scottish Executive guidance document *Safe and Well: Good Practice in Schools and Education Authorities for Keeping Children Safe and Well*. This is available at www.scotland.gov.uk

The pupil should remain on the school roll until traced or until the Director, Education, Communities and Economy or the Head of Education authorises removal from the roll.

3.0 Register of Attendance

A register of pupil attendance will be kept by every school using the Education, Communities and Economy - Management Information System for schools.

The attendance register should be completed for each morning and afternoon for each day that the school is open to pupils. The relevant Attendance/ Absence code should be made against the name of each pupil. (Appendix 2). It is important to ensure that the correct code is used as these codes determine the number of recorded absences and the reason for absence.

By the end of each school week all pupil attendance information for that week must be entered in the attendance register on the Education, Communities and Economy - Management Information System for schools.

4.0 Protocol for dealing with unexplained absence at the start of a school day

Head Teachers should ensure that the school has a policy for dealing with the unexplained non-arrival of a pupil at the start of the school day. The policy should be made available to all parents and carers, and regular reminders placed in school newsletters. A sample *Information Sheet* for parents and carers is appended for schools to make use of when drafting information for parents and carers (App 3). To minimise demands on the time of office or other staff, the following guidelines should be followed, and should be incorporated into the school policy for unexplained non-arrival of pupils. In formatting policy and practice guidance at school level Head Teachers should take account of the age, maturity and ability of pupils to act and behave in a responsible manner in relation to school attendance. Where a school is dealing with very young children at Nursery and the early years stages of Primary then a much more rigorous approach should be considered. However, the care and welfare of all children and young people is an important part of our work and Head Teachers are asked to maintain a rigorous approach where individual pupils may be vulnerable whatever their age or maturity.

- Parents should be asked to inform the school in advance of any planned absence such as a doctor's appointment.
- Parents should be made aware that it is in the best interests of the child's safety and well-being to make sure that the school has their up-to-date contact details. Problems commonly arise, for example, where there is no land-line telephone in the home, and the parent changes to a different mobile number without informing the school.
- It should be made clear to parents that the onus is on them to contact the school if their child is absent and that they should not rely on the school to contact them in this situation.
- Parents should be asked to inform the school by a set time in the morning if a pupil is unable to attend school.
- If a pupil has not arrived at school and there is no explanation from the parent, then the Head Teacher should decide on how best to investigate non-arrival based on the pupil's known circumstances. If the Head Teacher believes that the parent may be unaware of the child's absence, and if the pupil could be considered vulnerable then the school should contact the parent by phone.
- The Head Teacher should set a cut-off time, after which phone calls to parents should commence. This needs to be a reasonable time from the school's start time, to avoid contacting parents unnecessarily when a child is simply late. It is suggested that approximately 30 minutes from the start of the school day is a reasonable period of time.

The development of a protocol for dealing with unexplained absence at the start of the school day should be based on the context of the school. School size, movement of pupils during the school day, age and maturity of pupils, local knowledge of the community, geographic location of the school will all have a bearing on the development of policy and practice. The policy and practice must be not only appropriate to the context of the school and meet the needs of the pupil, it must also be manageable and achievable within the resources available to the school.

4.1 Lateness

A pupil is late for school if he or she arrives after the start of a morning or afternoon session but before the mid-point of that session.

A record should be kept of late arrivals and early departures and these situations should be dealt with through the school's normal procedures for the management of pupils.

In a few cases of persistent lateness it may be necessary to take further action:

- In the first instance, the Head Teacher or designated member of school staff should make every effort to obtain the parents' co-operation to ensure the pupil's punctuality. Head Teachers should issue a written invitation to the parents or carers to visit the school to discuss the matter. Where appropriate, the pupil should be included in this meeting.
- If contact is established with the parents or carers, the Head Teacher should explain the benefits of punctuality in the context of school attendance. If possible, an assurance should be obtained that the parents or carers will take all reasonable measures to respond in a positive way to the problem of lateness.
 - Where parents or carers do not respond to the Head Teacher's request for a meeting or do not agree to co-operate with the school to resolve the problem, a referral should be made to the Education Welfare Officer through the local Integration Team.

5.0 Unsatisfactory attendance and unexplained absences of three days or more

A pupil is absent from school if he or she fails to attend school for a period greater than half of the morning or afternoon session.

The Head Teacher or designated member of staff should pursue an absence enquiry with the parent when there is an **unexplained** absence of three days or more (i.e. six openings or more).

- If no satisfactory explanation is received, or if the unexplained absence continues, then the Head Teacher should send a letter to the child's home requesting a meeting with the parents or carers to discuss the situation.
- If there is no response the Head Teacher should send a Recorded Delivery letter, again requesting a meeting.
- If the Head Teacher is still unable to address the problem of poor pupil attendance, a referral should be made to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) through the local Integration Team. The EWO will then send out a letter advising the family of his/her intention to carry out a home visit. The EWO will undertake an assessment, advise the family of their responsibilities and discuss strategies for improving the situation.

- If, following the involvement of the EWO, the matter has still not been resolved, the Head Teacher should ask via the local Integration Team for a warning letter to be sent to the parent by the Director, Education, Communities and Economy.
- Where the situation remains unresolved after the stages outlined above, referral of a pupil to an Area Attendance Advisory Group (AAAG) should be made by the Head Teacher. This referral will normally only be made after the pupil has been supported through the staged system of support within the school and the referral has been endorsed by the School Liaison Group (SLG) or Under-12s Forum.

6.0 Applications for Exemption

Midlothian Council has delegated the power to grant exemption from school to the Director, Education, Communities and Economy. All applications submitted by parents to the school for the exemption of their child should be referred to the Inclusive Services Manager.

Applications for exemption do not refer to absence for holidays. Exemption refers to a parent or guardian requesting exemption from school attendance for a child over 14 years of age because of family circumstances and where it may lead to hardship if the child is not at home to help for a limited period.

The authority has a duty to arrange for educational provision to be continued outside school, as far as is practicable, for a child or young person given such an exemption.

6.1 Authorised Absence

Authorised Absence

The category of authorised absence includes absence deriving from reasons such as:

- *Sickness*
- *Medical and dental treatment*
- *Bereavement*
- *Short-term exceptional domestic circumstances*
- *Religious observance*
- *Meetings prior to and in court*
- *Attendance at or in connection with a Children's Hearing or Care Review*
- *Weddings of immediate family*
- *Agreed debates, sports, musical or theatrical productions not arranged by or in conjunction with the school*
- *Sanctioned extended absence in relation to children of travelling families.*

Extended Leave with Parental Consent

Where most family holidays will be recorded as unauthorised absence (see below), extended leave with parental consent should not be considered the same as a family holiday. Extended leave with parental consent should be recorded separately outside the figures for attendance and absence, and includes circumstances such as:

- *Extended overseas educational trips not organised by the school*
- *Short-term parental placement abroad*
- *Family returning to its country of origin (to care for a relative, or for cultural reasons)*
- *Leave in relation to the children of travelling families.*

Exceptional Domestic Circumstances

Absences related to short-term exceptional domestic circumstances can be classified as both authorised and unauthorised absence. Authorised absence under this heading covers situations such as:

- The period immediately after an accident or illness
- A period of serious or critical illness of a close relative
- A domestic crisis which causes serious disruption to the family home, causing temporary relocation

7.0 Requests for Holiday Leave during Term-Time

A Head Teacher may accept the absence from school of any pupil for the purpose of a family holiday for a period not exceeding two weeks in a 12-month period. The Head Teacher should be notified in advance by the parent.

For a request of more than two weeks' absence, the parent must apply in writing to the Head of Education.

'A guide for parents about school attendance' (Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2010) states that absences for family holidays are generally classified as unauthorised. However there is specific guidance on the classification of absences for Family Holidays in Paragraphs 16, 17 and 18 of the Circular, reprinted below.

Family Holidays During Term Time

Schools will not normally give a family permission to take pupils out of school for holidays during term-time. This means that if your child is off school because you are away on holiday the school will record this as an **unauthorised absence**. It is up to education authorities to decide what sanctions they will use if there is an unauthorised absence. There are some circumstances where permission might be given for a holiday during term-time. This would include when:

- A family needs time together to recover from distress.
- A family holiday is restricted to term-time because of the parent's job (for example a parent is in the armed services or emergency services).
- There are other circumstances considered to be exceptional.

A family holiday classified under the 'authorised absence' category should not include such reasons as:

- The availability of cheap holidays
- The availability of desired accommodation
- Poor weather experienced during school holidays
- Holidays which overlap the beginning or end of term
- Parental difficulty obtaining leave (with local judgement applied in cases where evidence is provided by the employer that it cannot accommodate leave during school holidays without serious consequences).

Family holidays with the above and similar characteristics should be classified as unauthorised absence. While otherwise unsatisfactory attendance may well be one reason for a school to withhold agreement to absence for a family holiday, it may not be the only factor needing to be taken into account. The decision on recording absence as authorised and unauthorised should therefore be based simply on whether the school has given prior agreement to the absence or not, using the criteria outlined above. Where a school's prior agreement has not been sought the absence should automatically be classed as unauthorised.

For extended visits to relatives overseas, the school should discuss with the pupil's parents or carers the practical steps that they plan to take to ensure the continuity of education for the pupil.

8.0 Information for Parents

Information for parents on pupil attendance and absence should be provided in the school handbook.

9.0 Annual returns to the Local Authority and the Scottish Government.

Information on attendance and absences in schools will be submitted to the Scottish Government each year via the Scottish Government Education Department reporting process, known as ScotXed. The data shall be extracted in electronic form from the Education, Communities and Economy – Management Information System for schools.

Head Teachers will be asked by the School Support Service on an annual basis to verify their attendance reports.

10.0 Further information

If further information or assistance is required on any of the procedures detailed above please contact:

The Head of Education
Education, Communities and Economy
Midlothian Council
Fairfield House
DALKEITH
EH22 3ZG

0131 271 3719

11.0	Appendix 1	Attendance Rules
	Appendix 2	Attendance / Absence Codes
	Appendix 3	Information for Parents: Absence from School

ATTENDANCE RULES

In addition to the statutory position defined in The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Sections 30-44 and The Education (School and Placing Information) (Scotland) Amendment, etc. Regulations 1993, the Education, Communities and Economy may prescribe other attendance rules. Accordingly, the Education, Communities and Economy has approved Attendance Rules 1-8 below.

- 1 In determining the mid-point of a morning or afternoon session, any morning or afternoon interval is included eg in a school with a 9.00 am start and a lunch interval starting at 12.30 pm, the mid-point of the morning session is defined at 10.45 am, regardless of the timing or duration of any morning interval.

Where a school opens or closes at other than the usual time, and notice of time has been given in advance to parents and pupils, the actual time of opening or closure should be used in determining mid-points.
- 2 For the purpose of these attendance rules, presence or absence of a pupil at the morning session should be regarded as wholly independent of his or her presence in the afternoon session and vice versa.
- 3 A pupil who arrives after the mid-point of a morning or afternoon session will be marked as Late 2 and subsequently absent for that session.
- 4 A pupil who has gone from school before the mid-point of a morning or afternoon session is complete should be marked absent for that session, unless they have the approval of the Head Teacher to leave.
- 5 The Authority may approve absence from school of a pupil who is not sick, or is the subject of an order granting exemption from school attendance under Section 34 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, or has been temporarily excluded from school. Approval can only be given by either the Director, Education, Communities and Economy or Head of Education.
- 6 A secondary Head Teacher may give "approved study leave" for pupils in classes S4, S5 and S6 who are preparing for certificate examinations. The number of days must not exceed twenty in any school year. Additional "approved study leave" may be given, subject to the approval of the Director, Education, Communities and Economy. "Approved study leave" will be recorded as "on authorised absence" on the pupil attendance register.
- 7 The Authority actively discourages parents from withdrawing their children from school during term-time for the purpose of family holidays, because of the disruption caused to the education of the individual child and for others in that pupil's class. Where parents make a specific request, however a Head Teacher may accept the absence from school of any pupil for a period not exceeding two weeks in a 12 month period for the purpose of a family holiday. The Head Teacher should be notified in advance by the parent.

For a request for more than two weeks absence, the parent must apply in writing to the Head of Education. Pupils will be marked absent for such approved family holidays.
- 8 Due to unforeseen circumstances, it may be necessary for a Head Teacher to effect an early closure of the school. The Director, Education, Communities and Economy may instruct the Head Teacher that all pupils are to be recorded as having been present for the whole of that day or for the afternoon/morning session.

[The procedure to be followed in these circumstances is contained in the Policy Guidelines on *Emergency Planning – Procedures for Schools – Severe Weather, etc*]

ATTENDANCE REASONS

Note – there are two types of attendance codes in SEEMIS Click & Go – single digit and triple digit. Which code the user sees depends on which screen or report is being used. Both types of codes are detailed here.

- Present

K (LT2) – Late 2 - Use when pupil arrives late during the second half of an opening. Classified as an **authorised** absence.

L (LAT) – Late - Use when pupil arrives late during the first half of an opening. Classified as an **attendance**.

A (ABS) – Other Authorised Absence – this category cover situations such as: -

- Immediate family weddings
- Bereavements
- Religious observances
- Attendance at court
- Attendance at child care review
- Attendance at children's hearing
- Lack of transport – including due to bad weather
- Sporting & cultural events not arranged by the school, but approved by them

P (PER) – Medical / Dental Appointments – to be used for all medical / dental appointments outside of school. This is classed as attendance

Q (DCA) – Exceptional Domestic Circumstances Authorised – covers situations such as: -

- The period immediately after an accident or illness
- A period of serious or critical illness of a close relative
- A domestic crisis which causes serious disruption to the family home, causing temporary relocation.

R (DCU) – Exceptional Domestic Circumstances Unauthorised – used for all other exceptional domestic circumstances not included above.

X (EXC) – Exclusion – to be used for temporary exclusions

G (UPH) – Family Holiday Unauthorised – the following examples are of reasons / circumstances that would cause a family holiday to be classed as unauthorised: -

- The availability of cheap holidays
- The availability of desired accommodation
- Holidays which overlap the beginning or end of term
- Parental difficulty obtaining leave (with local judgement applied in cases where evidence is provided by the employer that it cannot accommodate leave during school holidays without serious consequences)

E (PHL) - Family Holiday Authorised – The majority of holidays taken within term time should be categorised as unauthorised absence. However, it is acceptable under exceptional circumstances to authorise a family holiday during term time. Such circumstances may include: -

- A family holiday judged to be important to the well being and cohesion of the family, following serious or terminal illness, bereavement or other traumatic events.

D (SEL) – Medical – this includes any time where a pupil is off sick, with proof of illness such as a parental letter or medical certificate. Classified as **authorised absence**.

B (SEP) – Sickness with Educational Provision – Use where a pupil is off sick with an appropriate level of educational provision is being provided – e.g. where a pupil is receiving tuition in hospital. Classified as **authorised absence**.

7 (RFS) – Refusal to attend – use this category where a pupil refuses to attend school. Classified as **unauthorised absence**.

S (STY) – Study leave – use from the start of the official exam timetable until the restart of timetabled lessons in school. This category is classified as **attendance**.

@ (TRU) – Truancy – use for Truancy. This is classified as **unauthorised absence**.

U (UNA) – Absence – Reason Unknown – use where no reason has been given for the pupil's absence. Classified as **unauthorised absence**.

O (OAT) – Provision Elsewhere – use where a pupil is receiving educational provision at another establishment – e.g. pupil attending another school for subject not available in base school, pupil attending college, etc. This category is classified as **attendance**.

W (WRK) – Work Experience – included work experience or volunteering, arranged or approved by the school. This category is classified as **attendance**.

V (VIS) – Excursion – use for trips out of school arranged or approved by the school. This is classed as **attendance**.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS ON ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL

The attached information leaflet is provided as an example that schools can make use of or adapt to suit the needs of the school.

Should a school make substantial changes to the leaflet and wish to continue to make use of the front page reference to the Education, Communities and Economy then the revised draft leaflet should be reviewed and discussed with the Head of Education prior to being printed and distributed to parents or carers.



Information for Parents: **Absence from School**

The Education, Communities and Economy would like pupils to make the most of their education by attending school on a regular basis. As a parent/ carer, you can help us with this, by ensuring that your child attends regularly.

We realise, however, that there will be occasions when your child is unable to attend school. This leaflet tells you what to do on such occasions. It also tells you how the school may respond when your child is absent. By following the guidance in this leaflet, you will help us to make sure that your child is safe.

Midlothian Council
Education, Communities and Economy

What do I do if I know my child is going to be absent from school, for example to see a doctor or orthodontist?

You should tell the school the date(s) and the reason, as soon as you know. That way, the school will know not to expect your child on that date. You can tell them by letter, which is our preferred method as this allows the school to make best use of its support staff time. The school's contact details are at the end of this sheet.

What do I do if my child is going to be absent today, for example, because he/she is unwell?

You should tell the school before 08:30¹. Then the school will know not to expect your child to arrive. You can tell them by phone. The school's contact details are at the end of this sheet.

We would emphasise that in this situation it is up to you to contact the school. The school will try to contact you if the Head Teacher has reason to believe that you might not know that your child is not at school, but **you should not rely on the school phoning as a matter of course**. Any calls the school makes about absences will be made after 09:15².

What if my child goes missing from school in the course of a day?

This is unlikely, but if it happens, the school will phone you or the emergency contact whose name and contact numbers you have supplied to the school.

Can I be sure that the school knows how to contact me if it has to?

Only if you have given the school your up-to-date contact details. For example, if your contact number is a mobile, and you change your mobile number, you must tell the school. Please do not just assume that the school will find you somehow.

We have tried to make this leaflet as clear as possible, but if there is anything you do not understand, or if you want to discuss any issues to do with your child's attendance at school, please contact the Head Teacher. Please remember that these arrangements are to keep your child safe. We thank you for your help in this.

The school phone number is:

The school address is:

¹ School should enter appropriate time.

² As 2. above.