

Policy on Promoting and Managing Pupil Attendance April 2015

1.0 Statement of Principles

- 1.1 Aberdeenshire Council's Education and Children's Services is committed to ensuring that all children and young people have positive and equal opportunities to learn and develop. We provide high quality educational experiences and learning opportunities which promote achievement for all.

Pupils who do not attend school regularly are unlikely to reach their potential. Significant concern exists for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people who do not attend school.

This policy aims to improve overall levels of pupil attendance through:

- Providing clear advice and guidance on Promoting and Managing Pupil Attendance;
 - Ensuring that robust procedures for the recording, monitoring and review of attendance are used consistently across establishments;
 - Supporting early and staged intervention to support children, young people and families;
 - Outlining clear protocols for early intervention and partnership working.
- 1.2 This policy and the associated Promoting and Managing Pupil Attendance Guidelines comply with current national and local guidance. They use existing frameworks to ensure that pupils are consistently supported to access their right to education.

2.0 Policy Focus and Target Audience

- 2.1 This policy and associated guidelines apply to all learning environments in Aberdeenshire and are relevant to all pupils. Staff, stakeholders and partner agencies are included within the scope of the guidelines.

3.0 Legal Framework

- 3.1 Under Section 35 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, non-attendance at school without reasonable excuse is an offence.

1. 'Where the child is of school age..... On one or more occasions fails without reasonable excuse to attend regularly then his parents shall be guilty of an offence against this section.

Under the Act reasonable excuse is defined as:

- 1) 'There is no school within walking distance of the child's home and the education authority has not provided transport or other appropriate arrangements to enable the child to attend school regularly'.
- 2) 'The child has been ill and therefore unable to attend school'.
- 3) 'There are other circumstances which in the opinion of the education authority or the court afford a reasonable excuse'.

The Schools General (Scotland) Regulations (1975) makes clear the duty placed on Head Teachers to ensure that an accurate register is held. Head Teachers are required to ensure that all staff are aware of the importance of this duty, and of the individual responsibilities involved.

Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (2000) - Section 1 protects the right of children to education of a suitable quality.

Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended by the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009. A clear legal framework underpins the system for supporting learners with additional support needs. This policy requires establishments to recognise that additional support may be required by a child or young person due to a low attendance rate, regardless of the cause.

4.0 Policy Framework

- 4.1 The Scottish Government's *Getting It Right For Every Child* (GIRFEC) provides a framework for all agencies involved in Children's Services to work together with parents in achieving improved outcomes for children and young people. Establishments must use Aberdeenshire GIRFEC approaches when managing non-attendance.

National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014 makes clear links between attendance and Child Protection. Managers are required to consider the risks stemming from non-attendance. The GIRFEC wellbeing indicators must be used when assessing the needs of children and young people.

Included, engaged and involved (Part 1: attendance in Scottish schools) gives clear guidance on non-attendance. This policy and guidelines comply with the advice given.

5.0 Policy Content and Impact

- 5.1 Absence from school regardless of the cause disrupts learning. Research carried out by the Department for Children, Schools and Families indicates that a 1% increase in attendance is likely to result in a 5-6% increase in attainment. This policy and guidance on monitoring and promoting attendance seeks to reduce the overall rate of absence across Aberdeenshire schools. By improving opportunities for our young people to achieve and attain, we enable them to achieve their personal ambitions.

Establishments are required to implement the guidelines on promoting and managing attendance. The guidelines provide establishments with robust procedures for the recording, monitoring and review of attendance. Used consistently across Education and Children's Services establishments, they will promote understanding of Local Authority expectations and requirements amongst parents, carers and the wider community.

- 5.2 The guidelines emphasise the important of Early Intervention and action planning. They set out the range of multi-agency supports available through GIRFEC assessment processes. Establishments must guarantee that pupils with problematic attendance patterns have their needs assessed and are able to access suitable alternative programmes. An appropriate attendance target must be agreed as part of any action plan.

Relevant partner agencies must be involved as is appropriate and necessary in supporting the child or young person to address any issue contributing to their low attendance.

- 5.3 Establishments will refer pupils whose attendance remains at an unacceptably low level to other forums. These forums include the relevant Aberdeenshire Council Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. The purpose of any such referral is to seek interventions which will enable the child or young person to access education.

6.0 Roles and Responsibilities

- 6.1 All stakeholders have responsibilities for promoting and managing good levels of attendance. Learners are responsible for behaving in a positive manner, and working within the boundaries of school policy and procedure.

Parents and Carers are bound by a legal responsibility to ensure that their child receives appropriate education and therefore must work with the Local Authority and its' representatives to ensure that this statutory right is upheld.

Schools are responsible for providing a coherent and inclusive curriculum which will stimulate and motivate all learners. The promotion and safeguarding of health and wellbeing is a responsibility shared by all staff.

- 6.2 The role of Head Teachers is to ensure the implementation of this policy and accompanying guidelines and these are fully implemented in their establishments. Establishments must prepare and publish a statement on how the establishment promotes and manages attendance.

Head Teachers will ensure that robust systems are in place to enable accurate recording and monitoring of pupil attendance. They will ensure that all staff know and understand the importance of their role(s) within these processes.

- 6.3 Quality Improvement Officers will monitor attendance patterns with schools. They may offer advice and may become involved in individual cases as they progress to the later stages of the policy.

Aberdeenshire Council provides information for statistical analysis and comparison via ScotXed data exchanges. A team of officers working within the Management Information System share the responsibility of managing this data, and organising/facilitating training in the use of the relevant systems.

- 6.4 Aberdeenshire Council's Senior Management Team is responsible for monitoring and tracking attendance across all Education and Children's Services Establishments. They may request further information on trends or individual cases from schools as part of this process.

7.0 Equalities

- 7.1 This policy adheres to the principle of keeping the child or young person and their family at the heart of the process surrounding the management and promotion of good attendance.

- 7.2 It is anticipated that there will be no adverse impact on the race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation or religion/belief arising from this policy. An impact assessment has been undertaken.

8.0 Monitoring and Review

- 8.1 This policy will be reviewed on a 3 yearly cycle by a Quality Improvement Officer nominated by the Director of Education.

A report will be prepared and presented to the Education and Children's Services Committee should it be necessary to request any change.