

# Attendance Policy (Secondary Schools)

August 2025

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## Introduction

The Highland Council is committed to providing an excellent education through a dedicated focus on wellbeing and inclusion. Good school attendance is the foundation of our ambition for our children and young people to reach their full potential and is fundamental to Getting it Right for Every Child, raising attainment for all, and securing positive and sustained destinations. Attendance is defined as participation in a programme of educational activities arranged and agreed by the school, including both attendance at school, and attending learning experiences with other providers whilst still on the school roll (The Scottish Government, 2019). A full description can be accessed [here](#).

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to schools about positive approaches to promoting school attendance, school attendance procedures and alternative attendance arrangements.

This policy should also be read in conjunction with the Highland Council's [Children Missing in Education Policy](#), the [Child Protection and Safeguarding Handbook for Education](#) and should be read alongside the information available in the dedicated MIS Portal which can be accessed [Pupil Absence / Attendance Codes & F.A.Qs](#)

## Promoting and Managing School Attendance

The Scottish Government has produced clear guidance [Included, engaged and involved part 1: promoting and managing school attendance](#). The key messages underpin the policy. School leaders, guidance staff and others will find this useful in reviewing school-based approaches within this policy and national guidance.

## Recording Attendance

There is a legal responsibility for schools to complete and maintain accurate registers of school attendance in SEEMiS. Class teachers are responsible for completing attendance checks for the children and young people attending their classes and this should take place at least twice per day for primary and period by period for secondary. Accurate attendance is also vital in the case of a school emergency.

Schools having due regard to the welfare, wellbeing and health and safety of children and young people, must be in a position to account for those present or out on an organised activity at all times. The Scottish Government collect and review attendance figures for all Local Authorities for the previous school day, so it is vital that they are up-to-date and accurate by the end of each school day.

The Highland Council has clear protocols and procedures in place to support schools with the recording and management of attendance using SEEMiS. The latest version of the attendance and absence codes are available for schools to access [here](#).

In addition, a comprehensive set of scenarios with the appropriate codes has also

been produced and is available at [Attendance and Absence Codes - Scenario Led](#).

The [Management Information System \(MIS\) Portal Home Page](#) offers a wealth of information on SEEMIS attendance issues that school should consult as required.

#### **Step 1:**

At the start of each school opening in primary and each period in secondary, pupil attendance is recorded on SEEMIS. Any pupil absences reported to the school office prior to attendance being taken are entered directly into SEEMIS

#### **Step 2:**

Once registration has been taken on SEEMIS, the school will attempt to make contact with the parent/carer(s) of any children who are not present and for whom an absence message has not been received. Schools may use email, phone-call or text according to which the school deem most effective.

#### **Step 3:**

If contact is made with parent/carer of absent pupil(s), SEEMIS must be updated timeously with the appropriate SEEMIS absence code.

#### **Step 4:**

If contact cannot be made with parent/carer of absent pupil(s), SEEMIS must be updated with the 'TBC' code unless the child is deemed vulnerable in which case the CME policy should be considered.

### **Tracking and Monitoring Attendance**

- Schools should have a clear vision and strategic plan to promote and manage attendance which is evident in school QA systems/ calendars.
- It is recommended that all schools complete the Forth Valley and West Lothian Attendance Self-Evaluation toolkit in order to evaluate their processes and inform improvement activities. The toolkit can be downloaded from here: [FVWL-RIC-Attendance-Self-Evaluation-Toolkit.xlsx](#)
- Also, schools will need to confirm identified roles and responsibilities for personnel and systems to support the tracking and monitoring of attendance as per the flowchart on the next page. An audit of the culture, systems and practice

of all schools- which helps identify roles and responsibilities has previously been shared with Pastoral DHTs and is available here: [Add link](#)

- The Attendance Tracker (using SEEMIS BI reports) that has been made available to all secondary schools should be at the heart of data collection and analysis to support this process.

Schools are reminded to follow the [Children Missing in Education Policy](#) to ensure the immediate safety of children and young people.

Below is a summary of the process of escalated interventions in a CYP's attendance pattern. Relationships, communication and knowing our data are the key components in building successful interventions.

### Step 1

Monitoring & tracking of attendance should be clearly structured in a school's QA processes. Positive early intervention strategies should be considered as a priority to reduce non-attendance. All teaching and support staff have a role to play in promoting the importance of attendance.

### Step 2

Where an attendance threshold has been crossed for reasons that suggest further deterioration is likely (90% or 80%) the appropriate member of staff should have a discussion with the pupil (at 90%) and the parent/carer (at 80%) to identify support to improve attendance.

*Letters which could be used to set up these and subsequent meetings are available in Appendices 1-4 though use of these is not a prescriptive part of the policy and schools should strive to improve attendance through relationship building and liaison with home rather than the more sterile and uncontextualized use of letters at a given point. In summary- choose the right intervention at the right time.*

### Step 3

If step 2 has been actioned, the pupil's attendance should be reviewed over a period of four weeks. This should be recorded on their child's plan if already established or be entered into pastoral notes.

### Step 4

Should attendance not improve after four weeks, parent/carer(s) should be invited to a solution-focused meeting to support attendance. This may include professionals from within the school's network. Child's plan (if established) or pastoral notes should be updated. A further four-week review point should be agreed by all.

### **Step 5**

Should attendance not improve over two months and attendance is now below 80%, schools should make contact with Practice Lead Schools to discuss further options. Parent/Carer(s) and associated professionals should be invited to a follow up child's plan meeting.

At this stage schools should be considering what external support is available. Youth Development Officers (YDOs) seek to target those young people who stand to benefit most from working with them. The work is aimed at 15% of the population just above the 5% with poorest outcomes. It is likely that low attendance / engagement with learning will be a barrier for many of these young people in achieving their own goals. Therefore, Youth Development Officers have a role in working with young people and schools in removing this and other barriers to their learning.

Schools have also been encouraged to explore the Mentoring networks previously established by MFMS. A referral to a CSW may also be appropriate if not previously considered.

Depending on the nature of the relationships built up in the earlier stages it may be that schools wish parents to hear from a different- more formal- voice. In this case, schools can approach their ESO and having explained what steps have been taken, can request that the ESO writes a letter in support of the schools' efforts.

### **Step 6**

Should attendance fall to 50% or less over 3 months, the AQIM team should be notified to write to parent/carers and consider the need for an attendance order (for those of compulsory school age). A generic letter can be used by AQIMs to remind parents of their obligations and of the risk of compulsory measures being imposed. It will be for AQIM and Chief Officers to decide on next steps if this does not elicit a meaningful response.

## Part-time Attendance

There are exceptional circumstances in which the needs of some children and young people are best met through part-time attendance at school.

This will include:

- A medical condition which prevents a child or young person's full-time attendance at school, and they are unable to undertake any other learning when they are not in school
- A returning OOA pupil requiring part-time arrangements as part of their transition back into a mainstream setting with some of the time supplemented by specialist services (H2H, Airport House etc)
- Where a child or young person has become significantly disengaged from school and part time attendance is agreed as a suitable intervention for their reintegration back into school. There is concern that full-time attendance may increase the likelihood of exclusion
- To support a return to school following a period of exclusion

The purpose of a part-time timetable is to:

- Create a bespoke support package in response to meeting the learning and wellbeing needs of a child or young person
- Help a child or young person re-engage with their learning and school community
- Allow a child or young person to develop relationships with key adults who are supporting them

*(Please note that an elaborated curriculum that involves a child/YP accessing their full entitlement to contact time across school, partner services, SEBN provisions such as the Bridge/An Cala/Airport House etc. is not part-time).*

Senior leaders should ensure mechanisms are in place so that the whereabouts of any child on a part time timetable are known during times they are without a detailed/named provision. The mechanism for each young person should be recorded within their plan. All young people should have provision of 27.5 hours of education.

Young people on part-time timetables should have a clear plan to re-engage in full-time education within an agreed timescale.

In all cases, a part-time timetable must be authorised by the AQIM, where it exceeds, or is likely to exceed, four weeks. Please copy in your ESO and ASNO to any such communication. All arrangements must meet the legislative requirements to provide a suitable education package, particularly where it exceeds short-term arrangements

due to a crisis:

- supported through a Child's Plan,
- in full consultation with the parent and child or young person. With the parental agreement that they are taking responsibility for their child when they are not in school or other education provision,
- discussed with other agencies involved in the life of the child or young person including social work and health
- a temporary measure which is reviewed as minimum every 4 weeks with a clear vision for full-time reintegration into school
- planned to build on the child or young person's strengths and positive relationships that they have in school
- planned to incorporate learning opportunities in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing and able to safeguard and protect a child or young person. This is a paramount consideration for all children and young people and particularly so for vulnerable children and young people with social work support, or who are care experienced.

 *The school remains responsible for the education of children on their roll.* 

## **Children and Young People Unable to Attend School Due to Prolonged Ill Health and other Complexities**

Legislation requires local authorities to make special arrangements for children absent from school through ill health without undue delay. The main emphasis in the initial period of absence for children or young people will be on recovery of the child or young person's fitness and health and the time for this will vary. However, where possible, absence should not lead to a reduction of education provision which would have a detrimental effect on the child or young person's progress.

Where a child or young person's illness is known, or reasonably thought, to be likely to extend beyond 5 days, then education should proceed immediately, if medical assessment permits. This is of particular importance for children and young people who require recurrent admission to hospital, even for relatively short periods.

Where there is less certainty over the possible length of any absence, education outwith school should commence at the earliest opportunity and certainly no more than 15 working days of continuous or 20 working days of intermittent absence.

The education of pupils on a school roll remains the responsibility of that school.

[Education of children unable to attend school due to ill health: guidance - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/education-children-unable-attend-school-due-ill-health/guidance/pages/1-1.aspx)

## Diverse School Communities

Some groups of children and young people may require authorised absence because of their religious or cultural practices, family's mobility or because they are from the Gypsy/Traveller community. Please see [Supporting Learners from Gypsy/Traveller Communities](#) for further details, particularly the STEP national guidance.

In these cases, the school should liaise with the family to understand their specific context and circumstances. **If required, the AQIM, ESO or ASNO can support and advise the school on a case-by-case basis.**

## Unauthorised Absence

Schools should record an absence as unauthorised, where no satisfactory reason has been provided. Unauthorised absence can include:

- Absence with parental awareness in specific circumstances. This may be because a parent believes their child will benefit from participation in an alternative activity. Sometimes, parents allow absence because they are in dispute with the school or believe the school is failing to act in the best interests of the child or young person.
- Family holidays during term time. Family holidays should not be recorded as authorised unless in exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances include where a parent's employment is of a nature where school holiday leave cannot be accommodated. Such employment may include armed forces, emergency services or professions where parents are required to work away from home for extended periods.
- Occasional absence without parental awareness. Consistent and vigilant school-based processes are essential for safeguarding children and young people. Follow-up action must be taken following identification of a child not in school without their parent's knowledge

## Compulsory Measures

Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school until they reach school leaving age (Section 30 Education (Scotland) Act 1980).

The Council is committed to ensuring that efforts to improve outcomes for children involve an appropriate and proportionate level of intervention. Where efforts to engage with parents have not been successful, whether from a lack of engagement or non-compliance from families with agreed planning, school leaders should take this information to a conversation in liaison with appropriate officers from the central team and/or the ASG Practice Lead. Measures for compulsion are expensive processes which are time consuming and can lead to further interventions into family life.



Furthermore, within this discussion, the need to consider the “No Order Principle” must be considered - in Scotland, the "No Order Principle" dictates that a court or children's hearing should not make an order regarding a child unless it is deemed better for the child than making no order at all. This principle, enshrined in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, reflects a commitment to minimal intervention in family matters unless a specific issue necessitates it.

Where there is dispute in the provision of next steps at this stage, this should be discussed with the AQIM in Education and the Children Services Manager in Social Care for their advice in agreeing the next step.

The Highland Council will aim to resolve issues through multi-agency approaches and where these have failed, the AQIM will make a judgement about next steps. Measures for compulsion can be used when efforts to engage children and families in voluntary measures to improve attendance have failed. Further information can be found [here](#).

## **Children and Young People Missing from Education**

Children and young people missing from education are defined as those of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll or being educated in an alternative provision such as at home or in a private provision. It may also include those who have not attended school for a period of time.

Schools should follow the Highland Council [Children Missing from Education](#) policy.

## **Attendance Beyond Statutory School Leaving Age**

School leaving arrangements are defined in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. There are two dates: 31 May and the first day of the Christmas holiday period (or 21 December, if earlier).

## **Post 16 attendance procedure**

This is new process introduced to support high attainment and positive destinations for young people choosing to stay on at school.

Through reviewing attendance data, the attendance of S5 and S6 pupils' of leaving age will be evaluated under a BRAG procedure which very closely matches the processes in further and higher education.

**Attendance data is reviewed regularly, and all pupils will start at Green but may proceed through the other levels.**

Blue	Alternative learning/development pathway required
Red	Very serious attendance and therefore performance concerns
Amber	Serious attendance and therefore performance concerns

A written record via a Senior School Attendance Monitoring Template (Appendix 5) must be kept for every CYP who is evaluated at A, R or B category and shared with the pupil within 24 hours of the discussion.

### BRAG Timeline:

1. With at least 4 weeks of data to base it on, pupil attendance is below 90%. Pupil advised by appropriate member of staff (Guidance, Registration, Class Teacher, clerical as per school systems) that their attendance has been flagged as a concern and will be monitored for the next two weeks.
2. Two weeks later attendance is reviewed and if it is improving, pupil is congratulated and process concluded. If not, pupil is called to interview by their Guidance teacher and Attendance Monitoring begins
3. Whilst attendance remains between 80% and 90%, review with Guidance teacher of the reasons and strategies being employed by the young person happens periodically and they remain at **Amber**.
4. If attendance for a four-week period falls below 80%, and no mitigating factors are identified, the young person is moved to **Red** category and a meeting with the young person, their parent / carer, Guidance and the appropriate member of SMT takes place to identify strategies to support attendance above 80%.
5. Four weeks later a follow up meeting is convened to review attendance since the last meeting. If attendance has been below 80% a review of strategies takes place and targets are agreed for the next meeting. Class teachers are asked to provide up to date performance information that is shared with the pupil at the meeting. The pupil then has four weeks to improve attendance and positively influence their likely attainment.
6. If after the next four-week meeting attendance has improved, the young person goes back to amber and reverts to stage 3 above. If not, the pupil is moved to category **Blue** and a final meeting to look at alternative education or training programmes for the young person takes place- this may involve them finishing their formal school education before their attendance and non-engagement makes it impossible for schools to write positive references and statements of support.

## **Alternative Attendance Arrangements**

Curriculum for Excellence promotes flexibility in the curriculum and allows schools to personalise learner journeys to meet the needs of all children and young people. When an alternative to traditional attendance at school is requested, it should be considered in relation to the child or young person's wellbeing needs and supported by the child's planning framework.

All decisions to grant an alternative attendance arrangement should be underpinned by a child or young person's right to an education as outlined by United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child.

## **Home Education and Flexi Schooling**

Parents can make a request to the Highland Council to withdraw their child from a Highland school. This can be on a full-time basis for the purpose of home education or for part of the child or young person's time at school as a flexi schooling request. See [Home Education | Home Education | The Highland Council](#) for details on Home Education and Flexi Schooling.

Under section 35 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, the parents of a child or young person who has been attending a Highland Council school must seek local authority consent before withdrawing the child or young person from school. The Highland Council must not unreasonably withhold this consent.

When considering these requests, the Highland Council is guided by Article 18 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the child or young person's voice and the necessity to take a child centered approach. The Highland Council is also guided by the duties, obligations and rights of the parents and its own policy position. There are a variety of reasons why a parent may decide to withdraw their child or young person from school. The area manager will oversee requests for home and/or flexi-schooling following the school's consultation with their ASN manager. The school and area teams will work in partnership with the family to address any issues which may have resulted in the request.



## Appendix 1: Attendance Letter (1) – Parent/Carer



Dear *(insert parent name)*,

### Child / Young Person's name

I write to advise that *(insert child / young person's name)*'s attendance at school has fallen below 80% in the past four-week period.

We would like to invite you (and your child) to a child planning meeting with on *(insert date and time of meeting)* to discuss this with you and identify appropriate solutions to support *(insert child / young person's name)*'s attendance.

I have enclosed some documents *(these may include child's plan/pastoral notes/other information)* which might be helpful in formulating your view and *(insert child / young person's name)*'s views prior to the meeting.

I have also enclosed a recent attendance printout for your information which we can refer to during our discussion / meeting. Please also find a useful link below to a Scottish Government booklet "School Attendance: A Guide for Parents".

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/guide-parents-school-attendance>

If the above date is not suitable for you, please call us at the school to reschedule the meeting.

Yours sincerely,

*Designation*

*School Name*



## Appendix 2: Attendance Letter (2) – Young Person over 12 years



Dear *(insert young person's name)*,

I write to advise that your attendance at school has fallen below 80% in the past four-week period.

We are concerned as attendance levels such as this can impact negatively on your learning and wellbeing, and we want to work with you to improve your engagement with your learning.

I will contact your parent to share this concern and a discussion or meeting will follow, to which you will be invited. This will help us to identify solutions to support improvements in your attendance.

I have enclosed some documents *(these may include child's plan/pastoral notes/other information)* which might be helpful in formulating your views before the meeting.

I have also enclosed a recent attendance printout for your information which we can refer to during our discussion / meeting.

Yours sincerely,

*Designation*

*School Name*



### Appendix 3: Attendance Letter (3) – School (no improvement)



Dear *(insert parent name)*,

#### *Child/Young Person's Name*

Further to my letter of *(insert date)* and our subsequent conversation / child planning meeting, I write to you as we remain concerned about *(insert child / young person's name)*'s continued pattern of poor / non-attendance.

According to our records, *(insert child / young person's name)*'s attendance is now XX% over the past eight-week period. I have enclosed a printout of *(insert child / young person's name)*'s attendance record.

An appointment has been made for you *(and insert child / young person's name)* to attend a child planning meeting on *(insert date and time of meeting)*. This will help us to identify solutions to support improvements in attendance OR review the supports and targets we put in place at our last child planning meeting.

I have enclosed some documents *(these may include child's plan/pastoral notes/other information)* which might be helpful in formulating your views before the meeting.

If the above date is not suitable for you, please call us at the school to reschedule the meeting.

It is important for us to meet to have this discussion so that the situation does not continue to have an impact on *(insert child / young person's name)*'s learning and wellbeing.

Yours sincerely,

*Designation*

*School Name*



## Appendix 4: Attendance Letter (4) – AQIM/Chief Officer



Dear *(insert parent name)*,

### *Child/Young Person's Name*

I write to highlight our ongoing concerns about *(insert child / young person's name)*'s continuing pattern non-engagement with learning.

According to our records, *(insert young person's name)*'s attendance is now XX% over the past twelve-week period. I have enclosed a print-out of *(insert child / young person's name)*'s attendance record.

Section 36 of The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 allows for an education authority to require a parent to provide an explanation for non-attendance at school. I, therefore, serve notice requiring you to appear before the local authority in line with the requirements of the above act to provide an explanation.

Failure to provide a satisfactory explanation for non-attendance at school may result in:

- Prosecution under Section 43 of The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 or
- Reporting the circumstances to the procurator fiscal or
- A warning to improve your child's attendance and postpone the above decisions by putting in place an attendance order under Section 38 of The Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Please also find a useful link below to a Scottish Government booklet "School Attendance: A Guide for Parents".

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/guide-parents-school-attendance>

An appointment has been made for you to meet with me on (insert date, time and location of meeting no less than 48hrs and no longer than 7 days). You may bring your child, should you so wish.

Yours sincerely,

*Name*

*Area Quality Improvement Manager*



## Appendix 5: Secondary School Attendance Monitoring Template

<b>Pupil Name and House Group</b>	
<b>Courses enrolled in:</b>	

Date	Category of Attendance and relevant data	Strategies agreed and review point

D R A F T V 6