

Highland Attendance Policy

March 2023



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Introduction

The Highland Council is committed to providing an excellent education through a dedicated focus on wellbeing and inclusion. The Highland Council wants to ensure all children and young people develop a broad range of skills and capacities, whilst supporting them to thrive, regardless of their social circumstances or additional needs. We aim to ensure Highland's children, young people and families are confident and resilient, and fully included as valued contributors within their schools and wider communities.

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. We recognise that promoting good school attendance can be a complex and multi-faceted issue and, in the production of this policy and associated procedures, a multi-agency approach has been adopted including input from children's services, community planning partnerships, third sector partners and police.

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. Staff in Early Learning and Childcare (ELCC) settings may find this policy useful as an indicator of good practice in the promotion of attendance and the prevention and reduction of absence.

This policy should also be read in conjunction with the Highland Council's [Children Missing in Education Policy](#) and the [Child Protection and Safeguarding Handbook for Education](#).

Promoting and Managing School Attendance

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

Recording Attendance

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 through the [Management of Information System \(MiS\) Portal on SharePoint](#).

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 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**.

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 designated school administrator, link worker or member of school leadership team 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.

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 SEEMiS 'TBC' code.

Further action to be taken as per School Daily Attendance Procedures.

Tracking and Monitoring Attendance

Schools should have a clear vision and strategic plan to promote and manage attendance. This should include identified personnel and systems to support the tracking and monitoring of attendance which is outlined in the flowchart. Improvement methodologies are helpful in supporting schools to achieve these targets.

Schools will find [HGIOS4 QI 2.1](#) useful in supporting review of processes to improve attendance.

School Daily Attendance Procedures for Unexplained Pupil Absence

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

School Attendance Tracking and Monitoring Procedures

Step 1

Monitoring & tracking of attendance should be a standing item on school SMT meeting agendas

Step 2

Appropriate member of school staff makes contact with parent/carer(s) to identify support to improve attendance. Positive early intervention strategies should be considered as a priority to reduce non attendance.

Step 3

Individual attendance improvement should be reviewed over a period of two weeks, this should be recorded on Form 1(or child's plan if established), appropriate updates should be entered into pastoral notes.

Step 4

Should attendance not improve within four weeks, parent/carer(s) should be invited to a solution focussed meeting to support attendance. Form 1 (or child's plan if established) should be updated.

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. Specific issues should be escalated to the headteacher. Parent/Carer(s) should be invited to a child's plan meeting.

The involvement of partners to explore learning pathways should be considered with the use of Form 1(or child's plan if established). These may include:

DYW Co-ordinator
My Future My Success
Virtual Academy

Additional Support Needs Officer/Practice Lead Schools

At 65% consideration should be given a referral to the children's reporter (for those of compulsory school age) and a letter sent home.

Step 6

Should attendance fall to 50% or less over 3 months, the area manager should be notified to write to parent/carer(s) and consider the need for an attendance order (for those of compulsory school age). A child's plan (if not already established) should be developed by the school with partners.

Part-Time Attendance

All children and young people have the right to an education which meets their needs. For the majority of children and young people, this will be through full-time attendance at school.

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
- 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.

In all cases, a part time timetable must be authorised by the area manager, where it exceeds, or is likely to exceed, four weeks. 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 8 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.

Recording attendance in SEEMiS

Schools can access guidance on the [Schools Hub](#) site. It has scenarios for all the possible absence codes in SEEMiS Click+Go, including the PTH and PTX codes used to record the 'absent' sessions of those on part-time timetables for health or behaviour reasons respectively.

The option to record as an SNA (Should Not Attend) involves using a 'Planned Pattern' where pre-determined sessions that the pupil is not at school are not counted as possible attendances for the attendance percentage

attendance of the pupil.

The Seemis codes are below.

Seemis Codes

Authorised Absence

School senior management teams may authorise absence if they are satisfied of a legitimate reason for the request. Requests should normally come from parent/carer(s) (via a note, email or phone call), self-certified or sometimes may be provided by another service provider. Reasons for authorised absence can include:

- Illness, where no learning provision is made (including ongoing mental health concerns)
- Medical and dental appointments to be recorded in separate category
- Meetings prior to, and during court appearances and other legal processes
- Attendance at, or in connection with, a children's hearing or care review, or appointment with another service provider, e.g., social worker
- Religious observance
- Bereavement
- Weddings or funerals of close friends and family
- Arranged absence in relation to children in gypsy/traveler families
- Participation in non-school debates, sports, musical or drama activities agreed by the school
- Lack of transport – including due to bad weather
- Family recovery from exceptional domestic circumstances or trauma
- Period of exclusion to be recorded in a separate category
- Extended leave with parental consent, including some young carer activities

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 out with 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 \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

Unauthorised Absence

Schools should record an absence as an unauthorized, 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.

Diverse School Communities

Some groups of children and young people may require authorised absence because of their religious or cultural practices or family's mobility. In these cases, the school should liaise with the family to understand their specific context and circumstances. If required, the education officer, ASN or area manager can support and advise the school on a case-by-case basis.

Compulsory Measures

The Council is committed to ensuring that efforts to improve outcomes for children involve an appropriate and proportionate level of intervention. Measures for compulsion are expensive processes which are time consuming and can lead to further interventions into family life. Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school until they reach school leaving age (Section 30 Education (Scotland) Act 1980).

The Highland Council will aim to resolve issues through multi-agency approaches and where these have failed, the area manager 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).

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.

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 the 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.

Highland Virtual Academy – Supporting Interrupted Learners

The Highland Virtual Academy (HVA) aims to support non-attenders and pupils with interrupted learning, following a successful model designed and implemented during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020-2021.

Children and young people are referred to the HVA interrupted learning support team from their base school. Starting with a 1:1 ratio with a HVA teacher, in consultation with the school leadership team and parent/carer(s), a support package can be agreed and implemented. The aim is to support young people to develop the skills and confidence they require to enable them to return to school.

Information on the referral process at:

<https://highlandcouncil1.sharepoint.com/sites/SchoolHub/SitePages/Highland-Virtual-Academy---Supporting-Interrupted-Learning.aspx>

Referral to the HVA should be supported by an appropriate child's plan.

My Future, My Success

My Future, My Success team is overseen by a senior lead who works across the nine community planning partnerships with local schools and their partners to design suitable pathways for young people experiencing barriers to their attendance who are in the last year of learning and or in danger of leaving without a positive destination. [Referrals can be made here](#).

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) – Area Manager



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,

Area Education & Learning Manager