



Education & Cultural Services

Policy: Attendance at School (with Guidelines)

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1 INTRODUCTION

West Lothian Council endorses the approach adopted in “Included, Engaged and Involved, Part 1 : Attendance in Scottish Schools” (12 December 2007).

This paper states that:

“Making sure pupils are included, engaged and involved in their education is fundamental to achievement and attainment in school and ultimately to the economic prosperity of themselves and Scotland. The joint concordat between the Scottish Government and local government provides an agreed framework of national outcomes. These outcomes support our shared aspirations for Scottish children and young people. They include the aims that our young people: are better educated, more skilled and more successful, are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, responsible citizens; have the best start in life and are ready to succeed”.

There has been a growing recognition that children and young people fail to attend school for a wide variety of reasons and that many such children and young people experience barriers beyond their control which prevent them from engaging fully with education. Non attendance may therefore be an indicator of issues a child is experiencing and these underlying issues need to be tackled if we are to effect change.

Attendance at school by children and young people is essential in order that they receive the education to which they are entitled. Absence from school, whatever the cause, disrupts learning and will impact negatively on the life chances of our children and young people and therefore our community. Attendance at school should be clearly linked to schools’ overall approaches to promoting positive behaviour and a climate for learning. At this time in Scottish Education, developments supporting this approach include Curriculum for Excellence, flexible packages, flexible curriculum, staged intervention and multi agency working.

Although pre school education is non statutory, West Lothian Council recognises that the early years of childhood is a key time in influencing the future lives of children. We aim to deliver high quality learning experiences through our early years provision and see it as essential that children begin to build up resilience and independence through regular attendance.

West Lothian Council recognises the need for all children and young people to engage fully in the education process and has developed a strategy for promoting attendance through a positive and supportive approach. This strategy provides a framework that allows early intervention, comprehensive information sharing and a positive partnership with parents through a staged intervention approach.

2 STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING ATTENDANCE

The stages of support outlined in “Included, Engaged and Involved” are:

- High quality pastoral care systems for early response to absence and signs of difficulty
- Effective approaches to assessment and planning for children and young people who require additional support in their learning
- Multi-agency planning to ensure effective local child and family support
- Involvement by the education authority in formal referral to local attendance committees, other agencies or placement in alternative services
- Measures for compulsory compliance by parents or children through attendance orders or referral to Children’s Hearings.

The West Lothian Council strategy provides a system that intervenes at an early stage and involves contact with parents/carers when attendance drops below 90%. It supplies a staged intervention that will continue until attendance improves. It also promotes a positive and supportive approach to improving attendance and acknowledges that non-attendance is often due to complex social and psychological reasons. Further information on the underlying causes of non attendance may be obtained from the Education Psychology Service.

The non-attendance of nursery children at pre school provision should follow stages one and two of the strategy and the part of stage 3 relating specifically to pre school provision.

Stage 1

Where a child’s attendance has fallen below 90% in the previous month and no good reason for such absence is supplied by the parent/carer, a letter should be sent to inform the parent/carer that this absence is unacceptable and needs to improve. (*Proforma 1*)

There is a range of possible outcomes from this action:

- Improved attendance to over 90%, pupil is taken off the list
- No improvement. Another letter (*Proforma 2*) is sent to parents/carers and the pupil inviting them to attend a Stage 1 meeting with the school key persons. This initial meeting should be supportive and should try to discover the reasons for non attendance. A plan should be agreed and produced to improve attendance.
- If the parent/carer fails to attend the meeting then another letter should be sent (*Proforma 3*) This letter again invites attendance at a meeting and also advises the parent/carer that a referral will be made to the Children and Young People’s Team if they do not attend.
- If the parent carer still fails to attend then the pupil is moved to Stage 2.
- If attendance remains below 90% then the pupil is moved to Stage 2.

Stage 2

The parent/carer and pupil are invited to a Stage 2 meeting (*Proformas 4 and 4(a)*) with the school key persons and the Children and Young People’s Team allocated worker, who will at this stage have made an initial assessment visit. Other relevant professionals may also be in

attendance e.g. school doctor, social worker. This meeting should continue to be supportive and should assume that the pupil and perhaps the parent/carer have low self-esteem and are anxious about the meeting. It is important to establish whether the pupil is truanting or if their non-attendance has a more complex reason. The other professionals attending the meeting should offer other interventions aimed either to help with the assessment of the circumstances around the non-attendance or with direct support to the family. In addition to individual family support, the Children and Young People's Team should offer group work programmes to address school attendance directly, to improve the pupil's self-esteem or to address family issues. A referral may be made to the School Health Team if/when medical issues are cited as reasons for repeated or prolonged absence without the school's prior knowledge of a medical condition serious enough to warrant such absence. Health professionals will interact directly with the family where appropriate.

Stage 3

For pupils whose non-attendance persists, the professionals involved with the child/young person should decide on the most appropriate next steps.

Disengagement from Education

Where the professionals involved with the child/young person has identified complex reasons for disengagement from education a decision must be made on the most appropriate action to be taken. An Integrated Assessment Meeting should be called to ensure that a comprehensive integrated assessment is completed and an action plan agreed.

Continued Absence/Truancy

The investigation of truancy should be carried out through the procedures set out in section 8 of this policy.

Continued absence or truancy should be dealt with through measures for compulsory compliance by parents/carers or pupils. The pupil should be referred to the Attendance Group (AG) or to the Reporter.

Pre School Provision

Where the professionals involved with the child/young person has identified complex reasons for disengagement from education a decision must be made on the most appropriate action to be taken. An Integrated Assessment Meeting may be called to ensure that a comprehensive integrated assessment is completed and an action plan agreed, where appropriate. A pre school place may be removed from a child whose attendance falls below 50%. Before a place is removed, the professionals involved with the child/young person should decide that this is appropriate taking account of the impact on the child of removing the place.

3 PROCEDURES FOR VERIFICATION AND REGISTRATION

It is essential that consistent procedures are used in all West Lothian schools to record and monitor the attendance and absence of pupils. The following information supersedes the previous attendance policy and implements the guidelines outlined in Scottish Executive Circular 5/03 – School Attendance and Absence. The revised guidelines outlined below also include agreed processes in relation to safe arrival at school.

The council will monitor attendance to ensure the provision of an appropriate education and maximise child safety.

Registration:

the recording of each pupil's presence or absence on a school register.

Verification:

the establishing and recording of the reason for each absence using agreed codes.

3.1 Recording

The attendance or absence of each pupil should be recorded on the class register at the start of or shortly after the start of each school day. In primary schools this will normally be carried out by the class teacher. In secondary schools, pupils usually meet in register classes or tutor groups at the start of the day and the attendance is recorded by the register teacher or group tutor. Where a pupil is absent, the letter 'T' (to be confirmed) must be entered in the register, unless one of the absence verification codes has already been entered indicating that advance notice has been given of the absence and the reason for it. Where a pupil is present, the appropriate code for presence must be entered. (In the SEEMIS computerised system this is a dash '-').

Notification to parents/carers in cases of unexplained absence -parents/carers will agree to contact the school before **9.30am** on the first day of absence if their child is going to be absent.

The council will provide schools with the means to contact parents/carers in all cases of unexplained absence (the Group Call system).

Schools will attempt to alert parents/carers to unexplained absence of their children using this automated telephoning system as soon as practicable and, in any case, by **9.45am** in primary and additional learning needs schools and **10.00am** in secondary schools on the first morning of unexplained absence.

Note: Parents/carers are responsible for providing schools with suitable emergency contact numbers and contact number for use in connection with the Group Call system and shall ensure that such numbers are kept up to date.

3.1.1 Dealing with Late Coming

Where late coming is due to official school transport problems, the code is 'J' (late before the mid-point). In secondary schools, pupils who come in late during the registration period, may, at the school's discretion, be given a code letter so that a persistent pattern of such late coming can be dealt with internally by the school. As far as the SEEMIS register is concerned, however, such pupils will be recorded as present. 'J' should not be entered into SEEMIS.

In primary schools, the Head Teacher should specify a time, between 10 minutes and 30 minutes of the start of the school day, after which any pupil is indeed entered as 'J'. In primary school, this can be recorded by the class teacher or centrally, dependent on how the security arrangements in the particular school affect the entry of late pupils.

In both primary and secondary schools, a pupil who arrives after registration but before the **declared mid point** of a morning or of an afternoon should be recorded as 'J' and so be given an attendance. A pupil arriving after the **declared mid point** is to be recorded using the code letter 'K'. In SEEMIS this will designate the pupil as 'absent' and will provide a record of particularly serious lateness, which can then be pursued, if it becomes frequent. Each school should identify its **declared mid point** by reference to a

morning or afternoon interval or a beginning or end of a teaching period which occurs around the middle of the day.

3.1.2 Absence occurring during the school day

In primary schools, the absence of a pupil during the school day is normally picked up by the class teacher and reported to school management so that investigation can take place. Where an absence of this kind is discovered and confirmed, the recorded code should be changed from present, ie '-' to 'T', pending investigation, and use of Group Call to alert parents to unexplained absence.

In secondary schools, a 'discrepancy' system is generally operated. Typically, within a short time of the end of the morning registration period, a complete list of all absentees from school is generated by SEEMIS and an individual copy of this distributed to each teacher. At the beginning of each teaching period, the teacher matches the pupils in the teaching class against this list of absentees, and immediately reports any discrepancy to the school office for investigation. Such systems pick up any pupils who have gone missing after being marked present at registration and also any who have arrived late and managed to bypass the late coming recording system. Where an unexplained absence of this kind is discovered and confirmed, the recorded code should be changed from present, ie '-' to 'T', pending investigation - See Section 5 of this Policy which deals with Safe Arrival, Attendance and Absence Management.

3.1.3 Recording – Pre-School

Pre school education is not statutory, and there is no statutory requirement to record attendance and no national framework for recording and monitoring attendance.

West Lothian Council expects pre school establishments to record absence and late arrival as above using SEEMIS in order to provide information on which to take evidence based action and to promote good practice in regular attendance.

4 VERIFICATION OF REASON FOR ABSENCE

Verification

This is the process by which each absence, recorded as 'T' on the register and in SEEMIS, is categorised by one of the 'reasons for absence codes'. The process is carried out, in most schools, by a member of the admin team with access to the SEEMIS attendance management programme, and this is the recommended procedure since the recording by one person helps to eliminate and prevent errors. In secondary schools, this is carried out daily, immediately after the registration period, so that the 'discrepancy record' can be issued promptly to teachers. In large primary schools, it may be carried out daily, but in small primary schools and pre school establishments it should be carried out as regularly as the availability of secretarial staff allows.

Verification Information

Information enabling allocation of an absence code may come to the school in a variety of ways, by letter, by telephone, or from teachers. Sometimes the appropriate information is available before the day of absence, for example, information about work experience or study leave or about parental requests for term time holidays which have been granted. Such information should be recorded as soon as it is available and will appear in advance on the weekly SEEMIS class registration sheet when it is sent to teachers. On some occasions, the information will be available on the day of the first absence through a phone call from parents. On other occasions, verification information will not be immediately available and clear systems

and time-scales must be in place to seek the information.

Seeking Verification Information:

Once the safety of the pupil has been established (see Section 5 of this Policy), verification of the reason for absence is required.

Schools must account for the absence and reason for absence of pupils.

Secondary schools have a pupil support structure that allows designated staff to contact parents to ascertain the reason for absence. This should be done as soon as possible within the working day.

The commonest method involves the generation by SEEMIS of letters to parents/carers seeking reasons for absence. Where parents/carers do not respond, the school should refer to Section 2 of this policy.

5. ABSENCE AND ATTENDANCE

Definition of Attendance

For the purpose of this policy, attendance is defined as participation in a programme of educational activities arranged by the school. In addition to actual attendance within the school premises, this encompasses a range of other activities within the category of attendance (marked present), such as:

- work experience
- educational visits
- day and residential visits to outdoor centres
- college/consortium school study
- interviews and visits relating to further and higher education
- debates, sports, musical and theatrical works arranged in conjunction with the school.
- activities connected to psychological services
- off-site school medical examinations
- study leave
- receiving tuition via hospital or outreach teaching services

Authorised Absence

This category of authorised absence includes absences derived from reasons such as:

- sickness
- medical and dental treatment
- bereavement
- short-term exceptional domestic circumstances
- religious observance
- authorised parental holiday
- arriving late after the mid point
- 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 theatre 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 unauthorised 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 include circumstances such as:

- extended overseas educational trips not organised by the school
- short-term parental placement abroad
- family weddings or funerals or other events which may require children to travel (eg overseas) or participate in extended preparations, for cultural reasons
- leave in relation to children of travelling families

Exceptional Domestic Circumstances

Absences relating to short-term exceptional domestic circumstances can be 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

As education authorities under section 40 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000 must ensure pupils within their catchment areas do not miss out on their entitlement to an education, a solution must be found for the long-term educational needs of pupils with care responsibilities. (Information on carers and young carers' entitlement to assessment can be found in the Health and Social Care Act 2001). If a pupil is unable to attend school due to such responsibilities, there is an expectation that additional support services will be accessed to support the pupil, and their absence from education will not be long-term and therefore categorised as authorised absence. However, where additional services have not been accessed and care responsibilities become long-term, the absence should be categorised as unauthorised absence.

Unauthorised Absence

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

- unexplained absence
- truancy (unauthorised absence from school for any period as a result of premeditated or spontaneous action on the part of pupil, parent or both)
- Most family holidays during term time (see below)

Family Holidays During Term Time

The majority of family holidays taken during term time should be categorised as unauthorised absence Code 'G'. However, it is acceptable under exceptional circumstances for schools to authorise a family holiday during term time. Such circumstances may include:

- a family holiday judged to be important to the wellbeing and cohesion of the family, following serious or terminal illness, bereavement or other traumatic events

- 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).

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

Family holidays with the above characteristic should be classified as unauthorised absence Code 'G'.

6 DEALING WITH UNEXPLAINED ABSENCE - NOTIFICATION OF PARENTS/CARERS

Parents carers will be asked to agree to contact the school as early as possible and before 9.30am on the first day of absence if their child is going to be absent.

When a pupil has been recorded as absent, and no prior notification has been given of the absence by the parent/carer, the school shall attempt to contact the parent/carer using the Group Call system.

The school will attempt to contact all parents/carers of pupils who are recorded as absent with no prior notification as soon as practicable and in any case by **9.45am** in primary and additional learning needs schools and by **10.00am** in secondary schools on the first morning of absence.

Parents/carers will be responsible for providing and updating emergency contact information and for providing and updating contact telephone numbers for use by the Group Call system. Parents/carers will be responsible for responding promptly to contacts from the school.

Where a parent/carer is informed of the unexplained absence of a child from school, the parent/carer will be responsible for taking appropriate action.

In cases where no explanation of an unexplained absence has been received by the school by **10.30am** on the first morning of absence, the Head Teacher will conduct a risk assessment.

Where a child is known to have a social worker, the appropriate Social Policy team will be informed of the absence and asked to contact the family through the appropriate member of staff. This may be a social worker/family support worker from the Social Work Practice Team, Youth Justice Team or the Children and Young People Team. Where a child is known or suspected to be at risk, the Social Work Practice Team should be informed. In this case responsibility for contacting the parent/carer or taking other action, for example contacting the police, will pass to Social Policy.

Headteachers will consider whether the case should be addressed as an unexplained absence, a case of truancy or persistent latecoming or as a child missing from education and respond appropriately.

In case of any doubt, Headteachers should discuss the matter with the Child Protection Officer, Lindsay House. In all cases, Headteachers shall have regard to existing **child protection**

procedures.

In order to receive the benefits of early notification of unexplained absence, parents/carers must opt into the system by providing an appropriate contact number and agreeing to follow the requirements of the policy by notifying the school of absences and responding promptly to contact from the school. The same standard of service in cases of unexplained absence cannot be guaranteed to parents/carers who do not opt into the system.

In cases where parents/carers repeatedly fail to respond to Group Call contacts, the school, in consultation with Social Policy, may decide to take no further action to escalate these unexplained absences. This action may be necessary to ensure that scarce resources are used effectively. Parents/carers must be informed in writing of such a decision.

No notification will be made to parents in relation to non-attendance at Breakfast Clubs or Wraparound Care.

Parental Notification Policy for Nursery Classes, Nursery Schools and Early Years Centres in relation to Unexplained Absence

When a pupil has been recorded as absent, and no prior notification has been given of the absence by the parent/carer, the school will attempt to contact the parent/carer using the emergency contact number provided, within one hour of the session (morning or afternoon) start time on the first day of absence. When no contact has been established within one and a half hours of the session start time (morning or afternoon), the Headteacher will conduct a risk assessment. In conducting the risk assessment, the Headteacher should take account of child protection, causes for concern, and specific family circumstances such as bereavement or break up. Where a child is known or suspected to be at risk the link Health Visitor will be contacted immediately. The Headteacher will explain the perceived risk to the Health Visitor.

Both Headteachers and Health Visitors have a responsibility for ensuring that they make up to date contact information available to the colleagues that they work with, and to agree the preferred method of contact. In cases of absence or holiday, details of alternative contacts must be readily available. In all cases if messages are left on answer phones or similar it cannot be assumed that they have been received, and so efforts to deliver an urgent message must continue.

The Health Visitor will make further efforts to contact the parent/carer (or their emergency contact) in order to ensure that the child is safe. If no contact can be made, the Health Visitor will decide what further action should be taken, following further discussion with the Headteacher where appropriate. This may result in the Police being informed.

Parents/carers will be responsible for providing and updating emergency contact information.

Where a parent/carer is informed of the unexplained absence of a child from school, the parent/carer will be responsible for taking appropriate action.

7 DEALING WITH UNREASONABLE EXCUSES FOR ABSENCE: CODE N

Where an explanation for an absence is given, but considered to be **not acceptable**, the school should enter the Code 'N' and send a letter to the parent/carer stating that the absence has been recorded as unauthorised.

(Proforma 5)

8 TRUANCY: CODE T

Truancy should be recorded as code T.

Initial Investigation

Secondary schools: appropriate member of Pupil Support Team should carry out the initial investigation or, where this would result in too long a delay, a member of the School Management Team.

Primary schools: a member of the School Management Team or, in small schools, the Head Teacher should carry out the initial investigation.

The Children and Young People's Team may be involved in this initial investigation.

The elements of this investigation are set out below:

ELEMENT	POSSIBLE ACTIONS
Did the pupil truant alone or with other pupils, from the same or another school?	If appropriate, extend the investigation to other pupils and/or inform other school.
How long was the truancy?	If appropriate, investigate why the truancy was not discovered earlier.
Where did the pupils go and were there elements of physical or moral risk involved?	Where appropriate, inform any other appropriate agency which is in a position to assess and deal with the situation.
What reason did the pupil give for truanting?	Investigate stated reasons. (see note (a) below)
How did the pupil hope to escape detection?	Where necessary, take action to close any loopholes in the absence detection system or any other relevant control system.
Was there any support to or collusion with the pupil in arranging the truancy?	Inform any appropriate agency which may be in a position to act. (see Note (b) below)

Note (a)

Where the pupil claims some school based problem (eg bullying or a relationship problem

with a member of staff), it is important that this is investigated and the result of the investigation recorded on file. (For further details see below).

Note (b)

The pupil, for example, may have been undertaking casual work for payment during school hours. This would be illegal. In such a case, it will be possible for the school to make a direct approach to the employer. If this is not successful, a report should be made to the Police.

Possible Actions after Investigation is complete: Informing the parent/carer of the truancy

It should be normal practice to inform the parent/carer of the truancy. There are some issues, however, mainly related to the age and stage of the child, which should be taken account of.

For a primary pupil, parents/carers should be informed of each truancy -unless there is a genuine likelihood of excessive physical abuse if the parents/carers are told. If this is the case, then action has to be taken under the Child Protection Procedures.

For a pupil of 12 years or over, in accordance with Section 2 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, the pupil has a right to express a view (on whether the parent/carer should be told). The teacher is required to listen to the pupil's case and then make a judgement - which may well be to inform the parent/carer. The child's right is to be allowed to express a view which may not be acceded to by the council.

The school may wish to impose a sanction on the pupil within its own discipline policy.

Maintaining Records

Each truancy investigation should be recorded as briefly as possible and the record stored in the Pupil's Progress Record Card. Care should be taken to avoid recording information confidential to the pupil since these records may be open to parent/carer inspection.

9 FOLLOWING UP OF SUSPECT MEDICAL ABSENCE: CODE M

Most cases of absence explained by illness are genuine. In a minority of cases, however, the school may have reasons to suspect that the excuse given is not genuine and is a cover for truancy or school avoidance. Suspicion may arise in a number of ways:

- the absence may extend for a longer period than seems reasonable for the nature of the medical reason given
- the pupil's attendance pattern may show regular absences of several consecutive days, or a week or fortnight, repeated every few weeks, with medical reasons provided to justify the absences
- there may be a regular weekly pattern of absence - perhaps on a particular day
- absence notes may indicate a variety of minor medical complaints
- additional information may be received by staff from other sources for example – other parents or pupils - which casts doubt on the reasons given for absence. In these cases, further school investigation is necessary and the absence may be dealt with through section 2 of this policy.

10 FOLLOWING UP PERSISTENT LATENESS: CODES 'J' AND 'K'

Most cases will be dealt with internally by schools on an individual basis.

Sometimes, despite best efforts, the late coming of a particular pupil may become persistent and damaging, both to the progress of the pupil and to the education of other pupils. The procedures set out below are recommended in order to establish **consistency** of criteria for action.

The procedures are:

- If there are 5 or more recordings of code 'J' or code 'K' for the pupil in a period of 5 weeks, then a letter should be sent to the parent/carer (*Proforma 6*)
- If late-coming continues and the pupil accumulates a further 5 or more codes J' or 'K' in the subsequent period of 5 weeks, then a further letter should be sent to the parent/carer and the late coming dealt with under section 2 of this policy

Proforma 7

- If, after 15 weeks, late-coming of primary and secondary aged children still continues at the same level, the case should be referred to the Attendance Group. Pre school children cannot be referred to the AG.

11 THE ROLE OF THE ATTENDANCE GROUP (AG)

Where the attendance/late-coming of a primary and secondary aged pupil continues to be unreasonable despite efforts, it is the responsibility of school management to refer the case to the Attendance Group (AG). This action should be taken by Head Teachers or their management representative in consultation with the professionals working with the pupil.

The responsibility of the AG is to consider the case at a meeting to which parents/carers and child are invited and, on the basis of the evidence to take a decision, on behalf of the council, on any further action required (See Appendix 1)

12 INVOLVEMENT WITH OTHER AGENCIES

In each cluster, the Cluster Resource Group provides a multidisciplinary, professional group to support young persons who are 'at risk'. It would not be appropriate to refer every child with an attendance problem to the CRG.

A pupil with an attendance problem can be referred to the CRG where the attendance investigation requires other agencies to address the problem and where the strategies outlined in section 2 of this policy have not impacted successfully.

A checklist of agencies, the contributions they might make and the circumstances in which the particular agency should be accessed is given below:

Community Education

Community Education staff are available to offer programmes designed to:

- develop social, communication and organisational skills in young people
- build confidence and improve behaviour management
- promote educational and social motivation in school or in the community

These programmes are planned locally based on an audit of need and can involve working with young persons on a one-to-one basis, or in small groups.

Where such programmes are specifically focused on **non-attenders**, they should be planned in **collaboration** with the Children and Young People's Team.

Psychological Services

Where members of school staff are concerned about a pupil's attendance, the school educational psychologist can offer support at a consultative level. This may involve discussion with school staff and/or attendance at multi-agency meetings. Should a more formal input be required involving direct work with the pupil, then a referral should be made to Psychological Services.

Guidance documents are available in the Policies Section of edweb.

The Psychological Service can be involved in any of the following circumstances:

- where the poor attendance may be related to learning difficulties
- where a psychological problem such as a school phobia is suspected
- where, after exhaustive investigation of other possibilities, it is concluded that the pupil might divulge reasons for non-attendance to an experienced psychologist.

As a result of a referral to the Educational Psychology Service, recommendations may be made for varying the provision or organisation for the pupil's programme within school or alternative education provision may be sought through the Senior Officer Review Group.

Community Child Health

Referrals to the medical service for investigative purposes were outlined in section 2 of this policy.

However, other cases in which the causes of absence are related to a health or medical problem for the child or within the family can also be referred directly to Community Child Health.

Social Work Services

The involvement of Social Policy has been outlined in section 2 of this policy.

Looked After Children

Education and Social Policy have a special concern to support young persons who are looked after at home, with foster carers, or within the West Lothian residential centres/Young Peoples' Centres. From August 2000, each looked after child has had a specific and individual Care Plan. This enables schools to clearly identify all the pupils on the school roll who are looked after and to initiate support as outlined in section 2 immediately. Further support may be sought from the LAC teaching team, based at West Lothian House.

West Lothian Education and Cultural services has a duty to report on the attendance and attainment of looked after children.

13 CHILDREN MISSING FROM EDUCATION

Headteachers will follow the Children Missing From Education guidelines and School to School

Transfer Procedures in cases where investigation of absence leads them to conclude that children are missing or suspected of being missing from education. Where Headteachers are unsure, contact should be made with the Child Protection Officer and the matter discussed.

WEST LoTHIAN ATTENDANCE GROUP

1. INTRODUCTION

West Lothian Council recognises the need for all children and young people to engage fully in the education process and has developed a strategy for promoting attendance through a positive and supportive approach. This strategy provides a framework that allows early intervention, comprehensive information sharing and a positive partnership with parent/carers through a staged intervention approach.

After schools have exhausted the staged intervention approach under the Attendance at School Policy and pupils, for no valid reason, have disengaged from education, the school should proceed with a referral to the Attendance Group.

The Attendance Group is set up under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to facilitate West Lothian Council's duties in terms of attendance of pupils in schools.

2. REMIT

The overall duty of the Attendance Group is to advise on the statutory responsibilities relating to attendance. This entails interviewing parent/carers who are not carrying out the responsibilities assigned to them in terms of the legislation in relation to attendance at school and making decisions with regard to disposal of the case:

The Attendance Group can determine the following disposals:

1. continue the case up to a maximum of 6 weeks for a specified purpose which may be to monitor attendance or request additional information or reports
2. refer pupil for medical examination
3. make an attendance order
4. refer to the Procurator Fiscal so that prosecution may be considered
5. refer the pupil to the Reporter
6. desert the case

A decision to refer to the Reporter should include as complete information as possible on the case, including full reasons for recommending the referral.

It is recommended that the Attendance Group's investigations are conducted in a formal manner, with the emphasis being on advice and encouragement to resolve the problem. The principal aim is to return the child to full time education. Only when these avenues have been exhausted should options such as prosecution be considered.

3. MEMBERSHIP

The Attendance Group will comprise:

- a Chairperson who is one of the Council's Heads of Service (Social Policy or Education & Cultural Services). The Heads of Service may delegate this role to a senior officer within their service.

- one member drawn from a pool of senior officers from within Education and Cultural Services
- one member drawn from a pool of senior officers from within Social Policy

Not more than three members should attend a meeting and the quorum is two members.

4.

PERSONNEL IN ATTENDANCE

The persons who should be present at a meeting of the Attendance Group are not specified by law, but West Lothian Council specifies certain conditions and these are:

1. Members of the Attendance Group.
2. The parent/carer named in the notice should be present, although it is competent for business to proceed if a parent/carer does not respond to a notice requiring them to appear at a hearing.
3. The pupil in question may also be present if the Attendance Group feels that this is necessary.
4. Admin Officer from within Education & Cultural Services.
5. The Chairperson may sanction the attendance at a meeting of an appropriate person other than members, officers, parent/carers and child, e.g. a relative, friend, social worker, to support but not replace the parent/carer.
6. The referrer.

5.

CALLING PROCEDURES

Through the Integrated Assessment process referral to an Attendance Group is made by the Head Teacher, after consultation with relevant staff. Administrative arrangements are the responsibility of the Director of Education. The Admin Officer will be responsible for:

- organising an annual schedule of meetings
- serving notice of a hearing to parents/carers and issuing all appropriate documentation to all parties involved.

Parent/carers will be served notice requiring him or her to appear, in accordance with the notice, before the Attendance Group and explain the reason for the absence of the child from school. The notice will be given not less than 7 and not more than 14 days before the Hearing. The parent/carer has the option to submit written information rather than appearing at the meeting.

If the parent/carer fails to satisfy the Attendance Group that he/she has a reasonable excuse in relation to the pupil's failure to attend school, the Attendance Group may make the appropriate determination as to the disposal of the case.

6. CONDUCTING THE MEETING

In conducting the meeting, the following should be observed:

1. All meetings must be held in private.
2. Venues for the meeting should be carefully considered in order to effect a positive outcome.
3. Meetings will be fixed and called, agenda arranged, minutes prepared, reports obtained and subsequent action taken by the Director of Education or delegated officer.
4. Agenda and minutes will be maintained as confidential documents, available only to members of the Attendance Group. Reports on the proceedings will be

restricted to a statistical account together with a general description of the disposal of the case considered.

5. All papers given out must be returned at the end of the meeting.
6. If the Group decides to interview a pupil, it must do so in the presence of the parent/carer and with the parent/carer's permission.

When the parent/carer has been invited into the meeting, he or she should be asked to confirm that he or she is the parent/carer or guardian of the pupil concerned. The date of birth of the child should be checked. The Chairperson should then endeavour to ascertain the facts of the case in the opinion of the parent/carers and establish whether reasonable excuse for non-attendance exists. The other members of the Attendance Group may, through the Chairperson, ask such questions as they feel are relevant to the proper disposal of the case. The Chairperson should allow the referrer to have the opportunity of putting questions to the parent/carer.

The parent/carer and the referrer should be asked to withdraw while the Group reaches a conclusion on the disposal of the case.

The Group's determination will be intimated to the parent/carer at the meeting at the discretion of the Group and will, in any event, be given in writing, following the meeting, by the Admin Officer. All decision letters by the Group must be signed by the Chair person.

7. DOCUMENTATION

Documentation submitted for a referral to the Attendance Group should be in line with the Integrated Assessment Framework. The Attendance Group Chairperson presiding at the meeting will be required to sign the minutes of meetings to confirm that they are correct.

8. ATTENDANCE ORDERS

The legal position on Attendance Orders is governed by sections 38-41 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. In summary, an Attendance order is a legal document signed by the Director of Education as the proper officer of the Education Authority, requiring the parent/carer to ensure the regular attendance of his/her child at the school named in the order. Before making an attendance order, consideration requires to be given to any views expressed by the parent/carer as to the school they wish the pupil to attend.

The Attendance Order remains in force as long as the pupil is of school age, unless revoked by the Education Authority or annulled by a decision of the Sheriff.

Parent/carers may, within 14 days of the serving of an Order, appeal against it to the Sheriff Court, whose decision is final. If the pupil fails to attend regularly at the school specified in the Attendance Order, the parent/carer is guilty of an offence unless the court is satisfied that there is a reasonable excuse for the lack of regular attendance. At any time while an Attendance Order is in force, a parent/carer may request that a different school be named in it, or that it be revoked as arrangements have been made for the pupil to receive efficient and appropriate education. If it considers it appropriate, the Education Authority may, on such a request being made, amend or revoke the order. A parent/carer may appeal to the Sheriff Court if no decision on his/her request is reached within a month, or if it is refused.

9. PENALTIES

Breach of an Attendance Order is a criminal offence. Sections 43 and 44 of the Education

(Scotland) Act 1980 itemise the penalties that courts may impose on parent/carers found guilty of offences in connection with school attendance. The penalties for any offence are a fine not exceeding level 3 of the standard scale, imprisonment, or both a fine and imprisonment.

10. REVOCATION OF ATTENDANCE ORDER

Section 39 of the Act allows an Education Authority to amend or revoke an Attendance Order subject to certain provisions. This section allows only the Education Authority to revoke an order.

11. REASONABLE EXCUSES

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 gives guidance on what may be deemed to be a reasonable excuse in connection with school attendance in section 42. There are 3 types of excuse:

- Sickness of a child – while a medical certificate may be produced as evidence of sickness at a particular time, it may be appropriate to consider other evidence (e.g. from Head Teacher) in connection with periods of time not covered by the certificate. It should be noted that, if sickness is alleged as the reason for non-attendance, a medical examination may be called for by the Attendance Group (S42.3), and if the parent/carer fails to co-operate over this, he or she is guilty of an offence.
- Distance from home to school – an excuse under this heading is reasonable only if the Education Authority requires a child to walk more than a specified distance, depending on age.
- Other reasonable excuses – these are not specified by the Act.

PROFORMA 1

Strategy for Promoting Attendance - Stage 1 – initial letter to parent

(Headed Paper)

(Name and Address of parent/carers)

(Date)

Dear (name of Parent/Carer)

(NAME OF PUPIL) (CLASS OF PUPIL) (DATE OF BIRTH) – PROMOTING ATTENDANCE

Attendance at school by children and young people is essential in order that they receive the education to which they are entitled. West Lothian Council recognises the need for all children and young people to engage fully in the education process and has developed a strategy for promoting attendance through a positive and supportive approach.

I am concerned because (name of pupil) attendance has fallen below 90% in the previous month and in accordance with Council policy I am bringing this to your attention to ensure the appropriate action is taken. This level of attendance by (name of pupil) is unacceptable and no good reason for the absence is evident. Should (name of pupil) attendance not improve to over 90%, then I shall invite you and (name of pupil) to attend a meeting at the school to try and discover the reasons for non-attendance and agree a plan to improve (his/her) attendance.

Thank you for your co-operation

Yours sincerely

HEAD TEACHER

PROFORMA 2

Strategy for Promoting Attendance - Stage 1 – first invite to meet with parent

(Headed Paper)

(Name and Address of parent/carers)

(Date)

Dear (name of Parent/Carer)

(NAME OF PUPIL) (CLASS OF PUPIL) (DATE OF BIRTH) – PROMOTING ATTENDANCE – INVITATION TO MEETING

I refer to my letter dated (date of letter1) in which I expressed my concerns about (name of pupil) level of attendance. Unfortunately there has been no improvement and (name of pupil) attendance is still below 90%.

I would now like to invite you and (name of child) to a meeting at the school with (name of school representative) to discuss the possible reasons for (his/her) non attendance and the effects that this is having on (his/her) education. The aim of the meeting is to discuss and agree strategies to help support (name of child) achieve an acceptable level of attendance.

This meeting will be held on (date and time). If you are unable to attend on this date please call me to discuss an alternative.

I look forward to meeting with you.

Yours sincerely

HEAD TEACHER

PROFORMA 3

Strategy for Promoting Attendance - Stage 1 – second invite to meet with parent

(Headed Paper)

(Name and Address of parent/carers)

(Date)

Dear (name of Parent/Carer)

(NAME OF PUPIL) (CLASS OF PUPIL) (DATE OF BIRTH) – PROMOTING ATTENDANCE – INVITATION TO MEETING

I refer to my letter dated (date of letter 2) in which I invited you and (name of child) to a meeting at the school with (name of school representative) to discuss the possible reasons for (name of attendance) non attendance and the effects that this is having on (his/her) education.

As you were unable to attend this meeting, I would like to offer you a further invitation to meet with (name of school rep/s) to discuss and agree strategies to help support (name of child) achieve an acceptable level of attendance. If you do not attend this meeting then, in accordance with Council policy, a referral will be made to the Children and Young People's Team who will investigate possible next steps.

This meeting will be held on (date and time). If you are unable to attend on this date please call me to discuss an alternative.

I look forward to meeting with you.

Yours sincerely

HEAD TEACHER

PROFORMA 4

Strategy for Promoting Attendance - Stage 2 – parent fails to attend 2 invitations to meeting

(Headed Paper)

(Name and Address of parent/carers)

(Date)

Dear (name of Parent/Carer)

(NAME OF PUPIL) (CLASS OF PUPIL) (DATE OF BIRTH) – PROMOTING ATTENDANCE – INVITATION TO MEETING – STAGE 2

I refer to my letters dated (date of letter 2 and 3) in which I invited you and (name of child) to meeting at the school with (name of school representative) to discuss the possible reasons for (his/her) non attendance and the effects that this is having on (his/her) education.

As you were unable to attend these meetings, I am now obliged to move to Stage 2 of the Attendance at School Policy. This stage involves a meeting with you and (name of pupil) and also school key persons and the Children and Young People's Team allocated worker who will have already made an initial assessment visit to you. Other relevant professionals will also be in attendance (detail the professionals eg school doctor, social work). The professionals in attendance will discuss with you and (name of pupil) possible interventions aimed either to help assess the circumstances surrounding the non-attendance or direct support to your family.

This meeting will be held on (date and time). If you are unable to attend on this date, please call me as soon as possible to discuss an alternative.

I look forward to meeting with you.

Yours sincerely

HEAD TEACHER

CC School Doctor

PROFORMA 4(A)

Strategy for Promoting Attendance - Stage 2 – Attendance still below 90%

(Headed Paper)

(Name and Address of parent/carers)

(Date)

Dear (name of Parent/Carer)

(NAME OF PUPIL) (CLASS OF PUPIL) (DATE OF BIRTH) – PROMOTING ATTENDANCE – INVITATION TO MEETING – STAGE 2

I refer to our previous meetings to discuss (name of child) attendance. Unfortunately, despite our interventions, (name of child) attendance remains below 90%.

In accordance with the Attendance at School Policy, I am now obliged to move to a Stage 2 meeting. This meeting involves a meeting with you and (name of pupil) and also school key persons and the Children and Young People's Team allocated worker who will have already made an initial assessment visit to you. Other relevant professionals will also be in attendance (detail the professionals eg school doctor, social work). The professionals in attendance will discuss with you and (name of pupil) possible interventions aimed either to help assess the circumstances surrounding the non-attendance or direct support to your family.

This meeting will be held on (date and time). If you are unable to attend on this date, please call me as soon as possible to discuss an alternative.

I look forward to meeting with you.

Yours sincerely

HEAD TEACHER

CC School Doctor

PROFORMA 5

Letter to parent/carer notifying an unacceptable reason for absence has been given

(Headed Paper)

(Date)

(Name and address of parent/carer)

Dear (Title and Name of parent/carer)

(Name of Pupil): Class (School Class of Pupil) (Date of Birth) – Notification of Unauthorised Absence

You will appreciate that the council must set and achieve targets in attendance in all its schools. This requires that absence is monitored much more closely than in the past.

(First name of pupil) was absent from school (either on date or from date to date). The reason given was (state reason).

I have to inform you that this reason is not acceptable for absence from school and I am required to record the absence as unauthorised.

In some cases of for example, serious family or domestic emergency, there is provision for authorised leave to be given and I should be grateful if you would contact me to dismiss.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

PROFORMA 6

Letter to parent/carer about Latecoming

(Headed Paper)

(Date)

(Name and address of parent/carer)

Dear (Title and Name of parent/carer)

(Name of Pupil): Class (School Class of Pupil) (Date of Birth) – Pattern of Latecoming

I am concerned that (First name of pupil) is sometimes late for school. According to our records, (First name of pupil)'s record of lateness is set out below.

SET OUT RECORDS FOR PREVIOUS 5 WEEKS UNDER THE HEADINGS SHOWN:

Day of Week	Date	Morning or Afternoon	Time of Arrival
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I would be grateful if you could emphasise to (First name of pupil) that it is important to arrive in time for school. Apart from loss of education time for (First name of pupil), dealing with a late arrival can be unsettling for other pupils and causes unnecessary additional administration work.

If there are any particular problems which I may be able to help with, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

A further check will be made in five weeks time and if the latecoming remains a problem, I will write to you again.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

PROFORMA 7

Letter to parent/carer about Persistent Latecoming

(Headed Paper)

(Date)

(Name and address of parent/carer)

Dear (Title and name of parent/carer)

(Name of pupil): Class (School class of pupil) (Date of birth) – Continued Pattern of Latecoming

I have already written to you about (First name of pupil)'s pattern of latecoming. I regret to inform you that the situation continues to be unsatisfactory. The pattern over the last five weeks is set out below:

SET OUT THE RECORD FOR PREVIOUS 5 WEEKS UNDER THE HEADINGS SHOWN:

Day of Week	Date	Morning or Afternoon	Time of Arrival
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Should there be no improvement in this pattern, I shall refer the problem to the Attendance Group.

I do hope that this will not be necessary since it will possibly require you to attend a meeting of the Group to offer an explanation of the continued pattern of lateness.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher