



A Practice Statement for ATTENDANCE, ABSENCE and LATENESS

## School Matters!



### Rationale/Legislation

The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 clearly states that it is, 'The right of every child of school age to be provided with school education by, or by virtue of arrangements made, or entered into, by an education authority.'

This right is also defined in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.



As part of Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services, the staff at Banchory-Devenick School have a responsibility to promote attendance at school. We have a duty of care to monitor the attendance of all pupils and intervene when attendance drops below Aberdeenshire Council's threshold of 90%.

Attendance is defined as participation in a programme of educational activities arranged and agreed by the school including:

- Attendance in school
- Educational visits: day and residential
- Interviews and school visits relating to further education, e.g. sitting an admissions exam etc.
- Debates, sports, musical or drama activities
- Activities in connection with psychological services, learning or behaviour support
- Receiving tuition via hospital or outreach teaching services

### Guidelines

#### 1. Recording of Attendance

All Aberdeenshire Council Education and Children's Services establishments use SEEMIS to record data relating to pupil attendance. In order to comply with

Data Protection Legislation, registers should not be projected onto whiteboards, and any computer screen in use should face away from pupils. In accordance with authority legislation, at Banchory-Devenick School absences are recorded twice daily (beginning of morning and beginning of afternoon) by the School Administrator following registration by Class Teachers, and unexplained absences are followed up with a phone call/email.

## 2. Managing Absence

At times, pupils are absent from school for a range of reasons. Where possible, advance notification of any absence is preferred.

Should a pupil have to leave school during the day (e.g. to attend a hospital appointment), school should be provided with information to ensure that staff know the time the pupil will be collected, who they will be collected by and at what time they are due to return. If the parent wishes the child or young person to travel unaccompanied to the appointment, this information should be included. It would be preferred if a written note/email was provided, however school can be contacted by telephone. If there are concerns about the authenticity of an appointment, parents/carers will be contacted by either the School Administrator, Class Teacher or Head Teacher. At Banchory-Devenick School, we have a system for signing in and signing out pupils to ensure that staff know who is present in the building at any one time.

## 3. Responding to Absences

At Banchory-Devenick School, we use Aberdeenshire Council standard letters to respond to absence. However, if any absence causes concern for the safety or welfare of any pupil, the Head Teacher, as the school Child Protection Officer, will initiate Child Protection procedures, not absence policy procedures.

## 4. Responding to Unexplained Absence

When a pupil is marked absent at any registration point during the day, and if no advance notification of a reason for absence has been received, attempts to make contact with home will be made by telephone/email. If parents/carers are unable to be reached, emergency contacts will be phoned.

If contact is still not possible, and the pupil is **not** considered to be vulnerable, a letter will be issued via email on the day of the unexplained absence, or as soon as is practical. The letter will request an urgent response providing an explanation for the absence and will explain that absences will be changed to unexplained/unauthorised if no response is received within five school days.

## 5. Tracking Persistent Non-Attendance

The average attendance rate for Aberdeenshire school pupils is approximately 95%. It is accepted that improving attendance has a direct correlation to improving achievement. The attendance of all pupils with an attendance rate of **90% or less** will be subject to close monitoring across two weekly periods until such time as appropriate improvements are made.

## 6. Dealing with Persistent Non-Attendance

Unless accounted for by a single period of certified absence, when a young person's attendance deteriorates to 90% for the first time the appropriate professional from Education and Children's Services e.g. School, Social Work, will carry out an assessment and associated action planning. This will ensure that regular focus is given to the young person's attendance and that structured intervention is implemented. In many cases, the reasons for non-attendance can be addressed in this way, and attendance rates will stabilise and improve.

Where there is no improvement in attendance, consideration will be made to initiating a Multi-Agency Assessment and Action Planning. If there is still a lack of commitment to improving attendance, other actions will be taken (e.g. referral to Truancy Sub-Committee or SCRA).

## 7. Area School Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee

Aberdeenshire Council's scheme of delegation provides for Area School Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committees to be set up. This is devolved to each Area Committee.

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 makes provision for the education authority to deal with failure of parents to provide education for their children. The function of the Area School Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee is to investigate matters which have led to the non-attendance of the child or young person, and to decide whether the parent is liable to prosecution in terms of Section 30 and/or Section 35 of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1980.

Section 35 provides that if a child fails to attend school regularly, without reasonable excuse, the parent is guilty of an offence.

Section 36 imposes a duty on the education authority if they consider that an offence has been committed under section 35, to serve a notice on the parent requiring the parent to appear before the authority to explain the reason for the absence of the child from school. The notice must be served on the parent at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting and the meeting must take place within

7 days of the notice. The Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee has delegated authority to fulfil this function.

If the parent does not satisfy the authority that there is a reasonable excuse for the child's non-attendance at school, the authority can:-

- a) Take no action
- b) Prosecute the parent
- c) Warn the parent and postpone the decision on whether to prosecute for up to 6 weeks - effectively, to give the parent a chance to ensure more regular attendance
- d) Refer the child to the Reporter to the Children's Hearing

If the Sub-Committee agree to postpone the decision to prosecute, they can make an Attendance Order in respect of the child, requiring them to attend a specific school. Breach of an Attendance Order is a separate offence.

It is a reasonable excuse to fail to attend if:-

- a) There is no school within reasonable walking distance and the education authority has not provided transport to another school
- b) The child has been prevented from attending school through sickness
- c) There are other circumstances which in the opinion of the education authority or the Court, offer a reasonable excuse

If the child is prevented from attending the school through sickness, the authority can require the child to be examined by a medical officer of the local Health Board.

In the event of a conviction following prosecution, a fine of up to £1000, a sentence of imprisonment for one month, or both can be imposed.

Where multi-agency action planning has been unsuccessful, consideration should be given to making a referral to the Area School Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee. Referral to an Attendance and Truancy Sub-Committee is a serious measure and it is hoped that by working in partnership through the Multi-Agency Action Planning framework, few cases will reach this stage.

## 8. Tracking Persistent Lateness

Lateness is a problem which causes significant disruption to the learning of children and young people. When a pupil arrives late, this will be recorded. If a pupil has a medical issue which routinely impacts on punctuality, this should be discussed with the Head Teacher and/or Class Teacher.

For young people who require a more flexible approach to the timing of their education, this must be built into their individual plans and support packages. Clear and appropriate boundaries will be negotiated in accordance with need.

At Banchory-Devenick, we follow Aberdeenshire policy and procedure:

- At 5 instances of lateness, a letter will be issued.
- At 10 instances of lateness, contact to be made with parents/carers.
- At 15 instances of lateness, a second letter will be issued, reminding parents of their legal responsibilities relating to attendance. This letter will contain a formal invitation to meet the Head Teacher.

Beyond this, the Head Teacher will initiate a Single or Multi-Agency Assessment.

## 9. Children Missing from Education

Children and young people may disappear from the view of schools and Local Authorities for many reasons. Children have a right to an education, and Local Authorities have a duty of care to provide education for all children in their area, and to plan and provide support for vulnerable children.

Schools must implement authority guidelines on Children Missing from Education where concerns exist.

## Appendices

This policy has been written in accordance with Aberdeenshire Council, Education and Children's Services guidelines.

- Promoting and Managing Pupil Attendance In Nursery, Primary and Special Schools - Guidance Document - Promoting and Managing Pupil Attendance in Nursery, Primary and Special Schools Guidance June 2022 (asn-aberdeenshire.org)
- GIRFEC Attendance at School Leaflet

