



ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Practical guidance to improve attendance together

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Whilst many of our children and young people enjoy school and attend regularly, there are those who find this difficult.

“Good” attendance at school is not only linked to academic achievement, but it is connected to pupils’ emotional health and well-being and supports them to thrive within their community.

We want schools to have the tools to know why those pupils may be absent and support them as much as possible through targeted early intervention support.

The strategies shared in this document were developed throughout the Education Authority’s *Attendance Pilot Programme (2022-23)* and were highlighted as effective practices.

They can also be linked to the Attendance Self-reflection guide.



Attendance Matters Strategy (2024)

This guidance offers some practical approaches, and these are connected to the themes of the Department of Education’s Attendance Matters Strategy (2024):

- **Leadership** committed to prioritising attendance in the interest of pupils
- Effective **early intervention**
- Appropriate **support** for pupils
- Effective **collaboration and engagement**



At a glance

Leadership committed to prioritising attendance in the interest of pupils

Raising visibility

Creating a supportive culture

Ensuring effective policies and procedures

Defining clear roles and responsibilities

Improving attendance should be a priority of the school leadership.

There should be a clear vision based on high expectations communicated to all pupils, parents and staff. Strategies could include:

Raising Visibility

SLT should be visible to greet and encourage pupils into school. Presence at the door, at the shops, at the bus-stops should not be underestimated. This allows for positive interactions whilst encouraging an “into” school conversation.

The importance of attendance should be visible across the school. **It is everybody’s business.** Dedicated attendance notice boards, attendance tracking

in pupil planners, school newsletters, flyers, etc. to ensure attendance remains at the forefront.

Attendance should be visible as a key priority within school development planning processes, and as a permanent agenda item in every meeting.

Creating a supportive culture

Ensuring a nurturing environment where pupils want to come to school goes a long way to improving attendance.

Create a **culture of being missed.** A simple welcome back for pupils after both short and long-term absence shows that they are a valued part of the school community. Staff should be



given time to have supportive conversations to ease re-integration, not only in terms of academic support but also to support emotional needs. These conversations can help to reduce anxiety around a return to the classroom.

Create a **culture of holistic support** by identifying barriers to good attendance considering the impact of external factors such as bus routes, sibling childcare, support for free school meal applications and uniforms.

Drive a **culture of positive relationships** through commitment to reducing suspensions and potentially sanctions for non-attendance but “carrots” tend to be more effective than “sticks”.

Ensuring effective policy and procedures

Having a clear policy which is regularly reviewed and truly reflects the needs of the school is essential. Consultation processes

will ensure that everyone understands the policy and their responsibilities within it. Using executive summaries and distributing pupil friendly versions ensures that the policy remains relevant and the driver to ensuring consistent approaches to improving attendance in school.

It is also important to understand the impact of the school calendar on improving attendance. For example, consider how starting a term on a Friday may not be suitable given the likelihood of reduced attendance or how having examination periods in early December may increase absences later in the month.

Defining clear roles and responsibilities

Every member of staff has a role to play in promoting good attendance.

Having a skilled leader in charge of attendance is key to ensure that everyone has the tools to support good attendance. This is a dynamic role in its truest sense.



Being able to be strategic and reactive to ever-changing situations is vital.

Many schools find having a member of staff dedicated to attendance administration within the school office not only supports the production and analysis of data, but they also have a breadth of knowledge on daily patterns.

Governors should have a clear knowledge of the school's attendance data and be informed of the current barriers to attendance.



Defining the roles and responsibilities of key staff including:

SLT

**Attendance
Lead**

Governors

**Administrative
support**

SENCO

**Form
Tutors**

**Heads of
Department**

Teachers

**Classroom
Assistants**



At a glance

Effective early intervention

Knowing the data and how to use the systems

Correct Coding for effective analysis

No missing marks

Using the data to target support

Pupil tracking their own attendance figures

Tracking contextual groups

Everybody understands good attendance and what it means

Attendance Notice boards

Attendance Assemblies

Appropriate awards

Embedding conversation

Pupils knowing who they can talk to

Subject specific support

Supporting transition

Using school events to support attendance

The most effective intervention comes from knowing who you need to support. Strategies could include:

The use of data

- Robust analysis of data should be used to support early intervention.
- Registers are a statutory requirement and should be completed on time.
- There should be NO missing marks.
- The correct codes should be used. There should be consideration given to who changes the codes.
- Reasons for absence should be chased up.
- Data should be used to identify cohorts of pupils who may need support and identify patterns of absence.
- Regular reports on attendance should be shared to enable staff to support attendance procedures and to understand current barriers to attendance.



The Pastoral system

Although attendance is not just a pastoral responsibility, attendance should be embedded within the pastoral system. Strategies could include:

- The use of assemblies to promote attendance
- Notice boards devoted to attendance
- Attendance review week at the start of every term
- Form time devoted to attendance gives tutors time to talk about reasons for absence and to gather information on support needed
- Pupils tracking their own attendance
- Pupils having someone to talk to and who understands when they are absent
- Organising subject specific support where required
- Using events at school to promote good attendance and build positive relationships with all parents
- Developing attendance rewards that work

Transition

Pupils face many periods of transition across their school life. It is important that schools take these changes into consideration and prepare to support pupils and parents through what can be, in some cases, a challenging experience.

- Supporting pupils and parents in the transition from home to school is essential. Familiarisation days, staggered starts and opportunities for parents to share any information about their child could help make their very first days in school a positive experience
- Similar strategies can be employed to support pupils as they move through the key stages in Primary School
- Supporting the transition for KS2 to KS3 by working with the Primary Schools to gather data and provide support prior to the start of the new academic. This could be phone calls in the summer to support parents to get ready for the academic year, walk arounds for pupils etc
- Supporting the transition from KS3 to KS4 through building aspirations and supporting the right pathways



At a glance

Appropriate support for pupils

Understand the whole person

Safe spaces at Break times

Develop Nurturing approaches

Create de-escalation areas

Flexible timetables (time limited)

Attendance Champion(s)

Adopt Restorative Practices

Peer Support

Knowledge of external support

Consider small groups

The best way to provide appropriate support comes from really understanding the needs of the pupil. This may not always be provided solely by the school, but some initial strategies could include:

Creating safe spaces at breaktimes

Having a range of safe spaces in the form of clubs or hubs can provide emotional support for pupils.

Developing the role of the Attendance Champion to be the key contact for parents and pupils in need of support

An Attendance Champion can act as a one-point liaison between pupil, parents and school. This can support effective information sharing ensuring that everyone is clear on next steps.

Developing Attendance clinics and where necessary adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to drive effective early intervention

Holding clinics can be an effective way of establishing specific barriers to attendance at an early stage. If external agencies are already involved, it is useful to develop shared working practices and support agreed targets.



Creating a Nurturing Environment and Developing Restorative Practices

Adopting approaches which support relational learning can lead to pupils feeling more valued in school and therefore more likely to attend.

Creating a system of peer support

This can take the form of Attendance Mentors with older groups supporting younger pupils or it can be trained peer mentors supporting pupils who struggle with attendance. Peer influence can be very powerful.

Creating safe spaces for de-escalation

The concept of de-escalate and re-engage can ensure that pupils who may otherwise be suspended can be given the necessary support to return to learning as smoothly as possible.

Setting pupil-centred action plans with targets agreed by the pupil and parents/carers

It is essential that the targets are realistic and concise; that they are understood and agreed upon by everyone. Review dates should be established to evaluate their success.

Adapting timetables

This could be changing start and end times to the day, changing break-times or providing subject specific interventions.

Ensuring that Attendance leads have current knowledge of the external support available for pupils struggling with attendance

The school should develop effective relationships with a range of external partners. This could include voluntary organisations and charities.



At a glance

Effective collaboration and engagement

Pupil Voice

Engage parents and carers

Engage the community

Collaborate with external agencies

A team around the child approach

A team around the school approach

A commitment to reducing suspensions

Seasonal Attendance Drives

Building respectful relationships where everyone involved has a voice can ensure that engagement is maximised. Successfully reducing barriers to attendance cannot be a one-person task. It cannot be something which is “done to” someone. To promote effective collaboration, strategies could include:

Developing pupil voice

Promoting opportunities for pupils to be truly heard is important. This could take the form of surveys, targeted pupil forums or policy

consultation groups. This not only promotes how valued a pupil feels but it can form part of the monitoring and evaluation processes of the school.

Engaging parents and carers

Engaging in a respectful and open way with parents can support building relationships based on trust. Feeling supported and having clear expectations from school ensures a consistency in everyone’s approach to improved attendance.



Engaging the community

Gaining support of local businesses to promote good attendance can be effective. Local shops and sports clubs can take an active part in promoting good attendance.

A team around the child/school

This is, once again, putting relationships at the forefront. Building the right network with the child at the very centre is key to addressing the underlying issues to absence. Nurturing these cross-organisational relationships can create a support team for the school to develop their early intervention processes.

A commitment to reducing suspensions

This relates to the climate and ethos of the school and how the policies interlink with each other. The questions to ask are: in your school, who is getting suspended? Are they not the very pupils who need to be in school?

Seasonal Attendance drives

Seasonal drives can be a fun way to create a clean slate for attendance and offer a time-limited reward for 100% attendance over a chosen period, suitable to your context. For example, they can be related to Christmas (the Twelve Days of Christmas), Spring into Spring, etc.

This can also work for a targeted cohort e.g. a 30-day drive for a particular year group. Allowing pupils to have the same starting point can provide a level of competition.

“Most improved” attendance can also be an effective way of supporting those pupils whose attendance has been very low but who have responded well to attendance drives/competitions.





Final Reflections

These strategies are not a definitive list but should provide some practical ideas to developing an effective whole school attendance strategy.

The self-reflection guidance can support in identifying key development areas and an inquiry-based approach is recommended in addressing these.

What will work in one school will not necessarily work in another.

Knowing your context and your pupils' needs is key.

