

Attendance Guidance Policy Thresholds and Responsibilities

Adopted by: Larkwood LGB

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Aims and objectives

We pride ourselves on being an inclusive school, where we celebrate diversity and difference and acknowledge the richness that this brings to our school community. We aim to provide opportunities for all children to access a broad, balanced and creative curriculum, regardless of age, attainment, ethnicity, language or background.

Each academy is led by the Lime Trust values. Our values encourage all stakeholders to display the behaviours expected of a member of our school community: courage, trust, enjoyment, partnership, equality, excellence.

The inclusion policy is an umbrella policy which covers and is inseparably linked to every other school policy including; special needs and disability (SEND), race equality, attendance, behaviour, equal opportunities and anti-bullying.

Introduction

The Lime Trust is committed to working with schools and other partners to improve school attendance and punctuality across the Local Authority. Underpinning this commitment is the understanding that unless children and young people attend school regularly and punctually they will not be able to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them.

The responsibility for raising and promoting attendance is shared by parents/carers, children and young people, schools and a range of services within the Local Authority. By co-operating and working together we can improve attendance and this in turn will raise achievement.

The Department for Education expects every school to nominate an 'Attendance Lead' who will hold overall management responsibility for raising and promoting school attendance. However this person cannot act in isolation. In order to achieve improvement and consolidation, time and resource must be made available. Improvements in attendance must be the business of all staff and must be addressed consistently by all concerned.

Early Intervention

The London Borough of Waltham Forest allocates a Senior Educational Welfare Officer to all schools within the authority. Officers bring a unique perspective by working with key school staff, parents/carers, children and young people and many other partners. However, the greatest difference can be made by the school itself. The school is likely to be aware of deterioration in attendance or of developing patterns of absence at an early stage. The most effective action stops problems developing.

Schools are recommended to organise their own strategy for intervention, using administrative staff to oversee routine approaches and more senior colleagues to intervene at an early stage where attendance over, for example, half a term falls below 95%.

Early intervention is key to ensuring that all young people engage and attend regularly. In order to achieve this, systems, monitoring and tracking need to be effective from the time children enter nursery. It is important that parents and children understand that the right habits need to be established from the start.

School procedures

The following basic approach is strongly recommended.

School action

- Produce an unambiguous policy on what will be done, by whom and in which cases. Agree early intervention thresholds and be absolutely clear what happens when a trigger point is reached.
- Identify resources, including human resources to administer and manage the process of managing attendance. Avoid staff having to squeeze a role of improving attendance in around other duties.
- Identify an Attendance Lead to act as overall leader and manager (see below).
- Ensure administrative and support staff have clear responsibilities and procedures to follow in order to promote and manage attendance. Make sure they have the time and the permission to follow procedures through.
- Play to your strengths. Give a member of staff a personal mission to improve attendance. Make sure they can be suitably direct at the same time as maintaining cordial relationships with parents.
- Agree a sampling period, usually the previous half term's attendance for each child. On this basis, categorise each child in the school according to the following thresholds.

Pre-referral action

Prior to referral to The London Borough of Waltham Forest's Senior Educational Welfare Officer and other relevant services, schools should apply their own internal procedures as described below. In order to support this work, The London Borough of Waltham Forest Senior Educational Welfare Officer is available for advice and guidance on any issues relating to attendance, categorisation of absence, target setting and legislation. Importantly, the Snr EWOs will also be able to establish 'Attendance Surgeries' in schools, with the specific aim of addressing emergent patterns of irregular attendance at an early stage and often prior to formal referral

The following are suggested actions at each threshold:

Pupils with attendance at, or below, 95%

For each absence, a designated member of staff makes a telephone call to the family home as early in the day as possible. Unless a satisfactory explanation has been received, send a letter to the parent regretting the absence and asking for an explanation for every session missed. Reasons and evidence to be recorded and filed.

Pupils deteriorating to 90% (equivalent to one session missed per week)

Make first day calls as above.

Send a standard letter to parent explaining deterioration in attendance levels with reminder of school targets / need for regular attendance / impact on continuity of learning / tear off slip. Ask the parent to

provide an explanation and comments.

Keep in contact with parents on a weekly basis. Provide encouragement where improvement has been made.

Maintain the approaches set out at the previous thresholds.

Ask parents to attend a meeting in school with Attendance Lead, or where deemed appropriate by the Head of School /Headteacher with a panel of Academy Council members chaired by the Attendance Lead. Use the meeting to investigate why pupil has missed 1.5 sessions per week (on average) and is now a persistent absentee. Discuss detrimental effect on attainment and continuity of learning. Warn of likelihood of referral to LBWF Senior EWO unless improvement is made. Reach agreements for rapid improvements over the next half term, aiming at least 95% attendance and better. This could form part of a parenting contract between school and parent.

Monitor attendance very closely and keep in weekly contact with the parent, either to praise improvements or to show ongoing concern. If concerns persist, the allocated The London Borough of Waltham Forest Senior Educational Welfare Officer should be consulted at this stage with regard to referral or inviting parent to attend an attendance surgery in school.

Pupils deteriorating to 80% (equivalent to one day/two sessions missed per week)

Absence at this level– Complex / High Risk, where responses require high level Specialist Services, often governed by statutory frameworks, to take the lead role. In regard to school attendance, this may be exhibited through chronic non-attendance and truancy.

Ensure that referral has been made to The London Borough of Waltham Forest Senior Educational Welfare Officer to plan strategy and intervention.

Actions to support the above

Head teacher/Head of School

- Set challenging targets to meet national averages. Ensure strategy is devised to make solid progress towards them.
- Appoint the Attendance Lead at a reasonably senior level. Provide sufficient time for Attendance Lead to supervise attendance management and to become involved with poor attenders. Also ensure there is sufficient time to analyse data, liaise with teachers and Local Authority officers. Give the Attendance Lead the full responsibility to lead on whole school policy and strategy.
- Take a personal interest in attendance and support intervention with the poorest attenders.
- Report statistics to the Attendance Governor and as part of the termly report to governors.

Attendance Lead

- Work with the Head teacher /Head of School to agree the school attendance targets
- Monitor attendance weekly and evaluate progress towards the targets. Identify pupils who are likely to jeopardise the school's performance and plan early intervention to avoid bad habits being established.
- Use the Persistent Absenteeism framework for identification of pupils whose attendance is falling below 90% (80% prior to July 2011).
- Keep the Link Governor informed and seek their advice and support.

- Ensure there is a clear attendance policy, showing who will do what and at what threshold.
- Keep attendance at the forefront of each member of staff's mind. Convince all staff that attendance is their responsibility.
- Promote regular attendance, by making use of reward systems, assemblies, parents' evenings, performance reviews, etc.
- Inform the Academy Council. Seek the support of members of the Academy Council in promoting good attendance.
- Supervise administrative staff. Ensure registers are checked daily and that the required action at each threshold level is taken at the earliest moment possible.
- Revise strategy to address issues with each individual pupil or family.

Class Teacher

- Do not accept poor attendance. Make 100% attendance the expectation.
- Promote regular attendance through rewards and other encouragement. Make it your business and make it clear that poor or erratic attendance is not expected.
- Ensure that registers are always completed appropriately; never leave blank spaces, never complete in pencil, never amend with correction fluid.
- Look carefully at attendance data. Make it your business to spot patterns of absence and overall levels of attendance of individuals.
- Make a personal connection with parents and pupils who have regular absence, or patterns of irregular attendance.
- Ensure the Headteacher/Head of School or Attendance Lead is informed of concerns over attendance.
- Following absence, do your best to provide catch-up opportunities so absentees do not fall behind. Where appropriate, ask parents to play a part in reinforcing missed learning.

Attendance Administrator

- Follow the school's procedures for first day calling. If no explanation has been received by the time registers close, seek one.
- Be prepared to be assertive. Parents must explain absence. Explanations need to be plausible.
- Do not show sympathy over absence unless you are convinced it is genuine.
- Issue attendance letters where required. Make sure they have the effect intended. Do not tolerate a lack of response. Seek advice as required.
- Provide data on weekly basis to class teachers and the school's Attendance Lead.
- Hold regular discussions with the Attendance Lead. Ensure the system works. If it does not, come up with suggestions to improve it.
- Ensure that the Attendance Lead is aware of the duty to maintain registers properly. Registers are legal documents and must be kept carefully and accurately.
- Make sure the Attendance Lead and/or the Head teacher know about families where bad habits are forming. Make sure action is taken to break bad habits at the earliest opportunity.
- Assist the Attendance Lead, Attendance Officer and others in collating data for inclusion in reports, attendance returns, etc.
- Check and file all absence notes that are received, and ensure that details are reflected appropriately through categorisation of absence in the registers.
- Pass messages from parents efficiently to the class teacher or other relevant member of staff.

The London Borough of Waltham Forest Senior Educational Welfare Officer

- Provides advice on strategy to the Head Teacher, Head of School, Attendance Academy Council member, Attendance Lead and Attendance Administrator.

- Encourage the school to take responsibility for early intervention and for following clearly set-out systems at each threshold level.
- Assist with any meetings with parents. Make the legal position and any likely sanctions clear.
- Liaise regularly with relevant school staff to ensure patterns of absence are being spotted and the early intervention is promoted.
- Provide direct intervention with parents and families in line with the school's policy and the thresholds laid out in it.
- Provide support for families where absence from school is causing concern. Do this at any appropriate stage as agreed with the school.
- Provide support and advice over any planned prosecutions or any penalty agreed with the school.

Learning Mentor - Attendance and Punctuality

The lead for attendance will be within the Leadership Team, however welfare and attendance officers and administrative staff make a significant contribution to whole school initiatives regarding improving and monitoring attendance and punctuality. This includes:

- First day calling
- Liaising with the Attendance Officer
- Contributing to pupil support plans by delivering interventions with pupils and families e.g. Early Help referrals.
- Developing initiatives to support attendance e.g. signposting to after school provision

Conclusion

This document suggests an approach which is in line with the Department for Education expectations. It also makes use of much effective practice observed in the Borough. The key message is about early intervention. Schools are advised to challenge apathetic parental attitudes to regular school attendance and to ensure that each child is encouraged to attend from the very first day that they enrol at nursery or reception.