



Partnership principles for improving attendance

August 2024

Copyright

Crown copyright 2024.

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

To view this licence, visit the [National Archives website](#).

Please [contact us](#) if you would like to know more about Education Scotland publications.

First published August 2024.

[Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of Education Scotland or any other government department.]

Contents

Copyright.....	2
Contents.....	3
Introduction	4
Principles.....	5
Develop your awareness of the factors that can lead to attendance issues.....	5
Develop your skills and qualities for working with children, young people and their families	6
Ways to develop your communication	6
Promoting Intervention.....	7
What needs to change?	7
Developing and maintaining strong partnerships	8

Introduction

There is no one size fits all solution or alternative curriculum to improving attendance at school as it “is a complex area that is influenced by culture, community, family, school and individual factors. Interventions need to consider all of these influences.” ([Attendance: the next pandemic?](#))

To truly improve the attendance of children and young people, all practitioners must have principles embedded in the approaches they plan to implement.

This document details these core principles which have been co-designed with the stakeholders across the country including the Community Learning and Development (CLD) sector, national parent, family and youth work organisations and the third sector interfaces. They are intended to be used schools and partners who wish to work together to improve attendance for children and young people at school.

Almost all partners agree that attendance within formal education is a responsibility they should contribute towards. The principles are divided into sections to build on this understanding.

Principles

Develop your awareness of the factors that can lead to attendance issues

- Understand the many barriers that can create attendance issues.
- Consider specifically poverty, family dynamics, mental health, equalities, relationships, trauma, neurodiversity
- Be aware of the communities that children and young people live in and the challenges that exist within them
- Tailor support as there is no single solution to improving attendance
- Seek to understand a family's history, their characteristics, the context of their surroundings, their aspirations and feelings
- Share and know who is already working with families and what has previously been done
- Understand how children and young people's rights under the UNCRC should underpin approaches to tackling attendance issues, especially their voice

Develop your skills and qualities for working with children, young people and their families

Practitioners working to improve attendance should:

- Be good listeners, balanced communicators and able to coach others
- Be caring and have empathy for others while being non-judgemental and undertaking a person centred approach
- Develop trusting and real relationships that are consistent and sustainable
- Be patient, encouraging, flexible and approachable
- Have or be willing to gain experience of implementing interventions and developing parental engagement skills
- Know how to create meaningful partnerships that have parity
- Understand children, young people and/or their families may be cautious of professionals from some sectors

Ways to develop your communication

- Communicate with ALL the key carers that are in a child or parent's life
- Present safe, welcoming, informal and neutral spaces to have face to face engagements
- Show interest while being inquisitive and transparent
- Explore the use of different communication methods and tools that are preferred by families
- Be willing to communicate in collaboration with partners, avoiding insular approaches
- Agree consistent approaches in messaging language

Promoting Intervention

- Support must be introduced as early as possible to be the most effective
- Have the aspirations and reasons for non-attendance at the core of interventions while being willing to explore these in depth
- Co-design approaches that work at the families pace, take stock of the family's world and involve the whole family
- Consider the community as a place for interventions to take place
- Empower and build the capacity of families while giving support to them
- Create equitable partnership interventions while being clear on their strengths and weaknesses
- Create and ensure pathways are available for any intervention
- Know key trusted relationships are necessary for success
- Understand that interventions must be consistent, stable and sustainable

What needs to change?

- Punitive approaches don't improve attendance and impact negatively on the most vulnerable children and young people
- Frustrations, deadlines, unrealistic expectations and negativity do not improve attendance
- Avoid forcing a child or young person back into the mainstream school curriculum when they are not ready
- Attendance in a classroom cannot be seen as the only measure of success
- Alternative and tailored curriculums based on the needs required must be developed
- Avoid applying a hierarchy and being inflexible in approaches utilised

Developing and maintaining strong partnerships

- Partners must be invited and be a respected part of school communities
- Parity of esteem must exist between partners, all being equal in the process
- Strategy, outcomes, objectives, knowledge, data and evaluations are a shared responsibility
- Sustainability and commitment are necessary, partnership working should not be seen as a temporary solution
- Communication between partners and schools must be strong and consistent
- Explore alternative opportunities for learning and nominate consistent staff that will build relationships in school and the community
- Create clear understanding of what partners can and cannot do, with roles and purposes being agreed

These principles are the first part how schools and partners should work together to improve attendance for children and young people.

After embedding these principles, the [community partnership mapping tool](#) and the [6 steps to an effective partnership to support attendance document](#) should be utilised.