



Guidance on Attendance Policies and Procedures

August 2024

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Contents

Copyright.....	2
Contents.....	3
Introduction	4
General principles	5
Who should be involved in developing local policies?.....	7
Local authority policy – basic structure	8
Part 1 Policy.....	8
1A Introduction.....	8
1B Promoting good attendance	9
Part 2 Procedure	9
2A Supporting attendance and reducing absence.....	9
2B Measures for Compulsory Compliance (refer directly to IEI1).....	10
2C Monitoring & evaluation of policy (as per LA procedures).....	10
2D Support for establishments in developing their own policy (Guidance and exemplification)	10
Part 3 Appendices.....	10

Introduction

[Included, Engaged and Involved Part 1: Positive Approach to the Promotion and Management of Attendance in Scottish Schools](#) (IEI1) was published in 2019. It provides advice on good practice and establishes the national requirements regarding classifying and recording attendance and absence. There is an 'expectation that *local*¹ authorities and schools would use IEI1 to revise and review existing policies and procedures on attendance, taking account of local circumstances and involving all partners in the development of the new policy' (p6). IEI1 recognises that although there will be 'local variation in processes and internal systems, there should be a degree of **consistency of approach and key messages** reflected in local authority policies and procedures' (p17).

Local authorities have the responsibility to:

- ensure **all staff** are aware of IEI1 guidance (p6)
- have clear guidance on supporting attendance and managing absence (p17)
- **ensure that all schools have in place policies** that promote good attendance and outline procedures to support the recording and management of attendance (p17)
- ensure that schools have staged intervention processes in place to support attendance (p23)

In 2023, [Improving Attendance: Understanding the Issues](#) revealed that there is significant variation across local authorities and establishments in how data is used to support attendance including:

- variations in thresholds that initiate support
- monitoring procedures for tracking attendance and late comings
- use of reason codes
- the use and monitoring of part-time timetables

Additionally, a small-scale survey across two local authorities revealed just over half of the schools surveyed had an attendance policy of their own. Of those schools, only one third said staff had access to their policy and only a fifth said parents had access

¹ Referred to as Education Authorities in IEI1.

to the policy. The report and survey findings imply that over time there has been drift between national guidance and implementation at local authority and school level.

One of the 'actions for consideration' from the [Improving Attendance: Understanding the Issues](#) report was that '**local authorities should carefully monitor their strategic and implementation plans for improving attendance or develop a plan where one is not in place**'.

IE11 encourages regular review of attendance policies and procedures to ensure they are updated in line with new legislation or national priorities (p17). This new Education Scotland guidance has been designed to support local authorities and schools to create, update or refresh their own policy guidance.

General principles

To promote and improve consistency of implementation and practice, there should be a clear line of sight between legislation, national guidance, contextualised local authority policy and procedures and each individual educational settings own policy.

Legislation and policy guidance that is non-negotiable, or fixed, should **not be duplicated** across the different levels of guidance but should **be specifically referenced**. Duplication introduces the potential for re-interpretation and inconsistency in implementation. For example, the national definition of attendance is contained within IE11, it should not be redefined or contextualised in local authority policy guidance. Working in this way should maximise consistency of implementation at every level and minimise drift from policy guidance and authority protocols at establishment level.

The following table highlights **non-negotiable** source information and what can be **contextualised** at local authority or establishment level.

Legislation (non-negotiable)	National Policy (non-negotiable)	Local Authority Policy (contextualised)	School Policy (contextualised)
<p>Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Sections 14, 30 & 35</p> <p>Children’s (Scotland) Act 1995 Section 1(3)</p> <p>The Standards in Scotland’s Schools Act 2000 Section 1</p> <p>The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004</p> <p>The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, (Part 9)</p> <p>UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill 2024</p>	<p>Guiding Principles</p> <p>Local Authority Responsibilities</p> <p>Definition of Attendance</p> <p>Wider policy context:</p> <p>GIRFEC Policy Guidance</p> <p>National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2014)</p> <p>National Home Education Guidance</p>	<p><u>Local Policy context:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement plan • Supporting policies <p><u>Operational procedure:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recording and reporting processes • LA monitoring processes • Minimum trigger thresholds • LA Staged Intervention Model • Part-time timetable guidance • SEEMIS code definitions • Quality assurance processes • Best practice guidance for ELC settings 	<p><u>School context:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values/Vision/ Aims • Supporting establishment policies <p><u>Contextualised:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal preventative approaches • Universal supports and structures • Staged Intervention for setting • Universal and targeted approaches for parental engagement

Who should be involved in developing local policies?

Local authority policy should be developed in consultation with all stakeholders such as central team members, headteachers, professional associations, and potentially learner, parent/carer and partner representatives.

Establishment policy should be developed in consultation with all stakeholders such as pupils, parents/carers, staff, and supporting professional and community partners.

As all local authorities and learning communities are different, it is therefore expected that policies will be suitably contextualised to meet local needs. This guidance provides general principles only and a suggested structure to support local authorities and educational establishments to create or refresh their own policies. This guidance is not prescriptive.

Local authority policy – basic structure

The policy should have 3 key parts:

PART 1 POLICY (the why)

PART 2 PROCEDURES (the what and the how – operational processes)

PART 3 APPENDICES (the detail and supportive information)

Part 1 Policy

This section contains the key messages and expectations for all establishments in relation to supporting attendance. This section should be concise in detail, and any additional information referenced to source material should be placed in the appendices.

1A Introduction

- Why is attendance important and what is the impact of absence?

Good sources of content:

- Why school attendance matters and strategies to improve it – [Meandor \(2017\)](#)¹
 - Why (education) schools are important? – [Jenkins \(2024\)](#)²
 - Harmful impact of absence – [Klein & Sosu \(2024\)](#)³
- **What is attendance?** (refer directly to [IE1](#))
 - **Policy context and legislation**
 - o Legislation and national policy guidance should be referenced
 - o Explicitly state that each establishment will need to develop its own attendance policy
 - o Explicitly state how the attendance policy compliments and articulates with other policies and guidance, for example, Inclusion Framework, Equalities and Diversity Policy, Relationships and Behaviour Policy, Exclusion and Anti-Bullying Guidance

1B Promoting good attendance

- **Everyone has a responsibility to support good attendance**

Provide roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders

- **Approaches that support good attendance**

Summary of approaches supported by the local authority

See supporting resources and exemplification:

- Exemplification of Local Authority Policy Guidance Part 1A Introduction
- Summary of key legislation and national policy guidance
- Exemplification of Roles and Responsibilities
- Exemplification of Supportive Strategies and Approaches

Part 2 Procedure

Complementary procedural guidance which outlines local authority expectations and explains the processes and procedures all establishments should be following. This section could provide easy-to-follow flowcharts and checklists to help school staff manage attendance and absence issues.

2A Supporting attendance and reducing absence

- Recording attendance, absence, and lateness including SEEMIS coding
- Tracking and monitoring
- Using data to support attendance and reduce absence
- Staged Intervention
- Protocols for using part time timetable to support attendance and wellbeing
- Protocols for ELC settings

2B Measures for Compulsory Compliance (refer directly to IEI1)

2C Monitoring & evaluation of policy (as per LA procedures)

- Processes developed to give senior managers an overview of attendance across their schools and enable them to best support schools with good practice and be responsive to challenges.
- Procedures to support evaluation of the effectiveness of approaches used to support attendance and minimise absence.

2D Support for establishments in developing their own policy (Guidance and exemplification)

Part 3 Appendices

This section may include supporting information referred to in Parts 1 & 2 such as:

- detailed information (legislation, SEEMiS codes)
- easy-to-follow flowcharts and checklists to support establishments in implementation of their policy and procedures
- copies of sample letters or leaflets
- referral processes for targeted, intensive or multi-agency supports
- Children's Reporter referral process
- part-time timetable guidance
- code descriptions

See supporting resources and exemplification of:

- Exemplar of Local Authority Policy Part 2A Procedures and Part 3 Appendices
- Exemplar from Inverclyde - Decision Making Tree for Unexplained Absence
- Exemplification of staged intervention for attendance
- Exemplification of Guidance for Part 2D School Attendance Policies with exemplars

- Exemplification of the practical steps in developing a school attendance policy (Part 2D)
- Attendance and ELC Information Note to support Policy Development