



ELLON ACADEMY

PUPIL ATTENDANCE POLICY

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1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 states:

'It shall be 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:

"Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free and different forms of secondary education must be available to every child. Discipline in schools must respect children's dignity and their rights. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this."

The *Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)* Practice Model aims to ensure that every child and young person can access appropriate and timely support in order to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors: attendance is a fundamental prerequisite for this.

All Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services employees have a responsibility to promote high levels of attendance. In addition schools must ensure that systems to monitor absence are used consistently and effectively to allow early intervention when attendance rates drop below the agreed acceptable rate of 90%.

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

- attendance at school;
- learning out with the school provided by a college, off-site unit or other learning provider while still on the roll of the school;
- educational visits, day and residential visits to outdoor centres;
- interviews and visits relating to further and higher education or careers events;
- debates, sports, musical or drama activities in conjunction with the school;
- study leave for pupils participating in national exams, if arranged by the school during the period of the national examination timetable;
- activities in connection with psychological services, learning or behaviour support;
- receiving tuition via hospital or outreach teaching services;
- work Experience.

The United Nations Convention on The Rights of The Child underpins all Ellon Academy policies, procedures and practices to ensure that our young peoples' rights and responsibilities, along with respect for all, are promoted. This links into our United Nations Rights Respecting School Framework.

2. SCHOOL AIMS

1. Achievement and Attainment

We have the highest expectations for every single young person who enters Ellon Academy. All our pupils are given every encouragement to aim for the highest possible levels of achievement in educational attainment and life skills.

2. Framework for Learning

We aim to provide quality learning and teaching experiences for all our pupils, based on their unique aptitudes, needs and abilities, delivered by a professional and highly dedicated staff. By constantly reviewing and evaluating our curriculum, we aim to ensure that the needs of all learners are addressed. We see each individual as unique and make every effort to make them aware of the school's responsibilities to them and also their responsibilities to the school, fellow pupils and the local community. Also, we have very high expectations for the learning that takes place in every classroom, and for each pupil's contribution to this. Good classroom relationships are crucial to developing a positive school ethos, firmly built on positive relationships between all partners.

3. Inclusion and Equality

Ellon Academy has a tradition of being a fully inclusive school. We aim to help every individual pupil to benefit from education, and take pride in the support we continue to provide for pupils of all abilities and needs, within a framework of equal opportunities. We aim to be a caring community, providing the highest possible levels of support for all pupils. All members of the Ellon Academy community are valued and respected.

4. Values and Citizenship

Promoting Education at Ellon Academy is firmly founded on a partnership that aims to teach pupils respect for themselves and others. It also aims to make pupils aware of their rights and responsibilities both within the school community and as part of society generally, thus developing effective skills of citizenship and an awareness of the need to care for and value our environment.

5. Learning for Life

Ellon Academy aims to create a learning environment that enables pupils to develop creativity, ambition, enterprise, and the skills and attitudes required for success in life the 21st Century.

3. POLICY AIMS AND LINKS TO THE NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

School Aims (SA) Links

1. Supporting Achievement and Attainment by promoting high levels of attendance
2. Applying monitoring, early intervention and staged support strategies to underpin Equality and Inclusion in attendance

National Improvement Framework Links

Achieving equity: ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed (SA: 1, 3)
Every child and young person has the right to expect appropriate support from adults to allow them to grow and develop and reach their full potential (SA 1, 3, 5)

4. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Attendance Protocol

Managing Absence

At times, pupils are absent from school for a range of reasons. Should a pupil have to leave school during the day (e.g. to attend a hospital appointment), they must provide an explanation to ensure that the school knows the time that they will be collected, who they will be collected by, and at what time they are due to return. If the parent wishes for the child or young person to travel unaccompanied to the appointment, this should be explained in the communication. Explanations can take the form of a written note, email, text, telephone call or a message on the school's Absence Telephone Line (accessed through the menu options made available when telephoning the school). Where concerns exist about the authenticity of explanations received schools may insist on written confirmation.

Absences

Following Aberdeenshire Council's Attendance Guidelines launch in May 2016, the following is a revision of Ellon Academy's attendance monitoring procedures to ensure consistency of approach across Pastoral Support (PTG / ASL / SLT team) and to tie-in with Aberdeenshire Council's revised absence monitoring procedures.

Registration

Completing an attendance register is the responsibility of the class teacher. This includes visiting specialist teachers, supply teachers and 'cover' teachers. Under no circumstances should registers be projected onto white boards, and the computer screen in use should face away from pupils in order to comply with Data Protection Legislation.

If a pupil is marked as absent, the office send a text to parent / carer informing them their child has not attended school. The text is sent only **after** the designated member of office staff has been to Time Out and cross-checked pupils who have been marked absent from

registration with those who have arrived late (up to the end of period 1). The expectation is that parents / carers respond to confirm (or otherwise) that their child is absent and to state a reason why. Seemis is updated accordingly by the designated member of office staff. The designated member of staff will check the text message system regularly for responses. Information gained through text messages or phone calls or from staff members, e.g. PTG, will be used to code the absence appropriately.

Should a message raise an issue which requires further investigation, this should be passed to the Principal Teacher of Guidance for follow up.

- **Vulnerable Pupils**

Vulnerable pupils by definition include those who are:

- currently on the Child Protection register;
- subject to ongoing (or recent) Child Protection investigation(s);
- looked after children;
- at risk of conducting themselves in a manner that may have a serious impact on their own health, safety and/or development and that of others.

The designated member of office staff maintains a list of vulnerable pupils. The list of vulnerable pupils should be updated (by PTG / Depute Pupil Support, as appropriate) as changes occur.

If the pupil marked absent is on the school's **vulnerable pupils list** and (following a text) no response is received within an hour, parent / carer should be contacted by phone by the designated member of office staff. All known parental / carer numbers should be called until contact is made. If no contact is made with the parent / carer of an individual on the vulnerable pupils list, the designated member of office staff will advise the PTG who, in discussion with their SLT link (or CPC, if SLT link is not available) will make an assessment of risk. If the pupil is deemed a High Vulnerability Risk, Child Protection Protocol should be initiated: Social Work or Police Scotland should be contacted.

- **Responding to Unexplained Absence of More than One Day**

If any child (for which there are no existing concerns) remains absent for a second day and contact still cannot be made, discussion must take place involving the PTG / Depute Head of House / Child Protection Co-ordinator in deciding the next appropriate steps. Actions may include:

- telephoning named emergency contacts (by PTG) ;
- seeking advice/updates from other agencies;
- requesting a home visit by another agency.

IF CONCERN ARISES AT ANY POINT FOR THE SAFETY OR WELFARE OF ANY PUPIL, CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES SHOULD BE INITIATED.

- **Pupils Marked Absent From Class Periods 1 to 6 / 7**

The designated member of office staff monitors Seemis registration for any attendance anomalies. If a pupil is marked absent from class, their name is noted. Their attendance is

noted for the following period. If they are still absent a text is sent home advising of this. The reason for absence should be dealt with by the PTG and, where appropriate (for example, truancy) this should be followed-up, at the earliest opportunity, with contact with parent / carer and the appropriate sanctions applied.

If the pupil marked absent is on the school's **vulnerable pupils list**, all known parental / carer numbers should be called by the designated member of office staff until contact is made. If no contact is made with the parent / carer of an individual on the vulnerable pupils list, the designated member of office staff will advise the PTG who, in discussion with their SLT link (or CPC, if SLT link is not available) will make an assessment of risk. If the pupil is deemed a High Vulnerability Risk, Child Protection Protocol should be initiated: Social Work or Police Scotland should be contacted.

Following Up On Any Unexplained Absence

Ellon Academy will make clear through communications with parents / carers (e.g school handbook, school policy, school website) that an explanation is required for each day of absence. It should be encouraged that notification is received in advance, although it is understood that this is not always possible.

Parents / carers should be asked to provide an explanation on the first day the pupil returns to school following any period of absence, unless notification of the reason for the absence was received in advance or in response to a text message or phone call home.

When a pupil returns from a period of absence, the register teacher should check the register: if TBC or UNA appears next to a pupil's name, the register teacher should ask for a note. The note should be passed to the office, in the registration folder.

Should a note **not** be provided the pupil will be handed a pre-signed absence enquiry form. The registration teacher should fill-in the date the pupil returned from absence. The form should be taken home by the pupil and returned to the registration teacher the following day. Registration teachers should fill-in the pupil's name and date of issue on the Pre-signed Absence Enquiry Record Sheet. On its return, the completed pre-signed absence enquiry form should then be passed to the office for recording on SEEMIS and forwarded to the PTG for filing.

Attendance of all pupils must be monitored on an ongoing basis and formally on a fortnightly basis by the PTG / Head of House. This should form part of the discussion at weekly House Meetings. If an absence has been coded as TBC (because an absence enquiry form has not been returned), a follow up enquiry letter, with attendance summary sheet attached, should be sent. This will state clearly that the absence coding will change to unexplained/unauthorised (UNA/U) if an explanation is not provided within five school days.

Tracking Persistent Non-attendance

- **Informal Stage** (attendance trigger of 90% reached)

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 until such time as appropriate improvements are made.

A report is available on SEEMIS which captures all pupils who have an absence rate of 90% and less, for the reasons categorised below. This will be the starting point for fortnightly attendance monitoring:

- self-certified illness (SEL/D)
- unauthorised absence (UNA)
- truancy (UNA)
- exceptional domestic circumstances (DCA / Q)
- unexplained or still to be explained absence (TBC/T)

Attendance is monitored fortnightly: if there are more than three days of total absence (without sufficient explanation), or after six weeks onwards, attendance is less than 90% then the informal stage process is initiated. Attendance reports must be run fortnightly and issued to the PTG. The PTG will review this information and identify appropriate actions for each pupil. **Vulnerable pupils should be subject to more regular attendance monitoring, where appropriate.**

Contact is made, by the PTG, with parents / carers (by phone) and the child to inform that attendance is being monitored, in line with Aberdeenshire Council's Guidelines on Managing and Promoting Attendance in Secondary Schools. Initial enquiries are made to establish reasons for absence and decline in attendance. Supportive dialogue with the parent / carer / pupil takes place where the importance of good attendance is emphasised. Where appropriate, short term internal support mechanisms are put in place to support attendance at school. Given that this could, potentially, be the start of a formal process, this phone contact should be backed-up by a letter to parents confirming content of the phone call. A note of the phone call should be recorded in Pastoral Notes and the letter filed in the pupil's PPR. In **exceptional** circumstance (such as a serious medical condition) the aforementioned phone call to parents / carers would allow for dialogue and appropriate supports to be put in place and a letter would not be required at this stage. A note of the phone call should be recorded in Pastoral Notes.

- **Initiation Stage**

This should take place after the PTG has followed-up the Informal Stage with supports for child / young person but there has been no improvement in attendance.

At this stage, a **Single Agency Assessment** is required. This will ensure that regular focus is given to this young person's attendance and that structured intervention is implemented. An Attendance Letter is sent to parents / carers inviting them to a meeting with PTG (and, where appropriate, head of house) to discuss attendance issues and support required to improve attendance. PTG may consider requesting informal consultation with the Educational Psychologist.

Where there is no improvement in attendance, consideration should be made to initiating a **Multi-Agency Assessment and Action Planning** process.

- **Multi-Agency Stage (MAAP)**

PTG should inform the family of multi-agency involvement, ideally seeking their consent. It must be made clear to pupils and parents that if a young person chooses not to commit to

improving attendance that other actions will be taken (e.g. referral to Truancy Sub-Committee or Children's Reporter). PTG should then complete a Multi-Agency Request form, with cover letters. A MAAPM is convened, to which the QIO is invited. Following the MAAPM, a review should be held in a maximum of six weeks. During this process, contact may be made with the Children's Reporter for advice. A Statutory Child's Plan is put in place, with relevant actions.

If no, or adequate, progress is made as a result of the MAAPM process then a referral to the Children's Reporter can be made.

- **Children's Reporter**

The Children's Reporter may decide to convene a Children's Hearing. MAAPMs continue to meet and plan. If the Children's Reporter decides not to call a Children's Hearing the PTG informs the QIO. The MAAPM process should continue, exploring options to support the young person in addressing the circumstances affecting their attendance.

- **Formal / Legal Stage**

If there has been continued lack of progress in attendance the QIO should be contacted for advice, which will be taken back to the Multi-agency meeting. Alternatively, the QIO agrees that all options have been explored and that the formal stage is required. A referral is made to the Area Attendance 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.

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 seven 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.

5. POLICY CONSULTATION PROCESS

This Policy has been subject to consultation with sample groups of relevant stakeholders including: Principal Teachers of Guidance, CLD, Educational Psychologist, Ellon Academy Office Staff.

6. STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCES

Professional development and resource requirements are identified and linked through the Improvement Planning and PDRS systems. Identified teacher, faculty and whole-school needs are resourced through annual core and enhanced budget allocations.

7. POLICY EVALUATION AND REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed as required and formally as part of the Ellon Academy policy review cycle outlined in the Whole School Improvement Plan. This Policy will be updated annually (as appropriate) and formally reviewed during session 2018-2019.