



# NORTH LIVERPOOL ACADEMY

## ATTENDANCE ROLE OF EDUCATION WELFARE OFFICER

Regular school attendance is essential if pupils are to make the most of the educational opportunities available to them. Irregular attendance seriously disrupts continuity of learning, undermines educational progress, and leads to underachievement and low attainment.

Young people's prospects in later life can be seriously harmed by irregular attendance. A recent survey of subsequent educational and labour market performance of school leavers found that "Young people who had truanted were less likely to be in full-time education, less likely to have a good job offering training, and more likely to be unemployed or inactive, than those who had not truanted".

### **The Law**

By law, all children of compulsory school age (5 – 16) must receive suitable education. Parents are responsible for making sure this happens, either by registering the child at a school or by arranging an effective alternative to school.

A child of compulsory school age who is registered at school must by law attend regularly. As well as checking attendance by calling the register, schools consider whether to permit (authorize) a child to be absent. This authorisation is either given in advance (e.g. – a hospital appointment) or subsequently after the parent has provided a satisfactory explanation (e.g. – absence due to illness).

Parents have no right to authorize the absence of a registered pupil of compulsory school age: only schools can do this.

### **Responsibilities of Parents**

In law, parents have the prime responsibility for ensuring that registered pupils of compulsory school age attend regularly. If a child does not attend regularly, parents should work closely with the school and any assigned education welfare officer to resolve the problem.

Parents can help schools by keeping requests for their child to absent from school to a minimum. They should not expect schools to automatically agree to such requests. Nor should they condone unjustified absence from school. If a pupil cannot attend for whatever reasons, the parent is responsible for telling the school, preferably on the first day of absence. Parents should follow the school's arrangements for reporting absence.

Parents should ensure that their children arrive at school on time, properly dressed and in a condition to learn. They should see themselves as partners

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with schools in their children's education. Parents should see that homework is completed on time and that children follow the school's disciplinary code.

### **Home-school agreements**

Every school must have a written home-school agreement, drawn up in consultation with parents. This will explain the respective responsibilities of the school and of parents and what the school expects of its pupils. Parents will be asked to sign a declaration in support of the agreement.

### **Contact on the first day of Absence**

If a pupil is absent without explanation when the register is called, school staff should, wherever possible, contact the parents the same day. A declared policy of first day contact makes it clear to pupils and their parents that absence is a matter of concern and it will be followed up.

### **The importance of early intervention**

If not tackled, irregular attendance quickly becomes a habit that is hard to break. The importance of regular and punctual attendance should therefore be emphasised to parent and pupil from day one of a child's school career and consciously reinforced at regular intervals. The emphasis should be positive, focusing on the need to maintain continuity of learning, but school staff should not be afraid to point to the possibility of legal sanctions.

### **Authorised and unauthorised absence**

Where a day pupil of compulsory school age is absent at the time of registration, the law requires all schools to indicate in their attendance register whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Authorised absence means that the school has either given approval in advance for the pupil to be away or that an explanation offered afterwards has been accepted as satisfactory justification. Accurate use of register codes within the school will allow teachers and EWO's to determine quickly the basis of the authorised absence in question. (See 'Guidance on Attendance Registers').

### **Parental notes**

Parentally condoned unjustified absence is a serious problem for some schools. Although requiring a different response to child – initiated truancy, it amounts to the same thing, unjustified absence of a pupil of compulsory school age. Given

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its importance, it may be appropriate to refer to parentally – condoned unjustified absence in communications to parents and at parents' meetings in order to minimize subsequent confrontations.

### **Lateness**

Schools should actively discourage late arrival. A pupil arriving late may seriously disrupt not only his or her continuity of learning but also that of others. Unpunctuality may also lead to full absence if not challenged. In recognition of local circumstances (such as very bad weather or occasional public transport difficulties), schools may keep their registers open for a reasonable period to cater for late arrivals.

For registration to mean anything at all, a firm line must be taken on late arrivals. Where pupils miss registration and fail to provide an adequate explanation, they be marked as unauthorised absent (late) for that session, even though they arrived later. To do otherwise undermines the whole purpose of registration and may serve to encourage other pupils to arrive late.

### **Responding to absence: Key Points**

The key points are these:-

- Registered pupil of compulsory school age must by law attend school regularly;
- Although schools should recognize that individual pupils and families have problems, they should always expect regular attendance
- Lateness should be actively discouraged
- Where a pupil is absent without prior authorization an explanation is required. If one is not forthcoming ((for whatever reason) the absence must be recorded in the register as unauthorized;
- Schools need not accept reasons given by parents if they doubt the validity of the explanation offered; and should only authorise absence if that is justified;
- Explanations such as minding the house, looking after other children, or shopping trips within school hours will not normally be acceptable reasons for absence;
- Parents should not expect, or be led to expect, that schools will agree to family holidays during term time. Each application will need to be considered on its merits;
- Even where absence is authorised, schools should be alert to emerging patterns of absence which may seriously disrupt continuity of learning;
- In promoting regular attendance, schools should work closely with education welfare officers;

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### GUIDANCE ON ATTENDANCE REGISTERS

1. The law requires regular attendance. Schools are required to take an attendance register twice a day; at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. The register shows whether the pupil is present, engaged in an approved educational activity off – site or absent.
2. If a pupil of compulsory school age is absent, the register must show whether the absence was authorised or unauthorised.
  - Authorised absence is where the school has either given approval in advance for a pupil of compulsory school age to be away, or has accepted an explanation offered afterwards as satisfactory justification for absence.
  - All other absences must be treated as unauthorised.
3. Parents may not authorise absence, only schools can do this. Schools may authorise any absence but inappropriate use can be just as damaging to a child's education as unauthorised absence. Since all absences are to be treated as unauthorised unless and until schools agree on a satisfactory explanation, it is clearly important that schools have procedures, consistently applied, for chasing up explanations and amending registers.

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**This table shows types of absences which schools may treat as authorized:**

Reason for absence	Remarks
Illness, medical and dental appointments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missing registration for a medical or dental appointment is authorised absence. Pupils should be encouraged to make appointments out of school hours. Sight of an appointment card is advisable if a pupil is an irregular attender.</li> <li>• If a pupil is present for registration but has a medical appointment later, or returns home because of illness, no absence need be recorded for that session.</li> <li>• Schools should keep a record of pupils leaving or returning to site in case of an emergency.</li> <li>• If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, schools and EWOs can consult the School Health Service, or the pupil's GP.</li> <li>• A pupil receiving medical treatment on site should be marked 'present'</li> </ul>
Days of religious observance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence to take part in any day set aside exclusively for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong, including religious festivals.</li> <li>• Parents should be encouraged to give advance notice.</li> </ul>
Interview with prospective employers, or a place at another school (including entrance examinations).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School staff should normally ask for advance notice and proof of the appointment e.g. a letter of invitation.</li> <li>• If the interview takes place during Year 11 and the school is satisfied that it is linked to future education or employment prospects, absence can be recorded as 'approved educational activity'.</li> </ul>
Study Leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study leave should not normally exceed 15 school days during Year 11.</li> <li>• If possible the period of study leave should be less than the examination period. Regard should also be paid to the individual pupil's ability to manage study leave and benefit from it.</li> <li>• Unsupervised study leave is not an 'approved educational activity'. It is authorised absence.</li> </ul>

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<p>Dual Registration involving Pupil Referral unit (PRUs) or special schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The law allows for dual registration of pupils at both a PRU or special school and another local school. This helps, for example, to ease a phased return to mainstream education.</li> <li>• Where a pupil is dually registered at institution X and Y, institution X marks the pupil authorised absent while they are attending institution Y and vice-versa. Both institutions share responsibility for the child.</li> <li>• Failure to attend either institution at the proper time without good reason is unauthorised absence.</li> </ul>
<p>Family holidays during term-time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents should not normally take pupils on holidays in term.</li> <li>• Each request for holiday absence should be considered individually, taking account of: the age of the child; the time of year proposed for the trip; its nature and parental wishes; the overall attendance pattern of the pupil; the child's stage of education and progress.</li> <li>• If a school does not agree absence and the pupil goes on holiday, absence is unauthorised.</li> <li>• If parents keep a child away for longer than was agreed, any extra time is recorded as unauthorised.</li> <li>• Schools may delete from roll a pupil who fails to return within 10 school days of the agreed return date unless there is a good reason for the continued absence, such as illness.</li> <li>• Schools should only, exceptionally, agree absence of more than 10 school days in a school year (and should not regard 10 days as the norm).</li> </ul>
<p>Exclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A pupil excluded for a fixed period remains on roll and the absence should be treated as authorised as it results from a decision taken by the school. Similarly, the absence of a permanently excluded pupil is treated as authorised while any review or appeal is in progress.</li> <li>• If a permanent exclusion is confirmed, the pupil's name should be removed from the school roll on the school day either: after the appeal committee's confirmation of permanent</li> </ul>

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	<p>exclusion; or on expiry of the time allowed for appeals to be made; or, if before that, the pupil takes up a place elsewhere. Meanwhile absence should be recorded as authorised.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teachers are responsible for setting work for an excluded pupil who remains on the school roll.</li></ul>
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<p>Traveller child when the family is traveling</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To help ensure continuity of learning for Traveller children, dual registration is allowed. This means that a school cannot remove a Traveller child from the school roll while they are traveling.</li> <li>• While the Traveller is away, the base school holds the place open and records absence as authorised.</li> <li>• Distance learning packs for Traveller children are not an alternative to attendance at school.</li> </ul>
<p>Family bereavements, or child caring for a sick or disabled family member (young carers).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools should respond sensitively to requests to attend funerals or associated events and have discretion to authorise such absences.</li> <li>• Similarly, schools may authorise limited duration absence for young carers until other arrangements can be made (see also Section 3 of Social Inclusion: Pupil Support).</li> </ul>
<p>Special Occasions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools should consider each request individually. Only exceptional occasions warrant leave of absence. For example, attending the wedding of a family member would be acceptable, but a day's absence for a birthday or shopping trip in school hours, would not.</li> <li>• Schools should consider: the nature of the event, its frequency (is it a one-off, or likely to become a regular occurrence?); whether the parent gave advance notice; the pupil's overall attendance pattern.</li> </ul>
<p>Public performances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Local Authority must licence a pupil to take part in a public performance.</li> <li>• Agreed participation should be treated as authorised absence.</li> </ul>
<p>Birth of a child</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support should be directed to keeping the pupil in school wherever possible, and to her return to full-time education as soon as possible after the birth.</li> <li>• A pupil who becomes pregnant should be allowed no more than 18 weeks' authorised absence to cover the time immediately before and after the birth of the child. After that time, any absence should be treated as unauthorised.</li> </ul>

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### Lateness

- Schools should actively discourage late arrival and be alert to patterns of late arrival, which could provide grounds for prosecution.
- Schools should have a policy on how long registers should be kept open. Thirty minutes from the beginning of registration would be reasonable, but schools can set shorter periods.
- In circumstances such as bad weather or public transport difficulties, schools may keep the register open for a longer period.

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