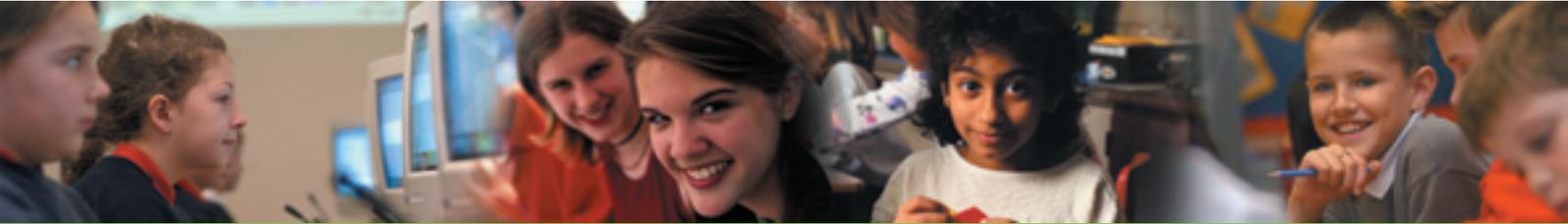# included, engaged and involved

part 1: attendance in scottish schools

SAFE & SUPPORTED

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SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

included, engaged and involved

part 1: attendance in scottish schools

12 December 2007

Support for Learning Division
Schools Directorate
The Scottish Government
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Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

MOTIVATED & LEARNING

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Ministerial Foreword

Making sure pupils are included, engaged and involved in their education is fundamental to achievement and attainment in school and ultimately to the economic prosperity of themselves and Scotland. This guidance looks at what schools and local authorities can do to promote attendance and manage absence. The joint concordat between the Scottish Government and local government provides an agreed framework of national outcomes. These outcomes support our shared aspirations for Scottish children and young people. They include the aims that our young people: are better educated, more skilled and more successful, are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, responsible citizens; have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.

We know that for some young people, life presents particular challenges which will distract from learning. They may not be motivated by learning opportunities or there may be other barriers entirely beyond their control which prevent them from engaging fully with education control. Non attendance may be an indicator of issues or difficulties a child or young person is experiencing. We also know that the impact of non-attendance at school and non-engagement with learning significantly increases the likelihood of young people leaving school and not going on to further education, employment or training. This guidance therefore goes beyond the recording of attendance and absence and explores many of the circumstances which may lead young people to be disengaged from learning.

Included, Engaged and Involved does not stand alone. We are committed to ensuring that all children are included and supported to engage in and benefit from education through supporting schools to develop peaceful and positive learning environments; promoting positive behaviour; and, promoting positive relationships. Through personal support for pupils, our aim is for happy children to become successful learners, emotionally resilient and confident. Our standards for personal support are set out in *Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential*, 2004, while the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 will ensure a focus on promoting health and emotional well being of all those within a school community in the widest sense. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 provides the framework for individual support which underpins young people's access to educational opportunities in Scotland. This framework enables authorities to provide support for learning, for any reason, in the short or long term. Patterns of attendance and absence often provide indicators of the need for support, for example, truancy may indicate concerns about school, a young carer may regularly be late to school after having taken care of the needs of the family at home.

A number of the responses to the consultation on this guidance suggested that a booklet for parents should be produced. We will develop a guide for parents as part of the *Making the difference* series of information for parents.

This document is part 1 of our approach to keeping all pupils included, engaged, and involved in learning. As part 2, we will review and revise the current circular 8/03 on Exclusion from School. This will enable similar linkages between exclusion and achievement to be explored, and will specifically address the needs of our most vulnerable children and families, including those young people who are looked after and accommodated and those with additional support needs, based within a similar context of promoting positive behaviour, promoting personal care and support, promoting individual learning planning; and, providing flexible curriculum opportunities and supporting children and young people to access education.

I trust this document will help and guide you in assisting our children and young people achieve their best.
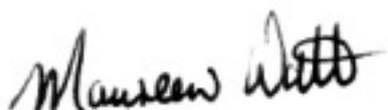
MAUREEN WATT
Minister for Schools and Skills
December 2007

1. Introduction

The Scottish Government aims to promote good attendance at school. Absence from school, whatever the cause, disrupts learning. This draft guidance replaces Circular 5/03 and the subsequent Addendum in September 2003. It draws together advice on good practice and establishes requirements regarding classifying and recording attendance and absence.

In addition to the classification of attendance and absence, this guidance seeks to explore and address wider issues around the promotion and management of good attendance and the prevention and reduction of absence.

This guidance seeks to make stronger links between absence and the protection of children. This is supported by funding which has been made available for automated call systems in schools to enable them to respond immediately when children, without explanation, do not arrive at school and, by the Children Missing from Education service which supports local authorities with the tracing of children across local authority boundaries and across borders.

Status

This guidance is aimed at schools and education authority staff. It is issued by the Scottish Government. It makes general references to law and legislation but is not an authoritative statement of the law. Interpretation of the law is a matter for legal advisers and ultimately the courts. Readers may wish to take legal advice regarding any particular set of circumstances.

Staff in pre-school establishments may also find this guidance useful as an indicator of good practice in managing attendance and absence.

Context

Included, Engaged and Involved is issued at an exciting time in Scottish education. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that every child gets off to the best start in life; and, focusing on the child as learner, to providing support and learning journeys that respond to individual needs and potential. To these ends, the Scottish Government is committed to *Curriculum for Excellence* and to making its aims a reality for every child and young person in school.

Skills for Scotland, A Life Long Skills Strategy 2007 sets the context for this guidance. Skills mean personal learning skills, literacy and numeracy, core skills such as communication, problem solving and working with others, employability skills, and vocational skills. Young people's education, including compulsory education, lays the foundations for skills and work, with a major bearing on participation in society and work in later life.

Key elements in supporting positive development of those skills include providing high quality school education, and making sure that all young people have positive opportunities to learn and develop. The design of *Curriculum for Excellence* will increasingly enable schools and other education providers to help young people develop the skills that will underpin their personal, social and economic futures. The new curriculum will encourage schools to provide pupils with increased opportunities to build work related knowledge, experience and skills. This system will provide more engaging and personalised support and approaches to learning to provide opportunities that will engage, motivate and engender a culture of enterprise and ambition in schools.

Attendance at school should be clearly linked to schools' overall approaches to promoting positive behaviour and approaches to providing guidance and pastoral care. Both are underpinned by the development of positive relationships and emotional literacy in whole school communities. The Scottish Government is firmly committed to creating peaceful and positive learning environments; and, to supporting schools to tackle more serious indiscipline. This includes the use of flexible curriculum, additional support staff, homelink workers, and a range of approaches such as staged intervention, restorative practices, solution oriented approaches, The Motivated School and Social, Emotional, Learning Frameworks (SELF) (www.betterbehaviourscotland.gov.uk) to help schools and education authorities develop children's pro-social behaviour, resolve conflict and tackle challenging behaviour. Standards for personal support for all children have been established in our guidance *Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential*, 2005.

Links to health promotion in its widest sense are clear. The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to ensure that schools are health promoting. This duty will commence on 3 January 2008, building upon work already done. A focus on promoting the emotional well being of all those within a school community links to the overall approaches to promoting positive behaviour set out above, and to personalised support.

Giving every child a strong start in life includes meeting the needs of young people who need more choices and chances, and who are more at risk of not engaging with or benefiting from compulsory education. Risks could relate to missing education for legitimate reasons such as illness, or through disengagement from education. The Scottish Government has prioritised supporting vulnerable children and families. A focus on, and priority of, improving outcomes for looked after children through the implementation of *We Can And Must Do Better* will be maintained, as will a focus on children in special circumstances, for example, those with additional support needs, those in the youth justice system and those in difficult home circumstances.

There are particular responsibilities for local authorities as corporate parents of looked after children, whether looked after and accommodated (ie. in foster care or residential care) or looked after at home (ie. with birth parents or in kinship care). As corporate parent local authorities have a statutory responsibility to ensure that children and young people receive education which is directed towards achieving their full potential (section 2(1) Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000), and this can present specific issues in relation to attendance and absence, as well as exclusion, which are covered in this document.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 provides a framework for assessing children's needs and helping them overcome barriers to learning by planning and collaborating to provide support.

There is significant work underway nationally, promoting more effective partnership working in areas such as domestic abuse, children affected by parental substance misuse, mental and emotional wellbeing (*HeadsUp Scotland: the National Project for Children and Young People's Mental Health, 2003*), and young carers (*Care 21 Report: The Future of Unpaid Care in Scotland*, recommendation 2, February 2005).

In addition, the importance of promoting good attendance at school is highlighted by concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children who are not at school. Child protection is of paramount importance and non-attendance at school may indicate a child is at risk. Our national guidance, *The Safe and Well handbook*, 2005 provides comprehensive advice on policies and procedures for schools. It also provides information on the Children Missing from Education (Scotland) service which supports the tracing of children who have disappeared from view of schools and education authorities.

Children's safety and wellbeing can be compromised by their own behaviour. Young people may avoid school and become involved in more negative activities in the wider community, sometimes leading to more serious concerns of offending or substance misuse. Children's attendance may also be compromised by the actions of others, for example their parents' involvement in substance misuse.

For every child to achieve their potential, all schools must consider each pupil's positive engagement with learning and their level of involvement in the school community. The Scottish policy context allows greater flexibility for professionals to develop creative approaches to enthusing and engaging learners, and for developing effective responses to the support needs of their pupils.

MOTIVATED & LEARNING

2. Managing attendance and immediate action on absence

2.1 Attendance

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

> Attendance at school

> Learning outwith the school provided by a college, off-site unit or other learning provider while still on the roll of the school (see 2.3)

> 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 (see 10.3)

> Activities in connection with psychological services, learning or behaviour support

> Receiving tuition via hospital or outreach teaching services (see 2.4)

> Work experience

2.2 School policies and procedures

Education authorities should ensure that all schools in their area have in place policies and procedures informing their management of pupils' attendance and absence. While there may be scope for local variation in policies and procedures, consistency of approach helps pupils and parents to understand expectations through transitions, for example between schools or from primary to secondary. The issues raised in this document should be reflected in local policies and procedures.

Regular reviews of policies and procedures, in consultation with parents, pupils and all staff, help to reaffirm expectations. When schools set specific objectives for good attendance, consultation on how this is to be achieved encourages buy-in, as does feedback on attendance rates during the year.

The term parent is used throughout this document and should, in the case of looked after children and those in kinship care, be taken also to mean carer.

2.3 Wherever learning takes place

More pupils are now learning in a variety of settings, gaining specific support for learning or accessing learning provided by other agencies or providers, in partnership with schools. The school's policies and procedures for managing attendance and absence should be agreed with every service involved in providing for pupils. A system should be in place to enable centralised recording of attendance and absence for each pupil, by the school in which the pupil is registered. If this is not collated by the school on a daily basis, then any action ordinarily taken by the school when there is absence should be taken on by the partner provider.

If absence is a concern for pupils accessing support from another provider, then partnership working between the provider, the school and the education authority would be expected on a similar staged basis to practice for schools (see sections 2.8 – 2.12) to fulfil the education authority's duty to register attendance at school and follow-up absence.

2.4 Providing for pupils during long-term illness

Education authorities are required to make arrangements to support the learning of children with prolonged ill-health (section 14 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (as amended by Section 40 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000) through outreach teaching or other special provision. Where appropriate provision is in place, schools may record this as attendance, but where it is not in place, this is still categorised as authorised absence but the local authority must actively be making alternative arrangements to ensure that children can access education.

Where schools maintain contact with pupils and parents, arrangements to support learning during absence and on return to school can make a positive difference in enabling the pupil to progress, limiting the setbacks the disruption may cause, and help them settle with their peers quickly on return. Further guidance is available in *Guidance on education of children absent from school through ill-health*
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/158331/0042883.pdf.

2.5 Education outwith school

Parents have a duty to provide efficient and suitable education for their children under section 30 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Most parents fulfil their responsibility to provide efficient and suitable education by sending their children to a local authority school. Some others may choose to do so by providing home based education. Home education must be efficient education and suitable to the age ability and aptitude of the child. Section 35 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 provides that parents of children who have attended a local

authority school must seek the education authority's consent before withdrawing their child. Section 35 also provides that the education authority must not unreasonably withhold consent. Parents are not required to seek the consent of the education authority in order to home educate their child if:

> their child has never attended a public school,

> their child has never attended a public school in that authority's area,

> their child is being withdrawn from an independent school,

> their child has finished primary education in one school but has not started secondary education, or

> the school their child has been attending has closed.

More information is available in *Guidance on the Circumstances in which Parents may Choose to Educate their Children at Home*
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/03/19061/34285.

2.6 High expectations

In addition to consulting on policies and procedures, schools can encourage good attendance by raising the profile of attendance and absence around the school and in school documents such as the School Handbook. Many schools link rewards systems with good attendance, where feedback from pupils helps to establish what rewards are 'desirable'. However, some absence from school is clearly legitimate (e.g. for genuine illness) and systems should distinguish between authorised absence and unauthorised absence. For pupils experiencing difficulties, some schools require good attendance as a condition of accessing flexible learning (e.g. the XL programme, Duke of Edinburgh/John Muir Awards or Skillforce), to ensure that a pupil's attendance improves all round rather than just for these sessions.

Parents should be encouraged to consider their own role and responsibility in motivating pupils to attend school. Some parents may allow unnecessary absence, which is no more helpful to their child than truancy. In particular, some parents may allow absence from school if they are concerned that a bullying issue or other support need is not being dealt with appropriately by the school. As outlined in *Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential*, having a named contact within the school for parents to discuss pastoral care issues is important. It is important that parents are involved in encouraging children to attend school, and the parent council will have a key role in ensuring that all parents are engaged. It is likely that many children whose attendance requires attention will have parents who are "hard to reach". The parent council should be asked to assist the school in engaging these parents.

In discussing attendance with parents it is important to maintain a practical focus that recognises the challenges of parenting. Modern family life can be difficult for parents, particularly those juggling work with getting children ready for school in the morning. Schools have found that breakfast clubs improved attendance as these are a practical help to parents and pupils. Timing of transport to school in some areas can be a difficulty, particularly when short-term disruptions arise that confuse established routines. Some parents will allow their child to avoid being in trouble for lateness by missing school altogether. When looked after children are experiencing a move in placement, they may have to travel longer distances or adjust to new routes and the designated senior manager for looked after children in the school should ensure that support is in place. It should be clear to parents and pupils that sanctions for lateness will be respectful and considerate towards any family difficulties, and that when the school becomes aware of any difficulties it will do what it can to help in partnership with other services.

Parents should be given clear information, updated on a regular basis, regarding their responsibility to inform the school if their child will be absent, and via which methods, and to provide current emergency contact information. It is helpful for schools to have an answering machine for out of hours contact by parents.

Scottish Executive information for parents on school attendance and absence is available on Parentzone www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk/topics/goingtoschool/attendanceandabsence.asp.

2.7 Registration and recording lateness

Recording of attendance should take place at least twice a day to enable the school to note attendance and absence for each morning and afternoon session.

In most schools, a daily register of attendance is taken in the morning. In addition to noting attendance and absence, staff have the opportunity to get to know pupils and to become aware of any concerns regarding their learning, social development, safety and wellbeing. This information should be shared with other staff as appropriate to enable support to be provided, as described in *Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential*. Some secondary schools have allocated a block of 'tutor group' time on a weekly basis, with tutors following groups throughout their school career, which provides an opportunity for a higher level of personal knowledge of pupils. Schools should seek to maximise opportunities for staff to get to know pupils well. In the case of looked after children the designated senior manager within the school should be aware of any particular issues which may impact on attendance and should look to find ways of supporting the young person through these. Persistent lateness, lack of preparedness for lessons, obvious bad moods or distress observed during the process of noting attendance and absence may be signs of difficulty that the school can then try to support.

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Some secondary schools have opted for attendance monitoring to take place in every lesson. This can provide useful management information helping schools to monitor absence 'hotspots' effectively.

However attendance and absence are noted, it is important that the information recorded is used to inform immediate follow-up action if required and in developing patterns of attendance and absence to inform strategic intervention, where necessary. Delays between class-level recording and further action should be minimised by efficient transfer of information.

Recording lateness

Attendance and absence are recorded per half-day session, but there also needs to be a method of recording the attendance of pupils who are late. There is also a clear difference between arriving a few minutes late due to traffic problems and entering the school five minutes before lunch, particularly where bursaries are dependent on attendance. Therefore, if a pupil arrives late, but during the first half of the session, this should be recorded differently to a pupil who arrives during the second half of the morning or afternoon session. In data returns to the Scottish Government these are termed 'Late 1' (L1) and 'Late 2' (L2) (see section 10.3 Recording and Coding information).

For secondary schools using period-by-period registration, where a pupil is late but registers in any registration in periods beginning in the first half of the opening, this will be converted to an overall L1 code for the opening (even if a later period is missed). If the first registration is in the second half of the opening, this will be converted to an overall L2 code for the opening (even if a later period is subsequently missed).

2.8 Immediate action when an absence is noted

If a pupil does not attend school, the absence should be checked against details of contacts made by parents, including expected date of return to school. **If a parent has not advised the school their child will be absent, then it must be assumed that they are unaware of the absence and that the pupil is either missing or truanting** (see 4.1 Unauthorised absence). This should be recorded as unauthorised absence until an explanation is received by the school

Parents should be contacted when a pupil has not arrived in school, using automated call systems or other methods. If attempts to contact the parent are not successful, then emergency contact numbers, such as other family members, should be used.

In most circumstances, contact with the parent will result in the pupil returning to school. However, in rare incidents there have been more serious or tragic reasons why children have

not registered at school. Schools cannot be complacent about children's safety. If the school has been unable to establish contact with the parents or carers, action must be taken to satisfy the school and the education authority that the child is safe and well. This means that a service provider, wherever the child is found (e.g. a member of staff from any of the children's services or the police), has seen the child to be assured that he/she is safe.

If the parent cannot be contacted to confirm the whereabouts of the child, the record of absence should be passed to a member of staff with responsibility for attendance (most often a member of the school's pastoral care team or home-school link worker) to consider the information in the light of known attendance problems, support needs or current concerns about the pupil. This member of staff will be responsible for assessing what further action is required, taking into account the age of the pupil; the implications for additional support to resolve any difficulties; and, if necessary, contacting the school's child protection co-ordinator.

In the case of looked after or highly vulnerable children, when the child does not attend school this should always be followed up immediately. To enable swift action to be taken it is vitally important that the school has an up-to-date and accurate record of the key contact information for the child's parent. In the case of children who are looked after at home, then the child's social worker should also be contacted.

In 2005 the Scottish Executive supported education authorities to pilot automated call systems to assist schools to contact parents when a child does not attend as expected; and, has encouraged further uptake of this system and made further funds available to every school to do this, in co-ordination with local authority information management system managers.

Automated call systems have been used by some authorities in all of their schools to provide information about school closures, transport disruption or severe weather arrangements. Some schools have used them to communicate positive messages to parents about individual pupils.

2.9 Children missing from education

Where there is a strong suspicion that or it has been ascertained that the family's whereabouts are not known, and extensive local authority wide searches and risk assessments have been carried out, the local authority should refer the case to the Children Missing from Education service. If there are, at any point, child protection concerns, the local authority should follow the local child protection protocol. Guidance on the circumstances and timescales of when a referral should be made to the Children Missing from Education Service is on p.25 of the *Children Missing from Education* section of *The Safe and Well handbook*, http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/0191408/14093.

There are many complex reasons why a family might move unannounced. Often, staff in schools are aware of children's circumstances and family connections which will enable them to find children quickly and easily or pass accurate information on to staff in other agencies. Children may simply have moved schools or have moved homes, and when the new school is contacted, information can be transferred to help the child settle quickly. Particular sensitivity should be given to children in Gypsy and Travelling families – please see 3.5 diverse school communities for further information.

Some children and families are more vulnerable and the action taken locally will be accelerated according to the level of concern for the child's safety and wellbeing. Effective local written procedures for both children who are missing from education and their subsequent tracing will assist actions taken. Guidance on this is available in *Safe and Well*. Education authorities have a designated manager(s) for child protection and children missing from education, who should be informed. Involvement of the Children Missing from Education (Scotland) service for national tracing, can be assisted by a systematic approach in schools to risk assessment and recording of information about the known circumstances of the child and family. Both will be enhanced by an effective approach to pastoral care in the school.

For further information, the *Safe and Well handbook for child protection in education* outlines what schools should do if a child disappears from view in the Children Missing from Education section.

The School-to-School system using the electronic transfer of pupil data was introduced in 2007. This will accelerate the process of identifying children who have left one school but not enrolled in a new school. Where a child has not been "matched" by the school to school database the Children Missing from Education service will be informed and support local authorities to provide jointly the human follow-up services for these unmatched cases.

2.10 Follow-up on absence

If a child's absence is authorised through parental contact, then an expected date of return to school, or further advice from parents, should be noted. If discussions between the parent, pupil and member of staff responsible for pastoral care are required to resolve any difficulties, then these should be arranged as soon as possible and need not wait for the pupil to return to school, especially if there is a concern for which additional support may be required.

If a child returns to school, but a pattern of absence is noted, then discussion with the pupil and parent is also important. In schools which have successfully improved attendance, pro-active personal contact with parents is effective in addressing individual pupils' difficulties.

Some schools contact parents by letter to advise them when attendance has fallen below a threshold set by the school. Where written communication is used, contact details should be provided of the member of staff who can support the pupil and parent to improve attendance. Parents should also be advised of any local parent support initiatives, and of any advocacy service, where a representative ensures the parent's views are provided and understood, in their area. Schools should cater for the differing needs parents/carers may have, such as those arising from a disability, or communication and linguistic barriers, and be aware that pupils can easily intercept mail obviously sent from the school. In the case of children looked after at home, the child's social worker should be copied into any communication.

Where concern about attendance is ongoing, home visits help to build relationships between parents and the school. Home visits help the school to consider whether the family has particular difficulties that they may not have shared with the school, and to consider if support should be offered via local multi-agency planning groups. Access to a home-school link worker is key to enabling good practice in home visiting and supporting families.

2.11 Attendance beyond school leaving age

Pupils who choose to stay on at school beyond school leaving age, usually 16 years of age, and their parents, should be asked to consider their continued commitment to full attendance. Some schools develop a pupil-school contract outlining these expectations. Attendance must also be monitored to ensure proper entitlement to the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) The EMA is a weekly payment, paid directly to young people who stay on at school and is designed to help overcome financial barriers which otherwise may prevent them from staying on.

Education providers will be required to record attendance of EMA recipients on days when the school or college is open to pupils. Where the institution is closed on days when it would normally be open, for example due to public holidays, extreme bad weather, polling days, in-service days etc, pupils should be treated as having attended for the purpose of the EMA. Similarly, where pupils have medical or dental appointments this should be recorded for EMA purposes as authorised absence providing that an appointment card or note is provided.

Where there is a shortened week at the start or end of an official school holiday, students will be eligible for the weekly payment if the number of days the school is "open" is **3 or more** (including the above exceptions) and where the student has fulfilled 100% attendance when the school was open.

Schools: in practice, schools are responsible for recording absences and notifying the local authority about the daily attendance patterns of students receiving the allowance.

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3. Managing authorised absence

3.1 Authorised absence

Schools may authorise absence when they are satisfied by a legitimate reason, provided usually by the parent or self-certified (via a note, email or phone call) or may be provided by another service provider (via a note, appointment card or phone call), such as:

> Illness where no learning provision is made

> Medical and dental appointments to be recorded in separate category (see 3.3)

> Meetings prior to, and in, court (see 3.2)

> Attendance at, or in connection with, a Children's Hearing or Care Review, or appointment with another service provider, e.g. social worker (see 3.5)

> Religious observance (see 3.5)

> Bereavement

> Weddings or funerals of those close to the family

> Arranged absence in relation to children in Gypsy/Traveller families (see 3.5)

> Participation in non-school debates, sports, musical or drama activities agreed by the school

> Lack of transport – including due to bad weather

> Exceptional domestic circumstances (see 3.6)

> Only those family holidays agreed by the school to be taken in exceptional circumstance (see 3.6)

> Period of exclusion to be recorded in a separate category (see 3.7)

3.2 Children with complex lives

Some pupils will have a high degree of interaction with a range of services and with other systems, such as children's hearings, court appearances or involvement with social workers for supervision or care planning. While absences for these reasons may be recorded as authorised absence, other services must be encouraged to recognise that access to learning is important. Continuity of schooling, stability and consistency are crucial to vulnerable children, as is avoiding the stigma of visible intervention which sets them apart from their peers. Through Integrated Children's Services Planning, all children's services must consider what steps can be taken to reduce absence from school as a result of these appointments, necessary though they may be.

Some vulnerable young people express their anger and hurt through challenging behaviour in school or disengagement from learning. In these circumstances, it is tempting for staff in many services to regard school as a lower priority for these pupils. However, where a school perseveres with maintaining a relationship with them, it can be an important source of consistent and long term support, positive adult and peer relationships, and a place where their talents and potential are recognised and supported, leading to achievement and self esteem. It is therefore important that from senior managers to practitioners in all children's services, there is a clear vision that all pupils should be supported to benefit from school education as far as possible. Staff at all levels should be aware of the policies and procedures in schools in relation to attendance and pastoral care, and should be prepared to work in partnership with schools to provide support and encouragement for good attendance. There is an additional responsibility to looked after children, where the local authority has a statutory obligation as a 'corporate parent' in terms of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

Schools may authorise absence where families are experiencing exceptional domestic circumstances which are distressing, such as, for family bereavement. However, authorising absence should not delay the process of considering how the school and other partners can plan to support the child and family, helping to minimise longer-term absence. For pupils who are looked after or looked after and accommodated, the authorisation of absence for exceptional domestic circumstances should be considered carefully with the other multi-agency partners to consider whether absence from school is in fact beneficial, and where it is, to ensure appropriate supports are in place.

3.3 Medical and dental appointments

For most children, it may be necessary at some time to attend medical, dental and other health related appointments during school hours, which schools should record within a Medical and Dental category within 'authorised absence'. However, parents and pupils should continue to be encouraged to arrange appointments, whenever possible, outwith school hours.

In remote areas, keeping health appointments may require significant travel and cause more disruption to school attendance. Education authorities in all areas may use their partnership with child health services to ensure that there is a flexible approach to appointments, particularly for pupils where attendance at school is particularly important, such as during exam periods, and that some services are provided on site within schools, to minimise disruption for pupils.

3.4 Different lives, different needs

Erratic attendance at school may be a sign of a range of circumstances affecting a child or family, such as domestic abuse, a parent involved in substance misuse, or that a child has caring responsibilities. In these circumstances, parents may allow a child's absence to avoid their difficulties being known by the school, particularly where the family fears that if their circumstances become known, there will be unwanted intervention or children may be taken into care.

The Safe and Well handbook provides an A-Z guide to a range of issues and circumstances experienced by different children, and outlines what schools may need to be aware of in order to support them effectively.

Positive relationships with schools start through the informal, casual contact when parents drop younger children off and collect them. Schools that capitalise on these opportunities to build a rapport and some trust, eventually become trusted supporters of vulnerable families and a gateway to other services. This positive relationship can be transferred to secondary school as the child makes the transition, by ensuring pastoral care and home-school link staff start transition arrangements early in P6 and P7 and make as much contact as possible with children and parents, informally and individually. *Practice for Positive Relationships – Reaching out to families* describes a range of good practice in both primary and secondary schools. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/07/23154948/0. Promoting positive parental involvement is also a key function of the parent council, which should be actively involved in developing school policy and practice, as well as encouraging all parents to be involved in their child's education.

3.5 Diverse school communities

Some groups of children may require authorised absence because of their religious or cultural practices or family's mobility:

› Gypsies and Travellers may travel as part of their tradition, for family connections or work commitments. Further information on supporting inclusive educational approaches for Gypsies and Travellers is available on www.scottishtravellered.net. Their absence is authorised at their 'base school' (school the child attends for most of the year). However, these children may enrol temporarily in other schools as they travel. These schools provide attendance information to be inputted at the 'base school', to ensure completeness of data. In some circumstances where concerns arise, referral to the Children Missing in Education project may be appropriate. Guidance on referral is available. In addition, a range of leaflets on Education in Scotland for Gypsies and Travellers is available from http://www.scottishtravellered.net/resources/educationguide/Ed_20pp_web.pdf.

> children of all faiths may take authorised absence to enable them to participate in religious observance.

In some cultures, family weddings or funerals are major events which may require children to travel (e.g. overseas) or participate in extended preparations. If this lasts for more than four weeks the school would normally have the right to remove the pupil from the roll in order not to be penalised in terms of its attendance record. However, in these circumstances, pupils should be considered as 'Extended leave with parental consent', which allows them to remain on the school register ready for their return, but without the school being penalised.

In all cases, staff will be best placed to judge the school's most appropriate response to requests for absence to be authorised, if they have positive relationships with families and are aware of their local community.

3.6 Family holidays during term time

Following consultation with headteachers, it has been clarified that family holidays should not be recorded as authorised absence, except in exceptional domestic circumstances, where a family needs time together to recover from distress, or where a parent's employment is of a nature where school-holiday leave cannot be accommodated (e.g. armed services or emergency services). It is for local authorities and schools to judge when these circumstances apply and authorise absence, accordingly.

The categorisation of most term-time holidays as unauthorised absence has been a contentious issue for some families, many of whom are concerned at the higher cost of holidays during school holiday periods. The Scottish Government has no control over the pricing decisions of holiday companies or flight operators. Our main focus is to encourage parents and pupils to recognise the value of learning and the pitfalls of disrupting learning for the pupil, the rest of the class and the teacher. It is for schools and education authorities to judge what sanctions, if any, they may wish to apply to unauthorised absence due to holidays.

3.7 Exclusion from school

Exclusion from school is recorded as a separate category in attendance statistics to enable the Scottish Government and education authorities to monitor the number of days lost to exclusion in schools, and to monitor the extent of provision made for learning for excluded pupils.

Exclusion from school, while a last resort, may be a necessary sanction in order to maintain safety and order for pupils and staff. Exclusion should not generally be used as a sanction for non-attendance.

Exclusion from school disrupts learning, which can be minimised by provision of learning outwith school or at home as advised in Scottish Executive Circular 8/03 on Exclusion from School. It is important to support pupils who have been excluded to maintain their learning while absent and to catch up with their learning on returning to school, to avoid pupils struggling and feeling further disengaged from school, which may lead to more absence to avoid this. This is particularly important in the case of looked after children, who are more likely to be excluded and consequently may have experienced interrupted learning and who may require additional tuition and support to enable them to make up lost ground. The decision to exclude a looked after child should be considered carefully in partnership with multi-agency partners wherever possible. In line with its corporate parent duty, if a looked after pupil is excluded the school should ensure that multi-agency partners are informed to ensure appropriate planning is in place and supports provided both for the period of the exclusion and to facilitate a smooth return to the school in due course.

There are a number of approaches which whole-school communities can adopt which help deal with the aftermath of incidents, or exclusion. For example, schools using restorative approaches can help to resolve conflict or damaged relationships, and can consider the impact on an individual pupil or others affected, following an exclusion. Restorative approaches can involve pupils in resolving conflict with peers or teachers which may otherwise have caused some pupils to stay off school to avoid further trouble.

If a child is excluded permanently and removed from the register, then information on attendance up to the point of exclusion is collected. However, where there is a temporary exclusion and a permanent exclusion follows immediately in succession, the exclusion is recorded as having taken place at the date of the earlier temporary exclusion. Further information on recording and coding of exclusions is contained in chapter 10.

Schools and authorities may wish to note the intention to review the current guidance on school exclusion and develop improved guidance.

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4. Managing unauthorised absence

4.1 Unauthorised absence

Schools must record absence as unauthorised when there is no satisfactory reason for absence provided. Such absence is likely to include:

> Most family holidays, unless there are exceptional circumstances (see 3.6)

> Parent-condoned absence where the school does not agree there is a satisfactory reason for absence (see practice point below)

> Truancy, with or without the knowledge of the parent

> All other unexplained absence is recorded as unauthorised absence unless a satisfactory explanation is subsequently provided

> Longer-term exceptional domestic carer circumstances where support has been provided

> During disputes, such as relating to the return of a pupil after an exclusion

Practice point

Where the school decides that the reason provided for the absence by the parent is unsatisfactory the school should record the absence as unauthorised. The parent should be informed that the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and the reasons for doing so shared with the parents and carers. The school should keep a detailed record of the absence(s), the parent's explanation and the reasons the school does not accept the explanation provided. The school should then initiate appropriate follow-up measures to ensure the protection and well being of the pupil. Follow-up measures should be in line with local policy and guidelines. Examples of appropriate follow-up may be:

> A referral to the school's home-link worker for a home visit

> A home visit by one of the school's pastoral team

> A referral to the school's multi-agency assessment group for advice/support

> A referral to the Reporter to the Children's Panel

> A referral to the attendance council

4.2 Parents' priorities

Parents generally act in the best interests of their children. At times, parents condone absence because they genuinely believe that their child will benefit from an alternative activity (e.g. trip, work experience opportunity outwith those arranged through the school) and may first seek the school's authorisation of the absence. In these circumstances clear school and authority policies and regular communication of expectations will help school staff respond appropriately.

Sometimes, parents condone absence because they believe the school is failing to act in the best interests of the child, for example, by failing to tackle bullying or to address conflict between the child and a particular teacher. How schools respond to this situation is important not only to the child and parent involved, but to other parents in the community. In these circumstances, early contact with the parent though home-school link or family support workers, or a key member of staff responsible for pastoral care, to build relationships and restore trust may be important. Flexible arrangements to ensure the child's attendance at school are the first priority, with plans in place to resolve difficulties agreed with the parents and pupil, to help ensure that absence from school does not become an habitual response to difficulties.

Sometimes, parents do not regard education as a high priority and are ambivalent about good school attendance for their children. Some parents and older generations in the same family have had poor experiences themselves of education. Some parents fear that involvement with the school, and the requirement to help with homework, will expose their own poor basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy. In some areas, these barriers have been overcome and attitudes towards children's learning have become much more positive. The key to building relationships is regular, informal contact, and encouragement to parents to see the school as a source of support and practical help, for example through partnership working with community learning and development services, to establish food co-ops, welfare benefits advice, parent health workshops within the school and co-location of services for example health services located on the same site as school services.

4.3 Casual truancy

It is estimated that one in five pupils is involved in truancy in a year (2005-06 data on Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools) though less than 2% of pupils are responsible for half of casual truancy. Tackling truancy requires clear messages that truancy is unacceptable. It also requires vigilance and a quick response from staff to contact parents notifying them that their child is absent from school. At secondary school many casual truants present themselves for registration and then absent themselves for specific lessons. This can be minimised by effective playground supervision with an eye on entrances/exits to the school

grounds; effective monitoring of lesson-by-lesson attendance and use of this information to manage absence hotspots; and identification of pupils prone to truancy for specific action if they do not arrive in lessons (i.e. immediate notification to the school office for action by the member of staff responsible for managing absence and notifying parents).

As break times are a key opportunity to leave school, many schools have found it beneficial to work in partnership with pupils to improve the areas within the school and grounds where pupils can gather, such as providing healthy snacks and drinks for purchase and allowing music, games or activities to encourage young people to stay within the school.[1]

Casual truancy may be a lone activity but is often a spontaneous social activity where peer influence helps overcome inhibitions and weighing up of consequences. Schools must ensure that there are consequences, such as parent contact, withdrawal of privileges or an impact on the pupils' rewards system. However, for pupils particularly vulnerable to peer influence, who may truant to gain standing with peers, buddying and mentoring during break times and even during class changeover can provide the positive peer influence that helps pupils stay within school.

Smoking is a further factor in exposure to the temptation of casual truancy for pupils who hang around on the fringes of school grounds at break times, or leave school to buy cigarettes. Positive action to prevent smoking and to support smoking cessation within schools in partnership with local health services, can improve health and help reduce casual truancy.

More rarely, some truancy is organised and planned in advance, and involves groups of pupils, for example in gang-related or territorial activity, or in preparation for parties or weekends. In schools where staff have positive relationships with pupils and make opportunities to listen, they will be in touch with what pupils are up to and through sharing appropriate information, can develop a school response. Local police and youth work staff should also be encouraged to share information where appropriate and collaborate on a joint response, so that the response is consistent in the community and continues outwith school hours. Further information is available from Open Scotland Data Sharing: Legal Guidance for the Scottish Public Sector http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/26350/0025711.pdf. As well as preventing truancy this approach can help prevent pupils coming to more serious harm.

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1 Snacks and drinks should comply with any healthy eating guidelines used within the local authority. From August 2008, all food in schools, including snacks and drinks, will require to comply with national nutritional regulations in line with the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007.

4.4 Chronic truancy – unhappy at school?

Young people truant from school for a number of reasons. For some, it is an expression of unhappiness with life in school, which may have a number of causes:

› Bullying

› Conflict with, or fear of, a teacher or teachers

› Conflict with, or fear of, another child

› Poor social skills

› Poor basic skills (reading, writing, numeracy)

› Struggling with learning or specific lessons

› Unhappy with course choices after S3

› Feeling stigmatised by the school's attempts to provide personal support, learning support or behaviour support

› Feeling stigmatised by insensitive sharing of information about personal details

› Feeling stigmatised by insensitive handling of appointments or involvement with other services (e.g. social work) during school time

In addition to communicating that truancy is unacceptable, it is essential to identify any underlying causes of truancy and to take action to resolve these. Schools require a strong approach to pastoral care, and strategic use of additional support staff. Schools which convey a positive, caring ethos help pupils to feel that they can approach staff within the school to express their views and discuss their concerns, or that when approached by a member of staff offering help, they will respond with trust.

A number of whole-school approaches are being implemented in schools which proactively develop and improve relationships and underpin an ethos of trust and communication. Schools using restorative approaches have found that conflict can be constructively handled and relationships can be restored to the benefit of pupils and staff. Solution oriented approaches can be used involving staff, pupils and parents in building on strengths and working together to identify solutions (see www.betterbehaviourscotland.gov.uk). Whatever approach schools decide to use, listening to pupils, and persistence in overcoming barriers to learning, are fundamental to improving attendance.

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4.5 Chronic truancy – unhappy for other reasons?

For some young people, their unhappiness may be linked to other issues, such as:

> Difficult family circumstances, including domestic abuse
> Difficulty coping with traumatic events
> Worries about parents, siblings or people close to them
> Living in foster or residential care or other major changes
> Experience of abuse or neglect

The young person's mental health and emotional distress may result in depression, anxiety or low self-esteem, or he or she may self-harm, in addition to truanting.

Staff must use their knowledge of the child and the family to judge the most appropriate response. Many of these issues, and others which may affect attendance and a child's wellbeing, are discussed in the A-Z section of *The Safe and Well handbook*.

It should be a priority to address any concerns, in the context of considering that, for many children, the consistency of adult and peer relationships, planned support and opportunities to achieve provided by schools are a key part of enabling the child to work towards positive outcomes. A range of services collaborate with schools to provide specialist help or services to children and families, and all should consider working towards full attendance in school or another learning provision, a shared goal.

4.6 Caught up with other influences

Peer group influence can be an important factor in attitudes to school. They can be constructive or negative, but either way will be extremely important to every pupil, as these friendships often represent the child's belonging to the school and community.

As they grow older, some young people may have friends (or partners) no longer attending school. Playground supervision and monitoring of entrances/exits can help deter older young people from hanging around in the vicinity of the school (see also Substance misuse, 4.7). School staff should consider whether, in all cases and particularly in the case of a school pupil who is involved in a relationship with an older partner,, there is coercion or any risk to the pupil for which child protection concerns may arise see *The Safe and Well handbook* (A-Z section, Teenage Pregnancy and Under-age Sexual Activity).

On some occasions community issues can spill over into the school community. Conflict between families, or gangs and territorial issues can cause young people to avoid school in order to avoid each other. It is helpful to involve partner agencies such as the police, community learning and development services and youth work, to consider a collaborative approach to sharing information and working to resolve this both within school and in the community, and to ensure that where there is conflict in the community, all young people feel safe at school and know that signs of intimidation will not be tolerated.

As young people grow older it becomes more difficult to challenge their formation of friendships. However, during transition between schools, the new environment and new peer groups present an opportunity to enable more vulnerable pupils to become attached to positive peer groups and to be exposed to positive role models through buddying and mentoring. For some pupils, the opportunity to be a buddy or mentor to others has a similarly positive effect on their own behaviour as well as the pupils they mentor.

Some schools have successfully re-engaged young people at risk of becoming socially isolated or refusing school by using the Circle of Friends approach. The approach enables small groups of pupils to provide support to other pupils by identifying and implementing positive strategies. A case study which provides further information on this approach is available at http://www.betterbehaviourscotland.gov.uk/knowledge/pupil_to_pupil/practiceexamples/ primaryschool/_816/default.aspx.

Some schools use additional support staff to provide break time and after school activities that provide a focal point for young people having difficulty forging positive peer relationships.

4.7 Substance misuse

The use of drugs and alcohol can affect school attendance in a number of ways:

> Being intoxicated or leaving school to get intoxicated

> Being hungover

> Being unable to function without using substances (addiction)

> Trying to avoid dealers or other users who may be in, or hang around school

> Trying to avoid people owed money for previous deals, who may be in, or hang around school

> Being part of a supply chain and trying to avoid intimidation by other suppliers

This issue is discussed in more detail in the *Safe and Well handbook* (A-Z section Drug and Alcohol Misuse). All staff should be aware of signs for concern, of which non-attendance may be the initial trigger of investigation. Substance misuse which is disrupting attendance may be a

lifestyle choice which has got out of hand, or it may be a reaction to unhappiness caused by other issues.

While exclusion may be a consideration in response to a young person found to be in possession of substances or involved in supply, it is unlikely that the situation is limited to one individual. Staff should consider a whole-school approach. Collaboration with other agencies such as the police, drugs services and youth services will ensure effective prevention activity, sharing of information, and shared efforts to respond to young people in difficulty.

4.8 Long-term exceptional domestic circumstances

There may be circumstances where a family may find their domestic circumstances change unexpectedly, as a result of a crisis. For example:

> as a result of an accident or illness, or
> during the serious or critical illness of a close relative which causes serious disruption to the family home

Once the crisis has passed, or once support has been put in place for the family, it is expected that the pupil will attend school as usual. If this does not happen the absence should be recorded as unauthorised, and steps taken to facilitate his or her expedient return to school.

4.9 Motivation

National data show that attendance at school declines during secondary years. Many believe that the structure of the curriculum, its mainly academic focus and the way that subject choices are presented in S2/3, contributes to the gradual disengagement of many young people. This is also supported by the HMIE report *Missing Out* which considered the reasons for pupil disengagement and how to meet these pupils' particular needs. A *Curriculum for Excellence* promotes flexibility in the curriculum and, as set out in *Skills for Scotland – A Lifelong Skills Strategy*, should provide vocational learning and the employability skills needed for the world
of work. Skills for Work courses have been developed to provide progression pathways to employment, training or further learning by learning through practical experience and the development of employability skills and specific vocational skills. In addition, the school and college partnership strategy *Lifelong Partners* 2005, paved the way for enhanced opportunities for pupils to access college learning to broaden their curriculum choices and enrich their educational experience. The strategy recognised that vocational education can provide a suitable context, something which may capture pupils' imagination and interest and better engage some pupils to learn, encouraging full attendance as well as enabling more young people to achieve. The policy framework established that pupils in all abilities in S3 and above should be considered for college learning opportunities.

Pupil motivation is a key issue in attendance at school and engagement with learning. To enable them to get on in life, pupils need to be able to work autonomously using a range of skills to seek information and help, solve problems and persevere with challenges. However, all pupils approach learning differently and a key skill of teachers is to understand pupils' different motivations and tap into these to engage them in learning. Some schools are developing 'The Motivated School', an approach which considers the aspects of the school and classroom climate which enhance motivation and techniques teachers may use to respond to the range of motivations of their pupils (www.betterbehaviourscotland.gov.uk).

Whole-school and whole-class approaches will support a more positive approach to school and attendance generally. For individual pupils who disengage from learning and where other causes have not been identified (see 4.2 – 4.7) some schools have successfully worked in partnership with programmes of personal and social development, such as XL (Prince's Trust), Skillforce, outdoor activity or environmental programmes, to prevent pupils from disengaging from school. Enterprise activities have also become an important feature of schools' learning and imaginative approaches have successfully engaged pupils at risk of dropping out, such as a social enterprise for school DJs.

As the school leaving age draws near, whether for summer or Christmas leavers, some pupils and parents may express a preference for work experience or employment. While schools may develop programmes of learning with vocational and work experience elements, in partnership with other agencies such as careers services, colleges and enterprise companies, ad hoc arrangements should be discouraged. Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school until he or she reaches school leaving age (section 30 Education (Scotland) Act 1980). In the case of looked after children the education authority as corporate parent will hold that responsibility and work will be underway on the transition into independent living. Any arrangements agreed by the school must take account of the health and safety of the child as well as the learning provided, as described in *The Safe and Well handbook* (A-Z section, Residential Visits and School Trips).

MOTIVATED & LEARNING

5. Promoting attendance – school, community and authority initiatives

5.1 Authority and school objectives

The Scottish Executive's *Quality Improvement Framework for Integrated Services for Children and Young People* (2006) requires local authorities and their partners to set realistic and achievable local targets for improving attendance, and to ensure that specific groups, such as looked after children, are considered within this. It is expected that education authority and school development planning will reflect agreed local targets for improving attendance, and the process of Integrated Children's Services Planning is an opportunity to consider which of the other partner agencies involved can contribute to helping schools achieve the target. Any service involved in supporting vulnerable children or supporting parents has a potential role to play.

Local authority reviewing, monitoring and evaluation, including quality assurance in education, should support schools to develop good practice in promoting attendance and responding effectively to absence, recognising improved attendance and to reflect on the level of collaboration with other agencies to achieve this.

5.2 Raising the profile

Promotion of positive attendance at school can be a key aspect of supporting schools, and this can be achieved on an authority wide basis, ensuring key figures such as elected members, senior managers and youth groups are signed up to raising the profile of the benefits of full attendance. The promotion of full attendance and recognising improvements in attendance, can also help to convey positive messages about young people to the wider community. In turn, pupils, parents and the wider community may feel more encouraged to support efforts to improve attendance.

5.3 Community partnership

Many in communities regard truancy as a growing problem and will focus on the nuisance created by young people when not in school. Community safety partnerships may consider how they can work effectively with communities and parent councils to encourage their co-operation in responding to truancy.

The community can work together to make not being in school a difficulty rather than an accepted norm. Their primary concern may be the safety and wellbeing of young people, and they may wish to support an emphasis on the value of learning.

5.4 Police partnership initiatives

In many areas, police and education authorities collaborate on initiatives to seek truants and return them to school or to their parents. These initiatives send a clear message that truancy will not be tolerated, and the associated local media coverage reinforces this, having a short-term impact on truancy in those areas.

While these are positive initiatives, they must be backed by year-round efforts to tackle truancy, with sustained work to ensure an early response to the first signs of absence and to ensure planned support resolves any underlying causes of absence.

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6. Pastoral care

Schools' high standards of pastoral care will enable staff to:

> be aware of early signs of concerns which may cause absence, to allow preventive support to be arranged
> develop positive relationships with pupils and parents to ensure difficulties are discussed and resolved
> respond quickly to absence, to ensure children are safe and well
> follow up on absence, to enable the school and its partners to make an effective response
> support reintegration into learning on returning from absence.

Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential: ten standards of personal support in schools.

The 10 standards for personal support in schools

Effective personal support in schools:

> Makes **opportunities for developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes** children and young people need to enable them to enable them to seek information and support throughout life
> **Provides access to information** to help children and young people make informed decisions and choices
> **Makes opportunities for children's citizenship and participation,** through involvement in their school community, their neighbourhoods and in democratic society
> **Provides regular review of progress** in learning, and personal and social development
> **Helps with transitions** between stages in education and between different providers of education and personal development opportunities
> **Helps to plan for the future**
> **Provides access to staff** by children and parents who want support
> **Co-ordinates support between agencies and schools,** wherever learning takes place
> **Respects confidentiality**
> **Ensures time and space to seek help**

SAFE & SUPPORTED

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Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential recommends that integrated support teams in school bring together pastoral care, learning and behaviour support, together with support staff such as home-school link workers and additional support staff. Effective teams are supported by effective leadership, a positive school ethos, and clear school policies and procedures of which all staff are aware.

School-based support staff, led by senior managers in schools, should forge links with partner agencies to strengthen support to pupils and parents. All national policies concerning children's services recommend multi-agency training as a means of enabling staff work effectively together particularly those supporting inclusion.

Education authorities can support school-based teams by ensuring appropriate structures for centralised support to schools. Continuing professional development for all staff, particularly staff such as home-school link workers or family support workers whose remits may vary, helps schools to develop their practice.

7. Additional support

7.1 Additional Support for Learning

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 requires education authorities and partner agencies to make provision for all pupils who require additional support to overcome barriers to learning. Barriers to learning may arise from a number of factors such as the learning environment, a disability or health need, family circumstances and social and emotional factors.

A co-ordinated support plan is required when a child or young person requires significant long-term additional support from an education authority as well as from another agency such as health or social work services for example. The co-ordinated support plan will describe what schools and other agencies will do to support the child to achieve the learning goals identified as appropriate. Guidance on planning to meet additional support needs is available from *Supporting Children's Learning – Code of Practice* http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/15105817/58187.

7.2 Supporting the care and welfare of children and child protection

The *Safe and Well handbook* provides good practice guidance to schools and education authorities for keeping children safe and well, this is particularly important where children and young people are not at school. *Safe and Well* provides advice on policies and procedures that schools and education authorities can put in place to safeguard children and young people where there are concerns about their welfare. Child protection is of paramount importance and non-attendance at school may indicate a child is at risk. *The Safe and Well handbook* is available from http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/0191408/14093 and all schools will have child protection link teachers who understand the local child protection protocol.

8. Multi-agency assessment, planning and review

Getting it Right for Every Child provides a framework for the improvement of children's services for each individual child. All education authorities have a structure which allows for the support needs of pupils and families to be discussed on a multi-agency basis, so that a plan for support or intervention can be agreed and reviewed. The names of these structures vary around Scotland, such as Joint Assessment Team, School Liaison Group, Pupil Support Group etc. The term used here is 'multi-agency group'. They may operate on a cluster, learning community or area basis.

There are some features of good practice in multi-agency groups, including:

› Services represented in the group focus on finding solutions for children and collaborate to make best use of their skills and resources by working together.

› Criteria for referral to this group by the services involved are clear and are communicated to staff at all levels in each of the services.

› The group shares a common assessment framework and shared language, to make working together easier and help children and families make transitions between services.

› Information is shared effectively between the services to ensure that the broadest understanding of the child and family is the basis for finding the solution.

› Children and parents are aware that concerns about their experiences will be discussed by the group, which will work to help them, and, if they wish, they will be included and, where necessary, supported, in discussions and finding solutions as far as possible.

› Responsibility for taking forward the solution with the child and family will be clearly taken on by one or more services, through a lead professional. If the proposed solution involves referral to other services, or waiting for an appropriate service or resource to become available, an interim approach will be agreed.

› The commitment to finding a solution is followed through by monitoring and reviewing cases, to ensure the proposed solution has worked or that interim approaches are adequate.

› Feedback will be provided to the referring service on outcomes of the case.

› The group will regularly take stock of the issues arising from its cases, from users of each of the services and the wider community, in order to evaluate what is working well for children and to consider future demands on services.

The views of children and young people on issues which affect them should be sought and taken account of, within assessment, planning and review procedures. The Scottish Government has published a good practice document which provides information, advice and ideas on involving children and young people in school life. *Positive about Pupil Participation* is available from http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/07/23152718/0.

9. Measures for compulsory compliance

9. Measures for compulsory compliance

Measures for compulsion are expensive processes which are time consuming and can lead to further unnecessary interventions into family life. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that efforts to improve outcomes for children are progressed quickly and involve an appropriate level of intervention. Measures for compulsion are essential when efforts to engage children and families in voluntary measures to improve attendance have failed, or if a wider range of issues are of concern in addition to non attendance at school.

Parents who have enrolled their child at a public school at any time, are then required to ensure their child attends, unless the education authority have consented to the withdrawal of their child from education (Education (Scotland) Act 1980; section 35).

9.1 Attendance orders

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 allows for an education authority to require a parent to provide an explanation for non-attendance, if it believes there is not a reasonable excuse for non-attendance (section 36). The education authority notifies the parent that a meeting or hearing is required, and that an explanation for non-attendance must be provided to the authority. To allow the parent to prepare for the meeting, it will not be held within two days of the notification but not later than seven days after the notification.

The process
If the parent fails to satisfy the authority that there was a reasonable excuse for the pupil's non-attendance the authority may:

> Proceed to prosecution through the sheriff court, or
> Report the circumstances to the procurator fiscal, or
> Warn the parent and postpone the decision to report for a maximum of six weeks.

In the circumstance where the education authority decides to postpone the decision it may, if the pupil is of school age (5-16), make an attendance order. An attendance order requires the parent to ensure the child attends the school which he or she has been attending or another local school (a school attended by children residing in the same neighbourhood as the child).

An attendance order:

> Requires the parent to ensure the attendance of the child at a school named in the order.
> Requires that the views of the parent on which school should be named should be considered by the authority.

> May name a public school, or other school which is willing to receive the child. A school at which the parent will be required to pay fees will not be named within the order unless at the request of the parent.

> Shall not name a special school unless the child has additional support needs requiring the education or special facilities normally provided at the school.

A copy of the attendance order will be served upon the parent and will place them under a duty to ensure the child's regular attendance at the named school.

Right of appeal

If parents are unhappy with the making of an attendance order, they may, within 14 days of being served with the order, appeal to the sheriff. The sheriff is able to amend, confirm or annul the order. The decision of the sheriff is final.

Parents may wish to seek legal representation when making an appeal to the sheriff. Legal aid may be available for advice and representation, subject to certain criteria for eligibility. Further information is available from the Scottish Legal Aid Board at http://www.slab.org.uk/.

Amending an attendance order

If the attendance order is later amended (e.g. a different school is named) the education authority should inform the parent of the proposed amendments and allow the parent fourteen days to make objections. If objections are made and not upheld by the authority, the parent can appeal to the sheriff as above.

Moving between authority areas

A child who is the subject of an attendance order may move from his or her home authority to a new authority area. In this case, the new authority may notify the parent of their intention to amend the attendance order by updating the school named in the order to a school which is attended by children in the child's new neighbourhood.

Where a child is attending a school in another authority area and the education authority providing education believes that a parent should explain the non-attendance of a child at school, the authority in which the child resides would be responsible for arranging a meeting or hearing and serving notice on the parent to attend the meeting or hearing for an explanation to be provided.

See 3.5 *Diverse school communities* for advice on attendance for Gypsy and Traveller families

Attendance orders and links to other systems

The education authority, may also make a referral to the reporter, if compulsory measures are required to support the child. (See 9.3)

Home-educated children

Scottish Executive Guidance on the circumstances in which parents may choose to educate their children at home, and the associated procedures is available from http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/03/19061/34286.

Good practice

In the case of children whose parents are separated, education authorities should consider the most appropriate means of communicating the process of making an attendance order to parents.

It is likely that by the time an attendance order is being considered, there will have been difficulties in the relationship between the school/education authority and the parent. Advocacy or mediation services, where both parties meet voluntarily to discuss their concerns and agree a mutual solution with an independent third party, should be used to ensure that the parent understands the process and has support to express views or appeal. Further disengagement or conflict during the attendance order process will make positive outcomes for the child difficult to achieve.

Children who have sufficient understanding of the process and who are judged to have sufficient legal capacity (this is presumed from age 12 unless the child does not have a sufficient understanding of the matter being considered) should be kept informed of the process. They may attend meetings or hearings with their parent. Such children should be consulted with the parent on the named school or subsequent amendments. However, the action is clearly being taken against the parent who has legal responsibility for ensuring the child attends school and it is for the parent to appeal, not the young person (a child of legal capacity may appeal in the case of exclusion, see Circular 8/03 *Right of appeal against the decision to exclude* – paragraph 37).

The attendance order should be regarded as a stage in an ongoing process. The child may attend school following an attendance order, but support arrangements and long-term monitoring of attendance and support needs will be required.

Prosecution

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 states that if a parent has not complied with an attendance order, an application may be made to the sheriff court for prosecution (either by the education authority or procurator fiscal). If convicted, a parent may be:

> fined (not exceeding Standard scale level 3, currently not exceeding £1000)

> imprisoned for up to one month, or

> both fined and imprisoned.

9.2 Parenting orders

Local authorities also have powers to apply to the sheriff for a parenting order under the Antisocial Behaviour (Scotland) Act 2004. These orders are for one year, and require parents to participate in programmes designed to improve their parenting by receiving support services which previously the parent has refused, and for their compliance to be monitored by a named officer.

The local authority must consult with other agencies in a multi-agency planning process, and consult with the reporter to the children's panel, before considering with its legal advisors whether an application for a parenting order should be made.

If the procurator fiscal raises criminal proceedings in respect of an alleged breach of an order and the parent is found guilty or pleads guilty, he or she will be liable to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale (currently £1,000). If the fine is not paid a court must impose a supervised attendance order (SAO). An SAO is a community-based alternative to imprisonment for fine default. For this type of offence the court can only impose a sentence of imprisonment for the fine default where an SAO has been breached.

Guidance for authorities on parenting orders is available from Guidance on Parenting Orders: Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/04/22133503/35042.

9.3 Referral to the Reporter to the Children's Panel

Referral to the reporter may be an option considered by an education authority in conjunction with other approaches above, or usually separately, as an important stage in engaging the child and the parent in compulsory interventions to improve outcomes for the child. Referral would usually only be made after appropriate measures at a local level have been exhausted.

The Scottish Government aims to reduce pressure on the children's hearings system by ensuring that children referred to it have serious welfare or offending concerns. It will not be appropriate for children to be referred to the hearings system solely on the grounds of failing to attend school. However, non-attendance may be a factor considered alongside other grounds for referral where there are a range of concerns about the child.

It is helpful for education authorities and reporters to work together to make panel members aware of the range of approaches that schools and education authorities may have already tried, to improve a child's school attendance. It is also helpful to consider with other services which may provide interventions recommended by the children's panel, how reintegration into school can be planned for during their work with the child.

9.4 Anti-social behaviour orders, Intensive Support and Monitoring Services

An Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC) or Acceptable Behaviour Agreement is a written agreement between a person who has been involved in antisocial behaviour and one or more agencies whose role it is to prevent further antisocial behaviour i.e. a housing association, local authority, police or school, etc.

They are generally used for young people, but can also be used for adults, and may be used with parents in relation to the behaviour of their children. Further guidance on Acceptable Behaviour Contracts is available from:
http://www.antisocialbehaviourscotland.com/asb/asb_display_prac.jsp?pDateFrom=&pContentID=810&p_applic=CCC&pDateTo=&pAsbNewsTypes=Acceptable%20Behaviour%20Contracts&p_service=Content.show&.

A local authority may also apply for an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) under the Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004. In these circumstances, a young person is likely to already have been involved in the hearings system and will be well known to children's services. The young person will be considered to be at risk of persistent anti-social behaviour.

Non-attendance at school is not anti-social behaviour in itself, but clearly while a young person is not at school, his or her activities may be part of their involvement in anti-social behaviour, causing significant disruption to the community. Improving school attendance may be made a condition of an ABC or ASBO, and services should work together to ensure that the conditions applied enhance the potential for a young person to be engaged in learning, whether in school or in the community.

Education authorities and schools can make a significant difference to outcomes for children and young people on the cusp of persistent and serious offending by working in partnership with other services to devise flexible and creative approaches to learning opportunities.

Young people on Intensive Support and Monitoring Services (ISMS) – young people who are tagged – will be subject to highly intensive support. Some education authorities have used this as a positive opportunity to construct a wide ranging programme of opportunities, including standard grade study, for the young people.

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10.Attendance and absence data recording and management

10.1 Recording and coding

School and local authority Management Information Systems should reflect the data specification consulted on and agreed between education authorities and the Scottish Government through the ScotXed programme, as published on www.scotxed.net. Guidance Notes and associated Advice Notes are also available for schools and local authorities on the ScotXed website to further assist understanding of the correct recording of attendance and absence.

10.2 Using data effectively

The most purposeful use of data is at school-level, to inform school development and planning to meet individual pupils' needs.

At individual level, many schools set a threshold for attendance, triggering specific responses when a pupil falls below this. Monitoring of individual patterns of attendance and absence can help staff, pupils and parents identify support needs or isolate causes of concern. Absence may reflect other patterns in school or home life.

Class and whole-school monitoring can contribute to schools' quality assurance and development planning processes.

Many schools which have succeeded in improving attendance significantly, have focused on school data for periods of concerted effort in checking unexplained absence in order to ensure coding is correct and targeting pupils where attendance is just above, or below a threshold in order to plan for improved attendance at individual level, or to tackle difficulties identified in classes or departments.

10.3 Recording and coding information

The information below is taken from ScotXed guidance on recording and coding which is available from https://www.scotxed.net. For the purposes of this document – links to the appropriate guidance sections have been inserted.

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on Completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised Absence
Extended leave with parental consent	02	Extended leave with parental consent is not to be considered the same as a family holiday. Extended leave with parental consent should be recorded separately outside the figures for attendance and absence, and includes circumstances such as: › extended overseas educational trips not organised by the school › short-term parental placement abroad › family returning to its country of origin (to care for relative, or for cultural reasons) See 3.5 Diverse school communities for further information *This will not be included within the Attendance and Absence statistics calculations, either in the numerator or denominator.*	
Attendance	10	Include › attendance in school › educational visits organised by the school › study leave during the period from the official start date of the national exam timetable (i.e. date of first exam) until timetabled lesson restart. No study leave is to be given outwith this period. › Other attendance out of school [e.g. pupil on a day release to a college or another school for a specific subject]. It is the responsibility of the teaching centre to inform the base school if the pupil is absent. See 2 Managing attendance and absence for further information	Attendance

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on Completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised Absence
Late 1: Arrives before 50% of opening	11	Where a pupil has arrived late but during the first half of the opening, this will be marked as late (L1). This is regardless of whether the lateness is for a valid reason. See 2.7 Registration and recording lateness for further information	Attendance
Work experience	12	Include › Work experience, arranged or agreed by the school › Volunteering, arranged or agreed by the school See 2.3 Wherever learning takes place for further information	Attendance
Sickness with educational provision	13	This may include time spent on sick leave or maternity leave, with proof such as a parental letter or medical certificate, and where adequate educational provision has been made. Adequate educational provision is as set out in Circular 5/2001. *Guidance on Education of Children Absent from school through Ill-health.* http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/gecas-00.asp See 2.4 Providing for pupils during long-term illness for further information	Attendance
Sickness with no education provision	20	This would include any time where a pupil is off sick, with proof of illness such as a parental letter or medical certificate, and section 14 of Education (Scotland) Act 1980 is not applicable. See Circular 5/2001, and Guidance on Education of *Children Absent from school through Ill-health.* http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/gecas-00.asp	Authorised

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Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on Completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised Absence
Late 2: Arrives after 50% of opening	21	Where a pupil has arrived late but during the second half of the opening, then this will be marked as Late (L2). This recording is regardless of whether the lateness is for a valid reason. For schools using period-by-period registration, any registration in periods beginning in the second half of the opening, without any registration in periods beginning in the first half of the opening, will be converted to an overall L2 code for the opening (even if a later period is subsequently missed). See 2.7 Registration and recording lateness for further information	Authorised
Family holidays authorised by school	22	Under exceptional circumstances schools can authorise a family holiday during term time. Such circumstances may include: › important to the wellbeing and cohesion of the family, following serious or terminal illness, bereavement or other traumatic events. A family holiday classified under the "authorised absence" category should **not** include reasons such as: › The availability of cheap holidays › The availability of desired accommodation › Poor weather experienced during school holidays › Holidays which overlap the beginning or end of term › Parental difficulty in obtaining leave See 3.6 Family holidays during term time for further information	Authorised

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on Completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised Absence
Exceptional domestic circumstances (authorised)	23	This relates to short-term exceptional domestic circumstances. Absences related to short-term exceptional domestic circumstances can be classified as either authorised or unauthorised absence. Authorised absence under this heading covers situations such as: › the period immediately after an accident or illness › a period of serious or critical illness of a close relative › a domestic crisis which causes serious disruption to the family home, causing temporary relocation See 4.8 Exceptional domestic circumstances for further information	Authorised
Other authorised absence	24	Includes › Immediate family weddings › Bereavements › Religious observances › Attendance at court › Attendance at child care review › Attendance at children's hearing › Lack of transport – including due to bad weather › Sporting & cultural events not arranged by the school, but approved by them. See 3.5 Diverse school communities, 3.2 Children with complex lives, and 3.4 Different lives, different needs for further information	Authorised
Medical and dental	25	› Attendance at medical and dental appointments See 3.3 Medical and Dental appointments. For those recording period by period, any opening that contains at least 1 session of attendance will be converted to 'attendance' for statistical purposes. For schools with one registration per opening, a medical and dental recording should be recorded as 'attendance' if the pupils attends for any part of the opening, for statistical purposes. It is assumed that the school will note the fact that the pupil was not in attendance for the full opening, for legal purposes.	Authorised

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on Completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised Absence
Family holidays not authorised by school	30	Under exceptional circumstances schools can authorise a family holiday during term time. Such circumstances may include: › important to the wellbeing and cohesion of the family, following serious or terminal illness, bereavement or other traumatic events. A family holiday classified under the "authorised absence" category should not include reasons such as: › The availability of cheap holidays › The availability of desired accommodation › Poor weather experienced during school holidays › Holidays which overlap the beginning or end of term › Parental difficulty in obtaining leave See 3.6 family holidays for further information	Unauthorised
Truancy, including unexplained absence	31	Include all absence for which no adequate explanation has been provided See 4. Managing unauthorised absence for further information	Unauthorised
Exceptional domestic circumstances (unauthorised)	32	Under section 14 of the 1980 Act as amended by section 40 of the SSSA 2000 Act, education authorities must make special arrangements to ensure young people with care responsibilities do not miss out on their entitlement to an education. If a pupil is unable to attend school due to care responsibilities, there is an expectation that additional support services will be assessed to support the pupil, and their absence from education will not be long-term and therefore categorised as authorised absence. However, where additional services have not been accessed by the pupil and care responsibilities become long-term, the absence should be categorised as unauthorised absence. See 4.8 Long-term domestic circumstances for further information	Unauthorised

Attendance/ Absence Reason	Attendance/ Absence Code	Notes on Completion	Authorised/ Unauthorised Absence
Other unauthorised absence	33	Include any other reasons for **unauthorised** absence; e.g. where a parent is refusing to send their child to school following a dispute with school, or when a parent refuses to sign a behaviour agreement following an exclusion. See 4. Managing unauthorised absence and 2. Managing attendance and absence for further information.	Unauthorised
Temporary exclusion	40	Include all pupils excluded from school on a temporary basis. Information should be consistent with that supplied in the exclusions data. Where a decision has been taken to remove a pupil from the register following an exclusion, the school is not expected to continue to mark the pupil as absent. For further clarification please refer to the ScotXed Advice Note **SXD04/2006** – "Accurate recording of absence of pupils who are excluded from school for a period of time on a 'temporary' basis." See 3.7 Exclusion from School for further information	Separate category of absence

11 Resources

This section contains links to other sources of information referenced within this guidance.

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
http://www.antisocialbehaviourscotland.com/asb/asb_display_prac.jsp?pDateFrom=&pContentID=810&p_applic=CCC&pDateTo=&pElementID=204&pAsbNewsTypes=Acceptable%20Behaviour%20Contracts&p_service=Content.show&

Better Behaviour – Better Learning
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/education/rdtg-00.asp

Better Behaviour Scotland
http://www.betterbehaviourscotland.gov.uk/

Care 21 Report: The Future of Unpaid Care in Scotland
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/04/20103316/0

Children Missing from Education Guidance on referral of Gypsy/Travellers
Please contact
Children Missing from Education project
c/o Scottish Government, Education Information and Analytical Services,
Area 1 A South Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

Curriculum for Excellence
http://www.acurriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/

Education of Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland
www.scottishtravellered.net

http://www.scottishtravellered.net/resources/educationguide/Ed_20pp_web.pdf

Getting it Right for Every Child
getting it right for every child: Proposals For Action: Section 3 Integrated Assessment, Planning and Recording Framework: Supporting Paper 1: The process and content of an Integrated Framework and the implications for implementation
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/07/25112327/23294

getting it right for every child: Proposals For Action: Section 3 Integrated Assessment, Planning and Recording Framework: Supporting Paper 2: Mapping template
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/07/25112359/24015

getting it right for every child: Proposals For Action: Section 3 Integrated Assessment, Planning and Recording Framework: Supporting Paper 3: Case Studies
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/07/25112435/24365

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Guidance on Home Education

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/03/19061/34285

Happy, Safe and Achieving their potential

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/02/20626/51543

HeadsUp Scotland: National Project for Children and Young People's Mental Health

http://www.headsupscotland.co.uk

Health Promoting Schools (website)

http://www.healthpromotingschools.co.uk/

Hidden Harm Action Plan

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/114027/0027764.pdf

Missing Out (HMIE)

http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/hmiemoeo.pdf

Parental advice on Attendance and Absence

www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk/topics/goingtoschool/attendanceandabsence.asp

Quality Improvement Framework for Integrated Services for Children and Young People

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/04/27135008/0

Safe and Well

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/0191408/14093

Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2007/20070015.htm

Scottish Executive response to Care 21 Report: The future of unpaid care in Scotland

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/112273/0027313.pdf

ScotXed

https://www.scotxed.net/jahia/Jahia

Skills for Scotland. A Life Long Skills Strategy 2007

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/197204/0052752.pdf

Supporting Children's Learning – Code of Practice – (under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004)

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/15105817/58187

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www.scotland.gov.uk/laceducationaloutcomes

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