

# Powys County Council

## School Attendance Guidance

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Local Authority (LA), including the Education Welfare Service, works in partnership with Powys schools to monitor and address a wide range of attendance issues. The following document provides guidance on the roles and responsibilities of schools and the LA. It includes links to key national and local attendance guidance which frames the work undertaken, to ensure that young people and children in Powys benefit from regular school attendance.

## 2.0 Legal Frameworks

- 2.1 The law on school attendance and right to a full-time education<sup>1</sup>:
- The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any additional learning need they may have<sup>2</sup>.
  - Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly<sup>3</sup>.
  - The law permits parents to educate their child at home (Elective Home Education)<sup>4</sup>.
- 2.2 Whilst the legal responsibility for regular school attendance rests with parents, the school shares with them, and the LA, responsibility for encouraging good attendance and improving poor attendance.
- 2.3 Schools are required by law to maintain specific records and to produce specified information on the attendance of learners<sup>5</sup>. Statutory obligation notwithstanding, the school is committed to improvements in attendance standards as a direct stimulus to raising learner achievement.
- 2.4 Poor attendance is detrimental to educational achievement, undermines the well-being of each learner, and can impede life chances.
- 2.5 The LA has a statutory duty to ensure that a child for whom they are responsible (a Child Looked After (CLA)) is receiving suitable education and is attending school regularly and on time<sup>6</sup>.
- 2.6 Compulsory school age means that children and young people should attend school from the start of the first term commencing after their fifth birthday and are of compulsory school age until after the last Friday in June of the school year in which they have their 16th birthday<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Education Act 1996. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Section 7. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/7> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, Section 436A. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/436A> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, Section 9. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/9> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>5</sup> The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulation 2010. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2010/1954/contents/made> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Part 6. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/part/6> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Education Act 1996, Section 8. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/8> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

- 2.7 If a registered learner of compulsory school age fails to attend school regularly, the parent could be guilty of an offence under section 444 Education Act 1996<sup>8</sup>.
- 2.8 An offence is not committed if it can be demonstrated that:
- the learner was absent with leave (authorised absence);
  - the learner was ill or prevented from attending by an unavoidable cause;
  - the absence occurred on a day set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the learner/parent belongs;
  - the school is not within the prescribed walking distance of the child's home and suitable transport arrangements have not been made by the LA. The law relating to walking distance effectively is defined as two miles for learners under eight and three miles for all other learners. Distance will be measured by nearest available walking route.
- 2.9 Only the registered school of the child can authorise an absence.

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, Section 444. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/444> Accessed on 08 January 2024.

### 3.0 National Context

- 3.1 Attendance is key to whole school improvement and has direct influence on a learners' learning, progress and well-being.
- 3.2 The Welsh Government guidance document, *Belonging, engaging and participating*<sup>9</sup>, provides advice and guidance and sets out responsibilities for maintaining high levels of attendance, positive behaviour and well-being of all learners.
- 3.3 Attending school is also crucial from a safeguarding perspective, ensuring that children are **seen, safe and heard**, and not exploited. Active follow-up of absence is a major element in their care and protection. This is one of the main reasons why recording and monitoring attendance accurately is so important.<sup>10</sup>
- 3.4 The Welsh Government has issued statutory guidance to prevent children from missing education<sup>11</sup>. This statutory guidance emphasises the safeguarding duties on local authorities, schools and other relevant partners in relation to children missing education. Powys County Council has created a Children Missing Education policy<sup>12</sup> which sets out clear duties and responsibilities for schools and the Schools Service.
- 3.5 The All Wales Attendance Framework<sup>13</sup> provides a toolkit on practice standards and guidance for schools and Education Welfare Service practitioners.
- 3.6 The Welsh Government have produced specific education guidance to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) learners, *Celebrate and participate*<sup>14</sup>. This guidance includes specific advice around GRT attendance.
- 3.7 The Welsh Government has also produced a range of other guidance, including guidance on the appropriate use of school register codes. These are available from the Welsh Government [website](#)<sup>15</sup>.
- 3.8 From October 2023, the Welsh Government has redefined persistent absence as attendance below 90%.

<sup>9</sup> Improving school attendance, Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/improving-school-attendance> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>11</sup> Statutory guidance to help prevent children and young people from missing education, Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/statutory-guidance-help-prevent-children-and-young-people-missing-education> Accessed on 16 April 2024.

<sup>12</sup> Children Missing Education, Powys County Council. <https://sites.google.com/hwbcymru.net/adnoddau-powys-resources/home/governors-policies/gov-policies-2> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>13</sup> All Wales Attendance Framework, Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/all-wales-attendance-framework> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Celebrate and participate: Education guidance to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people, Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/education-guidance-support-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-children-and-young-people> Accessed on 15 February 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Pupil inclusion, wellbeing, behaviour and attendance. Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/pupil-inclusion-wellbeing-behaviour-and-attendance> Accessed on 15 February 2024.

## 4.0 Local Context

- 4.1 Powys County Council is committed to promoting positive school attendance by supporting schools to develop and implement policies and processes to improve levels of attendance and well-being.
- 4.2 All schools in Powys are supported by the Education Welfare Service, who provide a link between the schools, education services, families, children, and young people.
- 4.3 The support provided by an Education Welfare Officer includes:
- support to develop school strategies and policy;
  - support to improve whole school attendance;
  - regular attendance meetings with school links;
  - supporting individual learners/families; and
  - undertaking actions as part of the LA's legal responsibilities.
- 4.4 Powys County Council Schools Service, following the Welsh Government redefinition of persistent absence, have introduced the term 'severe absence'. Attendance concerns in Powys should make use of the terms persistent absence and severe absence as follows:
- Persistent Absence ☐ Attendance between 50% and 90%
  - Severe Absence ☐ Attendance below 50%

## 5.0 Attendance policies

- 5.1 Powys encourages each school to have a clear school attendance policy which all leaders, staff, learners, and parents understand.
- 5.2 School policies should be constructed in line with the guidance in *Belonging, engaging and participating*<sup>16</sup>.
- 5.3 The guidance explains the link between attendance and safeguarding, and emphasises that learners are, **seen, safe and heard**<sup>17</sup>. The Mid and West Wales Regional Safeguarding Board undertook a Child Practice Review, Cysur 3/2021<sup>18</sup>, learning from which included that schools should have an 'eyes on' approach for learners where there are attendance concerns. This reinforces the guidance in *Belonging, engaging and participating*<sup>19</sup> and schools should therefore include the 'eyes on' approach in their attendance policy, so that learners are seen and safe.

<sup>16</sup> Improving school attendance, Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/improving-school-attendance> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>18</sup> Child Practice Review Cysur 3/2021, Mid and West Wales Regional Safeguarding Board.

<https://cysur.wales/child-practice-reviews/cysur-3-2021-concise-child-practice-review/> Accessed on 16 April 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Improving school attendance, Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/improving-school-attendance> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

- 5.3 Schools should implement whole school attendance improvement strategies within their policy, including instilling a staff mindset of high expectations around attendance.
- 5.4 Schools must also be mindful of the processes outlined in the LA's:
- Children Missing Education policy<sup>20</sup>;
  - Elective Home Education policy<sup>21</sup>;
  - Code of Conduct for Fixed Penalty Notices<sup>22</sup>;
- and their responsibilities contained therein, particularly in regard to how attendance processes safeguard learners.
- 5.5 Powys Education Welfare Service offers training and resources to schools to support and improve whole school attendance which can be requested via the Education Welfare Officer and these include (but are not limited to):
- Attendance best practice;
  - Registration practices, including coding;
  - Whole school attendance improvement;
  - Positive attendance workshops with learners;
  - Code of Conduct for Fixed Penalty Notices
- 5.6 Some learners find it harder than others to attend school and therefore at all stages of improving attendance, schools and partners should work with learners and parents to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place.

## 6.0 Parent/Carer Responsibilities

- 6.1 Parents are responsible in law for ensuring that their child/children attend(s) the school at which they are registered, regularly and on time.
- 6.2 Parents are also responsible for ensuring that their children stay at school once they have registered.
- 6.3 Parents can do a great deal to support the regular and punctual attendance of their children, including:
- take an active interest in their child's school life and work;
  - attend parents' evenings and other school events, if possible;

<sup>20</sup> Children Missing Education, Powys County Council.

<https://sites.google.com/hwbcymru.net/adnoddau-powys-resources/home/governors-policies/gov-policies-2> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Elective Home Education, Powys County Council.

<https://sites.google.com/hwbcymru.net/adnoddau-powys-resources/home/governors-policies/gov-policies-2> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Code of Conduct, Powys County Council.

<https://sites.google.com/hwbcymru.net/adnoddau-powys-resources/home/governors-policies/gov-policies-2> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

- ensure that their child completes his/her homework and goes to bed at an appropriate time;
  - be aware of letters from school which their child brings home or alternative communications from the school;
  - ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day;
  - ensure that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or justified, such as illness or days of religious observance;
  - always notify the school as soon as possible - preferably on the first morning - of any absence;
  - confirm this in writing when the child returns to school;
  - avoid booking family holidays during term-time;
  - talk to the school if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to attend;
  - make all medical and dental appointments outside of school hours wherever possible.
- 6.4 If a child misses school without an explanation from the parents/carers, or if the school is not satisfied with the explanation, the absence will be recorded as 'unauthorised'.
- 6.5 Although parents/carers may provide a reason for the absence, it is the decision of the school whether the absence is recorded as authorised or unauthorised.
- 6.6 If parents/carers think there may be a reason why their child does not want to go to school, they should speak to their child's class teacher for help and support in the first instance.

## 7.0 School Responsibilities

- 7.1 All schools are expected to develop processes that meet the needs of all learners and their particular context. Please also see Appendix 1.
- 7.2 The Welsh Government document *Belonging, engaging and participating* provides guidance on what exactly these processes are.
- 7.3 Schools should identify a designated member of staff for attendance matters. Attendance is the responsibility of all staff, but the designated member of staff will have oversight of school attendance and processes. Please see Appendix 2.
- 7.4 Schools also have a safeguarding duty, under section 175 Education Act 2002<sup>23</sup>, to investigate any unexplained absences. As described in point 5.3, above, this includes having 'eyes on' a learner.

<sup>23</sup> Education Act 2002, Section 175. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/section/175> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

- 7.5 Schools are required under the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010<sup>24</sup> to take an attendance register twice a day: at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. The accuracy of the register is important to support any statutory interventions that may be required. It should be noted that it is a legal offence not to maintain accurate registers.

## 8.0 Education Welfare Service Responsibilities

- 8.1 The role of the Education Welfare Service is described in Welsh Government guidance, principally in *Belonging, engaging and participating*<sup>25</sup>. The Education Welfare Service will support schools to develop their own attendance strategies and policies in line with national guidance.
- 8.2 The Education Welfare Service encourages collaborative working between schools, agencies, parents/carers and learners to support best outcomes. Agencies and support available include:
- School Nursing Service;
  - Youth Intervention Service;
  - Powys Early Help;
  - CAMHS;
  - Learner-Centred Support Meetings;
  - Pastoral Support Plans (PSP's);
  - Youth Justice Workers;
  - Family Liaison Officers;
  - Additional Learning Needs (ALN) processes as outlined in the ALN Code<sup>26</sup>;
  - Powys ALN support, including behaviour consultations, ALN consultations and requests for assessments.
- 8.3 Referrals to the Education Welfare Service should only be made once a school has exhausted all reasonable avenues of support to improve a learner's attendance.
- 8.4 Referrals to the Education Welfare Service for targeted work (as opposed to advice and guidance) can only be made using the online [Education Welfare Service Referral Form](#).

<sup>24</sup> The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulation 2010. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2010/1954/contents/made> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Improving school attendance, Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/improving-school-attendance> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>26</sup> The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021, Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/additional-learning-needs-code> Accessed on 15 February 2024.

## 9.0 Registration

- 9.1 The register is a legal document and must be kept accurately.
- 9.2 The register may be requested in a court of law as evidence in a prosecution for non-attendance.
- 9.3 It will also be used for end of term reports, records of achievement and reference requests, and information for other schools, LAs and external agencies.
- 9.4 No learner should be marked present unless actually in attendance at school or other agreed educational activity.
- 9.5 The register should not have missing marks.
- 9.6 When a learner arrives late but the register is still open, the learners should be marked as late but counted as present for the session. When a learner misses registration, they should be marked as an unauthorised absence, unless a medical letter/phone call by parent is received and deemed to be genuine.
- 9.7 Learners should not have access to the register.
- 9.8 The headteacher is the only person who can authorise that a learner be added or removed from the register; this can only be done with the agreement of the LA and in line with the Regulations<sup>27</sup>.
- 9.9 In addition to twice daily registration in form groups, a class register is taken for every lesson throughout the day. These are checked by the Head of Year/Phase to identify possible truancy and any learner found to have missed a lesson.
- 9.10 The Welsh Government publishes information and guidance on school attendance codes<sup>28</sup>.

## 10.0 Data Analysis

- 10.1 The school and LA should both regularly analyse attendance and absence data to identify learners or cohorts that require support with their attendance, and put effective strategies in place.
- 10.2 Regular data analysis is key to both identify concerns and provide immediate additional support to learners or learner cohorts that need it, and to look at historic and emerging patterns across the school and develop strategies to address those.

<sup>27</sup> Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010, Regulation 8.  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2010/1954/regulation/8/made> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Guidance on school attendance codes, Welsh Government, June 2010.  
<https://www.gov.wales/school-attendance-codes-guidance> Accessed on 8 January 2024.

### 10.3 This can include:

- The monitoring and analysis of weekly attendance patterns and trends and deliver intervention and support.
- Looking further into patterns of attendance within a session to ensure all learners are attending all timetabled lessons.
- Using this analysis to provide regular attendance reports to class teachers or tutors.
- Identifying the learners who need support and focus staff efforts on developing targeted actions for those learners.
- Conducting thorough analysis of half-termly, termly, and full year data to identify patterns and trends.
- Benchmarking attendance data.
- Devising specific strategies to address areas of poor attendance identified through data.
- Monitoring the data to evaluate the impact of whole school and bespoke attendance efforts.
- Providing data and reports to support the work of the governing body.

## 11.0 Useful information and contacts

### 11.1 Welsh Government

- All Wales Attendance Framework  
<https://www.gov.wales/all-wales-attendance-framework>
- Guidance on school attendance codes  
<https://www.gov.wales/school-attendance-codes-guidance>
- Improving school attendance: *Belonging, engaging and participating*  
<https://www.gov.wales/improving-school-attendance>
- Improving school attendance: *Belonging, engaging and participating* (quick guide)  
<https://www.gov.wales/improving-school-attendance-easy-read>
- My Local School  
<https://www.gov.wales/my-local-school-guide>
- Pupil inclusion, wellbeing, behaviour and attendance  
<https://www.gov.wales/pupil-inclusion-wellbeing-behaviour-and-attendance>
- Statutory guidance to help prevent children and young people from missing education  
<https://www.gov.wales/statutory-guidance-help-prevent-children-and-young-people-missing-education>
- School Admissions  
<https://www.gov.wales/school-admissions>
- School Admissions Code  
<https://www.gov.wales/school-admissions-code>

## 11.2 Powys County Council

- Admissions and Transport  
<https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/10943/Admissions-and-Transport>
- Attendance and Welfare  
<https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/10949/Attendance-and-Welfare>
- Children and Families  
<https://en.powys.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies>
- Family Information Service  
<https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/1988/Family-Information-Service>
- Powys policies on Children Missing Education and Elective Home Education and Powys Code of Conduct for Fixed Penalty Notices  
<https://sites.google.com/hwbcmru.net/adnoddau-powys-resources/home/governors-policies/gov-policies-2>
- School Meals and Clothing Grants  
<https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/3758/School-meals-and-clothing-grants>
- Schools and Students  
<https://en.powys.gov.uk/schools>
- Youth Intervention Service  
<https://en.powys.gov.uk/article/2064/Youth-Intervention-Service>

## 11.3 Contacts

- School Admissions  
[admissions@powys.gov.uk](mailto:admissions@powys.gov.uk)
- Schools Data Team  
[education.data@powys.gov.uk](mailto:education.data@powys.gov.uk)
- Elective Home Education  
[ehe@powys.gov.uk](mailto:ehe@powys.gov.uk)
- School Service Safeguarding Team  
[safeguarding.education@powys.gov.uk](mailto:safeguarding.education@powys.gov.uk)
- Education Welfare Service  
[educationwelfare@powys.gov.uk](mailto:educationwelfare@powys.gov.uk)

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – School Attendance Processes

All schools are expected to develop processes that meet the needs of their learners and contexts that include (but are not limited to) arrangements to:

- Develop and maintain a whole school attendance policy;
- Ensure that all staff are aware of the registration procedures, registration regulations and education law relating to school attendance;
- Complete school registers at the start of the morning session and afternoon session;
- Stress to parents and carers the importance of contacting the school as early as possible on the first day of absence;
- Ensure all staff understand their role in:
  - ☐ Promoting good attendance;
  - ☐ Monitoring attendance and absences;
  - ☐ Responding to and following up on any absences;
- Promote positive staff attitudes to learners returning after absence;
- Ensure regular evaluation of attendance by the Governing Body;
- Work towards ensuring all learners are supported and valued and so want to attend school;
- Proactively manage lateness;
- Encourage parents to contact the school when their child is absent to explain the reason;
- Identify any absences that are not explained for each session and contact parents;
- Develop positive relationships with parents/carers and external agencies working with the family/learner;
- Monitor and evaluate the early intervention strategies adopted by the school;
- Where reasonably possible, hold more than one emergency contact number for each learner;
- Regularly inform parents about their child's attendance and absence levels;
- Hold regular meetings with the parents of learners who the school (and/or local authority) consider to be vulnerable;
- Identify learners who need support from wider partners and agencies;
- Ensure that any attendance support required is offered on a person-centred basis, adhering to the ethos of Welsh Government guidance *Belonging, engaging and participating* and the ethos of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It is recommended that schools use the Signs of Safety model;
- Make the necessary statutory data returns to the local authority;

- Support learners back into school following a lengthy or unavoidable period of absence;
- Support an Education Welfare Service audit when requested.

## Appendix 2 – Designated Member of Staff

Schools should identify a designated member of staff for attendance matters, which includes (but is not limited to):

- monitoring registers;
- liaising with teaching staff;
- meeting with the Education Welfare Officer on a regular basis;
- making referrals to other appropriate agencies;
- making referrals to the School Nursing Service in regards to queries around learner absence due to reported illness;
- overseeing the use of standardised letters to parents addressing specific aspects of attendance;
- arranging for attendance meetings in the case of repeated, unexplained absences;
- ensuring the Education Welfare Officer's role is known and understood in school;
- ensuring all staff are aware that attendance is the responsibility of all staff.