

# **Newport City Council Attendance Policy**

**December 2015**

## **All our children, all our business – attendance really does matter!**

Children and Young People who do not attend school may regret the fact for the rest of their lives. Absence and exclusion from school are associated with a higher risk of poor educational achievement and attainment, limited job prospects and criminal activity. The significance of school attendance must not and can not be underestimated, particularly for those children and young people who show signs of disaffection or unhappiness. Newport local authority believes that:

- Children and young people have a right of access to an education appropriate to their individual needs
- That a balance of rights and responsibilities between children and young people, parents, schools, other professionals and the wider community should be maintained
- Early assessment, identification and intervention are keys to safeguarding the welfare and interests of children and young people

Promoting positive behaviour and excellent attendance is the responsibility of the whole school and wider community.

Newport schools will promote positive behaviour and good attendance through their use of an appropriate curriculum which is geared to the child's age, aptitude and ability. Schools will aim to create a learning community which benefits from the positive behaviour, regular attendance and well-being of its pupils and staff. Good attendance and behaviour will be recognised appropriately.

All children should be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for absence is unavoidable. Schools have a legal duty to publish attendance figures and to promote attendance. Equally, parents have a duty and responsibility to ensure that their children attend school on a regular basis. The local authority has a duty to promote and enforce attendance.

It is acknowledged that all children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems which arise with attendance are best resolved between the school, the parents and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend, it is inappropriate to cover up this absence or to give into pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the parents and the child the impression that attendance does not matter and in fact will only make the situation worse. Permitting absence from school without a good reason is an offence by the parent.

Schools have a duty in law to refer any absence over 10 days or more where they have been unable to make contact with the parent/child or have general concerns about the absence to the educational welfare service.

Schools are required to take an attendance register twice a day, and this shows whether the pupil is present, engaged in an approved off-site activity, or absent. If a pupil of compulsory school age is absent, every half day absence from school has to be classified by the school, as either **authorised** or **unauthorised**.

<b>Only school can authorise the absence, not parents.</b>
--

Information regarding the cause of the absence will always be required, preferably in writing.

**Authorised absences** are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness or other unavoidable causes (e.g. bereavement). Where possible medical appointments should be booked outside of the school day, however if this is not possible then some absences will be recorded as authorised as proof of the appointment is provided. Parents should be made aware that unless there is a valid medical reason that children should return to school following such appointments. If the child does not return to school the parents should be informed that the absence will become unauthorised.

When the absence is authorised, schools will use the appropriate code to record the absence. It is essential that there is consistency in the way that schools record absences so that data provided to the local authority and Welsh Government is correct.

**Unauthorised absences** are those which the local authority does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave of absence' has been agreed by the school. These include:

- Holidays during school time
- Parents keeping children out of school unnecessarily, e.g. for company
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Children who arrive at school too late to get a mark

It is not appropriate for schools to authorise absences for shopping, looking after other children, birthdays, hair appointments etc.

**Parentally condoned absence** – there may be many reasons why a parent chooses to keep their child away from school. It is essential that when school staff feel that a worrying pattern of non-attendance is emerging, they work closely with the education welfare service to ensure that the appropriate level of intervention and support can be offered to the parent and child to encourage attendance. The first action of a school should always be to see a parent about the problem.

**Lateness**, especially if persistent, should be treated in the same way as irregular attendance. Parents can be prosecuted if the issue of persistent lateness is not resolved. Lateness can be damaging to a pupil's educational career as persistent absence. It leads to very bad habits that employers will not accept, for instance.

**Family holidays during term time – Regulation 8 of the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 (amended) gives schools *discretionary* power to grant ten days leave for the purpose of an annual family holiday during term time. In exceptional circumstances a school may authorise a holiday of more than ten days.**

Parents do not have the automatic right to withdraw their child (ren) from school for a holiday, and in law, have to apply for permissions in advance. Schools are very clear about both the effect of term time holidays on their performance figures and about the damage they do to a child's progress.

Requests for leave of absence for children who are Looked After must be made by the social worker and **NOT** the foster carer. If such a request is received the school should immediately refer this case to the senior educational welfare officer or pupil services manager.

**Extended overseas trips** should only be agreed where schools have taken into full account the National Assembly guidance and individual circumstances. Parents should be advised of the impact such a lengthy absence will have upon their child (ren) and be encouraged, where possible to take their holiday to coincide with school closure. Trips overseas are the same as family holidays. For many of the children involved, it is critical that their time in school is maximised and whether it is for linguistic or delayed attainment reasons, parents need to be encouraged to plan for trips in the 13 weeks available to them outside term times.

**Parents should be advised that their child's name will be removed from the school register if he/she has not returned to school on the expected day of return.** Legally, a child can be taken off a school register if they have not attended for 4 weeks (because of parental action). In these circumstances the parents would need to make an application for re-admission on their return to UK and may not be guaranteed the school of their choice, as all available places could be taken. Therefore a change of school would be required.

Everyone (local authority, governing bodies, school staff, parents, children and young people) has a responsibility to promote the attendance of all children and young people within the City of Newport, together we will make attendance matter!

December 2015