

GUIDANCE ON INVESTIGATING UNEXPLAINED ABSENCES

Introduction

Frequent school attendance is imperative in order for pupils to reach their full potential. Persistent absence is one of the key reasons why pupils achieve low attainment grades; this assumption is something which is widely recognised, yet rarely officially stated. It is, however, reasonable to expect a certain amount of pupil absence during a full school term due to illness, family bereavement or other authorised reasons. Nonetheless, unexplained absences are a key issue and it is the responsibility of schools to inform the LA so that action can be taken.

Children, who are of compulsory school age, need to be monitored by the school if they have been absent for an unexplained reason; this is to ensure the pupil's safety and wellbeing. If a school picks up on a noticeable period of unexplained absences, there are set protocols, outlined in this guidance, which should be carried out.

Attendance law

It is of paramount importance that children of compulsory school age receive a suitable education. Children should be enrolled on to the admission register, which must, at all times, be kept up-to-date. Once a child has been listed on the admission register of a school, it is the legal responsibility of the child's parents to ensure the regular, punctual attendance of the child. Any unexplained absences will be investigated by the school and the LA. Parents must be made aware of and adhere to the school's Attendance and Truancy Policy.

Investigating unexplained absences

Role of the school

Once a child has been enrolled, the school has no more than five working days to inform the LA. If the child does not attend school on the agreed date; the school must then carry out a reasonable investigation as to the whereabouts of the child. It is the responsibility of the school to inform the LA at their own discretion.

Through the progression of the academic year, an attendance register must be filled in daily to monitor pupils' attendance. The register monitors attendance explained and unexplained absence. If a pupil has missed more than 10 days of school or fails to attend school regularly, it is the responsibility of the school to inform the LA.

If a pupil misses more than 10 consecutive days after an authorised absence or is absent from school for more than 20 days for unexplained reasons, it is of primary importance for the school and LA to make full enquiries as for the reasons behind the absence. If no sufficient evidence materialises as to why they are absent, then the pupil can be removed from the admission register.

If a pupil has been removed from the admission register, the school must inform the LA as soon as possible with full details of the pupil including: name and address of pupil, full contact details of at least one parent, name of the pupil's new school, and the grounds under which the pupil was removed from the admission register.

If a pupil has been absent from school for a sustained period of time; then it is the responsibility of the school to first investigate the reason behind the absence using the

appropriate lines of enquiry. If no plausible reason has been deduced then it is the responsibility of the school to pass on their concerns to the LA.

Role of the LA

It is the role of the LA to ensure that children in the local area are receiving suitable education, through the means of attending school or any other suitable arrangement. If no arrangement has been made for the child, then it is the responsibility of the LA to consult the child's parents and return the child to full-time education. If a pupil enrolled in school has a noticeable period of unexplained absence, then the LA will be informed and immediate action should be carried out.

There are many different reasons as to why pupils may be absent from school and it is the responsibility of the LA to address these with sensitivity. Furthermore, any absences from school which are unexplained need to be dealt with by the LA. If a pupil is absent, the LA has the authority to prosecute the parent, issuing parenting contracts and/or penalty notices, as well as fining parents for unauthorised absences.

It is the responsibility of the LA to identify pupils who have sustained periods of unexplained absences and to redistribute them into full-time education, into a suitable school environment or other educational service they may deem appropriate for the child.

How to minimise the rate of unexplained absences

Ultimately, it is the parent and child who can minimise cases of unexplained absences. The school and the LA can, however, demonstrate good/outstanding approaches to improve attendance.

Parents

There are many ways in which schools can assist parents in reducing the rate of a pupil's unexplained absences. These include:

- Directing parents to documents which outline the rules and regulations on absences, including instances such as holidays in term time and the repercussions of not adhering to said rules.
- Promoting the correlation between improved attendance and high attainment in school to parents.
- Consulting with parents on causes of absences, such as doctor's appointments.

Pupils

To successfully encourage pupils to attend school, targeted reward schemes can be put in to place. Further examples of good/outstanding approaches to attendance include:

- Promoting the correlation between improved attendance and high attainment in school to pupils.
- Consulting with pupils on the causes of their absences and the development of personalised initiatives to improve attendance, especially with hard to reach pupils.