Pupil attendance

Governing board responsibilities from September 2022

This information sheet summarises the responsibilities outlined in the *Working together to improve school attendance* guidance that applies to all schools from September 2022. The guidance is accompanied by a table of responsibilities for governing boards and other stakeholders.

The guidance is clear that improving attendance begins at board level, meaning governing boards should:

- take an active role in attendance improvement
- support their school(s) to prioritise attendance
- work together with school leaders to develop a whole-school attendance culture

We recommend that boards use this information sheet to prompt conversations with school/trust leaders about existing practices and routines and the plans in place to meet the new expectations and requirements.

Policy

Boards should ensure that an effective whole-school culture of high attendance is underpinned by a clear attendance policy. Trusts and federations may wish to have one attendance policy which covers all their schools. The policy should:

- Meet the expectations set out in section one of *Working together to improve school attendance* (see also paragraph 17 for minimum details to be included).
- Be **tailored to the needs of individual schools** and the barriers to attendance pupils experience (as identified through analysis of school-level attendance data).
- Account for the specific needs of certain pupils and pupil cohorts/groups.
- Be easily accessible to staff, pupils and parents, including being published on the school/trust website.
- Be sent to parents when pupils join the school, at the start of each academic year and when it is updated.

Boards should also recognise that attendance improvement does not happen in isolation; it should also be prioritised in wider policies and improvement strategies such as those related to raising attainment, support for disadvantaged pupils, behaviour management, SEND, wellbeing, and safeguarding. For example, a pupil premium strategy should address non-academic challenges that pupils may be facing, such as poor attendance and punctuality.

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Data and monitoring

Governing boards should regularly review attendance data and improvement efforts at board meetings. This should include:

- Thorough examination of recent and historic trends and patterns.
- Benchmarking against comparator schools within the local authority, region and nationwide.
- Paying particular attention to pupil cohorts and to groups that face entrenched barriers to attendance (this should be specific to the school's context but may include vulnerable groups such as pupils who have a social worker, are from a background or ethnicity where attendance has historically been low, have a long-term medical condition, have special educational needs or disabilities or are eligible for free school meals).
- Working with school leaders to set goals and outline areas for support and challenge.

Schools that are struggling with attendance improvement should also be developing a comprehensive action plan that is reviewed and evaluated regularly (this may form part of a wider school improvement plan).

Trust and federation governing boards should monitor attendance patterns across their schools to identify common issues and barriers and share effective practice between schools. They may, for example, hold termly attendance review meetings with each individual school and/or ask them to report on their attendance at defined intervals.

Governing boards may also wish to consider a link governor or trustee to focus on attendance.

Training

School staff should receive training on attendance. As a minimum, this should ensure that all staff understand:

- the importance of good attendance and that absence is almost always a symptom of wider circumstances
- the law and requirements of schools including on the keeping of registers
- their school or trust strategies and procedures for tracking, following up and improving attendance
- the processes for working with partners to provide intensive support to pupils who need it

Members of staff with a specified attendance function should also receive training on:

- the necessary skills to interpret and analyse attendance data
- supporting pupils in overcoming barriers to attendance

Boards can use a range of sources to monitor and evaluate the extent to which staff training is effective and improves outcomes for pupils. Read our guide to CPD for school staff to further explore this topic.

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