

VALE of GLAMORGAN

# Attendance Policy

2024 - 25



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## Introduction

The aim of the Vale of Glamorgan Local Authority is to create an environment in which all children and young people can flourish as members of a happy, caring and safe school and wider community. It is our goal that all our children and young people attend school regularly and on time, making the most of the opportunities available to them.

The Vale of Glamorgan (VOG) Inclusion Team aims to work in partnership with our schools to monitor and address a wide range of attendance issues to make the above a reality.

Schools in the VOG are supported in all matters relating to school attendance including Children Missing Education (CME), Elective Home Education (EHE) and the welfare of non-attending learners etc by the Inclusion team in collaboration with the Admissions team and the Data support teams for SIMS and ONE.

Inclusion team officers will advise on matters such as the need for referral to other Local Authority (LA) teams such as: Learning Links (previously known as Vulnerable Groups team), Additional Learning Needs team (ALN), the Social Emotional and Mental Health Panel (SEMHP) or support from the Engagement Service (ES).

All references to roles and remits of the Education Welfare service (EWS) are, in the VOG since September 2021, functions which are carried out by the Inclusion Team officers as opposed to Education Welfare Officers (EWO) and EWS.

The following document outlines our commitment to supporting schools in addition to outlining school responsibilities within this process.

There are also links provided to key attendance documents which frame the work undertaken, to ensure that young people and children in the VOG benefit from regular school attendance. The **VOG Attendance Toolkit 2023 resource pack** developed by the Inclusion Team is included in this document.



## Key Aims

This document will:

- Provide guidance to develop and implement whole school attendance strategies.
- Summarise efficient and effective early intervention and support strategies.
- Identify Schools responsibilities and parental responsibilities with regards to attendance related issues
- Outline information which should be included in School Attendance Policies in the form of a draft school attendance policy.
- Explore the use of data analysis to support positive attendance strategies and proactive response to attendance trends.
- Provide a pack of model letters that can be used by schools to promote good attendance and communicate with parents on these issues.
- Encourage educational provisions to work collaboratively with a range of partners to support and promote the welfare and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Outline the Local Authority's role in dealing with non-attendance.
- Explain legal contexts such as Fixed Penalty Notices and other Legal frameworks and provide guidance in relation to the use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) as a measure to improving attendance.
- Provide an outline of the support available through the Inclusion Team
- Provide school attendance codes and explanations with a clear definition of authorised and unauthorised absences.
- Identify legalities around registration.

## **The Role of the School**

The school has a multi layered role to play to ensure good levels of attendance by all learners. A key aspect of this is how the school engages with and supports its learners and their families.

## **School Culture and Ethos**

To promote high levels of attendance schools are expected to be working towards creating an ethos and culture where: -

- School is a safe place for all.
- School is an interesting and engaging place for all learners.
- School is a welcoming, happy, and kind environment.
- Positive use of language is present in all interactions between school staff and the school community.
- Outstanding learning and teaching strategies exist, and an appropriate and purposeful curriculum is constantly being worked towards.
- Building, maintaining, and restoring relationships is central.
- Trauma informed work is embedded, and the school offers support and appropriate challenge to bring about the best outcomes for all learners.
- There are clear expectations around bullying and discrimination and the processes to deal with it effectively.
- Strategic planning and support to reduce barriers to learning and engagement is embedded within day-to-day school practice.
- Working with other agencies and the school's work as a community focused school is evident.
- Clear procedures, information, and expectations around attendance to school is available and promoted on a regular basis to parents/carers and learners.

**Please see the VOG Attendance Toolkit 2023 resource pack for useful materials to help support with the above.**

## The law on school attendance and the right to a full-time education

- 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.
- Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly.
- For the most vulnerable pupils, regular attendance is also an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided. Whilst the legal responsibility for regular school attendance rests with parents, the school shares with them, and the Local Authority (LA), responsibility for encouraging good attendance and improving poor attendance.
- Schools are required by law to maintain specific records and to produce specified information on the attendance of pupils.
- Statutory obligation apart, the school is committed to improvements in attendance standards as a direct stimulus to raising pupil achievement. Poor attendance has a direct impact on educational achievement and undermines the well-being of each pupil.
- Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, parents are responsible for ensuring that their child(ren) of compulsory school age (5-16), receives efficient full-time education, suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude, and any additional learning needs (ALN) the child may have. This can be through regular attendance at school or educated otherwise by the Local Authority.
- The law also permits parents to educate their child(ren) at home under the terms of Elective Home Education (EHE). The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure that a child for whom they are responsible is receiving suitable education.
- Only the Headteacher of the registered school of the child can authorise an absence.
- 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.
- If a registered pupil of compulsory school age fails to attend school regularly, the parent could be guilty of an offence under section 444 (1) (1a) (z) Education Act 1996.

Under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 it is the duty of parents/carers to secure the ***"efficient, full-time education"*** of children of compulsory school age. This is by reference to the age, ability and aptitude, and any special educational needs of the child and they should do so by regular attendance at school or otherwise. The otherwise is usually in cases where the parent has chosen to home educate their child – EHE. Schools and LAs may also vary the

provision depending on a child's need and so some learners may access alternative provisions (AP), specialist provisions or a mixture of school and alternative provision. For learners on roll with a school then the responsibility for the suitability of the provision lies with the school. For learners with Local Authority supported education other than at school provisions (EOTAS), the school and Local Authority are jointly responsible for assuring the quality and suitability of the learning offer and maintaining the attendance.

### **Promoting good attendance**

Schools should take opportunities to promote good attendance, through all communications with parents / carers and pupils. By Schools should create learning opportunities to explore the benefits of good attendance at school within classroom activities, assemblies and through visual and online campaigns. The local authority **#MissSchoolMissOut** campaign will continue throughout the year. Digital and physical materials have been offered to schools so that this campaign can be promoted by schools as well as in the wider VOG community.

### **Governor links**

Schools should ensure that attendance is a standing agenda item for Governors meetings and that attendance data is analysed and updates around attendance improvement plans are discussed at each meeting. It is expected that there is a named governor for attendance and that school attendance policies are reviewed yearly by Governors.

Schools could also consider establishing attendance panels where Governors can meet with families where there are concerns around their children's attendance. The LA Inclusion Team would be happy to support with this.

### **Cluster work / Policy**

Schools within the VOG are strongly encouraged to develop their own whole school / cluster policy on attendance. This should be developed in consultation with staff, governors, parents / carer and pupils, taking account of relevant guidance issued by Welsh Government and good practice identified by the Local Authority. A model cluster attendance policy is provided in the **VOG Attendance Toolkit 2023 resource pack** to help schools with the development of their own.



## **Attendance Targets for Schools**

The Local Authority will work with schools to seek to promote positive attendance on a whole school target basis (see yearly published targets for school attendance from the Local Authority), but also on an individual learner basis and to reengage learners flexibly and creatively where they have lower than expected attendance levels.

In line with this approach the VOG Inclusion Team are available to advise school on measures that can and should be taken by school prior to referral for Local Authority support. In all instances the team will seek to understand the reasons for non-attendance and to engage with learner and parent / carer and other professionals to seek to support re engagement or attendance rather than consider penal measures in the first instance. Where necessary, the Inclusion Team will support schools with penal measures, and if needed will refer to and work with, other teams if there are safeguarding or child protection concerns.

## **Data systems and recording procedures.**

It is imperative both for safeguarding and attainment reasons that schools have robust absence reporting and recording systems in place for ensuring that both authorised and unauthorised absences are tracked and flagged both individually and by year or cohort.

Registers are legal documents, and it is essential that they are completed in a timely and accurate way each day (AM and PM), and that parents / carers are informed at the earliest opportunity if their child is not present through first day response procedures. This is a key safeguarding duty for the school.

It is also important that the most appropriate codes are being used, and that unknown reasons for absence are explored as soon as possible. Please see the document below for further information on coding.

[guidance-on-school-attendance-codes.pdf \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/guidance-on-school-attendance-codes.pdf)

A parent / carer cannot authorise an absence. An absence can only be authorised by the Headteacher and should only be authorised if the absence was due to illness, medical/dental appointment or religious reasons.

## **School based Interventions / Referrals to Local Authority Inclusion Team**

School should follow a series of interventions / actions once a child's attendance levels / pattern of attendance becomes a cause of concern. Examples of the actions that a school is expected to take before referring to the Local Authority Inclusion Team can be found in the **VOG Attendance Toolkit 2023 resource pack**. There are resources included in this pack such

as exemplar letters / emails, and trackers to record and monitor the interventions that have been tried by the school and the impact of these.

### **Penalties for non-attendance / FPNs / Prosecutions**

Schools and the Local Authority may instigate legal penal measures for non-attendance. These include the use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN). The full Welsh Government Guidance is located at <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/guidance-on-penalty-notice-for-regular-non-attendance-at-school.pdf>

Fixed Penalty Notices or non-attendance may be used by school after 10 unauthorised sessions of absence in a term. School will have tried a range of interventions to bring about positive change and penalty measures will be used only when reasonable efforts to engage with the family have been tried and have failed. The Inclusion Team can advise on Education Act Prosecutions for failing to secure the regular attendance of a learner after referral to the Inclusion Team.

### **Holidays during Term Time**

The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010, give schools discretionary power to grant leave for the purpose of family holiday during term time. **Parents do not have an automatic right to withdraw their child from school for a holiday** and, in law, must apply for permission from the school in advance.

Schools within the VOG should only authorise family holidays where parents are able to demonstrate that **unique or exceptional circumstances** prevent the holiday from being taken outside of term time.

In general, holidays during term time should not be authorised.

The decision to authorise absence is at the headteacher's discretion (up to 5 days), but it is the VOG's policy that absences will not be granted during term time and will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances based on the school's assessment of the situation.

It is the VOG's view that term times are for education. This is the priority. Children and families have 175 days off school to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. For this reason, schools will rightly prioritise attendance to school.

If an event can reasonably be scheduled outside of term time, it would not be normal to authorise absence. Absence during term time for holidays is therefore not considered an exceptional circumstance.

The considerations that the school will ascertain whether the request is because of an exceptional circumstance are outlined below:

- Where a parent or child is experiencing a life limiting illness
- Absences to visit family members are also not usually granted during term time if they could be scheduled for holiday periods outside school hours. Children may however need time to visit seriously ill relatives
- Families may need time to recover from trauma, crisis or bereavement involving an immediate relative, i.e.: parent, guardian, carer, sibling, or grandparent
- Absence for a bereavement of a close family member, is usually considered an exceptional circumstance but for the funeral service only, not extended leave
- Absences for important religious observances, civil or ceremonial activity are often considered but only for the ceremony and travelling time, not extended leave. This is intended for a one-off situation rather than regular recurring events
- The needs of families of service personnel will be considered if they are returning from long operational tours that prevent contact during scheduled holiday times

Any examples provided are illustrative rather than exhaustive. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable, and short. By 'unavoidable' we mean an essential event that could not so reasonably be scheduled at another time.

### **Procedure for potential CME**

If a school believes a child or family have gone missing, they should NOT remove any child from their roll without first completing the CME checklist procedures found in the Welsh Government Guidance below – Appendix 9 and then referring to the Inclusion Team for support - [Inclusionteamreferrals@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:Inclusionteamreferrals@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

[statutory-guidance-help-prevent-children-young-people-missing-education.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

**Where a pupil is missing for 10 school days**, the school should notify the VOG Inclusion Team on the tenth day of school absence. Email your completed 'Children and Young People Missing

Education' Checklist to the Inclusion Team to advise that the pupil is believed to be missing. Keep a copy for school records and update your My Concern system.

The school and the VOG Inclusion Team will then work in partnership to locate and ensure the safety of the pupil.

### **Procedure for potential CME - Children and Young People at Risk**

If the child is the subject of a Child Protection Plan and / or is a looked-after child, the school should notify the Social Services Key Worker within the first 24 hours of the unauthorised absence if no home contact can be made.

Where it is otherwise suspected or known that a child or young person is at potential risk of harm, or where the school has information or reason to suspect the child has been a victim of criminal activity, the school should notify Social Care Services and / or the VOG Safeguarding Team and Police Child Protection Team immediately; and inform the VOG Inclusion Team as soon as possible afterwards.

### **Procedure for supporting Elective Home Education (EHE) enquiries**

There are many reasons for parents considering EHE. Sometimes it is due to philosophical / lifestyle decision. However, there are occasions when families consider this option due to unresolved issues in school or breakdown in relationships. We should be mindful of this and the potential impact on the pupil and family, the VOG Inclusion Team are happy to support schools and families if this is the case and work together to help resolve these issues.

If a school is made aware that a parent/carer is considering EHE, the school should refer to the Welsh Government Guidance below for guidance and contact the VOG Inclusion Team at - [InclusionTeamReferrals@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:InclusionTeamReferrals@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

[Elective Home Education Guidance \(gov.wales\)](#)

[Home education: handbook for home educators \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

### **Reduced timetables / PSPs:**

Where a learner is not able to access a full-time school or education provision then this must be documented by the school and VOG, using the process and format of a Pastoral Support Plan (PSP). PSPs should only be put in place for social, emotional and mental health needs of the learner and only if in the best interest of the learner.

This document is usually a multi-agency document and process and must include the engagement and consent of the parent / carer. There should also be regular reviews of the PSP where the parent/carer is in attendance. PSP's need to be reviewed at least every two weeks and no more than six weeks. The time threshold for a PSP to be in place should be limited to twelve weeks for actions to have taken place and the learner to be ready to return to school full time. If a PSP is unsuccessful, it needs to be withdrawn and support from the inclusion service requested.

A PSP can not be created and continued without the signed consent of the parent / carer.

The PSP will set out the reasons why a full-time education is not able to be accessed at that time but will also set out the measures which are in place to increase the learners access to full-time education as soon as is possible.

The Local Authority Inclusion team provides training on the use of PSPs and reduced timetables, and separate guidance on when a PSP may or may not be supported in the best interests of the learner.

## **The Role of the Local Authority**

The VOG Local Authority is committed to adopting and embedding a trauma informed, relational, restorative, and fully inclusive person-centred approach to their work around low or non-attendance.

Both at school policy level and at the level of individual learner support there should be full use of wellbeing data, due regard to learner and parent / carer voice, the rights of the child and parent / carer and the need to adhere to the public sector equality duty.

The VOG Inclusion Team work in a way that seeks to align these values with the existing legal and advisory Welsh Government framework in all related areas and encourages and supports schools to do the same.

## **Structure of VOG Inclusion Team**

The VOG Inclusion Team has a responsibility for all aspects of attendance work, exclusion related work, and work around Children in Entertainment and Employment (CIEE) and is made up of the following officers: -

- Lead Officer for Social Inclusion and Wellbeing (Education)
- Inclusion Manager
- 2 x Lead Inclusion Officers
- 4 x Inclusion Officers (1 IO has particular focus on EHE)
- Pupil Engagement Casework Co-ordinator (Focus on PSPs)
- 3 x Engagement Officers (Focus areas: Persistent Absenteeism, EHE, Out of School Tuition/SEMHP)
- Data Officer / CIEE Officer
- Admin Support Team
- 2 x Out of School Tutors

The VOG Inclusion Team is committed to supporting schools and promoting regular attendance by:-

- Ensuring that the Local Authority fulfills its statutory responsibilities relating to attendance
- Providing Headteachers, schools and their governing bodies with advice, guidance, support, and challenge to ensure that schools have appropriate processes in place in relation to attendance

- Ensuring campaigns, policies, guidance and the VOG Attendance Toolkit resource pack is kept fully up to date and is shared with school colleagues in a timely manner
- Exploring new resources and strategies to bring about positive change, and by working creatively with schools to develop strategies to improve attendance
- Working proactively with other agencies to address underlying issues which may impact upon pupil attendance
- Monitoring the attendance of all registered pupils and analysing the attendance data of cohorts of pupils in line with Public Sector Equality Act obligations
- Playing an active part in All Wales meetings and CSC regional forums
- Following the Local Authority's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies in all interactions

### **The VOG Inclusion team offer:**

#### **Universal Offer**

- Annual training programmes in key areas such as: all aspects of Attendance related areas e.g. EHE and CME, PSPs and reduced timetables, data analysis and trackers
- Half termly liaison team meetings at schools offering support and case discussion / intervention following full analysis of school data
- Reflection meetings / telephone consultations
- Yearly attendance audits and reports following visits
- Once monthly reporting on attendance data
- Opportunities to support and develop pilot projects to improve attendance
- Updated resources within the **VOG Attendance Toolkit 2023 resource pack**

#### **Referral Based Offer**

- Targeted inclusion team / school liaison meetings and clinics to create bespoke support and address any areas of concern
- Bespoke training package based on schools identified needs
- Direct case work with families and pupils following referral from schools
- Reflection meetings / telephone consultations / advice and support for individual cases for schools to action
- Consultation meetings with families/services around families to offer advice and signposting to further support

### **Targeted Offer**

- Bespoke training package based on schools identified needs
- Targeted inclusion team / school liaison meetings and clinics to create bespoke support and address any areas of concern
- Attendance audits and reports following visits
- Workshops to support pupils and parents/carers where persistent absenteeism is a concern / potential concern
- Joint school visits with CSC partners where appropriate

### **Referral Process**

The VOG Inclusion Team accept referrals to support with low attendance issues. A referral should be made where there is a continued lack of improvement in attendance for a pupil following the implementation of school based documented interventions.

Referral forms that can be used to access Inclusion Team support can be found in the VOG Attendance Toolkit 2023 resource pack.

Referrals should be sent to the Inclusion Team inbox:-

[Inclusionteamreferrals@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:Inclusionteamreferrals@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

The inbox is monitored throughout the working day, and on receipt the Lead Inclusion Officers will triage the referral and school will receive a response of next steps. This could be allocation of the case to a member of the Inclusion Team, a request for further information, further discussion about the referral with the school or an offer of alternative support.



## APPENDIX 1 – Resources

### Welsh Government Attendance Framework documents

[School attendance and absence | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES](#)

**The VOG Attendance Toolkit 2023 resource pack emailed out at start of Academic Year including:-**

- Attendance Graduated Support
- School based tracker for attendance intervention
- School based tracker for fortnightly attendance data analysis
- School based Attendance Letters
- Audit document