Access to Learning: Attendance Matters!

Strategies for Working with Poor Attenders/Persistent Absentees

“To improve pupil attendance, all staff must be insistent, consistent and persistent.”

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Islington
Community of Schools

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**Background**

From the beginning of the academic year, 2015 to 2016, the government is reducing the persistent absence threshold from 15 per cent to 10 per cent. Therefore, a pupil is now considered to have persistent absence if their attendance falls below 90%.

This change came about because to have 85% attendance means a pupil has to be absent for 56 sessions (28 days) of school. This is a great deal of schooling to miss and, in the government’s opinion, setting the bar too low in this respect.

The following table shows estimated cumulative absent session thresholds for around 15 per cent and 10 per cent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>15%</th>
<th>10%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Half term 1</td>
<td>10 or more sessions</td>
<td>7 or more sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half term 1-2</td>
<td>22 or more sessions</td>
<td>14 or more sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half term 1-3</td>
<td>30 or more sessions</td>
<td>20 or more sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half term 1-4</td>
<td>38 or more sessions</td>
<td>25 or more sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half term 1-5</td>
<td>46 or more sessions</td>
<td>31 or more sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half term 1-6</td>
<td>56 or more sessions</td>
<td>38 or more sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The DfE and Ofsted continue to have a sharp focus on persistent absence as there is a direct link between persistent absence from school, poor attainment and ‘not in employment, education or training’ (NEET) status. These pupils tend to come from families that have complex needs and require concerted multi-agency approaches to help them make significant progress.

**Poor Attenders - Meetings with Parents/Carers and Pupils**

Analysis of your attendance data will identify those pupils whose attendance is at a level which causes concern. You will need to decide where you set this level and plan strategies for working with those pupils below it.

One strategy may be to invite parents/carers and pupils to a meeting with the Headteacher or Attendance Lead and identify:

- Reasons for the poor attendance.
- Strategies to address improving the attendance.
- Targets to achieve.
- A date for a review to take place.
Developing an Escalation Process for Intervention and Support

The most important thing to do is develop an escalation process for working with and supporting Persistent Absentees. In most cases there is likely to be something in place already. However, with the changing of the threshold and the changes in EWS arrangements, schools will now be expected to work with those pupils whose attendance falls between 90-85%.

One suggested way of developing an escalation process is to start by working out what your attendance thresholds are going to be:

Once you have done this, then you could list all the school staff and wider support agencies you can call on, before working out who should be involved at which threshold. Don’t forget to include the Headteacher and Governors in the process.

Attendance and Punctuality Target Setting with Pupils

Most schools are currently working with their pupils and supporting them in setting attendance and punctuality targets, but why do they do this?

Benefits of target setting with pupils:
1. To ensure an accurate and up to date record of attendance.
2. To enable parents/carers to support high attendance and 100% punctuality and also be aware where attendance may be a cause for concern.
3. To identify the causes of non-attendance and act upon them.
4. To identify those students classed as Persistent Absentees and to work to increase the attendance levels of these students.
5. To use existing monitoring systems for early identification of Persistent Absenteeism in order to prevent decline in attendance.
6. To raise attendance of vulnerable groups of students (SEN, FSM, LAC, EAL).
7. To monitor and reduce absence through holidays in term time.
8. To ensure all staff understand their roles in the monitoring and recording of attendance, and it is part of a whole-school approach.
9. To identify and reward improved attendance.
10. To give clear information on expected levels of attendance to all stakeholders.
11. To support children in becoming self-motivated to attend school.

For most pupils, setting termly targets should be sufficient:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Target %</th>
<th>Actual %</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autumn Term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Actual attendance figure for academic year:**

However, where pupils are at risk of becoming persistent absentees, these targets might need to be worked on with the pupil on a daily/weekly basis.

Suggested activity to carry out with older children: **How are you doing currently?**
Using the grids below, tick the appropriate box for yourself, but as if you were your form tutor or class teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punctuality</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you were an employer or worked in a college, would you employ/give a place to this pupil? Why?
Information to share with Pupils

- Good attendance at school is the single most important factor to ensure that young people have the maximum life chances - attendance is strongly linked to educational achievement. Promoting positive school attendance is everyone's responsibility.
- Pupils who miss school risk failing to achieve what they are capable of.
- Figures have shown that 90% of persistent, poor or non-attenders fail to achieve five or more good grades at GCSE and approximately one third achieve no GCSEs at all.
- Developing good habits of attendance and punctuality are key life skills.
- When pupils miss school ... they miss out!
- Good attendance is important in order for children to:
  - Achieve their potential.
  - Develop a positive attitude towards school and good habits of punctuality and attendance.
  - See themselves as an important part of the school community and to value and respect school life.
  
  Schools recognise that this can only be achieved through a close partnership with parents.

Questions to consider:

- Do you know what your current attendance and/or punctuality figure is?
- Do you know what it means?
- Do you know what effects it could have on your future?

What does 90% Attendance Mean?

- 90% attendance = ½ day missed every week!
- Over one school year this is 4 weeks of learning lost!
- Over the 5 years at your secondary school you will have missed half a year!
- What impact might this have on your child’s future ...?
- 17 missed schools days means that in secondary school they could drop a whole GCSE grade.
- 8 days absence = 96%.
- 19 days absence = 90%.

![Chances of success at GCSE](image-url)
Punctuality matters too!
Missed minutes = missed learning = missed opportunities!
- Being frequently late for school adds up to lost learning:
  - Arriving 5 minutes late every day adds up to over 3 days lost each year.
  - Arriving 15 minutes late every day is the same as being absent for 2 weeks a year.
  - Arriving 30 minutes late every day is the same as being absent for 19 days a year.

Some Strategies to Improve Punctuality
- Bedtime routines – packing school bag ready for the next day, getting to bed earlier, setting a time for a television, IPad, computer, mobile phone and other devices to be turned off.
- Morning routines – setting the alarm earlier, no television until ready for school (and maybe not even then), having breakfast before leaving home, so no need to call in at the shop, meeting a reliable friend to walk to school with.
- Coming to school for breakfast club if available.

The more you learn, the more you can earn – what your potential earnings could look like:

- Your school attendance is vitally important to give yourself the best start in life.
- All employers and colleges look at attendance and punctuality as major factors in recruiting people.

What else will colleges/employers ask for?
Colleges will also ask the school for information on your predicted grades and what sort of person you are:
- Are you hard working?
- Do you always try your best?
- Are you reliable?
- How do you get on with and work with others?
- What is your behaviour and general attitude towards learning like?
What else you need to be successful outside of school, apart from a good school attendance record

- Communication skills – be polite, ask questions.
- Written skills (formal and informal language) – C.V., letter, report, email.
- Presentation – how you look, talk, write.
- Team work.
- Understanding diversity.

Key Messages

- Your attendance and punctuality is being monitored all the time, but targets should be set each term.
- Pupils with low attendance and punctuality will be highlighted and given extra support to improve this.
- In Islington 96% or above is considered to be good attendance.
- Nationally 90% or below means a pupil is considered to be a persistent absentee and so there will be involvement and monitoring in order to improve this and avoid prosecution.
Information to share with Parents/Carers

- Good attendance at school is the single most important factor to ensure that young people have the maximum life chances - attendance is strongly linked to educational achievement. Promoting positive school attendance is everyone's responsibility.
- Pupils who miss school risk failing to achieve what they are capable of.
- Figures have shown that 90% of persistent, poor or non-attenders fail to achieve five or more good grades at GCSE and approximately one third achieve no GCSEs at all.
- Developing good habits of attendance and punctuality are key life skills.
- When pupils miss school ... they miss out!
- Good attendance is important in order for children to:
  - Achieve their potential.
  - Develop a positive attitude towards school and good habits of punctuality and attendance.
  - See themselves as an important part of the school community and to value and respect school life.
- Schools recognise that this can only be achieved through a close partnership with parents.

Questions to consider:

- Do parents know what their child’s current attendance and/or punctuality figure is?
- Do they know what it means?
- Do they know what effects it could have on their future?

The Role of Parents/Carers:

- It is a legal obligation of all parents/carers to ensure their child attends school regularly. By law all children of compulsory school age (5–17) must get a proper full time education.
- Parents are responsible for ensuring children attend school regularly in a condition to learn.
- Children should be at school by 9.00am each morning.
- Parents should contact the school as soon as possible if a child is going to be absent or late for any reason e.g. doctor, dentist and provide an appointment card. The school has a dedicated phone line for reporting absence.
- Parents should send a written note into school with the child on their return, giving reasons for the absence. Parents may be required to provide medical evidence to substantiate that their child’s illness required them to be absent from school, i.e. some form of medical verification.

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“*Young children don’t play truant from school, they are off because their parents allow it.*”

Charlie Taylor, the Government’s expert advisor on attendance and behaviour.

The same can be said about punctuality – young children are late for school because of their parents’ poor organisational skills …