

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL**Lifelong Learning Committee****4 November 2015****Update Report on Attendance Recording, Management Guidance and Operational Procedures****Report by Director (Education and Children's Services)****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report provides a further update on the use of the Attendance Recording, Management Guidance and Operational Procedures, approved at Lifelong Learning Committee in August 2013 ([Report 13/386 refers](#)), in schools across Perth and Kinross, and incorporates the additional information requested at the Lifelong Learning Committee in January 2015.

1. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

1.1 The Attendance Recording, Management Guidance and Operational Procedures for schools were approved by Lifelong Learning Committee in August 2013 ([Report 13/386 refers](#)). Subsequently they were the subject of an internal audit review and their impact was evaluated and reported to Lifelong Learning Committee in January 2015 ([Report 15/41 refers](#)). At that Committee it was requested that a further report be submitted which considered:

- (a) scrutiny arrangements to ensure compliance with the guidelines;
- (b) any clarification of procedures with the existing guidelines deemed to be necessary;
- (c) best practice in other Educational Authorities; and
- (d) the most appropriate future role for the Attendance Sub-Committee.

2. PROPOSALS

2.1 **Scrutiny arrangements to ensure compliance with the guidelines**
Within Perth and Kinross Council local monitoring of attendance in schools is the responsibility of the Headteacher. In Secondary schools this responsibility is usually delegated to the Depute Headteacher (Support). Schools are expected to identify patterns of absence, rates of absence and act appropriately to address emerging issues.

Approaches which schools currently employ to do this include:

- Monitoring of attendance in line with current guidance
- Attendance monitoring sheets
- Amendments to timetables
- Use of nurturing approaches including Nurture Groups, soft starts, and breakfast clubs
- Establishing an individualised education plan or other support plan
- Offering parents access to Parenting programmes
- Referral to other services, for example Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Parent to Parent and Perthshire Families
- A wider integrated approach where a range of Council services work together to support children, young people and their families. Community-based services, such as Community Link Workers who provide more intensive support to children, young people and their families may also be involved. Integrated teams also regularly take an overview of attendance issues and how improved attendance can be achieved across Perth and Kinross as a whole.

2.1.1 Central monitoring and reporting of attendance in schools is undertaken by Education Services as follows:

- Attendance statistics are reported annually in school handbooks. This information provides high level data but does not provide the narrative around individual cases.
- Termly statistics at a school level, detailing attendance rates, authorised and unauthorised absence are considered at Divisional Management Team (DMT) meetings which are chaired by Heads of Service (Early Years and Primary and Secondary and Inclusion). Any concerns identified then become a matter of discussion between the Quality Improvement Officer (QIO) and the Headteacher to identify what further action may be required.
- Any attendance issues identified by school management will be discussed during planned visits to schools, again with a view to identifying what further action may be necessary and appropriate. Specific areas of concern relating to an individual can also be escalated through the relevant Integrated Team.
- Term 1 visits have a focus on attendance monitoring and management.

2.2 Next Steps

2.2.1 Despite the scrutiny arrangements outlined above, there remain a few cases where the possible attendance of some children and young people is not maximised.

2.2.2 Selected schools, identified by Heads of Service, will be asked to provide a summary of the actions that have been taken in identified cases to address attendance concerns.

- 2.2.3 In cases where the actions have had a positive impact on attendance, the strategies and alternative approaches will be shared across all schools. Targeted support and training will be provided for relevant staff in any school where there is a need to improve the attendance of children and young people.
- 2.2.4 To support this approach, it is proposed the Lifelong Learning Committee receive an annual report which notes termly and annual attendance figures in schools, gives an account of steps taken to further improve attendance rates and provides detail of the cases selected by the Heads of Service.

2.3 **Clarification of procedures with the existing guidelines deemed to be necessary**

The Attendance Reporting, Management Guidance and Operational Procedures document has been in use for two years and feedback has been received from schools regarding the layout, ease of use and clarity of the document. Taking cognisance of this, some refinements have been made to the procedures document including:

- The redesign of the contents page;
- Specific guidance has been included with regard to recording attendance in Nursery and Early Years establishments;
- The Operational Guide for Named persons, Headteachers and other staff involved in managing attendance section has been streamlined;
- Greater clarity has been provided regarding which letters are to be used in specific circumstances;
- Further improvements have been made to the format and ordering of pages relating to the Integrated Team, Referral to the Attendance Sub-Committee and Referrals to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration;
- Clarity regarding the actions to be taken to access support from the Attendance Sub-Committee;
- Agreed referral criteria and format for referral to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration;
- An explanation of "Attendance Orders" has been added; and
- A flow chart for attendance management in nursery and early years establishments and in primary schools has now been created.

The updated guidelines will be shared with all schools during session 2015/16. A briefing session will be arranged for all relevant staff on new procedures and actions which may arise from this report.

2.4 **Best practice in other Education Authorities**

Other Councils were asked how they track, monitor and act in response to non-attendance in schools. In total 20 Authorities provided information, either through a questionnaire circulated to relevant officers or directly through a telephone conversation.

- 2.4.1 The information gathered suggests that there are a range of approaches across Scotland to tackling persistent non-attendance in schools tailored to specific local circumstances. A number of Councils (5) are currently reviewing their procedures to increase effectiveness.
- 2.4.2 A few Councils (4) have groups which involve Elected Members and two are considering introducing this approach. The majority of those who responded (12) operate groups with Education Officers or Headteachers using an integrated approach with other services such as Social Work or Health in order to support attendance in schools. Some have dedicated officers whose primary role is to support attendance in schools.
- 2.4.3 Only four Council areas indicated that they had referred parents to Court regarding issues relating to non-attendance at school, two of those resulted in prosecution.
- 2.4.4 Almost all Councils stated that referral to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) on the grounds of non-attendance alone was rare, acknowledging that continued non-attendance in school is often due to a number of complex and inter-related issues. For example, the lack of attendance at school may be linked with mental wellbeing concerns or social issues which are best addressed by working in partnership with other agencies.
- 2.4.5 While the above cannot be considered to provide a rigorous assessment of best practice around Scotland, it does allow a number of conclusions to be drawn:
1. Most of the Councils who responded use an Officer/Teacher based referral process rather than Committees with representation from Elected Members.
 2. Almost all of the Councils operate with an integrated team approach for support of children and young people who have significant attendance issues.
 3. Some Councils have a small off-site facility where young people currently not attending school can be placed to assist re-integration to mainstream.
 4. Across Scotland there are very few referrals to the Sheriff Court regarding pupil non-attendance at school.
 5. No Councils view the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration as a route for schools to pursue 'attendance only' referrals.

2.5 **The most appropriate future role for the Attendance Sub-Committee**
 The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 states that a parent is guilty of an offence where his/her child fails without reasonable excuse to attend school regularly. Where a local authority considers that this has happened, it is under a duty to serve a notice requiring the parent to appear before the authority and explain the reason for the absence of the child from school.

2.5.1 In Perth and Kinross, an Attendance Sub-Committee was established to consider serious cases of non-attendance in schools. The Attendance Sub-Committee has been given delegated powers to consider cases of school attendance default and requires parents to appear before it.

2.5.2 If the parent fails to satisfy the Attendance Sub-Committee of reasonable excuse, it may instruct various steps, namely:

- prosecute the parent
- warn the parent and postpone the decision whether to prosecute for a period of not more than six weeks
- where the decision is postponed, make an attendance order
- refer the child to the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration

2.5.3 Concerns about the number of cases being referred to the Attendance Sub-Committee have been raised by Elected Members. There has been a significant reduction in the number of cases being referred by schools to the Attendance Sub-Committee as noted below:

Academic Session	Total Number of referrals to ASC	Primary School age referrals	Secondary school age referrals
2010-2011	27	5	22
2011-2012	13	2	11
2012-2013	9	2	7
2013-2014	3	1	2
2014-2015	5	0	5

2.5.4 It is recognised that effective identification of patterns of non-attendance and subsequent early intervention can have a positive effect on children and young people’s attendance in school. Continued non-attendance in school is often due to a number of complex and inter-related issues. For example, the lack of attendance at school may be linked with mental wellbeing concerns or social issues. In such cases schools work closely with partners from other agencies. However, these are not the reasons behind all cases of persistent non-attendance.

2.5.5 It is acknowledged that the Attendance Sub-Committee in Perth and Kinross can provide additional support to schools where there is evidence to suggest either ineffective or insufficient commitment by the family in ensuring attendance at school.

2.5.6 While noting the reduction in referrals to the Attendance Sub-Committee, it is proposed that Perth and Kinross Council maintain the Attendance Sub-Committee as it provides an additional route to support schools in ensuring that parents are fulfilling their parental duties as described in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and detailed above.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 There is not a common approach across Scotland with regard to tackling non-attendance in school at Authority level.

- 3.2 Schools have a range of strategies in place for monitoring and improving attendance, however the scrutiny and reporting of the impact of interventions could be further improved. By collating positive strategies and then sharing good practice schools will benefit from having a broader range of approaches to use in the support of good attendance than previously.
- 3.3 Where there are complex causes for non-attendance and a range of additional services are involved, schools, and/or the Attendance Sub-Committee, will continue, where appropriate, to refer non-attendance concerns to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration.
- 3.4 It is proposed that Perth and Kinross Council maintain the Attendance Sub-Committee as it provides an additional route to support schools in ensuring that parents are fulfilling their parental duties as described in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.
- 3.5 It is recommended that the Committee approves:
- (i) the proposed enhancement to the scrutiny arrangements of the Attendance Recording, Management Guidance and Operational Procedures in schools outlined in section 2.2;
 - (ii) the proposal that the Lifelong Learning Committee receive an annual report which notes termly and annual attendance figures in schools, gives an account of steps taken to further improve attendance rates and provides detail of the cases selected by the Heads of Service;
 - (iii) the proposed clarifications to the Attendance Recording, Management Guidance and Operational Procedures outlined in 2.3 above; and
 - (iv) the maintenance of the Attendance Sub-Committee in its current form.

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Approved

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	None
Workforce	None
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	None
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	None
Strategic Environmental Assessment	None
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	None
Legal and Governance	Yes
Risk	None
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	Yes
Communication	
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement

- 1.1 The proposals relate to the Perth and Kinross Community plan by contributing to the creation of safe, healthy and inclusive communities. We will target resources to promote social inclusion, improving the quality of life for our most disadvantaged areas and closing the gap between the most affluent and most disadvantaged. The emphasis is on improving attendance in education.

Corporate Plan

- 1.2 The Perth and Kinross Community Plan 2013-2023 and Perth and Kinross Council Corporate Plan 2013/2018 set out five strategic objectives:
- (i) Giving every child the best start in life;
 - (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens;
 - (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy;
 - (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives; and
 - (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

This report relates to Objective No (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens.

- 1.3 The report also links to the Education and Children's Services Policy Framework in respect of the following key policy area:
- Inclusion and Equality

2. Resource Implications

Financial

- 2.1 There may be some costs associated with training for staff which will be offered through the PKC Learning Hub during sessions 15/16 and 16/17. General training will be offered as 'twilight' sessions. Where targeted support and training is identified as being required for individual schools this will be arranged on a needs basis.

Workforce

- 2.2 n/a

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.3 n/a

3. Assessments

Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for plans and policies allows the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting these duties.

The proposals have been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:

- (i) Assessed as **not relevant** for the purposes of EqIA

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.2 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.

The matters presented in this report were considered and no further action is required as it does not qualify as a PPS as defined by the Act and is therefore exempt.

Sustainability

- 3.3 n/a

Legal and Governance

- 3.4 Attendance Recording, Management Guidance and Operational Procedures fully comply with the requirements of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

Risk

- 3.5 The risks associated with the proposals in this report are that schools do not comply with the procedures for recording attendance of children and young people or intervene at an appropriate stage.

4. Consultation

Internal

- 4.1 Democratic Services, Legal Services, Children and Families Services, staff from primary and secondary schools have been consulted in the development of the proposals and the preparation of the report.

External

- 4.2 Representatives from all other Council areas were contacted in the preparation of this report.

5. Communication

- 5.1 Information will be shared with Headteachers, Depute Headteachers and Principal Teachers through development days and awareness raising sessions in order to inform staff in schools. The guidance will also be published electronically on the Council website.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

