



Education Department

Circular No 5/03

To: Chief Executives of Local Authorities

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Copy to: Directors of Education
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For distribution to:

Area Offices

Headteachers

School Boards

Other interested organisations

Dear Sir/Madam

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCE

1. **This Circular replaces Circulars No 1/95 and 10/95, and offers guidance on issues relating to attendance and absence at school.** The guidance maintains the definition of attendance given in Circular 1/95, and updates the guidance provided in that Circular on authorised and unauthorised absence.
2. The guidance in this Circular relates primarily to the classification of attendance and absence rather than decisions on the determination of individual cases. The guidance is not intended to be comprehensive, but to resolve certain anomalies in previous practice and provide useful overall guidance to schools and authorities in most cases which may arise.
3. In 2002 the Executive engaged in consultation (both external and internal) on changes designed to introduce greater consistency. These changes cover sickness, study leave, family holidays, absence for family reasons and exclusions, and are outlined within the sections on authorised absence and unauthorised absence below. (Full guidance on exclusions is available in Scottish Executive Education Circular X/03.) During 2002 the Executive also undertook the first stages of the Scottish Exchange of Educational Data (ScotXEd) project, a partnership initiative aimed at improving the exchange of electronic pupil and teacher data among education partners in Scotland. Further information on the requirements for, and uses to be made of attendance and absence data within ScotXEd can be obtained from the Guidance Notes for September 2003 Attendance, Absence and Exclusions Data Collection contained in Annex A of this Circular.

4. Any enquiries on the Circular should be directed to Rod Burns, Scottish Executive Education Department, 3-A North Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ (0131 244 0949, rod.burns@scotland.gsi.gov.uk).

Definition of Attendance

5. For the purposes of this Circular, attendance is defined as participation in a programme of educational activities arranged by the school. In addition to actual attendance within the school premises, this encompasses a range of other activities within the category of attendance (out of school but marked present), such as:
 - Work experience
 - Educational visits
 - Day and residential visits to outdoor centres
 - College/consortium school study
 - Interviews and visits relating to further and higher education
 - Debates, sports, musical or theatrical productions arranged by or in conjunction with the school
 - Activities connected to psychological services
 - Off-site school medical examinations
 - Study leave
 - Receiving tuition via hospital or outreach teaching services.
6. Under section 30 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, parents of school age children must provide education for their children either by attendance at a public school or by other means. Schools in turn must ensure attendance, maintain an attendance register and record pupil absence for each morning and afternoon school session. Education authorities must record the authorised and unauthorised absence of all school pupils, and have powers to enforce the statutory requirements on school attendance by making attendance orders, referring children whose attendance is unsatisfactory to the Reporter to the Children's Panel or by reporting parents of children who do not attend to the Procurator Fiscal.

Sickness

7. Section 40 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 requires education authorities to make special arrangements for sick pupils to receive education elsewhere than at an educational establishment, if the pupil is deemed unable to attend school due to prolonged ill health. (Full guidance on this requirement is available in Education Circular 5/01.)
8. Previously, no distinction was made between sickness where a child was simply absent from school and sickness where some form of tuition or other education was provided. Where a child was receiving tuition in hospital, this was defined as attendance. In keeping with the 2000 Act, therefore, sickness where an appropriate level of educational provision is being provided should be recategorised as attendance. Sickness where no such provision is provided should continue to be categorised as authorised absence.

Study Leave

9. The previous classification of study leave as authorised absence is updated by the current guidance. As study leave is part of a programme arranged by the school, rather than granted at pupil or parent request, it falls within the definition of attendance. Study leave (during the period from the official start date of the national exam timetable until the restart of timetabled lessons for affected pupils in the school) should therefore be recategorised as attendance.

Authorised Absence

10. The category of authorised absence includes absence deriving from reasons such as:
 - Sickness
 - Medical and dental treatment
 - Bereavement
 - Short-term exceptional domestic circumstances
 - Religious observance
 - Meetings prior to and in court
 - Attendance at or in connection with a Children’s Hearing or Care Review
 - Weddings of immediate family
 - Agreed debates, sports, musical or theatrical productions not arranged by or in conjunction with the school
 - Sanctioned extended absence in relation to children of travelling families.

Extended Leave with Parental Consent

11. Where most family holidays will be recorded as unauthorised absence (see below), extended leave with parental consent should not be considered the same as a family holiday. Extended leave with parental consent should be recorded separately outside the figures for attendance and absence, and includes circumstances such as:
 - Extended overseas educational trips not organised by the school
 - Short-term parental placement abroad
 - Family returning to its country of origin (to care for a relative, or for cultural reasons)
 - Leave in relation to the children of travelling families.

Exceptional Domestic Circumstances

12. Absences related to short-term exceptional domestic circumstances can be classified as both authorised and unauthorised absence. Authorised absence under this heading covers situations such as:
 - The period immediately after an accident or illness
 - A period of serious or critical illness of a close relative
 - A domestic crisis which causes serious disruption to the family home, causing temporary relocation.
13. As education authorities under section 40 of the SSSA 2000 Act must ensure young people within their catchment areas do not miss out on their entitlement to an education, a

solution must be found for the long-term educational needs of pupils with care responsibilities. (Information on carers and young carers' entitlement to assessment can be found in the Health and Social Care Act 2001.) If a pupil is unable to attend school due to such responsibilities, there is an expectation that additional support services will be assessed to support the pupil, and their absence from education will not be long-term and therefore categorised as authorised absence. However, where additional services have not been accessed and care responsibilities become long-term, the absence should be categorised as unauthorised absence.

Exclusion

14. In addition, as exclusion is imposed by the school and not the action of a pupil or parent, it does not sit comfortably within the definition of unauthorised absence as previously categorised. Exclusions should therefore be recorded and reported separately from other types of absence, but not recorded as unauthorised absence. (Recording of attendance and absence should cease when a pupil is removed from the register of the school.) Where a pupil is undertaking off-site education as a part measure to address indiscipline, this should be categorised as authorised absence.

Unauthorised Absence

15. The category of unauthorised absence includes absence deriving from reasons such as:

- Unexplained absence
- Truancy (unauthorised absence from school for any period as a result of premeditated or spontaneous action on the part of pupil, parent or both)
- Most family holidays during term time (see below).

Family Holidays During Term Time

16. The majority of family holidays taken during term time should be categorised as unauthorised absence. However, it is acceptable under exceptional circumstances for schools to authorise a family holiday during term time. Such circumstances may include:

- A family holiday judged to be important to the wellbeing and cohesion of the family, following serious or terminal illness, bereavement or other traumatic events.

17. A family holiday classified under the 'authorised absence' category should *not* include such reasons as:

- The availability of cheap holidays
- The availability of desired accommodation
- Poor weather experienced during school holidays
- Holidays which overlap the beginning or end of term
- Parental difficulty obtaining leave (with local judgement applied in cases where evidence is provided by the employer that it cannot accommodate leave during school holidays without serious consequences).

18. Family holidays with the above and similar characteristics should be classified as unauthorised absence. In relation to previous Circulars, a criterion of otherwise

satisfactory or otherwise unsatisfactory attendance was attached to the differentiation of family holidays as authorised or unauthorised absence. While otherwise unsatisfactory attendance may well be one reason for a school to withhold agreement to absence for a family holiday, it may not be the only factor needing to be taken into account. The decision on recording absence as authorised and unauthorised should therefore be based simply on whether the school has given prior agreement to the absence or not, using the criteria outlined above. Where a school's prior agreement has not been sought the absence should automatically be classed as unauthorised.

Definition of Removal from the Register

19. The current circular retains the definition of removal (withdrawal) from the register given in Circular 1/95. Removal from the school register is defined as:

- Permanently excluded from the school, arising from incidents in class or outside of class
- Withdrawn by parents with the consent of the education authority
- Known to be attending another school
- Special arrangements having been made to receive education elsewhere than at an educational establishment
- Absent for a period of 4 consecutive weeks and unable to be traced.

20. If a child's whereabouts is unknown within this 4 week period, reference should be made to the authority's child protection procedures for guidance on appropriate action. In all cases, appropriate arrangements should be made for the transfer of pupil records as described by the authority's child protection guidelines, following removal from the register.

21. More detailed information about the requirements for data, and the uses to be made of it, can be found in the Guidance Notes contained within Annex A of this Circular.

Yours faithfully

RUTH CAMPBELL

Annex A

Guidance Notes for 2003/04 Attendance and Absence Data Collection

These notes have been prepared by the ScotXed project team to assist local authority and MIS developer support staff who provide advice and detailed guidance to administrative staff in schools and local authorities. They provide information on the requirements for and uses to be made of data. Support staff involved in using school MIS should find these notes helpful and are free to adapt them and make them more relevant to users of a particular MIS.

The document complements the data specification documents and the XML Schema prepared by the project team. The documents can be downloaded from the ScotXed website at www.scotxed.net

Precise details of the format of items such as dates are part of the XML schema. Software developers will ensure that values held in the school MIS are converted to the format specified in the appropriate schema.

Further guidance on such issues as under what circumstances family holidays might be authorised will be found in SEED circular *School Attendance and Absence* (to be) issued in Summer 2003

School Data Items

School Code

Requirement

This is the main identifier for the school.

Notes on Completion

This item must be provided for all schools. This is the 7 digit code allocated by SEED to all schools. SEED will provide lists of school codes to the software suppliers, though schools should already know their codes in most cases.

Attendance & Absence

Individual Data items

Student ID

Requirement

The Student ID is the key unique identifier of pupils within school and local authority (LA) management information systems (MIS). Student ID will be used for data management and quality assurance purposes, together with linking to other ScotXed datasets for statistical analysis purposes only.

Notes on Completion

This should be picked up automatically from the school information management system

Gender

Requirement

Used in this case only for producing quality assurance tables to be signed off by headteachers before data is sent.

Notes on Completion

This should be picked up automatically from the school information management system

A value of M or F must be provided.

Stage

Requirement

Used in this case only for producing quality assurance tables to be signed off by headteachers before data is sent.

Notes on Completion

This should be picked up automatically from the school information management system

A value from the Stage code list must be provided. For special schools, as part of the data transfer process, the code SP will be provided as the stage of all pupils, even if the school has allocated a primary or secondary stage value (e.g. P1, S2, etc) to these pupils on the school system. For schools that use these stage values there is no need to change them on the school system.

Where a child has changed stages during the year, the stage at the end of the academic year will be used.

Status

Requirement

The Student Status variable identifies pupils who are officially on the roll of the school. Data exchanges may include records for pupils who attend some classes in the school but who are on the roll of another school. The Student Status variable distinguishes between pupils who are on the roll of the school and those who are not. This variable also identifies adults included on the roll of the school.

Notes on Completion

This should be picked up automatically from the school information management system

Use code 01 for pupils who are on the roll of the school. Code 02 identifies pupils who attend classes in the school (and so may be included in the school MIS) but who are on the roll of another school. Pupils who have not reached the statutory school leaving age but who attend a further education college on a full time basis with the agreement of the school and local authority should be identified with code 04 (and will not be counted in the school roll).

Adults, normally 18 years of age or more on 1 March preceding the census date, should be identified with code 03.

SEED is only collecting information for 01 and 04. Information for code 02 pupils should be included in the data from the school where the pupil is on the school roll, not their temporary host school.

Term

Requirement

This information will allow analysis of different causes of absence in different parts of the year.

Notes on Completion

In most cases, only codes 01, 02 and 03 will be used. Some schools may use a four term system.

Possible Half-day Attendances

Requirement

Used as the denominator for calculation of attendance rates.

Notes on Completion

The number of possible half day attendances while the pupil is on the school roll. This will normally be the same for all children in the school, unless a pupil has joined or left the school part-way through. Do not reduce this figures if the pupil is on extended leave overseas, on study leave, or for any other form of absence, authorised or unauthorised.

Extended Leave with Parental Consent

Requirement

Used to identify extent of absence due to this category.

Notes on Completion

Extended leave with parental consent is not to be considered the same as a family holiday. Further guidance on what is categorised as *Extended Leave with Parental Consent* will be found in SEED circular *School Attendance and Absence* (to be) issued in Summer 2003

Included in summary Attendance Statistics

Attendance at school

Requirement

Used to identify attendance.

Notes on Completion

Include

- attendance in school
- educational visits organised by the school
- study leave during the period from the official start date of the national exam timetable (i.e. date of first exam) until timetabled lesson restart. No study leave is to be given outwith this period.
- other attendance out of school [e.g. pupil on day release to a college or another schools for a specific subject]. It is the responsibility of the host school to inform the originating school if the pupil is absent.

Work Experience

Requirement

Used to identify attendance under this category.

Notes on Completion

Include

- work experience, arranged or agreed by the school
- volunteering, arranged or agreed by the school

Sickness with educational provision

Requirement

Used to identify attendance under this category.

Notes on Completion

This definitions may include time spent on sick leave or maternity leave, with proof such as a parental letter or medical certificate, and where adequate educational provision has been made.

Adequate educational provision is as set out in SEED circular 5/2001, and the document *Guidance on Education of Children Absent from School through Ill-health*.

Late (arrive in first half of opening)

Requirement

Used to identify attendance/absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

Where a pupil has arrived late but during the first half of the opening, this will be marked as Late (L1). This is regardless of whether the lateness is for a valid reason.

For schools using period-by-period registration, any registration in periods beginning in the first half of the opening will be converted to an overall L1 code for the opening (even if a later period is missed)

Included in summary Authorised Absence Statistics*

(* though LAs may choose to include Late2 in a pupil's attendance statistics)

Sickness with no educational provision

Requirement

Used to identify absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

This would include any time where a pupil is off sick, with proof of illness such as a parental letter or medical certificate, and section 14 of Education (Scotland) Act 1980 is not applicable. See SEED circular 5/2001, and the document *Guidance on Education of Children Absent from School through Ill-health*

Late (arrive in second half of opening)

Requirement

Used to identify attendance/absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

Where a pupil has arrived late but during the second half of the opening, then this will be marked as Late (L2). This recording is regardless of whether the lateness is for a valid reason.

For schools using period-by-period registration, any registration in periods beginning in the second half of the opening, without any registration in periods beginning in the first half of the opening, will be converted to an overall L2 code for the opening (even if a later period is subsequently missed).

Family holiday authorised by the school

Requirement

Used to monitor absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

Further guidance on what is categorised as *Family holiday authorised by the school* will be found in SEED circular *School Attendance and Absence (to be) issued in Summer 2003*

Exceptional domestic circumstances (authorised)

Requirement

Used to identify absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

This relates to short-term exceptional domestic circumstances. Further guidance on what is categorised as *Exceptional domestic circumstances (authorised)* will be found in SEED circular *School Attendance and Absence (to be)* issued in Summer 2003

Other authorised absence

Requirement

Used to identify absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

Includes

- **medical/dental appointments**
- **immediate family weddings**
- **bereavements**
- **religious observances**
- **attendance at court**
- **attendance at child care review**
- **attendance at children's hearing**
- **lack of transport – including due to bad weather**
- **sporting & cultural events not arranged by the school, but approved by them.**

Included in summary Unauthorised Absence statistics

Family holiday not authorised by the school

Requirement

Used to identify absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

Further guidance on what is categorised as *Family holiday not authorised by the school* will be found in SEED circular *School Attendance and Absence (to be)* issued in Summer 2003 (also see note on *Extended Leave with Parental Consent*)

Exceptional domestic circumstances (unauthorised)

Requirement

Used to identify absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

Further guidance on what is categorised as *Exceptional domestic circumstances (unauthorised)* will be found in SEED circular *School Attendance and Absence (to be)* issued in Summer 2003

Truancy, including unexplained absence

Requirement

Used to identify absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

Include all absence for which no adequate explanation has been provided

Other unauthorised absence

Requirement

Used to identify absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

Include any other reasons for absence not covered in the above categories; e.g. where a parent is refusing to send their child to school following a dispute with the school, or when a parent refuses to sign a behaviour agreement following an exclusion.

Included separately in summary Statistics

Temporary exclusion

Requirement

Used to identify absence under this category.

Notes on Completion

Include all pupils excluded from school on a temporary basis.