



**Ministry
of Defence**

**Directorate Children & Young People
Policy Directive 3.2.6
Attendance in MOD Schools**

Version 2.0 November 2016

Preface

Authorisation

1. This DCYP Policy Directive has been authorised for use by the Director, Children & Young People.

Coherence with other Policy and Guidance

2. Where applicable, this document contains links to other relevant policies (including JSPs and Other Government Departments), as listed below:

Related Policy and/or Documents	Title
DfE	The Education Act 1996
DfE	The Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations, 1995
DfE	The Education (Pupil Registration) (Amendment) Regulations, 1997
DfE	The Education (Pupil Registration) (Amendment) (England) Regulations, 2001
DfE	The Education (School Leaving Date) Order, 1997
DfE	School attendance, October 2014
Ofsted	Improving Behaviour & Attendance in Secondary Schools – Ofsted, 2001.
DfE	Key Stage 3 Advice on whole school behaviour and attendance policies, 2003
Annex A	Parental Request Form for Exceptional Term Time Leave
Annex B	Parental Request Form for POL Term Time Leave
Annex C	School Attendance Policy Template

Further Advice and Feedback - Contacts

3. The owner of this DCYP Policy Directive is the Senior Principal, MOD Schools together with the Acting Principal, Targeted Services. For further information on any aspect of this guide, or questions not answered within the subsequent sections, or to provide feedback on the content, contact:

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Review Date

4. This Policy Directive will be reviewed in November 2017.

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Introduction

5. 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.
6. MOD Schools are to ensure that all children gain maximum benefit from the educational opportunities available in order that they achieve their full potential.
7. The Policy Directive sets out the DCYP MOD Schools commitment to ensure that attendance is given a high priority in all MOD Schools and realistic targets for improvement are set. It is supplemented with practical guidance for schools, which reflect best practice as outlined by the Department for Education (DfE).

Legal Framework

8. MOD Schools' policies and practices correspond, wherever possible, to DfE guidance and the statutory framework that applies to schools in England. MOD Schools are Ofsted inspected and safeguarding practices comply with legislation in England, such as the [Children Act 2004](#) and statutory guidance e.g. [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2016](#).
9. It is a requirement under Service regulations¹ that personnel should ensure that their children receive an appropriate education. Should parents fail to do so there are mechanisms that can be brought to bear, if necessary, in order to enforce attendance.

School Requirements

10. MOD Schools are to have an attendance policy including details regarding aims, expectations, roles and responsibilities within the school community, parents and the local chain of command as well as the school calendar, the school day timings, how to report absences, annual attendance targets, published on school websites. A template policy is available at Annex C.
11. MOD Schools are to have a register of pupil attendance and use national attendance codes, as detailed in [School attendance, October 2014](#).
12. MOD Schools are required to regularly analyse school attendance data in order to identify pupils with poor overall attendance and persistent absentees.

Attendance Data

13. Given their pupil profile, MOD Schools may experience the majority of pupils simultaneously having a parent deployed on an operational tour and therefore a potential high number of requests for absence linked to Post Operational Leave (POL).
14. MOD Schools therefore can experience a significant impact of term time leave for pupils following an operational deployment. Attendance data may reflect this and it is acknowledged as being significantly different to UK based schools. It is expected that this dynamic is understood, i.e. by the School Governance Committee (SGC) and Ofsted.
15. To enable transparency in the data, MOD Schools attendance data is expressed through two figures:

¹ Command Standing Orders; for example SO BF(G) 3208.

- a. one overall school attendance figure;
- b. an additional school attendance figure which is 'attendance minus code H and minus code G'. As a result, the only relevant code to record absence agreed to by the head teacher when linked to POL is code H. Code G is when a child is absent without this being agreed by the head teacher and without the child having been ill.

Attendance Targets

16. Overall attendance targets for MOD Schools and the performance against such targets will be reviewed annually by the DCYP MOD Schools Senior Leadership Team (SLT), which is headed up by the Senior Principal, MOD Schools.

17. Individual schools should set their own annual targets for attendance based on school data and DCYP MOD Schools' targets. The SGC should review performance against targets annually, and agree revised targets for the following school year. Targets, and performance against previous targets, should be made known to staff and parents. For example, targets could be set out in the staff handbook and school prospectus, and published on the school website.

18. Attendance levels at individual schools and performance against the targets set by schools will be reviewed annually by the DCYP MOD Schools SLT. DCYP MOD Schools' staff will work with individual schools to understand the factors that affect school attendance and to identify appropriate strategies for improvement.

Term Time Pupil Leave

19. Attendance regulations in England changed with effect from 1 September 2013, removing the former notional limit of 10 days that head teachers could authorise for children to be absent from school during term time for family holidays.² All term time pupil leave applications in England have to now be on 'exceptional grounds' in line with the regulations.

20. The DCYP MOD Schools position is that there are no grounds for parents to apply for term time leave for their child/ren for family holidays. There are, however, two grounds on which parents can apply for term time pupil leave through the head teacher, who has the sole authority to approve term time pupil leave. They are:

- a. **Exceptional circumstances.** Parents can apply to the head teacher using the Application Form at Annex A. By definition this is decided upon by the head teacher on a case by case basis. Examples of 'exceptional' would include bereavement or serious illness of relatives, medical needs where treatment is required in the UK by the child's primary care giver etc. Another example would be where service parents are employed in crucial roles and therefore, to fulfil the needs of the regiment, can't take leave at the same time as other service parents;
- b. To link with **Rest and Recuperation (R and R) and POL** with a maximum of 10 days. Parents can apply to head teachers using the Application Form at Annex B. This application requires the prior signature by a Unit representative, confirming that the parent is entitled to apply for term time pupil leave.

21. **POL.** It is recognised that families face unique circumstances in a military community given operational tours. The entitlement to and granting of POL, for service personnel, is covered by JSP

² Contained within the 'Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013', which is available online through the DfE site.

760 Chapter 3 with DCYP MOD Schools acknowledging that section 3.004 requires POL to be taken *'as soon as possible and at the latest within one month, after a Service person's return from qualifying Operations or Deployments'*. POL therefore does frequently coincide with academic terms. POL is for serving personnel and is a valuable part of the staged process of returning from operational tours. It is, however, important that parents understand the potential detrimental effect on a child's education by them missing school. The Application Form makes note of that fact. The granting of POL to a serving parent is a separate issue to the authorisation, from a head teacher, for a child to be absent from school. It is essential to highlight that families can and do enjoy the POL of the serving parent without going away and without therefore requesting that their child is absent from school during term time.

22. When deciding whether to authorise such requests, head teachers will take into account a range of issues, for example the individual pupils' previous attendance record as well as their age and stage within the academic cycle.

Non Compliance

23. Unfortunately, there will be occasions when term time leave has been applied for by a parent, not agreed to by the head teacher, but then taken anyway. For the purposes of school data, such absences should continue to be recorded as code G, defined as 'Unauthorised absence as pupil is on a family holiday, not agreed'.

24. In England there is a legal power to issue parenting orders and penalty notices; that power does not exist overseas. Where there is a concern over the welfare of the child the in-country social welfare services can be contacted. For persistently non-compliant parents head teachers can work in partnership with the Unit Welfare Officer (UWO) to seek a solution, or at last resort inform the Service person's Chain of Command through the UWO.

Attendance Practice in MOD Schools

25. Success starts by children being at school. Regular attendance is a prerequisite to a good education and securing it must be a high priority for all.

26. There are proven links between absence rates and pupil attainment. Being out of school can cause serious long-term harm to young people's lives and ruin their chances of success. By failing to attend school regularly, pupils diminish the value of the education provided for them. Schools need to monitor and support pupils to maintain regular school attendance principally because:

- a. regular and punctual attendance at school is essential to the process of raising attainment;
- b. young people not in school are more vulnerable, i.e. to drifting into crime or other anti-social activity.

27. MOD Schools are to encourage and promote good attendance in as many ways and for as many pupils as they can, but need to balance this with measures to address the needs of vulnerable children who, for whatever reason, find it difficult to attend.

28. MOD Schools are to have a whole school approach to attendance which focuses primarily on promoting attendance but also addresses such issues as truancy, condoned absences, exclusion and re-integration. It relates to a wide range of other school issues including punctuality, rewards and incentives, the quality of teaching and learning, curricular differentiation and home-school links.

29. MOD Schools use the DfE definition of unauthorised absence (also known as truancy): *“absence without leave from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absence”*.

30. The overall absence rate is likely to be more relevant to the MOD Schools context as truancy is less likely in Service communities overseas than in the UK. It is vital, however, to recognise that every child is an individual and no school or local community should be complacent.

31. The context of MOD Schools within a Service environment and overseas locations gives rise to a number of issues that can be positive such as:

- a. the close knit nature of our local communities make truancy a less likely occurrence in Service communities overseas than in the UK;
- a. parents are usually eager for their children to attend school;
- b. there is an expectation within the military community that children will attend school regularly and that parents will support their children’s education;
- c. family circumstances (health, housing, employment) are usually favourable;
- d. there is organised transportation in most locations from home to school and back each day;

32. However, the list above should not distract from individualised issues which can occur in any family and which can result in poor attendance. Whilst some aspects of the Service community overseas do encourage good attendance, others can impact on the continuity of education for children of Service personnel, for example:

- a. frequent moves of school due to parental postings can mask underlying issues regarding attendance and welfare;
- b. pupils can be absent from school due to a family requirement for compassionate leave;
- c. special consideration for additional leave has to be given to the return of a parent from active duty;
- d. the stress of deployment can impact on families in many ways;
- e. gaps between postings can result in children being out of school and tracking children can be complex when families may move at short notice and without a destination address being available;
- f. there can be added pressure on non serving parents during times of service related separation due to deployments etc., i.e. getting children to school if the non service parent doesn’t drive and no school transport is provided. This highlights the need for close liaison between the parents, school and unit staff all of whom have a close interest in identifying solutions to attendance issues.

33. MOD Schools need to consider how these ‘Service specific’ factors can be mitigated in order to promote maximum attendance.

34. Improving attendance requires effective working relationships between MOD Schools, SGCs, the community and parents. To achieve success it is essential that partners should work together within a creative framework, but also one that contains certain expectations on all sides.

Partnership Working

35. Joint action between DCYP MOD Schools/SGCs, parents and the local Chain of Command is required in order to meet MOD Schools/DfE targets for attendance. While MOD Schools may not always have access to the full range of services that might support attendance in the UK, it is essential to recognise the support that is available which includes:

- a. Unit Welfare (Families) Officers;
- b. DCYP MOD Schools staff and Link Inspector Advisors as well as DCYP Targeted Services staff, including Senior Educational Psychologists and Senior Education Social Workers;
- c. Health, e.g. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Nurses;
- d. Police;
- e. Army Welfare Service (AWS)/British Forces Youth Service;
- f. Social Work Services (BFSWS/SSAFA).

Working with Parents

36. The crucial partners are parents. If parents are unaware of the impact that absences can have on their children's education, or are unsupportive of the school, then interventions may be ineffective. It is essential, therefore, that parents are seen as partners in any strategy to improve attendance. This can be achieved in a number of ways:

- a. Overseas Commands and DCYP MOD Schools through:
 - (1) use of the local press and BFBS for publicising the importance of attendance;
 - (2) leaflets for parents on attendance matters;
 - (3) supporting UWOs in their work with families;
 - (4) identification and close monitoring of any vulnerable children and/or vulnerable groups;
 - (5) monitoring at key times e.g. transition between primary and secondary Schools.
- b. Locally, by MOD Schools through:
 - (1) regular and timely communication to parents;
 - (2) home/school agreements;
 - (3) Citizenship and Personal, Social & Health Education (PSHE);

- (4) parents' evenings;
- (5) award/reward systems;
- (6) specific reports on individual pupils.

Roles and Responsibilities

37. As MOD Schools do not operate an Education Welfare Service as per an English local authority, the lead responsibility for monitoring and ensuring attendance is with the school staff. This makes it particularly important that all staff have a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities in relation to attendance.

38. Link Inspector Advisors will have a monitoring role as part of their responsibility for school improvement and this can involve the analysis of data.

39. DCYP Targeted Services staff, such as Senior Education Social Workers, provide assistance in the following areas:

- a. development and monitoring of school procedures;
- b. contribution to in-service training of school staff;
- c. direct work with families and pupils

40. It is essential that MOD Schools liaise with UWOs. If a military unit does not have a designated UWO then the Commanding Officer assumes or delegates UWO functions. For RAF personnel, the Station Admin Officer fulfils this role.