



Ministry
of Defence

DCYP Directive 3.2.6

School Attendance

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General

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| Authorisation | Director DCYP |
| Senior Responsible Owner | DCYP Chief Education Officer MOD Schools |
| Points of Contact | SO1 Policy and Assurance MOD Schools 01980 61 5143 DCYP SO1 Policy 01980 61 8838 |
| Review Date | May 2022 |
| Related Policy/Guidance | The Education Act 2002 The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010 The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 |
| | Department for Education Statutory Guidance: School Attendance (2019) Department for Education Statutory Guidance: Parental responsibility measures for school attendance and behaviour (2013) Department for Education Advice: Behaviour and Discipline in schools (2016) |
| Annex A | Model School Model Policy |
| Annex B | Application for term time absence for exceptional circumstances |
| Annex C | Application for term time absence for Post Operational Leave (POL) |

Introduction

1. Good attendance at school is strongly linked to educational achievement and is the single most important factor to ensure that children and young people have optimal life chances.
2. MOD schools are to ensure that all children gain maximum benefit from the educational opportunities available in order that they achieve their full potential.

3. MOD Schools use the Department for Education (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” and will mirror, where reasonably practicable overseas, statutory guidance directed by Central Government (England) through the DfE.

Aim

4. This document provides a supporting framework for the prioritisation of attendance in school; laying out DCYP direction and guidance for managing school attendance and encouraging good attendance.

Scope

5. This Directive applies to the attendance of pupils of compulsory school age who are on roll within a MOD school overseas.

6. The Queen Victoria School (Dunblane) will follow Scottish National statutory direction and guidance for school attendance and may make use of this Directive where it is complementary.

7. MOD Early Years settings should use this Directive when developing their strategies for encouraging good attendance.

Legal Framework

8. DCYP’s MOD school direction and guidance mirror, where reasonably practicable overseas, Central Government policy for England directed through the DfE.

9. The MOD applies the statutory requirement for parents to ensure that their children of compulsory school age receive an ‘efficient and suitable’¹ education. Should parents fail to do so there are mechanisms that can be brought to bear, if necessary, in order to enforce attendance for Defence personnel who come under scope of the Armed Forces Act 2006.

Roles and Responsibilities

10. DCYP does not operate an Education Welfare Service as a local authority in England would, therefore 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. The MOD Schools Educational Social Workers (ESW) will monitor the effectiveness in this area during their safeguarding audits on school attendance.

11. MOD Schools district Assistant Chief Education Officers will conduct oversight of pupil attendance during their core visits.

12. HQ DCYP (MOD Schools) provides the following support:

¹ Education defined through case law: Mr Justice Woolf in the case of R v Secretary of State for Education and Science, ex parte Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass School Trust, *the Times* (April 1985)

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

13. It is essential that MOD schools liaise with local Commands, in particular the Unit Welfare Officer/single Service equivalent. Where there is no designated Unit Welfare Officer/equivalent then the Commander/Commanding Officer/Head of Establishment assumes or delegates this function.

School Requirements

14. All MOD schools are to have a school attendance policy which is to be published on the school website. Schools are to adapt the model policy at Annex A and should include:

- a. Roles and responsibilities;
- b. How schools will work in partnership with parents and the local Command;
- c. How schools will manage attendance;
- d. How schools will report absences;
- e. Details of school calendar; school day timings; absence reporting.

15. MOD Schools must have a register of pupil attendance and use national attendance codes, as detailed in DfE statutory guidance for School Attendance (2019).

16. MOD schools are to have arrangements in place for attendance issues, including:

- a. Following up unexplained and unexpected absence;
- b. Granting leave of absence;
- c. Notifying of illness;
- d. Making appointments during school hours.

Attendance Data

17. A high proportion of children in MOD schools are likely to experience a parent deployed on an operational tour – this may generate a high number of requests for absence linked to Post Operational Leave (POL) which will impact on term-time leave and attendance data. Whilst MOD school attendance data is benchmarked against National (English) targets, the impact of POL is recognised by Ofsted, School Governance Committees (SGC) and by MOD Schools district Assistant Chief Education Officers during their core visits.

18. To enable transparency in the data, MOD school attendance data is expressed through two figures:

- a. one overall school attendance figure;

- b. an additional school attendance figure to record absence agreed to by the head teacher for Post Operational Leave (POL) (Code H).

19. MOD schools are required to regularly analyse school attendance data in order to identify pupils with poor overall attendance and persistent absentees. This will be used to inform reviews of attendance and absence management conducted by MOD Schools district Assistant Chief Education Officers.

20. MOD Schools district Assistant Chief Education Officers will provide oversight of attendance and absence management during their core visits programme and will work with individual schools to:

- a. understand the factors that affect school attendance and
- b. identify appropriate strategies for improvement.

Term Time Pupil Absence

21. In line with statutory requirements laid out by the DfE, the granting of term time pupil absence can only be on the 'exceptional grounds' detailed below:

a. **Exceptional circumstances.** Each MOD school will consider every application for term-time absence individually. Parents will need to be directed to use the form at Annex B to apply for term-time absence on the grounds of exceptional circumstances. Schools should define 'exceptional circumstances' in their school attendance policy. Examples of 'exceptional circumstances' should include:

- (1) bereavement or serious illness of relatives;
- (2) medical needs where treatment is required in the UK;
- (3) where delivery of the Defence Mission by service parents employed in specific roles impacts on the ability to observe standard leave patterns.

22. **Post Operational Leave (POL).** Children may be granted a maximum of ten days term time absence in support of a parent's POL. Parents must have confirmation from their Command that they are entitled to apply for this absence and will need to use the Application Form at Annex C.

23. The entitlement to and granting of POL to Service personnel is contained in JSP 760 (Ch3). Whilst it is recognised that families face unique circumstances in a military community, given operational tours, it is important that parents understand the potential risks of non-attendance at school to a child's education. The granting of POL to a serving parent is distinct from the granting of term-time absence for a pupil and it is important 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.

24. MOD Schools acknowledges that, as directed in JSP 760 (Ch3, section 3.004) POL will be taken '*as soon as possible and at the latest within one month, after a Service person's return from qualifying Operations or Deployments*' and will therefore coincide with academic terms. When deciding whether to grant 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.

25. **Non-compliance.** There will be occasions when term time absence has been applied for by a parent, not agreed to by the school, but been 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'.

26. 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 contracted social care service may be contacted. For persistently non-compliant parents head teachers can work in partnership with the local Command to seek a solution.

Encouraging Attendance

27. 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.

28. 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.

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

30. 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.

31. The context of MOD schools within a Defence environment and overseas locations presents a number of supporting conditions for good attendance:

- a. the close-knit nature of local communities means that truancy is less likely;
- b. parents are usually supportive of attendance in school;
- c. there is an expectation within the military community that children will attend school regularly and that parents will support their children's education;
- d. family circumstances (health, housing, employment) are usually favourable;

e. there is organised transportation in most locations from home to school and back each day;

32. The list above should not distract from individual issues which can occur in any family and which can result in poor attendance. Whilst some aspects of the Defence community overseas do support good attendance, others can impact on the continuity of education for children of Defence 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, (for example, transporting children to school if the non-serving parent does not 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 will need to consider how these 'Service specific' factors can be mitigated in order to promote optimal attendance.

Partnership Working

34. Improving attendance requires effective working relationships between MOD Schools, SGCs, local Commands, the community and parents. To achieve success outcomes for Service children it is essential that partners work together within a creative framework, but also one that defines agreed expectations for all partners.

35. Joint action between partners is required in order to encourage and manage pupil attendance. Whilst MOD schools may not always have access to the full range of services and agencies that might support attendance in the UK, it is important to recognise the support that is available, which includes:

a. Unit Welfare (Families) Officers;

b. DCYP personnel (MOD Schools district Assistant Chief Education Officers, the Educational Psychology and Advisory Specialists);

c. Health and Welfare

d. Service and Civil Police;

- e. Single Service specialist welfare agencies;
- f. MOD contracted social care services.

36. Where 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 recognised 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) Citizenship and Personal, Social & Health Education (PSHE);
 - (3) parents' evenings;
 - (4) award/reward systems;
 - (5) specific reports on individual pupils.