



Attendance and Engagement at School:

Section 1 | Policy

2025

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SECTION 1: POLICY CONTEXT

1. Background

This policy and associated operational procedures apply to primary, secondary and ASN establishments in West Lothian Council for learners up to the age of 18 years. The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear and consistent framework for all staff to promote attendance and manage absence in line with "Included Engaged and Involved - part 1: attendance in Scottish schools" and the West Lothian Positive Relationships policy. The West Lothian Council vision is that of excellence and equity and inclusion for all learners.

The policy has been reviewed in partnership with staff, stakeholders, and partner agencies and provides guidance to all stakeholders involved in the management and promotion of good school attendance. Staff in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings may find this policy useful as an indicator of good practice in the promotion of attendance and the prevention and reduction of absence.

1.2 Definition of attendance at school

In line with Included, Engaged and Involved (part 1) attendance is defined as participation in a programme of educational activities arranged and agreed by the school, including:

- Attendance at school
- Learning out with the school provided by a college or other learning provider while still on the roll of the school
- Educational visits, day and residential visits to outdoor centres
- Interviews and visits relating to further and higher education or careers events
- Debates, sports, musical or drama activities in conjunction with the school
- Study leave for pupils participating in national exams, if arranged by the school during the period of the national examination timetable
- Receiving tuition via hospital or outreach teaching services
- Work experience

1.3 Why is attendance at school important?

Attendance at school, from age 3 -18, is important to enable children and young people to maximise their potential to learn through a variety of learning opportunities and to grow and develop cognitively, socially and emotionally. While achievement and attainment are a key aim of the school experience so too is wellbeing. Education provides social experiences which enable young people to develop social skills, relationships and self-regulation strategies so equipping them for the next stage of their lives.

Good attendance and engagement at school is linked to higher levels of participation, attainment and future opportunities.

Regular school attendance is crucial for children and young people's education and future life chances. Evidence demonstrates that when attendance falls below 90%, there is a significant impact on a child's learning, achievement, and development.

Research shows that low attendance can lead to:

- Lower academic attainment and achievement.
- Difficulty maintaining friendships and relationships and becoming socially withdrawn.
- Increased risk of becoming involved in antisocial or offending behaviour.
- Higher likelihood of unemployment, poverty, and homelessness in adulthood.

For some young people, life presents particular challenges which may impact negatively on attendance and engagement. Attendance at school therefore has to be approached within the wider Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach considering the holistic needs of the child/ young person ensuring clear identification of need and planning to support the young person and their family.

1.4 Legislative and policy framework

National and local policies underpin our approaches to supporting attendance in West Lothian. The legislation includes:

- [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1980](#)
- [Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000](#)
- [The Education \(Disability Strategies and Pupil Records\) \(Scotland\) Act 2002](#)
- [The Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2004 \(amended 2009 & 2018\)](#)
- [Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act 2006](#)
- [The Equality Act 2010](#)
- [The Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014 \(part 9\)](#)
- [UNCRC \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#)

1.4.1 Parental duty

Parent/carers are legally responsible for making sure a child is educated by attending school. Once enrolled in school, the law says the child must attend school unless the parent has the permission from the education authority to withdraw their child (refer to School attendance: a guide for parents).

1.4.2 Local Authority Duty

Education authorities (as agents of the local authority) are legally responsible for asking parent/carers why a child or young person is absent. The education authority has a duty to make special arrangements for children and young people granted an exemption from the obligation to attend school (see Education of children unable to attend school due to ill health: guidance 2015).

1.4.3 National Policy Context

[Getting it Right for Every Child](#)

[Curriculum for excellence – specifically, HWB Responsibility of All](#)

[National Improvement Framework– particularly, children’s rights and HWB priorities](#)

[National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 - updated 2023](#)

[Education of children unable to attend school due to ill health: guidance 2015](#)

[Children Missing from Education Guidance for local authorities](#)

[Included, engaged and involved part 1: promoting and managing school attendance 2019](#)

[Included, Engaged and Involved – Part 2 – preventing and managing school exclusions 2017](#)

[Developing a positive whole school ethos and culture: relationships, learning and behaviour 2018](#)

[Supporting Children’s Learning – Code of Practice](#)

[Home Education Guidance](#)

[Guidance on the Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act 2006](#)

[The Curriculum for Excellence](#)

[The National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education](#)

[How Good is Our School Frameworks and How Good is OUR School?](#)

[Respect for All: National approach to anti-bullying](#)

[School Handbook Guidance \(2012\)](#)

1.4.4 West Lothian Policy documents

- [Raising Educational Attainment Strategy 2023-28](#)
- [Promoting Positive Relationships in West Lothian Educational Establishments](#)
- [West Lothian Council Home Education Policy](#)
- Child protection is of paramount importance and non-attendance at school may indicate a child is at risk. In this situation Child Protection takes precedence over the Attendance Policy and Child Protection procedures must be followed.

2. Policy Aims

- To ensure consistency in dealing with issues of attendance and absence
- To ensure the accurate recording of pupils' attendance and absence in line with Scottish government guidance.
- To make certain engagement and attendance is a priority for pupils, parents and school staff to enable all pupils are successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and
- Effective contributors
- To improve school attendance and punctuality
- To ensure a holistic and child centred partnership approaches to supporting those young people for whom there are barriers to attending school

2.2 Guiding Principles

This attendance policy is based on the following principles:

- All children and young people have the right to any education and education authorities have a duty to provide education.
- Parents/carers have a legal responsibility to provide efficient education to their child until they reach school leaving age.
- All children and young people have the right to get the appropriate and proportionate support they need to benefit fully from their education and fulfil their potential.
- All children and young people should be included, engaged, and involved in their learning. Children and young people should be given opportunities to fully engage and participate in the life of their school to encourage good attendance.
- The foundation for schools, learning establishments is a focus on positive relationships and an inclusive ethos and culture that promotes good attendance.
- Schools and settings should actively engage with parents/carers to try to ensure that any barriers to good attendance are understood and addressed.
- Attendance is a shared responsibility between children and young people, parents/carers, schools, partners, and the education authority who should all work collaboratively to promote and support good attendance. Open and transparent communication between all stakeholders is essential.

- Attendance should not be considered in isolation; it is often a key part of understanding a pupil's learning journey and planning for effective and supportive interventions informed by personal circumstance and context.