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## WHOLE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY

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This document has been designed to help your school create its own Whole School Attendance Policy.

It gives the background to developing a Whole School Approach to attendance; moving towards an Attendance Policy; diagrams and explanations of a model for an Attendance Policy; stages of policy development. You may wish to incorporate any or all of the prompts and ideas when drafting your school's policy document.

A Whole School Attendance Policy should be more than just another document created to fulfil statutory obligations. It can help form a coherent and effective strategy for your school to help with issues around attendance.

It will also promote a consistent, clear and co-ordinated response to attendance in the context of informed and disciplined procedures which have been clearly communicated to all relevant groups connected to the school: children, staff, parents, governors and the whole school community.

Acknowledgments are due to Birmingham EWS for permission to use extracts from 'Improving and Maintaining Pupil Attendance'

Further information and examples of attendance policies are available at [www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolattendance/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolattendance/)

### DEVELOPING A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

#### *Ethos*

Much has been written about the impact of school ethos and there are many publications which support the exploration of this area. 'Successful Schools' defines a positive school ethos as the sum of all parts. It is the kind of ambience which overtly communicates to all those in the school community that 'we care', 'we are doing our best for the children' and 'we have an idea of where the school should go from here'.

'Education Observed' 13, 'Attendance at school', comments that 'Effective schools convey their positive regard for regular attendance to pupils, parents and teachers'. To this could also be added the wider community. It also states that 'children quickly pick up the message that their presence is important'. The key to addressing the issue of a whole school approach to improving attendance at school is to bring into the arena the feelings and attitudes of all those individuals connected with the school.

### *Sensitivity*

Sometimes the examination of the ethos of our school can feel risky as it may entail tackling sensitive areas. Starting points could be answering questions such as:

- ~ how valued do members of staff, pupils and parents feel within the school?
- ~ how do we communicate the attitude and belief that attendance at school is important to the process of ensuring that young people have the best start in life and a positive, supportive and enabling education?
- ~ are the relationships between all staff in the school a good model for pupils?
- ~ what strategies can we put in place to improve our existing situation?

### *Whole School Approach*

These questions will also need to be answered:

- ~ what do we all understand by 'attendance'?
- ~ do we all know and understand the procedures for registration, absences etc.?
- ~ do we all know who our Education Welfare Officer is and what his/her role is?
- ~ in what ways can we involve the EWO more in the life of the school?
- ~ what do we all perceive to be the causes of non-attendance?
- ~ which of these identified causes can we affect by a change in our school practice?
- ~ does our school environment reflect our desire to create a safe, positive and caring place for pupils and for all staff, parents and others who came into contact with the school?
- ~ in what ways could we improve our environment?
- ~ what are the support systems in school for pupils and staff?
- ~ do our systems and procedures build in time to interact and listen to each other?
- ~ how do we communicate with parents, pupils and each other?
- ~ what can we do to improve communication?

- ~ do we ever ask parents and pupils what they think can be done to improve aspects of the school? If not, why not? If we do, do we act on the information?
- ~ how do we interact with the governing body of the school? Could improvements be made?

### *Success in Schools*

‘Successful Schools’ found these criteria to be useful indicators of whether a school enjoyed success. They found that the vital ingredients were:

- ~ a positive school ethos
- ~ shared goals
- ~ a collaborative work culture
- ~ appropriate leadership style
- ~ planning for and evaluating learning
- ~ a sense of family
- ~ a positive attitude
- ~ openness

All these factors apply to developing a whole school approach to attendance in school.

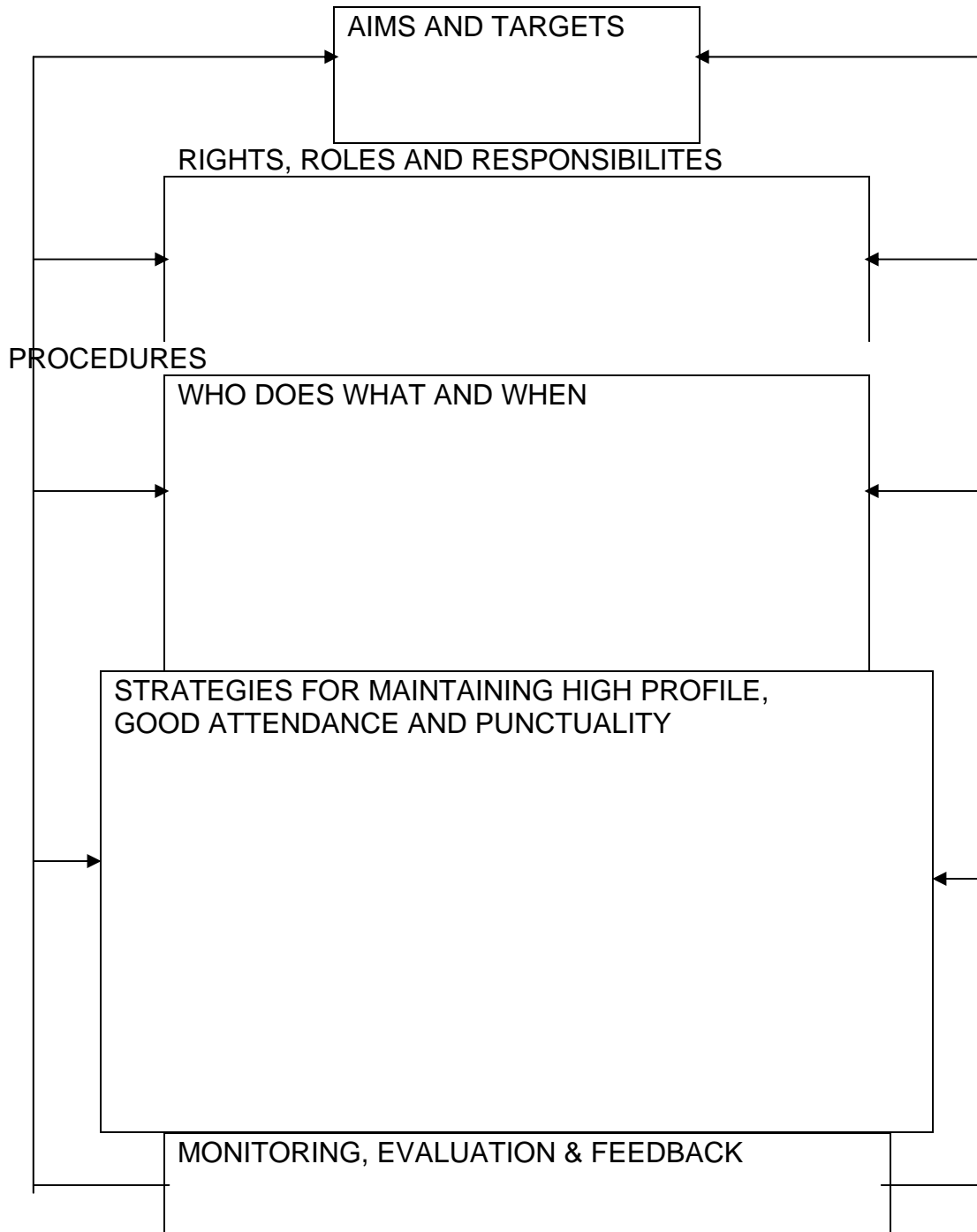
## **TOWARDS AN ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Before you go any further can you answer these questions?

Who is going to write this policy? If it is going to have any meaning make sure that it’s not just one member of staff who writes it. If the whole school owns the policy, attendance at your school is more likely to improve. You will need to consult pupils, families, teachers, your EWO, administrative and ancillary staff, governors and senior management and involve them before and during the drafting of the attendance policy.

Where and when will policy be written? Do the people involved in its development have all the information they need to draft a policy? Is your school willing and able to support the development of this policy with resources? If your school can support policy development with resources you have a good starting point. It means that there is an ownership of the need for this policy – and a whole school approach means that attendance at your school is more likely to improve.

# MODEL FOR AN ATTENDANCE POLICY



## **MODEL FOR ATTENDANCE POLICY**

### **BOX 1 – AIMS AND TARGETS**

These should:

- Set out specific but realistic targets for improving and maintaining attendance figures.
- Break these targets down by year groups rather than have global school figures.
- Set out the resources available and how they will be used.
- Contain statements about how communication between all the partners in the process will be implemented.

### **BOX 2 – RIGHTS, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Details of a school's partnership agreement with the EWS should be referred to here.
- The legal responsibilities of LEA, schools and parents should be cited.
- Emphasis on a partnership approach between senior management, governors and those working to support attendance with parents and pupils should be outlined.
- School attendance leader

### **BOX 3 – PROCEDURES - WHO DOES WHAT & WHEN**

Schools need to address:

- The stages, processes and staffing involved in registration.
- A system for lateness (not so punitive that it prevents late registration).
- How and when problems with attendance are communicated to parents.
- What processes are used to reintegrate students returning to school after absence?
- How to impress upon parents and students the strong link between attendance and educational achievement.
- Procedure for applying for holidays in term time and school policy.
- Referral criteria to Support Services.
- How and who co-ordinates this activity.

#### **BOX 4 – STRATEGIES USED BY THE SCHOOL IN THE AREA OF ATTENDANCE**

- How will this policy integrate with other policies which impact upon attendance e.g. equal opportunities, special needs, behaviour management, etc.
- Strategies used could concern the following range of activities: rewards and incentives, sensitisation mechanisms, reintegration programmes, same day contact schemes, post registration truancy policy and practice, attendance support groups, individual target setting and parent and community initiatives.
- At Key Stage 4 strategies can be within the curriculum like Relaunch, ASDAN or other work related initiatives.

*Or*

Negotiate a mix and match basis using support and community agencies outside the school for off-site provision.

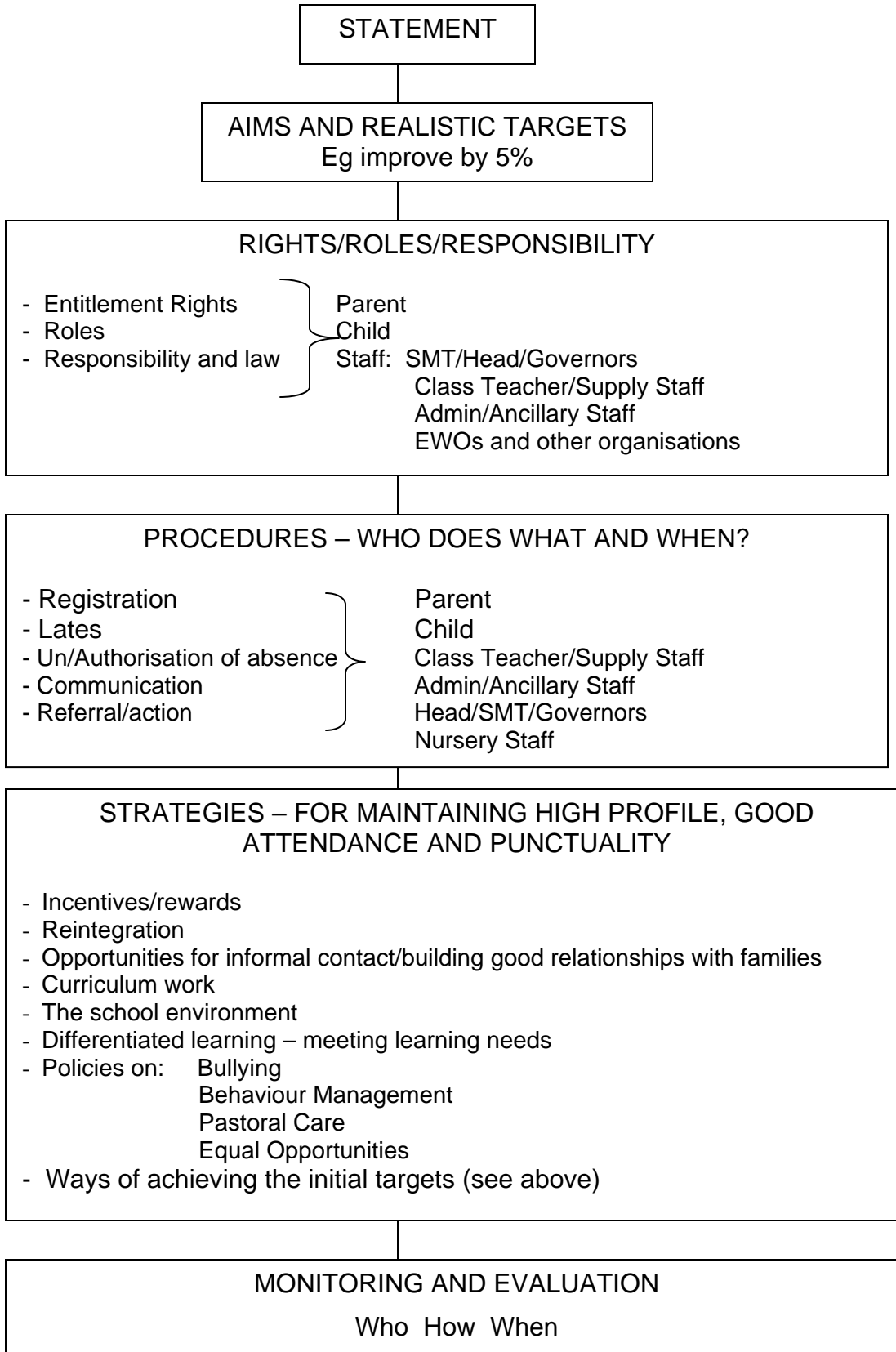
- The methods and means of achieving the school's strategies should also be outlined in this section, including any training required for staff involved in implementation.

#### **BOX 5 – MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

This element will need to consider:

- **HOW** will the school evaluate the effectiveness of its strategies – try to create something concrete like a spreadsheet that enables immediate assessment.
- **WHEN** will monitoring and evaluation take place? Will they be built in to processes and strategies or will they be part of a regular review at a preordained end of target period?
- **WHO** Which staff, parents, governors, pupils etc. will be involved and how will they contribute?
- Will this element require its own resourcing?
- How are any evaluations to be fed back into the various stages of the policy?

# MODEL FOR AN ATTENDANCE POLICY



## Drafting an Attendance Policy

*General Points* In drawing up a policy you might consider the following:

- use language which is clear and simple to follow so that it is accessible to all.
- phrase statements positively.
- consult with parent, pupils, governors, administrative and ancillary staff.

You might also ask:

- how will this policy integrate with other school policies and a whole school approach.
- how committed is the school to putting this policy into practice? Could reference to attendance be made in staff job descriptions?

## Stages of Policy Development

*Statement* Could be called mission statement, statement of intent or policy statement and could include:

- why the school believes that education is important.
- why the school believes regular attendance is important.
- reference to equal opportunities and access.
- indication of shared responsibility – the partnership approach with parents, local community, EWS.

*Aims* Could include:

‘This school will .....’

- have clear procedures for enabling pupils to come to school.
- ensure that all pupils and parents understand the issues and procedures for attendance and punctuality.
- ensure that all staff, including governors, administrative and ancillary staff understand the issues and procedures for attendance and punctuality.
- aim to allocate resources (e.g. time, space, funding) to support the policy.
- ensure that attendance issues are addressed in the curriculum.
- give parents and pupils the opportunity to raise concerns and share in the addressing of those concerns.

The school must set an attendance/absence target every year. The LA will forward this to the DCSF.

## *Rights, Roles & Responsibilities*

You may want to outline the statutory situation:

- the LA has to offer educational provision for all school age children through its schools.
- schools must:
  - i) take the attendance register at the start of the morning session and at any time during the afternoon (after the lunch break) session
  - ii) report pupils who fail to attend regularly or who are unauthorised absent for more than 10 school days.
- parents must ensure that their children are educated. For most parents this means registering their child at school. Parents can be prosecuted or issued with a fixed penalty if they fail to ensure that their child attends regularly.
- the Education Welfare Service has the role of helping parents and acts on behalf of the LA to meet its statutory obligations on school attendance.

Parents also have statutory rights to certain involvement in their child's education. You may want to include a general statement reflecting this.

### **The Partnership Approach:**

You should include in this part of the policy a statement about your school's aims in working in partnership with parents, the local community and pupils.

### **Roles:**

- you could include a statement about the role of class teacher / form tutor / Head of Year / Deputy Head / Head in improving or maintaining good attendance.
- in line with a whole school approach you could also include a statement about the role of the governors, administrative and ancillary staff.
- you could outline the school's perception of the role of pupils and parents in maintaining good attendance.

## *Procedures*

It will help everybody if they know who is doing what and when.

You will need to address:

- the way in which all staff will approach lateness and attendance issues such as registration, reintegration of pupils, poor attenders, pupils signing out, persistent absentees, communication with parents, recording and passing on of verbal explanations.

- sending a clear message from the school that poor attendance and punctuality is unacceptable.
- setting clear targets, along with procedures for enabling pupils to meet those targets.
- which member of staff will have overall responsibility for attendance issues?

### *Strategies*

Research has shown that young people often develop strategies to avoid attending school because they feel that their needs are not addressed by the school. Your strategies for improving attendance could begin with asking these questions:

- why are pupils choosing to arrive at this school late /not at all? What message are they sending the school? What message is the school sending them?
- do the procedures we have in place or want to develop give pupils a chance to tell the school what they perceive their needs to be?
- will our strategies for improving attendance give all those involved in the life of this school a voice?

Strategies put in place will need to address those involved:

- how will people be enabled to become involved?
- how will strategies fit together with existing school approaches?
- how will this attendance policy be made active and how will it integrate with other school policies e.g. bullying, pastoral care, behaviour management, equal opportunities, special needs, health education?

Strategies could include:

- reward/ incentive schemes
- reintegration
- differentiated learning – to meet varying learning needs
- developing a partnership approach with parents
- re-assessing the way the school communicates with parents and the community and with staff and pupils
- assessing how the school environment may affect the people using it. This will not mean simply how cared for the school looks but also how the layout provides hidden areas for bullying or post-registration truanting. How valued do staff, pupils and parents feel in the school environment?

## *Ways of Achieving*

In this section you could address the practicalities which mean you will be able to put your procedures and strategies in place. You will need to answer these questions to clarify how this policy will be supported.

- how will staff, pupils and parents be enabled to become involved in the process of improving attendance?
- what staff development time will be allocated for which issues e.g. INSET for teaching staff; training for administrative staff; training for lunchtime supervisors; training for governors; the co-ordination of a whole school approach.
- what extra time/money will be needed to administer/ follow up attendance procedures?
- what extra resources will be needed to support curriculum work e.g. room space, time to develop packages, money, particular training needs of staff such as counselling skills?
- what extra resources will be needed to improve communication with families and the local community?
- what extra resources will be needed to improve the school environment?
- how will the Education Welfare Service be involved with these procedures and strategies?
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## *Monitoring & Evaluation*

A policy can only be of use if it is monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. You will need to consider:

- how you will monitor the effectiveness of your attendance procedures. How will you evaluate? You may find it most useful to build in evaluation to each of your strategies rather than only trying to evaluate overall.
- when you will monitor and evaluate.

Can you set out a time-scale in advance so that regular review is built in? If you don't do this at the outset you may find it difficult to accommodate later on.

- who will do the monitoring? Will there be a group involved or will it be the responsibility of one member of staff? It will be more successful and encourage more of a whole school approach if you can set up a group.

Will you involve the EWO, families, pupils, governors and teaching, administrative and ancillary staff in this process?

- what resources – time, money, space – will need to be allocated to monitoring and evaluation?