



Attendance Policy

Date of review: February 2016

1. Introduction

Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun's Attendance Policy is based upon the necessity for every pupil to attend the school every day in order to access the best possible education and the best preparation as a full and responsible member of society. It is expected that every pupil aims for a minimum of 95% as an attendance target on an annual basis.

When formulating this policy various implications of missing school were considered, the attitude of pupils and parents, transport issues, pupils who miss school for lengthy periods, pupils who consistently miss school on occasional days, the support from the LEA, various internal strategies to combat non-attendance.

Legal context of school attendance

Parents/Carers of pupils of school age have a legal obligation to ensure that their children attend school in order to access an effective education (Education Act, 1966, Section 7).

Any child of compulsory school age who has registered with a school but is constantly absent from the school, the parent/guardian is deemed guilty of breaking the Education Act (1996), Section 444 (1).

The school has a legal responsibility to keep a register of all pupils according to the Education Act, 1996, Section 434 (1).

Every pupil of compulsory school age must be punctual for school and register twice a day: at the beginning of the day and once during the afternoon session.

Parents should not expect, or be led to expect, that schools will agree to family holidays during term time. To comply with The Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) Regulations 2013, the school will operate in accordance with the local authority's Code of Conduct for fixed penalty notices for regular non-attendance at school. It remains the discretion of the head teacher to authorise absences in line with The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 attendance codes and supplementary guidance provided by the local authority.

2. Aims

Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun is committed to the importance of high attendance. The aim of the policy is to support this aim with an effective, high profile system that encourages a whole school approach to excellent attendance and provide a rapid response in order to deal with various attendance issues.

The policy outlines the various strategies at work and how the school will co-operate with parents, guardians and pupils to ensure this aim.

3. Expectations

- All pupils of compulsory school age should arrive punctually for registration in the morning and afternoon.
- Every pupil is expected to attend all lessons punctually.
- Punctuality is a legal requirement for all pupils of compulsory school age, and parents/carers of pupils who constantly late to registration, lessons face legal action.
- If/When a pupil leaves the school /is absent from school it is necessary to provide a letter/medical note requesting the absence.
- Parents/Carers should provide an explanation for every absence.

4. Recording of attendance

Registration Procedures:

- Pupils must arrive at school between 8.20am and 8.30am.
- Pupils should attend registration between the following times:
Morning registration from 8.40am-9.00am
Afternoon registration by 2.00pm
- An unauthorised late mark will be recorded if pupils arrive late for registration. The accuracy of the register is important in order to support any statutory intervention.
- The register must record whether the pupil is present, absent, and note if the absence is due to an authorised educational event.
- It is important that any half day absence is recorded as 'authorised' or 'unauthorised'. Only the school can make this decision.

5. Definitions:

'Authorised absence'

- An absence is classified as authorised when a child has been away from school for a legitimate reason and the school has received notification from a parent, guardian or carer. For example, if a child has been unwell, the parent writes a note or telephones the school to explain the absence.

- Only the school can make an absence authorised. Parents and carers do not have this authority. Consequently, not all absences supported by parents and carers will be classified as authorised. For example, if a parent takes a child out of school to go shopping during school hours, this will not mean it is an authorised absence.

‘Unauthorised absence’

- An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of both the school and a Parent, Guardian or Carer.
- Therefore, the absence is unauthorised if a child is away from school without good reason, even with the support of a parent.

An approved educational activity’

- One taking place of the school premises
- Approved by a person authorised by the Governing Body or Headteacher
- Supervised by a person authorised by the Governing Body or Headteacher
- Of an educational nature, including work experience, field trips, educational visits or where pupils are receiving part of their education at another location while remaining on roll, and in most cases under school supervision.

‘Not required to attend’

- Used for a small number of specific infrequent circumstances. An absence resulting from the partial closure of a school e.g. due bad weather when road conditions make some roads impassable

6. School Responsibilities

- Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun will respond to attendance issues by monitoring attendance levels on a daily basis. The school receives an annual attendance target from the LEA.

Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun’s responsibilities are:

- Monitor attendance of all pupils on a weekly basis
- Monitor general attendance every half term
- Forward attendance rates to the LEA every six weeks
- Contact/liaise the LEA to discuss the targets for attendance
- ensure attendance data is available for ESTYN and Welsh Government purposes

7. Absence requests

- **4.5 Sickness Absence**

- A sickness or medical related absence occurs when a child does not attend school because through illness. If reported by the parent/carer in the appropriate way, it will be recorded as an authorised absence in the first instance.
- Pupils are not expected to attend school when they are not well enough to do so, whether as a result of short term, long term or recurring illness.
- However, they should not be kept away when they are well enough to go to lessons. The AWS have produced a Consortium-wide health leaflet which outlines the NHS' recommended time a pupil should be away for school for the most common illnesses. These will be available in schools from September 2014.
- It is perfectly reasonable for a school to ask the parent/carer about the nature of illness, expected duration of absence and to make arrangements with them to call the school again if the situation changes.
- Schools are well within their right to challenge a parent or carers position with regard to medical absence as there are occasions when parents report parentally condoned absence to the school as medical absence.
- Schools should ask the parent to substantiate the illness by asking to see additional evidence such as an appointment card, medical certificate, medication packet etc. and keep a photocopy on record.

4.3 Holidays in Term Time

Parents do not have the automatic right to withdraw pupils from school during term time for a family holiday, but must make a formal request to their child's school for a leave of absence.

Whilst the legislation under Section 7 (3 and 4) of The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 allows head teachers to "*grant leave of absence from school for the purposes of a family holiday for no more than 10 days in an academic year*", the local authority has adopted a zero tolerance approach to the authorisation of holidays in term time. It is hoped that this will discourage holiday requests and in turn reduce the number of absences.

There are, however, reasons that a school may be inclined to authorise such a request due to the pupil and family being exempt under one of the following three "exceptional" circumstance criteria:

- Families of serving armed forces personnel;
- Parent or child experiencing a life limiting illness;
- Families that have suffered an acute trauma.

In the event of holiday leave for a pupil being requested by a parent/carer, the school is asked to record the sessions as unauthorised absences in line with the Cabinet decision and then make a formal request for a fixed penalty notice to be issued. This process is outlined in more detail in the local authority's Code of Conduct.

4.4 Persistent Absence

As the name suggests, persistent absence is when a pupil has frequent absences over a prolonged period of time.

This may be authorised absence, unauthorised absence or a combination of both.

It is important that schools are alert to persistent absence, irrespective of whether or not it has been authorised. For example, a pupil may be reported as being repeatedly ill, which would be registered as an authorised absence; however, it is the responsibility of the school to monitor this and where appropriate, challenge it.

Prosecution for non attendance can only take place if absence is recorded as unauthorised. Where schools have not received a reason for a pupil's absence, or have reason to question the reason provided by parents the LA will support schools to unauthorise absence in order to assist the AWS in discharging its statutory duties. It is the duty of schools to ensure that parents are aware when absences have been recorded as unauthorised and the reason for doing so, via written communication (see Section One, point 3 for further details).

9. Monitoring and reviewing attendance rates

Every pupil receives an attendance target of 95% (minimum). For the pupils who do not achieve this target the following strategies are in order:

- Parental responsibility is highlighted in the School Discipline Policy and Home to School agreement. We invite all parents to read and sign the agreement in order to commit themselves to the school's ambitions and vision.
- The school will attempt to contact the home via text regarding 1st day absence.
- When a pupil returns to school a letter explaining the absence is required. If no letter is forwarded the registration teacher will leave a message in the pupil's Homework Diary. In the event that there is no response, the Main Administration Office will contact the home. According to the Welsh

Government (Circular 3/99), only the school can authorise an absence, not the parent.

- The Head of Inclusion in conjunction with the Head of Progress and Welfare will send letters to the parents of pupils who are a cause for concern regarding their attendance. Further co-operation with the school's AWS will support the letters.
- The Head of Progress will contact the Head of Inclusion and possibly the Headteacher if there are grave concerns regarding attendance. Immediate contact of the home and a further formal meeting with the parents/guardian will be arranged.
- Attendance is discussed on a weekly basis in the HoP/Tutor meetings.
- When the attendance declines to 86% the school will send a 'first letter' to the home. If there is no further improvement after a further fortnight a 'second letter' is sent.
- Any pupil with an attendance of less than 86% within a 6 week period is referred to the AWO.
- The Head of Inclusion will meet with the RCT AWO on a weekly basis and refer any newly emerging pupils.
- The school will create target groups between 92-86.9% and will be mentored on a weekly basis.
- Every pupil sets an attendance target based upon the previous academic year attendance – the minimum will be 95%. Pupils are reminded in assemblies and by their tutors of the target. Printouts of individual and whole class attendance rates are produced. These are placed on classroom noticeboards.
- Prize giving ceremonies are arranged every term for excellent attendance. All pupils achieving 95% or higher are provided with a certificate on a termly basis. Bar graphs reflecting the attendance of all classes and years appear on noticeboards. All pupils with 100% attendance at the end of the academic year are provided with a prize.
- A 100% attendance week is held on a termly basis with a prize to the victorious class.
- Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywaun works in partnership with other members of the SIG group regarding attendance, strategies and good practice.

- **10. Fixed Penalty Notices for school absence**

In 2013, The Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) Regulations 2013, came to power to engage and support pupils and parents in the drive to improve attendance. The school will operate in accordance with the local authority's Code of Conduct for fixed penalty notices for regular non-attendance at school. It remains the discretion of the head teacher to authorise absences in line with The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 attendance codes and supplementary guidance provided by the local authority.

Every LEA has developed a Code of Conduct which highlights how the code will work with particular reference to the cross-county consistency when implementing a fixed penalty notice.

On July 31st 2014, Rhondda Cynon Taf Cabinet implemented a Code of Conduct, which included the criteria for issuing Fixed Penalty Notices:

- Absent for 10 sessions or more without permission during the present term
- Arriving over 30 minutes late for registration 10 times or more in the present term
- When parents/carers/guardians refuse to co-operate with the school regarding the attendance of their child.
- When a child plays truant on a regular basis in a public area during school hours.
- The above policy was ratified by the Full Governing Body in January 2015.

11. Holidays during term time

- All requests for holidays during term time will be unauthorised. Only under the following extreme scenarios will this request be an authorised request.
 - Families of personnel who work for the Armed Forces
 - Parent or child who has a life restricting illness/condition
 - Families who have suffered acute trauma

The 'G' Code will be used for unauthorised holidays, and 'H' for any causes that meet the above criteria.