Risca Cluster Attendance Policy



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Version	1.0
Date	10.07.24

Date of policy implementation:	02.09.24
GB member/staff responsible for policy review:	Melissa Armishaw
GB Link Governor:	Sarah Bowen
Date of creation:	02.09.24
Date of review:	02.09.25
Date review completed:	
Date of next review:	

Policy Control

Policy Title:	Risca Cluster Schools Attendance Policy for Pupils
Author:	Cluster Headteachers / Cluster Attendance Leads
Date of policy implementation:	02.09.24
Staff responsible for review:	Head teacher
Link Governor:	
Owner:	Head teacher
Review Cycle:	Annually
Start date for next review:	

Policy Revision History

Date	Version	Lead Reviser	Additional Revisers	Description	Date ratified by full GB

1. Mission statement

Our Cluster of Risca Primary School, Waunfawr Primary School, Ty Sign Primary School, Ty Isaf Infants School, Risca Community Comprehensive School is committed to providing a full and efficient education to all pupils and embraces the concept of equal opportunities for all.

The Risca Cluster Attendance Policy has been agreed by all schools and Governing Bodies, within the Cluster.

The Cluster of schools will provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcomed and are committed to the fundamental principle that early intervention and partnership working is crucial in ensuring the attendance, protection and wellbeing of all children.

The schools will follow the All Wales Child Safeguarding procedures and local protocols in relation to specific and identifiable wellbeing issues that prevent a child from accessing education, or where there are safeguarding concerns.

For a pupil to reach their full educational achievement, a high level of school attendance is essential. We will consistently work towards a goal of 100% attendance for all pupils. Every opportunity will be used to convey to pupils and their parents or carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

School attendance is subject to education law and guidance and our schools' attendance policy is written to reflect this legislation and the guidance produced by the Welsh Government. For information relating to this legislation and guidance, see Appendix 2.

The legislation makes provision for a school day which is to be divided into two sessions with a lunch break in the middle and to be available for 190 days in any school year. Registration will take place at the start of the morning session and following the last lunch period.

The schools will review their systems for improving attendance on an annual basis to ensure that it is achieving its set goals and targets as identified by the Cluster, Governors, Local Authority, Consortium and the Welsh Government.

This policy will contain the procedures that the schools will use to work towards meeting its attendance targets, as set by the local authority.

2. Promoting Attendance

The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the schools, parents, carers and pupils.

We will ensure that our pupils are made aware of the importance of good attendance and how this will benefit them, both now and in the future; we will offer reward schemes for individual learners, classes and year groups who have high levels of school's attendance, no unauthorised absence and/or have shown to significantly improve their attendance rates.

We will use a variety of strategies to intervene at an early stage to encourage improved attendance of individual pupils and assist to overcome any barriers that may be preventing the expected level of attendance. These strategies may be schools-based, or may be implemented jointly with other partners to ensure the most appropriate support for the individual and their family. These strategies are agreed at a Cluster level.

The home school agreement will contain details of how we will work with parents and carers and our expectations of what they will need to do to ensure pupils achieve good attendance. These expectations and potential consequences of not meeting the expectations will be regularly communicated to parents / carers throughout the academic year in various ways such as text messages, individual letters, the schools' websites, newsletters and at parents' evenings.

3. Risca Cluster School Procedures

Any pupil who is absent from school at the morning or afternoon registration period will have their absence recorded as being authorised, unauthorised or as an approved educational activity (attendance out of school). Only the head teacher, or a member of staff acting on their behalf, can authorise absence.

If there is no known reason for the absence at registration, then the absence will be recorded in the first instance as unexplained (N code) and promptly followed up by the school as part of its early intervention and safeguarding strategies. This will be in the form of a text message, telephone call or letter to the parent or carer to enquire about the whereabouts of the pupil. If no reason is given by the end of 5 school days or the reason given is not reasonable, the pupil will be recorded as an unauthorised absence (O code).

The coding for any absences will be in accordance with the guidance provided by the Welsh Government's All Wales Attendance Framework as in Appendix 1.

4. Punctuality

- All schools have their own individual registration times. Please refer to the School Session Times Policy.
- A pupil arriving late and before the registers are closed will receive an 'L' mark.
- Any pupil arriving after the registers have closed will receive the 'U' code, which will be followed up by school as with all other unauthorised absences. Unless there is an acceptable explanation. Some examples of these could be; transport arranged by the LA, which was delayed, or an arrangement as part of a support package to young carers, or reintegration / part-time timetable planning.
- In addition, where the absence at registration was for attending an early morning medical appointment, the appropriate authorised absence code will be entered (M code in this instance).
- The registers will remain open for a maximum of 30 minutes from their specified start time, in accordance with Welsh Government guidance.
- Afternoon registration will follow the same format as morning registration.

In the event of persistent late arrivals, the school will contact the parent / carer to inform them of the impact on their child's attendance and subsequent attainment.

Parents and carers are reminded that the Local Authority **may** issue a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) for persistent lateness after the close of the register in accordance with the Local Authority's Code of Conduct for the Issuing of Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) for non-school attendance, if the number of unauthorised absences or lates (O or U codes) is 10 sessions.

5. First Day Absence

Parents and carers are reminded that they should contact the school by 9:00am if their child is not able to attend school on that day. Parents and carers must state the **full** reason for the child's non-attendance (not just "feeling unwell") and indicate the likely date they will return to school. Parents/carers should be prepared for members of the school's staff to ask questions about the pupil's condition, the patterns or trends in their absences and any treatment they may be receiving.

For safeguarding reasons, staff will endeavour to ascertain the specific reason for non-attendance as soon as possible on the first day of absence, after both morning and afternoon registration. This may include a telephone call, texting service, a home visit from a member of school staff or an Education Welfare Officer. Once the specific information is received, the register will be amended to reflect the appropriate absence code (see Appendix 1 for the types of code).

On the third day of absence and if school has not received an adequate explanation, a letter will be sent to the parent or carer requesting this information. The absences will remain unauthorised, until an adequate explanation is received. We will make use of all numbers held as additional contact details for each pupil. In exceptional circumstances, schools may refer to the Education Welfare Service (EWS). However, should there be any concerns around well-being or safeguarding, a referral will be made to Children's Services.

Priority will be given to children who are deemed to be particularly vulnerable, e.g. those known to Children's Services or are looked after (CLA). The Local Authority's Education Welfare Service will be notified of unexplained absences of two days or more, which will be reduced to only 24 hours if the pupil is on the child protection register, who may conduct an unscheduled home visit to determine if the pupil is safe and well.

Any family may be subject to a visit from the Education Welfare Service where the school has any concern around attendance, or lack of contact from parents / carers. These visits are intended to offer the right support to overcome any barriers to attending school.

6. Absence Communication and Supporting Evidence

Communication received from parents / carers explaining the reason for the absence will be kept on file in line with our individual school retention policy. Parents and carers are aware that only the head teacher or their representative can authorise an absence and that further information such as a letter/appointment card from a GP or consultant may be required to support reasons given for absence.

7. Medical and Illness Absences

Cluster schools appreciate that there are times a pupil has to attend a medical appointment during the school day. In these instances, a copy of the hospital appointment letter should be provided to the school **prior** to the appointment date to inform the school of the set scheduled time. This, however, does not apply to routine GP or dental appointments, which can and should be arranged for times outside of the school day.

If a pupil is repeatedly absent due to illness, the schools will request supporting evidence that the pupil is receiving the necessary medical treatment. An appointment card, consultant letter, photograph of prescription medication (with child's name and date of issue clearly visible), would all suffice as medical evidence. Please do not send us photographs of your child for safeguarding reasons. Without the necessary evidence, all future absences will be unauthorised until the necessary medical evidence has been provided, and a referral to the Education Welfare Service may be made. Unfortunately, not all childhood illnesses, such as sickness and diarrhoea, require a visit to the GP. As a result, these absences will not be authorised.

8. Continuing and Frequent Absence

Within each school it is the responsibility of the class teacher/registration tutor or attendance officer to be aware of and bring to the attention of the Head Teacher (or person to whom they have delegated responsibility for attendance), any emerging attendance concerns.

In cases where a pupil begins to develop a pattern of absences, school will attempt to resolve the problem as soon as possible to avoid a referral being made to the Education Welfare Service (EWS).

Our schools acknowledge that for some pupils, a range of personal and / or complex circumstances can impact negatively on attendance. We will therefore aim to work with the pupil, family and partner agencies to help address any issues identified.

For unauthorised absences of 10 sessions or more in a rolling 12 week period (there are two sessions in a day, morning and afternoon) and following the issue of a warning letter and a period of monitoring, the school can request that the LA issue a FPN in accordance with the Local Code of Conduct.

9. Persistent Absence

Welsh Government defines persistent absence as pupils whose absence level is more than 10% (less than 90% attendance). These pupils will be subject to an action plan to support their return to full attendance. This plan may include a referral to the Education Welfare Service for additional support for the pupil and their family.

If the pupil and family do not engage with the action plan, court action may be taken against the main parent(s) or carer(s) via the Education Welfare Service.

10. Absence related to Discrimination

A pupil's absence from schools may be due to bullying, which can take many forms and can be direct (either physical or verbal) or indirect, for example, ignoring a pupil or not talking to them. Some of this bullying may be discriminatory.

Our schools will monitor and report all discriminatory incidents each term and if the reason for a pupil's absence is related to any of the above issues, we will take action to deal with the situation.

11. Leave of Absence / Holidays in Term Time

Leave of absence during term time is actively discouraged as it negatively impacts on the pupil's ability to engage with the full curriculum. Parents and carers do not have the automatic right to withdraw their children from schools for a family holiday and will be reminded of the effect that absence can have on a pupil's potential achievement.

Our schools will only agree to an application for holiday or trip if we believe that there are exceptional circumstances. Exceptional circumstances for not attending school are one-off, unavoidable events such as the death of a close relative, attending a funeral, respite care for a looked-after child, or a housing crisis. In rare cases, a school may also approve a holiday if it is deemed essential for the family's well-being and cohesion, such as following a serious illness, bereavement, or another traumatic event. Forms to request a holiday or trip can be obtained from the schools, either in paper copy from the school's office or from the schools website. The Headteacher will consider the request and inform the parent or carer whether the request has been authorised. Subsequently, a parent or carer can make an informed decision whether they wish to pursue the absence in the knowledge of any potential consequences.

Parents and carers are advised that a fixed penalty notice may be issued (if this arises alongside issues with persistent absenteeism) by the local authority when permission for a holiday or leave of absence has not been authorised by the schools. The Local Authority's Code of Conduct for Issuing Fixed Penalty Notices can be obtained from the schools, the Local Authority's website or the Education Welfare Service.

12. Fixed Penalty Notices for Non-Attendance at School

The school may request the Local Authority to issue fixed penalty notices where a parent/carer has failed to secure their child's regular attendance at school. A penalty notice can be requested against one of the following criteria:

1. Where there is a minimum of 10 unauthorised sessions (5 schools days) within a 12 week period (these do not need to be consecutive) which may or may not include pupils who are persistently arriving after the close of the registration period (Recommended that registers be kept open for thirty minutes);
2. Where a parent has received two Advisory/FPN warning letters and the child's attendance is still a cause for concern, a referral will be made to the Education Welfare Service for consideration of prosecution.
3. Where a parent(s)/carer(s) refuses to engage with a school in the interest of improving their child's school attendance levels;

4. Where a pupil is repeatedly caught truanting in public places during school hours (Police can request a penalty notice be issued for this offence);

To comply with The Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) Regulations 2013, Cluster schools will operate in accordance with the Local Authority's Code of Conduct for Fixed Penalty Notices for regular non-attendance at schools. It remains the discretion of the Headteacher to authorise absences in line with The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 Attendance Codes and Supplementary Guidance, provided by the Local Authority.

Each pupil's absence will be considered on its own merits and if appropriate, a Fixed Penalty Notice may be requested to encourage improved future attendance. If a pupil's attendance is significantly low, a referral to the Education Welfare Service may be considered as an alternative to requesting a FPN.

13. Reintegration

The schools will welcome back all pupils on return from an absence.

If the pupil has been absent for a considerable period of time, a reintegration plan will be introduced tailored to the needs of the individual.

It is the parents / carers responsibility to continue to monitor school communication channels for any key messages.

14. Roles and Responsibilities

Cluster schools are aware that ensuring regular school attendance is a demanding area of work that depends on establishing and utilising close working relationships between parents/carers, pupils, schools, the Local Authority and other professionals who work with children.

A key part of any successful working relationship is a clear understanding of each person's role and responsibilities, and as such the following sets out to clarify the roles and responsibilities for those people engaged with tackling absence issues.

14.1 The Parent/Carer

Under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, the parent/carer is responsible for ensuring that their child of compulsory school age pupils receives a full-time education that is suitable to their child's age, ability and aptitude and to any additional learning needs the child may have. This can be by regular attendance at schools, alternative provision or by elective home education (the parent / carer can choose to provide education for their child).

A pupil's punctuality is also a legal requirement and parents/carers of a pupil who is persistently late (after the close of the register) can also face legal proceedings. (see 12.1)

14.2 The Schools

Cluster schools are required under the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 to take an attendance register twice a day; at the **start** of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. The accuracy of the register is important in order to support any statutory interventions that may be required. It should be noted that it is an offence not to maintain accurate registers.

The schools have the responsibility to monitor individual attendance rates at least weekly and use their own intervention methods to tackle individual pupil attendance issues where the pupil's attendance rate is 90% and below.

Head Teachers will be responsible for the strategic management of attendance across the schools. They will scrutinise the data on a weekly basis, monitor trends and patterns across cohorts of pupils, and evaluate interventions for their impact and effectiveness and direct resources for the best possible outcome. The Head Teacher will present the data to the Governing Body on a termly basis for scrutiny.

Class Teachers will be responsible for completing the session registers fully and accurately during every registration. This practice ensures good safeguarding processes, enabling the schools to know where every pupil is at the start of all sessions and for schools clerks/office managers to commence the 'first day response' process if the pupil is not present. SIMS notes fields should be used to ensure that the additional details relating to the absence are captured and retained on file.

Attendance Officer/ Schools Clerk/ Office Manager will be responsible for the daily operational attendance duties. They will ensure that all registers have been completed by the classroom teachers on a daily basis and if not will escalate this to the Head Teacher for action. They will undertake the 'first day response' each morning for those pupils whose families have not made contact. They will collate the supporting evidence, and chase any outstanding forms, absence notes, holiday request forms etc. The officers will compile the data in preparation for analysis by the Head Teacher and make the referrals to the Education Welfare Service.

In order to request a Fixed Penalty Notice, the schools will monitor the individual attendance patterns of their pupils. If trends are identified that match the criteria stated in the Local Authority's Code of Conduct, a school has the opportunity to make a formal request to the Local Authority to issue a FPN.

14.3 The Education Welfare Service (EWS)

The role of the Education Welfare Service is to improve attendance in all schools and alternative education provisions across the Local Authority by supporting pupils and their families to overcome their barriers to engagement.

The service provides support to schools, pupils and their families to ensure regular attendance and address any difficulties relating to absenteeism. The Education Welfare Service works collaboratively with a range of support services and agencies and provides an essential link between home and schools to ensure that pupils benefit from the educational opportunities available to them.

The service acts on behalf of the Local Authority in its statutory enforcement capacity and is responsible for a number of related duties that include:

- the regulating and issuing of child employment and performance licences for schools age children and young people, and their chaperones;
- to investigate, locate and track children who are referred as “Children Missing from Education”;
- to oversee the education needs of vulnerable pupils e.g. Gypsy Traveller families;
- to work in partnership with the Police in the arrangement and coordination of formal truancy operations in accordance with Crime and Disorder legislation.

14.6 The Police

The Police take a fundamental role in Truancy Sweep initiatives. Police Officers should be made aware of categories of children who may have a justifiable cause to be out and about during school hours, especially home-educated children and excluded pupils. The police should also be made aware of other relevant information such as school hours, school holidays, training days, and whether the area is frequented by children from other areas with different school holidays.

The Police should be given names and known movement patterns of children known to be persistent non-attendees and, where appropriate, their address.

It is recommended in the ‘All Wales Attendance Framework’ that the Police Officers operating the power to approach young people do so in uniform (due to child safeguarding concerns) and where practicable are accompanied by an education representative such as an EWO, who will be able to check the school status of the young person concerned.

Where appropriate the British Transport Police are brought into discussions in respect of problems, involving pupils congregating on the rail network.

During Truancy Sweeps there may be occasional cases in which suspected truants refuse to comply. In such cases, if the Police Officer has reasonable grounds for believing that the child or young person is absent from school without authority, the power under section 16 and section 8 will enable the officer to use such reasonable force as is necessary in the circumstances. Similarly, once the child is returned to the Designated Central Location or schools where the suspected truants refuse to comply, the Police Officer has reasonable grounds for believing that the child or young person is absent from school without authority, the power under section 117 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 enables an Officer to use such reasonable force as is necessary in the circumstances.

As part of the Local Authority’s Code of Conduct for tackling non-attendance at school, Police are able to request an FPN be issued to a pupil’s family if they are found in a public place during school hours (truanting).

15. Attendance Initiatives

The school and Local Authority will work closely together to raise the awareness of school attendance, promote good attendance and tackle unauthorised absence.

Schools will use an award system to reward pupils who have excellent or improving attendance.

Schools will work with the Education Welfare Service to undertake Local Authority initiatives to raise attendance.

16. Categorisation of Absence

All pupils who are on role but not present in the schools must be recorded within one of these categories.

- Authorised Absence
- Unauthorised Absence
- Approved Educational Activity

Unauthorised Absence

These codes are for those sessions where pupils were absent and no reason has been provided, or whose absence is deemed to be without valid reason.

Authorised Absence

These codes are for those sessions where pupils are away from schools for a reason that is deemed to be valid. Evidence may be requested to support the reason given (e.g. medical evidence, appointment cards, etc.)

Approved Educational Activity

These codes cover types of supervised educational activity undertaken off the school site but with the approval of the schools and/or the LA, where the session has been supervised by an approved tutor.

This would include:

- Work experience placements
- Field trips and educational visits
- Sporting activities
- Link courses or approved education at another venue
- Education arranged by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- (CAMHS)

17. Dual Registration

Pupils who attend another school or unit will be dually registered at both venues. The enrolment status within the management information system (MIS) indicates the main place of education and which the subsidiary is. An example would be a pupil registered at a school but attending EOTAS provision or a pupil referral unit for certain days each week. The main school will be whichever the child attends for more than 50% of their time. The other will be the subsidiary.

The school or provision where the child is expected to attend is responsible for accurately recording the pupil's attendance and chasing up non-attendance. Schools will liaise with the other education provider on a daily basis in order to identify pupils who are absent for the session and mark the register accordingly.

18. Retention of Records

Computer registers are preserved as electronic back-up copies. Attendance regulations stipulate that attendance records should be retained for at least three years; however it is good practice to extend this period in line with the education record retention schedule.

19. Register Checks

The Local Authority will formally check school registers on a termly basis to ensure there is compliance with the national legislation. It should be noted that registers are legal documents, and it is an offence not to maintain accurate records.

20. Attendance Targets

A system for analysing performance towards the targets has been established and the Headteacher is responsible for overseeing this work. Cluster schools and their Governing Bodies will make use of the attendance data available from the Consortium and the Local Authority when reviewing its targets and analysis of the outcomes in comparison with similar schools from across the region.

The Headteacher will present the attendance data in each of the termly reports to the Governing Body for the figures to be scrutinised against the attainment data. The Governors will have the opportunity to challenge the data alongside the practices for managing attendance, to tackle the overall absence rates across the school and within specific cohorts of learners.

Our aspirational Cluster School target is 95%.

21. School Development Planning

Cluster schools will ensure that attendance is a key part in their improvement plans.

This will be reviewed on an annual basis, at least.

APPENDIX 1

The Registration System
The following national codes will be used to record attendance information.

CODE	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
/	Present (AM)	Present
****	Present (PM)	Present
B	Educated off site (NOT Dual registration)	Approved Education Activity
C	Other Authorised Circumstances (not covered by another appropriate code/description)	Authorised absence
D	Dual registration (i.e. pupil attending other establishment)	Approved Education Activity
E	Excluded (no alternative provision made)	Authorised absence
F	Extended family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
G	Family holiday (NOT agreed or days in excess of agreement)	Unauthorised absence
H	Family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
I	Illness (NOT medical or dental etc. appointments)	Authorised absence
J	Interview	Approved Education Activity
L	Late (before registers closed)	Present
M	Medical/Dental appointments	Authorised absence
N	No reason yet provided for absence	Unauthorised absence
O	Unauthorised absence (not covered by any other code/description)	Unauthorised absence
P	Approved sporting activity	Approved Education Activity
R	Religious observance	Authorised absence
S	Study leave	Authorised absence
T	Traveller absence	Authorised absence
U	Late (after registers closed)	Unauthorised absence
V	Educational visit or trip	Approved Education Activity
W	Work experience	Approved Education Activity
X	Un-timetabled sessions for non-compulsory schools-age pupils	Not counted in possible attendances
Y	Enforced closure	Not counted in possible attendances
Z	Pupil not yet on roll	Not counted in possible attendances

#	schools closed to pupils	Not counted in possible attendances

APPENDIX 2

Legislation and Guidance

The Education Act 1996 Part 1, Section 7 states:

The parent of every child of compulsory schools age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable:

(a) to his age, ability and aptitude and

(b) to any special needs he may have either by regular attendance at schools or otherwise.

For educational purposes the term parent means natural parents and includes any person who has parental responsibility or has day to day care of the child.

Section 444 1, 1(a) and (ZA) contains the details of when an offence is committed if a child fails to attend schools or alternative provision arranged by the Local Authority.

The Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) Regulations 2013 set out the framework for the operation of the Fixed Penalty Notice scheme.

The Equalities Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011

Registers and Admission.

- The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010
- The Education (schools Day and schools Year) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2006

Attendance Targets

- The Education (schools Performance and Unauthorised Absence Targets) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2006.

Guidance Documents relating to Attendance

- All Wales Child Safeguarding Procedures
- Keeping Learners safe
- Belonging, engaging and participating – Guidance on improving learner engagement and attendance
- The All Wales Attendance Framework
- The National Assembly for Wales Circular 47/2006 Inclusion and Pupil Support.
- Consortium's Attendance Strategy
- Local Code of Conduct relating to the Fixed Penalty Notice scheme
- Welsh Government Guidance on penalty notices for regular non-attendance at schools
- Welsh Government Guidance on attendance codes

- Code Use for Common Courses and Activities

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EXCEPTIONS	**Code**	**SIMS Notes Field Exemplar**
Music Exams	B	Music Exam. Letter provided & copied
Speech & Language Therapy	B	SALT Letter provided & Copied
Asthma Clinic	M	Asthma Clinic. Appointment card copied
Physiotherapy	M	Physiotherapy Appointment card copied
Sporting Tours	C	Tour (E.g. Rugby) and date. Evidence copied
Football Academy (With classroom learning)	B	E.g. Cardiff Academy with classroom. Letter copied
Football Academy (Without Classroom learning)	C	E.g. Swansea Academy. Letter copied
Club & National Competitions	P	Activity / Competition, Place and Date. Letter copied
Overseas Trips through Competitions	P	Activity / Competition, Place and Date. Letter copied
Travelling Time to Competitions (With letter from the Club)	C	Travelling to (Place Name) for competition . Letter copied
E-learning where there is an agreed package with the L.A	B	E-learning. Evidence Letter copied.
Child Performance	C	Child Performance. Evidence with L.A.

*** Any evidence provided to support code usage must be retained by schools**