Department of
Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk

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MISS SCHOOL = MISS OUT

Improving Pupil Attendance Strategy

Contents

Terms Used in this Document

BoG   Board of Governors

CFS   Common Funding Scheme: Under the provisions of the Education and
                     Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, a Common Funding Scheme (Scheme)
                     has been drawn up to apply to all grant-aided schools funded under the Local
                     Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements.

Department   Department of Education

EA   Education Authority

ETI   Education & Training Inspectorate

EWO   Education Welfare Officer

EWS   The EA's Education Welfare Service is a specialist education support service
                     which helps young people of compulsory school age and their families get the
                     best out of the education system. EWS enables the EA to fulfil its statutory
                     duty in respect of pupil attendance.

FSME   Free School Meal Entitlement

IDS   Inclusion & Diversity Service; offers advice, resources and support to schools
                     and teachers who are working with Newcomer pupils.

LAC   Looked After Child. A child or young person who is in the care of a Health
                     and Social Care Trust or who is provided with accommodation by a Trust.

Newcomer pupil   A child or young person who is enrolled in a school but who does not have
                     satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and
                     does not have a language in common with the teacher.

NIAO   Northern Ireland Audit Office

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PAC   Public Accounts Committee

Parent   Refers to the parent, carer and/or legal guardian of a child or young person.

PfG   Programme for Government

TESS   The EA's Traveller Education Support Service; it provides support to schools,
                     Traveller children and young people to improve educational outcomes.

Minister's Foreword

I am pleased to announce the publication of the Department's new *Improving Pupil Attendance Strategy*. It is an important document that provides a strategic framework for all the work that goes into maximising pupil attendance.

As Education Minister, I believe that it is essential that every child should receive the support they need to be able to flourish. A child being able to access a high quality education is an essential part of their development and I will be working to ensure that this is open to all and that no child is left behind. Maximising levels of pupil attendance is a fundamental part of the Department's contribution to the Executive's Programme for Government outcome that *"We give our children and young people the best start in life"*.

Alongside the Department of Education, there are a number of groups of stakeholders that have responsibility for ensuring all pupils attend school. Schools, the Education Welfare Service, the Department of Education and a range of other bodies can affect pupil attendance levels. However, no stakeholder can influence a child's attendance levels more than his or her parents. Parents have an opportunity to shape their child's views and instill an understanding of the importance of attending school. Statistics indicate a correlation between how often a child attends school and the qualifications they achieve and parents should not underestimate how their child's attendance at school can affect their life chances.

This strategy highlights the benefits of promoting pupil attendance in order to minimise absenteeism. However, in cases where a child has been absent from school, I believe that every support should be offered to tackle the barriers to their attendance, taking into account the individual circumstances of each pupil.

The key role for the Department is to provide a coherent strategy for improvement and to help translate the strategy into actions for parents, schools and support services that will encourage regular attendance at school. This strategy identifies four key themes that underpin a successful approach to managing pupil attendance:

- school leadership;

- early intervention;

- tailored support; and

- collaboration and engagement.

The Department will continue to work in partnership with all stakeholders to ensure that the importance of improving school attendance and therefore the life chances for our children and young people is widely understood and promoted.

Peter Weir MLA
Minister of Education

Executive Summary

Attending school regularly is important for all pupils because of how their attendance can affect their educational attainment and their subsequent life chances. Although the evidence shows that most pupils attend school regularly there are some who struggle with attendance. Overall school attendance was 94.6% of possible attendance in 2014/15 but this translates into 2.8 million missed school days or the equivalent of 10 days for each pupil.

This strategy draws upon the good practice already in place to build an overarching framework to guide the actions of all those working to support improved pupil attendance. It sets out the roles and responsibilities of those who are best placed to support pupils to attend school and achieve their full potential. The strategy presents this work under four key themes, which research and practice have shown to be essential in successfully managing pupil attendance:

- school leadership;

- early intervention;

- tailored support; and

- collaboration and engagement.

For each of the four themes, the strategy sets out the strategic goal, indicators of success and the key roles and responsibilities of each of the key stakeholders.

Commitment from **school leadership** allows the creation of a school ethos and culture that values the importance of attendance and its link to attainment. With such commitment in place, school attendance will be considered when developing school plans; attendance will be discussed by the Board of Governors; leaders will promote school attendance policies and be proactive in implementing appropriate strategies to address attendance issues.

Early intervention is crucial to avoiding the emergence of poor patterns of attendance, both in terms of establishing positive habits from an early age and also intervening before negative patterns become entrenched for pupils of any age Schools which successfully address poor attendance will monitor data closely, take prompt action on potential concerns and involve parents at an early stage. Some schools will use internal resources successfully to provide additional support to improve attendance. When they feel they have exhausted their own strategies and need help to address the concern they will involve support services, such as the EWS, in a timely manner.

The EWS will work in partnership with the school to provide support to young people of school age and their families. Its aim is to promote a culture of regular attendance at school. Alongside their caseload of referrals, Educational Welfare Officers work proactively with schools to raise awareness of attendance issues using a range of agreed strategies.

This strategy recognises that circumstances experienced by individual pupils and groups of pupils may require a form of **tailored support** to be offered by their school and, where appropriate, the EA. This may include a range of interventions within the school to tackle particular barriers to attendance or may involve an individual pupil's referral to the EWS.

The Department also provides additional support for pupils who fall within specific groups including those entitled to Free School Meals, Newcomers, Traveller children and Looked After Children. Interventions for such groups can have either a direct or indirect positive impact on pupil attendance. An example of this is in relation to the support offered to pupils who are eligible for free school meals, where access to initiatives such as the Extended Schools programmes and the provision of free school meals will often lead to an improvement in levels of engagement with school, with the consequence of increased attendance levels.

The strategy also highlights the importance of the policies and interventions in place to support children and young people struggling with other issues which may impact upon their attendance, such as emotional health and well-being issues or bullying concerns.

Improved pupil attendance will not be achieved without everyone working together to promote the importance of attendance at school. This requires **collaboration and engagement** between schools, parents, the EA and other agencies, as appropriate. A close working relationship between parents and their child's school is vital in both the prevention and tackling of poor attendance. In addition, there is an opportunity for the Department of Education and the EA to builder closer ties with other public sector bodies in order to improve attendance levels through cross promotional work and consideration of systemic improvements.

A common theme that runs throughout the strategy document is the importance of sharing good practice. There are many examples of good practice in improving pupil attendance which schools can draw upon. The Department provides guidance for schools on improving attendance. In addition to this the ETI has developed a good practice guide[1] based upon examples of best practice in schools which is now available to assist schools in improving attendance. In order that they can learn from each others' successes in the development of their own approaches.

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1   ETI Good Practice Guide

1.   Context

1.1   Background

1.1.1   "Miss School = Miss Out" has been a consistent theme within recent materials aimed at promoting the value of regular school attendance. This simple phrase summarises and simplifies the potential impact of non attendance at school and reflects the evidence that suggests a link between school attendance and educational achievement. This strategy sets out the importance of improving attendance at school and therefore enhancing the life chances of our children and young people, particularly those who are struggling with attending school.

1.1.2   The majority of pupils attend school regularly and are supported to do so by their parents. Engagement with schools has highlighted multiple examples of good practice in respect of managing attendance in schools and the dedication of staff within schools to supporting and encouraging regular attendance.

1.2   Consultation with Stakeholders

1.2.1   In order to inform the development of a draft strategy a number of engagement events were held with schools, parents, young people and Education Authority staff. A full public consultation process was then undertaken on a draft strategy document. A summary of the responses to the public consultation[2] is available on the DE website. This final revised strategy was then approved by the Education Minister.

1.3   Recent reports

1.3.1   The NIAO produced a report on improving pupil attendance in 2004[3] and a follow-up report was published in 2014[4]. The PAC also published its own report on Improving Pupil Attendance on 11 June 2014[5]. These reports made a number of recommendations including the need for the development of a clear strategic perspective in relation to improving school attendance.

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2   Summary Report on Improving Pupil Attendance Strategy Consultation
3   NIAO Improving Pupil Attendance 2004
4   NIAO Improving Pupil Attendance Follow up Report 2014
5   PAC Improving Pupil Attendance Report

1.3.2   The Department commissioned research by McClure Watters[6] into pupil attendance in socially deprived areas in 2012. The report noted that there cannot be one single solution to improving attendance. It also identified positive outcomes from Extended Schools funding which had provided opportunities to strengthen links with families and communities and to communicate with parents on a range of issues including attendance. The benefit of every school having an attendance policy, which clearly sets out its expectations for pupils and parents, was emphasised. It recommended that easily accessible best practice examples and case studies should be provided to guide schools and help them to address the common issues on attendance management. These recommendations have been taken into account in developing this strategy.

1.3.3   Charlie Taylor, the UK government expert advisor on behaviour[7] confirmed the benefits of an emphasis on early intervention when he highlighted the link between poor attendance at school and lower academic achievement. Non-attendance starts at primary level and becomes a pattern. This pattern is very often repeated throughout secondary years and establishes poor attitudes towards school. Early intervention is a key strand of this strategy.

1.4   Attendance Statistics

1.4.1   **The overall Northern Ireland pupil attendance rate in 2014/15 was 94.6% with an absence rate of 5.4%.** This rate is broadly consistent with that of England, Scotland and Wales. Although this statistic may appear quite positive, it translates into some 2.8 million missed school days in 2014/15, or an average of around 10 days for each pupil. There were 18,401 pupils in 2014/15 missing 15% or more school days, meaning each of those pupils missed over five weeks of school.

1.4.2   Considerable work has been undertaken by schools in respect of managing attendance and the number of pupils with attendance of 85% or less has reduced significantly from almost 25,000 in 2009/10 to almost 18,500 in 2014/15 *(see Figure 1)*. While this reduction demonstrates that the overall approach to promoting pupil attendance is delivering improvements in the levels of attendance, there remains a need for further progress to be made.

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6   Research into Improving Attendance in Schools Serving Deprived Areas – RSM McClure Watters 2012
7   Charlie Taylor: Improving Attendance at School

**Figure 1   Pupil Enrolments with less than 85% attendance;
all schools 2009/10–2014/15**
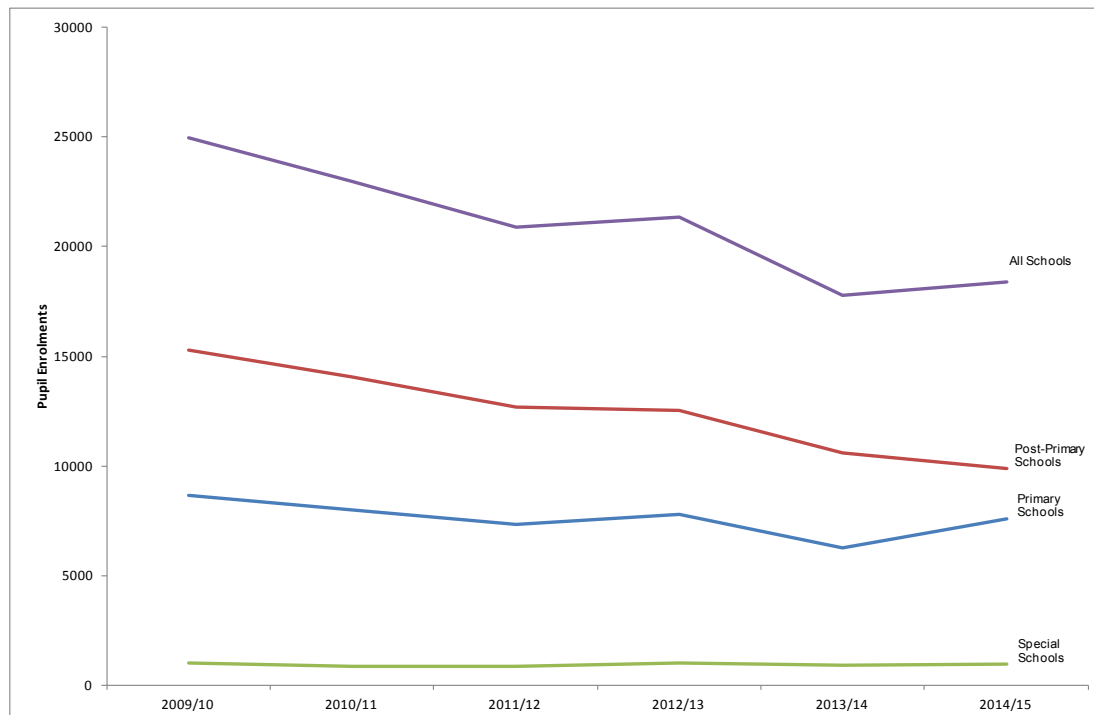
Source: The Northern Ireland School Census 2009/10–2014/15

1.4.3   While it is the aim of this strategy to maximise pupil attendance, it is acknowledged that there will inevitably be days on which a pupil is unable to attend school for a number of acceptable reasons, for example illness. Such absence is recorded as *authorised* and schools will work with parents and pupils to minimise these occurrences where possible. Unauthorised absence[8] is where no acceptable reason has been provided to the school for the absence and this strategy aims to reduce unauthorised absence wherever possible. 28% of absences across all schools in 2014–15 were unauthorised and the Department will continue to seek to reduce this.

1.4.4   The Departmental circular[9] on pupil attendance details the absence codes and descriptions to guide schools as to whether a pupil's period of absence should be recorded as authorised or unauthorised.

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8   Family holiday (not agreed)
      No reason yet provided
      Late after registration closes
      Other absence (where reason not acceptable)
9   DE Circular 2015/02 Attendance Guidance & Absence Recording by Schools

1.5   Attendance and Attainment

1.5.1   Although there can be valid reasons for a pupil being absent from school, Figures 2 and 3 both demonstrate that there is a link between the educational attainment of pupils and their attendance levels. Figure 2 shows that in 2014–15, 77% of school leavers who had an attendance level of over 95% achieved at least five GCSEs (A*-C inc English and Mathematics) however there is a steady and significant drop in the percentage of pupils achieving these grades when their attendance is lower.
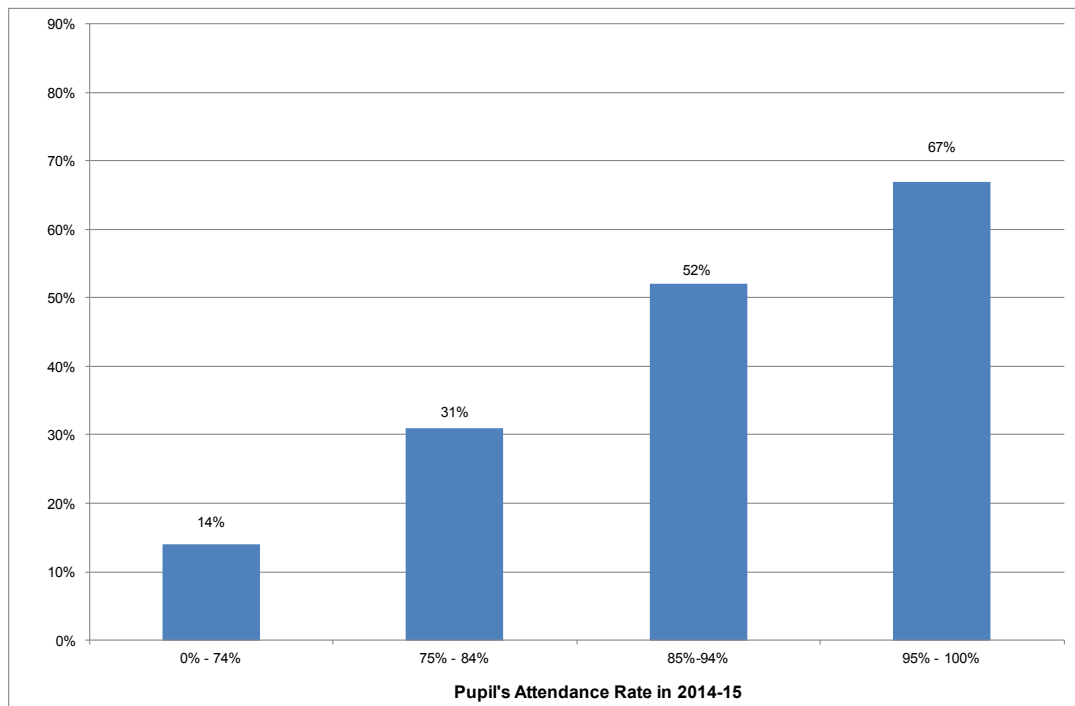
Figure 2   Percentage of School Leavers Achieving at least Five GCSEs (A*–C inc English and Mathematics) by Attendance Levels in 2014–15
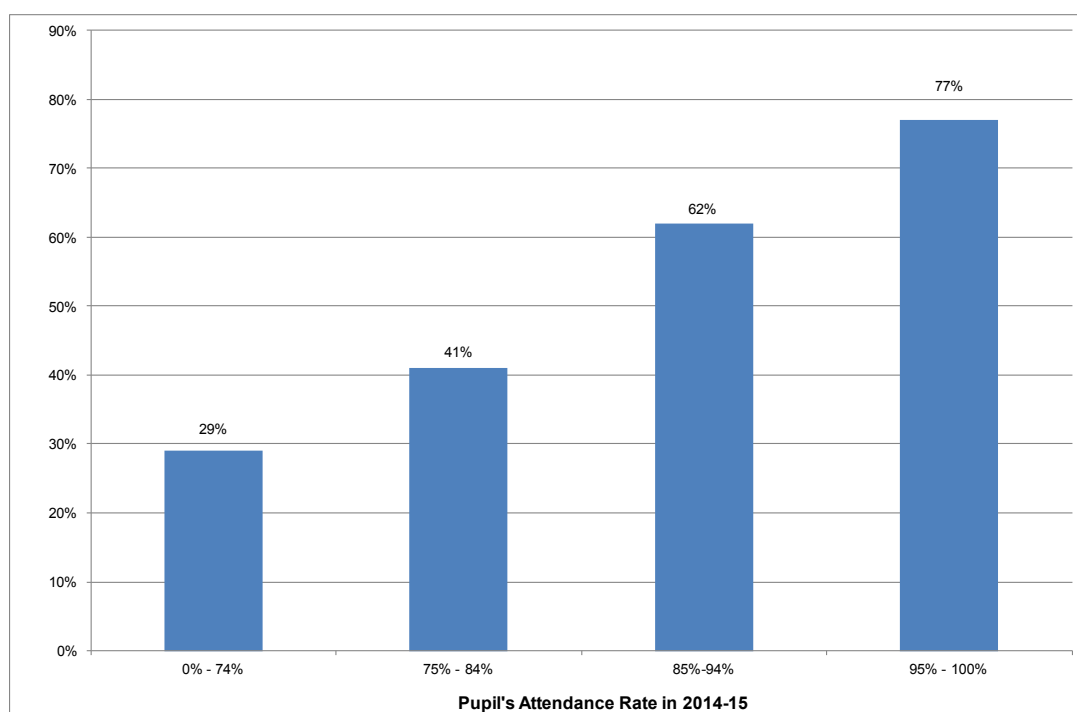
Source: The Northern Ireland School Leavers Survey 2014/15

1.5.2   Figure 3 shows that in 2014–15, 67% of school leavers who had an attendance level of over 95% achieved at least two A Levels, however, as at GCSE level, there is a significantly lower achievement rate for those with lower attendance rates.

Figure 3   Percentage of School Leavers Achieving at least Two A Levels by Attendance Levels in 2014–15

Source: The Northern Ireland School Leavers Survey 2014/15

1.5.3   Figure 4 shows the percentage of school leavers in 2014–15 who were recorded as being unemployed in the School Leavers Survey. This survey records the destination of pupils after they leave school; and possible destinations include further education, higher education, training, employment or unemployment. It is clear from Figure 4 that there is a significant increase in the percentage of school leavers who are recorded as unemployed when their attendance levels were lower. Only 2% of school leavers in 2014–15 with an attendance rate of over 95% were recorded as unemployed however 21% of those with an attendance rate of 75% or less were recorded as unemployed.

Figure 4   Percentage of Unemployed School Leavers by Attendance Levels in 2014–15

Pupil's Attendance Rate in 2014-15
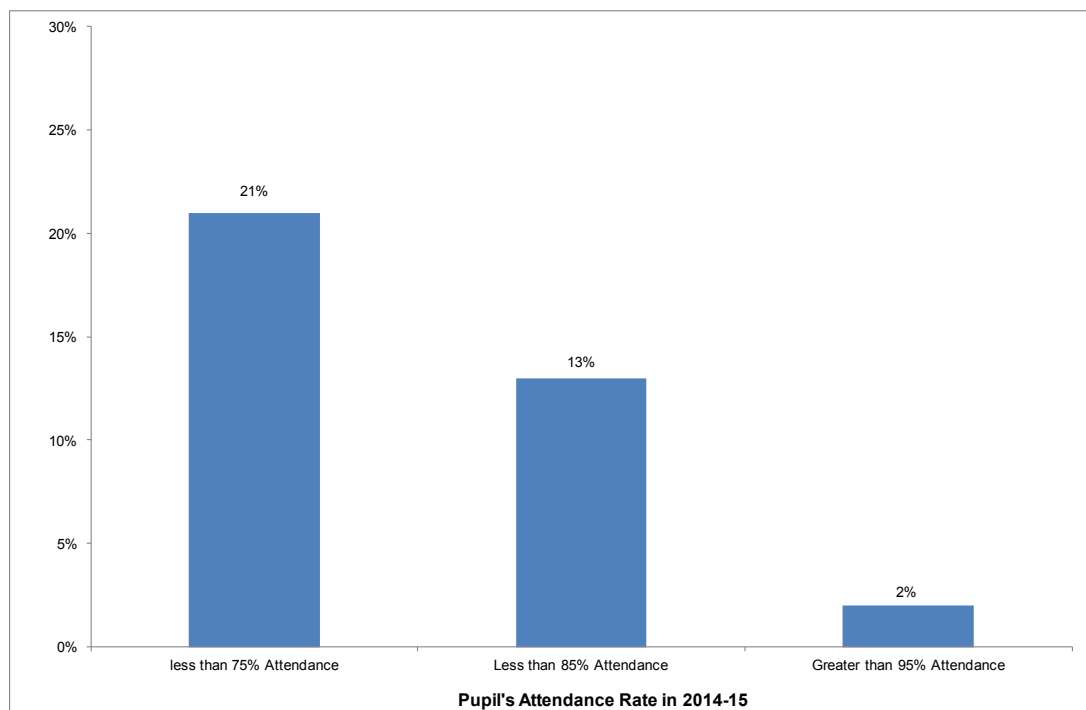
Source: The Northern Ireland School Leavers Survey 2014/15

1.5.4   In summary, Figures 2–4 would strongly suggest that, for school leavers in 2014–15, there is a link between attendance and attainment; and that poorer attendance is associated with an increased likelihood of lower grades at GCSE and A level and an increased likelihood of unemployment.

1.6   Legislative Framework

1.6.1   Parents have a statutory duty, as set out in Article 45 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 (1986 Order), to ensure that each child of compulsory school age

receives full time education according to age , aptitude and ability either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. If a parent registers their child in a school they have a legal duty under the 1986 Order to ensure they attend school regularly.

1.6.2   Schools have a duty, as set out in the Registration and Attendance of Pupils Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1974, to keep details of their pupils' attendance and have arrangements in place to address attendance issues. The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 state that schools should include strategies for promoting attendance in their School Development Plan.

1.6.3   Under the 1986 Order, if a child or young person who is registered at a school does not attend regularly the Education Authority (EA) can initiate court action which could result in the parent receiving a fine not exceeding (£1,000) for each child. The EA can also apply under the Children (NI) Order 1995 for an Education Supervision Order to be made by the Court.

1.7   Approaches in Other Jurisdictions

1.7.1   Research into other jurisdictions confirmed broadly similar policies in respect of attendance. Attendance policies in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Canada and New Zealand, emphasise the central and key role of the parent in securing their child's regular attendance at school. Each country ensures that schools and local authorities have attendance policies and support mechanisms in place both to assist parents and to understand influences upon attendance emanating from both the school and the external environment.

1.7.2   Schools and local authorities are generally assisted through the provision of non-statutory guidance from central government on what constitutes an effective attendance policy. The guidance provides the basis for schools to develop and tailor their attendance policies to their specific circumstances. The enforcement of penalties upon parents is used as the last resort mostly in circumstances where a parent fails to co-operate.

1.7.3   A summary of the attendance policies in other jurisdictions has been provided in the Appendix.

2. Our Vision for School Attendance

2.1   This overarching strategy for school attendance provides a framework for all those involved in managing and improving attendance in our schools. The overall policy aim is to:

- Maximise the attendance rate of pupils so that they are in school being supported to reach their full potential.

2.2   This strategy will:

- Establish the strategic direction in respect of school attendance to inform the actions of those responsible for managing attendance.

- Provide a framework which brings together and builds upon the work already in progress to improve attendance.

- Articulate the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders.

- Reflect the crucial role played by both schools and parents working together in establishing patterns of good attendance and in identifying and addressing any attendance concerns at an early stage.

2.3   This strategy identifies four key themes that underpin a successful approach to managing pupil attendance:

- school leadership;

- early intervention;

- tailored support; and

- collaboration and engagement.

The strategy explores each theme in more detail, setting out in each case a strategic goal, indicators of good practice and roles and responsibilities for all relevant parties.

2.4   Alongside the four themes, there is recognition of the need to share good practice to enable schools to learn from techniques and approaches that have been employed successfully in other schools. This can be through formal local mechanisms such as Area Learning Communities where schools can engage directly with each other, through the informal relationships often developed between school leaders or through central provision such as the ETI's good practice guide.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.0.1   Under each of the four key themes of this strategy, the roles and responsibilities of four primary groups of stakeholders are identified. This will allow those within each group to clearly identify the steps to be taken in order to effectively support and promote pupil attendance; whether that be in relation to the whole school population, in relation to pupils at a particular school, or in relation to specific children. Each one of these groups plays a vital role in helping to achieve the overall policy aim of this strategy.

3.0.2   The four groups of stakeholders are:

- Parents and Pupils.

- Schools.

- The Education Authority.

- The Department of Education and the Education and Training Inspectorate.

3.1   Parents and Pupils

3.1.1   The attitudes of parents can have a significant impact on the school attendance levels of children. The views of parents in particular are vital in shaping the mindset and behaviours of their children, particularly younger children.

3.1.2   Parents have a legal requirement to ensure that each child of compulsory school age receives full-time education. If a parent registers their child in a school, they have a legal duty to ensure they attend that school regularly. Positive support from parents and a willingness to engage with their child's school (and other support bodies as necessary) will make a significant contribution towards their child maximising their attendance at school and realising their full educational potential.

3.2   Schools

3.2.1   School leaders should foster a culture within their school which promotes and prioritises attendance. School leaders are usually best placed to determine how attendance at their school can be improved. Therefore it is appropriate that each school develops its own school attendance policy and procedures to meet the individual needs and circumstances of the school. These should be reviewed regularly

to ensure they remain both relevant and effective. Each school should prioritise the improvement of pupil attendance levels within its School Development Plan as a crucial mechanism for enabling its pupils to succeed.

3.2.2   The degree of engagement that a pupil has with his/her school is often heavily influenced by the quality of the teaching that is being offered. When a pupil's interest has been captured by the teaching, it is likely that he/she will be more motivated to attend school regularly. It is important that schools therefore consider pupil attendance as being influenced by many facets of the school experience including areas such as the quality of the teaching, the relevancy of the subjects available and the level of pastoral care available to pupils.

3.3   The Education Authority

3.3.1   The Education Authority's responsibilities in relation to pupil attendance are primarily delivered through the EWS. EWS primarily seeks to support referred pupils and their families to stay engaged with education by helping them to tackle barriers to attending school. They work in partnership with the young people, their families, schools, other education services as well as statutory and voluntary agencies. Alongside their caseload of referrals, the EWS carries out capacity building work with schools to enable schools to be more effective in their management of attendance issues. In cases where parents do not co-operate with the advice and guidance of the EWS and where a pupil's attendance remains a matter of concern, the EA may consider legal action.

3.3.2   The EA is currently undertaking a wide ranging review of the EWS in order that it can maximise its effectiveness in addressing the needs of referred pupils and schools. This review is due to be completed during 2018.

3.4   Department of Education and Education and Training Inspectorate

3.4.1   Within the Executive's draft Programme for Government 2016-2021 the Department has lead responsibility for delivering *Outcome 14: We give our children and young people the best start in life*. One of the key indicators in the achievement of this outcome is the provision of high quality education. However if children and young people do not attend school, they will not receive that education; consequently maximising pupil attendance must be viewed as an important factor in contributing to the achievement of this outcome.

3.4.2   The Department has the lead role in setting the strategic direction in relation to pupil attendance and provides a policy framework and guidance to schools and the Education Authority to enable them to maximise pupil attendance. In carrying out this role, it will work with the EA and other public bodies to seek opportunities to support and promote pupil attendance.

3.4.3   The ETI's key objective is to promote the highest possible standards of learning, teaching and achievement throughout the education, training and youth sector. As part of the ETI's inspection process, one of the factors that is considered is the approach used by schools in their efforts to improve pupil attendance and to what extent they have been successful. The ETI are able to use their experience and breadth of knowledge to play a key role in the dissemination of good practice. A key example of this is the good practice guide launched alongside this strategy.

4. School Leadership

4.1   Delivering effective leadership in schools is the responsibility of the Board of Governors, Principal and senior staff of each school. Without each of these three groups demonstrating the necessary leadership qualities, it will be difficult for a school to effectively manage and improve pupil attendance.

4.2   Schools that are effective in managing pupil attendance are led by principals committed to promoting and prioritising attendance within their schools. Schools with effective attendance management will have targets in respect of attendance in their school development plan which is discussed regularly by the BoG.

4.3   The BoG of a school should provide challenge, direction and support to the principal in respect of pupil attendance, who in turn should communicate commitment to meeting attendance targets to staff, parents and pupils.

4.4   Commitment from school leadership allows the creation of a school ethos and culture that values the importance of attendance and its link to attainment. Staff must be clear about what is expected of them and every opportunity should be taken to communicate the importance of attendance to pupils and parents.

4.5   Leaders should be proactive in implementing appropriate strategies to address attendance issues. These will be tailored to their school's circumstances but might include extra support for those struggling with regular attendance such as adjustments and tailoring of the curriculum, personal education plans or homework clubs.

Indicators of School Leadership committed to prioritising attendance

The school has an attendance policy that is documented and accessible for all parents and pupils. This policy reflects each school's duty to keep details of their pupil's attendance and have arrangements in place to address attendance issues.

The attendance policy within each school contains challenging targets which are also part of the School Development Plan. These targets should be monitored regularly at Board of Governors' meetings.

School leaders are proactive in implementing a range of strategies to improve attendance at a whole school level or in their targeting of additional support measures for those struggling with regular attendance including curriculum adjustments or personal education plans.

A clear commitment exists within the school leadership to the promotion of regular attendance and to communicate the impact of non-attendance at all appropriate opportunities to staff, pupils and parents.

School leaders are able to identify if areas of its school policies and practices may be impacting adversely on pupil attendance and take action to reduce the impact.

Attendance is a consideration when determining school improvement plans and resource allocations from within delegated school budgets.

Ensure all staff understand their role in managing and improving attendance.

School leaders will monitor, evaluate and improve the management of attendance in their school on an ongoing basis. They will understand that circumstances within a school evolve over time and approaches to attendance management need to change to take this into account.

School leaders understand the importance of the link between a pupil's attendance and their potential future attainment and promote this with parents.

School leaders are flexible in how they manage cases of poor attendance taking account of all relevant factors both in the pupil's school life and home life.

School Leadership – Roles and Responsibilities	
Parents/Pupils	**Schools**
✓ Parents should be aware of their legal responsibilities for ensuring their child's regular and punctual attendance. ✓ Parents should read and adhere to the school's Pupil Attendance Policy and procedures and support their children to understand and follow the rules. ✓ Parents should support the efforts of school leaders to prioritise school attendance. ✓ Parents should co-operate with and support school leaders if they recommend actions to address their child's poor attendance. ✓ Parents should be aware of the link between pupil attendance levels and their subsequent academic attainment.	✓ Schools should ensure a Pupil Attendance Policy is in place in their school, approved by their Board of Governors. ✓ Schools should ensure that all pupils and parents are aware of and understand their school's Pupil Attendance Policy and what it means to them. ✓ Schools should include school attendance targets in the school development plan and ensure pupil attendance is on the agenda at all Board of Governors' meetings. ✓ Schools should promote the importance of school attendance and its link with attainment. ✓ Schools should engage with pupils in relation to potential barrier to attending such as the appropriateness of the curriculum. ✓ Schools should enhance the capacity of teachers and support staff to understand and support pupils with attendance problems.
Education Authority	**Dept of Education/ETI**
✓ The EA should provide advice and support to school leaders in their development and delivery of approaches in their management of attendance.	✓ The Department should provide strategic direction on improving attendance. ✓ The Department should ensure that all the Department's policies and initiatives promote regular attendance at school, whenever possible. ✓ The ETI should formally assess and evaluate the effectiveness of all aspects of leadership (including the management of attendance) as part of the ETI school inspection process.

5. Early Intervention

Early Intervention – Strategic Goal
To positively influence the attendance of pupils as early as possible in order to prevent the development and/or entrenchment of negative patterns of attendance.

5.1   There are two aspects to "early intervention" in the management of attendance and both have a crucial role in the Department's strategic approach to improving pupil attendance:

1.   Efforts to promote and manage the attendance of younger pupils in order to develop an early understanding of the benefits of school attendance and establish positive patterns of attendance from a young age.

2.   The swift targeting of support to individual pupils and groups of pupils of any age following the identification of attendance concerns prior to the establishment of long-term patterns of poor attendance.

5.2   The importance of a school helping to develop a positive mindset in young pupils in relation to attendance cannot be over-emphasised. The establishment of such thinking during the pupils' most formative years is likely to have a bearing on the pupil's attendance levels across their school career. Both the child's parents and school have a vital role in developing a child's understanding of the importance of attending school. Each primary school principal should seek to engage with both the child and their parents as soon as possible to emphasise the value of school attendance. The manner in which this is most effectively progressed is for the school principal to determine, taking into account the individual circumstances of their school.

5.3   Early intervention is a vital tool in preventing poor school attendance. Schools should be proactive in identifying and managing patterns of non-attendance through early intervention, at any stage of pupil's school career whether it be in the early years of in Primary school or at any stage when attendance issues are first identified. Patterns of non-attendance, which develop in the early years, become very difficult to reverse in post-primary school.

5.4   Schools are required to record and monitor pupil attendance and have appropriate measures in place to deal with attendance issues. Effective collection and monitoring of attendance data is essential to putting effective interventions in place before a long-term pattern of non-attendance develops. Schools which successfully address poor attendance are those that take action in accordance with school attendance policies and involve parents at an early stage when concerns are identified.

5.5   School staff should be clear about their own roles and responsibilities and those of others in the school in relation to pupil attendance. Schools will consider how best to adapt their approach to tackling non-attendance depending upon the specific circumstances, in conjunction with support from the EWS. Schools/EWS may, in some cases, need to engage with other agencies or third parties to effectively address the underlying issues, such as child protection, poverty, mental health issues or family support.

Indicators of Effective Early Intervention
Primary schools are proactive in their efforts to develop a positive mindset in their pupils towards attending school and establishing positive patterns of attendance from an early age.
The range of measures used by a school to address pupils' poor attendance are documented in their school attendance policy and are commenced prior to the development of established patterns of poor attendance.
Registration information is effectively recorded and analysed to enable the identification of any concerning patterns of attendance either with individual pupils or groups of pupils as early as possible.
Schools' attendance information on their children is shared with parents frequently including, where appropriate, details of how the schools attendance policy tackles cases of poor attendance.
Parents are promptly contacted and their input sought when there has been a breach of the school attendance policy and/or their child's attendance at school is a cause for concern.
Pupils and their parents are made aware of, have access to and understand the school's policy and procedures in respect of attendance.
The school acts promptly to seek additional support when the school's interventions have not brought about a sufficient improvement in pupils' attendance level.

Early Intervention – Roles and Responsibilities

Parents/Pupils	Schools
✓ Parents should be aware of the aim of schools in preventing the establishment of long-term patterns of poor attendance through early intervention.	✓ Schools should robustly follow up on all pupil absences and lateness. Monitor post-registration pupil absence and advise parents of issues by, for example, a phone call or text message.
✓ Parents should let the school know of any issues that may impact upon attendance as early as possible.	✓ Schools should ensure there are systems in place to monitor and analyse attendance patterns at an individual pupil, pupil group and whole school level prior to their entrenchment.
✓ Parents should recognise the role that can be played by parents of young children in helping their children to shape a constructive attitude towards school attendance.	✓ Schools should have an attendance policy that documents how the school will apply the principles of early intervention into their work to promote and support the maximisation of pupil attendance.
✓ Parents should be supportive of the school's efforts to develop positive patterns of attendance amongst pupils from an early age.	✓ Schools should have flexible processes in place to enable support to be provided to pupils with poor levels of attendance at an early enough stage to "nip it in the bud".
✓ Parents should understand the need for a positive mindset on attendance to be developed in pupils from an early age.	✓ Schools should proactively promote the value of school attendance to pupils in their earliest years, particularly in order to establish good attendance practices.
	✓ Schools should take action to react, where appropriate, to changes in a pupil's circumstances that may impact upon their attendance such as a domestic crisis.

Early Intervention – Roles and Responsibilities *(continued)*	
Education Authority	**Dept of Education/ETI**
✓ The EA should provide advice to schools on how to identify and address cases of poor attendance at an early stage, prior to the entrenchment of poor attendance practices. ✓ The EA should provide effective support as soon as possible in cases referred to the Education Welfare Service. ✓ The EA should promote the benefits of early intervention through their engagement with schools.	✓ The Department should work in partnership with the Education Authority to provide clear up to date guidance to schools in respect of early intervention. ✓ The ETI should ensure that attendance continues to be examined as part of all ETI inspections and that any concerns are clearly identified in order that appropriate action may be taken. ✓ The Department should work with the Education Authority to ensure the importance and value of attendance is communicated at an early stage and that there is active and regular engagement between schools, parents and pupils. ✓ The Department should work with the Education Authority to consider awareness raising activities particularly aimed at primary pupils and their parents.

6.   Tailored Support

Tailored Support – Strategic Goal

For tailored support to be provided by the school and the Education Authority (if appropriate) to individual pupils or groups of pupils that takes account of their specific circumstances and works in partnership with all relevant parties to effectively tackle barriers to the pupils(s) regular attendance at schools.

6.1   There are many reasons why pupils struggle with attendance, many of which are not specifically school based issues such as illness, bereavement, family problems and child protection issues. Other reasons for non-attendance more directly relate to the pupil's school life and can include issues such as bullying, language difficulties, perceived lack of relevance of the curriculum and a lack of appreciation of how attendance at school is linked to their educational outcomes.

6.2   Schools monitor attendance to identify potential concerns at an early stage. When a concern is identified the school will contact parents to seek their assistance. Some schools have been successful in improving attendance by allocating resources to provide dedicated support to pupils and their families who struggle to engage with education sometimes through a home/school liaison officer. However there are instances when, despite the school using a range of intervention strategies to support them, the pupil will still struggle with attendance.

6.3   When schools are unable to resolve an attendance issue and the school is concerned or attendance has reduced to below 85%, they should refer a pupil to the EA. The EA's dedicated Education Welfare Service (EWS) helps young people of school age and their families to get the best out of the education system. Its aim is to promote a culture of regular attendance at school.

6.4   The EWS has service level agreements with every school and each school has a dedicated Education Welfare Officer (EWO). EWOs work proactively with schools to raise awareness of attendance issues using agreed strategies for example; Primary Attendance Matters programme, whole school assemblies and information sessions for parents/teaching staff on the role of EWS. EWS carries out termly attendance audits which they discuss with school staff. Considerable time and resources are also spent on case work and assisting young people in improving their attendance levels. EWOs are also now able to access live the electronic data provided by schools on each pupil's

attendance. The EWS' work therefore largely focuses on two distinct area of work in improving attendance levels:

- Individual case work with pupils who have unsatisfactory levels of attendance referred by schools or other sources.

- Capacity building in schools, including advice and training about managing pupil non-attendance and promoting the importance of attendance within schools.

6.5   This strategy outlines a universal approach to supporting pupil attendance. It applies to all schools and all pupils; however, there are specific groups of children and young people who may require additional support. This additional support may be provided through the EA support services or by schools themselves. All of the support mechanisms for these specific groups of pupils target a variety of issues specific to each group, however a common theme across all of their work is to promote and facilitate their attendance at school.

6.6   Problems with a pupil's attendance are often the consequence of another issue that has impacted upon their ability or willingness to attend school. It is often more appropriate for efforts to be targeted at the root cause. There are therefore many support mechanisms and initiatives that will have a positive impact on pupil attendance levels without that being their primary aim. Examples of this relate to the support offered to pupils of socially deprived families where in addition to funding provided directly to the school, there is access to DE initiatives such as the Extended Schools programme and the Educational Maintenance Allowance scheme. There is also access to programmes delivered in partnership with other bodies and government departments such as the Early Intervention Transformation Programme.

6.7   The Department also provides additional delegated funding to schools through the Common Funding Scheme (CFS) for each pupil who falls within specific targeted groups *(see Table 3 below)*. Pupils within these groups are often more likely to have attendance issues.

6.8   It is for schools to determine their spending priorities, from within the totality of funding they receive. Some schools have indicated that employing a Home/School Liaison Officer can have a positive impact on improving attendance and tackling the underlying issues in relation to absenteeism, either short or long term.

Table 3   Additional Support

Group	Support
Pupils in receipt of free school meals	Schools receive an additional amount of funding for each child through the CFS. There is access to additional support programmes targeted at areas of social deprivation such as Extended Schools and the Early Intervention Transformation Programme.
Traveller children	Schools receive an additional amount of funding for each Traveller Child through the CFS in order to address their specific needs. The EA's regional Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) is funded by the Department to support schools with Traveller pupils and their families. TESS provides specific advice and guidance in relation to Traveller attendance and transition matters, and the improvement in attendance levels is a specific priority area in its delivery plan.
Roma children	Schools receive additional funding from the Department through the CFS. The EA has a dedicated liaison officer for the Roma Community.
Looked After Children	Schools receive additional funding from CFS. The Department funds the EA to provide support to Looked After Children within schools to help them achieve their full potential.
Newcomer pupil	Schools receive additional funding for each child assessed as being Newcomer through the CFS. The Department funds the EA's regional Inclusion and Diversity Service which strengthens and improves support to Newcomer children and young people and their families, primarily working through schools.
School Age Mothers	The Department funds the EA's School Age Mother programme. The programme offers financial support for childcare and transport for those who require it. Home tuition may also be provided for short periods of time if needed.

6.9   From the engagement with stakeholders, including pupils and teachers, it is clear that emotional health and well-being challenges, along with issues related to bullying, can have a negative impact on school attendance. As part of a wider emphasis on pastoral care support to pupils, a number of policies and interventions are in place to support children and young people who may be struggling with these issues. These support mechanisms are primarily aimed at tackling the underlying issue, for example bullying, rather than specifically focusing on the pupils' attendance level. If the underlying issues is addressed, consequential improvement in attendance will often follow.

6.10   Every school is required to have pastoral care policies in place. Key elements of a school's pastoral care provision include equipping pupils to cope with personal challenges through teaching the personal development strand of the curriculum, having in place systems for monitoring pupils' academic and social progress and wellbeing; and ensuring that a range of supports are available within the school to those pupils experiencing difficulties.

6.11   Under the Department's iMatter programme which supports pupils' emotional health and well-being, schools are provided with materials that address topics that can be a challenge to children and young people today. These consist of leaflets, posters and diary inserts, covering a range of topics such as Peer Pressure, Mental Health, Alcohol, Drugs and Solvents, and Body Image.

6.12   The Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) is available in all post-primary schools and special schools with a post-primary cohort. The counselling service is independent of the school, is responsive to pupils' needs and operates as an integral part of the schools pastoral care provision.

6.13   The Board of Governors of each schools has a legal duty to have a positive behaviour policy which should outline the behaviour it expects from pupils and the sanctions it will impose for breaches in discipline. All schools must provide a copy of their positive behaviour policy to the parents and pupils of the school.

6.14   The NI Anti-Bullying Forum is funded to raise awareness of the need to effectively tackle bullying and to provide best practice resources on how schools can respond effectively to all forms of bullying.

6.15 The "Addressing Bullying In Schools Act (NI) 2016", was granted Royal assent on 12 May 2016. It is anticipated that provisions of the Act will commence during the 2017/18 academic year. The legislation will:

   i. providing a common definition of bullying;

   ii. require all grant aided schools to centrally record all incidents of bullying, their motivation and their outcomes; and

   iii. require the Board of Governors of a school to collectively take responsibility for the development, implementation, monitoring and periodic review of the school's anti-bullying policies and procedures.

Indicators of Effective Support
Schools allocate resources to allow individuals with key roles to provide support for improving attendance if appropriate.
Pro-active support is available and schools, pupils and parents know about the support and how to access it.
Detailed up to date guidance and best practice examples on managing attendance are being accessed by a school and tailored to their specific needs and deployed in line with the school's attendance policy.
Support services are able to provide a timely, appropriate and flexible range of interventions to improve attendance.
Support services actively analyse school attendance data to identify schools that need additional whole school support and take action in a timely manner.
Appropriate support is provided for pupils who struggle with regular attendance including timely delivery of a range of specialist services as required.
In cases of poor attendance, due account is taken of individual circumstances either in the pupil's home or school life.
Legal action is taken, where appropriate, to ensure parents fulfil their legal responsibilities to ensure their child receives an appropriate education.

Tailored Support – Roles and Responsibilities	
Parents/Pupils	**Schools**
✓ Parents should be aware of their legal responsibilities in respect of their child attending school regularly. ✓ Parents and pupils should engage openly and constructively with the school and/or the EWS as they provide support and advice to improve attendance. ✓ Parents should understand that the EA will take legal action, where appropriate, to ensure that a child receives an appropriate education.	✓ Schools should ensure that their pupil attendance policy includes timely supports to be made available to target attendance issues either on an individual pupil or group basis. ✓ Schools should take account of the challenges or barriers to learning that may affect a pupil's attendance and offer appropriate support that takes account of their individual circumstances. ✓ Schools should be sensitive to personal issues that may impact upon a pupil's attendance, and offer effective pastoral support. ✓ Schools should refer a pupil to the EWS in line with the guidelines in the Department's Attendance Circular. ✓ Schools should co-operate with the EA support services in their working with referred pupils.

Tailored Support – Roles and Responsibilities *(continued)*

Education Authority	Dept of Education/ETI
✓ The EA should deliver an effective Education Welfare Service to provide support to referred pupils with poor attendance levels and schools with overall attendance levels less than 90%.	✓ The Department should work with the EA to provide clear up to date guidance to schools on effective support for pupils with poor attendance and the need to refer all cases which are a cause for concern to EWS.
✓ The EA should carry out termly audits of attendance in all schools.	✓ ETI should monitor the impact of timely and effective support provided by the EA to schools, parents and pupils to address concerns about attendance.
✓ The EA should deliver a range of services to support various groups of pupils. For example, Newcomer pupils and Looked After Children.	✓ ETI should share updated resources with schools on issues that may affect a pupil's emotional health and well-being.
✓ The EA should give advice, direction and support to schools on effective pastoral care arrangements.	✓ The Department should provide guidance, resources and training on best practice approaches to teachers and Boards of Governors to assist with the discharge of their duties under the new legislation aimed at addressing bullying in schools.
✓ The EA should share updated resources with schools on issues that may affect a pupil's emotional health and well-being.	✓ The Department should provide specific guidance for parents and young people on addressing bullying in schools.
✓ The EA should take legal action, where appropriate, to ensure that a child receives an appropriate education.	✓ The Department should provide guidance to schools on the provision of appropriate pastoral support to pupils.
	✓ The Department should put in place policies and supports to assist those groups who are identified as at greatest risk of under achievement.

7. Collaboration and Engagement

Collaboration and Engagement – Strategic Goal

For schools, the Education Authority and the Department of Education to work with parents, statutory bodies and other service providers in order to have a positive impact on pupil attendance.

7.1.1   There are a range of stakeholders that have an important role to play in the promotion, monitoring and intervention aspects of an effective approach to improving pupil attendance. Operating in isolation will render these stakeholders less effective than if they work together. Schools, the Education Authority and the Department of Education should take the lead in working with parents and other bodies at both central (including statutory, community and voluntary sector bodies) and local level in order to have a positive influence on pupil attendance.

7.1.2   Moving forward, the strategic context for collaboration and partnership will be the NI Executive's Programme for Government 2016-21 which, it is envisaged, will provide a framework for joined up working in pursuit of 14 strategic outcomes, including the outcome "We give our children and young people the best start in life". At the time of publication of this document, a draft Programme for Government was out for public consultation.

7.1.3   In addition, the Children's Services Co-Operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 places a duty on the Executive to make arrangements for co-operation to improve children's well-being. All key agencies are therefore required to cooperate in the planning, commissioning and delivery of children's services. There is also a requirement for a cross-departmental Children and Young Person's Strategy to be a key aspect in ensuring compliance with the Act by outlining how the Executive will promote better working practices and better co-operation. The delivery of the Strategy for Improving Pupil Attendance will offer an opportunity for closer working between government bodies aligned with the requirements of the Children's Services Co-Operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015.

7.1.4   Many of the opportunities for closer partnership working are building upon existing work. There is already effective collaboration taking place, particularly at local level, however this strategy endorses the development of a more joined up approach between statutory bodies, particularly in relation to the prevention of absence from school.

7.1.5   There are three areas of collaboration and engagement that are highlighted within this strategy:

1.   Parental Engagement.

2.   Strategic/System Level Collaboration.

3.   Inter-School Collaboration.

Each of these forms of collaboration and engagement have a different emphasis in terms of their purpose, those involved and the potential outcomes.

7.2   Parental engagement

7.2.1   It is vital that parents are involved at all times in their child's education to provide encouragement and support from an early age. Parents also have a legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school and have a crucial role in the establishment of positive attitudes to attending school. Engagement with parents should therefore form an important element of every school's attendance policy and procedures. A school should inform parents and pupils regularly of about expectations with regard to attendance and provide attendance information for parents on a regular basis. This can be on a school-wide basis with information communicated to all parents or on an individual pupil basis if the school has concerns about an individual pupil's attendance.

7.2.2   If a concern arises regarding a pupil's attendance, the school should contact the parent as soon as possible to discuss the issue and to seek their help to address the concern. Such engagement will usually be instigated by schools but there are opportunities for parents to raise issues or seek information through mechanisms such as Parent Teacher Associations or through requesting a meeting with a relevant member of staff.

7.2.3   In terms of a school's efforts to engage parents with the education system, it is often through the provision of extra-curricular activities that such engagement can be most successful. Examples of this are initiatives such as the Extended Schools Programme which can offer services before and after schools for pupils and also to the wider community. In recognition of the vital role played by parents in their children's learning this funding is aimed specifically at involving parents in the life of the school. These resources enable schools to deliver a co-ordinated approach to providing parenting programmes and activities which help parents support their children at home including dealing with a range of social, emotional and behavioural issues, which may adversely impact on attendance, and in the development of literacy

and numeracy skills. The Extended Schools Programme is available to schools serving socially deprived areas and the McClure Watters research identified positive outcomes from Extended Schools funding on a range of issues, including attendance.

7.2.4   A further example of a government programme that aims to engage with parents and children is the SureStart programme that provides a range of support services for parents and children under the age of four, who live in disadvantaged areas across Northern Ireland. Its focus is to support parents from pregnancy and to give children the best support in life and get ready for pre-school. The programme aims to help a child's social and emotional development, build on their communication and language skills and encourage their imagination through play. SureStart encourages parents to participate too because, parents play a key role in encouraging and helping children to succeed at school and in life. Statistics show that children who attend educational programmes and nursery provision, in early life and whose parents engage with these are more likely to have higher attendance rates when at school.

7.2.5   As a partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors, the Youth Service plays and important role in promoting positive influences for those young people who are struggling to attend school on a regular basis. Many schools have recognised that youth workers have the skills and background knowledge to engage many young people who do not or cannot comply with the expected norms.

7.3   Strategic/system level collaboration

7.3.1   At a strategic/system level, government departments and agencies should work together to promote the importance of regular attendance at school and work together to address any issues in terms of how systemic mechanisms operate. This form of collaboration will help to ensure that when individuals (parents and pupils) engage with services, such as health, justice, local government or social care, a consistent message on school attendance is shared and understood. This cross-sectoral collaboration can also help us to engage with communities to ensure that the value of education and regular school attendance is understood and championed within those communities.

7.3.2   An example of the successful collaborative work being taken forward across government departments is the Early Intervention Transformation Programme. This programme aims to improve the outcomes for children and young people across Northern Ireland through embedding early intervention approaches. It is delivered in partnership with other Departments including the Department of Justice, the Department of Health and the Department for Communities continues to encourage

parental involvement with their child's learning which has led to improved levels of pupil attendance.

7.3.3   The community use of the schools estate in order to meet the needs of pupils, their parents and families and the wider community has significant benefits, including developing positive attitudes to learning which increases motivation to attend school.

7.3.4   The community planning process being led by the new local councils will provide an opportunity for education to become a partner alongside local communities. Support from councils to promote improved levels of school attendance could, through the link between attendance and academic attainment, act as a contributing action for the achievement of a range of other educational outcomes with their community plans.

7.2.5   This strategy encourages a variety of government bodies to work in closer partnership to promote pupil attendance. Examples of this could be promotional campaigns that involve materials being made available through a range of local service providers and work with local councils through their community planning initiatives in local community services.

7.4   Inter-School collaboration

7.4.1   While system level collaborative working is more likely to be led by statutory bodies with a regional remit, collaborative efforts that take place at a more local level, often led by schools, have the potential to have a positive impact on pupil attendance.

7.4.2   Inter-school partnerships at post-primary level can be seen through Area Learning Communities, particularly in relation to the delivery of the entitlement framework. In addition, Area Learning Communities can be used for the sharing of good practice that has been effective in their local communities and for the pooling of ideas and resources in delivering locally based initiatives. When combined with the Education and Training Inspectorate's regional good practice guide, the sharing of local best practice can offer a school the stimulus to develop and evolve their own approaches in the management of attendance. The Department and the EA will be working to ensure that both ESaGS.tv and C2k offer effective platforms for schools to share good practice and work collaboratively.

7.4.3   There are also opportunities for schools to work collaboratively with other local bodies for whom improving pupil attendance levels is an important direct or indirect aspect of their work. Examples of this include working with those responsible for Sure Start, local charities and community policing. The work of each of these bodies can help to promote school attendance and schools have an opportunity to build closer links that can work alongside their own efforts to improve pupil attendance within their school.

7.5   Working together to help pupils

7.5.1   Collaboration and engagement will be most effective when it spans the breadth of attendance issues. At an individual pupil level, co-operation between services is essential, particularly when the cause of poor attendance may be due to complex issues facing a family. Schools and the EWS, when dealing with pupils who struggle with attendance often need to work with others, particularly social care workers. "There can be a range of complex reasons for a pupil being absent from school. This might include personal or family problems. Whilst the school could take action against and offer support for the pupil, without addressing the family issues poor attendance patterns would almost inevitably reoccur."

7.5.2   This strategy endorses the building of closer links between such bodies in order to reduce the impact of those issues upon a child's attendance.

Indicators of effective collaboration/engagement
All stakeholders appreciate the benefits that can be gained through greater collaboration in their efforts to improve pupil attendance levels.
Good relationships exist that facilitate engagement and communication between the school, parents and the wider community it serves.
Schools use their involvement in programmes such as Extended Schools to build effective relationships with parents and the community and to promote the importance of regular school attendance.
The school works closely with other relevant statutory and voluntary agencies whose work may be able to have a positive influence upon pupil attendance, including local councils, PSNI and charitable organisations.
Schools invite statutory and non-statutory bodies such as the PSNI, charities and voluntary sector organisations to engage directly with their pupils. The building of relationships between pupils and such organisations can make them aware of the help that is available to address issues that may be impacting upon their school attendance for example, relationship problems in the home.
Schools develop their position within the wider community and build further relationships with parents by making its facilities available for community use, where appropriate.
Schools collaborating with other schools within their local area consider joint initiatives and sharing of good practice that has worked well in similar school settings.
Good relationships exist that facilitate engagement between the EA and other agencies that can assist in providing support to improve pupil attendance for example Social Services.
The Department collaborates with cross sectoral and cross departmental partners to explore how the importance of attendance can be promoted and to ensure regular pupil attendance is a consideration in other relevant policy areas.
The Department explores ways of working collaboratively with local councils through their community planning initiatives.
The Department and the EA explore a range of promotional opportunities and materials to communicate widely the importance of attendance and parental engagement.
The Department works with other statutory bodies to explore how barriers to improved attendance can be mitigated.

Collaboration and engagement – Roles and Responsibilities

Parents/Pupils	Schools
✓ Pupils should talk to a teacher or trusted adult about any worries they have about school which may affect their attendance in order that the school can take action if necessary.	✓ Schools should work to build positive relationships with the local community that will help to promote closer engagement with the education system.
✓ Parents should provide a reason immediately each time their child does not attend school and advise the school on issues such as medical appointments.	✓ Schools should try to promote closer parental engagement in their child's education by maximising the involvement of parents in the life of the school.
✓ Parents should attend all parent/teacher interviews and be willing to address poor attendance patterns.	✓ Schools should seek to share good practice through co-operation with local schools, with the EA and the ETI.
✓ Parents should take an active interest in their child's education, the life of the school and promote the benefits of regular attendance.	✓ Schools should consult with their pupils about the appropriateness of the curriculum and the effectiveness of the teaching in engaging the learner.
✓ Parents should support school staff in their efforts to manage difficult or challenging behaviour.	✓ Schools should have in place forms of pupil participation to help pupils be involved in making decisions that affect them such as curriculum choices.
	✓ Schools should ensure all parents are aware of what information is required in respect of their child's non-attendance and when it should be provided.
	✓ Schools should seek to exploit the opportunities for sharing of good practice offered through C2k and ESaGS.tv.

Collaboration and engagement – Roles and Responsibilities *(continued)*

Education Authority	Dept of Education/ETI
✓ The EA should disseminate best practice to schools both at a system level and individual school level. ✓ The EA should work closely with schools, social services and other agencies to provide the necessary help to support children to maintain their education. ✓ The EA should develop the capacity of schools, where appropriate, to enable schools to more effectively manage cases of poor attendance. ✓ The EA should engage with parents in a positive way to improve attendance at school.	✓ The Department should work with the EA to provide updated advice and guidance to schools on attendance and absence recording. ✓ The Department should promote the importance of school attendance across statutory bodies to ensure a joined up approach and to maximise opportunities across the public sector to support and promote school attendance. ✓ The Department should work in partnership with other statutory bodies to mitigate any systemic issues that may hinder the improvement of pupil attendance. ✓ The ETI should identify good practice in schools with good or improving attendance and effectively disseminate this information to schools. ✓ The ETI should work with the Department in relation to their policy approach to managing attendance.

8.   Sharing Good Practice

8.1   The four key themes of this strategy of school leadership, early intervention, tailored support and collaboration and engagement are visible in the schools that are most effective in managing pupil attendance. The Department's engagement with stakeholders on improving attendance has consistently highlighted the need to develop a structured, strategic approach to disseminating good practice throughout the school sector.

8.2   There are already many examples of good practice on improving pupil attendance taking place at school level. Many schools are committed to the implementation of innovative approaches in their management of pupil attendance. Innovative approaches can range from reward and recognition of excellent attendance rates, to procedures to identify and provide support as soon as poor attendance patterns become established.

8.3   The Department will work with the EA to determine other mechanisms to share best practice and to access resources on improving attendance. Building upon the current methodologies such as C2k and ESAGs TV, which provides an effective platform to disseminate good practice, the EA will also look to develop a single repository for educational staff to access online resources to promote improving pupil attendance.

8.4   The Department issues guidance and circulars to schools, which highlight tried and tested approaches for improving pupil attendance, such as a model school attendance policy and the monitoring of attendance patterns as an early indicator of an issue.

8.5   It is important that schools learn from each others' successes in the development of their own approaches. The Department therefore asked the ETI to use their knowledge and experience of good practice in local schools in publishing a guide to good practice which draws together practical examples of effective strategies which have been successfully used in local schools. The publication of this guide allows schools to draw upon the experience of others facing similar issues and to introduce interventions that have been successful in other schools.

9. The Outcomes of the Strategy

9.1   In keeping with the Executive's outcomes based approach for the Programme for Government 2016-21 (PfG), this strategy focuses on the contributions it can make to tangibly improving life for citizens.

9.2   A successful attendance strategy and overall approach to the management of attendance across NI will contribute to the achievement of the draft PfG Objective 14 – "We give our children and young people the best start in life". The draft PfG indicators for this objective that are relevant to pupil attendance which will be used to determine the extent of success are: "Improve educational outcomes" and "Reduce educational inequality".

9.3   The PfG indicators will be supported by various delivery plans. At the point of this strategy being published, the PfG is being consulted upon by the Executive and the approach documented below, although based upon the draft PfG, can be refined to reflect its final position. The draft delivery plan for indicators 11, 12 and 13 proposes that DE will revise the system level and school level evaluation structures to support the highest quality educational provision and outcomes by creating a dashboard of measures. This will reflect the wide range of outcomes that constitute success. It is also intended that improved levels of attendance will be appropriately reflected in the DE business plan and the EA's annual business plan.

9.4   The high level output measures shown below will be used to monitor the impact of the efforts each year to improve pupil attendance and will also be used to identify targeted future action to improve the attendance levels of specific groups.

9.5   These output measures will be monitored in year by DE in conjunction with the EA with any issues raised through the established governance and accountability structures in order that forward work plans for DE, EA and the support services of the EA can be shaped accordingly.

Output measures:

1.   An increase in the overall average attendance level across Northern Ireland.

2.   A reduction in the levels of unauthorised absence.

3.   A reduction in the proportion of pupils with attendance levels less that 85%.

10. Conclusion

10.1   The Department of Education is committed to promoting pupil attendance, so that every child has the maximum opportunity to reach their full potential. This strategy will provide a coherent framework for action and improvement to guide all those working to support pupil attendance. It will operate in parallel with other departmental policies and initiatives that provide support for targeted groups of pupils to ensure that those pupils are engage with the education system. The focus will be to strengthen school leadership commitment, early intervention, tailored support and collaboration and engagement, underpinned by the sharing of best practice, to ensure that fewer of our young people *Miss School and Miss Out*.

Summary of the Attendance Policies in Other Jurisdictions

Wales

Document:

www.gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/pupilsupport/framework/?lang=en

Summary

The role of central government is to provide guidance as to what constitutes an effective Attendance Policy.

Schools should develop an Attendance Policy with emphasis on the specific circumstances eg the age of the pupil(s), level of parental interest or engagement, geographical location, and local and family-specific social/economic circumstances. When developing a policy schools should consult with stakeholders (staff, parents, Board of Governors, pupils, etc). The policy should allow both for the investigation and analysis of underlying issues/themes (to help improve the policy) and set out strategies for the way issues are to be dealt with. Maximum use should be made of electronic attendance records when investigating issues such as identifying and/or examining patterning in attendance data.

Parents are ultimately responsible for the attendance of their child(ren) and so their engagement is crucial, both at the school-policy development stage and in the solution to the specific needs of their children.

Scotland

Document:

www.gov.scot/resource/doc/294630/0091104.pdf

Summary

Like Wales, central government in Scotland provides advice to parents on why attendance matters and what's available to them by way of support. In this way, it emphasises that attendance is a parental responsibility, but that assistance for parents can be provided. A variety of information is available, including a booklet which provides parents with a description of the level of support that a child is entitled to.

England

Document:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/361008/Advice_on_school_attendance_sept_2014.pdf

Summary

Central government in England was the most specific of the UK regions in setting out that it was providing non-statutory advice to schools and local authorities which was developed to help them maintain high levels of attendance and plan the school day and year. The document also provides information about the interventions available to address pupils' poor attendance and behaviour at school and advises that the guidance should be read alongside the statutory guidance on parental measures for school attendance and behaviour.

The guidance is clearly aimed at Local Authorities, schools (including BoG) and parents.

Ireland

Document:

www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/primary_and_post_primary_education/attendance_and_discipline_in_schools/school_attendance.html

Summary

The emphasis is placed on the legislation and parental responsibility when parents elect to send their child(ren) to school. The document then sets out that it is the Child and Family Agency's responsibility to ensure that every pupil attends school regularly. The Agency's emphasis is on helping schools, families and children rather than imposing penalties for non-attendance at school. It employs educational welfare officers at local level throughout the country to provide support and advice to parents and schools and to follow up on absences from school. They also help to co-ordinate all policies concerning attendance and educational welfare.

New Zealand

Document:

www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Managing-your-school/Guides-for-managing-your-school/Understanding-attendance

Summary

The practice in New Zealand is that central government provides (non-statutory) guidance to Boards of Governors and schools which are expected to make the appropriate interventions supported by facilities such as electronic attendance monitoring.

Canada

Document:

www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/reports/attendance/school_attendance_final.pdf

Summary

The document is an operationally focused document, unlike those previously considered. It reflects more of the on-the-ground approach taken by a "local authority" (Manitoba).

**Improving Pupil
Attendance Strategy**