



Department
for Education

Consultation

Launch Date 1 November 2012
Respond by 13 December 2012
Ref: Department for Education

Department for Education advice on school attendance matters

The purpose of this consultation is to gather views on revised guidance that has been consolidated into one document relating to: pupil registers and attendance codes; the school day and year; and statutory guidance on education-related parenting contracts, parenting orders and penalty notices. This guidance document is aimed at governing bodies, head teachers, school staff, police officers, local authority officers and parents.

Department for Education advice on school attendance matters

A Consultation

- To** Governing bodies, head teachers, school staff, local authority officers and parent organisations.
- Issued** 1 November 2012
- Enquiries To** If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the policy lead, Ade Alao at:
SchoolAttendance.CONSULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

Contact Details

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the Public communications Unit by e-mail: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk

or by telephone: 0370 000 2288.

1 Executive Summary

1.1 **The Government is determined to improve school attendance and ensure schools tackle all forms of absence because there is clear evidence that any absence from school can and does impact on children's attainment.**

This document, issued for consultation, aims to provide clear and concise guidance on the legal framework for promoting attendance.

Schools are required to maintain an accurate attendance register and must follow up all unexpected absences.

Maintained schools are required to meet for a minimum of 380 sessions (190 days). Governing bodies determine the length of the school day and sessions.

By law, parents whose children are of compulsory school age (5-16) and registered at school are responsible for ensuring their children attend school regularly. If they fail to do so there are a range of measures available that schools can use - parenting contracts, parenting orders and penalty notices. As a last resort local authorities can prosecute parents.

We are asking for feedback on how clear and helpful the guidance is, and whether any other advice should be included.

2 Background and Context

2.1 The Government wants pupils in England to leave school with the qualifications and skills they need to become successful adults. There are clear and tangible benefits for pupils who are registered at school to attend regularly. Poor attendance can disrupt pupils learning and mean that they fall behind their peers. Frequent absence from school places pupils at a significant disadvantage academically - there is clear evidence of a link between poor attendance at school and low levels of achievement:

- Of pupils who miss more than 50 per cent of school sessions, only six per cent manage to achieve five A* to C GCSEs including English and maths.
- Of pupils who miss between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of school sessions, only 39 per cent manage to achieve five A* to Cs including English and maths.
- Of pupils who miss less than five per cent of school sessions, 71 per cent achieve five A* to Cs including English and maths.

2.2 Attendance: Persistent absence is a serious problem for pupils. Much of the work children miss when they are off school is never made up, leaving these pupils at a considerable disadvantage for the remainder of their school career. The Department has changed the definition of persistent absence to deal with the reality of pupil absenteeism in schools and its impact on their learning. The threshold at which a pupil is defined as persistently absent has been reduced to 15 per cent, down from 20 per cent. Some schools tend to take action to intervene when pupils near the persistent absent threshold, but nearing 20 per cent is too late. Lowering the threshold will ensure that schools take action sooner to deal with absence. The Government will look at the possibility of further lowering the threshold over time.

2.3 School day and year: All maintained schools and non maintained special schools must open to educate their pupils for at least 380 half-day sessions (190 days) in each school year, unless this is reduced by Parliament. All schools are free to decide how long their school day should be. The law requires the school day to be divided into two sessions with a break in between. There is no legal requirement regarding the length of the break, or the two sessions.

2.4 The Government wants to give teachers and heads more power over how they run their schools. The Government believes that all schools should be able to vary their school day to benefit their pupils. Since September 2011 all local authority maintained schools have been free to change their session times without having to follow a nationally prescribed process. Academies already benefited from this freedom.

- 2.5 Parental Responsibility Measures: Parents have a role to play in their children's education and must ensure their school registered children regularly attend school. The parenting measures provide a balance of support (parenting contracts and orders) and sanctions (penalty notices and prosecutions) where a pupil's attendance and behaviour at school becomes problematic. The Government expects schools and local authorities to use these measures to support and challenge parents where necessary.

3 The Proposal

- 3.1 The purpose of this consultation is to gather the views of people involved in improving children's attendance at school, including: governing bodies, head teachers, school staff, local authority officers and parents. We want to ensure that this guidance document, which outlines in one place the Government's approach to school attendance and the use of parental responsibility measures, meets our objective. This is to provide clear and concise advice to help schools and local authorities maintain good attendance amongst pupils, plan the school day and year and to understand and use their legal measures to address pupils' poor attendance and behaviour at school.
- 3.2 We know that the consultation period we have allowed for people to comment on this new guidance is relatively short. This is because we want to be able to consider the responses and then publish the final guidance in time for the beginning of the spring term. We hope those who wish to comment will be able to do so in the time: the questions are straightforward and the guidance doesn't incorporate any new policy proposals.

4 How To Respond

- 4.1 You can respond to the consultation by completing the response form and emailing it to: SchoolAttendance.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

or by downloading a response form which should be completed and sent to:

Juliette Duah
Behaviour and Attendance in Schools Division
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

5 Additional Copies

- 5.1 Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from the Department for Education e-consultation website at: www.education.gov.uk/consultations/

6 Plans for making results public

- 6.1 We will attempt to incorporate your comments where possible. Please note that it will not always be possible to incorporate all your comments. A summary of the results of the consultation and the Department's response will be published on the DfE e-consultation website in spring 2013.