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

Subject: **Attendance Guidance & Absence Recording By Schools – Circular 2023/11**	**Circular Number: 2023/11** **Date of Issue: 12 January 2024** **Date effective from: 15 January 2024**

Audience: • Principals and Boards of Governors of all primary, post-primary grant-aided schools , special schools and EOTAS settings • Education Authority; • Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; • Governing Bodies Association; • Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; • Independent Schools; • Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; and • Controlled Schools Support Council.	**Governor Awareness:** Essential
Summary of Contents: This Circular provides guidance to schools on managing pupil attendance. It has been updated in January 2024 to add additional text in relation to the use of Code ! "No Attendance Required" (page 22) for pupils who are Asylum Seekers and Refugees (ASRs). All new content has been highlighted in red for ease of identifying changes.	**Status of Contents:** Action Required Information for Schools **Related Documents:** Circular 2013/09 Circular 2016/22 Circular 2017/14 Circular 2018/12
Enquiries: Any enquiries about the contents of this Circular should be addressed to: Dale Heaney Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team Department of Education Rathgael House 43 Balloo Road Bangor BT19 7PR	**Superseded Documents:** Circular 2022/07 **DENI Website:** www.education-ni.gov.uk E-mail:**attendance@education-ni.gov.uk**

Introduction

1. This Circular provides guidance to schools on managing pupil attendance and should be read in conjunction with Circular 2016/22 'Guidance on the

Enrolment Status of Pupils, including those subject to SEN and EOTAS Referrals, using Dual Registration'.

Impact of Absence Tiers in 2022/23 Academic Year

2. The Department introduced new guidance to schools in September 2022 regarding the use of Absence Tiers. As you will see below, there have been positive signs of improvement in attendance between 2021/22 and 2022/23 however there remained approximately 96k pupils with chronic or severe chronic attendance by 30 June 2023. This is 18,500 less pupils than in the 2021/22 academic year.

September 2022 to June 2023

School Type	Regular Perc (Absence 0% to 4.99%)	At Risk Perc (Absence 5% - 9.99%)	Chronic Perc (Absence 10% - 19.99%)	Severe Chronic Perc (Absence 20%+)
Primary	45.7%	30.5%	17.9%	5.9%
Secondary	29.8%	27.6%	25.6%	17.0%
Special	27.4%	26.7%	25.2%	20.7%
Grammar	50.4%	30.0%	15.2%	4.4%
Total	41.9%	29.5%	19.6%	9.0%
Total number of pupils	142,271	100,041	66,473	30,344

September 2021 to June 2022

School Type	Regular Perc (Absence 0% to 4.99%)	At Risk Perc (Absence 5% - 9.99%)	Chronic Perc (Absence 10% - 19.99%)	Severe Chronic Perc (Absence 20%+)
Primary	36.3%	34.2%	22.5%	7.1%
Secondary	24.5%	28.1%	28.8%	18.7%
Special	20.5%	26.0%	28.6%	24.9%
Grammar	37.2%	35.4%	21.4%	6.0%
Total	33.0%	32.7%	24.0%	10.3%
Total number of pupils	111,110	109,859	80,755	34,615

3. Compared with 2021/22, there was:
   - an 8.9% point increase in regular attendance;
   - a 3.2% point decrease in 'at risk' attendance;
   - a 4.4% point decrease in chronic attendance; and
   - a 1.3% point decrease in severe chronic attendance

4. While these improvements are to be welcomed, there remains a considerable amount of work to do, both in school and outside school, to address pupil absence levels and consequently, attendance should remain a priority for all settings.

5. A histogram demonstrating pupil absence by month in 2022/23 is available at Annex D. The following summary of the main reasons for absence from school are provided for information.

Main Reasons for Absence (2021/22) – Percentage of total half days[1]

Absence Reason	Primary	Post-Primary	Special
Authorised Absences			
Code I - Illness (excluding Covid-19 codes)	3.7%	4.2%	5.8%
Unauthorised Absences			
Code D - No Reason Provided, Code G - Family Holiday Not Agreed or Code H - Other)	2.3%	3.9%	4.4%
Total Absence	**8.4%**	**11.0%**	**15.6%**

Recording pupil attendance

6. Attendance or absence of pupils should be recorded at the beginning of the morning and afternoon registration sessions using the C2k codes detailed in Appendix B. Information recorded by schools is published by the Department.

7. Care should be taken in how pupil absences are recorded and schools must ensure that the reasons for pupils' absences are followed-up with parents / carers within 5 days. Schools may wish to consider using a notification form for completion by parents/carers when their child returns to school or home learning following an absence. A suggested template can be downloaded from the Department's website at: www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/absence-notification-form

Referrals to the Education Welfare Service (EWS)

8. If a school is concerned about a pupil's pattern of attendance and/or if and there is a cause for concern, consultation with the designated Education Welfare Officer must be undertaken. Referrals to EWS (EA) will be agreed in accordance with Partnership Agreements. The EWS will be monitoring pupil absences at school level during audits which will also identify those pupils who require support.

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[1] Source: Statistics and Research Bulletin 2021/22

Removal of pupils' names from the register

9. A pupil's name may be removed from a school's register **only** in the following circumstances:

	Reason for Removal	Date of Removal
i.	Confirmation that pupil is registered at another school in Northern Ireland	Day of last attendance
ii.	Departure from Northern Ireland	Day of last attendance
iii.	Expulsion	Day of expulsion
iv.	Death	Day of death
v.	Leaves school after having completed his/her compulsory education	Day of last attendance
vi.	Parent/carer advises that child is being removed under Regulation 6(2) of The Registration and Attendance of Pupils Regulations (NI) 1974 [No. 78], for example elective home education.	Day of last attendance

10. For child protection purposes, **it is essential** that an SA1 form is completed **where a parent is opting for elective home education**, the original SA1 form must be retained by the school, a copy must be sent to the parents and a final copy submitted to the Education Authority by email to ehe@eani.org.uk

    In all other scenarios where an SA1 form is being completed, the above process must be followed except the final copy should be submitted to SA1Notifications@eani.org.uk

    In situations where parental contact has not been possible or has been unsuccessful, schools should maintain and submit a record of all attempts made along with the completed SA1 form.

11. The Department of Education and the Education Authority are aware that schools may not always be completing these forms, despite it being a legal requirement to do so

12. In cases where it has been discovered that forms are not being completed, the Chair of the relevant Board of Governors will be notified as well as a copy of this guidance.

13. It is important that a school engages with the Education Authority before removing a pupil from its register.

14. Where a parent has indicated that they are considering elective home education, schools must constructively engage in discussion about the implications of making this choice, including the potential impact on examinations options where relevant. Schools should always be cognisant of the legal framework and parental rights.

15. Parents must be made aware of their legal duty to ensure that their child receives a suitable efficient full time education. Parents must also be informed that if they choose to de-register their child from school, it may not be possible to re-register them again at the same school.

16. The Education Authority has guidelines in respect of Elective Home Education and parents who are considering this option must be presented with a copy for their information. Copies can be downloaded from the Education Authority's website via: Guidelines for Elective Home Education

Retention of Records

17. All schools must continue to hold copies of pupil attendance records and pupil registration records for not less than ten years from the date on which the register ceased to be used. This can be in the form of a printed version of the data held on the system or alternatively the documentation can be retained electronically. Paper copies of such information may be required for purposes of verification, for example audit of pupil numbers and may also include notes from parents to explain a period of pupil absence.

Absences during term time

18. Missing school (either face-to-face or virtual learning at home) at any time is detrimental to a child's education therefore family holidays or other appointments e.g. doctor or dentist should be arranged, where possible, outside school hours. Schools must discourage holidays during term time as this can have a significant impact on pupils' learning. Family holidays taken during term time, which have not been agreed, will be categorised as an unauthorised absence.

Study Leave

19. It should be noted that Study leave (Code S) should be applied only to **public examination** candidates during the examination timetable, or in the event of any cancellation of examinations to facilitate study for those pupils in Years 12 to 14 completing alternative qualification assessments.

20. Study leave **should not be used for** internal examinations, for extended periods or in advance of the commencement of the examination timetable.

21. Study leave should only be granted, using this criterion, and is at the discretion of the school. The Department is continuing to monitor the use of the study leave code and will address any misuse.

22. Decisions on study leave should be made by senior management and it is recommended that schools using study leave have a written policy on such leave to ensure consistency and provide clarity for parents/carers.

23. It is considered good practice to provide parents/carers with a **minimum notice of one week** that study leave is being provided to such pupils.

Exceptional closure (whole day closure) – used for unexpected / unplanned for events

24. Exceptional closures should only be used when the school has been granted permission by the Department of Education. The Department will consider an application for a reduction in the days on which a school is in operation to take account of specific exceptional circumstances where the closing of the school is outside the control of the school authorities. Schools must not use this code unless they have applied and been granted permission to take an exceptional closure day/s by the Department's Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team (see contact details below).

25. Schools must first register to use the application. Should you have any difficulties in accessing this application, please contact the Department by email at attendance@education-ni.gov.uk.

26. Applications should be submitted online at: http://apps.education-ni.gov.uk/appExclos/default.aspx

27. Circular 2020/09 refers and can be accessed at: Circular 2020/09 - School optional and exceptional closures

28. Examples of exceptional closures are:

- Flooding or burst pipes at the school;
- Electricity failure;
- Damage to school;
- Severe weather conditions e.g. heavy snowfall;
- The death of a teacher or pupil at the school;
- The only exception to an exceptional closure being unexpected is when a school is being used as a polling station for parliamentary/local government elections.

Failure to meet all the protocols may result in the exceptional closure being refused.

29. Exceptional Closures require approval from DE. Schools must also record any exceptional closure days in the SIMS Attendance / Lesson Monitor module. Use Information Sheet EN083 on C2k Exchange to update the school closures page on the NIDirect website.

Reduced Timetable for a pupil

30. Schools have on occasion seen the need to reduce the time pupils are in attendance in school for various reasons such as emotional, behavioural and welfare reasons under SEN or phased return after a long illness. Pupils should only be excepted from the statutory curriculum (reduced timetable) and assessment requirements on a temporary basis if the school has carried out the appropriate procedures outlined in the Education (Curriculum) (Temporary Exemptions) Regulations (NI) 1990.

See link: Temporary Exemptions from the Statutory Curriculum and Assessments provisions for Individual Pupils

In instances such as those referred to above, the pupil in question should have a Code ! applied when absent.

Industrial Action

31. Code ! Must be used for the following:

- If the whole school cannot operate for a session(s) i.e. am, pm or both due to strike action;

- For groups of pupils. In this case some of the school is affected, whereby certain classes or year groups can't be covered, and parents/carers are asked not to send their children in those classes or year groups to school. The code ! could be used for am, pm or both sessions; and

- For pupils unable to get to school e.g. due to strike action affecting their normal mode of transport.

Special Schools closure in event of Nurses Industrial Action

32. Guidance on Exceptional Closures has been updated in light of unprecedented industrial action by nursing staff which took place in

December 2019 / January 2020 which led to a decision by some Special Schools to close.

33. Please note that in the case of children absent from school due to any other reason, parents/carers deciding themselves not to send the children to school due to the strike action, normal action should be taken to establish the reason for non-attendance and the appropriate code used.

Extended Leave

34. Code "J" has been in place since September 2018 with the aim of meeting the needs of our increasingly diverse population. This "Extended Leave" code allows pupils, for a limited period only), to travel outside Northern Ireland without their attendance levels being adversely affected. Family holidays either agreed or not agreed are **not** to be coded using this code. The code may be used for the following purposes:
    - Short-term parental placement/employment outside the UK
    - A need to leave Northern Ireland for a specific complex family need such as:
        - death of a relative;
        - care for a sick relative;
        - sibling or parent receiving medical treatment outside NI; or
        - attend to immigration matters.

35. For this code to be used, the family concerned must make an application to the school, outlining the reasons for the request and the proposed period of extended leave. Each request should be considered on an individual basis, taking into account the circumstances for which leave is sought, the pupil's attendance (and attainment) to date, previous similar requests and whether or not the pupil's specific needs will be met (both personally and academically) during the proposed absence.

36. The Department will require the following documentation to be provided in support of applications where appropriate:
- An email or letter from the parent's employer confirming the dates and location of placement/employment outside the UK
- An email or letter from the hospital or clinic confirming appointment details for the individual receiving medical treatment outside Northern Ireland
- An email or letter confirming appointment details at either a passport office or a visa application centre outside Northern Ireland – alternatively a photocopy of the renewed documentation will suffice.

37. If there is a failure to provide the required documentation then schools should advise the parent accordingly and should determine which other codes would be most appropriate, These can include:
    a. Code G – Family Holiday Not Agreed;

        b. Code H – Other Absence.

38. The school should ensure it is content with the information provided by the child's parent(s)/carer(s) before the template is completed (see link: http://bit.ly/2q54tZ1).

39. All applications along with supporting documentation must be sent to the Department of Education via email at attendance@education-ni.gov.uk for consideration and approval **before the absence is recorded on SIMS**. Schools should retain a copy of this supporting documentation for their records. **Schools should not record an absence as Code "J " without the prior approval of the Department.** Incidents where this code has been used without such approval will be challenged and if required brought to the attention of the Education Welfare Service, Education and Training Inspectorate and Board of Governors.

40. **The Department will delete all supporting documentation upon successful verification.**

Attendance Returns

41. Schools should ensure that all attendance data is updated on a daily basis in order to facilitate the running of attendance reports during 2023/24 academic year. Missing marks will be monitored on a monthly basis and shared with to Education Welfare Service and Education Training Inspectorate.

42. Attendance data must be returned as part of the annual School Census and the "return a hard copy" check box should not be checked.

43. The Department may on occasion, contact schools to follow-up on any issues which arise during the year.

Checklist to help schools manage and improve attendance

1. Ensure you have a School's Attendance Policy and this it is up to date. A sample policy is available here.

2. Board of Governors should know their roles & responsibilities regarding attendance.

3. Have a Dedicated Attendance person within the school.

4. Strong monitoring system in place, which is overseen by Board of Governors.

5. Set time for regular communication with EWO, in line with their Partnership Agreement with the Education Welfare Service

6. Schools could consider an Incentive system for pupils to encourage regular attendance.

7. Early intervention is key and there should be ongoing engagement with pupils, parents/carers & teachers regarding attendance.

8. Schools should have a strong pastoral care system in place to address any issues early.

9. Measures to improve and sharing of good practice, such as contact with similar schools who have high attendance levels to examine what measures they have put in place.

10. Highlight the link between attendance and attainment – leaflets in various languages

11. Schools may also wish to issue links to parents and pupils highlighting some of the advertising campaigns and key messages that the Department has published:
- Give your child a helping hand
- Miss School Miss Out
- Try and Stop Me

ONLINE FORMS

The following forms are all available from the Department of Education website:

Sample Pupil Attendance Policy

This document serves as a template to assist with the creation of an effective pupil attendance policy

Absence Notification Form

This is a sample form which must be completed for each period of pupil absence and returned to the school immediately - https://bit.ly/3kAb0mo

<u>Extended Leave Application *</u>

Previously application forms had to be printed and completed by hand. A new editable pdf application form is now available.

Please use the following procedure:

1. Download the form from the following link: http://bit.ly/2q54tZ1 and save to your own device.
2. Complete all sections of the form and save.
3. Submit completed form along with any required supporting documentation to: attendance@education-ni.gov.uk

Frequently Asked Questions

A list of frequently asked questions is available to download from the DE website.

ABSENCE CODES

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

January 2024

ABSENCE CODES: GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

Note: the descriptions below may be different to that on SIMS. This is to facilitate greater discretion when selecting the correct code. Please refer to page 13-26 for clarity.

A3 Summary of Attendance Codes

Attendance and Absence Codes

The attendance codes, a brief explanation of each and some examples can be found in this section. The codes for 'present', 'attendance not required', 'authorised absence' and 'unauthorised absence' have been grouped together for ease of reference.

Present codes:

Codes / \: Present

/ = AM
\ = PM

These codes should be used when a pupil is present during both/either of the registrations at AM or PM. If a pupil leaves the school premises after registration he/she would still be counted as present for statistical purposes, although schools should have a system in place to identify that a pupil has left during a session.

Please note if a pupil leaves after registration without an appropriate reason their present code may be changed to unauthorised absence using either code D or H.

For health and safety reasons, schools need to be aware of the whereabouts of all pupils, particularly those leaving or arriving on the premises during a session.

Dual Registration

This is when a pupil is registered in one school and attends another school. The two schools are categorized as:
1. Main school – where they are originally enrolled; and
2. Subsidiary school – where they have been referred to and are attending for purposes identified in codes 1 - 8.

The Main school is required to record attendance for the sessions when the pupil is attending their school and the Subsidiary school using the appropriate code. **The Main school should make arrangements with the Subsidiary school to inform them if the pupil has or has not attended.** The Subsidiary school should also record the attendance accordingly. Attendance statistics for publication will be taken from the Main schools data in the Census returns.

Present / Approved Educational Activity Codes

Code L*: Late (before registration closed)

This code should be used when a pupil arrives late to school but before registration is closed. Schools should actively discourage late arrival. Schools should identify in their Attendance Policy how long registers are kept open. In circumstances such as bad weather or public transport difficulties, schools may keep the register open for a longer period.

If a pupil persistently arrives late before registration the school should address this with the parent/carer.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code P*: Approved Activity

This code should only be in the event of a pupil attending an activity which the school deem has a direct correlation to their ongoing academic or educational progression.

This code may also be used when a pupil is participating in or attending an approved sporting or other activity such as participation as an amateur in a school-organised sport or as a representative at county, provincial or international level.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code S*: Study Leave

This code should be used for study leave as agreed by the school.

Study Leave is unsupervised time out of school and should only be applied to public examination candidates, in Years 11 to 14, during the examination period.

This code can also be used in the event of any cancellation of examinations to facilitate study for those pupils in **Years 12 to 14** completing alternative qualification assessments.

Study Leave should not be granted to pupils not involved in public examinations. (Public examinations are those which are authenticated or awarded by an external organisation, and not internally by the school. The main examples of such examinations include GCSEs, A Levels and BTECs).

Supervised study or revision classes provided in school should be coded Present **/** (am) or **** (pm).

Study leave should not be used in advance of the commencement of the examination timetable.

Decisions on study leave should be made by senior management and should be addressed in the school's Attendance Policy to ensure consistency and provide clarity for parents/carers.

It is considered good practice to provide parents/carers with a **minimum notice of one week** that study leave is being awarded to such pupils.

*Please note there is no requirement for schools to grant study leave to pupils and therefore is at the discretion of the school.

Code V*: Educational Visit / Examination

This code should be used for pupils attending school-organised trips and visits, including residential trips. It may also be used for other trips of a strictly educational nature, which are arranged by external organisations, provided the school deem has a direct correlation to their ongoing academic attainment or educational advancement.

Code V can also be used for academic interview. The school should be satisfied that the interview is linked to future education such as Further & Higher Education.

This code can also be used in the event of a pupil attending a recognised examination where a correlation can be made between it and ongoing educational attainment / progression.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code W*: Work experience

This code should be used for pupils on supervised work experience. Work experience should be arranged by or in conjunction with the school. Schools must ensure that they check on the attendance of the pupil at the work experience placement and mark the register using the appropriate code.

Code W can also be used for a job interview. The school should be satisfied that the interview is linked to job prospects.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code 1: Community Providers / EOTAS (organised by the EA) (Post Primary)

This code should be used for a registered pupil who is attending a Community Provider and/or an EOTAS setting by approval of the Education Authority. This code is for pupils at Key Stage 3 & 4 only. A pupil's placement in either a Community Provider and/or an EOTAS provision must be arranged through the Education Authority.

When a pupil in either Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4 has been referred to an EOTAS provider, it is the role of the main school to initially record pupils as Code 1. The Main school should make arrangements with the EOTAS facility to inform them if the pupil has or has not attended. The Main school should then update the attendance record accordingly.

Code 2: Education Teaching Arrangement (ETA) or Hospital tuition (organised by the EA)

This code should be used for a registered pupil who is currently being educated off-site by receiving education by an ETA or in hospital under arrangements approved by the Education Authority. Schools should make every effort to arrange ETA/Hospital tuition for School Aged Mothers during the period of the child's birth. **The Main school should make arrangements with the ETA provider/ hospital school to inform them if the pupil has or has not attended. The Main school should record the attendance accordingly.**

Code 4: Pupil Referral Unit (Primary)

This code should be used for a registered pupil who is currently being educated off-site at a Pupil Referral Unit as organised and approved by the Education Authority. **The Main school should make arrangements with the unit to inform them if the pupil has or has not attended. The Main school should record the attendance accordingly.**

Code 5: Another mainstream school (under Entitlement Framework – EF)

This code should be used for a registered pupil who is currently being educated off-site at another mainstream school (under the EF). The pupil may be attending days or sessions at other post primary schools for selected courses through arrangements made under the EF.
The Main school should make arrangements with the EF school to inform them if the pupil has or has not attended. The Main school should record the attendance accordingly.

Code 6: Training Organisation (under Entitlement Framework – EF)

This code should be used for a registered pupil who is currently being educated off-site at another training organisation (under EF). Pupils attending days or sessions at a training organisation through arrangements made under the EF.
The Main school should make arrangements with the EF organisation to inform them if the pupil has or has not attended. The Main school should record the attendance accordingly.

Code 7: Further Education (FE) College (under Entitlement Framework – EF)

This code should be used for a registered pupil who is currently being educated off-site at a FE College (under the arrangements of EF).
The Main school should make arrangements with the EF organisation to inform them if the pupil has or has not attended. The Main school should record the attendance accordingly.

Code 8: Intensive Support Learning Unit

This code should be only be used for a registered pupil who is currently being educated off-site at an Intensive Support Learning Unit (ISLU).
The Main school should make arrangements with the ISLU to inform them if the pupil has or has not attended. The Main school should record the attendance accordingly.

Code 9: CAMHS / Mental Health Support

This code should be used for a registered pupil who is currently either being educated off-site whilst an in-patient or whilst they are attending sessions at a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) facility.

Code 9 can also be used for a pupil attending other support systems organised by the Education Authority.

The Main school should make arrangements with the CAMHS facility to inform them if the pupil has or has not attended. The Main school should record the attendance accordingly.

Covid-19 – Approved Activity Codes (reflect current health guidance and will be kept under review). The use of these codes are specifically for Covid-19 related circumstances. These codes will be closely monitored as we do not expect there to be a significant level of usage.

Code [- Left Open Square Bracket - Covid-19 Self-Isolating & Learning from Home

This code should be used in situations where a pupil is required to self-isolate and should only be used until a Covid-19 test result is returned and the outcome is known.

This code should only be used where there is prior agreement between the parent/carer and the school. There should be evidence that learning is taking place at home – this does not discount from attendance record (can be used for multiple periods of isolation as necessary). This code may also be used in **exceptional circumstances** where medical evidence is provided to support the child abstaining from school. **If a pupil refuses to take a Covid-19 test they must self-isolate for the full period and be marked as CODE H and include a note to that effect on SIMS, e.g. refused to take Covid-19 test.**

Code] - Right Closed Square Bracket - Covid-19 Learning from Home - Social Distancing

This code should be used in situations where pupils are not required to attend physically at school due to social distancing rules, imposed by DE or school. E.g. pupils required to attend on certain days or for a certain number of hours per day (not to be used if pupils are self-isolating). This decision must be informed by health professional advice.

Attendance not required codes

Code J*: Extended Leave

[This code should only be used following approval from DE.]

Extended leave is not to be considered the same as a family holiday and should only be considered in circumstances such as:
- Short-term parental placement/employment outside the UK
- Family required to leave Northern Ireland for a specific complex family need such as:
  - death of a relative;
  - to care for a sick relative;
  - sibling or parent receiving medical treatment outside Northern Ireland;
  - attend to immigration matters.

The school should ensure they are content with the information provided by the parents/carers before they record the absence and the appropriate template (see Annex A) has been completed.

The Department will require the following documentation to be provided in support of applications where appropriate:

- An email or letter from the parent's employer confirming the dates and location of placement/employment outside the UK
- An email or letter from the hospital or clinic confirming appointment details for the individual receiving medical treatment outside Northern Ireland
- An email or letter confirming appointment details at either a passport office or a visa application centre in a country outside Northern Ireland – alternatively a photocopy of the renewed documentation will suffice.

If there is a failure to provide the required documentation then schools should advise the parent accordingly and should determine which other codes would be most appropriate, These can range from:

> a. Code G – Family Holiday Not Agreed;
> b. Code H – Other Absence.

The school should ensure it is content with the information provided by the child's parent(s)/carer(s) before the template is completed (see link: http://bit.ly/2q54tZ1).

All approved applications along with supporting documentation must be sent to the Department of Education via email at attendance@education-ni.gov.uk before the absence is recorded on SIMS.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code X: Only staff should attend

This code should be used for days on which teachers are in school; however, there is no requirement for pupils to attend. For example, staff training, INSET or school development days.

Code X can be used for part session, i.e. AM or PM.

Code Y*: Exceptional closure – used for unexpected / unplanned for events

This code should be used when the school has been granted permission by the Department of Education for an exceptional closure day. The Department will consider an application for a reduction in the days on which a school is in operation to take account of specific exceptional circumstances where the closing of the school is outside the control of the school authorities. Schools must not use this code unless they have applied and been granted permission to take an exceptional closure day/s by the Department's Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team at attendance@education-ni.gov.uk. Circular 2020/09 refers and can be accessed here.

Examples of specific exceptional closures are:

- The death of a teacher or pupil at the school;
- Flooding or burst pipes at the school;
- Electricity failure;
- Damage to school;
- Severe weather conditions e.g. heavy snowfall; or
- The only exception to an exceptional closure being unexpected is when a school is being used as a polling station for parliamentary/local government elections.

Failure to seek permission may result in the exceptional closure being refused.

Partial Closure

Exceptional conditions mean that part of the school is closed due to an unavoidable cause e.g. a school may operate on 2 sites with only 1 site affected.

If part of a school is closed Code Y can be used for those year groups affected **only**.

(Note: In the SIMS Attendance Module this code is displayed as Exceptional Circumstances - For all other exceptional circumstances Code O should be used)

Code #: Holiday for all

This code should be used for school vacations where pupils and staff are not required to attend. Examples are:

- Between terms;
- Half terms;
- Occasional days when the whole school (including staff) are on holiday; or
- Weekends.

Note: Schools may wish to check that this code is applied on SIMS from the 1 August until the first day of the new academic year. If this code is not applied then the period of time between 1 August and the first day of the new term will otherwise show as missing marks.

Code !*: No attendance required

This code should be used where attendance of a pupil or some pupils may not be required in either the morning or afternoon session. It may also be used for:
- Induction days e.g. Year 8;
- A pupil who is unable to attend due to adverse weather or EA provided transport failure;
- When school is closed for partial day due to unforeseen issues such as power failure;
- A pupil is dual registered and this code should be used by the Subsidiary school when they are not required to attend that school. It will be the responsibility of the main school to record the attendance;
- Pupils who may, for specific reasons, have been excepted from the statutory curriculum (reduced timetable) and assessment requirements on a temporary basis (as outlined in DE Circular 1990/45: Temporary Exceptions from the Statutory Curriculum and Assessment Provisions for Individual Pupils;
- A pupil is ordered to attend court;
- Industrial action; or
- For pupils defined as "Asylum Seekers and Refugees (ASR)" who have had to move place of residence at short notice and are unable to attend school due to circumstances beyond their control. Until such times as the pupil has been formally registered in a new school, schools should continue to support the pupil through online learning and / or hard copy in line with DE Circular 2022/16. We would encourage schools to record "ASR" in the notes field of the absence where appropriate. School should review the situation after 4 weeks.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code 3: Elective Home Education

This code should be used for a registered pupil whose parents/carers have elected to educate at home and have advised the school or EA of the position. See additional advice on NI Direct here.

This code should be used from the date a parent/carer advises the Principal that they **have** decided to educate their child at home until the Principal provides a

certificate of attendance (Form S.A.1) to the parent/carer, which states the reason for removal as "elective home education". When Form S.A.1 is issued, the pupil can be removed from the General Register and there will no longer be a requirement to record their attendance. The original of this form should be held by the school and following consultation with EWS, a copy emailed to the Education Authority at ehe@eani.org.uk, a further copy given to the parents, and a leaving date entered in SIMS once all relevant aspects of SA1 have been completed. Copies of the form S.A.1 can be found at: Form SA1 – Removal of a pupil from registration.

Authorised absence codes

Code A*: Artistic Endeavour

This code should be used when a pupil is absent from school to attend an event which relates to a pupil's artistic endeavour which has not been organised through the school as part of normal school activities. However the school is content that there is a correlation between it and the pupil's ongoing educational attainment / progression.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code B*: Bereavement

This code should be used when a pupil is absent from school due to the death of a close relative. Death of a close relative would be parent/carer, sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, nephew, niece, or other relative who is a member of the household. Should the pupil have to leave the UK then please apply for use of Code J.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code C: Suspended

This code should be used for a pupil who has been suspended for a fixed period and remains on the school register.

Code F*: Family Holiday (agreed)

This code should **only** be used in very exceptional circumstances when a family holiday is judged to be important to the wellbeing and cohesion of the family, following serious or terminal illness, bereavement or other traumatic events and agreed by the school.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code I: Illness

This code should be used when parents/carers phone to say that their child is ill or when parents/carers send a letter after the period of illness to explain the child's absence. Parents/carers should be advised to notify the school as soon as possible

when a child is ill. If a pupil is present for registration but returns home because of illness, no absence need be recorded for that session. Schools should keep a record of pupils leaving or returning to school in case of an emergency.
Schools can request parents/carers to provide medical evidence to support absence on the grounds of illness, however, they are advised not to request medical certificates unnecessarily (particularly retrospective certificates), especially if the illness was not treated by a doctor at the time.

If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, schools can record the absence as 'Other Absence' (Code H) but should advise parents of its intention.
A pupil receiving medical treatment on site should be marked 'present'.

For an absence at registration due to a medical, dental or hospital appointment please see Code M for additional information.

Code M: Medical/Dental Appointments

This code should be used when a pupil is absent from registration for a medical or dental appointment. If a pupil is present for registration but has a medical appointment later, no absence need be recorded for that session. Although, for Health and Safety reasons or in case of emergency, a system must be in place to record that a pupil has either arrived at school or left the premises during the session.

If a pupil misses registration for a medical appointment, which has been notified to the school in advance, but returns to school within that session then the registration code should be changed from M to / or \ as applicable (i.e. present).

Code M should be used for the session if the school had not been notified of the appointment in advance.

Code M can be used for part session, i.e. AM or PM.

Medical appointments include:

- Attendance at a GP's surgery;

- Attendance at a dentist's surgery; or

- Hospital appointments (not a stay in hospital).

Code O*: Other exceptional circumstances

This code should be used for special occasions that have been agreed at the discretion of the school or an exceptional event outside the control of the pupil. Only exceptional occasions warrant leave of absence. Schools should consider each request individually taking the following into account:
- The nature of the event;
- Its frequency (is it a one-off, or likely to become a regular occurrence?);
- Whether or not the parent/carer gave advance notice; or

- The pupil's overall attendance pattern.

Examples might include occasions such as attending the wedding of an immediate family member or as stated below:

Young Carers

- In a genuine crisis, a school can approve absence for a child to care for a relative until other arrangements can be made.

Birth of a Child

Code O should only be used when the provision of home tuition (Code 2) is not available. Schools should provide direct support to assist pupils remaining in school wherever possible, and to return her to full-time education as soon as possible after the birth. Further information about School Age Mothers can be obtained at: https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-age-mothers-programme

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code R*: Religious observance

This code should be used when a pupil is absent to take part in or to attend any event deemed exclusively for religious observance by the religious body to which the parent/carer belong, including religious festivals.

Parent/carer should be encouraged to give advance notice.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Covid-19 Authorised Absence Codes (reflect current health guidance and will be kept under review). The use of these codes are specifically for Covid-19 related circumstances. These codes will be closely monitored as we do not expect there to be a significant level of usage.

Code (- Left Open Bracket - Covid-19 Illness Confirmed

This code must be used in situations where a pupil has tested positive for Covid-19 and includes both symptomatic and asymptomatic scenarios.

In cases where the pupil is asymptomatic, schools and parents should discuss the provision of education materials. Schools will wish to support pupils as much as possible to complete school work if they are well, however, clearly in these circumstances teachers will be continuing to teach all classes during the school day so expectations must be realistic.

Code) - Right Closed Bracket - Covid-19 Illness Suspected / Unconfirmed

This code should be used in situations where the pupil may be Covid-19 positive but this is unconfirmed. This code should only be used until a Covid-19 test result is returned and the outcome is known. **If a pupil refuses to take a Covid-19 test they must self-isolate for the full period and be marked as CODE H and include a note to that effect on SIMS, e.g. refused to take Covid-19 test.**

Unauthorised absence codes

Code D: No reason provided for absence

This code should be used when no reason has been provided for a pupil's absence 5 school days after the pupils return to school. Every effort should be made to establish the reason for a pupil's absence from school. During the absence and in the initial 5 school day period after the pupils' return, Code N (no reason yet provided for absence) may be used as a temporary code.

Code D should only be used in exceptional cases as a reason for absence should always be established.

(Note: In the SIMS Attendance Module this is displayed as – Did not provide a reason for absence.)

Code G*: Family Holiday (NOT agreed)

This code should be used for a family holiday that is not agreed by the school. Examples of reasons a school would not agree a holiday would be as follows:

- The availability of cheap holidays;
- The availability of desired accommodation;
- Poor weather experienced during school holidays;
- A holiday that overlaps the beginning or end of term;
- Where a school's prior agreement is not sought and the pupil goes on holiday; or
- If parents/carers keep a child away for longer than was agreed, any extra time should be recorded as Code G.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Code H*: Other Absence

This code should be used for other absences which are not covered by any other code and where the reason is not acceptable to the school. Examples would be:
- Un-notified illness or false claim of illness;
- Pupil's/parent's/carer's/sibling's birthday;
- Shopping;
- Having hair cut; or
- Couldn't get up.

Please note that unexplained absences should be recorded under code N (initially) and then Code D.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

If a pupil refuses to take a Covid-19 test they must self-isolate for the full period and be marked as CODE H and include a note to that effect on SIMS. E.g. refused to take Covid-19 test.

Code N: No reason yet provided for absence (temporary code)

This code is a temporary code and should be only used during a pupils' absence and in the initial 5 school day period following the pupils' return to school.

This code should be used to cover an unexplained absence on a temporary basis until the pupil returns with an explanation of their reason for absence. After 5 school days following the pupil's return to school, if no explanation for the absence has been provided, the code should be changed to Code D and every effort should be made to get a reason of absence from the parents/carers.

Code U*: Late (after registration closed)

This code should be used when a pupil arrives late to school after registration is closed with no relevant reason to code it otherwise.

For example, if a pupil arrives late (after registers have been closed) for reasons such as: they couldn't find their shoes; their school uniform was drying in the tumble dryer; their younger sibling was misbehaving etc, then code U should be used. Although, if a pupil arrives late (after registers have been closed) due to a doctor or dentist appointment, then code M would be used for the session if the school had not been notified of the appointment in advance.

Schools should actively discourage late arrival. Schools identify how long registers are kept open in their Attendance Policy. In circumstances such as bad weather or public transport difficulties, schools may keep the register open for a longer period.

*The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.

Covid-19 Unauthorised Codes (reflect current health guidance and will be kept under review). The use of these codes are specifically for Covid-19 related circumstances. These codes will be closely monitored as we do not expect there to be a significant level of usage.

Code { - Left Open Curly Bracket - Covid-19 Self-Isolating – Vulnerable Pupil or Household Member

This code should be used in situations where a pupil does not attend school due to underlying health conditions or due to health conditions of other household / family members. If a pupil is sick they should be recorded as such. This code should only be used in exceptional circumstances and where a letter from a GP or Consultant has been provided.

Code } - Right Closed Curly Bracket - Covid-19 Self-Isolating - No evidence of learning from home

No evidence of learning from home. This code should be used in situations where a pupil is required to self-isolate but is not learning from home or insufficient evidence has been provided to satisfy school. This code should only be used until a Covid-19 test result is returned and the outcome is known.

Frequently Asked Questions

A list of frequently asked questions is available to download from the DE website.

All Schools