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

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

MONITORING AND REPORTING PUPIL ATTENDANCE USING ABSENCE TIERS

Updated January 2023

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Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide additional support to schools to manage and improve pupil attendance at school. It should be read in conjunction with DE Circular 2022/07 "Attendance Guidance and Absence Recording for Schools" which is published each year at the start of the Autumn term.

2. This is not a new policy. Rather it is provided to schools to consider using on a voluntary basis as it provides an alternative way of monitoring, reporting and assessing the level of absence within a school in a more nuanced way than simply reporting a percentage present figure or percentage absent figure. We have been evaluating the use of absence tiers for some time at system level and believe that this information would be helpful to support schools in their endeavours to improve pupil attendance which has been understandably impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Attending school regularly is important for all children and young people because of the link between attendance and attainment. Regular attendance at school combined with high-quality teaching and learning ensures that pupils get the best possible outcomes from their time in compulsory education. Equally, poor attendance at school can have a negative impact on the absent pupil with potentially negative consequences in terms of their future success.

4. The "Miss School = Miss Out" Pupil Attendance Strategy, which was launched in December 2016 reflects that the schools most successful at improving attendance take a holistic approach and tailor their attendance policy to meet their own school's individual needs. These schools are proactive in the use of effective interventions for those struggling with attendance. This guidance is another tool in the steps which schools and Boards of Governors can take to address issues associated with absence from school.

5. Going to school is and should be an enjoyable experience for all pupils, there are however many reasons why some young people don't want to go to school and quite often there exists a combination of factors impacting on a young person's ability to engage in education. It is important therefore to understand and address the underlying issues when supporting children and families, for example, when children are unwell. Schools are already very good at using data to support their decision making processes and to support children and young people who may need specific support, particularly in terms of attending school regularly. We hope that this guidance helps schools in doing this and would welcome any feedback from schools on how they have improved attendance in their school so that this can be shared more widely. Please feel free to contact the Department at attendance@education-ni.gov.uk

6. Since September 2018, at DE's request, C2K have been providing DE with monthly attendance school data which provides a much more up to date picture of attendance. This monthly information is shared with colleagues in the Education Authority (EA) including the Education Welfare Service (EWS) for information to supplement their existing data sources in order to provide additional support to schools.

Present Situation and Challenges

7. The Department in partnership with the Education Authority (EA), schools and other organisations is continuing to promote the benefits of regular attendance at school and the implications of poor attendance on educational outcomes through promotional materials and the "Miss School = Miss Out" strategy. The Department published examples of good practice amongst post-primary schools in November 2018 - see The Challenge of Improving Pupil Attendance at School Case Studies paper. The ETI published 2 papers covering examples of good practice in 2016. See Part One: Attendance in Schools - ETI Good Practice Report (etini.gov.uk) and Part Two: Attendance in Schools - Case Studies | Education Training Inspectorate (etini.gov.uk). Annex B draws on the good practice identified within these reports.

8. The annual statistical bulletin rightly focuses upon levels of pupil attendance rather than levels of pupil absence. It also provides breakdowns by pupil characteristics such as gender, religion, ethnicity, children looked after and Free School Meal Entitled (FSME) pupils etc. Whilst this is understandable since we want to paint as positive a picture as possible, we know from research carried out by Cognisense[1] and Parenting NI in relation to our "Miss School. Miss Out campaign" that percentages of attendance which are 90%+ can be misinterpreted by parents as "good" when we know that that is not the case. See below.

In a survey conducted independently by Cognisense in May 2019 in response to the Department's "Miss School. Miss Out" advertising campaign, one of the questions asked was "What is good attendance?"

i. 11% thought 100% was good attendance
ii. 47% thought 95% or above was good attendance
iii. 27% thought 90% or above was good attendance
iv. 8% thought 85% or above was good attendance
v. 6% thought 80% or above was good attendance
vi. 1% thought that less than 80% was good attendance

This suggests that approximately 42% of parents do not understand that attendance below 95% would not be considered "good" attendance and significant effort is needed to change that mindset.

[1] Source: Cognisense research: May 2019

9. By way of example:

- 90% attendance means that a child is missing half a day of lessons every week.
- In a single year this would mean a child has missed four whole weeks.
- Over five years it means that a child has missed half a school year, or one and a half terms.

10. Given this general misconception, it remains 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 receives a suitable full-time education and if registered at a school, to ensure their regular attendance at school[2]. They also have a crucial role in the establishment of positive attitudes to attending school. Those parents who elect to educate their child at home also have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child receives a suitable education at home, Guidance for parents on whether or not elective home education is appropriate can be found here.

11. 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 about expectations regarding pupil 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.

12. The Department provides a number of advice leaflets in different languages which schools should find useful. See here.

13. Whilst there are many views on the purpose of education, few would disagree that education is the engine of our economy and essential preparation for adult life. We all have a responsibility to educate the next generation, introducing them to a range of knowledge, skills and positive experiences and instilling in them a love of knowledge and culture for their own sake. But education is also about the practical business of ensuring that young people receive the preparation they need to secure a good job and a fulfilling career, and have the resilience and moral character to overcome challenges and succeed.

14. 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

[2] Paragraph 3 (1) of Schedule 13 to the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1986/594/schedule/13

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 during audits which will also identify those pupils who require support. Schools should be routinely and regularly monitoring pupil attendance at individual, class, form, year group and school level. In so doing, they should be pro-actively addressing pupil absence concerns with the pupil / parent and taking steps to avoid issues escalating.

15. The impact of the pandemic is such that schools and EWS have experienced unprecedented numbers of children falling into what we refer in this guidance as "Chronic" and "Severe Chronic" attendance categories. The central role played by schools is vital in terms of tracking attendance and ensuring that every possible support is made available to pupils in conjunction with EWS. Schools should liaise with the EWS on an ongoing basis.

Attendance levels prior to and during Covid-19

16. At a system level in NI, pupil attendance tends to change very little from year to year.

Percentage of half day sessions recorded as present 2014/15 to 2020/21[3]

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Primary	95.4	95.5	95.5	94.9	95.2	94.4	95.6
Post Primary	93.4	93.5	93.3	93.3	92.9	92.4	93.4
Special	90.2	90.2	90.1	89.9	90.0	89.3	89.7

17. More recently, the impact of the pandemic has been significant. In 2021/22 AY we have seen a fall in attendance rates of circa four to five percentage points when we compare 2021/22 academic year (post-pandemic) with 2018/19 academic year (pre-pandemic).

Percentage of half day sessions recorded as present 2018/19 to 2021/22[4]

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Primary (inc prep)	95.1	94.5	95.5	91.6
Grammar (selective)	94.6	94.1	96.0	91.8
Secondary (non-selective)	91.4	90.9	92.0	87.1
Total Post Primary	**92.8**	**92.3**	**93.8**	**89.2**
Special	89.3	88.7	89.6	84.3
Total	**94.0**	**93.4**	**94.6**	**90.3**

[3] Source: Annual School Census

[4] Source: Monthly cumulative attendance data provided by C2K SIMS

18. Monthly statistics also demonstrate that beneath these headline figures, pupil absence at individual school level, pupil level and absence code level, reveals some very high levels of absence.

19. In 2019/20 AY, circa 94,000 pupils (28.9%) had less than 90% attendance at end May 2020[5]. In the 2021/22 AY, this figure rose to circa 117,000 pupils at end of May 2022[6] (35.0%) (a 6.1% point increase).

20. Whilst this is undoubtedly due to Covid-19 and its on-going impact during 2021/22, it suggests that schools, families and the community will have to continue to support our children and young people in a variety of different ways as we recover from the pandemic and its consequences.

New Absence Tiers

21. The Department of Education, has been considering how it can better present pupil absence statistics to help inform and support, schools, parents and pupils regarding the scale of the challenge and the impact which pupil absence can have on outcomes.

22. The following guidance is based on the methodology used in the USA by "AttendanceWorks" and due credit must go to that campaign for this approach.

23. Overall, school level attendance figures can often overlook pupils who may be small in number but whose individual attendance is less than we would ideally like. Research has demonstrated that reducing chronic absence goes hand in hand with cultivating positive conditions for learning. When schools provide an engaging, supportive, welcoming and responsive curriculum and learning environment, families are inclined to help their children get to school, and pupils are motivated to attend, even when there are hurdles to getting there.

24. Using a comprehensive data-driven approach, schools can engage pupils and families more effectively as well as preventing absences from accumulating before students fall behind academically. We hope that if schools use chronic absence data as a diagnostic tool to identify where preventative measures and early intervention are needed, we will help to improve attendance figures in Northern Ireland. This is increasingly important as the pandemic has the potential to continue to adversely affect pupil attendance in schools.

[5] Source: Absence Tier Report Sep 2019 to May 2020
[6] Source: Absence Tier Report Sep 2021 to Jun 2022

25. Based on the Attendance data that DE gather from SIMS each month, it is possible to calculate the numbers of pupils at system level who fall into each category. We have provided those figures at Annex A along with examples of possible interventions below.

Absence Tiers and possible interventions

26. **Tier 1a - pupils with "Regular Attendance" missing 0% - 4.9% of school (< 1 day per month). Universal strategies should be used by schools to encourage good attendance for all pupils.**

27. Possible pro-active interventions at this level may include, an engaging and supportive curriculum, emotional health and wellbeing support, a school attendance policy, regular data analysis and sharing of results with the whole school; incentives for good attendance, most improved attendance, positive re-enforcement with parents.

28. Other interventions might include:

- Measuring pupil wellbeing and attitudes to self and school.
- Monthly data shared amongst form teachers.
- Use of notice boards in staffrooms and form rooms to reinforce attendance messages.
- Ensuring that teachers are aware of attendance policy including which attendance codes to use.
- Breakfast clubs each morning; After school clubs/Homework clubs in the afternoon; one school reported to DE about its facilitated "Before school sports programme".
- Important to celebrate success, encourage and intervene early.

29. **Tier 1b - pupils "At Risk Attendance" missing 5%-9.9% (1+ day per month). Schools should be implementing more focused strategies to ensure attendance improves and pupils who need more support receive it, to avoid chronic absence.**

30. Possible interventions at this level may include, as at Tier 1a above plus analysis of data at Group, class and pupil level, including identifying any pupils for whom there may be cause for concern. This could include early "nudge" letters, texts and / or offers of support.

31. Other interventions might include:

- Attendance policy in place and is understood by all staff and pupils.

- Corridor posters - Miss School = Miss Out; in-school attendance league tables (on school notice board).
- School assemblies are typically used to show the link between attendance and success.

32. "Attendance Works" has recently published an article highlighting interventions that schools are using to address "Chronic Attendance". The text below has been modified to suit a NI context.

- **Schools need to pay special attention to emotional health and well-being**. Since the pandemic, pupils are more vulnerable emotionally. There is a need to take care of the whole child to help them feel supported and successful at school. The emphasis here is not to just consider the fact that a pupils may be chronically absent, rather to understand why that is the case and work with them before it becomes a bigger issue. DE's support for children emotional health via its Emotional Health and Well-being Framework is a valuable source of reference for schools.
- **Schools forging solid relationships with parents.** Parents engaged in school life can have a positive impact on a pupil's attendance. The Education Authority have a range of resources to support parents / carers / families. These provide schools with practical examples regarding how to engage parents.
- **Schools shifting focus from reactive to proactive approaches and moving from punitive action to restorative practices, thus getting ahead of the absence to prevent it from happening.** Pupils who are suspended from school for whatever reason will potentially be negatively impacted in terms of their learning and consequently, may be less likely to want to come back to school. There is a need to create a supportive, encouraging and stimulating learning environment for pupils through increased use of restorative practice. Work relating to "A Fair Start" report is being taken forward by the EA in this area.

33. **Tier 2 – pupils recognised with "Chronic Attendance", missing 10% - 19.9% (2-3 days per month). At this level, schools would introduce interventions such as action planning for the pupil, mentoring or personalised early outreach to the pupil. Schools should be engaging with their EWO through school audits and identifying at an early stage, children and young people experiencing school related attendance difficulties. If schools are considering a wide range of data to help inform what preventative measures would be helpful, then there is a good chance that issues can be addressed before they escalate.**

34. Possible interventions at this level may include as at Tier 1b above plus face-to-face meeting with pupil / parent; trying to establish the reasons for absence and what more can be done to support the pupil / family. Involvement with EWS may be required.

35. Other interventions might include:

- The provision of a dedicated Home/School worker where a parent engagement worker links with parents prior to the need for Education Welfare Service (EWS) involvement. In "The Challenge of Improving Pupil Attendance at School Case Studies paper" published in November 2018, this intervention was described by one school as a "nip-it-in-the-bud" intervention aimed at building positive relationships with parents and child, support with routines and linking families to other family support services.
- Home visits by a home liaison person once an absence trigger is reached.
- Advice provided by school on sleeping patterns, energy drinks, online gaming.

36. **Tier 3 - pupils recognised as "Severe Chronic Attendance", missing 20% or more of school. At this level, we recommend specific interventions implemented by EWS in conjunction with the school, which may include interagency work and / or court action.**

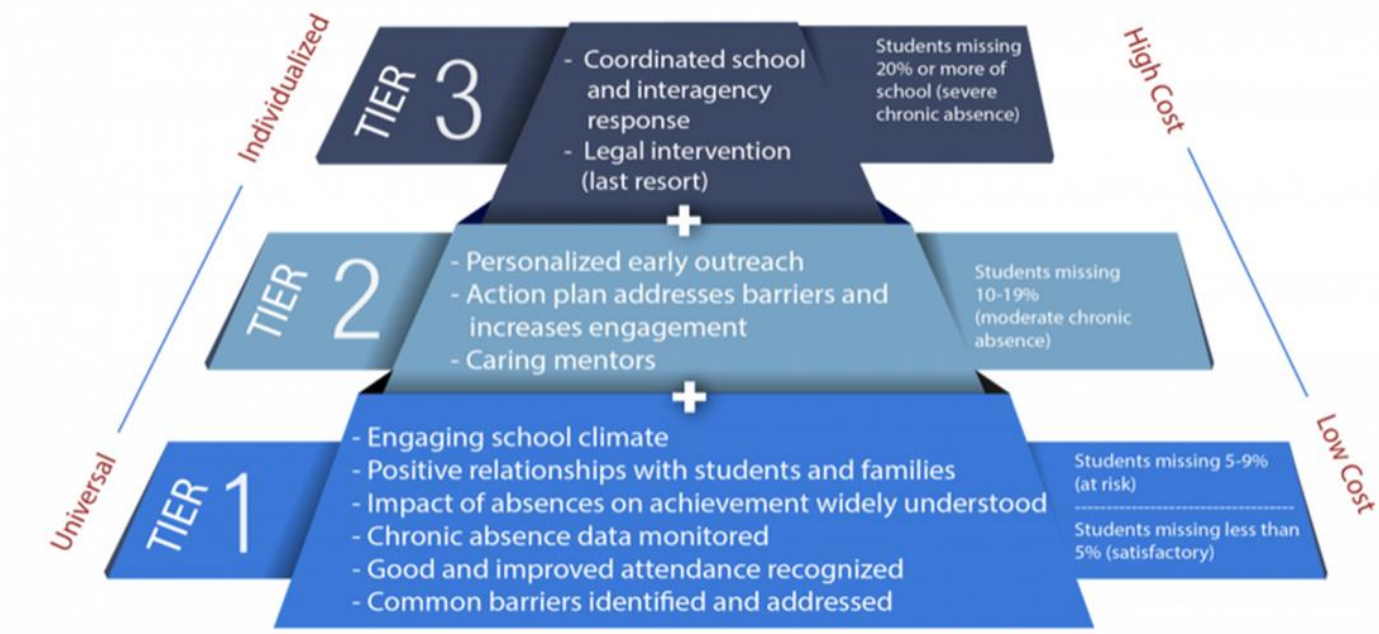
37. Possible interventions at this level would include as at Tier 2 above plus further and regular meetings with EWS, seeking support from outside agencies, home/school liaison person employed to support pupils with significant concerns, individual plans of action. Ultimately legal action may be required if no change is apparent within an agreed timeframe.

38. Other interventions might include:

- Use of social media channels to promote messages.
- Use of parent app to provide up-to-date data and reports.
- Text messages sent to parents where a pupil is missing in the morning.
- Nudge letters to parents advising on attendance.
- Parent Report comments in respect of attendance and the golden figure of 95% could be regularly communicated to parents.
- DE Attendance workshops with schools in 2017/18 identified letters sent by one school that highlighted the number of lessons missed in English, Maths, Science etc and the impact on results if poor attendance continued.
- Automated daily 'truancy calls' informing parents of non-attendance and its implications.
- Traffic light system in one school is displayed in every classroom and this is used to traffic light individual attendance.

- Recognising good attendance - award schemes for best attendance, most improved attendance; class of year competition; competition between years; individual rewards; e.g., in one school, a letter of praise was introduced for pupils who had improved their attendance by 10%.
- 'Pupil Voice' strategy created online. The pupils had the opportunity to share their views on tackling poor attendance and celebrating excellent attendance.
- In one school, 3 Heads of Year identified 3 boys each = 9 boys to work with (boys who had 85% to 95% attendance).
- In another school, meetings are held with 5 pupils from each year group every month with 86%-92% attendance and targets are set which are reviewed the next month.

Absence Tiers Summary



Reasons why regular school attendance is important

Why should we pay attention to chronic absence?

39. **Poor health and undiagnosed conditions can cause many absences and this needs to be considered in any approach to ensure that individual circumstances are taken into account**.

40. Covid-19 has had an unprecedented impact on children being able to attend school regularly. We all need to work together to support our children's learning and that means maximising opportunities for face to face learning. Even when absences are excused, missing too much school can lead children to fall behind.

Successful learners are healthier adults:

41. Showing up to school is essential to leaving school with positive outcomes and continuing in education, training or employment. Higher levels of academic achievement are associated with lower incidence of disease and longer lives for adults[7].

Why should early childhood educators care?

42. Promoting attendance is in keeping with the goal of partnering with families to prepare children for success in pre-school and beyond. Consider the following:

- **Regular attendance ensures children benefit from participating in quality early education**: Research shows that pupils who miss too many days of pre-school have weaker literacy and numeracy skills entering primary school. This is especially true for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, who gain the most when they attend but lose out more when they are absent[8].
- **A habit of attendance is a school readiness skill**: An important role of early education programmes is helping children to develop important social-emotional skills, including forming a habit of attendance. Children

[7] See: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5880718/ and https://www.health.org.uk/infographics/how-do-our-education-and-skills-influence-our-health

[8] Melhuish, Quinn, Hanna, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart (2006) Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI): Compared with children who did not attend pre-school, children who attended nursery Class/School or Playgroup scored higher scores on literacy, and made more progress in literacy and numeracy over the first two years of primary school; From analyses of children's development during pre-school compared with 'home' children, EPPNI found that pre-school attendance improves all children's cognitive development and aspects of social behaviour, such as independence and concentration, co-operation, conformity and relationships with other children (peer sociability). Children with no pre-school experience (the 'home' group) had poorer cognitive attainment, sociability and confidence when they started school. These differences show even when we take account of differences between the pre-school and home groups in child, family and home environment characteristics.

who are chronically absent in pre-school are far more likely to be chronically absent in later school life[9].

- **Good attendance is a measure of parent engagement**: Attendance improves when families understand what their children are learning and why attendance is important, as well as feeling welcomed and supported. Early childhood educators can use attendance to assess how well they are doing with engaging and supporting families and their children.

Why pupil attendance matters to families from lower socio-economic backgrounds

43. Afterschool programmes are designed to provide pupils with more time to learn. This extra time is particularly important in areas of deprivation, where there is potential for less access to books or a quiet place to study at home. Absenteeism undercuts this effort, costing children valuable instructional time during the day, as well as time in afterschool programmes. Unfortunately, chronic absence tends to be higher among children living in poverty, who in many cases miss school because of issues beyond their control.

44. Research has shown that good afterschool programmes can improve school-day attendance. The sense of belonging, the connection to caring adults and the academic enrichment that we provide in afterschool can make children more likely to go to school. Schools may wish to regularly measure pupils' attitudes to self and school in an effort to better understand what might be driving behaviours and address them earlier. Often, improved attendance is a by-product of these after school programmes, rather than a stated goal. This could make even more of a difference if it was an intentional focus of the work.

Why should Business Leaders care?

45. **The workforce challenge**: Absenteeism contributes to lower educational attainment (such as GCSEs), and reduces the risk of pupils leaving education without having developed the broader skills needed to compete in a 21st century workforce such as team working, communication and problem solving.

46. **The soft skills challenge**: Regular attendance is the precursor to the "soft skills" that business leaders continue to expect and include things such as regular attendance and punctuality. Pupils who don't develop the habits associated with good attendance in the early years will find it difficult to develop them as adults.

Why should Boards of Governors care?

[9] https://www.epi.org/publication/student-absenteeism-who-misses-school-and-how-missing-school-matters-for-performance/

47. As highlighted in the Improving Pupil Attendance Strategy, Miss School = Miss Out, the strategic goal for school leaders is to foster a culture within their school where pupils are inspired to attend and to employ a robust school attendance policy that works closely with both pupils and parents in maximising attendance levels.

48. School Governors should provide challenge, direction and support to the principal in respect of pupil attitudes and wellbeing to support pupil attendance. They in turn should communicate a commitment to supporting pupils who need extra help to staff, parents and pupils.

49. The attendance policy within each school should contain details of the support available to pupils to encourage regular attendance at school as part of the School Development Plan (SDP). These support measures should be discussed regularly and agreed at Board of Governors' meetings.

50. Leaders should be proactive in implementing strategies to ensure regular attendance at school. Such strategies and interventions should be tailored to schools' and pupils' circumstances to understand better, the reasons why attendance may be poor and identify with pupils, what more schools can do to support those individuals who need extra support.

51. In DE's January 2020 publication "10 Features of Effective Schools – STAR Case Studies Paper", #10 highlighted the importance of "A well-informed and skilled Board of Governors committed to supporting the school".

Next Steps

52. Emotional health and wellbeing is increasingly at the heart of how schools support their pupils to achieve their full potential. This approach is undoubtedly needed for pupils who, for whatever reason, struggle to attend school every day. We hope that this guidance assists schools in understanding and interpreting their attendance data with a view to supporting pupils before issues escalate.

53. We are inviting schools to analyse their school attendance data (on an on-going basis) in Absence Tiers format and consider interventions at each level. This information could form part of your School Attendance Policy and should be considered by staff and Boards of Governors when addressing pupil attendance.

54. A new attendance report has been developed allowing schools to run this new Absence Tier report at any time on C2K. Schools can access guidance on producing the new Absence Tiers report from SIMS via the following links:

- Attendance and LM Reports - Post Primary and Special using Timetable OR

- Attendance Reports - Primary and Special not using Timetable and
- Attendance - Absence Reports (all schools)

55. This guidance is also available through C2k Exchange | Document Centre | Primary/Post Primary/Special/EOTAS | MIS (SIMS)

56. Pupil Absence Tiers figures for 2021/22 are provided at Annex A to enable schools to compare their figures against their sector average.

Queries / Concerns

57. Any queries on this guidance should be forwarded to attendance@education-ni.gov.uk

Annex A - 2021/22 Absence Tiers Figures – Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools[10]

2021/22

Context – Covid-19 Prevalent

Total Students: 336,724

Total Enrolment: 348,338 (inc Nursery Units)

FSME Number: 98,133

FSME%: 28.2%

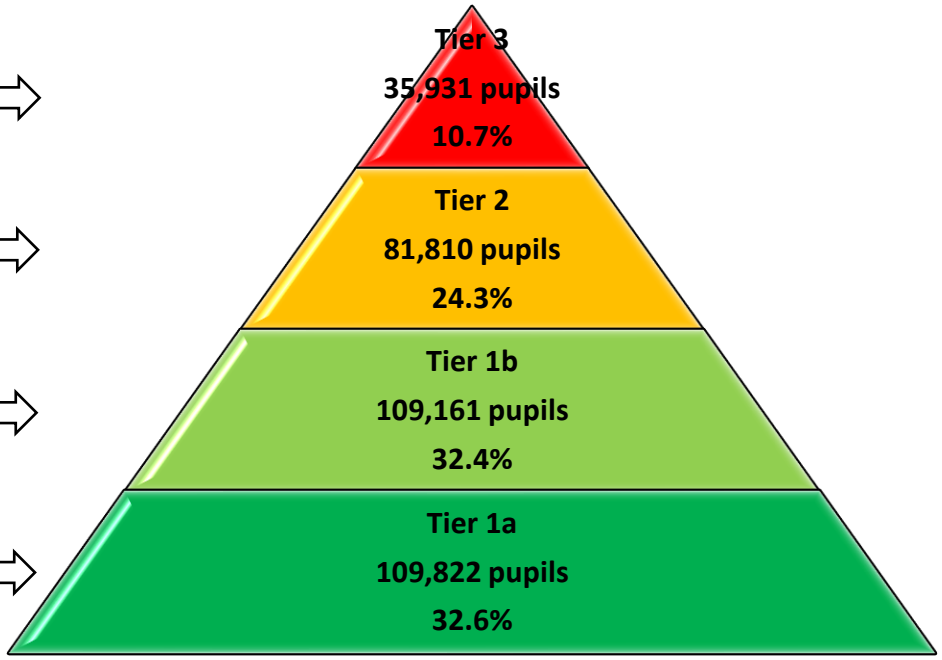
SEN%: 18.2%

Tier 3
Severe Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 20%+ absence
(4+ days per month)

Tier 2
Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 10%-19.9% absence
(2-3 days per month)

Tier 1b
At Risk Attendance
Pupils with 5%-9.9% absence
(1-2 days per month)

Tier 1a
Regular Attendance
Pupils with 0-4.9% absence
(<1 day per month)



[10] Period covered: September 2021 to May 2022.

Primary Schools

2021/22

Context – Covid-19 Prevalent

Total Students: 175,923

Total Enrolment: 186,641 (inc Nursery Units)

FSME Number: 53,687

FSME%: 28.8%

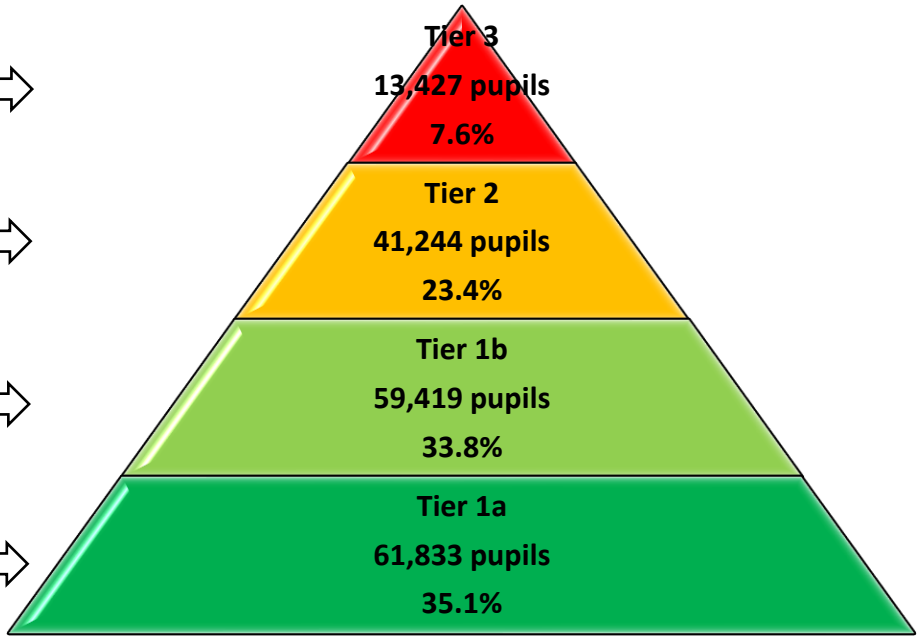
SEN%: 17.8%

Tier 3
Severe Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 20%+ absence
(4+ days per month)

Tier 2
Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 10%-19.9% absence
(2-3 days per month)

Tier 1b
At Risk Attendance
Pupils with 5%-9.9% absence
(1-2 days per month)

Tier 1a
Regular Attendance
Pupils with 0-4.9% absence
(<1 day per month)



Secondary Schools

2021/22

Context – Covid-19 Prevalent

Total Students: 87,986

Total Enrolment: 88,397

FSME Number: 31,604

FSME%: 35.8%

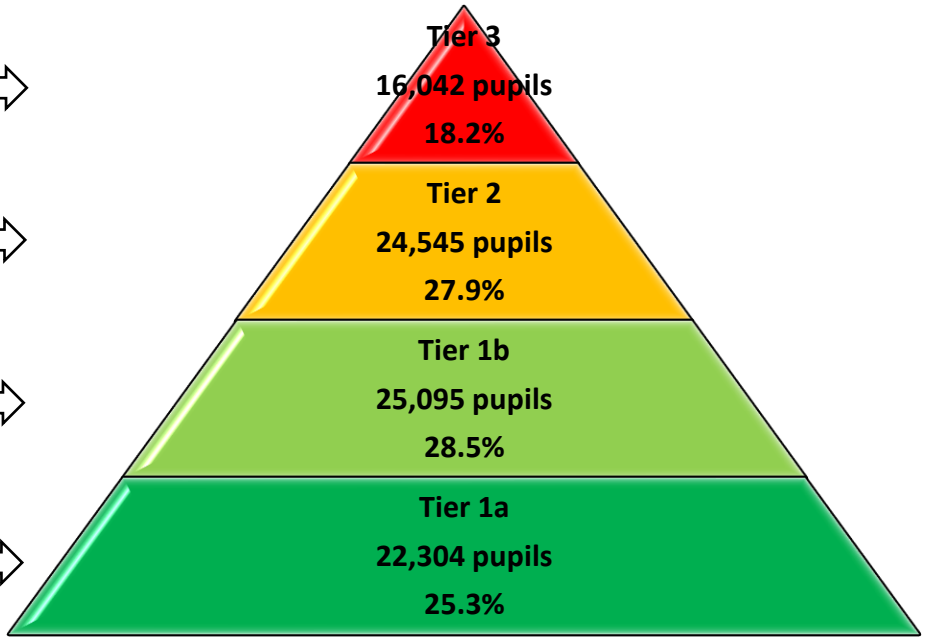
SEN%: 22.4%

Tier 3
Severe Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 20%+ absence
(4+ days per month)

Tier 2
Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 10%-19.9% absence
(2-3 days per month)

Tier 1b
At Risk Attendance
Pupils with 5%-9.9% absence
(1-2 days per month)

Tier 1a
Regular Attendance
Pupils with 0-4.9% absence
(<1 day per month)



Grammar Schools

2021/22

Context – Covid-19 Prevalent

Total Students: 65,766

Total Enrolment: 65,880

FSME Number: 8,969

FSME%: 13.6%

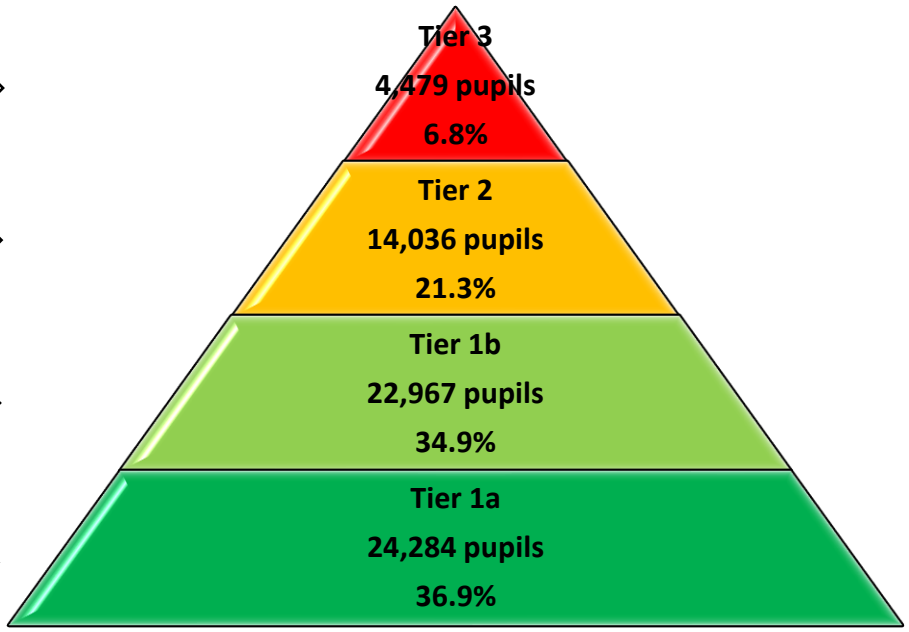
SEN%: 6.5%

Tier 3
Severe Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 20%+ absence
(4+ days per month)

Tier 2
Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 10%-19.9% absence
(2-3 days per month)

Tier 1b
At Risk Attendance
Pupils with 5%-9.9% absence
(1-2 days per month)

Tier 1a
Regular Attendance
Pupils with 0-4.9% absence
(<1 day per month)



Special Schools

2021/22

Context – Covid-19 Prevalent

Total Students: 6,592

Total Enrolment: 6,952

FSME Number: 3,691

FSME%: 53.1%

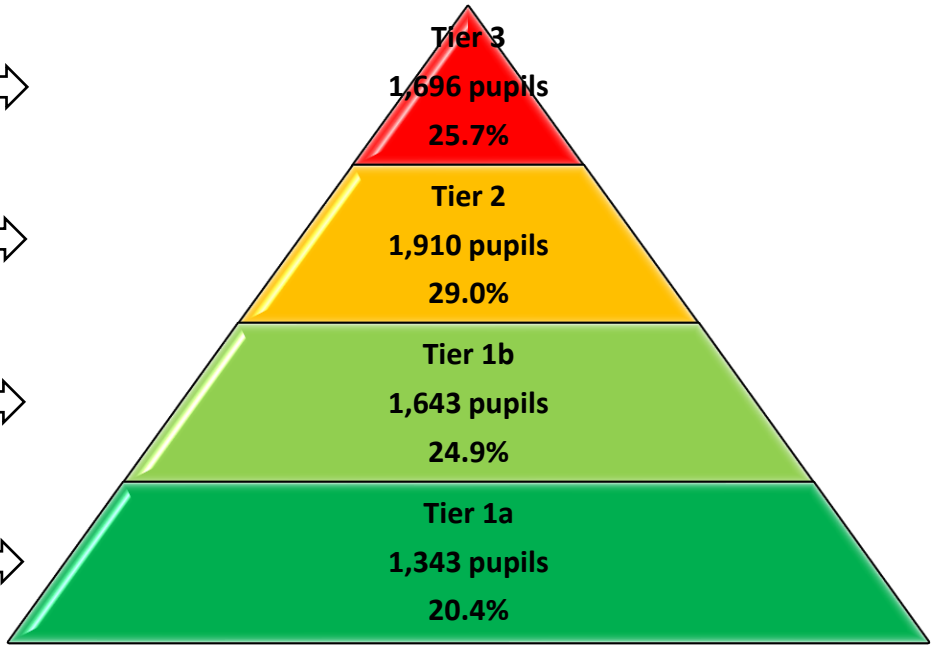
SEN%: 100%

Tier 3
Severe Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 20%+ absence
(4+ days per month)

Tier 2
Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 10%-19.9% absence
(2-3 days per month)

Tier 1b
At Risk Attendance
Pupils with 5%-9.9% absence
(1-2 days per month)

Tier 1a
Regular Attendance
Pupils with 0-4.9% absence
(<1 day per month)



How many children in your school fall into these categories?

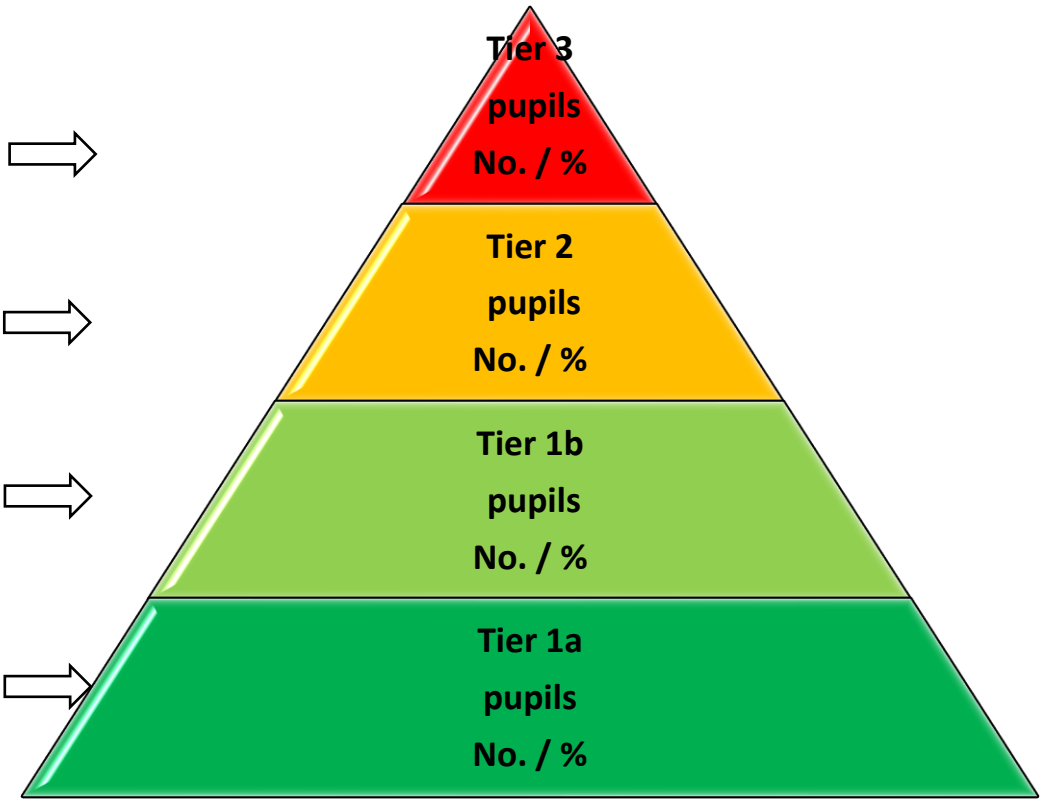
Context	What are the significant issues impacting on pupil attendance this month?
Total Students: ? Total Enrolment: ? FSME Number: ? FSME%: ?% SEN%: ?%	

Tier 3
Severe Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 20%+ absence
(4+ days per month)

Tier 2
Chronic Attendance
Pupils with 10%-19.9% absence
(2-3 days per month)

Tier 1b
At Risk Attendance
Pupils with 5%-9.9% absence
(1-2 days per month)

Regular Attendance
Pupils with 0-4.9% absence
(<1 day per month)



Annex B - ETI report on attendance in Schools - Good Practice Report 2016 ("If you don't attend, you can't attain")

[The following is taken from the report "The Challenge of Improving Pupil Attendance at School"]

We want to remind readers of the work which ETI undertook in 2016 with primary and post primary schools culminating in two reports in July 2016. These came about following the Public Accounts Committee report on improving pupil attendance when ETI was commissioned by DE to undertake a good practice survey into how schools are improving attendance:

a. Part One: Attendance in Schools ETI Good Practice Report; and

b. Part Two: Attendance in Schools Introduction to the Case Studies

As part of this work, there were 24 case studies of schools available which addressed attendance effectively - 12 primary and 12 post-primary. These can be found at: https://www.etini.gov.uk/articles/part-two-attendance-schools-case-studies

We highly recommend that you take time to read these reports from which we have distilled the following important and complementary findings.

"The findings of this Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) survey of attendance in schools confirm that there is no one tip which offers a 'quick fix' for poor attendance. The reality, in those schools that are successful in improving attendance and raising standards, is that a holistic approach, with determined leadership which creates a positive culture for success and acts on all of the pieces of the attendance jigsaw, is necessary for an effective solution.

Leadership, vision, ethos, culture, pastoral care, a relevant and adaptive curriculum, careful consideration of the needs, interests and ability of all of the learners, teaching which engenders engaged learning for all learners, prompt responses to upward trends in absence data, close engagement with parents, external agencies and others; all of these pieces make up the jigsaw.

Underpinning the findings is the need for teachers and leaders to have a research-informed understanding of the personal, social and emotional reasons why and how learners learn and, more importantly, why and how they may fail. The development of this understanding is necessary right from initial teacher education and must be reinforced through continuing professional learning and development. And, no matter how well-informed or holistic, nothing works well forever, so evaluating the impact of each action and making adjustments matters to a school's continued success. [Page 1]

2. What works - a summary [Page 2-3]

Through the survey we identified four central elements which evidentially lead to improved attendance and higher standards in schools. Furthermore, we identify three effective actions which need to be taken when low attendance is evident.

Although it is impossible to make a causal link between the strategies outlined here, and improvements in academic attainment, the evidence is that a relentless focus on promoting attendance can help to break the cycle of deprivation and raise standards.

2.1 The four central elements

i. Leadership: means taking responsibility for prioritising good attendance and building a culture which connects attendance and attainment in the minds of staff, pupils and parents. A key characteristic is a defined role for a senior member of staff, sometimes a specific post of responsibility, to take the lead and link with the local community, with parents, local social agencies and businesses. In successful case studies, the governors take an active part in constructing the school attendance policy and strategies, holding those who take the lead to account and monitoring the impact.

ii. Close educational engagement with parents: seeks to raise awareness of the intrinsic link between attendance and attainment, and especially the importance of building habits of good attendance from the earliest years: both in early years settings and in primary schooling. Inspection work by ETI in early years settings affirms the importance of pre-school and nursery providers placing an emphasis on establishing good habits of attendance from the outset.

iii. Tailored education programmes: refers to the need to ensure that young people experience the curriculum and teaching as relevant to their needs, interests and learning styles as well as addressing the barriers which they may experience as individuals. Mentoring young people is cited by successful schools as a key driver in raising attendance and attainment by reminding them of the intrinsic value of learning.

iv. Strategic monitoring, reporting and evaluating: refers to a clear strategy for closely monitoring relevant data and evaluating and reporting on the effectiveness of actions taken to promote improvement. In these case studies, evidence is collected systematically; data on attendance is recorded accurately and is linked to progress and attainment. For example, in terms of qualitative data the measurement of the impact of mentoring with the most vulnerable learners is a key feature of the most effective practice.

2.2 The three effective actions

When closely-monitored, attendance data indicates poor or falling attendance, for individual or for groups, three effective actions need to be taken:

i. Prompt and direct contact with individual parents: in the effective case studies, schools take action on the first day of absence and do not wait until absence drops to formal trigger points. The personal contact with parents works best because it establishes that the school knows the learner as an individual and can guide the family or carer to appropriate support, if necessary.

ii. Early intervention of external support: early engagement with external services initiates early intervention and provides bespoke support as soon as poor attendance shows signs of becoming an established pattern.

iii. Rewarding attendance and sanctions: rewarding good attendance, both explicitly with the use of extrinsic rewards (prizes, recognition and so on) alongside highlighting the intrinsic motivation of success, is used along with being equally clear with parents and carers about the sanctions available for absence".

Of particular note is the following:

"5. Tailored education programmes [Page 6]

5.1 Schools which have focused on the relationship between the curriculum and teaching on attendance have found that: creating a positive, happy, engaging learning ethos for learners; nurturing the learner; providing a good education in the classroom; tailoring better the curriculum to the needs of the pupils; including guest speakers from business and industry in the school's careers education information and guidance (CEIAG) programme; building the pupils own awareness of the importance of attendance and the negative impact of their absence, are all strategies which make for a more engaging curriculum and a climate for eager learning.

A stronger emphasis is placed on differentiated learning to ensure that learning activities are better matched to the ability of the learners who are succeeding in school and want to attend. The high levels of activities make learning interesting, such as educational visits to engage children, to give them more experience of self-improvement and so that children do not want to miss out on school.

11. Summary [Page 13]

Although it is impossible to make a causal link between the strategies outlined here and improvements in academic attainment, the evidence is that a relentless focus on promoting attendance can help to break the cycle of deprivation and raise standards.

The outcome of the ETI analysis indicates that those schools which adopt a holistic approach, effect improvement best of all. Such schools do not regard poor attendance as an inconveniently chronic and fundamentally unfixable problem, but rather as a symptom that indicates that they are, in some way, failing to meet the needs of all of the young people.

These school leaders take responsibility for prioritising good attendance and building a culture which makes the intrinsic link between attendance and attainment in the minds of staff, pupils and parents alike. They review and revise the curriculum offered, and evaluate and improve teaching to ensure that it is engaging for all learners, ensuring that they want to come to school for fear of missing out.

They have a clear strategy for monitoring relevant data closely and evaluating and reporting on the effectiveness of actions taken to promote improvement. When attendance drops they act quickly, engaging directly and immediately with parents, carers and intervene as necessary with the help of the appropriate external agencies. And, while they are clear with parents and carers about the sanctions available for absence and do resort to extrinsic rewards, which recognise and prize good attendance, they recognise that such strategies have a limited value in the medium to long term”