

**Subject:****Attendance Guidance & Absence Recording By  
Schools – Circular****Circular Number: 2026/15****Date of Issue: 20/08/2026****Date effective from:  
20/08/2026****Audience:**

- Principals and Boards of Governors of all primary, post-primary grant-aided schools and special schools;
- EOTAS Centres;
- 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.

**Summary of Contents:**

This updated circular reflects the introduction of BROMCOM in its trial phase across certain settings. It is therefore imperative that all staff familiarize themselves with the codes according to which system they are using at the commencement of the 2026/27 academic year.

Any enquiries about the contents of this Circular should be addressed to:

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**Governor Awareness:**

Essential

**Status of Contents:**

Action Required  
Information for Schools

**Related Documents:**

Circular 2013/09  
Circular 2016/22  
Circular 2017/14  
Circular 2018/12  
Circular 2022/16  
Circular 2024/08  
Circular 2024/12

**Superseded Documents:**

Circular 2022/07  
Circular 2025/09

**DENI Website:**[www.education-ni.gov.uk](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

E-mail: [attendance@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:attendance@education-ni.gov.uk)

## **Changes to terms of use for specific codes:**

### **Bereavement leave / Extended leave:**

- Pupils who have to leave Northern Ireland to attend a funeral should use Code B – Bereavement Leave.
- “Death of a relative” has subsequently been removed as being an eligible criterion for Extended Leave – Code J

### **Visa/passport renewal within Northern Ireland:**

- In cases where a pupil must attend an appointment in Northern Ireland to renew a visa or passport, schools should use:

Code ! – No attendance required, if using SIMS

Code Q – No attendance required, if using BROMCOM

## **IMPORTANT REMINDER OF DUE PROCESS:**

Both the Department for Education and the Education Authority are aware that pupils are being removed from school registers without the completion of the SA1 form.

School leaders are reminded that the completion of a SA1 form is mandatory and particularly where any of the following circumstances apply:

- Departure from Northern Ireland
- Expulsion
- Death of pupil
- Parent/carers advise 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.

## 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'.

## Recording pupil attendance

2. Pupil attendance should be recorded at the beginning of the morning and afternoon registration sessions using the Schools Management System (SMS) codes detailed in [Annex B or Annex C](#) if the school is using BROMCOM. Information recorded by schools is reviewed and published by the Department.
3. 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 school 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: [Absence Notification Form](#)
4. Schools must ensure that pupil attendance records are updated promptly and accurately. Failure to do so can compromise the ability to identify patterns of concern, placing children at potential risk. Timely record-keeping is not just an administrative task, it is a critical safeguarding and child protection responsibility.
5. [Benchmarking data is also available](#) to assist schools when gauging their own attendance and absence levels against all sector averages.

## Referrals to the Education Welfare Service (EWS)

6. 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 (EWO) must be undertaken. Referrals to EWS (EA) will be agreed in accordance with Partnership Agreements and should be done as an exercise towards the end of each academic term. **Referrals should NOT be left until the end of the academic year.** The EWS will be monitoring pupil absences at school level during audits which will also identify those pupils who require support.



## Removal of pupils' names from the register

7. 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 |

8. For child protection purposes, **it is essential** that a [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 (EA) by email to [ehe@eani.org.uk](mailto:ehe@eani.org.uk)
9. 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](mailto:SA1Notifications@eani.org.uk).
10. 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 EA 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. It is important that a

school engages with the EA before removing a pupil from its register.

13. 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.
14. 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.
15. The EA 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**

16. 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 the purpose 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**

17. Missing school 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, should be categorised as an unauthorised absence.**

18. **For that reason, former absence Code F "Family Holiday (Agreed)" has been removed from the SMS.**

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

19. 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 (Code Y in SIMS and Code ! in BROMCOM) 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).
20. 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](mailto:attendance@education-ni.gov.uk).
21. Applications should be submitted online at: [Exceptional Closures](#)
22. 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 member of staff, Board of Governors 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.**

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

**Applying a flexible timetable in exceptional circumstances**

24. Schools may consider the need to reduce the time pupils are in attendance in school for welfare reasons, or reasons associated with a long-term health condition, or Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance.
25. **A flexible timetable should NOT be used to manage a pupil's behaviour.**

26. Such occasions should be **exceptional, short term and fully justified** since there may be significant safeguarding concerns associated with such decisions.
27. Flexible timetables **must be for an agreed limited period of time with target progress dates established with the intention of seeing pupils returning to full time education in school.**
28. In agreement with parent/carers, progress dates should be established as part of a multidisciplinary approach with a robust review process in place.
29. Pupils should have the words 'Flexible timetable' recorded in SMS notes to allow for ease of data retrieval.
30. School Principals should keep Board of Governors advised where flexible timetables are applied in exceptional circumstances.
31. In instances such as those referred to above, the pupil in question should have the appropriate absence code applied when not present in school e.g. Code I4 – EBSNA or Code O2 – Exception to the curriculum.

### **Industrial Action**

32. Code ! (SIMS) or Code Q (BROMCOM) 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 parts of the school may be affected, whereby certain classes or year groups cannot be covered, and parents/carers are asked not to send their children in those classes or year groups to school. This 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.

### **School closure in the event of industrial action**

33. [Guidance on Exceptional Closures has been updated](#) in light of previous industrial action which led to a decision by some schools to close to teachers and pupils or close to pupils only.
34. 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 strike action, normal action should be taken to establish the reason for

non-attendance and the appropriate code used.

## **Extended Leave**

35. Code J - Extended Leave code allows pupils, for a **maximum of two weeks** only, to travel outside Northern Ireland without their attendance levels being adversely affected. Family holidays should **not** 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:
  - care for a sick relative;
  - sibling or parent receiving medical treatment outside NI; or
  - attend to immigration matters.

36. 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, considering the circumstances for which leave is sought, the pupil's attendance (and attainment) to date, previous similar requests and whether the pupil's specific needs will be met (both personally and academically) during the proposed absence.

37. **The following documentation must be provided to the Department in support of applications:**

- 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.

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

- a. Code G – Family Holiday Not Agreed;
- b. Code H (SIMS) Code H1 (BROMCOM)– Other Absence.

39. 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: [Extended Leave Form - Updated August 2024](#) ).

40. All applications along with supporting documentation must be sent to the Department of Education via email at [attendance@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:attendance@education-ni.gov.uk) for consideration and approval **before the absence is recorded in the SMS**. 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.
41. The Department will delete all supporting documentation upon successful verification.

### **Updating attendance data on a regular basis**

42. Schools should ensure that all attendance data is updated daily to facilitate the running of attendance reports during 2026/27 academic year. Missing marks will be monitored monthly and shared with the Education Welfare Service and Education Training Inspectorate.
43. Attendance data is automatically included as part of the annual School Census.
44. 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**

- Ensure you have a School's Attendance Policy and this it is up to date. [A sample policy is available to download](#).
- Make use of the [guidance on Absence Tiers](#) and the data generated from those school and regional reports.
- Implement a self-reflection guide to support planning for improving attendance published in August 2024 (see paragraph 12).
- The Board of Governors should know and exercise their roles & responsibilities regarding attendance – Monitor attendance and Absence Tier levels through a standing agenda item at meetings and promote pupil attendance whenever possible.

- Have a dedicated Attendance Champion within the school.
- Have a robust monitoring system in place, which is overseen by the Board of Governors.
- Set time for regular communication with EWO, in line with their Partnership Agreement with the Education Welfare Service.
- Schools could consider an Incentive system for pupils to encourage regular attendance.
- Early intervention is key and there should be ongoing engagement with pupils, parents/carers & teachers regarding attendance.
- Schools should have a strong pastoral care system in place to address any issues early.
- Measures to improve and share effective practice, such as contact with similar schools who have reduced their high absence levels to examine what measures they have put in place.
- The Department has published examples of good practice in respect of improving pupil attendance which schools should consider and utilise:
  - [A self-reflection guide to support planning for improving attendance](#)
  - [Attendance Hero project](#)
- 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](#)
- Schools may also wish to utilise [information relating to school attendance which is contained on the NiDirect website](#). A translation facility also exists on the site which allows schools to convey key messages and information to those parents who do not have English as a first language.

## ANNEX A – ONLINE FORMS

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

### **A Sample Pupil Attendance Policy is available at:**

[Circular 2026/15 - Attendance Guidance & Absence Recording By Schools](#)

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

### **Extended Leave Application\***

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: [Extended Leave Form - Updated August 2026](#) 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](mailto:attendance@education-ni.gov.uk)

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

A list of frequently asked questions is available to download from the DE website at: [Circular 2026/15 - Attendance Guidance & Absence Recording By Schools](#)

