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

Subject: **Attendance Guidance & Absence Recording By Schools**	**Circular Number:** **2020/08** **Date of Issue:** **14 August 2020**

Audience: • Principals and Boards of Governors of all primary, post-primary grant-aided schools and special schools; • 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 in light of Covid-19.	**Status of Contents:** Action Required Information for Schools
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Road BANGOR BT19 7PR	**Related Documents:** Circular 2013/09 Circular 2016/22 Circular 2017/14 Circular 2018/12 **Superseded Documents:** Circular 2019/14 **DENI Website:** www.education-ni.gov.uk Tel: 02891 279543 Fax: 02891 279100 E-mail:**attendance@education-ni.gov.uk**

Introduction:

This Circular provides guidance to schools on managing pupil attendance.

As a result of the unprecedented Covid-19 circumstances that schools have faced and may possibly continue to face, several amendments have been made to the existing guidance with the intention of simplifying attendance recording.

Use of Code 'P' – Approved Activity

In addition to its existing purpose, this code should now also 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.
- A pupil's arranged transport fails to materialise, a school may use Code P - Approved Activity if the school is content that this is appropriate and the pupil is able to learn at home for that particular day.

Use of Code '8' - Intensive Support Learning Unit / Shielding due to Covid-19

This code can now also be used in situations where:

- A pupil does not physically attend school due to Covid-19 concerns, the parent requests work to be sent home and will ensure that lessons are followed. This code should be used if the child or parent has chosen to shield but there are no underlying medical conditions of pupil or immediate family members.
- A pupil is choosing not to attend school or parent chooses not to send pupil to school as they are self-isolating and there are underlying medical issues of pupil or immediate family members.
- If insufficient evidence is provided in respect of learning assigned, school should record as unauthorised absence (Codes D, H or N), unless other circumstances are relevant.

Note: schools who use Code 8 will be contacted to ascertain if the code is being used in the context of Covid-19 or the original scenario (Intensive Learning Support) in order to ensure accuracy of attendance reports.

In order to assist with attendance recording in the incoming academic year the following list of scenarios have been listed with corresponding codes to be applied.

	Potential Scenario	Attendance Recording Actions
1.	Pupils attending.	Schools to record attendance as normal in the AM and PM.
2.	Pupils not attending due to illness.	Schools to record attendance as normal using Code I – Illness.
3.	Pupils asked to attend school on a part-time basis due to rules regarding social distancing imposed by DE or school. E.g. pupils required to attend on certain days or for a certain number of hours per day.	Attendance at school would be recorded as normal in the AM and PM by school. **When not required to attend physically at school due to social distancing rules, Code P[1] - Approved Activity would be used.** Pupil would have to evidence their learning through completion of work which would be percentage checked periodically by school. If insufficient evidence provided iro learning assigned, school should record as unauthorised absence (Codes D, H or N) where appropriate. We would suggest that registration of pupils working from home would happen once a day (rather than twice a day) for example provided that work was being completed as required. We appreciate that for some schools, this may be very challenging therefore schools may have to rely on a combination of their professional judgement and pupil's work on whether or not pupils have engaged with learning at home. Schools are encouraged to engage with pupils using online tools, such as "Collaborate Ultra" or other software to enable registration of pupils working from home. Microsoft and G Suite tools are available via C2k as opt in services. Other options include SIMS Parent app, Seesaw, Facebook, Whatsapp, email, telephone, etc.
4.	Pupil refusing to return to school due to fears over Covid-19 or parent refusing to send pupil to school due to fears over Covid-19.	If pupil is required to attend school either physically or remotely and pupil does not attend and does not complete work / assignment as required, school may wish to consider an unauthorised absence. E.g.

[1] Code P description in SIMS is "Approved Sporting Activity" but is given a wider definition by DE which now includes Covid-19 circumstances.

		Code D – no reason provided Code H – Other Absence Code N – No reason yet provided …unless other circumstances are relevant. If pupil is required to attend physically and pupil does not attend but is able to evidence learning from home as required by school, the school may record absence as set-out at #5 or #6 below.
5.	Self-isolating / shielding due to underlying medical issues of pupil or immediate family members.	This may be particularly relevant for children who attend Special Schools or who have an underlying medical condition. If pupil is <u>not</u> unwell and learning can be undertaken at home: • Schools use Code 8 – Intensive Support Learning Unit provided that pupil is able to evidence learning at home. • If insufficient evidence provided iro learning assigned, school should record as unauthorised absence (Codes D, H or N), unless other circumstances are relevant. In these circumstances, the school should satisfy itself, through evidence provided by the family that either the pupil or family members are shielding due to underlying medical conditions. If schools do not receive evidence or are not satisfied with evidence provided and there is no evidence of learning by the pupils concerned, then Point 4 would apply. This information is important to identify the number of pupils choosing to self-isolate due to COVID-19.
6.	Where a pupils is late to school due to issues outside his / her control (e.g. transport), or is unable to attend school on a particular day due to transport issues.	Adequate provision of school and public transport should be in place to facilitate social distancing and to provide transport to pupils as required. In the event that this is not the case, schools have a range of attendance codes from which to choose and should use their discretion as appropriate in each case: • If pupil is at fault: - Code L – Late (before registration closed or Code U – Late (after registration closed) may be used. • If lateness is due to circumstances beyond pupil's control, Code U may be amended subsequently by the school. • If arranged transport fails to materialise, a school may use Code P - Approved Activity if the school is content that this is appropriate.

7. School not open due to teacher shortage – either through absence due to illness, shielding or possible refusal due to health & safety concerns.	School may wish to apply for an Exceptional Closure to the Department however this is unlikely to be approved if schools have been asked to open.

1. This circular replaces DE Circular 2019/14 'Attendance Guidance & Absence Recording by Schools' 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'. www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/circular-201622-guidance-enrolment-status-pupils-including-those-subject-sen-and-eotas-referrals

Recording pupil attendance

2. Attendance/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.

3. Care should be taken in how pupil absences are recorded and schools should 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)

4. If a school is concerned about a pupil's pattern of attendance and/or if it falls below 85% and there is a cause for concern, a referral should be made to the EWS, based on consultation with the designated Education Welfare Officer during the school year. The EWS should be monitoring pupil absences at school level during termly audits which will also identify those pupils who require support.

Removal of pupils' names from the register

5. 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

6. It is expected that a school should notify the Education Authority once a pupil has been removed from its register.

Retention of Records

7. 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.

Absences during term time

8. 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 should 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

9. It should be noted that Study leave should be applied only to **public examination** candidates during the examination timetable. Public examinations are those which are authenticated or awarded by an outside person or organisation, and not internally by the school.

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

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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

14. 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).

15. 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 or by telephone at 02891 279328.

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

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

18.   Examples of 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.

<u>Failure to meet all the protocols may result in the exceptional closure being refused.</u>

19. 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 schools closures page on the NIDirect website.

Reduced Timetable for a pupil

20. Schools often unofficially 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 outline 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

21.   Code ! Should 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.

NEW : Special Schools closure in event of Nurses Industrial Action

22. <u>Guidance on Exceptional Closures has been updated</u> in light of unprecedented industrial action by nursing staff which took place in December 2019 and January 2020 which led to a decision by some Special Schools to close.

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

Extended Leave

24. 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 (ideally no more than three weeks), to travel outside the UK without their attendance levels being adversely affected. Family holidays either agreed or not agreed are <u>not</u> 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 the UK for a specific complex family need such as:
      - o death of a relative;
      - o care for a sick relative;
      - o sibling or parent receiving medical treatment outside NI; or
      - o attend to immigration matters.

25. 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.

26. 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 UK visa application centre in a country outside the UK – alternatively a photocopy of the renewed documentation will suffice.

27. 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.

28. 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).

29. 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. Schools should retain a copy of this supporting documentation for their records.

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

Attendance Returns

31. Schools should ensure that all attendance data is updated on a daily basis in order to facilitate the running of attendance reports during 2020/21 academic year.

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

33. 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 at: https://bit.ly/30No28g

2. Board of Governors roles & responsibilities.

3. Dedicated Attendance person.

4. Strong monitoring system in place.

5. Set time for regular communication with EWO.

6. Incentive system in place for pupils.

7. Ongoing engagement with pupils, parents/carers & teachers.

8. Strong pastoral care system in place.

9. Measures to improve, 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.

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 - **https://bit.ly/30No28g**

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**

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: 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 at: https://bit.ly/32iGnta

ABSENCE CODES

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

August 2020

ABSENCE CODES: GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

Note: the description below may be different to that on SIMS. This is to facilitate greater discretion when selecting the correct code. Please refer to page 20-32 for clarity.

CODE	DESCRIPTION	STATISTICAL MEANING	NOTE
/\	Present: / = (AM): \ = (PM)	Present	
A*	Artistic Endeavour	Authorised Absence	
B*	Bereavement	Authorised Absence	
C	Suspended	Authorised Absence	
D	No reason provided for absence	Unauthorised Absence	
F*	Family Holiday (agreed)	Authorised Absence	
G*	Family Holiday (not agreed)	Unauthorised Absence	
H*	Other Absence	Unauthorised Absence	
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointments)	Authorised Absence	
J*	Extended Leave	Attendance not required	
L*	Late (before registration closed)	Present	
M	Medical/Dental Appointments	Authorised Absence	
N	No reason yet provided for absence (temporary code only)	Unauthorised Absence	
O*	Other Exceptional Circumstances	Authorised Absence	
P*	Approved Activity / including learning remotely from home	Approved Educational Activity	
R*	Religious Observance	Authorised Absence	
S*	Study Leave	Approved Educational Activity	
U*	Late (after registration closed)	Unauthorised Absence	
V*	Educational Visit/Examination	Approved Educational Activity	
W*	Work Experience	Approved Educational Activity	
X	Only staff should attend	Attendance not required	
Y*	Exceptional Closure	Attendance not required	
#	Holiday for all	Attendance not required	
!*	No attendance required	Attendance not required	
1	Community Providers / EOTAS (organised by the EA)	Approved Educational Activity	
2	Exceptional Teaching Arrangement/hospital tuition (organised by the EA)	Approved Educational Activity	
3	Elective Home Education	Attendance not Required	
4	Pupil Referral Unit	Approved Educational Activity	
5	Another mainstream school (under Entitlement Framework – EF)	Approved Educational Activity	
6	Training Organisation (under EF)	Approved Educational Activity	
7	FE College (under EF)	Approved Educational Activity	
8	Intensive Support Learning Unit / shielding due to Covid-19	Approved Educational Activity	
9	CAMHS / Mental Health Support	Approved Educational Activity	

* The use of this code is at the discretion of the school.
Present / Approved Educational Activity Codes
Attendance not required codes
Authorised Absence Codes
Unauthorised Absence 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

During the 20/21 academic year this code will be used in the following situations:
- When 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.
- A pupil's arranged transport fails to materialise, a school may use Code P - Approved Activity if the school is content that this is appropriate and the pupil is able to learn at home for that particular day.

This code would normally have been used 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 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.

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.
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 record the attendance 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

During the 20/21 academic year this code can be used in the following situations:

- A pupil does not physically attend school due to Covid-19 concerns, the parent requests work to be sent home and will ensure that lessons are followed. This code should be used if the child or parent has chosen to shield but there are no underlying medical conditions of pupil or immediate family members.
- A pupil is choosing not to attend school or parent chooses not to send pupil to school as they are self-isolating and there are underlying medical issues of pupil or immediate family members.

- If insufficient evidence is provided in respect of learning assigned, school should record as unauthorised absence (Codes D, H or N), unless other circumstances are relevant.

This code would normally have been 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.

Attendance not required codes

Code J*: Extended Leave

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 the UK 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 NI;
  - 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 UK visa application centre in a country outside the UK – 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.

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; or
- Industrial action.

*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.

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. A completed copy of this form should be held by the school and a copy forwarded to the respective Education Welfare Service for information and a leaving date entered in SIMS. 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 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.

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.

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.

<u>Frequently Asked Questions</u>

A list of frequently asked questions is available to download from the DE website at:
https://bit.ly/32iGnta