

Covid's costly impact on school attendance – March 2021 update

From 8 March 2021 attendance at school is once again mandatory - we look at the updates to the attendance guidance for schools.

16 March 2021

From 8 March 2021 attendance at school is once again mandatory. This means that parents will be required to ensure that their child of compulsory school age regularly attends their registered school, schools will be required to record attendance and follow up absence, and schools again have the ability to apply sanctions for non-attendance. [Laura Murphy](#) looks at the updates to the attendance guidance for schools.

Schools should record attendance in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended) for all pupils, including the changes implemented last year around the use of Code X in relation to absence in circumstances relating to Covid-19. However, last week the Department for Education (DfE) released a new set of sub-codes to assist schools. These can be found [here](#). These have been introduced into information management systems to help schools with data collection. The main guidance on attendance remains the same. The sub-codes relate only to Covid-19 absence and are optional but can be used to support the DfE data submission. This will help schools record non-attendance related to coronavirus accurately and consistently. The aim is that the sub-codes will help settings:

- extract attendance data to complete the daily educational settings status form;
- consistently record non-attendance related to coronavirus (Covid-19);
- monitor non-attendance related to coronavirus (Covid-19) for the settings' own purposes.

The sub-codes relate to attendance codes 'X' and 'I' which cover the updated non-attendance in circumstances related to coronavirus (X) and illness (I). Full details of the sub-codes can be found [here](#). In short, under Code X the sub-codes cover issues such as:

- self-isolation;
- confirmed contact with a case of Covid-19 inside the school setting;
- confirmed contact with a case outside the school setting;
- quarantine due to arrival from outside the UK from a non-exempt country;
- due to advice of CEV status by medical team and should not attend; or
- cannot attend due to restrictions in government advice e.g. local or national restrictions.

Under Code I for illness the sub-codes cover:

- illness (general and not linked to Covid-19); and
- a confirmed case of Covid-19.

These categories will only be used for recording during sessions in the 2020-2021 academic year. It should be remembered that Code X is not counted as absence in the school census.

Schools which have already set up their own systems for recording and monitoring non-attendance may continue with their own methods due to the non-compulsory nature of the sub-codes. Any use of a sub-code will be on an individual basis and schools and settings will need to consider whether Code X is appropriate for any non-attendance, as per previous guidance, and only where the individual pupil is not in attendance because their travel to or attendance at school would be:

- contrary to guidance relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus (Covid-19) from either Public Health England (PHE) and/or the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC); or
- prohibited by any legislation (or instruments such as statutory directions) relating to the incidence or transmission of coronavirus (Covid-19).

If attendance does not meet the above, then Code X should not be used and another code should be considered.

Schools should check that their information management systems have been updated to allow for these changes and that the relevant codes can be used so that their data can be accurately recorded. You will need to brief those staff who are using the systems on how the setting plan on recording and reporting this data. Giving this additional context to attendance during the pandemic will help schools and the DfE gather data and be able to understand what trends they are seeing in their schools and across the country. This may help schools to plan ahead, which, given the last year, can only be a good thing.

If you have any questions about attendance or the return to school please free to get in touch and talk to us about the issues you are facing and how we can help.

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