

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO REGISTRATION CODES

Introduction

All schools have to mark an attendance register for every pupil on roll and for every half-day session the school is open. This is a legal requirement both for safeguarding reasons and, where children are of compulsory education age, to establish whether or not parents have fulfilled their legal obligation to ensure that they attend 'regularly'. Registers are evidence which can be produced in Court, so they must be accurate. It is an offence by the 'proprietor' not to keep them in accordance with the applicable Regulations. (This is usually the headteacher or an executive head across a group of schools).

This is why schools ask for information about the reasons for every absence; they have to decide whether or not it is 'authorised' or 'unauthorised'. Unauthorised absences are offence by the parent, though each local authority determines its own rules for when legal action may be taken. These vary considerably across the country. **The decision whether to authorise is always the headteacher's responsibility**, though in multi-academy trusts, it may be a matter of policy across the MAT. The different codes are used to show the different reasons for the absences; which ones have been authorised and which have not.

To make sure that these decisions are made as fairly and as consistently as possible, the DfE issues Guidance to all schools. The latest version is September 2018:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>

This Guidance is not statutory; it does not have the force of law. But it explains the Regulations that must be complied with. There is no good reason for a headteacher not to follow the Guidance, though some discretion may sometimes be reasonable and there is room for slightly different interpretations here and there.

The Guidance contains explicit advice on the various absence codes. While these are the codes for the national absence reporting system that all state schools have to use, (including special schools, academies and free schools but not private independent schools), there may be some local variation in the system used to record the data. However, schools cannot change the meaning of a given situation, for example by describing something as an attendance in their system that the DfE Guidance describes as an absence.

There are also detailed Regulations about removing children from the Admission and Attendance registers. This must always be done in accordance with the law. This is not covered in the DfE Guidance above but headteachers and local authorities must comply. There is a link to the relevant Regulations at the end of the DfE Guidance.

Using the right code

The following comments should be read alongside the official DfE Guidance and seek only to clarify some key points. Sometimes the Guidance cannot be made to fit the facts entirely, especially as there is only one mark available to cover a whole session, even if the child attended only for part of it. Systems of 'every lesson' monitoring are not part of this legal requirement about the whole session.

Pupils who are not of compulsory school age cannot be marked as 'unauthorised absent' and none of the unauthorised absence codes can be used for them.

Children are of compulsory age from the beginning of the term after their 5th birthday until the last Friday in June of Year 11. Before the relevant date, and in sixth forms, attendance is not legally compulsory but schools should have a clear agreement about what will happen if the child/student does not arrive when expected. This is still important for pastoral and safeguarding reasons. For pupils who are not of compulsory age, the school should mark X for the sessions that are not part of their agreed programme. This does not count as an absence.

/ Present in school for the morning session.

\ Present in school for the afternoon session.

B Educated off-site (approved educational activity; counts as present)

The pupil must participate as required to be credited with an attendance and the off-site setting must provide the school with daily feedback about whether they were there. The mark cannot be used simply because they are supposed to be elsewhere for that session, whether or not they actually attended. It could be used for on-line learning provided it can be evidenced that they logged on and were supervised by a teacher or other designated person (not their parent) during the relevant session. It cannot be used for children who are working at home with parents.

C Other authorised circumstances (authorised absent)

This covers all the circumstances where the headteacher has granted "leave", that are not covered elsewhere, e.g. bereavement, family problems, weddings etc. It is also often used for 'working at home' under the parent's supervision. As it is an absence, it should only be used for short periods. This is the code that schools should use to mark the sessions where children on part time timetables do not have any provision. It may also be used where the LA has granted leave for a licensed performance in school time as this does not have its own code

D Dual registration (discounted)

This code avoids the pupil being absent from school A when attending school B for that session. D can only be used where a pupil is registered at 2 schools, (or a Pupil Referral Unit and a school), not with other alternative providers. Only the school where the pupil should be on that day records a

mark for that session. D is entered by the other school, which discounts it from their record. Children temporarily attending another establishment as “guests” (i.e. not yet on their Admission register) should retain their legal registration at the home school. The school they are attending must pass the information back to the home school and just keep an informal register for fire regulation purposes etc. They are not “dual-registered”.

E Excluded (authorised absent – if no alternative provision made)

This includes all fixed term exclusions and permanent exclusions until all the representation procedures have been completed. Alternative provision is a requirement from the 6th day of any period of exclusion so there should never be more than 5 consecutive days marked as E. If pupils are engaging in a full-time programme in a support unit, or actually attending an alternative facility while excluded, these sessions should be recorded as an attendance or approved educational activity (B) provided they attend. (Separate arrangements will be needed to record the actual exclusion data). There is no such concept as an “unofficial” (i.e. illegal) exclusion in the Regulations, or just sending children home, so there is no mark to cover it other than C.

F *Extended leave - No longer in use*

If extended leave is agreed for more than just a “holiday”, e.g. to visit relatives overseas or travel by the family for an extended or open-ended period, either C or H now has to be used if the child is to be kept on roll. If the school has not approved some or all of the absence, those sessions must be marked as G or O (unauthorised absence). Off-registration may be appropriate in some circumstances if it is not clear when the child will be returning and no contact has been made with the school.

G Family holiday - NOT agreed (unauthorised absent)

This mark depends on the school making its expectations clear and then not authorising sessions that are taken outside those rules. A few isolated days of unauthorised holiday will not necessarily be sufficient for the LA to take any legal action; that will depend on their Code of Conduct for the issuing of Penalty Notices. (You can ask to see a copy). But the register still needs to show what happened in case there are any other unauthorised absences as well. If an unauthorised holiday is part of a child’s wider attendance problem, the LA will normally be informed.

H Approved holiday leave (authorised absent)

For use in “exceptional” circumstances only at the discretion of the headteacher. Each school defines its own criteria and the procedure for requesting leave in term-time. There is no requirement to adopt a policy of zero-tolerance in all circumstances but there is no parental entitlement to any leave; it is all at the headteacher’s discretion. There is no national definition or DfE Guidance on what is meant by “exceptional circumstances”.

I Illness (authorised absent)

Children absent for the whole session through illness, not intended for those who leave early or arrive late because of a medical appointment. Requesting

independent evidence that the child was genuinely ill is reasonable in some specific circumstances, but not every child will necessarily need to be taken to the doctor or require a prescription. The DfE advises that a doctor's note or other independent evidence cannot be required as a matter of routine or in all cases before authorisation will be given. That would be unreasonable. The British Medical Association makes it clear on their website the GPs are not required to provide medical notes for children at school.

J Interview (approved educational activity; counts as present)

Where a child of compulsory school age needs to miss a whole session for an interview, entrance exam or taster day at another educational establishment or prospective employer. They can be marked as present in the usual way if they come to school first. Note that this counts as present, not authorised absent.

L Late before registration closes or for an acceptable reason (counts as present)

This mark is the one where there seems to be most disagreement because there is no legal definition of how late a child can be and still get a present mark. It is intended for children who are only a little late (within the defined 'registration period') but can it also be used for those who come in at the first reasonable opportunity, (for example when the car has broken down or the child has had an early medical appointment?) The failure of official transport to get the child to school on time would be another example beyond the parents' control. It is meant to reward those parents who still make sure the child attends for most of the session (if 'unpunctual') as distinct from those who miss so much of the session that they have to be counted as unauthorised absent (U). L counts as present, just like the child who has to leave for a good reason part way through the session, so no legal action against parents can be taken based on this mark, only U. Any disciplinary sanction based on L must be careful not to include those where the school has already accepted that the explanation for the lateness was reasonable.

M Medical or dental appointments (authorised absent)

In my opinion this mark should only be used where the pupil misses the whole session, ideally notified in advance. Evidence of the appointment is reasonable and parents should be encouraged to avoid school times, though this is not always possible. If the child needs to leave school for an appointment during the session, or goes home ill, or even leaves without permission, there is no power to change the original present mark. So, see also L for arrangements if they have an early appointment and then come in.

N No reason for absence provided (unauthorised absent)

This is an interim mark pending more information and should be changed to either an O or some other code before registers are closed for the termly Census.

- O Unauthorised absent for any other reason not defined elsewhere**
All absences that the headteacher does not consider reasonable or unavoidable, where no acceptable reasons have been given by parents, or for sessions which have remained unexplained.
- P Approved sporting activity (approved educational activity; counts as present)**
Where children are involved in any representative or supervised sports event (or trial) that has been agreed by the headteacher. Some schools also use it for music exams, (or J). Both count as present. Parents have no right to demand it. Taking the time off without permission would be unauthorised absence (O).
- R Religious festival for child's family (authorised absent)**
Any major festival in any religious community as requested by parents. There is no set limit on the number of days but it is meant for one off or short events not long periods. (Some academies and free schools may choose to close on these days to avoid high numbers of absences. That is one of the freedoms they have to decide their own session times).
- S Study leave (authorised absent – NOT an approved educational activity)**
Study leave can only be used in Year 11 for external examinations (not 'mocks') and DfE advice is that, even then, schools should use it only 'sparingly', not for long periods before the examinations or for 'review days'. It can only be offered not required; the school must still be open for these pupils if their parents wish it. It is absence because the child may not actually be studying and is not supervised by the school. (Supervision by parents does not count as an attendance). The sessions when pupils attend for an examination or school-based revision should be marked present, even if the session is shorter than normal. Once the exams are over, it may be better to provide an educational programme right up to the last Friday in June as Y11 pupils are not allowed to leave until then, or get a job in school hours.
- T Traveller absence (authorised absent)**
Children currently away from the area, and actually travelling because of their parents' work, but still registered pupils as they are expected to return. It may be appropriate to remove the child from the Admission and Attendance Register if they have physically left the area, though there may be an agreement with the LA not to do so in order to avoid losing track of them. Traveller children temporarily registered at another school can be marked D and therefore discounted by the 'home' school while they are elsewhere. It is up to that school to record their actual attendance. This code may also apply to people who are not from the recognised Traveller Community, such as parents who are students from overseas or those who have to travel as part of their work and where children have to accompany the family – though this interpretation is not mentioned in the DfE Guidance.

U Late after close of registers (unauthorised absent)

This mark is for children who will not be credited with an attendance, even though they came in for part of the session. Each school defines its own criteria for when registers close. Note that U counts as unauthorised absence and is therefore an offence by the parent.

V Educational visit or trip (approved educational activity; counts as present)

School-organised trips and visits, including residential trips. Counts as present. Can also be used for trips and events of an educational nature by outside organisations that are in school time, provided they are agreed and supervised by appropriately vetted adults (not parents). This is at the headteacher's discretion.

W Work experience, and work-based courses (approved educational activity; counts as present)

Only Y10 and 11 pupils can do work experience, which must be approved by the school or it would be illegal child employment. There is no maximum permitted number of days. This code or B should also be used for vocational and college courses where pupils are still on roll (day release and longer-term courses). Note that this counts as present (as long as the child actually attends as agreed.)

Y Enforced closure for the whole school or individuals (not counted)

When the whole school, or part of it, is closed due to bad weather, heating problems etc. It can also be used for individual children if the school is still open but they were genuinely unable to attend because of widespread travel disruption or safety issues such as snow. If they did not attend, but could reasonably have done so, the session still has to be classed as absent, either authorised or unauthorised. Can also be used for those in Young Offender Institutions (or B).

Additional relevant information can be found on the following sites.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-mental-health-in-schools-and-colleges>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-exclusion>

<https://www.gov.uk/school-attendance-absence>

<https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/school-attendance-and-absence/>

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