

Shefford Lower School

Attendance Policy (Pupils)



Throughout this policy 'parents' refers to natural parents, whether married or not, to those with parental responsibility and to designated carers who have responsibility for the child.

Rationale

- Children are entitled to a full-time education and to feel happy, confident and successful at school.
- Children need to attend school every day in order to benefit fully from their education. Missing school leaves children vulnerable to falling behind, reduced confidence and increased social and emotional difficulties.
- Parents have a legal duty to ensure their children of compulsory school age are registered in full time education and attend regularly.
- The government expects schools and local authorities to promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence.
- We recognise that at times families and children may need additional support and that circumstances need to be considered individually. We always endeavour to work in a supportive partnership with families so that children are able to have excellent attendance at school.

Legal Context

This policy is written in the context of legal obligations placed on parents, the school and the local authority in order to provide every child between the ages of 5 and 18 with a fulltime education. A list of relevant legislation relating to this policy can be found at Appendix 1.

Shefford Lower School admissions and attendance

The legal requirement is that children must be receiving full time education from the term after their 5th birthday. Shefford Lower School admits children into the reception year, the September before their 5th birthday. Therefore, parents are requested to support the school in making the best provision for children's education by enabling them to be full time from the beginning of their reception year.

We recognise that some children will be very young and some may have individual needs that mean parents judge it to be more suitable for their child to attend on a part time basis. The school would support this to ease the start to school for some children, but expects that all children are full time by January so that they can benefit both academically and socially as a whole class.

Morning session: Children are required to be in school before the start of school at 9am. Registers close at 9:10.

Afternoon session: Children are required to be in school for the start of the afternoon session: Reception and Year 1 12.45pm and 1pm for Years 2 to 4. Registers close at 12.50, and 1:05pm respectively.

Aims

To support parents in maintaining their child's 100% attendance at school.

- To support children by monitoring their attendance and acting on any concerns.
- To work with families and other professionals to overcome any difficulties and improve attendance.

Responsibilities

Parents/ carers can help support their children's attendance by:

- Encouraging children to attend regularly and on time.
- Taking an interest in their children's education and life at school.
- Talking to the school about any emerging issues or problems.
- Not arranging holidays during term time.

Parents/ carers are responsible for:

- Ensuring their children receive a full time education either in school or at home .
- Ensuring their children are present in school by 9am every day.
- Ensuring that any absences are unavoidable and kept to a minimum.
- Reporting the reason for their child's absence by 9.30 on the first day of absence and again on each further day of absence if a return date has not been given.
- Working with the school to ensure that their child's education is maintained as far as is reasonable during any unavoidable long term absence.
- Seeking authorisation for children to be absent for any reason other than illness.
- Providing evidence of reasons for absence when required by the school, Education Welfare Service or other children's services.
- Attending meetings as required in relation to their child's attendance.
- To sign their child in or out of the signing in book if they are late arriving or need to leave during the day.

The school is responsible for:

- Monitoring the attendance of all children daily.
- Monitoring attendance and punctuality over time on at least a monthly basis.
- On a daily basis, following up any absence that has not been reported by the parent/ carer by 10am in the morning.
- Maintaining the attendance data base for children and updating it weekly.
- Proactively seeking support and tuition for those children who are unable to attend school in the long term, for medical reasons or illness.
- Reporting attendance to the school's Governing Body, the Local Authority or to Central government as required.
- Providing attendance reports to parents half termly and as required.
- Providing attendance information to other professionals to ensure children's welfare and safeguarding.
- Identifying any concerns / difficulties and seeking support to bring about an improvement.
- Informing appropriate agencies if there are safeguarding concerns, in line with the school's Safeguarding policy.

Taking the register

- Registers are treated as legal documents and they may be used as evidence in court cases. For this reason they are retained for a minimum of three years;
- The Legal register is held on our MIS (Management Information System);
- The register will be taken twice a day: once at the start of the morning session and again at the end of the afternoon session;
- For each pupil, the register must be marked either as present or absent:
 - o / - is entered to show the pupil is present in the morning session.
 - o \ - is entered to show the pupil is present in the afternoon session.
 - o N – is entered to show the pupils is absent until the reason is known;
- Once the school has been officially notified of the reason for the absence, the appropriate registration code will be inserted by the school office; (Appendix ii)
- The register must clearly differentiate between whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised by the school;
- It is the policy of the school that no absences are unaccounted for.

The local authority is responsible for:

- Monitoring the school's attendance.
- Monitoring the education of pupils receiving Elective Home Education.
- Children missing from education.
- Children missing education and taking appropriate action through the legal system.

Understanding Types of Absence

Authorised Absence

- Authorised absence is absence with permission from the Head teacher. This includes absences for which a satisfactory explanation has been provided, e.g. ill health;
- Even when pupils are engaged in an Approved Educational Activity off-site, they must not be marked as present, as good Health and Safety practice requires that the school needs to know who is on the premises in the case of a fire drill or real emergency;
- The school may authorise absence in the following circumstances:
 - i. Personal illness (excessive or extended absences will require medical evidence)
 - ii. Medical Appointment (copy of appointment to be seen and copied)
 - iii. Family bereavement
 - iv. Conditions rendering attendance impossible or hazardous to a child's health and safety
 - v. Religious observance (limitations apply)
 - vi. A travelling child's absence
 - vii. Involvement in a public performance
 - viii. Approved sporting activity
 - ix. Entrance exams
- For periods of extended absence because of illness, the school will seek the advice of the school nurse and HPA (Health Protection Agency) and will only authorise the number of days that have been advised by the Health Authority for the illness.

Unauthorised Absence

Unauthorised absence is absence without permission from the Head teacher. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absences.

- The school is unlikely to authorise absence in the following circumstances:
 - i. No explanation is offered by the parent/carer
 - ii. The Head teacher views the explanation offered as unsatisfactory (e.g. shopping, minding the house, refusing to attend etc.)
 - iii. Written confirmation of the reason for the absence is not forthcoming
 - iv. If a pupil's attendance percentage is below 96% and no medical evidence has been supplied
 - v. Leave of absence which is taken without the school's prior consent or knowledge and/or is in excess of the time agreed by the school
 - vi. Special occasions such as birthdays
 - vii. Minding siblings
 - viii. Parent/carer or sibling illness
 - ix. Treatment of head lice
 - x. Family holidays in term time
- Unauthorised absence from school is considered truancy. This can take the form of absence from school for complete days, lateness and absenteeism from individual lessons. Each of these is as serious as the other, but the strategies for effecting change may need to be different;
- When parents are unaware of such absences there may be a significant danger to the young person's safety, as it is likely that their whereabouts are unknown by a responsible adult;
- Unfortunately, there may be occasions when truancy is condoned by parents. If such collusion occurs, it is the duty of the school to work with the pupil and family to change their attitudes towards school, thus encouraging full attendance;
- If a pupil has 10 sessions of unauthorised absences during a 12 week period (equivalent to five days), the parents/carers can be issued with a Fixed Penalty notice by the Local Authority.

Persistent Absenteeism (PA)

- Persistent Absentees are pupils whose attendance becomes unacceptable.
- While discretion may be deployed (e.g. in cases of long term illness), the school will refer any individual child whose attendance is 90% or below to the School Attendance Improvement Officer. At this point, legal proceedings could follow; (Appendix i) .
- No absence below 90% will be authorised unless in extenuating circumstances such as long term illness; all PAs are tracked and reported to the Governing Body.
 - The school is mindful that absence may quickly fall below 90% in the autumn term for reasonable and authorised reasons.

Punctuality and Lateness

- A child will be registered as late in the morning if they arrive after 09:00am.

- The 'Late' will be recorded on our electronic management system and on the register as a 'L'.
- Arrival after the register closes, (register closes at 09:15am) unless for an authorised medical reason, is automatically coded as 'U'.
- Lateness can be an indication of more serious problems, as well as poor time management. We have a duty to ensure every child's safety and therefore will telephone home after 4 recorded lates.
- Our level of contact will be increased if lateness continues, until after 10 lates when the School Attendance Improvement Officer may be informed.
- For full details see Appendix iii (Punctuality Protocol).

Pupils who are consistently late are disrupting not only their own education but also that of other pupils. Parents, guardians or carers of pupils who have patterns of lateness will be contacted to discuss the importance of good time keeping and how this might be achieved. If lateness persists parents, guardians or carers will be invited to attend the school and discuss the problem and support offered. If support is not appropriate or is declined and a child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence due to lateness recorded in any 12 week period, the school may ask Central Bedfordshire Council to issue parents with a Penalty Notice.

Temporary School Closures

Where a school has to close due to severe weather conditions, problems with amenities such as water or heating, fire, structural damage or in-service training, no attendance registers are needed. This will be coded appropriately.

Reporting Absence – First Day Response

- It is the policy of the school that no absence should be unaccounted for.
- For safe-guarding purposes, on the first day of absence parents/carers are expected to contact the school, preferably by telephone before 09:30am.
- The parent/carer reporting the absence should give the reason for the absence and the expected date of return.
- The office team will make a written note as to why the child is absent, including how the message was received, verbal/voicemail.
- If the date of the return is unknown, regular contact on a daily basis should be kept with the school.
- If the school receives no contact a member of the office team will:
 - i. Arrange to check if the child is in the lesson that they should be in. If he/she is present, the register will be marked accordingly. If he/she is absent, they will:
 - ii. Telephone the parent/carers by 10am that morning.
 - iii. If contact cannot be made, the school has a duty of care to ensure the child is safe and therefore the school may seek advice from the Education Welfare Service/ School Attendance Officer.
 - iv. If this still fails, the police may be alerted that the child is missing.
- When the child returns to school, even if the absence has been reported verbally, the parent/carer is expected to confirm the reason for the absence in writing, within five school days. The written confirmation will be placed on file.
- If written confirmation is not received within the expected time frame, a standard letter and form will be sent out for completion.
- If this is still not returned within a school week, the non-compliance with the school policy will be recorded as unauthorised on the register.
- Reporting an absence, verbally or in writing, does not guarantee authorisation.

Leave of Absence

External Appointments within school hours

The school recognises that there are occasions when pupils need to leave school for an appointment (e.g. doctor, dentist, optician etc.). If at all possible, all appointments should be made outside of school hours.

- If an appointment is during the school day, a request for the absence to be authorised should be made at least 24 hours before the appointment to allow for authorisation to be considered.
- Evidence for the appointment should be provided with the request (e.g. appointment card/ hospital letter).
- The request can be made verbally or in writing through the office or class teacher who will place the request in the register folder which is sent to the office during morning registration.
- • Where this is not possible before the appointment, it should be made available on the child's return to school.
- Without this evidence, the absence will not be authorised.
- The school acknowledges that there are occasions when requests cannot always be made in advance, as appointments at doctors and dentists etc. can sometimes only be made on the actual day. Where this is the case, evidence must still be provided when the child returns to school or the absence will not be authorised. Safe guarding issues require that we must be certain where a child has been, even if they are with their parent/carer.
- If the pupil returns during the school day they are also required to sign back in. We require all pupils leaving for an appointment to be collected by a parent/carer in person. We will not allow a child to leave alone. (Being told that a parent/carer is going to wait in the car park etc. is not sufficient for our safeguarding procedures.)

Holidays in term time

The latest amendments to education law (September 2013) make it clear that Head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time, unless there are exceptional circumstances. The purpose of this change in the regulations is doubtless to highlight the crucial link between pupil's attendance and their success within school and to ensure Head teachers take a firmer approach towards parents/carers who remove their children from school during term time in order to go on holiday. The school will therefore consider every absence application individually, although our policy will be NOT to grant leave of absence, other than in the most exceptional circumstances.

Holidays in term time can only be agreed by the Head teacher.

The Head teacher will use discretion to grant authorised absence in a school year if both the following apply:

- i. The parent/carer the child normally lives with applies to the school in writing, with appropriate evidence, at least 2 weeks in advance of the intended holiday.
- ii. There are 'exceptional circumstances' for the holiday.

Special reasons or exceptional circumstances that may be agreed to are:

- i. A dying close relative in a different country.
- ii. A family funeral of a close relative in another country/ part of the country.
- iii. Holidays for fostering or adoption purposes.
- iv. Religious observance.
- v. Holidays for armed services personnel when meeting the criteria set out by the ministry of defence.
- vi. When a family needs to spend time together to support each other during or after a crisis
- vii. Where disability means it is difficult for the family to organise care at another time.

Exceptional circumstances do not include:

- Being unable to take a family holiday during the 6 week summer break
- The availability of cheap holidays
- Poor weather experienced during school holiday periods
- Overlap with the beginning or end of a term.
- Different holiday dates for siblings in different schools.
- A surprise booked by another person/ treat for the child
- A mistake in term dates when booking

It is not permitted to withdraw children for holidays in term time and these absences will be unauthorised except in very exceptional circumstances, at the Headteacher's discretion. Exceptional circumstances may include:

- Holidays for families in the armed forces when meeting the criteria set out by the Ministry of Defence
- Where disability means it is difficult to organise care at another time
- To allow families time together following a serious crisis

In making this policy it is recognised that where families are unable to take a family holiday in the summer months, they may still take one during school holidays at other times of the year.

Sporting events/ exams

We support our pupils in their achievements outside school. Leave of absence to attend exams or participate in competitions will be authorised as long as there is no serious detriment to their overall education.

Serious Cause for Concern

There is serious cause for concern if:

- A child has frequent authorised absences
- A child has unexplained absence
- Reasons for absence are not plausible
- A child is absent for a prolonged period
- There are frequent short absences
- Attendance for a child is 90% or below
- The school is unable to contact the parent in regards to attendance
- Parents fail to engage with the school

Failure to attend school or improve attendance

Children's attendance is regularly monitored.

If a child's attendance falls below 95% and there is cause for concern, parents will be informed of the concern by letter.

If attendance falls below 90% and there is cause for concern, parents will be sent a letter as above. They will be asked to meet with the Headteacher to discuss ways to improve attendance and any support that may be needed.

In all cases we will be proactive in seeking to support parents and children where there is cause for concern. This will involve a meeting with the Headteacher and an opportunity to discuss any support that may be available.

Further poor attendance will result in a referral to the Education Welfare Service. Failure to engage with the school, to ensure their child attends school or to bring about an improvement, may mean the Local Authority takes the parents to court. A parenting order, education supervision order or school attendance order may be issued.

Ultimately, in the most serious cases, failure to support a child in receiving their entitlement to a full time education could result in a large fine or custodial sentence.

Attendance and the Law:

Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 empowers designated Local Authority officers, head teachers (& deputy and assistant head teachers authorised by them) and the police to issue Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absence from school.

When a Penalty Notice may be issued

In Central Bedfordshire schools and academies may ask the local authority to issue a Penalty Notice.

Penalty Notices for non-school attendance

The school will always ask the Local Authority to issue a Penalty Notice when:

- A pupil is taken out of school for a term time holiday which has not been authorised by the school
- A truancy patrol carried out by a school attendance officer has found a pupil absent from school and the absence has not been authorised by the school
- A child's school attendance has been poor and his/ her school believe that the issuing of a Penalty Notice may lead to an improvement in the child's attendance, such as being persistently late for school and when parents/ carers are not addressing the issue. Parents will be warned that a penalty may be issued and absence will be unauthorised unless there is a medical evidence to confirm the pupil is not well enough to attend school.

When a Penalty Notice is issued it is on a per child/ per parent basis. This means that if a mother and father have 2 children and take both children out of school they may be issued with a total of 4 Penalty Notices; one to each parent for each child.

Issuing a Penalty Notice:

Attendance officers will apply the following criterion when issuing a Penalty Notice:

- The number of absences totals 10 sessions (5 days) within a 12 week period

Once the Penalty Notice has been given there is no statutory right of appeal, although there are circumstances in which the council may withdraw the Notice, such as the retrospective provision of satisfactory, specific medical evidence for any absences.

Payment of Penalty Notices:

- A Penalty Notice is initially for £60.
- If this £60 is not paid within 21 days of the date of issue, it rises to £120.
- If after 28 days of the date of issue the £120 is not paid, the council will prosecute the parents under section 444 of the Education Act 1996. This will lead to an appearance in the magistrates court and may result in a fine of up to £1,000.

Non-Compulsory Age Attendance

Attendance is a vital foundation for a child's learning, but to get the most benefit a child must attend regularly and promptly. These also provide good habits for the future. Nevertheless, parents of non-compulsory school age (below the age of 5) children do not have a legal duty to ensure their children receive suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise than at a school (this includes home education).

However, if a child is registered at a school, parents do have a responsibility for ensuring that their child attends regularly.

The school census now collects absence data in relation to pupils who are aged 4. Hence, the need to ensure good attendance habits with non-compulsory aged pupils is now heightened for all schools.

All non-compulsory age pupils should be treated exactly the same as compulsory age pupils and the same protocol should be followed in order to follow-up absences and to encourage regular attendance.

Rewarding Good Attendance

Children receive certificates for 100% attendance on a termly basis. Children who have absences due to chronic medical conditions, but whose attendance is otherwise excellent, also receive certificates for their attendance.

Equal Opportunities

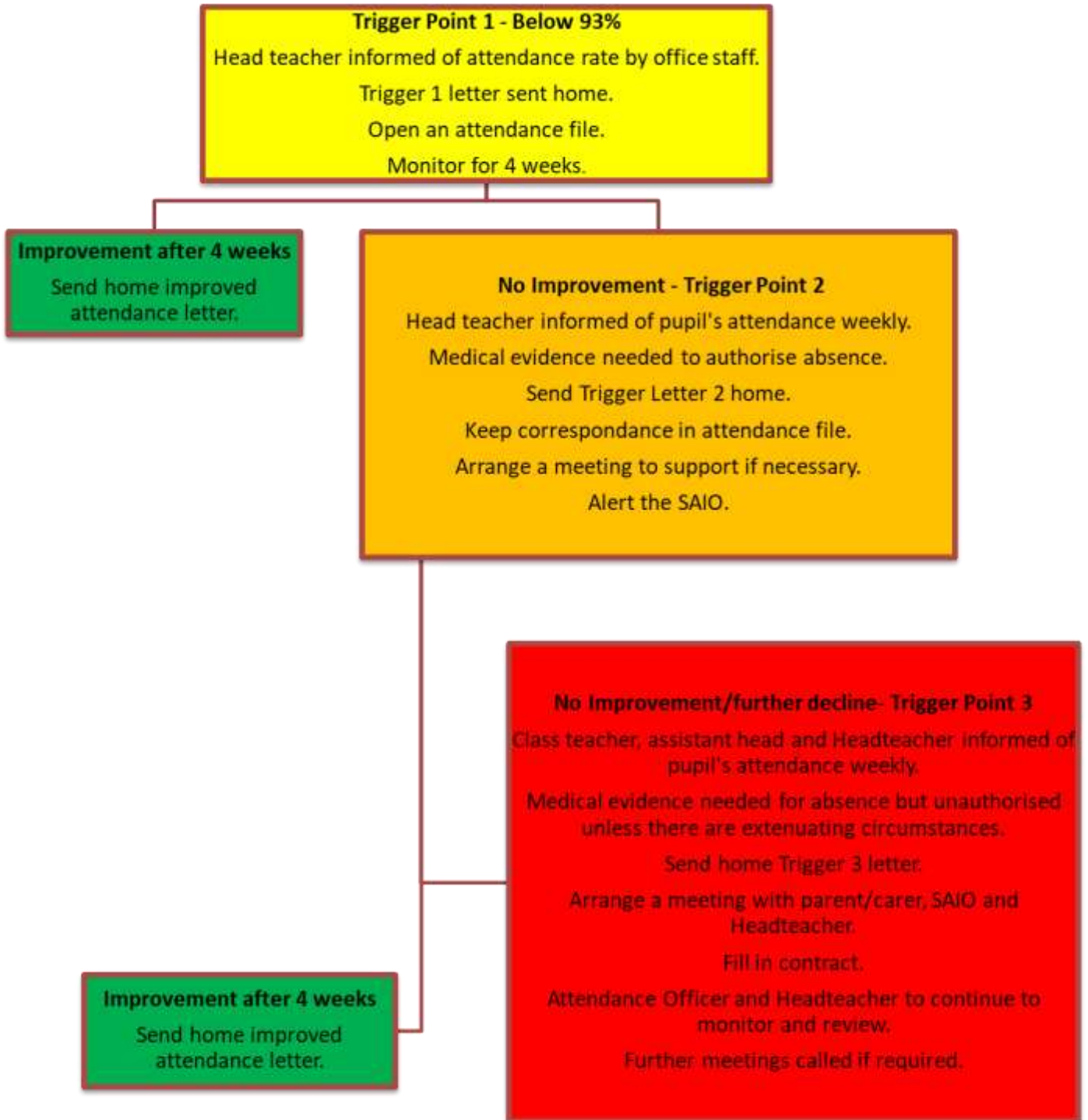
All children of statutory age are entitled to a full time education. The school will support parents and carers in order to ensure children receive their entitlement regardless of their individual needs, disability, medical needs, economic status, gender, race, culture or religion. The school will maximise its own resources and will seek the advice and support of other professionals in order to overcome barriers to children's attendance.

Monitoring

Attendance is monitored on a daily basis by admin staff and any patterns arising or concerns are reported to the Headteacher. Attendance over time is monitored on at least a half-termly basis. The Headteacher provides a termly report on attendance, within the Headteacher's report to the governing body.

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years.

Date agreed:	July 2018	
Head teacher:	Tracey Callender	
Chair of Governors:	Val Thompson	
Next review date:	July 2020	



Legislation relating to the school's attendance policy

Pupil registers and attendance codes:

- The Education Act 1996; and
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 and amendments.

Section two – school day and year:

- The Education Act 1996;
- The Education (School Day and School Year) (England) Regulations 1999;
- The Education Act 2002; and

The Changing of School Session Times (England) (Revocation) Regulations 2011.

Section three – statutory guidance on parental responsibility measures:

- The Education Act 1996;
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998;
- The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003;
- The Education Act 2005;
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006;
- The Education (Parenting Contracts and Parenting Orders) (England) Regulations 2007;
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 and amendments; and
- The Education and Skills Act 2008.