

Attendance and Inclusion

**Education Access Service and
Shropshire Virtual School**

October 2024

Who are we

Jo Smith

Education Access Team Leader

Education Access Team

The Education Access Service supports Shropshire council in collaboration with schools and parents to meet the obligations and duties placed upon them by successive education acts and childcare legislation.

We are a team of highly skilled officers, with a wealth of experience, knowledge and individual skills to offer. Our aim is to continually improve the outcomes for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and to improve school attendance, safeguarding all pupils, helping to raise attainment.

Amy Foulger
Lead Attendance Officer
Shropshire Virtual School

We're the education champions in the local authority for children and young people in care to Shropshire, supporting three families of children, those being: Children Looked After, Previously Looked After Children and Children with a Social Worker.

Our team promotes education, achievement and wellbeing, and we influence policy and practice that affects our learners. We advise and work closely with schools/settings, social workers and other professionals to support our children to fulfil their potential. We recognise that regular school attendance is an important protective factor for our vulnerable children and young people and promote a collaborative approach, working with schools and partners to remove barriers to attendance.



**What do you
think good
school
attendance
looks like?**



Why is school attendance so important?

Attending school **regularly** helps to build **confidence** and develop vital **life skills**



School
is the **key** to
future success!



Missing **2 days** of school each month = Missing nearly **3 weeks** during a school year



15 minutes late every day =



two weeks of learning lost each school year

Data shows pupils with more than **95%** attendance Achieve better GCSE results!



at least one grade higher!

Even **90%** attendance is still 19 days of education lost in a school year



In Shropshire we aim for an attendance figure of 95% or above for all children.

Our overall attendance figure for all children in Shropshire for 2023/2024 academic year was 91%.

Current attendance for Shropshire is 94.6%. Exclusions to date are 0.

Our overall attendance figure for looked after children during 2023/2024 was 90.02%.

A child with less than 90% attendance is classed as PA pupil.
A child with less than 50% attendance is a SPA pupil.

ATTEND! AIM HIGH! ACHIEVE!



What do you think are some of the barriers to regular attendance for our children?





**What are some
of the risks to
children by not
being in
school?**



For vulnerable children, being in school acts as an additional protective measure, giving them the chance to build stable, positive relationships with staff and for safeguarding professionals to see them regularly. We cannot start transforming care leavers' outcomes when they leave care. It starts in the early years. It starts with education.

Dame Rachel De Souza
Children's Commissioner, 2023

Attendance and Attainment

A DfE 2019* study of attainment at the end of Primary School and Secondary School, showed that generally, the higher the percentage of sessions missed across the key stage at KS2 (Y3-Y6) and KS4 (Y10-Y11), the lower the level of attainment at the end of the key stage.

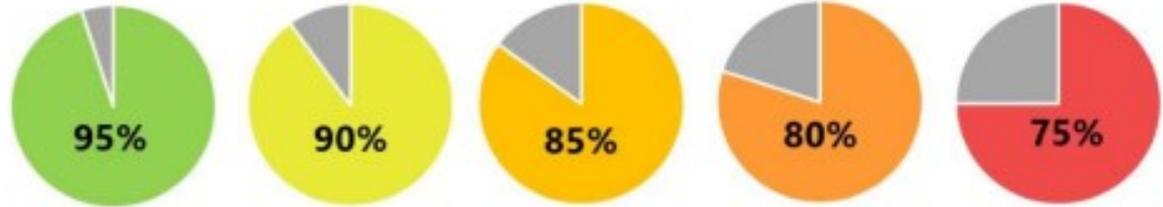
Among pupils with no missed sessions over KS2, 83.9% achieved the expected standard compared to 40.2% of pupils who were persistently absent.

Among pupils with no missed sessions over KS4, 83.7% achieved grades 9 to 4 in English and maths compared to 35.6% of pupils who were persistently absent.

[*The link between absence and attainment at KS2 and KS4, Academic year 2018/19 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics)



If your child's attendance is...



In a year, this means your child has been absent for...



Also, if your child is this late every day by...



In a year, this is the same as losing...





Who is responsible for ensuring a child attends school regularly?



Working Together to Improve School Attendance

New statutory guidance came into force on 19th August 2024

Improving attendance is everyone's business.

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude and any special educational need.

Some pupils find it harder than others to attend school and therefore improving attendance requires schools and partners to work in partnership with pupils and parents/carers to remove barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place.

Support for pupils with a social worker

Parents are expected to:	Schools are expected to:	Academy trustees and governing bodies are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:
<p>Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance.</p> <p>Proactively engage with the support offered.</p>	<p>Know who the pupils who have, or who have had, a social worker are.</p> <p>Understand how the welfare, safeguarding, and child protection issues that they are experiencing, or have experienced, can have an impact on attendance – whilst maintaining a culture of high aspiration for the cohort.</p> <p>Provide additional academic support and make reasonable adjustments to help them, recognising that even when statutory social care intervention has ended, there can be a lasting impact on children's educational outcomes.</p> <p>Work in partnership with the local authority at a strategic and individual level, sharing data on attendance including, at an individual level, informing the pupil's social worker if there are any unexplained absences and if their name is to be deleted from the register.</p>	<p>Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.</p>	<p>Ensure that all Children's Social Care practitioners understand the importance of good attendance for pupil's educational progress, for their welfare and their wider development – and understand their role in improving it.</p> <p>Through the work of Virtual School Heads, they should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake systemic monitoring and data sharing of the attendance of children with a social worker in their area: developing and implementing targeted cohort level interventions to improve attendance. • Provide advice, challenge and training to schools on how to promote and secure good attendance for children with a social worker. • Develop whole system approaches, with social care, to support the attendance of children in need.

Looked after and previously looked after children

Parents are expected to:	Schools are expected to:	Academy trustees and governing bodies are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:
<p>Work with the school and local authority to help them understand the child's barriers to attendance – including the development of Personal Education Plans.</p> <p>Proactively engage with the support offered.</p>	<p>Have high expectations for the cohort – with expert support and leadership provided by the designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after pupils.</p> <p>Work in partnership with the local authority Virtual School Head to develop and deliver high quality Personal Education Plans for looked-after children that support good attendance.</p> <p>Work directly with parents to develop good home-school links that support good attendance. For previously looked-after pupils this could include discussion on use of the Pupil Premium Plus funding managed by the school.</p>	<p>Designate a member of staff to have responsibility for the promotion of the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after pupils.</p> <p>Monitor and review attendance of the cohort and consider how school policies, including behaviour policies, are sensitive to their needs and support good attendance.</p>	<p>Promote the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children – doing everything possible to minimise disruption to education when a pupil enters care.</p> <p>(LA that looks after the child:) Appoint an expert Virtual School Head (VSH) – will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor, report on, and evaluate the education outcomes of looked after children, including their attendance, as if they attended a single school - wherever they live or are educated. • Ensure schools know when they have a pupil looked after by the authority on their role and that information is shared with the school on issues that may impact on their attendance. • Ensure that all looked-after pupils have high quality, up to date, effective Personal Education Plans developed in partnership with schools, social workers and carers – including, where necessary, clear interventions and use of pupil premium plus funding to support good attendance. • Provide expert advice and information on the education of previously looked-after pupils to schools and parents – including their attendance.



Who can support us if we have attendance concerns for one of our children?



Education Access Service

Shropshire EWO's

- Every school in Shropshire has an education welfare officer allocated to their school, Academies have to purchase an SLA.
- The EWS work with all Shropshire schools, aswell as Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire, these approaches came from the excellent reputation the service holds. We have seen an increase in our traded position over the last 6 years.
- EWO's have their own 'patch' giving them responsibility for a number of schools, where they assess and advise on the managing of whole school attendance.

What you can expect from your EWO

Within Shropshire we pride ourselves on our dedicated team of highly trained and skilled officers.

The services of an Education Welfare Officer include but not exhausted:

- Review all school registers to identify children with <90% (or agreed figure) attendance
- Review coding of registers each term to inform on trends, especially children educated off site
- Meet with staff who have strategic responsibilities re attendance to review policy and procedure and contribute and advise on appropriate strategic interventions – **Early intervention is Key**
- To advise on and undertake the necessary tasks in respect of, Child Employment, Elective Home Education and Children Missing Education
- To network, liaise and signpost to other agencies as required.

Facts

- The team work in line with current DfE guidance in relation to School attendance and relevant sections of legislation as contained in the Education Act 1996.
- Pre Covid times Shropshire held good County Averages in attendance, we saw within Primary attendance av 96.4% and PA 7% and Senior schools av attendance of 94.5% and PA 12%. Shropshire were at 91% overall attendance during academic year 2023/2024.
- As we begin the new academic year of 2024/25, we are celebrating that attendance is everyone's business as we are 5% higher year on year already.
- As of Monday 30 September 37,329, pupils were registered at a Shropshire School (not independents) with 94.6% average attendance with 6800 PA=12% 586 SA% 1.6%

- Ensure you work with the EWO who is tasked with exploring the whys, to build a relationship with the child, to offer support and trust, to engage the child and their family with early intervention / identified actions to bring about change required.
- **Key Message** - “ absence of a child whether it be persistent lateness, odd days that build a pattern of not being in school, is a symptom that something may be happening in their life”

Inclusion Support - Pupil Planning Meeting

- The aim of the pupil planning meeting process is to improve the situation in school for the child, and to reduce the effects of their presenting needs through the implementation of effective and proactive support within school and the engagement of support services/agencies.
- Please note that pupil planning meetings are not the appropriate action to take if the only area of need to be discussed is poor attendance. The allocated school EWO can advise on action for poor attendance/punctuality.

Shropshire Virtual School

Attendance Monitoring Looked after Children

Virtual Schools have a statutory duty to collect, report and monitor the attendance of all looked after children, responding swiftly to absence patterns or concerns and working collaboratively with schools, social workers, parents/carers to put strategies in place to support regular attendance. Attendance is monitored in many ways:

- Daily attendance marks are gathered through ePEP, enabling Virtual School links to see live attendance data.
- Attendance is a key area of the termly PEP's, enabling discussions with all parties to take place and ensuring appropriate support is put in place to overcome any barriers to attendance.
- Monthly reporting on the school attendance of looked-after children through the authority's corporate parenting structures.
- Fortnightly attendance support meetings, between Virtual School Link and Lead Attendance Officer, to address absence concerns of the most vulnerable e.g. children with less than 50% attendance, those on reduced timetables or who have no registered school setting.

Attendance Monitoring Children with a Social Worker

We have a strategic responsibility for improving the outcomes for Children with a Social Worker, of which an important part is improving attendance.

- We train, support and advise schools and social workers on the importance of regular attendance for children with a social worker.
- We have worked alongside local authority colleagues to develop an attendance reporting system for children with a social worker, enabling us to now report on this cohort and use data to identify patterns and barriers to attendance which in turn drives our support strategy.
- Regular attendance at Stepping Stones forum signposting support to social workers with attendance and education queries.
- Leading a regional attendance forum with colleagues across other local authorities to share best practice and discuss common themes for this cohort.

Virtual School or Education Access – who can support?



Education Access

An EWO should always be contacted if there are concerns for a child not attending school.

Each School has a named EWO and the Team Leader can also assist as required.

Attendance should always be included in any CIN/CP plan, and all factors should be considered when reviewing non-school attendance in line with Educational Neglect guidance.

Remember to always celebrate improved attendance.

EWOs can be key to supporting those important messages regards School attendance.

Virtual School

Looked-after children

Speak to your Virtual School link worker if you have any concerns about attendance of a looked after child.

Children with a Social Worker

Alice Evans is our Education Advice and Support Officer for children with a social worker and can provide advice and guidance to social workers for children on CIN or CP plans. Where it is an attendance issue and there is a Shropshire EWO attached to that school, Alice will be able to signpost who best to contact.

How can you support good attendance

Early intervention is key!

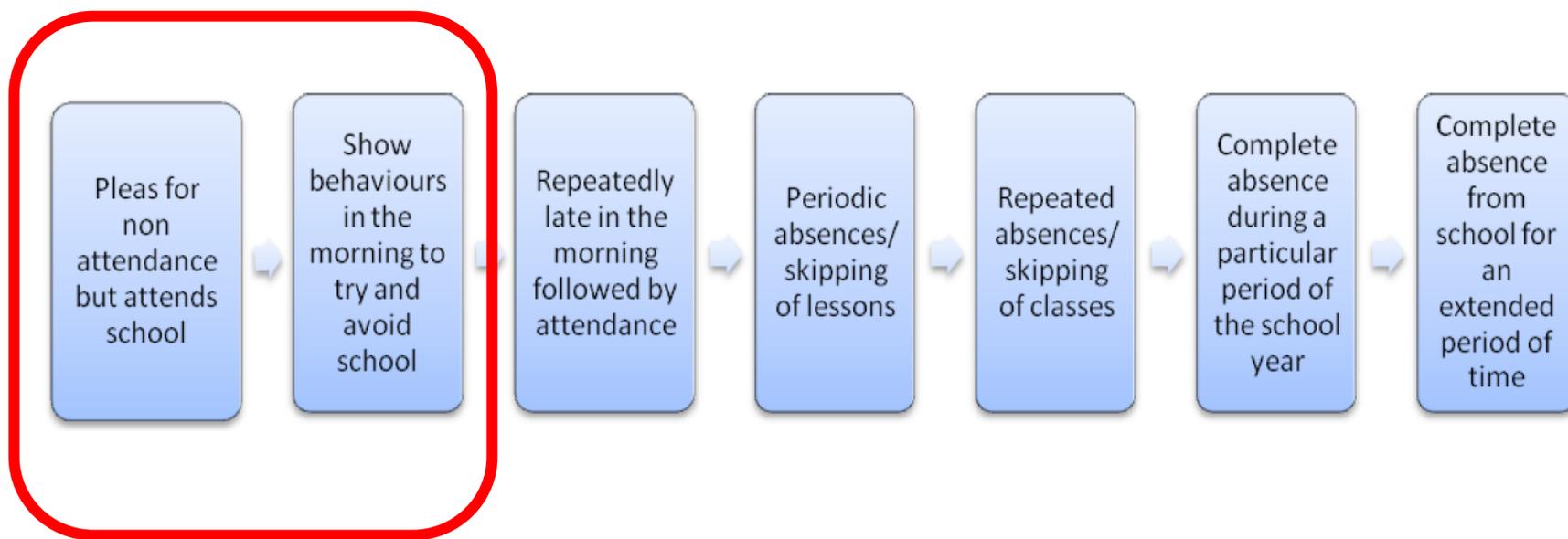
Be aware of the child's current attendance %. For looked after children this will be part of the PEP. For children with a social worker, enquire with the school and/or Parents/Carers.

Speak to the child's school, EWO and/or Virtual School link if you have any concerns, so that all parties can work collaboratively and in a timely way to avoid attendance issues becoming entrenched.

Questions to consider

- Are school or Parents/Carers worried about attendance?
- Can all absences be explained?
- What are the reasons for absence? Are there any patterns emerging?
- Are there any unauthorised absences?
- Are we satisfied with the reasons given for absence? Professional curiosity.
- Is the child punctual?
- Do Parents/Carers know how and when to report an absence?
- Has the child been able to share their views? Gathering the child's voice helps to understand what they perceive the barriers to be.

Emotional Based School Avoidance



Important to spot these early warning signs so that poor attendance doesn't become entrenched.

Suspensions and Exclusions

OFSTED Guidance

- 204. If a school uses fixed-term and internal exclusions, inspectors will evaluate their effectiveness, including the rates, patterns and reasons for exclusion and whether any pupils are repeatedly excluded. Schools should have a strategy for reintegrating a pupil who returns to school following a fixed-term exclusion and for managing their future behaviour.
- ***Inspectors will consider how well the school is recognising and acting to address any patterns that exist, because disruptive behaviour or sudden changes in behaviour can be an indication of unmet needs or a change in another aspect of a young person's life.***

-

Fixed term suspensions

‘Informal’ or ‘unofficial’ suspensions, such as sending a pupil home ‘to cool off’, are unlawful, regardless of whether they occur with the agreement of parents or carers. Any suspension of a pupil, even for short periods of time, must be formally recorded.

Permanent Exclusion

The decision to exclude a pupil permanently should only be taken:

- in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour

policy; **and**

- where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others such as staff or pupils in the school.

The law does not allow for extending a suspension or 'converting' a suspension into a permanent exclusion.

This should only ever be used as a last resort.

Children with a Social Worker

Please refer to the Guidance* and especially from paragraph 58:

Pupils who have a social worker, including looked-after children, and previously looked-after children

For children with a social worker, education is an important protective factor, providing a safe space for children to receive support, be visible to professionals and realise their potential. When children are not in school, they miss the protection and opportunities it can provide and become more vulnerable to harm.

*Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement Guidance for maintained schools, academies, and pupil referral units in England September 2023

Threat of Permanent Exclusion for a Looked after Child

If you are concerned that a Looked after Child is having increasing suspensions or is at threat of permanent exclusion, please contact the child's Virtual School link urgently. They will work collaboratively with you and school to look at strategies and plans to support the child's continued education and avoid permanent exclusion.

Reduced Timetables

What is the purpose of a reduced timetable and who can authorise its use?



Reduced Timetables

- Consideration should be given to other interventions first and not an automatic solution to manage a situation. Every child has the legal right to a full-time education.
- It is not a tool to manage behaviour, the Inclusion team should be contacted for those cases.
- Parents have to be consulted and agree to any plan formulated.
- Parents hold the responsibility for safeguarding their child when not in school.
- As an interim short-term measure to support change and re integration they can be an excellent tool if planned and managed correctly.
- If a child has an EHCP school must consult first with the SEN caseworker.
- The new working together guidance (page 25 states) - Where the pupil has a social worker, the school is expected to keep them informed and involved in the process.



How many reduced timetables do you think were submitted last academic year for children with a social worker?



49 CP

34 CLA

13 CIN

11 CLA (previously)

Reduced Timetables and Flexible Learning Plans for Looked after Children

- All pupils are entitled to a full-time education
- In exceptional circumstances adaptations to a pupil's timetable might be in their best interests & can be a positive tool to support engagement & improve attendance
- It should not be used to 'manage behaviour'
- Flexible Learning Plans (FLP's) are better for a young person than a Reduced Timetable (RTT) 😊 - this should be your first consideration
- FLP's are a personalised timetable with each morning and afternoon session having an education activity delivered by an education practitioner / QA'd provider
- If an FLP is not possible, then an RTT can be considered.

RTT/FLP Process for Looked After Children

- Consent for a Flexible Learning Plan or Reduced Timetable is required from Parents/Social Worker and Virtual School Headteacher before it commences
- Safeguarding – checks must be done by school
- Shropshire Policy – review & aim to close at 6 weeks
- A request for extension must come back to the Virtual School Headteacher for agreement
- Risk Assessments are an essential part of the RTT/FLP paperwork, addressing any actual or potential safeguarding, welfare, offending or harmful behaviour concerns that may result from a change in the pattern of school attendance. Consideration must be given to the needs of the child/young person and the potential risks posed to them whilst not in receipt of education during the school day. An RTT/FLP will not be signed off without one.

Term Time Holidays



**Who can
authorise a
holiday?**



Term time holidays

DfE guidance is very clear that holidays during term time is not acceptable or exceptional circumstances.

The LA cannot influence the decision of headteachers, it is their discretion as set in guidance.

Shropshire LA has a new published Attendance / Inclusion policy and Code of Conduct as of September 2024.

In the past academic year, the LA prosecuted 172 families for non-school attendance and issued 795 Penalty Notices for LATT.

Term time holidays for Looked After Children

- CLA term time holiday must only be agreed in exceptional circumstances
- Last year unauthorised absence from term time holiday was too high.
- Policy - the carer & SW (& person with Parental Responsibility if S20) must consult with SVS before going to a School to make a request.
- The VS Link must come to the Virtual School Headteacher with any request for consideration in advance.
- The VSHT will take into account other factors e.g. transitions, staying with another family, current attendance %
- If VSHT agrees there is an exceptional case only then can the SW approach the School HT - and it is their decision ultimately
- It cannot be agreed retrospectively.



**EACH ONE OF US CAN
MAKE A DIFFERENCE.
TOGETHER WE MAKE
CHANGE.**

“I strongly believe that deep down in every child, however invisible, hostile or rejecting they may seem, is a deep longing to be seen, known and truly understood”.

L. Bombèr, 2007

What we sometimes see as
a failure to **BEHAVE**
properly,

is actually a failure to

COMMUNICATE
properly.

“The only way to make change is to see these challenges that we face as opportunities.”

– Adam Bellow, *Educator*





Any Questions?

**Thank you for your time
today**