

# Devon Virtual School for Children in Care

## Attendance Policy

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Parents and Carers of children of compulsory school age (aged between 5 and 15 years at the start of the academic year) are, by law, required to ensure that their children receive a suitable education through regular attendance at school or otherwise. Official research by the DfE shows, in general, the higher the percentage of sessions missed across the Key Stage, the lower the likely level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. In particular, pupils with no absence are 1.6 times more likely to achieve Age Related Expectations or above, and 4.7 times more likely to achieve above Age-Related Expectations than pupils that missed 15-20% of all sessions.

At Key Stage 4, 78.7% of pupils with full attendance achieved the equivalent of 5+ GCSEs grades 4-9 including Maths and English. For pupils with attendance between 95% and 99.9% this dropped to 69.1% and by the time a pupil became a persistent absentee (ie. attendance of 90% or below) the rate of pupils still achieving 5+ GCSEs at the top grades decreases to just 35.6%.

### Attendance

As a general rule, Children in Care should be given the same opportunities as all children. They will attend school from the beginning of their entitlement in Reception to the end of the summer term in Year 11. Their school place will be based on their need and, in the majority of cases, this will be a mainstream school unless they have an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) which names specialist provision.

Children are expected to attend school and should only be absent:

- If they are ill. For absence up to 7 days including Saturday and Sunday, the Carer should contact the school on the first day by phone and confirm in writing when they return to school. Longer absences should include a letter from a GP;
- Circumstances where absence can be authorized by the school such as:
  - Religious observance
  - Interviews
  - Study Leave
  - Approved Educational activities
  - Family bereavement
  - Family contact that cannot be arranged outside the school day
  - Medical appointments
  - CAMHS appointments
  - CiC Review.

The Virtual School will not support holidays in school time for Children in Care unless there are clearly exceptional circumstances, which are outlined by the Social Worker to the Area Learning Advocate, and which show that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. This will never be agreed where attendance is below 98% for the school year in question.

Should the **leave of absence** be refused and Carers still take their child out of school, the absence will be recorded as **unauthorised**. This would then lead to the involvement of the Educational Welfare Service and an attendance target in the PEP.

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Where no school place has been identified for the child the Virtual School will arrange temporary education. This may be alternative provision, online learning or tutoring. Where the child has an EHCP, the 0-25 SEN Team is responsible for ensuring that an appropriate school place is found without delay.

Children in care are expected to attend school on time, and where required, will need to be brought and collected by Carers or another authorised adult to ensure that this happens.

Non-attendance that has not been authorised will be treated as a serious matter by all agencies concerned. Any actions to support children's attendance will be taken in their best interests and will be included in their Personal Education Plan. Early intervention must be taken as soon as attendance falls below 98% or there is a concern.

Schools will contact Carers on the first day of absence to ask for a reason and will pass this information to the Virtual School Administrator ([kate.clarke@devon.gov.uk](mailto:kate.clarke@devon.gov.uk)) when attendance falls below 98%.

Actions taken to improve attendance will be agreed by the Area Learning Advocate, school, Social Worker and Carers. Where there are entrenched problems of non-attendance and there is no resolution, there will need to be an escalation to senior managers of agencies involved to consider the best course of action. Children and young people must be involved in the discussions and their views taken into account.

### Roles and Responsibilities

#### Children & Young People:

- Are expected to attend school regularly and on time, except where absence has been authorised. They are expected to register morning and afternoon and attend all lessons.

#### Carers:

- Are responsible for Children in Care receiving education;
- Are expected to be a 'good parent' and promote the child's education and attendance;
- Are expected to be positive about the value of education and have high expectations for Children in Care;
- Are responsible for ensuring that children in their care attend school with all appropriate equipment, lunch and uniform. Carers support the children's learning which includes the travel to and from school;
- Are expected to contact the school, Social Worker and Area Learning Advocate if there are any attendance problems and to work with the school and other professionals to resolve them;
- Are expected to arrange any medical and other appointments outside school hours wherever possible and to take family holidays outside of school term time;
- Are expected to listen to the child to find out why they are not attending (for example bullying, problems with learning);

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- Are expected to raise any concerns at the Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting and CiC review;
- Are expected to refuse permission for a child not to attend school unless there are good reasons such as illness.

### **Social Workers:**

- Have primary responsibility for ensuring the child has an up-to-date care plan including the education and health arrangements.
- Attend Personal Education Plan meetings.
- Wherever possible, ensure that placement moves do not impact on school stability. Inform the Virtual School and where necessary the 0-25 SEN team of any placement instability.
- Listen to the child to find out why they are not attending.
- Help carers to support the child's education.
- Work closely with the Area Learning Advocate to better understand the issues affecting the education of children in care.

### **Education Welfare Officers:**

- Work in partnership with the Virtual School, Carers, Social Worker and schools in matters related to school attendance;
- Support work to raise educational attainment and progress for Children in Care through improved attendance;
- Attend PEP Review meetings where there are issues of poor attendance;
- Monitor trends in relation to school attendance for Children in Care and report to the Virtual School.
- Work with carers to improve attendance.

### **Schools:**

- Ensure that there is a system of first day calling for Children in Care so that Carers are telephoned when the child fails to attend;
- Avoid the use of exclusion for a Child in Care. Work with the Virtual School to ensure early intervention;
- Listen to Children in Care to find out why attendance is a problem and to find out the reasons;
- Inform the Virtual School Administrator as soon as attendance becomes a problem ([kate.clarke@devon.gov.uk](mailto:kate.clarke@devon.gov.uk)).

### **Virtual School:**

- Will arrange a 'Planning for Success' meeting when a Child in Care starts at a school;
- Complete the Relational Support Plan with the young person and other professionals;
- Work with children, schools, Carers and Social Workers to improve attendance;
- Attend PEP meetings and quality assure the process ensuring that attendance has a high profile;
- Monitor attendance and take action with other agencies where necessary.