

**Wiltshire Council**

**Children's Select Committee**

**6<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

---

## **Working Together to Improve School Attendance**

### **Executive summary**

The DfE published new non-statutory guidance in May 2022 to help schools, trusts, governing bodies and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance.

The guidance applies from September 2022.

Following public consultation earlier this year, and subject to parliament, the Secretary of State has committed to this guidance becoming statutory when parliament time allows (this will be no sooner than September 2023).

### **Proposal**

That the committee:

a) is aware of the latest requirements for schools, trusts, governing boards and local authorities in maintaining high levels of school attendance, as set out in guidance.

### **Reason for proposal**

The new guidance sets out important, new expectations on what schools and local authorities should do to maintain high levels of school attendance. The committee should be aware of these changes as part of the council's commitment to ensuring the best educational outcomes for Wiltshire children.

**Author:** Kathryn Davis – Head of Targeted Education

Contact details: [kathryn.davis@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:kathryn.davis@wiltshire.gov.uk)

# Working Together to Improve School Attendance

## Purpose

1. The premise of this guidance is that 'attendance is everyone's business'. It recognises that the barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families. Improving school attendance must be a concerted effort across all teaching and non-teaching staff in school, the trust or governing body, the local authority, and other local partners. All these partners should work with pupils and parents to remove barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and by working together to put the right support in place.

## Expectations of Schools

2. To manage and improve attendance effectively, all schools are expected to:

- have a clear school attendance policy which all staff, pupils and parents understand
- have a designated senior leader with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance in school.
- ensure attendance support and improvement is appropriately resourced, including where applicable through effective use of pupil premium funding. Where possible this should include attendance or pastoral support staff (either school based or contracted) who can work with families, conduct home visits and work in partnership with school leaders, the local authority's School Attendance Support Team and other partners.
- not use a part-time timetable to manage a pupil's behaviour.
- regularly analyse attendance and absence data to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place.
- share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe.
- ensure academy trustees and governing bodies regularly review attendance data, discuss and challenge trends, and help school leaders focus improvement efforts on the individual pupils or cohorts who need it most.

## Expectations of Local Authorities

3. Individual pupils' barriers to attendance often go far beyond the school gates. Persistent absence is almost always a symptom of wider issues in a pupil's life and barriers to attendance are often specific to local contexts. The local authority, statutory safeguarding partners and other local partners therefore have a crucial role in supporting pupils to overcome those barriers and ensuring all children can access the full-time education to which they are entitled.

Local authorities are facilitators of wider support needed by individual families and schools to overcome barriers in the short term. They are also strategic leaders that work across a geographical area to remove barriers in the longer term.

As local authorities vary significantly in size, organisational approach and demographics, the guidance makes clear that it is right that the specifics of attendance service delivery and how those roles are discharged should be determined locally to meet local needs of pupils, parents, and schools. As a minimum, however, all local authorities are expected to:

- rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools on which to provide support and focus its efforts on, to unblock area wide barriers to attendance.
- have a **School Attendance Support Team** which provides the following core functions free of charge to all schools (regardless of type):

### **3.1 Communication and advice:**

Regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area.

Show leadership and work together with all schools to tackle common issues across the geographical area. This may include agreeing common practices to issues such as term time holidays or follow up for persistent lateness, so that families receive the same approach if they have children at several schools.

### **3.2 Targeting Support Meetings:**

Hold termly conversations with all schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils.

### **3.3 Multi-disciplinary support for families:**

Provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance.

Emphasis is placed on voluntary early help assessments as a first line intervention. Multi-disciplinary support should build on the existing early help offer in local authorities rather than requiring additional resource.

### **3.4 Legal intervention:**

Take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with. Schools, trusts and local authorities are expected to work together in this regard.

- monitor and improve the **attendance of children with a social worker** through their Virtual School.

## **Conclusion**

There is recognition in the guidance that time will be needed to transition to meet these expectations, including for those local authorities that need to revise, or bring to an end, models of trading or service level agreements. In Wiltshire, attendance support services are currently traded with academies.

Therefore, whilst local authorities should meet these expectations as far as possible for academic year 2022-2023, the School Attendance Support Team should be available to all schools free of charge (and free from any service level agreement) by no later than September 2023.

The Head of Targeted Education and the ATM of the Education Welfare Service have drafted an implementation plan for the local authority School Attendance Support Team which will be presented for scrutiny at Education & Skills SMT on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

It is recommended that a further update is provided at the next Children's Select Committee.