

**Wiltshire Council**

**Children's Select Committee**

**20 September 2022**

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

### **Executive summary**

In May 2022 the DfE published new guidance "Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities". The guidance is effective from September 2022 and likely to become statutory from September 2023.

The guidance is clear that improving attendance is everybody's business. It provides advice for local authorities, schools, governing bodies, trusts and parents to support and maintain high levels of school attendance.

### **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 and the support the LA is providing.

### **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. This document details the attendance support that all schools, including Academy and Independent Schools, Special Schools and registered alternative provision settings can expect to receive from Wiltshire local authority during the academic year 2022-2023.

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# School Attendance Support in Wiltshire

September 2022-July 2023



**Wiltshire Council**

## Overview

In May 2022 the DfE published new guidance “Working together to improve school attendance: Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities”. The guidance is effective from September 2022 and likely to become statutory from September 2023.

The guidance is clear that improving attendance is everybody’s business. It provides advice for local authorities, schools, governing bodies, trusts and parents to support and maintain high levels of school attendance.

**This document details the attendance support that all schools, including Academy and Independent Schools, Special Schools and registered alternative provision settings can expect to receive from Wiltshire local authority during the academic year 2022-2023.**

## Context

The current arrangements for statutory attendance support in Wiltshire are largely coordinated through the Education Welfare Service (EWS) with support from colleagues in the Virtual School, Targeted Education Service, Support and Safeguarding, SEND, School Effectiveness and the Young People’s Service.

The EWS (Education Welfare Service) operates on a model of support that is free to maintained schools and traded to academies.

There are statutory functions that the EWS currently provides to all schools regardless of status which include legal interventions- penalty notices and prosecutions and Child Missing Education processes.

The DfE expectation is that local authorities will provide some functions free of charge to all school settings.

The DfE has stated that local authorities who operate a model of trading will need time to transition to meet those expectations and that the functions of the School Attendance Support Team should be available to all schools free of charge no later than September 2023.

In line with the guidance Wiltshire local authority will, during the academic year 2022-2023, continue to operate the established model of a traded option for academies. This will ensure that there is continuity for schools who currently commission attendance support through the EWS and will enable the local authority to have a comprehensive support offer and model of delivery in place for September 2023.

## DfE Expectations of local authorities

- **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):
  - **Communication and advice:** regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area.
  - **Targeting Support Meetings:** hold termly conversations with 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.
  - **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.
  - **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.
- Monitor and improve the **attendance of children with a social worker** through their Virtual School.

## Current Practice in Wiltshire

### Rigorously track local attendance data

We are grateful to all schools that have signed up to Group Call. This allows us to have access to contemporaneous attendance data which will enable us to be responsive to school and individual pupil need.

As we move through the academic year this data will be used to help us understand where there may be barriers to attendance –for example in particular cohorts of students or in particular areas of the county. This will enable us to target our resources and services effectively and where they are most needed to support improvements in attendance.

Wiltshire's attendance strategy will be published shortly and will lay out our vision and plans for all pupils in Wiltshire schools to achieve excellent attendance.

### School Attendance Support Team

Education Welfare Officers will carry out the functions of the School Attendance Support Team with support from colleagues in other LA services as appropriate.

The new guidance requires that certain functions are provided free of charge to all schools regardless of status.

### **Service Delivery 2022-2023**

- **All schools will be notified of their designated Education Welfare Officer (EWO) at the beginning of the academic year**
- **Maintained schools will also be advised of the hours of Education Welfare Service (EWS) time that they have been allocated for the academic year**
- **All schools will have a Targeting Support Meeting in the Autumn, Spring and Summer terms. Schools will be contacted by their EWO to arrange this. We will prioritise schools where we have identified higher rates of persistent and severe absence from our analysis of attendance data for the academic year 2021/2022**
- **The established traded model with academies will continue – academies can purchase EWO time to provide support with attendance meetings, implementing parenting contracts, facilitating discussion with families on attendance matters, case work, support and advice in developing attendance strategies and procedures etc**
- **All EWOs will offer a fortnightly attendance focus/surgery for their designated schools. This will be an online group drop-in session where schools can discuss concerns, seek advice, guidance and solutions and share good practice.**
- **EWOs will continue to support multi-agency approaches to resolving attendance difficulties for individual students where an appropriate referral has been made to the EWS. There is an expectation that schools will have attempted a range of strategies and interventions before a referral is made to the EWS, including the use of an Early Support Assessment (ESA).**
- **All schools will continue to receive free legal interventions including the penalty notice service and prosecution/court proceedings. This aspect of the work of EWS has never been chargeable to schools and has always been provided in addition to agreed or purchased hours.**
- **The LA will monitor the attendance of all children who have a social worker and attendance planning and discussion will be required for all social care assessments and plans/reviews (Child in Need, Child Protection and Support Plans). Schools can expect that attendance information will be requested by social care professionals to support this function of our work.**
- **Templates are available through the EWS pages in Right Choice for schools to use and adapt to include:**

- **LA Attendance policy and model framework (updated)**
  - **Reduced Educational Provision Guidance and notification documents**
  - **Attendance letters for school use including leave of absence (holiday in term-time) paperwork**
  - **Formal warning paperwork**
  - **Model pack for legal intervention (request for prosecution)**
  - **Guidance on use of parenting contracts**
- **There is training focusing on attendance for Governors available through Right Choice.**
  - **Where schools need urgent attendance advice, and they are unable to contact their designated EWO, they can contact the EWS duty officer by emailing [EWS@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:EWS@wiltshire.gov.uk) There is a duty officer available every school day.**