

Walsall Virtual School **Attendance Policy, Practice & Procedures**



Walsall Council



The purpose of this document is to outline the work of the virtual school in relation to promoting good school attendance and to identify the roles and responsibilities of schools, social workers and parents/carers in improving attendance for children in care.

Regular school attendance is crucial to ensure children and young people achieve their full potential. Walsall Virtual School is fully committed to ensuring all their children and young people attend their school and education settings regularly and will work with parents/carers, social workers, schools and settings to help improve attendance.

The aim of Walsall's Virtual School's attendance policy is to provide consistent practice which encourages and facilitates the regular school attendance of all Walsall's children in care regardless of where they are living.

The role of the Virtual School

As part of our whole-school approach to maintaining excellent attendance for all our children in care, the Virtual School will:

- Monitor the attendance of children and young people in care through our attendance collection service.
- Use the attendance data gathered to highlight problems and feedback issues/ patterns of absences to the appropriate social workers, team and group managers and regularly report to the local authority's performance board.
- Use opportunities as they arise, to remind parents/carers that it is their responsibility to ensure that their children/young people receive their education.
- Work with young people, their school, social worker and parent/carer when issues of attendance and punctuality arise.
- Where the attendance of a child is a concern the child's allocated Virtual School Education Support officer (ESO) will implement an attendance support plan.
- Attend an action plan meeting where necessary for a child who has received a suspension or any unauthorised absences to ensure that a plan is put in place for reintegration.
- Support the young person at disciplinary meetings and/or at risk of 'dropping out' of their course or training.
- Inform Heads of Service, Social Workers and Supervising Social Workers on a monthly basis about attendance concerns.
- Send postcards to children and young people with for good and improved school attendance.

The role of Parents/carers

As part of our whole school approach to maintaining excellent attendance, we request that parents/carers:

- Engage with their children's education by supporting the child's learning and taking an interest in what they have been doing at school.
- Promote the value of a good education and the importance of regular, punctual school attendance.
- Encourage and support their children's aspirations.
- Follow the child's school procedure for reporting the absence of their child from school.
- Prevent unnecessary school absences, for example by making medical and dental appointments outside of school hours where possible.
- Ensure that the child's holidays are taken during school holiday periods and where leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances is likely to occur, that authorisation is sought from the Head of Service and the child's school in advance.
- Contact the child's school for support when they or their child are having difficulties, and to work to form positive relationships with school staff to enable both supportive and difficult conversations to take place (if a problem arises).
- Keep the child's school informed of any circumstances which may affect their child's attendance.
- Implement regular routines at home in terms of homework, bedtime etc, so that the child is used to consistency and the school day becomes part of that routine. It is vital that the child receives the same message at home as they do at school about attendance.

The role of parents/carers of young people aged 16+

- Support young people's learning by taking an interest in what they are studying at college or training provider
- Encourage and support young people's goals and aspirations
- Promote the value of education and training and the importance of attending all lessons/sessions at college/training provider punctually to achieve and fulfil their potential.

The role of the Social Worker

As part of our whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, we request that social workers: -

- Work with schools, parents/carers and the Virtual School to promote excellent attendance and punctuality
- Provide support to parents/carers when problems with attendance and punctuality arise
- Inform the Virtual School without delay, if there are any problems with attendance or punctuality in order for them to provide support to the child, parent/carer and school
- Inform the child's school or young person's education/training provider, as well as the Virtual School without delay, if there are changes to care plans or if there are any difficulties with the care placement.
- Work together with the school, foster carer and the child to complete an attendance support plan if there are issues around attendance
- Will not authorise any holidays during term time and will forward requests for term time leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances to the Virtual School Headteacher and Head of Service for consideration.

The role of the Designated Teacher

As part of our whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, we request that Designated Teachers:

- Work with parents/carers, social workers and the Virtual School to support children who are struggling with regular attendance and punctuality
- Provide reports on attendance and punctuality of looked after children at school PEP meetings, as well as when requested by Walsall Virtual School

The role of the child/young person

As part of our whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, we request that pupils:

- Attend all lessons ready to learn, with the appropriate learning tools requested and on time for the class
- Speak to their class teacher/form tutor or another member of staff if they are experiencing difficulties at school or at home which may impact on their attendance
- Bring a note of explanation from carers to explain an absence that has happened or is foreseen
- Follow their school's procedure if they arrive late in order that their school can monitor attendance and keep accurate records for individual attendance which is also vital for health and safety in the event of a school evacuation.

Categories of absences

Absences are treated as unauthorised unless there is a satisfactory explanation for the child's/young person's absence. Parents/carers or social workers cannot authorise absences.

Illness

Most cases of absence due to illness are short term, but parents/carers will need to make a phone call to alert the child's school on the first day, as well as for each subsequent day of absence. When the child returns to school, they should bring a note from their parent/foster carer explaining the absence, if they have failed to call the school daily. For prolonged absence due to illness, parents/foster carers may be asked to provide the child's school with medical evidence, such as a note from the child's doctor, an appointment card or a prescription paper.

Medical or dental appointments

Parents/carers should make every effort to ensure that these appointments are made outside of school hours. Where it cannot be avoided, children should attend school for as much of that day as possible. Parents/carers must present a proof of any medical appointments.

Authorised absences

The Virtual School requests the child's school consider the following as authorised absences:

- Family bereavement
- Unplanned emergency contact arrangements
- Attendance at case conferences
- Home Office appointments
- Meetings with solicitors
- Others – with consultation on a case-by-case basis

Exceptional Circumstances

The Virtual School will not support absence from school for children in care unless there are clearly exceptional circumstances. These circumstances must be outlined by the social worker and show that they are significant and outweigh any disadvantages to being absent from education for a minimum time.

Unauthorised absences

The Virtual School requests that the child's school consider the following as unauthorised absence:

- Shopping visits
- Care for family members
- Days out to theme parks or to attend concerts/shows
- Parents/carers' work commitments or business trips
- Holidays taken in term time
- Supporting parents/family with translation.

Reduced timetables

All children of compulsory school age are entitled to a 'full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have.' In very exceptional circumstances, where it is in a pupil's best interests, there may be a need for a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs." (Working together to improve school attendance" DfE September 2022)

Reduced timetables for children in care are only agreed by the Virtual School Head in exceptional circumstances and are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are in place for the shortest possible period with a clear end date. Children in care with reduced timetables are monitored monthly by the ESO and designated teacher. Schools must ensure that when a reduced timetable is employed, they complete the 'Reintegration Plan and Risk Assessment' spreadsheet and send it to the Children Missing from Education team (CMFE) Email: CMFE.mailbox@walsall.gov.uk. Further details can be found in the Walsall Council 'Guidance for school on the use of reduced timetables' documentation.

Punctuality

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. There will be an attendance action plan included in the PEP Document which outlines the actions that will be taken to improve attendance. There will be an expectation that if attendance has been raised as a concern, a PEP target will be set to help improve attendance.

Attendance Action Planning

Level 1

At this stage Walsall Virtual School will adopt a preventative approach through recognising and rewarding excellent attendance of our children in care. We will recognise good attendance by:

- Sending out termly good attendance recognition letters
 - Recognise good attendance at our end of year celebration event.
 - Follow up N codes with schools, parents/carers and social workers on a weekly basis.
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Level 2

To highlight attendance concerns and promote attendance expectations and responsibilities, Walsall Virtual School will:

- Send out the traffic light awareness letter to all carers where school attendance has been raised as a concern.
 - Formally notify social workers when there is a concern about a child/young person's attendance.
 - Ensure there is an attendance target in PEP document if attendance starts to decline
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Level 3

When there is a significant concern about a child's attendance Walsall Virtual School will:

- Discuss any actions required at the weekly complex meeting
 - Arrange a professionals meeting to implement an attendance action plan.
 - Arrange a home visit to the young person to discuss how to support them back into education
 - Make a referral to the VS Specialist Support Team i.e. Senior mental Health Practitioner, Educational Psychologist or Attendance Support Officer.
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Level 4

If the child/young person continues to be absent from school after level 3 interventions, Walsall Virtual School will support schools to consider alternative methods of delivering appropriate education to re-engage children. This may be achieved through employing:

- Alternative Provision
- Managed move
- Online tuition providers

Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) packages are only used in exceptional circumstances when all other avenues for education have been fully explored and can only be agreed by the Virtual School Head and SEN Team Manager, if the child has an EHCP



Virtual School
2nd Floor
Walsall Council,
The Civic Centre,
Walsall WS1 1TP

Tel: 01922 652816