

THE 5 STEP APPROACH TO MANAGING ATTENDANCE

A Working Partnership

The Maintained Schools Partnership Agreement sets out the responsibilities of the local authority and schools in dealing with matters of attendance.

The Education Welfare Service Level Agreement builds on these identified responsibilities.

All Secondary Schools have signed Service Level Agreements in relation to the 5 Step Approach to Attendance and it is recommended good practice that cluster primary Schools should have develop Service Level Agreements with their secondary schools which clearly sets out expectations, responsibilities and allocation of School Attendance Officer support in each primary school.

The partnership between the Education Welfare Service and the school takes the form of a programme of regular focused meetings between an Education Welfare Service Officer (EWO) and the School Attendance Officer (and additional school staff as appropriate) about pupils whose attendance and welfare are causing concern.

Casework Management

In order to achieve our shared goal, of improving attendance and welfare for all children, young people and families a good working relationship between the EWS and the school is vital. The EWS will work with the School Attendance Officer who is responsible for initiating the 'in school' action, and making referrals in accordance with the 5 Step Approach.

The stages in the procedure are:-

- Step 1** ***School based intervention***
- Step 2** ***EWS advice***
- Step 3** ***EWS referrals***
- Step 4** ***Case review and assessment***
- Step 5** ***Formal statutory action***

Each of the steps will be explained in greater detail.

Step 1 **School Based Interventions**

This step focuses on school based approaches to supporting and improving attendance for all pupils.

Every school should have policies and procedures in place designed to ensure its pupils attend regularly. There should be a consistent and whole school approach, where all members of the school community are clear about their role. In summary, they should:

- Demonstrate a strong attendance ethos;
- Have a clear policy on absence, stating how it will be managed;

- Apply the policy fairly and consistently to all pupils;
- Shared the policy with all parents/carers at the time of admission to the school and regularly draw it to their attention;
- Have a named member of their management team with lead responsibility for attendance;
- Re-enforce and communicate positive attendance messages throughout the year;
- Have effective systems for monitoring attendance, including first day calling, analysis of data and follow up by form tutors when pupils return from absence;
- Have efficient systems of registration which encourage children and parents to account promptly for any absences, which are in accordance with legal requirements and which show a consistent approach to the classification of absences as either authorised and unauthorised;
- Set and monitor an annual absence target;
- Nominate a school governor with a specific attendance remit;
- Ensure all relevant staff receive training about attendance issues;
- Ensure regular training for staff with registration responsibilities and monitor of practice to ensure high standards by class teachers and others with key responsibilities;
- Promote the importance and legal requirements of good attendance to pupils and parents;
- Intervene early when individual pupil absence gives cause for concern
- Reward and celebrate good and improved attendance;
- Make best use of additional support for pupils and parents with the greatest need;
- When absence problems do not respond to interventions from Form Tutor or Head of Year; refer appropriately to the School Attendance Officer.

Research has shown that schools' success in improving attendance depends on continual attention to detail, consistent application of agreed procedures and most of all the provision of a stimulating and appropriate curriculum for the needs of all pupils.

Good Practice

Heads of year

In secondary schools, heads of year should take special responsibility for attendance. This should involve:

- Checking the registers each week
- Working with Form Tutors to devise and act upon plans to tackle poor attendance
- Initiating contact with the parent and work cooperatively and preventively with the child and parent to improve the pattern of attendance
- Meeting regularly to discuss problems with the SAO.

Good practice at Step 1

- Regular monitoring of registers.
- Phoning home on the 1st day of unauthorised absence.
- Sending a letter home on the 3rd consecutive day of unauthorised absence.
- Liaison with other school pastoral staff/HOY.
- Keeping records of actions/contacts regarding each case

Good Practice

A suggested 'Calendar of Attendance Activities' can be found in Appendix 1 which helps to communicate positive attendance messages and actions throughout the year

Good Practice

Suggested procedures for first day calling can be found in Appendix 3

Step 2 Advice and Consultation

- Parent/guardian(s) should be encouraged to visit school to discuss attendance and strategies for improvement. The parent and pupil should be given achievable target(s) to improve attendance. A date should be set for review.
- If attendance has not improved the Class Teacher, Head of Year or Attendance Manager should prioritise the list of pupils to be referred to the SAO.
- There should be regular formal advice meetings between Education Welfare staff and the School Attendance Officer to identify pupils who are experiencing attendance difficulties. This should include regular examination of attendance registers. The frequency of which will vary according to mutually agreed need. These should take place in both Secondary and Primary schools as appropriate. The Senior Lead for Attendance should attend these meetings at agreed intervals.
- The SAO and EWO will discuss and agree actions which needs to be taken; when and by whom.
- Commitment required from all parties to undertake agreed actions by the next scheduled meeting.
- Discussions, advice and actions to be recorded, with a copy kept by both the EWS and school at the end of each consultation and other appropriate feedback as agreed with school staff.
- EWS will provide advice and support to the school on issues relating to attendance, access to education, welfare and safeguarding, exclusion or related matters in order that future action can be agreed.

- SAO's to keep accurate & up-to-date electronic casework records of any contact and communication with parents/guardians/pupils/other agencies.
- The EWS will feedback information in relation to work which has been undertaken on cases open to EWS (those previously referred at step 3).

An early referral and subsequent involvement of both SAO/EWO may help to prevent a child going missing, or prevent truancy and other social problems from becoming entrenched. Delay in making an appropriate referral is often detrimental to the interests of the child involved and once truancy becomes entrenched it can be very difficult to bring about a return to regular school attendance

Good Practice

Schools may wish to consider using a formal 'Attendance Contract' which can be found in Appendix 4 which outlines expectations, actions and responsibilities for the pupil and their parent(s) for improved attendance, which they must agree and sign together with the school, School Attendance Officer or EWO.

Good Practice

PROPOSED AGENDA FOR MEETING WITH LINK EWO

It is best practice to plan for regular meetings with the School's link EWO. The EWS suggest the Schools School Attendance Officer and the lead person with responsibility for attendance is a part of these meetings.

Suggested structure of these meetings:

- **General Preventative** – to discuss, agree and review procedures and short-term strategies or projects to improve general punctuality and attendance in the year group/whole school.
- **Early Intervention** – to identify, discuss and review individual pupils with emerging punctuality or attendance problems. Decide what school-based or other actions could be used to address concerns.
- **New Referrals to EWS for support** – to identify, discuss and make formal referrals to the EWS of those pupils where EWS intervention is needed over and above school's actions to address attendance concerns.
- **Reviewing Cases** – EWO and school to provide feedback and share information about progress with existing referred cases.

Schools should provide overall attendance data for the year group and class/form groups and individual pupil attendance printouts to be able to target work.

The EWO will take notes from this meeting and share agreed actions with the School.

Appendix 5 contains an example Linkwork record which the EWO and SAO's complete and agree at these meetings

Good Practice

Before accepting a referral from a School Attendance Officer, the EWS will expect the school to have first undertaken a number of steps to address the pupil's non-attendance. these would include:

- action by the class teacher/form teacher;
- action by the Head of year (secondary) or Head or Deputy Head (primary)
- contact with parents; including the school sending a sequence of letters of concern to the parents before formally involving the SAO;
- Inviting parents to a meeting in school;
- Offering help and support in the first instance; signposting to other agencies as appropriate.
- Challenging the outcome if not satisfactory – i.e. if absences for illness continue to be

covered by notes – advise parents that medical confirmation is required.

- Undertaking home visits and speaking to the parents about making improvements/addressing attendance difficulties.
- Agreeing a timeframe in which improvements need to be made, with robust monitoring during this period

Step 3 Referral to the Education Welfare Service

- Referrals should be made only after appropriate strategies have been explored by the school and undertaken at step 2.
- The referral will only be accepted if there is evidence of work completed by the school and School Attendance Officer.
- The referral will only be accepted if the School Attendance Officer has undertaken a school meetings/ and home visits to speak with parents/carers to seek improvement/address any difficulties.
- Referrals to EWS must be made using formal SAO and EWS referral forms and will only accepted by the EWS on receipt of an electronic referral sent to ewsreferrals@cardiff.gov.uk.
- An up to date print out of the registration certificate should accompany the referral.
- Once the case has been formally referred to the EWS, the case will be allocated to the School's EWO.
- At the outset of casework by the EWO, the parent will be given a written "Initial Warning" letter reminding parents/carers of their responsibilities and of the possible legal consequences if their child's attendance does not improve.

Mandatory Practice

If there are concerns that the pupil's family have moved out of the area, without leaving a forwarding address/name of new school, the School Attendance Officer must complete and forward the CME Checklist (**Appendix 6**) for Schools to the EWS for further tracking. Further information on Children Missing Education (CME) is detailed in **Section 4, page 46**.

Step 4 Case Review and Assessment

When there is no progress at Steps 1, 2 & 3. The EWO will undertake a range of actions and interventions aimed at facilitating the pupil's return to regular school attendance.

Casework will be based on an assessment of needs and action planned appropriate to the individual circumstances of each case, but may include:

- Home visits in order to assess the situation and agree a way forward. Arranging meetings between the school, parents and pupil in school or elsewhere.
- A range of interventions which could include liaison and joint working with other professionals. The Education Welfare Officer may also signpost and negotiate a plan of support for pupils and families to receive additional specialist support such as counselling or group work e.g. CAMHS.
- All casework will involve the setting of targets for improvement and will be time-limited and subject to regular review.
- All casework will involve close and continuous liaison with the pupil's school. Regular reviews and feedback to schools through a variety of methods which may include face to face consultation, phone, and written communication on work undertaken.
- In cases where the main causes of non-attendance may be school-related (e.g. alleged bullying, peer pressure, difficulties with a particular lesson or teacher) the worker will discuss these with the school in order to develop strategies to overcome these difficulties.
- Keeping accurate casework records detailing all EWS involvement and interventions.
- Sending a "Final Warning" letter where a child's attendance fails to improve advising the parent/carer that legal action may be started.
- If no improvement in attendance within a given timescale is achieved the EWO and enhanced EWO (Legal) will meet to undertake a case review to consider the appropriateness of moving to Step 5 – Formal Statutory Action. They will then instigate a Pre-Court meeting.
- ***Instigating a Pre-Court Meeting***
 - If the child's attendance fails to improve, parent/carers and their child will be invited to a Pre-Court Meeting to which a school representative and any others involved with the family or child may also be invited. Parents/carers may have a legal representative at this meeting.
 - If a parent/carer fails to attend this meeting without an acceptable reason or behaves unreasonably or aggressively and does not co-operate, court paperwork will automatically be issued and the parent/carer's non attendance at the meeting used as evidence of a lack of engagement

Step 5 Statutory Action

The Education Welfare Service will:

- Consider suitability of Court proceedings based on a portfolio of evidence provided by the school, SAO's and EWO's.

- Decide on the most appropriate proceedings to instigate and inform the school and the parents.
- Prepare documentation for the legal proceedings based on the portfolio of evidence provided by the school.
- Seek legal advice as appropriate.
- EWS will attend court and present evidence as required.

(NB Authorised absence is a defence in law. An offence has been committed only when unauthorised absence is recorded)

Status of referrals open to the EWS at the end of an academic year

All referrals that are EWS at the end of an academic year will be subject to a formal review. The referral will remain open and active at the start of the next academic year if the attendance concerns persist. The referral will then progress through the steps (up or down) as appropriate.

Prosecution of parents of Year 11 pupils

The LA can take legal action against the parents of any child of compulsory school age who is not attending school regularly. But it does not have to take legal action.

If the attendance of a Year 11 pupil has not improved after a final warning, the EWS will look at the individual situation, taking advice from the school and the Council's Legal Department.

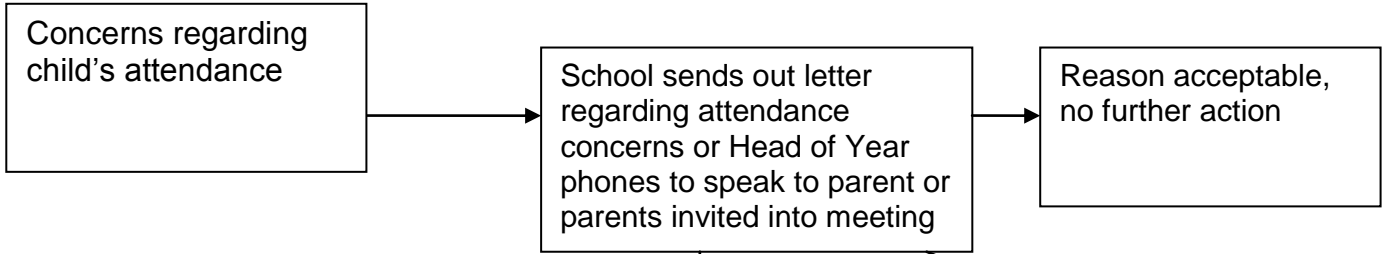
If a Year 11 pupil has less than one and a half terms of school left the EWS is unlikely to start a prosecution, unless there are younger siblings with attendance concerns.

The Prosecution Process and how school's can support this process is outlined in further detail in Section 6.

Procedures for Non Attendance Flow Chart

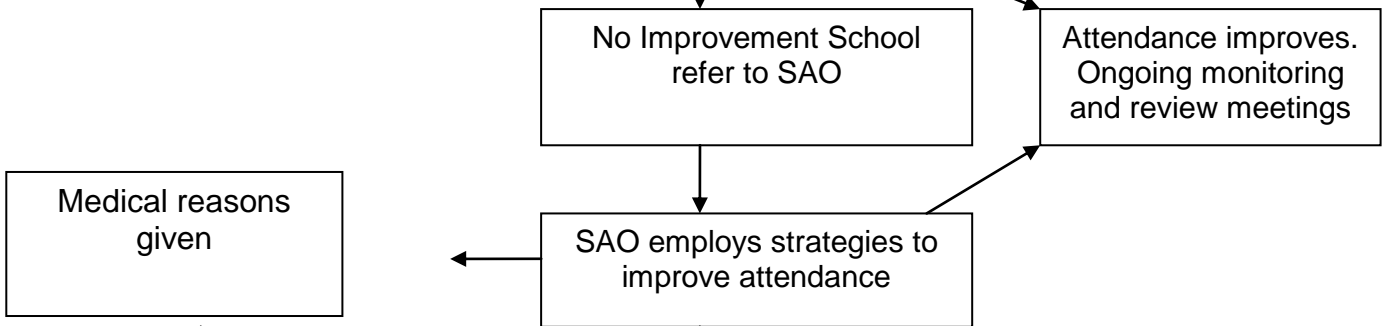
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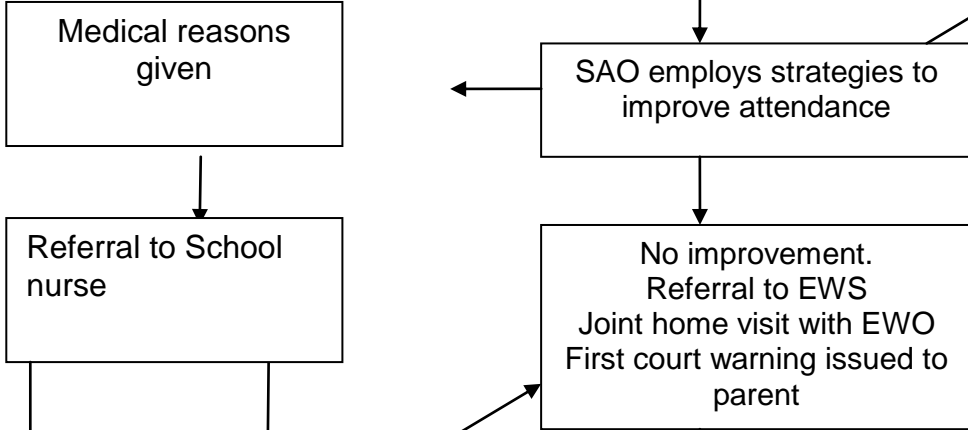
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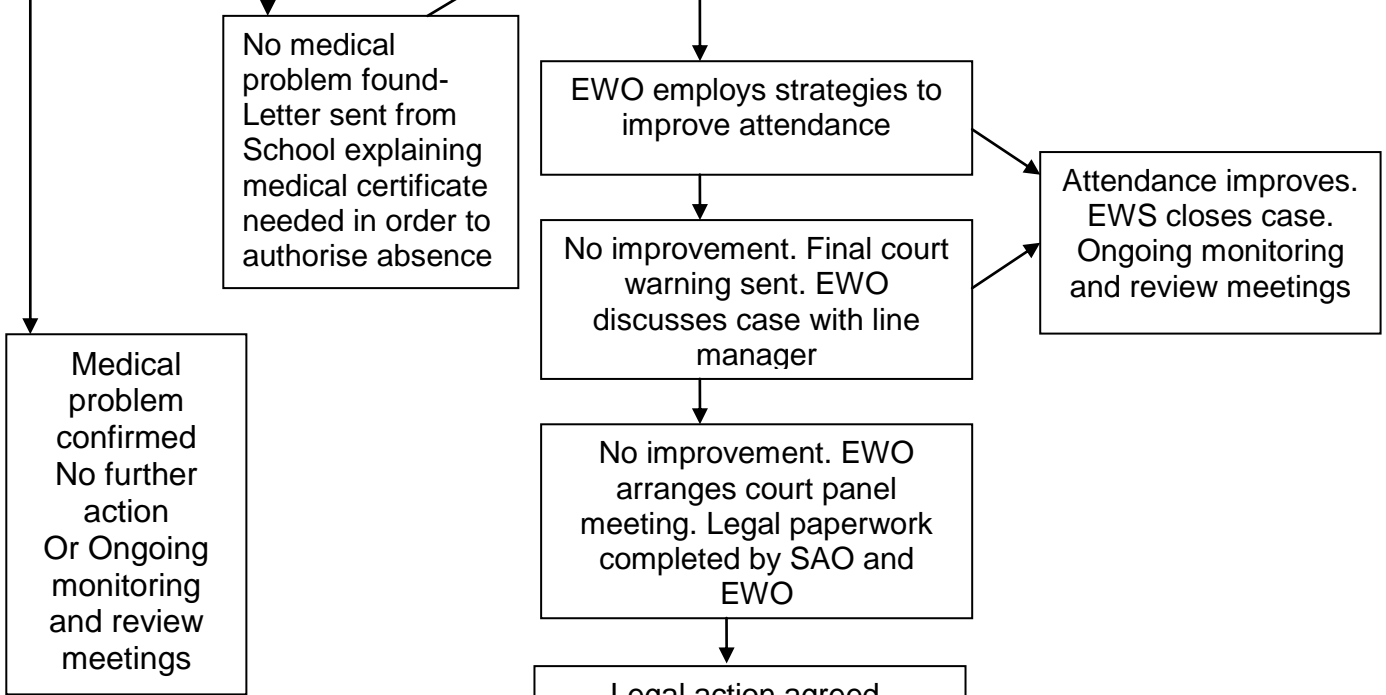
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