

Belonging, engaging and participating

Guidance on improving learner engagement and attendance

Guidance

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Belonging, engaging and participating

- Audience** This guidance is intended for all leaders, teachers and other practitioners in maintained schools, pupil referral units (PRUs) and education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) settings. It outlines the important role of family and community engagement in securing improved engagement and attendance amongst learners.
- Overview** The guidance has been developed to support maintained schools, PRUs, parents/carers and local authorities with improving learner engagement and attendance. It sets out approaches that can be used by schools, PRUs and EOTAS settings to help improve learner engagement and attendance, and by local authority services and other partners when attendance issues escalate. The approaches should be adopted, developed and built upon so that they are aligned to the needs of children and parents/carers.
- Action required** Leaders, teachers and other practitioners in maintained schools, PRUs and EOTAS settings should use the suggested good practice in terms of approaches to improving learner engagement and attendance.
- Further information** Enquiries about this document should be directed to:

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Additional copies This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at gov.wales/school-attendance

Related documents All Wales Attendance Framework 2011

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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The purpose and scope of this guidance

This guidance is aimed at maintained schools, PRUs, EOTAS settings, parents/carers and local authorities. It is a practical document for leaders, teachers and other practitioners which sets out the approaches and resources that can be used by schools, PRUs and EOTAS settings to help ensure high levels of learner engagement and attendance. These approaches and resources should be adopted, developed and built upon so that they are aligned to the needs of children and parents/carers.

Attendance cannot be considered in isolation. The many interrelated and overlapping causes of absence and the varied nature of the learner experience in school, the community and at home mean that whole school strategies and strong multi-agency working arrangements are needed, designed to support all learners. There is a growing understanding that schools also need to support learners in developing a sense of belonging, connectivity and engagement with school, and to build their resilience and ability to cope with the challenges they face.

This guidance aims to outline suggested good practice in terms of approaches to improving learner engagement and attendance, and to signpost to further guidance and resources. For legal background, including the formal processes for managing attendance, see the [All Wales Attendance Framework](#). For references to some of the evidence that underlies this guidance see the [Attendance Review](#).

Terms and definitions

The following terms and definitions are used in this document.

'School' unless otherwise qualified refers to maintained, primary, secondary and special schools, voluntary schools and PRUs. For PRUs, 'governors' refers to the management committee members and 'headteacher' to the teacher in charge in charge of a PRU.

The definition of **'parent'** is set out in section 576 of the Education Act 1996 and includes:

- any person who, although not a parent, has parental responsibility (as defined in the Children Act 1989) for a child or young person, and
- any person who has care of a child or young person.

Having care of a child or young person means that a person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child, is considered to be a parent.

'Learner' unless qualified, refers to a child, young person, learner or student of compulsory school age.

Compulsory school age. Under section 8 of the Education Act 1996 and associated legislation, children become of compulsory school age on the 31 December, 31 March and 31 August (whichever comes first) following their 5th birthday. A young person ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June of the school year in which they have their 16th birthday.

Attendance There is no statutory minimum level of attendance specified in legislation. Traditionally, good attendance depends on circumstances, but is usually taken to be around

95%. For data collection and statistical purposes, persistent absence has been defined in statistical terms in Wales as being absent for over 20% of half day school sessions. Evidence suggests that even small increases in absence above this level can have a disproportionate adverse effect on learners. It is also recognised that the earlier the intervention, the more likely it is that a positive outcome will be achieved. As such, the Welsh Government will amend the statistical definition of persistent absence to over 10% of sessions, which is the definition currently in use in England.

Family Engagement Officer refers to a dedicated member of staff working with parents and could have the title of parent liaison officer, community pastoral worker, family support worker, or wellbeing officer.

Education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) refers to education provision to meet specific needs of pupils who, for whatever reason, cannot attend a mainstream or special school. In law, local authorities are responsible for providing these services.

The importance of good school attendance for all learners

Regular school attendance has a positive effect on children and young people and a strong impact on learner outcomes, standards and progression. Within this, regular attendance supports the development of literacy and numeracy skills, and on the conceptual understanding needed for further study and success in the workplace. [Analysis](#) shows that examination outcomes link strongly to attendance rates, for example, where a modest increase in absence can lower outcomes. Lessons missed can mean missing key information, skills and ideas.

Good attendance also has a positive effect on emotional and physical wellbeing. Establishing good attendance patterns from an early age is vital for social development. For example, the more time a child spends with other children in the classroom and as part of broader school-organised activities, the more chance they have of making friends, of feeling included, and of developing social skills, confidence and self-esteem. Conversely, extended absence from school is linked with behavioural and social problems. These effects can be long lasting and can affect a young person's mental health and their long-term life chances. Absences can start a negative cycle, where learners start to be absent for reasons such as bullying or not coping with school work, with prolonged absence only likely to make the situation harder to resolve. The inter-relationship between attendance and wellbeing is considered so strong that attendance is often considered a proxy measure for learner wellbeing.

Attending school also supports learners' wider development as full and rounded members of society. The [Curriculum for Wales](#) is based on four purposes that demonstrate the breadth of the academic, wellbeing and social benefits that learners gain by attending school. Because of the well-established links between attendance and attainment, wellbeing and citizenship, improving attendance has long been an important policy aim for governments, local authorities and individual schools. Internationally, the advantages of education are such that the right to a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities is one of the seven core aims of the Welsh Government based on the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#).

These strong reasons for attending school do not mean that learners should come to school at all costs. It is counterproductive for learners to attend when they are ill, for instance,

because attending school could be more harmful to the learner and/or others than if they had stayed at home.

All learners and their parents should be made aware of who they can speak to if they are unhappy in school, and they should be encouraged to do so at the earliest possible time to prevent escalation. There are a number of issues that may be preventing learners from attending a mainstream setting, such as mental health or behaviour challenges, and in some cases alternative arrangements such as local authority home tuition or attending a PRU may be appropriate. But any such arrangements should generally be only a short-term measure and for the vast majority of learners, the long term goal should always be to return learners to their usual place of education as soon as practicable.

It is well established that factors such as poverty, additional learning needs and certain protected characteristics are associated with learners having a greater risk of absence from [school](#) and can exacerbate the challenges they already face. Promoting good attendance is, therefore, particularly important in these cases.

Attending school is also crucial from a safeguarding perspective, ensuring that children are seen, safe and heard, and not exploited. Active follow-up of absence is a major element in their care and protection. This is one of the main reasons why recording and monitoring attendance accurately is so important.

Engagement as key to improving attendance

The periods of home learning during the pandemic highlighted the adverse effect of not attending school on learner engagement, standards and [wellbeing](#). It is widely [acknowledged](#) that for most learners, standards in literacy, numeracy and Welsh language (especially for learners from non-Welsh speaking parents) deteriorated during this period, and that the wellbeing and mental health of some learners also suffered.

Prior to the pandemic, concerted attention given to attendance by schools in Wales over many years had led to a gradual improvement in attendance rates. But attendance levels have not returned to pre-pandemic levels and remain a concern.

For some learners and parents, the barriers to learning they face have been exacerbated since the pandemic. In some cases, the intensive support provided during the pandemic improved relationships between school and parents and led to better attendance. In other cases, previous habits of good attendance may not have been re-established, and more casual attitudes to learning and school attendance may have gained ground. In addition, campaigns for promoting good attendance were disrupted during the pandemic.

It is now timely for schools to renew and re-launch their campaigns, refresh their attendance policies and review their strategy for improving attendance in the long-term. There are no quick solutions and improving engagement and attendance will need frequent re-emphasis of the benefits of good attendance. Communications with learners and parents should stress the school's wish to understand and help, as well as set clear expectations.

Some key actions which can support positive attendance include the following:

- Building positive relationships when children first start school. Home visits provide the opportunity to meet parents in a more relaxed setting and to share information about the importance of good attendance. This also allows the school to have an

understanding of the individual context of children and families within the school as well as explore parental attitudes to school and education more generally.

- Providing clear guidance and information on attendance and the school's expectations;
- Allowing parents to feedback their views on attendance and to be involved in co-constructing the policy and approaches that the school adopt.

Roles and responsibilities: Attendance is everybody's business

A key element of any successful working relationship is a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Parents

Parents have a statutory responsibility for ensuring that their compulsory school-age children receive a suitable education appropriate to their age, ability and aptitude and to any additional learning needs they may have (see [section 7](#) of the Education Act 1996). This can be through regular attendance at school, agreed education provision other than at school, or by elective home education.

However, we recognise that for some children good attendance at school presents challenges which parents may feel unable to deal with. This is why Welsh government, schools, local authorities and other agencies must work together ensure that parents receive the support they need to ensure their children achieve the best attendance they can. The importance of working with parents to support good attendance is detailed in the Family Engagement section of this guidance. Further information for parents to help them understand the support that is available to help their children attend school is currently being developed.

Kinship, SGO and Foster Carers

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 creates the duty of a 'parent' to ensure the child concerned receives a suitable education. Section 576 of the Act defines a parent as someone who either has parental responsibility OR has care of the child.

For people who are not parents, but who have responsibilities to care for a child under special guardian arrangements, the responsibility for ensuring the children within their care attend school remains with them. For those caring for a child in an informal kinship arrangement, the parents retain parental responsibility and would therefore also be responsible for school attendance.

For mainstream foster carers and formal kinship foster carers, where the child is subject to an interim care order or care order, although the foster carer has 'care' of the child, that care is provided as an agent of the local authority. In this case the responsibility for school attendance rests with the local authority as the corporate parent (see section 33 Children Act 1989).

For mainstream foster carers, where the child has been accommodated under section 76 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the child is classed as looked after, the parents retain parental responsibility. However, in these cases as the local authority accommodates the child, it will also take responsibility for school attendance.

Support for those who have responsibility for looking after children and young people within their care can be accessed from their local authority or fostering agency. In particular under Parts 3 and 4 of Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, local authorities have a duty to assess the care and support needs of both adults and children and to meet those assessed needs where certain conditions are met.

Corporate Parenting

The [Part 6 Code of Practice](#) (Looked After and Accommodated Children) issued under the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 outlines the statutory duty on local authorities as “corporate parents” to promote the education of children who are looked after and help them succeed. This is also reinforced in the [Corporate Parenting Charter](#) issued by the Welsh Government, which includes as one of its principles “A Good Education” providing opportunities and support for all care-experienced children and young people to learn/develop and help them become who they want to be. This is because all children have a right to an education and aligns with the rights set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Schools and governing bodies

Mainstream settings have a range of responsibilities for learner attendance. For example, they are legally required by way of the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010, to maintain an accurate learner attendance register and to provide data on pupil absence to the local authority under the [School Performance Information \(Wales\) Regulations 2011/1963](#) and [The School Information \(Wales\) Regulations 2011/1944](#). They are also expected to publish or make available an easily understood, regularly reviewed attendance strategy that sets out the principles underlying its approach to improving learner engagement and attendance, and how the school intends to develop a positive culture around attendance.

Schools should communicate and engage with parents effectively to make sure they are fully aware of the attendance policy. This should include the steps they will take to provide learners with engaging and relevant teaching and learning opportunities, and the support they will provide to meet learner wellbeing and mental health needs.

School strategies should be developed in partnership with learners and parents and show the importance and advantages of good attendance as well as the possible implications of absence. They should work with parents to identify any possible reasons that could affect attendance and direct them to sources of support.

School governors need to ensure that they are well-informed about the school’s attendance position and priorities, and its strategies for improvement. They should receive sufficient training from their local authority to enable them to contribute to the schools’ overall strategy for improving attendance and feel confident to challenge where there is insufficient improvement.

Education Other Than At School (EOTAS)

Local authorities have a duty to make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school, or otherwise than at school (within an EOTAS setting), for children within their area who are of compulsory school age and by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not receive suitable education for a period unless such arrangements are made for them.

‘Suitable education’ means an efficient education suitable to the child’s age, ability and aptitude and to any additional learning needs the child may have.

EOTAS providers play a crucial role in giving some of the most vulnerable children and young people access to learning in a range of settings including, but not limited to, *pupil referral units*, independent special schools and third-sector organisations.

PRUs and Independent Schools

PRUs are legally a type of school. They fall within the scope of the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 which place a duty on the proprietor of a school to keep accurate admission and attendance registers for pupils registered at the school (on the admission register). The local authority which established and maintains the school is the “proprietor” upon whom the duty falls in relation to PRUs, but they will necessarily be reliant upon information gathered by the PRU for this purpose.

Independent Schools are also subject to these requirements. In addition, under [the Education \(Information About Children in Alternative Provision\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2009](#), an independent school providing education to a child that is arranged and funded by a local authority in Wales in accordance with section 19A of the Education Act 1996, is required to make available to the child’s parents, a summary of the child’s attendance record, showing the number of authorised and unauthorised absences and the number of possible attendances, for each school year.

Local Authorities

Local authorities are required, by way of section 436A of the Education Act 1996, to make arrangements to enable them to establish the identities (so far as it is possible to do so) of children in their area who are of compulsory school age but are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at school. That is, local authorities have a duty to identify, as far as is possible, children who may be or who are missing education. This duty therefore requires local authorities to monitor whether children within their area are receiving an education, and to monitor the quality of that education.

Local authorities should therefore have measures in place to ascertain and monitor the attendance of pupils receiving EOTAS provision - directly via parents and/or through arrangements made with contracted EOTAS providers.

This information will be relevant to the local authority’s determination as to whether a child is receiving a suitable education, and also to support any action which may be taken by the local authority to promote attendance – such as, for example, issuing a penalty notice under [regulation 12](#) of the Education (Penalty Notices) (Wales) Regulations 2013.

In addition, having accurate and timely attendance data will facilitate local authorities in fulfilling their duty under [section 175](#) of the Education Act 2002, to make arrangements to ensure their education functions are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Where a parent does not make timely contact with the local authority or the EOTAS provider to report an absence, the local authority or the provider should contact the parents on the same day (of the unreported absence) if possible. Contacting parents immediately can prevent absences from becoming prolonged and has a safeguarding function, which is particularly important for vulnerable groups such as EOTAS pupils.

On behalf of the local authority, the Education Welfare Service (EWS) provides support for schools, learners and parents to ensure regular attendance and address problems relating to absence. The service liaises with other agencies and provides an important link between home and school, helping parents and teachers to work in partnership.

Contributing factors: the many possible reasons for absence

Attendance problems are often a symptom of some underlying cause. There are many possible underlying reasons for low attendance aside from physical ill health. These other reasons often broadly relate to wellbeing or mental health issues. And for some learners, low attendance can be as a result of a number of interlinked, sometimes complex factors.

School should consider whether there are school-related factors or worries that are affecting a learner's attendance, such as:

- experience of bullying or discrimination
- unmet or unidentified additional learning needs or disability
- anxieties about school work or examinations
- emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)

We know that learners with additional learning needs or are living in poverty are more likely to be absent from school, however there are a number of factors which may place learners particularly at risk of missing school, including but not limited to:

- children who are looked after
- children who have previously been excluded
- young carers
- some children from ethnic minority communities and children with English or Welsh as an additional language
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children
- children of transient parents
- asylum seekers, refugees, new migrants and children of migrant workers
- transgender, non-binary or gender-questioning children
- children in the youth justice system or with parents in the justice system
- children with long-term medical or mental health issues
- children who have experienced trauma and/or had [adverse childhood experiences](#)
- children of service parents and armed forces parents
- children and young people who are at risk of forced marriage
- children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation, including children who have been trafficked

- children and young people of homeless parents living in temporary accommodation, houses of multiple occupancy or bed and breakfasts
- children of parents fleeing domestic violence or living in women's refuges
- children and young people who are privately fostered
- young parents and pregnant young women
- children who are on the child protection register.
- children experiencing severe period pain or other period related health issues

Speech, Language and Communication Needs.

Speech, language and communication (SLC) skills are essential for children's positive health, well-being, education and future employment outcomes. SLC needs are the most common form of additional learning needs (ALN) and if unidentified, can lead to behaviour issues, exclusions and disengagement from school. Schools should recognise the importance of speech, language and communication development and have clear systems in place to ensure children develop their speech and language skills to their full potential.

Supporting parents to cultivate a communication and language rich environment is fundamental to improving children's early speech, language and communication development. Schools and other agencies can work with their parents to provide evidence-based strategies and activities that can support speech, language and communication development in the home. The Welsh Government '[Talk with Me](#)' guidance provides key messages for parents on these strategies and activities.

Other family circumstances may have adverse effects on children's attendance at school. Research suggests that children who experience family upheaval are more likely to be absent. Such home circumstances might include:

- bereavement
- divorce, separation or parents in frequent conflict
- formation of a new family unit involving new partnerships
- stress resulting from unemployment, low income, alcohol or drug abuse, or mental illness.

Principles and approaches

This guidance on improving learner engagement and attendance is based on the following principles and approaches:

- A person/learner-centred approach, based on the rights of the child
- A strengths-based approach
- An Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) aware and trauma-informed approach
- A focus on learner wellbeing and mental health
- A whole-school, whole-system approach
- Building positive relationships, culture and ethos
- Family engagement and multi-agency support
- Prevention and adopting sustainable ways of working.

A learner-centred approach, based on the rights of the child

The reasons why learners do not attend school are complex and various. Although we often talk in generalised terms about absence and are aware that there are clear trends and correlations in the data, the specific combination of causes for each individual often proves to be unique, and similar seeming causes can manifest differently for each learner. Hence, any approach to improving engagement and attendance needs to be personalised and individualised to address the specific needs of each learner.

The Welsh Government is committed to taking a learner-centred approach to all aspects of providing for a learner's education and for ensuring their safety and wellbeing, based on the rights of the child. As a minimum, this means that all children and young people have the following basic rights and expectations:

- to be offered flexible, worthwhile, and relevant **learning opportunities** that are engaging and suited to their needs
- to be fully **included** in their learning experiences and to be treated with respect, so that they feel that they belong to, are involved in, and can participate in the life of their school
- to get the individual **support** they need to benefit fully from their education and to address any barriers they have to fulfilling their potential.

This guidance highlights that attendance will improve if learners actively want to come to school and if they find what is offered engaging, interesting and relevant to them. The development of the Curriculum for Wales, and the agency and local flexibility it affords schools to meet the needs of their learners, is expected to play an important role in learner engagement. Schools that have increased attendance have typically carefully designed their curriculum offer and improved pedagogy through professional development and research-informed practice. As set out in the Curriculum for Wales [guidance](#) this approach involves respecting learner 'voice' and enabling learners to influence decisions that concern them, including what and how they learn. Involving learners in the evaluation and development of the school's work is a key factor for improving engagement and attendance.

It is well established that some learners, including those eligible for free school meals, with additional learning needs, having English as an additional language, or have previously been excluded are more at risk of having lower attendance. There is a statistical correlation between poverty and having additional learning needs and increased absence rates, for example. Therefore, it is crucial that all learners are included and supported by schools

whatever their needs, experiences, personal characteristics or home circumstances. The current additional learning needs **reforms** place learners at the centre of the process of identifying needs and required provision, to encourage learner-centred planning that should lead to a better understanding of what is important to the learner and help identify difficulties before they escalate.

This learner-centred approach is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Welsh Government's vision is that all children have access to their rights as set out in the UNCRC. The Welsh Government has seven core aims, based on the UNCRC, which seek to ensure that all children and young people:

- have a flying start in life
- have a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities
- enjoy the best possible health and are free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation
- have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities
- are listened to, treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised
- have a safe home and a community which supports physical and emotional wellbeing
- are not disadvantaged by poverty.

A strengths-based approach

A strengths-based approach focuses on the positive attributes of the learner and their parents, rather than any negative ones. This includes resilience, protective factors, and strengths. It also means providing support in a way which avoids labelling, blaming, or stigmatising them and which considers the wider social and economic contexts of their lives.

An Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) aware and trauma-informed approach

Studies into Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have demonstrated the association between childhood adversity and trauma and poorer school attendance, behaviour, and learning outcomes. Toxic stress, which comes from extreme, frequent, or extended activation of body's stress response, can negatively impact brain development and the development of stress, immune, endocrine, and metabolic systems. This can lead to children experiencing poorer physical and mental health and wellbeing, which can have an impact on their attendance. It can also lead to the adoption of health harming and anti-social behaviours, during adolescence, it can also have an impact on their attendance, behaviour, and learning outcomes.

One way which schools can support children, or staff, who have or are experiencing adversity is through working in a trauma-informed way. A trauma-informed approach acknowledges that trauma is widespread in society and understands how it can impact mental, physical, social, and emotional wellbeing and the ability to build trusting relationships. It recognises that everyone has a role to play in helping to prevent trauma and mitigating its impact and seeks to empowers people to improve their health and well-being.

The Welsh Government has commissioned a trauma-informed practice framework for Wales to support the development and delivery of trauma-informed approaches. The Trauma-Informed Wales Framework¹ sets five down practice principles, which should underpin all trauma-informed approaches, and four practice levels, ranging from universal and the minimum everyone should know and understand about trauma, through to specialist trauma services. The ACE Hub Wales has produced a self-assessment toolkit which can help organisations become ACE aware and trauma-informed² and has supported the development of a range of other resources and training courses and materials which can be found on their website³.

A focus on learner wellbeing and mental health

There is a widespread acknowledgement of the importance of learner health and wellbeing, particularly of emotional and mental wellbeing, for all aspects of education and learning. For example the [Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing](#) (March 2021) includes some of the evidence for this and the contextual background. Ensuring that all our children and young people are healthy, confident individuals is also one of the mandatory [four purposes](#) of the Curriculum for Wales. This focus on learner wellbeing and mental health is particularly important in the context of improving engagement and attendance.

It is well established that poor attendance patterns are often related to learner mental health or wellbeing issues. Poor mental health in particular has been linked to poor school attendance, with anxiety often identified as a key factor. Behaviour is often a product of circumstances and past experiences. In particular, there is an increasing awareness of the impact that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can have on attendance because of their impact on learner health and wellbeing, and of the benefits of adopting trauma-informed [practices](#). Research into the impact of ACEs on school attendance found common childhood health conditions, like asthma, gastrointestinal conditions, headaches and other somatic complaints, and associated school absence, increased with the number of ACEs.

This understanding has grown during the pandemic. There is also a greater recognition of the social, emotional and physical challenges faced by children and their parents as a result of the pandemic. Pre-existing issues for some learners, from emotionally-based school avoidance to bullying, may have been exacerbated by the circumstances of the pandemic. Learners welcome the wellbeing-focused approach taken by most schools during the pandemic and they highlight the importance of schools ensuring a positive, forward-looking and friendly ethos, and the provision of specialist support and preventative interventions such as nurture groups and restorative approaches.

Outdoor Learning

The importance of offering children and young people opportunities to access regular experiences outdoors to support their physical and mental health has been widely acknowledged. Being outdoors provides opportunities for children and young people to experience awe and wonder, and allows them to be themselves in open, relaxed and stimulating spaces. This can have a significant impact on their well-being, sense of

¹ [Trauma-Informed Wales \(traumainformedwales.com\)](https://traumainformedwales.com/)

² [TrACE Toolkit - ACE Hub Wales](#)

³ [Resources - ACE Hub Wales](#)

belonging and level of engagement. More information on outdoor learning can be accessed in the Curriculum for Wales guidance.

A whole-system approach

School attendance can be hugely complex and should not be considered in isolation from other aspects of education and learner wellbeing. There are many underlying causes for learner absence. Whether a learner attends school depends on many factors, and for any particular learner the reasons are often a combination of generic and specific causes. Good support for learner wellbeing and mental health and an effective learning environment are intrinsically linked, and both should be promoted through a whole-school approach.

Improving attendance is most effective when the school adopts a number of complementary and overlapping approaches and interventions. The initiatives used by schools to encourage attendance are influenced by a number of local factors, including parental dispositions and social and economic circumstances. It is because of this contextual complexity and the need to be learner-centred that improving attendance requires a whole-school and whole-system approach. Improving attendance, as with any other aspect of educational improvement, depends on the breadth and cohesiveness of the response from the education system and partners.

An individualised and personalised focus to improving attendance presupposes a graduated or phased approach. In the first instance, all learners can expect support from classroom teachers and pastoral staff who are in a position to identify and address early signs of disengagement (for further information see sections 3 and 5 in this guidance). Low-level but concerning absence may then trigger more detailed, face-to-face engagement with the learner's family by specialised school staff such as Family Engagement Officers (see section 6). More regular absence may require the school to work with external agencies including the local authority Education Welfare Service (see section 7).

Building positive relationships, culture and ethos

Learners' sense of connection to school and to their engagement with learning, is linked to many of the reasons underlying attendance or absence. Improving learner engagement requires schools to develop positive relationships and an inclusive, welcoming ethos and culture. A positive school ethos and culture is also essential to developing positive learner behaviour in the classroom, around the school and in the wider community.

Schools need to present a coherent message and a consistent experience to learners and avoid any discrepancy between the messages communicated and the lived experience of learners at school. For example, sessions about bullying are of limited worth unless learners see that the school deals with allegations of bullying appropriately and rigorously in practice. Similarly, policies about restorative practice mean little to learners unless staff apply those approaches consistently. In order to create this environment, there needs to be a shared, whole-school understanding of the benefits of positive relationships across the school community. This whole-school culture means that schools where learners are well supported should also provide strong support for [staff](#).

Learners' sense of belonging and self-worth depends on the extent to which they feel staff care about them, listen to their views and take time to get to know them. Positive relationships between staff and learners are a key factor in whether learners want to attend school. A personalised, empathetic and flexible approach that is tailored to each learner and recognises their individuality is most likely to succeed. For example, [Estyn](#) reports that

simple actions, such as teachers smiling and greeting learners by name and engaging in positive conversation at the start of the school day, help learners feel cared for.

Family engagement

A key strategy for helping learners feel they belong to the school community is to ensure that their parents and carers feel respected and engaged. Research and inspection data suggests that this involves communicating, engaging and building strong and trusting relationships with parents. This is important for all learners but especially for vulnerable learners, including those eligible for free school meals, with additional learning needs or with English as an additional language.

Family engagement is a key element of the 'community-focused schools' approach, which sees improving attendance not in isolation but as part of a broader strategy for helping learners achieve their best. This approach underpins and strengthens all other ways of improving engagement and attendance. A Community Focused School aims to develop:

- Family engagement: Creating meaningful opportunities for families and carers to be involved in school life and decision making and to be engaged in children's learning;
- Community engagement: Encouraging schools to draw upon and utilise links with community groups and organisations and also offer support and opportunities to community members; and
- Multi-agency engagement: Developing partnerships with wider services and interventions to remove any barriers to learning.

In practice, the ways in which schools improve family engagement is by building positive, trusting relationships; by face-to-face engagement and communication; by consulting actively, seeking and acting on feedback; by trying to help parents overcome socio-economic and other barriers to learning; and, by working in liaison with a range of external support services and agencies.

Parents and families also play a significant role in attendance on a practical level. For younger learners in particular, attendance is strongly dependent on parental and family attitudes, not least as they often depend on them to get physically to school. For all learners, their parents and parents are well placed to provide important insights into reasons for learner absence, especially for untypical absence patterns. Schools should actively provide opportunities for parent voice and to help remove barriers to attendance, including recognising the possibility of parental difficulties, stresses or trauma.

Prevention and adopting sustainable ways of working

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act encourages all public bodies to adopt the following five ways of working:

- Long-term
- Prevention
- Integration
- Collaboration
- Involvement

For example, in the context of improving learner engagement and attendance, these ways of working could include the following:

Long-term - improving attendance requires long term commitment and perseverance. There are no quick fixes and the emphasis of this guidance is on helping learners develop a sense of belonging and engagement with the school community and to see the value of participating more in school life. This is a longer-term strategy than taking only a reactive punitive approach.

Prevention - knowing your learners and their parents well helps to identify any issues or barriers to engagement, attendance and learning, to source and implement suitable interventions for support, and to help prevent difficulties from arising.

Integration – reasons for non-attendance is complex and should not be considered in isolation from other aspects of learner education and wellbeing. Improving engagement and attendance requires a whole-school and whole-system approach. Learners are sensitive to any inconsistencies of approach across the school that may affect their engagement with their education.

Collaboration - schools should work collaboratively with learners, their parents and across agencies to promote and support good attendance. This requires schools working with a range of services, such as education welfare service, social services, youth services, behaviour management services, educational psychology, counselling and mental health services, the national health service, housing services and the police, for example.

Involvement - based on good practice, this guidance emphasises the value of involving learners and their parents fully in the life of the school community. Learner and parent voice are crucial elements in improving engagement and attendance.

Whole-school attendance strategies, policies and practices for all

The most successful schools understand that building learner engagement and improving attendance is a continuous process that begins with developing trusting relationships between school staff and learners. They understand that learners' wellbeing is the responsibility of all staff and that every interaction and engagement has an impact on learners' sense of worth. Staff know their words and actions affect learners' attitudes and, where learners feel respected and valued, this fosters a greater sense of belonging and engagement, meaning learners are then more likely to attend school.

School nursing services in mainstream schools and children's community nursing in special schools have a vital role to play in relation to enhancing trusting relationships. Welsh Government, in partnership with NHS Wales, is currently developing part of two of the [Healthy Child Wales Programme](#). The programme will set out a clear national operating model for a unified service for all compulsory school-aged children across Wales and the planned contacts children and their families can expect from NHS Wales and from the School Nursing and Children's Community Nursing Services, to support the learners on their journey through their education regardless of where or how they access education.

A school attendance strategy sets out the school's vision for engagement and attendance and the principles underlying its broad approach to improving engagement and attendance. It is a starting point for achieving an inclusive school ethos and should link to and complement other school strategies, including those on safeguarding and child protection, learner wellbeing and mental health, behaviour, anti-bullying, and tackling the impact of poverty. The attendance strategy should also link to learning and teaching policies, such as those on curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and homework, building on what we know about learners being more likely to attend school if the learning opportunities are motivating, interesting and relevant.

Detailed attendance policy documents should specify the roles and responsibilities for learners, parents, staff and governors. It should also set out procedures for dealing with any attendance and absence issues that are likely to arise, as well as being a vehicle for planning interventions and support mechanisms for individual learners when they have difficulty in attending regularly for whatever reason. Consultation with staff, and with learners and their parents, should be a well-established basis for developing all school strategies, policies and practices, including those on attendance.

It is important that parents and all school staff understand that they have a key role in improving learner engagement and attendance. Attendance is not something for the pastoral team and the education welfare service (EWS) only. In particular, the attendance strategy and policies should explain how all staff can establish and maintain positive, constructive relationships with learners, and detail how the school intends to support staff in achieving this ethos, through induction, staff development, feedback and self-evaluation. The policy is most likely to be realised by all if it is developed in full consultation with staff, including all teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as with parents.

The overall attendance strategy should be published and easily accessible so that it can be understood by all, especially by learners and parents. It should explain how the school intends to communicate with learners and parents. Schools should make sure learners and their parents understand and are fully aware of the strategy and policies and their role and responsibility in ensuring their children attend school. Learners should be involved in

making decisions that influence school life and their learning. Consultation with learners and their parents on the attendance policy is most easily achieved where schools have already established ways for enabling learners' and parents' voices to be heard.

Relevant local services such as the EWS should also be consulted in drawing up the attendance policy so that it reflects the local authority's attendance strategy. The policy should set out the school's working partnership with the EWS and the circumstances under which it will start formal processes for dealing with regular absence, including referral to the EWS and the use of other formal measures, and explain what those processes entail.

Leadership and role of senior staff and governors

The school's attendance strategy and policies and their effectiveness should be regularly reviewed and evaluated. Governors and senior leaders have a key role in developing, monitoring and reviewing the attendance strategy and policies, and their implementation and impact. The professional development and in-service training needs of staff, governors and senior managers need to be identified and addressed to ensure that all can understand and implement the attendance policy fully.

Establishing and maintaining an inclusive whole-school ethos that is welcoming to all learners and celebrates diversity is the responsibility of the school leadership - where leadership is understood as something to which all staff members contribute. Leadership regarding attendance involves:

- recognising attendance as an important area of school improvement
- having a clear vision for improving learner engagement and attendance
- conveying clear messages about how absence affects attainment, wellbeing and wider outcomes
- making sure staff, learners and parents understand that absence from school is a potential safeguarding risk
- expecting good attendance and punctuality from all members of the school community
- designating an attendance champion on the senior leadership team
- ensuring staff and governors receive professional development and support to understand and implement attendance systems effectively
- ensuring a balance between a system-level view, including considering and reflecting on data and trends; and on ensuring the full needs of each child are emphasised in each individual case as part of a rights-centred approach
- providing governors with the information they need to have an accurate view of school attendance and to engage in escalation procedures where appropriate.

For further guidance on developing school culture and leadership see:

[National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales](#)

See also the references to the wider leadership literature in [Estyn's](#) thematic reports on: Leadership development

[Estyn's](#) Leadership and primary school improvement

For examples of checklists and self-evaluation audit tools for attendance policies see:

Safeguarding and child protection

All schools and education settings have statutory duties to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of learners. All staff members must be aware of and understand how to contact and raise concerns with the designated safeguarding person for the school. Absence from school is a potential safeguarding risk and tracking and monitoring attendance has a crucial safeguarding role. Absence can signal possible wellbeing issues or problems at home. Keeping Learners Safe guidance states that:

- Education settings should use their attendance policy and practice to ensure they are in regular contact with parents if a child is absent from school without authorisation or if they have patterns of absence. The child's attendance record at school could be an indicator of safeguarding concerns and an opportunity to identify and deal with abuse such as child exploitation.
- If a child is absent without notification it could also be without the knowledge of their parent or carer and could be an early sign that the child is missing from home or care. The education setting should ensure any absence is followed up quickly to ensure the child is safe and not missing from home or care.
- If the education setting identifies the child is missing from home or care they should refer to the Wales Practice Guide '[Safeguarding children who go missing from home or care](#)'.

Schools should regularly review attendance data to identify and respond to children who are at risk. Schools should have first day absence reporting processes in place and processes for deciding whether welfare sightings are needed. These systems should ensure back-up staff are in place when key attendance staff are themselves absent.

Where a child is registered at a school and subsequently attends a setting such as EOTAS the original school should assume responsibility for checking the child's attendance (at both settings) on a daily basis.

It is good practice for all staff to [share information](#) when necessary and lawful and to work closely with the designated safeguarding person and Education Welfare Officer (EWO) to ensure that support for vulnerable learners is timely and joined up. One of the specific circumstances in which data protection legislation allows the sharing of sensitive personal information without the consent of the child or parent is to safeguard children and protect them and others from harm. Staff should be trained to understand when information should be shared with other stakeholders and what information may be disclosed.

For more information regarding safeguarding see:

[Keeping learners safe](#)

Guidance for local authorities and governing bodies on arrangements for safeguarding children

[Safeguarding](#)

Guidance to help you follow the law on safeguarding people

Staff development

As part of staff induction, new staff should be briefed on the school's strategy for attendance and introduced to their responsibilities for attendance management. Local authorities will have a programme of training for staff and governors. It is good practice for local authorities to review the training needs of their school and support services staff and to address them. Local Authorities may offer enhanced training around school attendance and engagement. Advice on training can be found at:

An induction pack for the EWS in Wales can be found [here](#).

Pupil voice and school councils

Schools should have mechanisms for capturing pupil voice and that reflect and cater for all learner's needs and evolving maturity. These should be in line with [the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards](#) and [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#).

For examples on how to improve the engagement of learners in school see Estyn's Pupil Participation: a good practice [guide](#). The report identifies that pupil participation is strong in schools that have the following characteristics:

- Pupil participation and building positive relationships are an integral part of the school's vision and ethos. Leaders and managers have a clear strategy for promoting participation and for fostering good relationships. They support and encourage open and honest participation. Leaders create an ethos where pupils respect the rights of others and understand the importance of diversity and equality.
- There are clear roles and structures in place across the school to capture the views of all pupils on a wide range of issues relating to school improvement. Staff take the views of pupils seriously and act on them. Pupils, staff and governors understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to participation. Leaders can demonstrate the impact of participation on school improvement planning.
- Pupils have a breadth of opportunities to participate within and beyond the school to contribute to debate and influence decisions across a wide range of issues that affect them. These opportunities encourage pupils to develop the skills needed to become active citizens.
- Pupils and staff access good quality training and continuous professional development that is well targeted to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to have pupils 'voice heard in discussions and in decision-making.

Recording and analysing attendance

There are detailed requirements for schools regarding the recording of learner attendance set out in the [Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2010](#). For example, schools are required by law to take an attendance register twice a day at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. The afternoon registration must take place at the start or during the afternoon session, not at the end of the morning session or during the break between sessions. Particular care is needed to ensure a consistent and legal approach to afternoon registration where a school has introduced split lunch arrangements - the afternoon registration should be taken following the last lunch period. Any change to an original entry in a register must be clearly distinguishable. The register may be requested as evidence in any prosecution for non-attendance.

In addition to meeting legal requirements, accurate recording and analysis of attendance is essential to ensuring child protection and the safety of all learners. In many respects, this is the primary reason for taking accurate registers of attendance. Accurate and careful use of codes is paramount to avoid possible safeguarding issues arising such as when learners attend education other than at school. School staff should be aware of when and to whom they should refer significant absence.

An accurate and consistent registration system is also crucial if attendance and punctuality within a school are to be improved. Analysis of attendance data enables patterns of absence or lateness to be identified early for individual learners, classes, times of the year, year groups and specific groups of learners or lessons. These analyses can help strategic planning and enable schools to target interventions and to improve attendance more effectively.

Schools should regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify learners or cohorts that require support and to put effective strategies in place. In particular, they should:

- monitor and analyse attendance and punctuality patterns weekly and deliver interventions for learners identified as needing support
- look at patterns of attendance and punctuality within sessions to ensure learners are attending all timetabled provision
- use these analyses to provide regular attendance reports for staff and governors
- identify learners who need support and focus staff efforts on developing targeted actions for those cases
- conduct thorough analysis of half-termly, termly, and full year attendance data to identify patterns and trends
- benchmark the school's attendance data against available local and national data
- devise whole-school strategies to address areas of poor attendance identified through data analysis
- provide data and reports to support the work of the governing body.

Where a child is not registered at a maintained school, and attends EOTAS, the local authority should monitor and analyse attendance and absence of these children to identify whether they require support and to put effective strategies in place.

For further suggestions of possible analyses see the [All Wales attendance framework](#).

For registration procedures and coding practices to be accurate, they need to be clearly explained in the relevant documentation outlining the school's attendance procedures, such as in the attendance strategy and policies and in the staff handbook. Schools should have quality assurance procedures in place for the recording of attendance and punctuality with a member of the senior management team responsible for overseeing issues relating to attendance, including ensuring practice is consistent with the national [Guidance on school attendance codes](#) and that a positive and honest whole-school culture exists around attendance.

Local authority EWS should work with schools to investigate attendance patterns including persistent, deteriorating or irregular attendance for individual learners, to advise on safeguarding issues, and to check for variations in the use of codes. Education welfare officers also have specialised roles in relation to regulating [child employment](#) and performance licences and in helping to arrange alternative educational provision such as EOTAS. A child under compulsory school age cannot do part-time work that may affect their health and safety or interfere with their education. They can start full-time employment when they leave school (on the last Friday in June of the year they turn 16). Any requests for part time work must be agreed by the head teacher and formally authorised by the local authority. See the [All Wales attendance Framework](#) for more information.

During 2020, the Welsh Government revoked the School Performance and Absence Targets (Wales) Regulations 2011 meaning schools were not required to set targets for future years or report on those previously set for 2019 to 2020 onwards. However, as part of their quality assurance processes, schools are advised to set targets for attendance. Targets need to be carefully formulated and be based on previous trends and the projected effects of any new approaches to improving attendance. Schools should guard against possible unintended consequences of trying to achieve these targets, such as placing undue expectations on learners to attend when not in their best interest or in inaccurate use of codes - see the Estyn [report](#) for detail. In setting targets and in using benchmarking attendance data, the school needs to keep in mind the government's expectation that data should be used to support schools to understand their context and to improve themselves. It should not be used to judge or compare [schools](#).

Many schools use incentives and rewards for learners rather than sanctions as a way of encouraging good attendance, either at a class or individual level. Such schemes can also increase the profile of attendance with parents and the wider community. However, schools are increasingly aware of possible unintended consequences of rewards that disincentivise learners whose attendance may, for no fault of their own, not be as high as their peers. To counter this risk, some schools have, for example, continued prize giving for good attendance but only after carefully discounting unavoidable absences from calculations. For cases studies of this approach, see the appendix in Attendance [review](#).

Schools now generally use electronic systems to maintain attendance registers and to collect and analyse school attendance data. There are rules for their use, including making hard copies at least monthly which should be bound into annual volumes. In addition, some schools employ electronic systems to record attendance and punctuality lesson by lesson.

All schools must comply with Welsh Government [Guidance on school attendance codes](#) which provides detailed advice on which codes should be used. The following sections provide further guidance on specific circumstances and codes that can be misused.

Authorised and unauthorised absence

The register must show whether a pupil is classified as being in one of the following categories - present, engaged in approved educational activities off site (treated as present), absent, or not required to attend (typically because of school closure). Where a pupil is of compulsory school age, the register must show whether any absence was authorised by the school or unauthorised. Authorised absence is where the school has either given approval in advance for the pupil to be absent from school, or where an explanation offered afterwards has been accepted by the school as satisfactory justification for absence. Only schools, and not parents or carers, can authorise an absence, and schools must consider whether the reason for absence is reasonable before doing so. Any absence that is not authorised by the school should be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

School staff need not approve an absence if they are in doubt that the explanation is not a reasonable basis for missing school. It is for schools to judge whether the explanation given is satisfactory justification for the absence. Any further investigation should be handled sensitively but if questions remain or no satisfactory explanation is forthcoming, the absence must be treated as unauthorised.

Schools should have processes in place that set out how to approach all absences whether approved or not. Where despite trying all school-based support unauthorised absence is a problem with a particular pupil, especially where there is little engagement from learner or parents, schools should seek advice from the EWS at an early stage.

Part-time timetables⁴

Whilst part-time timetables, can help learners re-integrate into a school after a long absence or be a means of preventing greater absence, they have the overall effect of reducing time in school for learners and can have a negative impact on learner progress and wellbeing. In addition, part-time timetables can place pressures on families and have the potential to further pupil disengagement from education.

Part-time timetables should only be used in exceptional circumstances as a short-term measure, (generally no more than a six-week period) with the intention of returning to full-time attendance at school sooner, if feasible. Schools should ensure learners who are on a part-time timetable, receive a full education, where this is appropriate for individual learners. This could include for example, providing the learner with on-line or hard copy resources and work. Schools should ensure learners can access on-line work prior to putting in place arrangements of that nature for the continuation of full education.

Where a part-time timetable is required, the school should contact the local authority to arrange EOTAS. Local authorities are required to provide education for children who, for whatever reason, cannot attend school. This duty is placed on local authorities under [section 19A](#) of the Education Act 1996 which states:

⁴ The section on reduced timetables has been informed by discussions with and the work Chloe Weaver has undertaken as part of her doctoral thesis, “This is your last chance to prove to us you can be here, we’ve tried everything to help you.” – Exploring the use of reduced timetables as exclusionary practice for young people in Wales.

(1) Each local authority in Wales must make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise than at school for children within the authority's area who -

- (a) are of compulsory school age, and
- (b) by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not receive suitable education for a period unless such arrangements are made for them.

Part-time timetables should never be used as a means of managing behavioural issues. All learners are entitled to a full-time education and access to the curriculum. In addition, schools are required to deliver the curriculum, other than where exceptions apply (see [Curriculum for Wales: summary of legislation](#)).

Part-time timetable arrangements should be recorded in a plan as a formal arrangement between the parents, the child, the school, the local authority and other relevant practitioners. This could include, for example, being documented in a reintegration plan following exclusion (see [Exclusions from schools and Pupil Referral Units](#), section 6.7), or a managed move arrangement (see [Effective Managed Moves](#), appendices forms MM1 and MM2). Reduced hours can also be recorded in a pastoral support plan or behaviour support plan (BSP), where the pupil has one.

Prior to pursuing a part-time timetable, parents and pupils and the local authority (such as the education welfare service, inclusion service and social services) should be fully consulted. Part-time timetables developed by the school without local authority involvement and parental agreement could be construed as an unofficial exclusion. This could be unlawful if the parent has not requested leave for their child and/or the school could be regarded as preventing the pupil from accessing the curriculum.

When considering placing a learner on a reduced timetable, the school should:

- be satisfied that a part-time timetable is an appropriate intervention given the needs of the pupil. There must be a clear and evidenced rationale for considering a part-time timetable as an intervention aimed at supporting the learner to transition back into full-time education
- be satisfied that suitable arrangements would be in place to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of the learner during the period when they would otherwise have been expected to be in school. This includes, for example, gaining agreement from social services where a child has a social worker or is considered to be a child in need; and securing written agreement from the parents or carers about who is responsible for the welfare of the student for the sessions in question
- evaluate the support already implemented and consider the need for any additional interventions. This could include additional behaviour support where a learner is, for example, returning to school after a long period of time due to being excluded from school
- have a clear rationale for the proposed education arrangements, such as part-time attendance at school supplemented by work provided by the school or EOTAS provision to ensure the learner receives a full education
- consult with the learner, their parents and the local authority to gain agreement to pursue a reduced timetable ensure, where a learner has an individual development plan (IDP), the number of hours of support set out in the IDP will be met so that schools, PRUs and local authorities continue to meet their statutory obligations
- ensure a reduced timetable would not impact on travelling and transport arrangements in a way which would make it difficult for the learner to access the education arranged

- ensure that arrangements for a reduced timetable would not adversely affect a pupil's access to free school meals
- Consider what support the learner may need to ensure they are able to fully reintegrate into full-time mainstream education. This could include additional academic and/or well-being support on return to school. This may involve consulting with all practitioners involved in supporting the learner.

Once it has been agreed by the learner, their parents, the local authority and any other relevant practitioners that a learner should have a part-time timetable, the school should:

- set out the new arrangements in a written agreement signed by all parties and supplemented by supporting evidence from professionals such as the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), health consultants or educational psychologist
- provide a detailed written action plan to the learner and their parent, or young person with a named person responsible, clear objectives, targets and review dates and a date for the expected return to full-time education
- liaise throughout with the parents, gain parental approval and written permission
- liaise throughout with the local authority to gain agreement to the proposed plan,
- liaise throughout with all relevant agencies and provide them with a copy of the plan
- undertake a risk assessment regarding the safeguarding implications for the learner being out of school and arrange that the pupil is sighted virtually by a professional regularly when not undertaking education supervised by the school or arranged by the local authority
- establish robust arrangements for a named member of senior staff to monitor and review the plan on a weekly basis
- ensure effective communication with parents, carers and key professionals with regard to progressing towards the pupil's full re-integration into full-time education
- maintain a formal record of all learners on reduced timetables, including the date implemented and review dates and share this with the local authority and other relevant practitioners
- mediate risks of negatively impacting on the learner's engagement with education and sense of belonging to the school community whilst the learner has a reduced timetable. This might include regular check-ins with a named school practitioner when the learner attends school and ensuring their timetable includes opportunities to maintain relationships with peers outside of lessons
- ensure all school staff feel confident to support the needs of the learner when they return to full time education. This may include training, involvement from external agencies or colleague support.

Where a reduced timetable has been agreed by all parties, the offer of provision may also include distance or blended learning either through the school's online platforms or in hard copy, where preferred by the pupil and parent, to ensure continuity of learning. Schools should not use code B (approved educational activity that counts as present) when a pupil is studying at home as part of an agreed reduced hours or part-time timetable arrangement. When not in school, learners are unsupervised and the arrangement does not meet the legal definition of approved educational activity. The authorised absence registration code C should be used when a pupil has been placed on an agreed part-time timetable.

Approved educational activity registration code B can only be used where a registered learner is being educated off-site at a supervised activity approved by the school. Schools

should not use this code if learners are sent home for private study, study leave, or as part of distance or blended learning arrangements.

Study leave

Study leave should only be used for students during mock and public examinations. Study leave should be recorded as authorised absence registration code S. Schools should not use code B to record study leave. Such study leave is unsupervised time away from school (and was originally designed for learners to prepare for public examinations) and does not meet the legal definition of approved educational activity. The decision to issue study leave or similar arrangement is at the discretion of the school's senior leaders. Where a school decides to issue such leave it should do so sparingly and it should normally not exceed 15 days. While it may be a positive experience for some students, extended periods of study leave may not be in the best interest of students who do not have the skills or the attitude to make good use of unsupervised revision time and would be better off in school. Preparation for examinations should be a carefully planned experience for students.

Flexi-schooling

Flexi-schooling is an arrangement between parents of a child and the school where the learner is registered in the normal way, but only attends the school on a flexible basis. The rest of the time the learner is educated at home but will continue to remain on the school roll.

Flexi-schooling is a permissible option, provided that the head teacher at the school concerned and, in many cases, the local authority, agree to the arrangement. There is no guaranteed right for parents to flexi-school; it is entirely at the discretion of the head teacher whether to agree.

Flexi-schooling can, in some circumstances, be a valid way to offer educational support to learners and local authorities are encouraged to work with head teachers to determine whether they can facilitate flexi-schooling where it is in the best interests of the child.

This is distinct from full-time home-education. Flexi-schooling means that children who may be home educated in part are still in mainstream school for some of the time and are therefore able to experience its benefits. This approach may be adopted for a variety of reasons, and is sometimes done as a short-term measure. Instances where flexi-schooling may be beneficial to the child can include (but are not limited to):

- where the child is transitioning back into school
- where the child is transitioning into school for the first time
- the child has an autism spectrum condition (ASC) and finds school challenging
- the child is suffering from school phobia or anxiety
- the child has an illness.

The Welsh Government Home education: handbook for home educators provides further information on flexi-schooling.

Under the current All Wales School Attendance Framework, flexi-school learners are recorded under attendance code 'C' which counts as an 'authorised absence' from school. Whilst this will impact the attendance figures of the school, the Welsh Government has taken a more holistic approach to school improvement by removing the calculation of school performance data (including attendance data) that formed Step 1 of the National Schools Categorisation System. This means the context of the school (including flexi-schooling

arrangements) will be more prominent when coming to a judgement on the school's self-evaluation and capacity to improve.

Learners from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

National data shows that attendance amongst Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners is generally lower than their peers. A statistical [summary](#) of school absence before and during the COVID-19 pandemic identified that absence was highest amongst Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller pupils.

Families' attitudes to school and the importance they place on education and attending school within Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities vary enormously, as they do with all families. There are a number of factors which could impact attendance, including (but not limited to) experiences of bullying and harassment, distrust within the community of the education system, and cultural expectations that a young person will take on the responsibilities of caring for family or engaging in the family business.

The unique position of Traveller families in relation to school attendance is recognised by Section 444(6) of the Education Act 1996. It provides a defence to conviction if the parent can demonstrate that:

- They are engaged in a trade or business of such a nature as requires them to travel from place to place
- the child has attended at a school as a registered learner as regularly as the nature of the trade or business permits; and/or
- where the child has attained the age of six years, has made at least 200 attendances (i.e. sessions or half days) during the preceding twelve months.

The purpose of this section is not to protect Traveller parents from legal action, nor does it relieve parents of their duties under section 7 of the Education Act 1996: *"To cause their child to receive a full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and any additional learning needs they may have"*. It is to ensure that children are receiving suitable education through regular attendance at school or otherwise.

In general, the aim should always be to ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people, in common with all other children and young people, attend school as regularly and as frequently as possible – attendance is at least 380 sessions, which equates to 190 days, during any school year. The 200 attendances stated above should not be regarded as the norm.

In cases where school attendance is an issue, a balance should be found between the need for legal action taken against individual cases, the interests of the child or young person, and adopting a sensitive and sympathetic approach that recognises the lifestyle and cultural traditions of the family.

Schools may authorise absence of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people where they are satisfied that a family migrates but gives reasonable indications that it has every intention of returning - consultation with the local Traveller Education Service, within the local authority, may be helpful at this point.

This includes Gypsy and other Travellers, circus and fairground families leaving sites and winter quarters, with every expectation that they will return. Some schools in these

circumstances are able to maintain contact with the children and young people via outreach work or the provision of distance learning packs, although such activities should not be viewed as a preferable alternative to attendance at school. Some reasonable latitude on absence might also be offered in respect of families who have moved from, or have been evicted from, unauthorised sites while the family finds another site. However, in the latter circumstances, all efforts should be made to encourage the maintenance of attendance at school.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 introduced the power for schools to dually register a Traveller child when they are known to be attending another school. In such situations their attendance can now be recorded as attending an 'approved educational activity'.

The school of main attendance should take responsibility for setting up the appropriate communication systems with the other educational provider to ensure the child or young person is in attendance when they are supposed to be. For safeguarding and educational reasons, the responsibility for following up on unexplained and unexpected absences in a timely manner falls to each school during the time in which the learner is in situ. Where Traveller children are registered learners at a school and are known to be present either at a site (official or otherwise) or in a house and are not attending school, the absence should be investigated in the same way as that for any learner.

Holidays in term time and extended overseas trips

Parents must apply in advance to take holidays or overseas trips in term time. Requests should be considered individually and schools should invite parents to discuss any such proposals. Schools can only agree to absence for a family holiday or trip if they believe there are special circumstances that warrant it. If a school agrees absence and the pupil goes on holiday or trip for 10 days or less, absence is authorised (use code H).

A school can only agree to absence of more than 10 school days in a school year if they believe there are exceptional circumstances. If a school does not agree absence and the pupil goes on the holiday or trip, absence is unauthorised (Code G). If parents keep a child away for longer than was agreed, any extra time is also recorded as unauthorised (Code G).

If the school considers that there are exceptional circumstances why the pupil should be granted approval for an overseas trip of more than 10 days, the approval can be given and the absence would be authorised and recorded under Code F. The use of a different code shows that an extended overseas trip should have a cultural justification other than for a holiday. In these cases, the school should explain the following to parents:

- advance application for term time absence must be made in line with school attendance policy
- the absence should be planned carefully with the school – leave and return date to be agreed
- the school will make the decision if the visit will be authorised or not
- where possible, extended visits should be made during school holidays
- outline the possible detrimental affect it could have on the learner's progress
- examination periods should be avoided
- explain the amount of school work that would be missed and how the school can provide a study pack which the family could help the learner to complete

- explore the possible educational benefits of the visit but also the wellbeing benefits, particularly for children of diaspora families.

Further advice on how to deal with children and young people who are taken on extended overseas trips or heritage visits by their family is available in section 3D and appendix 6 of the [Statutory guidance to help prevent children and young people from missing education](#).

Education other than in school (EOTAS) provision and pupils who are registered at more than one setting (dual registration)

EOTAS is generally designed as a short-term placement to support learners to return to mainstream education. EOTAS settings play a crucial role in supporting some of the most vulnerable young people and providing them with access to learning in a range of settings, including PRUs, further education institutions, independent schools and third-sector organisations. These options can also be combined with part-time education at a mainstream school as part of a package of measures designed to provide suitable education. As such, EOTAS often requires greater flexibility than mainstream education. While concerned with educational progress, EOTAS also focuses on helping learners overcome barriers preventing them from accessing mainstream provision and from participating fully in education.

Registration and attendance

EOTAS pupils who are dual registered

Where a child is registered at a mainstream school and at another school, such as an independent school or a PRU, the [Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2010](#) require the child to be registered at both settings – dual registered.

Where a pupil is dually registered at institution X and Y, institution X marks the pupil using - approved educational activity, code D - while they are attending institution Y and vice-versa. Approved educational activity must be supervised by someone approved by the school or PRU. It must also take place during the session for which the mark is recorded.

Both institutions share responsibility for the child. Failure to attend either institution at the proper time without good reason is unauthorised absence.

Schools should ensure that they have in place arrangements whereby the school where the pupil is scheduled to be can notify the other school of any absences by individual pupils so that both schools can record the pupil absence using the relevant absence code. For safeguarding and educational reasons, one of the schools must follow up all unexplained and unexpected absence in a timely manner, such as through “First Day Calling” procedures.

Further information about registration and attendance requirements for pupils who are dual registered can be found in [Guidance on School Attendance Codes](#) and in guidance about [attendance data collection](#).

Pupils registered at a mainstream school who also attend an EOTAS setting (not dual registered)

Where a pupil is registered at a mainstream school and is in receipt of EOTAS provision, other than at a registered provider, code B is used where the EOTAS provision is an approved educational activity. Approved Educational Activity must be supervised by someone approved by the school and must take place during the session for which the mark is recorded.

Code B code should not be used for any period when there is no educational delivery by a staff member. as this could mask possible safeguarding concerns. This would include, for example, sessions where face-to-face teaching is not scheduled to take place for a child who is in receipt of local authority home tuition. Where the school is authorising absence for a session the child is not required to attend, either via mainstream or EOTAS provision. In such cases code C should be used.

For educational and safeguarding reasons, schools should ensure they have in place arrangements whereby the EOTAS provider can notify the school of any absences by individual pupils to enable the school to record the pupil as absent, using the relevant absence code. For safeguarding and educational reasons, the schools must follow up on all unexplained and unexpected absence in a timely manner, such as through “First Day Calling” procedures.

Deleting learners from the school roll and children missing education

[The Education \(Pupil Registration\)\(Wales\) Regulations 2010](#) set out the circumstances in which schools must and must not delete learners from their admissions register.

[Regulation 8](#) prescribes the grounds on which the name of a pupil of compulsory school age must be deleted from the admission register. These are:

- the pupil is registered at the school in accordance with the requirements of a School Attendance Order and another school is substituted by the LEA for that named in the Order, or the Order is revoked
- the pupil has been registered at another school
- the school has received written notification from the parent that the pupil is receiving education otherwise than at school
- the pupil has ceased to attend the school and no longer resides within a reasonable distance from the school; each case should be referred to the Education Welfare Service/Officer for investigation before removal from the school roll
- the pupil has been granted leave of absence exceeding 10 days for the purpose of a holiday and fails to attend school within 10 days immediately following, and the school is not satisfied that the absence is caused by sickness or any unavoidable cause
- the pupil is certified by the school medical officer as unlikely to be in a fit state of health to attend school before ceasing to be of compulsory school age
- the pupil has been continuously absent from the school for a period of not less than four weeks and both the proprietor of the school and the local education officer have failed, after reasonable enquiry, to locate the pupil

- the pupil has died
- the pupil will cease to be of compulsory school age before the school next meets and does not intend to continue at school
- in the case of a pupil at a school other than a maintained school, that they have ceased to be a pupil at that school
- Where the pupil is registered at a maintained school, that they have been permanently excluded from and the permanent exclusion of a pupil does not take effect until the governing body have discharged their duties under section 66 of the 1998 Act, and:
 - a) The relevant person has stated in writing that he or she does not intend to appeal under Section 67 of the 1998 Act
 - b) The time for bringing an appeal has expired and no appeal has been brought forward within that time; or
 - c) an appeal brought within that time has been determined or abandoned.
- where the pupil has been admitted to the school to receive nursery education and has not, on completing such education, transferred to a reception class at the school.

Regulation 9 sets out the circumstances, in cases where a pupil is registered at more than one school or PRU, in which a school must gain the permission of the either the local authority or the proprietor of the other school at which the child is registered before deleting a pupil from the register.

Regulation 12 places a duty on schools to inform the local authority when a pupil is deleted from a register under regulations 8(1)(c), (d), (g), (i) or (m).

- Where a pupil is registered at more than one school, that the pupil has ceased to attend the school and the proprietor of any other school at which the pupil is registered has given consent to the deletion (regulation 8(1)(c)).
- The pupil has ceased to attend the school and the proprietor has received written notification from the parent that the pupil is receiving education otherwise than at school (regulation 8(1)(d)).
- The pupil is certified by the school medical officer as unlikely to be in a fit state of health to attend school before ceasing to be of compulsory school age, and neither the pupil nor the pupil's parent has indicated to the school the intention to continue to attend the school after ceasing to be of compulsory school age (regulation 8(1)(g)).
- That the pupil has been detained in pursuance of a final order made by a court or of an order of recall made by a court or the Secretary of State, that order being for a period of not less than 4 months, and the proprietor does not have reasonable grounds to believe that the pupil will return to the school at the end of that period (regulation 8(1)(i)).
- Where the pupil is registered at a maintained school, that the pupil has been permanently excluded from the school (regulation 8(1)(m)).

When a school removes a pupil from their roll in other circumstances, they should as a matter of good practice, notify the local authority. If a pupil is to be taken off roll because of moving to another school, staff should first find out the name and address of the new school and when the pupil will start, confirming this information with the receiving school. School staff should be concerned if:

- parents or carers do not name the new school
- a pupil has 'disappeared' from the area without explanation
- a pupil has not returned to school within 10 school days of the agreed return date where a holiday or trip during term time has previously been approved.

If schools are concerned, they should alert the Local Safeguarding Children's Board without delay. If they have no named contact, they should inform the local authority's designated child protection officer who can make a decision on whether to alert social services. Social services may, in turn, involve the police. If, however, schools have any reason to believe that a crime may have been committed, they should immediately contact the police.

Young offenders may only be deleted from the register when the period of custody is for at least four months **and** where the school has reasonable grounds for believing that they will not be returning to school at the end of that period (regulation 8(1)(i)). They will be recorded as an authorised absence until their name is deleted from the register. If an alternative approved educational activity is provided during the period of custody, the school may record the pupil as receiving approved educational activity against the sessions that are being offered.

Schools must make sure that all staff understand the legislation providing for learners to be deleted from the school roll. This is to ensure any required agreement is obtained prior to a pupil being deleted from a school roll and that the school informs the local authority, where required, that a child has been deleted from the register.

In addition, schools must ensure the local authority is informed when parents have elected to educate their child at home (elective home education). This will support local authorities fulfil their duty under Section 436A of the Education Act 1996, as amended by section 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which places a duty on all local education authorities requiring that they make arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the 'identities of children in their area who are not registered at a school and are not receiving a suitable education. For further guidance see [Statutory guidance to help prevent children and young people from missing education](#) - A practical toolkit to help identify children and young people missing education.

Early identification and learner support

Prevention and early intervention are crucial in ensuring issues do not escalate or become entrenched. We know that attendance is often a symptom of an underlying issue and that successful approaches are rooted in working with the child, parents and other agencies to identify and resolve these issues. As such, schools need to be able to identify and address early signs that there may be a problem as quickly as possible. To help them do this, all schools will already hold a range of useful information about learners' wellbeing. For example, all schools know which learners are eligible for free school meals, those who are looked-after, and those with additional learning needs. Schools are often provided with further information about learners by their local authority with accompanying analysis, sometimes known as a **vulnerability assessment profile** that takes account of risk factors such as the number of previous schools a pupil has attended and exclusion information. Such a profile helps schools to identify which learners may require more targeted support.

Analysis of attendance data, if carried out effectively, can contribute significantly to wellbeing profiling and to enabling schools to identify worrying trends early, especially as attendance is a good general indicator of wellbeing. Analysis of attendance data should be combined with analysis of other wellbeing indicators collected by the school, such as those on learner behaviour, attitudes to learning, and on academic achievement and progress, along with other sources of information from form tutors, the learners themselves, parents and other family members, and pupil survey information. Taken together, this information gives a more complete picture that one source may provide.

The majority of learners will require some extra support at some point during their education and schools need to identify appropriate and proportionate response. Where issues are emerging, a period of classroom support may be sufficient to resolve the issue. Classroom support, could resolve the issue. It is at this stage the teacher/school should be considering (depending on the issues) whether the child has additional learning needs or whether they could benefit from EOTAS provision.

In cases where there are significant or more complex issues, more intensive or longer-term interventions may be needed such as, nurture groups, pupil support centres, or mentoring. This individual or group support should still be in the context of an inclusive curriculum, so that learners do not miss essential mainstream provision. With appropriate and timely support, it is more likely that learners will be able to overcome their difficulties without need for further intervention.

When learners continue to experience issues or are beginning to display challenging behaviour, which would put them at risk of disengagement or exclusion from mainstream schooling, the school must consider what more intensive support may be needed which might require external support, for example from a local authority service, behaviour specialist, educational psychologist or CAMHS.

Schools use a range of strategies to reduce exclusions and prevent learners from going into EOTAS. These include having:

- systems for identifying learners at risk of disengagement and putting in place appropriate and timely intervention
- a whole-school approach to behaviour management, wellbeing and mental health

- additional learning provision tailored to meet the additional learning needs of each pupil
- close working with other agencies to provide support for learners and their parents.

Supporting learners' wellbeing and mental health also involves developing their **resilience**. Resilience is the capacity to cope, learn and thrive in the face of change, challenge or adversity. It helps learners feel a greater sense of control over their life and destiny, helps them to regulate behaviour and emotions, and helps them to feel involved and connected.

Resilience is closely related to wellbeing and mental health, and it cannot easily be developed when learners are unhappy or emotionally unwell. Resilience also requires a degree of self-esteem and confidence, of emotional understanding, and the ability to establish trusting relationships to benefit from support. For further information on developing the resilience of learners, see the Estyn report [Learner resilience - building resilience in primary schools, secondary schools and pupil referral units](#).

Early intervention and first day responses

Schools should emphasise parental responsibility for ensuring accurate attendance records by asking parents to inform them as soon as possible when their child will not be attending school on a particular day. Where a child is registered with a school and is attending another setting on the day of the absence, parents should inform both the school and the other setting their child is unable to attend.

There are a variety of ways in which parents can communicate with schools. If no reasonable reason for absence is provided, then schools should contact the parents, on the same day if possible. Contacting parents immediately can prevent absences from becoming prolonged and has a safeguarding function, which is particularly important for vulnerable groups such as children on the child protection register. An active policy of first-day contact makes clear to learners and parents that absence is a matter of concern and will be followed up. By contacting parents the school also makes them aware that their child is not in school and enables them to take steps to ensure their child's safety. A dedicated attendance officer or family engagement officer can help these processes.

Day to day attendance processes typically involve:

- actively managing lateness and setting out in the attendance policy the length of time the register is open
- identifying any absences that are not explained for each session and contacting parents
- regularly informing parents about their child's attendance and absence levels
- early discussion of absence between pupil and registration or form teacher
- ensuring learners know who to go to in school if they have any concerns
- use of learning mentors or peer mentors to build positive relationships
- consideration of timetable and subject choice with the aim of engaging the pupil
- consideration of whether attendance problems could be related to an unidentified additional learning need
- identifying learners who need support in partnership with wider partners, including referrals to external agencies including youth, counselling, health or education wellbeing services

- holding meetings with parents to discuss reasons for absence and strategies to encourage regular school attendance, particularly with learners the school and local authority consider vulnerable
- consider home visits, attendance or parenting contracts, reintegration plans or pastoral support plans.

Supporting learners returning to school

Learners who are returning to school, particularly following lengthy periods of absence, need to feel that the school is glad to see them and is ready to make the transition back to full-time education as easy for them as possible. To support these learners, schools should consider the following:

- welcome learners back and provide tailored praise and encouragement when they attend and arrive on time
- provide catch-up support to build confidence and bridge missed work, for example through providing lunchtime and homework clubs, extra lesson resources, mentor support, small group work or one to one input
- have daily or weekly check-ins to discuss issues, review progress, and consider the impact of support
- contact parents regularly to discuss progress and emotional wellbeing, and the support available to help with [costs](#) such as for school uniform, trips, after-school clubs, IT, stationery or transport
- consider what additional targeted support for re-engagement might be needed, and consider establishing formal action plans, such as pastoral support plans.

Where a child has been excluded from school, [The Education \(Reintegration Interview\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2010](#) prescribe the circumstances in which a head teacher must request the parents of an excluded pupil of compulsory school age attend a reintegration interview under section 102 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the procedure by which the interview must be arranged. The regulations provide that:

- the request for interviews apply to all fixed-term exclusions for primary-aged pupils; for secondary-aged pupils, only when fixed-term exclusions of six or more days have been applied will parents/carers be expected, but not required, to attend the interview
- reintegration interviews need to take place within 15 school days of the last day of the exclusion period
- headteachers are required to inform the parents/carers of all relevant details of the reintegration interview
- schools have to offer reintegration interviews and a request for parents/carers to attend a reintegration interview is not required if the first day of exclusion is within the last 10 days of the school year or the pupil is expected to leave school for a reason unconnected with their behaviour before the end of the required 15-day period for the interview.

Many schools carry out reintegration interviews for parents/carers of excluded pupils as a matter of good practice, providing the headteacher (or any other person authorised by the headteacher) with the opportunity to discuss with parents/carers how best the pupil can return to school and any further support they need to be successful. Reintegration interviews represent an additional important element to ensure that parents/carers actively engage with schools to address challenges. For that reason it has been made compulsory

for schools to request parents/carers to attend reintegration interviews following fixed-term exclusions.

While the regulations do not require schools to request pupils attend the reintegration interviews, schools should ensure that this is a core aspect of their practice. Every attempt should be made to encourage children and young people to attend reintegration interviews or to ensure their views are adequately represented. If the child attends the interview, then schools will need to ensure that the interview is conducted in a manner which enables the child to be comfortable in offering their views.

The interview provides an opportunity to:

- emphasise the importance of parents/carers working with the school to take joint responsibility for their child's behavioural issues
- discuss how behavioural issues can be addressed
- explore wider issues and any circumstances that may be at the root cause of the behavioural issues
- reach agreement on how the child's education should continue, how best they can be reintegrated and what measures could be put in place to prevent further issues arising

Schools should offer reintegration interviews and parents/carers will be expected, though not required, to attend them. If a parent/carer does not attend this should not affect the learner's return to school: an exclusion cannot be extended because a parent/carer did not attend a reintegration interview.

Resources: selected programmes for supporting learners' wellbeing

The underlying causes of absence can be complex and various, and their effects may manifest themselves in a variety of ways other than or in addition to low attendance such as through behaviour, disengagement, or anxiety. The factors that increase the risk of absence affect learners whose attendance may not necessarily be low but whose progress, wellbeing or motivation may nevertheless be adversely affected. Schools need to actively pursue the reasons and root causes of absence and ensure they have good relationships and communication channels with parents. Schools should contact the appropriate local authority services or external agencies in cases where a multi-agency approach is required.

The many reasons for absence means that a school needs to be able to offer a range of education and other interventions to support these learners. The selected resources below represent some of the programmes and sources of support available.

Counselling services

Some learners who require extra support may benefit from counselling. Local authorities must make reasonable provision for a counselling service for children and young people aged between 11 and 18 regardless of whether they attended a maintained school, and learners in Year 6 of primary school in their area under [section 92](#) of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013. Counselling offers one-to-one supportive therapy, which gives children and young people the opportunity to explore issues and concerns, in confidence, with a qualified counsellor. Children and young people may self-refer or be referred to counselling over a range of issues, for example abuse (including sexual), inter or extra familial neglect, academic concerns, anger, anxiety, behaviour-related issue,

bereavement, bullying, caring responsibilities, cyber safety (including cyber-bullying and sexting), depression, domestic abuse, eating disorders, family, financial concerns/poverty, relationships with teachers, relationship with boyfriend/girlfriend, self-harm, self-worth, sexual (including orientation), stress, substance misuse, suicidal ideation, transgender issues, or children who offend. A child or young person who attends counselling may need to be referred on to CAMHS or to Child Protection or other appropriate services. Find out more [here](#).

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CAMHS has traditionally been organised in a tiered framework.

Tier 1 service (primary level service)

Direct contact services. Direct access to staff able to recognise, assess and intervene with children's mental health problems – general practitioners, primary health carers, health visitors, school nurses, teachers and other school staff.

Tier 2 service (secondary level service)

First-line specialist services in which the child is usually seen by one professional, that is specialist CAMHS or education support services (including counselling, specialist social workers, staff of voluntary organisations).

Tier 3 service (secondary level service/tertiary level service)

Teams of specialist staff working together; community intensive therapy teams and specialist day care.

Tier 4 service (tertiary level service)

Very specialist interventions, inpatient units and residential schools and specialist social care.

Find out more [here](#).

Youth work and youth engagement

Youth work plays an important part in supporting young people, through informal and non-formal ways of engagement that can support young people in their personal, social and education development. In addition to general youth work engagement, some youth workers act as lead workers for young people who are identified under the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework as being at risk of disengaging from learning or who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Lead workers provide continuity of support and contact for the most at-risk young people, to help them remain in or to enter education, employment and training. The Framework also identifies and supports young people at risk of youth homelessness.

Work is underway to update existing guidance on the early identification of young people at risk of becoming NEET or homeless. The new guidance will cover early identification indicators, including school attendance.

Find out more [here](#).

Careers guidance

Careers Wales focuses on helping the 14-16-year-olds most in need of independent advice and guidance for their career pathways. Careers advisers provide guidance sessions for these learners at schools and settings as well as other activities such as employer engagement, parental engagement, support for those entering the labour market and professional learning and coaching services for schools. Find out more [here](#).

Nurture groups

Nurture groups are an approach to inclusive education and are designed to increase the access to learning for children who are often marginalised. It consists of small group provision in primary schools, usually for children identified as having difficult behaviour, or traumatic early experiences. Staff model positive relationships and there is an emphasis on the development of language and communication skills and a focus on social, emotional and challenging behaviour. Young people are encouraged to celebrate their own progress with acquiring skills that will reduce barriers to learning and enable success back in the mainstream classroom.

Find out more [here](#).

Supporting children who are bullied

Bullying can be a significant factor in children and young people's absence from school. We know that learners with some protected characteristics are more likely to experience bullying and this can be a reason for absence. Teachers are encouraged to actively check this with learners, and be aware that bullying is disproportionately experienced by some learners including those that are LGBTQ+.

Welsh Government guidance is available here:

- [Rights, respect, equality: guidance for schools](#)
- [Rights, respect, equality: guidance for local authorities](#)
- [Rights, respect, equality: guidance for parents and carers](#)
- [Rights, respect, equality: guide for young people](#)
- [Rights, respect, equality: guide for children](#)

Supporting learners with healthcare needs

All learners with healthcare needs are entitled to a full education.

Learners with healthcare needs should be supported so that they have full access to education, including trips and physical education. Governing bodies should ensure that arrangements are in place to support learners with healthcare needs and that school staff consult with relevant professionals, learners and parents to ensure the needs of the learner with healthcare needs are properly understood and supported.

Local authorities should work with education settings to ensure learners with healthcare needs receive a suitable education. Where a learner of compulsory school age would not receive a suitable education for any period because of their health, [section 19A](#) places a duty on the local authority to make arrangements to provide suitable education. Where a learner is over that compulsory school age but under 18, the local authority may make such arrangements.

The local authority is unlikely to provide education at home for learners who are ill for very short periods of time, as their education setting should be able to provide appropriate support. However, they should take into account the way in which the absence is likely to affect the learner on their return to education. In the case of a short absence (likely to last for less than 15 school days) the learner's school should provide work to be completed at home, if the learner's condition permits, and support the learner to catch up on their return.

The local authority should be ready to make arrangements for learners in cases where it is clear that the learner is likely to be absent from school for a significant period, e.g. more than 15 school days, whether consecutive or cumulative over the course of an academic year. For instance, period-related absences may be cumulative as they happen a few days each month. However, the local authority might still need to make arrangements where a shorter absence is anticipated, depending upon the circumstances.

If the pupil is a patient at hospital, the local authority would generally arrange for suitable education to be delivered by on the ward by teachers who are based at the hospital. Further information can be found in Welsh Government guidance [here](#).

Support for Emotionally Based School Avoidance

EBSA is an umbrella term used for the experience of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school. It refers to absence from school due to the specific emotional distress experienced around attending school. EBSA is the result of a complex variety of factors, and there will not be one single cause or factor. Although a quick return to school is important for positive outcomes for children and young people experiencing EBSA, it is important to take time to complete assessments and plan the return and the support carefully. A graduated approach to EBSA involves early identification, a whole-school approach, good communication and working with parents, and emphasises the importance of relationships in school.

Research by the [NFER](#) points to a number of best practices adopted by schools to support pupils experiencing school phobia. These include:

- allowing pupils to start school later and finish school earlier
- using different school entrances
- collection by a parent/carer at lunchtime
- provision of a 'safe place' for pupils who could not face crowded classrooms
- provision of extra support in class
- buddy systems – support in school from named pupils
- gradual reintegration – including individually tailored part-time timetables.

Some schools also provide a separate support unit for pupils experiencing ESBA. Separate units provide a 'safe' environment and provide the opportunity for vulnerable pupils to support each other.

Counselling may be beneficial for some children. Counsellors are independent of school, governing body and teaching staff and offer a confidential service to children and young people.

Where ESBA is diagnosed as a medical condition, such as depression or acute anxiety, provision for schooling should be treated in the same way as for children who are unable to attend school due to illness.

The Educational Welfare Service's main role is to improve school attendance, and the Education Welfare Service is able to take legal action where necessary. This however would not be an appropriate route in the case of school refusal as emphasis should be on

putting in place the necessary support and planning reintegration into mainstream schooling dependent on the success of the support.

Transport

Local authorities have powers to make any arrangement they think fit to facilitate the travel of learners to and from a place where they receive education or training. The power applies in relation to a learner living or studying in the authority's area under [section 6 of the Learner Travel \(Wales\) Measure](#). If a local authority does make use of their section 6 powers, in accordance with section 9 of the Measure, the authority must ensure that the policy applies to all learners in similar circumstances living in that authority's area. The local authority should ensure that any policy is fair, reasonable and complies with relevant equality legislation to ensure that they do not discriminate unlawfully between learners when using their section 6 powers.

Some local authorities have used these discretionary powers to address identified issues due to transport and learners attendance rates – such as providing free school transport to children whose parents are in receipt of certain benefits (and who live over a prescribed distance); reducing the distance threshold to below the statutory thresholds and providing transport if a child is moving schools due to bullying/ antisocial behaviour and where education welfare office and/or inclusion unit have been involved.

The learner travel [guidance](#) also states that it is the parent's legal duty to ensure attendance of a child at school. Section 1, Chapter 5, Part 6: Roles and Responsibilities states

“In the event of a child not being eligible to receive free transport and having to walk to school, it will be for parents to make suitable travel arrangements for their children between home and school. Within the community, parents have the option of sharing the school run. The Welsh Government recommends that parents investigate whether community groups can coordinate this activity”.

Family engagement and multi-agency support

It is clear that parents and families exert considerable influence on learners' views in general and on their attitudes to learning and their connection or engagement with school in particular. Therefore, establishing positive and trusting relationships with parents and families is a key strategic element in improving learner engagement with school life, and in turn in improving their attendance and participation. The goal is to meaningfully involve parents and families in the school community to help them understand the benefits of education and the need for good attendance at school, as well as helping them know how best to negotiate the education options available to their child.

As a minimum, schools should work with parents and families to encourage them to:

- take an active interest in their child's school life and work
- attend parents' evenings and other school events when possible
- be aware of school communications, including letters their child brings home
- make sure their child arrives at school on time each day
- ensure that their child only misses school for reasons which are unavoidable or agreed and understood by the school
- notify the school of any absence as soon as possible, preferably on the first morning
- confirm this in writing when the child returns to school
- avoid booking family holidays during term-time
- talk to the school if they are concerned that their child may be reluctant to go to school.

Partnership and multi-agency working

As referenced above, supporting learners to overcome any barriers to learning is crucial if they are to succeed and fulfil their potential. Many of the barriers that learners face are shared by the family or arise within the family or community. In practice, supporting learners often means supporting the family. Because the challenges facing many parents affect various aspects of their lives (including money, housing and health), several local services and agencies are needed to support them. Some children with attendance issues may also be receiving support from Youth Justice Service teams.

In most local authorities, [Family Information Services](#) are the first point of contact for help or information about family matters. They provide free impartial help, support, guidance and advice on a range of family issues including childcare, costs of childcare, training, family programmes, education, health, financial matters and recreation.

[Families First](#) promotes the development of multi-agency systems of support for families experiencing difficult times, particularly those living in poverty. The programme emphasises early intervention and prevention and on bringing organisations together to work with the whole family to identify and understand the underlying reasons for any issues, including problems with school and education, and to stop problems escalating. Support provided by the Families First programme is bespoke, intensive and based on need. The programme has strategic links with a range of agencies exemplified in the delivery of the Team Around the Family model. In many instances, schools form a central part of the Team Around the Family, often taking a lead coordinating role. It is important for teachers to be aware of how the Families First programme works in their local area and the referral mechanisms available to them.

Through parenting teams, each local authority in Wales offers a range of universal, targeted, and intensive parenting support, information and advice. Parents and carers can access a range of services to support positive parenting. Help is available at different points in a child's life through parenting groups and one-to-one work and ranges from informal, bespoke support for parents, through to more specialised assistance for example difficulties with family relationships including parenting parental conflict, separation and divorce.

[Parenting. Give it time](#) provides positive parenting information, advice and support for parents with children up to the age of 18 years of age. Advice, information and resources are available through a dedicated website⁵, digital advertising and social media.

The Welsh Government [Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing](#) (2021) sets out the conditions for successful partnership working in the context of learner wellbeing - see page 6 of the Framework for details.

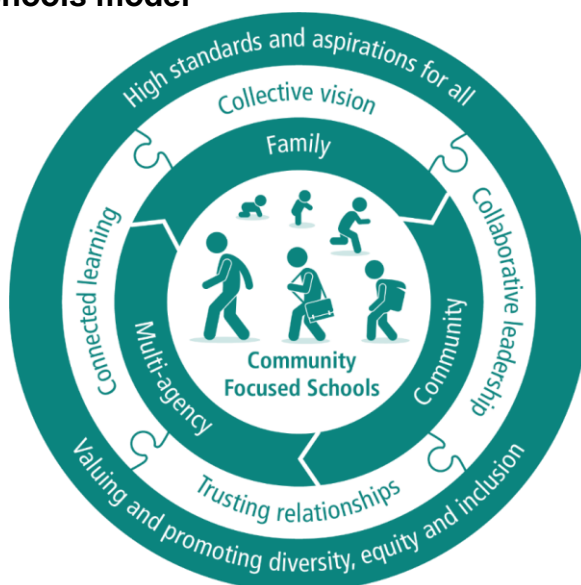
Community-focused schools

The focus on supporting parents is a key element of a 'community-focused schools' approach. A Community Focused School aims to develop:

- **Family engagement:** creating meaningful opportunities for families and carers to be involved in school life and decision making and to be engaged in children's learning.
- **Community engagement:** Encouraging schools to draw upon and utilise links with community groups and organisations and also offer support and opportunities to community members.
- **Multi -agency engagement:** Developing partnerships with wider services and interventions to remove any barriers to learning.

The elements of family, community and multi-agency engagement are interconnected; Developing all 3 elements in an integrated way will ensure the greatest impact on children and young people's attendance.

Community-focused schools model



⁵ [Parenting. Give it time.](#) | GOV.WALES

Engaging with parents and families is a crucial feature of effective community focused schools. Successful Community Focused Schools ensure families are made to feel welcomed, listened to and valued. Their needs, and those of their children, are understood and catered for and they are treated with dignity and respect, irrespective of the challenges they face.

In response, parents and families are proud of their school and want to work with staff to secure the best life chances for their children. Parents see the school as a place where they can access advice and support to help them resolve issues relating to their children or to their wider concerns around housing, money, employment skills or family wellbeing.

All parents want the best for their children but some face barriers to engagement. Among the most accurate predictors of a child's achievement are the family's socio-economic status, the home-learning environment and the expectations communicated by parents or carers. For example, there is a close relationship between parental engagement in reading-related activities and learners' academic performance. Children whose parents regularly read to them during the first year of primary school perform better than those whose parents read to them only occasionally. Leaders and staff in community focused schools that have strong parental engagement build the skills, confidence and self-esteem of their parents and families. Well-designed family learning programmes can help parents and family members improve their ability to support their children. These programmes can also support parents to move onto employment or further learning.

Community engagement has a positive influence on learning outcomes. Schools that reach out and actively engage the community in the life of the school, and the school in the life of the community, have a positive impact on educational outcomes. This can be through contextualising learning, improving basic adult skills, supporting parents to understand what their children are learning in school and how to help them. Supporting the development of parents' key skills is likely to have a direct impact on learners. For example, Cefn Hengoed Community School in Swansea offers monthly a range of learning sessions targeted to interest parents. These include sessions on basic ICT and internet safety, financial maths, careers for life and bilingualism. You can read more about the way in which Cefn Hengoed Community School works with parents and the community in the case study on page 50 of [Community schools: families and communities at the heart of school life](#).

The Welsh Government has published overarching [community focused schools guidance](#) as well as supplementary guidance on [family engagement](#).

Practical resources can be accessed in the [Family and community engagement \(FaCE\)](#) toolkit for schools. The Estyn report [Community schools: families and communities at the heart of school life](#) identifies eight characteristics of a Community Focused School and provides case studies illustrating each:

- a focus on social, emotional and health needs of all learners including access to a coherent range of services and personal learning plans
- engagement with parents and families, often including the development of a family support service in school
- engagement with the wider community, providing both the opportunity and the mechanisms to build capacity in the local community

- integrated provision of school education, informal as well as formal education, social work and health education and promotion services
- integrated management often supported by an integration manager
- services delivered according to a set of integrated objectives and measurable outcomes, a significant feature in many cases being co-location
- commitment and leadership
- multi-disciplinary training and staff development.

Parental communication

Schools and parents agree that the basis for developing positive relationships is effective two-way communication. Schools that build meaningful relationships with parents communicate with them regularly in a variety of ways, making sure there is a good flow of information going both ways. They ensure that there are genuine opportunities for communication which supports the 'mutual exchange of values and knowledge' (Arnot, M. and Schneider, C. 2018, '[Transactional school-home-school communication: Addressing the mismatches between migrant parents' and teachers' views of parental knowledge, engagement and the barriers to engagement](#)').

Consulting with parents about the most effective ways to communicate is important.

Schools should communicate frequently with parents to emphasise their responsibility and role in partnership with the school in ensuring their child attends school regularly. initial communication can occur in many ways including through the school website, handbook or prospectus. When welcoming and inducting new children and their parents, it is crucial to raise awareness of the importance of punctuality and attendance. Schools can raise the profile of attendance further through parents 'evenings, school newsletters and other communications, such as letters, emails, phone-calls or text messages.

Communications should aim to increase parents' awareness of the consequences of absences. Messages need to convey the importance of attendance and add specific information about the child's attendance history where appropriate, for example 'nudge' letters sent to parents of learners identified as persistently absent. The communications should focus on the importance of students 'attendance to their learning and the number of days of school the student had missed the previous year. It is helpful to issue regular reminders to parents of school procedures for notifying the school of a pupil's absence.

Targeted interventions involving staff having discussions with parents to gain information about the reasons for low levels of attendance are helpful especially in planning support for learners and their parents. These interventions are usually more intensive, with parents being offered access to services such as counselling, mentoring, resources and family activities.

Family engagement officers and similar staff

Many schools employ dedicated non-teaching staff such as family engagement officers or home school coordinators to lead their family engagement activities and to help build relationships between schools and families, especially with those who find it challenging to engage. Where this role is carried out effectively, the staff member has considerable knowledge of the local community and experience in dealing with vulnerable learners and often plays a major role in brokering multi-agency and partnership working. They build the trust of parents, and organise, develop and deliver family and community learning activities.

Some are also deployed to assist with parent councils. In a few schools they play a pivotal role within a whole-school approach to family engagement.

The work of these lead practitioners should be coupled with and complement the work of EWS, especially where poor attendance is a factor. A joint approach between the school and EWS should ensure a rounded view of the learner and the family.

Parent voice and parent councils

A supportive approach to improving engagement and attendance is more likely to be effective if parents feel that their concerns and views are listened to and acted upon, and successful schools have explored ways of ensuring that the parent voice is heard. Direct, face-to-face communication has been found to be a key way of establishing and opening good communication channels with parents and families.

Schools with parent councils or forums consult most effectively with parents. While some parent councils have evolved from the school's parent teacher association and may still fulfil a fundraising and social activities role, many have been set up specifically to support the school in providing feedback on teaching and learning issues or the school's communication practices. Effective parent forums are often supported by a senior leader or a family engagement officer. To ensure an equitable representation, they may elect one parent from each form. A few parents' associations also have clear terms of reference or charters. These approaches ensure that meetings remain constructive environments for school improvement and helpful feedback.

See Estyn's report [Involving parents - Communication between schools and parents of school-aged children](#) for suggested strategies and case studies of good practice.

Formal absence management

Local authorities support schools on matters relating to learner engagement and attendance through their EWS. For example, education welfare officers visit schools regularly to undertake a range of tasks, such as register consultations to discuss how they can best support the school in improving attendance and in reducing persistent absence.

In particular, section 436A of the Education Act 1996 as amended by section 4 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 places a duty on all local education authorities requiring that they make arrangements to enable them to establish (so far as it is possible to do so) the 'identities of children in their area who are not registered at a school and are not receiving a suitable education'.

The duty applies in relation to children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and who are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being at school (for example, via elective home education or via EOTAS provision) and who have been out of any educational provision for a substantial period of time, usually agreed as four weeks or more.

When the school has exhausted all reasonable avenues of support to improve the attendance of a learner, the school may refer the case to the EWS. This referral is a formal process involving the completion of appropriate forms. It is a significant escalation in the school's procedures for dealing with absence and is undertaken when criteria set by the local authority are met, usually including when absence is persistent. When such a referral is made to the EWS, all concerned should understand the significance of this step and that it begins legal processes that may lead to statutory interventions or sanctions.

Before making a referral to the EWS, the school should have explored possible reasons for absence and mitigating circumstances with the learner and their family. The school should have engaged with relevant agencies and services within the local authority to ensure that support and intervention is in place for both the child and family to address any identified barriers to attending school.

It is crucial that schools identify learners at risk of exclusion or disengagement from mainstream schooling and, working together with other relevant services, devise a strategy to address the child's future through the preparation of a [pastoral support programme](#) (PSP). The PSP is a school-based intervention which aims to providing additional support to avoid exclusion. Schools should consider whether pupils at risk of exclusion or disengagement from mainstream schooling have ALN and, where required, prepare an IDP.

The PSP should be reviewed on a regular basis – at least every six weeks and more frequently initially – to ensure that it remains relevant to the pupil's needs. For pupils receiving education out of school the review should consider whether full reintegration to mainstream schooling is feasible and the timescale required for this to happen.

Reduced timetables can be useful to support gradual reintegration or transition. Whilst part-time timetables are a useful technique to help learners adapt or re-adapt to the school setting, they have the effect of reducing the sessions on offer to those pupils to under the minimum 380 sessions. Such timetables should be a short-term measure.

Any arrangement for part-time provision out of school must be established through a plan. The plan must make clear what work the pupil is expected to do and its purpose. All out-of-school placements, and those which are internal to the school, must focus on the specific

needs of the pupil, both academic and social, and must have as their objective the re-integration of the pupil into the mainstream as soon as practicable.

If a school places a compulsory school age pupil on a part time timetable, for example as part of reintegration, then the school is authorising the pupil's absence from the sessions not in the timetable. That absence should be recorded under Code C. Schools should not place pupils on part-time timetables for an indefinite period and should review the timetable on a regular basis.

Parenting contracts

Local authorities and school governing bodies can suggest using parenting contracts in various situations, including in the case of regular non-attendance. Parenting contracts are intended to be supportive and to help parents make sure their children regularly attend school. They are useful as a means for focusing on underlying issues and in building constructive relationships with families. They are not punitive and it is important to use them in conjunction with the full range of strategies for engaging and supporting families set out in this document. For example, they can be used with a pastoral support plan. The contract should contain statements by the local authority or governing body agreeing to provide support to the family and by the parent agreeing to specified requirements. Entering into a parenting contract is voluntary for both parties. If a parent refuses or fails to meet the requirements, alternative courses of action, including statutory interventions and sanctions will need to be considered.

Fixed penalty notices

When the local authority Education Welfare Service, working with the school, has fully explored the reasons for regular non-attendance and exhausted all reasonable intervention and support mechanisms with little success, the use of other statutory interventions and sanctions will be considered. Fixed penalty notices are one option, where the threshold for prosecution has been reached, that can be used instead of prosecution.

Fixed penalty notices should be used as part of a package of intervention and support strategies to improve attendance. Such fines are used in extreme cases, when all efforts to engage the family have been tried and failed in having an impact. A warning rather than a penalty should normally be issued in the first instance, and in most cases this is enough to raise awareness of the severity of the attendance issue and lead to improved attendance.

Local authorities are responsible for the administration of the fixed penalty notice scheme and must issue a local code of conduct to ensure consistency across the local authority. The local authority should take care to ensure that notices are properly issued and only issued when it is willing to prosecute, which it should normally do when the penalty is not paid. Specific criteria for issuing a fixed penalty notice should be set out in the code of conduct. In the code of conduct, the local authority may limit the power of issuing penalties to the authority only. When headteachers are empowered to issue penalty notices, they must comply with the local code of conduct and provide the local authority with a copy of any notice issued.

At the outset of any process leading to issuing a penalty notice, the parent should be given a formal written notification explaining the actions that may be taken. It is good practice to make sure the parent understands the consequences of failing to ensure their child's regular attendance, in particular that it could result in a penalty or prosecution. It is also good practice to warn the parent of the possibility of a notice being issued and to allow time

(typically 15 school days) for the parent to improve the situation before issuing the penalty notice or commencing proceedings.

The key consideration in deciding whether to issue a penalty notice is whether it will be effective in helping to get the learner back sustainably to school or alternative provision. A penalty notice is a suitable intervention in circumstances where the parent is judged capable of securing their child's regular attendance but is not willing to take responsibility for doing so, for example where the parent has not engaged with any supportive measures proposed.

For further guidance on the use of fixed penalty notices, including circumstances in which a penalty notice might be issued, see the [Guidance](#) on penalty notices for regular non-attendance at school (2013).

Other interventions and sanctions

Education supervision orders and parenting orders are other mechanisms that can be used to help secure regular attendance. For example, a local authority can consider applying to court for an education supervision order or they can prosecute parents for failing to ensure their child attends regularly at school or alternative provision. As a result of a successful prosecution, a court may make a parenting order or impose a fine.

These options clearly represent a significant escalation in dealing with absence and are not taken lightly. Schools and local authorities should work with parents and learners as far as possible to encourage attendance and provide any necessary additional support, before taking forward any prosecution. Schools and the local authority Education Welfare Service should consider each case individually.

For information on education supervision orders and parenting orders (and school attendance orders for when learners are not on the roll of any school) see the [All Wales attendance framework](#)

The role of the Education Welfare Service (EWS)

The EWS provides professional, quality support to schools, children, young people and parents and provides appropriate support to education settings, so that children and young people can benefit from the educational opportunities provided to them.

The EWS supports good school attendance and high standards of pupil welfare and will support schools to create a culture which encourages attendance.

The EWS explores the reasons behind school absence, offer information and guidance, undertake planned interventions, advise parents about specialist support services and make referrals to appropriate services when required.

The EWS works collaboratively with other agencies to support all children and young people with specific emphasis placed on safeguarding and child protection issues.

The EWS believes that children and young people have the right to equal opportunities and are committed to ensuring that all children and young people gain maximum benefit from education regardless of learning needs, ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, religious beliefs or non-belief, language or nationality.

The EWS recognises that children and young people with additional learning needs and also families who are vulnerable and or socio-economically disadvantaged may, at times, require extra support.

The EWS is committed to the fundamental principle, that early intervention strategies and partnership working, is crucial in ensuring the protection and wellbeing of all children and young people.

The role of the EWS is to:

- review attendance register returns under the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 and any associated guidance.
- recognise the requirements of both the legislation and underlying principles related to data protection, access to personal files and pupil records under the GDPR.
- support the school to develop a whole school approach to managing attendance and addressing potential wellbeing and safeguarding issues that could be affecting school absence and poor punctuality.
- refer and work with other agencies when appropriate to ensure a holistic approach to welfare and attendance issues.
- collate, interpret and present data on issues relating to attendance. When required EWOs will provide attendance reports on whole school attendance, individual pupil data and vulnerable groups data.
- provide advice and guidance to school staff on the management of SIMs.
- support schools in their development and review of their school attendance policies and assist in implementing strategies to raise attendance.
- link with relevant staff to plan intervention for learners with persistent absence.
- ensure a co-ordinated and consistent approach to referral, recording, reporting and case closing systems.
- provide advice on proven good practice.

Attendance is the overall responsibility of the whole school and the EWS will work in partnership with schools in raising attendance.

The EWS undertakes proceedings on behalf of the local authority, in respect of parents who do not ensure their children's regular attendance at school or enrol them at school or education otherwise than at school.

The EWS will make relevant assessments and action plans in partnership with learners, parents, school staff and other relevant parties, concerning attendance at school or alternative educational provision.

[Section 444](#) of the Education Act 1996 states that if a child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, his parent is guilty of an offence. The use of legal action against parents will be considered as part of a planned intervention to improve attendance. This can include the issuing of fixed penalty notices under section 444A of that Act. If fixed penalty notices are used, then local authorities should take great care to ensure that notices are properly issued and only issued for offences where the local authority is willing and able to prosecute in the event the parent does not pay the fixed penalty.

The EWS must ensure accountability for cases taken to court and liaise with schools concerning such cases.

The EWS will offer information to parents and learners about rights and responsibilities concerning attendance and the legal process, during any intervention with the family.

Referrals to the Education Welfare Service

The Education welfare officer (EWO) has a dual role to play as a provider of a service to the school and as mediator between home and school. Schools will normally have a named EWO who has a duty to visit the school regularly. Attendance is the responsibility of the whole school. Schools should therefore consider the most effective ways of giving all staff access to the EWO and an understanding of their responsibilities.

The EWO's time is limited and schools should agree how and when a referral to the EWS is to be made and make sure that all staff understand these procedures and conditions. In particular, prior to a referral two things need to happen:

- a school's own procedures for dealing with absence should have been exhausted
- a referral form should be used so there is a written record of the pupil's attendance, lateness, strengths and weaknesses, relationships with peers and teachers, past and present contact with external agencies and any other relevant information from the school's records.

The referral processes

During the timetabled visit to the school, the learner's attendance data should be analysed. The knowledge and coding of the absences will be a factor contributing to whether a referral to the EWO is appropriate. Before accepting a referral for more intensive work an EWO should look for evidence that the school itself has made an effort to address the attendance issue through:

- action by the class or form tutor as part of their day-to-day duties
- involvement of others within the school, such head of year, pastoral staff, and headteacher
- contact with parents.

Referrals may include the following information:

- pupil information, including name, age, date of birth, year or class group, gender, ethnic origin, language other than English or Welsh, requirements of any religious affiliation, address if different to parents or carers
- assessment by school of pupil, for example ability, academic history, areas of difficulty, reason for referral, attendance details
- parent or carer information including date of birth
- actions taken by school to resolve difficulties and the outcomes of these actions;
- other relevant information relating to contributory factors and any other persons or agencies involved
- risk factors such as safeguarding or protection issues, aggression or violence in family or by the pupil
- any other information pertinent to the case.

Referrals should be made when schools have followed their attendance process and despite this there is:

- a pattern of irregular attendance and unauthorised absence
- a period of entrenched non-attendance
- lack of parental co-operation in ensuring a child's regular attendance
- a pattern of post-registration absence despite the school's efforts to prevent it
- a pupil has reached the percentage absence trigger set by the school
- a pattern of persistent lateness after the close of the school register
- a specific welfare issue which is preventing a pupil from accessing education
- a pupil withdrawn from school by the parents who are moving to another area and the school does not receive a request for the pupil's records from a school in the new area
- a parent withdrawing a child from school having expressed an intention to electively educate them at home but have not formally deregistered the pupil by advising the local authority of their intentions

Any safeguarding concerns should immediately be referred to the school's lead designated safeguarding officer.

The response to referrals

A home visit may be undertaken. The purpose of a home visit by the EWO varies from case to case depending on the circumstances of the work being undertaken. It is important that staff understand the need for contact with young people and their parents in their homes or in other places in the community. It is good practice for the EWO to make a dynamic risk assessment prior to visiting a home.

Where ill health is a factor in the learner's absence, the EWO will need to confirm the medical problems identified by the child or parent, particularly if there have been several referrals and the explanation for absence has been given as ill health. If it is felt that the parents have not sought appropriate medical help and the absence persists, with the co-operation of the parents, an enquiry should be made to the relevant medical professional. In addition, where illnesses such as mild asthma, migraine or period pains are given as a reason for frequent or prolonged absence, a medical opinion may need to be sought from the relevant medical professional, remembering that there is often an [association](#) between these and Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Where there may be emotionally based school avoidance concerns the EWS will enquire with the schools ALNCO whether a referral has been made to the Educational Psychologist and an appropriate plan of support developed.

The EWO may also need to discuss with the family and child whether a referral to the GP/CAMHS/NDS/Counselling services or other agencies is appropriate and who is best placed to make that referral.

Where there is children's services involvement the EWS will need to liaise with the designated social worker in order to determine areas of responsibility and to consider the possibility of a joint visit.

The EWO will need to discuss any perceived barriers to attendance raised by the child and/or family regarding any difficulties that might prevent regular attendance with a relevant member of staff.

Depending on the issue, the school in partnership with the EWO may need to have discussed with the family other provision, such as an education other than at school (EOTAS) provision.

EWS Attendance Process Summary

- School makes a referral to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO)
- Contact with the family is made through house visits and telephone calls
- Attendance to be monitored following communication with the young person/family
- If no improvement after 2-3 weeks, a letter may be sent highlighting attendance concerns
- Throughout the process, communication is maintained via various means and strategies implemented accordingly
- Meeting arranged between the school, parents/carer and EWO
- Attendance monitored for **2-3 weeks** after the meeting
- If the meeting is not attended by the parent/s or carer/s, a second letter is sent offering the opportunity to reschedule another one
- Is attendance still a concern?
- If the absences have been unauthorised by school, progress to the Official Warning and review in **4 weeks**
- If absences are authorised by school then a Pre-warning is to be sent and reviewed in **2-4 weeks**
- **Pre-warning - no improvement = Official Warning**
- **Official Warning - no improvement = Fixed penalty notice / court prosecution**

Exclusions

The following regulations provide the legal framework regarding exclusions in Wales:

- The Education (Pupil Exclusions and Appeals) (Maintained Schools) (Wales) Regulations 2003.
- The Education (Pupil Exclusions and Appeals) (Pupil Referral Units) (Wales) Regulations 2003.
- The Education (Pupil Exclusions and Appeals) (Wales) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2004
- The Education (Reintegration Interview) (Wales) Regulations 2010

Unlawful exclusion

Unlawful exclusion (sometimes referred to as informal or unofficial) refers to:

- head teachers or other school staff sending learners home for disciplinary reasons, but not following the procedures required for formal exclusion even if done with the agreement of parents or carers
- learners being sent home for either short periods of time, or for longer, indefinite, periods which can sometimes result in the pupil not returning to school at all.

For example, where a learner is sent home for disciplinary reasons for part of a school day, the school may view this as a 'cooling off' period and not take action to exclude the learner formally. There is no basis in law for this and the relevant regulations do not state a minimum length of exclusion, so if a learner is sent home, even for short periods of time, this must be formally recorded as an exclusion.

In every instance where a learner is sent home for disciplinary reasons, head teachers must formally record and specify the length of the exclusion (for reporting purposes this should be recorded as a half day, whole day or lunchtime). They should ensure that:

- they are meeting their legal duty of care towards learners, and that parents/carers are formally notified of the exclusion
- child protection issues are taken into account, e.g. bearing in mind the learner's age and vulnerability, that a parent/carer is at home and the learner is not placed at risk by, for example, being left to wander the streets
- that work is sent home or alternative provision is arranged.

The very fact that unlawful exclusions are not recorded by a school means it can be extremely difficult to identify instances of this practice. If a learner is excluded unlawfully they are unlikely to have educational provision made for them.

However, local authorities should work to identify instances of unlawful exclusions. This could include:

- providing opportunities for members of the public to inform the local authority of possible instances of unofficial exclusions
- encouraging parents to report instances of unlawful exclusion to the LA.

In addition, EWS should follow up informal intelligence from parents, learners, and home visits about learners out of school.

The following policies and practices may be used to tackle unlawful exclusions where they are identified:

- training for school governors and managers, and EWO meetings with all schools to remind them of their obligations
- letter to the relevant school from Senior Education Officer reminding head teachers of their legal obligations

Further guidance on managing exclusions is available in [Exclusion from Schools and Pupil Referral Units](#), 2019.

Education provision for excluded learners

The school's obligation to provide education continues while the learner is still on the roll. The name of a permanently excluded learner should remain on the school roll until the appeals procedure is completed, or until the time for appeals has expired without an appeal being lodged. It may be removed earlier if the parents/carers and/or learner give notice in writing that they do not intend to appeal.

In all cases of more than a day's exclusion, work should be set and marked. Headteachers must arrange for work to be provided as soon as a learner is excluded for a fixed-term. Parents/carers should arrange for the work to be collected and returned and the school must ensure that it is marked and that further work is set until the learner returns to school. Letters to parents/carers and/or learners informing them of the exclusion must include the arrangements for setting and marking work.

The governing body is responsible for ensuring that the school complies with these requirements. Headteachers should have a written policy on arrangements for receiving learners back into school after a fixed-term exclusion, which should include receipt of work completed during the exclusion. However, failure to complete work does not constitute a reason for refusing to allow the learner to return to school.

Partnership agreements between local authorities and each of the schools it maintains must set out the responsibility of the school for the setting and marking of work for excluded learners.

Where a headteacher is considering excluding a learner for more than 15 school days in any one term, whether permanently or for a fixed term, they should put in place plans to address the learner's problems and secure their continuing education. The Welsh Government expects local authority and schools to work toward ensuring all learners excluded for more than three weeks receive full-time and appropriate education. Where, in exceptional cases, this is not possible owing to the circumstances of an individual learner, there should be in place plans for full-time, appropriate provision with regular reviews of progress.

Excluded learners should only be educated outside mainstream schools where there are significant problems that are better addressed in a different environment. Where this is the case, the EOTAS Panel (or equivalent) will discuss the case and consider the most appropriate provision.

Part-time provision is often inadequate to meet the educational needs of excluded learners and to ensure continuity of education. It also leaves some of these learners unsupervised

for significant periods of a normal school day. The LA, therefore, aims for all learners to receive full-time education 15 days after being excluded, either at another school or, where necessary an alternative provision. Where learners may have become so disengaged from education, or their current circumstances may be such, that a rapid reintroduction to full-time education is unlikely to prove successful a plan will be drawn up specifying how the move to full-time education is to be achieved.

Full-time means that the amount of supervised education should mirror that provided by mainstream schools in the area. An average school week might amount to some 25 hours; so excluded learners should receive around five hours of supervised education or other activity a day. A full timetable for an excluded learner may, however, look significantly different from that provided in a mainstream school.

Statutory interventions and sanctions

For information on the legal background to parenting contract or orders, school attendance orders, education supervision orders or fixed penalty notices see the [All Wales Attendance Framework](#)