

Cambridgeshire Virtual School - Attendance Statement of Intent

Improving the attendance of children in care, previously in care and those known to social care is a priority for Cambridgeshire Virtual School. Research consistently shows learners with good attendance achieve higher grades than those who do not, and that education can provide much needed stability.

All children are entitled to a full-time education that meets their needs from the school term after their 5th birthday until the last Friday in June in the school year in which they turn 16.

Our aim is to:

1. Reduce the time children miss education through absences, suspensions/exclusions and placement moves.
2. Remove the barriers faced by children known to social care in accessing education.

The Virtual School will:

- Monitor the attendance and transition of children in care, using data from Welfare Call and social care.
- Support social workers, carers, learners, schools and other Local Authority services to ensure regular school attendance.
- Offer support, guidance and advice to social workers, carers, schools, other Local Authority services and learners on all aspects of school attendance and admission.
- Ensure that all relevant agencies comply with and uphold the statutory guidance on school suspensions and exclusions.

Understanding authorised and unauthorised absence:

Every half-day absence must be classified by the education setting attended by the child as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from the education setting for a good reason. The Department for Education (DfE) has issued guidelines to all education settings detailing valid reasons for authorised or justified absences:

- A child is ill or receiving medical attention.
- Days of religious observance, notified in advance.
- Absence due to an exceptional or unavoidable family circumstances (e.g. bereavement, serious illness).

For children in care there may be additional justified absences which could include:

- When a child moves into a pre-adoptive placement, time out of school may be necessary to prioritise bonding with the new family. This should be planned and time-limited.
- Post-adoption celebration hearings should be authorised.
- Where a child is living beyond reasonable distance of the education setting and is awaiting a new education placement.

Unauthorised absences are those which the education setting does not consider reasonable and for which no permission has been given. DfE guidelines state that the following activities are examples that would be classified as unauthorised:

- Parents/carers keeping children off unnecessarily.
- Absences which have never been properly explained.
- Children who arrive at the education setting too late to get an attendance mark at registration.
- Day trips and holidays in term time.

Children missing from Education:

A child is missing from education when they are of compulsory school age of 5 to 16 years old and are:

- Not registered on a school roll.
- Not attending an alternate education provision.

A child is not missing from education if they are:

- Being Electively Home Educated (EHE).
- Registered on a school roll and their whereabouts known, but not attending school.

Context for children in care:

- Both at the point of entering care, and throughout their childhood, children in care may experience planned and unplanned placement moves. When a placement changes, every effort is made to maintain the child's access to school, however at times this may not be possible or safe.
- For children in care, school may be their primary place of safety and security and therefore it should be acknowledged that the loss of this key environment and of relationships is substantial.
- Data shows that children in care typically underperform academically; each day of non-attendance for a child in care is therefore significant.
- Where a child moves to a new care placement which means that they are unable to access their current school, consideration should be given as to whether the child should stay on the school's admission register ('on roll').

Removal from roll - Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006:

- Any removal from roll must be in line with the statutory guidance; usually the reason for a child in care is 'except in the case of a boarder, that he has ceased to attend the school and no longer ordinarily resides at a place which is a reasonable distance from the school at which he is registered.'
- If a child in care is removed from roll, they will usually become a child missing in education (CME) as a child whose whereabouts are known, but does not have any educational provision in place.
- A child in care who is a registered pupil at a special school cannot be removed from roll without the consent of the local authority, or if that authority refuses to give consent, without a direction from the Secretary of State.

For all compulsory school aged children not on a school roll, an Education Advisor from the Virtual School's Achievement Through Access & Inclusion Team is allocated to support, including co-ordinating Personal Education Plan meetings in the place of a school's DT.

[Children Missing from Education guidance September 2016 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Term time leave or holidays:

Prior to June 2013, the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 allowed for headteachers to grant leave of absence for term-time leave or family holiday in 'special circumstances' and for extended leave in exceptional circumstances.

Amendments to these regulations remove references to family holidays and extended leave. **The amendments state that headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.** Headteachers should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted.

For children in care, requests should be made by the social worker to the Head Teacher of the school the child attends, **AND the Virtual School Head Teacher.**

Permission will only be granted if the circumstances are exceptional.

Exceptional circumstances could include:

- Service personnel returning from a tour of duty abroad where it is evidenced the individual will not be in receipt of any leave in the near future that coincides with school holidays.
- Where an absence from school is recommended by a health professional as part of a parent or child's rehabilitation from a medical or emotional issue.
- The death or terminal illness of a person close to the family.

- To attend a wedding or funeral of a person close to the family.

Both Head Teachers must agree for the absence to be authorised

Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions:

Suspension	Permanent Exclusion
Not being able to attend school for a fixed term.	Not being able to return to school.

Suspensions from school should be the last resort for children in care, who are particularly vulnerable to the impacts. Suspensions re-enforce feelings of loss, shame and rejection for learners who are care experienced. For learners with a social worker, being away from school results in them missing the protection and opportunities it can provide. Permanent exclusions should be an absolute last resort and Cambridgeshire take the approach that these should not be issued for children in care.

As per statutory suspension guidance:

- The child's background and educational needs must be considered by the headteacher in the lead up to a suspension or permanent exclusion, including whether any additional support to the pupil could be provided to improve their regulation in school and avoid exclusion where possible.
- Any concerns about a child in care's behaviour should be recorded in their Personal Education Plan, as well as how the pupil is being supported to improve their regulation and reduce the likelihood of suspension. **This information is monitored by the Virtual School through the quality assurance process; follow-up support and challenge are put in place where needed.**

The school should inform the following without delay if:

- a learner is at risk of suspensions or a permanent exclusion
- The Head Teacher has issued a suspension or permanent exclusion

Children in care	Children previously in care	Children with a Social Worker
Social Worker Carers Virtual School	Parents/carers	Parents/carers Social Worker

The Virtual School gathers, analyses and responds to suspension data gathered through daily Welfare Call checks.

An Education Advisor from the Virtual School’s Achievement Through Access & Inclusion team provides follow-up for each suspension that is issued and further support and challenge through child-level work where needed.

[Suspension and permanent exclusion guidance September 2023 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Temporary Reduced timetables

All children of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. In very exceptional circumstances, it may be appropriate for a child to attend school in a reduced capacity as part of a re-integration package; for children in care this would need to be agreed by their social worker and in consultation with the Virtual School. For children who are not in care this would need to be done in agreement with their parents/carers.

A reduced timetable must not be treated as a long-term solution, must have a time limit and be reviewed regularly. In agreeing to a reduced timetable, a school has agreed to a child being absent from school for part of the week or day and therefore must record it as authorised absence. Appropriate Local Authority partners should be involved if a reduced timetable is to be considered and a plan to ensure that the child is reintegrated into full time education must be in place.

For all compulsory school aged children in care on a temporary reduced timetable, an Education Advisor from the Virtual School’s Achievement Through Access & Inclusion Team is allocated to support; including co-ordinating regular reviews and ensuring there is a clear plan towards full-time education.

Cambridgeshire Virtual School Procedures

Promoting and supporting regular attendance is everybody’s responsibility. The procedures below outline the Cambridgeshire Virtual School’s approaches to attendance. These actions will be applied in most cases, but they are dependent on context.

	Statutory School Age	Post-16
Promoting the importance of regular attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Virtual School training reiterates the importance of regular school attendance for cohorts and strategies to support this. • Recovery through relationships training 	

<p>Monitoring</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily attendance recording from Welfare Call • Weekly review of attendance codes, concerns escalated to ATAI AHT • Termly data scrutinised to identify concerns and allocation to ATAI where child-level support and challenge is required. • Termly scrutiny of school/Trust cohort data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly attendance recording from Welfare Call • Termly data scrutinised to identify concerns and allocation to ATAI where child-level support and challenge is required.
<p>Support, guidance and advice</p>	<p>Termly advisory meetings to review attendance data and set appropriate actions to address any concerns.</p> <p>Child level advice and information as requested.</p> <p>Targeted support for individuals as identified</p>	<p>Termly advisory meetings to review attendance data and set appropriate actions to address any concerns.</p> <p>Child level advice and information as requested.</p> <p>Targeted support for individual as identified</p>

To facilitate effective working across the local authority, schools are expected to inform a pupil's social worker if there are unexplained absences from school. Children missing education officers, or a school's point of contact in the School Attendance Support Team, should also inform a pupil's social worker if their name is to be deleted from the school register.

[Working together to improve school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)