The role of the Local Authority Attendance Officers

Previously known as Education Welfare Officers
The role of the Local Authority Attendance Officer

The Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to identify, as far as it is possible to do so, children missing education (CME). To ensure that we are satisfying this responsibility as well as investigating cases of poor attendance, all academies, schools and alternative providers will have a named Local Authority Attendance Officer.

Further clarification of local authority statutory duties in relation to attendance can be accessed via the link below see page 9:


Each School will have a full consultation visit, ideally during the end of the summer term or early autumn term to begin the process of supporting schools to identify the development of operational strategies to reduce levels of non-school attendance. The consultation visit might not necessarily be your linked officer but where possible this will be the case.

The main purpose of the consultation meetings will be to discuss attendance issues and to identify children whose attendance is, or is becoming, unsatisfactory or who are otherwise a cause of concern, and recommending that a referral be made by the school for the application of a Penalty Notice or prosecution.

A range of indicators that reflect the needs of each school will determine the identified level of visits available from the Local Authority Attendance Officer throughout the academic year. The Officer will work alongside your school to ensure children and young people are able to access their education provision.

Information on the level of consultation visits allocated to a school will be communicated by the linked Officers.

Cluster meetings will occur throughout the academic year to enable the dissemination of information, advice and guidance activities in relevant attendance related topics.

From September 2019 there will be a helpline telephone service for schools which offers to provide information and advice on general attendance issues and will operate every Monday 10am to 4pm during term time.

We expect all children to attend school 100% of the time, however poor, unacceptable attendance is defined as anything under 90% and all schools should make a referral at the agreed time for every child who fails to attend school regularly or has been absent from school where the absence has not been treated as authorised.
To support schools to secure early sustained improvement in attendance we are introducing a fast track direct referral process for the application of Penalty Notices. The Council’s Penalty Notice Code of Conduct now states that there must be at least 8 unauthorised sessions over at least an 8 week period for the Penalty Notice to be issued. In addition school early intervention support must be confirmed.

Local Authority Attendance Officers are trained to have regard to the legal framework, when carrying out duties relating to Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) code of contract, Parenting Orders and Penalty Notices. All interventions are available to promote school attendance and outlined within the Department of Education’s document ‘School Attendance, Departmental advice for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities’:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance

The Local Authority Attendance Officer as Case Investigator:

The process of investigation begins when a school makes a referral for the application of a Penalty Notice or Prosecution and the Legal Panel decides that the referral requires further investigation. The investigation is the responsibility of the Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAAO) and ends with the application of a Penalty Notice, the conviction of a parent via the Single Justice Process (SJP) or in cases of an aggravated offence, in the magistrate courts or the withdrawal of the referral.

The Legal Panel will open a case directly to an Local Authority Attendance Officer who will contact the referring school within 5 working days and complete the investigation within 20 working days – please note that this may not be a schools linked Officer. The Local Authority Attendance Officer is expected to question the school and gather information on the robustness and appropriateness of the referral. The Local Authority Attendance Officer will consider the evidence of the case and in particular the quality of the schools early intervention support and consider the potential of mitigating circumstances. It is the Local Authority Attendance Officer responsibility to make the decision on the use of the statutory interventions and to inform the school and Legal Panel of next steps on an ongoing basis.

Local Authority Attendance Officer’s carry out the Local Authorities’ statutory duty to ensure that parents carry out their legal duty to ensure that their child receives suitable full time education, as defined by the Education Act 1996