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Guidance

Senior leaders and practice supervisors: attendance considerations

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Applies to England

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The [children's social care national framework](#), sets out effective practice around attendance for senior leaders and practice supervisors.

The role of practice supervisors and

senior leaders

Practice supervisors should:

- collaborate with education colleagues to ensure consistent access to learning
- build strong relationships with schools to promote attendance, and identify when falling attendance may signal wider issues
- establish strong working relationships with virtual school heads to draw on their expertise and support children in overcoming attendance challenges

Senior leaders should:

- establish strong partnerships with and value the expertise of local school leaders and the virtual school head to set high aspirations for engagement and tackle barriers to attendance and attainment
- understand the importance of education as a protective factor that helps to keep children and young people safe and able to access opportunities
- consistently promote and track children's attendance across protected characteristics, being proactive where there are distinct differences in rates

The role of virtual school heads

Since 2021, virtual school heads have been responsible for promoting the educational outcomes of children with a social worker.[\[footnote 1\]](#) They support schools, parents, carers and social workers in understanding and addressing barriers to attendance.

Their role with regard to the attendance of these children largely involves the following skills.

Monitoring, analysing and driving improvement

Virtual school heads:

- regularly monitor the attendance of all children in the area with a social worker,

including looked-after children

- use this insight to set clear, time-bound, ambitious targets for attendance of pupils with a social worker in the area, that can be tracked over the year
- ensure strong and effective personal education plans are in place for looked-after pupils to help support improvement and address concerns early

Breaking targets down term by term can help maintain steady progress. For children with more complex needs, this may include gradually increasing their level of provision and putting in place support that helps build regular attendance.

Offering strategic leadership

Virtual school heads work across education and social care to:

- influence policy
- co-ordinate support and ensure children with a social worker receive help to improve:
 - attendance
 - engagement
 - outcomes
- promote inclusive practices and reasonable adjustments
- advise on ensuring children's additional needs are identified and assessed promptly, including where an education, health and care plan needs assessment may be appropriate

Building partnerships

Virtual school heads:

- strengthen collaboration between schools and local authorities to:
 - align strategies
 - share information

- reinforce that attendance is a shared responsibility
- utilise specialists such as:
 - educational psychologists
 - speech and language therapists
 - mental health services

Raising the visibility of the cohort

Virtual school heads:

- deliver training to social workers
- share data
- raise awareness to ensure professionals understand the needs of children with a social worker
- promote high aspirations through:
 - professional development
 - positive messaging
 - consistent standards across local authorities

How virtual schools are expected to support attendance

The [working together to improve school attendance](#) guidance sets out clear expectations for local authorities about how to make use of their virtual school to:

- **monitor attendance** of all children with a social worker, including those looked-after
- **set ambitious targets** for attendance and ensure personal education plans are in place for looked-after pupils
- **train and support designated teachers** in promoting attendance for looked-after and previously looked-after children

- **ensure the regular attendance of looked-after children** in their role as the corporate parent and advise the services supporting previously looked-after pupils
- **embed attendance** within multi-agency care planning, focussing on sustained attendance over time to allow habits and routines to be established and sustained
- **ensure all social workers understand the importance of attendance** and include it in child in need or protection plans, where relevant

Multi-agency working and attendance

Strategic frameworks and expectations

[Children's social care national framework](#)

The framework states that agencies should collaborate, using their unique expertise, to support the long-term outcomes of:

- good child development
- educational attendance and attainment
- physical and mental health
- family stability
- crime prevention^{[\[footnote 2\]](#)}

[Families first partnership programme](#)

The programme encourages safeguarding partners and agencies to form community-based multi-disciplinary teams. These teams wrap support around families through integrated services.

All safeguarding partners and relevant agencies should understand the:

- importance of absence as an indicator of wider need
- benefits of improving attendance to improve outcomes for the whole family

Where pupils face out-of-school barriers and the family do not have a social worker, they should routinely be assessed for family help.

Attendance as a shared responsibility

As the [working together to improve school attendance statutory guidance](#) states, 'attendance is everyone's business'.

All practitioners working with children should understand their role in supporting attendance, especially for children with a social worker.

A [London Borough of Newham case study](#) highlights effective partnership working, including admissions support for child in need pupils during transitions.

Practitioners should know who the relevant education partners are in their area – especially the attendance team and the virtual school head in their local authority.

Key roles in education settings

A designated safeguarding lead is:

- a role defined in the [keeping children safe in education](#) statutory guidance
- a senior staff member responsible for safeguarding and child protection

A designated teacher for looked-after children is:

- a statutory role promoting educational outcomes, including attendance^{[\[footnote 3\]](#)}
- the central contact for looked-after and previously looked-after children

The importance of regular attendance

Attendance is important for 3 reasons. It has:

- a protective factor: regular school attendance is a safeguard for vulnerable children
- an impact on mental health: children missing more than 50% of school have mental health outcomes twice as poor as those missing only 1%
- an impact on attainment: children who miss 2 weeks in year 11 have half the odds

of achieving a grade 5 at English and maths compared to similar children attending well

Useful links

- [Working together to improve school attendance](#)
- [Children's social care national framework](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education](#)
- [Families first partnership programme](#)
- [Children's social care dashboard](#)
- [Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools](#)
- [Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after children](#)
- [Children's social care: virtual school head role extension](#)
- [DfE's school attendance toolkit for local authorities](#)
- [Giving every child the best start in life](#)

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1. [Promoting the education of children with a social worker and children in kinship care arrangements: virtual school head role extension](#) ↩
 2. [Children's social care national framework](#) ↩
 3. [Designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children](#) ↩

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