

Herefordshire Council Attendance Strategy

‘Listen, understand, empathise and support – but do not tolerate’

‘Improving attendance is everyone’s business. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, and are often specific to individual pupils and families. The foundation of securing good attendance is that school is a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn’

Working together to improve school attendance – DfE Guidance May 2022

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Purpose

1.1 Herefordshire Council is committed to working with schools and other partners to improve school attendance and punctuality across the Local Authority. Underpinning this commitment is the understanding that there is a strong correlation between good school attendance and achieving positive outcomes for children. There is a wide range of evidence as to the health and wellbeing benefits for school age education, and the Chief Medical Officers have been clear that time out of school can hold back young people’s development and wellbeing.

1.2 It is recognised that attending school regularly can be a protective factor for children and young people. Learning from serious case reviews and child practice reviews in England, highlight the importance of having access to a school place to a child’s life and the need to place school life at the heart of multi-agency planning and provision. It is therefore important to ensure that schools and settings offer a safe environment, positive relationships, high-quality teaching and learning, and opportunities to develop social and emotional skills.

1.3 In our work with children and families, we are committed to ensuring that all staff advocate the child’s right to a full-time and successful education. This means that our work with children, parents and schools should be underpinned by the key principle that any child, regardless of their characteristics, needs or the type of school they attend, deserves access to a full-time, high-quality education that allows them to flourish and paves the way to a successful future.

1.4 This attendance strategy has been developed to help the Local Authority, schools, settings and other partner agencies understand what we need to do to work in a more coherent way, making the best use of resources available, in order to ensure that:

- All children and young people can make the most of the opportunities provided by attending school;
- Systems are developed to provide the Local Authority with accurate and contemporaneous attendance data; Data is used to identify patterns and trends and systems are responsive to those supporting schools to intervene early and prevent escalation of concerns;
- Through training and guidance, the workforce understands the Local Authority's responsibilities for school attendance, they know who to contact for support and are confident to address concerns about school attendance;
- Responses to concerns about pupil absence at an individual, institutional and local level are co-ordinated across teams. Schools, parents and children are clear about what support is on offer as well as their responsibilities.

As a consequence:

- Teams across the Local Authority take collective responsibility for improving school attendance and there is collaborative response to planning;
- Overall attendance improves and levels of persistent absence reduce;
- Safeguarding of children is improved because they attend school regularly and any issues are identified and responded to at the earliest opportunity;
- Parents understand the positive contribution they can make to their child's wellbeing, achievement and good attendance and know where to go to access help and support and parents understand their legal responsibilities

1.5 This strategy has been developed by the School Attendance Strategy Working Group. The strategy will draw out learning from audit, case reviews and relevant local and national developments. The strategy will constantly evolve with collaboration from partners, ensuring learning from local practice, audit and emerging Government policy. The strategy links to the following work streams and activity:

[Herefordshire Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2024](#)

[Draft early help strategy 2021-2024 \(herefordshire.gov.uk\)](#)

[2.1 Children affected by Exploitation and Trafficking \(including Gangs\) | West Midlands Safeguarding Children Group \(procedures.org.uk\)](#)

- Virtual School for Children In Care and Previously in Care including the extension of the role of the Virtual School for Children with a Social Worker
- Vulnerable Adolescent Strategy

1.6 This strategy is informed by the Department for Education working together to improve school attendance guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent school and local authorities - Published May 2022 and local attendance data (see Appendix 1)

1.7 The delivery of the strategy will be driven by Herefordshire's Children and Young People's Partnership and the children and young people's plan: Giving children and young people a great start in life 2019 – 2024. The priorities of which are:

- Keeping children and young people safe – BE SAFE FROM HARM
- Improving children and young people's health and wellbeing – BE HEALTHY
- Helping ALL children and young people succeed – BE AMAZING

- Ensuring that children and young people are influential in our communities – FEEL PART OF THE COMMUNITY

1.8 The key priorities of the Attendance Strategy are described and developed in Section 3. They can be summarised as:

1. Relationships and Communication
2. Effective Intervention
3. Systems and Data
4. Workforce Development

2. Context

2.1 The roles and responsibilities of schools, parents and local authorities are clearly defined with statutory guidance and advice as follows:

Statutory guidance & advice

- [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- [School behaviour and attendance: parental responsibility measures - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-missing-education>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions->
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alternative-provision>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-for-children-with-health-needs-who-cannot-attend-school>
- [School suspensions and permanent exclusions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/providing-remote-education-guidance-for-schools>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-issues-affecting-a-pupils-attendance-guidance-for-schools>

Local guidance & policy framework

- [Children missing education \(Herefordshire\) – Herefordshire Council](#)
- [Herefordshire Virtual School for looked after children – Herefordshire Council](#)
- [Local Offer - SEND – Herefordshire Council](#)
- http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/1472/enforcement_and_prosecution_policy
- https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/3891/penalty_notice_code_of_conduct
- <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/schools-education/home-education>
- https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/18686/part-time_timetables_good_practice_guide.pdf
- <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/5600/herefordshire-directory-of-early-help-services>
- <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/16209/herefordshire-supporting-families-outcomes-framework>

2.2 In Herefordshire the Local Authority's statutory responsibilities for school attendance and tracking pupil movement are overseen by staff within the Children and Families and the Economy

and Environment (Enforcement) Directorates. Moreover, school attendance is a priority for Children's Services leadership and wider council leadership teams, including members of the council and this strategy has been developed with representatives from across the local authority including external partners; schools, health, police and the voluntary sector

2.3 Attendance continues to be a significant challenge for many schools in Herefordshire. Herefordshire's figures for unauthorised absence are comparatively low, particularly in the primary phase, however overall absence, driven by a significantly higher than national average rate of authorised absence and persistent absence are consistently higher than the national average and higher than in many other local authorities that are statistically very similar to Herefordshire. The issue is one that affects secondary and special schools in particular; too many children are persistently absent from school. Comparative data can be found in Appendix 1 of this document.

3. Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Relationships & Communication – We will consult with a broad range of stakeholders to identify what is working well, what they are worried about and in order to determine what happens next.

Poor school attendance is more than one incident or experience; it is a result of a series of events, interactions, and experiences inside and outside the school walls. There are many stakeholders involved who experience and respond to the challenge of school absence in different ways, bringing different perspectives and approaches to change. Understanding how these factors and stakeholders relate to one another and identifying underlying patterns can help us look for opportunities to intervene early and reduce the likelihood of escalation.

How we will do it:

- consult with schools, children, parents and carers to understand the barriers as well as enablers to good school attendance and what they need help with to achieve this
- Work in partnership with schools to give clear messages about school attendance to parents through a variety of media
- Co-ordinate strategies and services to ensure that messages on attendance are consistent and that information is shared appropriately
- Connect with targeted services including Voluntary Community Sector partners to understand current service delivery and how their work can support the promotion of good school attendance.

Priority 2: Effective Intervention – We will create a clearly defined pathway for schools, families and other professionals to support them to set clear expectations about attendance, identify and support vulnerable groups at all points of transition and respond to attendance concerns at the earliest opportunity.

All pupils

- Trauma informed practice
- Consistent and restorative approaches to addressing challenging behaviour
- A strong focus on relational practice

Targeted Groups

- Early Identification
- Mental health and well-being support
- Engaging with families
- Multi-agency and community sector response

- Academic engagement and support

Staff

- Attendance networks
- Inclusive school leadership & whole school approaches

How we will do it:

We will review and revise current practice models and guidance so that:

- All plans, including early help assessment (EHA), children in need (CIN) and child protection (CP) seek to identify and tackle the root causes of absence;
- The link between school attendance and safeguarding is clearly understood;
- Family network and trauma informed approaches are embedded in practice;
- Through clear signposting schools, children and their families have access to appropriate support making full use of Voluntary Community Sector partners;
- We continue to consistently apply the full range of parental responsibility measures where required.
- There is a multi-agency response for the most vulnerable learners where interventions have not supported them to access a full-time education.

In order to test the effectiveness of practice models, we will undertake some pilot programmes with targeted schools.

Priority 3: Systems & Data - Through access to contemporaneous data, the Local Authority will have a clear understanding of the current local picture and how this compares to national trends. As a result, the system will be responsive to emerging need and Local Authority Teams respond to the data strategically, offering tailored support in response at a locality, institutional and pupil level.

How we will do it:

- Drive forward the live data feed to enable the use of contemporary data to target interventions and reduce absence.
- Develop a clear system for monitoring all relevant data which outlines respective teams' roles and responsibility and frequency of the activity.
- Share data and emerging patterns and trends routinely with school leaders and attendance leads individually and collectively through networks and in training.
- Support schools to understand and own their data, analyse it accurately, identify trends and compare it with the national picture, have a clear picture of the reasons for absence, understand their attendance profile, and have in place actions for improvement.

Priority 4: Workforce development - Everyone who works with children, young people and their families has a role to play. These roles should complement each other and work together to support raised attendance. In order to achieve this, we will seek to develop the skills of the workforce ensuring they have the knowledge, understanding and skills to meet the needs of our young people and respond effectively to concerns about school attendance.

How we will do it:

- Enhance the existing offer of training, support and guidance to schools based on consultation, learning from audit and needs analysis. This will include training for governors and academy trusts.
- Create a training offer for staff in other services to ensure our partners understand their role in supporting good school attendance and understand where to access further advice and support.

- Provide opportunities for practitioners to problem solve, reflect on practice, coach and shadow others.
- Identify, collate and share good practice highlighting the impact of those interventions for children and their families as well as on school standards
- Develop an attendance self-assessment for schools to evaluate the whole school approach to managing school attendance.

4. Monitoring & Oversight

An Action Plan has been developed and will be updated on a regular basis. This will address the priorities identified within the Strategy.

5. Appendices

Appendix 1 Herefordshire data on absence/attendance:

Individual school data can be found here:

<https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/schools-by-type?step=default&table=schools®ion=884&geographic=la&for=abspop>