

Croydon Council Access To Education

Croydon Local Authority: Attendance Strategy- based on “Working Together”



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Contents:

1. Rationale.....	3
2. National context	3
3. Our Vision	4
4. Key Objectives	4
5. How will we do this?.....	5
Objective 1: Engagement with stakeholders and settings	5
Objective 2: School Policies and Practices	6
Objective 3: Partnership with Parents / carers or families	6
Objective 4: Supporting Schools	7
Objective 5: Participation of Children and Young People	9
6. Strategy In Action- staged intervention process.....	9
Stage 1: Prevention	9
Stage 2: Early Intervention.....	10
Stage 3: Targeted support for persistent and severe absenteeism.....	10
Stage 4: Statutory Processes	11
7. Promoting the attendance of children with a Social Worker.....	11
Appendix A	12
Operational “Working Together” Group Meeting.....	12
Performance Indicators.....	12
Monitoring	13
Evaluation	13
Appendix B	15
New Penalty Notice Guidance And School Application Documents	15
Appendix C	18
Attendance Preventive Referral Pathway flowchart	18
Appendix D	19
Attendance Team Structure	19

1. Rationale:

A primary objective for Croydon Council's Access to Education team is to raise the actual attendance, in all Croydon schools, in line with the National average and statistical neighbours.

This will involve "working together" with all Education settings and other services within the Local Authority (LA), voluntary sector, and community.

Our vision is for all Croydon schools to be evidently inclusive and promoting the benefit for all pupils, of regular school attendance.

2. National context:

Although nationally there is still a focus on reducing unauthorised absence to reduce truancy locally there is a greater emphasis on reducing authorised absence to improve actual attendance. The actual attendance figures for Croydon indicate that the Croydon Local Authority is below the National average.

In 2008 national unauthorised absence was at 6.4%, by 2018 this was at record low of 4.3%.

In 2015 a Persistent Absence (PA) level was introduced as a key measure. This remained steady from 2015 until 2018, when it began to rise.

Prior to the pandemic, school attendance trends across the country were improving. In 2019, with the onset of COVID-19 both overall absence and persistent absence began to increase. Overall absence reached 4.93% and PA at its highest was 13.14%. The next two years saw unprecedented levels of absenteeism (above even 2008) due to the pandemic.

We have since seen levels of overall absence similar to 2008, and a record persistent absence rate of 23.59% in 2022.

In May 2022, the DfE published the guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance and Summary Table of Responsibilities for School Attendance.

The guidance gives a clear message that improving attendance should not be the responsibility of one organisation. It should be achieved by working collaboratively and addressing the root cause of the absence.

Improving attendance is everyone's business. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates. They are often specific to individual pupils and families. The foundation of securing good attendance is that the 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).

3. Our Vision:

The vision that Croydon Local Authority wants to promote in partnership with schools, is based on a fundamental belief **that inclusive schools are “Schools to which the teaching and learning, achievements and well-being of every young person matter”.** We will support every Croydon education setting to achieve this for all Croydon’s young people.

Croydon Local Authority believes that inclusion is a dynamic process which involves challenging and redefining culture, policies, and practice to ensure each individual is valued and enabled to achieve his/her potential.

To ensure inclusion for vulnerable pupils is a challenge that can only be met by the Local Authority, school/settings and other agencies “Working together” to ensure a strong and tangible inclusive ethos.

The Office for Standards in Education states that **“a school cannot be considered effective and to be satisfactorily promoting educational inclusion if:**

- *The rates of attendance generally or of any particular group are unsatisfactory and show no signs of improving.*
- *The reasons given for the underachievement, low levels of attendance or disproportionately higher rates of exclusion of any particular group of pupils are not well founded and fail to take effective and appropriate action.*
- *Insufficient attention is given to preparing pupils positively for living in a diverse society.*
- *The response to incidents of racism, bullying or harassment is inadequate; it fails to address racial harmony.*
- *The behaviour generally or of any particular group is unsatisfactory and shows no signs of improving.*
- *The rate of excluding pupils shows no sign of improving.*

4. Key Objectives:

The Local Authorities key objectives on attendance, as set out below, will drive our work with and commitment to all settings:

- 1: To engage with all schools, settings and relevant stakeholders to develop a shared commitment to inclusion as an integral part of raising attendance.**
- 2: To have clear and consistent policies in place regarding attendance which have been subject to full consultation and are reviewed at least every two years.**
- 3: To ensure that parents / carers or families are supported in issues relating to their child’s attendance and its impact on learning and have the necessary information to make informed judgements in decisions affecting their child’s education.**

- 4: To work with schools to support them in meeting the needs of pupils at risk of poor attendance and promoting positive attendance for all pupils.**
- 5: To promote the participation of children and young people in all decisions affecting their education and ensure that their views are valued.**

5. How will we do this?

Objective 1: Engagement with stakeholders and settings

We will hold termly, 2 way sharing meetings for school leaders and additional termly meetings for attendance leads, to collaborate gather feedback and prioritise development of issues affecting schools thematically. Also to promote the sharing of good practice and what is working for schools and settings.

Partnership with Schools

The Local Authority will work in partnership with schools to ensure that pupils' attendance does not impede their learning or inclusion, recognising the need to do everything possible to include all pupils. The partnership is based on providing the best for all pupils Croydon's children and recognising our joint responsibility for their education, whatever their particular difficulties.

Partnership with Other Agencies

There are a number of agencies and initiatives that offer important support for children and young people at risk of poor attendance. To provide an effective service for these pupils we need to have excellent communication networks and coordination of service delivery. This will then result in support that is focused on early identification and intervention and is experienced by the parent and young person as a seamless approach rather than a series of interventions by different agencies.

This approach will be promoted through:

- Work with CAMHS Team to ensure that the multi-agency wrap-around support is as effective as it can be in terms of minimising disruption to a pupil's educational entitlement.
- Commitment to and active participation in the Team Around the School Approach.
- Commitment to and participation in this Strategy.
- Termly joint training and information sessions across all relevant agencies to share understanding of agencies' agendas and priorities and disseminate good practice.
- Integrated work with the Youth Offending Service, Early Help, Youth Engagement and Social Services.

- Joint publication of materials showing the clear allocation of roles and responsibilities of schools and other agencies.

Objective 2: School Policies and Practices

It is important to ensure that all schools review their current attendance policy to reflect the guidance within the "[Working Together to Improve School Attendance](#)" guidance.

Schools can use the Croydon model attendance policy to further improve their current policy guidelines.

Schools can ask the attendance team (And their named Attendance Inclusion Officer for advice.) Every school will have a termly attendance review meeting with a named Local Authority representative.

Objective 3: Partnership with Parents / carers or families

The Local Authority recognises the importance of parents / carers or families as a child's first educators and believes that parents / carers or families should be supported in playing an active and valued role in their child's education.

The involvement of parents / carers or families in planning, delivering and recording success both in the home and at school is crucial to the development of good attendance. Parents / carers or families' participation in early discussions about their children's attendance can promote a collaborative and consistent approach to responding to children's needs. There is a need for a two-way process: teachers know what children are like in school, but parents / carers or families have unique insights into their children's development.

It is important that parents / carers or families understand how to access support services and feel at ease in doing so. We want to see the influence of parents / carers or families develop in relation to the way support is delivered and will ensure systems are in place for them to feedback and contribute to service development. We particularly want to engage those parents / carers or families whose own educational experiences result in them not engaging with their child's education.

In addition, the partnership approach will be promoted through:

- School based initiatives involving parents / carers or families.
- Encouraging parents / carers or families to stand for election as governors.
- Governor training
- Providing better information on services
- Provision of Parent Partnership Service
- Provision of dispute resolution service
- Networking through parent support groups and voluntary organisations
- Involving parents / carers or families in performance management of service

- Home-school agreements.
- Parental involvement in the development of schools' attendance policies

Objective 4: Supporting Schools

Supporting schools is the Local Authorities main objective. Our functions exist to enable schools to better impact on pupil absence.

We offer a number of methods of support.

- Support from the Local Authority in working with other agencies to support families and their children.
- Ensure that there is a cohesive approach to addressing attendance across all initiatives to ensure that parents / carers or families receive consistent and practical advice.
- Ensure information regarding the legal remits is disseminated widely and accessible by all.
- Promotion of home school links so that parents / carers or families feel able to approach schools.
- Make Services accessible to parents / carers or families so that they can self-refer if they want support/ advice or guidance.

The use of the live data feed “Studybugs”

The aim is to promote a Fully hosted online service “Studybugs” which will enable the Local Authority to analysis live attendance data and give the Local Authority the opportunity to respond to need. The database is: -

- Accessible by any number of Local Authority staff and teams via a secure web interface
- Provides access to pupil-level data including complete attendance history
- Works for all Croydon schools that agree to participate
- Includes live reports and analysis
- Local Authority -wide attendance
- Breakdown by attendance code
- Breakdown by target groups (pupil premium, free school meals, SEN, etc)
- Attendance history by phase (primary, secondary etc) and by school
- Detailed pupil-level information including attendance history, groups, and contacts
- Where available, reasons underlying illness absence (Covid, stomach bugs, anxiety, etc)
- Map of illnesses reported by parents / carers or families
- Children potentially missing education

The Local Authority has secured funding for the 2023-24 academic year the aim is to get 100% schools to support the integration of the system.

Termly Targeted Support Meetings – Local Authority Attendance team with schools

Croydon Access to Education team, and other partners will work together to put joint support in place for schools on an on-going basis. To enable this to happen, the expectation is that partners will:

- Organise termly Targeting Support Meetings with each school in their area so the school's attendance leads and their point of contact in the Local Authorities School Attendance Support Team can identify, discuss, and agree joint targeted actions for pupils who are persistently or severely absent and those at risk of becoming so. This should include agreeing what support the Local Authority will provide and which (if any) other statutory or voluntary services should become involved.
- These meetings will be used to build strong relationships and work collaboratively with the school's attendance leads, including providing advice on recording in the register, accessing services or the wider area-wide attendance approach. The meeting may also include helping a school to identify areas to focus on in their school policies or approaches where they seek it. This may include help with analysing their own data, comparing themselves to other schools in the geographical area or considering how they may learn from or work with other schools who have faced similar patterns or trends.

Some of these targeted meetings will be partnered alongside members of the Early Help Team who will provide expertise in particular areas such as community knowledge, thematic support, threshold understanding and whole school advice and guidance.

In areas where scheduled 'Team Around the School' meetings already take place between the school, Local Authority, and other partners, the school's point of contact in the Local Authorities School Attendance Support Team may join the existing meeting instead of having a separate Targeting Support Meeting for that school.

We will also support schools by:

- Analysis of data to identify trends to inform strategic planning within the individual schools.
- Analysis of data to identify pupils at risk of irregular school attendance. This could incorporate other triggers such as behaviour, exclusion, and special needs.
- Benchmark across the school to identify triggers. E.g., all pupils with less than 95% attendance.
- Compare with schools in similar challenging circumstances.
- Involve school-based support staff such as Learning Mentors.

- Promote the role of Elected Home-School Liaison Officers.
- Develop personal attendance plans or include attendance targets in all individual plans.
- Disseminate good practice across all schools.
- Develop sense of value and sense of worth to all pupils.
- Ensure the whole school community understands the ethos of the school.
- Ensure rewards and privileges are reflected in school policies and adhered to consistently.

Teaching and Learning

- Advice from the Local Authority on access to a range of strategies to enhance inclusive approaches to teaching and learning including positive behaviour management.
- Ensure there is a cohesive approach to the development of the Behaviour Improvement.
- Identify good practice and disseminate within and across Schools.
- Ensure there is diversity in addressing the learning needs of all pupils.

Objective 5: Participation of Children and Young People

It is often difficult to engage pupils with poor attendance in making decisions affecting his/her education. However, it is a basic tenet of this strategy that every effort should be made to ascertain the views of the child or young person.

The approach will be promoted through:

- Work with schools to research and disseminate good practice on involving pupils.
- Developing child/young person-friendly information that can be used to encourage pupils' involvement.
- Supporting schools in developing a balance between involving pupils in a meaningful way and yet not over-burdening them with decision making.

6. Strategy In Action- staged intervention process

There are 4 stages to operationalising the Croydon strategy:

1. **Prevention- school level intervention**
2. **Early Intervention- involvement of services**
3. **Targeted Support for persistent and severe absenteeism**
4. **Statutory Processes for absenteeism- Penalty Notice notification/ School Attendance Orders**

Stage 1: Prevention

This strategy is based around the core preventative principles of the working together to improve school attendance guidance.

In addition to these strategies schools and the Local Authority as needing specific emphasis to prevent difficulties arising in ensuring regular school attendance have identified the following.

Working with Parents / carers or families (see objective 3)

Support to schools (see objective 4)

Stage 2: Early Intervention

The Local Authority in collaboration with schools will offer:

- Early identification of interrupted attendance.
- Assessment of circumstances which have led to irregular school attendance.
- Plan appropriate interventions including targets, timescales and review dates.
- Negotiate with schools' reintegration arrangements for cases of prolonged absenteeism.
- Assist schools in the interpretation of attendance data to inform practice.
- Regular feedback and review of all casework.
- Training opportunity on developing strategies to promote and monitor attendance.
- Support in developing a whole school attendance policy.
- Advice regarding attendance procedures.
- Assisting schools in sharing good practice.
- Ensuring schools have access to relevant agencies/services to support young people and schools in promoting inclusion.

Working with Families

- Ensuring Parents / carers or families, young people and children have easy access to support networks.
- Ensure parents / carers or families have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities within the Education Act 1996
- Ensure parents / carers or families have clear information about school policies and procedures.
- Ensure all agencies/services are clear and consistent when working with parents / carers or families and their children with regards to ensuring regular school attendance.
- Ensure there is clarity of targets and steps that can be taken to achieve targets.
- Ensure there is a clear system for monitoring progress and impact.
- Ensure families remain engaged and participate in process.

Stage 3: Targeted support for persistent and severe absenteeism

The Access to Education Team currently have several preventative models designed to support the improvement of pupils at risk of persistent and severe

absenteeism this offer should be explored collaboratively before considering the lines of permanent prosecution:

This will be implemented through the following: -

- The Team Around the School Approach (multi-agency early intervention support for schools).
- Frontline family support from Attendance Improvement Officers (holistic support for pupils and their families).
- Missing Monday Panel meeting (Case allocation Meeting).
- Carry out the statutory duties of the Local Authority by initiating timely prosecutions of parents / carers or families where appropriate.
- Where appropriate to apply for and undertake Parenting Contracts/Orders. Issue appropriate directions and prosecute where these are not complied with.
- Implement Personal Attendance Plans for pupils who are out of school without permission.
- Undertake procedures in accordance with the guidance of the **staged intervention process**.

Stage 4: Statutory Processes

- Undertake procedures in court issuing procedures in accordance with the statutory guidance of the **staged intervention process**. [See Appendix B.](#)

7. Promoting the attendance of children with a Social Worker

The Access to Education Team will work in partnership with Croydon Social Care teams to ensure that there is a broader understanding that school attendance is everyone's business. To promote and support best practice and to ensure the following:

- **Raising awareness of the disadvantages** that children and young people with a social worker can experience.
- **Promoting strengths-based practice** that supports children's engagement in education, including attendance.
- **Promoting work to improve children's outcomes** and narrow the attainment gap so every child can reach their potential.
- **Identifying barriers** to their education to inform our planning by consulting with a wide range of stakeholders.

This responsibility is led by the Virtual School in Croydon and the role of the **Strategic Lead for Children with Social Workers**.

Appendix A

Operational “Working Together” Group Meeting

Creating an operational group that facilitates co-ordination amongst services working with the most vulnerable children resident in Croydon. The focus of the group is to address issues leading to vulnerable children not accessing full time suitable education through regular attendance and/or at risk of suspension or exclusion to contribute to effective safeguarding and to maximise opportunities for the most vulnerable children to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Partnership working is central to this group where the key focus is to promote effective interventions to support children accessing education provision. The group will consist of representatives from:

- *Early Help & Social Care*
- *Virtual School*
- *Education Psychology Service*
- *Family Services*
- *Alternative Provision*
- *Safeguarding*
- *School Admissions and Access to Education*
- *School Standards*
- *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities*
- *Youth Offending Services*
- *CAMHS*
- *Business Intelligence and Strategy*
- *Family Hubs*

Performance Indicators

Best Value Indicators

- Percentage of Half days missed due to total absence in secondary schools maintained by the Local Authority.
- Percentage of half days missed to total absence in primary schools maintained by the Local Authority.

National Performance Indicators

- To raise attendance levels to 95% (primary schools) 2023-2024.
- To raise attendance levels to 94% (secondary schools) 2023-2024.
- To reduce levels of authorised and unauthorised absences.

Local Performance Indicators

- To improve levels of attendance in individual schools.
- To improve overall level of attendance in secondary schools by 2024-2025.

- To continue to develop strategies to address condoned absence.
- To continue to enhance partnerships with schools to develop multi-disciplinary strategies to promote presence, participation, progress, and protection.

Monitoring

Overall monitoring of the Strategy will be the responsibility of the Head of the Access to Education and the Lead Delegated officer.

Termly monitoring reports on impact will be made available to all stakeholders.

Monitoring of each of the objectives measured against performance indicators will be the responsibility of the named Lead Officer.

Formal monitoring will entail; -

- Termly reviews of school action plans.
- Termly review of actual attendance data measured against termly targets using Studybugs to gain live data.
- Half Termly review of individual attendance targets measuring impact.
- Reasons for targets not being achieved if applicable.
- Review of support mechanisms to schools. Children and families.
- Review of number of prosecutions on a termly basis.
- Analysis of data to identify areas that need to be addressed.
- Comparison with all performance indicators.
- Monitoring of the impact of school-based policies and procedures.

Evaluation

Responsibility for ensuring appropriate arrangements for evaluation rests with the Head of Access to Education and the Lead Delegated officer.

Evaluation is about the impact of activity and the extent to which the delivered action plans have made a difference. The monitoring reports will feed into an annual evaluation report and are made available to all stakeholders as part of the consultation process.

The evaluation report will include: -

- The achievement of a specific quantifiable outcome. Attendance for each school and Croydon as a whole compared with local and national targets.
- Views of all stakeholders gained in an objective way. This would include the views of as many young people as possible.
- Internal evaluation against Ofsted criteria.

- Number of prosecutions and outcomes.

Contact details for any referrals:

If you have any questions or enquiries, please contact:

Education Welfare Services at EWS.admin@croydon.gov.uk

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Appendix B

New Penalty Notice Guidance And School Application Documents

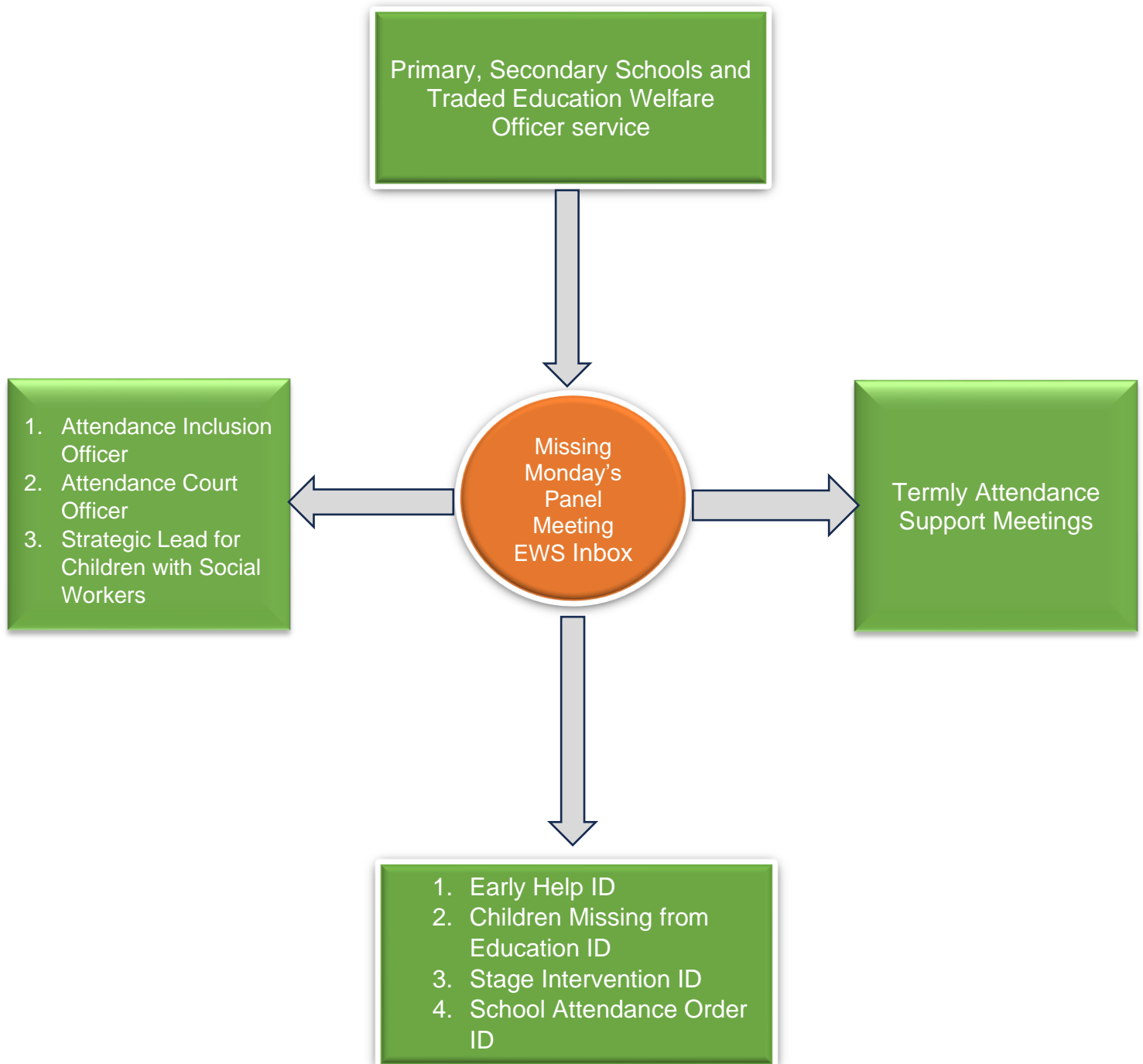
<u>Who will receive a fine?</u> Fines are issued per parent, per child. A parent is defined as the person who has parental responsibility and lives with the child during school time regardless of who applied for the leave.	<u>Types of Fines</u> <i>Penalty Notices for Unauthorised Holiday:</i> 5 consecutive days of unauthorised term time leave. <i>Penalty Notices following Notice to Improve:</i> 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling 10-week period. These days do not have to be consecutive and can include a mixture of G, O and U codes, or non-effective engagement.	<u>How many fines can be issued?</u> Maximum of 2 penalty notices per child, per parent can be issued within a rolling 3-year period, which can span school academic years and areas.
<i>Where difficulties arise with school attendance, professionals should take a “support first” approach in line with the DfE’s ‘Working to improve school attendance guidance’, only resorting to legal enforcement when necessary. The aim is that the need for legal enforcement is reduced taking a supportive approach to tackle the barriers to attendance and intervening early before absence becomes entrenched.</i>		
<u>First Offence:</u> The first time a Penalty Notice is issued for term time leave or irregular attendance, the amount will be £160.00 per parent, per child, paid	<u>Second Offence (within 3 years):</u> The second time a Penalty Notice is issued for term time leave or irregular attendance, the amount will be £160.00 per parent, per child, paid within 28 days.	<u>Third Offence and any further offences (within 3 years):</u> The third time an offence is committed for term time leave or irregular attendance, a Penalty Notice will <u>not</u> be issued and the case will be presented straight to the

within 28 days. Reduced to £80.00 per parent, per child, if paid within 21 days.		Magistrate Court. Magistrate Fines can be up to £1,000 or up to £2,500 under Section 444 (1A).
		
Below is the section which relates to the expectations of the school when applying for a first and second offence Penalty Notice or a third offence application within 3 years. Please note: this is to be included with Guidance to Schools / Education Welfare Officer's only.		
Penalty Notices for Unauthorised Holiday (1st Offence) 5 consecutive days of unauthorised term time leave	Penalty Notices for Unauthorised Holiday (2nd Offence) 5 consecutive days of unauthorised term time leave	Penalty Notices for Unauthorised Holiday (3rd offence within 3 years) 5 consecutive days of unauthorised term time leave
<i>Documents required: In cases of complex attendance, the Local Authority will consider requiring extra interventions before accepting an application.</i>		
PN application	PN application	Referral application
Registration Certificate with comments page	Registration Certificate with comments page	Registration Certificate with comments page
Leave request form	Leave request form	Leave request form
Email communication with or from parent	Email communication with or from parent	Email communication with or from parent
Other documents – flights, funeral etc.	Other documents – flights, funeral etc.	Other documents – flights, funeral etc.
School leave refusal letter	School leave refusal letter	School leave refusal letter
No School Attendance Notice to Improve	No School Attendance Notice to Improve	No School Attendance Notice to Improve
Local Authority to Issue Penalty Notice	Local Authority to Issue Penalty Notice	Local Authority to Issue Court Warning Letter (CWL) – decision made depending on parent response – if decision is to proceed – Local Authority to complete Single Justice Procedure (SJP) court paperwork.
Penalty Notices for Poor attendance (1st Offence) 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a 10-week rolling period	Penalty Notices for Poor attendance (2nd Offence) 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a 10-week rolling period	Penalty Notices for Poor attendance (3rd Offence within 3 years) 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a 10-week rolling period

<i>Documents required: In cases of complex attendance, the Local Authority will consider requiring extra interventions before accepting an application.</i>		
PN application	PN application	Certificate of Attendance (1 st exhibit)
		Application following 2 PN's within 3 years
Registration Certificate with comments page regarding telephone calls / texts to or with parent	Registration Certificate with comments page regarding telephone calls / texts to or with parent	Registration Certificate with comments page regarding telephone calls / texts to or with parent
Attendance Overview Letter – Including a warning regarding unauthorised absences and possibility of a fine	Attendance Overview Letter – Including a warning regarding unauthorised absences and possibility of a fine	An Attendance Overview Letter – Including a warning regarding unauthorised absences and possibility of a fine
An Attendance Support Meeting Invite – With warning of the consequences should their child continue to have unauthorised absences and they do not effectively engage	An Attendance Support Meeting Invite – With warning of the consequences should their child continue to have unauthorised absences and they do not effectively engage	An Attendance Support Meeting Invite – With warning of the consequences should their child continue to have unauthorised absences and they do not effectively engage
Other documents relating to the unauthorised absences	Other documents relating to the unauthorised absences	Parent Contract
<i>In cases of complex attendance, the Local Authority will consider requiring extra interventions before accepting an application</i>	<i>In cases of complex attendance, the Local Authority will consider requiring extra interventions before accepting an application</i>	Letter informing parent of referral to Local Authority
		Other documents relating to the period of unauthorised absences
		MG11 & Exhibit documents mentioned above
Action by Local Authority upon receipt of Application		
School Attendance Notice to Improve – 3 weeks to improve	School Attendance Notice to Improve – 3 weeks to improve	No School Attendance Notice to Improve – Local Authority to issue Court Warning Letter (PN n/a)
If penalty notice is issued and remains unpaid, Court Warning Letter issued	If penalty notice is issued and remains unpaid, Court Warning Letter issued	
14 days for parent to respond	14 days for parent to respond	14 days for parent to respond
Decision to proceed or not is made depending on response from the parent		
If decision is made to proceed, Local Authority to complete SJP paperwork	If decision is made to proceed, Local Authority to complete SJP paperwork	If decision is made to proceed, Local Authority to complete SJP paperwork / MG11 (witness statement) / exhibit CWL and include School / EWO paperwork.

Appendix C

Attendance Preventive Referral Pathway flowchart



Appendix D

Attendance Team Structure

