

## **Barnet Virtual School Attendance Policy, Practice and Procedures 2022-23**

The Virtual School is committed to supporting children to reach their full educational achievement for which a high level of school attendance is essential. The Virtual School believes that regular school attendance is the key to enabling children to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and become emotionally resilient, confident, and competent adults who are able to realise their potential.

### **1. Aim**

We will work with individual schools, colleges, social workers, key workers, parents and foster carers to raise levels of achievement by ensuring the highest possible levels of attendance.

### **2. Attendance Objectives**

For the Virtual School to:

- To keep an accurate and up to date record of attendance of all our children looked after using Welfare Call and for children on a child protection plan using Asset
- To work with social workers, schools, colleges, parents and foster carers to support our young people with attendance and punctuality issues and minimise suspensions/exclusions.
- To help social workers, schools, colleges, parents and foster carers identify causes of non-attendance and take action to support improvement.
- To maximise the attendance of individual children looked after.

### **3. The Role of the Foster Carers and Those with a Caring Role in Residential Care**

It could be that a child/young person has had a poor attendance history before becoming looked after by the local authority. It is expected that Children Looked After's (CLA) attendance will improve once they have been taken into care. The Virtual School will support foster carers to:

- Understand why regular, punctual school attendance is essential.
- Understand how to prevent their foster child from missing school.

For ways in which foster carers can support good attendance and punctuality - see Appendix 1 – Checklist for Carers. This can also be shared with parents.

### **4. Social Workers**

As part of our whole-school approach to maximise attendance, we request that social workers:

- Work with foster carers/parents/key workers and the Virtual School to promote excellent attendance and punctuality.
- Provide support to foster carers/parents/key workers when problems with attendance and punctuality arise.
- Inform the Virtual School without delay, if there are any problems with attendance or punctuality in order for them to provide support to the child/foster carer and school.
- Inform the child's school or young person's education/training provider, as well as the Virtual School without delay, if there are changes to care plans or if there are any difficulties with the care placement.
- Work together with the school, foster carer, and the child to ensure outcomes are set and strategies are put into place in the PEP where there are concerns with attendance.
- Do not authorise any holidays during term time and for children in care, will forward requests for term time leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances to the Virtual School Headteacher and Head of Service for consideration.
- For children on a child protection plan, monitor changes in their attendance via weekly spreadsheet sent by the Virtual School.

- When a child on a child protection plan or child in need plan's attendance falls below 90%, a target to improve school attendance is included on their plan.

## **5. Designated Teachers/schools**

As part of our whole-school approach to maximising attendance, we request that schools:

- Work with foster carers/parents, social workers and the Virtual School to support looked after children who are struggling with regular attendance and punctuality.
- Provide reports on attendance and punctuality of looked after children at school PEP meetings.
- Work together with the social worker, foster carer, parent, and the child to ensure outcomes are set and strategies are put into place in the PEP where there are concerns with attendance.
- Ensure that the school's attendance policy accounts for specific needs of certain pupil cohorts (LAC, PLAC, children with social worker) and that it is applied fairly and consistently, and in doing so school's always consider the individual needs of pupils and families who have specific barriers to attendance. *(Working together to improve school attendance Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities, DfE September 2022).*
- Are aware that all schools are expected to provide "more frequent and comprehensive sharing of data than the statutory minimum where it's essential to fulfilling their obligations under the Education Acts" *(Working together to improve school attendance Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities, DfE September 2022).*
- Provide updated attendance data for all LAC to the Welfare Call and for children on a child protection plan to Asset, daily for statutory age children.
- Inform the child's social workers and carers immediately if the child has an unexplained absence from school so that actions can be taken promptly.
- Ensure that teaching and learning experiences encourage regular attendance and that pupils are taught the high value of attendance and punctuality for their own personal progression and achievement.
- Ensure that they follow the correct systems for recording attendance and that attendance is recorded daily.
- Work with and make referrals to external agencies to support pupils and their families who are struggling with regular attendance, as quickly as possible;
- Regularly scrutinise the attendance and punctuality of the school's cohort of looked after children, previously looked after children and children with a social worker to monitor, identify and address any needs swiftly and accordingly.
- Ensure that part time timetables are agreed by the Virtual School (for looked after children) and social workers (for children with a social worker), and are not used as a means to 'manage a pupil's behaviour', are only considered in 'very exceptional circumstances' to 'meet the child's individual need, 'are 'only be in place for the shortest time necessary and not be treated as a long-term solution.' All agreed time outside of school will be marked as C. *(Working together to improve school attendance Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities, DfE September 2022).*
- Ensure that the B code is not used for 'unsupervised educational activity' and understand that in using the B code the school is satisfied that 'education is supervised, and measures have been taken to safeguard the pupil'.
- Notify the Local Authority (and child's social worker and Virtual School) if school are considering removing the child's name from the school register.

## **6. Young person's (post-16) education/training provider**

As part of our whole-school approach to maximising attendance, we request that the young person's education/training provider:

- Be active in their approach to promoting good attendance and punctuality.
- Ensure that teaching and learning experiences encourage regular attendance.
- Ensure that all staff are up to date with the education/training provider's attendance policy.
- Ensure that systems to record and report attendance are working effectively.
- Inform the young person's foster carer/keyworker, social worker and Barnet Virtual School when the young person is at risk of 'dropping out' of his/her course/training due to poor attendance.
- Provide support for the young person who is having difficulties with their attendance and punctuality. Support could be through one-to-one tutorials, meeting with the education/training provider's student adviser, counsellor or support staff.

## **7. Children**

As part of our whole-school approach to maximizing attendance, we request that pupils:

- Be aware of their school's attendance policy and when and what they are required to attend.
- Speak to their classroom teacher/form tutor or another member of staff if they are experiencing difficulties at school or at home which may impact on their attendance.
- Attend all lessons ready to learn and on time for the class.
- Bring a note of explanation from carers to explain an absence that has happened or is foreseen.
- Follow their school's procedure if they arrive late in order that their school can monitor attendance and keep accurate records for individual attendance which is also vital for health and safety in the event of a school evacuation.

## **8. Barnet Virtual School**

As part of our whole-school approach to maximising attendance, the Virtual School will:

- Use opportunities as they arise, to remind parents/carers/keyworkers/social workers/parents of the importance of attendance and that it is their responsibility to ensure that their children/young people receive their education or training.
- Work with young people, their social worker, foster carer/keyworker/parent and education/training provider when issues of attendance and punctuality arise.
- Monitor the attendance of looked after children and young people and those on a child protection plan on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.
- Monitor the authorised and unauthorised absence of looked after children via the Challenge Committee Report and Annual report to identify and monitor any attendance trends of looked after children (with particular reference to those at risk of becoming persistently absent) to ensure that relevant support and interventions are put into place in a timely fashion.
- Use the attendance data gathered to highlight problems and feedback issues/patterns of absences to the appropriate social worker teams and foster carers.
- Attend meetings where necessary for a looked after child who has received a suspension to ensure that a plan is put in place for re- integration.
- Support the young person at disciplinary meetings and/or at risk of 'dropping out' of their course or training at Post 16
- For looked after children follow the Virtual School Support Strategy (appendix 2)
- Ensure attendance issues are raised at Permanency Tracking Panel so Heads of Service, Social Workers etc., are aware.

- Send postcards/letters home for excellent attendance and improved attendance to children in care.

NB Barnet Virtual School are working in partnership with the EWO team to instigate an attendance panel to discuss 'stuck' cases of children with a social worker who are persistently absent.

## 9. Categories of absences

Absences are treated as unauthorised unless there is a satisfactory explanation for the pupil's/young person's absence. Parents/foster carers or social workers cannot authorise absences.

### a. Illness

Most cases of absence due to illness are short term, but parents/foster carers will need to make a phone call to alert the child's school on the first day, as well as for each subsequent day of absence. When the child returns to school, they should bring a note from their parent/foster carer explaining the absence, if they have failed to call the school daily. For prolonged absence due to illness, parents/foster carers may be asked to provide the child's school with medical evidence, such as a note from the child's doctor, an appointment card or a prescription paper.

### b. Medical or dental appointments

Parents/foster carers should make every effort to ensure that these appointments are made outside of school hours. Where it cannot be avoided, children should attend school for as much of that day as possible. Foster carers/parents must present a proof of any medical appointments.

### c. Authorised absences

The Virtual School requests from the child's school and the young person's education/training provider that they consider the following as authorised absences:

- Family bereavement
- Unplanned emergency contact arrangements
- Attendance at case conferences
- Home Office appointments
- Meetings with solicitors
- Others – with consultation on a case-by-case basis

### d. Unauthorised absences

The Virtual School expects from the child's school and young person's education/training provider that they consider the following as unauthorised absence:

- Shopping visits
- Care for family members
- Days out to theme parks or to attend concerts/shows
- Parents/carers' work commitments or business trips
- Holidays taken in term time (including long weekends taken on Fridays and/or Mondays) unless approved in advance by the Virtual School Headteacher, Head of Service and the School.
- Supporting parents/family with translation.

### e. Reduced timetables

All children of compulsory school age are entitled to a 'full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have.' In very exceptional circumstances, where it is in a pupil's best interests, there may be a need for a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs." (*Working together to improve school attendance" DfE September 2022*)

Reduced timetables for looked after children are only agreed by the Virtual School in exceptional circumstances and are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are in place for the shortest possible period with a clear end date.

## **10. Suspensions or Permanent Exclusion from school**

Suspensions or permanent exclusion from school means that a pupil is not allowed in school for disciplinary reasons. Only Headteachers can make the decision to suspend or permanently exclude pupils.

- Suspension means that the child is not allowed on school site for a defined period. Most suspensions are usually for short periods of fewer than 5 days.
- Permanent exclusion means that the child is no longer allowed to attend the school and his/her name will be removed from roll.
- Permanent exclusion should only be used as a last resort and as a response to a serious breach, or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy. The Virtual School should be kept informed and updated of any proposed exclusions of looked after children (and Social Workers and parents/carers in the case of children with a Social Worker) to enable support processes to be considered to avoid any such exclusion. *(Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, Academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement – DfE September 2022 publication)*

a. If a school is suspending a looked after child or child with a Social Worker for a fixed period, the child's school:

- Informs the child's foster carer, social worker and Virtual School immediately.
- Ensure work is provided for the suspended child.
- Arrange education from the first day following the suspension or permanent exclusion.
- Ensure that there is a re-integration programme on the first morning back at school with a plan for managing future behaviour in place if appropriate.

b. Suspension from college/training provider

Further education colleges and training providers will normally have a code of conduct which all students or trainees sign at enrolment. The code of conduct includes standards of behaviour, as well as acceptable levels of attendance and punctuality.

- Misconduct can be for unacceptable behaviour, poor attendance or being regularly late for classes.
- If a young person breaches the college or training providers code of conduct through misbehaviour or poor attendance, he or she will be given an oral or written warning.
- Disciplinary procedure normally comprises of three warnings; first oral or written warning, second written warning and a third and final warning.
- For gross misconduct, the young person may be issued with a third and final warning or asked to leave the college/training provider's premises.
- If behaviour or attendance and punctuality do not improve after the third and final warning, the young person may be asked to leave or may be suspended by the college/training provider.
- Individual college/training providers will have their own disciplinary and appeals procedures which can be requested if needed when supporting young people who are experiencing difficulties with their training provision.

## **11. Children/Young Persons Missing Education**

A child is classed as CME if they are not on a school roll for any amount of time. This may be because of a permanent exclusion; they may have moved foster placement or home to another Borough or may be an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC). Barnet Virtual School aims for all children to have a new school placement if needed within 20 days. Tuition is put in place to ensure children are receiving education whilst they are awaiting a place.

## **12 Conclusion**

It is vital that all professionals who work with and for the Child Looked After or children with a social worker have a clear understanding of the importance of good attendance at school and how essential it is that they receive their full entitlement to education without any prolonged gaps. It is the intention of this policy to support young people and children looked after by the London Borough of Barnet through a whole school approach so that children and young people may receive their full entitlement to education and training and eventually fulfil their potential.

## Appendix 1

### Checklist for carers

- ✓ Encourage the child/young person in your care to be positive about school life and work. Praise the child's achievements frequently
- ✓ Ensure the child/young person attends school regularly and on time.
- ✓ Work in partnership with the school when trying to sort out problems.
- ✓ Make regular contact with teachers and support workers to discuss the child/young person's progress
- ✓ Attend parents' evenings, reviews and meetings about the child/young person. Ensure their educational progress and achievements are discussed. Before each meeting, check that the information you have is still accurate. Make sure you update it at the meeting.
- ✓ Try and attend less formal occasions like plays, concerts, social evenings, exhibitions, fairs and sporting events.
- ✓ Be available.
- ✓ Inform school of any issues, which might affect progress or behaviour, just as a school would expect of any parent.
- ✓ Tell the school when you know in advance about an absence or as soon as possible on the day if it is unexpected.
- ✓ Do not make appointments in school time unless it is essential
- ✓ Do not book holidays in school time.
- ✓ Make sure all communications from the school are dealt with promptly
- ✓ Provide lunch and a uniform.
- ✓ Arrange transport to and from school when appropriate, although be aware when you need to escort young people to school. This may not always be age related; it might be to make sure that they arrive!
- ✓ Be prepared to give time to them at the end of the school day by supporting learning tasks or just be available to listen to their views and opinions.
- ✓ Be ready for the more stressful times in school e.g. exams/problems with teachers or work, conflict with friends and other students.
- ✓ Provide somewhere quiet and essential materials for homework; check homework and sign diaries or planners
- ✓ Make sure there is plenty of access to reading and study materials; provide a place to study; provide finance for after-school activities and educational trips in line with the school's charging policy.

## Appendix 2 Attendance Support Strategy – statutory age children in care

It is essential that children and young people attend school or education/training provision regularly so they can achieve their full potential. Barnet Virtual School is fully committed to ensuring all their children looked after and young people attend school and education/training provision regularly and will work with social workers, foster carer's, key workers, parents, schools and education/training providers to improve attendance.

### CASEWORKER

Caseworker monitors attendance of LAC via welfare call.

If attendance is below 95% and a cause for concern

(e.g. not early in the Autumn Term with no issues the previous year)



Caseworkers attend PEPs for children where attendance is an issue. The caseworker should ensure there is a robust discussion around attendance issues with all professionals involved.



Any child with attendance under 95% should have a target on their PEP identifying strategies to support improvement in attendance (unless there is a clear reason e.g. attendance is low in the Autumn Term following a period of sickness and expected to rise). Caseworker should work with the school/social worker/carer/young person to ensure there is a meaningful target – NB share the sample target/strategies sheet

If there is an emotionally based reason for low attendance, the adapted EBSA form should be shared with the school and completed.



Once a plan is in place, the caseworker should monitor attendance at least fortnightly



If a child's attendance is below 90%, the caseworker should liaise with the school, social worker and carer if attendance has not improved and check strategies have been put in place and address any anomalies with unauthorised/authorised absence.

A review meeting should be organised if attendance issues continue/strategies are not implemented.

If the caseworker has not discussed the young person with the V S Deputy head, they should do so. Consideration whether involvement of the E.P. would be useful.



Postcards sent to young people for excellent or improved attendance, at least termly.



## PEP COORDINATOR

The PEP Co-ordinator monitors the quality of PEP and supports their improvement.

If attendance is below 95% and a cause for concern

(e.g. not early in the Autumn Term with no issues the previous year)



The PEP co-Ordinator will check there is a target in the PEP.



If there is no target they will follow up with caseworker so they can establish whether there is a reason for this or work with the school to get a target put in (unless there is a particular reason for the absence)

If the target is below standard, they will contact the caseworker, copying in the Deputy Head so they can work with the school/social worker to ensure a robust target and strategies are in place.



Liaise with Deputy Head over any particular issues with attendance targets

The PEP co-ordinator will also disseminate any good practice with team/newsletters.

## DEPUTY HEAD

The Deputy head monitors the attendance of all LAC and supports caseworkers to ensure attendance issues are addressed and followed up.

Deputy Head monitors the attendance of all children at least monthly.



If attendance is below 95% and a cause for concern or there has been a change

(e.g. not early in the Autumn Term with no issues the previous year)



Contact the caseworker to ensure they are aware, especially with small changes



Follow up with caseworker to ensure actions are put in place

The Deputy head will also:

- At least once termly write pieces in newsletter around attendance/target setting sharing advice or good practice
- With PEP co-ordinator, audit the quality of attendance targets and feedback to the team/individual caseworkers
- Share the sample targets/strategies with caseworkers and social workers
- Support caseworkers in using the EBSA form with the school (if relevant)
- Follow up on any emails from PEP coordinator to caseworkers re attendance targets

- Consider ways of celebrating improvement in attendance
- Work with the Education Lead for CWSW to disseminate info/training to social workers around attendance
- Lead half termly attendance meetings and put in place actions to improve. Feedback to caseworkers
- Provide analysis of attendance on a termly basis including an explanation of work carried out with young people with attendance under 90%.

