



HALTON ATTENDANCE FRAMEWORK

2023 – 2026

A Graduated Partnership Approach to Improving School Attendance

Attendance Matters and *every day counts*



Contents

Introduction	3
What are our key issues?	4
Halton's Vision/Aim for school attendance	5
The Impact of Improving school attendance	6
Halton's School Attendance Framework	7
The graduated approach to managing school attendance	8
Halton's Staged Intervention Approach	9
Halton's 3 Staged Intervention for poor school attendance	11
Role of Parents/Carers	14
Role of Schools and Academies:	14
Role of the Local Authority	15
Stage 1: Early Intervention	17
Stage 2: Cause for Concern	20
Stage 3: Referral to Education Welfare Service	25
Working Better Together	34
Glossary	37
Key Contact information	39

INTRODUCTION

[Evidence](#) shows that good attendance at school is a prerequisite to pupils' attainment, wellbeing and wider development. When children and young people attend school regularly, they enjoy new experiences, opportunities to learn and develop new skills. Being in school with their peers enhances life skills, develops friendships, increases confidence and self-esteem and builds resilience.

In contrast, pupils who miss school frequently risk falling behind with their work and are unlikely to reach their potential and makes them vulnerable.

Pupils who are persistently absent (those who attend for less than 90%) often reflect wider issues in their life. We all have a crucial role in helping children and young people to overcome barriers to attendance and supporting all children to access the full-time education they are entitled to. Young people who regularly miss school are also at greater risk of anti-social behaviour and are more likely to become victims of crime.

Parents are legally responsible for ensuring their child, is enrolled at a school, and attends regularly. However, a collaborative approach between parents, schools and other agencies (including the Local Authority) is key to ensuring appropriate support/planning is in place to resolve barriers to attendance. This golden thread of support can take our children and young people towards their hopes and ambitions in adulthood.

We know that schools play a pivotal role in supporting our children and young people and many of our children and young people are already enjoying the benefits of this through good attendance levels. Schools have worked hard to do this following Covid, and the new DfE attendance framework '[Working together to improve school attendance](#)' expands this expectation where schools can enhance their attendance procedures to suit their school community.

It is important that good attendance routines start from the earliest stages of education. Attending a nursery school gives children a valuable introduction to school and the opportunity to develop their skills and mix with others of their own age. Children are not of statutory school age until the term after their fifth birthday. However, establishing regular routines for children at an early age is extremely important. It will benefit children as they progress through their school life, and limit the chances of poor attendance, which will have a negative effect on their enjoyment and achievement. Research shows that pupils who performed better both at the end of primary and secondary school missed fewer days than those who did not perform as well. Data also shows that in 2019, children in Key Stage 2 who did not achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths missed on average four more days per school year than those whose performance exceeded the expected standard. Similarly, in the same year, secondary school pupils who did not achieve grade 9 to 4 in English and maths missed out on 10 more days on average over the key stage than those who achieved grade 9 to 5 in both English and maths.

What are our key issues?

Halton's overall attendance for 2021/22 was 91.78% compared to national figures for England of 92.45%. Halton's primary school attendance was 93.45% within 0.3% of the national figure for England of 93.74% Halton's secondary school attendance is 90.2% (2021/22 data) compared to the England average of 92.45%.

Halton's special school attendance is 87.2% which is above the National figures for England (86.82%).

This ranks Halton's attendance as 127th highest nationally (out of 152 Local Authorities). Halton is ranked 114th out of 151 local authorities for primary schools and 115th out of 151 local authorities for secondary schools (not all LAs have both primary and secondary schools). This is within the context of Halton as the 13th most deprived borough (reported in the 2019 Government's ranking of Index of multiple deprivation). Despite the challenges we have all faced during

COVID, we must acknowledge the collaborative approach undertaken by schools, Education Welfare Service, LA partner services and other agencies in supporting children and families to improve attendance.

However, there remain challenges:

Across all school types, 39.88% of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) were identified as being persistently absent in 2021-22 in Halton, compared to 37.19% nationally, and 16.96% of non-FSM pupils (17.54% nationally). These rates were highest in secondary schools, where the rate of FSM children was 2.99% higher than their peers nationally. PA was higher across all year groups than the national rate, with the exception of children in Year 11. Children with a social worker are also more likely to be absent from school and this leaves this group vulnerable to poor progress.

Across all school types attendance 37.71% (36.9% nationally) of children with an EHCP were identified as being persistently absent in 2021-22 in Halton compared to 25.84% of all pupils, (22.51% nationally).

This document sets out Halton's Vision, Aim and Framework to support further improvements in school attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism

Halton's Vision/Aim for school attendance

Our vision for Halton is for all children to attend school regularly and to make positive progression. We aim to provide early intervention for children and families when they need it by working together with schools, parents, children and other agencies to remove barriers to attendance.

Halton Education Welfare Service has already developed strong working relationships with schools and other agencies to support children and young people. We will continue to strengthen our partnership working to raise levels of attendance and make a difference.

The Impact of Improving school attendance

Improving attendance will:

- Enable children and young people to achieve academically, emotionally and socially;
- Overcome some of the challenges we have all faced during and after the COVID pandemic;
- Help children develop their resilience and build positive friendships;
- Improve mental health and wellbeing of children and families;
- Reduce the risk of child exploitation and anti-social behaviour;
- Increase chances of success in further /higher education, apprenticeships or vocational studies;
- Improve employability for young people;

We know that many children and young people are attending school regularly. However, there are still some challenges going forward as there are still too many missing lessons, enrichment activities and opportunities to build meaningful relationships with their peers and school staff.



Halton's School Attendance Framework

The purpose of Halton's School Attendance Framework is to:

- Set out the expectation for school attendance in Halton;
- State the priorities for supporting school attendance;
- Describe roles and responsibilities to safeguard a child's attendance to ensure they receive an appropriate full-time education suitable to their age, ability, and aptitude;
- Set out expectations for parents/carers and children;
- Set out the role of the schools, the Local Authority and other partner agencies in improving school attendance;
- Set out a staged approach to manage school attendance which reflects Halton's Continuum of Need and Risk; part of the four levels of vulnerability, risk and need in the Levels of Need Framework and
- Assist practitioners to identify the most appropriate service response for children, young people and their families.



The graduated approach to managing school attendance

Introducing the Staged Intervention approach to School Attendance:

The graduated approach sets out how schools, the Education Welfare Service alongside other Local Authority services and partner agencies work together to manage and support improvements in school attendance.

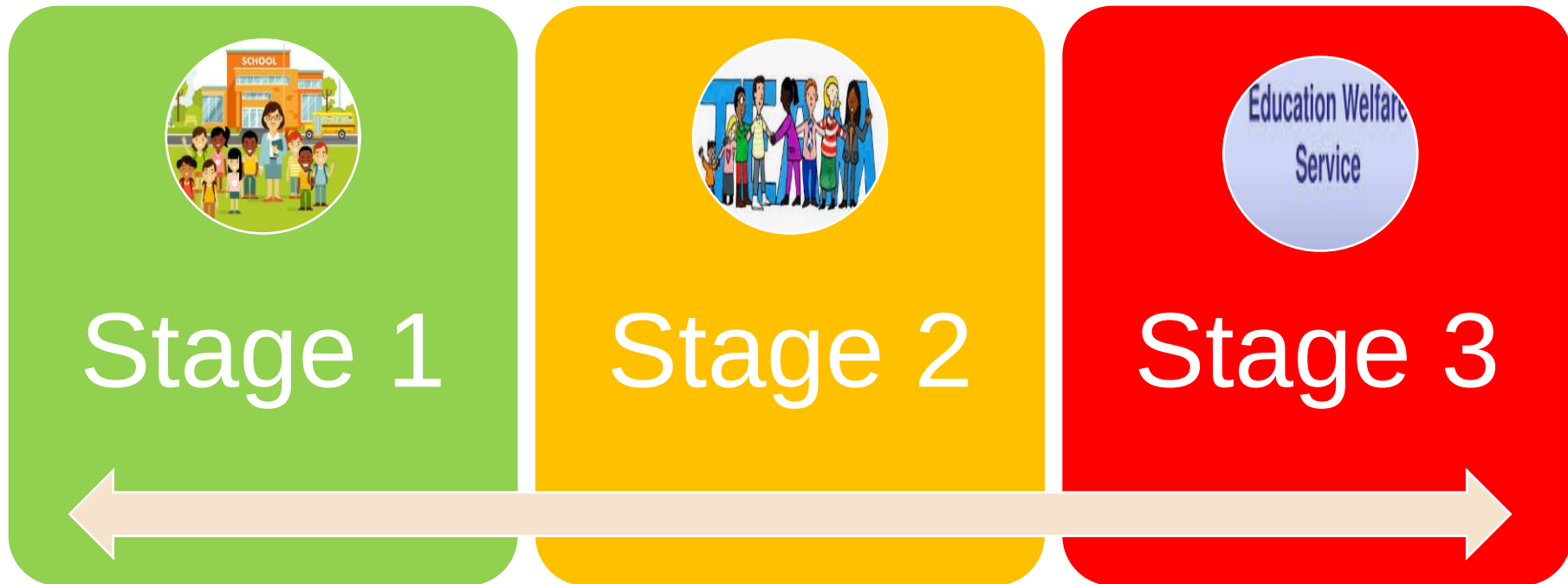
The Framework sets out 3 levels of intervention and support:

STAGE 1 Early identification of attendance concerns and intervention by school to identify barriers to attendance and provide support to bring about an improvement in attendance.

STAGE 2 Use a multi-agency approach to target interventions at barriers to attendance and support families and children to improve attendance.

STAGE 3 Consideration by the local authority Education Welfare Service of statutory interventions.

HALTON'S STAGED INTERVENTION APPROACH



SEE CHILDREN, HEAR CHILDREN, HELP CHILDREN

Halton's staged intervention approach

The Department for Education's attendance guidance [Working together to improve school attendance](#) has set out expectations to help schools, trusts, governing bodies & local authorities to achieve and maintain high levels of school attendance. From September 2023, this guidance replaces **all** previous guidance on school attendance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities (with the exception of the existing statutory guidance on parental responsibility measures). The Government advises that this guidance will become statutory when parliamentary time allows (likely to be 2024).

Halton has developed a staged intervention process in line with the guidance. This is focused on ensuring families have the opportunity to receive timely and appropriate support to address persistent and severe absence. Criminal investigation and legal proceedings will only be instigated when patterns of poor attendance continue and evidence exists to demonstrate that parent/carer(s) have failed to engage effectively with the support offered by schools, other partner agencies and the Local Authority.

To achieve this, we have set out the expectations upon schools and the Local Authority as part of a staged intervention model for poor attendance. This staged intervention model is designed to link with Early Help and [Halton's Continuum of Need](#) relating to integrated multi-agency support for the needs of children and families in Halton. There is an expectation and requirement for an evidence-based portfolio to refer and escalate children with poor attendance to the Education Welfare Service for consideration of legal action. These may include parental prosecution or other legal orders – for example Education Supervision Orders or Parenting Orders.

Schools can seek advice from their link Education Welfare Officer at any stage of this process

HALTON'S 3 STAGED INTERVENTION FOR POOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

All schools have a continuing responsibility to manage and improve school attendance across their school community.

There should be a clear school attendance policy which all staff, pupils and parents understand. School should have a system in place where contact is made daily with parents of pupils who are absent to identify the reasons for absence and support the child's safety and welfare.

All pupils' attendance data should be regularly monitored and analysed to identify pupils or cohorts that require support with their attendance and when identified to ensure that effective strategies are implemented and evaluated.

Building strong relationships with families is key in understanding potential barriers to attendance and the impact to their progression.

Schools are required to maintain accurate registers as they are a legal document required to pursue any legal intervention.

Schools should raise the profile of the importance of regular attendance amongst parents via a range of initiatives ranging from simple positive communications sent home about a child's improved attendance to events/ activities at school with an attendance focus. For instance, presentations at parents' evenings, coffee mornings, drop ins (school nurse could be included) and workshops.

Rewards for good attendance are also a popular initiative which schools can use as an incentive to improve attendance and punctuality. They can be used for individual or whole school initiatives and work more effectively if age specific. Schools can use a variety of rewards as an incentive to improve attendance, for instance, stickers, treats, certificates, awards,

badges etc. The attendance of those children with 100 per cent attendance is often celebrated in assemblies. Recognising and rewarding those children who have the most improved attendance can also act as an encouragement to promote even better school attendance. Not all rewards need to be costly, 'front of the line' dinner passes, access to a classroom converted into a 'VIP' lounge during lunch periods, or a simple 30-minute reward session at the end of week are all free, and hugely valued by pupils. However, reward systems can penalise children with health issues who miss school due to hospital treatments etc. or encourage children who are genuinely ill to come to school unwell.

Alongside a whole school rewards programme there needs to be flexibility for staff to offer personalised rewards for those pupils with complex needs who require adjusted attendance targets which recognise small improvements. Through the staged intervention process we want to create a school system which immediately highlights a student's declining attendance and allows schools to allocate appropriate resources and interventions to ensure a successful approach to managing attendance.

School Attendance Staged Intervention Process

Pupil has unauthorised absences

STAGE 1

School to continue to use everyday contact methods to establish reasons for absence such as phone calls text messages and communication applications.

Attendance is improving or known authorised reason for absences

No

Is the pupil continuing to have unauthorised absences

YES

Complete home visits/meet with parents to establish reasons for absence and consider MAP if appropriate.

School to support

Are unauthorised absences continuing?

NO

YES

MOVE TO STAGE 2

Do you have a traded agreement (SLA) with Education Welfare Service?

NO

YES

STAGE 2

School to arrange a School Attendance Meeting, Consider support services including Early Help to assist with action planning and consideration of a MAP. Set a 4-6 week attendance targets and actions appropriate to support and encourage positive school attendance. School must gather appropriate evidence, i.e. minutes of meetings

School to complete referral form for stage 2 intervention. The traded EWO arrange and chair a School Attendance Meeting and an Attendance Improvement Plan or Parenting Contract is agreed. An attendance target will be included and sent out. EWS will consider outside support services to encourage positive school attendances part of AIP.

School Attendance Review Meeting to be held. Did the parent engage with the process and actions?

Yes

Consider further periods of review or closing if attendance has improved to acceptable level

YES

EWO to chair the School Attendance Review Meeting. Did the parent engage with the process and actions?

NO

School to complete EWS referral form for stage 3 to the School named EWO for statutory support at level 3 with evidence of intervention,

Unauthorised absences continue after reviews

Unauthorised absences continue after reviews

EWO to meet with school to support the school completing referral form and compiling evidence of intervention.

STAGE 3

If all information at Stage 1 & 2 is complete, EWO to arranged APM for consideration of legal proceedings

Role of Parents/Carers

Parents/carers are legally responsible for ensuring their child has a suitable, full-time education. This can be achieved by attending school regularly or education otherwise (EHE).

Parents/carers must:

- Ensure that their children attend school regularly and punctually Report the reason that their child is absent from school on each day of absence
- Work with school staff and other agencies, including Education Welfare Service where there are concerns about a pupil's attendance
- Book non-urgent medical appointments for their child outside of school hours wherever possible
- Avoid taking leave of absence during term time
- Ensure their children have the correct uniform and necessary equipment
- Ensure their children attend school whilst they are resolving any issues
- Ensure that their child attends their current school when they are seeking a place at another school.

Children & Young People must:

- Come into school every day and on time
- Attend and participate/engage in lessons
- Stick to school rules

Role of Schools and Academies:

Schools and academies have a crucial role in supporting improvements to attendance and reducing persistent absenteeism.

Schools and academies must:

- Have a published School/Academy Attendance Policy to set out their processes and personnel to support good attendance and promote it across the school's ethos and other policies
- Appoint a member of the Senior Leadership Team to take strategic responsibility for attendance matters and ensure all school staff are clear about their individual responsibilities and accountabilities in relation to school attendance
- Inform Parents/carers of the school's staged response systems

- Nominate a governor to take a monitoring responsibility for attendance issues
- Accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence
- Ensure robust day to day processes to track and follow up absence and poor punctuality which are rigorously applied across the school
- Actively use data to identify pupils at risk of poor attendance
- Regularly review attendance data, discuss and challenge trends
- Provide data & PA cases for discussion at targeted support meetings with their named Education Welfare Officer
- Set annual targets for attendance and monitor progress towards them
- Build strong relationships with families, listen to and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them
- Ensure pupils with medical conditions and/or special educational needs and disabilities have appropriate support/adaptations to help them access their full-time education
- Ensure part-time timetables are only used in exceptional circumstances for limited time and not treated as a long-term solution
- Share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe;
- Operate first day absence procedures to ensure that parents are aware when their child is not in school.
- Ensure they monitor attendance of pupils receiving alternative provision
- Ensure that staff receive adequate training/development opportunities for attendance

Role of the Local Authority

Regular school attendance is essential for academic success and social development ensuring children reach their potential and improve their life chances. Halton has a duty to ensure that parents fulfil their legal responsibility in ensuring children receive a suitable education. The Attendance Framework is based around early help and support to ensure families receive the support they need to address difficulties in attendance in a timely manner and are supported by local services.

Halton will promote good school attendance in our community through a communication campaign working together with partner agencies, local authority services and communities based upon a common understanding that attendance is everyone's business.

The local Authority will:

- Provide a named Education Welfare officer for each school
- Provide a traded offer for schools to support and advise schools on attendance policy and practice
- Establish a Communications campaign to promote good attendance and ensure it has a high profile
- Share good practice
- Support families of children who are electively home educated
- Identify children not in receipt of an education
- Ensure that the local authority statutory duties on school attendance are met
- Provide access to Early Help support to work with families to help address barriers to school attendance
- Through the SEND and Inclusion Teams provide advice and support to families of children with EHCPs and SEND
- Monitor attendance for all children with a social worker and ensure attendance is a priority in all plans
- Support schools to co-produce plans for children who are severely absent
- Support schools to address children with attendance concerns through the 'Team around the school' meetings
- Take the lead on legal action when appropriate to address poor attendance



Stage 1: Early Intervention

Primary Responsibility: Schools

Schools should implement basic procedures to challenge attendance and promote improvements. School should contact parents either to highlight the concerns or seek information about why children are absent where attendance is becoming an initial cause for concern. This can be through initial phone calls home from relevant staff to discuss absences to enquire if there is any support school can offer. When a pupil does return to school, there should be supportive conversations with parents at drop off times (primary-aged) or with the pupil directly (secondary-aged). Any improvement in attendance should be acknowledged.

Supporting Documents

Stage 1 Letter 1 (S1L1)

Process Map (PM)

However, where attendance continues to be a concern, school should make further contact with parents via letters home and home visits, to have a broader conversation about reasons for absence and focus on the potential impact of poor attendance. School should attempt to resolve any issues that arise and offer support and advice. At this stage schools should consider whether the family need further support and complete a referral to ICart for early intervention. Should, despite school's attempts at involving parents by letter, phone calls and home visits, the family still fail to engage with the process, the case should then be referred to Stage 2 of the graduated process. If the school has a traded agreement with the Education Welfare Service, a referral can be made to the school named EWO. This should be documented on school internal recording systems.

Schools must:

- Check if pupil has a Special Education Need (SEND) Support Plan/Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) behaviour plan or equivalent. Consideration can be made to see if the existing plan is meeting the identified need or consider if there are any unidentified needs,
- Talk to the class teacher/form tutor/other colleagues about any possible in-school difficulties (relationships, academic pressures, changes in behaviour etc.) to identify any circumstances that could be impacting on attendance,
- Talk to the parent or pupil (if age appropriate) about anything that may be causing concern in or outside of school,
- Establish whether there are any medical needs that may be impacting on school attendance and consider a referral to the School Nursing Service.
- Provide the opportunity to help the student to feel they are not falling behind or provide sessions to support work missed through absences.
- Consider the offer a key adult in school who can meet the pupil at the start of the school day and provide support at other times if appropriate
- Signpost to appropriate apps, online sources of support, early intervention services, outside agencies, skilled colleagues in school, school counselling service or GP if appropriate. The School Health Service can also support schools by offering screening and support for young people who are struggling with their emotional health, sleep routines, healthy eating etc.
- Maintain regular contact with the family, arranging meetings and home visits as necessary

- Follow safeguarding procedures as appropriate and consider a referral to the police if a child has not been seen
- Consider any information provided by other agencies, e.g. information from police from Operation Encompass and develop support for the child
- Contact the Virtual School for advice and support if the child is in care
- Contact the allocated Social Worker where the child is open to CSC and report attendance at any CiN or CP meetings arranged

School should write to all adults with parental responsibility or day-to-day care (this may include parents, step-parents and any other adults who are residing with and caring for the pupil, and notify the allocated Social Worker or virtual head where appropriate). This correspondence should summarise attendance issues and the support that has been offered/implemented.

Outcomes of Stage 1 Interventions

- ***Attendance improved to satisfactory level = End staged process and monitor attendance.***
- ***Attendance improving and agreed plan of support in place = Remain at Stage 1 for agreed period.***
- ***Attendance not improving despite agreed plan of support in place/parents not sufficiently engaging with the plan/ no engagement from parents in Stage 1 = MOVE TO STAGE 2***

Stage 2: Cause for Concern

Primary Responsibility: Schools and Education Welfare Service (if traded)

Schools need to work alongside other agencies/services where appropriate. Consideration should be given to referral to iCart for Early Help to address the barriers to school attendance if appropriate where there is parental consent for support.

A referral can be made to the Education Welfare Service to undertake casework with the family to support and deliver interventions at Stage 2 as part of a traded offer. Schools not trading with the EWS must complete case work and gather appropriate evidence themselves.

Stage 2 intervention is an escalation where the school should send a letter to parents/other adults with 'day to day care' of the pupil. This can include an invite to a School Attendance Meeting (SAM). School should include the pupil(s) in the meeting where it is appropriate. For example the age of the child may make it inappropriate to include the child in the meeting. However, with parental consent, schools can complete 'Wishes & Feelings' of the child and bring this information for inclusion in the meeting.

The School Attendance Meeting should be led by an appropriate member of the school staff and attendance and pastoral staff should attend. The named EWO for the school should be invited if school trade with the Education Welfare Service.

The School Attendance Meeting should focus on:

- The reasons for absence, emerging absence patterns or trends
- Strategies to improve attendance and remove barriers. This should include supportive approaches to address poor school attendance including appropriate external support such as Early Help.

- The voice of the child
- Any medical issues as reasons for absence at this stage and where appropriate a referral to be made to the School Nursing Service
- Offer a Parenting Contract/Attendance Improvement Plan setting out an agreed action plan that is clear, personalised and formally recorded. Parent must have the opportunity to discuss and agree actions and support offered and be given a copy of the Parenting Contract/Attendance Improvement Plan - either at the meeting or without delay following the meeting.

A Review date must be set for **4-6 weeks**.

The review dates should be clearly communicated to parents.

At the review success can be celebrated or further concerns discussed.

If parents do not attend a planned review, without notice or explanation, schools should follow this up and offer another suitable meeting date or offer a home visit.

If the pupil is already in the MAP, Child In Need (CiN) or Child Protection (CP) process, a separate School Attendance Improvement Meeting may not be needed as actions to address attendance must be included in the child/family plan. Schools should liaise with the lead professional to ensure that is the case. If they are not included, schools should have a separate school meeting prior to any planned review of the MAP, CiN or CP Conference or Core Group. Where the case is open to the Education Welfare Service the named school EWO must be invited to the CiN CP Conference or Core Group.

School should continue to monitor attendance regularly, ensuring first day calling for any further absences and follow-up conversations with parents and pupil (where appropriate).

Where the pupil has a Social Worker, school should inform them of any unexplained absences. Attendance must be included in the discussion and recorded as part of any CiN, CP Conference or Core group.

School should maintain regular contact with family, including meetings and home visits as necessary and follow their safeguarding procedures.

Next steps

School must review the Parenting Contract/Attendance Improvement Plan at end of the agreed 4-6 week review period. School can offer a further period of monitoring where needed where positive progress has been made and parental engagement. However, if there has not been progress and attendance has not improved and/or parents have not engaged school should decide whether to start the formal process which may lead to enforcement. This should be recorded. This review should include attendance levels (with authorised & unauthorised absence rates), consideration of previous actions and the impact of those, parental contact and engagement, pupil view where appropriate, and consideration of the impact of prosecution should this be the final outcome. This should be recorded and parents informed in writing. Advice can be sought from the schools allocated Education Welfare Officer (EWO) as to next steps.

Referrals to Education Welfare Officers for enforcement for pupils that are part of a MAP, CIN or Child Protection process should not be made without consultation with the lead professional or Social Worker.

- School should communicate with parents where there has been significant improvement in attendance since the Parenting Contract was agreed. This can be done by meeting, phone or letter. School can then continue to monitor as part of whole school monitoring processes to ensure that regular attendance is sustained.
- When a pupil has not met the target but has shown some signs of improved attendance and engagement there should be a further review at Stage 2. This should be recorded as part of the review process.
- Where attendance is not improving and/or parents are not fully engaging consideration for enforcement actions

- If a pupil has had 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence in the preceding 12 week period consideration can be given to the issue of a Penalty Notice Warning Letter. Penalty Notice Warning letters are part of a traded offer with the Education Welfare Service
- If a pupil is part of a multi-agency plan and there has been no improvement and/or a lack of parental engagement school must discuss with MA partners or seek advice from their Education Welfare Officer
- If school refer to the Education Welfare Service (as part of their traded arrangements) a letter must be sent to parents. (S2L2)
- School may also refer to the Education Welfare Service for consideration of enforcement, e.g. legal action
- Schools can discuss consideration of legal interventions with their named Education Welfare Officer at the Targeted Support Meetings
- Schools should discuss the plans to support children who are severe PA or at risk of becoming so, with the named school EWO at the Targeted Support Meetings

It is the decision of schools to refer to the Education Welfare Service on an individual case basis and schools can discuss cases for legal intervention as part of the Targeted Termly Support Meetings. There is an expectation that support underpins any enforcement action. Therefore prior to a child's attendance being progressed to Stage 3 action, there should be evidence that initial support action has been undertaken, and support put in place where additional need has been identified. There should also be evidence that the parent/carer(s) have failed to effectively engage with Stage 1 and 2 interventions. There should be documents such as minutes of meetings to evidence actions and interventions taken. The impact of the child's poor attendance should be made clear.

Evidence of Stage 1 Interventions	Evidence of Stage 2 Interventions
Dates of contact made with parents about school attendance of their child. To include telephone conversations, text messages, emails, face-to-face conversations, home visits and meetings (a chronology/record of contact can be uploaded with the referral if one exists to avoid duplication). Reasons for absence / identified barriers to attendance, including issues outside of school which may be impacting on attendance. Actions taken and adjustments made to overcome the barriers to attendance. Evidence of early help involvement (where appropriate), Where involvement of other services is not considered appropriate, evidence should be provided which demonstrates that it was considered. Other support offered / involvement of other agencies Stage 1 letters. These should include date when they were posted and have full address of family on. They should be specific to the child.	Stage 2 letters confirming that absences will no longer be authorised without medical evidence (this will need to be uploaded with the referral). Details of any further contact with parents re absences. Date of School Attendance Meeting and Reviews with overview of discussion and actions agreed which includes a target set between 2 specific dates. (Notes of meeting with plan should be included in the referral). Progress made or not made following School Attendance Meeting. Evidence of a further offer of Early Help if this wasn't offered or was refused at Stage 1. Evidence of review For cases in MAP or subject to a Child Protection Plan, a School Attendance Meeting and plan are not necessary as attendance should be addressed as part of the MAP, CIN or CP process. Evidence would need to include actions taken in relation to attendance with outcomes, and confirmation that the decision to make an enforcement referral was discussed and agreed through this process.

Stage 3: Referral to Education Welfare Service

Primary Responsibility: Halton Borough Council Education Welfare Service (following referral from school)

Schools can refer to the Education Welfare Service for Stage 3 intervention when:

- All attempts to engage with the family at intervention stages 1 & 2 have not brought about improvements to school attendance
- Clear evidence of support /meetings and reviews have been offered to the family
- The pupil meets the criteria for referral (levels of unauthorised absence)

On acceptance of the referral, consideration of the most appropriate level of enforcement action will be undertaken. This may include the offer of a Penalty Notice Warning Letter (traded element) or the offer of an Attendance Planning Meeting (where criminal investigation is instigated in line with the Criminal Investigation Process). The named Education Welfare Officer for the school will write to the family on acceptance of referral to encourage the parent to engage with the process and notify them of the next steps.

Schools must ensure that a referral is completed together with evidence of intervention(s).

The Criminal Investigation process is a minimum 2 step process. This involves an Attendance Planning Meeting (APM) with the parent, school and other professionals working with the family. Parents and professionals will be invited to the APM and failure to attend will be recorded in the minutes. However, if a parent does not attend without explanation the meeting will go ahead in their absence and a plan will be prepared.

The Attendance Planning process will set actions for parents, schools and professionals to support parents and children to address barriers to attendance. Minutes of the meeting, including plans designed to support improvements, will be prepared and sent out to professionals and families.

Prior to an APM being arranged the evidence presented to the Local Authority by the school will be examined to ensure all actions at Stage 1 and 2 have been completed. If the level of evidence is not sufficient schools will be contacted to discuss and the referral may be declined and passed back for further actions to school

A maximum of one further APM will be set to review the agreed actions. At the review if actions have not been completed or complied with and the attendance target is not met without satisfactory explanation (unauthorised absence) consideration will be given to legal proceedings under section 444(1) or 444(1A) of the 1996 Education Act. Consideration will also be given to the appropriateness of an Education Supervision Order at this meeting.

The aim of the Attendance Planning Process is to establish whether or not an offence has been committed. If legal action is considered under section 444(1A) of the 1996 Education Act (aggravated offence) the parent will be informed and invited to an interview under caution. An interview under caution is carried out by the Principal Education Welfare Officer in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984) This provides a final opportunity for a parent to disclose any further information before the Council instigates legal action.

Should new information be revealed at the Attendance Planning Meeting (for example an additional need raised which is not supported and addressed by the school) the investigation will cease and the case will be returned to school for Stage 2 intervention.

Legal Action

If the decision is made by the Education Welfare Service to initiate legal proceedings, schools must provide the following:

- Documents confirming actions from school to seek improvements to school attendance. This must include any meetings, home visits, discussions with parents, pupil voice or any other actions taken,
- A signed, prepared attendance certificate by the Head teacher.

The named Education Welfare Officer will inform schools of the outcome of any legal actions undertaken. The expectation is that schools will continue to liaise and support families and children throughout the time of any criminal investigation/legal actions and update our service of any actions or further information.

Role of the Local Authority and Education Welfare Service

Regular school attendance is key to academic success and social development and improves life chances. By working together with partner agencies and communities and intervening at the earliest opportunity to address attendance concerns we will help embed good school attendance from an early age and ensure our children are safe.

We will promote good school attendance and ensure attendance has a high profile across communities, local authority services and partner agencies and increase understanding that attendance is everyone's responsibility.

The Local Authority and Education Welfare Service will:

- Set out, in this guidance, clear expectations about how we will support schools, parents and children to enable good attendance through this Attendance Framework and service level agreements,
- Provide all schools in Halton with a named Education Welfare Officer,
- Use data to understand who is severely/persistently absent and why, and consider how to remove identified barriers to improve access to education for those children,
- Commit to planning and taking action based on the individual circumstances of a child,
- Focus on the prevention of severe & persistent absence,
- Continue to work with partners to identify and resolve Children Missing from Education (CME),
- Support and monitor families that have opted to electively home educate (EHE) their child(ren) and ensure they receive a suitable and efficient education,
- Provide support and advice for children and families with an EHCP from the SEND service,
- Discuss the attendance of vulnerable children through the Targeted Support Meetings and monitor and escalate cases in conjunction with school to the 'Team around the School' meetings when appropriate,

- School and the EWS can refer cases to Working Together Meetings where open to Early intervention, for further professional advice if progress is not being made,
- Deliver the four statutory duties as set out in the '*Working Together to Improve School Attendance Guidance which includes* improving communication and advice, Targeted Support Meetings, signpost to Multi-disciplinary Support Services, and legal intervention. Continue to give advice in respect of families who require multi-disciplinary support and provide legal interventions where required. Continue to work with multi-agency partners to support children and families.
- Share best practice for school attendance through a termly Newsletter and school attendance leads meetings,
- Ensure school attendance is a priority for children open to Early Intervention Service and for children with a social worker through the EWO in iCART (front door) who provides attendance data as part of every assessment. The named school Education Welfare Officer will provide updated attendance data for every child open to CiN, CP Conference or Core Group where the case is open to the service. Schools must provide updated attendance data for every child open to CiN, CP Conference or Core Group where the case is not open to EWS,
- Establishing an understanding of 'educational neglect*' across schools, partner agencies and the local authority
- Provide support and advice to schools and parents regarding suspensions and exclusions and ensure statutory processes are followed and ensure all children are offered access to an education whilst excluded,
- Provide access to an education offer for children unable to attend school due to their identified health needs,
- Manage the local authority's duties in relation to child licensing and employment,
- Provide a Termly Support Meeting for every school.

Termly Targeted Support Meetings

From September 2023, every school in Halton, including independent schools, will be offered a termly 'Targeting Support' meeting with their named EWO, in line with expectations set out in the DfE attendance guidance [Working together to improve school attendance](#).

EWOs will contact the school's attendance lead and their main point of contact for attendance matters (usually the attendance officer responsible for day-to-day attendance processes) to arrange the meeting. The school may invite additional colleagues to the meeting to support these discussions, for example pastoral staff/heads of year.

Schools will be offered a meeting which will be based on the persistent absence rate and population for the school.

The main purpose of the Targeted Support meeting is for the Education Welfare Officer to work collaboratively with school attendance leads to identify, discuss, and agree targeted actions for pupils who are persistently absent (90% or less attendance) or severely absent (50% or less attendance).

School must provide a list of current PA pupils prior to the meeting for discussion. If there are more PA pupils than can reasonably be discussed in the allotted meeting time, schools will be asked to prioritise cases where they feel they would benefit most from support and advice. EWOs will also prioritise pupils for discussion that they have identified as missing education prior to the meeting, for example pupils on part time timetables with multiple C and I codes recorded in the attendance register.

Where schools have low numbers of persistently absent pupils, discussion may also extend to those at risk of becoming persistently absent.

Schools will be expected to share information on the application of the Staged Attendance Process in relation to each PA pupil, including:

- Contact with family in relation to attendance concerns,
- The reasons for absence/barriers to attendance,
- Strategies/interventions in place to reduce barriers to attendance,
- Whether Early Help has been offered and actions taken as a result,
- Whether a Social Worker, School Age Plus Worker or other early help worker are acting as lead professional and how attendance concerns are being addressed as part of the child/family's plan.

Advice to schools will include:

- How to apply the Staged Attendance Process in relation to each case and next steps to take when attendance is not improving, or parents are not engaging.
- When and how to offer early help and involve other services where appropriate.
Schools should note that whilst the EWO may recommend that a school contacts or makes a referral to a particular service, the referral may not necessarily be accepted or result in an offer of support.
- Whether a referral for attendance enforcement at Stage 3 is appropriate.
Schools do not need to wait for their Targeting Support meeting before making a referral if they have followed the Staged Attendance Process and can evidence that they have reached Stage 3.
- How to appropriately record absences in the register.
- Advise on cases where a letter to the child's Consultant or GP may be appropriate.
- Joint actions for both the school and LA in relation to severely absent pupils (under 50%) attenders.

EWOs will record any actions agreed and share with the attendees following the meeting.

EWOs can offer advice and support to lead practitioners in cases where attendance is not improving despite actions within a child/family's plan or where it is considered that more could be done to address attendance through that process. This may involve attending Team around the School meetings, CiN, CP Core Group or Conference to offer advice where attendance enforcement is being considered.

Schools can request support in analysing/auditing their attendance data, identifying areas to focus on in their school attendance processes, and developing links with other schools that have faced similar attendance patterns or trends by contacting their named EWO in the first instance.

Additional resource is available for targeted schools where attendance is weakest, and practice needs to improve, with additional support to the school and families to ensure early intervention and best practice is in place. Bespoke support would be identified through the strategic Termly Support Meetings with the school and the Department for Education funded School Attendance Support Officers as part of the Priority Education Investment Area Programme – Attendance Strand.

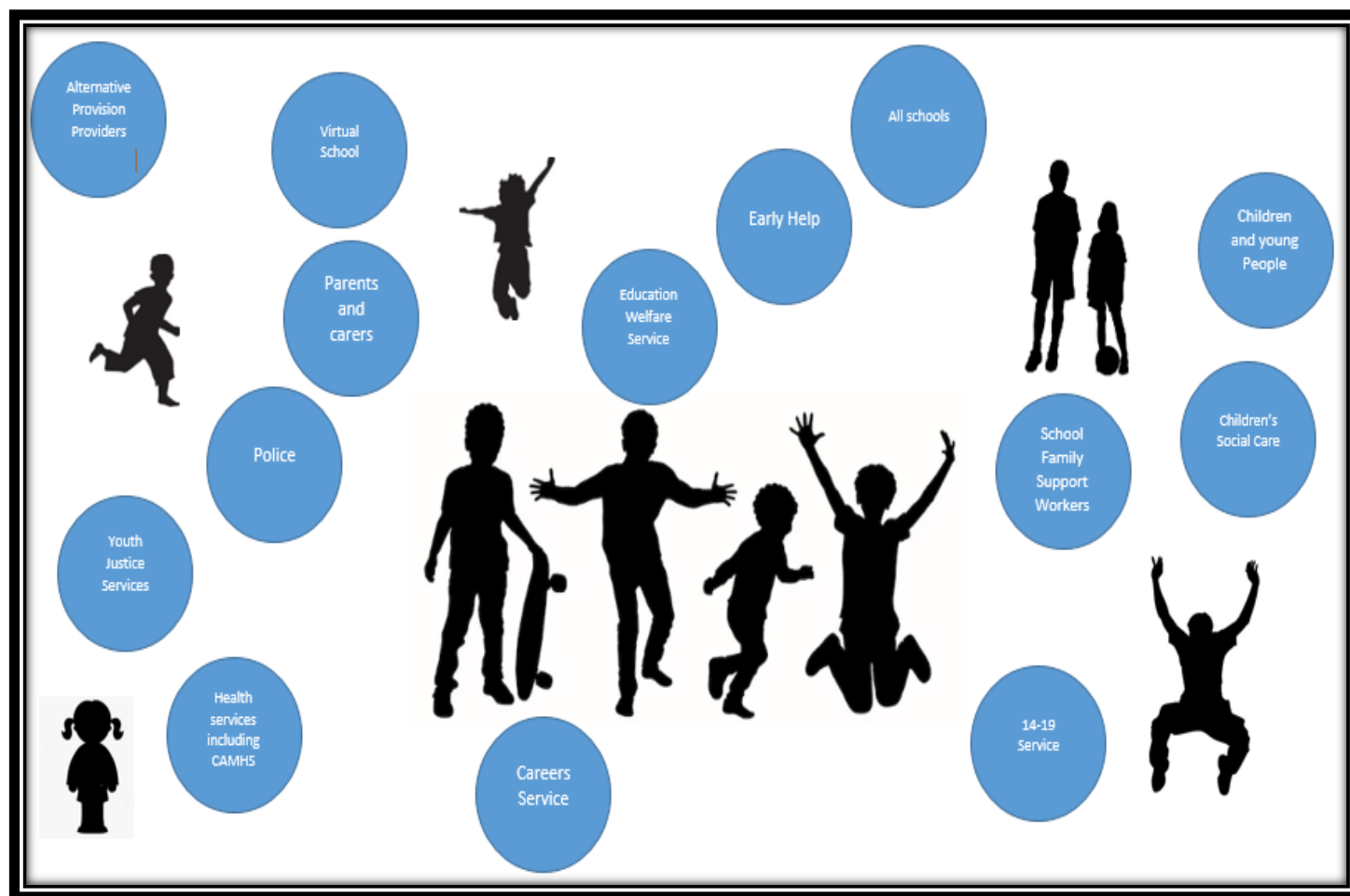
Halton was identified by the Department for Education as a Priority Education Investment Area and is receiving some time limited direct funding from the DfE to help reduce persistent absence particularly in primary and secondary schools. This funding will allow for the provision of some dedicated staff to support schools, parents/carers and families, and children and young people directly to help improve attendance. School Attendance Support Officers (SASOs) who will be part of this support mechanism, will focus on schools where PA is above national average, and support will be focused on cohorts or individual cases where PA is highlighted as of particular concern compared to peers or cohorts in other schools. The funding will also provide additional support for attendance outcomes through Assistant Education Psychology support, and they will work together with schools and the EWS to provide advice, support, training and bespoke interventions for cohorts of

children. The EWS would target the additional support together with schools through the Targeted Termly Meetings which would include:

- Family and child faced support – particular cases would be identified for additional targeted and timely support to enable gains in attendance outcomes.
- Targeted support with identified cohorts of children such as children transferring schools in year, reception children to instill good routines and attendance at an early age, children with poor attendance in year 6 transferring to secondary in year 7
- Running attendance initiatives such as an attendance Blitz or Star weeks with identified schools where appropriate
- Providing school faced support such as training and capacity building for particular practice
- Advising on interventions, parental and child engagement and support to improve attendance

To enable this to happen in the most effective way, the School Attendance Support Officers will be co-located within the Education Welfare Service team and rooted in the understanding of the data (supported through a Data Officer), the school, and the families and the children that the team have identified and directed through the Termly Support Meetings. The additional staff will be working alongside schools and will compliment school-based duties. They will not duplicate the statutory or traded offer provided through the Education Welfare Service as part of the Working together guidance. The support through the Assistant EPs will be in addition to any statutory or traded support through the EP Service. The support will act as a boost to support additional attendance outcomes over and above that already in place. The DfE funding for Halton enables this additional targeted support to be provided at no cost to schools or the LA for an 18 month period, likely to be 31st March 2025. However after this time it is anticipated that schools will be able to trade with EWS and the EP Service for this ongoing support going forward.

Working Better Together



WORKING BETTER TOGETHER

We can achieve more by working together. The Education Welfare Service provides a single point of contact for schools to advise on accessing the right support at the right time. Early intervention is key to addressing barriers to attendance to sustain good levels of attendance and outcomes for children. The Education Welfare Service will consider legal actions to support enforcement activities aimed at improving attendance.

School Nursing Service

All school age children whether attending school or educated otherwise are entitled to support from the school Nursing service. School Health support children to be school ready and with both their physical and mental health needs throughout school. They also support with childhood immunisations. Many schools offer school nurse drop-in sessions at schools that pupils and parents can attend.

Family Hubs

Halton is one of 75 areas in the country to be allocated funding to set up Family Hubs which bring together a range of services to support families with children and young people aged 0-19, or up to 25 years with special educational needs or disabilities. Services will include Parenting support, family support, youth services, activities for children under 5 and domestic abuse support.

Team around the School Meetings

These weekly meetings take place in schools and are an opportunity for schools and professionals to raise pupils not attending school and to inform multi-agency support to improve attendance. The Team around the School meetings are attended by mental health professionals, Education Psychology Service, Education Welfare Support, Early Help, Education Services, schools, Children's Social Care.

Working Together Meetings

Working Together Meetings are multi-agency meetings that consider referrals for support from the Early Help Team. If the case is open at a MAP and actions are not being achieved the case can be referred to the Working Together Meeting for further advice from professionals.

Enhanced EBSNA Panel

(Emotionally Based School Non Attenders)

For children with mental health/ anxiety as barriers to attendance the school should follow the EBSNA pathway which provides a graduated approach to addressing attendance concerns and includes a referral to the school EP. Where a school have followed the EBSNA pathway but attendance has failed to improve school should refer to this panel for further advice and consideration of a tuition offer if appropriate.

Additional support and resources can also be provided from:

- Traded Education Welfare Service via the school named EWO or by emailing EWSservice@halton.gov.uk
- SEND Assessment Team email SENAT@halton.gov.uk
- Children's Social Care and Early Intervention Service via a [referral to iCART](#)
- [Halton Family Hubs](#)
- [School Nursing Service](#)
- [Cheshire Police](#)

“Securing good attendance is everyone's business”

Glossary

School Attendance Meeting (SAM)/School Improvement Meetings (SIA)

This is a mandatory step within the Stage 2 Process.

This meeting is to speak with parents and pupils about the concerns about their school attendance. The primary focus is to consider why they have irregular attendance and to put in a plan to support improvements.

It should be made clear to parents/carers that the meeting is part of a formal attendance process which could lead to legal intervention.

Schools will need to:

- Establish details of all with parental responsibility (or day to day care) and obtain addresses, contact details and date of birth, where possible. Siblings and their schools should also be recorded
- Set achievable actions for all to help improve pupils attendance
- Set a 4-6 week Review Period and arrange and confirm how things will be reviewed and what may happen if things do not improve

School should send letters to those with PR and day to day care to explain invite them to the meeting. Schools should follow up with parents who do not attend the School Attendance Meeting. If they fail to engage in attempts to re-arrange the meeting a letter should be sent (see templates below),

A template invite letter, parenting contract, and a “failed to attend” letter can be found in the downloads section for this stage.

Persistent absence

A child is considered to be persistently absent if they have less than 90% school attendance. This is the equivalent of missing half a day of school each week. Pupils with this profile of attendance can struggle to maintain the same levels of academic progress as a child who attends regularly. The absences can be authorised or unauthorised.

Severe absence

A child is considered to be severely absent if they have less than 50% school attendance. This is the equivalent of missing 2 and a half days of school each week and will impact their academic and social progression when compared to pupils who attend school regularly. The absences can be authorised or unauthorised.

Parenting Contracts

These are voluntary agreements between parents, pupils and the school. Parenting Contracts were introduced in accordance with the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 to help address children's behaviour and attendance. They should be written in collaboration with all parties and set out clear actions and support to address identified barriers to school attendance. Schools should consider referrals for parenting support as part of this Plan.

Educational Neglect

The Department for Education (DfE) has stated, 'persistent failure to send children to school is a clear sign of neglect'. The NSPCC has cited, 'failure to ensure regular school attendance which prevents the child reaching their full potential academically' as one of their six forms of neglect.

KEY CONTACT INFORMATION

Debbie Houghton

Principal Education Welfare Officer

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Debbie.Houghton@halton.gov.uk

EWSservice@halton.gov.uk

Special Educational Needs Assessment Team

senat@halton.gov.uk

Charlotte Finch

(charlotte.finch@halton.gov.uk)

Early Help

Widnes - Janice Maddison

Janice.maddison@halton.gov.uk

Runcorn – Krista Hibbert

Krista.hibbert@halton.gov.uk

Halton Contact Centre

0303 333 3030

Safeguarding Children in Education

SCiE Officer

Maria Needham

maria.needham@halton.gov.uk

0151 511 6454

ICART

The team can be contacted during the hours of 9am to 5pm from Monday to Thursday and 9am to 4.30pm on Friday, call 0151 907 8305.

If you have an urgent (safeguarding) concern outside these hours, please call the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) on 0345 0500148.

[iCArt website](#)

[iCART referral form](#)

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