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NORKOLK SCHOOL ATTENDANCE STRATEGY

Introduction

1. Although the enforcement of school attendance is the responsibility of the County Council, the responsibility for improving attendance is a multi-agency one. Only through a commitment to work in a collaborative way by all the agencies that work with children and families will any progress be made in improving attendance at Norfolk schools.
2. This document outlines the attendance strategy for Norfolk that will lead and guide the work to improve attendance levels from September 2004. The strategy defines who the partners are, their roles and responsibilities, and sets out time lines for the delivery of the different elements of the strategy. It also includes a section on how the strategy will be monitored and evaluated over time.
3. Some elements of the strategy are already in place and embedded in normal working practices. Others need to be developed and implemented. Where this is the case then objectives/targets and time lines have been set out.

Partners and their Roles and Responsibilities

4. The **County Council** provides educational opportunities for the children of Norfolk at schools and through other specialist provision. The Norfolk Pupil Attendance Service (NPAS) is the Service that carries out the enforcement of attendance on behalf of the County Council. NPAS also supports schools, other specialist provision, parents/carers and children in tackling the reasons why some children do not attend school regularly.
5. The **Local Education Authority** (LEA) ensures that attendance is a high priority within strategic plans (e.g. Education Development Plan, Behaviour Support Plan). The LEA recognises the importance of regular school attendance in improving pupil achievement at all levels. NPAS will deliver a high quality level of support to schools, parents/carers and children to assist them to improve attendance rates.
6. Norfolk **schools** recognise and accept ownership of school attendance and have in place policies, strategies and practices that tackle poor levels of attendance. They work with parents/carers to achieve a high level of attendance. They work with NPAS and other relevant agencies to tackle the multi-faceted problems that result in low levels of attendance. They provide the LEA with regular data on attendance to inform resource allocation and to support the monitoring of strategic targets.
7. **School Governing bodies** will monitor the level of attendance at their school on a termly basis. Governing bodies may wish to consider appointing an attendance governor whose role it is to lead on this aspect of their work.
8. **Parents** should carry out their legal responsibility to ensure that their child(ren) receive an appropriate education, usually at school. They should also work with the school regarding any problems or difficulties to ensure the highest level of attendance is achieved. They should work with other relevant agencies when difficulties occur and try to resolve the problem as quickly as possible.
9. **Other LEA Services** should recognise the role they can play in supporting children in achieving a high level of attendance. Attendance should be included in service planning. All services should work collaboratively with any other involved agency, and the school to improve the level of attendance. Whenever any new

development is undertaken, then consideration of whether attendance should be key to the initiative should be given.

10. **Other local authority departments** will recognise the importance of working collaboratively with the LEA and schools, to support vulnerable groups and individual children where school attendance is causing concern. In particular the role of Corporate Parent will be jointly carried out by the LEA and Social Services staff with regard to children in public care.
11. **Other agencies external to the County Council** should work collaboratively with any LEA service, schools and parents/carers to improve the level of attendance where appropriate.

LEA Attendance Policy

12. In order to set out the framework through which the County Council will deliver its attendance strategy an attendance policy has been approved by elected members. (See Appendix 1) This policy sets out the commitment given by elected members to improve the level of attendance in Norfolk schools and supports the multi-agency approach set out in the attendance strategy.

Elements of the Attendance Strategy

13. **Work with schools** will mainly involve the NPAS.
 - An Education Social Worker (ESW) will be allocated to each school using an agreed formula that takes into account the needs of each school and the resources available.
 - A Service Level Agreement (SLA) will be developed with each school, and reviewed annually, that will set out how the NPAS and the school will work together to improve school attendance. For secondary schools, and targeted primary schools, the SLA will also include an annual target on attendance.
 - Advice and guidance will be made available electronically to schools about strategies to use, best practice, model school attendance policy and DfES guidance and information.
 - Register checks/audits will be carried out at all schools over a three-year period.
 - NPAS support will be available to schools to assist in the preparation for an OFSTED inspection.
 - Referrals will be taken and casework carried out by the ESW. Feed back will be provided in writing to the school on each case.
 - Legal action to enforce school attendance will be taken by the NPAS in appropriate cases using the “fast track” process where it is judged to be necessary. Schools will be provided with information following the final disposal of each case. NPAS will monitor the outcome of each case to assess the impact of the prosecution.
 - Parenting Support programmes will be run by the NPAS for parents who have been directed to attend such a programme through the courts, or on a voluntary basis.
 - NPAS will carry out truancy patrols and sweeps in conjunction with the Police and in discussion with schools.
 - Specialist staff will provide support for targeted primary schools. Whole school strategies will be developed to support improved attendance.
 - Training on attendance strategies and the legal aspects of attendance will be available to all schools and governing bodies.
 - The County Council will hold an awards event for those children who have achieved 100% attendance during their primary education and their secondary

education, and for those who have shown significant improvement over a period of time.

14. **Work with parents/carers** will be mainly carried out by NPAS staff.
 - Following the receipt of a referral from a school the allocated ESW will take appropriate action and work with the parent/carer.
 - Advice and support will be provided that is relevant to the situation.
 - Referral to another agency or service will be made where necessary.
 - Legal action will be taken in appropriate cases.
15. **Work with the Advisory Service** will be around the sharing of attendance data and the appropriateness of the curriculum and teaching styles.
 - Attendance data will be shared with the Advisory Service on a termly and annual basis.
 - Where attendance levels are poor the Advisory Service will use the data in their discussions with schools.
 - A six monthly meeting will take place between NPAS Team Leaders/Managers and Advisory service colleagues to discuss particular schools and to monitor the data sharing arrangements.
 - Where the appropriateness of the curriculum and/or teaching styles is identified as having an impact on attendance then the Advisory Service will take the matter up with the school.
16. **Work with the Courts** will be carried out by the NPAS.
 - Regular meetings will be established between the NPAS and the different Court User Groups to set up and maintain a dialogue about processes and systems.
 - A programme of training will be made available to Magistrates about the work of the NPAS and attendance issues.
 - Legal action will be taken in all Norfolk Courts in appropriate cases using the relevant Education legislation.
17. **Work with the Connexions Service** will take place to determine the way in which NPAS staff and Connexions Personal Assistants (PAs) can work collaboratively.
 - A Partnership Agreement between the NPAS and the Connexions Service will be drawn up.
 - To support the Partnership Agreement a practice guidance document will be developed that will determine how ESWs and PAs will work collaboratively to support individual young people.
 - A six monthly meeting between Managers from the NPAS and the Connexions Service will take place to monitor the Partnership Agreement, practice guidance and working practices.
18. **Work with the Youth Offending Team** will be about individual children.
 - A protocol will be developed between the NPAS and the YOT to establish how the two services will work collaboratively to support individual children.
 - A six monthly meeting will take place between NPAS managers and YOT Managers to monitor the protocol and working arrangements.
19. **Work with the Behaviour Support Team** will be about individual children.
 - Behaviour Service workers and NPAS staff will work collaboratively to support individual children.

Strategies for Improving School Attendance

20. Appendix 2 is a list of the strategies that can be used to improve school attendance. It is a summary of most of what is included in this document so far but also includes specific activities about the professional support and development of NPAS staff.

Monitoring Arrangements

21. In order to monitor the attendance strategy a series of activities need to be established. Monitoring needs to take place at a number of different levels and for a range of different reasons.

- An annual report to the Education Review Panel to report on the level of attendance in Norfolk schools and on the work of the NPAS.
- An annual report to each school governing body about the level of attendance at the school and the involvement of the NPAS. This will include comparative data on attendance, information about the number of referrals made, the number of cases where legal action resulted and the outcome, and any general comments about arrangements for dealing with attendance in the school.
- Six monthly meetings between NPAS managers and Managers in other Services/agencies to monitor protocols and working agreements and to revise them accordingly.
- Termly report to PASS SMT about the level of attendance in Norfolk.
- EDP monitoring process to include progress being made towards the achievement of the attendance targets.

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ATTENDANCE STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

Introduction

1. The attendance strategy is set out on the previous pages. In order to ensure the strategy is delivered and that the monitoring arrangements are followed the following action plan identifies:
 - the work that needs to be done,
 - the time line within which the action needs to be completed
 - the person responsible for ensuring each action point is achieved

DRAFT Attendance Strategy Action Plan

Action Point	Timeline	Person Responsible
1. To develop a LEA Attendance Policy that has been approved by elected members.	To be completed by the end of May 2004.	Principal Attendance Officer
2. Review the formula used by NPAS to allocate ESW time to individual schools and clusters of schools.	To be completed by the end of July 2004.	NPAS Managers
3. To develop a Service Level Agreement with all schools and PRUs that sets out how the schools, PRUs and the NPAS will work together to promote and improve the level of school attendance.	To be completed by the end of July 2004.	NPAS Managers
4. To develop an annual report to governing bodies about the level of attendance at each school and the work of the NPAS at the school.	First annual report to be delivered in October 2005.	NPAS Managers and Team Leaders
5. To review the advice, guidance and information currently placed on ESINET and to revise and update it where necessary and to add new advice and guidance where necessary.	Initial review to be completed by September 2004. A termly review then to be carried out.	NPAS Managers
6. To develop a series of information leaflets for children, parents/carers, schools and other agencies/services about school attendance and to ensure a wide distribution.	Leaflets to be ready for distribution by October 2004. Ongoing review of publicity/information material.	NPAS Managers and Team Leaders
7. A programme of register audits to be drawn up to ensure that all schools receive a formal register audit at least once every three years as part of a rolling programme.	Programme to be drawn up by September 2004 – first audits to be carried out during the autumn term 2004.	NPAS Core Manager
8. To establish the regular use of legal action in all parts of Norfolk, and to extend the use of the “fast track” process across the county in a managed and structured way.	Process to be in place to support the regular use of legal action across Norfolk by September 2004. Fast track to be in use across Norfolk by January 2005.	Principal Attendance Officer and NPAS Team Leaders.

9. To review the parenting support programme to ensure that it is able to meet the needs of those parents who are being referred to it.	To be completed by September 2004.	NPAS Team Leader
10. To develop a training course for Magistrates about the work of the NPAS to support the increase in court cases across the county.	Course to be ready for first delivery to Magistrates by October 2004 – aim will be to deliver the training annually to new Magistrates.	NPAS Team Leader
11. To develop an annual programme of truancy patrols/sweeps across all areas of Norfolk.	To be completed by September 2004. Programme of patrols to begin during the autumn term 2004.	NPAS Managers and Team Leaders and Norfolk Police.
12. To establish a team of specialist Attendance Assistants to work in primary schools to develop strategies to promote and improve attendance among primary age children.	Team to be established ready for September 2004.	Principal Attendance Officer
13. To develop a range of activities to support the work of the Attendance Assistants with schools, children and parents/carers.	To be in place by September 2004.	Principal Attendance Officer and Attendance Assistants
14. To review and revise the training programme for school staff and governors about attendance strategies, legislation and responsibilities.	To be completed by September 2004.	NPAS Managers and Team Leaders.
15. To arrange for the County Council to hold an annual awards event to celebrate the achievement of 100% attendance by children at the Primary phase, the Secondary phase and of those who show significant improvement in their attendance.	Arrangements to be in place ready for first event to take place in November 2004.	Principal Attendance Officer

16. To develop an information sharing process between the NPAS and the Advisory Service about school attendance data, and to establish regular six monthly meetings between Managers in each Service to monitor the information sharing arrangements and other attendance related issues.	To be in place for October 2004.	NPAS Manager and Advisory Service Manager
17. To establish a regular pattern of meetings between the NPAS and the Magistrates Courts to enable a dialogue to take place about attendance cases and processes.	First meetings to be held in the autumn term 2004.	NPAS Manager and Magistrate/Court Clerk
18. To develop a Partnership Agreement and working practices document between the NPAS and the Connexions Service and to set up a six monthly monitoring meeting between NPAS and Connexions managers.	Partnership Agreement to be in place by September 2004. Working practices document to be in place by November 2004. First monitoring meeting to take place in January 2005.	NPAS Core Manager and Connexions Manager.
19. To develop a protocol between the NPAS and the Youth Offending Team to address how the two services can work together, and to set up six monthly meetings between Managers in each service to monitor working arrangements.	Protocol to be in place by October 2004. First monitoring meeting to take place in February 2005.	NPAS Managers and YOT Managers
20. To write an annual report to elected members about the level of attendance in Norfolk schools, and about the work of the NPAS.	First annual report to be delivered in January 2005.	Principal Attendance Officer
21. To prepare a termly report to PASS SMT about the level of attendance in Norfolk schools.	First report to be delivered at the end of the autumn term 2004.	Principal Attendance Officer.

22. To develop the Behaviour Forums to include school attendance issues including the sharing of good practice discussion about new DfES initiatives.	First joint behaviour and attendance forum meetings to be held before the end of the autumn term 2004.	Principal Attendance Officer and Behaviour and Attendance Manager.
23. To review the current structure of the NPAS with a view to realigning the management of the Service and the creation of a court officer post.	Review to be completed by the end of November 2004 and any changes to be implemented from January 2005.	Principal Attendance Officer and Behaviour and Attendance Manager.
24. To review the pilot case management system and to introduce a case management system across all NPAS teams.	Evaluation of the review to be completed by June 2004. Plan to introduce case management system across the county to be in place by September 2004. Case management system to be in place by January 2005.	Principal Attendance Officer and NPAS Managers
25. To ensure that NPAS is aware of, and where appropriate a member of, working groups set up to respond to new government, and local initiatives.	Ongoing	Principal Attendance Officer
26. To review the role and function of posts within NPAS in relation to promoting and improving attendance, and in supporting schools, children and parents/carers.	Working group to be set up during autumn term 2004. Report to Head of PASS by January 2005. Implementation of any changes by April 2005.	Principal Attendance Officer and working group (to comprise NPAS staff, schools, and governors?)

Draft LEA Attendance Policy

Report by the Director of Education

The LEA is committed to supporting schools, parents/carers and children to ensure that every child achieves the highest level of attendance at school. This will take place through collaborative working arrangements between The Pupil Access and Support Service, schools and families. The Pupil Access and Support Service will also work in partnership with other parts of the Education Department, with Social Services, Health Services, Youth Offending Team, Connexions and the Police. It is particularly important to improve the attendance of vulnerable groups of children such as children in public care and Travellers.

Legal Requirements

Parents have a duty to ensure that their children receive a full time education. The Education Act 2002, and the Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003, places a legal responsibility for enforcing regular school attendance on the LEA. This responsibility is delegated to the Education Social Workers (Attendance) in The Pupil Access and Support Service. Legal action will be instigated against parents/carers whose children fail to sustain an acceptable level of attendance and where the parents/carers are failing to fulfil their responsibility.

Working with Schools

The Pupil Access and Support Service Education Social Workers will provide written advice and guidance to schools about strategies to promote good attendance. Education Social Workers will examine attendance registers and computerised databases on a regular basis to check on patterns of absence and to ensure that the requirements of the Pupil Registration Regulations are being met. At least once every three years a formal audit will be carried out in each school.

An Education Social Worker is allocated to each school for which the LEA has responsibility. The Education Social Worker will work collaboratively with school staff to identify children with unacceptable levels of attendance and to determine appropriate action to address the concern. The way in which the Education Social Worker and the school work together will be specified in a Service Level

Agreement (SLA) for each school that will be reviewed annually. For all secondary schools an agreed attendance target will be included in the SLA. All schools, and chairs of governing bodies, will receive an annual report from The Pupil Access and Support Service on the working of the SLA. All schools will be expected to develop a school attendance policy that details what action they will take to promote good attendance.

Working with Parents/Carers

The role of parents/carers is crucial in ensuring that children achieve high levels of attendance. The Pupil Access and Support Service will support parents/carers to fulfil their responsibility wherever possible. Liaison with other Services and agencies will take place to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken. Where parents/carers fail to work with the Education Social Workers and fail to fulfil their responsibility then legal action will be used to enforce regular school attendance.

Working with Other Agencies

Poor school attendance can be both a symptom of other difficulties faced by a child or a family, and a cause of other problems such as exclusion and involvement in criminal activity. Children with low levels of attendance tend to have other complex needs also. A co-ordinated approach by a number of agencies can assist these children and families.

Regular meetings between The Pupil Access and Support Service managers will be held to improve the co-ordination of service provision, identify and build on good practice and evaluate the impact of a co-ordinated approach.

Close links between The Pupil Access and Support Service and the Norfolk Education Advisory Services will be established to ensure that attendance concerns are brought to the notice of Review and Development Advisers (RDAs). This will enable Review and Development Advisers to pursue school management issues related to attendance where necessary.

Managers from The Pupil Access and Support Service will also meet regularly with representatives from Social Services, Health, Youth Offending Team, Connexions and the Police to develop a more joined up approach.

Monitoring Arrangements

Although the law distinguishes between authorised and unauthorised absence it is overall school attendance that is crucial. Both authorised and unauthorised absence will, therefore, be monitored. Targets for improving overall attendance have been set within the Education Development Plan (EDP) and the Behaviour Support Plan, and will be monitored annually.

Schools will be asked to provide the LEA with information about the level of attendance at the end of each half term. This data will be used to inform the LEA on the progress being made in achieving the targets set in the EDP.

An annual report will be presented to the Joint Children's Services Working Group about the level of attendance in Norfolk schools and about the work of the Pupil Access and Support Service in this regard.

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APPENDIX 2

STRATEGIES FOR TACKLING POOR LEVELS OF ATTENDANCE

The following are a series of strategies that can be used to tackle poor levels of school attendance. None of them will be successful as stand alone strategies but by combining a number of them then an impact may be seen and levels of attendance will begin to improve.

Some of the strategies are already being used by NPAS staff but some may not.

- ESW allocated to schools (time) by formula
- Provision of attendance data to the LEA by schools electronically
- Monitoring of data by NPAS/LEA
- Service Level Agreement with all schools and PRUs
- Targets set with all secondary schools and with relevant primary schools and included in the SLA
- EDP targets set and monitoring arrangements in place
- Register audits/checks carried out and reports provided to schools and governors
- Advice and guidance provided to schools on – Pupil Reg./ referrals/ responsibilities/strategies/holiday approval
- Training of school staff and governors
- Robust use of legal action across the county including Section 444 (1a) cases/ fats track/SAO
- Links made with Connexions/Health/Magistrates/YOT/Behaviour services/SSD/Voluntary Sector/Police/Advisory service to enable liaison, information sharing, on-going dialogue and joint working
- Programme of professional development opportunities in place for NPAS staff
- Truancy patrols/sweeps
- Parenting Support programmes
- Effective referral procedure and process
- Case management system
- Supervision of NPAS staff
- Information leaflets for schools, children, employers, parents
- Attendance Panels
- Effective Child Employment system
- Monitoring and evaluation systems
- Service Business Plan with PIs and objectives
- NPAS appropriately resourced
- Preventive work with Primary Schools
- LEA/County Council awards for attendance
- Attendance given a high priority by schools/LEA and County Council