North West Safeguarding Partnership

# Stronger Together:

## A Community Toolkit for Inclusive Attendance & Belonging



Guidance & strategies for everyone, to support every child's right to belong, engage, & thrive

North West ADCS Leading Children's Services

North West Regional Improvement Plan Pilot

Department for Education

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**Click on blue text marked with a * to access resources for professionals.**

# Foreword

## North West Voice and Influence of Education Lead

> Every child deserves more than a place in education; they deserve a place where they belong. Belonging fuels confidence, curiosity, and hope. It turns attendance from an obligation into an opportunity. When children feel truly seen and valued, they don't just show up - they show up as themselves, ready to learn, ready to connect, and ready to grow.



Stronger Together: A Community Toolkit for Inclusive Attendance & Belonging stands as a testament to what we can achieve when we unite around that belief. The challenges to consistent attendance are real—and often deeply rooted. Yet so are the strengths in our communities, in our partnerships, and in the unwavering dedication of those who work every day to lift up children and families.

This toolkit shifts practice from **chasing absence to designing presence**. It asks us to look beyond the surface and to listen—to the quiet worries, the unspoken barriers, the dreams waiting to be supported. It invites us to move from intervention to prevention, from compliance to compassion, from "What's wrong?" to "What's happened?" and "How can we help?" Because inclusion is not just a practice—it is a promise.

When we work together across education, services, and communities, we create the conditions where children feel safe, connected, and inspired to attend. We build cultures where engagement is nurtured, where relationships matter, and where every child knows they have a community standing behind them.

This is the heart of Stronger Together. A belief that shared responsibility leads to shared success. A conviction that when we combine insight, empathy, and action, we transform the everyday experience of children and young people across our region.

I am profoundly grateful for the commitment shown by our children, young people, families, partners, practitioners, and communities. Your passion, your persistence, and your belief in every child's potential underpin this work. This toolkit is shaped by you and for you—so that together, we can keep building a future where every child has the chance not only to attend, but to belong.

**"Belonging isn't created by one person—it's strengthened by all of us."**

# Parent Foreword

As a parent, I know that every morning when we encourage our children out of the door and into education, we are placing our trust in a community. We trust that they will be welcomed, understood, and supported. We hope that they will find friends, feel safe, and be inspired to learn. And we know that when life becomes challenging—whether at home, in education, or within themselves—connection is what helps them keep going.



That is why Stronger Together: A Community Toolkit for Inclusive Attendance & Belonging matters. Behind every absence there is a story. Sometimes it's a moment of worry, a feeling of not fitting in, or a change at home that feels overwhelming. Sometimes it's something a child cannot find the words for. What families need most in those moments is not judgement, but partnership—a reminder that we are not facing these challenges alone.

This toolkit recognises that attendance is about more than getting children to education settings; it's about helping them feel they want to be there. It shows what is possible when education settings and services look beyond the register and see the whole child. It offers practical, compassionate approaches that strengthen relationships with families, build trust, and create environments where every child feels they belong.

As parents, we want to work with educators. We want to be heard and understood. We want to feel that when we speak up for our child, someone will listen with empathy. This toolkit encourages exactly that kind of partnership—a shared journey where families are valued as experts in their own lives, and where every child's voice is at the heart of the conversation.

Most of all, it gives hope. Hope that together we can remove barriers, rebuild confidence, and ensure that no child feels alone in their struggles. Hope that the power of strong relationships—between families, education, and the wider community—can help every child engage, learn, and thrive.

As a parent, I am grateful for a toolkit that sees attendance not as a number, but as a story of belonging. And I am grateful for the collective commitment across our region to ensure that every child's story is one of possibility.

**"When we listen to families and walk alongside them, every child has a better chance to shine."**



# Young Person's Foreword

Going to school is easier when you feel like you fit in. When you feel safe, supported, and listened to, it's much easier to show up, join in, and be yourself. But when things feel overwhelming—at home, with friends, or in lessons—it can be hard to explain why coming to school feels tough.

What I like about Stronger Together: A Community Toolkit for Inclusive Attendance & Belonging is that it focuses on understanding, not blaming. It reminds adults to ask how they can help, instead of just worrying about the numbers. It encourages schools and services to work together so that young people get the right support at the right time.

Most of all, it shows that our voices matter. When adults listen—really listen—it makes a huge difference. Feeling heard makes school feel more welcoming. Feeling understood helps us feel like we belong.

This toolkit is a step towards making sure every young person has that feeling.

**"When we feel we belong, we believe we can succeed."**



# Introduction: Why the North West is Stronger

The North West Safeguarding Children Partnership brings together education, councils, health teams, social care, and community groups across the North West.

We work together to:

- Share ideas
- Solve problems
- Make things better for children, young people, and families

## Why We Need a Regional Approach

We heard the same message across the North West:
**“We want practical, easy-to-use tools that help us support children better.”**

This toolkit helps families and friends, education, and other services understand what works, who can help, how we can avoid working in silos, and how to make support simple instead of confusing. If we adopt a regional approach:

- Families get clearer support
- Families and relevant agencies can work better together
- Multiple agencies can spotlight specific attendance themes at the same time
- Services can share information and avoid repeating work

This helps children feel supported **wherever they live or learn.**

**DfE LA Toolkit*** **DfE LA Self-Assessment Tool***

# Why Attendance Matters

Attendance issues should be addressed through inclusion, not compliance. Coming to an education setting regularly helps children.

**Learn**

**Make Friends**

**Build confidence and routines**

**Feel part of something**

Some young people who get support from services (e.g. social care, early help, SEND teams, or health services) can find education attendance especially hard.

Their attendance can show:

- How they're feeling
- What help they might need
- Whether something has changed at home, at the education setting, or socially





## Who This Toolkit Is For

This toolkit is for anyone who supports a child or young person, including:

- Family members and friends
- Educators
- Attendance and pastoral teams
- Social workers and early help practitioners
- Health and SEND services
- Youth justice teams
- Community and voluntary groups

In short: **If you care about a child's attendance and wellbeing, this toolkit is for you.**

## Understanding Non-Attendance

Children don't usually miss education "for no reason."
There is often a story behind absence.

This toolkit encourages adults to ask:

- "What is making it hard to attend?"
- "What might help things feel easier?"

We look deeper at things like:

- Friendships
- Learning needs
- Worries or anxieties
- Home situations
- Education environment
- Health and wellbeing

The more we understand, the better we can help.

## What This Toolkit Aims to Do

This toolkit is here to help everyone:

- Understand why children might struggle with attendance
- Work together in a kind, joined-up way
- Make sure every child feels they belong
- Find solutions that fit each child's story
- Use simple tools, clear steps, and shared language.



# Sense of Belonging

Belonging quotes from children and young people in Warrington:

- Our uniform makes it clear who we are as a school.
- The chill out area makes us feel safe.
- All your friends care and your teachers care.
- It's really colourful and it feels really welcoming.
- I feel included when my friends play with me.
- I feel very very happy in my brain.
- People talking to me and my uniform make me feel welcome.
- Everyone helps me to be myself.
- I think when you belong somewhere you feel happy to go there, it is nice and welcoming. I'd feel calm.
- All one big family.
- To not just be heard but understood.
- Knowing there are teachers you can talk to always.
- The teachers knowing all our names.

## Supporting Children Through Change

Every child goes through changes at the start of a new academic year:

- New teachers
- New classrooms
- New timetables
- New subjects

Some children find this exciting, whilst others find it stressful. This toolkit helps adults plan early so children and young people feel calm, confident, and supported.

## Creative Solutions to Complex Problems

Barriers exist at:

1. **Individual level** – health, anxiety, SEND, motivation
2. **Family level** – routines, capacity, housing, transport
3. **Education setting level** – relationships, curriculum, systems
4. **Community level** – poverty, safety, culture

Effective strategies tackle multiple layers at once. We must work together to identify root causes – not just symptoms.

Sometimes attendance issues are complicated and small changes can make a big difference.

This toolkit gives ideas that are:

- Flexible
- Creative
- Practical
- Tried-and-tested in Northwest education settings



# Educational Neglect

## What do we mean by “educational neglect”?

Family members and friends play a vital role in their child or young person’s learning. When a child or young person repeatedly misses education or doesn’t receive a suitable education at home, it can sometimes be a sign that they are not getting the support they need.
The Department for Education (DfE) and organisations like the NSPCC recognise that not ensuring a child or young person regularly attends education can be a form of neglect. The law says every child and young person must receive a suitable education—either at an educational setting or through elective home education. Without this, a child or young person’s development and wellbeing can be seriously affected.

## What is the impact?

Children and young people who are not regularly in education are more likely to be identified in safeguarding reviews because missing education can increase their vulnerability.

Going to an education setting regularly gives children and young people:

- A sense of routine
- Friendships
- Learning opportunities
- Support from trusted adults
- A stronger foundation for future success



When children and young people miss a lot of education, they may be at higher risk of:

- Falling behind in their learning
- Struggling to reach their potential
- Becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training)
- Experiencing harm, exploitation, or abuse
- Difficulties with their emotional or mental health
- Low self-esteem
- Being drawn into criminal or gang related activity

## Indicators of Education Neglect

There are many possible signs and indicators that might suggest a child or young person is not receiving a suitable education:

- Frequent or long periods of absence
- No suitable education in place if the child or young person isn't enrolled at an education setting
- Parents or carers regularly missing meetings or finding it difficult to engage with education based support
- Limited communication about why a child or young person is absent
- A pattern of persistent or severe absence
- A child or young person regularly refusing or being unable to attend an education setting

These signs don't always mean something is wrong, but they do mean support may be needed.

## Understanding the Reasons Behind Attendance Concerns

If a child or young person is struggling with attendance, it is important to think about what might be going on. For example:

- Are their learning needs being met?
- Are they getting the right support to make progress?
- Is anything at school worrying them or affecting their wellbeing?
- Is there a full-time education offer in place?
- Is every school-aged child and young person in the family registered with an education setting, or have you formally chosen Elective Home Education (EHE)?
- Are other professionals or services needed to help?
- Is the difficulty linked to a child or young person, family circumstances, or something else entirely?

Understanding the "why" helps everyone work together to find solutions.

# Working Together to Get Attendance Back on Track

When attendance becomes a concern, education settings and services will want to:

- Consider whether educational neglect might be a factor when a child or young person is persistently or severely absent
- Be curious and explore the reasons behind non-attendance, including for young people who are not enrolled at an education setting
- Talk openly about what is making attendance difficult
- Work alongside children, young people, and other services to put support in place
- Seek guidance from the education setting's safeguarding lead if needed
- Explore whether additional parenting or family support might help
- Follow government guidance, such as Working Together to Improve School Attendance and the advice on Elective Home Education

The aim is always to support a child or young person to access the education they deserve, and to support their families in making this possible.



# North West Attendance Promises

The North West Attendance Promises are our simple commitments to children, young people, and their families. They explain how we will work together to help every child feel welcome, supported, and ready to learn.

**“My school has 'lovely staff and lovely students' and I've made lots of new friends' so other schools should be like mine.”**

- Cynthia, young person

These promises are not rules for you to follow — they are promises from us. They show how we will listen, communicate clearly, build trust, and celebrate every step forward.

By keeping these promises, we create a North West where every child feels they belong and every family feels included.

## Promise 1: Voice of Children and Young People

We listen to what children and young people think and feel.
We ask them what helps and what doesn't.

**North West example:**

An education setting in Stockport created a simple "check-in board" where pupils tell staff how their morning is going.



## Promise 2: Voice of Families

Families know their children best.
We will involve them as partners from the start.

**North West example:**

A education setting in Halton holds friendly family drop-ins every week. Family members come for advice—or just a chat.




## Promise 3: Partnership Working (Stronger Together)

Teams work together so support is easier for families to understand.
No child should fall between gaps.

**North West example:**
In Sefton, education staff, health teams, and early help meet to make one shared plan for each child.

## Promise 4: Systemic Practice

We look at the whole picture—not just one part of a child's life.
We think about what might be going on at home, in education, and in the community.

**North West example:**

An education setting in Bolton changed noisy corridors by adding quiet zones, helping anxious students attend more often.



## Promise 5: Blockers & Enablers

We spot what is getting in the way, and what helps. Then we fix what we can.

**North West example:**

A setting in Liverpool changed their late arrival rules to make things calmer for pupils with anxiety.

## Promise 6: Evidence-Informed

We use data, research, and real experiences to guide what we do.

**North West example:**

An education setting in Wirral noticed absences were higher on days with tests. They changed how they prepared pupils, and attendance rose.




## What You Will Find in the Toolkit

- Easy guides and checklists
- Conversation tools
- Transition and reintegration ideas
- Real-life impact stories from North West education settings
- Planning templates
- Tips for early help and partnership working
- Simple ways to track progress



# What Children and Young People Say Would Help Them Attend Education Settings

Children and young people in Lancashire shared that they want education settings to be a place where they feel supported, understood, and set up to succeed. They told us they would be more likely to attend when:

- **Learning feels manageable and pressure is reduced.** They value clear support with schoolwork, reassurance around exams, and opportunities to build confidence so they don't feel overwhelmed.

- **Bullying is taken seriously and acted on quickly.** Feeling safe, listened to and protected helps them feel comfortable coming into education settings.

- **Education settings feels welcoming and positive.** They want settings to be seen as a place where they belong, and where families also feel positive and connected to what happens there.

- **They are treated as individuals.** Young people told us they attend more when they feel seen, valued and recognised as people—not just numbers.

- **Mental health support is easier to access.** Timely help, trusted adults, and spaces to talk make a real difference to their wellbeing and confidence in attending.

- **Behaviour policies help, rather than hinder, attendance.** Approaches that focus on support, understanding, and keeping them included help them stay connected to their education setting.

- **Healthy routines are encouraged.** Support around sleep, digital habits and balance helps them feel ready for learning each day.

# Partnership Principles: Working Together for Children in the North West

> In the North West, we believe children do best when everyone who cares for them works as one team. No single service can solve attendance difficulties alone — but together, we can make education feel safe, welcoming, and achievable for every child.

Here's what this means:

**We all have clear roles**

Education settings, health teams, social workers, local authorities, police, and community services each have their own part to play. When everyone understands their role, help is quicker and less confusing for families.

**We share expectations**

Children, young people, and families should hear the same messages no matter who they speak to. This helps build trust and makes the system feel fair.

**We work as one team**

When services don't work well together, families feel the strain. We work hard to keep communication clear, warm, and supportive — not stressful.

**We speak simply and kindly**

We avoid complicated terms or scary language. We also talk in days or minutes of learning, not percentages, so it's easier to understand.

**Children and young people are at the heart of everything**

Their feelings matter and their voice helps shape the plan. We use tools like Zones of Regulation or other simple strategies to help children explain how they feel.




## Families are partners

Parents and carers know their children best.

We offer support through:

- Family Hubs
- Coaching or advocacy sessions
- Practical help with routines, behaviour, sleep, nutrition, or wellbeing

We also understand that parental mental health can affect or be affected by attendance, and we respond with empathy.

## Education plays a key role

Education settings help by building strong relationships, offering safe spaces, and making attendance part of their whole-school priorities. Governors, school leaders, careers advisers, and pastoral staff all play their part.

## Health teams help support wellbeing

Health partners help with sleep, diet, mental health, medical needs and clear advice about GP letters and appointments.

## Police, social care, and community teams help keep children safe

They work with education settings and families to remove wider risks or worries that affect attendance.

## Local Authority Attendance Teams support early help

They offer advice to education settings and direct support to families, so problems don't get worse.



## Trauma-Informed & Gentle Support

We always ask, “What has happened, and how can we help?” not “What is wrong?”
Together, we aim to make sure children feel they belong, families feel understood, and everyone knows how to get help early.

## Be Curious

When adults approach conversations with genuine interest—asking open questions, exploring the child’s thinking, and joining the logic behind their feelings—it builds trust, uncovers barriers, and helps children feel understood and supported in returning to and engaging with education.

**Sefton TAS Impact Story***

**Working Together for Better Outcomes Resource***

**Remember!**
**Click on blue text marked with a * to access resources for professionals.**

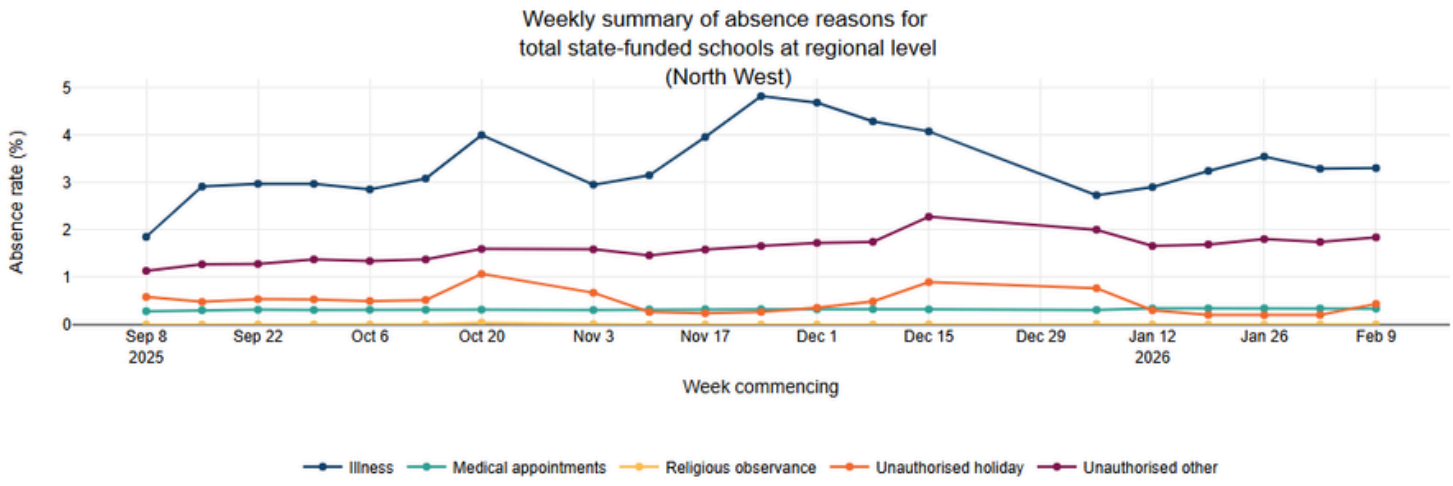
# North West Attendance Statistics

Across the North West, more children are missing from their education setting regularly than in most other parts of the country.

In Spring 2025, about **1 in 5 children** (20%) in our region were classed as persistently absent, meaning they missed at least 6 out of 60 days (10%) of education — **this is the highest rate in England,** and above the national figure of **17.6%.**

Severe absence, when children and young people miss half or more of their lessons, is also rising across all regions nationally, reaching **2.26%,** which is much higher than before the pandemic. Children who are severely absent miss at least 30 out of 60 days during this term (the equivalent of 6 weeks of education in a school term).

Although overall absence has improved slightly across England, it is still higher than before COVID. This shows that many children, young people, and families are still finding education attendance challenging.



# Why We Use Data as a Starting Point

We use data as a starting point because it gives us a clear picture of what is happening with attendance across the North West, where **persistent absence is one of the highest rates in England (20.6%).**



Data helps us spot patterns early, understand risks, and measure progress in a simple way — not to blame families, but to make sure children and young people are safe and supported. We know that missing education affects safeguarding, wellbeing, learning, and future life and career opportunities.

The data also shows three big issues we must tackle together: **a large amount of low-level absence**, increasing **severe absence,** and children who are **missing from education.** By looking at days and minutes of learning lost, we can plan the right support at the right time and see whether things are improving for each child.

**“Data can diagnose the problem, but only people can build the solution. It is our relationships, not our spreadsheets, that change a child’s story.”**

## Oldham Impact Story on Data Regression model*

# Creating the Right Culture: Everyone Has a Role to Play

Good attendance starts with the right culture — a culture where every child and young person feels they belong, every family feels valued, and every adult takes responsibility for creating a safe, positive environment. Culture is not built by one person or one service. It is created together, through everyday actions, relationships, and the way education and other services speak to and support children, young people, and their families.

**"I didn't go to school because I felt invisible. When someone finally asked why, everything changed."**

- Young person

**"We were scared of being judged. But once people listened, we felt supported."**

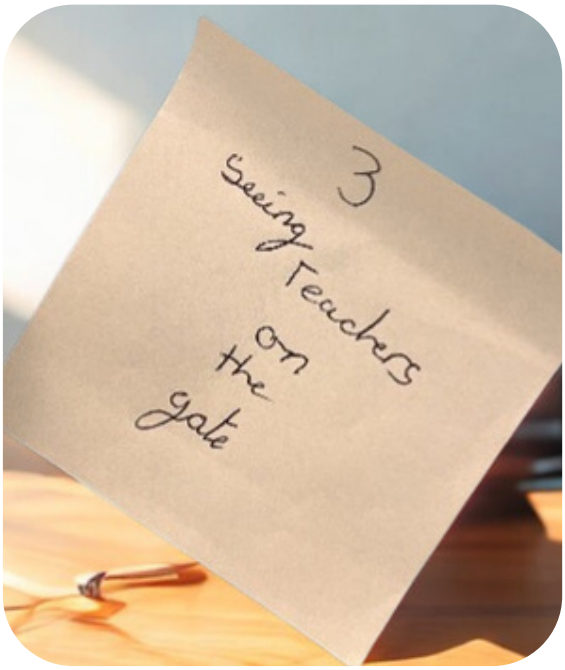
- Parent, lived experience group

## Belonging and Feeling Valued

Children and young people attend their education setting more easily when they feel they belong.

This means:

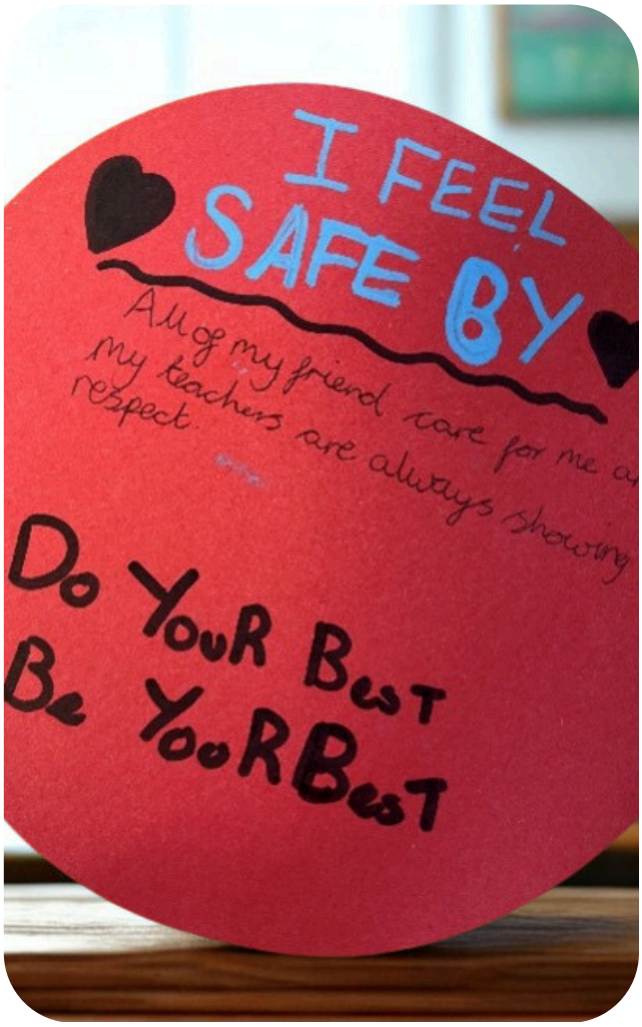
- Being welcomed warmly
- Being noticed when they are there
- Being missed when they are not
- Being given opportunities to add value — to help, contribute, and shine



Children and young people in Lancashire identified ways in which they can feel safe in education:

- It's important that all children feel they have someone they can talk to when they're feeling unsafe
- Digital leaders in school (pupils) could be used to share messages about online safety and the latest advice for children and parents - Kaitlin
- No shouting in schools, it makes us feel unsafe - Jaiden
- Our anti-bullying ambassadors work really well, and pupils can come to us if they need help - Elsie
- Not having mobile phones in school has really helped, 'I feel like I can breathe without my phone' - Libby
- Listen to all pupils when they are trying to tell their side of the story
- Treat us like people - Isabelle
- It would be good to have a safe space we can go when we're overwhelmed
- Be kind, when it feels very strict it can feel hostile which leads us to feeling unsafe
- Make it a fresh start every day or even every lesson if necessary - Summer

## Trafford Belonging Impact Story*




### Relationships Matter

Good attendance is built on strong, respectful relationships. That means getting the right balance between:

- Clear boundaries (what is expected) and
- Warm connection (showing care and compassion)

It is important for everybody to avoid anything that feels like blame, shaming, or humiliation — these break trust and make attendance harder, not easier. Traditional, punitive, compliance-led approaches (letters, fines, sanctions) do not create sustained improvement.
A child or young person should always have at least one trusted adult in their education setting who they can talk to when things feel stressful or overwhelming.

## Working With Families, Not Doing Things To Them

Family members and friends describe:

- exhausting daily routines
- mistrust and communication breakdowns
- the emotional cost of advocating
- employment impacts
- the need for partnership, not penalisation



Partnership means:

- Contact before absence escalates (belonging calls, not warning letters)
- Listening first
- Understanding the whole picture
- Agreeing the plan together
- Respecting each family's strengths

Support should never feel like something being "done to" families. It should feel like something we build with them, step by step.

## Stay Positive and Celebrate Every Win

Small steps matter. Whether it's arriving earlier, managing one more lesson, or speaking to a trusted adult — we celebrate each step forward. Positivity builds confidence. Rewarding 100% attendance is problematic and penalises pupils with health conditions. Education settings should recognise effort, resilience and improvement, not perfection.

## Follow Up Every Time

Care and compassion is evident through consistency. If a child or young person is absent, worried, or struggling, we always follow up. Every missed day or wobble is an opportunity to check in, and not to judge.

## Make Attendance Part of Everyday Conversation

It should feel normal to talk about attendance — not scary or overwhelming. Explaining things clearly and simply, including the reasoning behind decisions, helps families understand why something is happening, not just what is happening.

An appropriate tone is:

- Firm and factual, when needed
- But always with empathy, warmth, and support

## Culture Lives in the Classroom, Too

Every moment shapes how safe and connected children and young people feel. A warm welcome at the gate can be undone by one harsh phrase in a lesson.

Children need consistent kindness:

- In the corridors
- In the classroom
- In conversations
- In every interaction with every child, young person, and adult




**"I felt listened to when my school asked what was making it hard to come in."**

- Year 9 pupil

## Learning How to Professionally Disagree

It is normal for adults to sometimes disagree.
What matters is:

- Disagreeing respectfully
- Understanding each other's roles
- Keeping the child or young person at the centre

Often, disagreements reduce when everyone is clear about their responsibilities and communicates openly and transparently.

## In Summary

Creating the right culture means:

- Children and young people feel they belong
- Families feel respected
- Staff feel confident
- Everyone works with each other, not against each other

When the culture is right, attendance improves — not through pressure, but through connection, consistency, and care.

## Attendance Culture Principles Poster for Agencies to Display*

## Creating the Conditions for Belonging Resource*

# Attendance Systems & Processes

Education settings have a range of systems in place to help every child and young person attend regularly and feel supported. These may include:

- Clear and consistent attendance expectations, with flexibility when needed
- Simple tools such as a one-page attendance policy, daily attendance procedures and timings, attendance calendars, and flowcharts
- Careful monitoring of attendance patterns, including rarely used codes
- Appointment of an Attendance Champion to coordinate support
- Strong, positive communication with families, including active listening and acknowledgement of worries
- ·Regular updates and supportive conversations about attendance
- Ongoing review of rewards and sanctions to ensure they are fair and motivating
- Home or welfare visits to offer support where needed
- A banded approach so support matches the level of need
- Early intervention and prevention work to tackle issues before they grow
- Deep dive reviews when persistent barriers to attendance are identified
- Clear escalation routes where concerns continue



## Deep Dive Resource*

## Banded Approach Resource*

# Making Sure Support Leads to Real Change

## Types of Change

When a child is struggling with education attendance, there are usually many things happening at once—feelings, routines, worries, friendships, academic pressures, and family stress.

There isn't a "quick fix," but understanding the **two different types of change** can help families and education settings work together in a way that really makes a difference.

We often talk about **first order change** and **second order change**.
Here's what they mean in simple, everyday language.

## First Order Change: Small Fixes to Daily Routines

**What it means**

First order change is about making small adjustments to the behaviours we can see. These are the things we try first because they are quick and practical. They don't change the deeper reasons behind attendance difficulties, but they can sometimes help things feel a bit easier in the short term.

**Example for attendance**

Your child gets a sticker chart or reward for getting into school, or the school sends more reminder texts in the morning.
This might help for a little while—but if your child is anxious, overwhelmed, or struggling socially, the attendance problem may return.

**First order changes = helpful short term tweaks.**

# Second Order Change: Changing What's Behind the Difficulty

**What it means**

Second order change goes deeper. It looks at the reasons behind non-attendance and helps everyone do things differently so the pattern changes for good. This might involve changing routines, expectations, or the way we understand what a child or young person is going through. Second order change takes more time, but it usually leads to longer-lasting, more meaningful improvement.

**Example for attendance**

Instead of seeing your child's absence as "refusal," the family and school work together to understand what is really going on—maybe anxiety, sensory overload, or fear of a certain lesson. School refusal is often not refusal, but protective behaviour rooted in distress.

Together, you create a new plan:

- a calmer morning routine
- a gentler school start
- meeting a trusted adult at the gate
- adjustments to lessons that feel overwhelming
- school and home communicating in a more supportive way

This changes the whole pattern, not just the surface behaviour.

**Second order changes = understanding the root causes and working differently together.**

## What type of change is better?

Both can help, but they do different things.

- **First order changes** can make mornings a bit easier but often don't last.
- **Second order changes t**ake longer but address the real reasons behind attendance difficulties and lead to more stable, confident education routines.

## First & Second Order Change - Short Script for Professionals*

## Kotter's 8 Steps of Change *

# Reviewing Cycles

When a child or young person is struggling with attendance, it's really important that education settings and other services don't just put support in place and hope for the best. We need to **check in regularly** to make sure the support is actually making things better. This is why we use something called the **Assess–Plan–Do–Review** cycle. It is simply a way of making sure everyone is on the same page and that progress is being made.

## How the Cycle Works (in simple steps)

1

### ASSESS – Understanding what is going on

This is about listening.

- How is the child or young person feeling?
- What are family members and friends seeing at home?
- What is the education setting noticing?
- What might be worrying the child or young person?

There is **no blame**. It's just about understanding the situation properly.

2

### PLAN – Agreeing the next small steps

Together, we decide:

- What small change will help next?
- Who will do what?
- What can the child or young person realistically manage right now?

We focus on **short-term goals** that are achievable. For example:

- "Come in by 9:15 on two mornings this week"
- "Stay in form time for 15 minutes with a trusted adult"

Interventions work best when **co-produced** with children, young people, and their families, and small wins help build confidence, belief, and momentum.

## 3 DO – Putting the support in place

Everybody takes responsibility for carrying out the plan. This could include:

- A check-in with a safe adult
- A calmer start to the day
- Help with routines, sleep, or emotional support
- Extra help from health or social care if needed

## 4 REVIEW – Seeing what is working

After a short time, the group meet again to ask:

- Is this helping?
- What is the child or young person saying now?
- What are parents and carers seeing at home?
- Do we need to adjust anything?
- Does the support plan require anyone else to become involved?

We talk in **days or minutes of learning gained or lost,** not percentages, so it's easy to understand. Reviews aren't about judging anyone — they are about making sure the support is right for your child or young person.



## Why regular reviews matter

- They make sure support doesn't drift.
- They help us spot improvements quickly.
- They help us act fast if things aren't getting better.
- They stop families feeling stuck or alone.
- They keep everyone working together, not separately.

## EEF Implementation Guide for Professionals*

# Putting Support into Action

Once a plan for helping a child or young person with their attendance is created,
we need to make sure it is put into practice **properly and consistently.** This section explains how we do that in a simple and family friendly way.

## Use What We Already Have

We don't always need new forms or new systems. Often, we can adapt things we already do in education or other services. This keeps things simple for everyone and avoids extra work.

## Prepare Staff Before Anything Changes

Before education settings or other services try something new, staff need the right training. This means:

- Understanding the data and context behind attendance in their area
- Knowing what good attendance looks like
- Knowing what support is available other than an EHCP
- Making sure care home staff are trained too, so children get consistent support wherever they live

When staff feel confident, children and families get better help.

## Explain the Value of the Change

People are more likely to support something when they understand **why it matters.** If we show how a change will help children and young people, reduce stress for families, or make education settings feel safer, staff and partners are more willing to get involved.

## Offer Support at Different Levels

We use:

- **Universal support** – the help every child and family should get (warm welcomes, clear routines, good communication)
- **Enhanced support** – extra help for the children who need more (safe spaces, trusted adults, tailored plans)

This means every child gets the **right level of support.**

## How We Do Things Matters

It's not just what we do, but **how we do it.** Kindness, consistency, patience, and clear communication make a bigger difference than any written plan. Children notice how adults make them feel.

## Keep Checking Things Are Happening

Good plans only work if everyone follows through.

It is crucial to keep checking:

- Are the steps being done?
- Is the child or young person getting the support that was promised?
- Does the plan need to change?

This helps families feel supported and prevents problems from building up.

# Attendance & Reward Systems

**Principles of rewarding attendance:**

- **Celebrate and reward both high and improved attendance** - recognising improvement is essential so pupils with additional needs are not disadvantaged by reward criteria. Rewarding improvement is inclusive and avoids discouraging pupils who may never reach 100% but are making significant progress.
- **Rewards should be low-cost, frequent, and meaningful** - small, authentic rewards reinforce belonging and effort.
- **Use rewards to reinforce a sense of belonging and school culture** - pupils should feel happy, safe, and recognised, and that positive conduct should be acknowledged first. Positive daily interactions, praise, and staff visibility form part of the "reward environment", not just formal incentives.
- **Embed rewards inside wider behaviour and pastoral systems** - rewards are not stand-alone strategies; they sit inside a whole-school system of routines and expectations.
- **Reward systems should support attendance during known risk periods (especially transition)** - celebrate attendance improvements in the first term with small recognition events (postcards, certificates). Early, visible recognition helps build a sense of belonging for new pupils.
- **Use competitive elements carefully (e.g., form competitions)** - Competition works when it encourages team spirit. Avoid competition that shames low-attending individuals.
- **Positive communication itself is a reward** - schools should send positive messages home about attendance improvements, recognising family effort as well as pupil behaviour. Communication tone should be supportive and celebratory. This builds trust and reinforces desirable behaviour.
- **Rewards should align with inclusive communication and SEND sensitive practice** - personalising rewards helps ensure equity (e.g., personalised letters, tailored praise).
- **Consistency matters more than extravagance** - rewards are part of the fabric of the school, not occasional add-ons. Key elements include daily consistency, regular reporting and visibility of attendance improvements. and clear reward routines embedded in the school calendar.
- **Rewards work best when coupled with strong relationships** - positive relationships and regular praise from tutors, heads of year, and senior leaders build motivation to attend. Pupils respond to recognition from trusted adults more than material incentives.

# A Graduated Approach to Attendance

Sometimes children and young people need different levels of support to help them attend their education setting and feel settled. A **graduated approach** simply means we start with the **smallest, simplest support first**, and only add more help if it is needed. It is a step-by-step way of working that makes sure a child or young person gets the **right support at the right time,** without becoming overwhelmed.

The process begins by noticing early signs of worry and offering light-touch help. If things don't improve, it may be necessary to move to the next step, working closely with children, young people, and their families to understand what is making education attendance challenging. As the support builds, more people may become involved — such as health services, social care, or community teams — but extra help is only introduced when it is truly needed.



A graduated approach is:

- **Flexible** – support increases or decreases depending on the level of progress a child or young person makes
- **Personalised** – based on individual needs, not a "one size fits all" model
- **Supportive**, **not punitive –** a focus on understanding, and not blaming
- **Done with you, not to you** – families are partners at every stage

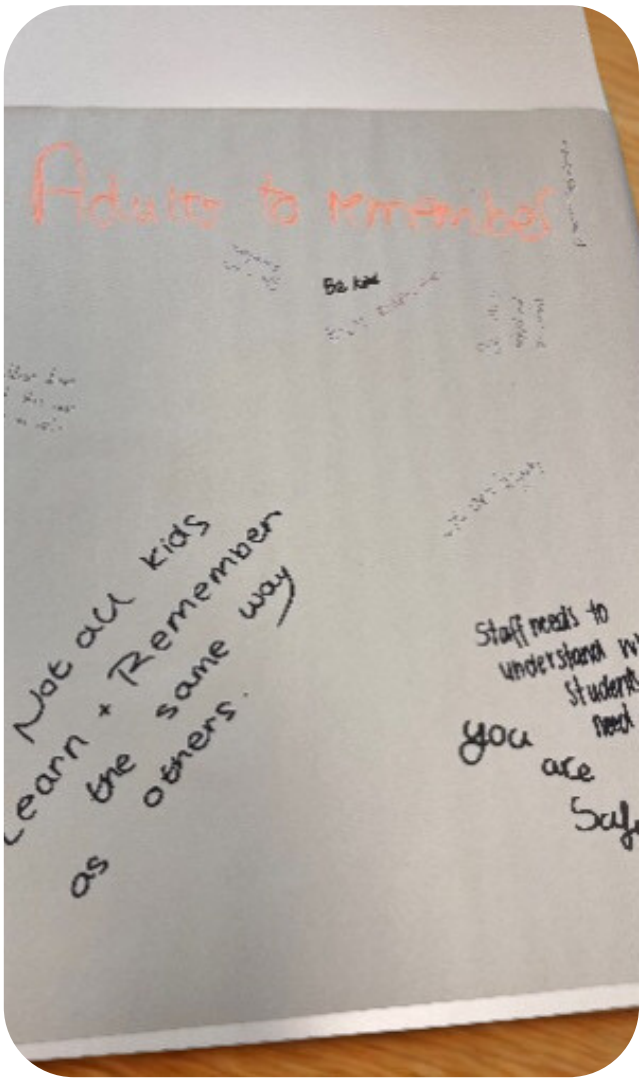
## Graduated Approach Model Training Slides*

## Attendance Support One Page Summary*

# Tier 1: Universal & Education Facing Support

## Support 1.1: Children & Young People

### 1.1.1 What Education Settings Have in Place




**Clear Attendance Routines**

- Easy-to-read attendance guide shared when you join the education setting.
- Simple timetable and “what happens if I’m late/absent”.
- Daily attendance calendar in your tutor room.
- Easy ways to catch up on missed work
- Quick rewards for small wins (e.g., improved mornings, fewer lates).

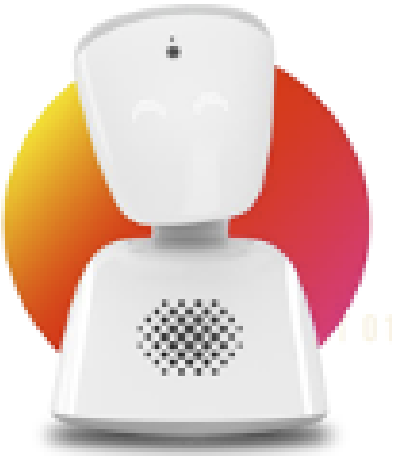
**Support in Lessons**

- Extra help when needed (scaffolding, visuals, pre-teaching, chunked tasks).
- Ways to make learning easier to access.
- Calm, predictable routines.
- Help with concentration, memory or social communication.

**Wellbeing and emotional support**

- Safe, supportive staff trained in trauma-informed approaches.
- Sensory breaks or quiet spaces if needed.
- Help with emotions, worries, and self-regulation.
- Mentors, role models, and careers guidance to build future goals.

**Extra support if you miss time in education**



- Same day follow ups from the education setting.
- A simple plan to help you catch up so you don't feel behind.
- Technology like VR/AV1 for long term medical absences.

An **AV1 robot** is a small, friendly telepresence device that allows children who can't attend an education setting — due to illness, anxiety, or other challenges — to join lessons from home and stay connected with their peers. It lets them see, hear, and take part in education life remotely, helping them maintain routine and confidence, but it is important for family members to know that AV1 robots are **not currently available in all areas.**

The next three sections are designed especially for children and young people. Please share them with your child so they can explore the ideas, reflect on their experiences, and use the tools in a way that supports their own attendance journey.

## 1.1.2 What You Can Do To Help Yourself

**Take small steps each day:**

- Check your bag, uniform, and timetable the night before.
- Set your alarm earlier so mornings feel calmer.
- If you are struggling to get in, tell someone early.
- Use the education setting's system for collecting missed work so you don't feel behind.
- Try short "micro-goals", like being on time three days this week.

**Look after your wellbeing:**

- Notice when you start feeling stressed and tell someone early.
- Use break spaces or calming strategies you've been shown.
- Talk to a trusted adult about anything that's making education harder.
- Think about your future goals—small steps in attendance can help you get there.

**Sleep Hygiene Resource***

**Nutrition Resource***

**Help yourself in lessons:**

- Bring your equipment so you feel ready.
- Ask for help early—don't wait until you feel stuck.
- Use any visual aids or checklists given to you.
- Let a trusted adult know if something in class feels overwhelming.
- Break tasks into smaller parts if that helps.

## Attendance Daily Checklist*

**Keep on track even if you're off:**

- Let the education setting know how you are feeling.
- Check online work so you don't fall behind.
- Keep a simple daily routine, even if you are not in your education setting.
- Take small steps back—start with one lesson, one morning, or one goal.

**Quick wins – a daily checklist builds positive habits, is visual, and builds confidence.**



## 1.1.3 Who Can Help?

- Form Tutor
- Class Teachers
- Attendance Champion
- Head of Year
- Pastoral Lead
- SENCo
- Teaching Assistants
- Learning Mentor/ELSA
- School Counsellor
- Careers Lead

## 1.1.4 Useful Questions to Explore Together

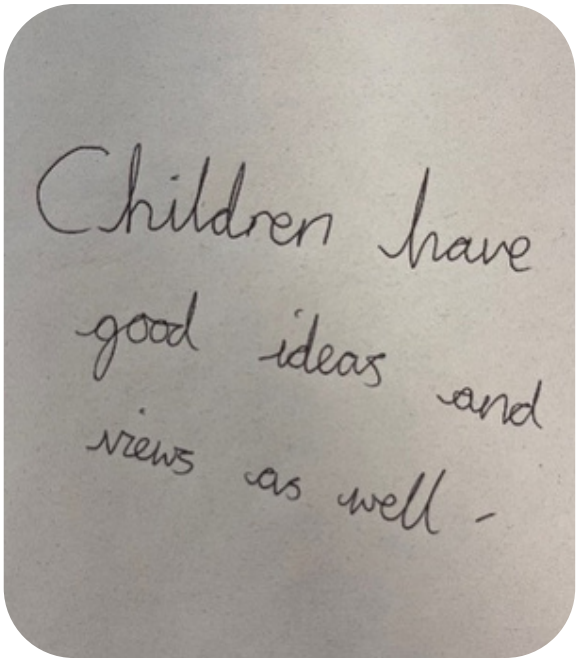
"What helps me calm down when I'm stressed?"
"When does school feel easiest and why?"
"Who do I feel safest talking to if something feels too much?"
"What is the best way for me to get my missed work?"
"What times of day feel hardest to return to?"
"How was my sleep last night, and what could help tonight?"

# Support 1.2: Family Members & Friends

## 1.2.1 Practical Support at Home

**Keep routines simple and steady:**

- Let the education setting know early if a child or young person is struggling or worried.
- Use a consistent morning routine—same wake-up time, same pattern each day.
- Keep a visible family calendar showing school days and breaks.
- Try to book appointments outside school hours where possible.
- Help your child catch up quickly after any absence so they don't feel behind.
- Talk positively about education, even if it feels difficult.




**Build confidence and reduce stress:**

- Let your child talk openly about worries —stay calm and listen.
- Use simple emotion tools (e.g., colour charts, feeling scales).
- Help them set up a regular bedtime and limit screens before sleep.
- Talk through the journey to their education setting—who they walk with, bus times, plan B backup options.
- Celebrate small steps, not just big wins.
- Join local parent groups or online communities for support—you're not alone.
- Reach out for help early if home pressures are making attendance harder.

**Clear and regular communication:**

Clear and regular communication between education, children and young people, families, and other supporting services is essential when working together to improve attendance. Talking openly from the earliest stage—even when the conversation feels difficult—helps everyone understand what's going on and prevents small worries from becoming much bigger problems later on. Using a tried and tested meeting or conversation structure also makes a big difference: it keeps discussions calm, focused, and fair, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and that decisions are made together.

## PSTB Approach Resource*
## 7 Steps to Fierce Conversation*

## 1.2.2 Who Can Help?

- Attendance Officer
- Pastoral Lead
- Head of Year
- Family Support Worker
- Home–School Link Worker
- SENCo
- Education Welfare Support Officer
- Parent Groups
- Community Groups

## 1.2.3 Useful Questions to Explore Together

“Which part of the morning is the hardest?”

“What would help you get ready more calmly?”

“What is worrying you the most about going in?”

“Would a quick check-in text from me help?”

“Can we choose one small goal for this week and a reward for trying?”

“How are you feeling this morning?”

“What would make today feel easier?”

“Is there one person at school you’d like to check in with?”

“What small change would help us tomorrow morning?”

“Do you want me to help plan the journey with you?”

“What reward would motivate you this week?”

**“We needed help, not punishment. The support team made a real difference.”**

**-** Parent, NW Region

# Support 1.3: Working with Education

## 1.3.1 What Education Settings Have in Place

**Strong systems to spot problems early:**

- Education settings have clear rules on attendance and works to prevent difficulties before they become bigger problems.
- An Attendance Champion makes sure attendance stays a priority.
- Staff use simple daily flowcharts showing what happens if a child is late or absent.
- Attendance information is checked regularly, including groups who may need extra help (e.g., children with SEND, young carers, children with social workers, children who speak English as an additional language).
- Education settings carry out reviews each term to see what is working well and what could be improved.
- Education settings run themed weeks (e.g., sleep routines, anxiety support, safe travel).
- Clear steps are followed when children move from one stage of school to another, or return from alternative provision.
- Education settings share key information with each other to help new pupils settle in well.
- There is a simple system for catching up on missed work.
- Technology (like VR/AV1 robots) may be used for children who are medically unable to attend.

## 1.3.2 How Education Settings Support Children & Young People

**Flexible support where it's needed**

- Some children may start with shorter days, calmer starts, or have a safe space if mornings are difficult.
- Staff make small changes first (such as seating, routines, or classroom environment) before changing bigger things like timetables.
- Staff receive training so they understand difficulties linked to trauma, memory, speech and language, and emotional needs.
- Reward recognise children's effort, progress and punctuality—not just attendance numbers.
- Home visits may be arranged when it's helpful, usually with more than one professional.
- Education settings listen to children, young people, and their families to understand what is really happening.

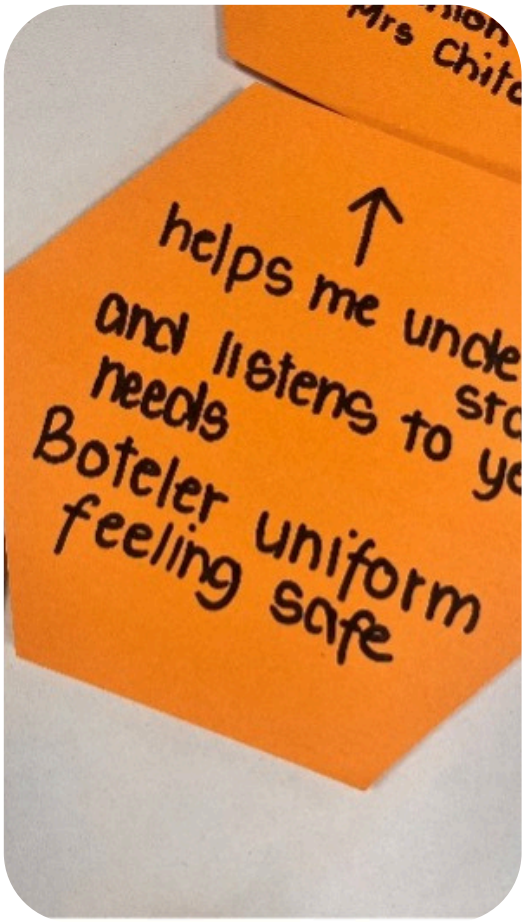
**Access to Learning:**

Sometimes children and young people find education challenging not because they don't want to attend, but because aspects of teaching and learning can feel overwhelming. When lessons move too quickly, feel too difficult, or don't match a child's learning style, it can lead to anxiety or frustration that makes attending an education setting more difficult.
Feedback from children and young people about how teaching and learning can be made more accessible and less likely to contribute to poor attendance:

- Practical, engaging lessons
- A balance between learning and fun (Haider)
- Focus on individual pupils and their needs, even if they don't have SEND
- Keep routines consistent; avoid changing rooms, sets, or teachers without preparation
- More vocational curriculum options
- Respect for both children and teachers
- Morale is key, especially around tests (Cameron)
- Ensure everyone is trained in managing stress and provide a 'cushion for them to land on' (Lorna)
- Don't assume everyone understands the work just because they're in a top set
- Engage family members more with the curriculum, the importance of each subject, and how grades/exams work
- Give children more control over their own revision to help prepare them for the future
- Spread out mock exams so they are more like the spacing of GCSEs
- Make rewards more consistent and frequent
- Use a variety of teaching methods, including quizzes and longer tests
- Shorter lessons to support attention needs and pupils with ADHD (Elsie)
- Keep more children in class; try multiple strategies before suspending or isolating someone
- Teachers are very busy, so sometimes pupils feel they can't ask questions – offer an option to send questions or ask a TA (Isabelle)
- Check that everyone is okay with their progress before moving on

## Link to Quality First Teaching Resource*

**Remember!**
**Click on blue text marked with a * to access resources for professionals.**



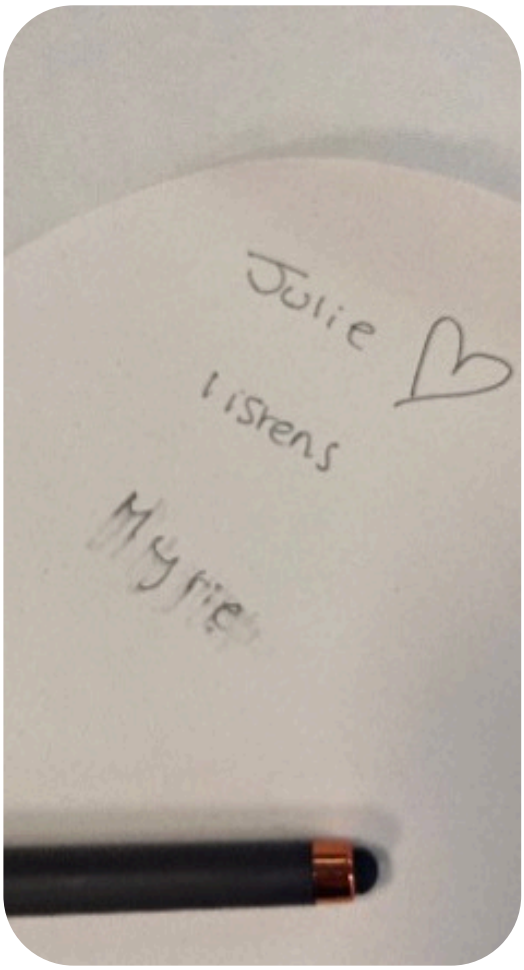

**Communication and Processing Skills:**

Working memory, verbal memory, and social communication skills all play an important role in helping children access learning and feel confident in their education setting.
Working memory helps children hold information in mind long enough to follow instructions or complete tasks, while verbal memory supports understanding, recalling, and using spoken information during lessons.

Social communication skills help children build relationships, understand social expectations, and ask for help when they need it. When any of these areas are challenging, an education setting can feel overwhelming, which can affect attendance. By understanding how these skills influence daily classroom demands, parents can better recognise when their child might need extra support.

**How family members can explore these skills at home:**

- Observe everyday moments: Notice how your child follows multi-step instructions, remembers information, or retells events.
- Talk together: Encourage conversations about their day, ask open questions, and let your child explain things in their own words.
- Play memory and communication games: Simple activities like “Simon Says,” matching games, or turn-taking conversations can highlight strengths and difficulties.
- Check in with education: Teachers can share insights about how your child listens, remembers, and communicates in the classroom.
- Seek further support if needed: If you are concerned, speak with the SENCO about whether additional assessment or interventions might help.



**Pupils with Additional Needs:**

Behaviour often reflects unmet SEND, trauma, or unrecognised learning needs. Misbehaviour is communication, not defiance.
Children and young people in Trafford identified ways in which they felt that those with SEND could be better supported:

- “Teachers didn't understand me at my last school so they need to try to get to know us and why we think differently” - Daniel
- “I am who I am today because of my teachers as they know my needs and respond to them” - Summer
- Teachers need to 'learn their problems' and understand how to help them - Haider
- It would be better if all of us (students) knew more about children with special needs so pupils can help as well as teachers and staff
- Schools need to notice children's needs early on and get them the help they need so it doesn’t escalate later
- Breakdown the work so everyone can understand it better
- Use lots of different teaching strategies to find out which one pupils respond to better - Sophie

**Social GRACES:**

When we work together to promote attendance, it helps to think about all the different parts of life that shape how a child or young person feels about education — things like family routines, health, culture, confidence, friendships, or past experiences. These are sometimes called “social graces,” and they remind us that every child, young person, and family has a unique story. By recognising what matters to a child or young person, we can understand challenges more fully and find the right support together. This approach helps us build trust, reduce misunderstandings, and create a plan that feels respectful, realistic, and truly supportive of a child or young person’s success in education.




**Social GRACES Professional’s Diagram***

**Careers & Aspirations:**

When children and young people have clear hopes and ambitions for their future, it can give them a strong reason to be in education every day. High-quality careers support helps them see the real opportunities education can open up - whether that is a job they would like to do, a pathway they are excited about, or simply a future they feel proud of. When young people can picture where they are heading, attending their education setting feels more meaningful and worthwhile. When adults at home and school support these aspirations, young people feel secure, understood, and believed in.

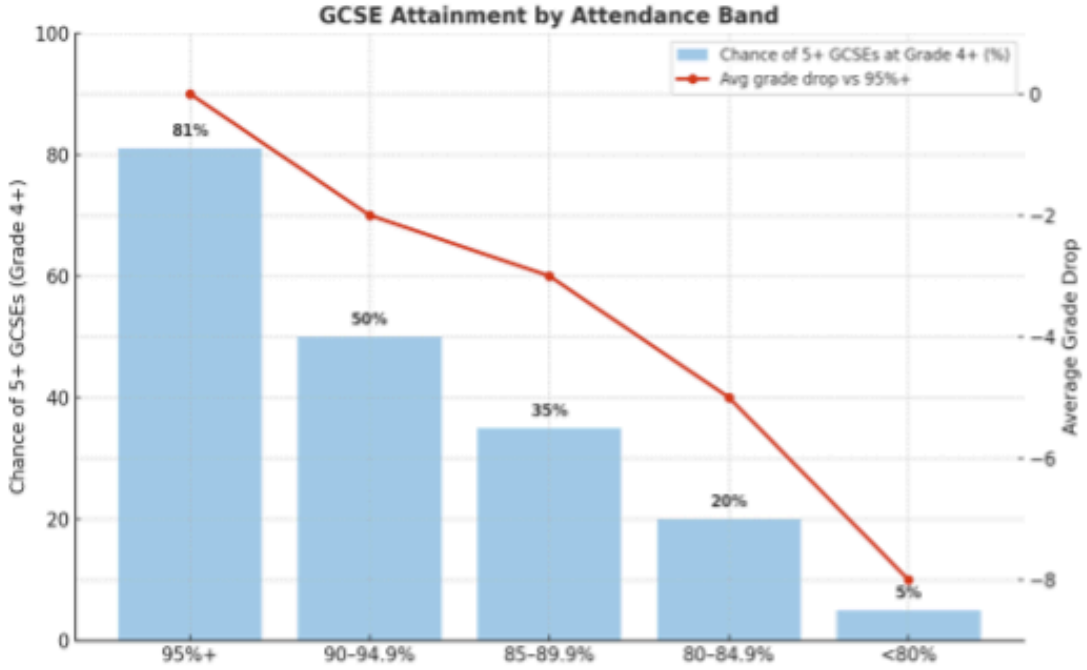
**Short Term Choices Matter**

**Each absence is small, but their impact is not.** Short term decisions around education attendance shape a child or young person's long term educational progress, wellbeing, and life chances. Research is definite: **attendance today is opportunity tomorrow:**

- **Short term absences create immediate learning gaps** - These early gaps make it harder for children to re-engage, and they begin a cycle of falling behind.
- **Learning loss accumulates over time** - Even if a child or young person only misses education now and then, those days can build up and slowly push them off track.
- **Attendance is a strong predictor of future success** – Short term choices today influence whether a child or young person stays on track tomorrow.
- **Long term impact on opportunities** - Studies show that children who miss more education often end up with fewer qualifications and may have lower earnings as adults.
- **Absence affects wellbeing, too** - Absence is connected with feeling less connected to an education setting, lower motivation, and higher chances of disengaging socially. Over the long term, it's also linked to poor health and increased challenges in adulthood.

## GCSE Attainment by Attendance Band

Attendance has a direct and powerful link to GCSE attainment. Pupils with high attendance (95%+) are far more likely to achieve strong passes, while persistent absentees see their attainment collapse. The chart below shows the relationship between attendance bands and outcomes.




**Key Findings:**

- Pupils with **95%+ attendance** have around an **81% chance** of achieving 5+ GCSEs at Grade 4 or above.
- Pupils with **90–94.9% attendance** are typically around **2 grades lower** across their subjects.
- Pupils below **80% attendance** see outcomes collapse: fewer than **5% achieve 5+ strong passes**.

**Key Message:** Each 1% drop in attendance is linked to lower attainment – approximately a quarter of a grade per subject.

Every day in education gives your child a better chance to learn, grow, and succeed, both now and in the future. Supporting consistent attendance is one of the most powerful things a parent or carer can do to help their child or young person thrive.

## Attendance and Career Aspirations Resource*

**Remember!**
**Click on blue text marked with a * to access resources for professionals.**



## 1.3.3 Who Can Help?

- Form Tutor
- Class Teachers
- SENCo
- Teaching Assistants
- Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Pastoral Leads
- Heads of Year
- Data Lead
- Examinations Officer (for part-time or medical arrangements)
- Transition Lead

## 1.3.4 Useful Questions to Explore Together

“Are our processes simple and easy to understand?”
“Where can we be flexible while still being fair and consistent?”
“What does the data tell us about the pupils who need help?”
“Have we tried simple changes before making big ones?”
“Are we listening to what children and their family members and friends tell us?

## OFSTED Attendance Briefing for Schools*

# Tier 2: Targeted Multi-Agency Support

Education settings cannot resolve the most complex cases alone.

## Support 2.1: Working with Community Groups & Services

### 2.1.1 Community Based Support for Families

**Practical help from the community:**

- Local parent groups offering help with routines, emotions, and support with mornings.
- Uniform banks for free or low cost clothing.
- Help with travel costs (bus passes/bursaries) where available.
- Support for getting online (digital access schemes).
- Mentoring from youth organisations.
- Signposting to Holiday Activities & Food (HAF) programmes.
- Social prescribing (linking families to community activities that support wellbeing).
- Joint events run with libraries, leisure centres, and other community partners.

### 2.1.2 Who Can Help?

- Family Hubs
- Community Development Workers
- Youth Workers
- Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Coordinators
- Faith or Community Leaders
- Social Prescribers
- Holiday Activities & Food (HAF) Coordinators

### 2.1.3 Useful Questions to Explore Together

“Which local group could support us this week?”
“Would it help to meet other parents going through the same thing?”
“Is transport or uniform making things harder?”
“Is there a local safe space where we could drop in for a chat?”

# Support 2.2: Working with Children's Services

## 2.2.1 Additional Support

**Clear support pathways:**

- If a child, young person, and/or family needs extra help, the education setting can refer to Early Help, which brings everyone together as a Team Around the Family (TAF).
- Staff look at the situation from different viewpoints to understand what is really going on and what might help.
- If a child or young person's needs reach certain thresholds, the education setting will involve statutory services such as social care (Child in Need, Child Protection, or Children Looked After).
- Information is shared safely and only when needed to keep children and young people safe.
- There is a clear process for supporting children and young people with social care involvement during transitions or when returning from alternative provision.

## 2.2.2 Supporting Family & Friends

**Targeted, practical support for your family**

- Help with building routines, boundaries, and morning habits.
- Attendance coaching to support positive daily habits.
- Parenting programmes to build confidence and skills.
- Help with budgeting, benefits, and practical issues like housing if these are affecting attendance.
- Home visits when needed, sometimes with more than one professional.
- Outreach support for families where absence is ongoing.
- A personalised plan with small, manageable goals and rewards to keep progress steady.

## 2.2.3 Who Can Help?

- Local Authority Attendance Team
- Early Help Advisers
- Social Workers
- Virtual School staff (for Children Looked After, and information, advice and guidance for children who have been previously in care, children who are currently or were previously supported by children's social care, and children who are cared for by a relative or someone close to the family—like a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or family friend).
- Family Group Conference Coordinators
- Education Welfare/Attendance Officers
- Youth Justice Workers (if relevant)



# Helping Children & Young People with Emotions

Neighbourhood parent groups often use approaches like Social Thinking and the Zones of Regulation to help families support children's emotional wellbeing. When children and young people feel understood, regulated, and confident, it becomes much easier for them to attend their education setting regularly and settle into learning.

## What are the Zones of Regulation?

The Zones of Regulation is a simple, visual way for children and young people to learn about their feelings, energy levels, and what helps them cope. It groups emotions into four colour-coded zones, making them easy for children to recognise and talk about.

All zones are normal, and children and young people (and adults!) move between them throughout the day. The goal isn't to avoid certain zones but to help children and young people recognise them and learn what helps them cope.

**Blue Zone:** Low energy or low mood (tired, sad, bored)

**Green Zone:** Calm, focused and ready to learn

**Yellow Zone:** Heightened emotions but still some control (worried, excited, fidgety, frustrated)

**Red Zone:** Intense feelings and big reactions (anger, fear, overwhelm)

# How the Zones of Regulation Support Education Attendance

Many attendance challenges are rooted in how children and young people feel, not in whether they "want" to attend. When children and young people learn to recognise and manage their emotions, education attendance becomes less stressful for everyone.

How these approaches directly support better attendance:

**1. Helps children manage morning worries and anxiety**

Children who can identify that they are in the Yellow Zone (worried, nervous) can use tools such as breathing exercises or sensory strategies to calm themselves before leaving for school.

**2. Builds predictable routines**

Using Zones language at home gives children and young people a familiar structure that mirrors what many education settings use. A shared approach between home and education reduces emotional tension and makes transitions smoother.

**3. Supports emotionally overwhelmed children and young people**

A child or young person who enters the Red Zone when travelling to their education setting may shut down or refuse to go. Understanding this helps family members and friends respond with calm co-regulation through modelling the calm Green Zone rather than escalation. Co-regulation is a key stage in helping children and young people learn to self-regulate.

**4. Helps children understand why they feel unable to attend**

The framework increases emotional vocabulary, allowing children and young people to say things like:

- "I'm in the Blue Zone—I'm too tired."
- "I feel Yellow—I'm worried about maths today."

This creates meaningful conversations that identify the real barriers to attendance.

**5. Encourages problem-solving and resilience**

The Zones encourage children and young people to think about what triggers their feelings and what tools help them feel better—skills that make education more manageable and reduce avoidance.

## Zones of Regulation Poster*

## The Role of Social Thinking

The Zones of Regulation builds on principles from Social Thinking, helping children and young people to understand:

- how their emotions affect their behaviour,
- how others may think or feel in situations,
- and how to navigate social situations more smoothly.

This kind of emotional and social understanding improves school participation because children and young people feel more secure with their peers and adults.

## Neighbourhood Parent Groups

Neighbourhood sessions are designed to give family members and friends practical skills they can use straight away. They typically help family members and friends:

**Learn the Zones language**
So children hear the same language at home and in education, building consistency.

**Try out regulation tools**
Such as movement breaks, sensory kits, breathing techniques, or grounding skills. These are especially helpful before leaving to travel to an education setting.



**Understand emotional triggers linked to attendance**
Like separation anxiety, fear of getting something wrong, sensory overload, or tiredness.

**Strengthen routines**
Helping mornings feel calmer, quicker, and more predictable.

**Build confidence for all**
Knowing how to support a child or young person's emotional state helps the whole family feels more prepared, and attendance improves naturally.

## 2.2.4 Useful Questions to Explore Together

"What would a good day look like at home and at school?"

"What is one small change we can try that might make the biggest difference?"

"What risks or worries grow when a child misses school?"

"How can we make sure your child doesn't have to repeat their story to lots of different people?"

# Support 2.3: Working with Healthcare Providers

## 2.3.1 Accessing Appropriate Healthcare Services

**Clear information about referrals and waiting times:**

- Children, young people, and their families will be supported in obtaining help from services like School Nursing, GPs, CAMHS/children's mental health, Paediatrics, Occupational Therapy, Speech & Language Therapy, or Sleep Clinics. They will also know how long referrals may take.
- Education settings only ask for medical evidence when it is fair and necessary.
- Staff follow guidance on how to support children and young people with medical needs in education.
- There is a clear "return to learning" plan after illness to help a child or young person settle back in gently.
- The education setting may consider technology such as VR/AV1 for children and young people who are unable to attend for long medical periods.

## Rochdale's Neighbourhood Parenting Group Impact Story*

## 2.3.2 Promoting Health to Support Attendance

**Clear information about referrals and waiting times:**

- Support to build good sleep routines.
- Step by step plans to help a child or young person return to education if they have anxiety.
- A simple "health passport" so staff understand needs (e.g. medication, symptoms, triggers).
- Care plans that help a child or young person attend as much as possible, including rest breaks or adjusted timings.
- Workshops for families about anxiety, pain, ADHD/Autism strategies, memory support and other health needs.

## Lancashire GPs impact story*

## 2.3.3 Useful Questions to Explore Together

“What health issues make mornings, travelling, or lessons harder?”

“What changes in school could help my child attend more often?”

“Would a gradual return plan help my child feel safer and more confident?”

“Is VR/AV1 or another option useful while treatment continues?”

# Tier 3: Statutory Safeguarding Partners

## Support 3.1: Working with Police

### 3.1.1 When Police Support May Be Required




**Sharing important safeguarding information**

- Education settings and other services share key information to help keep children safe — for example, notifications about domestic abuse (like Operation Encompass).
- Clear procedures are in place for children and young people who go missing from home or education.
- Staff look at wider risks outside the home, such as exploitation or unsafe situations in the community.
- Legal action related to attendance is only used as a last resort and only when necessary. Everything is recorded and explained clearly.

### 3.1.2 Keeping Children & Young People Safe

**Practical support to make education settings safer and easier to attend**

- Joint home visits when there are safety worries.
- Safety planning for the journey to and from an education setting (routes, trusted adults, transport options).
- Staff look at “hotspots” — places where children may feel unsafe, such as certain streets or bus stops.
- Early problem solving with neighbourhood police to reduce risks like harassment or anti-social behaviour on the way to an education setting.

## 3.1.3 Who Can Help?

- Safer Schools Officers
- Police Community Support Officers
- Neighbourhood Policing Team
- Missing Persons Officers
- Compass Team
- Integrated Front Door Teams (who help coordinate safeguarding)

## 3.1.4 Useful Questions to Explore Together

“Are there any safety concerns on the journey to school?”

“Are there any risks in the community (e.g., peer pressure, unsafe adults, online contact) we need to know about?”

“What could we do together to make the journey or school day feel safer?”

When education settings, families, and local services work together, children and young people get the joined up support they need to feel safe, confident, and ready to attend an education setting every day.

## Graduated Approach Summary*

## Solution Circles Resource and Examples*

# Managing Transition

**School Readiness**

School readiness is about giving your child the best possible start by helping them feel confident, prepared, and excited to learn. This includes having a routine that supports good sleep, healthy meals, and calm mornings; helping your child develop simple skills like following instructions, getting dressed, and managing their belongings; and talking positively about school so they know it's a safe and welcoming place to be. When children arrive ready to learn, they settle more easily, build stronger relationships, and are more likely to attend regularly—setting them up for success throughout their school journey.

## Oldham Impact Story on School Readiness

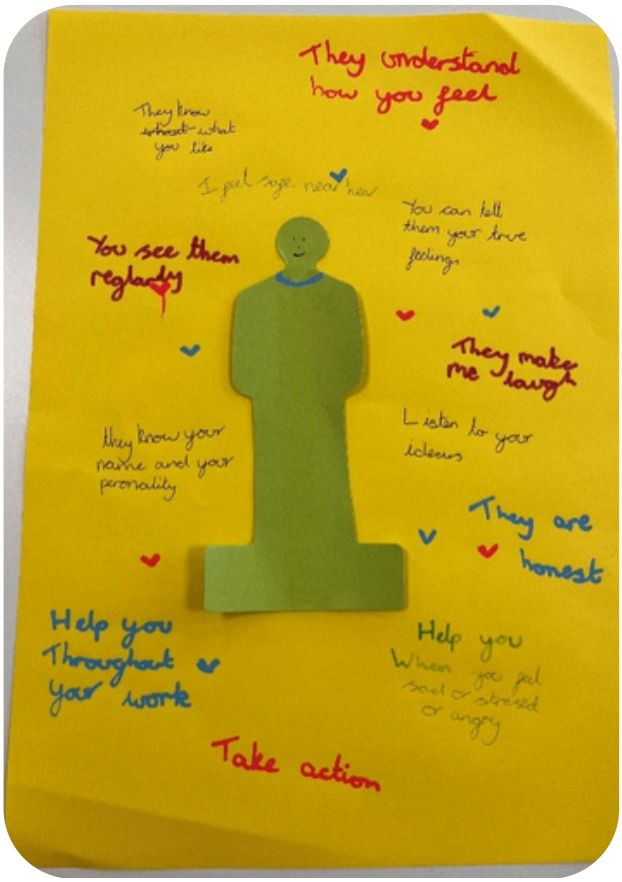
## Wirral NHS School Readiness Parent Booklet

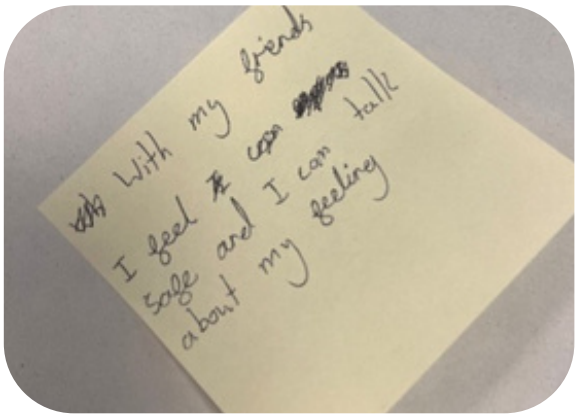
**Moving from Primary to Secondary School**

Patterns set in the first weeks of September strongly shape the rest of the academic year. Education settings should:

- Welcome pupils warmly
- Make immediate and same day contact for absences
- Begin high quality learning from day one
- Review emerging patterns within the first 2–3 weeks
- Establish trusted adults for all children and young people

Early action prevents escalation later in the year.






The following comments come directly from children and young people in Trafford, sharing their honest experiences and feelings about the move from primary to secondary school.

**Year 6 – Looking Ahead to Secondary School**

- "I can't wait to go!" – Jayden
- Many children are feeling excited about the new opportunities that secondary school will bring.
- "I have siblings who go, so I'm not worried." – Reece
- Having older brothers or sisters already at the school can really help children feel confident and prepared.
- "I'm a bit nervous about changing classes and knowing where to go or what to bring." – Lyra
- Some pupils are naturally a little unsure about the new routines, but this is completely normal. With support, most children quickly learn their way around.
- "I'm 1000% excited because I already know lots of people there!" – Sophie
- Friendships and familiar faces help many pupils feel enthusiastic about starting this next chapter.

**Year 7 – Reflecting on the First Year of Secondary School**

- Some children shared that moving to a larger school felt like a big change at first, especially with busy corridors and lots of new faces.
- Lunchtimes and moving between classes were described as a bit "fast-paced," but pupils said it gets easier as they get used to the routine.
- "It's heart-racing to go from one class to another." – Ayara
- Many pupils said the quick transitions were new, but they soon learned how to manage them.
- Some mentioned that remembering all the rules and equipment every day can be challenging at first, though this improves with practice and support.
- A few pupils shared that some rules or detentions felt strict, and that they would like chances to put things right when mistakes happen.
- "Primary made it seem scary, but it wasn't so bad."
- Several Year 7s said the reality of secondary school was much more manageable than they expected.
- "You should have more chances to make it right, otherwise you're worried all the time." – Seren
- Pupils value encouragement, reassurance, and opportunities to learn from mistakes.



Children and young people also felt that the transition from primary to secondary school could be supported by the following actions:

- More homework at Primary school to help us with the transition (or less at high school!)
- It would be helpful to practice carrying the right books/equipment while at primary school
- Lots more taster days with actual lessons maybe in lower year groups, a taster week would be even better
- Summer schools are really helpful
- Transition ambassadors/peer buddies from other year groups really helped
- If high school students came back to their primaries to tell us what it's like
- If high school staff could visit so we've made a relationships with a teacher before we start
- My school was 'so nice, so caring, so amazing' on transition that all schools should be like this, Matthew
- Part time timetables for some students and then build up might really help

## GM Transition Charter*

## Impact Story on Transition Funding*

**Yearly Transitions**

The transition from Year 7 to Year 8 is an important step, as children move from settling into secondary school to building confidence, independence, and consistent routines. Over this year, children begin to understand expectations more clearly, form stronger friendships, and develop habits that support good attendance and learning. Family members and friends can help by keeping communication open, encouraging positive routines at home, and noticing early signs of worry or disengagement. A smooth transition sets the foundation for good attendance, stronger progress, and a more enjoyable education experience in the years ahead.



"My family makes sure I have a good morning at home by supporting and caring for me, and then I know I will have a good day at school"

**Returning to Mainstream Education**

The transition from an alternative provision back to a mainstream setting can be a positive step, offering children and young people the chance to build on the progress they have made in a new environment. This move works best when home and education work closely together to create a gradual, well-planned return that supports confidence, wellbeing, and learning. Parents can help by maintaining open communication with staff, keeping routines steady at home, and celebrating small successes along the way. With the right support and clear expectations, children and young people can settle back into a mainstream setting, rebuild connections, and establish strong attendance habits that help them thrive.



## TCAT Impact Story on AP*

Secondary offer – be clear for each school to aid primary preparation work.

# Common Misconceptions About Attendance

Many parents and carers work hard to make the best decisions for their children. However, research shows there are a few widespread misunderstandings about attendance that can unintentionally affect a child or young person's learning, wellbeing, and long term confidence in education providers.

This section aims to gently clarify these misconceptions and offer supportive, practical steps for families.



## “Attendance problems don’t apply to us.”

**The misconception:**

Many parents feel confident in the decisions they make about their child’s attendance. They often assume that attendance messages are aimed at other families—those dealing with significant refusal or who appear disengaged from their child’s education.

**Why this isn’t true:**

Even small, regular absences can have a meaningful impact on a child or young person’s progress, social confidence, and long term outcomes. National data shows that children and young people who miss more than 9.5 days of education per year begin to show lower achievement and weaker connections to education settings. Good attendance matters for every child and young person, even when absences seem minor or justified.

**What can help:**

- Compare your child’s attendance to the threshold where it begins to affect learning (9.5 or more days of absence each year).
- Ask education staff what patterns they see; sometimes a quick conversation can highlight small issues before they become big ones.
- Think about attendance not as a judgement but as part of supporting your child or young person’s opportunities.

## “Some absences don’t really count.”

**The misconception:**

Parents’ views on what is “acceptable” time off have become more fixed—especially with illness, minor ailments, and term-time holidays. Many feel confident their decisions are reasonable and fully justified.

**Why this isn’t true:**

While some absences are unavoidable, frequent short illnesses, extended recovery days, and term-time breaks can add up quickly. Even when well intentioned, these can interrupt routines, cause learning gaps, and make it harder for children to settle socially after returning.

**What can help:**

- If you are unsure whether your child or young person is well enough to attend their educational setting, contact the setting for advice as they handle these situations daily.
- Plan holidays and appointments outside of education time wherever possible.
- Keep an eye on how quickly occasional absences accumulate, as five days here and there easily become weeks across a year.

# “Schools and the Government are being unfair or lecturing us.”

**The misconception:**

Some parents feel that attendance messages sound punitive or patronising. They may view education’s efforts as criticism rather than support, even when trying to do what they feel is best for their child or young person.

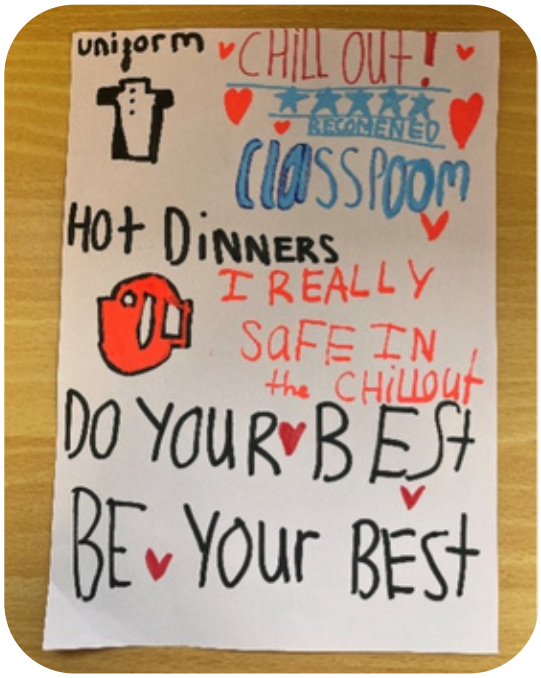
**Why this isn’t true:**

Education settings are required to monitor attendance because they see, every day, how strongly it affects children and young people’s learning and wellbeing. Most attendance conversations come from concern, and not judgement. The intention is to work in partnership with parents and carers, not to penalise them.

**What can help:**

- Approach attendance discussions as a shared problem-solving conversation.
- Ask education staff to explain how they can support your child or young person, not just what the rules are.
- Share any worries or family pressures openly, as education settings can help more effectively when they understand the full picture.

# “Missing school won’t affect my child’s social life—home is where they feel safest.”




**The misconception:**

Many parents’ biggest worry is their child or young person’s social experience in education settings; friendships, belonging, and emotional safety. This can sometimes make adults more comfortable with letting their child or young person stay at home if they seem unhappy, anxious, or “not quite themselves.”



**Why this isn’t true:**

Being in an education setting regularly is one of the strongest ways children and young people build friendships, feel part of a community, and grow in confidence. Each missed day makes it that bit harder for them to reconnect socially when they return. Staying home may relieve stress in the moment but can unintentionally make social worries worse over time.

**What can help:**

- If your child is anxious or struggling socially, contact their education setting early—they can provide pastoral support, friendship groups, safe spaces, or wellbeing routines.
- Frame the education setting as a place that supports belonging and feeling valued; attending helps them feel included, valued, and connected.
- Celebrate small successes—getting through a tough day gradually builds resilience.

Good attendance isn’t about perfection. It is about giving children and young people the best possible chance to learn, grow, and feel part of school life. Small adjustments and early conversations with education staff can make a big difference.

# Useful Resources

## For Supporters & Champions of Children & Young People

- Child of the North: An evidence-based plan for improving school attendance
- DfE: Attendance toolkit for local authorities
- DfE: Attendance Hubs
- DfE: Guidance for parents on school attendance
- DfE: Working together to improve school attendance
- EEF: Communicating effective with parents
- EEF: Supporting School Attendance
- Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities
- National Attendance Strategy (Opportunity Mission)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026)

**Remember!**
**Click on blue text marked with a * to access resources for professionals.**



# References


- 7 Steps to a Fierce Conversation (Susan Scott, 2017)
- EEF resources
- Kotter's 8 steps of change

# Contributors

We would like to acknowledge the many individuals who generously shared their expertise, insights, and time in shaping this toolkit. Their contributions have ensured that the guidance reflects real experience, practical solutions, and a shared commitment to improving school attendance.

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This toolkit has been enriched by the voices of children and young people from the following schools. Their contributions have ensured that the guidance reflects what matters most to those at the heart of school attendance.

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North West

# Safeguarding Partnership

Department for Education

North West Regional Improvement Plan Pilot

North West ADCS Leading Children's Services