

## Letter from the Department for Education to Square Peg & Not Fine in School (October 2019)



Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

tel: 0870 000 2288  
[www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

Fran Morgan and Beth Bodycote  
c/o Square Peg

BY EMAIL ONLY

Our reference: 2019/0031144

29 October 2019

Dear Ms Morgan and Ms Bodycote,

Thank you for your letter of 27 August addressed to Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards, about school attendance and absence codes. Your letter has been passed to the team responsible for the Government's policy on school attendance to respond. We should be clear that this response relates to schools and local authorities in England only.

Good mental health is a priority for the Government. The department has committed to support schools and colleges to promote good mental wellbeing in children, provide a supportive environment for those experiencing problems, and secure access to more specialist help for those who need it. To enable this, we confirmed our commitment to take forward our ambitious, transformational proposals to provide earlier support for children and young people's mental health in the Government response to the department's consultation [‘transforming children and young people's mental health provision’](#).

The NHS Long Term Plan, published on 7 January 2019, announced that by 2023/24 an extra 345,000 children and young people aged 0-25 will receive mental health support via NHS-funded mental health services and school or college-based Mental Health Support Teams. Under the Long Term Plan, mental health services will continue to receive a growing share of the NHS budget, with funding to grow by at least £2.3bn a year by 2023/24. For the first time, funding for children and young people's mental health services will grow faster than both overall NHS funding and total mental health spending.

It may also be helpful if I explain that every school has to have arrangements to protect its pupils from harm and provide support for pupils with health issues – mental as well as physical. When a school identifies an emerging issue, including mental health issues which require additional support, they should not delay putting it in place. They should follow the graduated approach process set out in the [department's statutory guidance on special educational needs and disability code of practice](#). The guidance is clear that support should be provided from an early stage, whether or not the child has a specific diagnosis.

The graduated approach, is a four-part cycle through which earlier decisions and actions are revisited, refined and revised with a growing understanding of the pupil's needs, what supports the pupil in making good progress and what they need to secure good outcomes. The four part-cycle is as follows:

- Assess: teachers, with the SENCO, assess the child's progress and identify needs regularly;
- Plan: put in place adjustments, interventions and support in consultation with the parent and pupil, regularly reviewing progress;
- Do: coordinated and continuous response from the teacher working with the SENCO, teaching assistants and other staff to problem solve and identifying what is effective; and,
- Review: on agreed dates assess the impact of the support against progress, agree changes and inform the parents.

A child in school who has this support would be regarded as receiving special educational needs (SEN) support. Where a pupil is receiving SEN support, schools must talk to parents regularly to agree clear outcomes and review progress towards them, discuss the activities and support that will help achieve them, and identify the responsibilities of the parent, the pupil and the school. Schools should meet parents at least three times each year.

A school should always involve a specialist where a pupil continues to make little or no progress or where they continue to work at levels substantially below those expected of pupils of a similar age despite evidence-based SEN support delivered by appropriately trained staff. Specialists might include, but are not limited to, Educational Psychologists, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), specialist teachers or support services and therapists (including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists).

For some children it will be appropriate for a request to be made to the local authority for an Education, Health and Care needs assessment. This request can be made by the school or the parent. If the local authority agrees that an assessment is necessary this can lead to the creation of an Education, Health and Care Plan which sets out the support needed to enable the child to achieve their best possible outcomes.

The special educational needs and disabilities code of practice intentionally does not require a diagnosis for a child to access the support they need. The process is based on a child's need.

We are sorry to hear that you feel the current policy on school attendance and the national codes for recording absence in school attendance registers are causing problems for children with difficulties that you believe affect their attendance at school.

I am afraid that we do not accept the argument that introducing an additional absence code is necessary. It may be helpful to explain that keeping and

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maintaining the school attendance register is governed by the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 as amended. The regulations are clear that where a pupil is unable to attend school by reason of sickness, their absence must be treated as authorised. The regulations also set out that where the reason for a pupil's absence cannot be established at the time when the register is taken, the absence must be recorded as unauthorised and that if the absence is subsequently established to be authorised, the register must be updated as soon as possible.

The use of the absence and attendance codes are not mandatory but they enable schools to record and monitor absence in a consistent way. They are also used for collecting statistics through the school census system. The absence and attendance codes are detailed in the [department's guidance on school attendance](#).

Schools are advised to use code I to record illness and guidance is clear that schools should authorise absence due to illness (both physical and mental health related) unless they have genuine cause for concern about the veracity of an illness. If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, school can request parents to provide medical evidence to support the absence. Schools are advised not to request medical evidence unnecessarily; we would not expect schools to request medical evidence unless there is a clear case to do so. This means that schools must authorise the absence unless they have reason to doubt that a pupil cannot attend school by reason of sickness.

Schools are advised to use code N to record absence where the reason for absence has not yet been provided. Schools should make every effort to establish the reason for a pupil's absence and when the reason has been established the register should be amended. This means that if schools cannot establish the reason for absence at the time the register is taken, they must record it as unauthorised. Code N is in effect a holding code while the reason for absence is being established. Guidance is clear that code N should not be left on a pupil's attendance record indefinitely. Schools are advised that if no reason for absence is provided after a reasonable amount of time code N should be replaced with code O which means the pupil is absent from school without authorisation. We expect schools to consider the individual case when determining what a reasonable amount of time is.

With regard to monitoring attendance, the regulations require schools to notify their local authority, at agreed regular intervals, the details of any pupil of compulsory school age who has failed to attend the school regularly, or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of ten school days or more. Schools and local authorities should consider the individual circumstances of each case and take the appropriate course of action to ensure the child receives consistent education.

With regard to parents being penalised for their child's absence, as you are aware, if parents register their child at school and the child fails to attend regularly, parents may be guilty of an offence under section 444 of the Education Act 1996 and may be issued a penalty notice or prosecuted. A

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parent cannot be penalised if a statutory exception applies. These exceptions are: where the school has given permission; where the pupil is prevented from attending by sickness or other unavoidable problems; where their family is marking a day reserved exclusively for religious observance; or where the local authority has failed to fulfil any duty it has to help them get to school.

It is for schools or the local authorities to decide if they wish to use a penalty notice as a sanction. Penalty notices are governed by the Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 as amended. The regulations require every local authority, in consultation with their schools and the police, to draw up a code of conduct for issuing penalty notices. The code will set out the occasions when it will be appropriate to issue a penalty notice. A penalty notice must be issued in accordance with that code.

It is for local authorities to decide whether to prosecute a parent having taken account of all the circumstances of the case and the information submitted by the school. Local authority officers are best placed to assess the family's circumstances and decide upon the most appropriate course of action.

We would encourage parents to work with their child's school and their local authority, to discuss the reasons behind their child's absence and agree an action plan so that the right support can be put in place to help their child to return to regular and consistent education, whether at school or otherwise.

Local authorities are responsible for arranging suitable education for children of compulsory school age who, because of health reasons, would otherwise not receive suitable education. This applies whether or not the child is registered at a school and whatever type of school they attend. The education must be full-time or as close to full-time as the child's health allows. The [department's statutory guidance on ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs](#) sets out that local authorities should provide education as soon as it is clear that the child will be away from school for fifteen days or more, whether consecutive or cumulative. Local authorities should have a named officer responsible for the education of children with additional health needs.

We hope you find this information helpful and that it has gone some way to reassure you that the department currently provides guidance for schools and local authorities to ensure that pupils who cannot attend school because of health needs continue to receive education and that SEN and health issues, including mental health, are supported.

Yours sincerely,

School Attendance Policy Team  
Behaviour, Attendance, Exclusion and Alternative Provision Division

## Summary of points made:

### PARITY of ESTEEM for MENTAL & PHYSICAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

- Good mental health is a priority for the Government and the Government is supporting schools and colleges to promote good mental wellbeing and provide a supportive environment for those experiencing problems.
- The government expects schools and colleges to support those experiencing problems with their mental health by securing access to more specialist help.
- Every school has to have arrangements to protect its pupils from harm and provide support for pupils with health issues – **mental as well as physical**.

Transforming children and young people's mental health provision (green paper):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-paper>

### MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS as a SEND (Special Educational Need or Disability)

- When a school identifies an emerging issue, **including mental health issues** which require additional support, they should not delay putting it in place.
- The school should follow the graduated approach process set out in the department's statutory guidance on special educational needs and disability code of practice.
- The guidance is clear that **support should be provided from an early stage**, whether or not the child has a specific diagnosis.
- A child in school who has this support would be regarded as receiving special educational needs (SEN) support.
- **A school should always involve a specialist where a pupil continues to make little or no progress or** where they continue to work at levels substantially below those expected of pupils of a similar age despite evidence-based SEN support delivered by appropriately trained staff.
- For some children it will be appropriate for a request to be made to the local authority for an **Education, Health and Care needs assessment**. This request can be made by the school or the parent.
- The special educational needs and disabilities code of practice intentionally **does not require a diagnosis** for a child to access the support they need. The process is based on a child's need.

SEND Code of Practice:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/398815/SEND\\_Code\\_of\\_Practice\\_January\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf)

Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3>

## ABSENCE for ILLNESS RELATED to MENTAL HEALTH

- The regulations are clear that where a pupil is unable to attend school by reason of sickness, their absence must be treated as authorised.
- Schools are advised to use code I to record illness and guidance is clear that schools should authorise absence due to illness (**both physical and mental health related**) unless they have genuine cause for concern about the veracity of an illness.
- If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, school can request parents to provide medical evidence to support the absence. **Schools are advised not to request medical evidence unnecessarily**; we would not expect schools to request medical evidence unless there is a clear case to do so. This means that **schools must authorise the absence unless they have reason to doubt that a pupil cannot attend school by reason of sickness**.
- Schools are advised to use code N to record absence where the reason for absence has not yet been provided.
- Guidance is clear that code N should not be left on a pupil's attendance record indefinitely.
- With regard to monitoring attendance, the regulations require schools to notify their local authority, at agreed regular intervals, the details of any pupil of compulsory school age who has failed to attend the school regularly, or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of ten school days or more.
- Schools and local authorities should consider the individual circumstances of each case and take the appropriate course of action to ensure the child receives consistent education.

School Attendance Guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>

## FINES & PROSECUTIONS

- **A parent cannot be penalised if a statutory exception applies.** These exceptions are: where the school has given permission; **where the pupil is prevented from attending by sickness or other unavoidable problems**; where their family is marking a day reserved exclusively for religious observance; or where the local authority has failed to fulfil any duty it has to help them get to school.
- It is for schools or the local authorities to decide if they wish to use a penalty notice as a sanction.
- Penalty notices are governed by the Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 as amended. The regulations require every local authority, in consultation with their schools and the police, to draw up a **code of conduct for issuing penalty notices**.
- It is for local authorities to decide whether to prosecute a parent having taken account of all the circumstances of the case and the information submitted by the school. Local authority officers are best placed to assess the family's circumstances and decide upon the most appropriate course of action.

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- We would encourage parents to work with their child's school and their local authority, to discuss the reasons behind their child's absence and agree an action plan so that the right support can be put in place to help their child to return to regular and consistent education, whether at school or otherwise.

### PROVISION for CHILDREN with MEDICAL HEALTH NEEDS who CANNOT ATTEND SCHOOL

- **Local authorities are responsible for arranging suitable education for children of compulsory school age who, because of health reasons, would otherwise not receive suitable education.** This applies whether or not the child is registered at a school and whatever type of school they attend. The education must be full-time or as close to full-time as the child's health allows.
- The department's statutory guidance on ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs sets out that **local authorities should provide education as soon as it is clear that the child will be away from school for fifteen days or more, whether consecutive or cumulative.**
- Local authorities should have a **named officer responsible for the education of children with additional health needs.**

Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-for-children-with-health-needs-who-cannot-attend-school>

Find your Local Authority education attendance policy:

<https://www.gov.uk/education-attendance-council>

**An additional letter from the DfE confirms the following points:**

- The DfE say that the current legal framework provides for sufficient “flexibility” to avoid issues such as prosecution for non-attendance, even where absences have not been authorised.
- They reiterate that the Department for Education’s Guidance on school attendance encourages a flexible approach: “Only where the authenticity of an illness is in doubt are schools advised that they can (not must) request parents to provide medical evidence, and schools are advised “not to request medical evidence unnecessarily”.
- The DfE make it clear that local authorities should be providing a “safety net” of suitable education for any child of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school, or otherwise, may not for any period receive education. A local authority must make arrangements for the suitable education of any child of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school, **or otherwise**, may not for any period receive education without such arrangements. Education Act 1996, s.19(1). Thus, the local authority can have a duty to provide alternative arrangements in situations not only where children are unable to attend by reason of illness or exclusion. This is because the phrase “*or otherwise*” “*is plainly intended to encompass other causes of non-attendance at school or non-receipt of education*”. R (DS) v Wolverhampton City Council [2017] EWHC 1660 (per Garnham J) (at para.36).
- The DfE say that there are statutory exceptions which ensure that a parent should not be penalised or prosecuted where a pupil is prevented from attending school by sickness, or where the local authority has failed to fulfil any duty it has to help them get to school.
- The DfE states that “there is no requirement for a formal diagnosis or formal medical evidence to authorise an illness absence.
- The DfE also make it clear that it is not necessary for children to be marked as absent due to illness in order to receive adequate education outside of school.

This additional letter (‘Update on school attendance legal action March 2020’) can be downloaded here:

<https://notfineinschool.org.uk/nfis-resources>





Most school-anxious children do WANT to attend school however their difficulties and anxiety become overwhelming. They care about their education and want to succeed, however they need understanding and support at home and at school. They may need adjustments to their daily routines, timetables, or even their school environment. Pressure to focus on attendance rather than a child's needs can make things even harder to fix.

## A Child is Struggling to Attend School - What can we do?

Increasingly children and young people are reporting school-based anxiety in addition to other mental health and SEND difficulties. These issues are not simply behavioural problems. Research acknowledges they are highly complex, multi-dimensional difficulties, requiring an individualised approach which assesses the triggers, difficulties and needs of each child. Early intervention, with professionals and parents working together, is vital to minimise any impact on education and wellbeing.

Unfortunately, many parents report being blamed and pressured to force attendance, without due regard to the complexity or severity of their child's difficulties.

Many parents find teachers insist a child is 'fine' one they are in school. If you describe a student as 'fine in school' please ensure:

- ✦ You have a good working definition of the word 'fine'
- ✦ You have gathered evidence as to why you make this assumption
- ✦ You consider descriptions of the child's difficulties by someone who knows them well
- ✦ You consider the impact of any diagnosed or undiagnosed /suspected SEND
- ✦ You consider the possibility that he /she may be masking their difficulties
- ✦ You consider the relevance of the 'Fight, Flight, Freeze or Submit' range of reactions to stress and anxiety
- ✦ You consider that describing anxious children as 'fine in school' means they are less likely to access the help they need to attend regularly and achieve their potential.

We recognise that schools have limited resources, but many helpful actions including empathy and understanding are cost free!

Please direct parents to our facebook family support group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NFISFamilySupport/>

and the NFIS website:  
[www.notfineinschool.org.uk](http://www.notfineinschool.org.uk)

### Support Mental Health Issues in Children & Young People

Children experience mental health difficulties for a range of complex reasons. The Government recommends that schools develop a mental health policy that creates an environment where young people with anxiety feel supported, understood, and able to seek help, making it more likely they will feel safe and able to attend school.

### Absence due to Physical or Mental Illness should be Authorised

Families need support rather than threats of fines or prosecution (which rarely help to resolve attendance difficulties). The potential legal implications of unauthorised absences will add to a child's anxiety and substantially increase the difficulties families face. Consideration of the long waiting times and high thresholds for referrals to NHS specialists indicates that attendance cannot take priority over health needs.

**Conduct Assessments for SEND** Many children have an underlying SEND that contributes to their difficulties; this can include Autistic Spectrum Conditions, ADHD, Sensory Processing Disorder or Dyslexia. SEND also include Social, Emotional or Mental Health Difficulties, which may affect a child's ability to establish friendships, cope with a variety of strong emotions, and increase a child's vulnerability to bullying. Remember your duty to use best endeavours and reasonable adjustments.

**Collaborate to Create a Child-Led Support Plan** High levels of anxiety can be classed as a disability and as a barrier to learning requiring the use of assess-plan-do-review cycles. It is important to ensure that children, their parents and health professionals participate as fully as possible in developing support plans that are flexible, child-led and individualised. Plans must be communicated to all staff and combined with relevant staff training and whole-school awareness. If children struggle to engage, they need patience and an experienced professional to help them access the right support.

### Make a Referral for Assessment by an Educational Psychologist

An Educational Psychologist can assess an anxious child and recommend appropriate interventions. This input can be useful as inability to attend school is often a symptom of a significant need or problem that requires more specialist knowledge and insight.

### Take action if Bullying or Sexual Assault are reported to you

There are legal duties on schools and LAs to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. School anti-bullying policies should set out the actions which will be taken to prevent or address bullying. The DfE have produced peer sexual violence guidance for schools & colleges.

Recovery can be a very slow process for many children and young people despite everyone's best efforts.  
Helping them to feel **connected, significant and welcomed** will encourage that big step back into school

In the absence of a national strategy for school attendance difficulties, we base this information on current legislation & statutory guidance:

Children & Families Act, 2014

The Equality Act, (2010)

Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions (DfE)

Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school (DfE)

Mental health and behaviour in schools: Departmental advice for school staff: March 2015 (DfE)

SEND Code of Practice (2015)

Special educational needs and disability: A guide for schools and alternative provision settings

The Education Act, 1996

Technical Guidance for Schools in England (Equality & Human Rights Commission, 2013)

Preventing and tackling bullying

Keeping Children Safe in Education, (2019)

Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges

Alternative Provision (2013)

### Support Referrals to CAMHS & other Health Care Professionals

Where significant health problems occur, schools should facilitate a student's access to more specialist support including Paediatricians, OT and SaLT. The school nurse, or school staff can support or provide further evidence to expedite a referral. Parents can also ask for referrals through their GP or Paediatrician. Unfortunately long wait times for referrals can compound the problem, but support from schools goes a long way to ensuring students gain access to necessary treatment.

**Apply for an EHCP Assessment** An EHCP application is crucial if a school does not have the expertise or funding to fully identify a child's needs, or to offer the provision or support a child requires to access an effective education. Parents can also make an application to the LA for an EHCP assessment, but a joint approach will be the most beneficial way forward.

**Social Care / Early Help Referrals** Families may benefit from early help support. Any referrals should be assessed quickly and thoroughly as school attendance difficulties are not necessarily safeguarding or parenting problems. It is vital that there is multi-agency understanding of the issues and policies surrounding these difficulties. Any interventions must be led by professionals who are suitably qualified and experienced in SEND, mental health difficulties and school attendance difficulties.

**Explore your Local Authority's Local Offer** Schools can collaborate with other local services and providers to meet individual needs effectively. The Local Offer can be an invaluable source of resources, information, advice and relevant support.

### Provide Homework & Connections While the Student is Absent

Not supplying learning opportunities during absence means a student gets further behind, adding to anxieties around returning to school. A school's duty to educate does not stop because a student is absent due to illness, SEND (diagnosed or not) or bullying. Schools should notify the LA if absence due to illness lasts over 15 days (consecutive or cumulative). The LA then have a duty to ensure that a child receives alternative educational provision whilst absent.



There are many reasons why a child may experience attendance difficulties.  
These reasons can be obvious, or baffle everyone.

**When a child is struggling, adults must recognise that their reactions can help or make things a whole lot worse.**

The combination of pressure from schools, threats of fines and prosecution and social service referrals does nothing to ease the strain on families, and does not reflect evidence based practice. Caregivers and schools can have differing priorities, but the focus needs to be on working together in the best interests of the child.

**The number one rule of getting a child to go back to school is:  
DO NOT FORCE THEM**

**Let's work together to resolve school attendance difficulties**





Most school-anxious/school refusing children do WANT to attend school however their difficulties and anxiety are overwhelming. They care about their education and want to succeed, however they need understanding and support at home and at school. They may need adjustments to their daily routines, timetables, or even their school environment. Pressures to focus on attendance rather than the child's needs can make things even harder to fix.

## My Child is Struggling to Go to School - What can I do?

Unfortunately there are many children and young people struggling with school-based anxiety and other mental health and SEND difficulties that can lead to school attendance difficulties.

Such difficulties shouldn't be viewed as a behavioural or parenting problem as they are much more complicated than that. There are many different things that can trigger anxiety and attendance difficulties including bullying, academic pressure and sensorial issues in the school environment.

### Fine or Not Fine?

Sometimes schools are aware of the difficulties children face, but unfortunately many parents report their child is described as 'fine in school', even if they are not in reality.

It is common for children to mask or hold in their distress until they get home from school. This leads to misunderstandings and differences in opinion between home and school.

Government good practice guidance acknowledges the importance of professionals working in partnership with parents and listening to the voices of children & young people.

### Relevant Government Documents:

- + Children & Families Act, 2014
- + The Equality Act, (2010)
- + Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions (DfE)
- + Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school (DfE)
- + SEND Code of Practice (2015)

**Believe your child's distress is real, listen to what they say and trust your instincts as a parent**

### Request Help

Schools should offer mental health support, counselling, and access to a School Nurse, they can also ask an Educational Psychologist to make an assessment of your child's difficulties. You should also speak to your child's GP and ask for a referral to a Paediatrician or CAMHS.

### Ask the School to Assess Your Child for any Relevant SEND

An underlying Special Educational Need or Disability often contributes to anxiety levels; this can include Autistic Spectrum Conditions, ADHD, Sensory Processing Disorder or Dyslexia. Undiagnosed or unsupported these can make school a difficult place to be and can contribute to mental and physical health deterioration.

### SEND includes Social, Emotional or Mental Health Difficulties

which can affect a child's ability to establish friendships, cope with strong emotions, and increase vulnerability to bullying. These are all barriers to learning requiring the use of SEND assess-plan-do-review cycles and possibly an EHCP. Severe anxiety is also classed as a disability and therefore protected by the Equality Act 2010.

### Apply for an EHCP Assessment

Some children will need an Education and Health Care Plan if a school does not have the expertise or funding to fully meet their needs, or offer the provision they require to access an education. SENCOs or parents can apply to the LA for an EHCP assessment.

**Contact SENDIASS, IPSEA or SOS SEN** or other sources of advice about SEND and educational provision. Some offer local advice and support, and can often attend meetings with you at school.

### If Bullying or Sexual Assault (by peers) are Factors Preventing

**Attendance** There are legal duties on schools and LAs to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including preventing bullying and assault.

**Read your school's policies and government statutory guidance for SEN, Disability, Mental Health, Bullying, & Attendance**  
- Are they being followed?  
If necessary follow the school's complaints policy

### Listen to your child \* Keep records \* Gather evidence \* Find support

#### Record Keeping

- ✦ It is important to keep a diary of what happens day by day to build a picture of the problem and the steps that have been taken.
- ✦ Keep a file of notes you take at meetings, during phone calls etc. and copies of ALL emails and letters.
- ✦ Check that minutes of meetings are accurate. Take someone with you to meetings, to take notes while you listen and you can discuss the meeting afterwards.
- ✦ If you're concerned about school records, make a full Subject Access Request (SAR) for a copy of all records held. Check through them carefully for accuracy and ask for errors to be corrected. (see the ICO website).
- ✦ When reporting absences use the phrase 'too unwell to come to school' not 'refusing to attend'.
- ✦ Check attendance records are accurate and challenge any errors.
- ✦ This evidence will be crucial if any legal proceedings occur and/or if you apply for an EHCP.

#### Self-care and Support

- ✦ School attendance difficulties, can be very stressful for parents, and can affect the whole family. Remember to seek medical advice & support for your own health.
- ✦ Employment commitments can be problematic - please seek advice regarding Work and Benefits.



#### Mental & physical illness related absence should be authorised by schools

Extended absence requires medical evidence, so see a GP and request a referral to CAMHS or a Paediatrician. Schools should notify the Local Authority if children are absent due to illness for more than 15 days. Local Authorities have a duty to ensure that a child receives alternative educational provision whilst absent, however you will usually be asked to provide medical evidence to arrange this support.

#### Ask the School to Provide Work While Your Child is Absent

Ask for work if you feel your child can manage homework or online learning. Many schools will be reluctant to provide this, so explain that in not providing learning opportunities a student will get further behind, which adds to anxieties around returning to school. Look for resources related to their interests to inspire them.

**Alternative Educational Provision** Some children and young people will benefit from alternative provision through home tutors, online education, hospital school, or specialist units. When statutory guidance is followed and children are supported, they may eventually return to mainstream school, but they may need long-term specialist provision.

**Elective Home Education** It may be that the current school is the wrong school environment for your child. Some parents decide to deregister their child from school to home educate. This is a big decision and you should not be under pressure from your school or LA to deregister, as you could find it harder to arrange the support your child is entitled to. Some children benefit from time at home to recover, and some will return to school and even university later on.

#### Work with Professionals to Create a Child-led Support Plan

- ✦ Try to maintain good relationships between your family and school so that you can work together to create an effective support plan
- ✦ Health professionals can advise schools on developing support plans that are flexible, child-led and sympathetic to the features of anxiety disorders or other health conditions.
- ✦ Any plans must be communicated to all staff. Schools may also need to arrange further relevant staff awareness and training.
- ✦ Remind professionals in schools about the duty to use best endeavours and reasonable adjustments (SEND Code of Practice and the Equality Act 2010).
- ✦ Your Local Authority's Local Offer can also be an invaluable source of resources, information, advice and relevant support.
- ✦ Some families may benefit from early help support, although school attendance difficulties should not normally be treated as safeguarding or parenting problems.
- ✦ Please look at our website [www.notfineinschool.org.uk](http://www.notfineinschool.org.uk) and share the NFIS resources with all professionals involved with your child/family.
- ✦ Look for online/social media support groups including the *Not Fine In School* family support group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/NFISFamilySupport/>

Long term recovery needs a focus on support and encouragement for a child to enjoy other activities and friendships (not only those related to school). This will help rebuild their self-esteem, confidence and happiness, all of which are integral aspects of school refusal recovery.

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YOUR NOTES: