

Barriers to School Attendance

The Define Fine: Parent Peer Support for School Attendance Difficulties Team have produced this resource based on relevant government policies and guidance, to help parents carers and their families to work with professionals to assess, then plan appropriate timely support to overcome their child's barriers to attendance.



Define Fine

Support Mental and Physical Health

Schools and colleges should develop an environment where all pupils with mental and physical health conditions feel properly supported so that they can play a full and active role in school life, remain healthy and achieve their academic potential.

Referrals to CAMHS and other Health Professionals

A child or young person may need support through referrals to CAMHs, paediatricians, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists or specialist coaches. Schools do not have to wait for a formal diagnosis before providing support to pupils but should follow advice from health professionals, and value the views of parents and pupils.

Collaborate on an Individualised Plan

It is important that children and young people, their parents, school or college and other professionals work together to develop a flexible, tailored evidence based action plan to remove barriers, provide support and set targets. Plans should be shared with all staff and include training and resources. They may need a SEND support plan and/or an individual health care plan.

Early Help and Social Services Referrals

Some families may benefit from Early Help or social care assessments but school attendance difficulties are not necessarily safeguarding nor parenting problems. It is vital that there is multi-agency understanding of the issues and guidance surrounding these difficulties. Any interventions should be led by professionals who are suitably qualified and experienced in SEND, mental health and attendance difficulties.

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Assess and Acknowledge Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SEND children and young people are more likely to struggle with attendance, especially those with needs not yet fully assessed, understood and supported. SEND includes ADHD, Autism, PDA, Sensory Processing Difficulties, Dyslexia, executive functioning, processing and working memory, other learning differences, and social, emotional and mental health conditions. These may affect their ability to learn, to communicate or regulate emotions, but they may also be masking. Schools have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure SEND pupils can fully participate in school life.

Referral to an Educational Psychologist

An Educational Psychologist can assess a child or young person's barriers to learning and recommend appropriate interventions. This input can be useful as being unable to attend school or college is often a symptom of a significant need perhaps not yet identified.

Request an *EHC (Educational Health Care) Needs Assessment or Review

An *EHC needs assessment may be necessary for a child or young person who is struggling with school and "has or may have special educational needs and may need special educational provision to be made through an EHC plan". They may need specific support, or an alternative to their current provision. Parents can make the application to the LA for an EHC needs assessment. *or statement in Wales or Scotland

IN THE ABSENCE OF A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE DIFFICULTIES, WE HAVE BASED THIS INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING CURRENT LEGISLATION & STATUTORY GUIDANCE:

- THE SEND CODE OF PRACTICE
- SUPPORTING PUPILS WITH MEDICAL CONDITIONS AT SCHOOL (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)
- SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY: A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS AND ALTERNATIVE PROVISION SETTINGS
- THE EDUCATION ACT, 1996
- REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS FOR DISABLED CHILDREN
- EQUALITY ACT TECHNICAL GUIDANCE EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,
- PREVENTING AND TACKLING BULLYING
- KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE IN EDUCATION, (2019)
- SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT BETWEEN CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
- ALTERNATIVE PROVISION (2013)
- HOME EDUCATION GUIDE (2019)
- NFIS DFE ABSCENCE AUTHORISATION, PROVISION MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS
- IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE (2021)

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School Attendance Difficulties are complex but all too often these children are described as being "fine in school". We need to DEFINE FINE and acknowledge barriers to attendance at the earliest signs. DO NOT FORCE THEM

Authorising Absence

Schools should authorise absence due to illness, both physical or mental health related, and not request medical evidence unnecessarily. Consideration of the long waiting times and high thresholds for referrals to NHS specialists should mean that attendance is not prioritised over health needs. Families need support rather than threats of fines or prosecution, which rarely resolve attendance difficulties and can add to a child or young person's concerns.

Provide Learning and Connections While Absent

Children unable to attend school should be able to access a broad and balanced education suitable for their needs, to enable them to maintain academic progression and allow them to thrive and prosper. Schools should welcome pupils back following an absence, provide good catch-up support to build confidence and bridge gaps in learning.

The LA are responsible for arranging education for children who, because of illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education, as soon as it is clear that the child will be away from school for 15 days or more.

Respond to all incidents of Bullying and Assault

Schools, colleges and Local Authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. Schools' anti-bullying policies should set out the actions which will be taken to prevent or address bullying, including racial and LGBT related incidents, as well as peer sexual violence and online bullying. SEND children and young people can be at an increased risk of being bullied..

Home Education

Parents have a right to educate their children at home. This works well when it is a positive, informed and dedicated choice. Pressure should never be put on parents to remove a child from a school roll as they then become solely responsible for their child's education.

Explore the Local Offer

Your local offer should provide information, resources, advice and relevant local or national support organisations including your local Send IASS.



Define Fine is led by a small team of parents and professionals with lived experience of school attendance difficulties. Please join our supportive parent carer Define Fine Facebook group where we share advice, signpost to support and coordinate our peer support training on how to use our resources. We are also able to provide training or support for professionals

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