

**NORTH SOMERSET EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
EDUCATION WELFARE SERVICE**

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MATTERS

**A STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING
ATTENDANCE IN
NORTH SOMERSET SCHOOLS**

June 2003



CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 1
The National and Local Context	Page 2
Overall Absence Targets	Page 2
The North Somerset Attendance Strategy	Page 3
Policy Framework	Page 3
Partnership Working	Page 3
Clear Roles and Responsibilities	Page 4
Publication of Targets	Page 4
Education Welfare Service Referral Criteria	Page 5
Advice from other teams	Page 6
Data Collection and Analysis	Page 6
Legal Responsibilities of Parents and LEA	Page 7
Working with Other Agencies	Page 7
Working with Parents	Page 7
Early Intervention	Page 9
Training for School Staff and Governors	Page 9
Helping Schools to Improve Attendance	Page 9
 Appendices:	
Appendix 1	Page 10
Comparative Data Primary Sector	Page 10
Comparative Data Secondary Sector	Page 10
LEA Targets to Reduce Unauthorised Absence	Page 11
Appendix 2	Page 12
Strategies for Improving Attendance	Page 12
Parents/carers Responsibilities	Page 12
Schools' Responsibilities	Page 12
LEA Responsibilities	Page 13
Appendix 3: Absence Intervention Chart	Page 15
Appendix 4: Specimen Paperwork	
Specimen First Day Letter	Page 16
Absence Notes	Page 16
Specimen Three Day Plus Letters :	
Unauthorised Absence	Page 18
Authorised Absence	Page 19
Warning Letter School	Page 20
School Attendance Matters Letter	Page 21
Family Holidays in Term Time: Heads' Letter	Page 22

Family Holidays in Term Time: Parents' Letter	Page 23
Appendix 5: Attendance/Absence Monitoring Form	Page 24
Appendix 6: Education Welfare Service Attendance Matters Leaflet ..	Page 25

INTRODUCTION

This Local Education Authority School Attendance Strategy is intended to provide support, guidance and information to North Somerset schools in managing school attendance in partnership with the Education Welfare Service, which has the lead responsibility for this work.

School attendance is a vital component of improving attainment in North Somerset Schools. The current LEA unauthorised absence rate of 1.1% in secondary schools is only the same as the national average. The Department for Education and Skills target is for LEAs to reduce by 2004 unauthorised absence by at least 10% from the 2002 figure. Unauthorised absence will remain a key indicator of school performance. Total attendance improvement is, however, perhaps the most realistic measure of success, as this statistic is not vulnerable to subjectivity and variable interpretation. The Local Authority Best Value Performance Indicator for attendance is reported in a total attendance figure.

The Attendance Strategy recognises that it is schools which have the major influence on pupil attendance, and relies heavily on initial work being carried out by schools prior to referral to the Education Welfare Service. However, once a pupil is referred, schools have the right to expect a quick response and feedback on the action taken. This response must include legal action against parents in appropriate cases and the Education Welfare Service has, in 2002, streamlined its court process in line with the DfES "Fast Track" pilot studies in certain LEAs. Magistrates also have a role to play in recognising the importance of the loss of education when determining cases brought by the LEA.

The Attendance Strategy is one in a series of recent publications by the EWS to support Attendance and Inclusion. Other publications are:

- Pastoral Support Plans - Guidance
- Managed Transfers Guidance
- Re-Inclusion of Excluded Pupils – LEA Exclusion Strategy.

The EWS has also issued a School Attendance Manual, which includes a revised Service Level Agreement (SLA) with schools. These documents will be discussed with Headteachers by their school Education Welfare Officer during June/July 2003.

Colin Tincknell
Principal Education Welfare Officer

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MATTERS A STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING ATTENDANCE IN NORTH SOMERSET SCHOOLS

THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Concern about truancy and attendance is a central feature of the Government's Social Inclusion Strategy, principally because:

- Regular and punctual attendance at school is essential to the process of raising attainment.
- Young people not in school are more likely to drift into crime or other anti-social activity.

In recent years, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) have been set targets to reduce truancy in the primary, secondary and special school sectors. Truancy, otherwise known as unauthorised absence, is defined by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) as:

“absence without leave from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absence”

Attendance and absence figures for North Somerset, with national comparisons, for the last three years are included as [Appendix 1](#). Overall attendance in North Somerset has remained stable and close to the national average over this period. Unauthorised absence has remained below the national average. Nevertheless, Government has placed considerable importance on reducing unauthorised absence and has made it quite clear to LEAs that they have a major role to play in reducing unauthorised absence in their area.

Each LEA has now been set targets to reduce overall absence and these are incorporated within the Education Development Plan 2 and the Behaviour Support Plan.

Overall absence targets (%age of half days missed)

	2000/01 actual	2003 target	2004 target
Primary	5.4	6.0	5.0
Secondary	8.6	8.0	6.0
Special	8.5	6.0	5.0

A number of initiatives are underway in North Somerset and these are now all brought together within the strategy described in this document.

THE NORTH SOMERSET ATTENDANCE STRATEGY

Policy Framework

The basis of the strategy is the School Attendance Matters policy agreed by Education Committee in June 1999. This was widely circulated and subsequently schools have been encouraged to develop their own policy and guidance in line with the model policy provided by the LEA.

Partnership Working

The LEA and schools have long accepted that joint action is required in order to meet the Government targets. It is recognised that there are no easy quick fix solutions to the complex problems of non-attendance, and no single organisation has all the answers. To this end, an Education Welfare Service Advisory Group has been established within the Authority. Representation includes LEA officers, primary, secondary and special schools, police, professional associations, Magistrates, Social Services and the Youth Offending Team. The Advisory Group remit is to:

- Draw up and implement the overall strategy to improve attendance.
- Monitor implementation of the strategy and the progress towards achievement of the Behaviour Support Plan targets.
- Ensure joint ownership of the targets and disseminate good practice across all schools.

Examples of school-based strategies are included as [Appendix 2](#).

In North Somerset, it is the Education Welfare Service (EWS) that takes the lead in promoting school attendance. However, the Service is clear that support is needed from other LEA Services. These include:

- Education Development Service (EDS) can support work on improving school management and attendance. EDS can also help schools look at ways to improve teaching and the curriculum to counter disaffection.
- The Connexions Service
- Educational Psychology Service
- Special Educational Needs Team
- Behaviour Support Team
- Education Family Support Team
- Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Service

- Local agreements between neighbouring Education Welfare Services.

It is also important that there is a clear understanding about responsibilities for school attendance with Social Services, and careful thought needs to be given to arrangements to monitor attendance of children looked after by the Local Authority.

Clear Roles and Responsibilities

It is important that schools and the LEA are clear about their respective responsibilities. A flow chart of intervention which identifies responsibilities is attached as [Appendix 3](#). It sets out each partner's responsibilities and identifies appropriate actions to ensure children who are absent return to school quickly. The flow chart provides a framework which will help to standardise practice across schools whilst allowing each to pursue policies and practices most suited to the local area. A key feature of the flow chart, and indeed Government advice, is the concept of contact with all parents/carers on the first day of absence. It is recognised that for some schools this is a significant task. Schools are advised to identify high risk families who should be contacted immediately there is an absence. To support the flow chart standard letters and termly returns of attendance at each school will be required. These are included as [Appendix 4](#).

The regular receipt of information will enable the EWS Advisory group to:

- Monitor overall levels of attendance, authorised and unauthorised absence at each school.
- Identify schools where there may be particular problems.
- Agree any necessary re-direction of LEA resources to address difficulties.
- Celebrate success and disseminate good practice.

Since 1996, a Service Level Agreement between schools and the Education Welfare Service has been in place. This sets out service standards and expectations so that schools and the Education Welfare Service can work more closely together using a shared understanding of individual roles and responsibilities.

Publication of Targets

LEAs are used to setting and publicising absence targets. Since 1992, the DfES has published National absence data, with specific targets set to reduce unauthorised absence in primary and secondary schools.

An LEA needs to identify the levels of authorised and unauthorised absence in each of its schools, and to work with individual schools to understand the factors that effect school attendance. An LEA needs to monitor whether specific groups of pupils e.g. traveller children or children in public care, have poorer attendance records than others.

From the academic year 2002\2003, targets have been set in the Education Development Plan 2 (EDP2) to reduce overall absence. These targets are also reflected in Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) 45 & 46 from the following year. The EWS monitors levels of unauthorised absence against national figures, and works with individual schools to identify strategies to improve figures.

Education Welfare Service Referral Criteria

The principal responsibility for implementation of this Strategy lies with the Education Welfare Service in partnership with schools. The EWS will need to align its service delivery within the priorities of this strategy. This will be identified through the Service Level Agreement with schools, but it is also essential that there are very clear priorities for referral, given that the primary responsibility for improving attendance must rest with individual schools. Schools in general, and individual form tutors and primary class teachers in particular, have a crucial part to play. It is the role of the Education Welfare Service to support schools' efforts rather than to replace them. It is therefore important that each school has implemented a strategy to improve individual attendance before referring a pupil to their Education Welfare Officer. The attached "Absence Intervention Chart" ([Appendix 3](#)) sets out the conditions and procedure by which the Education Welfare Service will accept referrals. The only exception to this will be where child protection visits are required, in agreement with Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) guidance, which, by their nature, tend to be immediate and unplanned.

Given this, the EWS Advisory Group has agreed the following priorities for referral to the Education Welfare Service:

- i. Child protection visit required under ACPC procedures
- ii. Unauthorised absence of a pupil of compulsory age
- iii. Irregular attendance of looked after children
- iv. Irregular attendance of a pupil with a Statement of Special Educational Need - the SEN Officer must also be informed and involved in any programme of intervention
- v. Irregular attendance of a pupil caused by authorised absence
- vi. Work in support of excluded pupils or those in danger of losing their school place and for whom there is an attendance concern
- vii. Poor punctuality
- viii. Welfare concerns
- ix. Child employment issues

Education Welfare Officers will now concentrate more directly on attendance matters in future and are unlikely to be in a position to undertake social and welfare work which is not related to non-attendance.

It is advisable to seek support from the **Special Educational Needs Team** if a pupil with a Statement of Special Educational Needs starts to be absent from school. This may be an indicator that their special educational needs are not being appropriately met and that adaptations may need to be made to support the placement. Further advice can be sought from the **Educational Psychology Service** if felt appropriate. The Educational Psychology Service may become involved if the poor attendance is as a result of high anxiety and school phobia.

Advice can also be sought from the Educational Family Support Team and the Behaviour Support Team:

Education Family Support Team

School staff, LEA officers, health and Social Services staff may refer primary aged children their families and carers to the Education Family Service

- When the child displays emotional or behavioural difficulties
- When the child is at risk of exclusion.

This includes children who are irregular attenders and non-attenders due to anxiety based school refusal.

Education Support Service Referral Criteria

The Behaviour Support Team work with pupils who are identified as having one or more of the following:

1. Identified on the SEN Audit and receiving funding
2. At risk of permanent exclusion
3. A Statement of Special Educational Needs

Attendance may be part of the area of concern.

Data Collection and Analysis

If schools and the LEA are to achieve the targets set by Government, it is essential that attendance information is regularly collected and analysed. Increasingly, schools are computerising their attendance information and the LEA will do all it can to support this. Likewise, it is proposed that detailed information is collected from schools on a termly basis and used to target particular problem areas.

The LEA must monitor how the EWS helps to improve attendance. Good practice would look at:

- Monitoring both referrals to the EWS and their outcome
- Monitoring the use and success of legal actions to enforce attendance
- Feeding this data back to schools to help inform their practice.

The Legal Responsibilities of Parents and the LEA

In law, parents must ensure that all children of compulsory school age receive suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. If a child is registered at school then parents have the primary responsibility for ensuring that their child attends regularly. LEAs have a duty to ensure that parents fulfil this obligation, and this duty is exercised through the Education Welfare Service. This means that the LEA has a number of legal remedies for ensuring children attend school regularly, but it is emphasised that court action against parents is taken only when justified and as part of a planned intervention. The decision to proceed to the Family Proceedings Court for Education Supervision Order applications depends very much on family circumstances and is only taken after consultation with colleagues in the Housing and Social Services Department. However, such action is a valuable part of the LEA's overall strategy and, in the last year, an increased number of cases have proceeded to court action. In addition, Education Supervision Orders are in place.

The Government has raised the level of penalties to parents who refuse to co-operate on attendance matters. The maximum penalty is now £2,500 and/or three months imprisonment. A high profile case in Oxfordshire in May 2002 made full use of these penalties.

Working with Other Agencies

Improving attendance and raising attainment are not just the responsibility of schools and the Education Department. The reasons for non-attendance are complex and include family circumstances, culture and economics as well as the behaviour and attitude of the individual child. Consequently, there is a developing multi-agency theme to attendance matters, examples include:

- An Education Welfare Officer is seconded to the Youth Offending Team (YOT).
- Connexions
- Education Welfare Officers, and police officers are working closely together to improve attendance in Truancy Sweep initiatives
- Joint initiatives with Social Services are in place to support high risk children, particularly those looked after by the local authority
- A weekly panel (Statutory and Complex Issues Panel), monitors the placements of pupils who are not registered at a school or who are in danger of losing their school place. Pupil Referral Units are sometimes considered as an appropriate intervention strategy.

Working with Parents

Whilst the DfES, the LEA, individual schools and other agencies can do much to encourage the raising of attendance, the crucial partners are parents. If parents are

unaware of a poor attendance or unsupportive of schools then interventions tend to be less effective and much effort will be wasted. It is essential, therefore, that parents are seen as partners in any strategy to improve attendance. This can be achieved in a number of ways:

(i) From the Government using:

- The national press
- National awards e.g. “truancy buster”
- The raised level of fines on parents, and promoting the use of parenting orders under the Crime and Disorder Act.

(ii) From the LEA using:

- The local press for publicity campaigning
- Parental leaflets
- Joint work with the local police and the Education Welfare Service to identify truants and return them to school
- Education Welfare Officers who undertake home visits
- Use of Education Supervision Orders where appropriate
- LEA awards to good attenders
- Identification and close monitoring of vulnerable groups
- Monitoring at key times, e.g. transition between primary and secondary schools

(iii) From schools by:

- Regular communication home to parents
- Home/school agreements
- Parents’ evenings
- Specific reports on individual pupils
- Award/reward systems.

Further work has been identified by the EWS Advisory Group which will consider a strategy for ensuring that parents are more fully involved as partners in the process of improving attendance.

Early Intervention

Setting high standards of attendance and punctuality in the early years is most important, given the research which confirms that early intervention in this way can improve attendance throughout the period of compulsory schooling. The Education Welfare Service has produced a booklet on promoting primary attendance for children in the early years and, through work with individual schools, will aim to ensure that all parents receive support and guidance on attendance and punctuality (see Appendix 6).

Training for School Staff and Governors

It is important that the LEA identifies and disseminates good practice and helps schools to improve attendance.

Alongside the School Attendance Matters policy document, the Education Welfare Service is able to offer training to schools and Governors to ensure they understand their responsibilities and that they are aware of best practice. Consultancy sessions can be requested via the Governor Training programme.

Helping Schools to Improve Attendance

The most important source of advice for schools on the management of attendance is the Education Welfare Service "Missing Out". The Audit Commission (1999) found that Services can provide help in four main areas:

- Preparation of policies
- Development of procedures
- Analysis of data
- Checks on procedures

This is explained in the Education Welfare Service document "Missing Out". However, the report found that the experience and expertise of staff can be limited by the amount of time they spend on individual cases of poor attendance. Ofsted has suggested that Education Welfare Service staff should spend more time helping schools to improve policies and procedures and less on individual casework.

Good practice could include arrangements to:

- Agree with schools what protocols and procedures they will have in place
- Ensure all EWS staff can advise schools on basic policies and procedures
- Identify good practice in schools and arrange to disseminate details
- Train specific EWS staff to provide more detailed, specialist help where this is needed by schools – e.g. audit of procedures

COMPARATIVE DATA

Primary Sector

North Somerset	2001\2002	2000\2001	1999\2000
Attendance	94.6	94.4	93.3
Authorised absence	5.2	5.3	0.3
Unauthorised Absence	0.2	0.3	0.3

England	2001\2002	2000\2001	1999\2000
Attendance	94.2	93.9	94.1
Authorised Absence	5.4	5.6	5.4
Unauthorised Absence	0.4	0.5	0.5

Secondary Sector

North Somerset	2001\2002	2000\2001	1999\2000
Attendance	91.4	91.1	91.6
Authorised Absence	7.5	8.0	7.6
Unauthorised Absence	1.1	0.9	0.8

England	2001\2002	2000\2001	1999\2000
Attendance	91.3	90.9	91.4
Authorised Absence	7.6	8.0	7.6
Unauthorised Absence	1.1	1.1	1.0

The LEA targets to reduce unauthorised absence are as follows:

	% of Half Days Missed	1999 – 2000	2000 – 2001	2001 – 2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Unauthorised Absence	Maintained Primary Schools	Actual 0.3%	Actual 0.3%	Actual 0.2%	Indicative Target 0.1%	Indicative Target 0.1%
Unauthorised Absence	Maintained Secondary Schools	Actual 0.8%	Actual 0.9%	Actual 1.1%	Indicative Target 0.82%	Indicative Target 0.57%

Source: Education Development Plan –2000-2001
 Education Development Plan 2002-2007
 Targets are to reduce overall absence

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ATTENDANCE

Improving attendance and at the same time reducing unauthorised absence is a complex process involving effective working relationships between the LEA, school, and parents/carers. The precise interventions used to meet the targets will depend on the scale of the change required in each individual school and the time limit available. A range of overlapping strategies have been developed which need to be addressed at different levels. Much of this is already incorporated in North Somerset's policy statement guidance document published in a series entitled "**School Attendance Matters**" – the LEA's policy on attendance. For any strategy to be successful it is essential that the Education Welfare Service and schools work together within a creative framework, but also one that contains certain expectations on all sides.

These strategies have been developed through the Education Welfare Service Advisory Group and in a number of cases already implemented by schools.

These are not in any order of priority, nor is any order implied.

(i) Parents\carers should:

- Ensure their children attend regularly and on time
- Notify school as early as possible on the first day of absence
- Send a note to school on their child's return
- Only request a holiday in term time in very exceptional circumstances
- Not keep their children away from school for trivial reasons
- Accept the obligations contained in the Home-School Agreements
- Speak well of the school and support the school's staff
- Ensure their child shows respect and care for self and others

(ii) Schools should:

- Ensure a senior member of staff is responsible for attendance matters
- Have an expectation that full-time, punctual attendance will be the norm and all absences will be followed up
- Use Parents' Evenings, Newsletters and other written communications between home and school to raise the profile of regular attendance

- Carry out spot checks on registers and parental notes
- Undertake lesson by lesson registration (in secondary schools) to minimise post-registration truancy
- Have a declared intention to contact parents of targeted pupils on the first day of any absence
- Make effective use of attendance competitions and award schemes
- Have a consistent system of pupil passes for legitimate time out of school
- Have a commitment to termly monitoring of attendance levels
- Have a practice of reporting to governors on attendance matters
- Have a willingness on the part of all staff to accept that improving attendance is the responsibility of everyone and not just that of the head teacher or pastoral care staff
- Have an emphasis on the importance of regular school attendance in Home-School Agreement
- Have a positive culture\ethos which is based upon a firm foundation of respect and care of self and others
- Practice positive reinforcement
- Identify, and act upon problems which link attendance, behaviour and self worth
- Set targets for improving behaviour\attendance with individual pupils and review progress
- Ensure that **all** pupils experience some measure of success at school
- Electronic registering
- Introduction of data management systems, e.g. SIMS module

(iii) The LEA should, through the Education Welfare Service:

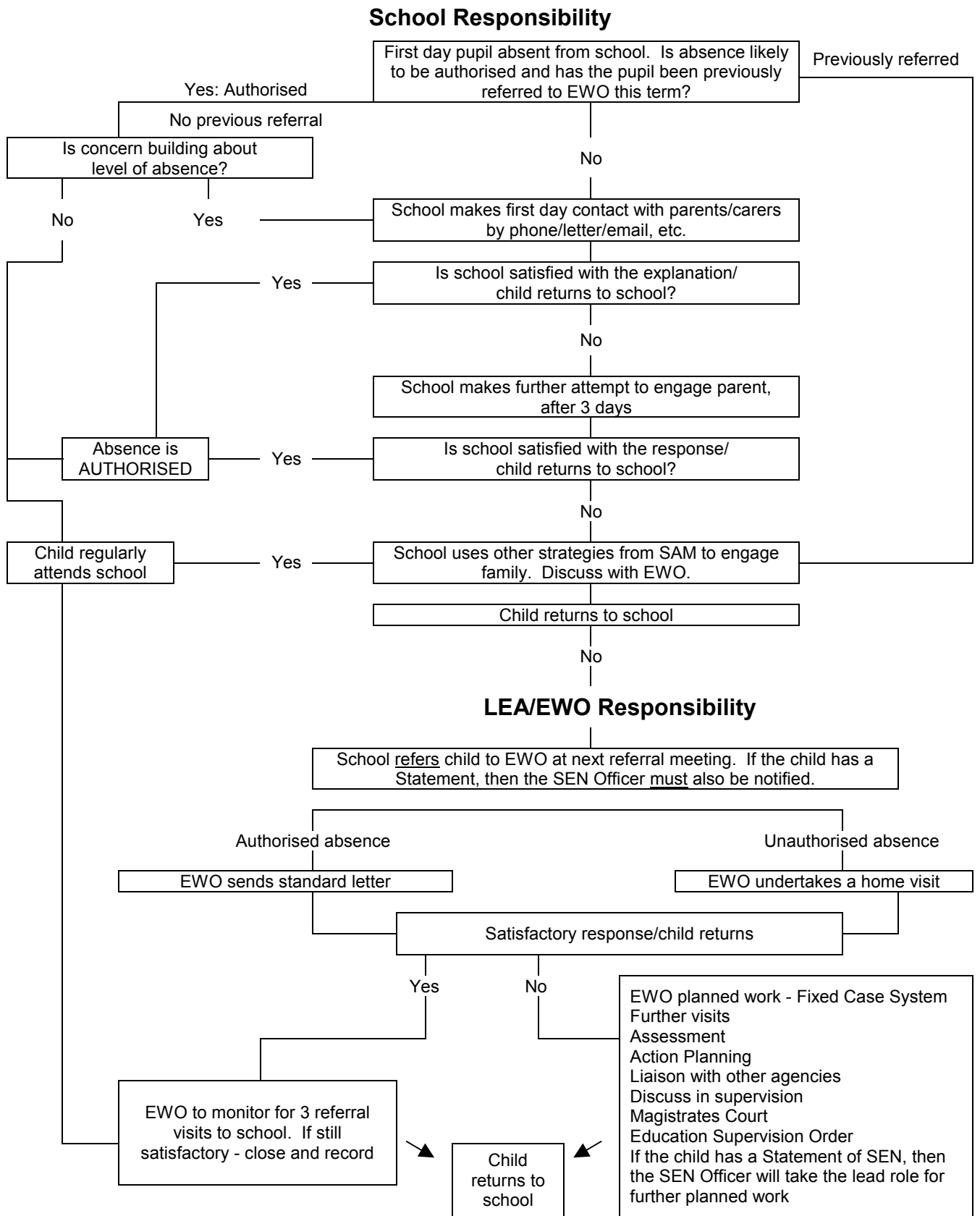
- Use parental leaflets\local publicity campaigns to gain parental support and raise awareness of the need for regular attendance e.g. holidays in term time is a major issue
- Regularly check all school registers
- Recognise the value of early intervention in primary schools to establish patterns of regular attendance

- Give greater focus at the Year 6\Year 7 transition of pupils who may be at risk of not settling into secondary school
- Do specific group work with targeted pupils or parents
- Use Education Planning Meetings to involve agencies and the wider family in searching for a resolution to complex attendance problems
- Make full use of parental prosecution and Education Supervision Orders
- Work with Housing and Social Services to target “Looked After Children”
- Work with the Police and Youth Offending Team on Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Orders, e.g. Truancy Sweeps, Parenting Orders
- Advise schools about research findings and good practice
- Undertake home visits for irregular attendance
- Support the efforts that schools make in a number of ways, including
 - Promoting regular attendance in school\class assemblies
 - Presenting “attendance prizes” at special occasions
 - Concentrating on specific work with a target group of pupils e.g. Year 6\Year 7 transition
 - Working with individual or groups of pupils who are experiencing attendance difficulties
 - Advising schools on the authorisation of particular absences
 - Contribute to the development of the Crime Prevention Strategy

The whole area of improving attendance and reducing unauthorised absence is a complex one and there are no easy, quick fix solutions. Success will only be achieved if all parties show a joint commitment to seeking, securing and celebrating improvements.

The above strategies will be discussed within the Service Advisory Group and will be amended and reviewed as appropriate. Schools will be encouraged to implement them. Their effectiveness will be subjected to regular monitoring and review.

ABSENCE INTERVENTION CHART



SPECIMEN 1ST DAY LETTER

Dear (*Name of Parent*)

(*Name of child*) is not in school today and I have not heard why
is absent.

As you know, this school would like all parents, if possible, to contact us on the first day of absence. Will you please let me know why (*name of child*) is absent and when they may return. Please let me know either by phone or use the tear off slip below.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher/Form Teacher

✂-----

ABSENCE NOTE

PUPIL NAME **CLASS**

Dates (from) (to)

Reason for absence:

.....

.....

Expected date of return:

Signature of Parent/Carer

_____ **SCHOOL**

ABSENCE NOTE (2002__/____)

PUPIL NAME FORM

Dates (from) (to) (..... days in total)

Reason for absence:

.....
.....
.....

Signature of Parent/Carer:

School Attendance Matters

_____ **SCHOOL**

ABSENCE NOTE (2002__/____)

PUPIL NAME FORM

Dates (from) (to) (..... days in total)

Reason for absence:

.....
.....
.....

Signature of Parent/Carer:

School Attendance Matters

SPECIMEN 3 DAY + LETTER
UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

Dear (*Name of Parent*)

(*Name of child*) has now been away from school since (*day and date*) and you have not contacted the school to offer an explanation.

As you know, this school expects parents to inform us as soon as possible when their children are absent. At the moment (*name of child*) absence remains unauthorised.

Please contact me as a matter of importance to discuss why (*name of child*) is absent and when they will return to school.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

SPECIMEN 3 DAY + LETTER
AUTHORISED ABSENCE

Dear (*Name of Parent*)

(*Name of child*) has now been away from school since (*date*).

You contacted the school on (*date*) to say that (*name of child*) was absent because
.....

- I am worried that (*name of child*) educational attainment may suffer if this absence continues.
- I am concerned that this is the (*number*) time that (*name of child*) has been absent this (*term/year*) and a pattern of poor attendance is developing.
- Even though (*name of child*) absence is authorised (*he/she*) has now had so much time away from school during this (*term/year*) that I have to refer (*him/her*) to (*name*) this school's Education Welfare Officer.

(***Delete/amend as appropriate**)

Please contact me as a matter of importance to discuss (*name of child*) attendance.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

WARNING LETTER SCHOOL

Dear (Name of Parent)

I am very concerned that *(name of child)* is absent from school again. This is the *(number)* time that *(he/she)* has been away from school this *(term/year)*.

- You have failed consistently to follow school rules about contacting the school when *(name of child)* is absent.
- You have failed to provide *(name of child)* with notes of explanation when *(he/she)* returns to school.
- *(Name of child)* absence remains unauthorised.
- Even though I have authorised *(name of child)* absence in the past, a serious pattern on non-attendance is developing.
- The Education Act 1996 requires you to ensure that *(name of child)* attends school regularly. Clearly they are not doing so.
- Despite all efforts to improve *(name of child)* attendance there has been little or no change in *(his/her/your)* attitude towards this matter.

(* *Delete/amend as appropriate*)

I have no alternative but to refer *(name of child)* absences to the Local Education Authority for them to take appropriate action.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Your ref:
Our ref:
Date:

Please reply to:
Telephone no:

Colin Tincknell
01275 888292

Dear Parent

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MATTERS

North Somerset, through the Education Department, is keen to see an overall improvement in school attendance levels. As you will know, the Government has set national targets for a reduction in unauthorised absence. As part of the process, schools have to produce figures for both their authorised and unauthorised absence.

The Local Education Authority (LEA) has a responsibility to ensure that the parents of all children registered at a school are carrying out their legal duty under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996. This says that you have to make sure that your child attends regularly. If children are absent, therefore, rigorous enquiries will be made into the reasons. If schools are not satisfied with the reason they will refer the matter to the Education Welfare Service.

I understand that sometimes children have to be away from school for genuine reasons, such as sickness. If your child has to be off school you should do everything you can to let the school know why they are absent as soon as possible on the first day. You should also make sure that the absence is kept to a minimum.

The Education Welfare Service make regular checks of all school registers to ensure that all children are attending school regularly. If you or your children are having difficulties over regular attendance, you should contact the Education Welfare Officer for your child's school at the above address.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Tincknell
Principal Education Welfare Officer

Your ref:
Our ref:
Date:

Please reply to:
Telephone no:

Colin Tincknell
01275 888292

To: All Headteachers

Dear Colleague

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MATTERS

FAMILY HOLIDAYS IN TERM TIME

I am aware that the subject of Family Holidays in Term Time causes concern to many head teacher colleagues. It has been raised with me on a number of occasions and the LEA has been asked to clarify its position. With this mailing I enclose a copy of a letter to parents, stressing the importance of avoiding holidays in term time if possible.

You may use this letter in the most appropriate way for your school. You may wish to circulate all existing parents, to all new parents, or just to individuals where you think there may be a problem in this area. Alternatively, you may not want to use it at all.

Whilst the final decision to approve request for holidays in term time rests with Head teachers, the LEA is anxious to see a reduction in these parental request which in turn will lead to an improvement in attendance rates.

If there are specific problems for your school in this area or you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Colin Tincknell
Principal Education Welfare Officer

Your ref:
Our ref:
Date:

Please reply to:
Telephone no:

Colin Tincknell
01275 888292

Dear Parent

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE MATTERS

As you know, pupils of school age must, by law, attend school regularly. If your child has to be away from school it is only the Head Teacher that can authorise or approve that absence. You cannot authorise it yourself. Any absence from school needs to be avoided whenever possible, as it can have a serious effect on a young child's education and development.

Please do not ask for leave of absence for a family holiday in term time, unless it is absolutely unavoidable. It is only in an **exceptional** circumstance that a Head Teacher has the legal authority to grant leave of absence for your child during the school year. A Head Teacher will not give this approval if he or she believes that your request is casual or unreasonable.

If a family holiday in term time has to be arranged, please try to ensure that it does not coincide with examinations or other important tests that your child has to take. Additionally, any request must be made to the school at least two weeks in advance of the start of the holiday. The law does not allow for approval after the event.

When considering a parental request of this nature a Head Teacher will take into account the amount of disruption your child's absence will have on their education. Not only will your child miss the lessons taught during the absence but they will also find it difficult to pick up on lessons on their return to school. Consequently, there is a risk that your child will risk underachieving. This is a serious situation which we must all try to avoid. A good attendance record is crucial if pupils are to achieve at school.

I look forward to your co-operation and understanding in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Tincknell
Principal Education Welfare Officer

**NORTH SOMERSET EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
EDUCATION WELFARE SERVICE**

ATTENDANCE/ABSENCE MONITORING FORM

SCHOOL _____ Autumn/Spring/Summer Term

School Year _____

1. Number of pupils of compulsory school
Age on roll for at least one session

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2. Number of pupil sessions

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3. Number of authorised absences

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4. Number of unauthorised absences

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5. Number of pupils with at least one
unauthorised absence

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N.B. “Authorised absence is absence that has been authorised by a teacher or other authorised representative of the school”.

“Unauthorised absence is absence without leave from a teacher or other authorised representative of the school. This includes all unexplained or unjustified absence”.

Thank you for completing this form which should be returned to your school Education Welfare Officer, or to the Principal Education Welfare Officer.