

School Attendance

- Issues 1: Responsibilities

Please note: 'child' = 'child or young person'

Parental Responsibilities

- Parent/carers have a duty, under section 7 of the Education Act 1996, to ensure that their child of compulsory school age (5 to 16) receives an efficient full-time education either by attendance at school or otherwise.
- As soon as you think there may be an issue with your child with attendance, arrange to speak with the school and share your concerns.
- Work with the school to understand the barriers to their attendance and, where appropriate, create a plan for attendance that fits with the needs of the child and makes *reasonable* adjustments to overcome those specific barriers in an effective way of building confidence and reducing anxiety about attending.
- While only medical professionals can make a formal diagnosis of a mental health condition, you can inform the school of a suspected mental health difficulty. They do not necessarily need to have a particular condition, but you can explain that they have experienced a series of symptoms that you feel is affecting their quality of life. Where possible it is helpful for the child or young person to voice their experiences themselves.
- Engage with support offered by the school.
- You should feel reassured that the school has a plan for your child, and parent/carers should feel supported in their responsibility of ensuring the child's regular attendance at school.
- If you are living with mental health problems yourself as a parent / carer, or experiencing wider vulnerabilities or challenging life circumstances, this may affect your ability to provide support and care. It is important for school to recognise the need for practical, whole-family support and/or early help support where necessary, to try to address the causes of poor attendance. For example, where applicable, the family's support worker might act as an instigator or organiser of any additional support offered and is a key party to join any conversations about a child's attendance.



School's Responsibilities

- Inform the LA where pupils are likely to miss more than 15 days.
- Work with the family to provide educational provision (whilst determining with the LA whether alternative provision should be provided under section 19 of the Education Act 1996, as outlined in statutory guidance).
- Put in place reasonable adjustments or support to ensure that the time the child or young person spends in school is prioritised as much as is possible, always considering their particular needs.

- School staff are not expected to diagnose mental health conditions or perform mental health interventions but **are** expected to work to ensure regular attendance for every child. This means schools have a responsibility to look at the barriers to attendance,
- Make suitable adjustments where needed, and review these regularly. *This is more than just telling a parent that their child or young person must be in school and leaving the duty solely with the parents to sort out.*
- Where parents have notified school of concerns about their child (which may or may not at this stage affect attendance), school staff should work quickly to communicate this expectation to parents/carers and **work together with them to ensure that such circumstances do not act as a barrier to regular attendance.**
- Any associated anxiety about attending should be mitigated as much as possible by creating a plan to implement reasonable adjustments to alleviate specific barriers to attendance ([see effective practice examples](#)). These adjustments should be agreed by and regularly reviewed with all parties, including parents/carers. In the above guidance any actions taken to support attendance are referred to as “reasonable adjustments” as a way of describing those actions in general terms, (as opposed to relating to a school’s duty to make reasonable adjustments pupils with a disability under section 20 of the 2010 Equality Act)
- In developing a plan to support attendance through reasonable adjustments, school staff will need to take into account the individual circumstances of the child, being mindful of safeguarding responsibilities as set out in the ‘*Keeping children safe in education*’ 2022 guidance.
- Where support is offered but parent carers and/or pupil has not engaged with it, or where all other options have been exhausted or deemed inappropriate, schools should work with LAs to consider whether to formalise support or to enforce attendance through legal intervention in the normal way under their existing powers. This should **not** be a case of ‘you haven’t agreed with what we have offered so now we will just fine you’ but exhausting *all* other options first.



Local Authority Responsibilities

- The LA must provide a suitable education for a child who is out-of-school ill, excluded, ‘or otherwise’. This duty applies to all children, whether they have special educational needs (SEN) or not
- (Section 19, Education Act (1996))
- Provide such education as soon as it is clear the child will be
 - away from school for 15 days or more, whether consecutive or cumulative. They should liaise with appropriate medical
 - professionals to ensure minimal delay in arranging appropriate provision for the child. If specific medical evidence, (i.e. from a medical consultant) is not quickly available, LAs should consider liaising with other medical professionals, such as the child’s GP, and consider looking at other evidence to ensure minimal delay in arranging appropriate provision for the child. (*Additional Health Needs Guidance*)
- LAs must **not** follow an inflexible policy of requiring medical evidence before making their decision about alternative education.
- LAs **must** look at the evidence for each individual case, even when there is no medical evidence, and make their own decision about alternative education.
- Where a CYP has an EHCP, the LA must secure the specified special educational provision for the child or young person. (Section 42 of the Children and families Act 2014)



- Where they have identified that alternative provision is required, LAs should ensure that it is arranged as quickly as possible and that it appropriately meets the needs of the child.
- **No pupil should be left without educational provision.**



Links to further information:

[Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools](#)
[Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school](#)
[Ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs](#)
[Mental Health & behaviour in Schools](#)

Service Statement

The role of the SENDIAS service is to ensure all parents, children and young people have access to impartial information, advice and support so they can make informed decisions related to their situation. Any information that is shared with the service is in confidence unless permission has been obtained to share this with any individuals, services and agencies that may be able to help in the circumstances. For more detail, view our [policies and privacy notice](#) on our website.

How to contact us: Tel: 0330 222 8555 / Email: send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk or cyp.sendias@westsussex.gov.uk (up to age 25) / Website: www.westsussexsendias.org

To view factsheet online and access all links: <https://tinyurl.com/btwbxzep>

or scan QR code:



Updated August 2025