DSPL | Delivering Special Provision Locally
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Dacorum

**Supporting Attendance**

**Good practice in supporting children and young people with autism and attendance at school  - April 2022**

# Contents Page

# Underpinning fundamentals to support Children and Young People with autism in school

This document is aimed at primary and secondary school aged children and young people (CYP). We also use the term children and young people with autism and autistic children and young people interchangeably reflecting the different opinions in the Autism community regarding the naming of autism as either an integrally part of someone's identity or alternatively using first person language.

Children and young people with autism work hard to adjust and achieve in the neuro-typical world. All children and young people are different, but all autistic diagnosed children and young people may have difficulties with:

- communication and social interaction

- change

- repetitive/rigid behaviours and activities,

- sensory processing differences.

The demands of the school day with high levels of social interaction, varied sensory experiences and changeable routines, can result in many CYP with autism finding school negative and/or overwhelming. Therefore, autistic CYP are at greater risk of not attending school or find themselves unable to attend. A UK national study in May 2020 concluded that non attendance is common in children with autism, the occurrence of this increased with the child's age when they attended mainstream school. Non attendance due to school refusal was the most common reason for non attendance. (Totsika, V and Heyne, D 2020) in Autism: Types and Correlates of non-attendance in students with autism spectrum disorders.)

Often CYP are not able to articulate the impact of their school experience. Requiring schools or parents to become detectives to unpick what is happening and how best to support the CYP. Home or school may only see seemingly unpredictable behaviour, disproportionate responses to situations or meltdowns without cause.

Reasonable adjustments which acknowledge the impact of the demands of the environment are key to maintaining the young person's ability to access school life. Experience tells us that CYP who have a strong relationship with at least one member of the staff team are more likely to cope in school, building this relationship may take time and it may not be someone who is the class teacher.

Even if CYP appear to be 'coping' how school is being experienced should be discussed routinely and promoted to avoid overwhelm at later times such as after school.

Tools and resources are provided within this pack to respond to attendance issues for CYP with autism, however not all approaches work for all CYP. Parents and schools should consider what is going to be most likely to be effective and supportive for the young person. The approach most likely to result in a positive outcome is to maintain a person-centred approach which seeks solutions, includes the CYP and young person's voice in planning and working to support attendance at school.

# Early warning signs

These are the some of the things schools and parents may see prior to attendance becoming a concern.

These signs may be seen in all CYP as starting points for attendance issues but the impact when seen through the autism lenses can develop quickly.

Autism friendly interventions can reduce increasing decline in attendance.

Autism leads in schools should be mindful of these and promote the understanding of these with teaching staff.

Early intervention is 6 times more likely to result in successful outcomes rather than waiting till non-attendance is long term and significant.

It is an approach based on working with parents to support them and their CYP. Attendance issues are the result of something occurring for that young person that needs addressing, it is a consequence and often not the problem itself for the young person.

However, attendance may decline for reasons unrelated to autism for example peer pressure to not attend, medical reasons, parental approach, it is important to unpick triggers, signs and reasons with CYP and parent.

## Home Early Signs and Triggers

Refusing to leave the home or car in the morning
Meltdowns after school
Increase in aggression or definence
Not doing homework
Reported sleep problems and anxiety symptoms
Family trauma or changes in family structure
Receiving diagnosis
Returning to school after a holiday period
Emotional at home but not able to communicate
the cause or reason
Increase in screen time / gaming.
Decline in self care, increase in lethargy
Illness – physical pain including sore throats, headaches,
tummy ache, pains in legs
Friendship issues
Social Media

## School Early Signs and Triggers

Reports of bullying to or from CYP
Being involved in having to report an incident
Friendship issues
Refusing to attend certain lessons or subjects
Being singled out in front of a class
Incomplete homework
Refusing to take part in activities during days or
struggling with lunch/breaks
Leaving lessons without reason which is increasing
Detentions
Supply teachers
Tests and exams
Transitions
GCSE choices
Perceived increases in work
Changes to school day or routines

# Good foundations in schools

**DSPL 8 and HCC ISL will support all schools to establish the following in order to ensure the needs of all CYP with autism are met to support attendance.** These fundamentals need to be in place and imbedded within the school culture.

- Autism Lead in place who has had training in role. **Autism Lead reviews attendance for CYP with autism in school**. The Autism Lead should have a clearly defined role in supporting attendance for CYP with autism. They should have a link to the school attendance lead and input into school attendance strategy.

- Schools are expected to have the Hertfordshire autism quality offer (source in reference section).

- Use of individual pupil passports / profiles to support CYP in school. An individual pupil passport ensures that every CYP with autism is an individual who needs are understood by those who support them. This can be a significant support tool when regular teachers or support staff are not available or when the young person is experiencing a school or home transition.

- Has a whole school attendance strategy. All schools should have a school attendance strategy which provides a framework and reference point for attendance issues. Non-attendance can present safeguarding issues for CYP and reduce life chances, monitoring and recording of attendance and plans to support attendance are vital to safeguard CYP and improve outcomes.

- In secondary school explore the use of autism trained peer mentors available to year 7 students with autism. These are focused mentors who can support CYP through the secondary transition and address the non-academic challenges of school.

- DSPL 8 will offer schools a training powerpoint for front of house staff in relation to attendance and CYP with autism in order to promote welcoming knowledgeable response from those staff who meet, greet and monitor attendance. (This is available in Early Support Tool Grid of this document)

- DSPL 8 to support the Schools SEND Family Work to offer workshops to parents looking at attendance for CYP with autism. These will support process outlined and ensure parents are equipped to support CYP and schools with attendance.

Building on CYP's strengths and favoured areas of interest is key to keeping school motivating and interesting. Providing and encouraging CYP to seek activity which restores their well-being or provides respite from high levels of interaction should be identified, such as.

- quiet safe spaces

- sensory seating

- calming apps on iPads

- headphones with music

- yoga

- sensory circuits

Clear routines in the school day including when planned or unplanned changes occur, preparation and support provided with visual timetable support will assist.  Good communication with parents and carers will support understanding of what reasonable adjustments are working and what else might support.

# Early intervention in autism attendance

The following flow chart has been developed with Local Authority Attendance Team, wider ISL, school family workers, families and schools. It takes an early intervention approach, addressing and exploring attendance issues early with the view maintaining relationships and school routine.

Early intervention is 6 times more likely to result in successful outcomes rather than waiting till non-attendance is long term and significant.

It is an approach based on working with parents to support them and their CYP. Attendance issues are the result of something occurring for that young person that needs addressing, it is a consequence and often not the problem itself for the young person.

The process is designed to provide a framework to address early attendance issues. Recording and planning in relation to attendance can allow a school to be more flexible in its response to attendance and acknowledge individual needs within the attendance strategy.

A plan to support the CYP or young person should outline what reasonable adjustments school will undertake, what the young person says helps to support them to be in school and how the parent or carer will support the young person and school.

The threshold for discussing attendance in line with this guidance is recommended to be either

- attendance at less than 94% or

- a parent or CYP reports non -attendance due to school refusal or

- in response to a sudden significant drop in attendance.

This is to ensure an early response and acknowledge the higher stresses school life presents to CYP with autism.

We recommend that the **Autism Lead and Attendance Lead routinely monitor** the attendance of CYP with autism.
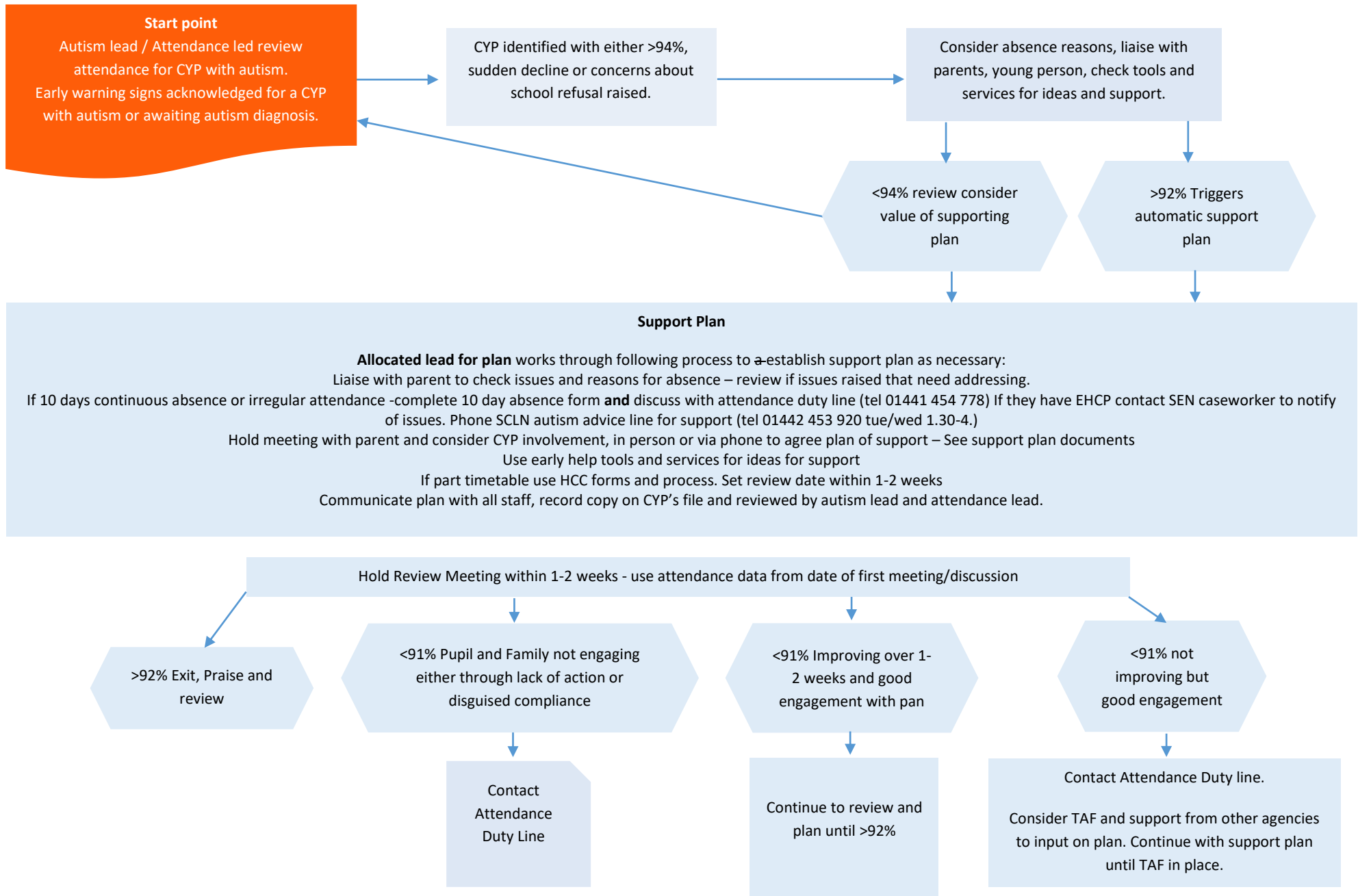
When a school feels action is needed, either through reviewing attendance or from information being flagged by the family, CYP or staff, the school should allocate an appropriate member of staff to lead the support plan. The school should ensure that a key person continues to be the main point of contact regarding attendance for the family and young person (it may be appropriate for the key worker for the adults in the family to be different to that of the child). The message from parents is they want consistent information regarding support and action for their CYP. The member of staff allocated may vary depending on staff workloads and relationships with the CYP/family. The key worker for the plan should be supported by the Autism Lead.

Ensure plans for support are recorded and added to the young person's file.

It is recommended that the Autism Lead and Attendance Lead review all support plans and monitor outcomes for CYP involved in these plans.

A power point presentation for office staff has been designed and can be personalised to your school. This should be presented to office staff routinely by your autism lead or SENCO.

# Flow chart for CYP with autism in relation to attendance

**Start point**
Autism lead / Attendance led review attendance for CYP with autism.
Early warning signs acknowledged for a CYP with autism or awaiting autism diagnosis.

CYP identified with either >94%, sudden decline or concerns about school refusal raised.

Consider absence reasons, liaise with parents, young person, check tools and services for ideas and support.

<94% review consider value of supporting plan

>92% Triggers automatic support plan

**Support Plan**

**Allocated lead for plan** works through following process to a establish support plan as necessary:
Liaise with parent to check issues and reasons for absence – review if issues raised that need addressing.
If 10 days continuous absence or irregular attendance -complete 10 day absence form **and** discuss with attendance duty line (tel 01441 454 778) If they have EHCP contact SEN caseworker to notify of issues. Phone SCLN autism advice line for support (tel 01442 453 920 tue/wed 1.30-4.)
Hold meeting with parent and consider CYP involvement, in person or via phone to agree plan of support – See support plan documents
Use early help tools and services for ideas for support
If part timetable use HCC forms and process. Set review date within 1-2 weeks
Communicate plan with all staff, record copy on CYP's file and reviewed by autism lead and attendance lead.

Hold Review Meeting within 1-2 weeks - use attendance data from date of first meeting/discussion

>92% Exit, Praise and review

<91% Pupil and Family not engaging either through lack of action or disguised compliance

<91% Improving over 1-2 weeks and good engagement with pan

<91% not improving but good engagement

Contact Attendance Duty Line

Continue to review and plan until >92%

Contact Attendance Duty line.

Consider TAF and support from other agencies to input on plan. Continue with support plan until TAF in place.

# Early help tools and services

**Bold items have resources that can be found on the DSPL 8 Website under Professionals/autism/supporting attendance**

## Assessment Tools

| Complete School Stress Survey with Young person | Review and update pupil profile<br><br>One Page Profile<br>All about Me | Review / undertake sensory profile for young person | Hertfordshire Steps – anxiety mapping, roots and fruits and risk management plan | Ideal school tool used with CYP |
|---|---|---|---|---|

## Resources

| Reintegrating plan and support | Drawing and talking work | **Reuse progression framework** to identify areas of strength and weaknesses. Support lesson planning and goals. | **Social Stories** about school timetable, changes and routine | **Autistic burnout and Energy Accounting** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Reduced timetable** – use Hertfordshire policy and planning tool on Grid | **Anxiety UK Websites** | **Healthy Young Minds** in Herts website parent and young person tips on anxiety | **Hertfordshire Educational Psychologist Emotionally Based School Avoidance – Parent Version has book and website list**. | **ESMA Anxiety Resources** – top tips for parents and CYP on anxiety |
| **Dacourm Guidance for Support Mental Health Resource List** | **AET Teacher Support Materials** | **Not Fine In School** | **Tony Attwood on Autism and Attendance explored** | **Leicestershire Sensory Assessment and Support Tool** |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **National autistic society information for parents when you child won't go to school** | **Ofsted Review of Attendance Report Jan 2022** | **Front of house / school office staff Power Point on Autism and Attendance** | | |

## Other

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Timetable changes – Early starts, separate lunch, time in other classes – this can be used where observations and assessments have indicated building challenges from school day | Identify liked adults encourage contact and relationship | Key young person, adult mentor / peer mentor or buddy allocated | Timetabled time and / or open access to safe space in school or safe room to relax and talk.<br><br>Timetabled liked or relaxing activity. | Communication plan between family, school and CYP – who what and when |
| Meet and Greet each morning – Who will do this and where – is there an agreed phrase – is this a check in with the young person or just a welcome. | Observing lessons to identify stresses and issues | Identify and build upon areas of strengths and interest for CYP | Screen for speech and language difficulties | **Whole school assemblies about autism** |
| If approved non-attendance preferred subject work sent home | Connections between CYP and class / school – letters home, involvement in out of school, after school activity. | **Playground plan**<br>**Using ideal school tool explore how unstructured time on** | **Teaching and talking about physiology of anxiety and coping strategies** | **West Sussex sensory profile and needs tool**<br>**Sensory Needs Reviewed** |

| | | playground could be improved or supported. | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|

## Early support external services

| | | | | SEND School Family Worker |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pupil support worker | **School Nursing** | **Step 2** | **DESC consultation** | |
| | **Speech, Language, Communication and Autism teachers** | **Children's well being practionaires** | **SPACE** and **Potential Kids** offer local activities for young people with autism. Extend child's activities with others. | PALMS |

## Support plan documents

Recording what is going to be done and by whom is important to support analysis of what works and doesn't work for a young person.

Pupil support plans designed for CYP on reduced timetables offer a good model – appendix A of the Hertfordshire County Council guidance on the use of part time timetables.

Alternatively, the following plan could be used – this is available on the website as a word document.

| Name:<br><br>Year Group: | Class: | Start Date: | End Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| Start date situation:<br><br>Attendance Levels:<br><br><br>Positives and Strengths: | Plan First Meeting | Review 1 Date<br>When will this occur? | Review 2 Date |
| Objective for coming period? | | What's been achieved?<br><br>New Objective? | What's been achieved?<br><br>New Objective? |
| What will school do/try? | | | |
| What will parents do/try? | | | |
| Young person needs to/try? | | | |
| Parents Signature | Pupil Signature | School Signature | |

## Long term or significant drop in attendance

CYP with autism can sometimes find anxiety related to school so significant that they stop attending. They often also stop interacting with life itself, so don't leave bedrooms, fail to undertake self-care skills and not engage with family. For these CYP it is important that the schoolwork with family and other agencies to support them through this period.

For reintegration to be successful individual relationships are often key and identifying young person's areas of interests important to building trust. The following actions have been used by schools to support CYP in this situation:
Referral to Educational Support for Medical Absence if appropriate see Targeted Services Framework

- Mentoring and support to bridge gap between home –school

- Consider Home visits or visits to neutral venues

- School visits out of hours

- Access to preferred activities in community

- Assessment of needs via Team around the Family

- Assessments by Health professionals – CAMHS / PALMS

- Assessment by Education

- Nessi in Ed can be commissioned by schools or parents to support therapeutically

# School attendance service advice and guidance

A good education will help to give CYP the best possible start in life. Parents or carers have a vital role to play in making this happen.

Central to raising standards in education and ensuring all CYP can fulfil their potential is an assumption so widely understood that it is insufficiently stated – CYP need to attend school regularly to benefit from their education. Missing out on lessons leaves CYP vulnerable to falling behind. CYP with poor attendance tend to achieve less in both primary and secondary school.

The government expects schools and local authorities to:

- Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence

- Ensure every pupil has access to full time education to which they are entitled, and, act early to address patterns of absence

Parents to perform their legal duty by ensuring their CYP of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend regularly

Schools must take the attendance register twice a day: at the start of each morning and once during the afternoon.

Schools are responsible for the attendance of CYP on their roll and must follow up on all instances of non-attendance and take reasonable steps to address this. If a pupil has irregular attendance or is absent continuously without authorisation for ten school days, schools must notify their local ISL Attendance Team -
**http://www.thegrid.org.uk/info/welfare/attendance.shtml**

## What does the law say?

All parents of CYP aged 5 – 16 who are registered CYP at a school have a legal duty to make sure that their CYP attends regularly and on time. Parents must make sure their CYP is at school when they should be and that they arrive on time for both morning and afternoon sessions. If parents fail to do this and there are no legitimate reasons – such as illness, for the non-attendance, a Local Authority Attendance Officer may become involved.  It is a Headteacher's or Principal's decision on whether an absence is authorised or unauthorised based on the information provided by a parent.

## Removal from Roll

Schools may only lawfully delete CYP from the admission register on the grounds prescribed in regulation 8 of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended by the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016). Removal from Roll Guidance is available at -
http://www.thegrid.org.uk/info/welfare/attendance.shtml

## Penalty Notices

Schools may apply to the Local Authority for a Penalty Notice to be issued to a parent who fails to ensure their CYP attends school regularly and the absences have been unauthorised by the Headteacher.

The application must comply with the Local Authority's published Code of Conduct and Guidance.

Once a Penalty Notice has been issued there is no statutory right of appeal however the Local Authority may withdraw a notice if it has been issued incorrectly. This does not mean that a notice will be withdrawn because a parent disagrees with it.

Schools may request intervention from the Local Authority Attendance Team for statutory intervention if deemed appropriate.

## What does a Local Authority Attendance Officer do?

Local Authority Attendance Officers (LAAOs) work as part of Hertfordshire County Council's CYP's Services, based in the Integrated Services for Learning teams. They have a responsibility to make sure parents are fulfilling their legal duty to ensure their CYP attends school regularly and punctually.

## LAAO Working with parents

If there are concerns about a CYP's attendance, the school will try to resolve them first, but if they can't the LAAO attached to the school may write to parents or carers. The LAAO may invite parents to a meeting at the school or at a local Hertfordshire County Council office, or they may visit parents at home.

LAAOs will always try to work with parents to resolve any difficulties that are preventing a CYP's regular attendance at school. However, the law is clear that parents are responsible for their CYP's regular and punctual attendance at school.

There may be good reasons for an attendance difficulty, such as illness. However, if it becomes clear that this is not the case, and despite every best effort to work out a solution, the CYP's attendance does not improve, the LAAO may begin legal proceedings against the parents on behalf of the County Council.

The decision to prosecute parents remains solely with the Local Authority.

# Language appendix

Language surrounding autism and school attendance has been contested. Families, children and professionals have found that the way situations are described can cause offence, be a barrier to progress and label young people.

This document is aimed at supporting children and young people early and so any label regarding attendance is unlikely to be helpful at this stage. It is better to work on the principle that everyone needs to support the CYP to feel comfortable and welcome in school. You are addressing the school environment and home support in order to ensure the CYP can be involved in school life.

The term SCHOOL REFUSAL is highlighted as the most problematic word used. Parents consulted in this work stressed how it placed the problem with the child and appeared to indicate that the child was just being difficult or the parent wasn't trying hard enough to get the child to school. They said if a child refused to go home from school, alarm bells would ring about home life and that child's experience of home. So when a child refuses to go to school why aren't the same concerns about what school is like for the child raised.

TRUANCY this word is mostly used to describe children who leave school without permission or are not in school without parental or school's permission.

NON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE this can be used to describe children who are not attending school in a factual way.

# References

Totsika, V and Heyne, D May 2020 in Autism: Types and Correlates of non-attendance in students with autism spectrum disorders.

Hertfordshire Autism Quality Offer -https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/local-offer/national-and-local-send-policies.aspx