PROMOTING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION
These guidelines support Kent County Council’s policy with respect to the education of Looked After Children and young people by promoting school attendance. They have been written to help parents, carers and other professionals understand each others role in supporting looked after children and young people’s attendance at school. “Being in school full time gives children the best possible chances to succeed. As well as learning subjects in class, they develop routines and understand about timekeeping. Missing school makes it harder for them to catch up what they miss” (Who Does What, DfES 2004).

1. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

1.1 Looked After Children should be given every opportunity to achieve their full educational potential through promoting opportunities for learning within and outside of school.

1.2. As a minimum legal requirement, Looked After Children should be attending suitable education on a full time basis from the term following their 5th birthday until the last Friday in June in the school year in which they are 16. The place where children receive their education will be based on the age, aptitude and ability and any special needs they may have. For most children, this will be a mainstream school.

1.3. Young people should only be missing education for the following reasons.

- If they are ill. For absence up to 7 days (including Saturday and Sunday), foster carers or the child’s primary carer/keyworker simply contact the school by phone on the first day and confirm by letter on the child’s return. Longer absences should be supported by a GP sickness certificate where possible.

- Circumstances where absence can be authorised by the school include days for religious observance, interviews, study leave (up to 15 days arranged by the school to prepare for Year 11 exams), approved educational activities (e.g. school trip), family bereavement, family contact arrangements that cannot be arranged outside the school day. Arrangements for pupils to be registered as attending education elsewhere might include part-time attendance at a Pupil Referral Unit or Special School. Absence to attend medical appointments, LAC review etc., will normally be authorised, although it is expected that these will take place outside school hours wherever possible and will not coincide with school exams (SAT’s GCSE etc.). Requests to take normal family holidays during term time are not generally authorised.

- Where no school place has been identified for the child. The Government expects local authorities to set a maximum time limit of 20 school days within which they must secure an education placement for any pupil in public care. This will normally be a full time place in a local mainstream school. Here the social worker (or parent if they retain parental responsibility) would approach the nearest appropriate school to seek a place. The exception to this would be where the circumstances of the child make full time or local or mainstream provision unsuitable. In this event the Authority will ensure that provision appropriate to the child’s needs will be made available. Where the child concerned has a Statement of Special Educational Needs, the Additional Educational Needs & Resources team is responsible for ensuring appropriate provision is in place. Most children with Special Educational Needs are successfully included in mainstream school, with support they need provided by the school.
Where the child has received a ‘fixed term exclusion’ or has been permanently excluded (see further guidance on exclusions below). If a child has been permanently excluded, the Exclusions Officer takes the lead in securing an appropriate education place. Where a mainstream school place is not suitable, they would seek appropriate provision (e.g. Alternative Curriculum). However, if the child concerned has a Statement of SEN, the Additional Education Needs & Resources team would lead on securing appropriate educational provision for them.

1.4. It is expected that children should attend school on time and, where required brought and collected from school by their carers or other authorised adult to ensure that this happens.

1.5. Non-attendance that has not been authorised as above will be treated as a serious matter by all agencies concerned. Any actions to support children’s school attendance will be taken according to what is in their best interests and included in the child’s Personal Education Plan. Action should be taken early where children’s attendance is causing concern.

1.6. Action taken to promote attendance will be agreed between professionals involved with the child concerned. Where entrenched problems of non-attendance cannot be resolved at this level, there may be a need for managers in the relevant agencies to consider together the best course of action for the child.

1.7. Children should be consulted and their wishes and feelings should be taken into account wherever possible. All agencies must work together to address any problems regarding school attendance in order to find the best solutions for the child concerned.

1.8. Young children benefit from access to good quality early learning opportunities. In Kent, 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to six consecutive terms of free part time early education. For most Looked After Children of this age, taking up this entitlement will help promote their social development and subsequent attendance and achievement at school.

2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1. Children / young people -
- Are expected to attend school regularly and on time, except where absence has been authorised. They are expected to register morning and afternoon and attend all their lessons.

2.2. Parents and others with parental responsibility
- Are legally responsible for their children receiving education.
- They are responsible for ensuring their children attend school (with the appropriate lunch, uniform and equipment) and for supporting their learning. This includes making arrangements for the child to get to and be collected from school.
- They are expected to contact school if there are attendance problems and to work with the school and other professionals concerned to resolve them.
- They are expected to arrange any medical and other appointments outside school hours wherever possible and to avoid taking family holidays during term time.

2.3. Foster carers/Residential Staff
Are expected to do all things a good parent would do to promote their child’s education and attendance at school. In addition, foster carers must:-
- Be positive about the value of education and have high expectations for children in their care.
- Adhere to the checklist for foster carers (Appendix 1)
- Inform the child’s school and Social Worker if they have concerns about attendance
- Listen to their looked after child to find out why they are not attending (e.g. bullying, problems with learning, anxiety).
- Ensure any concerns are raised at the child’s LAC Review Meeting.
- In partnership with the child’s social worker do what a good parent would do in order to ensure that their looked after child has a school place and attends school.
- It is not acceptable for a foster carer/residential staff member to give permission for a child to not attend school unless this is for one of the reasons outlined under paragraph 1.3 of this report.

2.4 Social Workers

- Have primary responsibility for ensuring the child has an up to date care plan in place, including education and health arrangements
- Taking the lead to ensure that the child has an effective Personal Education Plan on place, drawn up with the child (according to age and understanding), parent(s), carers, Designated Teacher and other relevant people. Further guidance will be issued on Personal Education Plans for LAC.
- Ensuring as far as possible, in the interests of stability, that in identifying a suitable care placement, disruption to the child is minimised i.e. consider whether the placement would enable the child’s current schooling to be maintained or would facilitate the child’s reintegration into school
- Keeping in contact with the child’s school in order to monitor progress.
- Listening to the child to find out why they are not attending.
- Advocating on the child’s behalf.
- Contributing to educational assessments and plans for the child.
- Helping parents and carers to support the child’s education.
- Adhering to the Social Workers Checklist (appendix 2).
- Consult, when necessary, with the LAC Education Advisor to understand the range of issues affecting the education of Looked After Children

2.5 Schools

- Identify a member of staff as the Designated Teacher to act as a resource and advocate for looked after pupils. They are responsible for identifying pupils who are looked after, monitoring and promoting their progress (including their attendance) ensuring Personal Education Plans are in place and are regularly reviewed for them and ensuring information regarding individual LAC pupils is shared with other professionals as appropriate.
- Inform parents and foster carers and intervene to address any attendance problems.
- Only use exclusion as a last resort and always within the legal guidelines (Appendix 2).
- Listen to their looked after child to find out why they are not attending (e.g Bullying, problems with learning, anxiety).
- Have high expectations for looked after children as for all pupils.
- Put pastoral support in place for pupils at risk of disaffection, documented within a Pastoral Support Plan.
- Respect Looked After Children’s privacy by ensuring that only those who need to know about the child/young person’s circumstances are informed, particularly in relation to maintaining confidentiality about the child’s Looked After status.
- Work in partnership with other agencies such as Social Services and Health in order to promote the welfare of Looked After Children.
2.6 **Admissions Officers**
Are responsible for
- Supporting schools and parents through the admission process
- Working closely with other professionals to ensure every child is offered a school place suitable to their age, ability and needs
- Administering and providing support to schools throughout the secondary transfer process.
- Supporting parents moving to Kent who require help in finding a school
- Assessing the eligibility of children for free home to school transport
- Administering and presenting appeals for both school places and school transport
- Working with the LAC Education Advisor to understand the range of issues affecting the education of Looked After Children.

2.7 **Connexions Personal Advisers**
- Provide a personal support and advocacy service for young people aged 13 to 19 (25 for young people with disabilities).
- Help LAC who are at risk of disaffection to re-engage with their education.
- Help LAC make informed choices about education, training and employment.
- Facilitate access to other appropriate services.
- Contribute to meeting individual needs and raising expectations/overcoming barriers to learning for looked after children.
- Working with the LAC Education Advisor to understand the range of issues affecting the education of Looked After Children.

2.8 **Education Welfare Officers**
- Promote the right of access to education for children of statutory school age.
- Work in partnership with children and young people, parents, foster carers, social workers, schools and other agencies in matters relating to school attendance.
- Support work to raise the educational attainment of Looked After Children through improved attendance.
- Attend Children’s LAC reviews and PEP meetings where there are issues of poor attendance.
- Offer initial advice on children in employment or entertainment, where attendance is affected.
- Monitor trends in relation to school attendance.
- Work with the LAC Education Advisor to understand the range of issues affecting the education of Looked After Children.
- From autumn 05, a Welfare Call service will check the attendance of children looked after by KCC and alert carers if children are not attending.

2.9 **Elected Members**
In Kent, elected members have established a cross-authority Children’s Champion Board as a focus for their corporate parenting responsibility for looked after children. The functions of the board are to:
- Understand the issues affecting looked after children (including their education)
- Maintain an overview of services and initiatives that are being developed to promote better outcomes for looked after children.
- Ascertain the views of looked after children and ensure they are taken into account by the County Council.
- Make recommendations to Cabinet.
- All County Council Members should endeavour to understand their role as Corporate Parents by familiarising themselves with KCC’s guide to members on Corporate parenting.
2.10 **Exclusion / Inclusion Officers**
- Ensure that all Governors and Headteachers are aware of and comply with DfES regulations and County guidelines relating to handling of exclusions.
- Represent the LEA at conciliation meetings and in planning the reinstatement of pupils.
- Represent the LEA as necessary at the Statutory Appeal Committee.
- Make arrangements in consultation with other colleagues and agencies to ensure that children who have been excluded are receiving appropriate education (liaison, tracking and monitoring).
- Monitor the pattern of exclusions and take action as appropriate to minimise the number of exclusions.
- Work with the LAC Education Advisor to understand the range of issues affecting the education of Looked After Children.

2.11 **Fostering Social Workers and Education Support Workers**
- Support foster carers in their role of promoting children’s attendance at school, learning and development.
- Consult, when necessary, with the LAC Advisor to understand the range of issues affecting the education of Looked After Children.

2.12 **Governing Bodies**
- Are expected to promote better outcomes for looked after children by:
  - Ensuring LAC are given top priority in their school’s admission arrangements.
  - Ensuring a Designated Teacher has been identified
  - Ensuring a Personal Education Plan is in place for all looked after children
  - Ensuring a mechanism is in place to identify looked after children and who holds parental responsibility for them.
  - Identifying a named Governor to monitor the progress of looked after children.
  - Inviting the Area LAC Education Adviser to provide training and information for the Governing Body.
  - Ensuring the needs of looked after children are taken into account in establishing policies, targets etc.
  - Establishing a Discipline Committee to hear cases where it is proposed to exclude a child from school
  - Work with the school's Looked After Children Designated Teacher to maintain an overview of the progress of Looked After Children pupils and action taken to promote their education.

2.13 **Health Professionals**
- Should support the attendance of looked after children by:
  - Providing appointments outside school hours, at weekends or during school holidays.
  - Ensuring Looked After Children receive health intervention without delay.
  - Working with schools, social workers and other agencies to ensure that services for children are co-ordinated.

2.14 **Independent Reviewing Officers**
- Ensure LAC review meetings are held within required timescales.
- Ensure that Looked After Children’s care plans (including Personal Education Plans) are reviewed and make appropriate recommendations and decisions to ensure that they are implemented effectively.
- Involve the child in decision-making processes.
- Provide statistics to help improve outcomes for LAC.
- Help ensure that LAC reviews take place out of school hours.
- Have the final say in relation to who should attend reviews and where they should be held – taking into account the views of all those concerned.
Consult, when necessary, with the LAC Advisor to understand the range of issues affecting the education of Looked After Children

2.15 Local Education Officers and Cluster Boards
- Supported by the LAC Education Adviser, Cluster Boards are expected to keep an overview of the number and progress of looked after children in their area.
- Promote collaboration between schools in order to support the inclusion and achievement of looked after children.
- Work with the LAC Education Advisor to understand the range of issues affecting the education of Looked After Children.

2.16 Looked After Children Co-ordinators (Social Services)
- Advise Social Services teams (Children’s Families, Family Support, Fostering, Adoption, Asylum, 16 plus) on issues concerning looked after children.
- In some cases attend and/or chair LAC reviews.
- Line manage Independent Reviewing Officers.
- Contribute to multi-agency training regarding looked after children.
- Develop and monitor strategies to promote the safety and welfare (including education) of looked after children.
- Co-manage Education Catch-up fund for looked after children with LAC Education Advisers.
- Promote partnership working.

2.17 Looked after Children Education Advisers
- Develop and co-ordinate the Education & Libraries Directorate’s support to schools in relation to looked after children.
- Work with schools and clusters to raise their awareness of the needs of looked after children and support them in promoting their achievement in accordance with Kent County Council’s plans and policies.
- Contribute to training programmes for schools and others.
- Ensure effective liaison takes place with other agencies with responsibility for looked after children.
- Ensure that schools have effective systems in place to monitor the progress and achievement of looked after children.
- Support school clusters in developing their response to the needs of looked after children.
- Line manage Connexions Personal Advisers for looked after children.
- Co-manage Catch-Up funds for the education of looked after children with Social Services LAC Co-ordinator.

2.18 Police Officers
- Support measures to promote attendance by working collaboratively with Education Welfare Officers and schools (eg. Truancy sweeps).

2.19 Youth Offending Service
- Reduces risks of young people offending, which are exacerbated by non-school attendance.
- To assist in the identification of appropriate education provision.

2.20 Kent Children’s Information Service (Tel 08000 323230 www.eydcp.com)
- Provides details of approved early education providers, to enable 3 and 4 year olds to take up their entitlement to free, part time early education.
- Providers include maintained and independent nurseries, accredited childminders and playgroups.
CHECK LIST FOR CARERS

These draw on KCC ‘Carers’ rights and responsibilities’ and NTAS ‘top tips for carers’ from “Education: A Carers’ Handbook”.

- Encourage the child in your care to be positive about school life and work.
- Praise the child’s achievements frequently
- Ensure the child attends school regularly and on time.
- Define the rights of the young person but support the school as much as possible
- Work in partnership with the school when trying to sort out problems.
- Make regular contact with teachers and support workers to discuss the child's progress
- Attend parents’ evenings, reviews and meetings about the young person. Ensure his or her educational progress and achievements are discussed. Before each meeting, check that the information you have is still accurate. Make sure you update it at the meeting.
- Try and attend less formal occasions like plays, concerts, social evenings, exhibitions, fairs and sporting events.
- Be available.
- Inform school of any issues, which might affect progress or behaviour, just as a school would expect of any parent.
- Tell the school when you know in advance about an absence or as soon as possible on the day if it is unexpected.
- Do not make appointments in school time unless it is essential
- Do not book holidays in school time.
- Make sure all letters from the school are dealt with promptly
- Provide lunch and a uniform.
- Arrange transport to and from school when appropriate, although be aware when you need to escort young people to school. This may not always be age related; it might be to make sure they arrive!
- Be prepared to give time to them at the end of the school day by supporting learning tasks or just be available to listen to their views and opinions.
- Without being too obvious look for changes in mood or behaviour that might suggest problems in school
- Be ready for the more stressful times in school e.g. exams/problems with teachers or work, conflict with friends and other students. Work out tactics and ideas about how best to cope.
- Provide somewhere quiet and essential materials for homework; check homework and sign diaries or planners
- Encourage the young person to use the local facilities for sport and leisure
- Make sure there is plenty of access to reading and study materials; provide a place to study; provide finance for after-school activities and educational trips in line with the school’s charging policy.
- Encourage involvement in school activities outside school hours such as visits, outdoor activities, sports, drama, art or any other club that might interest the young person.

INFORMATION CHECK LIST FOR CARERS

When a child comes to live with you, you will need to:

- Make sure you are clear about your role and responsibilities in relation to the child’s education.
- Find out about travel arrangements to school and who is responsible for paying for the travel, books, uniforms, school trips.
- Make sure you have the names of key staff at the child’s (e.g. headteacher, year tutor, designated teach for looked after children).
- Find out who is arranging for an education place to be offered if the child does not have a school place.
- Keep accurate and up to date records of the child’s educational history, plans and progress. Obtain copies of recent school reports on academic progress and after school activities.
- Make sure you have a copy of the child’s placement plan and care plan. The care plan includes the child’s Personal Education Plan and Health Plan.
- Keep plans, school reports, awards, qualifications, school brochures in a safe place
- Keep a list of previous schools, dates and reasons for leaving. Share information with the child’s school. Teachers will need to know:
  - Name of the child’s social worker
  - The legal status of the child
  - the names of parents/relatives and the extent of their contact
  - relevant parts of the child’s care plans
  - particular needs that will require their attention in school (e.g. diet, medicine, history of truanting, bullying, being bullied, special educational needs)
  - travel arrangements and who has the authority to collect a younger child from school.
- Find out about any extra support required from you in the home (e.g. help with literacy or homework).
- Make sure you know what support the child requires a school to address any additional educational needs (e.g. a copy of a Statement of Special Educational Needs and/or Individual Education Plan).
- Keep details of previous exclusions or absence from full-time school and alternative educational provision.
- Discuss with the child’s social worker how the young person’s parents are to be kept informed about progress (e.g. sharing a school report).
- The agreed arrangements for you and/or parents or social worker to receive information about school trips, parents evenings, medical consent forms for activities.
- Whether the young person is entitled to and receiving Education Maintenance Allowance.
- When the time comes for the child to move on, pass these records on to the next carer, child and social worker. This will ensure a vital link in the change for the child and help promote his/her educational opportunities.

Questions the child might ask you (From “Who Cares about Education” – an action guide for young people in residential and foster care)

Be prepared for questions the child might ask. Do you know the answers to these questions or where to go to find out?

- Who can I talk to about my school work and how I am getting on?
- Who should read the things that the school sends home?
- Who comes to the school on open evenings?
- What can I do if I am bullied or picked on?
- How can I get extra help with reading, maths or other subjects?
- Where can I do my homework?
- How can I catch up with missed schooling?
- What are the arrangements if I want to do after-school sports or activities?
- Can I say what I want and do not want people at school to know about me being looked after?
- What do I do about being picked on by a teacher?
- Can I complain and how?
- I have been excluded – where can I go to school?
- Can I leave school but still get an education?
- Can I go back to school or college when I am older? Who will pay?
CHECKLIST FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

- Make sure you know the name of the designed teacher at the school your child attends. Make sure they know your child is looked after and how they can contact you if they need to.
- Ensure that your child has a Personal Education Plan and that this is up to date.
- Alert yourself to what is available for the child at their school, e.g. subject choices, extra-curricular activities like sport or music, school outings and help him/her to take advantage of these.
- Make sure that someone (i.e. foster carers, parents or a significant relative/adult) is going to the school’s parent evenings.
- Read all reports on your child’s progress and achievements in the year (e.g. in their SATs, CGSEs or A level mocks) and discuss them with the child.
- Ensure that your child has somewhere at their foster or residential home where they can do their homework without being distracted.
- If your child has to change their placement, make sure that wherever possible, they are able to continue attending their school to promote continuity and stability.
- Encourage your child to join their local library and encourage reading outside school.
- If your child is excluded or not in school full time, involve everyone who can help to get them back into full time education as soon as possible (i.e. the child’s carers, parents, significant relatives/adults, Exclusion/Inclusion Officers, Education Welfare Officers, District Inclusion Forum).
- Promote opportunities for your child to have access to computer and other ICT equipment to aid their learning.
- Familiarise yourself with education processes and procedures and how they can be used to get the best for your child.
- Recognise and acknowledge your child’s achievements, however small.
INFORMATION ON EXCLUSIONS

Exclusion is a very serious step for a school to take. When a pupil is excluded from school, parents, the school and the LEA (Local Education Authority) have certain rights and responsibilities, which must be adhered to in every instance where a decision to exclude a child has been made. It is not acceptable for any school to exclude a child outside of the formal exclusion process (sometimes referred to as an unofficial exclusion).

- **Decision to exclude**
  
The Headteacher is the only person who can take the decision to exclude a pupil from school and here only in response to serious breaches of school discipline and following discussions between parents/carers and school staff. The Headteacher must inform the parents, school governors and the LEA. The Headteacher must explain:

  - The reasons for the exclusion.
  - The steps taken to try to avoid exclusion.
  - The parents’/carers’ right to state their case to the Governing Body’s Discipline Committee.
  - The arrangements made for setting and marking work during the exclusion
  - The parents’/carers’ right to see the child’s school record.

- **Types of Exclusion**
  
  - Fixed period, which range from half a day to a maximum of 45 days in a school year. The pupil can also be excluded for lunchtime(s)
  - Permanent.
  
  - **Fixed Period Exclusions**
    
    - If a pupil is excluded for a fixed period, the Headteacher must inform the parent/carer of the start date of the exclusion, the reason and the date the pupil should return to school
    - Parents/carers will be informed of their right to put their case to the Governing Body and given contact names and addresses.
    - The Governors’ Discipline Committee must arrange a review where exclusions total over 15 school days in a term. Parents/carers and a representative of the LEA must be invited to this meeting.
    - If exclusion is more than 5 days or a public examination is missed, parents/carers have the right to request a meeting of the Governor’s Discipline Committee and governors must agree to this within 50 school days.

  - **Permanent Exclusions.**
    
    - The Headteacher will advise parents/carers at once, by telephone if possible, if a pupil is permanently excluded and give specific reasons for this action together with details of previous warnings, exclusions or other disciplinary actions.
    - Parents/carers will be advised how to express their view, either in writing or in person to the Governing Body exclusion meeting which must take place between the 6th and 15th day of the exclusion.
    - By arrangement with the Headteacher, parents/carers have the right to see the pupil’s school record before the meeting.
    - Parents/carers may take a friend or legal representative to the Governors’ Discipline Committee. The pupil should attend. The Exclusion/Inclusion officer will also be present.
The meeting will be informal and the school will explain the issues that led to the exclusion. Participants at the meeting will have the opportunity to ask questions.

Parents/carers (or their representative) will be asked to make a statement and asked questions.

Governors will make a decision and will confirm in writing giving their reasons. The Governors have the right to direct the school to readmit the pupil.

Parents/carers will be advised in writing should the Governors decide that a pupil should return to school give a return date.

If the decision to exclude a pupil permanently is upheld, parents/carers have the right of appeal to an Independent Appeal Panel to be arranged by the LEA. The intention to appeal must be expressed within 15 school days of this decision.

Independent Appeal Panel

Will hear parental appeals.

Members of the Panel will have no connection with the school.

The Panel will meet within 15 school days of the appeal being logged.

Parents/carers, the school and the LEA will be invited to the meeting.

The meeting will be similar to the original meeting and all parties will have the opportunity to restate their views.

The Panel will either uphold the appeal or reject it and the exclusion will be confirmed.

Partnership with Parents

Provides confidential information, advice and support for parents/carers of pupils at risk of being or who are excluded from school

Useful contacts

- DfES Exclusion Guidance  
  www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/exclusion/guidance

- Partnership with Parents  
  01622 755515  
  partnershipwithparents@kent.gov.uk

- Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) Helpline for parents/carers  
  0207 704 9822  
  www.ace-ed.org.uk

- DfES Exclusion Guidance  
  www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/exclusion/guidance