

**ATTEND TODAY, ACHIEVE TOMORROW:
ATTENDANCE MATTERS**

I M P R O V I N G



**TO GIVE CHILDREN
THE BEST START IN LIFE**

2023-2028



Introduction

This Attendance Improvement Strategy 2023-28 for Northumberland sets out our local safeguarding partnership's vision for school attendance:

All children and young people in Northumberland enjoy good attendance at school, or alternative education provision, in environments where they are safe to learn, achieved through partnership working to provide timely and meaningful support when it is needed.

The strategy details our aspirations and priorities for the county and the improvements that we plan to make with our partners so that attendance at school is better than it was before the global pandemic of 2020.

This strategy should be read alongside statutory guidance documents on improving school attendance, safeguarding, children missing education, supporting pupils with medical conditions at school, suspensions and exclusions, alternative provision, and elective home education (See useful links on page 16). Delivery of the strategy will ensure that the requirements of statutory guidance Working together to improve school attendance are fulfilled.

Our world continues to return more and more to how life was before 2020 and the global pandemic, but the lasting impact on children's lives continues to reverberate as they progress through the education system. Getting children back on track with their learning, after an extensive period of disruption, is complex. Even before the pandemic the prevalence of children's emotional wellbeing and mental health needs had been increasing, but this has been accelerated and complicated further by uncertainty caused by lockdowns, closure of schools, isolation from peer groups, bereavement and the pressures on families.

The landscape is ever-changing with currently over 170 schools, academies, free schools and independent schools in Northumberland that educate more than 44,000 children and young people (Nursery to Year 13).

Before the pandemic school attendance in Northumberland was good. For at least the 3 years previous to that it had been improving and better than national and regional averages in all measures.

Like most other local authorities in England, recent statistical data shows that this position has changed. The challenges are around reducing persistent absence for certain pupil groups, particularly those of secondary school age, those with families affected by Covid, and children with a social worker.

The strategy complements the values and aims of Northumberland County Council, set out in the local authority's Corporate Plan.

Doing everything we can, together, to safeguard our children by improving attendance will ensure that they have the best start in life.

As professionals, and parents, we need to continually ask:

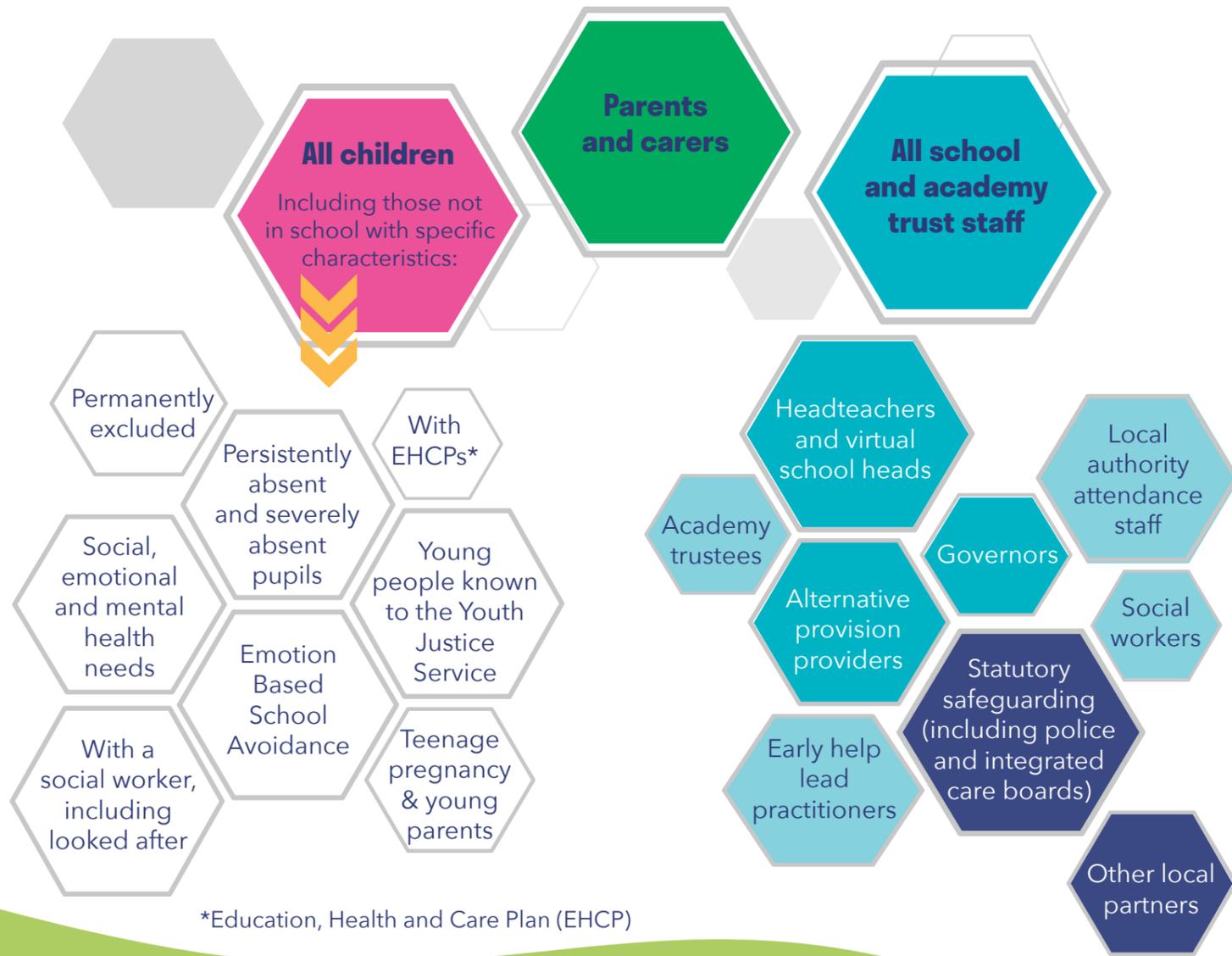
If a child is not in school, then where are they, and are they safe?



A strategy for everyone



Who is the strategy for?



The importance of good school attendance

Protective factor

If children are in school then they are visible to professionals and we know that they are safe.



Learning & achievement

Regular attendance is vital for children to make the most of educational opportunities to become emotionally resilient, confident, competent young adults. It's crucial to establish good habits for attendance from Early Years.

Meeting needs

If children are in school then they can get access to the support that they need, when they need it, including from health & social support services

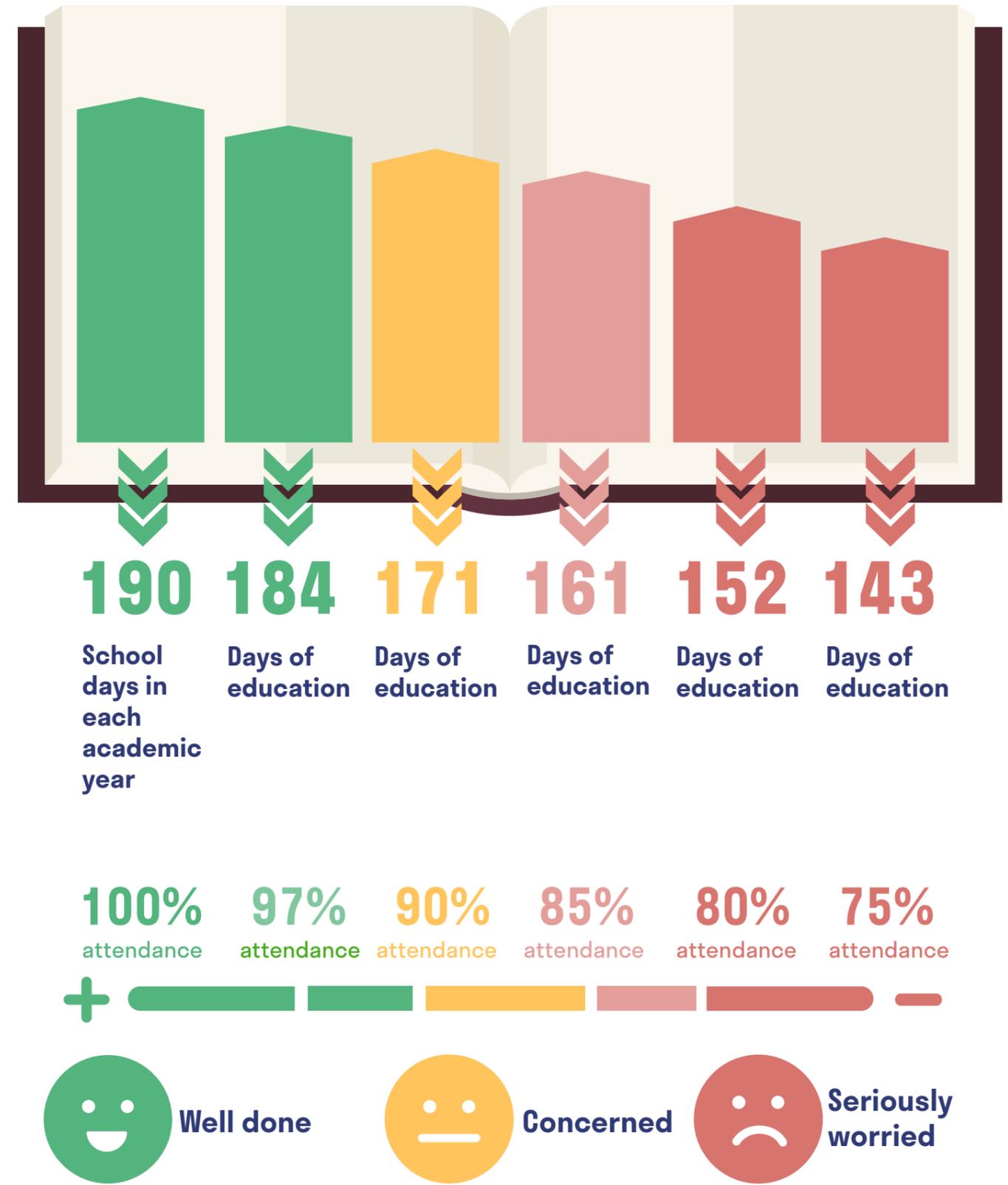


The law

All children are entitled by law to a suitable education and it is the parents' duty to ensure they get it (either at school or home educated).



Good school attendance is ...



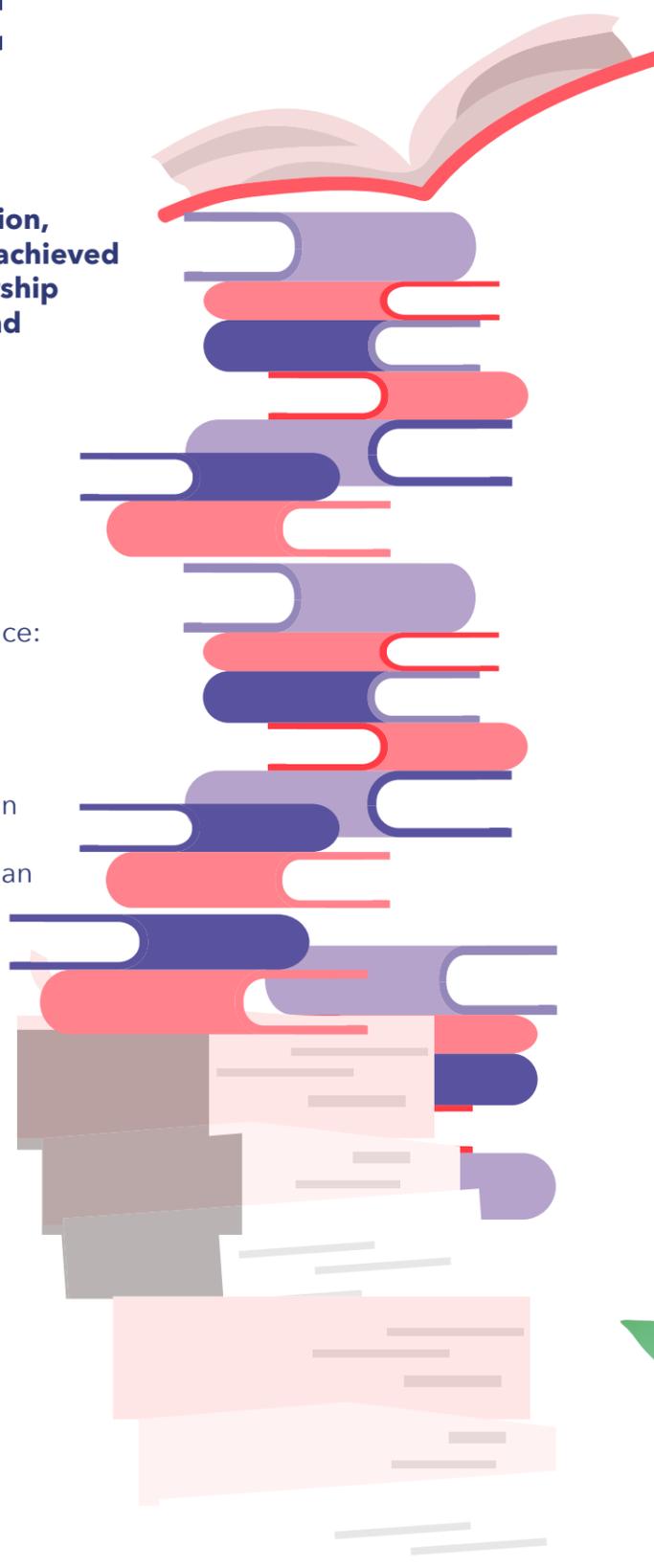
Our approach to attendance improvement

Everyone has a part to play in improving school attendance and keeping children safe in education, so our approach to attendance improvement is achieved through our local safeguarding children partnership arrangements (the Northumberland Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership, or NCASP).

Here in Northumberland, we have developed our approach to attendance improvement to meet the specific needs of Northumberland's children, families, schools and education providers.

There are therefore local strategies and plans that have a direct impact on improving school attendance:

- Early Help Strategy: Supporting families to give children the best start in life 2021-24
- A Council that works for everyone: Northumberland County Council's Corporate Plan 2021-2024
- Northumberland Children and Young People's Plan
- Northumberland SEND Strategy 2021-2024
- Northumberland's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy for Children and Young People 2022 - 25
- NCASP priority 3: Understanding how Covid 19 has impacted on safeguarding children and young people



There is also national statutory guidance to support us:

- [Working together to improve school attendance](#) (DfE May 2022)
- [Children missing education](#) (DfE September 2016)
- [Keeping children safe in education](#) (DfE September 2022)
- [Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement](#) (DfE September 2022)
- [Ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs](#) (DfE January 2013)
- [Alternative Provision](#) (DfE January 2013)
- [Elective Home Education](#) (DfE April 2019)



As a partnership of services and agencies, we commit to the following principles (to ensure we fulfil statutory requirements) to underpin the work we do together:



Consistency

Everyone in Northumberland agrees that **'good' attendance is 97% or above**

Attendance is part of any plan that might be in place for a child, including EHCPs and Child Protection Plans

We will aim to provide **support first** and measures to enforce school attendance will be a last resort

Parents/Carers will have the same experience of **the legal framework** to enforce school attendance, regardless of which school their child(ren) attends

Attendance thresholds for intervention will be consistently applied across the county



Partnership

Schools will receive **regular support from the Education Welfare Team** as part of our universal offer

Professionals will **actively listen** to the views of children, young people and their families to plan the support provided

Professionals will take a **relational and trauma-informed approach** to understanding and improving school attendance

Good communication between professionals and families will characterise all aspects of attendance improvement work

Long lasting solutions to improving school attendance can only be achieved in partnership and not in isolation



Fulfilling potential

We will continue to promote **early identification of need** - social, health, education - to prevent problems with attendance arising

Attendance improvement will **level up outcomes** for children and young people by challenging inequalities for specific groups

The starting point for planning support will be identifying the **underlying causes** for poor school attendance

Good and improving attendance will be **celebrated**

The strategy will be **driven by data** so that the right support reaches those that need it the most, including schools/providers

Universal offer of support from Education Welfare to all Northumberland schools



Regularly bring schools together via their named Attendance Leads at regular Attendance Network Meetings, to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within Northumberland and to share meaningful data - for individual settings and to provide context.

Hold regular conversations with schools, using their attendance data, to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to support for those pupils.

This includes agreeing joint action plans for severely absent pupils (where there are out of school barriers), agreeing joint actions for persistently absent pupils (where necessary), putting in place parent agreements, and agreeing any legal action to be taken forward.



Provide access to early help, social care, Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) support etc to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance. Plans will be monitored and reviewed to avoid legal intervention if possible.

Take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with. This includes:

- Use of Education Supervision Orders
- Ensuring that attendance is part of any plan, e.g. child in need or child protection plans, Personal Education Plan, EHCP, education support plan
- Issuing penalty notices issued in line with Northumberland's Code of Conduct
- Issuing School Attendance Orders
- Taking forward attendance prosecutions



All schools in Northumberland, regardless of designation, will receive the same offer of support from the Education Welfare Team.

Our attendance priorities

We want to ensure that our resources are focused on the actions that will have most impact on securing good and improving attendance.

In order to achieve this, together we will address the following priorities:



PRIORITY 1: Promoting attendance

Together we will ...	1. Deliver a visible, high impact attendance campaign
	2. Have a clear map of available support services to improve attendance, and accessible Sharepoint site of resources and guidance for professionals
	3. Develop dynamic half termly Attendance Network Meetings to sustain good communication and to share good practice

PRIORITY 2: Resourcing the strategy

Together we will ...	4. Use a graduated approach to attendance improvement so that resources are targeted where there is greatest need
	5. Identify gaps in current provision and work with partners to develop the local offer
	6. Deliver, facilitate, or commission a training support programme to ensure successful delivery of the strategy, e.g. relational and trauma informed approaches, emotion based school avoidance

PRIORITY 3: Data collection and sharing

Together we will ...	7. Make the most of the electronic register system to provide schools and education providers with meaningful data to challenge and drive improvement
	8. Use contextual data to support early identification and target resources appropriately eg individual schools, partnerships, persistently absent and severely absent pupils
	9. Establish data sharing protocols across the county and with other services

PRIORITY 4: Improve attendance of children with a social worker

Together we will ...	10. Set up user defined groups in schools to track and monitor attendance
	11. Make use of, and audit, lived experience case studies to monitor impact
	12. Work closely with social workers to improve understanding of barriers to attendance, strategies to overcome them and to ensure that attendance is included in children's plans

Together we will

Children and young people

- Go to school every day and take part in learning

Parents/Carers

- Support my child to get to school
- Ask them if they are struggling with this and talk to the school or professionals if we are worried
- Ensure my child has what they need

Schools

- Provide a place where children feel safe
- Ask children what will help if attendance drops
- Talk to parents/carers about worries about attendance
- Know the different options available to support attendance
- Think holistically about children's needs
- If there are children in care at school, ask - is the school being the best corporate parent it can be?

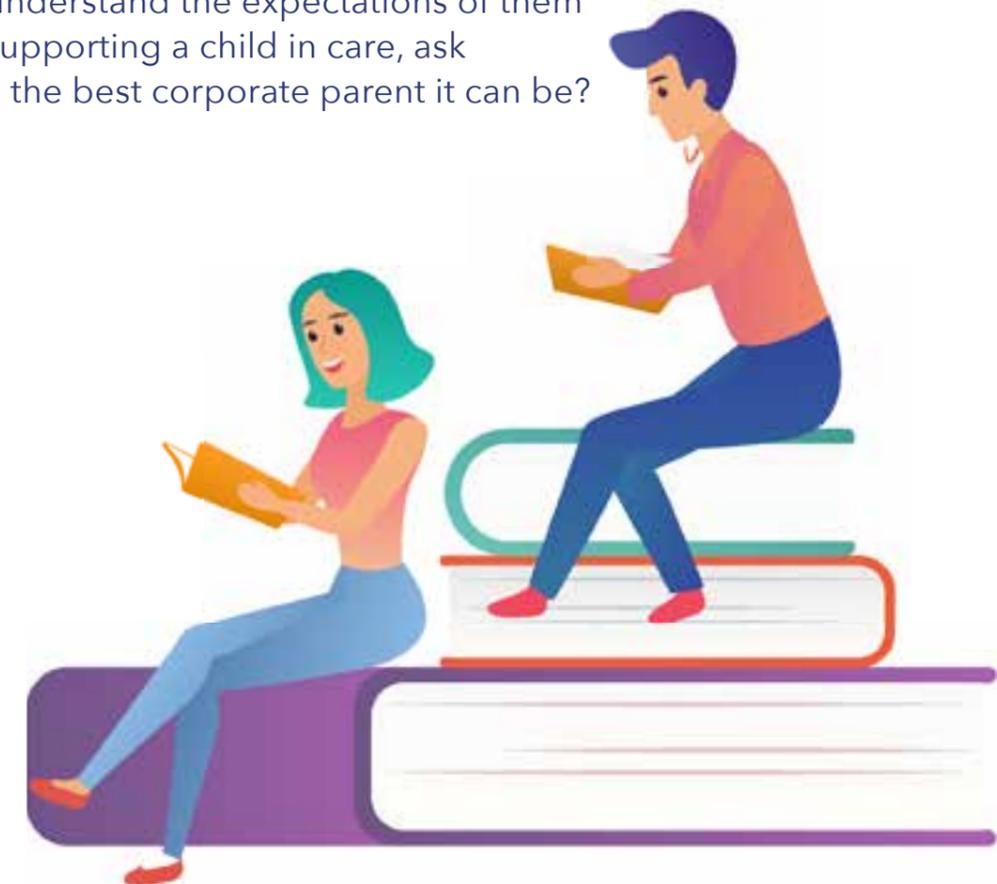


Education Welfare Officer

- Ask questions to understand where there are struggles with attendance
- Help others understand the expectations of them to support attendance
- Support schools, children and their families
- Refer to other services where needed
- If a child in care has poor attendance, ask
 - is the service being the best corporate parent it can be?

Social Worker

- Listen to what children say about school
- Ask children what will help
- Make it a priority to ask the school about the child's attendance
- Where attendance is a concern, include it in the child's plan
- Refer to support services when needed
- Link with Education Welfare Officers when there are worried about attendance
- Support families to understand the expectations of them
- If a social worker is supporting a child in care, ask
 - is social care being the best corporate parent it can be?



How we will know the strategy is working

It is important that measures of success are monitored to know that we are delivering on our priorities.

The following indicators will demonstrate the overall effectiveness of the strategy:

- Improved levels of overall absence in primary, secondary and special school phases
- Reduced % of persistent absentees (attendance 90% and below)
- Reduced % of severe absentees (attendance 50% and below)
- Reduced % of pupils missing school with unauthorised absence
- Reduction in penalty notices issued and prosecutions
- Reduced absence for holidays in term time
- Improved levels of overall absence for specific groups of children, in each national curriculum year group:
 - children with a social worker
 - looked after children
 - children with SEND
 - children who have been permanently excluded from school
- More children accessing suitable education (using the Children Missing Education process to measure)
- What children and young people are telling us about attendance at school



Monitoring and evaluation of the strategy is the responsibility of the Education Welfare Service, with senior management oversight from the Head of Service Virtual School, and will be achieved through data analysis and customer feedback (schools, professionals, parents/carers and children and young people). The strategy will be monitored termly and evaluated annually (including a contextual review) using the Signs of Safety service delivery model Meaningful Measures adopted by Northumberland County Council.

Governance of the strategy and accountability for its successful implementation will be provided by:

- Northumberland Children's and Adults' Safeguarding Partnership (NCASP), with reporting to the board from the Safer in Education sub-group chaired by the Head of Service Virtual School (with responsibility for the Education Welfare Team)
- The Quality Performance and Assurance Group (QPAG) managed through children's social care



Useful links

▶▶▶ [School and college behaviour and attendance: detailed information \(Gov.Uk\)](#)

[Virtual School webpage: Children not in school](#) ◀◀◀

[Virtual School Sharepoint page](#) - access for school and alternative provider Attendance Leads (please ask your Education Welfare Officer) ◀◀◀

▶▶▶ [Northumberland Local Offer for children with SEND](#)

▶▶▶ [Northumberland Family Hubs](#)

▶▶▶ National statutory guidance:

- [Working together to improve school attendance \(DfE May 2022\)](#)
- [Children missing education \(DfE September 2016\)](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education \(DfE September 2022\)](#)
- [Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and Pupil Referral Units in England, including pupil movement \(DfE September 2022\)](#)
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- [Alternative Provision \(DfE January 2013\)](#)
- [Elective Home Education \(DfE April 2019\)](#)

▶▶▶ [Children's Commissioner: Back into school - resources for schools](#)

▶▶▶ [Early Help in Northumberland](#)

▶▶▶ [Healthy Families Northumberland: 0-19 health services for children, young people and families in Northumberland](#)

▶▶▶ [Northumberland's Ordinarily Available Provision Guidance](#)

