### Attendance and Punctuality – Information for Social Workers

When a child or young person is taken into care, they may have had a history of low or erratic school attendance. Attendance is directly correlated to high academic outcomes and therefore the attendance of looked after children in schools is monitored on a daily/weekly basis by the Virtual School.

**Good attendance equates to 95% attendance or higher throughout the academic year.**

The residential staff / carer must notify the school and the child’s social worker immediately if the child does not attend school for any reason.

In any case where the child has been absent from school for more than 10 days, the social worker should liaise with the school, the child, the residential staff / carers and any other relevant person to address:
- The reasons for absence
- How to ensure the child returns to education as soon as possible
- Whether and how the child can be helped to catch up on what they have missed.

Where necessary, the Children Missing from Care Procedure must be followed.

The Virtual School are advised daily of attendance issues with Cambridgeshire CiC by Welfare Call Limited. This will be communicated to the social worker and carer where appropriate by the Virtual School team.

**When would an absence be authorised?**

- Absences due to sickness/ill health.
- Where possible LAC meetings and appointments which involve the child should be made outside of the school day. These include medical appointments, meetings with guardians/IROs; if it is not possible to complete these outside of the school day then the school will be expected to authorise the absence.
- When a child moves into a pre-adoptive placement, time out of school may be necessary to prioritise bonding with the new family. This should be planned in advance and time-limited; a school start date should be planned.
- Post-adoption celebration hearings should be authorised.
- Other reasons for absence (such as bereavement, exceptional circumstances) may be authorised and schools will make individual decisions regarding such cases.
- Unavoidable causes such as bad weather conditions.
- Religious observance where applicable.
- For an interview at a place of employment or different education provider.

**What absences are not acceptable as authorised?**

- There is no entitlement and therefore it is not acceptable for a foster carer to take a child out of school for a holiday during term time. This will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.
- Schools are not allowed to send a child home for part of a day; this is an illegal exclusion and should be challenged.
Reduced Timetables

All pupils of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. In very exceptional circumstances, it may be appropriate for a child to attend school in a reduced capacity as part of a re-integration package. A reduced timetable must not be treated as a long-term solution. Any pastoral support programme or other agreement must have a time limit by which point the pupil is expected to attend full-time or be provided with alternative provision.

In agreeing to a reduced timetable a school has agreed to a pupil being absent from school for part of the week or day and therefore must record it as authorised absence.

The Virtual School and appropriate LA partners should be involved if a reduced timetable is to be considered and a plan to ensure that the child is reintegrated into full-time education must be in place.

What if a child has been excluded?

Exclusion from school should be a last resort for Children in Care, who are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of exclusion. Therefore, it is important to work with the school and carers to intervene as soon as a child’s behaviour becomes a cause for concern. Schools should co-operate proactively with foster carers or children’s home workers, the local authority that looks after the child and the virtual school. Where a school has concerns about the behaviour, or risk of exclusion, of a child in care, it should, in partnership with others (including the local authority as necessary), consider what additional support or alternative placement may be required.

If a child is excluded (fixed-term or permanent), schools are required to comply with DfE guidance.

Where a Child in Care is excluded from school, the child’s social worker must inform the Independent Reviewing Officer with responsibility for that child.

Fixed Term Exclusions

The school must provide appropriate education for all Children in Care who receive fixed term exclusions from the first day of exclusion. (All other pupils receive this support from the 6th day)

The school have a responsibility to communicate the reason for the exclusion to the residential staff / carer and the social worker. Whoever is the most appropriate one to do so will discuss this with the child / young person and the social worker will inform birth parents if required.

If a child is excluded, then the Virtual School should be made aware at the earliest opportunity to ensure that guidance is being adhered to.

Permanent Exclusions

Guidance states that schools should, as far as possible, avoid permanently excluding any child in care.

When a Child in Care is permanently excluded but is remaining with the same foster carer or residential placement, the social worker will liaise urgently with the Virtual School to find an alternative school placement. Within Cambridgeshire, appropriate provision must be provided by
the excluding secondary school until a new placement is found. Primary children will have education provided for them by the relevant District SEND 0-25 team.

If the child is placed out of county, the Virtual School will liaise with the appropriate authority to understand their processes.

What if the child is refusing to attend or truanting?

School refusal is the refusal to attend school due to emotional distress. School refusal differs from truancy in that children feel anxiety or fear towards school, whereas truant children generally have no feelings of fear towards school but may feel angry or bored with it instead.

School refusal or truanting requires a holistic approach with home, school, social care and any other relevant professionals working together. If a child is refusing or truanting then the Virtual School should be made aware at the earliest opportunity.

What if a young woman becomes pregnant?

Becoming pregnant is not in itself a reason to stop attending school, nor to cease education.

Where a young woman becomes pregnant, the social worker, in conjunction with the Virtual School must ensure that the young woman remains in education if at all possible and arrange for her to receive support from the LA for the area in which she lives and / or the school she attends.