



**"Every Day Counts"**  
**A Strategy for Improving School Attendance**

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# "Every Day Counts"

## A Strategy for Improving School Attendance

### Guiding Principles

The Council's vision for Gateshead is set out in its document Towards 2010. The strategy for improving school attendance supports this vision and, in particular, the outcomes identified for children and young people:

"children and young people who develop to their full potential and have the life skills and opportunities to play an active part in society".

The Council recognises that it cannot meet this challenge alone and must work closely and in partnership with all those who have a stake in the education service in Gateshead.

### National Context

In a series of documents "Every Child Matters - Change for Children" (DfES 2004), the Government has identified five outcomes for children and young people, which will be at the heart of future children's service planning:

- **Stay safe**
- **Be healthy**
- **Enjoy and achieve**
- **Make a positive contribution**
- **Achieve economic well-being**

Regular school attendance has a crucial part to play in contributing to all of these outcomes.

### Child Welfare

This has been further underlined in the recently published guidance, "Safeguarding Children in Education" (DfES 2004), which outlines the statutory responsibilities of the education service (the Council and schools) to safeguard children and promote their welfare. One obvious way to keep children and young people safe is to ensure that parents and carers know that their children are attending school and play their part in ensuring that attendance is regular (**Stay safe and Be healthy**).

### Pupil Attainment

There is also clear evidence to link school attendance with pupil attainment. If we are to continue to raise standards of achievement for our children and young people, it is clear that the drive to improve attendance must continue (**Enjoy and achieve, Be healthy, Make a positive contribution and Achieve economic well-being**).

### Anti-social Behaviour

Also, well known links have been confirmed between truancy, street crime and anti-social behaviour (**Make a positive contribution, Stay safe**).

The government sees reducing absence from school as a priority and has made it a key aim of the "Change for Children" programme and has put this issue at the heart of the drive to raise school standards. The government has recently announced a target to

reduce the 2003 level of absence (6.83%) by 8% by 2008. Nationally some 450,000 children miss school every day - an 8% reduction represents 36,000 more pupils in school each day. The government sees this as a minimum target.

## **Local Context**

Through the work of the Council, its schools and other partners, we have seen a steady improvement in attendance. Secondary attendance has increased from 89.32% in 1999 to 91.39% in 2004. Primary attendance has improved from 93.80% to 94.67% in the same period. The number of pupils missing from school in Gateshead due to unauthorised absence has decreased over this period from 3714 to 2794 while the overall attendance level has improved from 91.94% to 93.21%. Linked to this, attainment at all key stages has shown improvement.

To stay in line with Government targets the overall attendance of pupils in Gateshead's schools would need to improve from 93.08% in 2003 to 93.33% in 2008.

To achieve this level of improvement we need to agree an attendance strategy with our partners and stakeholders. This will not only build on our existing good practice but will introduce some new measures including the use of new statutory functions to help address the issue.

## **Development of the Strategy**

In order to develop this strategy, a small working group of Council officers and representatives from schools met to consider current good practice and key issues which affect school attendance. This was developed into a consultation document, "Every Day Counts", which was circulated to all schools in Gateshead and to key partner agencies in January and February 2005.

The key themes for improving attendance, which emerged, were as follows:

- The role of the Council
- The role of schools
- Use of legal/statutory powers
- Information sharing
- Data collection and target setting
- Celebrating good and improved attendance
- Role of other agencies
- Role of parents and pupils
- Monitoring, evaluating and reviewing outcomes

## **Strategy**

### **1 *Role of the Council***

Under the Education Act 1996, the Council has a statutory duty to ensure children and young people receive full-time, efficient education, which is suitable to the age, aptitude and ability and any special needs they may have. This is usually through attendance at school.

- The Education Welfare Service (EWS) will continue to take the lead role for the Council in supporting school attendance. It will do this through working with children and families, supporting schools and linking with other agencies including the legal system.
- The EWS will take the lead role on behalf of schools in utilising the increased number of legal powers (see 3 below) available to address poor school attendance.
- The EWS will continue to be funded and managed centrally with EWO time allocated to schools on a needs led basis, identified by levels of absence and performance against benchmarks.

## **2 Role of schools**

Schools have a statutory duty under section 175 Education Act 2002 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This can only be fulfilled through effective registration systems and active, whole school monitoring of pupil absence, in order to support and promote regular school attendance.

- All schools should have a whole school attendance policy, which sets out how attendance is managed and what monitoring systems are in place. This should be actively supported by every member of staff and endorsed and monitored by the governing body.
- Each governing body should nominate one governor to take a lead responsibility for attendance issues. Other governors may also play a more active role in monitoring individual cases where this is part of the school's attendance policy.
- All schools should operate First Day absence procedures to ensure that parents are aware when their child is not in school.

## **3 Legal powers**

The Council has the power to take legal action against parents either in the Magistrates Court or the Family Proceedings Court if their children do not attend school regularly. Around 50 cases go to court each year. New powers have been given to the Council under the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 to impose Fixed Penalty Notices and Parenting Orders. Parenting contracts are also recommended as a means of supporting parents and avoiding the need for legal action.

DfES expects all Councils to use Fast Track Case Management where appropriate. This involves the setting of targets for pupil attendance, which if not met can result in early prosecution of parents.

- Parenting contracts will be promoted as an early intervention to address concerns about school attendance. The EWS will take lead responsibility for initiating and monitoring this, with the co-operation and involvement of the school.
- Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) will be used as a precursor or alternative to legal action, in appropriate cases. Head teachers, EWOs and the Police may recommend the use of FPNs, which will be issued by the EWS.
- All recommendations for prosecution will be considered by an Attendance Improvement Group (AIG), which will include representatives from the various agencies involved with child and family support issues.
- The Council will initiate legal proceedings only as a last resort when all other attempts to resolve attendance issues have been unsuccessful. All agencies should recognise

this. The Council may recommend to the courts the imposition of a Parenting Order following a recommendation from the AIG.

- The Council will implement a pilot Fast Track Case Management programme and assess its effectiveness before extending this to all schools.

#### **4 Information sharing and Pupil Tracking**

The Council is currently contributing to the development of an information sharing system to promote early intervention by support services with children and young people and their families (the Passport to Services project).

The Council has developed a comprehensive database which tracks individual pupil mobility, exclusions, attainment, looked after status and pupils who are educated other than at school. Regulations provide that a pupil's name should not be removed from the school roll except in specific circumstances. Removal in any other case will be unlawful. However if the Council is to minimise the risk of pupils "slipping through the net", it is essential that it is made aware of all decisions to remove a pupil's name from the school role, in order to plan for continued and appropriate education.

The EWS has existing protocols with other Council services and the health agencies for information sharing where a child appears to be without a school place.

- The Council and its schools will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to develop information sharing systems.
- The Council will continue to develop protocols and procedures to improve pupil tracking and monitoring of pupils without a school place in line with "Safeguarding Children in Education" guidelines.
- Schools will be expected to inform and liaise with the EWS before removing a pupil's name from the school roll (unless it has been established that the pupil has been admitted to another school and Common Transfer File (CTF) procedures have been followed or the pupil has been permanently excluded by the school).

#### **5 Data collection and attendance targets**

Schools have supplied attendance data to the DfES annually for a number of years and are now required to supply this information on a termly basis. The Council has access to this information but it is available at whole school level only.

The EWS is not currently able to gather attendance information on an individual pupil basis, which would enable EWOs to identify priority areas of work.

Attendance targets are set in consultation with schools, Education Welfare Service, Raising Achievement Service and Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP). Individual school targets are aggregated into an overall Council target. Schools involved in the BIP are set more challenging targets. Recent information provided by the DfES, using free school meals quintiles, has also helped to identify where attendance is of concern.

- The EWS will continue to work with schools, where there are attendance concerns, to draw up individual school/EWS action plans to address these issues.
- The EWS will implement a centralised electronic pupil attendance monitoring system. Schools will need to maintain accurate and up to date attendance records and allow remote access to this information by the EWS.

- The Council and its schools will work together to set challenging attendance targets and work closely to ensure those targets are met.

## **6 Celebrating good and improving attendance**

Schools are encouraged to promote good attendance achievement using a range of initiatives, including celebrating good and improving attendance. In addition the Council is keen to support this through borough-wide initiatives as well as supporting individual school activities.

- The Council and its schools will continue to find ways to celebrate good and improving attendance, including the use of rewards (with appropriate sponsorship) and Civic recognition.

## **7 Role of other agencies**

The EWS works closely with a range of agencies to address school attendance issues. Nexus and Northumbria Police are particularly involved in regular truancy patrols in various locations in the borough and on the Metro system. In addition protocols with other Council services and the health services help to identify any children or young people who do not have a school place and refer them on to the EWS. Youth Offending Team (YOT) staff identify school attendance issues and work actively to resolve them.

- The Council will work with agencies such as housing companies, Police, Connexions, YOT and voluntary organisations to develop protocols to identify children without school places.

## **8 Roles of parents and pupils**

Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school regularly. Parents are expected to report their child's absence from school on the first day of absence and to confirm the reason in writing on their child's return to school. Where there are concerns about a pupil's attendance parents are expected to work with school staff and the EWS to address these concerns.

Parents are expected to support school attendance by avoiding family holidays during term time. Where this is not possible, they are expected to avoid key times involving public examinations. The head teacher may authorise any such absence from school for up to a maximum of 10 school days in any academic year. School work may be set to cover such absences but this should not be recorded as "approved educational activity".

- Head teachers should record any absence for holidays above 10 school days per academic year as unauthorised absence and should refer such cases to the EWS for further action.
- The Council will promote the importance of good attendance and avoiding term time holidays through publicity materials and the media.
- Pupils are expected to attend and stay in school. Where there are issues that may affect their attendance, they are expected to discuss these matters with their parents or another adult at school.
- Schools should expect pupils to remain on site at lunchtimes unless the parent/carer has confirmed that the child will return home for lunch.

## How we will know the strategy is working - key outcomes

If the strategy is working, then the key outcomes we would expect to see are:

1. attendance targets in place that are agreed annually with all schools
2. improved levels of attendance
3. reduced absence for holidays in term time
4. reduced numbers of pupils missing for unauthorised absence
5. all schools having a whole school attendance policy in place
6. all schools operating first day absence procedures
7. all schools providing accurate termly and annual attendance data to the DfES
8. all pupils educated at home being monitored in accordance with DfES guidance
9. contracts being offered to all parents/carers where there are concerns about their child's attendance
10. all pupils removed from school rolls in Gateshead without a known destination being identified to the EWS and included on the national missing pupil database
11. information sharing agreements in place with all partner agencies to identify pupils without a school place

## Monitoring and evaluation

In order to implement this strategy, an action plan will be developed by the Social Inclusion Strategy Group. This is a multi agency group with representation from the Council's Learning and Children Group, Connexions, the health services and others.

Progress in relation to the Attendance Strategy and Action Plan will be monitored termly by the Social Inclusion Strategy Group.

The impact of the strategy will be evaluated annually against the key outcomes and the targets shown below and the findings will form the basis of a report to the elected members. The Action Plan will be updated annually to reflect this evaluation.

The Council will monitor the effectiveness of this strategy through regular reports to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## Targets

Performance indicators and targets relevant to this strategy that are included in the Council's Annual Plan are as follows:

Reference	Performance Indicator	Target 2005/6	Target 2007/8
BV 45	Percentage of half days missed due to total absence in secondary schools maintained by the Council.	8.61%	8.49%
BV 46	Percentage of half days missed due to total absence in primary schools maintained by the Council.	5.31%	5.24%