

Sefton School Attendance Strategy 2024 - 2025

A GRADUATED RESPONSE
TO IMPROVING ATTENDANCE

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Sefton Council 



Foreword

In Sefton, we must adopt an **'attendance is everyone's business'** mindset. It is not just schools and local authorities that have a role here; multi-agency approaches to attendance are a key part on our attendance improvement journey.

We recognise the importance of the role of schools play in safeguarding and we know children who are persistently absent and not accessing full-time education are at increased risk of being victims of harm, exploitation, radicalisation.

Our new school attendance strategy has been created to assist the Local Authority, schools, settings, and other services in understanding how to work together more effectively, utilising available resources to ensure that:

- All children and young people can fully benefit from the opportunities provided by attending school or a good quality education provision.
- Systems are in place to supply the LA with accurate and up-to-date attendance data.
- Data is utilised to identify patterns and trends, enabling responsive systems that support schools in intervening early and preventing concerns from escalating.
- Through training and guidance, the workforce is informed about the LA's responsibilities regarding school attendance, knows who to contact for support, and feels confident in addressing attendance issues.
- Responses to concerns about pupil absence are coordinated at individual and local levels across teams. Schools, parents, and children are well-informed about the available support and their respective responsibilities.

As a partnership we are committed to ensuring children get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances and that is why we have highlighted attendance is a priority in our Children and Young People's Plan.

Cllr. Diane Roscoe

Cabinet Member - Children Schools and Families



**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Contents

1	Introduction	Page 4
2	Our Vision	Page 5
3	Our Core Principles	Page 5
4	Attendance Matters	Page 6
5	Local Context	Page 6
6	Requirements of schools	Page 7
7	Working with cross border pupils	Page 8
8	Our Graduated Response	Page 9
9	Attendance Legal Intervention	Page 11
10	Working Together	Page 19
11	Roles and Responsibilities	Page 19
12	Core Offer	Page 20
13	Traded Offer	Page 21
14	Clarity and Consistency	Page 22
15	How do we support the most vulnerable?	Page 23
16	Being responsive to need	Page 30
17	Ambitions and focus	Page 31
18	How will we know the strategy is working?	Page 33

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE SUPPORT TEAM

PHONE: 0151 934 3359

EMAIL: Welfare.Officers@sefton.gov.uk

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Introduction

In Sefton, we strive for the best educational outcomes for our children and young people, regardless of background, and ensure by working together that they are Heard, Happy, Healthy and Achieving. (Children & Young People's Plan 2020 – 2025)

Being in school 100%, is important to a child's achievement, wellbeing, and their wider development. Evidence shows that the students with the highest attendance throughout their time in school gain the best GCSE and A Level results.

The data shows:

- Pupils with higher attainment at KS2 and KS4 had lower levels of absence over the key stage compared to those with lower attainment.
- Pupils who did not achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in 2019 had an overall absence rate of 4.7% over the key stage, compared with 3.5% among pupils who achieved the expected standard and 2.7% among those who achieved the higher standard.
- Pupils who did not achieve grade 9 to 4 in English and maths GCSEs in 2019 had an overall absence rate of 8.8% over the key stage, compared with 5.2% among pupils who achieved a grade 4 and 3.7% among pupils who achieved grade 9 to 5 in both English and maths.
- Generally, the higher the percentage of sessions missed across the key stage at KS2 and KS4, the lower the level of attainment at the end of the key stage.
- Among pupils with no missed sessions over KS2, 83.9% achieved the expected

standard compared to 40.2% of pupils who were persistently absent.

- Among pupils with no missed sessions over KS4, 83.7% achieved grades 9 to 4 in English and maths compared to 35.6% of pupils who were persistently absent.

The DfE guidance, '*Working Together to Improve School Attendance*,' was produced in the wake of the pandemic and sets out a vision for effective school level policy and practice which incorporates partnership collaborating with the Local Authority and other partners where necessary.

We have worked in consultation to support the creation of our attendance strategy for all schools, academies, families, children, and young people across Sefton.

This has been directly informed by a wide range of sources, including:

1. DfE Statutory Guidance, '*Working Together to Improve School Attendance*'
2. Feedback from children, young people, schools, and families, particularly those with co-existing vulnerabilities such as SEND who have attended Sefton school attendance panel.
3. Frontline officers, including the School Attendance Service, CME, Complimentary Education, Educational Psychology and Children's Social Care, 0 to 19 Services, Schools Nurses, CAMHS, Mental Health Teams in Schools.
4. Sefton Early Help Partnership Board
5. Safeguarding Children's Partnership
6. Consultations with Head teachers, DSL's and Senior Leaders across Sefton's schools and academies and LA Governors and the Police.

Our vision

Every child has a right to an education. We and our partners are fully committed to this. Together, we will initiate and forge a cultural shift within our families, schools, communities, and services to ensure that everyone takes responsibility for the attendance of Sefton's children.

We know we cannot achieve our priorities without working together with our wider partners in Sefton and we recognise that each organisation is just one part of a whole system and that by working together we can make the best use of the resources available to provide support where it is most needed. These organisations are committed to maintaining, strengthening, and maximising partnership working to best support the children and young people of Sefton.

Our core principles

Schools and education

We know high quality education is the greatest liberator so want all pupils to make at least “good” progress in every year of their education. We will ensure in the future that all children attend good or better educational settings in Sefton and barriers to participation and progress are addressed.

There will be a broad and balanced curriculum equipping them with the life skills they need to be independent and successful as an adult. These skills and opportunities to achieve will also value the contribution of sport, cultural, social and health education in preparing young people for their future.

Individual and collective

All partners acknowledge, understand, and uphold their individual and collective responsibilities. We will use and build onto our strong, existing partnerships, recognising that attendance is everybody's business.

When appropriate we will utilise the Sefton Multi-Agency Working Agreement to strengthen ‘working in partnership’ with family members and professionals to improve the lived experience of a child and improve outcomes. [multi-agency working agreement sept 21.doc \(live.com\)](#)

Continuous improvement and appropriate support

Partners will jointly problem solve where necessary and are open to feedback. Policies and practice are evidence-based, are reviewed, and updated annually. An attendance continuum sets out our graduated approach to support and the child is at the centre of supportive decisions and actions.

Clarity and consistency

‘Working Together to Improve School Attendance’ is the foundation for most of our work. In some cases, additional/amended policy and process, supported by effective communication and training, will provide clarification and consistency to ensure that we jointly offer the best approach for our local context.

Attendance matters

Regular attendance enables children and young people to access the best possible start in life, one which sets them up for a lifetime of learning.

They will be better equipped to make positive contributions to their communities, achieve economic wellbeing, and live happy, fulfilled, and healthy lives.

Most children and young people will receive the best formal educational opportunities in school. Here they will learn, make friends, grow in confidence, and discover their passions and talents supported by a setting that is safe, with adults around them who care about their lives, and who provide opportunities, routine, and structure.

School attendance is a protective factor for our most vulnerable children and young people, for example as a safe haven from issues such as domestic abuse, or the risk of criminal exploitation. The longer children are away from school they become isolated, and it makes it much more difficult to re-integrate back into education.

Schools provide the most regular and consistent point of contact for children and young people, and they enable their wellbeing and safety to be monitored, and early intervention to be put in place where necessary.

Local context

Sefton's school attendance rates and the national average.

Sefton Attendance Data Comparing AY 22/23 and AY 23/24		Overall Absence Rate	Authorised Absence Rate	Unauthorised Absence Rate	Percentage of Persistent Absentees	Percentage of severely absent pupils
Sefton	AY 23/24	7.8	5.2	2.6	22.6	1.9
	AY 22/23	7.9	5.3	2.6	23.2	2.3
	Change	-0.1	-0.1	0.0	-0.6	-0.4
National	AY 23/24	7.1	4.7	2.5	20.3	1.7
	AY 22/23	7.4	5.0	2.4	21.3	2.0
	Change	-0.3	-0.3	0.1	-1.0	-0.3
Difference to National	AY 23/24	-0.7	-0.5	-0.1	-2.3	-0.2
	AY 22/23	-0.5	-0.3	-0.2	-1.9	-0.3
Change Relative to National		0.2	0.2	-0.1	0.4	-0.1
National Ranking	All Local Authorities (Out of 152)	74	75	49	75	63

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Autumn Term 2022/23 Census Data for Attendance

Until 2021-22, Sefton's attendance data was published in arrears via census returns, with the council having no access to 'live' school data. Following the DfE attendance data pilot, Sefton has access to 'live' data from 100% schools. This enables the Local Authority to make fully informed strategic decisions and provide leadership in attendance across the Borough.

Sefton's data, in common with national data, shows a clear link between severe absence/persistent absence, and other vulnerabilities such as economic disadvantage, SEND, and family/community issues, including social care involvement.

Requirements of schools

Admission register / Attendance register

The law requires all schools including independent schools to have an admission register and, except for schools where all pupils are boarders, an attendance register. These registers must be kept electronically. All pupils (regardless of their age) must be placed on the admission register and have their attendance recorded in the attendance register.

Requirements from schools to share information with the Local Authority

To facilitate timely collaborative working across partners, all schools are legally required to share information from their registers with the local authority. As a minimum this includes:

New pupil and deletion returns: notifying the local authority when a pupil's name is added to or deleted from the school admission register outside of standard transition times.

Attendance returns: providing the local authority with the names and addresses of all pupils of compulsory school age who fail to attend school regularly or have been absent for a continuous period of ten school days where their absence has been recorded with one or more of the codes statistically classified as unauthorised (G, N, O, and/or U). This should be no less frequently than once per calendar month.

Sickness returns: providing the local authority with the full name and address of all pupils of compulsory school age who have been recorded with code I (illness) and who the school has reasonable grounds to believe will miss 15 days consecutively or cumulatively because of sickness. Only one sickness return is required for a continuous period of sickness in a school year. This is to help the school and local authority to agree any provision needed to ensure continuity of education.

Local Authority School Attendance Support Teams – working with cross-border pupils

Summary table of responsibilities

Alongside the expectation of working together, each LA has long standing responsibilities for providing the following main actions set out in the guidance.

Early help or Supporting Families Plan		Assessing and putting in place any early help or multi-agency family support plan in cases where LA action is needed sits with the Home LA . Where schools are completing the single assessment or acting as the lead practitioner (but with LA involvement) the school will need to work together with the Home LA.
Children's Social Care		In line with usual processes, any assessment or plan under sections 17 or 47 of the Children Act 1989 sits with the Home LA . For looked-after children, local authorities have a statutory duty to promote the educational attainment of all children in their care, wherever they live or are educated. When a looked-after child is placed out of area, the Virtual School Head of the Home LA should work with Virtual School Heads from other local authorities to support their attendance and additional educational support needs.
Alternative Provision		Responsibility for arranging any alternative provision a pupil requires under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 sits with the Home LA .
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)	SEN support	No specific provisions apply, so the expectations of each LA are the same as for a pupil who is not in receipt of SEN support.
	Education, health and care plans (EHCP)	Where a pupil has an EHCP, the School LA should alert the LA which maintains the EHCP about any significant issues emerging over attendance of which it becomes aware, so that the LA can consider whether needs continue to be adequately supported through the existing plan.
Transport		If the child is eligible for free home to school transport under section 508B of the Education Act 1996, responsibility for arranging that travel sits with the Home LA .
Attendance legal intervention	ESO	Either local authority can apply for an ESO, but it will usually be the Home LA that acts as the 'designated LA' and therefore both LAs should discuss and agree before proceeding.
	FPNs	A fixed penalty notice must be issued in line with the code of conduct for the area in which the child goes to school, and if issued by a local authority, it must be the School LA .
	Prosecution	Either local authority has the power to prosecute, but in general it should be the School LA that takes forward prosecutions under s.444(1) and (1A) of the Education Act 1996. It is, however, good practice for the School LA to inform the Home LA that legal action is being taken.

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Our Graduated Response

The DfE's statutory guidance, 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' will underpin and inform Sefton's Attendance strategy.

We will strive to meet the specifications of this guidance and combine this with a focus on issues related to our local area and develop partnership working to ensure that Attendance Matters for Everyone. By consulting and being responsive to data, feedback, and research, and drawing on our Core Principles, we have identified the following local priority areas for our strategy:

- 1 We are in this together:** Clear roles and responsibilities for all partners.
- 2 Clarity and consistency:** Shared approach (graduated response to addressing school attendance flowchart). Attendance Codes: The use of national attendance codes ensures consistent monitoring and understanding of attendance patterns, allowing for accurate data collection and analysis.
- 3 We recognise and support the most vulnerable:** Severe absence and other cohorts.
- 4 We are responsive:** Meeting need in the local context. Data can assist us in identifying early both individuals and cohorts across the Borough with emerging issues and concerns around attendance.

Schools are encouraged to develop and implement individual school attendance plans that identify and address barriers to attendance at the earliest opportunity. These plans should be created within school in collaboration with parents and pupils following their termly school attendance panels and reviewed regularly to ensure their effectiveness.

The guidance below sets out the expectations of actions that you should consider taking at each stage of a child's absence.

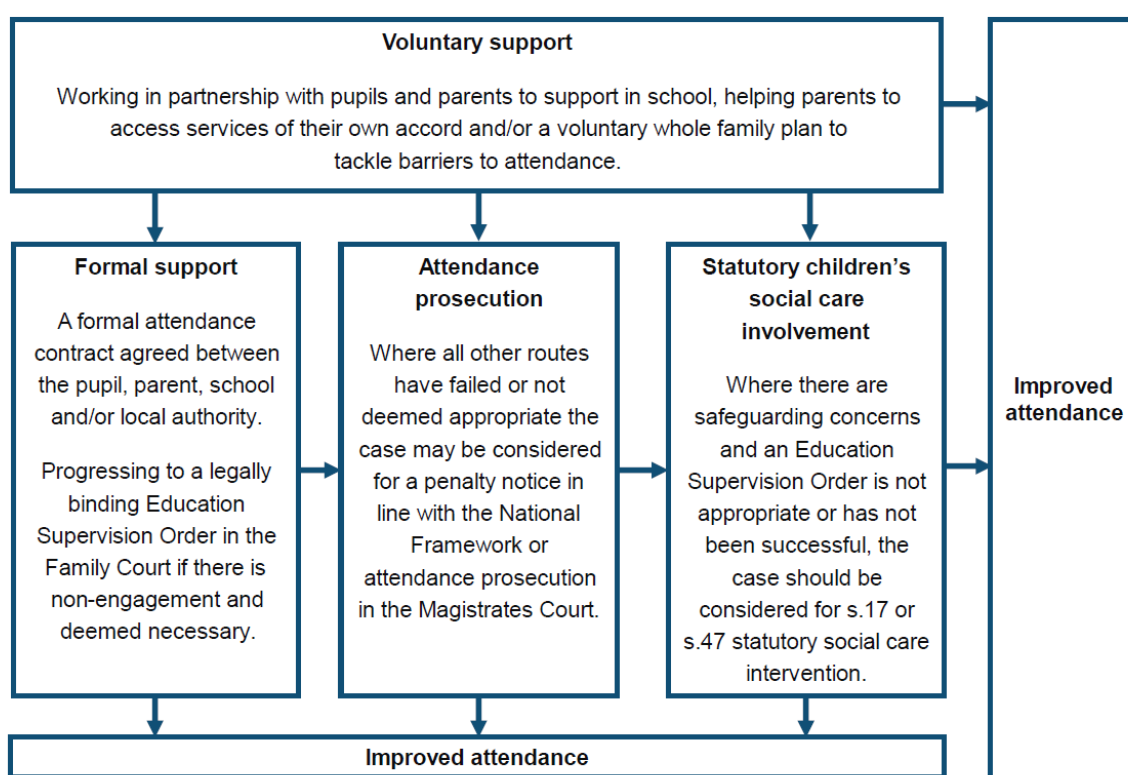
Excellent attendance	96+
Rewards and positive messages home	
Initial discussions with child – identify barriers (school)	91–95
Consider School Attendance Plan (school)	
Refer to school attendance policy and local authority guidance (school)	
Letter home to parents explaining impact (visually) see attendance toolkit (school)	
Consider incentives with the child (certificates) (school)	
Child is now persistently absent from school	
Meeting to be held with child and parents – School Attendance Panel (school)	86–90
School Attendance Plan to be in place (school)	
Barriers to attendance should be identified and appropriate pathways implemented e.g., health, referral to Team around the School / Conversation for Change plan implemented	
Conversation with FAST team	
Termly Targeted Support Meetings – monitor school attendance plan (LA)	
Consider Fixed Penalty Notice (notice to improve)	
Consider referral to LA School Attendance Panel where offers of support have not been engaged with (Attendance contract)	
Early Help Plan or multi-agency plan must be in place and include attendance as part of the plan and have a School Attendance Plan alongside	
Refer to Sefton Level of Need document and consider a conversation with FAST team	51–85
Following referral to LA School Attendance Panel and 12 week monitoring period with no improvement, proceed to prosecution / consider Education Supervision Order (LA)	
Monitor Education Supervision Order (LA)	
Termly Targeted Support Meetings – continue to monitor (LA)	
Child is now severely absent from school	0–50
Consider safeguarding risks and refer to Sefton Neglect Strategy	
Following referral to LA School Attendance Panel and 12-week monitoring period with no improvement, proceed to prosecution / consider Education Supervision Order (LA)	
Monitor Education Supervision Order (LA)	
Ensure there is multi-agency support around the family	
Assess, Plan, Review, Do and keep repeating the cycle	
Termly Targeted Support Meetings - continue to monitor (LA)	

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Attendance Legal Intervention

As absence is so often a symptom of wider issues a family is facing, schools, trusts and local authorities should always work together with other local partners to understand the barriers to attendance and provide support. Where that is not successful, or is not engaged with, the law protects pupils' right to an education and provides a range of legal interventions to formalise attendance improvement efforts, and where all other avenues have been exhausted, enforce it through prosecuting parents. Attendance legal intervention can only be used for pupils of compulsory school age and decisions should be made on an individual case by case basis.

Providing support first before attendance legal intervention



**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Legal processes

Regular and punctual attendance at school is both a legal requirement and essential for pupils to maximise their educational opportunities.

Sanctions of any nature are for use only where parental co-operation in this process is either absent or deemed insufficient to resolve the presenting problem. They are never used as a punishment, only as a means of enforcing attendance where there is a reasonable expectation that their use will secure an improvement.

Penalty Notices

A penalty notice can be issued to parents or carers who do not ensure that their child goes to school on a regular basis.

They can be used by all schools (except for independent schools) where the pupil's absence has been recorded with one or more of the unauthorised codes and that absence(s) constitutes an offence.

The threshold is ten sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of ten school weeks.

This can be met with any combination of unauthorised absence (e.g., four sessions of holiday taken in term time plus six sessions of arriving late after the register closes all within ten school weeks).

When a school becomes aware that the threshold has been met, they should consider if support is more appropriate in this case and if not proceed with the penalty notice.

A **Notice to Improve** is a final opportunity for a parent to engage in support and improve attendance before a penalty notice is issued.

If the national threshold has been met and support is appropriate but offers of support have not been engaged with by the parent or have not worked, a Notice to Improve should usually be sent to give parents a final chance to engage in support.

It should be issued in line with processes set out in the Sefton Local Code of Conduct. Details of what sufficient improvement for each case should be made clear in the Notice to Improve.

Only two penalty notices can be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within a 3-year rolling period and any second notice within that period is charged at a higher rate.

The penalty notice is £160 per parent per child. If paid within 21 days this is reduced to £80 per parent per child.

A second penalty notice issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil is charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.

If a third offence is committed within the 3-year rolling period, the local authority must consider other options available to them. This will include a consideration to prosecute under section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

The School Attendance Support Service will monitor the number of penalty notices issued to any parent in a 3-year rolling period.

There is no right of appeal by parents against a penalty notice.

For further information, please contact:

PCN@sefton.gov.uk

Attendance contracts issued by the LA

(these are not School Attendance plans which are usually carried out within the school when attendance as an issue is first identified as part of the school's attendance policy)

An attendance contract is a **formal** written agreement between a parent, the school (except for independent schools and non-maintained special schools) and local authority to address irregular attendance at school or alternative provision. It is not legally binding but allows a more formal route to secure engagement with support where a voluntary early help plan has not worked or is not deemed appropriate. (as it may be used as evidence in court)

There is no obligation on the school or local authority to offer an attendance contract, and it may not be appropriate in every instance, but should always be explored before moving forward to an education supervision order or

prosecution.

The aim should be for the parent(s), and the pupil where they are old enough, the school and the local authority to work in partnership.

Where a referral has come from school requesting an attendance contract after all school efforts have shown no improvement, a meeting should be arranged with all parties.

This is known in Sefton as the **LA School Attendance Panel (LASAP)**. The parent(s) and the pupil will be asked to outline their views on attendance, any underlying issues and what type of support they think would be helpful to secure regular attendance.

All attendance contracts should contain:

- Details of the requirements the parent(s) is expected to comply with.
- A statement from the school and/or local authority agreeing to provide support to the parent(s) to meet the requirements and setting out details of the support.
- A statement by the parent that they agree to comply with the requirements for the period specified by the contract.

Each individual attendance contract should set out the duration it will be in place, and most are for 12 weeks.

Where there are issues of non-compliance, the local authority will decide whether this is undermining the contract to the extent that it is no longer useful in which case an alternative course of action (such as a different legal intervention) will to be decided upon. The decision and reasons will be recorded.

If the pupil's irregular attendance continues or escalates to the point where prosecution is deemed appropriate, any failure or refusal to comply with the attendance contract may be presented as evidence. It is therefore important that any non-compliance with the contract is recorded so that it can be presented in court if necessary.

Education Supervision Orders (ESO)

Purpose of ESOs and when they may be appropriate.

Where a voluntary early help plan, or formal attendance contract has not been successful, an Education Supervision Order (ESO) can be used to provide formal legal intervention without criminal prosecution.

In deciding whether to progress to an ESO, the school and local authority should have exhausted voluntary support and be clear that making the order would be beneficial for the pupil and parent.

Where safeguarding concerns exist, the lead practitioner should also discuss with the school's designated safeguarding lead and children's social care services and agree an ESO would be a more suitable option than a s.17 (Children in Need) or s.47 (Child Protection) plan.

In all cases, local authorities must fully consider using an ESO before moving forward to prosecution. ESOs are made through the

Family or High Court, rather than Magistrates Court. They give the local authority a formal role in advising, helping and directing the pupil and parent(s) to ensure the pupil receives an efficient, full-time, suitable education.

For the duration of the ESO, the parent's duties to secure the child's education and regular attendance are superseded by a duty to comply with any directions given by the local authority under the ESO. The order initially lasts for one year, but extensions can be secured within the last 3 months for a period of up to 3 years at a time.

If it is decided to progress with an ESO, the local authority will notify parents in writing of the intention to consider an ESO and set up a meeting to discuss with the parent (including the pupil if they are old enough to understand). Following the conversation, the local authority will make its decision and inform the parent and pupil of whether the case will be taken forward to court or not.

Where the decision is to proceed, this can be combined with the service of an application notice. Once an ESO is secured, an officer of the local authority will be chosen to act as the supervisor of the order on the authority's behalf; this does not need to be an attendance officer, it could be whichever lead practitioner is working with the family (including their social worker where appropriate).

Schools should, however, work in partnership with the local authority and whilst the designated supervisor (the local authority) retains overall responsibility, schools can and should provide support and supervision where appropriate.

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Where parents persistently fail to comply with the directions given under the ESO, they may be guilty of an offence. Local authorities can prosecute in the Magistrates Court for persistent non-compliance with the Order and parents (upon conviction) will be liable to a fine of up to £1,000.

The supervisor will raise persistent failure to comply with children's social care services and work together to investigate the circumstances of the pupil and decide whether it is appropriate for any further action to be taken (including statutory social care involvement) to secure their welfare.

Attendance prosecution

Purpose of prosecution and when it may be appropriate

If a child of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly at a school at which they are registered, or at a place where alternative provision is provided for them, their parents may be guilty of an offence and can be prosecuted by the local authority.

Prosecution in the Magistrates Court is the last resort where all other voluntary and formal support or legal intervention has failed or where support has been deemed inappropriate in the circumstances of the individual case.

Local authorities have the power to prosecute:

- 1) Parents who fail to comply with a school attendance order issued by the local authority to require a parent to get their child registered at a named school (under section 443 of the Education Act 1996). This may result in a fine of up to level 3 (£1,000).
- 2) Parents who fail to secure their child's regular attendance at a school, for which there are 2 separate offences: section 444(1) where a parent fails to

secure the child's regular attendance; and section 444(1A) where a parent knows that the child is failing to attend school regularly and fails to ensure the child does so. The section 444(1) offence may result in a fine of up to level 3 (£1,000) and the section 444(1A) offence may result in a fine of up to level 4 (£2,500), and/or a community order or imprisonment of up to 3 months.

- 3) Parents who fail to secure the regular attendance of their child at a place where the local authority or governing body has arranged alternative provision (under sections 444 and 444ZA). This may result in a fine of up to level 3 (£1,000), or if the parent is found to have known the child was not attending regularly and failed to ensure that they did so, a fine of up to level 4 (£2,500), and/or a community order or imprisonment of up to 3 months.
- 4) Parents who persistently fail to comply with directions under an Education Supervision Order (under Schedule 3 to the Children Act 1989) or breach a Parenting Order or directions under the order (under section 375 of the Sentencing Act 2020). These may result in a fine of up to level 3 (£1,000).

The decision to prosecute rests solely with the LA as an independent prosecuting authority, but in deciding whether to prosecute the local authority may consider:

- 1) The level of engagement from the parent and whether prosecution is the only avenue left.
- 2) Whether all other legal interventions have been considered and are not appropriate or have been tried and have not worked.

- 3) Whether statutory children's social care intervention would be more appropriate in the case, especially where absence is severe.
- 4) The parent(s)' response to the Notice to Improve and/or warning(s) and/or evidence given in the interview under caution
- 7) If the absence was from alternative provision, the parent had not been notified about the provision in writing before the absence.
- 8) If the child has no fixed abode and the parents' business requires them to travel and the child has attended school as regularly as the nature of the trade or business permits.

The 1996 Act also sets out the circumstances in which a pupil has not failed to attend school regularly and therefore the parent **has not** committed an offence under section 444(1) or (1A) of the Act (the statutory defences). These are:

- 1) The parent proves the pupil was prevented from attending by their ill health or any unavoidable cause, including exclusion.
- 2) The pupil has been granted leave of absence by the school or, in the case of alternative provision, by a person authorised to do so.
- 3) The absence was on a day set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parent(s) belong.
- 4) The parent proves the local authority were under a duty to provide transport to the school and have failed to do so.
- 5) If the school is an independent school, the parent proves that the school is not in walking distance of the pupil's home and the local authority have not made suitable arrangements for the child to either board at the school or be admitted to a state funded school closer to home.
- 6) If the absence was from certain types of alternative provision, the parent proves the child is receiving education otherwise than by regular attendance.

Investigations and court presentation

Any prosecution case must be laid before the Court within 6 months of the alleged offence. Parents should be prosecuted by the local authority for the area where the pupil attends school or that has made the alternative provision, and the case should be heard in the Magistrates Court for the same area.

Before beginning any legal proceedings, the parent should be given a formal written notification, explaining the process and potential consequences. This should be followed by application to the Magistrates Court for a hearing date and a summons to be issued. The local authority should then serve the summons on the parent, either in person or by first class post. Alongside the summons, the parent should receive a copy of the witness statement taken at the interview under caution.

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

In presenting the case in Court, the local authority should set out clearly and concisely the facts of the case, including the offers of support that have been made and why they failed. This includes why an ESO has not worked or has not been sought prior to prosecution. Effective Court presentations will also demonstrate the impact of the absence on the pupil and the family.

If the prosecution is being taken forward because the parent has already reached the limit of penalty notices, the local authority cannot raise previous out of court disposals before the parent has been found guilty. They should prosecute solely for the third (or subsequent) offence.

Parenting orders

Purpose of parenting orders and when they may be appropriate.

Parenting orders are an ancillary order that can be imposed by the Court following conviction for non-attendance alongside a fine and/or community order. Parents' agreement is not required before an order is made. They may be appropriate where the parent has not engaged in support to improve their child's attendance and where compulsion to do so would help change parental behaviour.

Contents of a parenting order

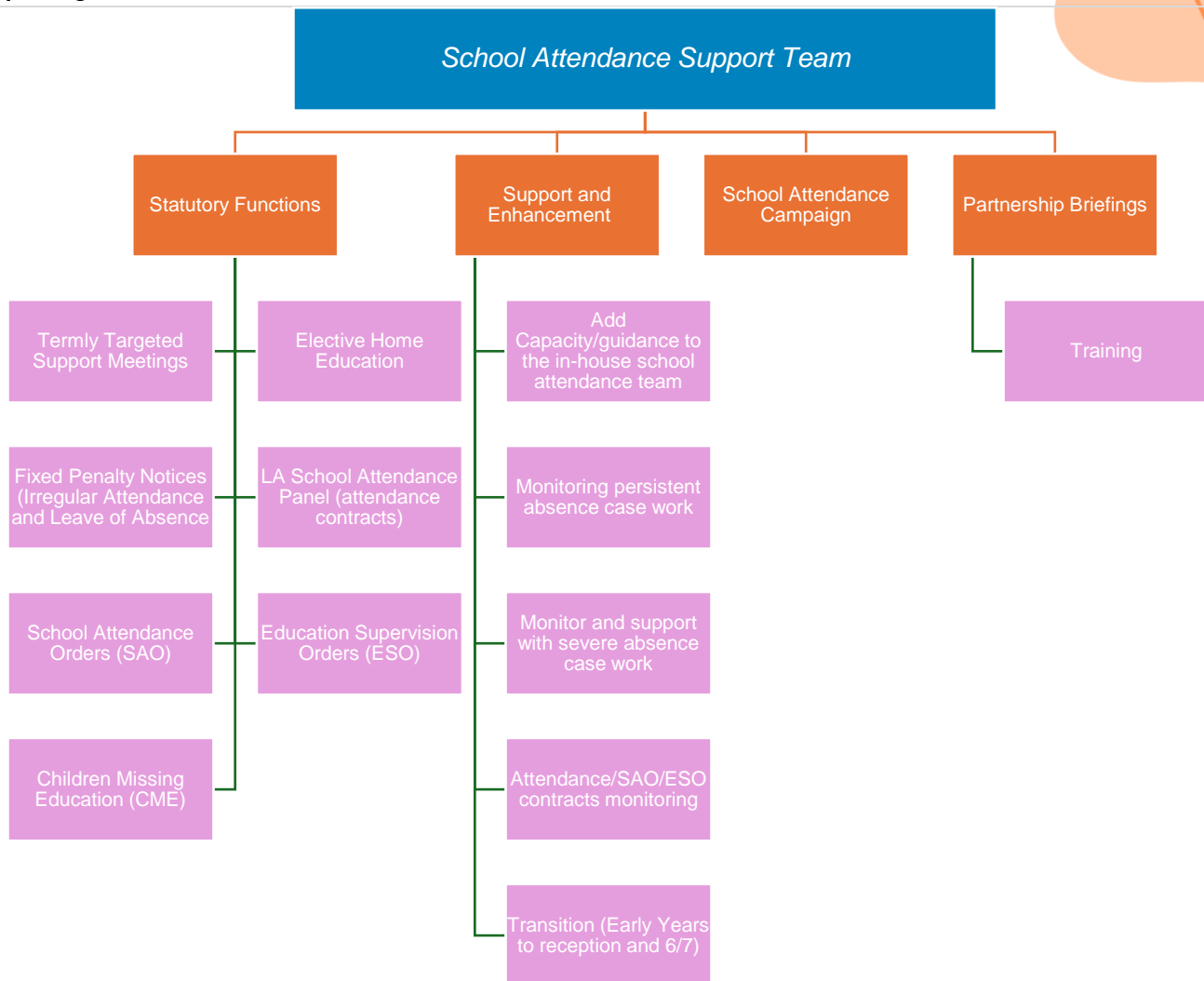
The order requires a parent to comply with the arrangements specified in the order by the Court which can include a requirement for parents to attend counselling or guidance sessions (e.g. parenting education or parenting support classes) where they will receive help and support to enable them to improve their

child's attendance for up to 3 months.

All parenting orders must specify a 'responsible officer' which will be named on the order. This should be the most appropriate lead practitioner working with the family.

Non-compliance with a parenting order

Any breach of the order could lead to a fine of up to level 3 (£1,000).



All local authorities are expected to have a School Attendance Support Team that works with all schools in its area (regardless of type) in accordance with the core offer. This includes all state funded schools, non-maintained special schools and independent schools. Where the needs in a local independent school differ significantly from state funded schools, the local authority may wish to, with the agreement of the school, implement different ways of providing the core expectations with that school.

Support and key contacts.

If you have any queries regarding the attendance process and steps to follow, then please contact School Attendance Support Team (SAST).

Telephone: 0151 934 3359

Email: Welfare.Officers@sefton.gov.uk

Working together

Parents, schools, governing bodies, trusts, Local Authority, and partners will work together to improve school attendance, fulfilling their individual and collective responsibilities, including the acknowledgement that children and young people themselves should take an increasing responsibility for their attendance as they mature.

We have adopted the DfE's Summary Table of Responsibilities for School Attendance as this document provides clarity regarding responsibilities when dealing with:

- All pupils
- Pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent.
- Persistently absent pupils
- Severely absent pupils
- Cohorts of pupils with lower attendance than their peers
- Support for pupils with medical conditions or SEND with poor attendance.
- Support for pupils with a social worker.
- General monitoring of attendance

Roles and responsibilities

We expect that we will hold each other to account when partners do not fulfil their responsibilities, be open to feedback and improvement in the best interests of children and young people, and where necessary take swift, determined and effective actions under statute to ensure that our children and young people are safeguarded and receive their right to an education.

We will ensure that we produce and collectively adhere to consistent processes and clear communication pathways, and systematically monitor and improve the quality of our offer.

This strategy has a focus on improving school attendance for statutory school age children and young people (aged 5 to 16) however we know that good attendance starts in early years and pre-school.

We will therefore ensure that Early Years settings are aware of our approach, and we will involve them in any appropriate campaigns/advice, to ensure that good attendance starts early.

We will also promote the effective participation in education and training of young people post 16 and have robust arrangements to identify those who are not engaged in education or training or who have left provision enabling us to offer support as soon as possible.

Core offer.

As a Local Authority we will provide the following Core Offer to all local schools where there are pupils of statutory school age, including independent schools. ⁶ :		We will do this via:
<p>Communication and advice:</p> <p>Regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area.</p>	<p><i>Including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Guidance on how partners will work together ☑ Named point of contact for each school ☑ Answering queries from school-based staff: ☑ Bringing schools together to share best practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Strategy and Policy, Website and Traded Services free information including on attendance law and Emotionally Based School Avoidance ☑ School Attendance Officers (SAO) ☑ Telephone & Email Advice line ☑ Half-Termly Attendance Meetings
<p>Targeting support meetings:</p> <p>Hold termly conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils.</p>	<p><i>Including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Meeting at least termly with each school in the local authority area: ☑ Signposting schools to relevant services and voluntary sector partners: ☑ Agreeing joint action plans for severely absent pupils (where there are out of school barriers) ☑ Agreeing joint actions for persistently absent pupils (where necessary) ☑ Agreeing any legal action to be taken forward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Via Team Around the School for cases with additional familial factors ☑ Individually via SAO where attendance is the only issue ☑ Refer to School Attendance Service Team (SAST)
<p>Multi-disciplinary support for families:</p> <p>Provide access to early help support workers 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.</p>	<p><i>Including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Providing access to existing support systems where appropriate – including early help, social care, SEND <i>etc</i> ☑ Advising the family's lead practitioner on any attendance elements of the family's plan ☑ Acting as lead professional in a family plan where an LA team is the most appropriate to do so (e.g. a housing issue) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Via Team Around the School ☑ Via named SAO ☑ Via EHCP SEND Officer ☑ Via Social Worker ☑ Via Virtual School Children with a Social Worker
<p>Legal intervention:</p> <p>Take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with.</p>	<p><i>Including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Parenting contracts ☑ Education Supervision Orders ☑ Building attendance into child in need or child protection plans where relevant ☑ Issuing fixed penalty notices ☑ Taking forward attendance prosecutions (including for persistently breaching any Education Supervision Order or Parenting contract in place) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Information on website ☑ Via SAST service email ☑ Via named SAO ☑ For severely absent cases where multi-agency approach is required but parents will not give consent, refer to named SAO or FAST team.

Traded offer

<p>School processes:</p> <p>Acting on behalf of the school to fulfil their <u>day to day</u> expectations as set out in section 1 of Working together to improve attendance.</p>	<p><i>For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ First day calling ☑ Home visits, calls and/or sending out letters from the school ☑ Late gates ☑ <u>Parent</u> drop ins or attendance services ☑ Providing advice and support on attendance at parents' evenings ☑ Running attendance reward and recognition systems ☑ Attendance assemblies ☑ <u>Analysing</u> the school's data
<p>Casework on behalf of the school:</p> <p>Delivering the attendance work with individual pupils and families that is expected of the school (rather than of the local authority and other partners as defined in section 4).</p>	<p><i>For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Contacting families and understanding what the barriers to attendance are ☑ Setting up and leading attendance meetings with families ☑ Developing in school reasonable adjustments and initial attendance action plans ☑ Completion of referrals to other services, including early help assessments
<p>Audits and attendance management support:</p> <p>ad hoc work with schools to support development of new systems, policies and processes</p>	<p><i>For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Intensive work with a school to develop a whole school strategy ☑ Help developing an attendance policy ☑ Policy reviews ☑ Support with developing day to day processes, eg Register Audits

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Clarity and consistency

DfE statutory guidance provides consistency alongside the revised attendance codes. This will be combined with clear policy guidance from the LA's School Attendance Service, which will provide a named School Attendance Officer (SPOC) for every school and academy, plus a telephone and email helpdesk.

Headteachers and governing bodies/trusts have ultimate decision-making power in attendance matters such as giving permission for children to be off during term time and we expect them to only agree in the most exceptional of circumstances.

Each child with concerning absence should follow its own pathway dependent on elements such as the severity of the individual needs of the student, relevant vulnerabilities, and evidence gathered by schools (and other partners where relevant).

It is essential that the school, supported by partners where necessary, ensures that their staff have strong relationships and an understanding of their children, young people, families, and communities. We recognise that behaviour is communication, and this includes behaviours around attendance.

It must also be remembered that the school's own ethos and approach is essential. This

includes providing appropriate and attractive curricular, extra-curricular and teaching offers combined with ensuring that the school is safe, welcoming, and nurturing.

Sefton Local Authority will continue to offer a traded service.

We have developed a Graduated Response Flowchart for identifying types of absence and allocating pathways and actions. This will be used within our policies and procedures, and schools and partners will incorporate it into theirs to ensure consistency of identification and pathways across the Borough.

By agreeing and sharing this joint approach to the identification of barriers and pathways, consistently successful and timely outcomes can be achieved. Some of these outcomes, for example a fixed penalty notice, will require further support from the Local Authority who will ensure that they follow their responsibilities in line with Section 6 of 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance', and Section 7 of the Education Act 1996.

We will review, improve, and share our procedures for legal action including Attendance Contracts, Education Supervision Orders and Penalty Notices (Fines) to ensure clarity and consistency of purpose, and create a new Attendance Policy for September 2024.

How do we support the most vulnerable?

Severe Absence

Particular focus should be given by all partners to pupils who are absent from school more than they are present (those missing 50% or more of school).

In 2023 – 2024 the total Number of Children on roll in Sefton ('Full Cohort') – 37 980 children.

Total Number of Children with Severe Absence ('Severe Absence Cohort') – 656 children. (1.7% of Full Cohort).

Breakdown of vulnerable groups:

Free school meals (FSM) with Severe Absence – 408 children. (1.1% of the Full Cohort. 62.2% of the Severe Absence Cohort).

SEN Support with Severe Absence – 251 children. (0.7% of the Full Cohort. 38.3% of the Severe Absence Cohort).

EHCP with Severe Absence – 115 children. (0.3% of the Full Cohort. 17.5% of the Severe Absence Cohort).

The figures above do not add up to 656 children because children may have more than one characteristic identified e.g., children may be in receipt of FSM and SEN Support.

Early Help with Severe Absence – 72 children. (0.2% of the Full Cohort. 11.0% of the Severe Absence Cohort).

CIN with Severe Absence – 38 children. (0.1% of the Full Cohort. 5.8% of the Severe Absence Cohort).

CP with Severe Absence – 19 children. (0.05% of the Full Cohort. 2.9% of the Severe Absence Cohort).

CfC with Severe Absence – 10 children. (0.02% of the Full Cohort. 1.5% of the Severe Absence Cohort).

Primary School Age with Severe Absence – 69 children. (0.2% of the Full Cohort. 10.5% of the Severe Absence Cohort).

Secondary School Age with Severe Absence – 587 children. (1.5% of the Full Cohort. 89.5% of the Severe Absence Cohort).

By using the Graduated Response Flowchart, schools and partners can begin to unpick the complexities of these cases. Most cases will require exploration of multiple levels of support and effective partnership working with an agreed joint approach.

Common vulnerabilities in cases of severe absence

Data shows that children and young people are more likely to be severely absent if they:

1. Are from an economically disadvantaged background.
2. Have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities.
3. Have Familial Vulnerabilities, and/or Require Social Care or Early Help involvement.

Economic disadvantage

All partners need to be aware of families and students who are economically disadvantaged, and they must work together to recognise and overcome barriers to attendance related to this issue.

Issues related to child poverty can create barriers to attending school. Schools must show understanding in these cases. They must also expect parents to collaborate proactively with them to problem solve, whilst also being vigilant about non-compliance, which may be a flag for educational neglect. Schools may use income such as their pupil premium funding to support this group and be aware of partners who can support families in difficult circumstances, both Local Authority and Voluntary Sector Services.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Children and young people with identified Special Educational Needs and Disabilities generally have more severe and persistent absence than those without. This can be for a number of reasons, including medical issues and social, emotional, and mental health issues. We understand the challenges around this and will work to continue to understand these further and develop our practice.

As a group, SEND students have regular, documented reviews by their schools and in the case of students with Education Health and Care Plans, the Local Authority's SEND services, and partners such as Health and Social Care, with the involvement of parents, carers, and the students themselves.

This provides an excellent opportunity to discuss, address and document any issues with attendance on a regular basis.

In Sefton, we recognise the vulnerability of this group of students, and will work to ensure that all generic SEND documentation and procedures emphasis attendance as everyone's business, containing sections where attendance can be addressed with discussion, targets, and joint actions to remove barriers to attendance.

For EHCP students, attendance will be discussed at annual reviews and more often if needed. This includes ensuring that our SEND specialist staff access training regarding attendance regulations, our strategy and understand how to promote, monitor, and support the improvement of attendance in their cohorts, and that this is also available to schools, particularly SENDCos.

SEND Services will collaborate with schools and partners to ensure that children and young people with EHCPs and co-existing vulnerabilities including severe absence receive support from the right professionals and that plans created for the severely absent EHCP cohort take into consideration the nature of the Special Educational Need.

SEND attendance data will be monitored and reported to the SEND Board to ensure that attendance is a strategic priority.

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

SEND Services will continue to listen and respond to children, young people, and families with SEND, via their current channels such as the SEND Parent Carer Forum and will ensure that items on attendance are incorporated into their communications and consultations.

Working practices will be reviewed to ensure that all the SEND responsibilities set out in Working Together to Improve School Attendance document are fulfilled.

Children in Care

Where attendance is an issue for children with CIN and CP schools state that stronger joint working is required and that some partners need to understand that lack of attendance can be a form of neglect.

Severe absence is both a flag of other vulnerabilities and a vulnerability in itself.

Children and young people who are regularly out of school can be exposed to additional risks such as exploitation and criminal gangs. Children and young people who have poor attendance are also likely to have a range of other co-existing vulnerabilities.

The Virtual School

The Virtual School has a statutory role to monitor the attendance of pupils on its roll. Sefton fulfils this duty by utilising the School Attendance Support Service to monitor attendance at school and alternative provisions. Where pupils are not in attendance, the carer is contacted by school to ascertain the reason for absence and the social worker and the Virtual School is notified and where needed the school will notify the SAST team and a home visit is conducted, this is known locally as the First Day Response and ensures that the whereabouts of every pupil is

monitored daily.

The Virtual School works across CYP services with professionals to address issues and proactively plan on an individual pupil basis. The attendance data per pupil is also captured on a termly basis on their PEP (Personal Education Plan) and this is recorded on the LA social care database. We strive to ensure that Children in Care attend at least as well as their peers.

To support in achieving this the Virtual School will additionally:

1. Continue with current good practice, and work with partners to ensure that the attendance gap for Children in Care closes to be at least in line with the national gap.
2. Report on a weekly basis to Children's Social Care all non-attending children, to ensure plans include interventions to address issues with poor school attendance.
3. Ensure they have regular briefings with teams across Children's Services emphasising the importance of identifying educational neglect and the strategies to address this.

Early Intervention and Prevention, Family Hubs, Youth Justice Service, Targeted Early Help and Statutory Social Care

Early Intervention and Prevention Services in Sefton have been developing approaches to supporting attendance for vulnerable children and young people, demonstrating an improved focus and outcomes for children and young people with attendance issues that sit alongside other vulnerabilities. In particular, the use of Team Around the School for termly meetings focusing on attendance.

Team around the School

The Team Around the School Programme commenced in September 2023 as a Pilot Project. There are twenty-eight schools taking part, six secondaries, 1 SEND provision and twenty-one primaries. The schools have been grouped into clusters based on their location and proximity to each other. Five cluster groups have been established. Due to the success of the project, this is now looking to be rolled out more widely across the Borough. Using dashboards, data is analysed and shows us:

All Schools in the pilot.

1. Overall attendance has increased by 0.6% from 92.7% to 93.3%.
2. Overall absence has reduced by 0.6% from 7.3% to 6.7%.
3. Authorised Absences have reduced by 0.4% from 5.3% to 4.9%.
4. Unauthorised Absences have reduced by 0.2% from 2.0% to 1.8%.
5. Children identified as being Persistently Absent has reduced by 234 children from 2760 to 2526 children.
6. Children identified as being Severely Absent has reduced by thirty-one children from 281 to 250 children.

(this data is from the whole school cohort not just those children in families involved with Team around the school)

Family Hubs

Sefton are in the development stage of 3 Family Hubs. This will be an integrated delivery model, providing universal / targeted and specialist support through three forms of delivery:

1. Family hubs and spokes, with the SEND offer part of a broader range of support for families
2. The online / virtual offer

Families will know where to go for help, will play a key role in designing what is available, and strong partnership working will provide high quality and seamless support, and will flex and grow over time to identified need and demand. We envisage five types of support:

1. Information advice and guidance
2. Group activities and events.
3. Networks and meetings
4. Clinics and consultations
5. Specific programmes and interventions

Our approach will be based on relationships and engagement, connecting families to the support available, making support more integrated, more accessible, and more impactful through learning and coproduction.

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) supports the emotional health and wellbeing offer across Local Authority and Voluntary Sector and Health Partners. This provides training and therefore access to a range of interventions that will support school attendance (Video Interaction Guidance, Interpersonal Therapy for Adolescents, Incredible Years, Riding the Rapids, CBT and Systemic Family Practice)

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Inclusion service

The Sefton Inclusion Service has an Inclusion Consultant attached to every Sefton School to support whole school staff in developing excellence in practice at High Quality Teaching and SEN Support Level. The team will continue work with SENCOs and Senior Leadership at a strategic level, using a range of methods including cluster group meetings, individual and team approaches, with training in SEND available to both primary and secondary settings. The Inclusion Consultants also support schools with pupil transition.

Youth Justice Service (YJS)

Regular participation in education is a key protective factor in preventing children's involvement in offending behaviour. To support this, Sefton Youth Justice Service (YJS) have a dedicated School Attendance Officer to identify and assess the educational needs of each child entering the youth justice system and work with schools and families to improve or maintain attendance and participation. The YJS also have a dedicated Career Connect resource offering information advice and guidance to support young people in accessing post-sixteen education training or employment and those who are NEET.

The Youth Justice Service review the education (incl post 16yrs) for all children accessing the service. Each month, the YJS Managers along with Education Partners and data analysts hold an Education Working Group where every child who is accessing less than or is offered less than 25hrs of education is reviewed. The group determines what actions will be taken (and by whom) in order to improve the offer and increase attendance. Suitable education is reviewed as part of the Key Performance Indicators and is reported on quarterly to the National Youth Justice Board as well as the Sefton's Youth Justice Partnership Board.

Early Help

A lead professional from the Local Authority Early Help Team and commissioned teams will work to address the identified needs of the whole family. Where a child has concerns around low attendance this will be included as part of the Early Help plan. This should be a follow on from schools attempts to improve attendance via their own school attendance plan and attendance support meetings and in some cases following the Team around the School, Conversations for Change Plan where the family needs more intensive support.

The Lead Practitioner and the wider team around the family partners including school will support and empower the family to engage in the plan to integrate back into education.

At the end of the intervention, most families will have made progress and a 'maintenance plan' will be agreed with them and the school. This should be shared with the pastoral team at school to continue the plan.

Should the family not engage with the plan and if there is no improvement, the case should close to Early Help and stepped back to school to instigate legal action.

Family support and safeguarding

Children's social care will work with families to reduce the safeguarding risks to the child. Where a child has school attendance below 50% it is expected that this will form part of the Child in Need or Child protection plan. School should consult with the social worker and support with strategies for non-attendance and work alongside the social worker to encourage increased attendance.

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

When the threshold is no longer met for a Level 4 intervention and school attendance is on an upward trajectory this will be stepped across to school to continue to support with attendance concerns.

Should attendance continue to decline and there are other identified vulnerabilities the plan should not close to social care.

We should still consider legal intervention if there is no sustained improvement in attendance alongside the CIN or CP plan.

Sefton employ an **Education Liaison Officer** based at the front door to accessing social care services. They identify those with poor school attendance at the point of referral. Attendance is recorded at assessment and monitored throughout the intervention. Advice and guidance are provided to practitioners and schools as well as communication, briefings, and statutory guidance updates.

To build on practice within this area, we aim to ensure:

The Front Door FAST and CHAT processes build upon joining up systems and pathways to access and cross-reference attendance data and ensure that these are taken into consideration during assessment processes and planning where relevant.

The Learning and Development sub group : which is part of with Sefton Safeguarding Children's Partnership will ensure the whole partnership have access to training to recognise attendance as a priority area, a flag of possible other familial vulnerabilities and a risk factor, including an understanding of the language and definitions of Educational Neglect.

Quality Assurance of plans for those who have Targeted Early Help or Social Care involvement:

Ensuring that attendance is a focus of every meeting and is documented as such, with attendance-specific outcomes led by the Lead Practitioner or Social Worker in cases with severe absence and dip sampling cases to find out and utilise what works.

'Step Down' or closure arrangements at all levels of Targeted Early Help and Social Care involvement will be reviewed:

For example, cases will not be closed if severe absence is still an issue. Instead, the case should be kept open, or other pathways identified via partners.

Language and definitions of Educational Neglect:

to be embedded into discussions and actions and evidenced in plans. Awareness of this will be raised via learning and development.

Social Care aspects of 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance':

to be recognised and where appropriate full social care assessments are conducted in response to severe absence and other vulnerabilities and attendance is built into Child in Need and Child Protection plans. In practice this means where there are concerns in respect of attendance and some additional vulnerability and a TAS process has already been attempted/is not sufficient, consideration should be given to either Early Help support or social work assessment / intervention.

For children subject to CIN and CP planning, their school attendance will continue to be tracked and monitored as part of those plans.

Build attendance support into the Family Hub Offer

across the Borough for both secondary and primary schools as well as monitoring and support for Early Years children.

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

MYSACE (Sefton Protecting Against Child Exploitation) and ETAC (Exploitation Team around the Child) All young people who are subject to an ETAC plan and has poor school attendance will have a School Attendance Plan alongside that is monitored monthly.

Attendance Governance and Monitoring – From September 2024 there will be a Children’s Service Partnership Strategy Group ensuring that this strategy is implemented, delivered and monitored to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence.

Health and Wellbeing Partners

Review and define communication, access, and approaches for school nursing, 0 - 19 Health Services and MHST teams as well as the ‘Waiting Well’ offer for when waiting for appointments.

Review their Continuum of Support for Mental Health, for children and their families, detailing points of access and levels of intervention in line with the Sefton Graduated Response to School Attendance.

Be integral to all multi-agency plans for children and young people including School Attendance Plans, Team around the School, Targeted Early Help and Social Care where poor health is a barrier to good school attendance in order to improve access to consultation from mental health services to support School Attendance Plans.

Emotional Based School Avoidance The post-pandemic rise in school absence includes a considerable number of cases where reasons for not attending include those linked to emotionally based factors, particularly anxiety and in some cases trauma. ‘Emotionally Based School Avoidance’ is not a diagnosis, but an umbrella term for this issue, which can be attributed to a multitude of factors and

barriers. Sefton Education Psychology Service alongside other partners will support schools in collaborating with this cohort and the recently published guidance offer resources and tools to utilize by both school and LA support staff. Mental Health Services are an integral part of support for children presenting with EBSA and should have some involvement when children are out of school due to mental health. Ongoing work to provide timely support, earlier in the child’s journey when mental health is affecting education.

The Police, the Local Authority and schools will review and develop their processes in order to liaise regarding school attendance data, for example to understand hotspots, identify cohorts of pupils across the Borough and how these link to issues such as anti-social behaviour, crime and child exploitation and what action the Police might take in order to support Sefton’s focus on attendance.

Communications with schools will be reviewed with the aim that schools are aware in suitable time of severe issues that impact on attendance, including where children have gone missing and Operation Encompass.

Sefton Safer Schools Officer – define the roll of the Safer Schools Officer when children and young people are not attending school most of the time and other vulnerabilities within the community are present.

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Community/Third Sector Partners

We will continue to engage with Sefton Voluntary Services and other community partners to ensure that we share best practice as a two-way process and collaborate with partners enabling us to get to know the Communities across the Borough and what Services are available to support our children, young people, and their families.

Sefton Emotional Achievement Service (SEAS) is a group of local charities that came together with the aim of helping children, young people, and families to aspire and achieve through providing bespoke emotional well-being support, delivered at the right time and the right place through voluntary sector consortium working. They have facilitated projects within Sefton Schools to support pupils with poor attendance, are regularly late, have low mood / motivation and need to get back on track with school.

Education & Mental Health Network: Chaired by Sefton CVS, this is an opportunity for colleagues from across education and mental health services to network and the group meets each half term. It is a place where schools can share good practice, partner agencies can share information about their offer and mental health support teams based in schools can update. Guest speakers are at each event sharing good practice and linking up.

Being responsive to need

The changed attitudes and anxieties around school attendance of some individuals and families is clearly recognised by the schools and services that serve communities across Sefton and play a large part of the increase in absence in our data.

We have evidence from our LA School Attendance Panel that many children and young people are experiencing normal but difficult emotions that make them nervous about attending school, such as worries about friendships, schoolwork and exams. It is important to note that these pupils are still expected to attend school regularly.

School staff should work quickly to communicate this expectation to parents/carers and collaborate with them to ensure that such circumstances do not function as a barrier to regular attendance. Any associated anxiety about attending should be mitigated as much as possible by creating a plan to implement reasonable adjustments to alleviate specific barriers to attendance. These adjustments should be agreed by and regularly reviewed with all parties, including parents/carers, and made clear that part of the aim of the plan is to maximise face-to-face attendance as much as possible.

Schools should consider additional pastoral care inputs for pupils, including any support that can be offered by the pupil's most trusted adults in school, and where appropriate making referrals to other services. This might include community groups, counselling services, psychological practitioners or, where available, Mental Health Support Teams.

Any professional workers supporting a pupil with a mental health or emotional issue should maintain the same ambition for the attendance of the child as the school, maximising in-person learning where possible.

Where available, school nursing services can also play a significant role in helping to alleviate barriers to attendance, by providing health advice or information to pupils, including an assessment of individual needs and strengths. The school nurse can work with young people, parents/carers, and the school to offer support based on these assessments, including helping families to navigate health and care services.

We are also aware that in some instances, parents/carers themselves might be living with mental health problems, experiencing wider vulnerabilities, or challenging life circumstances. This may affect their ability to provide support and care, and so it is important to recognise the need for practical, whole-family support and/or early help support where necessary.

Where support offered is not engaged with, or where all other options have been exhausted or deemed inappropriate, schools should work with LAs to consider whether to formalise support or to enforce attendance through legal intervention in the normal way under their existing powers.

There is no need to routinely ask for medical evidence to support recording an absence as authorised for mental health reasons. This is because, in general, primary care health professionals such as General Practitioners are unlikely to be able to offer such evidence to support one-off absences related to mental health.

In instances of long-term or repeated absences for the same reason, however, seeking medical evidence may be appropriate to assist in assessing whether the child requires additional support to help them to attend more regularly, and whether the illness is likely to prevent the child from attending for extended periods.

If a parent proactively seeks out a note from a GP, it does not imply a need for absence unless this is explicit in their letter.

Any part-time timetable arrangements should be designed with the specific barrier to attendance in mind, have a time limit by which point the pupil is expected to attend full time, (either at school or at an alternative provision setting), and have formal arrangements in place for regularly reviewing the timetable with the pupil and their parents/carers. Mental Health Services via Mental Health Support Team or Specialist Mental Health Services should be contacted for advice, when consent to do this is present to support through a continuum of need)

Ambitions and focus

Our strategy sets out our ambitions and areas of focus for 2024 – 2025.

This cannot be achieved without secure and effective joint ways of working. Many of these improvements are detailed in the sections above. In addition to this we are committed to improving the following:

1. Poor school attendance is everybody's responsibility who works with children and young people in Sefton and our approach will be joined up and consistent.
2. Our graduated response to school attendance will make the process clearer and more consistent across all sectors when addressing poor school attendance.

3. Developments in data analysis and dashboards will enable much clearer identification of children and young people with multiple vulnerabilities including severe absence, which will inform further effective partnership working, at the right place and right time. This will enable mapping across the Borough of hotspots, both geographical and demographic.
4. Working in localities enables careful consideration of the challenges and opportunities according to the local context and supports collective responsibility, underpinned by a sense of identity and place. Our Locality Hub Model will be realised and implemented enabling co-location of partners, workforce development, shared learning and children, young people and families accessing timely support and seamless transitions where more specialist support is required.
5. We will collaborate jointly with schools and families to identify gaps in our approach to attendance and develop multi-agency approaches to solve these, aligning pathways as part of an ongoing programme of improvement.
6. To ensure that our core offer is high quality, and continues to improve, we will consult schools and partners about what works for them and what needs to improve, reviewing and building upon current good practice such as Team Around the School and our School Attendance Service Team (SAST).
7. Our core offer to schools may annually change in detail and allocation, dependent on the identified focus for the academic year, which will be based on local data and other evidence. For example, we may increase our core offer to some schools based on their deprivation levels or identified issues within a cluster or type of school. However, all schools will continue to be offered the core offer universally.
8. An Attendance Report for the Borough will be created annually and shared with elective members, senior leadership team, directorate, and board level and with schools. This will focus on progress against data, consultation results, research and good practice, and updates to regulations, policies, and processes.

How will we know the strategy is working?

- 1) Sefton average attendance figures to align with or exceed the national average.
- 2) Sefton attendance figures to place us in the top three amongst our statistical neighbours.
- 3) Severe absence rates amongst annually identified vulnerable groups, hotspot areas and/or settings to stabilise and then reduce year on year.
- 4) Improved levels of overall absence in primary, secondary and special school.
- 5) Reduced % of persistent absentees (attendance 90% and below)
- 6) Reduced % of pupils missing school with unauthorised absence.
- 7) Reduction in penalty notices issued and prosecutions.
- 8) Reduced absence for holidays in term time
- 9) More children accessing suitable education (using the Children Missing Education process to measure)