



School Attendance

A guide for Social Care staff to support families and schools



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Why attendance matters

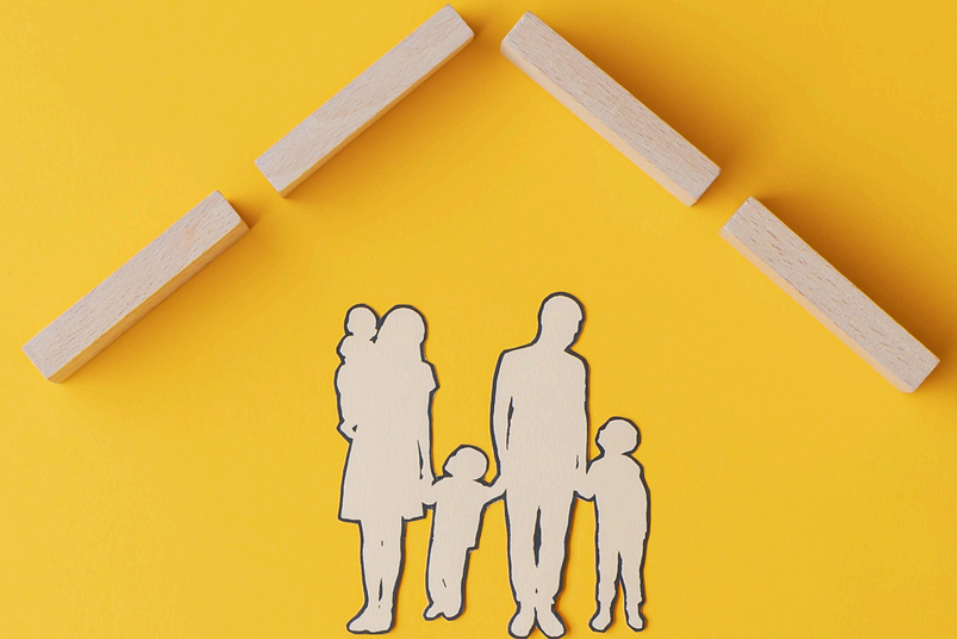
Recent research by the Department for Education shows just how closely attendance and attainment are linked.

At **primary school**, children who attend school nearly every day in Year 6 (95-100% attendance) are 30% more likely to reach the expected standard in reading, writing and maths compared to similar pupils who attend 90-95% of the time.

The link is even stronger at **secondary school**. Year 11 pupils with near-perfect attendance are almost twice as likely to achieve grade 5 in English and Maths GCSE, compared to similar pupils attending 90-95% of the time. In other words, missing just 10 extra days a year reduces the likelihood of achieving these grades by around 50%.

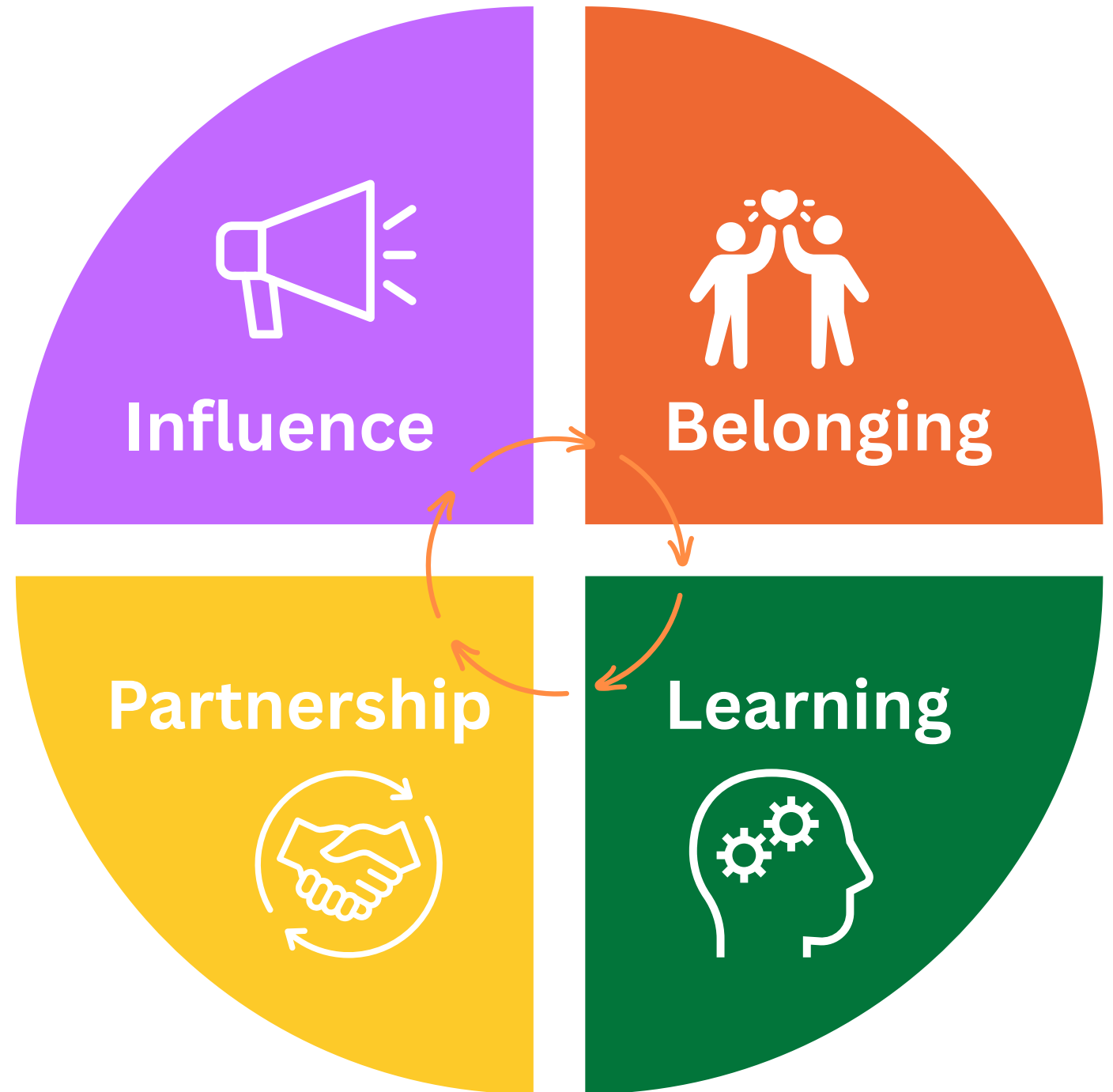
Data shows that children are **more likely to miss school** if they have free school meals or special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Additionally, students who are neurodivergent. are more likely to experience worry about school attendance.

Good school attendance provides children with stability, a safe place, and better outcomes long term.

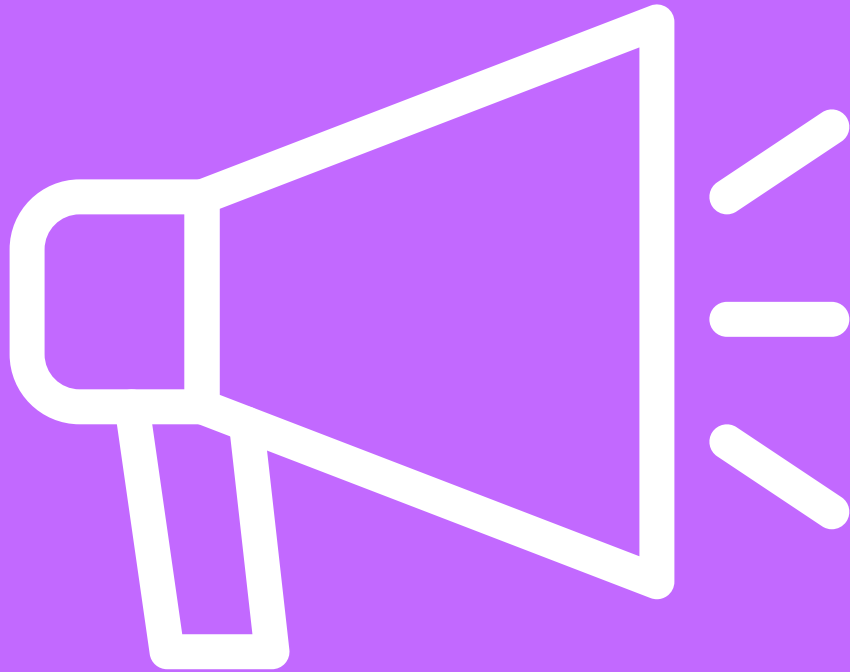


What supports good school attendance?

- **Influence** – Enabling pupils to have an **impact on their school life**
- **Belonging** – Helping pupils to feel **accepted, respected and included**
- **Learning** – Identifying and removing **barriers to learning**
- **Partnership** – schools and families **working together**



Influence



Children should feel they can influence their education and school life

It is essential for students to feel heard and to have a sense of control over their school lives. Empowering them to take part in decisions regarding their school experience plays a vital role in fostering their well-being. When students are included in the decision-making process, they feel appreciated and respected, which can significantly boost their motivation and engagement in learning. This is particularly crucial for those facing emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), as they often perceive many elements of their schooling to be beyond their control.

Supporting children to share their views on school

Explore various methods to help the child convey their thoughts, utilising strategies like conversation, drawing, questionnaires, or card sorting activities.

Students experiencing Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) often find it challenging to discuss school for various reasons.

Those with EBSA may also have difficulty identifying and communicating their emotions, especially if they lack effective coping strategies.

School-related anxiety can be overwhelming, hindering their ability to express their feelings.

Pupils who are neurodivergent or have specific needs related to social and sensory issues may face heightened anxiety, complicating their ability to share their concerns about school.



When engaging with a pupil to understand their perspective and any worries they might have, it's crucial to:

- Acknowledge and take seriously any anxieties or concerns they express.
- Show empathy and validate their emotions.
- Consider the pupil's age and comprehension level.

Supporting children to share their views on school

Some students feel comfortable discussing their challenges, while others may struggle. If a student is hesitant to communicate directly, you might consider the following approaches:



Using a card sorting activity, like 'The School Wellbeing Cards.' Many students find it helpful to express their emotions through the cards, which can serve as a starting point for deeper discussions.



Using a questionnaire, such as the 'School Views Questionnaire,' can also assist students in articulating feelings they might otherwise struggle to express verbally.



For some, engaging in drawing activities, like the 'Ideal School Activity,' can provide a creative outlet for them to share their thoughts and feelings about school.



Taking a walk while speaking can be beneficial, as some pupils find it easier to speak when not in direct eye contact. You may find it helpful to gain their views in a more informal way, for example whilst kicking a football or completing some craft activities



Engaging with a Child's Parents or Carers

Some students may choose to confide in a parent, carer, or family member regarding their worries. It's crucial to involve parents or carers in these discussions to understand any concerns they may have or insights into what their child might be anxious about.

Including Children in Decision-Making

It's essential for children to feel that their voices are heard and that they can influence their education and school experience. Gathering the child's perspective on any plans related to their school attendance is vital. They may be able to express what they feel confident about, what challenges they face, and what support they may require.

Belonging



There are a number of approaches which can be taken to support all members of the school community to feel a sense of belonging. This includes:

- Where pupils are experiencing difficulties with attendance ensure that they have opportunities to build trusting relationships with key members of staff
- predictability of routines, and management of the environment.

- Embedding relational policy and practice throughout all aspects of the school.
- Encourage positive interactions among students.
- Peer mentoring programs and group activities that promote teamwork and friendship.

- Ensuring that pupils feel safe in school
- provide a 'safe base' through their interactions,
- Recognise and celebrate the diverse backgrounds and cultures of your students.

- Supporting children to be involved in sports, music, drama, charity events or other extra-curricular activities.
- If there are no clubs that interest the pupil, there may be opportunities to start a club at school which could also promote a sense of belonging for pupils with similar interests.

Working with parents to help promote a sense of belonging

Schools can work with parent carers to support in developing a pupil's sense of belonging if they have been away from school including:



Good home and school links such as having regular email, video calls or telephone contact with a key member of staff.



Providing updates about school events, such as assemblies, trips, performance or sports events which can help a child feel connected to the school community.



Supporting pupils to maintain friendships from school. Schools can work with parents to find ways in which children could be supported to attend after-school clubs or extra-curricular activities. Parents may also support in encouraging their child to meet friends after school or at weekends.

Learning



Identifying and removing barriers to learning is key to help children thrive at school.

Learning can be difficult for some children and may cause them to avoid school.

Supporting children's learning

It can be difficult for some pupils with SEND to access the curriculum. For some pupils, difficulties accessing the curriculum can impact feelings of self-esteem and contribute to emotionally based school avoidance.

Consequently, it is important that schools make reasonable adjustments and use a graduated approach to meet pupil's needs. For some children, it may be appropriate to complete further assessment of their needs in school or seek advice from a professional such as an advisory teacher, Speech and Language Therapist or Educational Psychologist.

If a pupil is not attending school, it will be important to consider how they keep up with their learning. Falling behind with learning can be a source of additional worry to children, making it harder to go back to school. Schools can send work home for children which is at their level, giving them an opportunity to stay up to date with what their peers are learning in school and get feedback on the work they've completed.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is often regarded as a framework for understanding how the human brain functions. It acknowledges variations in brain activity concerning sensory processing, motor skills, social comfort, cognition, and neurobiological differences. This includes conditions such as autism, ADHD, and developmental language disorder (DLD). It's crucial to recognize the overlap between neurodivergent students, particularly those with Autism or ADHD, and those who experience anxiety and worry in school settings.

The school environment can sometimes be overwhelming for neurodivergent children. To help them feel safe, calm, and foster a sense of belonging, it's essential to consider adjustments within the learning environment.



Use visual aids such as timetables, Now/Next boards, calendars, and countdown charts.

Validate students' emotional and social concerns

Support emotional regulation by regularly checking in with visual aids, teaching relaxation techniques, and using time-out cards.

Use Social Stories to help anticipate changes

Consistent and predictable environment.

Minimise changes & prepare students for changes

Make reasonable adjustments, such as altering uniform requirements, allowing movement between classes before the crowds, or providing access to a sensory room or sensory toys.



Neurodiversity

Partnership



Building trusting relationships between families, the school and pupils is critical to creating positive outcomes for all pupils.

Collaboration between schools and parents provides a comprehensive understanding of the pupil's needs. Parents often hear views of their child, see behaviours and witness distress that the child may not present at school. Sometimes pupils 'hide' their distress at school, which leads to heightened emotions and, sometimes behaviour, at home. It is key that we understand the pupil's behaviours both in and out of school to get a 'full picture' or holistic view of the situation.

When parents and schools work together this can ensure that the pupil receives consistent support both at home and at school. A strong partnership also ensures that the child feels understood by both their family and school. This emotional support is vital in reducing anxiety and building the pupil's confidence to attend school. Over time, a collaborative approach builds trust between the school, parents, and the pupil. When pupils see that their parents and teachers are working together, it can enhance their sense of security and belonging.

Working in partnership with families

To support families to feel heard and build trust, schools can support by doing the following:



Regular communication

- Maintain regular and open communication with parents about their child's progress and any concerns. This can be through emails, phone calls, or meetings.
- Be transparent about the steps the school is taking to support the pupil and involve parents in the planning process.



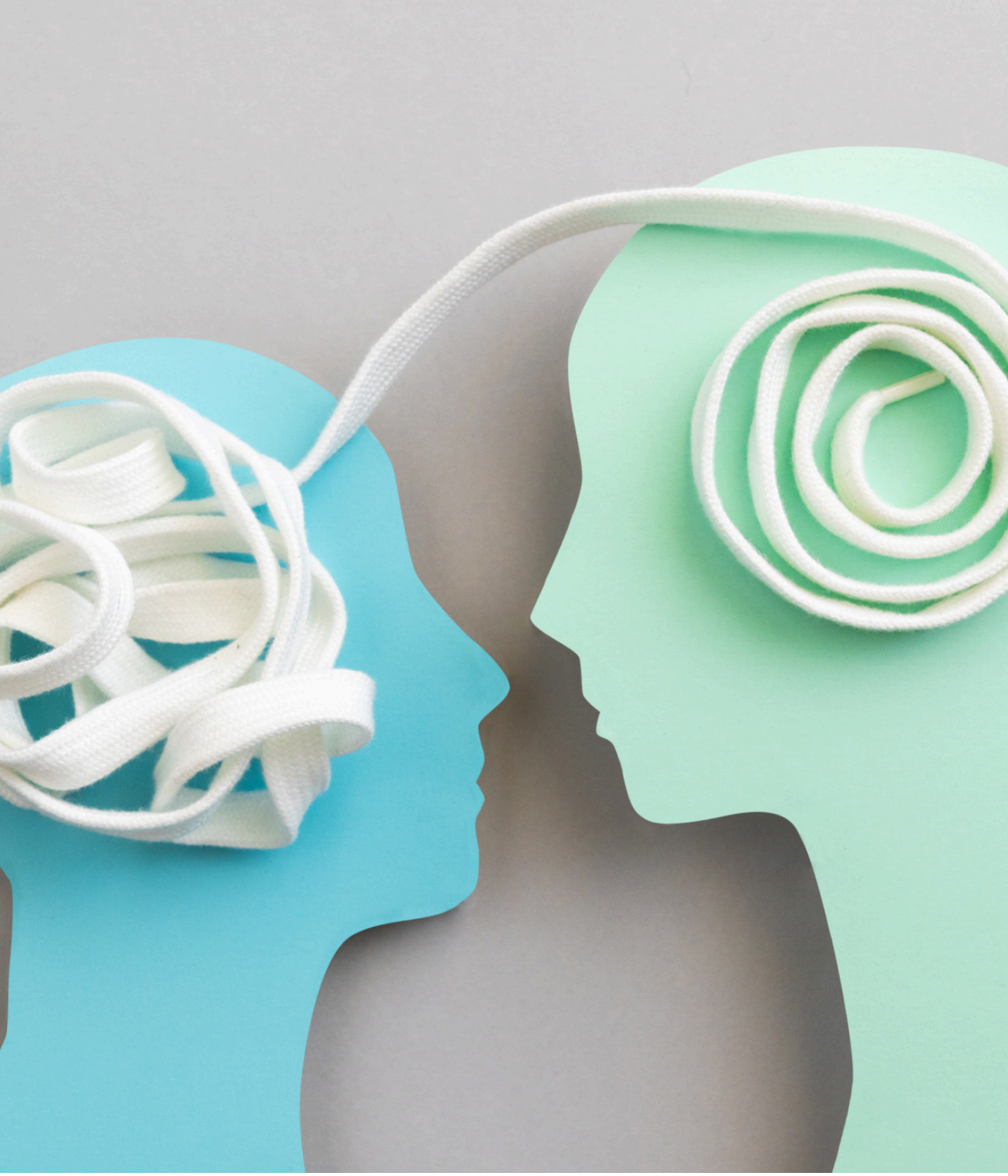
Active listening

- Listen to and validate the parents' and pupil's concerns. Show empathy and understanding towards their experiences and feelings.
- Work together with parents to identify issues and develop strategies to address them.



Personalised support

- Develop personalised support plans that cater to the specific needs of the pupil. Include input from both the pupil and their parents.
- Be willing to adapt strategies based on feedback and changing needs.
- This may include developing a stepped support plan.



Involvement in decision-making

- Involve parents in meetings and decision-making processes regarding their child's education and support plans.
- Empower parents by providing them with information and resources to support their child at home.

Building relationships

- Ensure that there is a designated staff member who the family can consistently communicate with and trust.
- Foster positive interactions between school staff and families through regular check-ins and supportive conversations.
- Facilitate support groups where parents can share experiences and strategies with each other. This could be through approaches such as regular coffee mornings.

Where to go for support



Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service

Educational Psychologist (EPs) are applied psychologists with an in-depth knowledge of psychological theories and their practical application. EPs use evidence-based approaches and interventions to empower others, build staff and school capacity to support learning and the social emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

Tel: 0116 305 5100

Email: psychology@leics.gov.uk



Attendance Team

The team's aim is to support the parent/ carer to understand and fulfil their responsibility to ensure that the child receives suitable full-time education. They will also ensure that the school is fulfilling their own responsibilities. They also have statutory powers to take legal action where appropriate if parents/ carers fail to ensure that their child receives suitable education.

Email: attendanceteam@leics.gov.uk



Inclusion Service

If a child or young person known to a social worker is missing out on their right to education schools can make a referral to the Inclusion Service. When a referral is received the Inclusion Service will triage the request and identify whether the child or young person is a 'child missing education' or a 'pupil missing out on education' and will allocate the case to an Education Officer.

Tel: 0116 305 2071

Email: inclusionpupilsupport@leics.gov.uk