

## **AfC Virtual School for Children in Care Attendance Policy**

Parents and Carers of children of compulsory school age (aged between 5 and 15 years at the start of the academic year) are, by law, required to ensure that their children receive a suitable education through regular attendance at school or otherwise. Official research by the DfE shows, in general, the higher the percentage of sessions missed across the Key Stage, the lower the likely level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. In particular, pupils with no absence are 1.6 times more likely to achieve Age Related Expectations or above, and 4.7 times more likely to achieve above Age-Related Expectations than pupils that missed 15-20% of all sessions.

As a general rule, Children in Care should be given the same opportunities as all children. They will attend school from the beginning of their entitlement in Reception to the end of the summer term in Year 11. Their school place will be based on their need and, in the majority of cases, this will be a mainstream school unless they have an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) which names specialist provision.

Children are expected to attend school and should only be absent:

- If they are ill. For absence up to 7 days including Saturday and Sunday, the Carer should contact the school on the first day by phone and confirm in writing when they return to school. Longer absences should include a letter from a GP;
- Circumstances where absence can be authorized by the school such as: -
  - Religious observance
  - Interviews
  - Study Leave
  - Approved Educational activities
  - Family bereavement
  - Family contact that cannot be arranged outside the school day
  - Medical appointments
  - CAMHS appointments
  - CiC Review.

AfC Virtual School will not support holidays in school time for Children in Care unless there are exceptional circumstances, which are outlined to the Assistant Headteacher who leads that area. This will never be agreed where attendance is below 98% for the school year in question.

Should the **leave of absence** be refused and Carers still take their child out of school, the absence will be recorded as **unauthorised**. This could then lead to the involvement of the Educational Welfare Service and an attendance target in the PEP.

Where no school place has been identified for the young person AfC Virtual School will arrange temporary education. This may be alternative provision, online learning or tutoring. Where the child has an EHCP, the 0-25 SEN Team is responsible for ensuring that an appropriate school place is found without delay. School places are required to be sourced in conjunction with the care placement and the aim is always to avoid time out of school.

Children in care are expected to attend school on time, and where required, will need to be brought and collected by Carers or another authorised adult to ensure that this happens.

Non-attendance that has not been authorised will be treated as a serious matter by all agencies concerned. Actions to support children's attendance will be included in their Personal Education Plan. Early intervention must be taken by schools, carers, social workers and AfC Virtual School as

soon as attendance falls below 98%.



AfC Virtual School and partner Schools will contact Carers on the first day of absence to ask for a reason and will ensure that this is recorded on Welfare Call.

Where there are entrenched problems of non attendance and there is no resolution, there will need to be an escalation to senior managers of agencies involved. Children and young people must be involved in the discussions and their views taken into account.

## **Roles and Responsibilities - Working together to improve attendance**

### **Children & Young People:**

- Are expected to attend school regularly and on time, except where absence has been authorised. They are expected to register in the morning and afternoon and attend all lessons.

### **Carers:**

- Are expected to be a 'good parent' and promote the child's education and attendance;
- Are expected to be positive about the value of education and have high expectations for Children in Care;
- Are responsible for ensuring that children in their care attend school with all appropriate equipment, lunch and uniform. Carers support the children's learning which includes the travel to and from school;
- Are expected to contact the school, AfC Virtual School and Social Worker if there are any attendance problems and to work with the school and other professionals to resolve them;
- Are expected to arrange any medical and other appointments outside school hours and to take family holidays outside of school term time;
- Are expected to listen to the child to find out why they are not attending (for example bullying, problems with learning);
- Are expected to raise any concerns at the Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting and CiC review;
- Are expected to refuse permission for a child not to attend school unless there are good reasons such as illness.

### **Social Workers:**

- Have primary responsibility for ensuring the child has an up-to-date care plan including the education and health arrangements.
- Attend Personal Education Plan meetings and champion school engagement.
- Wherever possible, ensure that placement moves do not impact on school stability. Inform AfC Virtual School and where necessary the 0-25 SEN team of any placement instability and complete the School Move Authorisation Form.
- Listen to the child to find out why they are not attending.
- Help carers to support the child's education.
- Work closely with AfC Virtual School and attend all statutory training to better understand the issues affecting the education of children in care.

### **Education Welfare Officers:**

- Work in partnership with AfC Virtual School, Carers, Social Worker and schools in matters related to school attendance;
- Support work to raise educational attainment and progress for Children in Care through improved attendance;
- Attend PEP Review meetings where there are issues of poor attendance;
- Monitor trends in relation to school attendance for Children in Care and report to AfC Virtual School.
- Work with carers to improve attendance.

**Schools:**

- Ensure that there is a system of first day calling for Children in Care so that Carers are telephoned when the child fails to attend and information is recorded accurately in the PEP;
- Avoid the use of exclusion for a Child in Care.
- Work with AfC Virtual School to ensure early intervention;
- Listen to Children in Care to find out why attendance is a problem and to find out the reasons; ● Inform AfC Virtual School Area Lead as soon as attendance becomes a problem.
- Attend AfC Virtual School training and in particular the Attachment Aware Schools Award.4

**AfC Virtual School:**

- Work with children, schools, Carers and Social Workers to improve attendance;
- Attend PEP meetings and quality assure the process ensuring that attendance has a high profile; ● Monitor attendance and take action with other agencies where necessary.
- Contact foster carers, social workers outlining falling or rising attendance
- Reward CLA attendance of 95% and above each term with a certificate and gift voucher
- Reward improving attendance termly.
- Signpost foster carers and schools to ERSA support and toolkit being used by AfC
- Ensure that training offer includes relevant and current information and support/strategies for foster carers, schools about the importance of good attendance to school and how to ensure this with CLA
- Collaborate with schools to create an attachment aware community.
- Ensure partners are aware of the negative impact of school moves which can lead to disengagement, persistent absence and NEET. Work to support stability and where school moves are unavoidable to ensure effective, attachment aware transition.

Attendance policy signed off by : Suzanne Parrott, Executive Headteacher AfC Virtual School / Associate Director Education of  
CWSW Date: January 2024