

# The Education Welfare Service

## **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE** The role of the EWS

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# Role of the EWS

## What does the Education Welfare Service do?

The Education Welfare Service's main task is to work with parents and children in order to support pupils' regular school attendance and to reduce unnecessary absence and truancy. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) works closely with schools and with other statutory and voluntary agencies to promote, encourage and enforce regular school attendance of children of compulsory school age who are resident in Blaenau Gwent.

By law, all children aged between 5 and 16 must receive an education. Once a child is registered at a school, it is the parents' legal duty under the Education Act 1996 to ensure that the child attends school regularly and punctually.

Children and young people will not perform as well as they should at school if they do not attend regularly. They are also likely to be disadvantaged as a result both educationally and socially. Not only are their own prospects damaged but sometimes the wider community is affected as well. Evidence has shown that truants are more likely to become involved in anti-social behaviour or crime either as perpetrators or as victims. Poor attendance at school adversely affects future employment prospects. Truants are also more vulnerable to abuse and being exposed to the risks of drug or substance abuse.

The law on school attendance means that parents who do not ensure that their children attend school regularly may receive a Fixed Penalty Notice or be taken to court by the local authority. The court may decide an Education Supervision Order is necessary for the child. In some cases, parents can face a criminal charge for failing to ensure their children attend school. The offence can result in a Parenting Order and a fine or even imprisonment.

# What we do

There is much that a school can and should do to promote and clarify its expectations about regular school attendance and punctuality to pupils and their parents. The school's attendance policy and procedures should be clear about what actions are to be taken if a pupil's attendance or punctuality becomes of concern. Senior members of staff should have overall responsibility for attendance matters in the school; in some schools they may also be supported by attendance officers or learning mentors.

Where a school is concerned about the pattern of a child's attendance or punctuality, the school should not hesitate to intervene at an early stage. If, however, appropriate school-based actions do not quickly resolve the attendance problem or if there is a lack of parental cooperation, then the school should inform the EWS and complete a formal referral form.

A first step would usually be for the school to contact the parents and arrange a meeting to discuss the issue.

Every school in Blaenau Gwent has a named Education Welfare Officer (EWO) for the school to contact to discuss any attendance issues. The EWO will visit the school at regular intervals in order to meet with the Headteacher or senior staff and discuss any pupils who may have school attendance problems or other welfare issues. The EWO will also inspect the school's attendance registers to check that they are being correctly maintained, to identify pupils with attendance or punctuality patterns that appear to be of concern and to discuss action about these cases.

Where a school has referred a pupil to the EWS, the EWO will arrange to meet the parents and the child to make sure they are fully aware of the referral information and the nature of the attendance or punctuality problems. The EWO will explain the importance of regular school attendance and inform the parents of their legal responsibilities regarding their child's attendance at school. The EWO will discuss the school attendance issues with the parents and the pupil and any other relevant agencies involved with the family as necessary. The EWO will seek information about any problems or difficulties that may be affecting the child's attendance at school and discuss how these may be resolved.

# What we do

The EWO will try to work with the child and with the parents to support them in meeting their responsibilities. Advice and assistance will be offered and information about other support services that may be accessed will be provided.

In most cases, a case assessment by the EWO and then carrying out an agreed short-term intervention plan with the cooperation of parents will lead to an improvement in the child's attendance at school. In some circumstances, where longer-term intervention is needed, an application may be made to the Family Proceedings Court for an Education Supervision Order.

In circumstances where parents do not cooperate with the EWO and fail to return their child to regular attendance at school, the EWS may take legal action to seek to enforce school attendance. A careful assessment is made by the EWS, advised by the Council's legal department, in terms of the suitability for legal action in every such case. Parents who fail to ensure that their children attend school can be issued with notice of a fixed penalty fine for their child's truancy. Parents of truants are also liable to face prosecution in the Magistrates Court under the Education Act 1996 (Section 444) and for each offence could face a maximum fine of £2,500 and imprisonment for up to three months as well as being made subject to a Parenting Order. In addition to its work supporting families and schools concerning school attendance, the EWS has responsibilities in a number of other areas connected with children's welfare.

## **CHILD EMPLOYMENT**

The EWS issues child employment permits for children of school age to be engaged in part-time work. Applications for child performance licences to enable children to take part in television, radio, film or stage productions and modelling work are checked and processed by the EWS. Licences for adult chaperones who are employed to look after these children are also carefully regulated. There are regulations covering all aspects of child employment and infringements can be prosecuted.

## **CHILD PERFORMANCE**

The EWS are responsible for issuing child performance licences, BOPA's, chaperone approvals and ensuring that the conditions of these licenses are met and adhered to.

## **SOCIAL INCLUSION**

The work of the EWS contributes to reducing exclusions, unnecessary absence and truancy from school and assists young people who are at risk of exclusion from school or who are missing out on education for other reasons.

## **REDUCING YOUTH OFFENDING**

The EWS contributes to the multi-agency network seeking to reduce youth crime and liaises with the Youth Offending Service.

## **CHILDREN IN NEED AND CHILD PROTECTION**

Education Welfare Officers link with colleagues in Families First, Children's Services and other agencies in the child protection network and support plans to assist children in need and to protect children at risk.

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# Supporting School Attendance

## ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

The EHE Officer links with children and families to offer support and guidance and ensures that all children are in receipt of a suitable education.

## EDUCATION CONSULTATION SERVICE

Education Welfare Officers regularly provide advice and guidance to parents and other professionals who have queries about educational issues.

### How does the EWS work with schools to support school attendance?

The EWS provides every school in the borough with a named EWO to help the school improve its attendance rates and reduce unauthorised absence and truancy. EWOs will usually support schools in three main ways:

- > through supporting school-based practice to improve attendance and punctuality;
- > by dealing with referred cases;
- > through supporting correct attendance procedures and register keeping

The EWO can advise and assist schools about attendance policies, procedures and initiatives, about dealing with attendance and welfare issues and about dealing with individual school attendance cases. The EWO will hold and manage a caseload of cases referred by schools for EWS intervention to address persistent attendance problems or other issues. The role of the EWO also includes responsibility for arranging school attendance register inspections to help their schools to ensure that their attendance registers comply with the law and regulations and also to help identify any pupils with patterns of irregular attendance and punctuality of concern.

These checks will be carried out at a suitable frequency, either twice a term or once a term or once an academic year.

Where a school wishes to refer a pupil for EWS support or intervention, a formal referral to the EWS must be completed and handed to the EWO or sent in to the EWS.

The EWO will arrange regular appointments to visit each school according to assessed need. These appointments should be arranged at mutually convenient intervals and times in order that the Headteacher/Key Stage Coordinator/Head of Year/Year Team Leader and/or other staff members are able to meet with the EWO. The purpose of these meetings is to:

- > facilitate effective working links between the school and the EWS;
- > identify the support needed by the school on any issues of concern about attendance matters or service delivery and for the EWO to make an assessment and provide reports to EWS managers;
- > discuss and agree any improvement targets for the school about attendance;
- > contribute to training of school staff about register keeping and attendance management;
- > advise and assist the school about liaison with other agencies;
- > afford opportunities for the EWO and school to discuss proposals for time-limited project work around attendance and related issues and support for initiatives such as: Late Watches; Attendance Clinics; Attendance Improvement Rewards and Special Assemblies;
- > provide an advice and consultation service about child protection issues and inform EWS managers of training needs or complex cases concerning child protection;
- > discuss potential new referrals to the EWS; provide feedback on ongoing cases.

## Nursery Schools and classes

Although children in nurseries are not of statutory school age, the EWS will respond to requests to:

- > discuss cases of children of non-statutory school age who are having attendance or punctuality problems and undertake preventative work;
- > discuss transition to primary school and links with schools;
- > discuss promotion of regular attendance;
- > promote parental and pupil preparation for expectations about school attendance;
- > offer advice and guidance on child protection matters.

## OUT OF BOROUGH SCHOOLS

The EWS receives a large number of referrals, particularly at secondary level, concerning children resident in the Borough attending schools in other local authorities. Some of these may be siblings of children attending schools in the Borough.



# Poor Attendance

## When and how should schools refer poor attendance cases to the EWS?

The majority of school attendance problems can and should be dealt with through the school's attendance policy and procedures. Class or form tutors and other school-based support staff have a vital role to play in encouraging good punctuality and attendance and following up on any concerns. If problems continue, then senior staff in the school will need to be involved and should seek to contact and meet with the parents to discuss the issues. Whilst schools have the initial responsibility to address pupils' poor attendance and punctuality, complex or difficult cases may need additional support or intervention from the EWS and other support agencies. for up to three months as well as being made subject to a Parenting Order. In addition to its work supporting families and schools concerning school attendance, the EWS has responsibilities in a number of other areas connected with children's welfare.

**The EWS supports schools in dealing with cases of persistent unauthorised absence.** It is the head teacher and not parents who should decide whether a pupil's absence should be authorised or not. Parents should provide a reason for the absence, but it is for the head teacher to consider whether the reason provided by the parent is an acceptable and valid one. The EWS can be consulted if advice is needed. In some circumstances, the EWS may also assist the school in making further enquiries about a child's absence to clarify whether the absence is justified or not.

Schools are advised to refer a case promptly to the EWS where the school has tried to resolve an attendance problem with the pupil and parents but there has not been a sustained or satisfactory improvement. Every school has a duty to notify the EWS if a pupil attends irregularly or if a pupil is absent without leave continuously for ten or more school days, but based on its knowledge of the circumstances of the child and family involved, a school may make a judgement to make a referral to the EWS much earlier.

# Poor Attendance

An early referral and subsequent involvement of the EWS may help to prevent a child going missing, or prevent truancy and other social problems from becoming entrenched. Delay in making an appropriate referral is often detrimental to the interests of the child involved and once truancy becomes entrenched it can be very difficult to bring about a return to regular school attendance.

A headteacher or designated senior member of staff should consider formally referring a case to the EWS without delay if:

- > a pattern of irregular attendance is continuing or getting worse;
- > a child has failed to return to school after a holiday period and the school has not been able to contact the parents;
- > a child is missing from school and there has been no response from the parents, or the school is concerned about the home circumstances;
- > parents seem not to be cooperating with the school in discussing attendance or welfare issues;

## Referrals

- > parents do not appear to be understanding or accepting their responsibilities;
- > parents are condoning unjustified absence from school;
- > it is suspected that a child may be being prevented from attending school.

The school should normally inform parents in advance that a referral is to be made to the EWS. It is very important that schools provide relevant and accurate information about the child and parents when referring. The information provided on the referral form to the EWS is shared with families and the contents of EWS case files may be disclosed to subjects and may be used in legal proceedings.

Schools are advised to discuss the timing or suitability of potential referrals with their link EWO and to consult the EWS about any case or issue.

Referrals from schools to the EWS may be emailed to the EWS or handed to the link EWO. The EWS also receives referrals from other statutory and voluntary agencies as well as self- referrals by pupils or parents.

# Referrals

## What happens once a referral is received by the EWS?

Upon receipt of a referral from a school and usually the same working day, the referral information is first checked against EWS records for any previous EWS involvement. An EWS manager will assess the referral information and decide whether it is appropriate to allocate to an EWO for follow up or whether further information or action is required before the referral can be properly dealt with. Once the manager has approved it, the referral information is then recorded on the EWS central database and the case allocated to an EWO as soon as possible. This is usually to the school's named link EWO unless there is already another EWO working with the family concerning children at another school.

Once the case is allocated, the EWO will contact the referrer within five working days to discuss the referral. The EWO will contact the parents and arrange a meeting either at the school or at the family's home in order to commence an initial casework assessment and plan. Thereafter the referrer will be kept regularly informed about the EWO's interventions and progress with the case. It is important that the school and the EWO work together and liaise closely and share information about any important contacts or developments. Sometimes the early intervention of an EWO can result in an immediate improvement in a pupil's attendance but in other cases the school attendance problems are symptomatic of wider social problems or difficulties affecting the child's family.

EWOs will always try to work together with families, schools and other agencies to resolve cases as efficiently as possible but in all cases they have to conduct careful initial and ongoing assessments and use planned interventions.

Such work often requires the support of school staff and sometimes of other agencies as well as a level of cooperation from the parents and child involved in order for it to be successful. EWOs follow established EWS practice, procedures and set standards in their work. Because there is always the possibility of legal action or data subject access to EWS case files, EWOs have to be mindful of good practice in their casework and record keeping and of the requirements of Education law as well as Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Human Rights laws. EWOs have the support of the EWS manager and receive regular supervision sessions. Casework plans are reviewed on a regular basis to determine whether further action is needed including legal action or whether the case has reached a satisfactory conclusion.

# Register Check

If schools need further information about the progress of a particular case or have concerns, then the link EWO should be contacted in the first instance. If there are any comments, commendations or complaints about service delivery, then the Senior Education Welfare Officer should be contacted.

## What is a register check?

The EWS visits the Borough's schools regularly and conducts register checks to help schools ensure that their attendance registers are being kept properly according to the law. These regular visits provide an additional opportunity for schools to consult face to face with the EWS and to discuss and review school attendance issues, procedures and individual cases of poor attendance or punctuality. The EWS offers advice about a range of attendance, pupil welfare and behavioural issues. The link EWO advises and encourages schools about making appropriate early referrals to the Service.

During the visit set aside for a register check, the EWO will look at each attendance register (or computer print-out) to check that it is being correctly marked and that it contains the necessary details. The EWO will complete an attendance register inspection form for every register examined. This form will provide comment on the standard of register keeping and whether there is evidence from the register that absences and lateness are being followed up. There will also be space on the reverse of the form or on a separate sheet for the EWO to record the names of pupils whose attendance or punctuality record appears to be of concern. This will include cases where there are: patterns of occasional absence; frequent authorised or unauthorised absences or lateness; blocks of absence; pupils who have ceased attending or have been removed from roll without explanation; any other unusual circumstances.

The EWO will provide the Headteacher of the school with a copy of each completed form or a summary letter reporting the findings either at the end of the visit or by email as soon as possible. This will enable the school to have considered the information about register keeping and about individual pupils from the register check before the next meeting with the EWO.

# Register Check

The EWO will arrange a further meeting to confirm the feedback about the registers to the Headteacher of the school (or to a senior member of staff to whom the Headteacher has delegated responsibility for attendance issues) and then discuss any issues arising from the register check about register keeping, attendance procedures and individual or general concerns. Schools may wish to raise attendance difficulties or request support or training on keeping registers or general attendance issues. The EWO will also review what action the school is taking about those pupils who have been identified as having poor attendance or punctuality records.

The EWO will also arrange dates with the school for the next register check and feedback session.

The EWO will discuss potential referrals and advise the school to make appropriate referrals to the EWS or to other appropriate agencies.

# Attendance Management Guidance

## **What further guidance is there about attendance management and register keeping?**

Section 434 of the Education Act 1996 requires all schools to keep an attendance register and for it to be kept in accordance with regulations. The Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 consolidated previous regulations and a copy of this statutory instrument was issued to all schools. The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 followed. It is an offence to fail to comply with or to contravene the Regulations. The attendance register is a legal document and in maintained schools should be available for inspection during school hours by an authorised officer of the Local Authority.

Detailed guidance on school attendance codes was issued to all schools by Welsh Government in June 2010.

In 2016 further guidance 'Inclusion and pupil support' was issued by Welsh Government. This guidance focused on providing inclusive education and developing school attendance and behaviour policies.

# Questions to consider

## What questions can the school and link EWO consider and review?

- > Does the school have an attendance policy and procedures in line with WG and Blaenau Gwent guidance?
- > Are the school's expectations about attendance and punctuality explicit?
- > Apart from the Headteacher, are there senior members of staff with responsibility for overseeing pupil attendance?
- > Does the school have effective procedures for dealing with lateness and absence and are these clear to all staff, pupils and parents?
- > Are the attendance registers kept in accordance with regulations?
- > Is it obvious from the registers that absences and lateness are followed up?
- > Is each member of staff setting the same high standard of expectation about attendance and punctuality?
- > Are new staff fully informed about the school's procedures and about register keeping?
- > Is the school rewarding good attendance and punctuality?
- > Are there pupils whose attendance warrants referral to the EWS?
- > Who decides when to refer to the EWS and how is this done?
- > Does the school need further advice about making referrals to the EWS or constructing an effective attendance policy or procedures?
- > Would Late Watches, Attendance Clinics, Special Assemblies or other projects or initiatives help with raising the profile of attendance and punctuality at school?

# Advice about school attendance

## What advice does the EWS give to parents about school attendance?

From the time your child first starts at school, make sure that good routines and habits are in place.

**Be ready** – make sure that children are ready and prepared for school with all the uniform, books and equipment needed.

**Be careful about breakfast** – children of all ages need a nutritious breakfast. Snacks, sweets and drinks that are high in salt or sugar and additives are not a good enough start to the day.

**Be on time** – lateness to school is upsetting for the child and disturbs the class and the teachers.

**Be interested** – make sure you have time to talk to your child about school each day and find out what homework needs to be done.

**Be positive** – from time-to-time problems in school may occur with other children or with the work but you need to reassure your child that the school and you will work together to give support.

**Be firm** – unless your child is too ill to attend school then he or she should be in school. Do not allow your child to stay at home.

**Be aware** – that you should not take your child out of school for a holiday during school term time.

**Be available** – let the school know how you can be contacted and any emergency telephone numbers where you and relatives or friends can be contacted.

**Be clear with the school** – if your child is too ill to attend school then contact the school on the first day of absence and keep the school informed.



**Be supportive to the school** – make sure your child follows the school rules and that you are clear about the school's expectations, policies and procedures about, for example, behaviour, uniform and attendance.

**Be informed** – how would you know if your child was missing school and how will you find out about your child's progress in school? Find out the school's procedures and attend parents' evenings when they are held.

**Be involved** – speak regularly to your child's tutor. Pupils need to know that there are good links between parents and teachers.

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