



Hampshire
County Council

Virtual School

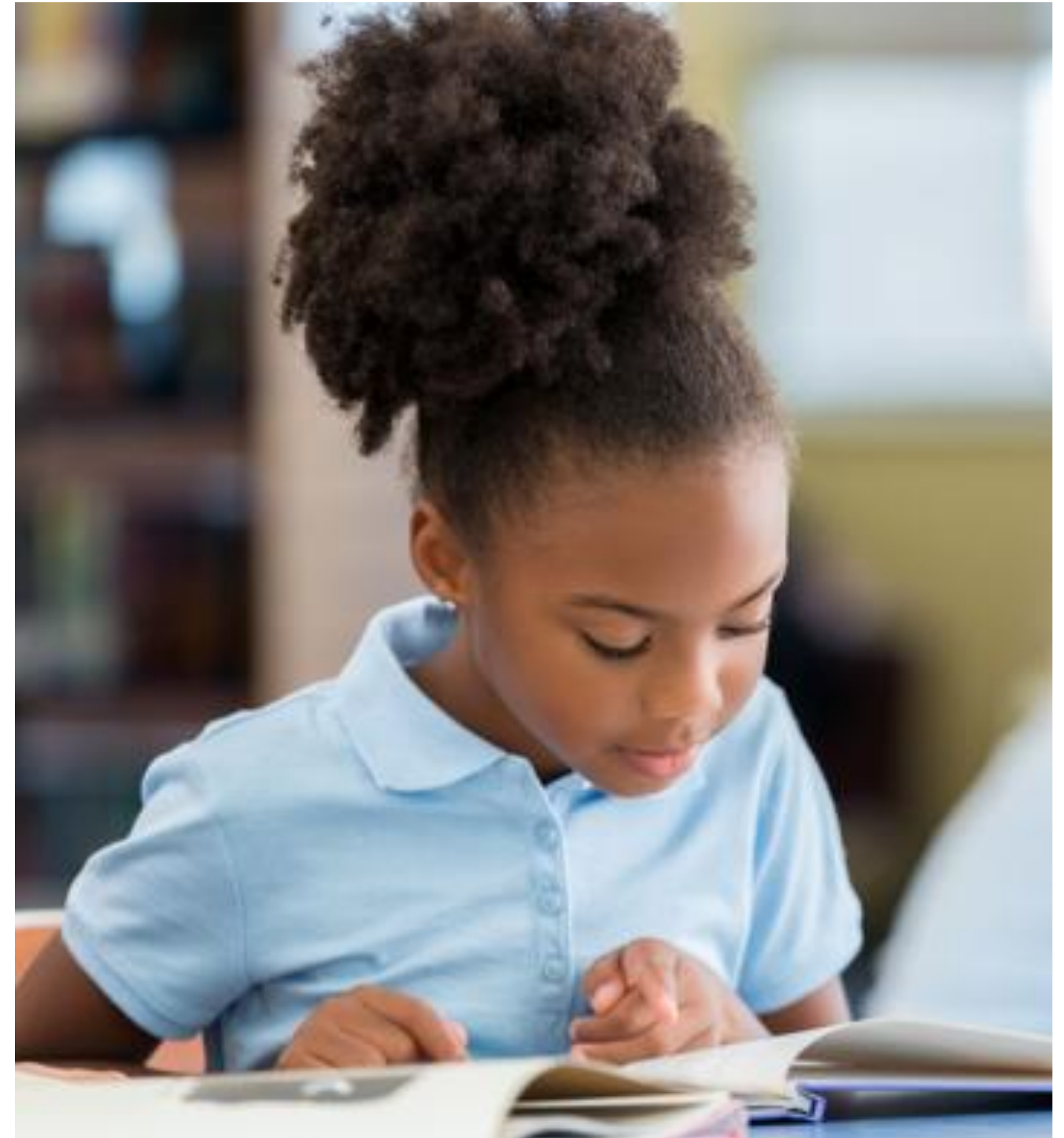
Supporting School Attendance: A Guide for Social Workers

Supporting Attendance

When supporting a child's attendance at school, social workers play a vital role in looking beyond the numbers to understand the full picture of a child's experience.

Attendance is not just about being present, it's about feeling safe, valued and connected. A child's sense of belonging, their perception of safety, and the quality of relationships they experience in school all significantly influence their willingness and ability to attend.

Equally important is how inclusive and engaging the curriculum feels to them, and whether the school environment reflects the belief that attendance is everyone's business, a shared responsibility across staff, families, and services. By considering these interconnected factors, social workers can help create the conditions where children feel supported to attend, engage, and thrive.



To effectively support a child's education and address attendance-related concerns, social workers need to gather and understand specific information from the school:

1. What is the child's current attendance?

Why it matters: Attendance percentage gives a clear picture of how often the child is in school. Persistent absence (typically below 90%) is a key concern.

What to ask for: Most recent attendance data, including termly and year-to-date figures.

2. Are there any records of lateness?

Why it matters: Frequent lateness can disrupt learning and may indicate underlying issues such as morning routines, transport, or anxiety.

What to ask for: Number of late arrivals, patterns (such as certain days), and any reasons recorded.

3. Has the child had any suspensions?

Why it matters: Suspensions can signal behavioural or emotional difficulties and may affect the child's sense of belonging and progress.

What to ask for: Dates, reasons, and duration of any suspensions, and what support was offered afterwards.

4. Is reduced hours provision being used?

Why it matters: Part-time timetables should be short-term and used only when in the child's best interest. They must be regularly reviewed.

What to ask for: Start date, rationale, review dates, and plan for reintegration to full-time education.

5. Although the child may be in school, what is their attendance to lessons?

Why it matters: A child might be present in school but not attending or engaging in lessons (such as spending time in pastoral support or out of class).

What to ask for: Lesson-by-lesson attendance, engagement levels, and any patterns of avoidance.

6. Where relevant, what support is being put in place to support attendance?

Why it matters: Understanding what interventions are in place helps assess their effectiveness and identify gaps.

What to ask for: Details of pastoral support, mentoring, counselling, family support, or external agency involvement.

7. What other external agencies have you sought support from?

Why it matters: confirming a referral ensures the child gets timely support to understand and address the reasons behind poor attendance. This early action helps prevent issues from escalating and promotes better stability and wellbeing in school.

What to ask for: Check that school have made a referral to the Inclusion Support Service (ISS) via their Mendix form [Hampshire County Council - School forms start](#) when they have an attendance concern for a child.

Next Steps

Pupil Voice

Explore how connected the child feels to school life. Here are some points to consider:

1. Understanding the Child's Lived Experience

Go beyond surface-level reasons for absence - explore how the child feels about school, including relationships, routines, and classroom experiences. Ask open-ended questions like: "What helps you want to come to school?" or "What makes it hard to be there?"

2. Creating Safe Spaces for Expression

Ensure the child feels safe and supported to speak honestly, without fear of judgment or consequences. Use age-appropriate tools (such as drawings, emotion charts, digital surveys) to help children express themselves.

3. Acting on What They Share

Demonstrate that their voice leads to action, whether that's changes in support, routines, or how adults respond to them. Feedback loops are important: let the child know what's being done in response to their views.

4. Recognising Individual Differences

Every child's experience is unique. Consider how neurodiversity, trauma, or cultural background may shape how they perceive and respond to school.

5. Embedding Voice in Planning

Ensure the child's views are reflected in attendance plans, multi-agency meetings, and any interventions.

Use their voice to co-produce solutions, not just to inform adult-led decisions

The virtual school offers [training](#) to professionals in collecting pupil voice.

Lived Experience

The Day in My Life Tools, which can be found on the Hampshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership website, provide a reference point to assist professionals' thinking when exploring neglect with children and their families/carers. These tools may be helpful when considering how a child's home and school life interact and impact on each other: [Day in my life tools - Hampshire SCP](#).

Each tool is designed for a different group of children and young people and helps identify particular issues professionals may want to consider. Tools do not need to be completed in their entirety; they can be used to guide conversations, contribute to assessments of need and support identification of thresholds. The tools are to support consideration of the child's daily lived experience.

Transition

Transitions between key stages – such as moving from primary to secondary school, or from Year 7 to Year 8 – are critical periods that can significantly affect attendance. These moments often bring changes in environment, expectations, peer groups, and support systems, which can lead to increased anxiety, reduced sense of belonging, and disengagement from learning. Without targeted support, children and young people may struggle to adapt, resulting in dips in attendance and wellbeing. Recognising and planning for these transitions is essential to maintaining continuity, connection and confidence in school.

Transitions within the school day, such as moving between lessons, arriving at school, or navigating break and lunch times, can be significant stress points for some children and young people. These moments often involve changes in environment, expectations, and social dynamics, which can trigger anxiety, dysregulation, or avoidance behaviours. For pupils with additional needs or those experiencing adversity, these transitions may feel unpredictable or overwhelming, leading to late arrivals, time out of class, or internal truancy. Recognising and supporting these micro-transitions is key to fostering a sense of safety, routine and belonging throughout the school day.

The virtual school provides [training](#) for professionals around transition. Hampshire Educational Psychology has updated the [Transition Partnership Arrangement](#) documents, which can be used to support good Team Around the Child meetings.

Team Around the Child

A Team Around a Child brings together key adults who know the child well, such as teachers, support staff, social workers, and family member, to create a coordinated, strengths-based plan of support. By focusing on the child's positive qualities and listening to their voice, the team can identify relational strategies that foster trust and emotional safety. This might include consistent adult relationships, predictable routines, and language that reassures and empowers the child. Through regular meetings and shared reflection, the TAC can adapt interventions to reduce anxiety, improve engagement, and ensure the child feels seen, heard, and supported across settings.

Tools such as [Reach2Teach](#) and the [PEP toolkit](#) can be used to help identify a child's needs and provide trauma-informed strategies and interventions to address them effectively. The Virtual School provides training on using these tools.