



Hampshire  
County Council

Virtual School

# Supporting School Attendance: A Guide for Schools

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As educators, teachers are at the forefront of supporting student attendance. **Attendance is more than just being present, it's about students feeling safe, valued and connected.** This guide offers practical strategies and reflective questions to help teachers foster a positive attendance culture in their classrooms and across the school.

For some children, regular attendance is a protective factor that promotes stability, access to trusted adults, and continuity in learning and relationships. These children may face additional barriers that require sensitive and proactive support.

### Why Attendance Matters

Consistent attendance helps students:

- build strong peer and adult relationships
- stay on track with learning and routines
- develop confidence and a sense of belonging
- access timely support when needed

Teachers can play a vital role in identifying and addressing attendance challenges for a child in care, a previously looked after child, a child with a social worker or a child in kinship care. This includes working closely with social workers, designated safeguarding leads, and the Virtual School to ensure tailored interventions are in place.

## What Teachers Can Do

### **1. Monitor and Reflect on Attendance Patterns**

Keep an eye on attendance and punctuality.

Notice patterns - are absences linked to certain days, subjects, or transitions?

Use this insight to identify potential barriers.

### **2. Build Positive Relationships**

Greet students warmly and show interest in their wellbeing.

Create a classroom culture where every student feels seen and valued.

### **3. Create a Safe and Predictable Environment**

Use consistent routines and clear expectations.

Support students through transitions (start of day, between lessons).

### **4. Engage with Families**

Share concerns early and with empathy.

Ask families what they think might help and offer practical suggestions.

Celebrate improvements and small wins together.

Ensure that children who have the support of a social worker are discussed in multi-agency meetings, and that their attendance plans reflect input from all professionals involved. Use tools like the PEP Toolkit and Day in My Life to understand their lived experience.

### **5. Collaborate with Colleagues and Services**

Work with pastoral teams, SENCOs, and external professionals.

Share insights and strategies to support individual students.

Ensure a referral has been made to the Inclusion Support Service (ISS) via their Mendix form [Hampshire County Council - School forms start](#) when you have an attendance concern for a child. This helps make sure the issue is recorded promptly and that the right support can begin without delay.

## Key Questions to Ask

What might be making it hard for this student to attend regularly?

How does this student experience the school day?

What support has already been tried, and what helped?

How can we involve the student and their family in finding solutions?

Children who have the support of a social worker may need extra reassurance that their views are heard. Use trauma-informed approaches to gather pupil voice and ensure their feedback informs attendance strategies. Consider how their experiences outside school may influence their engagement.

## Pupil Voice

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

Understanding how pupils feel about school is essential to supporting attendance. Teachers can help by creating safe spaces for pupils to express themselves and by using tools such as drawings, emotion charts, or digital surveys.

Ask open-ended questions like: “What helps you want to come to school?” or “What makes it hard to be there?”

Act on what pupils share and ensure their voices are reflected in attendance plans and interventions. Feedback loops are important – let pupils know what’s being done in response to their views.

Recognise individual differences, including neurodiversity, trauma, or cultural background, and how these may shape a pupil’s experience of school.

The virtual school offers training to professionals in collecting pupil voice.

## Transitions

Transitions can be particularly challenging for vulnerable children. Plan carefully for changes in school, year group, or routine, and involve the child's social worker in transition planning. Use enhanced support strategies to reduce anxiety and promote attendance.

Transitions between key stages, such as moving from primary to secondary school, can significantly affect attendance. These periods often bring changes in environment, expectations, and peer groups.

Support pupils during transitions by planning ahead, maintaining routines, and providing reassurance. Transitions within the school day (such as between lessons or during break times) can also be stress points and should be supported.

The Virtual School provides training for professionals around transition. Hampshire Educational Psychology has updated the Transition Partnership Arrangement documents to support good Team Around the Child meetings.

## Working Together

Improving attendance for vulnerable children requires a team approach. Teachers, social workers, families, and the Virtual School must work together to create a safe and supportive environment. Early intervention and consistent communication are key.

Improving attendance is a shared responsibility. Teachers, families, and services all play a role. By working together, we can create conditions where every student feels able to attend, engage, and thrive.

## Training and Resources

Teachers can access a range of tools and training to support attendance:

**Day in My Life Tools**: Available on the Hampshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership website, these help explore how a child's home and school life interact.

**Reach2Teach and PEP Toolkit**: These tools help identify a child's needs and provide trauma-informed strategies. Training is available via the Virtual School.