**Principles of Attendance September 2020**

The Cheshire East Principles of Attendance are: -

1. All Cheshire East children to return to school in September on a **full-time timetable.**
2. All Cheshire East children will be s**upported with their mental health and wellbeing** to be able to attend and sustain attendance in school.
3. If a de-registration letter is received for a child to become **Elective Home Educated a joint meeting will be arranged** within 5 working days involving parents, children, school and the Local Authority.
4. **Robust support will be offered** to children and families to address barriers and increase attendance prior to penalty notices being considered.
5. **Transition plans will be in place to support children with an EHCP** for the first half of term if a child requires it with agreement with the parent, Head and SEND keyworker.

Returning to school in September can be an anxious time for some pupils after being away from school over the summer period. This year, due to COVID-19, some students may have been away from school for 5 months and others will have been in school but on reduced days and times. It is understandable therefore that levels of anxiety/stress for both pupils and parents will be higher than in previous years. You will have pupils/families that have experiences in the last 5 months that will need to be taken into consideration when addressing attendance e.g. bereavement, serious illness, isolation, mental ill health and family breakup to name a few.

Following the announcement of 2 July 2020 there will be a return to compulsory attendance from September 2020. All legal interventions will now be available for schools to consider if appropriate. The DfE guidance states that they expect schools to have a reasonable response to support parents to sending their children back. The DFE and Cheshire East would encourage all schools to have a measured approach to any legal interventions they instigate. An expectation would be for schools to engage with parents and understand the families individual concerns and look to offer bespoke solutions to support the family and enable them to gain confidence for their children to return to school, some measures may include a tour of the school and talking through the schools protective measures that are in place.

In July, Cheshire East provided all schools with template letters for children and parents to reassure them about the return to school in September. The team have produced a guide for professionals who are currently working with families to support the transition back to school over the summer, helping address anxieties, barriers to attendance and actions they can take.

The Wellbeing for Education Return project seeks to better equip education settings to support children and young people’s wellbeing, resilience and recovery in the context of Covid-19. A localised approach called Together in Education is being developed that will support schools with training materials and designated links to support children with anxiety and mental health via a local partnership approach.

**Advice for Schools preparing for good attendance**

* Check for the latest coding guidance from the DfE, as codes have been amended for COVID-19. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>
* Consider what the effect of COVID-19 may have had on the emotional wellbeing of all pupils when they return to school and how this will impact on the strategies you use to encourage attendance. You may notice more anxiety-based non-attendance.
* Obtain a list from your SENCO of any pupils with an EHCP to support return to school under COVID SEND Temporary Provision Arrangements.
* Follow your first day calling procedures for all pupils who do not return to school and where the parent has not made contact.
* Where this is an emerging concern or pattern of lateness. Explore with the family what has changed and is impacting with a view to supporting the family to address this e.g. has parent changed jobs, has the way the child comes into school changed e.g. cycling rather than on public transport? Is the child having to take other siblings to school, are they affected by staggered school start times etc.

**Requests for Penalty Notices**

Initially, in September, the Attendance and Children Out of School Team (ACOOS) will be able to offer welfare visits and supportive communications with parents as part of the Traded service rather than routinely issuing fines. <https://www.chesshub.co.uk>

Absences should be challenged sensitively and authorised only where satisfactory evidence has been provided. It is anticipated that by October half term, we will be able to issue warnings followed by fines where appropriate however evidence of supportive measures will need to be clearly exhausted and evidenced.

In these cases, a penalty notice warning period request can be sent in by the school with a minimum of 10 unauthorised sessions of absence. In line with usual practice schools will need to evidence they have made reasonable efforts to establish the reasons behind the poor attendance and put in support measures to enable the child to attend.

We are asking that prior to sending in a Penalty Notice (PN) warning request schools have made contact with the family via **letter** – see template, **phone call**, **home visit** or **meeting** **in school** or **video conference** where there is a health risk.

We are recommending the following actions are taken by schools;

**School Actions Flow Chart**

Child does not attend school as expected, if no reason to authorise the absence is established then the child will be coded in the register with an unauthorised mark.

**Step 1** - Each day of unauthorised absence - School make a telephone call to parents / carers, exploring barriers to attending and measures to support child back into school if fit and well. Where the child or parent has specific anxieties, this may highlight the need for a further discussion either face to face or remotely

**Step 2** - If absence continues – school to invite parents in for a meeting / video meeting and or complete a home visit to discuss attendance, explore barriers and offer support to enable child to attend. The Attendance and Children Out of School Team can support home visits and meetings in school as part of the traded service via Chess, please speak with your locality lead to gauge availability of the team to help with your required support. Please see guidance to support good attendance. If mental health is identified as a barrier to attendance, consider a conversation with the Together in Education Lead.

**Step 3** - At 6-8 unauthorised absences the school send a template letter to each parent / carer to advise that if there are 10 unauthorised absences an Attendance and Children Out of School Team (ACOOS) referral for a 15-day warning period will be made, resulting in penalty notice if there is an unauthorised absence in the advised time period.

**Step 4** - Following a series of 10 unauthorised absences schools make a Penalty Notice Warning Period request to the Attendance and Children Out of School Team (ACOOS) alongside evidence of the contact made and support offered to family to increase attendance.

**Attendance and Children Out of School Team process**

The ACOOS team will triage the request within 5 working days and allocate to a locality worker for contact with family within 3 days. The locality worker then updates the request with information established from the family - this additional step has been introduced as a response to COVID19 and in the Principles of Attendance guidance to ensure children receive adequate support to return to school.

The ACOOS team panel will then review the request to decide whether a 15-day warning period will be issued. ACOOS panels meet on a weekly basis.

* If the panel feel a warning period is not appropriate and more support is required to the family to support the child into school, this recommendation will be made to the school. Recommendations could include: staff at gates to meet and greet, direct contact from a member of staff that has good relationship with the child, a package put in place to support transition back to school, a conversation with the Together in Education Lead or the school to lead on an Early Help to support the parent and child.
* If decided at the panel that a 15 day warning period is appropriate, parents / carers are issued with letter from the ACOOS team to advise them of the date the 15-day warning period commences and expectations in the period. A link to the DFE site regarding the opening of schools during COVID 19 will be provided.
* School will be advised of the outcome of the panel by email within 2 working days.

If there is unauthorised absence in the 15-day warning period, then the panel will look at the case and agree whether a penalty notice will be issued.

Penalty notice fines are £60 if paid within 21 days or £120 if paid within 28 days per parent. If the fine is not paid a request is sent to the ACOOS Team Manager, Head of Service and Legal team for authorisation for prosecution.

**Leave of Absence checklist and request**

There is no entitlement to leave during term time for the purpose of a holiday. Each Headteacher can determine what constitutes an exceptional circumstance and authorise leave based on individual cases.

This year, because of the pandemic and restrictions on travel, schools will need to consider some additional factors when assessing requests for exceptional leave. Whilst we expect every child to attend school, some families will want to travel to see other family members who they have not been able to visit since lock-down or to pay respects to those who have passed away. There will also be families who have been asked to rebook a holiday or are in receipt of travel vouchers; these may have a use by date.

Key workers may also be restricted to when they can take leave from their workplace. All requests for exceptional leave will need to be treated sensitively backed with supporting evidence to support a parent’s request. It is advised that you may want to put some information on your website to remind parents to keep holidays within school holiday breaks.

Parents should provide evidence that children are required to quarantine following travel.

**Elective Home Education**

Following a long period at home, some parents may now feel they want to Electively Home Educate their children. As part of the Principles of Attendance guidance before de-registration, a meeting with the parents, school and the Attendance and Children Out of School team will be held to explore the reason for the de-registration and to ensure parents understand their responsibilities to provide a suitable education following de-registration. Schools to invite the ACOOS team to the meeting by emailing EHE@cheshireeast.gov.uk .

**Exclusions**

Schools have been asked to review their behaviour policies in line with DFE guidance for opening.

Please be aware that any students that are sent home following a breach of policy will need to be recorded as a fixed term exclusion and notification in writing sent home.

Schools should be mindful that COVID 19 and the time away from school will impact on some children’s behaviour on their return to school and strategies to avoid any fixed term exclusions and support around behaviour should be considered before the issue of any fixed term exclusions. It’s worth remembering that 45 days of fixed term exclusions can result in a permanent exclusion for a child.

Please contact Anne Vaughan Griffith, Education Access Officer, for support, advice and guidance if there are students that are accumulating a series of fixed term exclusions. Anne can explore a range of options with schools to reduce risk of exclusion.

**Transition plans for children with Education, Health Care Plans (EHCP)**

If children with EHCPs are finding it difficult to transition back to full time education following this long period out of school, parents may request a transition plan to support them back in. The plan will need to be short term (between 2 - 4 weeks), capture the reasons why it is required and demonstrate how the hours onsite will increase to a full time timetable in agreed timescales. The plan will also need to demonstrate the support measures in place for children with EHCP’s returning to school.

The plan should registered with the Local Authority by emailing it to SchoolPartTimeTables@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Part time timetable guidance and forms can be accessed on the Attendance and Children Out of School page on the Chess site <https://www.chesshub.co.uk>

**How has the process changed?**

* The Attendance and Children Out of School (ACOOS) team can now support home visits, parent meetings, transition and education family support work in Academy and Maintained schools in Cheshire East via the traded service in Chess.
* The Together in Education programme will provide training resources to schools to support children’s anxiety and mental health to support children to return to school and sustain attendance in September. Locally a co-ordinated approach to access appropriate mental health support for children and young will take place as part of the project.
* At the point of request from schools, contact will be is made from an ACOOS locality worker with the family to establish the reasons for the child’s absence.
* The ACOOS panel make a decision on whether a 15 day warning period is appropriate to be issued with additional information gained.
* Penalty notices will not be issued without evidence of communication and support offered to the family. Cheshire East are proposing to delay issuing of penalty notices until October 2020, to ensure sufficient support has been offered to aid the return to school.
* Families wishing to de-register their children to Electively Home Educate them will be offered a multi-agency meeting to explore reason for their decision and explore the expectations of the Local Authority.

The Attendance and Children out of school team can be contacted on 01270 375255, useful email addresses for the team are:

Penalty notices: cepenaltynotices@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Children missing education: cechildrenmissingeducation@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Elective home education: ehe@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Child employment: childemployment@cheshireeast.gov.uk.

Exclusions and Fair Access Protocol: ExclusionCE@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Part time timetables: SchoolPartTimeTables@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Appendix 1 – Template Warning letter

Appendix 1

**Template Warning Letter**

Insert Date

Dear insert parent name

It has been brought to my attention that your child has not been attending regularly at school. According to the Attendance Register, insert child’s name attendance is currently insert %, this is below the schools expected attendance.

Insert child’s name currently has xx unauthorised sessions, if this reaches 10 authorised sessions within 2 half terms then school can apply to the Local Authority to issue you with a Penalty Notice warning period, which could result in each parent receiving a £60.00 fine, increasing to £120.00 if not paid within 21 days.

I must remind you that S.444, Education Act 1996 requires you to make sure that your child comes to school, on time, every time the school is open. I am writing this letter to give you an opportunity to make sure that from now on and in future, your child attends school regularly.

If your child continues not attend regularly, I will have to refer you to the Local Authority and they may decide to pursue further action. These interventions may include,

(A) Issuing you with a Fixed Penalty Notice under S.444A Education Act 1996 which will make you liable to a penalty of up to £120. **(As above)**

(B) Initiating legal proceedings in the Magistrates Court under S.444(1) Education

Act 1996. If convicted under this section, you may be fined up to £1000.

(C) Initiating legal proceedings in the Magistrates Court under S.444(1A) Education Act 1996. If convicted of this offence you may be fined up to £2,500 or be sent to prison for up to 3 months or both.

In order to avoid Local Authority intervention, please ensure your child attends school regularly and on time.

If there are any issues that may be impacting on your child’s attendance, please contact insert appropriate named person to discuss further.

Yours sincerely,

Insert name signature and role