

Rotherham Early Help & Family Engagement Service

School Attendance Matters Pathway

A Guide for Parents and Carers



Why is good school attendance important for children?

The Local Authority in Rotherham takes absence from school very seriously because we know that children who attend school regularly are much more likely to achieve positive outcomes throughout their childhood and later in life. We want all children in Rotherham to thrive throughout their lives and attending school to learn and develop socially is an important part of achieving this.

The law states that all children of compulsory school age must receive a suitable full-time education and it is important that parents and carers are aware of this and that they take responsibility for making sure that their child attends school regularly and on time.

Who is responsible for what?

It is the **legal responsibility of every parent or carer** to make sure that their child receives an education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school (such as Elective Home Education).

Parents and carers are responsible for making sure that their child attends school regularly.

Parents and carers are responsible for providing medical proof when their child is absent from school due to illness.

Schools are responsible, by law, for challenging parents and carers and for reporting poor attendance to the Local Authority.

Schools are expected to build strong relationships with families, listen to and understand any barriers to attendance and work with families to resolve issues.

The Local Authority is responsible for taking legal action against parents and carers when a child doesn't attend school regularly.

What is the School Attendance Matters Pathway (SAMP)?

This is a way of working in Rotherham between schools, the Local Authority and families when school attendance is an issue. This can be for a holiday or leave of absence in term time or for poor school attendance in general. The SAMP requires school to offer support through the Early Help Assessment and send a series of letters to parents if attendance does not improve. Enforcement will only happen in Rotherham if the SAMP has been followed appropriately. If parents and carers refuse support the SAMP must still be followed.

What is an Early Help Assessment and plan?

The Early Help Assessment is a document, that captures what we are worried about and what is working well within families. It is used as a way of supporting families who may need extra help. Issues with school attendance is one of the reasons for offering a family support through the Early Help Assessment. We understand that sometimes families experience difficulties and may need a helping hand. The Early Help Assessment will help in documenting the issues that are affecting family life, resulting in poor school attendance and once this is completed a plan of support is developed with the family to help.

The Early Help Assessment and plan can be completed by any professional working with a child and family, for example school, a health professional or an Early Help Worker. This will help family and professionals to work together to address barriers to school attendance and other issues the family may be experiencing.

What is enforcement action?

The Local Authority takes poor school attendance very seriously, and enforcement action will be taken if a child's attendance does not improve. Your child's school will follow the SAMP and refer to the Local Authority for enforcement action to take place.

In Rotherham parents and carers will be given a fixed penalty notice (FPN) for poor attendance, which is £60 per parent, per child. This increases to £120 if not paid within 21 days. Parents and carers will not be issued a second FPN and if an FPN is not paid then it will be referred to the Magistrates Court. There is no right of appeal once a FPN has been issued according to the Code of Conduct.

If your child's attendance does not improve following an FPN, you will be requested to attend a panel meeting to discuss the concerns. The Local Authority School Attendance Panel (LASAP) is a group of professionals who make decisions about enforcement, from one of the following outcomes:

- Apply to the Family Court for an Education Supervision Order (ESO).
- Issue a Fixed Penalty Notice (if one hasn't been issued already).
- Offer intervention and support.
- Refer to the Magistrates Court for prosecution – this could result in a fine of up to £2,500, an order to do unpaid work or imprisonment of up to 3 months.

In some cases, it may also be necessary to refer to Children's Social Care.

How can I get support?

In the first instance parents and carers should speak to their child's school so that they can support you and explain what is happening.

If you think you need an Early Help Assessment and plan, please speak to your child's school, or contact MASH on 01709 336080.

If, after this, you need more information on attendance, you can contact one of the Early Help Attendance Team:

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