

The Willows School Academy Trust



Educational Neglect Policy

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1. Definition of Educational Neglect

1.1 The [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) placed additional duties on local authorities, naming them as safeguarding partners alongside the police and integrated care boards. Safeguarding partners are duty bound to work together, and with other partners locally including education providers and childcare settings, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.

1.2 One in five referrals to children's social care come from schools. Whilst schools were not named as one of the safeguarding partners in 2017, [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#) continually emphasises the importance of education and childcare providers in safeguarding children. Education providers are asked to co-operate with local safeguarding partners to improve, implement and monitor the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements.

1.3 [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#) defines neglect as the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development, including the provision of suitable education. Where children are not receiving education, either because they are persistently missing school, or are not registered at a school and not receiving a suitable education otherwise, this could be an indicator of neglect.

1.4 The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children defines educational neglect as not making sure a child receives an education.

2. Legal Attendance to School Requirements

2.1 It is a legal requirement that every child of compulsory school age receives an efficient, full-time education that is suitable to their age, aptitude and any special educational needs they have. [Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2024](#) identifies it is the legal responsibility of parents to make sure their child receives an education either by attendance at school or by education other than at school.

2.2 Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child every child has the right to access education that is of good quality. This education must develop every child's personality, talents, and abilities to the full.

2.3 Where a child is not supported to attend and engage with education, this could be an indicator of educational neglect or wider safeguarding concerns. [Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2024](#) states professionals should intensify support through statutory children's social care involvement where there are safeguarding concerns, especially where absence becomes severe (below 50% attendance).

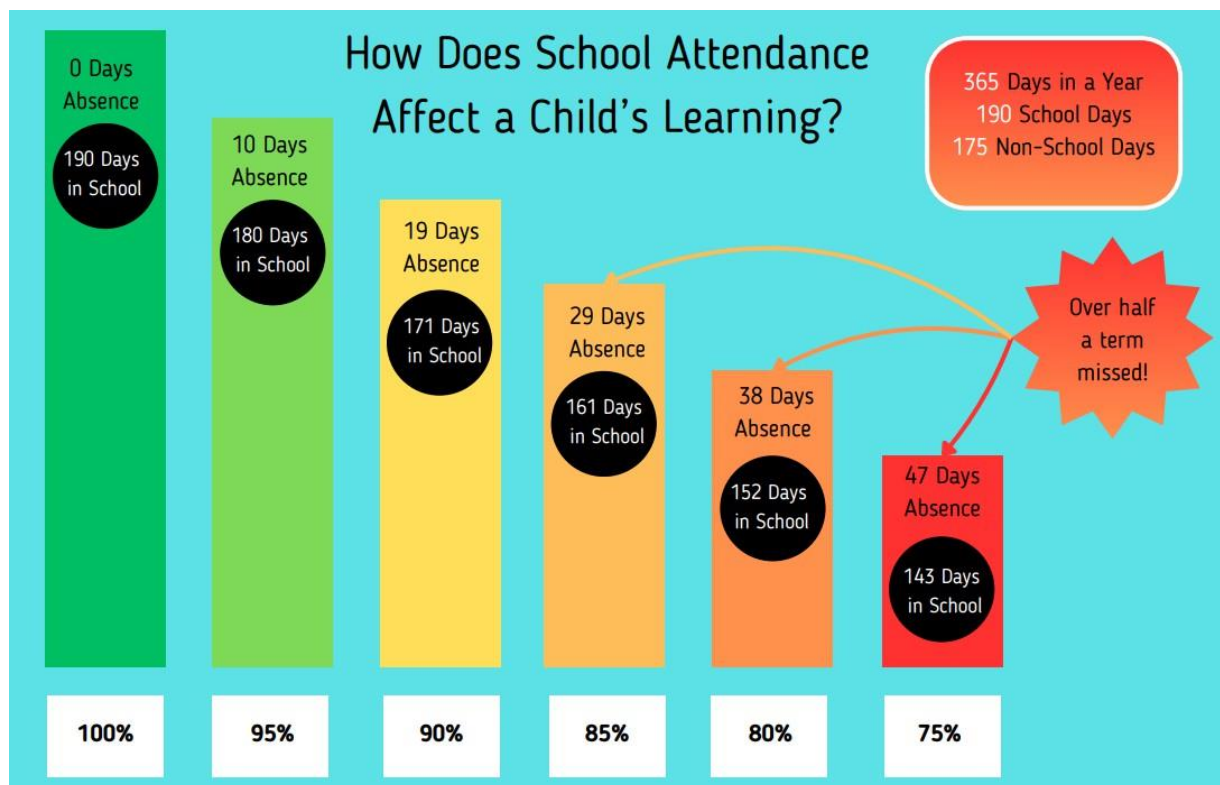
2.4 The Department for Education refers to children who are registered at a school but regularly fail to turn up as being 'persistently' or 'severely' absent. Pupils who have missed more than 10% of school sessions are considered persistently absent, whilst children who have missed more than 50% of school sessions are referred to as severely absent.

2.5 Attendance is everyone's responsibility. Having a collaborative approach across all safeguarding partners will ensure effective multi-agency working to increase the chance of successful outcomes.

3. The Importance of Education and School Attendance

3.1 Attendance to school provides several protective factors to children. The most widely recognised protective factor schools offer students is academic, creating opportunities for pupils to advance in their further education and careers working towards their aspirations. This protective factor is evidenced by a large amount of research which investigates the relationship between school attendance and academic outcomes.

3.2 Where children are absent from school, their likelihood of having academic success declines; data has shown that children with higher attainment at Key Stage Two (KS2) and Key Stage Four (KS4) had lower levels of absence over the key stage compared to those with lower attainment.



3.3 Progress 8 scores show the relationship between a child's outcomes at the end of KS2 and the end of KS4. Predictions are made based on outcomes at the end of KS2 regarding expected outcomes at the end of KS4. If the child meets that prediction exactly, they will have a progress 8 score of 0. If they perform better than the prediction their progress 8 score will be positive and if they perform worse at the end of KS4 their progress 8 score will be negative.

3.4 Research has shown a correlation between absence from school and progress 8 scores where children with more than 90% attendance to school have positive progress 8 scores on average and those with less than 90% attendance have negative progress 8 scores on average.

3.5 At primary age, attendance persistently at 75% or below halves the possibility of achieving the Expected Standard at the end of KS2. At secondary age, persistent attendance below 75% means the young person is five times less likely to achieve 5 GCSEs including English and Maths.

3.6 School not only provides children with opportunities for success in their future education and careers, but it also offers more holistic protection in terms of the identification of need and the implementation of support. This includes the identification of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or mental health concerns that without intervention could impact negatively on attendance.

3.7 Children with SEND account for around 12% of pupils in England, yet they represent 20% of children who are severely absent from school. Additionally, children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) account for 4% of all pupils in England but account for 12% of severely absent pupils ([Lost but not Forgotten Report, 2022](#)).

3.8 In line with [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#), safeguarding is the responsibility of all adults who meet children professionally. Therefore, from a safeguarding perspective, regular attendance to school allows children's wellbeing to be monitored and concerns to be identified, maintaining a child-centred approach which considers what is in the best interests of the child. Research shows links between regular absence from school and several extra-familial harms.

3.9 [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024](#) identifies that children absent from education for a prolonged period and/or on repeat occasions can act as a warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, child sexual and criminal exploitation. One report found that 90% of young offenders had been persistently absent from school and 83% of knife possession offenders had been persistently absent from school.

3.10 School also provides a place of stability and safety for pupils where they may not be receiving this at home; allowing them to experience the development of positive relationships with both peers and adults who support them. This supports children to develop their self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-belief.

4. Educational Neglect in Hillingdon – Data

4.1 Within Hillingdon, the average attendance of children at the point of becoming Cared for Children (CFC) decreased from the 2019-2020 to the 2023-2024 academic years. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the average attendance to education at the point of becoming CFC was 50% whereas in the 2019/2020 academic year it was 60% and in the 2020/2021 academic year it was 64%. The majority of children who became CFC after their statutory school age education in Hillingdon were found to not be in education, employment, or training.

4.2 A 2024/2025 audit of the inclusion of education in Child in Need (CIN) and Child Protection (CP) plans identified that where there are educational concerns for children supported by social workers, the most common worry is attendance to school. A similar pattern was found for children supported by early help services such as Stronger Families.

4.3 In Hillingdon, neglect accounts for around 44% of Child Protection plans and for many of these children there are concerns regarding school attendance. Worries regarding attendance to school are also common for children open on Child Protection plans where emotional, physical or sexual abuse is the main concern.

5. Educational Neglect in Hillingdon – Thresholds

5.1 Based on this evidence, Hillingdon’s educational neglect threshold takes into consideration two aspects: whether those with parental responsibility are meeting the child’s basic educational needs **and** the overall attendance percentage of the child over an academic term.

5.2 Where there are evidenced factors other than safeguarding and/or parenting concerns which account for a child’s low attendance at school, such as an ongoing medical need, this educational neglect policy does not apply. Each case will need to be considered individually to identify the factors contributing to the child’s absence from school. Where there are evidenced factors that mean this policy does not apply, schools are expected to continue monitoring attendance as per statutory guidance.

5.3 The threshold for ‘persistent failure’ of a parent or carer to meet their child’s basic educational need may include:

- Persistent failure or inadequately maintaining access to education.
- Persistent failure to ensure regular attendance to school or arrival on time.
- Persistent failure to provide an education or apply for a school place to enable access to education.
- Persistent failure to consent to assessment to explore unmet or undiagnosed need that may require higher threshold support, intervention, or specialist provision.
- Persistent failure to attend assessments or appointments related to health or education.
- Persistent failure to engage with the school or local authority education services and support offered.
- Persistent failure to engage with the specific action contained within the Education Health Care Plan or other formalised plan offered by the school, local authority or imposed by the magistrate or family court.
- Persistent failure to provide substantiated and evidenced reasons for absences from school.
- Persistent failure to enforce boundaries and routines at home that may improve attendance or access to education.

5.4 The threshold for attendance percentages likely to have a serious impairment on the development of the child is met **both**:

- Where safeguarding and/or parenting concerns are directly influencing a child’s attendance at school as outlined in section 5.3
 - **And** the child’s overall attendance is less than 50% across a whole school term for children across primary, secondary and/or special schools.
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5.5 Where it has been evidenced a parent or carer is failing to meet their child's basic educational needs and the overall attendance of the child is persistently below 50% across a school term, a referral to the Stronger Families Hub and thus a family help assessment should be completed for the family.

5.6 Where the child is already known to social care and being supported on a Stronger Families or Child Protection plan and the above thresholds are met, the case should not close to children's services where it is believed that changes in the behaviour of parents could have a positive impact on the school attendance of the child.

6. Expectations of Schools

6.1 Expectations of Schools Prior to Referrals for a Family Help Assessment

6.1.1 Prior to completing a referral via the Stronger Families Hub, unless there are safeguarding concerns which would usually meet threshold for school completing a referral, all schools should offer support to the family to encourage and improve school attendance.

6.1.2 The following checklist should be considered by schools when they first become aware or concerned about a drop in attendance:

- Schools should consider in collaboration with the child and their family potential triggers for the change in attendance; considering the barriers to attending for the child and the support the school could implement or signpost to. A set review period of four to six weeks should be agreed to consider if there have been any improvements in attendance.
- If the child and family do not engage with attempts to hold a meeting, the school should complete a home visit to engage the child and the family.
- Schools should work in partnership with other agencies supporting the family particularly if they are unable to engage the family. Other professionals may hold information regarding the change in the child's school attendance not known by the school which could support decision making regarding next steps. These professionals could include but are not limited to those working within the Youth Justice Service, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Children's Social Care or Health.

6.1.3 If the above checklist has been completed and attendance remains a concern or the family has continually not engaged with the school, then the school should complete a referral via the Stronger Families Hub as per section 5 of this policy.

6.1.4 Schools can reference this policy in their referrals for children where the defined threshold for educational neglect has been met.

6.1.5 Where there are safeguarding concerns for a family which would usually result in a referral via the Stronger Families Hub or other action by school, this policy is overridden, and schools should follow their usual safeguarding procedures.

6.2 Expectations of Schools During and Following a Family Help Assessment

6.2.1 All schools should engage with and support the process of the Family Help Assessment, sharing information and attending all meetings.

6.2.2 If it is agreed the child and family will be supported either by a Stronger Families or Child Protection plan, the school should support the plan development by bringing SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound) targets regarding

education and attendance. These targets should be led by schools and supported by the wider network of professionals supporting the child. This will support, and in turn be supported by, the intervention of Key Workers or Social Workers in supporting the family functioning at home.

6.2.3 Schools should prioritise attending all review meetings, support visits of the Key Worker or Social Worker to the child in school and continue to monitor the child for any additional safeguarding concerns. Any new concerns should be shared in a timely manner with the local authority in line with the school's safeguarding policies as well as statutory guidance.

7. Expectations of the London Borough of Hillingdon Children's Services

7.1 Expectations of the London Borough of Hillingdon Children's Services where a Child has not recently had a Family Help Assessment

7.1.1 The local authority will consider all referrals via the Stronger Families Hub in the context of educational neglect. Where a referral clearly outlines a child's attendance is below 50% and their parents have persistently failed to meet their educational needs, the referral will be accepted for a Family Help Assessment.

7.1.2 The local authority will inform the referrer of the outcome of the referral.

7.1.3 The local authority will consult with schools within the Family Help Assessment (where consent has been obtained).

7.1.4 Upon conclusion of the Family Help Assessment, the local authority will update school of the outcome. Where the outcome is a plan being initiated, the local authority will ensure schools are invited to all necessary meetings.

7.1.5 The local authority will support the family to overcome barriers and access education including any identified specific interventions regarding the educational neglect experienced by the child.

7.2 Expectations of the London Borough of Hillingdon Children's Services where a Child has recently had a Family Help Assessment

7.2.1 The local authority will not close a child below the level of a Stronger Families Plan where their attendance is less than 50% and their parents have persistently failed to meet their educational needs as defined in section 5 of this policy.

7.2.2 The local authority will continue supporting the family to overcome barriers and access education including specific intervention regarding the educational neglect experienced by the child.

8. Helpful Links and Contacts

8.1 Helpful links:

- [Children and Social Work Act 2017 - Social Work England](#)
- [Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership Education Inclusion Toolkit](#)
- [Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership Escalation: Resolving Professional Differences](#)
- [Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK](#)
- [Local Area Education Partnership \(for further advice, guidance and education contacts\)](#)
- [London Safeguarding Children Partnership – Threshold Document: Continuum of Help and Support](#)
- [London Safeguarding Children Partnership – Threshold Document: Continuum of Need Matric](#)
- [Lost but not forgotten - The Centre for Social Justice](#)
- [NSPCC – Protecting Children from Neglect](#)
- [Protecting children from neglect | NSPCC Learning](#)
- [UN Convention on Rights of a Child \(UNCRC\) - UNICEF UK](#)
- [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK](#)

8.2 For advice and to discuss any circumstances, please contact:

- Attendance Support Team - attendancesupport@hillingdon.gov.uk
- Hillingdon Virtual School – Cared for Children Inbox: virtualschooladmin@hillingdon.gov.uk
- Hillingdon Virtual School – Extended Duties Inbox: virtualschoolcsw@hillingdon.gov.uk
- Nicole Diamond (Lead Child Protection Schools Advisor) - ndiamond@hillingdon.gov.uk
- Special Educational Needs and Disability - sensupport@hillingdon.gov.uk
- The Stronger Families Hub - strongerfamilieshub@hillingdon.gov.uk

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