

Fosterline Wales Factsheet: School attendance and punctuality

About the issue

It is a legal requirement that children and young people attend school regularly and on time. Time out of the classroom can mean they miss important lessons, even ten minutes can mean they miss the introduction to an activity and so don't know what to do. Poor school attendance can often lead to children and young people failing to take advantage of opportunities in later life.

Truancy can impact on a child and young person's future. Truancy matters because:

- Children and young people who skip school don't do as well in tests, assessments and exams.
- If the child or young person does not turn up for lessons, these missed sessions in school can add up and can really impact on achievement/attainment over a school life.
- Being out of school during school hours gives your child or young person time to kill - and research has shown that this can lead to criminal or anti-social behaviour.
- Missing lessons can result in children and young people failing to develop the necessary skills which they later rely on in adulthood, such as learning multiplication in mathematics.
- Children and young people miss out on opportunities which aid their personal and social development.

A foster carer's role and responsibility

Penalty notices are described in the Welsh Government guidance as an additional option available to schools and local authorities to promote better school attendance and ensure parents/carers fulfil their responsibilities in regard to their child's education. Despite not being legally responsible for the looked after child, fixed penalty notices are applicable to foster carers as parents/carers as defined in section 576 of the Education Act 1996.

<http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/130925-guidance-regular-non-attendance-en.pdf>

As a foster carer, it's your responsibility to make sure the child or young person you foster attends school on a regular basis, and if they don't, to make sure that they get the support they need. If the truancy is regular, a meeting should be called without delay between the foster carer, social worker and school, with the possible involvement of the education welfare officer, to discuss possible causes and prevention.

The important factor here is that there is documented evidence that you as a foster carer have actively sought to address the issue and have attempted to work positively with other professionals. Truancy is more likely to happen in secondary schools, but even young children can feign illness to avoid going to school.

A pattern of missing school can develop for a number of reasons including anxiety with settling in, bullying, stress around school work and unhappiness about the family situation.

What to do if a child or young person is missing school

There are several things you can do to support a child or young person who is taking time out of school.

- Get to know their school week and the lessons/teachers they feel most comfortable with, and those they do not.
- Look for patterns in times when they are trying to avoid school.
- Are they doing homework? Missing a deadline can cause a child or young person to feel anxious and this can lead to the deliberate choice to miss a lesson. They may be avoiding a particular teacher or subject. Talk to them regularly and ask about lessons they don't like and why. Make as many positive links with the school as possible and check your foster child's school routine regularly. Maybe they are not doing their homework and want to avoid confrontation? Or they are self-conscious in PE?
- It could also be an issue in the streets or on the bus, bullying for instance. They may need to change route, get a lift, or arrange to meet friends to travel with.

If you do find that your foster child has truanted, then make sure you, and your child, understand why. If a child is anxious then they may need support in analysing what is the root of the problem; otherwise, it can turn into 'everything' and 'I just hate school'. It is important that you work with the school to find out what support is available; it may be that mentoring is a possibility, or the school runs a buddy scheme which could really help your foster child work through their concerns or problems. A good school will be really keen to address issues and to ensure that all students are attending regularly and making sustained progress.

How The Fostering Network can help

The Fostering Network offers advice, information and support. Our expertise and knowledge are always up to date and available through our vital member helplines, publications, training and consultancy.

Advice

Fosterline Wales

Call us on 0800 316 7664 from 9.30am - 12.30pm Monday to Friday. If you call outside this time please leave a message and someone will call you back as soon as possible.

You can email us or write to us at:

Fosterlinewales@fostering.net

The Fostering Network Wales

1 Caspian Point, Pierhead Street

Cardiff Bay CF10 4DQ

Support and resources

Our website is an essential source of information, while our online community brings together foster carers for peer support and advice. You can login to share your experience and get advice from other foster carers. Our online community is a safe and secure area to discuss foster care matters. thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

Publications

The Fostering Network's Guide to Education in Wales

The Fostering Network, in conjunction with Welsh Government, has launched A Foster Carer's Guide to Education in Wales. This free guide will help foster carers understand better how the education system works in Wales so that they are better equipped to support the children and young people in their care.

bit.ly/FCGEinWales

Making it Happen

The aim of this magazine is to inspire foster carers to help fostered children and young people in their care raise their ambitions and fulfil their potential in education. It also supports foster carers to consult, challenge and collaborate with schools as an integral part of the team around the child.

bit.ly/MakingItHappenEnglish

Greater Expectations

This magazine aims to help foster carers, understand more about the challenges that fostered children face at school. But, more importantly, it gives foster carers practical ideas for steps to take to help children in care aim high and fulfil their potential.

bit.ly/GreaterExpectationsEnglish

Training and consultancy

Wherever you are in your fostering career, as a foster carer, social worker or manager, The Fostering Network has a range of training designed to meet your development needs. For more information, contact our learning and development manager, Sarah Mobedji at

sarah.mobedji@fostering.net.

About The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children to make foster care the very best it can be.

Contact us

To find out more about our work in Wales, please contact:

The Fostering Network Wales
1 Caspian Point, Pierhead Street
Cardiff Bay CF10 4DQ

Telephone: 029 2044 0940

Email: wales@fostering.net

Web: thefosteringnetwork.org.uk



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