

Suffolk Primary Care Protocol

Part of the [Barriers to Education \(BTED\)](#) resources and guidance, working together to support and improve school attendance.

The development of guidance for best practice for health services, schools and families, in managing school absences reported to be for health-related reasons. This protocol has been created collaboratively with NSFT GP Leads; Local Medical Council (Suffolk); Suffolk County Council (Inclusion & SEND; P&TS; Attendance; Virtual School).

Aims

1. To work collaboratively, and to follow a clear pathway for management of school absences to ensure our CYP are well supported.
2. To clarify information-sharing arrangements between health professionals and schools in Suffolk.
3. To explain how families access medical records and therefore reduce inappropriate requests for medical information.
4. To increase effective, rapid signposting to appropriate services, reducing unnecessary attendances at GP surgeries.

Guidance on absence for medical reasons

- Under Section 7 (Education Act 1996), parents/carers are responsible for making sure that their children of compulsory school age receive a suitable full-time education.
- Parents/carers should notify school on the first day of non-attendance due to illness. Schools must record absences as authorised where pupils cannot attend due to illness (both physical and mental health related).
- GPs do not provide certification for sickness for under 18s. This should not be requested by educational settings.
- Educational settings do not require evidence for **short-term** absences (see school's attendance policy).
- For **long-term** illness, medical evidence is provided by the responsible specialist, not the GP. For example, if a young person is under the care of a specialist team (e.g., ADHD, epilepsy, diabetes) and their diagnosis impacts on the young person's ability to attend full-time or requires reasonable adjustments to their education offer. Schools and Health Professionals should work with parents and carers to create and review an [Individual Health Care Plan](#) (example [here](#)).
- For recurring short-term illness: School nursing service/ chat health, school, parents and child should plan together to provide the best education for the child. ([How to record absence](#)).

Guidance on non-medical barriers to education

- Where a child or young person has an emerging a pattern of non-attendance, and parents or carers are stating that this is due to ill health, schools should discuss the reasons for absence with the child's parent or carer. ([Suffolk Staff Toolkit](#) and [One Page Plan](#)).
- If there is an unmet medical need then it is important that a parent or carer arranges a GP appointment. This ensures that every CYP receives appropriate care.
- Health care professionals should not be asked to make an assessment about whether a CYP is able to attend school or their type of educational provision.
- The parents or carers (or CYP if [Gillick competent](#)) can provide a summary of the GP record – obtained **free of charge** via [NHS app](#) or from their GP reception.

- If attendance does not improve, **school**, with the informed consent of parents or carers, should request support from wider services, following the [‘Support from Other Services’](#) link on the [BTED website](#).
- Schools should speak with their [Education Welfare Officer/ Attendance Officer](#) for [guidance](#) around continued absences. Schools will already be reporting [this data](#).
- If there is a safeguarding concern, follow the guidance [here](#) to use the MASH professional consultation line or live web chat.
- If CYP is awaiting a diagnostic assessment / pathway then they should access resources and support via their school. (Additional information is also available via [BTED](#) signposting, for example regarding anxiety or sensory sensitivities).

For more information about school attendance please [click here](#).

This guidance applies **regardless of the school** the CYP attends. Health colleagues who have concerns around the education of their young patient can find out more about the BTED processes and support available here: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/BTED>

References and further reading:

[Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK](#)

[Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school - GOV.UK](#)

[Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK](#)

[Support for pupils where a mental health issue is affecting attendance: effective practice examples](#)

Information share:

Therapeutic Thinking

Therapeutic Thinking is an approach which focuses on how all children and young people can be supported in schools and other settings, particularly in terms of their emotional wellbeing and mental health. The programme also helps to develop an understanding of how to respond to those who may be communicating through their behaviour.

BTED Processes

Parent/Carer support

Graduated Response

The Suffolk Graduated Response is a structured approach used in schools through a continuous cycle of assessment, planning, intervention, and review.

Recording Absence

- 1) The authorisation of absences is at the discretion of the individual Headteacher in line with the school's attendance policy. The Statutory guidance around authorisation of absences can be found in the Working Together to Improve School Attendance [Working together to improve school attendance \(applies from 19 August 2024\)](#)
- 2) Schools notify the LA when a pupil hasn't attended continuously for either 10 school days when an absence is unauthorised or 15 school days or more if the absences are either authorised or unauthorised. This is currently via [View Your Education Data \(VYED\)](#).