Putting Children and Young People's Views at the Centre

Improving Attendance and Engagement Assessment Tool

February 2025
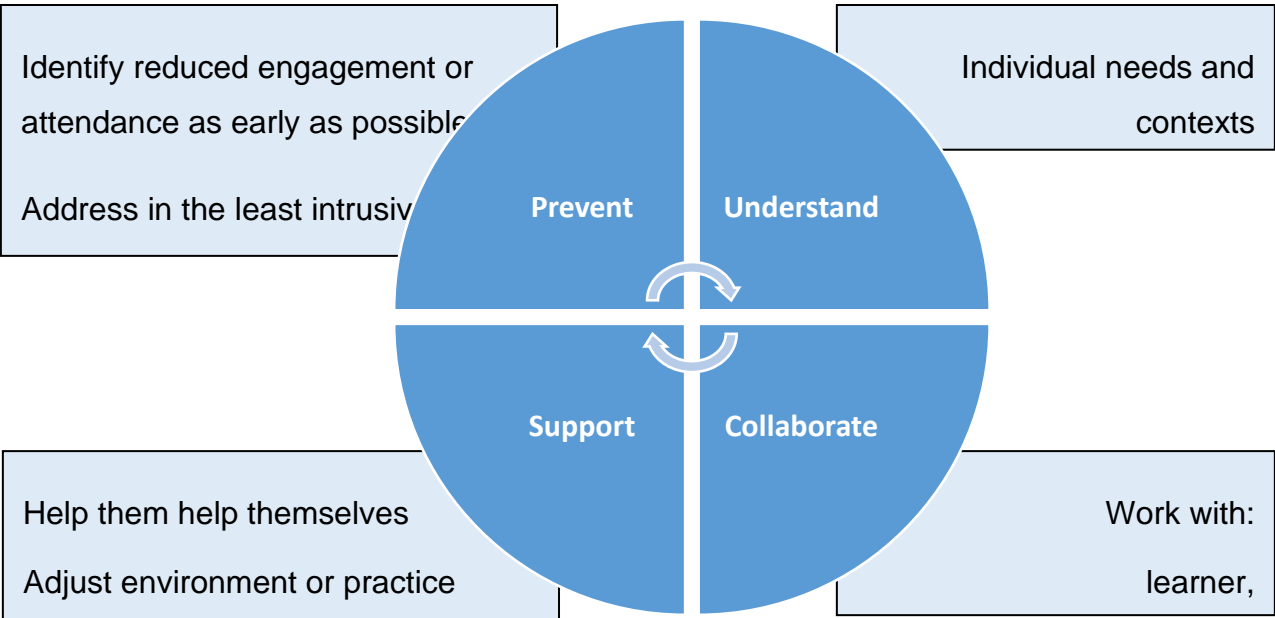
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What is this?

Use this assessment tool when you have **any** concerns about a learner's engagement or attendance.

This assessment tool can be used by anyone with an existing good relationship with the learner (a supportive and trusted adult) and someone that the learner can trust emotionally. This approach expands the capacity of the school/setting, beyond pastoral care leads, to provide early preventative support, and increases the likelihood of meaningful engagement by the learner.

School leaders may need to provide time and place for the supporting adult to go through the questions with the learner to try to get to a better understanding of why a learner has started to disengage from learning, isn't attending some classes, or is absent.

Principles underpinning engagement and attendance support:

Identify reduced engagement or attendance as early as possible

Address in the least intrusive

Individual needs and contexts

Prevent

Understand

Support

Collaborate

Help them help themselves

Adjust environment or practice

Work with:

learner,

Disengagement from learning or being absent from class/school can be caused by a number of factors including **INDIVIDUAL, PEER**, **FAMILY** or **SCHOOL** factors (or a combination of these).

Each factor can either **push** a learner away from the learning environment or **pull** them towards something else (a person, place or activity). Push factors help a learner **avoid** things such as uncomfortable feelings, certain people, or stressful situations. Pull factors may involve a more attractive activity such as gaming or may be needs-led such being home to care for or keep a family member safe.

To support engagement and attendance we need to know:

- What does their engagement/attendance look like?

- What are the risk and resilience factors affecting them?

- What are the key factors/feelings contributing to their disengagement or absence?

- What do they need?

Using the toolkit

The toolkit has 4 sections corresponding to the four questions. Together the sections bring together the four elements of data interrogation, information gathering, professional judgement, and planning. It may not be necessary to use all four sections. Sections 1 and 2 could take as little as 20 minutes to complete depending on access to SEEMIS records. Sections 3 and 4 could take an hour or more to complete and may require a number of separate conversations.

Each setting should decide who completes each section, and this does not necessarily have to be the same person. For example, in a large secondary school it may be appropriate for an administrator to complete Section 1 after a member of pupil support, or an assigned adult has completed Section 2 and decided that monitoring is required even at the very early stages of disengagement or a few absences. In a primary school it may be one member of staff completes all 4 sections.

The setting should also decide what sections need to be completed and the order they should be completed in. A setting may start with Section 1, as engagement or attendance has already been flagged as concern, and then progress through the sections accordingly. With knowledge of a specific learner, the setting may choose to complete Section 2 first as soon as disengagement begins to be noted in order to intervene at the very earliest stage. If the learners risk factors outweigh the resilience factors, they then should progress with completing Section 1, 3 and 4.

Sections 1 and 2 would be completed by staff and not with the learner or a parent/carer.

In Sections 3 and 4 the learner should lead the process. The questions should only be considered as a starting point for the discussion and not used in a prescriptive manner. For some learners, particularly very young learners, a parent or carer may need to support the process from the outset.

Section 3 should be completed by the 'supportive and trusted adult' after discussion with the learner. It may be necessary to follow-up with parent/carer to add detail to the learners responses. Practitioners should use their judgement whether the learner sees the form or whether they complete it after speaking to the learner. In Section 3

for each main factor the initial open question (s) can be used and then the responses added to the comments box. For more detail about certain factors the specific questions provided, or a version of these questions, can be used. The questions are designed to be prompts only. The language should be adapted to suit the age, stage and understanding of the learner. The process should not formulaic but should be conversational and natural. Care needs to be taken to ensure the questions do not become overly intrusive or start to overwhelm the learner. The 'trusted adult' may wish to add information that they know about the learner which may be relevant. This reduces the need for the learner to repeat information that may be sensitive or painful. As multiple factors are likely to be relevant an indication should be provided on whether the influencing factor is of high or low importance. If a factor doesn't seem to be relevant leave the impact/comment box blank.

Section 4 should be completed in collaboration and with the agreement of the learner and potentially the parent/carer. Section 4 should be informed by the responses given in the previous sections. Reference should also be made to the [staged intervention model](#) to ensure that supports are considered on a sliding scale from the least intrusive universal support first and working up through the stages as required. For example, if individual factors are considered to be significant factors influencing disengagement or absence then using the [Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing Profile](#) (GMWP) may be useful to confirm the initial questions in Section 3 or instead of these questions. The GMWP looks at the learner's sense of affiliation, agency, and autonomy, i.e. does the learner feel they belong, do they feel they have any control over their learning experience, and can they express themselves as an individual, all of which contribute to their wellbeing.

This resource is based on information from multiple sources several of which are listed below:

[Improving Attendance: Understanding the issues](#) report Education Scotland

[Forth Valley and West Lothian Attendance Toolkit](#)

[Child of the North: An evidence-based plan for improving attendance school report 10](#)2024 N8 Research Partnership

[Push and pull factors associated with non-attendance | Gloucestershire County Council](#)

[Emotionally Based School Avoidance Guidance for Schools Part 1](#), Milton Keynes Council

[Protective Factors: Building Resilience and Well-being](#), Counselling Psychology September 14, 2024

[School Attendance and Mental Wellbeing, Anna Freud](#): Online resource highlighting risk factors

Section 1: What does their attendance look like?

Through tracking and monitoring we should know (only use relevant parts of the tables/duplicate if required):

- Attendance overall (e.g. termly and year to date)
- Absence/lateness patterns over the week (e.g. particular days, first or last week of term)
- Absence/lateness during certain times of the day (e.g. in the morning, after breaks, last period)
- Absence/lateness during certain subjects/activities

Editable primary example of attendance report:

Overall % attendance	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Year to date

Update daily/weekly/fortnightly. Add date below day.

Lateness (L) Absence (Reason Code)	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week 1					
Week 2					
Week 3					
Week 4					

Comments (include relevant detail such as reasons for absence, subjects or activities being avoided, emerging patterns)

Editable secondary example of attendance report:

Overall % attendance	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Year to date

Update daily/weekly/fortnightly. Add date below day.

Lateness (L) Absence (Reason Code)	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week 1					
Week 2					
Week 3					
Week 4					

If required add timetable and record absence/lateness across week. Add date below day.

Lateness (L) Absence (X)	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Period 1					
Period 2					
Period 3					
Period 4					
Period 5					
Period 6					

Comments (include relevant detail such as reasons for absence, subjects or activities being avoided, emerging patterns)

Section 2: What are the risk and resilience factors affecting the learner?

When considering any level of absence we first need to consider the immediate risk posed to a learner when they are not in class or in school and also how vulnerable they are to the negative impact of absence such as lost learning. For example, there may be an immediate safeguarding risk for a learner if they are not in class/school, and/or poor mental health and wellbeing, additional support needs, poverty (financial or digital), parents with little or no capacity to support their attendance or learning, or parents who don't value education may make it more difficult for them to return to learning or catch up on lost learning ([School Attendance and Mental Wellbeing, Anna Freud](#)).

On the other hand, resilience supports attendance overall but will also support catch-up learning after an absence (see Appendix 1 for ideas about catch up learning). Resilience boosters, for example, personal strengths and protective factors such as, good mental health and wellbeing and self-esteem, a strong work ethic, supportive and able parents/carers, will all mitigate against the negative impact on learning of any absence regardless of the reasons for the absence ([Protective Factors: Building Resilience and Well-being](#), Counselling Psychology 2024).

Identifying risk and resilience factors will help determine the need for support and how urgently it should be provided. For example, for a learner with overall high attendance but who is also on the child protection register, any absence or lateness may cause significant concern. Alternatively, another learner who misses 10 days of school due to a mid-term holiday but whose parents can help them catch up on lost learning may cause less concern even if their overall percentage has dropped below 90%. Risk and resilience factors should be identified and balanced to determine when and if an intervention is needed.

In the table below check all risk and resilience factors that apply. Add any relevant comments.

Risk Factors	Comment	Resilience Factors	Comment

Child protection concerns or known safeguarding issues		Personal strengths: social confidence/competency, …	
Wellbeing or health issues (use wellbeing indicators)		School connectedness	
Additional support needs		Parent/carer values education	
Care experienced or young carer		Parent/carer resilience	
Following a major transition – P7-S1, care placement, …		Parent/carer able to support learner academically	
Learner excluded or at risk of exclusion		Has at least one caring relationships with an adult	
At risk of coming into contact with the law, or at risk in the community		Supportive friends/social connections	
Parent/carer ill-health or lack of capacity		Access to support/resources in times of need	
Parent/carer disengagement from working with school		Learner has opportunities to participate and contribute	
Learner/family marginalised such as gypsy travellers		Access to community resources: clubs, hobbies	
Other disadvantage such as deprivation, cost of living issues, inadequate housing, no access to resources, rurality, other family issues...		Other (please specify)	

Response level required

Monitor but no urgent response required (alert guidance lead)	Monitor & initiate enquiries as to factors affecting disengagement or absence (liaise with guidance lead)	Initiate support immediately (refer to senior lead)

Section 3: What are the factors/feelings contributing to low engagement or attendance?

School

Open question: What do you think about school? (Prompts: Why's that? Tell me more about that?)

Specific Questions	Factors	High-Low Impact	Comment
Do you find the school welcoming and safe? Do you have any issues with the school rules or expectations?	School culture and environment		
Does the school day structure suit you? Prompts: start time, break times, length of the day, your timetable, choice of subjects, clubs offered, buses …?	School structure		
How well do you get on with the staff in the school? Prompt: Any issues?	Relationships with staff		
Do you enjoy learning? Do you find it engaging or interesting? Do you find any subjects particularly difficult or too easy?	Subjects and academic demands		
How do you find the transitions in school? Prompts: changing classes, teachers, or even different activities during the day? Any specific issues?	Transitions		
Other factors			

Comments

Individual

Open questions: How do you feel about school? Do you want to come to school? Do you feel supported in school? (Why's that? Tell me more about that?)

Specific Questions	Factors	High-Low Impact	Comment
Do you feel: part of the school, that you belong? you have a say in what happens in the school? you can be your own person, an individual, in school?	Affiliation Agency Autonomy		
Do you think your confidence or your behaviour is affecting your learning or your attendance?	Personal attributes or temperament		
Do you feel emotionally and/or physically well? Prompts: Tired, low mood, unfit, …..	Health		
Does anything make you feel anxious? Prompt: separation from family, learning tasks, exams, …	Anxiety		
Do you think you are well supported with your wellbeing? Do you think you are supported in your learning?	ASN Support		
Do you smoke or vape? Does it affect you in school? Do you have other habits that affect you attending class or school? Gaming? Social media?	Unhealthy influences		

Comments (from your knowledge of the learner consider whether maturity (developmental delays), attachment, or trauma are influencing factors)

Peers

Open questions: Do you have friends in school? Tell me more about them?

Specific Questions	Factors	High-Low Impact	Comment
Do you find it easy to make friends? Do you have a lot of friends or just a few? Are they close or good friends? Any issues with your friends? Do you ever fall out with your friends?	Friendships Relationships		
Do you ever feel lonely? Would you like to have more or different friends?	Social isolation		
At times do you feel pressurised by your friends? Prompts: looks, how to behave, through social media? Do you think your friends are good influence on you?	Peer pressure Helpful/harmful		
Do you think your friends are there for you when you need support? Would you like more or less support from them?	Peer support		
Do you ever feel bullied? Have you been bullied? Prompt: Tell me more about that?	Bullying		

Comments

Family

Open questions: How are things at home? (Sensitivity and discretion is required for all questions about family)

Specific Questions	Factors	High-Low Impact	Comment
Do you get on well with everyone else in your family? Prompt: Tell me more about….?	Family Relationships		
Has anything changed at home recently?	Family dynamics: change, separation, bereavement		
Is everyone well at home? Prompts: Everyone healthy, happy, or stressed out? Does your *Mum (or appropriate person)* help you with, or harass you about, your homework/grades?	Parent/carer health/capacity		
Do you feel your family support you? Would you like more or less support from them?	Parenting style (overprotective or permissive)		
Do you help out at home? How? Prompt: Tell me more about that?	Caring responsibilities		
Did/do others in your family enjoy school? Were/are they good attenders?	Family influence, historical issues		

Comments (from your knowledge of the learner consider whether factors such as care experience and family history are relevant)

Section 4: What do they need?

This section should be informed by the responses given in the previous section but formulated in collaboration with the learner and/or the parent/carer. Reference should also be made to the staged intervention model to ensure that supports are considered on a sliding scale from the least intrusive universal support first and working up through the stages as required.

Only complete relevant sections.

School supports to try:

Individual supports to try:

Peer supports to try:

Family supports to try:

Review date:

Impact review/Follow-up required:

Appendix 1

Ideas for catching up on lost learning due to absence:

The following examples demonstrate how practitioners/parents can address/support lost learning/catch learning after absence.

- Use the first/last part (10-15 mins) of the day/class to target learners who need to catch up
- Work with the learner, or with a group of learners who have missed similar content, or who need reinforcement in the same areas
- Work with the learner to help them catch up in a time away from whole-class input
- Focus on recapping main concepts rather than trying to cover every missed detail, to avoid overwhelming learners
- Include short activities that cover essential skills and knowledge in bite-sized chunks
- Focus on core concepts and learning outcomes rather than trying to review everything missed, prioritise content that is needed for future learning
- Build in opportunities to revisit or reinforce missed skills during ongoing lessons
- Provide parents with key tasks that relate to the content missed, so that they can support catch-up at home