**Essex County Council’s offer in respect of School Attendance (absence concerns)**

**Attendance Specialist Team (AST)**

This team consists of 8 members of staff (2 per quadrant within Essex). Their role is to provide strategic, whole school advice and guidance to schools, to ensure that school-based colleagues are responding quickly and appropriately in cases where pupil absence is a concern. Key elements of the team’s role are:

* to share good practice in relation to strategies which may be used to address absence, with a view to minimising the need for schools to require legal intervention (penalty notices/prosecution) via the Education Act 1996
* to encourage schools to take a multi-agency approach to addressing absence and providing a signposting service to inform schools about the services/organisations/agencies that may be able to offer support in this aim
* to advise schools on the requirement for clear and transparent whole school attendance processes, policies and strategies which allow for the early identification of pupils with declining levels of attendance and ensure that supportive interventions are offered to enable pupils to return to regular, full-time attendance at school
* to ensure that all Essex schools and academies have access to the most up-to-date government advice and guidance in respect of coding of absence and attendance reporting requirements (e.g. census returns, attendance returns to the DfE, etc.)
* to scrutinise available data to identify emerging local patterns of positive attendance improvement and ‘hotspots’ where attendance patterns appear to be declining, using this data to facilitate opportunities for schools to collaborate and network so that school-led improvement relationships may be formed, as appropriate
* to facilitate networking and training opportunities for Attendance Officers, Attendance Leads and Headteachers which seek to promote local and national good practice and allow colleagues to share successful strategies which have enabled them to overcome barriers to regular attendance for their pupils.

N.B. It is important to note that the AST are available to provide advice to schools/parents in individual cases, by telephone, but that their role does not routinely include attendance at school-based meetings which are arranged to discuss and agree action plans in relation to individual pupil absence. They may attend to offer support to new members of school staff where structuring such meetings is an identified training need.

**Contact details for the Attendance Specialist Team:**

Telephone: 0333 032 2968

MID ESSEX: midattendanceteam@essex.gov.uk – Simone Webb/Elizabeth Newman

NORTH EAST ESSEX: neattendanceteam@essex.gov.uk – Sue Thomas/Jeni Noakes

SOUTH ESSEX: southattendanceteam@essex.gov.uk – James Moir/Jenny White

WEST ESSEX: westattendanceteam@essex.gov.uk – Derai Lewis-Jones/Daisy Alexander

**Attendance Compliance Team (ACT)**

This team covers the whole of Essex and sits within the central Specialist Education Services portfolio. The team consists of 10 members of staff, with publicised named links for quadrant/BAP areas within Essex. The role of this team is to ensure that the local authority’s statutory responsibilities in respect of school attendance are consistently fulfilled. These responsibilities include the issuing of penalty notices in line with the published Essex Code of Conduct and also the instigation of prosecutions under section 444 Education Act 1996, when this is deemed appropriate. Schools and academies may, after exhausting all appropriate avenues of school-based intervention, refer individual cases where legal intervention is deemed an appropriate next course of action to address ongoing absence.

Schools wishing to seek expert advice as to the appropriateness of referring an individual pupil for legal intervention should contact ACT to ensure that all relevant pre-referral work/evidence is in place.

ACT members hold individual caseloads and are responsible for ensuring that all necessary evidence is available to allow the local authority to successfully prosecute parents under the relevant statutory provisions. Officers must have regard to all available intelligence when collating evidence in their cases, liaising with key professionals (school-based and otherwise) as part of their investigations. They are responsible for preparing legal files to enable cases to be listed for court action and, it is important to note, the final decision as to whether a case should proceed to court, under section 444 1 or 1A Education Act 1996, lies with the local authority.

ACT members present all prosecution cases on behalf of the local authority in the Magistrates Court and will notify schools of the outcome when matters have been concluded.

**Contact details for Attendance Compliance Team:**

Telephone: 0333 032 2988

Email: attendancecompliance@essex.gov.uk

MID ESSEX: Maria Knight

NORTH EAST ESSEX: Julie Holley (Tendring)

Rachel Anderson (Colchester)

SOUTH ESSEX: Jo Hickey (Basildon, Billericay and Wickford)

 Tracie Yorke (Castle Point, Rochford and Brentwood)

WEST ESSEX: Cheryl Vickers