**School attendance - communications to parents / collection of parental dates of birth**

**Advice to Essex schools - September 2024**

Please be aware of the following updated advice to schools, in relation to how communications relating to school attendance concerns may be sent to parents, from the start of the new academic year (2024/25).

**Emails**

Where schools are confident that they hold an up-to-date email address for each individual parent of a pupil for whom they hold attendance-related concerns, they may send email communications to parents to raise their concerns, offer support, invite parents in for meetings, send notes following any meetings held, respond to requests for leave of absence during term time, send Notices to Improve, etc.

**Emails should be sent to each parent, separately, in the way that letters have always been sent to each parent by separate cover.**

N.B. When choosing to communicate via email, schools must store a copy of their email, including any attachments AND request a “read receipt” for all such emails so that these may be shared, if necessary at a later date, as part of any pre-referral evidence which is submitted alongside a request for statutory legal intervention (penalty notice/prosecution).

Schools are reminded NOT to send emails to shared inboxes where there is any chance of interception and emails being deleted by another party e.g. one of the children within the family. An example of such an email address type includes: [thesmithfamily@gmail.com](mailto:thesmithfamily@gmail.com)

**Handing letters/communications/attendance contracts directly to parent/s**

Where parents attend face-to-face meetings OR are present and available in school to be handed a communication in relation to attendance concerns/response to a leave of absence request, etc., schools may hand such communications to parents (fully addressed so that it is clear who the intended recipient of the letter is), PROVIDED a note is made of the date, time, staff member involved and the name of the parent to whom the communication is handed. Any record of communications having been handed to a parent must be in a format which may be shared, should such evidence be required at a later date. Schools may wish to have a printed template on which to log such information OR make use of their school’s management information system (e.g. Arbor, SIMS, etc.) to make the required record.

**N.B. Schools must not hand copies of formal letters/communications to one parent, which are addressed to an alternative parent for the pupil concerned. Examples of such letters would include:**

* **Notices to Improve;**
* **Responses to leave of absence (term time holiday) requests;**
* **Any communication which contains a clear legal action warning OR other important evidence (e.g. an attendance contract) where we need to be able to evidence “good service.”**

This advice is provided due to the fact that the intended recipient of the formal communication, which will contain a legal action warning statement alerting parents to their risk of legal action due to their child’s existing/pending unauthorised absences, may later argue that they did not receive the communication and the local authority would not be able to produce evidence to the courts to address such a claim and any case against the parent concerned may potentially be placed in jeopardy.

**Post** - Where communications cannot be sent via email (as per the advice above) OR handed directly to the intended recipient (with the required log being available to confirm date/time, etc.), these should be sent via Royal Mail, first class post so that “good service” may be evidenced to the court.

Collection of parental dates of birth

Please be aware that schools are no longer encouraged to routinely collect, as part of the contact information that they request from parents, the dates of birth for the parents/carers of their pupils. Where schools have a specific purpose for which such data is to be collected, they may continue to do so. However, if schools have previously updated their contact detail request forms to include the collection of parents’ dates of birth so that this information may be shared with the local authority alongside any potential referral for statutory legal intervention pertaining to irregular school attendance, we would now ask that this data field is removed to ensure that your data requests remain compliant with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).