

MAXIMISING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BULLETIN

BUMPER EDITION – START THE YEAR WELL

SEPTEMBER 2025 – HT1

Welcome back, we hope you had a restful summer break. This bulletin is a bumper edition, designed to help you start the year well and meet statutory requirements. It is therefore longer than usual, please read it in full, and remember to check ESI (Essex Schools Infolink) for supporting forms and documents. **Please note some documents have been updated, a list of which can be found on page three.**

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DFE 2024-25 Indicative data:

Please find below summary of indicative data for the 2024-25 academic year obtained from the [DfE data dashboard](#). Thank you to all schools for their continued efforts to improve school attendance in Essex. Please note, DfE data does not include the first week of the academic year due to the variety of return dates across the country and therefore schools should run comparative data reports from 9th September 2024.

Primary	Overall Absence / Absence	Authorised Absence	Unauthorised Absence	PA	SA
National	5.2 / 94.8	3.8	1.4	13.4	TBC
Essex	5.35 / 94.65 (0.15)	3.93 (0.13)	1.42 (0.02)	13.31 (0.09)	0.8

Secondary	Overall Absence / Absence	Authorised Absence	Unauthorised Absence	PA	SA
National	8.6 / 91.4	5.3	3.5	24.3	TBC
Essex	8.85 / 91.1 (0.1)	5.32 (0.02)	3.5 (equal)	24.16 (0.14)	4

Special	Overall Absence / Absence	Authorised Absence	Unauthorised Absence	PA	SA
National	12.9 / 87.1	9.5	3.4	38.8	TBC
Essex	11.16 / 88.84 (1.74)	8.88 (0.62)	2.27 (1.13)	32.5 (6.3)	TBC

Starting the academic year well

A new academic year is an opportunity to set out clear attendance expectations. It is important you communicate these expectations at the start of the academic year and regularly throughout.

Pick up where you left off

When considering attendance processes, a new academic year does not require starting over for pupils with previous attendance concerns. If a pupil's attendance was already at the stage of declining last academic year, or a contract was issued, as soon as an unauthorised absence occurs move forward. Please also remember that although legal intervention is the last resort, for Year 11s the cut off for referrals is usually end of December, early January. Please therefore be mindful of this when supporting improved attendance of year 11 pupils from September.

The summer holidays are long, and a lot can happen during that time, where there are concerns, schedule pupil check-ins early and make calls to the family. Templates are available on Essex Schools Infolink (ESI - [Essex Support First Toolkit](#)) some of which can be altered as per need, ensuring the tone of the communications remain the same with support at the heart. Documentation and evidence of these (and all) interventions are crucial – see [Important Pre-Referral Considerations \(Word, 36KB\)](#).

Unauthorised leave during term time

For those who ended the year with an unauthorised holiday, that met criteria (5 consecutive days / 10 consecutive sessions), or who remain G coded from the first day remember the continuous period can span terms/half-terms. So, don't forget to make your **referral within 10 days of them returning this academic year**.

Schools may be reluctant to refer for legal action in terms of unauthorised leave of absence, however it is essential that schools consider long-term; one holiday in term time without consequences may lead to another. The National Framework in place from last academic year means that the fines increase per term-time holiday leading to the potential of prosecution (in a rolling 3-year period), so if you do not apply for the first one, undeterred, families may take another. Information for schools and families on this is imbedded within the Essex [Leave of absence request form \(Word, 60KB\)](#) - updated September 2025.

Transitions

Supporting a smooth transition and fostering a strong sense of belonging for new starters is essential. Recent attendance data shared in the [June Monitor your school attendance](#) webinar and DfE conference, highlights a decline in attendance within the Year 7 cohort, particularly in the second and third half term of the academic year. Similar patterns are seen in the transition from Year 7 to 8. Using the View Your Education Data (VYED), transition and banding reports can help identify potential patterns and enable timely, targeted interventions. Providing additional pastoral support, safe spaces, and a key adult for pupils who may struggle to settle can strengthen their sense of safety and belonging.

Have you got an Attendance focus week scheduled?

The goal of an Attendance Focus Week is to create a positive and engaging environment that encourages students to prioritise their education and attend school regularly. By

focusing on attendance, schools aim to improve academic outcomes, reduce inequalities, and foster a strong school community.

An attendance week can include bespoke assemblies, quizzes, raffles, class competitions, design a poster competition, early bird challenges and can be included in form time or PSHE lessons. All staff, pupils and parents can get involved.

Updates to ESI Documents

The below documents have had minor updates following feedback from schools and partners:

1. Leave of absence application form **and** template letters – ‘normally lives with’ has either been removed and changed. Please ensure you start to use the new documents moving forward or applications for legal intervention may not be taken. [Leave of absence application form and template letters](#)
2. Attendance Contract – additional section to record at first meet a review date / next meeting date and to enable a roll on of the document a review section - [Essex attendance contract meeting pro-forma \(Word, 57KB\)](#) - updated September 2025
3. Model Attendance Policy – addition of afternoon registers open and close times - [Attendance model policy \(Word, 965KB\) - effective September 2025](#)

Virtual School

Schools and the Virtual school must regularly monitor the attendance of children with a social worker, including those looked after. Inspirational targets are needed for the attendance of pupils with a social worker and personal education plans (PEPs) should be in place for looked after pupils. This includes pupils who have a social worker, have had a social worker, are or have been a child in need (CIN), or are on/have been on a Child Protection Plan (CP) as well as those looked after and previously looked after. Absence rates for pupils with a social worker are higher, with **43.4% of children who have ever been Children in Need are persistently absent** compared to 22.8% of all pupils. For support for pupils with a social worker, schools should contact the [Essex Virtual School](#). The virtual school's responsibility is to monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker. It is therefore important that efforts to improve attendance for this group are doubled.

Training

It is the responsibility of the school to ensure all staff are trained on attendance. Whole school attendance training is essential so that all parties understand and share the responsibility. Regular training on the school's vision, procedures, and systems is vital to ensure a consistent whole-school approach and shared responsibility. The start of the year usually means new school staff, some who may be new to teaching or the school environment, ensure as part of their onboarding remember to make attendance a focus – with a new teacher attendance training pack in place.

The DfE have a catalogue of online training, videos are linked on ESI for you and can be found here [DfE Attendance Training Playlist](#).

Attendance Resource Materials

A number of attendance campaign resources can be found here: [Essex Attendance resource materials for schools](#), these can be included as part of your school attendance toolkit. Please access the link for Primary, Secondary and more generic posters and resources.

Attendance Compliance Team Essential Documents

The Attendance Compliance Team have produced three documents regarding referrals for Legal intervention. These are listed below. To obtain these documents, please email either your Attendance Compliance officer or Attendance Specialist team. Contact details can be found at the end of this bulletin.

1. [Important Pre-Referral Considerations \(Word, 36KB\)](#)
2. Good Practice Chronology Example
3. Collected decline rationales for referrals 2024-25

Early Help

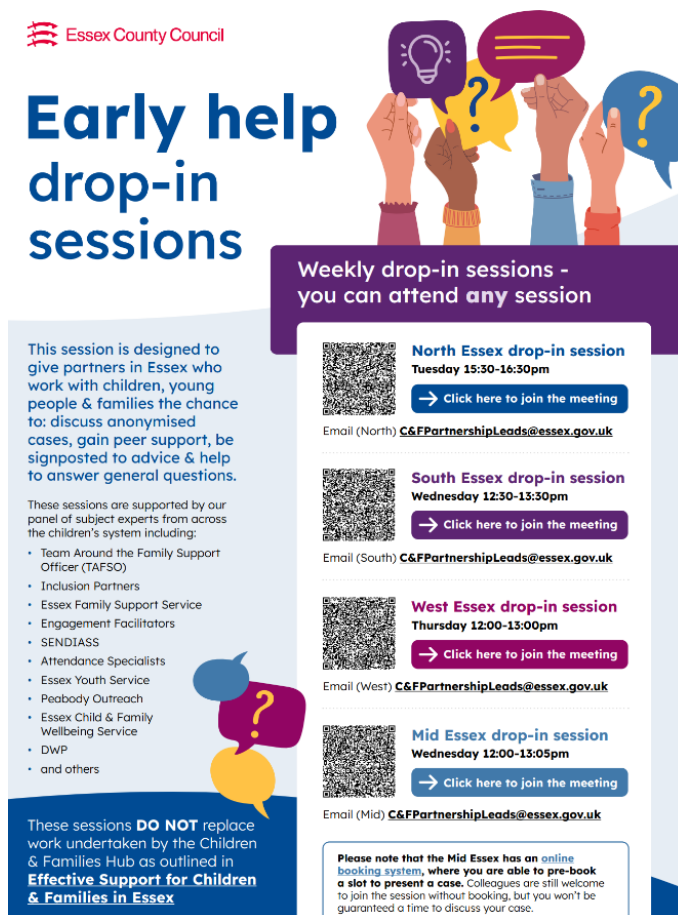
It is recommended schools reach out to families at the earliest opportunity prior to the pupil becoming a persistent absentee to better understand individual barriers and seek appropriate targeted support.

Schools are encouraged to bring cases to the Early Help Drop Ins that operate weekly across quadrants. Additionally, ESI has a wide range of resources available.

As soon as a pupil show signs that they may become a school refuser, it is essential the Let's Talk We Miss you toolkit is used. The questionnaires that form part of the toolkit should also be completed with the family, in person. Please see ESI for additional resources: [Social, emotional and mental health \(SEMH\) | Essex Schools Infolink](#)

Early Help Drop-Ins

For links, please visit: [The children, young people and families page for more information](#). Schools can attend any session where they aren't able to make their designated quadrant drop in. Get the dates in your calendar weekly!



Essex County Council

Early help drop-in sessions

Weekly drop-in sessions - you can attend any session

This session is designed to give partners in Essex who work with children, young people & families the chance to: discuss anonymised cases, gain peer support, be signposted to advice & help to answer general questions.

These sessions are supported by our panel of subject experts from across the children's system including:

- Team Around the Family Support Officer (TAFSO)
- Inclusion Partners
- Essex Family Support Service
- Engagement Facilitators
- SENDIASS
- Attendance Specialists
- Essex Youth Service
- Peabody Outreach
- Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service
- DWP
- and others

These sessions **DO NOT** replace work undertaken by the Children & Families Hub as outlined in **Effective Support for Children & Families in Essex**

North Essex drop-in session
Tuesday 15:30-16:30pm
→ [Click here to join the meeting](#)
Email (North) C&FPartnershipLeads@essex.gov.uk

South Essex drop-in session
Wednesday 12:30-13:30pm
→ [Click here to join the meeting](#)
Email (South) C&FPartnershipLeads@essex.gov.uk

West Essex drop-in session
Thursday 12:00-13:00pm
→ [Click here to join the meeting](#)
Email (West) C&FPartnershipLeads@essex.gov.uk

Mid Essex drop-in session
Wednesday 12:00-13:05pm
→ [Click here to join the meeting](#)
Email (Mid) C&FPartnershipLeads@essex.gov.uk

Please note that the Mid Essex has an online booking system, where you are able to pre-book a slot to present a case. Colleagues are still welcome to join the session without booking, but you won't be guaranteed a time to discuss your case.



Attendance Specialist Team Contact details

North East	Sue Thomas Emily Marks neattendanceteam@essex.gov.uk
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Attendance Compliance Team Contact details

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Maria Knight maria.knight@essex.gov.uk	Mid Essex – Chelmsford, Braintree, Maldon South Essex – James Hornsby, Basildon Upper Academy
Rachel Anderson rachel.anderson@essex.gov.uk	North-East Essex – Colchester (parts of Tendring) South Essex – Basildon Lower Academy, Woodlands School
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