

Case study - Ghost Pupil

Scenario

A school has on roll a pupil who has only ever attended for 1/2 day (his first day) and then has not returned (that was a year and a half ago). The pupil has an EHCP and is receiving support from other services, but the pupil remains on the school roll. The school feels obligated to do regular safeguarding checks, but the parent is not willing to engage. The family is on benefits, so the school does not feel able to impose a fine (if that were the right approach to take, which is doubtful). There are no legal grounds for the pupil to be removed from roll. What should happen next?

Response

If the school or parent/carer or both feel that the placement is not 'suitable' then the placement breakdown needs to be quickly raised and refer back to Suffolk County Council's Family Services for an immediate emergency annual review. During that meeting, parent/carer, school and Suffolk County Council need to consider whether an interim alternative provision placement is required. The aim of such a placement could be to either support the pupil to transition back into a school (the existing school or another mainstream school), or to gather information to support an application for a longer-term specialist placement.

If the parent/carer believes that the current placement is not suitable, but the school and/or Suffolk County Council believes that the placement is suitable, the parent/carer can appeal for the plan/provision to be reviewed and, if the parent/carer remains unsatisfied, there is recourse to a SEND tribunal.

If the core issue (in the eyes of the school or Suffolk County Council) is that the parent/carer is 'unreasonably' refusing to engage in discussions/plans, and there are additional safeguarding concerns, then a detailed chronology of the concerns needs to be compiled as normal and submitted via MARF - with the school taking escalatory action in line with Suffolk's Escalation Procedure and, if necessary, Safeguarding Partnership protocols, as required. It is likely that a CAF should be offered and, if the parent/carer is unwilling to engage in that, the reasons for that should be noted and should also be shared as part of the MARF.

Even if there are no other safeguarding concerns, if a pupil has been out of school missing education, this is likely to be sufficient grounds for a referral into MASH.

Please see, Appendix A, extracts from Suffolk's matrix of needs, which specifically relate to issues around attendance.

If a parent / carer indicates an interest in elective home education (EHE) school should direct family to [Suffolk InfoLink | Elective Home Education \(EHE\)](#) and ensure family fully understand the implications and expectations of elective home education. Before consideration is made to deregister on the grounds of electively home education, a formal

assessment must be undertaken by Suffolk's Family Services or EHE team (who legally must assess whether a parent of a pupil with SEN/EHCP can provide education at home prior to any arrangement being made)

In parallel, the school should attempt to coordinate a meeting with parent/s, and any involved professionals, to collate and fact find the information required to move the situation forward.

Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 - places a duty on local authorities to make suitable provision of education at school, or otherwise than at school, for those children of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them. A 'section 19 panel' has been set up by Suffolk County Council to consider which pupils qualify for such arrangements - that panel can be accessed by submitting a referral to the Alternative Tuition Service (ATS). For pupils who have an EHCP, discussions and advice on this process should take place during their annual review meeting, or by requesting an emergency annual review.

Where a pupil is being supported via ATS, outcomes for the pupil are likely to be best if a strong working relationship can be established between ATS, the school, the parent/carer and the pupil. This may involve the school liaising with the ATS tutor (if applicable) to set additional work (beyond the core English and maths support which ATS is likely to be focused on) which may support an eventual reintegration (if that is a plausible outcome) and to help the pupil/parent remain connected to the school. Depending on the nature of the ATS involvement, it may be possible for the ATS tutor to conduct the regular 'eyes on' safeguarding checks, which the school is currently doing - which may reduce workload for the school and prevent a deterioration in relationships between parent/carer and external services especially if the parent/carer is resentful of the school's continuing insistence on regular safeguarding checks.

If parent/s 'unreasonably' refuse to contribute to education meetings/discussions, then a referral to school/LA Education Welfare Officers may be appropriate.

Appendix A

Suffolk Threshold of need matrix- **Attendance aspects**

Level 1: Children with Universal Needs

- **Good attendance at nursery/school/college/training**

Children at this level are achieving expected outcomes. There are no unmet needs or need is low level and can be met by the universal services or with some limited advice or guidance. Children, parents, and carers can access services directly

Level 2: Low Risk to Vulnerable – Early Help or Targeted Support Services

- **Is regularly unpunctual for school/occasional truanting or significant non-attendance/parents condone absences**

Children at this level will have their needs met through additional support that may involve support from one or more agencies and are low risk to vulnerable.

Level 3: Medium Risk/High or Complex Level of Additional Needs Ranging from Targeted Early Help to Child in Need

- **Child is out of school due to parental neglect**
- **Non-engagement of parents/carers in child's education/resistance from parent/carer to support education.**

Children at this level have diverse and complex needs and targeted multi-agency support services are required and are supported by a clear co-ordinated action plan with the need for statutory social work intervention

Level 4: High Risk/Complex or Acute Level of Additional Needs Requiring Specialist or Statutory

- **Chronic non-attendance/persistent truanting**

Children at this level who are experiencing significant harm that requires specialist or statutory intervention such as child protection or legal intervention and children with complex or acute levels of additional need.