

Southampton City Council Educational Neglect

Practitioner Guidance

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Educational neglect is everybody's business. It is about working together, being curious and asking when something doesn't make sense for children, parents or professionals.

What is Educational Neglect?

There is no statutory definition of educational neglect. A task and finish group consisting of representatives from across Southampton Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership (SCASP), including education colleagues, have revised this guidance in January 2025. This guidance was originally developed from 2019 Serious Case Review recommendations and SCASP has oversight of the work.

Neglect is defined as:

"The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical, emotional, and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- *provide adequate food, clothing, and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)*
- *protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger*
- *ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate caregivers)*
- *ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment*
- *provide suitable education*

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It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs".

[Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)

The definition agreed for Southampton and included in the SCASP Neglect Strategy is:

"Neglect is the most common form of child abuse. In Southampton we recognise neglect as the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs in order for them to thrive. Neglect means that a child may be left hungry or dirty and without adequate clothing, shelter, supervision or medical care. A child may be put in danger or not protected from harm. Neglect also includes psychological and emotional harm; a child needs care and attention and opportunities to relax, play and learn".

The local authority recognises that educational neglect can be a factor within physical, emotional, sexual or criminal harm. It is also a likely outcome of a range of factors that could be attributable to parent(s)/carer(s), professionals, organisations or any combination of these. It could also be the continued persistent failure of a young person, on a case-by-case basis, deemed old enough to determine their own actions, for example, if they are able to manage their own travel to and from an educational setting and attend this setting regularly.

A range of barriers are likely to be present, whether known or unknown for a young person, and professionals should work to reduce any known barriers and be curious as to why absence issues exist.

The context of Educational Neglect

Neglect is the most common category of abuse for child protection (CP) plans in England. Data published from 2019 -2023 shows the number of children in England with a Child Protection plan for Neglect in a 12- month period as being consistently over 24,000.

Analysis from Serious Case Reviews (SCR) 2014 - 2017 shows evidence of neglect featured in nearly three-quarters (208 of the 278, 74.8%) of the SCRs examined. Features of neglect were apparent in 112 out of 165 (68%) fatal cases and 96 out of 113 (83%) non-fatal serious harm cases.

As of March 2024, 49% of children on a Child Protection plan in Southampton have neglect identified as the primary feature. Many of these children struggle with regular school attendance and may have current or historic part-time timetables. However, these factors alone do not indicate educational neglect.

It is important to recognise that the abuse/neglect category is broad in regard to Child in Need (CiN) and CP cases, therefore most children will have this as an identified feature in their assessments. It is crucial that the educational setting, any identified provision, and attendance data is included in all assessments.

Factors associated with Educational Neglect – Parent/ Carer/ Professional & Agency/ Young person

Educational neglect can be difficult to identify as cases are often complex and multi-faceted. Educational neglect could be considered because of any one or more of the following:

Parent & Carer factors:

Parents should be informed of their duties under the Education Act 1996 and their responsibilities for educational attendance as outlined in the [summary table of responsibilities for school attendance](#). Educational neglect should be considered if parents:

- Do not ensure that their child is maintaining schooling or receiving a suitable non-school based education, for example, Elective Home Education (EHE)
- Do not attend educational setting/local authority/trust meetings, resulting in the child's disengagement and negatively impacting the child's learning and development
- Do not engage with external agencies, such as health services, consequently delaying their child's development or learning
- Do not follow steps agreed at meetings with an educational setting and/ or professionals to address attendance barriers
- Do not collaborate with an educational setting or other agencies to improve attendance and engagement
- Withhold information about their child's developmental needs during application or enrolment

It is expected that parents will:

- Work with the educational setting and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance
- Proactively engage with informal support offered to prevent the need for more formal support
- Proactively engage with formal support offered – including any parenting contract or voluntary early help plan to prevent the need for legal intervention

- Ensure their child attends an educational setting every day that it is open except when a statutory reason applies
- Notify the educational setting as soon as possible when their child is unexpectedly absent (e.g., sickness)
- Only request leave of absence in exceptional circumstances and do so in advance following educational setting procedures
- Book any medical appointments outside of the normal timings of the educational setting day where possible

Some of the above examples may lead to legal intervention.

Professional & Agency factors:

Educational neglect should be considered if professionals/ agencies:

- Do not report or act on concerns that require additional intervention to avoid serious impairment of a child's learning and development at any age or stage of a child's development
- Organise educational provision that is not full time in school and any alternative is not planned and monitored in line with an individual's needs
- Place a child in an alternative provision setting and do not undertake and record appropriate checks to ensure the safeguarding of a pupil in the placement
- Do not share known information that supports a child's learning and developmental needs, including their social, emotional, mental health, well-being and learning needs, with other professionals/ new settings in a timely manner to enable the subsequent setting to establish support from day one
- 'Off-roll' a child from an educational setting roll. Ofsted state, "Off-rolling is the practice of removing a pupil from a setting roll without using a permanent exclusion, when the removal is primarily in the best interests of the setting, rather than the best interests of the pupil. This includes pressuring a parent to remove their child from the school roll. While it may not always be unlawful, Ofsted believes off-rolling is never acceptable." It must be noted that a child can also leave a school roll for reasons that are in their best interests and are also lawful.
- Do not take timely action to minimise the impact of known and recognised poor parental management of educational attendance or provision

- Do not establish, in a timely manner, an Individual Health Care Plan and/or Individual Education Plan to support a child's health/educational needs or have not sufficiently taken into account advice from relevant professionals
- Do not consult with the educational setting the child attends/is registered at when planning and working with families in considering the needs of the child
- Do not attend and/or contribute to multi-agency planning, this includes the educational setting and any other organisations involved with the family
- Have not ensured the child's learning and development needs are central to multi-agency planning, and the lead agency has not monitored and challenged where improvement is required
- Do not implement or support the Think Family Approach and Family Safeguarding Model with a multi-agency presence where required
- Do not provide support for parents to make applications (at any age or stage) where this is needed
- Do not support engagement with post 16 education or employment with training
- Do not report information about a post 16 young person who is no longer attending an educational provision. Any cases must be reported to the post-16 education team so the young person can be supported back into education, employment and training

Young person factors:

In Southampton, we usually do not hold young people responsible for their own educational neglect. We first identify barriers to their attendance and engagement, recognising that erratic attendance and truancy may reflect their needs or responses to their environment. Each case should be considered individually to determine if the young person is old enough to be accountable for their actions.

In this context, educational neglect should only be considered once any identified barriers have been removed/mitigated. For example, when:

- Full parental co-operation is clearly demonstrated, and educational provision offered is appropriate for the young person's needs
- Pupil engagement and attendance levels are identified as seriously impeding their development
- Action may have been taken previously against the parent for failing to secure regular attendance of the young person and the young person will have awareness of the impact of their disengagement

Where a voluntary early help plan, or formal attendance contract has not been successful, an Education Supervision Order (ESO) can be a useful alternative to provide formal legal intervention without criminal prosecution. In deciding whether to progress to an ESO, the educational setting and local authority should have exhausted voluntary support and be clear that making the order would be beneficial for the pupil and parent.

ESOs are made through the Family or High Court, rather than the Magistrates Court. They give the local authority a formal role in advising, helping and directing the child and family to ensure the child receives an efficient, full-time and suitable education. For the duration of the ESO, the parents/ carers duties to secure the child's education and regular attendance are superseded by a duty to comply with any directions given by the local authority under the ESO. The order initially lasts for one year, but extensions can be secured within the last 3 months for a period of up to 3 years at a time.

Where safeguarding concerns exist, professionals should consider, together with Southampton's [School Attendance Support Service \(SASS\)](#), whether an ESO could be a suitable consideration alongside other safeguarding or educational planning.

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Educational neglect may also be more likely if any of the following are present:

Child Risk factors	Parental risk factors	Wider agency & professionals risk factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Unemployment • Lack of positive personal networks • Adverse childhood experiences (neglect/abuse) • Disability • Substance misuse • Learning difficulties • Family unit breakdown • Bereavement • Views not taken into account in decision making about education • Chronic ill-health • Poor mental health • Child subjected to exploitation (sexual or criminal) • Living in poverty • Going missing • Reduced or inappropriate educational or timetable provision • Child performing role of carer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous action regarding poor attendance at school • Poor parental mental and emotional well-being • Substance use • Domestic abuse/violence • Learning difficulties • Lack of positive parenting in childhood • Adverse childhood experiences • Being obese or underweight • Poor parental engagement in education • Family history of poor engagement of other siblings in education • Unable to provide/uninterested in development of child of any age • Disguised compliance/ non-compliance with agencies • Exploitation or criminality • Bereavement • Family breakdown • Ill health • Not following health advice that enables engagement in education • Low/poor pre-school developmental experiences provided for child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of sharing of information between agencies regarding concerns • Ineffective monitoring and review of part-time timetables or alternative provision • Lack of triangulation or challenge regarding information provided by parent where it raises query/ may not be substantiated • Lack of substantiated / reasonable information for absence • Inconsistent or unsustainable responses to agency support • Lack of health information to support a suitable individual health and care plan that supports engagement in education • Lack of consideration of wider context e.g. of family history of poor engagement of siblings in education or previous actions not sustained
Protective factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental interest and action to support the educational development of their child, including providing a suitable education if EHE • Full educational provision that meets needs or amendments that are effectively reviewed regularly • Early identification of issues that may lead to educational neglect that are acted upon to reduce the risk • Positive and effective engagement with agencies to support the child, parent/ family (health, social care, early help, education) • Sustained improvements in attendance managed independently by child or parent that are recognised • Effective agency communication and sharing of information to safeguard a child including for their attendance at school or educational provision 		

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Advice and support for Educational Neglect concerns

It may be helpful to utilise the [Southampton Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership Neglect Toolkit](#) when considering educational neglect.

Statutory School Age

[Working together to improve school attendance](#) emphasises the expectation that educational provision and attendance should be a central part of any multi-agency planning for children. Southampton City Council (SCC) has a process for addressing school attendance issues in children of statutory school age. This [process](#) clarifies how to manage and escalate pupil absences, involving all relevant agencies at each step. For more details, see Southampton's [School Attendance Support Service \(SASS\)](#).

Professionals working with families should liaise with the link SASS Officer associated with the educational setting or contact education.welfare.service@southampton.gov.uk when a decline in attendance or emerging patterns of absence become apparent, or when concerns regarding pupil attendance or educational arrangements arise.

Professionals will often need to communicate with colleagues across the multi-agency workforce in order to best support a child and their family. [Information Sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services for children, young people, parents and carers](#) makes clear that all children have a right to be protected from abuse and neglect and sharing relevant and accurate information is appropriate when supporting provision of services.

If a child is Electively Home Educated (EHE), professionals can contact the Southampton [Inclusion team](#) for more information.

If there is a query regarding application for a school place, professionals are able to contact the Southampton [Admissions team](#).

For Looked After Children (LAC), educational settings and Virtual School Heads should ensure Personal Education Plans (PEPs) identify and address any barriers to good attendance.

For children who have CiN or CP planning in place, education and attendance should form a key part of the plan.

For children who have medical needs, parents or professionals should be including relevant health professionals in discussions about the child. Individual Health and Care plans should be in place. If a child has special educational needs and [section 20 of the Children and Families Act 2014](#) applies, advice should be sought at the earliest opportunity from the [Inclusion team](#).

Early Years

Regular attendance at early years' settings helps establish positive behaviours and routines for future education. Conversely, educationally neglectful behaviours can also become established during this time and impact on later routines and attendance patterns. Whilst attendance in early years education (until the term before the child becomes 5) is not statutory, non-attendance at an early year's setting can be recognised as educational neglect if this absence is likely to seriously impair the learning and educational development of the child.

Early years settings should have clear policies and processes for handling absences and specify steps of intervention. Professionals working with children under 5 should actively promote the benefit of regular attendance and direct families to relevant support through [Family Hubs](#) when issues arise.

SCC would expect all parents to apply for a school place for their child in year R unless they have made alternative arrangements for their educational provision. To not apply or notify may be an indicator that the parent does not know the process, or [expectations in England](#), so they may need support with this. It can also be a potential indicator of educational neglect.

Each child's education is paramount, and needs should be considered equally alongside health and well-being or other factors, when determining what support a family requires to reduce barriers to attendance or engagement for a child. Early intervention or help is encouraged where early indicators are present.

Key questions to consider:

- Are the child's developmental needs being met? Is this in line with expected learning milestones nationally for all children?
- Are needs being addressed so that progress can be seen appropriate to any identified needs?
- Are there aspects of the provision that are impacting negatively on the educational development of the child?
- Is a full-time education offer in place? Alternatively, is a part-time timetable being used as a short-term intervention in line with local guidance?
- Has each child in a family had an application made for a school place or a parental decision to electively home educate been made and reported?
- Have other local authority teams/ agencies who may be able to support a young person (e.g. if post-16 or additional needs identified) been notified by professionals?

Post 16

The statutory school leaving date is the last Friday in June of the academic year in which a pupil turns 16. There is a statutory duty to participate placed on all young people to participate in education or employment with training up to the age of 18.

Under Part 1 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, young people aged 16 and 17 who have not attained level 3 qualifications of sufficient size are under a duty to continue in education or training until the young person's 18th birthday. The statutory duty does not extend until the end of the academic year in which the young person turns 18. Young people should however be encouraged to complete the education or training they are undertaking beyond their 18th birthday.

Advice on the definitions of participation in education or training is set out in Annex 1 of [Participation of young people in education, employment or training](#). The aim is to ensure that every young person continues their studies or takes up training and goes on to successful employment or higher education.

Where a young person does not engage with ongoing participation in education, they are identifiable as NEET (Not in Education or Employment with Training). This is a concern, and the post-16 service should be notified of any young person who leaves school at the end of Year 11 and does not become engaged in EET (Education or Employment with Training). The post-16 service will make contact with the young person and use their best endeavours to support them into EET.

Addressing Educational Neglect - what should professionals consider?

The term "educational neglect" can be used to hold constructive conversations with colleagues, agencies and parents to consider if their actions could be viewed as neglectful i.e. likely to seriously impact on the development of the child. Each case needs to be considered individually, based on information available concerning the child, their family, and their unique circumstances.

It is important to note that a simple overall total percentage attendance does not provide enough detail to know if there is an issue to be tackled or not. Absence can be authorised or unauthorised by an educational setting and therefore will relate to a range of factors some of which may indicate less concern than others.

It is vital that there is a shared understanding between educational settings, parents and any other agencies involved with the family regarding application of attendance coding and reasons identified where overall attendance appears to be of concern.

Contacting the setting's link SASS Officer can support the understanding of absence coding as well as any requests made to the local authority for penalty notices where relevant (statutory school age only).

Targeting support meetings (usually convened at the educational setting) can aid identification and planning to support increased attendance. More information regarding these processes can be found in [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK](#).

Barriers to engagement in education can often be varied and complex – but the child has a right to their education - and this should be planned in line with their needs, including other professionals, when needed to assess, support or challenge.

In situations where educational neglect is a concern, the following aspects may be helpful to consider:

- Work on a principal of “Setting first”- initial contact should be with the setting’s senior attendance champion¹.

Professionals not working in education should find out if a child is:

- registered at an Early Years setting on a school roll
 - on a college (Further Education) roll
 - is in Education or Employment with Training (EET)
 - or is Electively Home Educated (EHE)
- In discussion with the senior attendance champion at the setting, establish what provision is on offer and consider how best to support the family and child or young person to better engage. Consider if other aspects are present, such as, but not limited to, suspensions/exclusions (lawful or unlawful), additional needs or housing issues.
 - Observe, engage and support the child – a range of professionals’ perspectives may be required. Ensure the child’s voice is heard and record this as part of any planning. Provide time for this to happen in a meaningful way.
 - Where needed, set appropriate, achievable steps within a clear timeframe to address the health, well-being and educational needs being discussed. Parents usually want the best for their child and so ensure they are supported to achieve this at the earliest possible opportunity with engagement through individual organisation teams and early help support via [Family Hubs](#). It is important that settings work with families and professionals to identify any reasonable adjustments required to support success of the plan.
 - Be sensitive in any challenge of parents or professionals and record reasons for this and any outcome. Escalate where a child’s basic needs are not met. Different parenting styles and cultures can affect what expectations are manageable and understood, therefore be sensitive but do not fail to raise concerns. It is possible that there may be other aspects of neglect or other safeguarding issues that may cross over with educational neglect therefore clear recording of concerns and recording of decision making is essential.
 - Consider a child in the context of their family and previous events or patterns. Record your thoughts and reasons for decisions, be professionally curious when safeguarding children and always consider their educational development in addition to other needs or risks.

¹ [Working together to improve school attendance.](#)

- Where there is evidence that parents are not supporting the educational learning and development of their child this should be clearly recorded and the necessary steps taken to minimise the impact of this together with other professionals.
- If it benefits the child or young person, call a professionals' meeting or request a safeguarding discussion with other agencies to clarify concerns. Clearly identify and record the need to share where another agency perspective is required. Consider if others may hold different or similar concerns and build a picture of different professionals' views.
- Ensure a cohesive strategy is created to address any neglectful professional behaviour. Raise any issues of professional disagreement to the appropriate managers or supervisors following the [4LSAB Working Together to Resolve Professional Differences \(escalation and resolution\)](#) procedure.
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education \(KCSIE\)](#), [The Data Protection Act](#) and [Information Sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services for children, young people, parents and carers](#) make clear that the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe and promoting their welfare is crucial. If in any doubt about sharing information, staff should speak to the designated safeguarding lead (or a deputy). Fears about sharing information must not be allowed to stand in the way of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- Always ensure that when a child changes educational settings (this could be at normal transition points or in-year) that their educational records are shared to aid set-up of appropriate support upon arrival at the new setting. Include any relevant information, for example attendance data, start-of-day arrangements, additional support or agencies accessed and safeguarding records etc, to help them settle in effectively.
- It is expected and reasonable to professionally challenge a setting where the transfer of records has not been timely or there is a lack information or detail shared, especially where this information is required by the next setting to be prepared for transition and to have appropriate support in place for the child from day one.
- A best interest decision should always be considered regarding the sharing of information early in the transition process, this should be recorded and the SCC Policy for [Transfer of child protection, welfare and educational records](#) should be followed in addition to [SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years](#), if relevant for the child.
- If a child has absence, or is missing their education, this should be explored, for example, in targeting support meetings. Consideration should be given to:
 - what has already been discovered or investigated and what actions have been taken
 - whether there is a full-time offer of education
 - whether there is a part-time timetable that is reviewed regularly and amended to support educational need (with the aim of re-building to a full-time offer)
 - whether there is Alternative Provision in place as a part or all of a provision. If there is, is the setting registered and what check and review have been undertaken
 - whether there is a provision (short or long term) relating to medical needs

- whether parents are fully aware of their responsibilities if removing a child to be Electively Home Educated
- If a child does not have a school place and is not recorded as being EHE the [Children Missing Education \(CME\)](#) statutory guidance should be followed.
- Part-time timetables can be used with discretion and careful planning, although SCC would encourage all educational settings to follow the [SCC part-time timetable protocol and guidance for schools and school leaders](#) regarding any timetable reduction and the monitoring of it. For any young person with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) statutory guidance must be followed. Where a child is open to any services, all stakeholders should be involved in decision making and monitoring of a part-time timetable.
- Ensure that where any change or reduction in an offer of full-time education is made, that parents understand and agree with this in the interests of their child. Check that SCC guidance for statutory part-time timetables or flexi-school arrangements are followed and review is planned and regular.
- Where Alternative Provision (AP) is being considered, all agencies involved with the child and family should be consulted and involved in the planning and monitoring of provision. From the outset, clear targets towards post-provision should be established.
- Where direction offsite to improve behaviour is used by governors of a maintained school, or other academy arrangements, ensure that this is understood by all relevant parties, and is time-framed with clear targets about how the improvement in behaviour is to be achieved. For further information, refer to [Suspension and permanent exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement](#).