



Professionals Working Together

When children and young people are not fine in school, health, education and other professionals need to work in partnership with families to support them.

Based on the experiences of parents of children with additional educational and medical needs, we are aware that NHS medical professionals and school staff are struggling with decreasing budgets and limited resources. As a result, parents are reporting difficulties in accessing the support they feel their children need. This impacts on school attendance, and school attendance pressures can also impact on their health. It is likely that despite being described as “fine in school”, these children and young people are really struggling.

Please reflect upon these points:

- Do you feel have enough resources to be able to meet the needs of all of your patients/pupils/clients?
- Do you have a level of funding that allows you to treat/ educate/support everyone you are responsible for in a way that is best for them? If not, is it any wonder children are struggling with school?
- Are you trained and qualified in all areas of treatment or teaching/social care, or do you sometimes need to refer to specialists?
- Are there long waiting times for diagnosis and interventions or support by specialists. These factors will all impact on health and recovery.
- Are you managing to keep up to date with all of the latest diagnostic criteria, and treatments within your own field?
- Are you aware of these for other specialist areas you related to your professional area of responsibility?
- It is impossible to be up to date with all of these. Is it possible that there are genuine reasons why children are not able to attend school?
- Are you aware of all educational policies including recent policy changes, practices within schools, alternative provision which affect your pupils and patients?

It is difficult for teachers, let alone doctors and social workers to keep up with changes within education, and the support available within school. Many would assume that children with additional needs have access to the support they need. This is simply not the case in many educational settings, so how can you help to improve the situation?

Education and social care are adding to the workloads of the medical profession - Doctors do not need to produce repeated sick notes for children who are too ill to attend school. Children with viruses and other illness which would otherwise be dealt with at home, should not be attending doctors' surgeries to clarify illness for the sake of attendance codes. SEND and mental health are specialist areas and children may need specialist Educational or Clinical Psychology based advice and support. Education professionals must accept medical diagnoses and follow medical advice. A child may need an EHCP in place to be able to access the necessary support.

- **Attendance is more likely to improve when health and special educational needs are met.**

All professionals need to be aware of the implications of long waiting lists and health problems on children's school attendance. There is an obvious impact of health conditions upon children's learning and ability to do well at school. However, the health impact of inadequately understood and unsupported SEND is often underestimated. Please also remember that co-morbidities can affect diagnoses and treatment and may require referral to specialists who understand these.

- **School nurses and even community paediatricians may not have the expertise required for these complex cases so please consider the most applicable referrals to make.**

All too often when children are not coping with school, even if they are waiting for treatment, or adequate intervention and support, they are referred to attendance officers, and safeguarding social workers may also become involved. Missing school is listed as a cause for concern of child abuse, but in the case of the majority of school refusers their difficulties are more likely to be due to mental health or SEND needs not being met within the school environment. Social workers may have limited knowledge or experience of education and health policies and practices. Whilst safeguarding must be taken very seriously, child protection proceedings should only apply for children at risk of significant harm. This causes unnecessary strain on children and families who are already struggling, and requesting help.

- **If children are struggling to attend school, please follow our Not Fine in School guidelines, including arranging assessments for SEND and health issues, and ensuring children and their families are receiving the necessary support.**

We would recommend a multidisciplinary approach to support children and families including the involvement of voluntary agencies with specialist experience. Assessment and diagnoses are taking too long for SEND and medical conditions.

- **We urge you to accept and acknowledge other qualified professionals diagnoses and consider their impact on attendance.**

Schools need to follow government policies including *Education for Children with health needs who cannot attend school*; *Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school*, and related SEND policies. Medical and social care models, and all educational policies emphasise the importance of listening to parents and children, and working in partnership. The majority of parents of children with health conditions and SEND are a valuable resource within any team working to meet their children's needs. Not only do they know their children better than professionals, they have had to research their conditions to ensure their needs are being met. Some parents have experience of these conditions themselves, or through other family members, yet this can sometimes be misinterpreted by professionals.

Long waiting times for diagnosis and treatment, changing criteria for diagnoses, a lack of expertise with co-morbidities, and relatively uncommon conditions, all contribute to the difficulties faced by children and their families - having significant impact on attendance.

- **Could the time being used to provide medical evidence where repeated medical reports are not necessary, and the time and resources being used to investigate families be re-diverted and used to diagnose and treat our children sooner - to focus on support supporting them within school or other forms of educational provision?**

Resources and time need to be prioritised to follow recommendations for interventions and environments children need to stay well. If health and education services are not adequately funded, then working together efficiently is more vital than ever. The sooner children and young people receive the support and treatment they need, the sooner they can increase their attendance and return to education.

Louise Parker Engels.

NFIS

Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3>

Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-for-children-with-health-needs-who-cannot-attend-school>

NFIS Guides for Children Who Struggle to Attend School

<https://www.facebook.com/NotFineInSchool/>

School sickness absence requests Emergency Guidance

<https://www.lmc.org.uk/visageimages/Campaigns/GPSoE16/schoolabsencegpsoeaug17.pdf>