



FAST TRACK INTERVENTION

GUIDANCE

Background

The Fast Track process for school non-attendance is a government initiative. It began as a Pathfinder in 9 Local Authorities (LA's) in January 2003. The Fast Track Framework is a time-focused model of best practice which concentrates on early intervention in cases of persistent non-attendance and aims to ensure a faster more effective approach to the implementation of strategies to tackle this behaviour and the underlying causes.¹ Where the parents/carers² fail to bring about the necessary improvement legal proceedings are initiated.

In summary, the aims and objectives of the framework are to:

- ensure the intervention strategies are put into place **early** to tackle school attendance problems
- ensure parents who fail to cooperate or are unwilling to work with the school/LA are identified sooner and action taken to make sure they take responsibility for their child's school attendance
- bring consistency across LAs to the prosecution process while still enabling local decisions³.

Referral

Schools should have in place arrangements for contact with parents in respect of both a pupil's absence from school and any late arrival at school.

It is important for schools to carry out its pre-referral work before any referral to the Education Welfare Service. The LA recommends that all schools operate a 'first day response' strategy, with appropriate follow-up action where there is a concern. The work could include monitoring of the attendance, telephone calls or letters to parents, meeting with parents and target setting with the pupil.

On receipt of a referral, the team leader will allocate the case with recommendations of the actions to follow which, in the majority of cases, will be to implement the Fast Track process.

Criteria for Fast Track

The pupil being considered for Fast Track should

- have an attendance rate of 90% or less within the previous 3 school months
- have unauthorised absences of 10 sessions or more

¹ Ensuring Regular School Attendance, DfES

² Hereafter referred to as parents

³ Evaluation of Fast Track to Prosecution for Non-Attendance, DfES Research Report RR567

- not be 'looked after' by the Local Authority
- have had pre-referral work undertaken by the school.

Action

On receipt of referral the EWO contacts parents and arranges to meet with them. The purpose of this meeting is to make an informal assessment of the situation and to ascertain if there are any reasons why the Fast Track process should not be followed. When this assessment meeting has been arranged, the EWO and head of year/house will agree a date and time (duration of 30-45 minutes) for the Fast Track meeting to take place in school. This meeting will be with the pupil and his/her parents to take place the week following EWO assessment meeting with parents, if at all possible.

During the assessment meeting the EWO gives letter FT 01/1a and the FT information leaflet (FT 02) to parents, ensuring 4/5 days notice prior to date of meeting in school.

If the EWO, after the initial meeting and assessment has reason to believe the Fast Track process should not be implemented then the EWO must speak with the Team Leader immediately or at the earliest opportunity.

EWO prepares information for the Fast Track meeting:

- 3 copies of attendance record (print-out)
- Fast Track monitoring form (FT 03)
- Notes of meeting record (FT 03a)
- Parenting Contract form (FT 04)
- Statutory defences information

Defence against legal action

It is not possible to prosecute parents in cases where the absence would be covered by defence(s) in law against an offence being committed, namely:

- **the pupil's absence was authorised by the school**
- the pupil was ill or prevented from attending by any unavoidable cause
- the absence was on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the parent belongs
- the school is not within walking distance of the child's home and the LA has not made suitable arrangements
- the parents can show that their trade or business requires them to travel, and the child has attended school as regularly as the nature of the trade or business allows and the child has attended school for at least 200 sessions in the preceding 12 months.

The Initial Meeting

The EWO takes responsibility for and chairs the meeting. If there are concerns about doing this there should be a discussion with the Team Leader. Areas to be covered in discussion:

- explain reason for meeting
- explain requirement to attend school regularly and Fast Track framework
- explain defences against legal action
- give parents and pupil copies of attendance record

- ask head of year/house about school's intervention
- seek parents and pupil's views of absences
- do parents and pupil accept that 95% attendance can be attained?
- agree support to bring about required improvement
 - what will parent do?
 - what will pupil do?
 - what will EWO/head of year/house do?
 - is there anyone else whom may be able to help?
- inform parent that illness (being a defence in law) should be covered by medical certificate (LA cannot enter into any discussions about charges)
- remind parent that if there are more than two absences (1 day) prior to the four week review and if they are not covered by medical evidence, legal proceedings will commence
- explain that school will not simply authorise absences on receipt of a note or telephone call
- agree parenting contract
- make arrangements for the four week review.

Parenting Contract

EWO explains to parents that the parenting contract is not a legally binding document. It is a tool, initiated by the government, to help the parents and pupil to recognise the seriousness of the situation and to support them in bringing about the necessary change. However, if the parent does not co-operate and support an improvement in their child's attendance a Parenting Order could be applied for in the Magistrate's Court. If it is necessary to apply for a PO the contract or refusal to sign the contract would be cited.

The parenting contract form (FT 04) is to be completed neatly and by the EWO or head of year/house and signed by the parent and EWO/head of year/house. A period of six months (not including holidays) is recommended for the contract. It is then copied and a copy given to the parents.

Authorising of Absences

It is vitally important that during this process the school does not authorise an absence unless it is covered by a medical certificate or an exceptional circumstance i.e. the death of a family member. Do therefore remind the parents of this

Case File

A copy of all the above information is to be put on the case file and the information entered on the Fast Track database which can be found in: Targeted Services/EWS/FAST TRACK INTERVENTION/Fast Track data

Reviews

Arrangements should be made for the four week review. This review could be in the form of another meeting or a paper exercise. The decision about the format should be dependant on the nature of the support planned for the pupil. For example, if it has been agreed that the EWO will see the pupil each week, either individually or in a group, then a review meeting would be appropriate. If the agreement was that the parent was going to provide all the support and the targets have been met than whilst it is good to meet and say 'well done' it could be more appropriate to telephone the parents and ask

whether or not they want to meet for a review as the target has been met. If parents do not wish to meet the four week letter (FT 08) should be sent with a copy of the up-to-date attendance record. Copies of all of these are to be put on the case file with a note of your telephone call. The data is updated as at initial meeting.

At the review meeting the decision is made whether to continue to monitor (if target has been met) or to seek advice about prosecution (target not met).

If the target has been met the EWO sends four week letter (FT 08) as above. The attendance is then monitored for a further 4 weeks.

At the 8 week review (decision about format as above) the EWO will either send the eight week letter (FT 09) or proceed as for prosecution. Data is updated as above.

If the target has been met, it is recommended that the contract continues to the end of the 6 months and the EWO monitors the case for a further 4 weeks; if there is no cause for concern the case is closed and school informed with a copy of the closing summary.

Prosecution

If target has not been met, EWO completes monitoring form (FT 03) immediately and gives to the Team Leader who will make decision about prosecution. Unless there are sound reasons of mitigation from the parents, absences will lead to a prosecution. Letter confirming decision (FT 11) to be sent to parents.

A quick response will be given to the EWO and when the decision is to prosecute the EWO will prepare the papers. **This must be done within a week.** In preparing the prosecution papers the EWO will ensure that the period of absence goes back **no further than 5 months.** The EWO will ensure that copies of all the information is on the case file and that the data has been updated.

The EWO then submits the case file and completed prosecution papers to the Team Leader who, after perusal, will forward the papers to the legal department.

The legal department will issue the summons and arrange for it to be served on the parent. The solicitor will email the Team Leader with date of hearing, this will be sent to the EWO for the case file.

Following the hearing the solicitor writes to the Team Leader with the outcome of the case. A copy is sent to the EWO, who will then inform the school.

After the prosecution

Whatever the outcome of the case, good attendance at school is expected after the prosecution. The EWO will seek advice from the Team Leader about future work with the family and liaise with the school.

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