



**SHETLAND**  
ISLANDS COUNCIL

**Children's Services**

**Promoting and Managing School Attendance**

**Policy 2024**

## CONTENTS

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Guiding Principles. ....	3
1.2 What is Attendance? .....	4
1.3 Why is Attendance Important and What is the Impact of Absence? .....	4
1.4 Policy Context .....	5
<b>2. Promoting Good School Attendance- Responsibility of All .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Developing a Positive Whole School Ethos and Culture .....	8
2.2 Family Engagement .....	9
2.3 School Policy, Procedures and Quality Assurance.....	10
2.4 Pastoral Care – Designated Senior Staff.....	11
2.5 Staged Intervention to respond to and address low attendance.....	11
2.6 Flexibility within Curriculum for Excellence.....	13
2.7 Attendance Beyond Statutory School Leaving Age .....	13
2.8 Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) .....	14

## **1. Introduction**

Shetland Islands Council is committed to promoting good attendance at school for all children and young people.

Shetland Islands Council's Promoting and Managing School Attendance Policy for Schools reflects the key national messages contained in "Included, Engaged and Involved" Part 1: A Positive Approach to the Promotion and Management of Attendance in Scottish Schools. We aim to ensure Shetland's children, young people and families are confident and resilient, and fully included as valued contributors within their schools and communities.

Attendance is one of the five key drivers for raising attainment as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

Good attendance and engagement at school helps children and young people thrive, achieve their potential and realise a positive post school destination.

Low attendance levels can have increased negative impacts on vulnerable children including children affected by poverty, those with additional support needs and children in need of care and protection.

This policy aims to support good practice around attendance across all of Shetland's schools.

The term 'parent' refers to parents, carers and wider significant family members.

### **1.1 Guiding Principles.**

1. All children and young people have a right to education (UNCRC Article 28); and Shetland Islands Council has a duty to provide this education.
2. All children and young people have the right to be included, engaged and involved in their learning, and have the right to express views freely.(UNCRC Article 12)
3. All children and young people have the right to get the support they need to benefit fully from their education and fulfil their potential.(UNCRC Article 29)
4. Shetland Islands Council schools focus on positive relationships and inclusive cultures that promote good attendance; attendance is not considered in isolation.
5. Schools in Shetland work in partnership with parents and partners to ensure any barriers to good attendance are removed.

## 1.2 What is Attendance?

Attendance is “participation in a programme of educational activities arranged and agreed by the school”.

This includes:

- Attendance at school;
- Learning out with the school provided by another learning provider while still on the school roll;
- Educational visits, excursions and residential visits;
- Interviews and visits relating to further and higher education or careers events;
- Debates, sports, musical or drama activities in conjunction with school;
- Study Leave for learners participating in National Qualifications, if arranged by the school during the period of examination timetable;
- Receiving education via hospital or outreach teaching services;
- Work Experience or volunteering;
- Virtual home learning – short periods of unexpected home learning due to external factors such as weather or transport; and
- Adapted timetable (where a student who cannot access school full time due to a health or wellbeing issue has been placed on an adapted timetable and is engaging in school led learning or activities, during the adapted openings).

Children and young people should normally engage in the weekly-recommended 25 hours for primary and 27.5 hours for secondary schools.

## 1.3 Why is Attendance Important and What is the Impact of Absence?

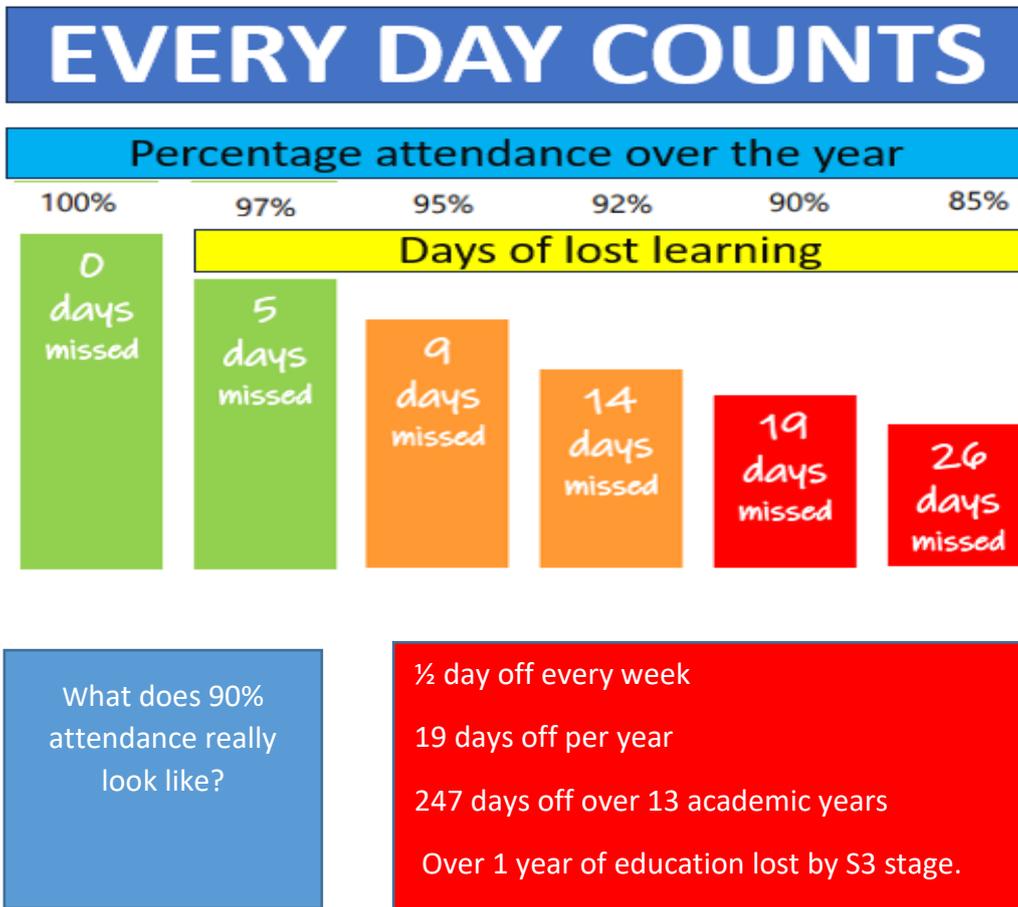
Attendance supports children and young people’s wellbeing and development and, progress in learning, and promotes attainment and achievement. Time spent in education and learning environments also helps keep learners safe, provides supportive pastoral care, and maximises opportunities for social and extra curricular activities beyond the classroom.

[Evidence](#) shows that the learners with the highest attendance gain the best academic results. The reason for this is simple, the higher the learner’s attendance, the more opportunities they have to learn, and gain success in learning.

Time in an educational setting, in the company of peers and caring adults, is about more than academic success. Time in education helps learners develop the 4 capacities and provides opportunities to learn positive skills, attributes and social behaviours for life, learning and work.

The converse of the above statements is also true; days missing from education result in fewer opportunities to learn and achieve. [Evidence](#) shows that absence

influences not only academic success but also social and emotional learning such as social awareness, self-efficacy, and self-management. Over the longer term further [evidence](#) shows that absence, regardless of the reason, reduces the likelihood of attending further and higher education, and increases the risk of unemployment.



### Useful Reading

- Why school attendance matters and strategies to improve it – [Meandor \(2017\)](#)<sup>1</sup>
- Why (education) schools are important? – [Jenkins \(2024\)](#)<sup>2</sup>
- Harmful impact of absence – [Klein & Sosu \(2024\)](#)<sup>3</sup>

### 1.4 Policy Context

Shetland Islands Council's Promoting and Managing School Attendance Policy adheres to the following National legislative and statutory policy and guidance

- Education (Scotland) Act 1980 [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1980 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#) sections 14, 30 and 35

- Children’s (Scotland) Act 1995 Section 1 (3) [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#);
- [Standards in Scotland’s](#) Schools Act 2000 Section 1;
- Supporting Children’s Learning Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 [ASL Act 2004](#);
- Getting it Right for Every Child [GIRFEC](#);
- Developing a positive whole-school ethos and culture- Relationships, learning and Behaviour (2018) [RLB](#);
- Included, Engaged and Involved part 1: promoting and managing school attendance 2019 [IEI \(2019\)](#);
- The Promise Scotland: National Care Review [The Promise](#);
- National Child Protection Guidance (2021) [Safer Shetland](#);
- Curriculum for Excellence [CfE](#);
- National Improvement Framework 2024 [NIF](#);
- Scottish Government Strategic Equity Funding Operational [Guidance](#);
- Developing the Young Workforce [DYW](#); and
- United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child. UN Incorporation Scotland Act 2024 [UNCRC](#).

This Policy sits alongside operational guidance to manage school attendance. It sits within a suite of guidance to compliment and promote a positive culture, ethos and attainment across Shetland Islands’ educational establishments.

- Shetland Islands Council Promoting and Managing School Attendance Operational Guidance (2024);
- [Managing Exclusions in Shetland Schools Procedures and Guidance](#) (2024);
- [Anti-bullying in Shetland Schools](#) Procedures and Guidance (2019);
- Shetland [Staged Intervention Guidance](#) (2021);
- [Parental Involvement and Engagement](#) Strategy;
- Nurturing Relationships and Promoting Positive Behaviour Guidance (in development); and
- Shetland Islands Council Trauma Informed and Responsive Change in Shetland- statement of Intent (2024).

**All educational establishments should have an Attendance Policy which outlines the importance of attendance and everyone’s role and responsibility in promoting attendance and minimising absence.**

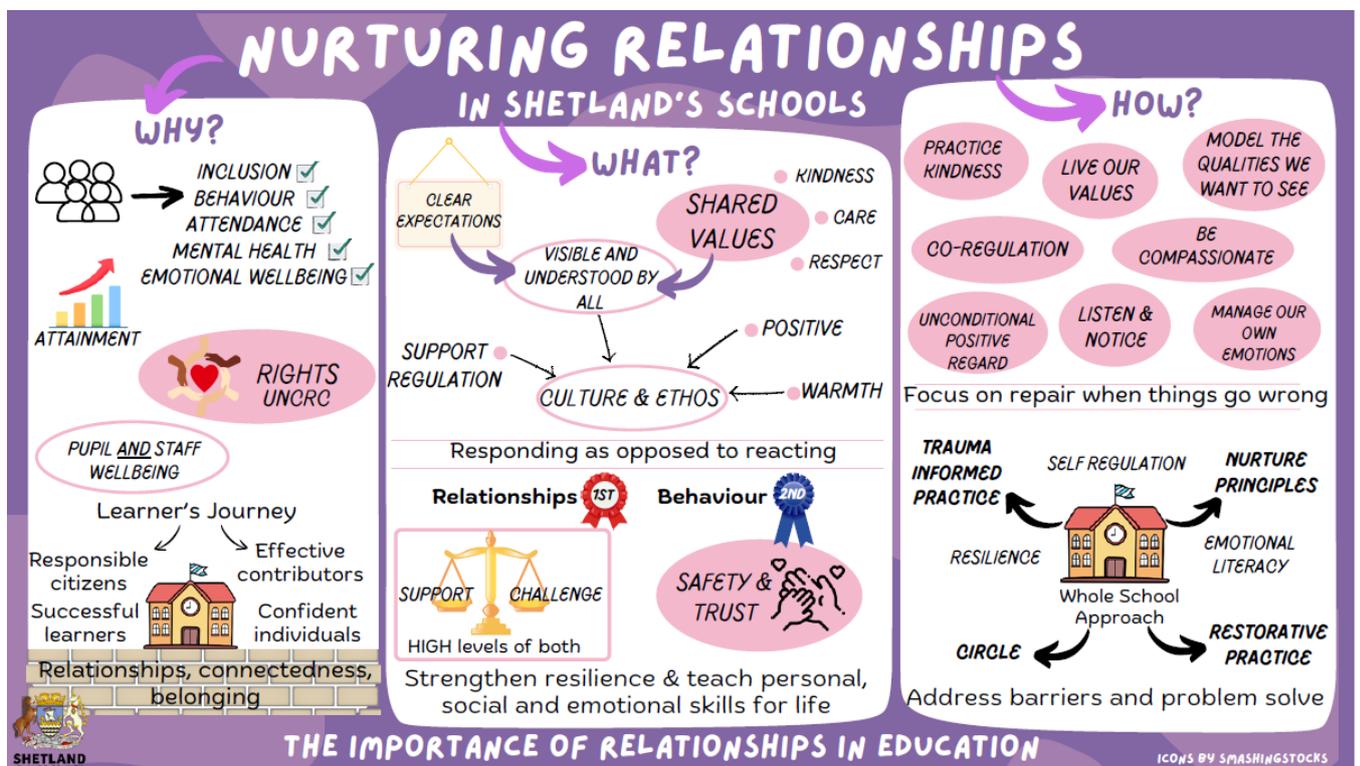
[Guidance for, and exemplification of, school attendance policies | Development of plans, policies and guidance | Improving attendance in Scotland | Resources | Education Scotland](#)

## 2. Promoting Good School Attendance- Responsibility of All

All staff have a role to play in promoting attendance and reducing absence from learning.

Key messages

- Safe, welcoming education establishments that prioritise positive relationships are crucial in promoting high attendance;
- Children and young people are more likely to attend school when they feel fully included and engaged in the life of the school;
- Schools must have clear and consistently applied measures for following up unexplained absence – this is a potential safeguarding concern;
- Schools have additional responsibility for care experienced children/young people;
- Schools should support parents and carers to recognise the vital importance of good attendance patterns and attitudes from the outset;
- Good attendance should be part of regular conversations with learners and parents to ensure we create healthy learners and healthy school communities in Shetland; and
- Schools should work with families and partners to remove any barriers to attendance for individual learners.



Nurturing Relationships and Promoting Positive Behaviour Guidance for Schools

Shetland Islands Council (in development)

## 2.1 Developing a Positive Whole School Ethos and Culture

### Safe, Welcoming Environments

A positive school culture and inclusive ethos are key in promoting good attendance for all. A culture where children and young people feel included, respected, safe and secure, where their achievements and contributions are valued and celebrated, is essential.

In order to create this environment for effective learning and teaching, there should be a shared understanding of wellbeing underpinned by Children's Rights and a focus on positive relationships across the whole learning community. Rights based approach, which takes account of the UNCRC and encourages children and young people's participation in their learning is also likely to ensure children feel included, engaged and involved, and therefore more likely to be motivated to attend.

### Nurture

A nurturing approach recognises that positive relationships are central to both learning and wellbeing, and that all staff have a role to play in establishing these positive, consistent and predictable relationships that are required to promote healthy social and emotional development. A nurturing approach has a key focus on the school environment and emphasises the balance between care and challenge, which incorporates attunement, warmth and connection alongside structure, high expectations and a focus on achievement and attainment. It is based on the understanding of six Nurturing Principles and helps to embed a trauma-informed approach, helping support children and young people's attendance and engagement.



Education Scotland's [Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach](#) provides a key framework to support schools to embed whole school nurture.

### Restorative Approaches

Schools may use restorative approaches as part of a planned response to relationship and/or discipline difficulties including dealing with bullying. This is a more effective response than traditional punitive approaches. Restorative approaches can change the emotional atmosphere in a school and lead to more positive relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff.

All staff have a duty of care in respect to pupils' health, wellbeing and welfare. Staff knowledge and assessment of a child or young person and any needs

should be used to plan to prevent the type of situation which may cause the child or young person severe stress or frustration, which may impact on attendance.

### **Inclusive Practice**

Developing an inclusive ethos and meeting the needs of learners will help to promote good school attendance. The four key pillars of inclusive practice are:



Scottish Government, 2019

These are often interlinked. For young people to participate, achieve and be supported effectively, it is first necessary to consider how they can be present in the learning environment.

There are a number of resources, which can support establishments to consider how they are supporting the four pillars of inclusion. For example, the CIRCLE Framework: Child Inclusion Research into Curriculum, Learning and Education. CIRCLE aims to promote effective inclusive practice in classrooms. The resource begins from the viewpoint that teachers are the experts. Additional support needs are considered to be any factor (physical, sensory, psychological, emotional, economic or cultural) that prevents the learner participating fully, being accepted and achieving in school.

The CIRCLE Framework - Primary

[CIRCLE Primary](#)

The CIRCLE Framework - Secondary

[CIRCLE Secondary](#)

## **2.2 Family Engagement**

Positive, trusting and non-judgemental relationships with parents are key to ensuring good attendance. It is widely documented that parental engagement leads to better educational outcomes.

Parents are key partners in their child's education, and it is important that they are aware of their responsibilities and encouraged and supported to enable their

child to attend school. Parents have a legal responsibility *to provide efficient and suitable education to their child until he or she reaches school leaving age, which they may meet by ensuring that their child attends school regularly* (section 30 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980).

Parents should be given clear information by the school, updated on a regular basis, regarding their responsibility to inform the school if their child will be absent, and to provide current emergency contact information.

Schools should involve the learner and the family when identifying the 'root cause' of any barriers to attendance. In discussing attendance with parents it is important to maintain a practical focus that recognises the challenges that can be part of family life, such as balancing work commitments; financial challenges or children being based in more than one household. Schools should work with families to ensure that any barriers causing lateness and absence are supported and overcome as early as possible.

Schools should be sensitive in their methods of communication with families. Any communication should take into account the differing needs parents may have, such as those arising from a disability, or communication and language barriers

Further information on parental engagement can also be found in [Engaging Parents and Families – a toolkit for practitioners](#), published by Education Scotland. Local Authority Strategy can be found here: [Parental Involvement and Engagement](#)

### **2.3 School Policy, Procedures and Quality Assurance**

**All schools should have in place policies that promote good attendance and outline procedures to support the recording and management of attendance.**

Schools' policies should be developed in consultation with all stakeholders such as parents/carers, staff, and supporting professional and community partners.

[Improving attendance in Scotland | Resources | Education Scotland](#)

Schools should have clear procedures for responding to absence with additional focus on vulnerable children and young people. This should include identified staff and systems to support the tracking and monitoring of attendance. Schools should make good use of attendance and absence data to have a clear understanding of any emerging concerns. Data is gathered centrally for quality assurance purposes.

Attendance should be promoted and well profiled in schools. Information on attendance and absence should be readily available for families via school websites, handbooks and other established communication approaches. Parents should be kept up to date with their child's levels of attendance through the school's tracking and monitoring system.

Routine and regular analysis of attendance and exclusion data at school level will provide schools with trend information ensuring an understanding of any growing absence patterns. Setting a school threshold and scrutinising data to identify low attenders will ensure early intervention steps are taken to identify barriers and agree appropriate supports.

Schools may wish to use reflective questions in order to inform school self-evaluation and improvement planning.

## **2.4 Pastoral Care – Designated Senior Staff**

All staff have a role to play in promoting good attendance and helping to reduce absence from school.

Staff with a pastoral care responsibility are in a unique position to:

- Develop positive relationships with pupils and parents to prevent difficulties arising and to ensure difficulties are discussed and resolved when they do take place.
- Respond quickly to absence, to ensure children and young people are safe and well.
- Follow up on absence, to enable the school and its partners to make an effective response.
- Support re-engagement with learning on return from absence.
- Be aware of early signs or concerns which may cause absence, to allow support to be arranged.
- Ensure non-attendance does not become a pattern or habit following a specific issue.
- Ensure robust monitoring and tracking of attendance, in order that issues are addressed, responding to underlying reasons for absence e.g. mental health difficulties or being a young carer. Other school staff and agencies may also contribute to this assessment and identify supports.

## **2.5 Staged Intervention to respond to and address low attendance**

Many issues relating to absence in school can be dealt with quickly and promptly by school supports and by ensuring that there are positive relationships in place to support children and young people and their families. If absence becomes a more significant cause for concern, schools should use staged intervention processes to support improvements in attendance.

Staged intervention should be used to assess barriers to attendance and identify supports. If appropriate, support would be offered through the GIRFEC Child's Planning framework. [GIRFEC – Shetland Islands Council](#).

**Key principles** of staged intervention in relation to attendance include:

### **Early intervention**

Attendance concerns are noted and monitored at the earliest stage with advice and support being provided to learners and their families to prevent low attendance becoming chronic.

### **Using Trauma Informed Principles**

Trauma informed practice recognises the prevalence of trauma, including childhood trauma and takes account of its impact on emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. School staff should be aware of that childhood adversity and generational trauma can be prevalent in families. In building relationships with learners and families, staff should use the principles of safety, trust, collaboration and empowerment and choice.

### **Collaborative Working**

Learner, parent and partner participation ensures views are considered in a meaningful way with regard to addressing barriers to attendance and finding effective solutions. Creating a plan which clearly outlines the actions that require to be in place to support any wellbeing or additional support needs

### **Approaches are supportive rather than punitive**

Learner re-engagement and planning to catch up on lost learning is always the priority.

### **Addressing barriers to attendance**

Schools should seek to build a full understanding of the complex reasons impacting a child or young person's attendance at school. Comprehensive assessment should be undertaken, involving the learner, family and relevant partners. An understanding of the barriers to attendance; the functions of non-attendance, and the push and pull factors between home and school, will guide goals and support within planning.

Effective assessment and planning address barriers to learning that might be impacting on attendance. Exploring creative solutions (temporary or longer term) may be required, such as, adjusting start or finishing times, soft starts, adaptations to the learning, changing the physical, social, or learning environment, or adaptations to the curriculum (personalised or flexible programmes)

### **Care experienced children**

The designated member of staff for care experienced children and young people in the school should ensure that support is in place as early as possible, to support those pupils with transition, with an awareness of its impact on attendance.

Children on the Child Protection register should have attendance monitored, and if appropriate, support offered through the GIRFEC Child's Planning process.

[GIRFEC – Shetland Islands Council](#)

School attendance issues cannot easily be separated from the relationships, behaviours and wellbeing of the pupils and wider school community and it is important that schools view the promotion of attendance in this context.

## **2.6 Flexibility within Curriculum for Excellence**

CfE promotes flexibility in the curriculum and allows schools to personalise learner journeys to meet the needs of all children and young people. When an alternative to traditional attendance at school is requested, it should be considered in relation to the child or young person's wellbeing needs and supported via GIRFEC Child's Planning framework.

Schools can also support children and young people's attendance through offering a range of wider achievement programmes and access to foundation apprenticeships.

Developing the Young Workforce; Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy builds on the foundations already in place through CfE and encourages schools to offer a flexible programme of skills development and vocational experiences to meet individual needs. Schools may develop programmes in partnership with other agencies such as, Shetland College and local businesses to ensure young people are fully engaged.

There are DYW School Coordinators in all junior highs and high schools, to help young people in Shetland explore options available to them, and prepare for the world of work both in Shetland and beyond. DYW also work with specialist partners to increase work-based learning and employer engagement opportunities for those pupils that would benefit the most.

You can find out more about DYW in Shetland here:

<https://www.dywshetland.co.uk/>

## **2.7 Attendance Beyond Statutory School Leaving Age**

School leaving arrangements are defined in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. There are two dates: 31 May and the first day of the Christmas holiday period (or 21 December, if earlier) are the statutory summer and winter leaving dates in each year.

Summer Leaving Dates:

- A pupil whose sixteenth birthday is on or after 1 March but before 31 May can leave school on 31 May.
- A pupil whose sixteenth birthday is on or after 31 May but before 1 October can leave on 31 May.

Winter Leaving Dates:

- A pupil whose sixteenth birthday is on or after 1 October but before the first day of the Christmas holiday period can leave school on the first day of the Christmas holidays (or 21 December if earlier)
- A pupil whose sixteenth birthday falls after the winter leaving date but before 1 March can leave school on the first day of the Christmas holidays (or 21 December if earlier)

It is important that schools support young people to develop a range of skills that will prepare them for the world of work, including regular attendance at school. Young people who choose to stay on at school beyond school leaving age, and their parents, should be strongly encouraged to consider their continued commitment to good attendance. Some schools develop a learning agreement outlining these expectations. There should also be ongoing support and encouragement for young people to ensure their sustained commitment and engagement.

For young people in the senior phase of their secondary education, there should be consideration of a balance between continued achievement and attainment and the desire for increased independence.

## **2.8 Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)**

### [EMA, Bursaries and Financial Support – Shetland Islands Council](#)

The EMA is a weekly payment, paid directly to children or young people who stay on at school, designed to help overcome financial barriers which otherwise may prevent them from staying on.

Attendance is monitored to ensure proper entitlement to the EMA. Ensuring entitled young people receive EMA may provide an incentive for high attendance.