

School Attendance & Exclusion Sweeps



The Law

Section 16 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 gives Police Officers and Police Community Support Officers the authority to stop young people if they have reasonable cause to believe that person is of compulsory school age and is absent from a school without lawful authority.

They are also empowered to return pupils to school or another “safe” place if necessary.

In common with Police Authorities nationally, Avon and Somerset Police discharge this responsibility in conjunction with Somerset County Council’s Education Attendance Service. School Attendance and Exclusion Sweeps are carried out across the County both on foot and in a Police vehicle.

What can you and /or your child expect to happen?

A Police Officer or PCSO in uniform accompanied by an Education Attendance Officer (EAO) will stop all young people who appear to be of school age whether they are accompanied by an adult or not.

Why stop children accompanied by an adult?

Until the Police Officer and EAO speak with the child and adult, they cannot be aware of the reason for the child’s absence and although there may be genuine reasons for the child being out of school, this could be a case of condoned absence or the adult may not be the child’s parent or carer.

What form will the questioning take?

Once stopped a “stop” form will need to be completed by the EAO.

The details requested are:

- Child’s name;
- Child’s date of birth;
- Child’s address and telephone number;
- Name of person accompanying (if child is accompanied);
- Name of parent/carer(s);
- School attended (if the child is a registered pupil);
- Reason why child is out of school;
- Child’s ethnicity.

The EAO will also record:

- Time when the child was stopped;
- Location where the child was stopped;
- Details of the Police Officer and EAO carrying out the stop.

Somerset County Council asks all children and adults to support School Attendance sweep initiative by giving the details required.

What will happen next?

- The parent or child will be given a copy of this School Attendance Sweep document to explain the reason why he/she has been stopped;
- If the pupil is out of school without good reason, they will be returned to the school premises and handed over to a member of the school staff;
- If the child is considered to be “at risk”, they may be accompanied to their home address or to a safe place. Contact will then be made with the child’s parent or carer;
- Within the next few days, the parents/ carers will receive a letter and a copy of the School Attendance Sweep “Stop” Form from Somerset County Council. This letter will go to all parents/ carers regardless of whether the absence is considered to be authorised or not;
- a copy of the School Attendance Sweep “Stop” Form will be held by Avon and Somerset Police and a copy sent to your child’s school.

Should I be concerned about the legal implications?

As a parent you are committing an offence if you fail to make sure that your child attends school regularly, even if they are missing school without your knowledge. Further unauthorised absence (such as truancy) may lead to Somerset County Council issuing you with a Penalty Notice or even taking legal action.

What if my child is not a registered pupil at a school?

Somerset County Council recognises that some children are educated otherwise than at a school.

If you are educating your child at home, please advise your child of the existence of the sweeps so they are not concerned if they are stopped. It is also helpful if you register with the local authority that you are Electively Home Educating your child.

If you have not been able to secure a school place for your child, for instance if you are new to Somerset, the EAO will pass the child’s details to the Admissions team in order to assist you.