



# Protecting vulnerable children with quality school attendance data

Case study

 Capita

## We're helping Staffordshire County Council to use data to track when vulnerable children are absent from school and quickly identify those who may need extra help or support.

Staffordshire County Council is responsible for nearly 1,000 children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and / or who are Looked After Children (LAC). These children attend 242 schools run by 78 different local authorities (LAs), including some in Scotland and Wales.

Local authorities have a moral, and sometimes legal, obligation to track whether these children are attending school and identify any cause for concern. This information helps to ensure that their education meets their specific needs and can even protect them from harm.

It is difficult to collect attendance data from schools that don't automatically or regularly report data to the LA, or which lie outside the LA's borders. This makes it very difficult to work out which children or schools might need help or support, as Staffordshire found in 2019 and 2020.

In the past, teams at the council produced reports to show which LACs were registered at which schools, and then sent a weekly spreadsheet to each school. Staff at each school then had to manually type data into the spreadsheets and return them to the council.



This process was very time consuming, with LAs needing to chase up completed attendance files, which trickled in at different times. The data from these files was manually imported to Capita One Education – a data management software used to collect and manage education-related information. With limited resources and no clear view of which schools had sent in attendance files, staff were only able to follow up on some children.

This cycle was inefficient and focused only on Looked After Children. There was no resource left to process data relating to SEND children. So, Staffordshire County Council came to us to solve the problem. We worked with Staffordshire during May 2020 to understand the challenges, and then spent 12 weeks developing the Attendance Collection Tool (ACT). ACT is a cloud-based website that participating schools can use to record students' attendance. Data that is entered is automatically saved in real-time into the Capita One system.

ACT automatically identifies which children are LAC or SEND, and which schools they are registered at. This information is gathered into a dashboard that shows the LA real-time weekly attendance data at each school. Staff can easily see which schools haven't reported data, or if a child hasn't attended school, allowing missing data to be followed up, and any concerns to be addressed quickly.



“ It’s making such a big difference! We worked with 200+ schools across our county, and we’ve never been able to collect the information in such a timely manner. It used to take us 10 minutes to process each file [we received for each school], now it’s instant and it’s amazing!

“We’ve also been able to identify issues with vulnerable children [by identifying] full-time exclusions that we didn’t know about or wouldn’t have known about before, and also for children out of county who may have moved school that we’ve not been informed about. We’re able to pick up on these much sooner. So, thank you!”

**Jenny Holdcroft – Staffordshire County Council**

“ I did some analysis for Ofsted and one school had 30 different LAs asking for its children’s attendance data. Now the school staff just fill in ACT and LAs can keep track of which children should be reported to Staffordshire – that’s not the case for children being reported to other LAs who aren’t using ACT.”

**Mandi Edwards – Staffordshire County Council**

“ Before ACT, Staffordshire had two people working full-time on collecting LAC attendance and we never got a full week of data in. Now all that time is saved [and we have all the data]. We didn’t have the resource before to even try to collect for all SEND children, [but with ACT these are all being reported to us as well]!”

**Mandi Edwards – Staffordshire County Council**

Schools can also view their own dashboard showing weekly missing attendance marks or non-attendance reasons, so they can see which children need more attention. It used to be difficult to see where data was missing, but the information is now provided to LAs regularly, reliably, cost-effectively and efficiently. This enables the LA to identify specific groups of children who aren’t attending school, and proactively offer the support they need.

Staffordshire County Council is also using the attendance data to review contracts and monitor suitable schools for education, health and care plan placements for children with SEND.

The education of SEND children is less likely to deliver improved outcomes if they aren’t attending and engaged. If a child’s attendance at a particular school drops below 85%, they may be offered additional support, including a transfer to a school that meets their needs more closely.

ACT went live in September 2020 and we’re working closely with customers to develop the product even further through collaboration and feedback.

We’re constantly planning improvements and making changes to provide more options to users for multi-factor authentication, and to reduce the effort schools need to put into reporting their attendance data.



To find out how we can help you to monitor vulnerable children’s school attendance, please call our dedicated team on 0161 274 814.