



Warwickshire County Council Attendance, CME & EHE Service
Guidance for schools:
Writing a Pupil Attendance & Punctuality Policy
Effective from September 2024

1. Department for Education

From August 19th 2024, the guidance "[Working together to improve school attendance](#)" becomes statutory. The guidance is for schools, trust, governing bodies, and local authorities to provide a relational and supportive approach, maintain high levels of school attendance and improve access to and consistency of support.

The Department of Education has not provided schools or Local Authorities with a template attendance policy, instead advising they want all schools to have a policy that reflects their ethos and procedures. Below is a framework that you could base your policy on. You should ensure that your policy and local processes, are compliant with '[Working together to improve school attendance](#)'.

To do this, the guidance focusses on managing attendance by:

- **Preventing** patterns of absence from developing by promoting good attendance.
- **Intervening early** using data to spot patterns of absence before they become persistent and working with families to remove the barriers to attendance.
- **Targeting support for persistent and severe absentees** with all local partners working together to re-engage pupils.

2. Rationale

Schools must have a clear, written, and accessible attendance policy detailing their expectations, procedures and responsibilities for Parents, Pupils, Staff and Leaders. The policy should be a manual for all, which is implemented fairly and consistently with a whole school approach.

Consideration should be given to:

- Attendance, like safeguarding, is everyone's business.
- There should be a support focus to promote good attendance.
- Children and parents and carers equally must feel safe, welcome, and supported.
- Children should be expected to attend school regularly, punctually, and prepared for the day. However, some pupils find it harder to attend than their peers and may require reasonable adjustments.
- Schools have a vital role in improving attendance but not all factors influencing attendance are in their control. Because of this, there cannot be an arbitrary attendance percentage that all schools need to reach. Focus on supporting individual pupils is paramount.
- The foundation of securing good attendance is that school is a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all pupils want to be and are keen and ready to learn.
- Whole school policy that works for all:
 - Should be a manual for all – accessible, usable, and visual.
 - Published/accessible on school website (paper copies should be available on request).
- Representative of school culture and systems, it must be meaningful to the school.
- Consistent implementation.

- Empower parents and carers; it is good practice to encourage, pupils, parents, and carers in the development of policies.
- Be clear – do not be tempted to use acronyms and abbreviations.
- Shared with all new starters and at the beginning of each school year.
- Review regularly and in line changes locally and at national level.

Several sections of the attendance policy outline potential legal processes, therefore specific wording has been provided. This is in line with the DfE guidance and the Education Act 1996; however, it is down to the individual school if they chose to utilise this.

3. Guidance for schools when writing their own attendance policy

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a. Introduction & Aims

The introduction and aims section of a school policy is where a school can outline their whole ethos including support around attendance. It is important to ensure that the policy remains up to date and in line with other key policies for the school. We suggest consideration of the following:

- Link improving attendance and wider school culture, include the importance of working in partnership with families to identify and find supportive routes to improving attendance.
- Be clear how attendance, like safeguarding, is the responsibility of everyone. From the Chair of Governors, and members of the governing board, head teacher or principal, teachers, heads of years, support/pastoral staff as well as anyone who directly works with the children on roll at your school, everyone should view attendance at school as a protective factor for each child.
- Why attendance is important, focus on outcomes and opportunities, and not arbitrary attendance percentages.
- Demonstrate intent, implementation and impact, ensure all staff working directly with, or supporting improved attendance understand their role and has the right level of training to undertake the key requirements integral to that role.

- Include examples how your school will raise and maintain levels of attendance whilst continuing to offer support to the most vulnerable children.
- Think about the aim of the policy and include key messages from 'Working together to improve school attendance' 2024.

Schools may find it beneficial to include a list of key people and their contact details with whom parents/carers can communicate with, to highlight/outline possible emerging barriers before attendance becomes a concern at the start of the policy. Schools are required to include the following:

- Name and contact details of the Senior Lead who is the 'Senior Attendance Champion' responsible for the strategic approach to attendance in school.
- A dedicated absence line number (ideally not just an answerphone – someone who can have an initial conversation with the parent/carer).

b. Support

In this section schools should outline their strategy for reducing persistent and severe absence outlining how access to wider support services 'The right support at the right time' offers of Early Help pathway to change will be provided.

Be clear that where barriers exist, the school will need to meet with parent/carers, work together to get the correct support, listen to the child and family, make reasonable adjustments, review plans together, identify and plan next steps. Schools should consider referencing the following:

Universal Support

- Graduated Response - Assess, Plan, Do, Review, all plans of intervention at each stage including offers of support either formal or informal
- Support pupils' parents and carers by working together to address any in-school barriers to attendance.
- Where barriers are outside of the school's control, discuss and offer support to parents, carers and pupils also signposting to the right voluntary support. Where referrals are required for voluntary support, gain parent, carer and child voice prior to referral to services and organisations.
- Meeting with pupils their parents or carers who are at risk of persistent or severe absence at the earliest opportunity, should be a minimum expectation. This will support greater understanding of the barriers to being in school and agreeing actions or interventions to address them.
- Who will lead in each phase of support.
- What happens at each stage in terms of support.
- What happens if improvements are made.
- What might initiate the next phase.
- Describe the Impact on safeguarding.

Additional Support

In this section we suggest schools should consider/include the following:

- Some students find it harder than others to attend school and will need targeted or specialist support. Schools should work with students/pupils and parents or carers to provide support to remove barriers to attendance by building stronger relationships and putting the right support in place at the right time.'
- The 'EBSA Pathway' seeks to respond to the growing number of children and young people who experience emotional challenges in attending school, an increase which has been seen both in Warwickshire and nationally. Should you require any additional support Please contact ebbsa@warwickshire.gov.uk

- Ofsted 2022 – “Listen, understand, empathise, support – but do not tolerate”. Attendance should be included as an agenda item for every meeting and form part of daily conversations. Absence from school should be challenged and understood.
- The right people, expertise, and relationships – Staff should understand their role/external partners/multi-agency approach e.g., early help — reference any specific external partners working collaboratively with your school.
- How will staff engage with children and their families, how will staff be expected to explore attendance issues – listen and understand – 2-way dialogue, will your staff be expected to conduct home visits etc.
- Individual plans – monitor impact and outcomes – what will happen when improvements are made. What will happen if they are not.
- How access to wider support services will be provided to remove the barriers to attendance.
- Data – regularly share data, at all levels – ensure your staff will be sufficiently trained to enable them to look for trends and patterns.

c. Roles & responsibilities

Everyone has a contribution to making a positive difference and contributing to a whole school strategy and it is important that this is outlined in this section. Schools should consider/include the following:

- Information and contact details of the school staff who pupils and parents/carers should contact about attendance on a day-to-day basis (such as a form tutor, head of year, pastoral lead or attendance officer, trusted adult etc).
- Who does what:
 - ‘Name’ relevant individuals and their contact details.
 - Identify ‘trusted adults’ who pupils can talk to, about why they are absent and any barriers they may be facing.
- Culture & systems – consistent, preventative, and responsive and supportive.
- The name and contact details of the senior leader responsible for the strategic approaches to attendance in school.
- Role of the Governing body, named governor for attendance.
- Knowing where children are during school hours is an extremely important aspect of safeguarding. Absence can be an indicator of abuse and neglect and may also raise concerns about other safeguarding issues, including extra familial harms.

d. Attendance and punctuality expectations of pupils and parents

In this section schools should be clear and concise about the expectations of pupils and parents/carers in relation to attendance. We suggest schools consider the following:

- What are the school’s attendance and punctuality expectations of pupils and parents/carers
- When does the school day start and finish.
 - What is the start of the morning session.
 - What is the start of the afternoon session.
- Before & after school provisions – What are they.
- What are the school’s registration times – AM & PM.
- What are the schools register closing times - AM & PM.
- Register coding when pupils are late/absent.
- SEND pupil's alternative provision.
- When and how should a parent/carer inform the school, their child will be late/absent.
 - Who should they inform.
 - Provide contact details.

e. **Daily Routines**

The DfE 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' 2024 attendance guidance on day-to-day processes:

Alongside accurate recording of attendance and absence, effective schools have robust day to day processes to track and follow up absence and poor punctuality which are rigorously applied across the school. All schools are expected to develop processes that meet the needs of their pupils and contexts.

In this section of the policy schools should therefore outline their first day absence procedures, ensuring they are clear on how they want parents/carers to notify them of an absence, making links to safeguarding where necessary. We recommend schools consider/include the following:

- The school's day to day absence process for managing attendance – meet & greet, register checks, and follow ups on unexplained absences, first day calling and home visits, engaging external agencies.
- Escalation policy, who will do what, when where and how?
- How the school will track the attendance of children.
- What will happen if a child is absent and there has been no contact from the parent/carer.
- How the school is promoting, incentivising and rewarding good attendance – this must be realistic. Promotion, and celebration even with small improvements in attendance can make a significant impact on individual children. Consider thank you calls to parent/carer as a key part of improvements.

f. **Persistent Absence & Severe Absence**

In this section schools should have clear definitions of persistent and severe absence. Where possible schools should move away from the use of arbitrary attendance percentages and consider representing this as number of days lost alongside percentages. Schools should consider/include the following:

- A pupil is defined by the Government as a '**persistent absentee**' when they miss 10% of their possible attendance (equivalent to 1 day or more a fortnight across a full school year) and as a '**severe absentee**' when they miss 50% of their possible attendance or more schooling throughout the school year for any reason; this can be authorised or unauthorised absence.
- Where absence escalates and pupils, schools and local authorities are expected to work together to put additional targeted support in place to remove any barriers to attendance and reengage these pupils. In doing so, schools should sensitively consider some of the reasons for absence and understand the importance of school as a place of safety and support for children who might be facing difficulties, rather than reaching immediately for punitive approaches.
- Particular focus should be given by all partners to pupils who are absent from school more than they are present (those missing 50% or more of school). These severely absent pupils may find it more difficult to be in school or face bigger barriers to their regular attendance and as such are likely to need more intensive support across a range of partners. A concerted effort is therefore needed across all relevant services to prioritise them. All partners should work together to make this group the top priority for support – this may include specific support with attendance or a whole family plan, but it may also include consideration for an education, health and care plan or an alternative form of educational provision where necessary to overcome the barriers to being in school.

g. **Escalation of procedures**

It is important that the school considers the DfE guidance “Working together to improve school attendance” 2024, when reviewing their escalation of procedures. In this section we recommend schools include the following:

- Clarify the sequence of actions - who, what, how & when.
- Specific timings, specific people, what will happen, what support will be given.
- Who is taking charge of each stage. Assess, Plan, Do, Review
- Who is looking at the data.
- Who is coordinating the support, intervention, and celebrations at each stage.
- Consider using ‘policy on a page’ – including the number of days lost along with percentages and RAG system – this can be referred to in meetings and be easily understood by all.
- What will happen if attendance gets worse/better.

h. Formalising Support

In this section we suggest schools should consider/include the following:

- When support will be formalised in conjunction with the local authority
- Outline referral processes – who does what?
- Partners and procedures, what should parents/carers expect will happen next? Rather than considering a referral, review and consider if parents/carers are actively engaging in trying to improve attendance?

The Warwickshire Attendance Service: Formalising support & Legal Interventions

- School/Academy is responsible for liaising closely with the Local Authority’s Warwickshire Attendance Service and will follow their standard approaches in managing attendance issues.
- Where all voluntary support options have not been successful, or have not engaged with, the law protects pupils’ right to an education and provides a range of legal interventions to formalise attendance improvement efforts, and where all other avenues have been exhausted, enforce it through prosecuting parents.
- Warwickshire Attendance Service can use the following legal interventions/formalised support; Attendance Contracts, Notice to Improve, issue of Penalty Notices, Education Supervision Orders, Attendance Prosecution, consideration of application of Parenting Orders.
- Warwickshire Attendance Service will decide which intervention will be most appropriate, however only after considering the individual circumstances of a family.
- The above voluntary support options are not appropriate for an unauthorised Leave of Absence in term time.
- Prosecutions for non-school attendance must be conducted in line with the [Warwickshire County Council Non-school attendance and Penalty Notice code of conduct](#) and the Code for Crown Prosecutors and must pass the evidential and public interest tests.

i. Leave of absence

The DfE ‘Working Together to Improve School Attendance’ 2024 attendance guidance states:

“Generally, the DfE does not consider the need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance “

Non-referring schools

The legislation is silent on what is an exception circumstances advising all leave of absence (holiday) requests must be considered on a case-by-case basis. It is therefore advised schools do not list in a policy because a leave of absence will but unauthorised/authorised. If your school would like to

include a more formal section on Leave of Absence, please contact wasstatutoryreferral@warwickshire.gov.uk for the appropriate extract.

Referring schools

If a school refers to the Warwickshire Attendance Service for Holiday – Leave of Absence Penalty Notices, please insert the extract that has been provided by the LA with no adaptations. You will have already been provided with this documentation in your referring pack however requests for updates can be sent to wasstatutoryreferral@warwickshire.gov.uk.

j. Non-compulsory age pupils

Although there is no legal requirement for a pupil to attend nursery, it is widely acknowledged establishing routines including good attendance in early years reaps benefits when children become of compulsory age. At the other end of the spectrum for pupils attending 6th form, it is important to establishing routines in engaging with independent learning and semi structured days as this will empower them in their future be it further education, apprenticeship, university or workplace.

The DfE have now advised in the Working together to improve school attendance that:

On each occasion the register is taken the appropriate national attendance and absence code must be entered for every pupil (of both compulsory and non-compulsory school age) whose name is listed in the admission register at the time (except for a pupil who is a boarder).

The codes enable schools to record and monitor attendance and absence in a consistent way and are used to collect statistics. The data helps schools, local authorities, and the government gain a greater understanding of the delivery of education and the level of, and reason for, absence.

It is therefore advised schools look to include the schools' expectations around attendance for these cohort of pupils, advising coding will be in line with the DfE guidance and what the schools' expectations are around notification of absence etc.

k. Legal responsibilities - *specific wording provided for schools to utilise*

Legal Framework

The Education Act 1996 requires parents/carers or guardians to ensure their children receive efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude; to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. A child is of compulsory school age at the beginning of the term following their 5th birthday.

Under the Education Act 1996, the Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that parents secure education for children of compulsory school age and where necessary, use legal enforcement.

Parents/carers and guardians have a legal responsibility to ensure their children receive efficient, full-time education by regular attendance at school or otherwise under section 7 of the Education Act 1996.

Section 576 Education Act 1996 defines 'parent' as:

- Any natural parent, whether married or not;
- Any parent who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility as defined in the Children Act (1989) for a child or young person;

- Any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person.

If a child of compulsory school age fails to regularly attend the school which he/she is registered at, then the parent/guardian is guilty of an offence under section 444 of the Education Act 1996. Schools must take the attendance register at the beginning of each morning session and once during each afternoon session. On each occasion they must record whether every pupil is:

- present;
- absent;
- attending an approved educational activity; or
- unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

The school will record absences in line with the DfE Attendance coding guidance.

I. Types of Absence - specific wording provided for schools to utilise

Only the Head Teacher or designated member of staff have the authority to **authorise** or **unauthorise** absences.

There are two types of absence:

Authorised absences are morning or afternoon sessions away from school for an acceptable reason, such as illness, medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies, or other unavoidable causes.

Where possible we ask that medical appointments be made outside of school time, during school holidays or at a time to minimise absence from school. However, we understand some medical appointments cannot be changed, please liaise with **[Insert name]** if this is the case.

Unauthorised absences are when a pupil is absent without prior authorisation from the school and/or when no justifiable reason for absence is provided by the parent/carer or guardian (including when parents have failed to provide a reason despite attempts to establish a reason by the school).

This type of absence could lead to the school referring to the Local Authority and/or increasing the level of support offered to improve attendance.

m. Disseminating and implementing policy

Once a policy has been approved and ratified, we encourage schools consider and implement the following:

- Ensure all documentation and other policies are consistent in their message.
- Communication – sharing updates via newsletters, school website etc.
- Visual & accessible – published on school website and hard copy available in school.
- Staff training & support, identify needs and action.
- Monitoring – does the content of the policy meet requirements, what would be better if, what difference has it made.
- Sharing data and findings – How will you do this, when and where.

n. Child Missing Education

In response to the guidance in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024) leaders have ensured that:

- Staff understand what to do when children do not attend regularly.
- Appropriate policies, procedures and responses for students who go missing from education (especially on repeat occasions) are in place.
- Staff know that travelling to conflict zones could be an indicator of FGM and forced marriage.
- Procedures are in place to ensure that the local authority is always informed if pupils':
 - leave the school to be home educated
 - move away from the school location
 - remain medically unfit beyond compulsory school age
 - are in custody for four months or more (and will not return to school afterwards); or are permanently excluded
- Schools will ensure that students who are expected to attend the school but fail to take up the place will be referred to the local authority.
- When a student leaves, schools will record the name of the student's new school and their expected start date.

o. Deletions from the register

The school will only delete a pupil from their register in accordance with The School Attendance (Pupil registration) (England) Regulations 2024 the local Authority will be notified of this removal.

Our school will inform Children's Service when a child with safeguarding concerns is due to be removed from the school register.

p. Data & Monitoring

In this section schools should outline the school's strategy for using data to target attendance improvement efforts to the pupils or pupil cohorts who need it most and explain how to school plans to reduce persistent and severe absence. We recommend schools consider/include the following:

- How will the school use attendance data
- How the school will ensure data is shared at every opportunity, ie: parents' evenings, induction days etc
- The school's strategy for reducing persistently absent (PA) & severely absent (SA)
- The school's strategy for using data to target attendance support and improvement
- How will the school ensure their work is effective? Meet with families, review plans, measure the impact.
- How will data be analysed? Daily, weekly, half-termly, termly, and annually analysis including who this data will be shared with e.g. Governors, Head teacher, staff.
- Referral to wider support services
- When support will be formalised