

DAG Busy Governance Guide to Attendance

Attendance is everyone's business. Good attendance begins with school being somewhere pupils want to be with pupils keen and ready to learn. Good attendance is a learned behaviour and effective schools recognise the need to develop good patterns of attendance from the outset.

1.The Law: Where parents decide to register their child at a school, they have a legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school. However, after COVID-19 attendance levels dropped markedly.

2.The Policy: The attendance policy is a statutory policy and should be easily accessible to leaders, staff, pupils, and parents and be published on the school's website. Parents should be sent it with any initial information when pupils join the school and reminded of it at the beginning of each school year and when it is updated. All attendance policies will now need to meet the requirements of [Working together to improve attendance](#) as it applied from August 2024. As the barriers to attendance evolve quickly, the policy should be reviewed and updated as necessary. In doing so, schools should seek the views of pupils and parents. Some trusts and federations may wish to have one attendance policy which covers all their schools. Whilst this can be useful in sharing effective practice, the attendance policy should be tailored to the needs of each individual school and the barriers to attendance pupils experience as identified through analysis of school level attendance data.

3. Absence: This is when a pupil misses or is absent from at least 1 possible school session. All absences are counted in sessions where 1 session is equivalent to a half-a-day. There are different types of absence:

- **Authorised Absence:** When a pupil misses (or is absent from) at least 1 possible school session with the permission of a teacher or other authorised school representative.
- **Overall absence:** The total number of all authorised and unauthorised absences from possible school sessions for all pupils. Expressed as a percentage of the total number of possible school sessions for all pupils.
- **Persistent absence:** When a pupil misses (or is absent from) 10% or more school sessions.
- **Severe Absence:** When a pupils is absent from school more than they are present (those missing 50% or more of school).
- **Unauthorised absence:** When a pupil misses at least 1 possible school session without the permission of a teacher or other authorised school representative. Includes all unexplained or unjustified absences and late arrivals.

4. The Register: Schools must take the attendance register at the start of each morning session of each school day and once during each afternoon session. On each occasion they must record whether each registered pupil is physically present in school or, if not, the reason they are not in school by using the appropriate national attendance and absence codes.

Granting Leave of Absence: All schools can grant a leave of absence when a pupil needs to be absent from school with permission but this is restricted to :

- Taking part in a regulated performance or employment abroad: in line with a licence issued by a local authority or Justice of the Peace or a body of persons approval.
- Attending an interview: for entry into another educational institution or for future employment where requested in advance by a parent the pupil normally lives with.
- Study leave: for public examinations, as agreed in advance with a parent the pupil normally lives with, this does not include any internal examinations such as mocks.
- A temporary, time-limited part-time timetable: where the pupil is of compulsory school age, both the parent who the pupil normally lives with and school agree the pupil should temporarily be educated on a part-time basis for exceptional reasons agreeing the times and dates when the pupil will be expected to attend school as part of that timetable.
- Exceptional circumstances: All schools can grant a leave of absence for other exceptional circumstances at their discretion. In the case of schools maintained by local authorities and special schools not maintained by local authorities, it must be requested in advance by a parent who the pupil normally lives with. Schools are then expected to consider each application individually taking into account the specific facts, circumstances, relevant background context behind the request. If a leave of absence is granted, it is for the school to determine the length of the time the pupil can be away from school. Generally, the DfE does not consider a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance. Leave of absence should not be granted for a pupil to take part in protest activity during school hours.

5. Barriers to Attendance: The barriers to accessing education are wide-ranging and can be complex, both within school and beyond and are often specific to individual pupils and families. Schools should support pupils and parents by working together to address any in-school barriers to attendance. Where barriers are outside of the school's control, all partners should work together to support pupils and parents to access any support they may need voluntarily. As a minimum, this should include meeting with pupils and parents at risk of persistent or severe absence to understand barriers to being in school and agreeing actions or interventions to address them. This may include referrals to services and organisations that can provide support. These actions should be regularly discussed and reviewed together with pupils and families. Where interventions are failing, all parties should work together to identify the reasons why and either adjust or change the approach. Where that is not successful, or is not engaged with, the law protects pupils' right to an education and provides a range of legal interventions to formalise attendance improvement efforts such as:

- **An attendance contract:** A formal written agreement between a parent and either the school or local authority to address irregular attendance at school or alternative provision, not legally binding, parents cannot be compelled to enter the contract.
- **Education supervision orders (ESO):** Provides formal legal intervention without criminal prosecution. In all cases, local authorities must fully consider using an ESO before moving forward to prosecution.

- **Attendance prosecution:** If a child of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly, their parents may be guilty of an offence and can be prosecuted but only by the local authority, who will fund all associated costs, including in the preparation of court documentation.
- **Parenting orders:** Parenting orders are an ancillary order that can be imposed by the Court following conviction for non-attendance alongside a fine and/or community order. Parents' agreement is not required before an order is made.
- **National framework for penalty notices:** These are issued to parents as an alternative to prosecution and can be used by all schools, except independent schools, where the pupil's absence has been recorded with any of the unauthorised codes and that absence(s) constitutes an offence. Penalty notices can only be issued by a headteacher or someone authorised by them (a deputy or assistant head), a local authority officer or the police.

6. Senior Attendance Champion: Schools should have a designated senior leader with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance and liaising with pupils, parents and external agencies where needed. The Senior Attendance Champion is expected to set a clear vision to improve and maintain good attendance, establish and maintain effective systems for tackling absence and ensure they are followed by all staff.

7. Attendance Data: Data to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched, schools are expected to:

- Monitor and analyse weekly attendance patterns and trends and deliver intervention and support in a targeted way to pupils and families. This should go beyond headline attendance percentages and should look at individual pupils, cohorts and year groups (including their punctuality) across the school.
- Use this analysis to provide regular attendance reports to class teachers or tutors to facilitate discussions with pupils and to leaders (including any special educational needs coordinators, designated safeguarding leads and pupil premium leads).
- Undertake frequent individual level analysis to identify the pupils who need support and focus staff efforts on developing targeted actions for those cases. This should not just focus on persistent and severe absence, but look at all absence to identify pupils who can be supported earlier before patterns become entrenched.
- Conduct thorough analysis of half-termly, termly, and full year data to identify patterns and trends, including analysis of pupils and cohorts and identifying patterns in uses of certain codes, days of poor attendance and subjects which have low lesson attendance.
- Benchmark their attendance data (at whole school, year group and cohort level) against local, regional, and [national levels](#) to identify areas of focus for improvement
- Devise specific strategies to address areas of poor attendance identified through data. This may include pupils in a year group with higher than average absence or for pupils eligible for free school meals if their attendance falls behind that of their more advantaged peers.
- Monitor via data the impact of school wide attendance efforts, including specific strategies. The findings should then be used to evaluate approaches or inform future strategies.
- Provide data and reports to support the work of the board or governing body.

8. Expectations of academy trust boards and governing bodies of maintained schools:

Strategies for improving school attendance begin at board level, therefore all academy trust boards and governing bodies of maintained schools should take an active role in attendance improvement, support their school(s) to prioritise attendance and work together with school leaders to set whole school attendance cultures. All trusts and governing bodies are expected to:

- Recognise the importance of school attendance and promote it across the school's ethos and policies
- Ensure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
- Regularly review attendance data, discuss, and challenge trends and help school leaders focus improvement efforts on the individual pupils or cohorts who need it most
- Ensure school staff receive adequate training on attendance
- Multi-academy trust boards and governing bodies of federations are also expected to share effective practice on attendance management and improvement across schools. Whilst it is expected that all trusts and governing bodies will provide support covering these areas, the approach to delivering it should be proportionate to the size of the group of schools and type of school(s) within it
- Boards may also wish to have a link governor or trustee to focus on attendance
- In addition, multi-academy trusts and federation governing bodies should identify and monitor attendance patterns across their schools to identify common issues and barriers and share effective practice between schools.