Oakley School

Skills for Life and Independence

Attendance Policy

Date reviewed: April 2025

Date agreed and ratified by Governing Body: Draft version – pending approval

Date of next review: April 2026

Appendices: 3

1. Introduction

At Oakley School, we are committed to supporting all pupils to achieve their full potential. We recognise that regular attendance plays a vital role in pupils' learning, wellbeing, relationships and sense of safety. We understand that for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, attendance may be affected by a range of individual, medical, emotional or contextual factors.

Our approach to attendance is trauma-informed, compassionate and exploratory. We work closely with pupils and families to understand the reasons behind attendance concerns and to identify barriers early. Positive relationships, trust and personalised support are key to promoting improved attendance over time.

The Governing Body, Headteacher and staff, in partnership with families, share responsibility for promoting good attendance at Oakley School. Parents and carers have a legal duty to ensure that their child attends school regularly and punctually when Oakley School is named on their Education, Health and Care Plan, unless the absence has been authorised.

Oakley School aims to meet its statutory obligations in relation to attendance by:

- promoting positive attendance and addressing absence through a supportive, graduated approach
- ensuring every pupil has access to the education to which they are entitled
- identifying and responding early to emerging patterns of absence
- working in partnership with families and other professionals to reduce barriers to attendance

We support parents and carers to fulfil their legal duty by providing guidance, flexibility and appropriate support and by promoting regular attendance and punctuality in a way that reflects pupils' individual needs, circumstances and wellbeing.

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the school attendance guidance from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- The Education Act 1996
- The Education Act 2002
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013

This policy also refers to the DfE's guidance on the school census, which explains the persistent absence threshold.

3. School procedures

3.1 Attendance register

By law, all schools (except those where all pupils are boarders) are required to keep an attendance register and all pupils must be placed on this register.

At Oakley School the attendance register is taken by the Class Teacher at the start of the day and after lunch every day.

Attendance is recorded using Department for Education attendance and absence codes (see Appendix A).

Every entry in the attendance register will be preserved for 3 years after the date on which the entry was made.

3.2 Unplanned absence

Families must notify the school on the first day of an unplanned absence – for example, if their child is unable to attend due to illness – by 9.00am or as soon as practically possible.

It is the parents/carers' responsibility to contact the school on the first day their child is absent. This is a safeguarding issue so that all parties know that the child is safe.

Parents/carers can leave messages on the school's answer phone on 01892 823096, (the school office is staffed from 8.15am to 4.15pm) or you can send an email to: **office@oakley.kent.sch.uk**

If you know in advance that your child will not be attending school e.g. to attend a medical appointment, please ring, email or send a note to school via Class Dojo.

If no contact has been made to the school regarding a child's absence:

- The family will be contacted via text/telephone/e-mail
- Where there has been no communication, an email is sent to families requesting a reason for absence and the absence is marked as unauthorised

Absence due to illness will be authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

The school may ask parents/carers to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents/carers will be notified of this in advance.

3.3 Medical or dental appointments

Missing registration for a medical or dental appointment is counted as an authorised absence; advance notice is required for authorising these absences. To help us accurately authorise absence, parents and carers are asked to provide evidence (e.g. appointment letter, text message or card) of medical or dental appointments where possible.

However, we encourage parents to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

Applications for other types of absence in term time must also be made in advance. Information relating to whether the school can authorise such absences can be found in Section 4.

3.4 Lateness and punctuality
Regular and punctual attendance at school is essential for pupils to maximise their educational opportunities. The school day starts at 8.45am and registers close at 9am. Late arrivals must enter via the Main Reception and sign in.

Pupils who arrive after the register has closed without an acceptable reason will be recorded as having an unauthorised absence. Where lateness becomes frequent, this will be treated as an attendance concern and discussed with parents and carers. Support will be offered to address any underlying barriers, and ongoing concerns may be referred to the Kent PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service (KPAS). Where attendance does not improve, further action may be considered in line with Local Authority and Department for Education guidance.

3.5 Penalty Notice Proceedings for Lateness
Where a pupil has 10 or more unauthorised late arrivals after the register has closed within a rolling 10-school-week period, the school may consider requesting a Penalty Notice in line with Department for Education guidance and Local Authority procedures.

Where a Penalty Notice is issued for unauthorised absence:

- The first offence is charged at £160 per parent, per child, reduced to £80 per parent, per child if paid within 21 days.
- A second offence within three years for the same child is charged at £160 per parent, per child, with no reduced rate.
- A third offence may result in prosecution, with the case presented directly to the Magistrates' Court.

Decisions regarding Penalty Notices are made in line with the national framework and take account of support offered, individual circumstances and engagement with attendance support.

3.6 Following up absence
The school will follow up any absences to ascertain the reason, ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary, identify whether the absence is approved or not and identify the correct attendance code to use.

3.7 Reporting to parents
Pupils' attendance record will be shared with their parents/carers annually in the written end-of-year report and in the Annual Review of the child's Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP).

4. Authorised and unauthorised absence

4.1 Granting approval for term-time absence
Headteachers are not permitted to grant any leave of absence to pupils during term time unless they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the Headteacher's discretion.

Valid reasons for authorised absence include:

- Illness and medical/dental appointments (evidence may be requested)
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents/carers belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents/carers' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart
- Traveller pupils travelling for occupational purposes – this applies to pupils from Traveller communities, including Roma, English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers, Showmen (fairground families), Circus families, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and New Travellers. This absence may be authorised only where a pupil is travelling with their parent/carer(s) in the course of their trade or business, and the absence has been agreed with the school in advance. Where possible, pupils are expected to attend education during this time, including through dual registration where appropriate.

The Headteacher is not obliged to accept a parent/carer's explanation and if the absence is not authorised, parents/carers will be notified.

The following reasons are examples of the kinds of absence that will not be authorised:

- Frequent non-specific illness (e.g. *"poorly"* or *"unwell"* without further justification or medical evidence)
- Absence of siblings when another child is ill
- Parent/carer illness (where this does not directly prevent the pupil from attending)
- Oversleeping
- Inadequate clothing or uniform
- Confusion over school dates
- Medical or dental appointments requiring more than half a day, unless there are exceptional reasons
- Child's or family birthday
- Shopping trips
- Family holidays taken in term time

Time off school for family holidays is NOT authorised. Absences may be agreed in exceptional circumstances such as during or after a crisis or a significant family event.

Applications for leave of absence must be made at least 4 weeks in advance of the requested date.

Agreement to each request is at the discretion of the Headteacher, acting on behalf of the Governing Body. Each case will be judged on its merits in line with the criteria outlined above.

If a leave of absence is not authorised and the absence is taken, the case may be referred to the local authority for consideration of a Penalty Notice, in line with national guidance.

Where a Penalty Notice is issued:

- The first offence is charged at £160 per parent, per child, reduced to £80 per parent, per child if paid within 21 days.
- A second offence within three years results in a Penalty Notice of £160 per parent, per child, with no reduced rate.
- A third offence may result in prosecution rather than a further Penalty Notice.

4.2 Legal sanctions

Schools may take legal action where a pupil of compulsory school age has unauthorised absence. Legal intervention is used as a last resort, where attendance support has not been successful, is not engaged with or is not appropriate. This may include the use of Penalty Notices or prosecution, in line with Department for Education guidance and Local Authority procedures.

The decision on whether to request the issue of a Penalty Notice rests with the Headteacher, acting in accordance with the Local Authority's Code of Conduct. In making this decision, consideration is given to the individual circumstances of the case, the support offered to the family and the nature and frequency of unauthorised absence. This may include:

- A number of unauthorised absences within a rolling 10-school-week period
- One-off instances of irregular attendance, such as unauthorised term-time leave
- Situations where an excluded pupil is found in a public place during school hours without justification

Penalty Notices are issued per parent, per child and are charged as follows:

- The first offence is charged at £160 per parent, per child, reduced to £80 per parent, per child if paid within 21 days.
- A second offence within three years results in a Penalty Notice of £160 per parent, per child, with no reduced rate.
- A third offence may result in prosecution rather than a further Penalty Notice.

Where a Penalty Notice is not paid within the required timeframe, the Local Authority will decide whether to pursue prosecution or withdraw the notice. Any prosecution is considered by the Local Authority and determined by the court.

Penalty notice thresholds, amounts and processes are applied in line with current national and local authority guidance.

4.3 Promoting good attendance

Oakley School promotes good attendance through a personalised, supportive and trauma-informed approach that recognises the diverse needs of our pupils. Rather than a one-size-fits-all model, we focus on understanding individual attendance patterns, identifying barriers to attendance and supporting pupils and families to make sustained improvements over time.

Attendance is promoted through positive relationships, careful monitoring and recognition of individual improvement from each pupil's starting point. Where attendance concerns arise, staff work closely with families and relevant professionals to remove barriers, make reasonable adjustments and agree bespoke support strategies that enable pupils to access education as consistently as possible.

4.4 Supporting attendance for pupils with SEND

Oakley School recognises that as a special school all pupils have SEND and an Education, Health and Care Plan and that attendance may be affected by a range of factors. Attendance support is therefore personalised, flexible and trauma-informed, taking account of individual barriers such as emotional wellbeing, health needs, sensory needs and wider life circumstances.

Where attendance concerns arise, the school works in close partnership with pupils, families and relevant professionals to understand the reasons for absence and remove barriers wherever possible. This includes appropriate consideration and support for pupils who are known to, or have previously been known to, a social worker. Support may include reasonable adjustments, phased or flexible approaches, multi-agency working and alignment with EHCP provision, in line with the school's duties under the Equality Act 2010. The focus is on building trust, promoting engagement and supporting pupils to access education as consistently as they are able.

5 Attendance monitoring

The Attendance Officer monitors pupil absence on a weekly basis. This information is discussed in a weekly meeting with the Senior Attendance Champion and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs).

Parents/carers are expected to call the school in the morning if their child is going to be absent due to ill health.

The school works closely with the Kent PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service (KPAS) through termly Targeted Support Meetings to review persistent and severe absence and to look at attendance patterns and trends across the school.

5.1 Responding to reduced attendance

Where a pupil's attendance begins to reduce, the school will contact parents and carers to discuss any concerns and understand what may be affecting attendance. Early support may be provided by the Attendance Officer, Senior Attendance Champion, Family Liaison Officer or other members of the school's pastoral and safeguarding team and may include advice, regular check-ins (either in person or online), or support linked to health or wellbeing where appropriate.

If attendance continues to decline over time and there is a lack of engagement with agreed support, the school may consider seeking advice or involvement from the Kent PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service (KPAS), in line with Local Authority guidance.

5.2 Persistent absence

Persistent absence is defined as an absence rate of 10% or more. Where a pupil is identified as persistently absent, the school implements a graduated and personalised response, working proactively with pupils and families to understand and remove barriers to attendance. Attendance concerns are reviewed through pupil progress meetings and support may include use of an Attendance Contract, Early Help, multi-agency involvement or adjustments linked to pupils' welfare, wellbeing, health or additional needs. The impact of support and interventions is monitored and reviewed regularly. Pupils who are persistently absent will also be discussed with the Kent PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service (KPAS) through Targeted Support Meetings, to help identify additional strategies or support. Families are expected to work in partnership with the school to engage with agreed support.

5.3 Severe absence

Severe absence is defined as a pupil missing 50% or more of possible school sessions. Pupils identified as severely absent are prioritised for urgent and intensive support, with the school working closely with families, the Local Authority and relevant services to coordinate a multi-agency response.

At this stage, families can expect increased and regular contact from the school, clear plans for support and close oversight from senior and safeguarding staff. This may include Early Help or Social Care assessments, statutory involvement or consideration of adjusted or alternative educational arrangements, while maintaining a clear focus on pupil welfare, safety and re-engagement wherever possible.

5.4 Safeguarding and pupil welfare during prolonged absence

Where a pupil is absent from school for a prolonged period, Oakley School has a safeguarding responsibility to maintain contact and ensure that the pupil is safe and supported. Even when a pupil is not attending school regularly, the school continues to have a duty of care and must be assured of the pupil's welfare. To support this, the school will seek to maintain regular contact with parents and carers and may request welfare check-ins, which can take place in person at the home or online, depending on what is most appropriate for the pupil and family. These check-ins are intended to be supportive and help the school understand how the pupil is managing, identify any additional needs, and plan appropriate support to support re-engagement.

Parents and carers are expected to engage with these arrangements and work in partnership with the school. Where there is limited or no engagement, the school must follow its safeguarding and attendance procedures. This may include unannounced home visits, seeking advice or involvement from the Kent PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service (KPAS) and, where required to ensure pupil safety, contact with the Police or Children's Social Care.

These actions are taken to fulfil the school's safeguarding responsibilities and to ensure that pupils who are absent for extended periods remain visible, safe and supported.

6 Use of attendance data and cohort analysis

Pupil-level absence data is collected each term and published at National and Local Authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics. We compare our attendance data to the national average and share this with Governors.

Oakley School uses attendance data strategically to identify patterns, target support and review impact. As a special school, all pupils have SEND and an Education, Health and Care Plan; however, attendance is also monitored across identified vulnerable cohorts including pupils eligible for Pupil Premium and free school meals, pupils known or previously known to a social worker, pupils with English as an additional language, Looked After Children and previously Looked After Children.

Attendance is reviewed regularly at individual and cohort level, including through pupil progress meetings, where barriers to attendance are discussed and support strategies and interventions are reviewed. The impact of attendance support is monitored over time and adjusted where necessary to secure sustained improvement. Attendance information is shared with senior leaders and Governors to inform strategic oversight and challenge.

7 Roles and responsibilities

7.1 The Governing Body

The Governing Body:

- Receives pupil absence and exclusion reports through the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee three times each year
- Reviews attendance information shared at subsequent Full Governing Body meetings
- Holds the Headteacher to account for the effective implementation of this Attendance Policy

7.2 The Headteacher

The Headteacher:

- Ensures this Attendance Policy is implemented consistently across the school
- Monitors overall school-level attendance and absence data
- Reports on attendance to the Governing Body
- Supports staff in monitoring the attendance of individual pupils
- Liaises with relevant staff and the local authority regarding the use of Penalty Notices, where necessary

7.3 Senior Attendance Champion (Attendance Lead)

The Senior Attendance Champion:

- Has strategic responsibility for championing and improving attendance across the school
- Provides oversight of attendance systems, procedures and whole-school attendance culture
- Analyses attendance data to identify patterns, trends and pupils or cohorts requiring additional support
- Leads and coordinates attendance improvement strategies, ensuring these are inclusive and proportionate
- Works in partnership with parents, carers and pupils to address barriers to attendance
- Liaises with external agencies, including the Local Authority and Kent PRU and Attendance Service (KPAS) where appropriate
- Ensures attendance practice reflects statutory guidance and the school's duties under the Equality Act 2010
- Reports attendance information and impact of interventions to senior leaders and Governors

At Oakley School, the Senior Attendance Champion (Attendance Lead) is Sophie Tillman-Harries, Assistant Headteacher. They can be contacted via the school office on 01892 823096 or by email at office@oakley.kent.sch.uk.

7.4 The Attendance Officer

The Attendance Officer:

- Monitors attendance data at the school and individual pupil level
- Provides attendance reports to the Senior Leadership Team and Designated Safeguarding Leads on a weekly basis
- Reports concerns about attendance to the Headteacher and Senior Attendance Champion
- Works with Senior Attendance Champion and Family Liaison Officer to tackle persistent absence
- Arranges calls and meetings with parents/carers to discuss attendance issues
- Advises the Headteacher if/when to issue fixed-penalty notices

At Oakley School, the Attendance Officer is Jo Paine. They can be contacted via the school office on 01892 823096 or by email at office@oakley.kent.sch.uk.

7.5 Class Teachers

Class Teachers:

- Record attendance accurately on a daily basis, using the correct Department for Education attendance codes
- Submit attendance information to the school office in line with school procedures
- Remain alert to patterns of absence or lateness
- Flag any emerging attendance concerns to the Attendance Team to enable early support

7.6 Office/Reception staff

Office / Reception staff:

- Receive calls, messages or emails from parents and carers reporting pupil absence
- Record absence information accurately on the school's attendance system
- Pass attendance information to the Attendance Team where required
- Support timely follow-up by ensuring absence information is logged promptly and clearly

7.7 Attendance support and contact details

For day-to-day attendance matters, including reporting absence or lateness, parents and carers should contact the school office (01892 823096 or by email at office@oakley.kent.sch.uk). For ongoing attendance concerns, support plans or persistent absence, parents and carers may be contacted by or request support from the Attendance Officer or Senior Attendance Champion, who will work in partnership with families to identify and address any barriers to attendance.

8 Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed every year by the Senior Attendance Champion. At every review, the policy will be shared with the Governing Board.

9 Links with other policies

This policy is linked to our Child Protection and Safeguarding policies.

Should you require any further information please contact Kent PRU and Attendance Service (KPAS) by email MIEducation&WiderEH@kent.gov.uk or call 03000 42 24 70

Appendix A: Attendance and Absence Codes

Oakley School records attendance and absence in line with statutory requirements and uses the Department for Education (DfE) attendance and absence codes to ensure accurate and consistent recording. These codes distinguish between authorised absence, unauthorised absence and circumstances where a pupil is unable to attend school.

Attendance codes reflect the reason for a pupil's absence and are used to support pupil welfare, attendance monitoring and reporting to the local authority. Codes are applied in accordance with the DfE statutory guidance: *Working together to improve school attendance* and the *School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations*. Attendance codes are applied accurately and reviewed regularly to support early identification of concerns and appropriate follow-up where attendance issues arise.

Summary of attendance and absence codes

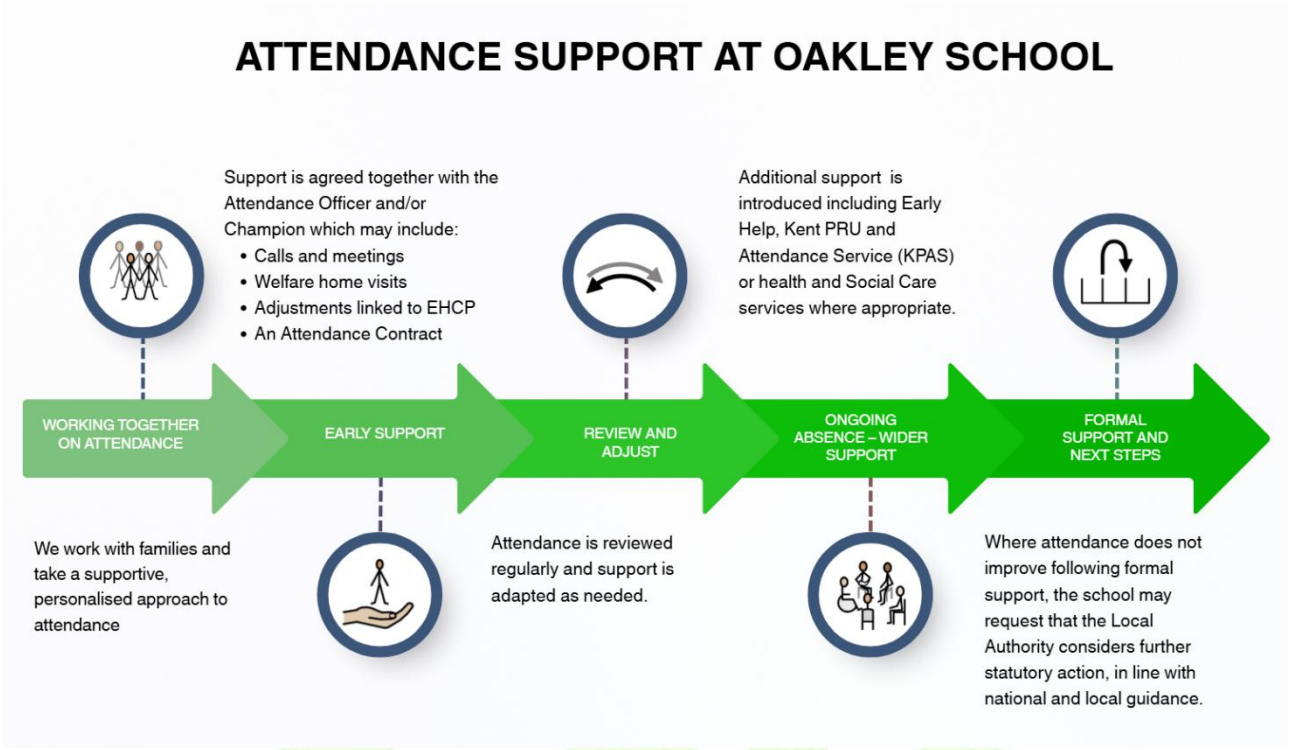
To support understanding, attendance is broadly recorded using the following categories:

- Present – the pupil is attending school or approved educational activity
- Authorised absence – the school has approved the absence, for example due to illness, medical appointments or other exceptional circumstances
- Unauthorised absence – the absence has not been approved by the school
- Unable to attend school – the pupil cannot attend due to unavoidable circumstances, such as transport disruption or school closure

School staff use the full set of DfE attendance and absence codes when completing the attendance register.

A complete list of attendance and absence codes, together with definitions, is available in the DfE guidance: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance

Appendix B: Attendance Support at Oakley



Appendix C: Attendance Questions and Answers for Families

Attendance Questions and Answers for Families

Why does attendance matter?

Regular attendance helps pupils make progress in their learning, routines, relationships and wellbeing. At Oakley School, we know attendance can be more complex for pupils with additional needs and we take a supportive and personalised approach to help remove barriers wherever possible.

Is attendance a legal responsibility?

Yes. When Oakley School is named on a child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), parents and carers have a legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school regularly, unless the absence has been authorised.

What is Oakley's approach for attendance?

- Attendance is important and a shared responsibility
- Support and understanding come first
- Expectations and next steps are made clear
- Families are expected to work in partnership with the school
- The focus is always on helping pupils attend as consistently as they are able

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What should I do if my child is unwell or cannot attend school?

Parents and carers should contact the school on the first day of absence, as early as possible, to let us know the reason. Call 01892 823096 or email office@oakley.kent.sch.uk.

Where possible, we may ask for evidence such as appointment messages or medication information to help us authorise absence accurately.

What happens if my child's attendance starts to reduce?

If attendance begins to reduce, the school will get in touch to understand what might be affecting attendance and agree support.

This early support may involve:

- contact from the Attendance Officer or Senior Attendance Champion
- phone calls, meetings or online check-ins
- welfare home visits
- adjustments linked to your child's EHCP
- an Attendance Contract to set out agreed support and expectations

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What is an Attendance Contract?

An Attendance Contract is a supportive agreement between the school and family. It helps everyone to be clear about:

- what support the school will provide
- what families can do to support attendance
- how progress will be reviewed

It is not a punishment and is used to support improvement.

What does "persistent absence" mean?

Persistent absence is when a pupil misses 10% or more of school sessions.

At this stage:

- attendance is reviewed regularly
- families can expect more regular contact and clearer support plans
- support may include Early Help, health support or other agencies
- attendance will be discussed with KPAS (Kent PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service) through Targeted Support Meetings to explore further strategies and support
- support is reviewed and adjusted regularly

What happens if attendance becomes very low (severe absence)?

Severe absence is when a pupil misses 50% or more of school sessions.

At this stage, pupils are prioritised for urgent and intensive support and families can expect:

- increased contact and clear coordination from the school
- close involvement from senior leaders and safeguarding staff
- multi-agency support, which may include Early Help, Social Care or health services
- consideration of adjusted or alternative educational arrangements, where appropriate

The focus remains on welfare, safety and re-engagement.

Why does the school want to see my child if they are absent?

The school has a safeguarding responsibility to ensure pupils are safe, even when they are not attending school.

If a pupil is absent for a prolonged period, the school will request:

- home visits or
- online welfare check-ins

These are supportive checks to:

- make sure your child is safe and well
- understand how they are managing
- plan appropriate next steps

Parents and carers are expected to engage with these arrangements.

What happens if there is little or no engagement?

If the school is unable to make contact or engagement is limited, we must follow safeguarding and attendance procedures. This can include:

- unannounced home visits
- seeking advice or involvement from Kent Pru and Attendance Service (KPAS)
- contact with Children's Social Care or the Police where required to ensure a child's safety

These steps are taken to fulfil our safeguarding duties and keep children safe.

When might the Local Authority become involved more formally?

If attendance does not improve following sustained and formal support, the school may ask the Local Authority to consider further action, in line with national and local guidance. Any legal processes are always a last resort, after a range of support has been offered.