

COGNITA



DOWNSEND
SCHOOL

Inspiring Young Minds

Children Absent from Education and Attendance Policy

(including
Attendance Guidance
for Parents)

September 2024

Children Absent from Education and Attendance Policy

Policy Statement

The school maintains its Attendance Registers in accordance with Statutory Regulations, as amended from time to time. The school adheres to Statutory Guidance when dealing with Children Absent from Education. The school will work in a collaborative way with external agencies, in accordance with the principles of the UK government guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023), Working Together to Improve Attendance (2024), and Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024)

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the approach taken to:

- Recording attendance information on a daily basis;
- Recording information at the point a pupil leaves the school;
- Managing a situation when a pupil has unexplained, persistent and/or prolonged absence from education; and
- Working with authorities where there are safeguarding concerns linked to attendance

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1. Attendance

Introduction

It is important that staff, parents and pupils are familiar with this policy. Regular school attendance from an early age creates a culture about the importance of education and learning so that all can benefit equally.

Missing learning time through having unexplained, persistent and/or prolonged absence, leaves children vulnerable to falling behind in their learning and it is well known that poor attendance leads to lower levels of achievement. Furthermore, poor attendance can also impact on a child's social and emotional development. The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child, beginning from the Early Years.

The legal framework

Legislation specifies the legal responsibility of parent/carer(s) of statutory school age children to ensure they attend school every day. All children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to an efficient full-time education which is suitable for their age, ability, aptitude, and any special educational needs; either by regular school attendance or home education.

The same law requires the school to have an Admissions Register (see Applications and Admissions Policy) and an Attendance Register, and to place all children on both registers. Failure to do so is an offence. The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2024) in the UK requires a daily record of the names of the children being cared for on the premises and their hours of attendance.

Good attendance

Our school considers good attendance to be that above 96%.

Link between attendance, wellbeing and achievement

There is clear evidence of a link between poor attendance at school and lower levels achievement, as well as a strong link between truancy and antisocial behaviour.

For the most vulnerable pupils, regular attendance is also an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided.

Individual pupils' barriers to attendance, however, often go far beyond the school gates. Persistent absence is almost always a symptom of wider issues in a pupil's life, and barriers to attendance are often specific to local contexts.

Parent/carer(s) responsibilities are to:

- Encourage regular and sustained attendance for the child in their care, being fully aware of their legal responsibilities.
- Ensure that the child in their care arrives at school punctually, prepared for learning.
- Provide clear reasons for any absence for the child in their care which ensures the school can code the absence properly and accurately.
- Contact the school on the first day of the child in their care's absence as early as possible and preferably before the start of the school day (no later than 9 am).
- Avoid making arrangements to remove children in their care from school during term time.
- Respond helpfully and positively to any enquiry made by the school to ascertain the reason for any absence of the child in their care, including any safeguarding matter.

School responsibilities:

- All staff will maintain a positive school culture where monitoring, promoting, and incentivising attendance is seen as everyone's responsibility; staff, child and parent/carer.

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- The school will have a nominated member of staff / small team who are the named Attendance Champion (s) who will have a clear vision and oversight of all attendance matters
- School staff will listen to children and their parents/carers to understand the barriers to the child's good attendance, working jointly with families to remove those barriers wherever possible
- All staff will work together to identify patterns/changes in attendance at an early stage to prevent any further absence, including addressing unexplained, persistent, or prolonged absence (deemed as attendance below 90%).
- All staff will work to ensure every pupil has good attendance so they can access the education they are entitled to, being particularly mindful of pupils absent from school due to mental or physical ill health or their special educational needs and/or disabilities and provide them with additional support.
- In very exceptional circumstances, where it is in a pupil's best interests, there may be a need for the school to provide a pupil of compulsory school age with less than full-time education through a **temporary** part-time/'staggered' timetable to meet their individual needs. A part-time timetable will have:
 - the written agreement of both the school and the parent/carers
 - a clear ambition and be part of the pupil's wider support, health care or reintegration plan.
 - regular review dates which include the pupil and their parents to ensure the plan is only in place for the shortest time necessary.
 - a proposed end date that takes into account the exceptional circumstances of the pupil, after which the pupil is expected to attend school on site full-time. It can, however, be extended as part of the regular review process. In some limited cases, a pupil with a long-term physical/mental health condition may require a part-time timetable for a prolonged period. Medical evidence will be needed, and external specialist intervention will need to be in place to support the child during this period.
- In agreeing to a part-time timetable, the school has agreed to a pupil being absent from school for part of the week or day and therefore must record the absence accordingly (normally using code X or C2).
- The school will keep accurate and efficient records (electronic) of attendance and registration at school, including attendance at all after school and before school activities.

We achieve this in the following ways by:

- Providing parent/carer(s) of children in their care with the timings of the school day and the calendar via the school website and any other usual method(s) such as the school newsletter, in advance.
- Teachers taking a register at least once in the morning and once in the afternoon;
- Those taking the register marking all children who are not present by the designated time, taking account of absence notes;
- Following up un-notified first day absence with a telephone call to the parent/carer(s) by 9:30 am; children who are vulnerable **must and will** be prioritised (safeguarding, medical, and learning needs). Children on sponsored visas are also a priority.
- Monitoring and analysing attendance and lateness and implementing strategies for promoting improved awareness of attendance such as year groups or vulnerable children, as required, including the use of formal letters home; for those on sponsored visas, see the Safeguarding Policy for requirements and Appendix 1.
- Reporting on patterns of attendance at Governance Meetings to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils;

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- Specifically monitoring any unexplained, persistent and/or prolonged absence (individual attendance below 90%) and addressing any concerns at an early stage with the parents/carers of those children;
- Using the DfE national codes to record and monitor attendance and absence (from regulation 10 of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024) in a consistent way which complies with the regulations, including preservation of the entries on both the Admissions and Attendance Registers for a period of six years after it was made;
- Authorising absences only in specific circumstances according to government guidance – authorisation to be undertaken by the Headteacher or an agreed nominated member of staff in their absence.
- All staff and Attendance Champions(s) closely liaising with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) to identify children whose attendance is emerging as a serious concern, including talking with children and their parents/carers regarding any unsatisfactory attendance, listening and understanding to find out the barrier (s) to good attendance and offering in- support;
- All staff and Attendance Champions(s) closely liaising with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) where there are significant concerns about children having prolonged absence with/without parental co-operation, especially where there have/currently are safeguarding concerns – the DSL should seek advice from the Regional Safeguarding Lead where needed;
- Implementing any agreed improvement strategies, such as referral to the local authority attendance services and/or children’s social care in accordance with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures (see section 4- Safeguarding below)

Unexplained, persistent and/or absentees

Persistent absentees are pupils with attendance below 90%. The school will contact the parent/carer(s) to have a formal meeting if their child’s attendance approaches this threshold to listen and understand the reasons for declining attendance, discuss any concerns, and to plan a positive way forward, both in terms of in school support and/or a referral to the local authorities via Early Help as required. If attendance does not improve after this meeting, the school will arrange a follow up meeting with the child’s parents/carers to discuss the concerns, and may contact the local authority children’s social care services in accordance with local authority procedures. Please see the Safeguarding Policy and Appendix 1 for children on sponsored visas.

Late arrival

If a pupil arrives late, they must sign in at the School Office so that school systems remain fully updated in case an evacuation of the school is necessary and in order that we know exactly where every pupil is at all times. Repeated lateness will be discussed with the child’s parents/carers to listen and understand the barriers to arrival on time.

Leaving school early during the day

- Pupils are not allowed to leave the site during the school day, unless accompanied by a known parent/carer for a specified reason. If a pupil has to leave the school during the day for illness or a parent is required to collect them for a medical appointment, they must sign out at the School Office. Where there are known medical appointments, parents must notify the school in advance.
- Pupils are not allowed to leave the site during the school day, unless accompanied by staff members (written agreement by the Headteacher) to attend a school visit, an off-site scheduled lesson, or a sporting fixture.

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Requests for absence from parent/carer(s)

- Schools, not parents, authorise absence. Requests to the school for granting permission for leave of absence to a pupil during term time must be made in writing in advance directly to the Head. The Head/other nominated staff member in the Head's absence is only able to authorise leave of absence where exceptional circumstances relate to the application. Authorised leave is unlikely to be granted for the purpose of a family holiday.
- We ask that parents make contact with the school when a child is going to be absent for ill health (mental or physical) reasons in order that the school can keep records updated and, importantly, so that the school can be kept informed of their progress to full health and anticipated return date. If necessary, the school may ask for medical evidence of any illness. We expect any absence for illness to be evidenced by a note from the parent/carer(s) as soon as possible.
- An absence is classified as unauthorised if a child is away from school without the permission of the Head /other nominated staff member in the Head's absence, in advance.

Maintaining records and reporting to the authorities

The school's Attendance Register, kept by means of a computer, is backed up in the form of an electronic copy at least once a month.

Monitoring and review arrangements

Attendance rates are reported regularly to the Cognita Board. Proprietorial Governors report on pupil attendance, as well as any patterns or trends of persistent absence from school. Representatives of the Proprietor scrutinise Admissions and Attendance Registers for compliance and safeguarding purposes.

2. Children Absent/ Missing from Education

Children Missing in Education are:

'Children who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. Children missing from education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later in life.' (DfE Children Missing in Education 2016). Children 'missing' in education are therefore different to those who are 'absent' from education.

Children Absent from Education

Often children can be persistently absent from school or have prolonged absences. Of course, there may be a satisfactory reason for their absence, most often medical, for why this is needed, for example, the child is having operations/treatments. In these situations, the school will offer work to be completed at home/involve the child with their class remotely on MS Teams, only where appropriate, and in collaboration with the parents/cares and children, No work will be sent home if this is thought to have the potential to place additional pressure on any child. Any arrangement will be short-term and reviewed regularly. Where children are absent due to mental health reasons, such as anxiety, a co-constructed plan will be put in place for their return (see Safeguarding Policy).

However, on other occasions, the child is frequently absent but there does not appear to be an explanation or a satisfactory reason. This is different from a child being a 'child missing in education' (as described above) but it is still a concern.

As stated above, it is mandatory that children of a compulsory age attend school, but of most importance, frequent absences impact on a child's development across all domains, not purely cognitive.

If a child's absence continues, despite interventions to listen, identify and address the underlying cause(s) /barriers to attendance with both the child and parents/carers, then consideration may be given to seeking advice from social care in order to support the family (see below section 4).

3. Procedures for Children Absent from Education and Children Missing in Education

- If a new pupil fails to attend at the beginning of first day of the agreed or notified admissions date, the school should undertake reasonable enquiries to establish the child's whereabouts and consider notifying the local authority at the earliest opportunity. Schools must monitor all pupils' attendance through their daily register.
- Schools must address all attendance concerns with both parents/carers and child as soon as challenges emerge..
- Schools should follow their local authority guidance in terms of the intervals at which they will inform local authorities of the details of pupils who fail to attend regularly or have missed ten school days or more without permission.
- Where a pupil has not returned to school for ten days after an authorised absence or is absent from school without authorisation for twenty consecutive school days, the pupil can be removed from the Admissions Register when the school and the local authority have failed, after jointly making reasonable enquiries, to establish the whereabouts of the child. The type of enquiries may include the school/local authority checking with relatives, neighbours, landlords – private or social housing providers – and other local stakeholders who are involved. **No home visits must or will be undertaken.** The school will make a written record that they have completed these procedures on their safeguarding systems
- If there is reason to believe a child who is absent from school is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, whether there has been communication from parents/carers or not, a

referral must and will be made to children's social care (and the Police if appropriate) (see below –Safeguarding). This only applies if the school does not have reasonable grounds (and medical evidence) to believe that the pupil is unable to attend because of sickness or unavoidable cause.

- **Elective Home Education:** Where a parent/carer has expressed their intention to remove their child from school with a view to educating them at home, the school will coordinate a meeting with parents/carers to explore why they are considering this option. Schools will explore keeping the child in school whilst respecting parental choice. Where a parent/carer notifies the school in writing that they are now home educating their child, the school must delete the child's name from the admission register and notify the local authority of the leaver, including the local authority's Elective Home Education Team (informing the parents that they have done this so that they can receive the necessary support). However, where parents orally indicate that they intend to withdraw their child to be home educated, the school should consider notifying the local authority at the earliest opportunity.

4. Safeguarding

- The school has a safeguarding duty in respect of its pupils, and as part of this will investigate any unexplained, persistent, and/or prolonged absences. Children being absent from education for prolonged periods and/or on repeat occasions (including truanting) can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, and/or child sexual and/or child criminal exploitation.
- It is important that the school's response to persistently absent pupils and children missing education supports identifying such abuse, neglect and/or exploitation and in the case of absent pupils, helps prevent the risk of them becoming a child missing education in the future. This includes when problems are first emerging, but also where children are already known to local authority children's social care and have an allocated Social Worker (such as a child who is a child in need or who has a child protection plan, or is a looked after child), where being absent from education may increase known safeguarding risks within the family or in the community.
- Where there are safeguarding concerns about any child's absence, whether this be persistent, prolonged or unexplained, absence;, the school will always talk to the child and parents/carers about their concerns, in order to understand the barriers to attendance. They will also follow its Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, which includes notifying the the local authority attendance services, and also referring to Social Care as appropriate.
- Where children are absent for a period of time and there are safeguarding concerns, the school will arrange to have twice weekly check-ins with the child via online methods e.g. MS Teams. The school has a duty to know where children are and have visibility of them. If the parent/s carers of the child do not agree to this request, or do not respond to any such request, consideration will be given to seeking advice from/making a referral local authority Social Care.
- Where there are existing/potential safeguarding concerns around a child, and the parent/carer unexpectedly removes their child to home educate them, a referral to children's social care must, and will be made (see above)
- If there is reason to suspect a crime has been committed whether this relates to a child's absence or not, the school will inform the Police.
- Where there is a concern that an absent child's safety or well-being is at imminent risk, the school will take action without delay by calling the Police and/or Social Care.
- For children on sponsored visas, please see the Safeguarding Policy and Appendix 1.
- The school will work in collaboration with external organisations and local authorities* when school absence is a significant concern. *All local authorities are expected to have a School Attendance Support Team that works with all schools in its area (regardless of type) and take forward any legal interventions, such as issuing notices/penalties, and in

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rare cases attendance prosecutions. This includes Independent schools. 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. If all avenues of support have been facilitated by schools, local authorities, and other partners, but severe absence for unauthorised reasons continues, it is likely to constitute neglect. In these situations, Social Care will be involved and make decisions around the child/family.

Appendix 1 - Attendance of Sponsored International students (Child Student and Student visas)

Cognita acts as a sponsor for international students who have Child Student and Student visas. The United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) has a duty to ensure that all sponsors discharge their responsibility to act in accordance with the immigration rules. As a school, we are responsible for ensuring that these students are appropriately cared for and that any safeguarding concerns are addressed.

Knowledge of the sponsored student

Prior to any children sponsored by Cognita arriving at the school, it is important that the school's pastoral and safeguarding team, and other relevant staff (including the child's form tutor/class teacher, Head of Year, Head of Phase) have knowledge of the child's circumstances, including who has parental responsibility, the child's care arrangements, and contact details for the carer/Private Foster carer in the UK. The most senior member of the pastoral team, with support from the DSL, must have oversight of all international students sponsored by Cognita.

Responsibility for each sponsored student starts from the moment the Cognita International Recruitment Team assigns the Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS), i.e. before the student leaves their home country and enrolls at the school. The Headteacher, school admissions team, most senior member of the pastoral team and DSL should be aware of the child's travel arrangements to the UK.

Records of sponsored student information

At the very least, this should be the student's passport and their BRP (once this has been issued, after arriving in the UK). If the child is aged 4-11 years old, then they will be here with one of their parents under the Parent of a Child Student visa route. We should have the parent's passport and BRP too.

Other appendices we hold, depending on circumstances, may include:

- Appendix A: letter of consent from the parents/guardians for Cognita to sponsor their child
- Appendix B: letter of undertaking from intended carer (if the child isn't coming to the UK with one or both of their parents)
- Appendix C: letter of consent from parents/guardians to intended carer
- Appendix D: close relative care arrangements (if the child is going to live with a grandparent, brother, sister, stepparent, uncle (brother or half-brother of the child's parent) or aunt (sister or half-sister of the child's parent) who is aged 18 years or over and has UK Settled Status.
- Appendix K: travel confirmation form (detailing travel arrangements to the UK)
- Appendix P: genuine student English interview (conducted and completed by the Cognita International team)
- Appendix Q: student route finance declaration (confirming the family have sufficient funds to meet the UKVI requirement for sponsorship)
- Appendix S: Tuberculosis certificate declaration

Arrival to the UK

If the child fails to arrive as expected, the school should report this as a matter of urgency to the Cognita International Recruitment Team (IRT), who are responsible for updating UKVI if the child fails to enroll. Cognita are responsible from the moment the CAS is raised. The

school needs to complete the enrolment checklist (Appendix F in the UKVI handbook) and upload it to the student's sponsor file on Teams.

Arrival to start school

If the student does not arrive when expected to start school, the school should notify the IRT immediately. If the student does not arrive within ten working days of the enrolment period, the IRT must report this to UKVI.

Once the child has arrived safely, the UKVI School Champion, in collaboration with the DSL, will aim to ensure that their needs are met, including pastoral need, and they will liaise with the child's parents and carers for the ongoing needs of the child.

Absences from school or pastoral concerns

With regards to safeguarding this potentially vulnerable group of students, any lack of engagement in study/social activities displayed by them, any absences, or failure to return to school after a holiday or break, should be escalated initially to the Regional Safeguarding Lead **on the day it occurs**. Therefore, schools must make notes of the child's planned travel dates and location/address of visit). The RSL will escalate the concerns to the Cognita International Recruitment Team as needed (but no later than 5 working days after the event); the latter is obliged to report the child to the UKVI if the child has ten consecutive unauthorised absences.

A formal meeting with the child's parent/guardians/carers **must** be arranged if a sponsored child's attendance falls lower than 92% and again if it falls below 82%. A record must be made of this meeting and saved in the child's folder in MS Teams, with agreed action points to improve the child's attendance. If a sponsored child's attendance falls below 80%, Cognita may be required to withdraw sponsorship of their visa and they will need to leave the UK. It is a requirement of the UK Visas & Immigration (part of the Home Office), that schools demonstrate how they track attendance of this group of potentially vulnerable children. The school must therefore collate evidence.

Changes in circumstances of the sponsored student

Schools should be proactive in determining whether there has been any change in a sponsored international student's circumstances. The school should liaise with the parent(s)/guardians of all sponsored international students **every term** to check whether:

- the student and their parent/guardian's address has changed; or
- the students' childcare arrangements have changed (e.g. moved from living with their parents to a private foster care arrangement).

Changes in circumstances must be reported immediately. These can include:

- a change in where a student studies;
- a change in the student's course;
- a change in a student's registered address;
- a change in whom the student lives with (e.g. from parent to private foster care); or
- any other circumstance that suggests that they are breaking the conditions of their permission to stay in the UK.

Templates are available in the UKVI handbook.

6. Appendix 2 – Attendance Guidance for Parents

Note – this section is intended to be used by schools to share with parents in whatever form is most appropriate.

Introduction

Regular school attendance from an early age creates a culture about the importance of education and learning so that all can benefit equally. Missing learning time leaves children vulnerable to falling behind and it is well-known that poor attendance leads to lower levels of achievement. The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child, beginning from the early years.

The legal framework

Legislation in the UK specifies the legal responsibility of parent/carer(s) of statutory school age children to ensure they attend school every day.

The same law requires the school to have an Admissions Register and an Attendance Register, and to place all children on both registers. Failure to do so is an offence.

Link between attendance and achievement

There is clear evidence of a link between poor attendance at school and low levels of achievement:

- Of pupils who miss more than 50% of school, only 3% manage to achieve five A* to Cs including English and Maths;
- Of pupils who miss between 10% and 20% of school, only 35% manage to achieve five A* to C GCSEs including English and Maths; and
- Of pupils who miss less than 5% of school, 73% achieve five A* to Cs including English and Maths.

Parent/carer(s) have responsibility to :

- Be fully aware of their legal responsibilities for ensuring the child in their care attends school every day
- Ensure that the child in their care arrives at school punctually, prepared for learning.
- Provide clear reasons to the school for any absence which ensures the school can code the child's absence properly and accurately.
- Contact the school on the first day of the child's absence as early as possible (and before 9 am)
- Avoid making arrangements to remove children from school during term time as this can only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.
- Respond helpfully and positively to any enquiry made by the school to ascertain the reason for any absence related to the child in their care, including any safeguarding matter.
- Adhere to any co-constructed reintegration plan where the child in their care has been absent from school for a longer period.

School has the responsibility to:

- Promote pupils' good attendance and reduce absence.
- Work to ensure every pupil has good attendance so they can access the education they are entitled to.
- Act early with parents/cares and children to address patterns of absence by listening and understanding any barriers to attendance.
- Encourage parents to ensure their child attends all learning opportunities regularly and punctually.

- Keep accurate and efficient records of attendance and registration at school, including attendance at all after school and before school activities

Late arrival

If a pupil arrives late, they must sign in at the School Office so that our systems remain fully updated in case an evacuation of the school is necessary and in order that we know exactly where every pupil is at all times.

Leaving school early during the day

Pupils are not allowed to leave the site during the school day, unless accompanied by a member of staff or their known parent/carer; or to attend a school visit, an off-site scheduled lesson, or a sporting fixture.

If a pupil has to leave the school during the day for illness or a parent is required to collect them for a medical appointment, they must sign out at the School Office. Where there are known medical appointments, parents must notify the school in advance and provide evidence.

Requests for absence from parent/carer(s)

Schools, not parents, authorise absence. Requests to the school for granting permission for leave of absence to a pupil during term time must be made in writing in advance directly to the Head. The Head/other nominated staff member in their absence is only able to authorise leave of absence where exceptional circumstances relate to the application. Authorised leave is unlikely to be granted for the purpose of a family holiday.

We ask that parents/carers make contact with the school when a child is going to be absent for ill health reasons in order that the school can keep records updated and importantly, so that the school can be kept informed of their progress to full health and anticipated return date. If necessary, the school may ask for medical evidence of any illness. We expect any absence for illness to be evidenced by a medical note from the parent/carer(s) as soon as possible.

An absence is classified as unauthorised if a child is away from school without the permission of the Head/other nominated staff member in their absence in advance.

Good attendance

Our school considers good attendance to be above 96%. The school will contact the parent/carer(s) of the child if there are emerging attendance concerns. If attendance does not improve, the school will contact the local authority in accordance with local authority procedures (see policy).

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