

Orchard Community Primary School



Attendance Policy

Version	Date	Author	Reason for Change
0.1	9/2018	FS	New Policy
0.2	10/2020	FS	Review and re-adoption
0.3	Summer 2023	FS	Review
0.4	1/2026	FS	Reviewed and updated

Review Frequency	Next Review Date
Every 3 years	1/2029 or as necessary

This policy meets the requirements of the school attendance guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) and draws from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

Part 6 of The Education Act 1996 Part 3 of The Education Act 2002

Part 7 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006

The Education (Student Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (and 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016 amendments)

Working Together to Improve School Attendance (Statutory within KCSiE 2025)

Aims of the policy:

- To work in partnership with parents and other agencies to strive towards every child reaching 96% attendance to ensure that they can get the best out of the educational opportunities provided.
- To make attendance and punctuality a priority for those associated with the school including pupils, parents, teachers and governors.
- To maximise attendance across the school population and reduce persistent absenteeism (below 90%).
- To ensure that we have clear and robust strategies in place to manage and promote regular attendance, for all students at Orchard Primary.

Section 1 - Introduction

The Importance of Good Attendance

Orchard Primary School seeks to ensure that all of its pupils receive an education which enables them to maximise opportunities to reach their full potential.

Good attendance is essential for students to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing and wider life chances. Research shows there is evidence of a strong link between good attendance and increased attainment. Pupils who regularly attend school make much better progress both socially and academically. Regular attendance enables pupils to adapt better to routines, schoolwork, and friendship groups.

For the most vulnerable students, regular attendance is also an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided. Additionally, research has shown associations between regular absence from school and a number of extra-familial harms. This includes crime (90% of young offenders had been persistently absent) and serious violence (83% of knife possession offenders had been persistently absent in at least 1 of the 5 years of study).

Expectations for Attendance

We want all children at Orchard to maintain at least a 95% attendance rate on an annual basis. All attendance below this threshold will be monitored and those children with lower than 90% attendance will have their attendance challenged with support being provided to overcome any barriers.

Section 2 - Roles and Responsibilities

School Staff to Support Attendance

A member of the senior leadership team will oversee, direct and co-ordinate the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and will ensure the Attendance Policy is consistently applied throughout the school. This person will also ensure that attendance is both recorded accurately and analysed. They will ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties.

In line with new local authority requirements, attendance data will be shared daily with the local authority, including being shared with the DfE.

The school's strategic leader for attendance is the Headteacher, Fiona Shields.

The school's Attendance Officers are Rachel Daft, Laura Thompson and Michelle Farrar.

The school's Safeguarding Leads are Fiona Shields, Rachel Daft & Hayley Caldwell.

The school's Pastoral Leads are Fiona Shields & Hayley Caldwell.

If absence is frequent or continuous, except where a child is clearly unwell, staff will discuss with parents/carers the need and reasons for their child's absence and will encourage them to keep absences to a minimum.

Responsibilities of the safeguarding team / attendance leader

- Monitor the students below 95% attendance.
- Conduct safeguarding home visits.
- Conduct informal and attendance meetings with parents and outside agencies such as the LA Inclusion Team, where required.

Responsibilities of the classroom teacher

- Ensure that all pupils are registered accurately.
- Promote and acknowledge good attendance with pupils at all appropriate opportunities.
- Liaise with the Attendance Leader on matters of attendance and punctuality.
- Communicate any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a child's absence.
- Support pupils with absence to engage with their learning once they are back in school.

Responsibilities of pupils

- Attend every day unless they are ill or have an authorised absence.
- Arrive at the school on time.
- Arrive with everything they need for the day.
- Talk to an adult in school if there is something causing them to not want to come to school.

Responsibilities of parents/carers

Ensuring a child's regular attendance at Orchard is a parent/carer's legal responsibility (Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act) and permitting absence from Orchard that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

To manage and promote the regular attendance of their children, parents will:

- Understand their legal responsibilities by ensuring regular school attendance with regard to the Section 444(1) and 444 (1A) Education Act 1996 and Section 36 of the Children Act 1989.
- Understand their responsibility to keep the school up to date with at least two emergency contact details as required by the Children Missing Education requirements and in line with the Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance.
- Impress on their children the importance of regular school attendance by keeping absences to a minimum and ensuring that children are only out of school when they are too sick to attend.
- Establish effective communication with the school and swiftly address any worries their children may have about coming to school so that we can work together to resolve this.
- Contact school on the first day of absence to inform school of the reason and when the child is expected to return. Keep school informed if the absence is likely to continue so that school and partner agencies can ensure that amendments or alternatives can be made to provision if required.
- Provide the school with any medical appointment cards and where possible make appointments out of school hours. If this is not possible, parents should ensure that children attend prior to or following their appointment.
- Ensure that family holidays are taken during school holidays and not during term time, appreciating that there are 13 weeks of the year during which the school is closed.
- Attend any meetings called by school and partner agencies to discuss attendance.

The Local Governing Body

The Local Governing Body is responsible for monitoring attendance figures for Orchard Primary School on at least a termly basis. It also holds the Head teacher to account for the implementation of this policy.

Promoting regular attendance through good practice

It is essential that everyone involved in promoting attendance is clear about the important role that must be carried out in order to raise standards. Helping to create a pattern of regular attendance is everybody's responsibility – parents/carers, pupils and all members of school staff.

To manage and promote regular attendance Orchard Primary School will implement the following strategies to improve attendance and reduce persistent and severe absence that meets the requirements of Working Together to Improve Attendance 22 (DfE):

- Emphasise the importance of good attendance at the meeting for new parents.
- Ensure that a high profile is given to the issue of attendance in all school publications e.g. prospectus.
- Keep parents updated on the school's overall attendance figure and individual pupil's attendance via advisory letters home, newsletters, termly pupil progress reports, the annual report, social media and the school website.
- Follow the DfE and Government guidance in relation to school attendance.
- Report to parents how their child is achieving in school and how their child's attendance is impacting on this via regular parent evenings.
- Build positive relationships between home and school that can be the foundation of good attendance. The link between attendance, attainment and wider wellbeing will be discussed with parents.
- Ensure prompt follow-up action in cases of non-school attendance by conducting a safe and well check by 9.20am via text message in the first instance, and then telephone call, where registers have been closed and no explanation given, on the first day and subsequent days of absence, to establish a reason for a child's absence.
- Report Pupils Missing Education (PME) and Children Missing Education (CME) to the LA. (CME - Updated to children who are absent from education KSCIE 2025.)
- Utilise attendance data, analysing patterns and trends to target attendance and punctuality improvement across pupil cohorts or individual pupils, to reduce persistent or severe absence from school.
- Review the attendance policy annually and publish this on the school website.
- Account for and consider the specific needs of pupils and their families where there may be other barriers to attendance (medical conditions or special educational needs and disabilities) and provide support to overcome these barriers. (e.g. Early Help or other wider partners).
- Follow Public Health guidance should any outbreaks in school occur.
- Support pupils back into school following a length or unavoidable period of absence and provide support to build confidence and bridge gaps.
- Assemblies held on the importance of good punctuality and attendance.
- Monitoring absence and punctuality each half term, to establish regular patterns of absence and to act on any findings by reporting to parents or to the Local Authority as appropriate. Particular attention is paid to vulnerable groups of children e.g. Disadvantaged; SEND etc.
- Prompt investigation of any issues that may be affecting a child's well-being and attendance. (If absence persists, or becomes a concern, the Headteacher will contact parents advising them about improving attendance. After this, any further unauthorised absence will result in a formal letter from the school and may end in the Local Authority taking legal action).
- Set challenging but achievable attendance targets on the annual Core Strategic Plan.

- Monitor attendance termly for any emerging patterns below 96%. Parents will be routinely contacted if attendance falls below 90% at the end of every full term.

Section 3: Recording Attendance

We will keep an electronic attendance register and place all pupils onto this register. We will take our attendance register at the start of the morning session and at the start of the afternoon session. Pupils must arrive at school by 8.45am on each school day. The school gates open between 8.35am and 8.45am.

The register will mark whether every student is:

- Present
- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

We use the DfE attendance codes to ensure our attendance is recorded accurately.

We will keep every entry on the attendance register for 6 years after the date on which the entry was made.

Punctuality/Lateness

Pupils are expected to arrive punctually, ready for registration at 8.45 a.m. (There is an arrival window of 10 minutes from 8.35am). The school gates are locked at 8.45am and any pupils arriving after this time must enter school through the main entrance and be 'signed in' by a parent/carer.

Morning registers close at 8.55 a.m. and pupils arriving after this time will be marked as 'Late' on the class register. Afternoon registers are completed by 1.05pm.

Parents, guardians or carers of pupils who have patterns of lateness will be contacted to discuss the importance of good timekeeping and how this might be achieved. If lateness persists, parents, guardians or carers will be invited to attend school and discuss the problem and support offered. If support is not appropriate or is declined and a child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence due to lateness recorded in any 10-week period, the school may issue parents with a Penalty Notice.

Section 4 – Reporting an Absence

First day absence - A child not attending school is considered a safeguarding matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required.

If a child is absent, parents/carers must contact us as soon as possible on the first day of absence and each and every subsequent day, giving the reason for the absence, including providing specific details if the child is ill. If no specific reason is provided, absence will be coded as unauthorised until further information is provided.

If a child is absent and we have not heard from parent/carer, contact will be made firstly via text message and then by telephone to each contact we have on our system, in order of priority. This is because we have a duty to ensure every child's safety, as well as ensuring their regular school attendance. If contact has not been established with any of the named parents/carers, the school will make all reasonable enquiries including making enquiries to known friends, wider family.

Where a child is on a Child in Need Plan, Child Protection Plan or Looked After, contact will also be made with the relevant Social Worker on day 1.

Second-Fourth day absence - Established contact is continued if a child continues to be absent and parents/carers have not informed us of the reason. School may perform a home visit if we are concerned about a child's safety.

Fifth day absence - When a student is absent for four or more days, medical evidence will be required to support the length of absence. A home visit may be carried out by the Headteacher or other Senior Leader to ensure the safety and whereabouts of the pupil if medical evidence is not provided or not sufficient.

Tenth day absence - We have a legal duty to report the absence of any pupil who is absent without an explanation for 10 consecutive days. If the child is not seen and contact has not been established with the named parent/carer then the Local Authority is notified that the child is absent from education. Children's Services will visit the last known address and alert key services to locate the child.

Fifteenth day absence - We are required to provide the Local Authority with the full name and address of all pupils of compulsory school age who have been recorded as with code I (Illness) and who the school has reasonable grounds to believe will miss 15 days consecutively or cumulatively because of sickness.

Continued or ongoing absence - If absences persist, and/or form a pattern of concern, we will invite the parent/carer in to discuss the situation with our pastoral and safeguarding team to understand best next steps.

We are required to provide the Local Authority with the names and addresses of all pupils of compulsory school age who fail to attend school regularly.

If a child misses 10% (three weeks/sessions) or more schooling across the school year, for whatever reason, they are defined as *persistent absentees*. Absence, for whatever reason, disadvantages a child by creating gaps in their learning. Research shows these gaps affect attainment when attendance falls below 95%. As such, we monitor all absences thoroughly, and all attendance data is shared with the local authority and the Department for Education. Any pupil who is persistently absent will be monitored and put on an action plan, if required. The Headteacher or SENDCO will meet with pupils, and their families whose attendance cause concern. Where necessary, home visits are made to discuss ways attendance could be improved and the barriers that may need removing:

This could include:

- Agreeing attendance targets as part of an Attendance Plan
- Signing an attendance contract or education supervision order
- Signposting to outside agencies including Inclusion team at the LA
- Attending attendance matters clinics
- Issue a Notice to Improve and/or Penalty Notice

A welcome back - It is important that on return from a longer and unavoidable absence all pupils are made to feel welcome. This should include ensuring that the pupil is helped to catch up on missed work and brought up to date with anything relevant.

Section 5: Requesting a Leave of Absence

Illness

Parents and carers are expected to inform the school office on the morning of the first day of absence either via email, telephone or voice message, clearly stating the reason for the absence and the expected duration of illness.

If office staff have not been informed of the reason for a pupil's absence, a 'Safe and Well' check will be carried out by 9.20am where staff will contact a parent/carer by telephone or text message to ascertain a reason for the absence. Attempts will be made throughout the day until successful.

Requesting absence for medical/dental absence

Parents should make routine medical appointments out of school time. If this is not possible, we require advance notification. A message via email, a telephone call or voice message may be sent to the school prior to the day of absence, e.g. if a pupil has a medical appointment. We require a copy of the appointment letter/card/text to enable us to authorise the absence and advise when they need to leave site. Reasonable travel time will be allowed. Pupils should attend school before their appointment and return to the school straight after the appointment where possible.

Request for leave of absence in term time

Parents/carers wishing to apply for a leave of absence should submit a formal application to school.

- The 'Application for Leave of Absence' form is available on the attendance page of the school website. A paper copy is available on request from the school office.
- The form **MUST** be completed by the resident parent(s)/carer(s) before requests will be considered.
- Requests for Leave of Absence should ideally be made at least 3 weeks in advance and before any arrangements are confirmed or money committed.
- Completed forms should be submitted directly to school office staff if they are in paper form; online forms will be sent automatically to the office.
- Consent for term time leave will not be granted without full description of special circumstances. If the request is for a holiday, parents/carers should indicate why the holiday could not be taken in the course of the normal holiday pattern.
- The school will request further evidence to support any leave of absence application where this is not provided with your application.
- If the exceptional circumstances are agreed, the Head Teacher will determine the length of the absence to be authorised.

Once a form has been submitted, this will be processed and parents/carers will receive confirmation of the decision via email within a week.

Section 6: Understanding Types of Absence

Authorised - The parent/carer of a child of compulsory school age is required by law to ensure that the child regularly attends the school at which he/she is registered. Should a parent fail to ensure that his/her child attends that school regularly then the parent is guilty of an offence.

Legally, every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school as either authorised or unauthorised.

Authorised absence is where the school has either given approval in advance for the child to be absent or where an explanation offered afterwards has been accepted as satisfactory justification for absence.

Absence may generally be authorised for the following reasons:

- Illness
- Medical or dental appointments, by necessity made in school time
- Accredited Exam – ballet/music (extra-curricular)
- Approved sporting event (e.g. absence through competing at regional, county or national level for sport)
- Absence through child participation in public performances, including theatre, film or television- work and modelling
- Family Bereavement
- Serious family crisis
- Exclusion
- Wedding – close family relative
- Religious Observance
- Traveller child travelling for the purposes of parents employment
- Other unusual/rare 'exceptional' occasions (the nature of such occasions will be determined by school on an individual basis)
- Education off site – (E.g. to attend an offsite approved educational activity; to attend another school at which the pupil is dual registered; to attend provision arranged by the local authority. e.g. alternative provision or as part of an education, health & care plan)

Unauthorised - Unauthorised absence is where no explanation has been given for the child's absence or where the explanation offered is considered by the school to be unacceptable.

Absence will **not** be authorised in the following circumstances:

- If no explanation is offered by the parent/carer
- The explanation provided is unsatisfactory (e.g. shopping, day off to celebrate a birthday, minding the house, day trip etc.)
- Family holidays in term time (unless granted under 'exceptional' circumstances)
- Where there are a sporadic absences and the attendance is declining.
- Where no medical evidence has been provided when requested.

Orchard can, if needed, change an authorised absence to an unauthorised absence and vice versa if new information is presented. Any changes will be communicated to parents/carers. An example of this would be where a parent states a child is unwell but on return to school, there is evidence that they have been on holiday.

If the authenticity of an illness is in doubt, the Headteacher may ask the pupil's parent/carer 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 Headteacher is not satisfied with the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents/carers will be notified of this.

Persistent Absence - Persistent Absence (PA) is absence of 10% or more. An individual child is deemed to be a persistent absentee, therefore, if his/her attendance is less than 90% (regardless of whether or not the absences have been authorised).

If a pupil has an increasing number of authorised absences, classed as 'persistent absence', contact will be made with the parents to ascertain if further action needs to be taken. Re-occurring unauthorised absence may be referred to the Local Authority and this can lead to legal interventions.

The school will also make a referral to the Local Authority Attendance Team, as well as Early Help, if there is a concern about a pupil's welfare or safety.

Parents are expected to co-operate with the school and attend any meeting when requested to do so.

Holidays during Term Time & Leave of Absence - Schools are given strict guidelines from the Department of Education that there is no entitlement in law for any leave of absence for a holiday during term time and as a consequence, requests for leave of absence for reasons that are not considered to be special or exceptional will not be approved.

Examples of circumstances that will not be authorised:

- Availability of cheap holidays and cheap travel arrangements.
- Days overlapping with the beginning or end of term.
- During the first term, when a pupil is just starting at School, as it is very important for the child to settle into their new class;
- During an assessment/test period – Key Stage 2 SATs
- When a pupil's attendance record already includes any level of unauthorised absence
- We will also take into account the current attendance for each child when making a decision.

'Exceptional Circumstances' Criteria

It is not possible to define all 'exceptional circumstances' therefore the circumstances of each leave of absence application will be taken into account on an individual basis. However, examples of what might be considered 'exceptional circumstances' for leave in term time, as agreed by Governors at Orchard Primary School are:

- Service personnel returning from or scheduled to embark upon a tour of duty abroad.
- Where it is company/organisational policy for an employee to take leave at a specified time in the year and there is no opportunity for a family holiday in school holidays i.e. in some cases a parent's employer might restrict holidays to a certain time period. This must be supported by documentary evidence from the employer.
- Where a holiday is recommended as part of a parent or child's rehabilitation from a medical or traumatic emotional issue. Evidence must be provided by qualified professionals such as a GP.
- An emergency situation that requires the child to be away from school.

Where there are other factors which the head teacher may consider to be exceptional circumstances, this may be referred to the local authority for advice.

The school reserves the right to ask parents for written evidence where it feels this is required.

National Framework for penalty notices - The threshold for when a school should refer to the LA is 10 sessions (5 school days) of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks.

A school week means any week in which there is at least one school session. This can be made up of any form of unauthorised absence including late after close of register (attendance code U), and odd days of unauthorised absence (attendance code O), which add up to 5 days within a 10-week period.

At this point the school will consider if it is likely that the attendance will improve with further support. We may then decide to refer the case to the LA for formal monitoring. This may proceed to legal action if the attendance does not improve

Costs & process:

- First offence: The first time a Penalty Notice is issued it carries a fine of £80 per parent, per child if paid within 21 days, or £160 per parent, per child if paid within 28 days.
- Second offence: (within a 3 year period) The second time a Penalty Notice is issued it carries a fine of £160 per parent, per child if paid within 28 days.
- Third offence and any further offences (within 3 years): The third time an offence is committed, a Penalty Notice will not be issued. Instead, the case will be presented straight to Magistrates Court. Magistrates' fines can be up to £2500 per parent, per child. Cases found guilty in Magistrates' Court can show on the parent's future DBS certificate, due to failure to safeguard a child's education.

Section 7: Supporting Attendance

Some pupils face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. This can include children with long-term medical conditions, those who have SEND or pupils whose needs have been identified on an Educational Health Care Plan.

Should a child struggle to cope with the demands of a full-time timetable, a part-time timetable may be implemented temporarily. This is agreed in conjunction with outside agencies such as Oakfield or the Educational Psychologist. This is the responsibility of the SENDCO, in liaison with the Headteacher, educational professionals and the class teacher.

School will deal with attendance sensitively, put reasonable adjustments into place and consider whether additional support is required.

Section 8: Legal Measures for Tackling Poor Attendance Penalty Notices for non-attendance and other legal measures

In education law, parents/carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular attendance of their child of compulsory school age at the school at which the child is registered, unless the absence has been authorised by the school.

Orchard Primary will use the full range of legal measures to secure good attendance. Legal measures will only be considered when there is unauthorised absence and:

- the child or family do not require the support from any agency to improve the attendance
- the child has 10 or more sessions (5 days) of unauthorised absence and parents are complicit in the child's absence.

The following legal measures may be used for pupils of compulsory school age who are registered at Orchard:

- Parenting contracts set at Attendance Meetings

- Notice of Improvement/Penalty Notices
- Education Supervision Orders
- Prosecution

The decision on whether to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the Head teacher, following the Local Authority's code of conduct for issuing penalty notices. This may take into account:

- a number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year
- one-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission
- where an excluded child is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason
- if the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute the parent or withdraw the notice.

Children Missing Education (CME) - Where a child is not attending school, cannot be traced/contact cannot be made with the parents/carers or has moved without a forwarding address, we are required to inform the local authority that the child is missing.

A referral will be made to the Local Authority if no contact has been made with parents/carers by the 10th day of the absence, or sooner if deemed appropriate, at which point the child will be deemed to be 'missing in education'. In addition, the school may carry out a home visit and refer the family to social care and the police to ensure any concerns for the child's welfare have been thoroughly investigated.

Pupils will not be removed from the school roll until notified by the Local Authority that their enquires are complete.

Safeguarding – Orchard Primary School recognises that children missing in education can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, sexual abuse, child sexual and criminal exploitation. A child not attending school is therefore considered a safeguarding matter. Any attendance issues which may be related to safeguarding and child protection issues will be followed up in accordance with the school's Safeguarding Policy.

Section 9: Use of Data

Pupils' attendance will be monitored and will be shared with the Local Authority and other agencies if a learner's attendance is a cause for concern in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

Orchard's registers are legal documents. We will ensure compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for at least three years. Computer registers will be preserved as electronic back-ups. Pupil's attendance will be monitored and may be shared with the Local Authority and other agencies if their attendance is a cause for concern.

Section 10: Related Policies

The Attendance Policy has a direct link to the school's Safeguarding Policy; Behavior Policy; Anti-Bullying Policy; SEND Policy; Equalities Policy and the Health and Safety Policy.

The school has also adopted the Local Authority Policies on Children Missing Education, Elective Home Education. The school follows Local Authority guidance in relation to coding absence for families who travel as part of their culture.

All of these policies have been endorsed by our Governing Body which support the school in all attempts to improve the attendance and safeguarding agenda.

Development and implementation of this policy will be considered under school obligations from the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.