

Attendance toolkit for schools

To support schools to identify the drivers of absence and adopt effective practice to improve attendance

Foreword

Attendance in schools is the educational challenge of our generation.

Post-Covid rates of absence are deeply concerning, particularly in those schools where attendance was a day-to-day struggle historically, and for particular groups of pupils, such as those eligible for free school meals or with special educational needs. And, whilst attendance can sometimes seem like a beast that is too big to move, we are now starting to see the benefits of the hard work that schools and local authorities have been doing to address this; in 2022/23 there were 375,000 more pupils with 95-100% attendance, compared to the year before. This increase in attendance is true across the country, across all school types, and for vulnerable groups.

But to move attendance rates not just to pre-pandemic levels but beyond, we must be steadfast in our pursuit to ensure all children can achieve and thrive. We must use data cleverly whilst making sure we do not fall into the trap of being information rich but intervention poor.

A powerful approach used by schools to understand absence patterns and opportunity for intervention is **banding: cutting the data by both severity and year group**.

Evidence suggests that almost two thirds of children are missing between 5-15% of school. Securing better attendance for this cohort (upon which schools can have a greater influence), can have a huge impact on whole school and national attendance rates, and translate to improvement in the attainment of this group.

It is widely recognised that attendance can drop sharply following **transition from primary to secondary school** (particularly for children eligible for free school meals). It then drops further for all children, but particularly girls, **from year 8**. Implementing strong and robust transition processes can mitigate these dips in attendance.

A focus on these groups must, of course, **not be at the expense of the most vulnerable children who attend school infrequently, if at all**. Schools must ensure that these children are safe and well, whilst not giving up on the aspiration to reconnect them with their education.

I truly believe that many effective approaches to attendance challenges already exist within schools. Leaders of schools with high attendance create a wider culture where children feel aspirant, valued, safe, and happy. They create simple systems and protocols which are implemented consistently and harness the expertise within the local authority and community to remove barriers that children and families face. It is therefore within our control to implement these robust attendance practices across all schools. To do this, we need strong attendance leadership from headteachers, and to work together to share our promising approaches and the resources we rely on.

I first devised the idea of an attendance hub because of my feeling that there were schools in similar circumstances facing similar challenges, but they were not effectively sharing what is working for them. We now have thirty-one hubs bringing together two thousand schools. In my role as the Government's Attendance Ambassador, I have worked with the Department for Education to go a step further to spread promising practice, by working with attendance hubs and other schools to develop this toolkit.

In doing so, we have sought to synthesise many of the effective practices that schools are already implementing. It includes both the key messages about what systems can be effective to improve attendance and links to the school resources that support their implementation. This is version one, and I hope we can develop it with your help, so I will engage with leaders across the country to hear about other promising practice and resources where these are showing early signs of impact.

Whatever your phase or context, I hope you will find some practice that supports you and your teams, children, and families.



Rob Tarn, CBE

National Attendance Ambassador and CEO of Northern Education Trust

Introduction

This toolkit seeks to make it easier for schools to tackle the absence challenge. It describes approaches for leaders to consider and adopt where they feel these could be helpful in improving their approach to reducing absence, including practical resources to support schools.

The approaches, case studies and resources included in the toolkit have been sourced primarily from England's 31 [attendance hubs](#), and other system leaders supporting to improve attendance.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to responding to absence. However, experience shows us that schools can identify and remove barriers to attendance through strong practice in **six key areas**:

1. **[Data and targeted support](#)**: how to gather, share and use attendance data to put in place action to improve attendance.
2. **[Culture](#)**: how to embed a support-first culture to encourage high attendance and make school a place children want to attend.
3. **[People](#)**: how to make attendance ‘everyone’s business’ and ensure individuals and teams work together to reduce absence.
4. **[Processes and systems](#)**: how to develop and implement strong and rigorous processes to identify and respond quickly and effectively to absence.
5. **[Relationships](#)**: how to build strong and positive relationships with pupils and families to understand, then prevent or remove barriers to attendance.
6. **[Communications](#)**: how to develop and share strong and inclusive attendance communications that convey messages with impact.

Much of the toolkit’s content also exemplifies how schools can meet the seven expectations in the Department for Education’s (DfE) [Working together to improve school attendance guidance](#), which became statutory in August 2024

Who is the toolkit for?

This toolkit is for school trust CEOs and improvement leads, headteachers, senior attendance champions, attendance leaders and wider pastoral teams within primary and secondary schools, including special schools and alternative provision settings.

How to use the toolkit

Each of the [six key areas](#) of practice includes:

- actions that schools with high or significantly improved attendance have taken to remove barriers to attendance and improve practice
- resources such as tools, templates, videos and guidance from these schools and other credible sources
- case studies and examples of how schools have used the actions and resources in the toolkit to improve attendance practices

Before you use the toolkit

You might find it useful to review your school's existing attendance practices using the self-assessment tool in Annex B. You could consider undertaking an analysis of your attendance data in conjunction with this, and as you review the toolkit. This could be via your management information system, your own school's analysis or using the Monitor your school attendance data [tool](#) via the View [your education data](#) service. This will help you to identify attendance challenges specific to your school for you to consider. For example, patterns of absence relating to specific pupil cohorts, lessons or days of the week.

In addition to using the toolkit, we recommend that you refer to the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) supporting school attendance [page](#). This provides emerging evidence around attendance, and evidence-informed recommendations and tools to support attendance.

Introducing changes to systems and processes around attendance can be challenging, and schools will need to carefully consider how they are implementing any new approaches. The EEF's [Guide to Implementation](#) can support schools to

maximise the impact of new approaches by considering the behaviours, contextual factors and processes that support good implementation

Key area 1: Data and targeted support

Gathering and analysing a whole spectrum of attendance data can help you to identify the drivers of absence, emerging patterns, and individual pupils and cohorts that require support. This is key to being able to implement targeted strategies to improve attendance and monitor the impact of these to make changes if needed.

Recommended actions

Gathering and monitoring data

Implement robust and timely data gathering monitoring, reporting and sharing processes, ensuring relevant staff are clear on their responsibilities and have the time, skills and capacity to complete them. An example of a [data monitoring schedule](#) is available for you to adapt for your setting.

Taking a banded approach to analysis

Review attendance by severity bandings using existing data tools or the DfE Monitor your school attendance tool to get a list of pupils and their attendance. Use this to identify any pupils that are persistently or severely absent, or at risk of becoming so. Look at trends over time and across year groups. You can view the [Monitor your school attendance user guide](#) for further detail on how to use it and visit the [DfE YouTube channel](#) to watch a webinar demonstrating how to interpret your data.

Use an attendance tracker

Use an attendance tracker to record all available data and identify attendance trends relating to specific days, lessons, academic attainment or year groups. You can analyse these against different characteristics, including gender, eligibility for free school meals (FSM) and special education needs and disabilities (SEND) status to develop targeted attendance support and strategies.

You can see this [guidance about building an attendance tracker](#) for information about how to develop a tracker to record, monitor and share data effectively.

You can use the [Monitor your school attendance](#) service to help identify trends across pupil groups and track data over time.

Understand the reasons behind attendance trends

Explore the reasons behind attendance trends (including positive ones) identified through data by speaking to staff, pupils and their families. Use feedback to identify and develop targeted support where there are barriers and improve your whole-school approach to attendance. You can look at the case study from the Northern Education Trust below to see how the trust identified absence trends through data.

Provide targeted support to overcome attendance barriers

When you have identified concerning rates of attendance, understanding what is driving them is key to putting in place targeted support to help pupils to overcome barriers. Support should be agreed with pupils and parents and carers in a meeting, recorded and regularly reviewed for impact. You can see an example [attendance support meeting record](#) for more information about what to discuss.

For more information about the actions that schools can consider taking to improve the attendance of specific pupils and cohorts, you can see a [list of actions](#) and an [interventions flowchart](#)

Share data regularly, including evidence of impact

Share granular data regularly with relevant school staff (for example, senior leads, year group leads, pastoral staff, mental health leads, SENCOs), as well as governors and other stakeholders, including pupils, parents and carers.

Ensure language and presentation of this data is accessible, easy to understand, and conveys key messages that are relevant to the target audience.

You can access [a list of key information to include in a governor report](#). Secondary schools can access a ready-made version of this via the [View Your Education Data](#)

attendance data report which includes key headline data and can be shared with governors.

Case study: identifying absence trends in data at the Northern Education Trust

Northern Education Trust consists of 13 primary and 16 secondary academies across the north-east and north-west of England.

We use DfE's absence banding feature of the [Monitor your school attendance tool](#). It has helped us to identify that the biggest attendance drop-off point happens during transition from year 6 into year 7.

We met with the local authority to raise this as a concern and identified that:

- 63 year 7 pupils had not selected our school as their first choice
- of this cohort, 28 pupils were persistently absent

This accounts for:

- 23.1% of all absence in year 7
- 3.3% of absences across the academy
- 10.2% of the whole academy's persistent absence

School leaders and the local authority agreed on a joint approach to supporting this cohort of pupils. The Education Welfare Officer (EWO) service delivered a weekly tutor time slot to provide mentoring and intervention around good attendance and any barriers. This has led to a demonstrable improvement in attendance.

To prevent this from happening in the next academic year, the EWO service will support an enhanced year 6 transition for pupils in a similar position.

Case study: identifying concerning attendance and providing targeted support to a pupil with multiple needs.

A state-funded secondary school located in north-west England (setting anonymised to protect the child's identity).

We regularly use data to identify low or declining levels of pupil attendance and have implemented various strategies to support pupils who need targeted support.

One example of this is a pupil later diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The child had access to free school meals. Other members of the immediate family had physical and mental health needs.

In year 7, the child had fluctuated around 90% attendance.

In year 8, attendance data showed signs of decline (in line with wider national trends) and became a cause for concern.

In year 9, they developed a physical health condition that required specialist medical support. This affected their attendance and, at the end of the first term, their attendance had fallen to around 75%. During this term, the pupil had disclosed to staff that they were questioning their gender identity. The pupil was registered male at birth but wanted to be referred to with she/her pronouns.

Throughout the academic year, their mental health deteriorated, including acting on thoughts of self-harm.

Several interventions were taken, including:

- assigning a lead professional within the school
- working directly with the child and parent to address increased anxiety and mental health needs
- early help meetings chaired by schools lead professional
- an internal pupil support unit
- early pass to allow pupils to leave classes and school early to avoid crowds
- part-time timetable (for a time limited basis, with review points)
- a quiet place to take time out and relax in a space outside the main classroom for targeted support
- regular home visits (fortnightly)

- emotionally based school avoidance work including identifying the factors that push and pull the pupil to attend or avoid school, and 'what if' cards to help them think through different scenarios

External agency referral:

- School Health
- Thrive (CAMHS)
- CAMHS

With the variety of support and service involvement, the child's attendance improved to 100% in the next academic year. This is a huge achievement for them and testament to the service involvement in place.

Key area 2: Culture

A supportive school culture helps to create an environment where pupils are listened to, feel they belong, and actively want to be in the classroom. Successfully developing this culture involves the collaboration and efforts of the entire school community including learners, their families and staff.

Recommended actions

Foster a sense of belonging

Foster a sense of belonging, promoting wellbeing and high attendance with a strong and supportive pastoral presence. Create a strategy to thread this through safeguarding, curriculum, special education needs and disabilities (SEND) support, behaviour and transition.

- you can visit the [Delta Academies Trust YouTube channel](#) to see how they have implemented an attendance strategy and an approach to attendance;
- and the [Northern Education Trust's YouTube channel](#) to see how they have implemented a strong pastoral structure

Here is an example [six-week induction programme for pupils beginning year 7](#) that can be deployed in other schools.

Create a supportive school environment

Create a warm, safe, and welcoming 'support first' school environment for pupils that celebrates and rewards good behaviour and high **and** improved attendance.

Including improved attendance is particularly important for pupils who have been ill or who have special education needs and disabilities (SEND). Rewards can also recognise the participation of absent pupils who are learning remotely.

Be 'curious not furious' in response to absence to encourage pupils to discuss any barriers to attendance, and warmly welcome them back to school

You can watch a video from the Northern Education Trust for more information about [creating a culture in which pupils want to attend](#).

Identify and understand attendance barriers

Collect and use pupil voice through questionnaires and open sessions to identify and understand attendance barriers. Visibly act on what you can and where you can't, explain why. You can see an example list of [pupil voice questions](#) for a primary school.

Use enrichment and extra-curricular activities

Encourage wider engagement with school via enrichment and extra-curricular activities that are accessible to all pupils, as well as academic support such as curriculum catch up sessions and homework clubs. Use pupil voice to identify extra-curricular events children would like to see added to the programme.

Get to know your school's community and work with local businesses and faith leaders to develop a diverse and exciting enrichment programme.

Get communication right

Be consistent in attendance communication and make sure everyone is aware of the attendance and punctuality expectations of pupils. Ensure that these consider the circumstances of pupils with established and emerging needs, such as those relating to SEND and caring responsibilities.

See the [communication section](#) of the toolkit for more detail.

Case study: creating a welcoming, safe and supportive culture at Putteridge High School.

Putteridge High School is a state-funded secondary school in an urban area.

We recognise that the culture of a school is fundamental to attendance. We place a key focus on this area and ensure we have a welcoming, safe, and supportive culture that the pupils enjoy and thrive in.

Establishing clear values and ensuring that these are understood and modelled by pupils and staff is critical to maintaining a strong culture. Our values are citizenship, learning, aspirations, standards, and school of choice (CLASS). These are embedded and regularly revisited through:

- personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education
- form time activities
- assemblies
- our behaviour curriculum

Pupils are taught healthy habits and communication skills to enable them to deal with a variety of situations and provide a predictable environment in which they can operate.

Pupils are made aware of the school's attendance expectations, and the importance of being in school to achieve the best they can. They are rewarded for both attendance achievements **and** improvements.

Staff greet pupils warmly and pay attention to positive conduct, rather than misconduct, first. There is a strong supervisory presence at the beginning and end of the day, and during lesson transition. Staff wear bright blue 'duty' jackets which the pupil voice says makes them feel safe as they know where to go if they need support.

We set out clear guidelines on professional behaviour standards. Pupils who do not follow standards are held to account, reminded of our policy and protocols and supported to improve their behaviour.

Case study: preventing absence during transition at Drayton Manor High School.

Drayton Manor High School is a state funded secondary school in an urban area.

Smooth and successful transition is key to maintaining a culture of high attendance. We have put the following processes in place to prevent attendance from falling at the known drop-off points of moving from year 6 to 7 and year 7 to 8, and to support mid-year admissions and pupils returning to school after an extended absence:

- gathering feedback and data from the previous school to identify, understand and address any issues
- planning activities and events to help pupils feel safe and welcome and to meet pupils and staff, including:
 - taster days
 - teacher exchanges
 - cross-phase curriculum planning
- identifying any pupil needs (for example, SEND, attendance concerns, medical conditions, caring responsibilities, and safeguarding concerns) to put targeted support in place
- holding welcome (or welcome back) events for pupils and their families at the start of the year to emphasise the importance of attendance, and make them aware of attendance processes, expectations and support, ensuring attendance is covered in parents' evening.
- DfE's webinar '[supporting excellent attendance in the new academic year: Transitioning between year groups](#)' provides more advice on attendance and transition.

Case study: maximising attendance with a culture of good behaviour and robust routines at Eden Boys' School, Birmingham.

Eden Boys' School is a state funded secondary school in an urban area of high deprivation.

Our success in maintaining good attendance for pupils is built on a strong culture of exceptional behaviour and routines to ensure that pupils feel safe, happy and well.

They quickly learn that the STAR values (Service, Teamwork, Ambition and Respect) underpin all aspects of school life and can also be applied to other aspects of their lives. Pupils buy into the values because they enjoy very high-quality teaching, a rich and varied enrichment offer and relationships between peers and staff based on trust and mutual respect. Many pupils refer to school as their second home and to the school community as family.

The transition from year 6 to year 7 is undertaken carefully to ensure all parents/ carers have been engaged. In advance of the September start, we hold repeat parent/ carer information evenings and make home visits. This ensures that children and parents/ carers understand the school's attendance expectations and processes, and that school is aware of any attendance challenges. Our summer school allows pupils with more complex needs to make friends and feel comfortable with staff before start of the school year, which encourages high attendance

To encourage, incentivise, monitor and intervene where necessary, school colleagues work under the direction of our attendance champion. They complete a daily, weekly and half termly analysis of data, and review information and intelligence about individual pupils. This enables school staff to take timely action to address any emerging trends or concerns.

Heads of year engage with pupils and parents/ carers with care, compassion, and consistency. They are supported by SLT who can advise and add capacity when needed. There is clear accountability for each year group's attendance percentage and persistent absence (PA) figure. PA is rare and severe absence (SA) is uncommon, but where specialist support is needed, for example (SEND input) it can be accessed through:

- school- led 'Every Star Matters' meetings or
- escalated to trust-led 'Team Around the Child with Complex Barriers to Attendance' (TACCBA) meeting

Form tutors take a keen interest in the attendance of the pupils and undertake mentoring discussions and information sharing on a weekly basis. They also run friendly competition in the form of a 'Champions' Cup' for form and year groups. This engages pupils, keeps them interested and brings a sense of shared responsibility.

Key area 3: People

Clear attendance roles and responsibilities enable schools to monitor attendance and tackle absence. Understanding the link between strong practice in this area and successfully embedding a culture of high attendance is key.

Schools have a statutory duty to [appoint a designated senior attendance champion](#) who has overall responsibility for improving attendance. You can watch [the DfE webinar](#) to find out more about the role of the attendance champion.

Recommended actions for the senior attendance champion

Regular conversations

Ensure attendance remains a high-status topic across the school, which is regularly discussed at senior leadership team (SLT) meetings. You can watch an [extract from North Shore Academy's SLT attendance meeting](#) to see how individual pupil absence is discussed.

Make effort to embed attendance processes into line management conversations, including within the school's safeguarding and wellbeing processes.

Strategically plan opportunities to integrate attendance into all aspects of school life by checking calendars to identify events where attendance can be featured and developing content for communications and reports to school staff, governors and families.

You can see [examples of attendance action plans](#) which set out suggested attendance priorities for the year, and the actions needed to deliver these.

Provide attendance briefings and coordinate actions

Provide regular attendance briefings to summarise progress and trends and highlight issues, risks, and concerns. This could include, for example, flagging to the wider school workforce the number of pupils with a 5 to 15% absence rate (equivalent to missing up to three school days every four weeks) or those with declining rates of attendance.

Ensure that staff know how to use the information provided in briefings and are aware of any actions they are expected to take to improve attendance.

Hold regular meetings with governors where attendance reports are presented and their content communicated clearly. This provides an opportunity for challenge and to discuss certain aspects in more detail.

Attend targeting support meetings with your local authority to discuss support for persistently and severely absent pupils.

Ensure quality practice

Quality assure attendance practice by observing meetings, providing scripts for staff, listening to phone calls with parents/ carers. Systems and processes should be reviewed regularly to look for strengths, impact and areas for improvement. Report your reflections and lessons learned to senior leaders and relevant staff members.

You can view examples of [priority actions for each area of attendance practice](#) and consider whether any of these can be implemented to strengthen your approach.

Case study: senior attendance champion at Denbigh High School

Denbigh High school is a state-funded secondary school in the east of England

Our senior attendance champion leads on attendance data monitoring, developing and implementing robust attendance processes, and ensuring these are consistently applied. Along with other members of SLT, they are responsible for ensuring that:

- the school is a welcoming, exciting and safe place
- attendance is part of every aspect of school life and consistently high on everyone's agenda
- staff are aware of their attendance responsibilities and have the skills to deliver them, providing regular training and development

- attendance procedures and policies are regularly reviewed, quality assured, inclusive, and adapted where there are additional needs such as medical conditions or SEND
- data is used to get a clear understanding of attendance by cohort
- bespoke strategies are developed to improve attendance
- they develop, implement and monitor the school's reward structure
- a calendar of attendance activities is developed and shared
- the PSHE curriculum is adapted to respond to attendance issues, for example, adolescence and GCSE options related issues for Key Stage 3 pupils, and anxieties about starting GCSEs and leaving school for Key Stage 4 pupils
- they lead termly meetings with governors and other stakeholders to discuss attendance data, inviting challenge to continuously improve
- they take decisions about penalty notices, attendance contracts, and education supervision orders when other strategies have failed to improve attendance
- partnerships are established and maintained with local schools, the local authority and external agencies who can support families with attendance issues
- attendance practices and systems are inclusive and adapted where required. For example, sending personalised attendance text messages and letters for pupils with medical conditions or other additional needs

Other recommended actions

Ensure clear roles and responsibilities

Ensure all staff are clear on their role in attendance, where this sits in the broader structure and how it links to the school's attendance strategy and culture. Staff should have the right skills and experience to deliver their attendance responsibilities, and these should be reviewed regularly.

Train all relevant staff in tracking attendance, including basic data handling and how to spot trends. This is particularly important for:

- pupils with 5 to 15% absence (missing up to three school days every four weeks)
- severe absence
- pupils with additional needs
- key stages such as transition into primary, year 7, 8 or 11

Ensure individual attendance roles and responsibilities are set out explicitly in job descriptions for the senior attendance champion and all teaching, administrative, attendance, pastoral and support staff, including SENCOs and mental health leads. These should be factored into recruitment and induction and discussed in performance management meetings.

You can view an example [attendance officer job description](#)

Provide clear staffing structures

Provide a clear and accessible staffing structure which details everyone's role in relation to attendance (including the headteacher, senior attendance champion, senior leaders, teachers, support and pastoral staff, lunchtime supervisors, and caretakers) and share this regularly, including with pupils and parents and carers. This ensures all attendance-related work is covered and prevents it from being duplicated, making the best use of staff time.

You can view here examples of [staff attendance responsibilities](#) in a secondary setting.

Provide all relevant staff and stakeholders, for example, governors and trust leaders, with the school's attendance strategy at the start of each term and store them in a readily accessible place. This can include school values, absence response, internal and external support available, and escalation processes. Ensure attendance is included in the role description and responsibilities of governors, to ensure they are engaging with and reviewing attendance data and practices.

Case study: staff roles and responsibilities at Denbigh High School

We have collaborated with leaders, staff, and stakeholders to develop our attendance expectations, which are set out in our attendance policy on our website.

The importance of attendance is emphasised by the headteacher, along with the senior attendance champion. They ensure that attendance is a high-status topic and is discussed at leadership meetings. They drill down into the data to look for any specific trends, issues, or concerns at cohort and individual pupil level.

We have ensured that everyone's attendance roles and responsibilities are clear, including pupils, families, school staff, and governors. All teaching, support, and pastoral staff have responsibilities linked to attendance included in their job descriptions. We provide training to help staff review attendance data, both at induction and through continuous professional development.

We encourage accountability by referring to agreed roles and responsibilities in staff meetings to ensure everyone is fully aware of attendance ambitions. Staff can also use staff meetings to share best practice.

Key area 4: Processes and systems

Simple but robust attendance systems and processes enable schools to track, follow up and tackle absence by supporting pupils quickly and effectively. They should be shared with all staff, reviewed regularly for impact, and sensitive to pupils with additional needs, such as those with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), whether formally diagnosed or not.

Recommended actions

Ensure key systems are in place

Ensure key systems are in place around register completion, including using the correct attendance codes to enable accurate daily data collection. A list of the required DfE attendance and absence codes are available in Chapter 8 of the [Working together to improve school attendance](#) guidance. DfE has recorded webinars that you can watch about [attendance and absence codes](#) and [attendance and punctuality](#)

Put in place systems to respond to absence (including who does what, how, and when) and clear escalation procedures (including actions to take when absence falls reaches specific thresholds). Ensure you regularly review the effectiveness of these, and check that that they are applied consistently.

You can view an example [primary school absence response workflow](#) and a [secondary school absence response workflow](#) that can be adapted to the context of your setting.

Have clear processes in place

Have clear flowcharts, checklists, guidance scripts and templates to support consistent delivery of the school's systems on a daily and weekly basis. Ensure these are accessible to all the relevant people. Where changes are made to these, explain the reasons behind this. [A School's Guide to Implementation | EEF](#) contains evidence-based guidance about successfully implementing changes.

You can view an example [checklist of daily attendance tasks](#) and a [checklist of end of week attendance tasks](#) to see if they would be appropriate for you to use or adapt for your setting.

Use the ‘golden hour’

Use the ‘golden hour’ (the first hour of the school day) to conduct pre-emptive and supportive telephone calls to encourage school attendance for target pupils. Where possible it is preferable to assign a child or family a member of staff who regularly contacts the family as required, to maintain consistency and build relationships.

You can access [example scripts and questions to use when having conversations with parents and carers about pupil absence](#). This resource is designed to help relevant staff explore the reasons behind why a pupil isn’t attending school and includes advice on framing questions and how to answer common questions.

Implement a triage system

Implement a triage system to assess pupil absence, and graduated responses. This can include taking no action if appropriate, setting up a ‘return to school meeting,’ making a referral to the school’s SENCo, mental health lead, safeguarding lead or local authority services and agencies, including legal intervention where appropriate.

You can access an example of [graduated responses to attendance](#).

Use bespoke letters

Avoid blanket communication with families and instead deploy adaptable, bespoke letters that ensure the communication reflects the context and situation of individual pupils.

It can be particularly effective to provide the number of days and lessons the child has been absent rather than a percentage, to provide ‘real world’ context and to clearly communicate the scale of the issue. Access example [attendance email and letter templates](#) that you can adapt for your setting.

Case study: processes and systems at Lift Schools (formerly AET)

Lift Schools is a multi-academy trust comprised of fifty-seven schools across England.

We use an attendance workflow document which identifies daily, weekly, fortnightly, half termly and termly attendance tasks. It shows us what checks, tasks and meetings are needed, when they should be done_(including a specified time for daily tasks) and who should do them. These are time stamped when completed for monitoring.

Our live weekly attendance dashboard shows:

- attendance and persistent absence by pupils and groups
- trends for pupils, including if attendance has improved or declined compared with the previous week
- colour-coded 'flags' to identify where action is needed
- formal meetings led by the trust to challenge and support school leaders and extra support for pupils who need it

The dashboard shows the next steps for each pupil. This can include:

- verbal recognition where attendance remains strong or is improving
- exploring reasons why attendance has declined
- identifying immediate support and actions
- referring actions to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), senior attendance champion, SENDCo or through the Local Authority

To monitor systems and support teams across the trust we:

- provide an attendance playbook to outline attendance strategies and resources, including scripts for conversations with parents and carers workflow decision maps and templates
- update national, regional and school meetings to ensure that the whole team is aware of current rates of attendance and pupils who need support

- attend a national attendance network meeting each half-term to share best practice
- participate in a live online community
- support our schools to implement attendance monitoring activities, for example, attendance and absence code monitoring and tracking pupils with severe and persistent absence
- review and share attendance data statistics each term and provide national and local benchmarks, to inform school action planning

Key area 5: Relationships

Strong, cooperative relationships with families can help to prevent absence problems from becoming entrenched and enable schools to provide pupils with the support they need to attend school.

Schools that build close relationships with families can work together to:

- identify and overcome complex barriers to attendance
- ensure the school is welcoming to all pupils
- support parents to recognise the value of their child being in school

Recommended actions

Get to know families

Get to know families and actively seek their views about attendance including via drop-in sessions, phone calls and targeted questionnaires ahead of the start of term for children identified as having attendance issues. View an [example questionnaire](#) that can be sent to families after a break from school.

You can view suggested actions to [build positive relationships with families](#).

Run parent/carer workshops on topics requested by them or offer the opportunity to meet away from school, for example, in other local community settings. You can use these [top tips for planning a parent workshop](#).

Offer wider school-based activities that families can engage with such as gardening clubs and outdoor activities in the spring and summer.

Understand family circumstances

Where issues emerge, listen to parents/carers sensitively, and without judgement to understand the family's circumstances, and any barriers to attendance, to explore how these could be overcome.

Focus conversations on motivating parents, carers and pupils, by discussing the links between good attendance and wellbeing, friendships, building good habits for life, attainment and the support school can offer. You can access attendance [advice](#)

[for parents and carers](#) to see if it would be suitable to use with families in your setting.

Use information provided by pupils and parents/ carers to review and improve your whole school approach to attendance by removing any barriers they identify.

Celebrate success

Praise children where attendance has improved and/ or progress has been made in engaging in school life. Create a sense of celebration with parents and carers to show that the school is proud of the child and family for overcoming barriers to attendance. Contact parents and carers with positive messages about seeing their child in school and engage in their interests in lessons or extracurricular activities.

Support families with access to resources

Consider how you can provide families with access to resources that might otherwise be a barrier to attendance. This could include introductions to local partners and charities to support with:

- school uniform
- access to alarm clocks
- sanitary products
- food parcels
- SIM cards for parents/ carers
- access to school mental health first aiders

You can also make parents/ carers of children with SEND aware of the support available from the local authority as part of their Local Offer.

Case study: building relationships with families at St Bede's Catholic Academy.

St Bede's Catholic Academy is a state-funded primary school located in North-East England.

We pride ourselves on developing strong relationships with families and work hard to understand the barriers to attendance. We work collaboratively with families (and other agencies, when required) to overcome them.

We worked closely with a particular family when a pupil had poor attendance of 85%. When we looked at the child's attendance data, there was no noticeable pattern of absence.

Our parent support advisor contacted the family. After careful discussion, they established that the child's parent was concerned that they were showing signs of sensory processing difficulties, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

As a school, we worked closely with the child's parent to understand why she felt they had these difficulties. We listened and provided her with reassurance that we were taking her concerns seriously. Together we agreed to refer the child to the relevant agencies for diagnostic assessments.

There was a long waiting time for this, so the child received in-school support for the issues they were experiencing, and we referred them for an educational psychologist's assessment. The child's parent was also referred to an NHS sensory support course for parents.

By building a strong relationship with the child and their parent, listening carefully to her concerns, and providing a support-first approach, the child's attendance improved, reaching 97.25% in the following academic year.

Key area 6: Communication

Clear, regular communication with parents and carers on absence is key to embedding attendance expectations and processes across the entire school community and making families aware of the support available and how to access it.

Recommended actions

Ensure clear communication using a range of communication methods

Ensure communications are clear, concise, accessible, jargon-free, consider language barriers and are meaningful and inclusive of families in all circumstances. Work with parent carer groups to co-construct messaging that contains the right level of information, using the appropriate tone. You can seek regular feedback from parents/ carers about the effectiveness of these, making improvements if necessary. For more information about communicating with families, view some [top tips for engaging with parents and carers about attendance](#).

Use a range of communication methods including social media, letters, videos, newsletters, the school website and text messages to ensure key information reaches all pupils, their families and the wider community. Examples of [attendance text messages](#) are available for you to consider using. View [examples](#) of attendance letters, which include information for parents and carers on attendance and absence. The [DfE toolkit for schools](#) is available to support you to communicate with families to support attendance.

You can also use home visits and phone calls (where appropriate) to create an opportunity to probe into the underlying reasons for absence and make personal connections with families.

Ensure staff are trained to have supportive but challenging conversations

Ensure staff are trained and have the skills they need to hold supportive but sometimes difficult conversations with parents and carers about their child's attendance. This should include careful and sensitive reminders about:

- the school's expectations
- the support available
- their legal duty to ensure their child attends school
- the potential consequences of them not engaging with the support school provides

Engage governors

Hold regular (for example, termly) meetings with governors where attendance reports are presented and the information is communicated clearly, allowing for challenge and the opportunity to discuss certain aspects in more detail.

Case study: strong attendance communication at Bedford Academy.

Bedford Academy is a state-funded secondary school part of Heart Academy's trust in east England.

We re-vamped our approach to attendance after data indicated we were not moving in the right direction, post pandemic. We had taken the same approach to attendance for years and this simply wasn't working anymore. We saw the same absence patterns across year groups and had some inconsistencies in our response to this across the school.

We decided to model a new approach at senior leadership team (SLT) level initially, to demonstrate the impact. A senior leader made daily phone calls to absent pupils over a trial period of four weeks. The aim was to check if pupils were okay and build relationships with parents/ carers by offering support to get their child back into school. We used our [tutor attendance conversation structure and prompts](#) resource when making these calls.

During the trial, we saw the number of days of absence reduce. We identified attendance patterns for individual pupils and referred them to wellbeing and pastoral staff where appropriate.

We extended the trial to focus on year 9. To do this, we:

- trained tutors to make the calls

- explained the importance of building stronger relationships with families
- highlighted the impact of attendance on attainment

We agreed that calls would be recorded on the school's management information system (MIS). They follow the escalation route for each day of absence:

- day 1 – tutor calls
- day 2 – head of year calls
- day 3 – senior leader calls

The extended trial saw an increase in attendance and the strategy was rolled out across the whole school.

Case study: Lealands High School's robust and supportive approach to communicating with parents

Lealands High School is a local authority maintained secondary school in Luton.

At Lealands High School we start communicating about attendance with parents and carers (including those of pupils transitioning from year 6) at the start of June. We send them a letter about the importance of high attendance, which includes our expectations, policies and procedures. We ensure these letters, and all our attendance communications, are sensitive to individual circumstances. We share our attendance information with parents regularly by including it in our half termly newsletter.

We encourage parents/ carers to monitor their child's attendance via our school app which updates daily. This enables them to see the number of days their child has missed, and any emerging patterns. Our communications include the amount of 'lost learning' to emphasise the impact of absence. Pupil reports include their attendance rates, benchmarking these against national and school averages. We also send letters to parents/ carers to recognise and praise their child's improved attendance.

The tone of our communications is clear and direct but also supportive and welcoming, encouraging parents/ carers to work with us in the best interests of their child.

Routine communication with individual parents/ carers is made by our attendance officer. Having a single and consistent point of contact has helped to build strong relationships. Where absence is a concern, our attendance and pastoral support managers offer parents/ carers support and may also invite them to a meeting to:

- discuss strategies to overcome barriers to attendance
- discuss any in- school adjustments that can be made
- offer parenting advice where appropriate
- discuss in-school and external support available

Parents/ carers of disadvantaged pupils with poor attendance may receive extra support from our disadvantage champion. They build strong relationships with families via regular phone calls and face-to-face meetings.

During exam periods, pupils with a history of poor attendance receive calls home to support good attendance, and a staffed study space is provided to support pupils who are nervous about exams.

Our approach to communicating with parents and carers breaks down barriers and builds positive relationships. This enables us to get to know individual families, understand the difficulties they face and support their children to attend school.

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Drayton Manor High School

Eden Boys' School, part of the STAR Academies Trust.

Forest Academy, part of the Inspire Partnership Academy Trust.

Lealands High School

Lift Schools

Meridian Trust

Mulberry Academy Shoreditch, part of the Mulberry Schools Trust.

Olive Academies Trust

Putteridge High School, part of the Chiltern Learning Trust.

St Bede's Catholic Academy, part of the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust.

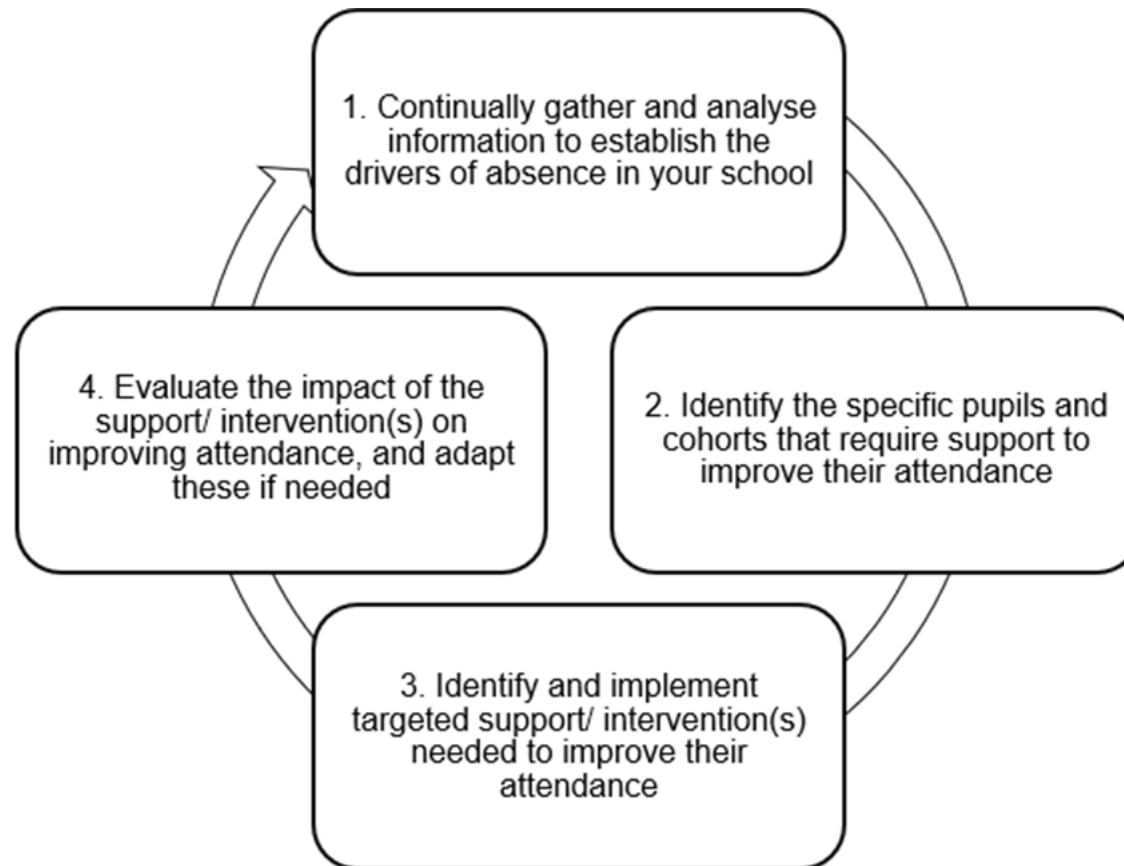
The Parks Primary Academy, part of the Delta Academies Trust.

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Wright Robinson College, part of the Flagship Learning Trust.

Annex A: Data flow chart



Annex B: Self-assessment

This self-assessment is an informal and optional resource designed to support you to review your current attendance practice and identify any areas of practice that can be strengthened.

For a more in-depth review of your attendance practice, you may also wish to:

- discuss attendance with your leadership team, including attendance and pastoral leaders and partners (where applicable)
- consider this alongside analysis of your attendance data and wider development plans

What you need to do

For each question, give a score between 1 and 4 that reflects the strength of your current practice, using the below key:

1. in place or in the early stages of development
2. in place but needs to be strengthened and further embedded
3. in place but effectiveness has not been tested
4. in place and known to be effective

Add notes explaining your score for each question in the 'evidence' column, along with details of your attendance systems, processes, engagement and communications and any supporting data.

When you have completed the assessment, use the results to help you refer to the relevant section of the toolkit. This will give you information to help improve practice.

You can record any agreed next steps or actions in the final column.

Please see the following page for the self-assessment table.

To what extent...	Current rating (1 to 4)	Evidence to support your score	Actions you can take to strengthen this area of practice
Data and targeted support			
Do you ensure that teachers and all other relevant staff are aware of attendance rates for their class, form and year (including overall, persistent absence, severe absence and specific cohorts)?			
Are pupils aware of their own attendance rates, and why these matter?			
Do you frequently monitor and analyse attendance data, including historic trends over time, pupil, year group, and specific cohorts e.g. SEN and FSM?			

To what extent...	Current rating (1 to 4)	Evidence to support your score	Actions you can take to strengthen this area of practice
Do you use data to identify individual and cohort barriers to attendance, taking targeted action and developing strategies to overcome these?			
Are staff aware of the full range of support available within school for pupils with barriers to attendance, and how and when to access these?			
Do staff understand how the targeted support in place will respond to the pupils' attendance barriers?			
Are you confident that you have a full picture of the external support available for pupils with barriers to attendance? For example, what support is provided by your local authority and charities.			

To what extent...	Current rating (1 to 4)	Evidence to support your score	Actions you can take to strengthen this area of practice
Are you aware of how and when to access external services to help pupils to overcome barriers to attendance?			
Do you make sure that the intended impact of attendance support is clear, regularly reviewed to measure effectiveness, and adjusted if needed?			

To what extent...	Current rating (1 to 4)	Evidence to support your score	Actions you can take to strengthen this area of practice
Culture			
Do staff, pupils, parents/carers, and governors know your school's vision and values and how this relates to maintaining high attendance?			
Do your vision and values promote a culture that supports strong attendance and high attendance expectations?			
Do you ensure that your school's culture is warm, welcoming, supportive and encourages a sense of belonging in all pupils?			
Are you confident that staff and pupils understand, model and communicate your values and culture?			

To what extent...	Current rating (1 to 4)	Evidence to support your score	Actions you can take to strengthen this area of practice
People, processes and systems			
The senior attendance champion			
Are you confident that the senior attendance champion is sufficiently visible, and that their role is understood by staff, pupils, governors and the wider community?			
Does the champion receive sufficient support and challenge from the headteacher and governors?			
Does the senior attendance champion have the capacity, time, and skills to effectively deliver their role?			

To what extent...	Current rating (1 to 4)	Evidence to support your score	Actions you can take to strengthen this area of practice
Do you ensure that staff are aware of their attendance responsibilities?			
Do you monitor the effectiveness of staff in delivering their attendance responsibilities and identify and meet any learning and development needs?			
Do you regularly review your current operating model to assess its effectiveness?			
Processes and systems			
Have you implemented clear attendance systems and processes to track and respond to absence in a timely and responsive way?			

To what extent...	Current rating (1 to 4)	Evidence to support your score	Actions you can take to strengthen this area of practice
Do you ensure that information about attendance systems and processes is easy to locate and communicated frequently across the school community?			
Do attendance systems and processes feature in staff induction and training?			
Are your systems and processes sensitive to children with additional needs, such as SEN and young carers? For example, that you reward improved attendance, not just high attendance.			
Do you regularly measure the impact of your systems and processes and update or change them when necessary?			

To what extent...	Current rating (1 to 4)	Evidence to support your score	Actions you can take to strengthen this area of practice
Relationships and communications			
Relationships with families			
Are the right staff within the school holding the relationship with parents/ carers?			
Do you create an environment that encourages families to feel welcome at school?			
Are school staff confident in discussing attendance- and any sensitive issues relating to this- with families, and do they have the listening skills required?			
Do you seek opinions from parents and carers and parent carer groups and use these to shape attendance support?			

To what extent...	Current rating (1 to 4)	Evidence to support your score	Actions you can take to strengthen this area of practice
Do you measure the impact, and effectiveness of attendance communications in reducing absence?			
Are you confident that families are aware of the attendance support, guidance and advice available to them, and how and when to access this?			
Do you describe absence in a relatable way? For example, in terms of lessons and days missed, rather than just percentages, and the social, health and academic benefits of regular attendance.			
Are you confident that families are satisfied with the frequency, accuracy, timing, language, tone and methods used for attendance communications?			

To what extent...	Current rating (1 to 4)	Evidence to support your score	Actions you can take to strengthen this area of practice
Do you ensure that communications are accessible to everyone, recognise diverse barriers to attendance and promote school as a positive and supportive place to be?			
Do you engage with other schools in your area or trust to ensure that your messaging and approach is consistent?			

Annex C: Data monitoring schedule

Below are suggested attendance tasks that can be completed on a daily, weekly, half termly and termly basis to support schools to adopt a robust approach to responding to absence and improving attendance.

Daily	Weekly	Half-termly (6 per year)	Termly (3 per academic year)
Attendance staff monitor register completion and return	Senior attendance champion meets attendance staff to discuss the week's data.	School leadership team meet to discuss and scrutinise data on overall banding distribution, current and cumulative attendance, persistent and severe absence.	Meet with governors or trustees to share data trends, and progress.
Registers updated based on messages from parents and carers	Scrutiny and review of attendance banding distribution on View Your Education Data service	Monitor impact of attendance strategies and make changes where needed.	Headteacher writes to parents and carers of pupils with the poorest attendance, ensuring messaging is appropriate and reflects the child and family's situation.
Register data used to take immediate action, including (where appropriate) contact parents/ carers, home visits, liaising with SENCo, escalating safeguarding issues, and requesting medical evidence	Review and progress individual action plans and consider next steps where plans aren't being engaged with.	Benchmark attendance outcomes against national and local authority level.	
Daily attendance data sent to relevant school leads with information about actions to take.	Senior leadership team to meet weekly to discuss weekly data broken down by key cohorts e.g. FSM, SEND etc...	Share absence data in communications to all relevant staff and parents/ carers.	
Final attendance data shared with relevant senior leads at the end of the day, including outcomes.	Identification of pupils attending persistent or severe absence.	Arrange meetings with parents and carers of pupils with the poorest attendance	