# Attendance Policy

| | |
|---|---|
| Reference Number | SO-0022 |
| Version Number | 4.3 |
| Latest Revision | August 2024 |
| Policy Owner | Education Directorate |
| Ratified | November 2024 |
| Next Review | August 2025 |

## Contents

1. Purpose ..... 2
2. Scope ..... 2
3. Approach ..... 2
4. Operational delivery ..... 3
5. Roles and responsibilities ..... 12
6. Evaluation ..... 13
7. The legal framework ..... 13
8. Related policies ..... 13
9. Definitions ..... 13

## 1. Purpose

To outline the NAS Education Directorate's policy for NAS schools' approach to supporting good attendance in our schools.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all schools and children's services within the National Autistic Society.

## 3. Approach

We believe that in order to facilitate teaching and learning, good attendance is essential. Pupils cannot achieve their full potential if they do not regularly attend school.

We are committed to:

- Promoting and modelling good attendance.
- Have high expectations for good attendance and promoting a culture where all staff see a role in supporting good attendance.
- Ensuring equality and fairness for all.
- Communicating with pupils and where appropriate pupils about why good attendance is important
- Listening to parents about why their child is not attending and support them to act accordingly
- Challenging parents and communicating expectations clearly but also offering support where needed.
- Intervening early and working with other agencies to ensure the health and safety of our pupils.
- Ensuing attendance is recorded and patterns are analysed and acted upon.
- Rewarding regular attendance.
- Ensuring parents follow the framework set in section 7 of the Education Act 1996 which states that:

  "The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient full-time education suitable:

  a) to age, ability and aptitude and
  b) to any special educational needs, he/she may have

  Either by regular attendance at school or otherwise".

Pupil/students with a diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder and related conditions may be extremely vulnerable in terms of lack of understanding of their own safety, and the significance of school rules relating to absconding. The NAS places high importance

on training and awareness for staff regarding matters of safety, security and support for pupils.

Parents/carers have the prime responsibility for ensuring that registered pupils of compulsory school age attend school regularly. The school will encourage a good working relationship with parents/carers and will publicise the arrangements for notifying absence. Where patterns are noticed or pupils are at risk of becoming a persistent non- attendee then the school should work with the parents early on. It is essential parents are listened to, shown empathy and supported to find solutions. However , it is also important that parents are challenged and that expectations for improved attendance are made clear.

It is important the leaders create a culture where attendance is everyone's priority and seen as linked to safeguarding and wellbeing. Monitoring, understanding and improving attendance is vitally important. Poor attendance not only impacts on progress but it could mean something is wrong for that pupil. This could either be in the home environment or school environment, incidences of bullying for example can lead to pupils avoiding school. All staff should be vigilant to the other reasons besides ill health that lead to poor attendance.

The attendance of all pupils at NAS schools will be monitored and should there be concerns regarding the safety or welfare of a pupil by their absence both the Local Authority and Social Services will be contacted and Child Protection / Missing Child Procedures will be activated. The school will support parents/carers as necessary.

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

- The Education Act 1996
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended)
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013
- The equality act 2010
- Working together to improve school attendance.
- Keeping children safe in education 2024
- Guidance for sharing daily pupil attendance
- Children Missing Education

# 4. Operational delivery

## 4.1 Absence procedures

Parents will be required to contact the school office via telephone or via email by 8.30 or as soon as practicably possible on the first day of any absence.

Alternatively, parents may call into school and report to the school office where arrangements will be made to speak to a member of staff.

If a child is absent for more than one day, the parent should contact the school each day to provide an update on the child's condition, unless otherwise agreed by the school.

If a pupil's absence is unaccounted for at the close of registration, the absence will be recorded as 'unauthorised' and parents/carers of that child will be contacted by:

- Calling every contact number that we hold for that pupil.
- If there is no response from any of these numbers, we will carry out a home visit.
- If there is nobody at home, we will inform the police that there is a missing child.
- If the child is absent without explanation for more than 10 days, a report will be made to the Local Authority as 'missing from education'.

A telephone call will be made to the parent of any child who has not reported their absence on the first day that they do not attend school.

The school will always follow up any absences in order to:

- Ascertain the reason for the absence.
- Ensure that proper safeguarding action is being taken.
- Identify whether the absence is authorised or not.
- Identify the correct code to use to enter the data onto the school census system.

Absence due to illness will be authorised unless the school has a concern about the authenticity of the illness. If this is in doubt, the school may ask parents to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. The school will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily. If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents will be notified accordingly.

The school will inform the LA, on a termly basis, of the details of pupils who fail to attend regularly, or who have missed 10 school days or more without permission.

If a pupil's attendance is of concern the local authority attendance officer and if appropriate social services will be informed, and a formal meeting may be arranged with the pupil's parent.

In order to keep pupils' safe, we require parents/carers to provide a minimum of three contact numbers for their child, at least one of which should be for a different household.

**Residential pupils (Residential schools only)**

Residential pupils/students will be checked safely in and out of the premises at the beginning and the end of the day, via the school's transportation/escort registers as well as in the formal twice-daily school register.

All staff will be vigilant in their recording of student attendance.

Staff will be designated specific pupil(s) for whom they are responsible for whilst travelling between school and residential settings. Attendance registers will be checked when going on and returning from educational visits.

## 4.2 Attendance Register

The designated staff members will take the attendance register at the start of each school day and at the start of the afternoon session. This register will record whether pupils are:

- Present
- Absent
- Attending an approved educational visit
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

## 4.3 Attendance codes

The school will use the national attendance codes to ensure attendance and absence are monitored and recorded in a consistent way. The following codes will be used:

- # = Planned whole school closure
- / = Present in the morning
- \ = Present in the afternoon
- L = Late arrival before the register has closed
- C = Leave of absence for exceptional circumstance
- C1 = Leave of absence granted by the school for the purpose of participating in a regulated performance or undertaking regulated employment abroad
- C2 = Leave of absence for a compulsory school age pupil subject to a part-time timetable
- E = Suspended or permanently excluded but no alternative provision made
- I = Illness (not medical or dental appointment)
- M = Medical or dental appointments
- R = Religious observance
- S = Leave of absence for the purpose of studying for a public examination
- T = Parent travelling for occupational purposes
- G = Unauthorised holiday
- N = Reason not yet provided
- O = Unauthorised absence
- U = Arrived after registration closed
- D = Dual registered at another school
- B = Attending any other approved educational activity
- J1 = Leave of absence for the purpose of attending an interview for employment or for admission to another educational institution
- K = Attending education provision arranged by the LA
- P = Participating in a supervised sporting activity
- Q = Unable to attend the school because of a lack of access arrangements
- V = Educational visit or trip

- W = Work experience
- X = Non-compulsory school age pupil not required to attend school
- Y1 = Unable to attend due to transport normally provided not being available
- Y2 = Unable to attend due to widespread disruption to travel
- Y3 = Unable to attend due to part of the school premises being closed
- Y4 = Unable to attend due to the whole school site being unexpectedly closed
- Y5 = Unable to attend as pupil is in criminal justice detention
- Y6 = Unable to attend in accordance with public health guidance or law
- Y7 = Unable to attend because of any other unavoidable cause
- Z = Prospective pupil not on admission register

When the school has planned in advance to be fully closed, the code '#' will be used for the relevant pupils who are absent. This code will also be used to record year groups who are not due to attend because the school has set different term dates for different years, e.g. induction days.

Pupils who are absent from school but are receiving remote education for any reason will still be marked as absent in the register using the most appropriate absence code.

The school will share its daily attendance data with the DfE directly from the management information system.

Every entry received into the attendance register will be preserved for six years.

## 4.4 Register amendments

All amendments made to the attendance register will include the original entry, the amended entry, the reason for the amendment, the date of amendment and the name and role of the person who made the amendment.

## 4.5 Record retention and data management

We will retain attendance records for a minimum of six years.

Data may be shared with the local authority, Ofsted and Department for Education.

## 4.6 Pupils at risk of persistent absence

The school will ensure it provides support to pupils at risk of persistent absence (PA), in conjunction with all relevant external authorities where necessary.

Persistent absenteeism (PA) is defined as missing 10 percent or more of schooling across the academic year for any reason.

In order to ensure the school has effective procedures for managing PA, the Senior Leadership team (SLT) will:

- Establish a range of evidence-based interventions to address barriers to attendance.
- Monitor the implementation and quality of escalation procedures and seek robust evidence of the escalation procedures that work.
- Attend or lead attendance reviews in line with escalation procedures.

- Establish robust escalation procedures which will be initiated before absence becomes a problem by:
  - Sending letters to parents / call the parents and arrange to meet.
  - Having a weekly tutor review.
  - Engaging with LA attendance teams and where appropriate following local procedures for managing attendance such as fixed penalty notices.
  - Creating attendance clinics.

Where a pupil becomes at risk of PA, the school will:

- Welcome the pupil back following any absence and provide catch-up support to build confidence and bridge gaps in learning.
- Meet with the pupil to discuss absence, patterns, barriers and problems.
- Establish plans to remove barriers and provide additional support.
- Lead weekly check-ins to review progress and assess the impact of support.
- Make regular contact with the pupil's parent to discuss progress.
- Consider what support for re-engagement might be needed, including with regard to additional vulnerability.

Where a pupil at risk of PA is also at increased risk of harm, the school will work in conjunction with all relevant authorities, e.g. social services, to support the pupil in line with the school's duty of care.

The school attendance system will be used to give an accurate and informative view of attendance, reasons for absence and patterns within groups, including:

- Children in need
- LAC
- Pupils who are eligible for FSM
- Pupils learning ESL

## 4.7 Lateness

The school will regard punctuality as of utmost importance, and lateness will not be tolerated.

The school will communicate arrangements for start times and registration to pupils, parents and staff.

Attendance after the register closes will receive a mark to show that they are on site, but will count as an absent mark.

## 4.8 Missing Children

Pupils will not be permitted to leave the school premises during the school day unless they have the appropriate permission from the school.

See NAS Schools Safeguarding Children and Young People (Child Protection) policy (SO-0189) for procedures to follow in the event of a child going missing.

## 4.9 Truancy

Because of the nature of our pupils and the likelihood of their journey to school being supervised truancy is extremely rare.

Immediate action will be taken when there are any concerns that a pupil might be truanting.

If truancy is suspected, the Principal will be notified and they will contact the pupil's parents, in order to assess the reasons behind the pupil not attending school. The Principal with will determine the relevant action to be taken.

## 4.10 Authorising parental absence requests

Parents will be required to request certain types of absence in advance. All requests for absence will be handled by the principal – the decision to grant or refuse the request will be at the sole discretion of the principal, taking the best interests of the pupil and the impact on the pupil's education into account. The principal's decision is not subject to appeal; however, the school will be sympathetic to requests for absence by parents, and will not deny any request without good reason.

**Leave of absence**

The school will only grant a pupil a leave of absence in exceptional circumstances. In order to have requests for a leave of absence considered, the school will expect parents to contact the principal in writing at least two weeks prior to the proposed start date of the leave of absence, providing the reason for the proposed absence and the dates during which the absence would be expected to occur.

Any requests for leave during term time will be considered on an individual basis and the pupil's previous attendance record will be taken into account. Where the absence is granted, the principal will determine the length of time that the pupil can be away from school. The school is not likely to grant leaves of absence for the purposes of family holidays.

Requests for leave will not be granted in the following circumstances:

- During Year 7 when a pupil is settling into the school, unless certain exceptional circumstances apply, e.g. the death of a family member
- Immediately before and during assessment periods
- When a pupil's attendance record shows any unauthorised absence
- Where a pupil's authorised absence record is already above **10 percent** for any reason

If term-time leave is not granted, taking a pupil out of school will be recorded as an unauthorised absence and may result in sanctions, such as a penalty notice. The school

cannot grant leaves of absence retrospectively; therefore, any absences that were not approved by the school in advance will be marked as unauthorised.

**Medical or dental appointments**

Parents will be expected to make medical or dental appointments outside of school hours wherever possible. Where this is not possible, parents will be expected to obtain approval for their child's absence to attend such appointments as far in advance as is practicable. Parents will be responsible for ensuring their child misses only the amount of time necessary to attend the appointment.

**Attending an interview for employment or for admission to another educational institution**

The school will usually grant leave of absence where an application has been made in advance by the parent who the pupil normally lives with and the leave is to enable the pupil to attend an interview for employment or admission to another educational institution.

**Study leave for a public examination**

The school may grant leave of absence for a pupil to study for a public examination and the leave has been agreed in advance with a parent who the pupil normally lives with.

Study leave will not be granted by default once tuition for the examination syllabus is complete and will be used sparingly. Provision will still be made available for pupils who want to continue to come into school to revise.

**Pupils subject to a part-time timetable**

In very exceptional circumstances and where it is in a pupil's best interests, the school will grant leave of absence to accommodate for a pupil on a part-time timetable. In such circumstances, the days on which the pupil is expected to attend school will be agreed in advance.

**Religious observance**

Parents will be expected to request absence for religious observance at least **two weeks** advance.

The school will only accept requests from parents for absence on grounds of religious observance for days that are exclusively set apart for religious observance by the relevant religious body. The school will define this as a day where the pupil's parents would be expected by an established religious body to stay away from their employment to mark the occasion.

The school may seek advice from the religious body in question where there is doubt over the request.

**Parent travelling or occupational purposes**

If a pupil is travelling with their parent as a result of the parent's trade or business and is therefore unable to attend, the school will assure itself that this is a genuine reason. Proof

will not be sought without genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the reason for absence given. The parent will be encouraged to ensure that the pupil can attend a school where they are travelling to, and be dual registered at that school.

## 4.11 Health-related absences

The school recognises that pupils in our schools may have underlying health conditions, including mental health issues, and may therefore face greater barriers to attendance than their peers.

In line with the SEND and Inclusion policy and Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy, the school will ensure that reasonable adjustments are made for disabled pupils to reduce barriers to attendance, in line with any EHC plans or IHPs that have been implemented. The school will secure additional support from external partners to help bolster attendance where appropriate.

Where the school has concerns that a pupil's non-attendance may be related to mental health issues, parents will be contacted to discuss the issue and whether there are any contributory factors to their child's lack of attendance. Where staff have a mental health concern about a pupil that is also a safeguarding concern, they will inform the DSL and the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy will be followed. All pupils will be supported with their mental health in accordance with the school's Wellbeing and Mental Health Support Policy.

If a pupil is unable to attend school for long periods of time due to their health, the school will:

- Inform the LA if a pupil is likely to be away from the school for more than 15 school days.
- Help the pupil reintegrate at school when they return.
- Make sure the pupil is kept informed about school events.
- Encourage the pupil to stay in contact with the school during their absence.

If required the school will incorporate an action plan to help pupils with health issues cope with the stress and anxiety that attending school may cause them. Such plans will be regularly monitored and reviewed until the pupil is attending school as normal and there has been signs of significant improvement.

To support the attendance of pupils with health issues, the school will consider:

- Holding termly meetings to evaluate any implemented reasonable adjustments.
- Incorporating a pastoral support plan.
- Carrying out strengths and difficulties questionnaire.
- Identifying pupils' unmet needs using therapists where required.
- Enabling a pupil to have a reduced timetable.
- Ensuring a pupil can have somewhere quiet to spend lunch and breaktimes.
- Temporary late starts or early finishes.
- Phased returns to school where there has been a long absence.

## 4.12 Absence in exceptional circumstances

Exceptional circumstances will include when a pupil is unable to attend because:

- There is a lack of access arrangements.
- Transport normally provided is not available and the school is not within walking distance.
- There is widespread disruption to travel.
- Part of the school premises is closed, and the pupil cannot be practicably accommodated.
- The whole school site has been closed unexpectedly.
- The pupil is in criminal justice detention.
- Public health guidance or law legislates that attendance is respectively not advised or prohibited.
- Any other avoidable cause makes attendance impossible.

The use of the seven 'Y' codes for exceptional circumstances will be collected in the school census for statistical purposes. Code Q will be used in circumstances where there are a lack of access arrangements.

## 4.13 Monitoring attendance

The School monitors pupil absence on a daily basis.

The School reports to parents/carers on a pupil's attendance at annual review. However, this can be sooner on request.

Due to the nature of our pupils' sometimes complex needs, each case will be individually considered. However, should absence be causing concern we will contact the parents to discuss the reasons for this. If after contacting parents a pupil's absence continue to rise, we will consider contacting the local authority involving an education welfare officer or attendance officer.

The school's attendance data is compared to the national average and is shared with governors. Our School collects and stores attendance data. It is used to track the attendance, identify whether or not there are particular groups of children whose absences may be a cause for concern, and monitor and evaluate those children identified as being in need of intervention and support.

Registers are a legal responsibility and the information collected is used to report census information.

## 4.12 Legal sanctions

Parents/carers may be prosecuted for failing to ensure their child's regular school attendance, and can be issued with a penalty notice by the local authority for the unauthorised absence of their child.

If issued with a penalty notice, parents must pay within the required time limits.

Payments must be made direct to the local authority.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the Principal who will follow the local authority's code of conduct for issuing penalty notices.

Factors taken into account will include:

- The 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.

## 5. Roles and responsibilities

**The responsibilities of the NAS Board of Trustees**

- Ratify and regularly review this policy to ensure it conforms to relevant law and guidance

**The responsibilities of the Schools Governing Group (SGG)**

- Monitoring the implementation of this policy and all relevant procedures across the school.
- Ensuring that this policy, as written, does not discriminate on any grounds including, but not limited to, ethnicity/national origin, culture, religion, gender, disability or sexual orientation.
- Handling complaints regarding this policy as outlined in the school's Complaints Procedures Policy.
- Having regard to 'Keeping children safe in education' when making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

**The responsibilities of the Principal**

- The day-to-day implementation and management of this policy and all relevant procedures across the school
- Ensuring all parents are aware of the school's attendance expectations and procedures.
- Ensuring that every pupil has access to full-time education and will act as early as possible to address patterns of absence.
- Liaising with local agencies including attendance officers as appropriate

**The responsibilities of staff**

- Following this policy and ensuring pupils do so too.
- Ensuring this policy is implemented fairly and consistently.
- Modelling good attendance behaviour.
- Using their professional judgement and knowledge of individual pupils to inform decisions as to whether any welfare concerns should be escalated.
- Where designated, taking the attendance register at the relevant times during the school day.

**The responsibilities of parents**

- Providing accurate and up-to-date contact details.

- Providing the school with a minimum of three contact numbers.
- Updating the school if their details change.
- The attendance of their children at school.
- Promoting good attendance with their children.

**The responsibilities of pupils**

- Attending their lessons and any agreed activities when at school.
- Arriving punctually to lessons when at school.

## 6. Evaluation

The school will monitor attendance and punctuality throughout the year.
The school will set attendance targets each year.
The policy will be reviewed annually and evaluated for its effectiveness.

## 7. The legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Education Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended)
- DfE (2024) 'Working together to improve school attendance'
- DfE (2016) 'Children missing education'
- DfE (2024) 'Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE) 2024'
- DfE (2023) 'Providing remote education'

## 8. Related policies

This policy operates in conjunction with:

- Complaints Policy
- Safeguarding Children Policy

## 9. Definitions

**Absence** is defined as:

- Arrival at school after the register has closed.
- Not attending school for any reason.

An **authorised absence** is inclusive of the following circumstances:

- An absence for sickness for which the school has granted leave

- Medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall during school time for which the school has granted leave
- Religious or cultural observances for which the school has granted leave
- An absence due to a family emergency

An **unauthorised absence** is inclusive of the following circumstances:

- Parents keeping children away from school without sufficient reason
- Truancy
- Absence which has not been sufficiently explained to the school's satisfaction
- Arrival at school after the register has closed without sufficient reason
- Absence due to shopping, looking after other children or birthdays
- Absence due to day trips and holidays in term time to which the school has not agreed
- Leaving school during the day without sufficient reason and agreement from the school

**Persistent absenteeism (PA)** is defined as:

Missing 10 percent or more of schooling across the academic year for any reason.

**SGG** - Schools Governing Group
**SLT** – Senior Leadership Team