

Updated by	Jodie Evans Headteacher	September 2025
Reviewed by	Brett Runcman Director	September 2025



Attendance Policy
September 2025
Review September 2026

Contents

Statement of Intent

Legal Framework

1. Definitions
2. Roles and Responsibilities
3. The School Day and Sessions
4. Training of Staff
5. Student Expectations
6. Students at Risk of Persistent Absence (PA)
7. Medical Absence
8. Absence Procedures (First-Day Response is Mandatory)
9. Parental Involvement
10. Attendance Register and Codes
11. Headteacher
12. Lateness
13. Truancy
14. Missing Children
15. Term-Time Leave
16. Religious Observances
17. Appointments
18. Young Carers
19. Exceptional Circumstances (Code Y)
20. Mental Health–Related Absences
21. Monitoring and Review
22. Attendance Contract
23. Statutory Duties and Legal Compliance

Appendices

Appendix A — Attendance SOP & RACI (Summary)

Appendix B — National Attendance Codes (Summary)

Appendix C — Essex Absence Enforcement (Principles

Appendix D —Abbreviations

Appendix E – Working together to improve school attendance

Statement of Intent

This policy is published for both internal and external audiences. It outlines statutory expectations and the school's approach to promoting regular attendance. Staff are directed to the **Internal Policies Folder** for supporting documents, including detailed operational procedures and Local Authority template letters.

Exceptional Ideas Ltd believes excellent attendance is foundational to safeguarding, learning, wellbeing, and life chances. We expect all students to attend full time on all school days unless absence is authorised in line with statutory guidance. We recognise the complex needs of students in Alternative Provision and SEND settings and commit to early help, reasonable adjustments, and partnership with families to remove barriers to attendance. This policy applies to all three Exceptional Ideas Ltd schools and any outreach/alternative provision arranged by the school. Decisions are made case-by-case with due regard to the Equality Act 2010 (reasonable adjustments) and any EHCP. Alternative formats and interpreters are available on request.

This policy operates within the framework of the *DfE Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2024)*, the *Essex Support First Framework (2024)*, and Exceptional Ideas Ltd.'s *Communication Standards and Support First Engagement Policy (2025)*.

Together, these documents ensure that communication with parents and carers around attendance is timely, empathetic, and consistent, with a focus on understanding barriers and supporting families before considering enforcement. Where penalty notices or formal enforcement become strictly necessary, they will only be pursued following full completion and documentation of the graduated Support First process, in consultation with the Local Authority Attendance Compliance Service.

We will:

- Promote and model good attendance and punctuality.
- Intervene early; address barriers with individualised support.
- Work in partnership with parents/carers, the Local Authority (LA), health, and other agencies.
- Comply with the Education Act 1996 s.7 duty for suitable full-time education, considering each child's age, ability, aptitude, and SEND.
- Treat enforcement (e.g., penalty notices) as a **last resort**, using Essex procedures and considering Equality Act duties.

Penalty notices or formal enforcement action will only be considered where the Support First graduated process, as set out in this policy and in line with *DfE*

Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2024), has been fully followed and evidenced.

Legal Framework

- Education Act 1996
- Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended)
- Equality Act 2010
- UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018
- DfE 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (KCSIE, 2025)
- DfE 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' (2024)
- DfE 'Arranging Education for Children Who Cannot Attend School Because of Health Needs'
- DfE 'Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions'
- SEND Code of Practice (2015)

This policy should be read alongside: Child Protection & Safeguarding; Children Missing Education; Medical Absence; Supporting Students with Medical Conditions; Data Protection; Records Management; Exam Access Arrangements; SEND; SEMH; Remote Education; Complaints. Abbreviations used in this policy are listed in

Appendix D.

1. Definitions

Exceptional Ideas Ltd follows the Essex County Council academic calendar (school term and holiday dates).

Absence includes arrival after the register has closed or non-attendance for any reason.

Authorised absence: any absence permitted under statutory categories (see Appendix B).

Unauthorised absence: any absence not permitted under statutory categories or without sufficient evidence.

Persistent Absence (PA): attendance below 90% across the year, for any reason.

Register timings: AM mark by **09:30**; AM close **10:00**. PM open **13:15**; PM close **13:30**. Code **L** applies before close; **U** after close.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

It is the legal right of every child to have access to education. Missing school leaves children vulnerable to falling behind and at risk of harm. **Parents have a legal duty to ensure children of compulsory school age who are registered at a school attend regularly.**

Senior Lead (on-site, each school — primary role):

- Leads daily attendance monitoring for their school.

- Checks AM register status by 09:20; initiates first-day contact by 09:30 for any unexplained absence.
- Escalates to the on-site Child Protection (CP) Lead and/or the DSL by 10:00 if contact is not established.
- Coordinates same-day welfare checks/home visits with the CP Lead when risk is indicated; records actions.
- Liaises with Headteacher and Admin for data quality and escalation.

Child Protection (CP) Lead:

- Works with the Senior Lead to triage risk and undertake/coordinate welfare checks the same day where necessary.
- Implements CME procedures on-site when whereabouts are unknown or risk indicators are present.
- Maintains safeguarding records and feeds back to the DSL.

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL):

- Provides same-day safeguarding advice/decisions; records and oversees case management.
- Authorises welfare checks/home visits where indicated and coordinates multi-agency responses.

Admin Attendance Lead:

- Maintains MIS registers/codes; supports first-day response logging; prepares weekly/half-termly reports.
- Notifies LA of admissions/deletions from roll as per Regulations and ECC processes.

Headteacher:

- Oversees policy implementation and LA liaison; analyses data; supports escalation/ACT referrals.

Staff (mentors/teacher):

- Take accurate registers; model punctuality; flag concerns immediately to the Senior Lead.

Parents/Carers:

- Ensure attendance, provide two emergency contacts, and work with school on support plans.

Students:

- Attend all sessions and agreed activities; communicate difficulties early.

3. The School Day and Sessions

- Morning: register marked by 09:30; closes 10:00.
- Afternoon: register opens 13:15; closes 13:30.
- Individual AP/SEND timetables may vary; any variations are confirmed in writing with parents/carers and the student.
- Missed taxi: parents must inform school immediately; non-attendance due to a missed taxi is normally unauthorised unless exceptional circumstances apply.

4. Training of Staff

Induction and annual refresher cover attendance law, coding, early help, trauma-informed support, and safeguarding links. Senior Leads/CP Leads receive enhanced training on escalation, welfare visits, and coding accuracy. Admin/Headteacher/DSL receive training on oversight and data compliance.

5. Student Expectations

Students are encouraged to raise concerns and participate in setting re-engagement goals.

6. Students at Risk of Persistent Absence (PA)

The school's escalation pathway for attendance concerns aligns directly with the *Essex Support First* model and the principles set out in the *Communication Standards and Support First Engagement Policy*.

Before any formal escalation, staff must evidence that supportive and restorative communication steps have been completed, including those related to medical absence where applicable (please also refer to the Medical Absence Policy).

We provide early help and multi-agency support where necessary. Prolonged absence or inability to contact a family may indicate safeguarding risk; staff act in line with the Safeguarding Policy and CME procedures.

Escalation (typical):

1. First-day response; early barriers assessment; support plan agreed with family.
2. Formal plan and review at PA threshold (<85%); ensure robust record keeping for potential referral to ECC Attendance Compliance Team (ACT).
3. Consider ACT referral around <75% with evidence of intervention and reasonable adjustments. Evidence for prosecution must demonstrate a clear need for legal action and be seen as a last resort where **all other routes have been exhausted** or deemed inappropriate.
4. 20 consecutive unauthorised days or viability concern: liaise with LA under CME regulations.
5. TAFs have been considered, and attendance compliance officers (ACO) have been notified, invited to attend /informed where appropriate.

Temporary/Part-Time Timetables (TPTPs)

In rare and exceptional circumstances, and only as a short-term intervention to

support re-engagement, the school may agree a Temporary/Part-Time Timetable (TPTP). A TPTP is **not** a long-term substitute for full-time education. Before any reduction is considered, the school will evidence reasonable adjustments to keep the student in full-time education.

a) Any TPTP must:

- Be **formally agreed in writing** with parents/carers and, where appropriate, the pupil;
- Include a **clear rationale**, SMART outcomes, and a **safeguarding/risk assessment** (including travel/collection arrangements);
- Specify **start date, hours, curriculum access, support, and a target return date** to full-time;
- Be **time-limited** (ordinarily no more than 6–12 weeks per cycle) and **reviewed at least fortnightly**;
- Be shared with relevant professionals and, where appropriate, **the Local Authority** (especially where an EHCP is in place or CME risk exists);
- Align with the pupil's **EHCP** (where applicable), with any needed interim amendments or review discussions recorded;
- Be overseen by the **Senior Lead (site)** and **Headteacher**, with **DSL** oversight where safeguarding risks are identified.

b) Reviews will record progress against outcomes and the plan to **step up** toward full-time hours. If a TPTP is not enabling progress, the plan will be **revised or withdrawn** and alternative support considered.

TPTPs are never a sanction; they are strictly time-limited, reviewed at least fortnightly, and ended as soon as it is safe and appropriate to return to full-time education.

7. Medical Absence

Where the policies overlap, the Medical Absence Policy governs education/provision; this policy governs registration, coding and escalation. See the Medical Absence Policy for full procedures, including liaison with health, reasonable adjustments, remote learning, hospital/home tuition, and reintegration planning. The LA is notified where absence is likely to be 15+ school days (consecutive or cumulative). Where this policy and the Medical Absence Policy overlap, the **Medical Absence Policy** governs the education/provision pathway; this policy governs **registration, coding and escalation**.

8. Absence Procedures (First-Day Response is Mandatory)

Parents must contact school **by 09:00** on the first and each subsequent day of illness (phone/WhatsApp/SMS).

****Sequence (each school):****

- ****By 09:20**** — Mentors complete AM registers; Senior Lead reviews.
- ****By 09:30**** — Senior Lead makes first contact for any unexplained absence (calls/texts/WhatsApp). Log all attempts.

Attendance communications (calls/SMS/WhatsApp/email) are made only via school-managed numbers/accounts; staff must not use personal devices/accounts

All first day and follow-up communications will be clear, supportive, and proportionate. Where appropriate, messages will remind families of the benefits of attendance and offer immediate support to remove barriers. Persistent absences trigger personalised follow-up communication, with the tone and format adapted to family needs and circumstances.

- ****By 10:00**** — If no contact, Senior Lead escalates to ****CP Lead **** and/or ****DSL **** to consider ****same-day welfare check/home visit****. Admin is notified to update MIS and record actions.
- ****PM**** — Repeat for afternoon session where required.

All communication regarding attendance or absence must follow the expectations outlined in the *Communication Standards and Support First Engagement Policy (2025)*.

This includes the use of appropriate tone, language, and accessibility methods, as well as ensuring communication is personalised and solution focused. Where absence relates to medical needs or ongoing health concerns, the procedures set out in the *Medical Absence and Health Needs Policy (2025)* must also be followed.

For students who fail to attend regularly, parents will meet with the Senior Lead/Headteacher. The school informs the LA of students who fail to attend regularly in line with local requirements. After 10 days post-authorised absence without return, or 20 consecutive unauthorised days, the school will liaise with the LA to review placement viability and CME risk.

Any removal from roll will only occur on a ground permitted by the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended) and with Local Authority liaison in line with Children Missing Education duties.

Where a student's whereabouts is unknown or risk indicators are present, the Senior Lead/CP Lead will commence ****Children Missing Education**** procedures and escalate to the ****DSL**** immediately.

Contacting parents for attendance is carried out under UK GDPR Art 6(1)(e) (public task) and, where urgent safeguarding is indicated, Art 6(1)(d) (vital interests). Only school-approved systems are used; staff do not use personal devices/accounts.

Where special category data is processed for safeguarding/education purposes, we rely on UK GDPR Art. 9(2)(g) (substantial public interest) and, where appropriate, Art. 9(2)(b), together with DPA 2018 Schedule 1, Part 2, para. 18 (safeguarding). Access is strictly need-to-know and data-minimised.

9. Parental Involvement

We prioritise building respectful, solution-focused relationships and maintaining open, transparent communication with families and external agencies to support

improved attendance. In all attendance-related interventions, parents and guardians are signposted to the School's Attendance Policy, which clearly outlines the potential legal implications should parents fail to engage or if attendance concerns remain unresolved despite support.

Communication with Parents and Carers about Attendance follows the school's escalation pathway for attendance concerns and aligns directly with the Essex Support First model and the principles set out in the Communication Standards and Support First Engagement Policy.

Before any formal escalation, staff must evidence that supportive and restorative communication steps have been completed, including those related to medical absence where applicable.

Parental Communication:

Exceptional Ideas Ltd. recognises that positive, consistent, and personalised communication with parents and carers is critical to supporting improved attendance. We will:

- Communicate early about emerging attendance patterns, with specific data where appropriate.
- Frame absences in terms of missed learning opportunities.
- Balance factual information with empathy, acknowledging the challenges families may face.
- Use positive, future-focused messages that highlight both academic and social benefits of attendance.
- Provide clear contact details for staff who can help families address barriers.
- Avoid unevidenced or judgmental statements and ensure all communication reflects Equality Act 2010 duties.
- Tailor communication methods — including phone calls, emails, letters, text messages, or meetings — to meet the accessibility and needs of individual families, including those with SEND, EAL, or other barriers.
- Ensure that attendance communication is timely, accurate, and consistent across all three school sites.

10. Attendance Register and Codes

Registers are taken AM and PM by staff. Status recorded as Present/Absent/Approved off-site/Exceptional circumstances using DfE national codes (Appendix B).

Planned full/partial closure uses '#'. Amendments are auditable (original entry, amended entry, reason, date, by whom). Registers retained for three years.

11. Headteacher

Students at risk of persistent absence will be referred to the Headteacher for discussion and support. If attendance does not improve despite support, escalate in line with Essex ACT procedures. Any Penalty Notices or prosecutions are

determined and issued by the ****Local Authority****; the school cannot prosecute or issue penalty notices. Pre-referral information **MUST BE** sufficient to enable a successful prosecution in court under section 444 1/1A Education Act 1996.

The Headteacher monitors attendance trends, supports Senior Leads, and ensures timely interventions. Admin provides weekly and half-termly reports to the Headteacher and Senior Leads.

12. Lateness

Students should arrive by 09:30. 'L' code applies before registers close; 'U' code applies after registers close. Patterns of lateness are addressed with families and may be escalated.

13. Truancy

Unexplained absence from any session is treated seriously. Parents are contacted immediately; CP Lead/DSL involved if safeguarding indicators are present. If truancy persists, the school will consult the LA ACT. The Local Authority may consider a Penalty Notice where criteria are met.

14. Missing Children

See the separate Missing Child Policy. CME procedures are followed where whereabouts are unknown or risk indicators are present.

15. Term-Time Leave

Exceptional Ideas Ltd. recognises that our learners often have complex social, emotional, and medical needs which may occasionally impact attendance. While we aim to respond compassionately and flexibly, we must also operate within national attendance regulations.

In line with *The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006* (as amended) and the *DfE's Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2024)* guidance, leave of absence during term time can only be authorised in exceptional circumstances. All requests must be made in advance and in writing to the Headteacher.

Each request will be considered on an individual basis, taking into account:

- the specific reason for the request;
- the student's personal, social, and emotional circumstances;
- their current attendance pattern and learning progress;
- any involvement from external professionals; and
- the school's duties under the *SEND Code of Practice* and *Equality Act 2010*.
-

Leave will not normally be authorised when:

- The student is in Year 11.

- The request falls within the first term of a new placement, except in exceptional circumstances (e.g. bereavement or serious family emergency).
- The request falls immediately before or during assessments, examinations, or key transition periods.
- The student's attendance is below 90%, or their current pattern of attendance gives cause for concern.

Where leave is not authorised, any resulting absence will be recorded as unauthorised. **In accordance with the 2024 National Framework for Legal Intervention, if a student accumulates 10 or more unauthorised sessions (5 school days) within a rolling 10-week period, the school will liaise with the Local Authority to consider a Notice to Improve or a Penalty Notice.**

Exceptional Ideas Ltd. will always prioritise a support-first and relational approach. Legal intervention is viewed as a last resort and will only be considered once all appropriate support strategies have been explored and recorded. Staff work closely with families and external agencies to understand barriers to attendance and to co-produce solutions that promote wellbeing, belonging, and consistent engagement in education.

16. Religious Observances

Absence is authorised where the day is exclusively set apart by the religious body. Parents should notify the school at least 7 days in advance where possible.

17. Appointments

Arrange medical/dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where not possible, students should attend before/after and follow sign-out/in procedures.

18. Young Carers

We identify and support young carers; adopt a flexible, compassionate approach; and work with other agencies as appropriate.

19. Exceptional Circumstances (Code Y)

Used where attendance is prevented due to unavoidable closure, LA/school transport unavailability (beyond walking distance), emergency travel disruption, or short periods of custody. If educational activity is confirmed while detained, sessions may be recorded as 'B'.

20. Mental Health–Related Absences

We support students whose mental health impacts attendance through therapeutic planning, reasonable adjustments, phased returns, and multi-agency work, in line with the SEMH and Medical Absence Policies. Inform the LA where absence is likely to exceed 15 school days.

21. Monitoring and Review

Attendance and punctuality are monitored weekly by each Senior Lead, with half-termly analyses to the Headteacher. Our aspiration is to secure the highest possible attendance for every student, recognising AP/SEND contexts; Persistent Absence remains a key risk indicator. This policy is reviewed annually by the Headteacher and approved by the Director (next review September 2026). Updates are communicated to staff, parents, and relevant partners. Records of all communication attempts, including informal and supportive contact, will be retained as evidence that the school has made reasonable and proportionate efforts to engage families prior to any formal attendance enforcement action.

22. Attendance Contract (Parenting Contract under s.19(2) Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003). Please also refer to Appendix E.

Purpose and Legal Context

An Attendance Contract is a *Parenting Contract* under section 19(2) of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, made between Exceptional Ideas Ltd., the parent(s)/carer(s), and (where relevant) other partners such as the Essex County Council Attendance Compliance Team.

It is a formal, time-limited agreement to address irregular attendance where early help has not achieved sustained improvement.

The contract is a supportive and preventative measure, designed to avoid escalation to legal proceedings while promoting engagement, consistency, and accountability.

Principles

- The contract is non-punitive and focuses on supporting families to overcome barriers to attendance.
- It is voluntary but formal failure to engage may lead to escalation, including a *Notice to Improve* or legal action under the Education Act 1996.
- It must always be considered before legal enforcement, unless clear safeguarding or welfare reasons prevent this.
- All parties contribute to and sign the agreement, demonstrating shared ownership.

Aims

1. To ensure pupils attend regularly and punctually, fulfilling the parental duty in law.
2. To identify and address the underlying causes of absence.
3. To provide coordinated, multi-agency support.
4. To secure improved educational and wellbeing outcomes for the pupil.

When to Initiate an Attendance Contract

An Attendance Contract may be considered when:

- The pupil's attendance is below 90 percent and early help interventions have not improved attendance.

- The parent has not engaged with previous informal meetings or support offers.
- There are complex family, medical, or SEND factors requiring a structured support plan.
- The school and parents agree that a formal, written plan will help clarify expectations.

Process

- 1. Identification** – Senior staff or Attendance Lead reviews data and identifies pupils meeting the threshold.
- 2. Invitation to Meeting** – Parent(s)/carer(s) are invited in writing.
 - They are provided with:
 - Current attendance certificate.
 - School Attendance Policy.
 - *DfE Parental Guide to School Attendance*.
- 3. Meeting** – The meeting includes:
 - Parent(s)/carer(s) and pupil (if appropriate).
 - Attendance Lead or Headteacher (chair).
 - Lead Practitioner and any relevant professionals (e.g., SENCo, Family Solutions, CAMHS, GP liaison).
- 4. Discussion and Agreement** –
 - Identify causes, barriers, and support.
 - Agree realistic attendance targets and timescales.
 - Confirm a Lead Practitioner to monitor the plan.
 - Record all actions, responsibilities, and review date.
- 5. Signatures** – All present sign the Attendance Contract confirming shared commitment.
- 6. Implementation and Review** –
 - Progress monitored weekly by the Lead Practitioner.
 - Formal review meeting held at the agreed date or sooner if progress stalls.
 - Additional or revised support recorded as required.
- 7. Escalation** –
 - If the parent(s) fail to attend or engage without reasonable cause, this is documented.
 - If attendance does not improve, the case may move to a *Notice to Improve* under Essex County Council procedures.

8. Notices to Improve –

Before any referral for a Penalty Notice or legal intervention, a Notice to Improve (NTI) must be issued to parents as a formal, written warning and final opportunity to improve attendance.

Both Essex County Council and Suffolk County Council require that NTIs are used consistently across all schools and issued using the official Local Authority template letter.

The NTI outlines the pupil's current attendance level, the support already provided, and a clear warning that failure to improve attendance within six school weeks may result in legal action under the *Education Act 1996*.

Key expectations:

- The NTI must be issued to each relevant parent when attendance falls below the legal threshold and reasonable support has already been offered.
- The validity period is six school weeks from the date of issue — consistent across Essex, Suffolk, and most Eastern Region local authorities.
- Schools must use the official Local Authority template letter, available through the Essex Attendance Compliance Team or the Suffolk Attendance and Welfare Service (AWS).

The template includes:

- Clear legal warnings about potential prosecution or Penalty Notices if attendance does not improve.
- A section for schools to list all support previously offered and currently available.
- Named staff contacts for parents to discuss attendance and access support.
- Evidence must be retained showing that the NTI was issued and received by each parent (e.g. signed letter, delivery record, or email confirmation).

Issuing a Notice to Improve is an essential step in the legal process and provides parents with one final opportunity to engage with the support available before formal enforcement action is considered.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Headteacher / Attendance Lead	Initiate, chair, and quality-assure the process.
Lead Practitioner	Coordinate multi-agency input, monitor compliance, and record outcomes.
Parent(s)/Carer(s)	Ensure the pupil attends punctually, notify absences promptly, engage with support.
Pupil	Engage with agreed support and attend punctually.
External Agencies	Provide timely input as identified (e.g., Early Help, CAMHS, Youth Service).

Failure to Engage

- If a parent fails to attend the meeting without good reason, follow-up attempts must be made.
- All communication attempts must be documented.
- A contract cannot be created in the parent's absence.
- Persistent non-engagement will be escalated in line with Essex Notice to Improve procedures and may lead to legal intervention.

Monitoring and Recording

- Attendance data, meeting notes, and copies of signed contracts are stored securely under UK GDPR.
- Only relevant staff (e.g., Attendance Lead, DSL, SENCo) have access.
- Non-compliance or escalation decisions are reported to the Headteacher and Director.

24. Legal Compliance Statement

This Attendance Policy and its associated appendices, including the Attendance Contract (Appendix E), have been developed in full compliance with the statutory duties, regulations, and guidance listed below. The policy is lawful, proportionate, and inspection-ready, ensuring that Exceptional Ideas Ltd. meets all national requirements for school attendance management, safeguarding, and parental engagement.

Statutory Framework and Legislative References

This policy is written in accordance with:

- **Education Act 1996** – Sections 7, 444, and 576, which outline the parental duty to ensure regular attendance and define “parent” in legal terms.
- **Education and Inspections Act 2006** – Duty on schools to promote good behaviour and attendance.
- **Children and Families Act 2014** – Duties relating to SEND and the requirement for reasonable adjustments to support pupils with additional needs.
- **Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 (Section 19(2))** – Legal basis for the use of **Parenting Contracts / Attendance Contracts** to address irregular attendance.
- **Working Together to Improve School Attendance (DfE, 2024)** – Statutory guidance for schools and local authorities on attendance expectations, early help, and legal intervention processes.
- **DfE ‘Toolkit for Schools: Communicating with Families to Support Attendance’ (2024)** – principles on timely, personalised, and empathetic communication.
- **Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended 2013)** – Procedures for fixed penalty notices and escalation following failed attendance interventions.
- **Equality Act 2010** – Duties to avoid discrimination and make reasonable adjustments for pupils and parents with protected characteristics.
- **Health Act 2006** – Prohibition of smoking or vaping on school premises, ensuring safe and healthy environments.
- **Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR** – Requirements for processing, storing, and sharing attendance data lawfully and proportionately.
- **Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE 2025)** – Duties regarding safeguarding, pastoral support, and attendance monitoring.
- **Ofsted SEND and Alternative Provision Inclusion Toolkit (2025)** – Standards for inclusion, engagement, and equitable access to education for all pupils.

Policy Assurance and Governance

- The **Director** of Exceptional Ideas Ltd holds ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance with all statutory attendance obligations.
- The **Headteacher** is responsible for implementing, monitoring, and reporting on attendance processes, including the use of Attendance Contracts, Notices to Improve, and Early Help interventions.

- The **Senior Leadership Team** monitors the consistent application of this policy across all sites and ensures all records, meetings, and communications are accurately documented for audit and inspection purposes.
- Attendance data is reported to the Director termly, including any legal interventions initiated in partnership with Essex County Council's Attendance Compliance Team.

Audit and Inspection Readiness

This policy:

- Provides a **clear escalation framework** from Early Help through to Attendance Contract, Notice to Improve, and legal intervention.
- Ensures **records of engagement, correspondence, and support** are maintained in line with Essex County Council expectations and DfE standards.
- Embeds **multi-agency working** and joint decision-making in line with the *Essex Support First* and *Team Around the Family* models.
- Is cross-referenced with the **Medical Absence Policy (2025–26)** to ensure equitable treatment where health or wellbeing impacts attendance.
- Is reviewed annually, or earlier if national legislation or DfE statutory guidance changes.

Appendix A — Attendance Monitoring and Follow-Up

Purpose

This appendix outlines how Exceptional Ideas Ltd monitors attendance daily to safeguard pupils and ensure compliance with legal requirements.

While the detailed internal workflow is held separately for staff reference, this summary explains the steps parents and carers can expect when a child is absent.

Daily Attendance Practice

- Registers are taken twice daily in line with DfE requirements: once at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session.
- Attendance information is recorded using the school's secure management information system and coded according to national DfE guidance.
- The school reviews all absences each morning and makes contact with parents or carers when no explanation has been received.
- If a pupil is absent without notice and contact cannot be made, staff follow the school's *first day calling and escalation procedure*, which may include a home welfare visit or referral to safeguarding leads.

Communication with Parents and Carers

- Parents and carers are expected to notify the school of absence before 9 a.m. wherever possible.
- The school will always work with families to understand and remove barriers to attendance, offering support or adjustments where appropriate.
- When attendance begins to decline, the school will contact parents to discuss concerns, agree actions, and, where necessary, put a support plan in place.

Escalation and Support

If attendance does not improve after early help has been offered, the following may occur:

1. Attendance Review Meeting – a formal discussion to agree support and shared expectations.
2. Notice to Improve – a formal written warning giving six school weeks for improvement in line with Essex and Suffolk LA guidance.

3. Referral to the Local Authority – where unauthorised absence continues, the case may be referred for consideration of legal intervention under the Education Act 1996.

Throughout this process, the school continues to provide support and reasonable adjustments in partnership with families and relevant agencies.

Safeguarding Link

Attendance monitoring forms part of the school's safeguarding procedures. Unexplained or persistent absence may indicate a welfare concern; therefore, the Designated Safeguarding Lead oversees attendance escalation to ensure that pupil safety remains the highest priority.

Data Protection

All attendance information is handled in accordance with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Data is stored securely and used solely for safeguarding, educational, and legal purposes.

Review

This appendix will be reviewed annually alongside the Attendance Policy, or sooner if statutory or local guidance changes.

Please note: A detailed staff procedure version of this appendix is available within the internal policies folder. It includes the full operational attendance workflow and documentation templates used to administer this policy.

Appendix B

Present at school:

Students must not be marked present if they were not in school during registration. If a student were to leave the school premises after registration they would still be counted as present for statistical purposes. **Note:** AM mark by 09:30; close 10:00. PM open 13:15; close 13:45. Use L before close and U after close.

Code Y will be broken down into:

- 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 whole school being closed
- Y5** – Unable to attend as pupil is in criminal justice detention
- Y6** – Absent in accordance with public health guidance or law
- Y7** – Unable to attend because of other unavoidable cause
- Q** – Unable to attend the school because of a lack of access arrangements

Part-time or reduced timetable / SEND support

- If a pupil's agreed timetable means they arrive after registration (e.g. 10 a.m.), record the missed session as **C2 – authorised absence (leave of absence for part-time timetable)**.
- Do **not** use **L** (late) or **U** (unauthorised late).

Remote or online learning

- Remote tuition, including LA-commissioned online education for medical needs, must be coded **C – authorised absence**.
- Do **not** use **B** (educated off-site) or **K** (approved educational activity at an alternative physical provision), as online learning is **not physically supervised**.

Disclaimer:

These codes follow the *DfE National Attendance and Absence Guidance (2024)* and the *Essex County Council Attendance Framework*. They are **subject to change** as national guidance is updated.

Registration Code	Representative Meaning	Notes
Authorised Codes		
/	Present in school am.	Present in school during registration.
\	Present in school pm.	Present in school during registration.
L	Late arrival before the register has closed.	AM mark by 09:30 , close 10:00 ; PM open 13:15 , close 13:45 . Code L before close; U after close.
B	Off-site educational activity.	Used when students are present at an offsite educational activity approved by the school. Schools are responsible for the safeguarding and welfare of students under this code, so are certifying that they are supervising and have taken measures to ensure safeguarding of students. Not to be used for unsupervised educational activity or where student is working at home.
D	Dual registered – at another educational establishment.	Not counted as possible attendance in school census. This code indicates that the student was not expected to attend the session in question as were scheduled to be at another school. E.g. pupil referral unit, hospital school.
J	Interview with prospective employers or another educational establishment.	Schools should be satisfied that the interview is linked to employment prospects, further education or transfer to another educational establishment.
P	Participating in a supervised sporting activity.	Sporting activity approved by the school and supervised by someone authorised by the school.
V	Educational visit or trip.	Organised trip or visit, including residential, organised by the school or attendance at a supervised trip of a strictly educational nature arranged by an organisation approved by the school.
W	Work experience.	Students in final 2 years of compulsory education only . Work experience placement provider should be asked to notify the school of any absence. Absence will be recorded with the appropriate code.

C	Leave of absence authorised by the school.	Only exceptional circumstances warrant this – each application should be considered individually taking into account specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind the request.
E	Excluded but no alternative provision made.	If still on the admission register but no alternative provision made whilst they are excluded. Alternative provision must be arranged for each excluded student from the 6th consecutive day of any fixed period or permanent exclusion.
H	Holiday authorised by the school.	These should not be granted by headteachers unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where this is granted, the headteacher must be satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances based on the individual facts and must determine the number of days students will be away from school.
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointments).	Schools should advise parents to notify them on the first day the child is unable to attend due to illness. Schools should authorise these absences unless they have genuine concern about the veracity of an illness. If the authenticity is in doubt, the school can request parents provide medical evidence. Schools can record absence as unauthorised if unsatisfied with the authenticity but should advise parents of their intention to do so.
M	Medical or dental appointments.	This is counted as an authorised absence. Schools should, however, encourage parents to make appointments out of school hours. Where this is not possible, students should only be out of school for the amount of time necessary for the appointment.
R	Religious observance.	Must treat as authorised when due to this. The day must be exclusively set apart for religious observation by the

		religious body to which the parents belong. Where necessary, schools should seek advice from the parents' religious body about whether it has set the day apart for religious observance.
S	Study leave	Authorised absence, should be used sparingly and only granted to year 11 during public examinations.
T	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence.	<p>Number of different groups covered by the generic term Traveller – Roma, English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers, Showmen (fairground people) and Circus people, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and New Travellers.</p> <p>This code should be used when Traveller families are known to be travelling for occupational purposes and have agreed this with the school but it is not known whether the student is attending educational provision. It should not be used for any other types of absence by these groups.</p> <p>To help ensure continuity of education for Traveller children, it is expected that the child should attend school elsewhere when their family is travelling and be dual registered at that school and the main school. Children from these groups whose families do not travel are expected to register at a school and attend as normal. They are subject to the same rules as other children in terms of the requirement to attend school regularly once registered at a school.</p>
Unauthorised absence codes		
G	Holiday not authorised by the school or in excess of the period determined by the headteacher.	

N	Reason for absence not yet provided.	Schools should follow up all unexplained and unexpected absences in a timely manner. Every effort should be made to establish the reason for a student's absence. When the reason for the absence has been established, the register should be amended. This code should not remain on a student's record indefinitely – if no reason for absence is provided after a reasonable amount of time, it should be replaced with code O.
O	Absent from school without authorisation.	If the school is not satisfied with the reason given for absence, they should record it as unauthorised.
U	Arrived in school after registration closed.	To be used if a student arrives after the register has closed (or an alternative absence code if one is more suitable). Schools should be alert to patterns of late arrival and seek an explanation from the parent.
X	Not required to be in school.	Used to record sessions that non-compulsory age children are not expected to attend.
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances. (see table above for further advice and guidance)	<p>Can be used where student is unable to attend because: the school or part of it is closed to an unavoidable cause, the transport provided by the school or LA is not available and where the student's home is not in walking distance, a local or national emergency has resulted in widespread disruption to travel which has prevented the child from attending school.</p> <p>This code can also be used where a student is unable to attend because they are in custody, detained for a period of less than 4 months. If the school has evidence from the place of custody that the student is attending educational activities then they can record those sessions as code B.</p>

Z	Student not on admission register.	Enables schools to set up registers in advance of students joining to ease administration burdens. This should be applied to students on induction or outreach programs of study.
#	Planned or whole partial school closure.	Known or planned only, e.g. between terms, half terms, occasional days (e.g. bank holidays), weekends, PD days and use of schools as polling stations.

Appendix C — Essex Absence Enforcement (Principles)

Disclaimer:

This appendix is based on the *DfE National Attendance Framework (2024)*, the *Essex County Council Code of Conduct for Penalty Notices (June 2024)*, and, where applicable, the *Suffolk County Council Code of Conduct for Penalty Notices (2024)* and associated Attendance and Welfare Service procedures. The content of this policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if national or local guidance dictates.

1. Legal and Statutory Context

- Parents have a legal duty to ensure regular attendance under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.
- Penalty Notices may be issued under Sections 444A and 444B as an alternative to prosecution.
- Only the Local Authority (LA) can issue a Penalty Notice or prosecute; schools may request consideration when criteria are met.
- Schools must evidence communication, early help, and reasonable adjustments before any referral to the LA.

2. National Thresholds for Penalty Notices (2024)

A Penalty Notice may be considered when a pupil has 10 sessions (5 days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10-school-week period.

Key points:

- A school week is any week when pupils are expected to attend.
- The 10-week period can cross academic years, terms, or school placements (including out-of-county moves).
- Absences may be consecutive or cumulative, recorded with O, U, or G codes.
- Authorised absence codes do not count.
- Registers close 30 minutes after opening; late arrivals without agreement must be coded U.
- For term-time holidays, all 10 sessions must be consecutive G codes.

3. Under the Essex LA Code of Conduct (2024)

A Penalty Notice may be issued when:

- 10 unauthorised sessions occur within a rolling 10-school-week period; or
- A suspended/excluded pupil is seen in a public place unsupervised during the first five school days of exclusion (unless written permission was given).
- Parents must be told verbally and in writing at the start of the exclusion that this duty applies.

Fine Structure and Escalation:

Stage	Fine	Notes
Fine 1	£80 (if paid within 21 days) → £160 (if paid within 28 days)	Standard first-offence rate

Fine 2	£160 (flat rate – no discount)	Acts as a deterrent; no lower-rate option
Fine 3	X Not permitted	Further offences within 3 years → prosecution or Education Supervision Order

Frequency Limits:

- A parent can receive a maximum of two Penalty Notices per child within a rolling three-year period.
- For exclusion-related notices, Essex applies a separate limit of two per parent per child within 12 months.

Issuing Principles:

- Penalty Notices are only requested for parents who knowingly allowed or could reasonably have prevented the absence.
- All reasonable adjustments and early-help actions must be evidenced.
- Schools submit referrals via the Essex online referral system, including attendance data and communication records.
- There are no payment plans or appeals, though limited extensions may be granted by the LA in exceptional circumstances.
- The escalation model ensures fines deter persistent absence and that ineffective repeat fines are replaced with formal legal intervention.
- The LA may consider aggravating factors (e.g. repeated term-time holidays or social-media-encouraged absence) when deciding to prosecute rather than fine.

4. Application to Alternative Provision (SEND Settings)

As an LA-funded Alternative Provision, Exceptional Ideas Ltd follows the Essex Code of Conduct and national attendance thresholds. However, enforcement is a last resort. Each case is reviewed individually, considering:

- The child's EHCP and SEND needs;
- Family health or caring responsibilities; and
- Duties under the Equality Act 2010.

The school must demonstrate that:

1. All reasonable adjustments and early-help interventions have been made;
2. Parents have been informed that continued unauthorised absence may lead to legal action; and
3. Attendance records and coding are accurate and DfE/Essex-compliant.

Where attendance issues are linked to SEND or health, the school may defer or decline referral, provided decisions are documented and shared with the commissioning LA. This approach fulfils our duty to pay due regard to the Code while exercising professional discretion.

5. Due-Process Steps for Staff

Step	School Action	Evidence Required
1	Identify 10 unauthorised sessions in 10 weeks	Attendance report (O/U/G codes)
2	Implement and record support / reasonable adjustments	Communication logs and plans
3	Warn parents in writing of possible legal action	Copy of letter / email
4	Refer to LA if criteria met	Attendance data + support evidence
5	LA reviews and decides on next steps	LA response filed for record

6. Contact for Mid Essex Attendance Enforcement

Schools must **liaise directly with Essex's Local Authority Attendance Compliance Team (ACT)** when submitting evidence or requesting a penalty notice.

7. Application to Suffolk-Placed Pupils

Where a pupil is commissioned or funded by **Suffolk County Council**, or is a Suffolk resident, *Exceptional Ideas Ltd* follows the **DfE National Attendance Framework (2024)** and the **Suffolk County Council Code of Conduct for Penalty Notices (2024)**.

While the national thresholds and fine structures mirror those used in Essex, referrals and enforcement are managed by **Suffolk's Attendance and Welfare Service (AWS)**.

Key points:

- National threshold applies: **10 unauthorised sessions within a rolling 10-school-week period.**
- Fine escalation matches Essex: **Fine 1 (£80 → £160); Fine 2 (flat £160); maximum two fines per child within three years.**
- **Exclusion-related penalty notices** may be issued if a pupil is seen in public during the first five school days of exclusion, provided parents were informed **in writing.**
- Schools must **liaise directly with Suffolk's AWS** when submitting evidence or requesting a penalty notice.

Exceptional Ideas Ltd ensures that attendance escalation follows the appropriate Local Authority's Code of Conduct and that consistent early-help and reasonable-adjustment principles apply to all pupils, regardless of commissioning authority.

Official LA letters and referral forms are stored in the Internal Policies Folder for staff use only

Appendix D — Abbreviations Key

General

- **AP** — Alternative Provision
- **SEND** — Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- **EHCP** — Education, Health and Care Plan
- **DfE** — Department for Education
- **ECC** — Essex County Council
- **LA** — Local Authority
- **HT** — Headteacher
- **MIS** — Management Information System
- **SOP** — Standard Operating Procedure
- **RACI** — Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed (roles matrix)

Safeguarding

- **DSL** — Designated Safeguarding Lead
- **DDSL** — Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead
- **CP Lead** — Child Protection Lead
- **KCSIE** — *Keeping Children Safe in Education*
- **CME** — Children Missing Education

Attendance & Inclusion

- **PA** — Persistent Absence (attendance < 90%)
- **ACT** — (Essex) Attendance Compliance Team
- **SEMH** — Social, Emotional and Mental Health
- **EAL** — English as an Additional Language
- **LAC** — Looked-After Child/Children
- **AM / PM** — Morning / Afternoon session
- **Y11** — Year 11
- **PRU** — Pupil Referral Unit

Data protection (for cross-policy reference)

- **UK GDPR** — UK General Data Protection Regulation

Attendance codes (quick reference)

- **L** — Late (before register closes)
- **U** — Late (after register closes)
- **N** — Reason not yet provided (temporary)
- **O** — Unauthorised absence
- **B** — Approved off-site educational activity
- **Y** — Exceptional circumstances

- **X** — Not required to be in school
- **#** — Planned full/partial school closure

Appendix E

Working together to improve school attendance

Being in school and having the best attendance possible underpins all the many benefits of school for your child, such as their learning, wellbeing and wider development.

For some children, attending school every day will be harder than for others. This is why schools, and local councils in some cases, are committed to working together with families to solve problems and support your child's school attendance. This guide covers two areas:

- [Parents' responsibilities](#)¹ for school attendance and what you need to do when your child needs to be absent.

How schools and local authorities will work with you to [support your child's attendance](#).

Parents' responsibilities

What are my responsibilities for my child's attendance?

As a parent, you are legally responsible for making sure your child gets a suitable fulltime education, usually from the [age of 5 to 16](#).

For most parents, this will mean making sure your child is in school every day except when:

- Your child is too ill to go to school.
- You have permission for a leave of absence from your child's school for them not to attend. You should only ask for this in exceptional circumstances. Generally, a holiday would not be classed as an exceptional circumstance.
- Your religious body has a day especially for religious observance.

There are also some other circumstances. For example, where:

- Your [local council](#) is responsible for arranging your child's transport to school and it is not available on that day or has not been provided yet.
- Your child attends an independent school that is beyond walking distance from home and your local council has not arranged for your child to board at or near the school or attend another school closer to home.
- Your child does not have a permanent address and you are required to travel for work. (This exception only applies if your child attends their usual school or another school where you are staying as often as possible. This must be 200 half days or more a year if they are aged 6 or older.)

¹ The meaning of 'parent' in relation to a child includes any person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility for the child or who has care of the child, as set out in [section 576 of the Education Act 1996](#).

Whilst some absence is unavoidable, it is important that your child is in school every day they can be for their learning, wellbeing and development.

If my child needs to be absent from school, what do I need to do?

You should contact their school as early as possible on the first day of absence to explain why. If you do not, your child's school will contact you on the first morning of their absence to find out why your child is not in school.

All parents can request a 'leave of absence' for their child which gives them permission to be absent from school. Your child's school has the final say over whether to approve the request and for how long your child can be absent. Generally, a leave of absence would not be allowed for a holiday.

My child has a short term illness. Do they have to go to school, and will I be penalised if they don't?

If your child is ill, read the [NHS's 'Is my child too ill for school?' advice](#) to help you decide whether they can go to school.

If they are too ill to attend, you are not breaking the law and will not be penalised. You should let the school know as soon as possible on the first day of absence and schools must record such absences as authorised. If the absence due to illness is ongoing or frequent you should speak to your [child's school to see what support](#) can be put in place.

Do I need to provide medical evidence to support my child's illness related absence?

If your child is too ill to attend school, schools must record these absences as authorised. In the majority of cases medical evidence is not needed, but schools may ask you for evidence where:

- Your child is regularly absent because of illness, to assess how they can help your child by putting the right support in place.
- In a small number of cases where they have reason to believe your child was not too ill to attend and a conversation cannot resolve the issue.

If you are asked to provide evidence this does not need to be a letter from your doctor or consultant, and doctors will not usually provide such letters. It can, instead, be appointment cards, prescriptions, or notes of previous consultations (including from the [NHS App](#)).

A lack of written evidence must not prevent the right support being put in place or the absence being authorised if you can demonstrate your child was, or is, unable to attend, or is awaiting treatment. If you are asked for evidence you cannot provide, a conversation with the school can help to resolve the issue.

What should I do if my child needs a dental or medical appointment in school time?

To avoid disruption to your child's attendance, medical and dental appointments should not be booked during the school day whenever reasonably possible. When they are, you should ask the school in advance for a leave of absence and collect them as close to the time of the appointment as possible and return them to school for the rest of the school day afterwards.

Accessing support to help my child attend school

My child is struggling to attend because of an issue in school. Who can help us?

The first step is to talk to your child's school about why your child is missing school, and what help the school can give. You should still do everything you can to help your child attend as much as possible whilst waiting for help and support to be put into place.

Information on who in school you can contact for help, including the school's senior leader responsible for attendance, can be found in the school's attendance policy on its website or available in hard copy from the school. The school and local council are expected to follow the expectations set out in the guidance document [Working together to improve school attendance](#).

If your child is struggling to attend because of something that is happening at school, their school is expected to work with you (and your child if they are old enough) to overcome the issues. You should agree a set of joint actions with the school that you have all developed together to support your child. This will often include a commitment to support you and your child by working together or help you to access support services, in exchange for an agreement from you (and your child if they are old enough to understand) to take part in the support offered. The school will also arrange times for you to come together to review these actions and your child's progress.

Depending on the reasons for your child's absence, this may take the form of an action plan, an early help plan, or an attendance contract.

My child is struggling to attend because of an issue at home or getting to school. Who can help us?

Again, talking to the school should be your first step. It is expected to help you access the support you need, such as from a school nurse or local housing or transport team.

Your local council's school attendance team is expected to work with the school and provide access to the support you need if the issues you or your child are facing are beyond the remit of the school. If there are lots of reasons for your child's absence, local services are expected to work together to support you and your child. They are expected to provide you with a single action plan and lead worker to help and support you. In most cases this will be a member of school staff, but it might be a member of local council or local healthcare staff.

In exchange, you are expected to agree and take part in accessing the support once it has been put in place. It is advisable to regularly meet with your child's school to review what is and isn't working, involving your child if possible. While waiting for

help, you should still do everything you can to help your child attend as much as possible.

Accessing support for my child with long term illness or special educational needs and disabilities.

My child has a long term illness, special educational needs or a disability that is impacting their attendance. What help is available?

If your child is regularly absent from school because of illness (regardless of whether it is mental or physical) or special educational needs or a disability, they have the same right to a suitable full-time education as any other child. You should work with your child's school to discuss the reasons and make sure the right support is in place. All schools are expected to provide support in these cases. Schools are expected to:

- Work with you to consider adjustments to practice and policies to help your child attend, as well as a duty to make formal reasonable adjustments where your child has a disability. These could include adjustments to uniform, transport, routines, access to support or lunchtime arrangements.
- Ensure your child receives the right pastoral care and in certain cases consider a time-limited phased return to school where appropriate, for example for those who have anxiety about school attendance.
- Work jointly with other services, including your local council and health services.
- For pupils with a long-term medical condition – either physical or mental – schools are also expected to make attendance support a key feature of any individual healthcare plan. More information can be found in your child's school's policy on [supporting pupils with medical conditions](#).

For pupils with [Education, Health and Care plans](#) schools must help ensure that the support set out in the plan is delivered.

To make this work, it is important that you are open and work with your child's school by sharing information. This will help ensure the right support is put in place to ensure your child's needs are met.

In most cases this will be sufficient, but no child should be out of school due to illness without appropriate education for more than 15 school days over a school year. Where additional support is needed, your local council is responsible for arranging alternative suitable fulltime (or close to) education for your child, as far as health needs allow.

If your child has an Education, Health and Care plan, we expect the school to inform the local council who is responsible for your child's plan if attendance falls. This is to ensure that they are aware of the situation and to seek their support for your child where necessary.

Where can I get help if my child is too anxious to go to school?

Attending school usually helps to protect your child's mental health, for a range of reasons including giving them a chance to be with friends and to benefit from learning. However, some children can be anxious or worried about going to school, particularly around the start of the new year or joining a new school or class. It's normal for children to feel a little anxious sometimes.

Avoiding school can make a child's anxiety about going to school worse. It's good to talk about any worries they may have such as bullying, friendship problems, schoolwork or sensory problems.

If their anxiety continues and becomes an attendance issue, you should speak to your child's school together with your child about why they are anxious and what can be done to help them.

If your child is still struggling and it's affecting their everyday life, it might be good to talk to your GP or school nurse. You can also find some useful advice from the NHS on [anxiety in children](#) and at [Young Minds](#). These sites will help you work through likely reasons together with your child, what to do and how to make sure that you get the right support if there are more serious issues.

Getting help when support hasn't been provided or hasn't worked.

Support isn't working because my child's current school place is not suitable for their needs. What can I do?

Your first step is to discuss it with your child's school to see if extra support can be given.

If you are still having problems, you can apply for a place at a different school or schools. Your local council will be able to provide details on how to apply.

It is important that you don't take your child out of their current school in the meantime – your application for another school may not be successful, for example, if it is full for that particular year group.

If your child has an Education, Health and Care plan then it is helpful to discuss the best way forward with both your school and your local council's SEND team.

What action can you take if your child's current school place is not suitable for their needs?

If you have applied for a place at a school and it does not offer your child a place, you have the right to appeal this decision. See [Advice for parents and guardians on school admission appeals – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

Mainstream education isn't working for my child. Can I get help with an alternative provision?

Your first step is to discuss with your child's school to see if extra support can be given.

If you are still having problems, you should discuss them with your local council. In many cases additional support can be provided to help a child remain in mainstream school. In a small number of cases where a child would not receive a suitable, full-time education without [alternative provision](#), your local council is responsible for putting that in place.

Where can I find help if my child's school or the local council have not delivered what they are expected to?

Your first step is to discuss it with school. Most issues can be resolved this way.

You can also contact your local council's school attendance support team. You should be able to find their contact details on the council's website or through your child's school.

Your local Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) will also be able to offer advice and support.

If these steps don't succeed, you can make a formal complaint to the school or local council following their complaints procedure. All schools must have one and details can usually be found on the school website.

If you believe that the school did not handle your complaint correctly there are [different processes of how to complain](#) depending on your child's circumstances. If you do not believe your local council handled your complaint correctly you can make a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) at www.lgo.org.uk once you have completed the council's complaint process.

Can my child's school force me to remove my child from school and home educate?

If your school has asked or is putting pressure on you to remove your child from school to home educate, this is known as off-rolling.

Off-rolling is the practice of removing a pupil from the school roll without using a permanent exclusion, when the removal is primarily in the best interests of the school, rather than the best interests of the pupil. This includes pressuring a parent to remove their child from the school. While it may not always be unlawful, Ofsted and the Department for Education believe that off-rolling is never acceptable.

Elective Home Education should always be a positive choice taken by parents without pressure from their school.

If you believe your child has been removed from the school site and formal suspension/permanent exclusion procedures have not been followed, you should approach the head teacher in the first instance to discuss the matter. If you are not satisfied, you can take up the issue with the governing board and in the case of a maintained school, with the local authority, or in the case of an academy, the trust. If

you remain dissatisfied, you are able to write to the Department for Education. You may also wish to consult the Coram Children's Legal Centre.

Formal and legal action where voluntary support hasn't worked or isn't taken up.

Will my local council take legal action against me?

If your child is absent from school without permission or a valid reason, you are likely to be breaking the law. Where this happens, your child's school or your local council will speak to you to understand the reasons. If your child hasn't attended because they are struggling to, both your child's school and your local council are expected to put the right support in place to help you.

If you do not take part in that support, or it doesn't work because more structured formal support is needed, then your child's school or your local council may:

- Invite you to agree to an attendance contract. This is a formal action plan that sets out what you will do to improve your child's attendance and what your child's school and/or your local council will do to support this.
- Apply to the family court for an education supervision order to ensure you and your child receive advice, assistance and direction to make sure they receive a suitable full-time education.

If you do not make any efforts to improve your child's attendance or it is clear you have knowingly allowed your child to be absent without good reason – for example, taking your child on holiday in school time without permission – your local council may prosecute you to protect your child's right to a full-time education. Even during this process, you have the opportunity to accept and engage in voluntary support (such as an early help assessment) or formal support (such as an attendance contract or education supervision order) to prevent the case from going to court. If found guilty you may be given a parenting order, community order, a fine of up to £2,500 or in very exceptional circumstances a sentence of up to 3 months in prison.

When can I be given a penalty notice (fine) if my child misses school?

From the 2024-25 school year, there will be new national rules on how penalty notices for school absence are used. The new rules mean that all schools must consider giving a penalty notice to a parent when a child has missed 10 or more sessions (5 days) for unauthorised reasons within a 10 school week period, and support to help your child be in school is not appropriate. If support would help improve attendance, that should be provided by the school or local council rather than a penalty notice. You cannot be given a penalty notice for absence that is authorised by the school (such as illness).

A penalty notice will usually only be issued in cases of holidays taken in school time, or for other reasons where the school or council is trying to help attendance to improve and you are not engaging in that support or it is not working and they believe that a penalty notice would improve attendance.

Your school or council can still decide to issue a penalty notice or proceed to prosecution for less amounts of absence than 10 sessions (5 days) if support is not

appropriate and they think it would improve attendance. For example, if parents are often taking shorter holidays in school time to deliberately avoid a fine.

When may I be given a ‘notice to improve’ instead of a penalty notice?

In some cases, your school or local council may choose to give you a ‘notice to improve’ instead of a penalty notice once the national threshold of 10 sessions (5 days) of unauthorised absence is met. This is a formal written warning that, unless attendance significantly improves, you will be issued with a penalty notice. This is to give you another chance to work with the school to improve your child’s attendance. A ‘notice to improve’ will not be given if you take a holiday in term time without permission.

How much could I be fined if my child misses school? How many penalty notices can I get?

From the 2024-25 school year, the fine for school absence penalty notices across the country will be £80 if paid within 21 days, or £160 if paid within 28 days. If you do not pay the fine you may be prosecuted in court.

If a parent receives a second penalty notice for the same child within any three-year period, the charge will be a flat rate of £160; there will be no reduction if paid within 21 days. Penalty notices for absence before the 2024-25 school year do not count. A parent cannot receive more than two penalty notices for the same child within any three-year period. This is because it is clear that previous penalty notices have not worked. Once this limit has been reached, another action like a parenting order or prosecution will be considered. Penalty notices for absence before the 2024-25 school year do not count in this limit.

Glossary

Attendance action plan – an informal agreement between you, your child if they are old enough to understand, their school and sometimes your local council about what actions supporting your child will take to improve their attendance.

Community order – an order that can be made by a Court after you have been found guilty of knowingly failing to secure your child’s regular attendance rather than sending you to prison. This may include requirements for you to take part in certain activities or observe certain rules.

Early help assessment – a voluntary assessment of what you and your family need help with to allow your child’s school and/or your local council to put the right support in place or help you access the right services.

Education supervision order – an order that can be made by the Family Court to require a local council to advise, assist, and direct you and your child so that they receive suitable full-time education. This is not a criminal conviction, but persistently breaching the council’s directions can lead to prosecution.

Leave of absence – permission given by your child's school for them to be absent from school for a specified period of time. You should write to the head teacher and ask for a leave of absence before the time your child needs to be absent from school. They will only be agreed to in exceptional circumstances, and not generally for holidays.

Attendance contract – a formal signed agreement between you, and your child's school and/or your local council agreeing what actions you will take to improve your child's attendance and what the school/council will do to support you in this.

Parenting order – an order that can be made by a Court after you have been found guilty of failing to secure your child's regular attendance. You will be required to take part in certain activities or observe certain rules.

Regular attendance – attending school every day that the school is open in line with the school rules apart from in a small number of allowable circumstances.

School attendance support team – the team in your local council who can help you with your child's attendance.

Special educational need (SEN) – A child has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which means that they need extra or different help from that given to others of the same age in mainstream schools. If the school has identified your child as having SEN, they will have discussed that with you.