



Athelstan Primary School Attendance Policy

2025 to 2026

This policy is available on our website and on request from the school office. Families are informed about it when children join the school and at appropriate points during the year. Attendance is an essential part of safeguarding, and all staff contribute to its development.

Reviewed: January 2026

Next Review: January 2027

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1. Introduction

Good attendance is essential for every pupil to achieve well, feel confident and enjoy learning. Missing lessons leaves children vulnerable to falling behind and affects their well-being. Pupils with strong attendance make better progress and build secure relationships.

Every child of compulsory school age must receive full-time education suited to their age, ability and needs. When a child is registered at a school, parents have the legal duty to ensure regular attendance and punctuality.

This policy reflects *Working together to improve school attendance* (DfE 2024) and Sheffield Local Authority requirements. Our approach is based on early help, strong relationships and understanding the barriers that affect attendance.

Our aims are to:

- Build a welcoming environment where pupils feel safe and valued
- Maintain a culture where good attendance is understood and celebrated
- Identify concerns early through regular monitoring
- Work with families to remove barriers and offer timely support
- Ensure pupils have access to the full range of opportunities

Regular attendance is also a key protective factor for children. Persistent and severe absence can increase safeguarding risks, reduce access to support and limit opportunities for concerns to be identified early. For this reason, attendance is monitored closely and forms part of the school's safeguarding systems and procedures. Where attendance concerns emerge, the school will take timely action to understand barriers and provide appropriate support.

2. Promoting Regular Attendance

Pupils should attend school every day they are well enough to do so.

Good attendance is supported by consistent daily routines.






Families can help by preparing school clothing and bags the night before, encouraging an appropriate bedtime, and ensuring children wake in time to arrive at school promptly. Establishing these routines helps children feel calm, confident and ready to learn.

Attendance expectations:

- 96 percent or above good attendance
- Below 96 percent early concern
- Below 90 percent persistent absence
- Below 50 percent severe absence

Small absences add up. Missing one day every two weeks means more than three weeks of learning lost each year. An attendance of **90 percent equals around nineteen days missed.**

Attendance information is shared through newsletters, meetings and messages. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's attendance, the following members of staff and governors can help. Please contact the most appropriate person listed below.

Days Absent	Percentage of attendance
 0 – 2 DAYS OFF	99 – 100%
 4 – 7.5 DAYS OFF	96 – 98%
 9.5 – 17 DAYS OFF	92 – 95%
 19 + DAYS OFF	Under 90%
 80 + DAYS OFF	Under 50% <small>▼</small>

Role	Name	Email
Senior Attendance Champion	James Mills	jmills@athelstan.sheffield.sch.uk
Attendance Officer	Megan Shepherd	mshepherd@athelstan.sheffield.sch.uk
Additional Support		
Attendance Governor	Rochelle Kirk	rkirk@athelstan.sheffield.sch.uk

What families can expect:

- A safe, welcoming environment
- Early support
- Clear communication
- Accurate registers and efficient procedures
- First-day contact. Where no contact is received, the school will follow up absence on the first day and may carry out further checks, including home visits, as part of its safeguarding responsibilities.
- Meetings and support plans when needed
- Fair and proportionate use of legal measures where attendance does not improve despite support

What school expects from parents:

- Ensure daily attendance
- Contact the school before 8.30am on the first day of absence and on each subsequent day unless otherwise agreed
- Encourage routines that support attendance
- Arrange appointments outside school hours
- Work with school to overcome barriers
- Attend meetings requested by school

What school expects from pupils:

- Attend every day
- Arrive on time and ready to learn
- Speak to staff if worried or needing help

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Governing Body

- Promote a culture where good attendance is expected
- Provide strategic oversight
- Review data regularly
- Ensure compliance with statutory duties

Headteacher

- Ensure delivery of this policy

- Allocate resources to support attendance
- Ensure attendance is embedded within safeguarding
- Ensure registers are taken promptly, accurately and in line with statutory guidance, including appropriate use of attendance codes

Senior Attendance Champion

- Lead the strategic approach
- Oversee systems and casework
- Chair attendance meetings
- Coordinate multi-agency work
- Report to governors

Attendance Officer

- Complete first-day calling and follow up unexplained absence in line with safeguarding procedures
- Monitor coding and patterns
- Maintain casework records
- Support meetings
- Liaise with agencies

Class Teachers

- Build relationships with families
- Notice emerging patterns
- Reinforce routines
- Promote attendance daily
- Report concerns

Parents

- Ensure their child attends daily unless unwell
- Communicate absences promptly
- Work with school to overcome difficulties

Pupils

- Attend regularly
- Arrive on time
- Seek help when needed

4. Understanding Types of Absence

School decides whether absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Authorised absence examples:

- Illness that prevents attendance

The school follows NHS guidance [Is my child too ill for school?](#) to support families in deciding whether a child is well enough to attend. Children with minor illnesses, such as coughs or colds without a temperature, are often well enough to attend school.

- Medical appointments that cannot occur outside school hours

Parents are expected to notify the school in advance of medical appointments wherever possible. Evidence such as an appointment card or letter may be requested where appropriate to support accurate coding.

- Religious observance
- Unavoidable emergency

Unauthorised absence examples:

- No reason provided
- Arrival after registers close
- Term-time holidays
- Day trips or family events

The school will not routinely request evidence for absence. Where absence becomes frequent, prolonged or irregular, and there are ongoing concerns, the school may request reasonable and proportionate information to help understand the reasons for absence and identify appropriate support.

Where no reason is provided for absence, or where absence is not authorised, it will be recorded as unauthorised. Unauthorised absence may include the use of the O code, where no acceptable reason has been provided or the reason is not accepted by the school, and the U code, where a pupil arrives after registers have closed.

Further information about attendance codes, including authorised and unauthorised absence, is provided in Appendix A.

5. Persistent and Severe Absence

Persistent absence is defined as attendance below 90 percent.

Severe absence is defined as attendance below 50 percent.

Pupils at risk of persistent or severe absence receive targeted support, regular monitoring and review in line with the school's Support First Model.

Persistent and severe absence can have a significant impact on a child's learning, wellbeing and safety. Children who miss large amounts of school are more likely to fall behind academically, experience social difficulties and miss out on early support. For this reason, concerns about attendance at these levels are treated as a priority and addressed through timely, supportive intervention.

6. Leave of Absence

Leave of absence during term time can only be authorised in **exceptional circumstances**, which are rare, significant and unavoidable. There is no automatic right for parents to take children out of school during term time.

Requests for leave must be made in writing to the school at least **twenty school days in advance**. The Headteacher will consider each request individually, in line with national guidance and Sheffield Local Authority requirements.

The following are **not** considered exceptional circumstances:

- Holidays because they are cheaper in term time
- Visiting family or attending family events
- Parental work patterns or limited annual leave
- Birthdays or celebrations
- Travel convenience
- Childcare difficulties

If leave is not authorised and a child is absent, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and the school may request a Penalty Notice from the Local Authority where appropriate and in line with local guidance.

Unauthorised term-time leave contributes to persistent and severe absence and is monitored closely as part of the school's attendance procedures.

Where a child is absent from school and their whereabouts are unknown, the school has a safeguarding duty to follow children missing education procedures. This may include making enquiries with other agencies and, where appropriate, a referral to the local authority. This also applies where a child does not return to school on the agreed date following authorised leave.

Further guidance for parents and carers, including questions and answers about term-time leave, funerals and exceptional circumstances, is provided in Appendix B.

6A. Term-Time Holidays, Childcare Expectations and Education Abroad

This section provides additional clarification for parents and carers about common situations related to term-time holidays, childcare arrangements and education during travel.

Term-time holidays

Parents do not have the right to take children out of school during term time for holidays. Leave can only be authorised in exceptional circumstances, which are rare and unavoidable.

Parents or carers providing schoolwork or learning activities during a holiday does not make the absence authorised and does not change how it is recorded.

Childcare and parental convenience

Department for Education guidance is clear that the following do not qualify as exceptional circumstances:

- Childcare difficulties
- Parental work rotas or employment restrictions
- The cost of holidays
- Travel convenience
- Family events or celebrations

Parents are expected to make reasonable childcare arrangements during term time so that children can attend school regularly.

Education during travel

If families choose to travel during term time:

- The child remains on roll
- The absence remains unauthorised
- The school is not required to provide work
- Parental provision of learning does not change the attendance code

Education abroad

A child remains registered at Athelstan Primary School unless formally removed from roll in line with the Pupil Registration Regulations. Attendance expectations and legal responsibilities continue to apply while a child remains on roll.

Exceptional circumstances

Exceptional circumstances may include, for example:

- A parent returning from armed forces deployment
- A sudden and significant family crisis requiring short-term relocation
- An unavoidable one-off event beyond the family's control

Holidays and travel arrangements are not considered exceptional circumstances under Department for Education or Sheffield Local Authority guidance.

Where siblings attend different schools, the school may liaise with those settings to support a consistent and joined-up approach.

Further guidance for parents and carers, including questions and answers about term-time leave, funerals and exceptional circumstances, is provided in Appendix B.

7. Medical Appointments and Illness

Appointments should be outside school hours where possible. Where medical appointments take place during the school day, parents are expected to inform the school in advance and provide evidence such as an appointment card or letter within five school days. Only the required time should be taken. Any request for evidence will be reasonable, proportionate and sensitive to family circumstances.

Where illness absence becomes frequent or follows a pattern, the school may arrange a meeting with parents to better understand the reasons for absence and consider appropriate support. Decisions about support and next steps are informed by professional judgement and individual circumstances.

Families are encouraged to use NHS guidance. Children with minor illnesses, such as coughs or colds without a temperature, are often well enough to attend school and may feel better once settled into the school day.

8. Religious Observance

Absence is authorised for recognised religious observance when the day is set apart by the religious body to which the family belongs. Parents are expected to inform the school in advance of any planned religious observance so that the absence can be recorded correctly.

9. Attendance Procedures

Parents must contact the school before 8.30am on the first day of absence, providing a reason and expected return date. Contact should continue on each subsequent day of absence unless otherwise agreed with the school.

If a child is absent without explanation, the school will take timely action in line with safeguarding procedures, which may include:

- Make first-day contact with parents or carers
- Make further contact attempts where required
- Contact emergency contacts if no response is received
- Carry out home visits where appropriate
- Inform and liaise with all relevant professionals for pupils open to services, including social workers and other linked practitioners

10. Register Keeping

The school day begins at 8.50am and registers close at 9.30am.

Registers are taken twice daily, at the start of the morning session and at the start of the afternoon session, in line with statutory requirements.

Pupils arriving after 8.50am but before 9.30am will be recorded as late (L code).

Pupils arriving after 9.30am, once registers have closed, will be recorded as unauthorised absence (U code).

A summary of attendance codes used by the school is included in Appendix A.

11. Punctuality

Being on time helps pupils feel settled, reduces anxiety and supports learning. Pupils are expected to arrive in school ready for the start of the school day at 8.50am.

Frequent or persistent lateness will be discussed with families to understand barriers and agree actions to support improved punctuality.

12. Support Systems

Support for attendance concerns begins as soon as a pattern of absence or lateness is identified. The Senior Attendance Champion or Attendance Officer will usually lead this work, in partnership with class teachers and pastoral staff, and in discussion with the child and their family.

Support may include:

- Meetings with parents and pupils
- Support plans or contracts
- Early Help Assessment
- Pastoral support
- Adjustments, including soft starts
- Emotional support
- Referrals to agencies
- Opportunities to capture the child's voice and understand barriers to attendance
- Additional support for pupils experiencing emotionally based school avoidance

Support is offered at the earliest opportunity and is always prioritised before any formal or legal action is considered.

Support is provided in line with the school's graduated attendance pathway, outlined in Appendix C.

13. Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

Some attendance difficulties arise from anxiety or emotional needs which make it hard for a child to attend school, even when they want to do so. Support may include:

- Understanding triggers
- Pastoral support
- Routine adaptations
- Safe spaces
- Work with SEND and agencies
- Listening to and capturing the child's voice to understand their experience
- Joint planning with families to agree supportive, achievable steps back into school

Support for EBSA focuses on reducing anxiety, building confidence and increasing attendance gradually, and is reviewed regularly to ensure it remains appropriate and effective.

14. Rewards and Interventions

Rewards and recognition are used to encourage positive attendance habits, reinforce routines and celebrate effort and improvement as well as high attendance.

Recognition may include:

- Weekly certificates
- Attendance badges
- Recognition for improvement
- Positive messages

Thresholds:

- 96 percent good attendance
- 94 to 95 percent early concern
- 90 to 93 percent support plans
- Below 90 percent persistent absence
- Below 50 percent severe absence

These thresholds are used as a guide to help identify pupils who may need support and do not replace professional judgement or individual consideration.

Rewards and recognition will be inclusive and fair. Pupils with medical conditions or SEND will not be disadvantaged, and improvement over time is recognised and valued.

15. Staged Intervention Support First Model

The Staged Intervention Support First Model is used when attendance concerns begin to emerge and is adapted to the individual needs of the pupil and family. The Senior Attendance Champion or Attendance Officer will usually oversee this process, working closely with class teachers, pastoral staff and external agencies where appropriate.

At every stage we:

- Listen to pupils and families and capture the child's voice
- Build on relationships
- Explore and understand barriers
- Offer tailored support
- Review progress before moving to the next stage

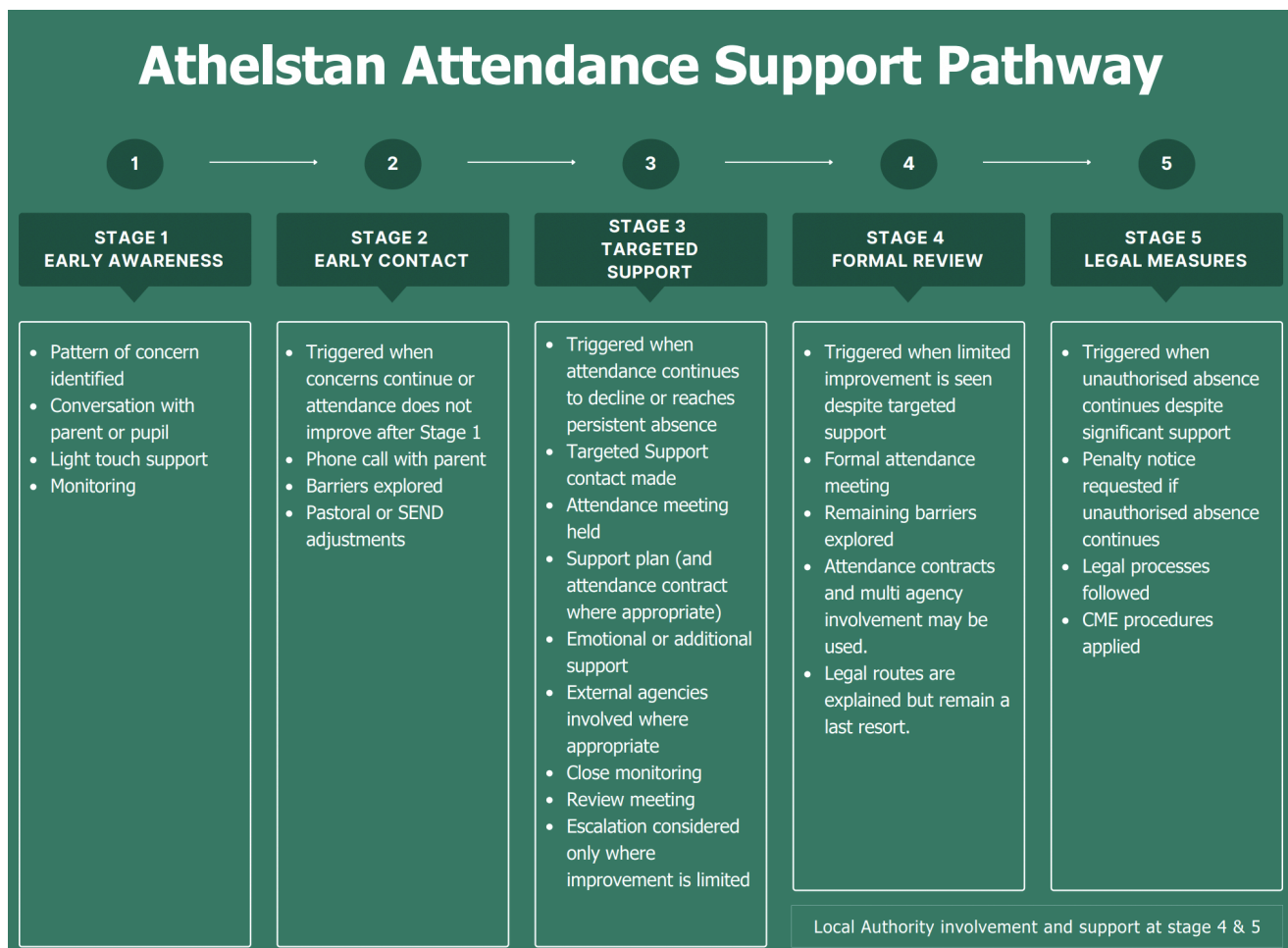
Movement between stages is flexible and based on need rather than time, recognising that some pupils may require longer periods of support or different approaches to achieve sustained improvement.

An overview of the school's Support First Staged Attendance Pathway is set out in Appendix C.

16. Staged Intervention Pathway

This pathway outlines how the school identifies and responds to concerns about attendance. Each stage builds on the support already offered and is recorded carefully to ensure consistency.

Progression through the pathway is guided by patterns of attendance, including the number of sessions missed, rather than percentages alone, and takes account of individual circumstances. Movement to the next stage occurs only when support has been offered and reviewed.



This pathway is summarised in Appendix C.

17. Part-Time Timetables

Used only in exceptional circumstances. Must be with the agreement of the school and family, be short-term, part of a support plan, agreed in writing and reviewed regularly.

18. School Attendance and the Law

The school has a duty to promote regular attendance and to follow national procedures where attendance does not improve despite appropriate support.

Under the Education Act 1996, parents are legally responsible for making sure their child attends school every day unless they are genuinely unable to do so.

Penalty Notices

Schools may consider requesting a Penalty Notice, in consultation with the Local Authority, where a pupil has accrued

- ten sessions (five school days) of unauthorised absence within ten school weeks

This includes:

- unauthorised term-time holidays
- repeated unauthorised absence
- lateness after the register closes (U codes)

Penalty Notices are issued by the Local Authority, not the school.

Per Parent, Per Child

Penalty Notices are issued **per parent, per child**, meaning:

- two parents taking one child out of school may each receive a Penalty Notice
- two parents taking two children out may each receive **two notices**
- one parent taking two children out may receive **two notices**

This is required by the Education (Penalty Notices) Regulations.

Penalty Notice Levels – National Framework 2024

From August 2024 all Local Authorities must follow the national levels:

- **First Penalty Notice:**
£80 if paid within 21 days, rising to £160 if paid within 28 days
- **Second Penalty Notice within three years:**
£160 fixed (no early-payment reduction)
- **Third offence within three years:**
A Penalty Notice cannot be issued.
The Local Authority may consider **prosecution** under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

If a case proceeds to court, parents may receive a fine of up to £2,500 or a Parenting Order.

Prosecution is used only as a last resort where all other avenues have failed.

Support Before Legal Action

Athelstan Primary School follows a **Support First Model**.

Legal measures are considered only when:

- support has been offered
- barriers have been explored
- attendance has not improved
- unauthorised absence continues

Offence 1

Penalty Notice fines will be £160 paid within 28 days, reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. With each parent/carer receiving a separate fine for each child.

Offence 2 (within a 3-year rolling period)

Penalty Notice Fines will be £160 paid within 28 days, no reduction.

Offence 3 (or further) within a 3-year rolling period

No Penalty Notice issued - consideration to prosecute through Magistrates Court.

Our aim is always to work with families early to avoid legal escalation wherever possible.

Parents and carers can find further clarification about Penalty Notices, including how notices are issued per parent and per child, in Appendix B.

Further information about Penalty Notices and Local Authority processes is included in Appendix B.

19. Deletions from the Register

Deletions from the school register occur only in line with the Pupil Registration Regulations and Sheffield Local Authority Children Missing Education procedures.

A pupil will not be removed from roll without appropriate checks and liaison with the Local Authority. Where a child is absent for an extended period and their whereabouts are unknown, the school has a safeguarding duty to follow CME procedures before any deletion is considered.

20. Related Policies

This attendance policy should be read alongside the following school policies:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Behaviour
- Anti-bullying
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs
- Exclusions

21. Statutory Framework

This policy reflects the following statutory guidance and legislation:

- Working together to improve school attendance (Department for Education 2024)
- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) Regulations 2024
- Children Missing Education statutory guidance
- Education Act 1996
- Keeping Children Safe in Education

22. Appendices

Appendix A: Attendance Registers and Coding

Appendix B: Term-Time Leave and Exceptional Circumstances: Questions and Answers for Parents and Carers

Appendix C: Support First Staged Attendance Pathway

Appendix A: Attendance Registers and Coding

Present codes

Code	Description	Example
/ or \	Present in session	In school on time
L	Late before register closes	Arrives after 8.50am but before 9.30am

Authorised absence codes

Code	Description	Example
I	Illness	Sickness or high temperature
M	Medical or dental appointment	Hospital or specialist appointment
R	Religious observance	Recognised festival day
C	Other authorised circumstances	Family emergency

Temporary or administrative codes

Code	Description	Example
N	Reason for absence not yet provided (temporary code)	Parent has not yet explained the absence

- *N must be updated to the correct code once a reason is provided.*

Unauthorised absence codes

Code	Description	Example
O	Unauthorised absence	No reason provided or not accepted by the school
U	Late after registers close	Arrives after 9.30am
G	Family holiday not authorised	Term-time holiday

Appendix B: Term-Time Leave and Exceptional Circumstances

Questions and Answers for Parents and Carers

This section is intended to help parents and carers understand how decisions about term-time leave are made. It reflects national legislation and Sheffield Local Authority guidance. Each request is considered individually by the Headteacher.

1. Can I take my child out of school for a holiday during term time?

No. Parents do not have an automatic right to take children out of school during term time. Leave can only be authorised in exceptional circumstances, which are rare, significant and unavoidable.

2. What does “exceptional circumstances” mean?

Exceptional circumstances are situations that:

- are rare and significant
- are unavoidable
- cannot reasonably be arranged outside term time
- are time limited

Each request is considered on its individual merits in line with national guidance.

3. Are cheaper holidays, limited annual leave or work patterns exceptional circumstances?

No. Cost, availability of flights, employer restrictions, work patterns, childcare difficulties or convenience do not meet the definition of exceptional circumstances.

4. Are family visits, weddings or celebrations exceptional circumstances?

No, not usually. Visiting family, attending weddings or family celebrations during term time will normally be recorded as unauthorised absence. The key consideration is whether the event has to take place during term time.

5. If a holiday is described as educational, cultural or language based, can it be authorised?

No. Describing a trip as educational or cultural does not make it exceptional and does not change how the absence is recorded.

6. If we do school work while away, will the absence be authorised?

No. Completing school work during a holiday does not change the attendance code. The school is not required to provide or mark work for unauthorised leave.

7. What about religious observance?

Absence may be authorised for recognised religious observance where the day is exclusively set aside by the religious body to which the family belongs. Parents and carers should inform the school in advance.

Extended travel for pilgrimage or religious visits is not usually authorised as religious observance and will be considered under the exceptional circumstances criteria.

8. Can absence be authorised for a funeral?

Yes, in many cases. The school recognises that bereavement is a sensitive time.

The school may authorise:

- the day of the funeral
- the minimum necessary travel time

This normally applies where the funeral is for an immediate family member such as a parent, sibling or grandparent. Extended stays before or after the funeral, or combining the funeral with a holiday or family visit, will normally be recorded as unauthorised.

9. What if we need to travel to care for a seriously ill relative?

In general, travelling to care for a sick relative is not usually authorised, as a child's presence is rarely essential and alternative arrangements can often be made.

A short period of leave may be considered where:

- there is a genuine medical emergency
- the child's absence is essential, not simply helpful
- the time requested is the minimum necessary

10. Why might the school ask for additional information before deciding?

To ensure decisions are fair, consistent and informed, the school may request additional information before deciding whether leave can be authorised. This may include confirmation of dates, evidence of urgency or confirmation of a funeral.

Requests for information are not intended to cause distress and help ensure decisions meet statutory guidance.

11. Can leave be authorised after it has already happened?

No. Leave cannot be authorised retrospectively unless there is an emergency situation.

12. What happens if flights are cancelled?

Where delays are genuinely unavoidable, the school may authorise the minimum additional time needed to return. Parents and carers should contact the school as soon as possible and provide evidence where available.

13. When might a Penalty Notice apply?

A Penalty Notice may be considered when a pupil has ten sessions, equivalent to five school days, of unauthorised absence within a rolling ten school week period. These sessions do not need to be consecutive.

Penalty Notices are issued by the Local Authority, not the school.

14. Are Penalty Notices issued per parent or per family?

Penalty Notices are issued per parent, per child. This means more than one notice may be issued where more than one parent or child is involved.

15. What if my child has SEND or anxiety and needs a break?

The school will always work with families to support children through reasonable adjustments and pastoral support. However, a holiday or extended break during term time is not usually considered an exceptional circumstance and would normally be recorded as unauthorised.

16. What should I do if I am unsure before booking anything?

Parents and carers are strongly encouraged to speak to the school as early as possible. Early conversations can help avoid misunderstandings and allow the school to offer advice or support where appropriate.

17. What happens if leave is taken without authorisation?

If a child is absent due to unauthorised term-time leave, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised. The school may request a Penalty Notice from the Local Authority where appropriate. This decision is not automatic and is considered on a case by case basis.

18. What happens if a child does not return on the agreed date or their whereabouts are unknown?

If a child does not return on the agreed date following authorised leave and no contact is made, safeguarding procedures will be followed.

If a child is absent for a prolonged period and the school does not know where they are, a referral may be made to the Local Authority under Children Missing Education procedures.

Appendix C: Support First Staged Attendance Pathway

This pathway explains how the school identifies and responds to attendance concerns using a graduated and supportive approach. Support is offered early and increases where concerns persist. Progression between stages is flexible and based on need, with decisions informed by patterns of attendance, individual circumstances and professional judgement.

Stage 1: Universal Support

Applies to all pupils. Focuses on promoting positive attendance habits, strong routines and a welcoming school environment.

Stage 2: Early Concern

Attendance begins to decline or patterns of absence or lateness emerge. Informal discussions with families take place and early support is offered to address barriers.

Stage 3: Targeted Support

Attendance concerns increase and may approach persistent absence. Attendance meetings are held, support plans are put in place and targeted interventions are agreed. The child's voice is captured and potential barriers, including emotionally based school avoidance or SEND needs, are explored.

Stage 4: Formalised Support

Attendance concerns persist despite earlier support. Formal attendance meetings take place and attendance contracts may be used. Multi agency involvement is considered where appropriate. Legal routes are explained clearly to families but remain a last resort.

Stage 5: Statutory Intervention

Attendance remains severely impacted or does not improve despite sustained support. The Local Authority leads statutory intervention to ensure the child's right to education is protected.

Part time timetables

Part time timetables may be used at any stage only in exceptional circumstances, as a short-term measure to support reintegration into full-time education, and in line with the school's Part Time Timetables section of this policy.