



THE MERCIAN TRUST

Increasing Opportunities | Improving Outcomes

Attendance Policy

Policy Owner	The Mercian Trust — Standards and Effectiveness Committee
Responsibility	Director for Attendance, Behaviour and Wellbeing
Effective from	1 st October 2026
Review Date	1st September 2027 <i>(or earlier if legislation changes)</i>
Legislation	• Education Act 1996; • Education Act 2002; • Children Act 1989; • Children and Families Act 2014 • Equality Act 2010 • School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024; • Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 • Department for Education's statutory guidance <i>Working together to improve school attendance</i> (July 2026) <i>Keeping children safe in education</i> • National Framework for Penalty Notices; and applicable local authority codes of conduct.
Changes since the last update	

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1. Purpose and policy statement

The Mercian Trust believes that education changes lives. Regular, punctual attendance is essential to increasing opportunity, improving outcomes and enabling every child and young person to flourish. Attendance is therefore everyone's responsibility, and it is a central part of safeguarding, inclusion, school improvement and educational equity.

This policy establishes a consistent Trust-wide framework while allowing each academy to respond intelligently to its community. We expect high attendance at school for every pupil and we combine these high expectations with early and compassionate support. We act with urgency when absence places a student's learning, safety or future opportunities at risk.

The Trust will work in partnership with pupils, parents and carers, local authorities and other agencies to understand and remove barriers to attendance. Support will be tailored, evidence-informed and built around secure relationships with the communities we serve. Where support is unsuccessful, not engaged with or inappropriate, the Trust will use statutory intervention fairly and consistently.

2. Mercian Trust Blueprint: words in action

This policy puts the Trust Blueprint into practice:

- **Social mobility and social justice:** absence must never be allowed to entrench disadvantage. We direct attention and resources towards pupils and groups experiencing the greatest barriers.
- **Belonging and inclusion:** every pupil should be known, welcomed and connected to the school they attend. We listen to pupils and families, make reasonable adjustments and build trusted relationships.
- **Innovation and improvement:** schools across the Trust use accurate data, educational research and disciplined evaluation to improve attendance practice and share what works with other schools through Strategic Network Meetings.
- **Safeguarding and wellbeing:** unexplained, persistent or severe absence is treated as a potential safeguarding concern and followed up promptly.

Our values shape our approach to attendance. We care by understanding the needs of our students and offering practical help; we are courageous in pursuing excellent attendance and making difficult decisions; we are candid through clear, timely communication; and we are accountable for actions, records, impact and follow-through. We work with humanity and precision at all times.

3. Scope, legal framework and definitions

This policy applies to compulsory school-age pupils and, where relevant, pupils below or above compulsory school age enrolled at a Trust school. Legal enforcement provisions apply only where the law permits.

This policy has regard to the Education Act 1996; the Education Act 2002; the Children Act 1989; the Children and Families Act 2014; the Equality Act 2010; the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024; the Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007, as amended; the Department for Education's statutory guidance *Working together to improve school attendance* (July 2026); *Keeping children safe in education*; the National Framework for Penalty Notices; and applicable local authority codes of conduct.

Persistent absence means missing 10% or more of possible sessions. Severe absence means missing 50% or more. In this policy, "parent" includes any person with parental responsibility or day-to-day care of a pupil.

4. Trust-wide expectations

Every school will:

- create a welcoming, safe and inclusive culture in which attendance is understood as a shared commitment to learning and belonging;
- accept that attendance is everybody's responsibility but also appoint a named senior attendance champion and sufficient trained staff to deliver the school strategy;
- publish school-specific arrangements, including the school day, register closing times, absence reporting routes and named contacts;
- ensure published register closing times are applied consistently, are reflected accurately in the management information system, and support correct use of national attendance codes;

- keep accurate admission and attendance registers using current national codes;
- follow-up on unexplained absence on the first day and escalate concerns without delay;
- analyse attendance data frequently by pupils and groups, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND, pupils with a social worker, young carers and other locally vulnerable cohorts;
- use a graduated response when engaging with families that begin with relationships, listening and practical support;
- work with local authorities and relevant partners when absence is persistent, severe or otherwise concerning;
- avoid discriminatory practice and make reasonable adjustments where required; and
- evaluate whether action has improved attendance, safety, engagement and access to education.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 Standards and Effectiveness Committee

The Committee promotes attendance across the Trust's ethos and strategy, approves this policy, assures statutory compliance, receives disaggregated attendance information, challenges variation and inequity, ensures sufficient capacity and training, and holds executive leaders to account for improvement.

5.2 Chief Executive Officer and Trust Executive Leaders

Executive leaders translate Board expectations into a Trust strategy, identify systemic risks, provide challenge and support to Trust schools, broker collaboration, ensure appropriate data and quality assurance, and escalate material concerns to trustees.

5.3 Trust Attendance Strategic Lead / Director

The Trust lead maintains the policy and a common operating framework across trust schools, convenes professional strategic network meetings, monitors comparative and pupil-level risk information, supports schools, including commissioned pieces of school improvement work, coordinates external partnership and reports impact.

5.4 Headteachers and senior attendance champions

Headteachers are accountable for implementation. The senior attendance champion leads a whole-school strategy, secures consistent practice, ensures staff training, oversees complex cases and legal referrals, and reports to local governors and the Trust.

5.5 Attendance staff and all school staff

Attendance staff maintain accurate records, complete first-day response, communicate with families, coordinate support and preserve an auditable chronology. All staff complete registers accurately, promote belonging, notice patterns, respond to barriers within their role and report safeguarding concerns.

5.6 Local governing bodies

Local Governors provide local insight and ensure that high expectations are set through the development of the school vivid vision. They champion better attendance for their groups in their activities and support leaders to understand the impact of leaders' actions on attendance for these champion groups

5.7 Parents, carers and pupils

Parents and carers must ensure regular and punctual attendance, report absence through the published route on each day required, provide accurate contact information, attend meetings and work with any agreed support provided by the school. Pupils are expected to attend school on time, engage with help and speak to a trusted adult about barriers.

6. Registers, reporting absence and punctuality

Registers are legal records. Schools will take an attendance register at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session, enter the correct national code, preserve records for the required period and make permitted amendments transparently.

Parents and carers must notify the school of any absence as soon as possible, and by the school's published deadline, stating the reason and likely duration. Where no satisfactory reason has been received, the school will make prompt contact using available numbers and agreed communication routes. If contact cannot be established, or information raises concern, staff will follow the safeguarding and children-missing-education procedures, which may include home visits and contact with other agencies.

Pupils arriving after the register opens but before it closes will be recorded as late. Arrival after closure without an authorised reason is an unauthorised absence for that session. Persistent lateness will be addressed through the graduated response because it disrupts learning and may indicate a wider barrier to attendance.

Attendance at approved off-site provision must be verified through robust daily arrangements. The school remains responsible for knowing where the pupil is and whether the pupil attends.

7. Authorised absence and leave of absence

Only the school may authorise absence. Decisions will be lawful, evidence-informed, consistent and sensitive to individual circumstances. Illness will normally be authorised when the school is satisfied that the pupil was not fit to attend; evidence may be requested where there is genuine and proportionate reason to do so.

Leave during term time will be granted only in exceptional circumstances and must normally be requested in advance using the school process. A family holiday, lower travel cost or parental work pattern is not, by itself, an exceptional circumstance. The Headteacher will determine each application individually, including the duration authorised. Unauthorised leave may lead to a penalty notice referral where the national threshold and local arrangements are met.

Religious observance, medical and dental appointments, interviews, regulated performance activity and other circumstances will be coded in accordance with current regulations. Routine appointments should, where reasonably possible, be made outside school hours.

8. A graduated approach: expect, monitor, listen, support, formalise and enforce

8.1 Universal culture and prevention

Schools will establish clear routines, welcoming relationships, strong teaching, an inclusive curriculum and regular communication so that pupils understand the value of attendance and feel that they belong. Good and improving attendance will be recognised without penalising pupils whose absence is linked to disability, illness or other protected circumstances.

8.2 Early identification and conversation

Schools will act on patterns and changes rather than wait for a fixed threshold. Staff will speak with the pupil and family, check the accuracy of information, understand barriers, agree immediate actions and review whether those actions are working.

8.3 Targeted support

Where difficulties continue, the school will coordinate an individual plan with clear outcomes, named actions, review dates and appropriate support. This may include pastoral, SEND, health, early help, transport, curriculum, mentoring, reintegration or multi-agency support. The pupil's voice and the family's knowledge will inform the plan.

8.4 Persistent and severe absence

Persistent and severe absence will trigger senior oversight, safeguarding consideration and a documented plan. Schools will work with the local authority and relevant partners, maintain frequent contact, protect access to education and review whether intervention is producing measurable improvement. Severely absent pupils will usually require a multi-agency response.

8.5 Formal and legal intervention

Where voluntary support is unsuccessful, not engaged with or inappropriate, schools will consider formalising support and using lawful intervention. This may include an attendance contract, a notice to improve, a penalty notice referral, an education supervision order or prosecution. Where a pupil reaches the national penalty notice threshold of 10 sessions

of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10-school-week period, the school will consider, as soon as practicable and on a case-by-case basis, whether a penalty notice is appropriate, taking account of the pupil's circumstances, previous support, engagement with support, safeguarding considerations, the national framework and the relevant local authority code of conduct. Action will be proportionate, evidence-based, consistent with the national framework and local code of conduct, and recorded clearly.

9. Inclusion, health, SEND and safeguarding

The Trust rejects a one-size-fits-all response to attendance. The school must be particularly mindful of pupils whose attendance is affected by physical or mental ill health, SEND, caring responsibilities, bereavement, bullying, discrimination, trauma, safeguarding risk or other vulnerability. Reasonable adjustments and additional support will be considered without lowering ambition for access to education.

Staff will cooperate with health professionals and local authorities, review education support where absence is likely to be prolonged and avoid requiring unnecessary medical evidence.

Repeated or unexplained absence may indicate abuse, neglect, exploitation, criminal involvement, mental ill health or unmet need. Staff must act under the safeguarding policy and never assume that another professional has taken action.

Part-time timetables may be used only in exceptional circumstances, for the shortest necessary period, and must not be used to manage behaviour or as an informal exclusion. Any part-time timetable must include:

- agreement with the parent with whom the pupil normally lives;
- a proposed end date and regular reviews involving the pupil and parent;
- involvement of the social worker where applicable;
- discussion with the local authority where the pupil has an Education, Health and Care Plan;
- a written reintegration plan, with clear arrangements for increasing access to full-time education; and
- appropriate safeguarding oversight throughout.

10. Prolonged absence, safeguarding and assurance

Where a pupil is likely to miss 15 school days because of physical or mental health needs, whether consecutively or cumulatively, the school will work with the local authority and relevant health professionals so that suitable education is arranged and access to education is protected. The school will maintain oversight of the pupil's safety, educational entitlement and reintegration while arrangements are being made.

Any delay by a local authority or other agency will not remove the school's safeguarding responsibilities. The school will maintain regular contact with the pupil and family, record referrals and follow-up activity, provide appropriate interim education and support within its powers, and escalate unresolved barriers through the Trust and relevant statutory routes.

11. Data, information sharing and quality assurance

Schools will use accurate, timely and granular data to identify patterns, compare groups, prioritise support and evaluate impact. Review will include whole-school attendance, persistent and severe absence, punctuality, year groups, vulnerable groups, individual pupils and attendance at off-site education.

Information will be shared lawfully, securely and on a need-to-know basis with the Trust, local authorities, the Department for Education and relevant partners. Schools will comply with statutory returns and daily attendance data-sharing requirements, including required submissions to the Department for Education, safeguarding duties, data protection law and the Trust's records-management expectations.

The Trust will quality-assure register practice, coding, first-day response, casework, use of legal intervention and the impact of school strategies. Findings will inform support, challenge, professional learning and reporting to executive leaders and trustees.

12. Training, communication and review

All staff will receive attendance training appropriate to their role. Staff with specific attendance responsibilities will receive additional development in statutory duties, registers and coding, data analysis, family engagement, safeguarding, support planning and legal processes.

Each academy will publish this policy and its academy-specific arrangements in an accessible form, explain expectations to pupils and families, and make alternative formats available where reasonably required.

The policy will be reviewed at least annually, or sooner following a material change in law, statutory guidance, Trust structure or identified practice. Schools will review their local arrangements whenever contacts, session times or procedures change.

Appendix A: Academy attendance arrangements

Each school will complete and publish the following information:

These academy-specific arrangements must be completed, checked and published alongside this policy so that pupils, parents, carers, staff and leaders can understand how the Trust framework operates in each school.

- school name and address;
- Headteacher;
- senior attendance champion and contact details;
- attendance officer or team and contact details;
- school day, morning and afternoon registration times, and register closing times;
- the route and deadline for reporting absence;
- the process for requesting leave of absence;
- first-day response and escalation arrangements;
- local authority attendance service and penalty-notice arrangements;
- academy-specific support, reintegration and family-engagement routes; and
- the date on which these arrangements were last reviewed.

Appendix B: Minimum graduated response

Stage	Minimum response	Evidence and review
Expect and prevent	Clear routines, welcoming culture, accurate registers, communication and universal promotion of attendance.	Published arrangements, staff training and routine data checks.
Monitor and listen	Identify emerging patterns, contact the family, speak with the pupil and explore barriers promptly.	Recorded contact, pupil and parent voice, initial actions and review date.
Support	Agree a personalised plan and coordinate relevant school, Trust, health, early-help or local-authority support.	Named lead, actions, timescales, adjustments and measurable outcomes.
Formalise	Use formal meetings, attendance contracts or notices to improve when voluntary support has not secured improvement.	Chronology, offers of support, barriers, warning and review evidence.
Enforce	Consider lawful statutory intervention where support is inappropriate, unsuccessful or not engaged with.	Proportionate decision, legal threshold, local code compliance and senior authorisation.