Attendance Policy

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1. Introduction

At Waterside School, regular attendance is central to the wellbeing, safety, learning, and emotional development of our learners. We recognise that for our children and young people, who all have Education, Health and Care Plans, attendance challenges are often linked to past experiences of trauma, anxiety, disrupted education, or unmet special educational needs.
Our approach to attendance is therefore:

- **Child-centred:** We respond to each learner's individual needs, strengths, and circumstances.
- **Safeguarding-led:** Absence is treated as a potential sign of risk or unmet need.
- **SEND-informed:** We consider neurodiversity, mental health, and medical needs in all attendance decisions.
- **Trauma-informed:** We use strategies that build trust and reduce anxiety, avoiding punitive or distressing approaches.
- **Legally compliant:** We meet statutory requirements under attendance law, the Equality Act 2010, and the SEND Code of Practice. In addition to regulations and guidance from the DfE and Local Authorities.

This policy explains how we support learners, work in partnership with families, and use early intervention to address attendance difficulties. Formal procedures are only used when a learner's right to education is at risk. It supports compliance with the Independent School Standards and reflects Ofsted expectations and current statutory guidance on improving school attendance.

This policy applies to all learners registered at Waterside School, including those attending full time, on transition timetables, or phased reintegration programmes. It applies to all parents and carers with parental responsibility and sets out shared expectations, responsibilities and support arrangements.

2. Aims and Objectives

This attendance policy sets out clear expectations for staff, learners, parents and carers, commissioners, and partner agencies, ensuring everyone understands how to support and promote positive attendance to:

- **Support learning and achievement:** Ensure learners can access education consistently, maximising progress and outcomes.
- **Maintain high attendance:** Strive for excellent attendance for all learners, recognising that some with chronic health needs may have different patterns.
- **Foster a positive attendance culture:** Create an environment where good attendance and punctuality are expected, valued, and celebrated by everyone in the school community.
- **Engage families and learners:** Raise awareness with parents, carers, and learners about the importance of regular attendance and punctuality for emotional, social, and academic development.
- **Ensure inclusivity:** Apply this policy consistently to all learners, recognising individual needs and circumstances.
- **Work collaboratively:** Partner with learners, families, staff, commissioners, and local agencies to remove barriers to attendance and support every child to reach their potential.
- **Provide a safe and supportive environment:** Promote a welcoming, trauma-informed atmosphere where learners feel secure, valued, and empowered to take responsibility for their attendance.
- **Monitor and respond effectively:** Establish clear systems for tracking attendance, celebrating achievement, and responding promptly to concerns.
- **Empower staff:** Recognise that every member of staff plays a vital role in promoting attendance through positive relationships, encouragement, and consistent practice.

3. Attendance Expectations

3.1 School Day and Registration

The structure of the school day and session times is communicated clearly to parents and carers at admission and reinforced through school documentation, including the parent handbook and transition planning. Attendance registers are taken at the beginning of the

morning session and once during the afternoon session and are closed in line with statutory requirements. Learners that arrive more than 15 min late for a session will be marked as Late. Any concerns arising from registration are followed up in line with safeguarding and attendance procedures.

3.2 Absences

Clear and consistent absence procedures support safeguarding and effective partnership with parents and carers. At Waterside School, procedures are designed to confirm learner safety, identify concerns early and provide appropriate support where attendance difficulties arise.

Parents/carers are expected to notify the school before 9 am on the **first day of absence**, using the agreed communication method, and to provide a clear reason. Where absence continues, contact should continue everyday thereafter unless alternative arrangements have been agreed.

It is important that parents/carers notify us of the details for their absence. This allows the attendance software to be kept up to date and avoid unauthorised absences being recorded. Should contact not be made by a parent by 20 min into a session with a reason for absence, a member of the admin or pastoral team will contact parent/carer to find out details of the absence.

3.3 First-Day Response and Safeguarding Checks

Where no explanation for absence is received, the school makes reasonable attempts to contact parents/carers on the first day. This first-day response is a safeguarding requirement intended to confirm the learner's wellbeing and whereabouts.

If contact cannot be established, or if concerns arise, the matter is escalated to the DSL. Further actions may include additional contact attempts, home-school liaison or consultation with safeguarding partners, depending on the level of risk.

3.4 Illness

To prevent transmission of illness, Waterside School operate a 48-hour sickness and diarrhoea policy, whereby a learner should be symptom free for at least 48-hours before returning to school.

When a learner has an illness resulting in a prolonged absence from Waterside School, we will make commissioners aware of situation and activate a '*keep in touch*' process, involving:

- Weekly update phone calls, videocalls or visits.
- Work being sent home for the student to complete.

3.5 Parental Request for Absence from School for Holiday

Parents/carers are not able to authorise absences for school, this is done by the Headteacher of the school. Guidance for this was released by the DfE in 2024, called Working together to improve school attendance:

Schools are able to grant a leave of absence at their discretion, but only in exceptional circumstances, each application individually considering the specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind each request. Where a leave of absence is granted, the school will determine the number of days a pupil can be absent from school. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the school's discretion.
Schools can only grant such a leave of absence under regulation 11(11), where an application is made in advance by a parent/carer the learner normally lives with (or the learner if they will be over compulsory school age by the time of the absence).
Generally, a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation would not constitute an exceptional circumstance.

Applications should be made in advance, in writing to the Headteacher at Waterside School.

3.6 Addressing Attendance Concerns

Waterside School maintains a clear ambition for all learners to attend regularly and benefit fully from their education. Waterside School expects learner attendance of at least 95%.

Attendance is promoted as a shared responsibility between the school, parents/carers, learner and, where appropriate, other professionals involved with the learner. Sustainable attendance is most effectively achieved where expectations are clear, communication is open and approaches are consistent across home and school. Therefore learners, whose attendance drops below 80% will have an attendance plan to support parents/carers and learners in the increase in their attendance. The focus at this stage is on understanding barriers and preventing escalation.

Where absence continues despite agreed support, concerns are reviewed by senior leaders and the DSL. Decisions are informed by attendance data, safeguarding information and professional judgement rather than rigid thresholds. Escalation may involve increased monitoring or involvement of external services, with communication remaining clear, supportive and transparent. In addition to the support Waterside School provide parents/carers and learners improving their attendance, support might be sought by Waterside School from the LA through the Magistrates Court as an Ancillary Order following a successful prosecution by the LA for irregular attendance or breach of a Schools Attendance Order. This will be in conjunction with an ACE referral.

3.7 Supporting Attendance

Raising awareness of attendance and punctuality issues among all staff, parents and parents and pupils:

- Ensuring that parents/carers understand the responsibility placed on them for making sure their child attends regularly and punctually.
- Equipping learners with the life skills needed to take responsibility for good school attendance and punctuality.
- Maintaining effective means of communication with parents/carers, learners, staff and referring on attendance matters.
- Developing and implementing procedures for identifying, reporting and reviewing cases

- of poor attendance and persistent lateness.
- Supporting learners who have been experiencing any difficulties at home or at school which are preventing good attendance.
- Developing and implementing procedures to follow up non-attendance at school.

3.8 Monitoring Attendance

Staff completing registers will receive appropriate guidance to ensure codes are applied accurately and consistently. Senior leaders review attendance records regularly to check accuracy, identify patterns of concern and ensure that coding reflects agreed arrangements and professional judgement. This oversight reduces the risk of error, misinterpretation or inappropriate escalation.

The Headteacher, has the responsibility for ensuring that all the attendance data is accurately recorded on the attendance software with the support of Waterside School's administration team. Weekly meetings are held with the Headteacher to discuss all attendance concerns and appropriate actions are taken following these meetings, such as letters sent to parents or meetings arranged to discuss attendance concerns with parents.

Attendance expectations and support arrangements are reviewed regularly with parents and carers. Progress is discussed openly and adjustments are made where strategies are not effective. Where attendance improves, this progress is acknowledged; where difficulties persist, further support is explored, including SENCo, DSL or external involvement, while maintaining a safeguarding-focused and supportive approach.

4. Use of Attendance Data

Attendance data is analysed alongside safeguarding, SEND and pastoral information to inform professional decision-making. It is used to identify emerging concerns, inform early help and attendance support planning, support safeguarding assessments, monitor the impact of interventions and provide evidence for governance oversight and inspection.

Attendance data is managed in line with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Access is limited to staff with a professional need to know. Information is shared with external agencies only where lawful, necessary and proportionate, and parents and carers are informed through school policies and privacy notices.

5. Definitions - Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

Clear distinctions between authorised and unauthorised absence are essential to ensure consistency, transparency and legal compliance. At Waterside School, decisions about whether an absence is authorised are informed by statutory guidance, professional judgement and a clear understanding of each learner's individual circumstances, SEN and safeguarding context.

5.1 Authorised Absence

Authorised absence may be granted where a learner is unavoidably absent from school and where the reason is considered legitimate, necessary and proportionate. In making these decisions, the school takes into account evidence provided, professional advice where relevant, and its wider safeguarding and equality duties.

Authorised absence may include, but is not limited to:

- Physical illness or injury.
- Mental health needs, including anxiety, emotional distress or school-related trauma.
- Medical, therapeutic or clinical appointments that cannot reasonably take place outside the school day.
- Religious observance recognised by the family's faith tradition.
- Exceptional circumstances agreed in advance.
- Attendance arrangements linked to agreed, time-limited part-time timetables or phased reintegration programmes.

In a specialist SEN context, the school recognises that not all legitimate absence can be immediately evidenced through formal documentation. Where appropriate, professional judgement is used alongside information from parents, health professionals or Local Authority services.

5.2 Unauthorised Absence

Absence is recorded as unauthorised where no satisfactory explanation is provided, where information remains unclear or unresolved, or where the absence does not meet the threshold for authorisation under statutory guidance.

Examples of unauthorised absence may include:

- Failure to notify the school of absence without reasonable explanation
- Absence where concerns remain following clarification and discussion
- Term-time holidays or leisure activities that have not been agreed as exceptional circumstances

The school will not authorise holidays taken for leisure purposes during term time, in line with statutory guidance.

5.3 Decision-Making and Communication

All decisions regarding authorised and unauthorised absence are made carefully, consistently and on a case-by-case basis. Parents and carers are informed clearly of how absence has been recorded and the reasons for any decision.

Where absence is recorded as unauthorised, this does not automatically trigger enforcement action. Instead, it prompts further monitoring, dialogue and, where appropriate, supportive intervention to understand and address underlying issues.

6. Children Missing Education (CME)

Waterside School recognises that learners missing education are at increased risk of harm, exploitation and disengagement from learning. Robust procedures are therefore in place to respond promptly where a learner's whereabouts is unknown or they fail to attend without explanation.

Where concerns arise, the school:

- Undertakes immediate safeguarding checks and attempts to establish contact
- Escalates concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Follows Local Authority Children Missing Education procedures

Learners are not removed from roll without lawful process, and the school works closely with the Local Authority to support re-engagement or ensure appropriate alternative arrangements where necessary.

7. Links to Other Policies

This Attendance Policy should be read in conjunction with the following school policies and documents, which together form the school's framework for safeguarding, welfare and education provision:

- Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- SEND Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Complaints Policy

8. Legal and Statutory Framework

Waterside School's attendance arrangements are informed by a clear legal and statutory framework that governs education, safeguarding, equality and SEND. This framework underpins how attendance is recorded and monitored, how decisions are made, and how support and escalation are applied where necessary.
Key legislation and statutory guidance informing this policy include:

- **Education Acts 1996 and 2002** – establish parental responsibility for securing attendance and the school's duty to safeguard and promote learner welfare. Attendance monitoring is therefore treated as a safeguarding function, with irregular or unexplained absence considered a potential indicator of unmet need or risk.
- **School Attendance (Learner Registration) (England) Regulations 2024** – set out requirements for registration, attendance coding and record keeping. Waterside School maintains accurate, auditable attendance registers as legal documents in line with these regulations.

- **Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2024** – provide the framework for legal intervention in cases of unauthorised absence. The school applies this framework proportionately, recognising that enforcement is not appropriate where absence is SEND-related, anxiety-driven or linked to safeguarding concerns.
- **Independent School Standards Regulations 2014** – inform the design and review of this policy, particularly:
    - *Part 3* (Welfare, Health and Safety of Learners)
    - *Part 6* (Provision of Information to Parents)
    - *Part 8* (Leadership and Management)
- **Equality Act 2010** – requires the school to make reasonable adjustments for learners with disabilities. Attendance expectations and interventions are adapted where necessary to avoid discrimination and support equitable access to education.
- **Children and Families Act 2014** and the **SEND Code of Practice (2015)** – require education provision, including attendance arrangements, to be aligned with Education, Health and Care Plan outcomes and agreed in partnership with families and Local Authorities where appropriate.
- **Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)** and **Working Together to Improve School Attendance (DfE, 2024)** – emphasise early identification, understanding the causes of absence and coordinated multi-agency working. Waterside School's approach reflects this through early help, relationship-based practice and proportionate responses.