

Attendance Policy

Belonging, support and regular attendance | 2026–27

Policy owner	Headteacher / Senior Attendance Champion
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Approved by	Governing Body — Autumn 2026
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Review date	September 2027 (or sooner if guidance changes)

Policy status

This policy reflects the Department for Education's statutory guidance Working together to improve school attendance, updated July 2026, and the national penalty-notice framework in force since 19 August 2024.

1. Purpose and principles

Excellent attendance supports achievement, wellbeing, safeguarding and personal development. Great Leighs Primary School works in partnership with pupils and families to understand and remove barriers, while maintaining high expectations that every pupil attends every session for its full duration unless a statutory reason applies.

- Attendance is everyone's responsibility.
- Good attendance begins with a calm, safe, supportive school where pupils feel they belong.
- Support will be early, individual and proportionate; absence is considered in context rather than through a purely punitive response.
- The school will make reasonable adjustments and have particular regard to disability, SEND, physical and mental ill health, young carers and pupils with a social worker.
- Attendance information will be handled lawfully and used to safeguard pupils and target support.

2. Legal and statutory framework

This policy has regard to:

- Education Act 1996, including sections 7, 19, 444 and 444A–B;
- Education Act 2002 and Children Act 1989 safeguarding duties;
- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024;
- Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007, as amended in 2024;
- Education (Information about Individual Pupils) (England) Regulations 2013, as amended;
- DfE Working together to improve school attendance (July 2026);

- DfE Keeping children safe in education, Children missing education, Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions, Education for children with health needs who cannot attend school, Providing remote education, and Suspension and permanent exclusion guidance;
- Essex County Council's current penalty-notice code of conduct.

A parent includes a natural parent, a person with parental responsibility, and a person who has day-to-day care of the child. Where a child is registered at school, each relevant parent has a legal duty to ensure regular attendance.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 Governing Body

- promotes attendance across the school's ethos and policies;
- ensures leaders fulfil statutory duties and the policy is published and understood;
- reviews attendance data and trends, including persistent and severe absence and key cohorts;
- challenges and supports leaders and ensures staff receive appropriate training.

3.2 Senior Attendance Champion

- sets the vision and maintains effective systems for attendance;
- monitors individual and cohort data and evaluates strategies;
- ensures barriers are listened to and support is coordinated;
- liaises with families, governors, Essex County Council and other partners;
- decides applications for leave of absence, or formally delegates that function.

3.3 School staff

- take the register accurately and at the same agreed time for all pupils in each session;
- follow up unexpected or unexplained absence promptly;
- notice patterns, listen to pupils and share concerns with the attendance lead or DSL;
- communicate consistently, protect confidentiality and implement agreed adjustments and support.

3.4 Parents and carers

- ensure their child attends every session, on time and ready to learn;
- notify the school before 9.15am on the first day of unexpected absence and on each later day unless another arrangement is agreed;
- give an accurate reason and expected return date, keep contact details current and respond promptly to school contact;
- arrange routine appointments outside school hours where possible and request leave in advance;
- work with the school and partners where support is offered.

3.5 Pupils

- attend every day and arrive punctually;
- speak to a trusted adult about any barrier to attendance;
- engage with agreed support and contribute their views.

4. School day, registration and punctuality

Event	Time
Gates open	8.35am
Morning registration opens	8.45am
Class registration closes	8.50am

Morning register closes	9.15am
End of school day	3.15pm

Pupils arriving after class registration must report to the office with their parent or carer. Arrival after 9.15am without an authorised reason is recorded as code U: late after the register closed. This counts as unauthorised absence for that session. Repeated lateness will be discussed with the family and supported through an agreed improvement plan where needed.

5. Attendance and admission registers

The school takes an attendance register at the start of each morning session and once during each afternoon session. Registers are taken at the same agreed time for all pupils. Each pupil is recorded using the statutory national attendance code that accurately describes whether they are present, attending approved education elsewhere, absent with leave, absent for another authorised reason, unable to attend because of an unavoidable cause, or absent without authorisation.

- Registers are legal records. Entries are made promptly and corrections preserve the original entry, reason, date and person making the amendment.
- The school submits attendance data to the DfE daily and makes statutory returns and notifications to the local authority.
- Unexpected or unexplained absence is followed up promptly. If contact cannot be made, safeguarding procedures and reasonable enquiries are used.
- Where a pupil attends another registered school, approved educational activity or alternative provision, the school verifies attendance through appropriate arrangements and applies the correct code.
- Code U is used only where a pupil arrives after the register has closed and no other more appropriate statutory code applies.

Safeguarding

Unexplained absence, repeated absence or a failure to establish a child's whereabouts may be a safeguarding concern. The school will follow its child-protection and children-missing-education procedures and involve the local authority or other agencies where appropriate.

6. Reporting and authorising absence

6.1 Illness and medical appointments

If a pupil is too ill to attend, the school will normally authorise the absence using the appropriate code. Routine medical or dental appointments should be arranged outside school hours where possible; where this is not possible, only the minimum necessary time should be missed and evidence of the appointment may be requested.

Medical evidence will not be demanded routinely. It may be requested where the school has genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of illness, where absence is prolonged or recurring, or where evidence will help identify suitable support. The school will explain why it is needed, accept flexible forms of evidence and avoid unnecessary cost to families. A lack of evidence will not automatically make an absence unauthorised; all available information will be considered.

6.2 Other authorised absence

The statutory codes include specific circumstances such as religious observance, agreed leave for exceptional circumstances, certain regulated performances or employment, and other situations prescribed by the 2024 Regulations. The school will use the code that most accurately applies and will not create local attendance codes.

6.3 Unauthorised absence

Absence is unauthorised where no statutory reason applies or the school has not granted leave. Examples may include unexplained absence, avoidable leisure or shopping trips, birthdays, unauthorised holidays, keeping a child at home unnecessarily, and lateness after the register closes. Unauthorised sessions can count towards the national penalty-notice threshold.

7. Leave of absence during term time

There is no entitlement to holiday or leisure leave during term time. The Headteacher may grant leave only where exceptional circumstances apply. Every request must be made in writing and in advance, and will be considered individually on its own facts. The school will not operate a blanket rule that automatically grants or refuses leave.

- The decision rests with the Headteacher or an authorised delegate.
- The Headteacher determines whether circumstances are exceptional and, if leave is granted, the number of school days authorised.
- Relevant considerations may include the nature and timing of the event, whether it could reasonably occur outside term time, the pupil's individual circumstances, educational impact and any relevant support needs.
- Attendance history may provide context but does not create an entitlement to leave and will not be used as an automatic bar.
- Cost, availability of holidays, bookings made before approval and wishes of relatives or friends do not normally make circumstances exceptional.
- If a pupil does not return on the agreed date, further absence will normally be unauthorised and the school will make safeguarding enquiries.

Great Leighs will generally understand "exceptional" to mean rare, significant, unavoidable and short, but no single definition or list replaces individual consideration. Events of unique and significant emotional, educational or spiritual value may be relevant where they outweigh the loss of education.

8. Monitoring, early help and graduated support

Attendance is monitored daily and analysed regularly at pupil, group and whole-school level. The school considers patterns, reasons, days and sessions missed, punctuality, historic and emerging trends, and comparisons with appropriate local and national data. Particular attention is given to pupils at risk of persistent or severe absence and to cohorts whose needs may be hidden by whole-school figures.

Persistent absence means missing 10% or more of possible sessions. Severe absence means missing 50% or more. These are monitoring definitions, not automatic thresholds for punishment. Where attendance falls below 95%, or another concerning pattern emerges, the school may make contact or begin closer monitoring before absence becomes entrenched.

- Listen and understand: meet the pupil and family sensitively to identify in-school and wider barriers.
- Facilitate support: agree practical actions, reasonable adjustments, pastoral or SEND support, referrals, Early Help or a Team Around the Family plan.
- Formalise support: where voluntary support is ineffective or not engaged with, consider a written attendance contract, Notice to Improve or work with the local authority on an Education Supervision Order.
- Enforce: use legal intervention only where support is unsuccessful, not engaged with or inappropriate, and in line with law and the Essex code of conduct.
- Review impact: record actions, named responsibilities and review dates; adjust the approach with the pupil, family and partners.

9. Pupils who may need additional support

The school will not lower its ambition for any pupil, but will adapt support to individual circumstances and comply with equality and safeguarding duties.

9.1 Physical or mental ill health, SEND and disability

- work with families, the SENCO, health professionals and the local authority where appropriate;
- make reasonable adjustments and ensure support is joined up with individual healthcare plans or EHC plans;
- avoid requesting medical evidence unnecessarily;
- consider whether absence indicates unmet special educational, disability, health or bullying needs;
- use remote education only as a short-term last resort, where the pupil is well enough to learn and it forms part of a plan to reintegrate into face-to-face education. Remote education does not change the attendance code required by law.

9.2 Pupils with a social worker, young carers and other vulnerable pupils

The school will identify and monitor pupils with a social worker, young carers and other vulnerable pupils; share relevant information lawfully; coordinate with the social worker, Virtual School Head, young-carer service or other professionals; and ensure the pupil's voice informs support. Severe absence may require intensified safeguarding and statutory children's social care involvement.

9.3 Part-time timetables

A part-time timetable is not a routine attendance intervention. It may be used only in very exceptional circumstances, normally for the shortest time necessary, with parental agreement, safeguarding and welfare checks, a clear time-limited plan, regular review and an explicit route back to full-time education. The school will notify the local authority where required and record sessions using the statutory codes.

10. National Framework for penalty notices

The national threshold

A penalty notice must be considered when a pupil has 10 sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling period of 10 school weeks. The sessions need not be consecutive, may combine different types of unauthorised absence, and the period may span terms, school years or education settings.

- A first penalty notice for the same parent and child in a rolling three-year period is £160, reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. It must be paid within 28 days.
- A second notice for the same parent and child within three years is £160, payable within 28 days, with no reduced rate.
- Only two penalty notices may be issued to the same parent for the same child within a rolling three-year period. A third or subsequent offence may lead to prosecution or another legal intervention.
- Liability is considered for each parent and each child. Meeting the threshold triggers consideration; it does not make a fine automatic.
- Where support is appropriate, a Notice to Improve will normally be considered first. It may be omitted where support is inappropriate, for example an unauthorised holiday, or where support has already failed or has not been engaged with.
- The authorised issuing body applies the current Essex code of conduct. There is no statutory right of appeal against an issued penalty notice, although parents may ask the school to review information or coding before issue.

Non-payment may lead to prosecution for the original attendance offence. On conviction under section 444(1A) of the Education Act 1996, the court may impose a fine of up to £2,500 and/or imprisonment for up to three months. The court, not the school, determines any sentence.

11. Moving school, admission-register changes and children missing education

Parents should tell the school in advance of a move and provide the child's name, leaving date, new address and the name and address of the new school. The school will notify the local authority of relevant

additions and deletions within statutory timescales. A pupil's name will be deleted only where a ground in regulation 9 of the 2024 Regulations applies. Reasonable enquiries and children-missing-education procedures will be completed where required; a pupil will never be removed simply because of poor attendance.

12. Data, reporting and governance

- Attendance data is submitted to the DfE daily and shared with the local authority and other partners where law permits or requires.
- Leaders review attendance at least half-termly and respond promptly to emerging individual and cohort patterns.
- Governors receive regular reports on overall, persistent and severe absence; vulnerable and key cohorts; punctuality; support and legal interventions; and impact over time.
- Small-group information is handled carefully to avoid identifying pupils. Records are retained and disposed of in accordance with statutory requirements and the school's data-protection arrangements.

Recognition of good or improved attendance, where used, will be sensitive and inclusive. Pupils will not be disadvantaged or made to feel responsible for absence linked to disability, medical needs, religious observance or other circumstances outside their control.

13. Complaints and policy review

Questions or concerns should first be raised with the Senior Attendance Champion. Complaints are considered under the school's Complaints Policy. Concerns about a penalty notice should be raised with the school before issue where possible; after issue, enquiries are handled in accordance with Essex County Council arrangements.

This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner if legislation, statutory guidance, local procedures or school arrangements change. Operational forms and contact details may be updated without waiting for the formal review, provided the policy's substance is unchanged.

14. Current sources and related school policies

- DfE: Working together to improve school attendance (July 2026) — www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance
- Essex County Council: School attendance and absence / penalty notices — www.essex.gov.uk
- Child Protection Policy; SEND Policy and Information Report; Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy; Behaviour and Relationships Policy; Anti-Bullying Policy; Remote Learning Policy; Data Protection Policy; Complaints Policy; Equality Scheme and Accessibility Plan.