Willow Vale
School

Attendance Policy

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Be Safe – Be Kind - Belong

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Key staff and contacts

Parents are required to inform the school on the first day of their child's absence. If your child is unable to attend school:

Willow Vale school parents/carers are asked to inform us of any absence by phone
Bridgwater site students – 01278 421148
Taunton site students – 01823 349338

Times of the school day

8.50 am	School opens – children and young people start to arrive at school
9.00 am	Morning registration
9.30 am	Morning registration closes
12.00 noon	Afternoon registration starts
12.30pm	Afternoon registration closes

1. Introduction

Willow Vale School comprises a number of centres across the Bridgwater and Taunton area, providing education for children and young people who are unable to attend mainstream schooling due to social, emotional, behavioural and medical needs.

- Cossington
- Albert Street
- New Prospects
- Deane Discovery Centre
- Holway Centre
- Northfields Centre
- Online Virtual Learning (OVL)

For our students to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend regularly and are at school, on time, every day the school is open, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. Regular attendance has a positive effect on motivation, engagement and attainment of pupils. Any absence whether it is from classroom learning or alternative provision may have a negative impact.

2. Aims

Willow Vale School recognises that positive behaviour and regular attendance are essential in enabling children and young people to get the most from their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances.

We do also recognise that many of our children and young people join with a history of disengagement and poor attendance. Addressing this is a priority, as regular attendance is essential for academic progress.

Many of our children and young people are also vulnerable due to safeguarding concerns, and improving attendance is key to promoting their safety and well-being.

At Willow Vale School, we take pride in our relational approach to behaviour and are passionate about supporting our children and young people to reengage with learning, equipping them with the skills they need to transition into further education, employment, or training. We are committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all children and young people and

recognise this can only be achieved by supporting and promoting excellent school attendance for all.

The Management Committee, Senior Leadership Team and all staff acknowledge that there is a strong correlation between high attendance and student progress. Attendance is a key part of safeguarding.

All staff share a legal responsibility, alongside the children and young people, Parents/carers and the Local Authority in respect of ensuring as full an attendance at school as possible for all children and young people regardless of age, aptitude and ability.

To this end we will do all we can to encourage parents/carers to ensure that the children in their care achieve maximum possible attendance and that any problems that prevent full attendance are identified and acted on promptly. Parents/carers have the prime legal responsibility (under s.444 Education Act 1996) for ensuring that their child attends school regularly and punctually, properly dressed, with the right equipment and in a fit state to benefit from the education offered to them. Parents/carers may be prosecuted if a child does not attend school regularly and punctually.

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school. Our school defines good attendance as a rate of 95% or better. While we are sensitive to the unique and often complex needs of our children and young people, we are committed to ensuring that this sensitivity does not hinder our ability to identify and address potential safeguarding concerns, including attendance. For most of our children and young people, regular school attendance is achieved, but we recognise that, for some, this journey may begin with a reduced part-time timetable. This gradual approach allows children and young people to rebuild trust and confidence in a school environment.

In cases where children and young people are absent for extended periods due to medical needs or where they are attending Willow Vale School to access medical provision, we offer tailored support. This may include online home learning and regular welfare visits, ensuring ongoing connection with school and consistent access to learning in line with their peers. Our goal is to work closely with families and children to facilitate a successful transition back into the school community.

At Willow Vale School, we will:

- Ensure all staff, children and young people and parents understand our expectations for attendance
- Promote good attendance and work to reduce absence, including persistent and severe absence. Ensure that attendance is monitored effectively and reasons for absences are recorded promptly and consistently and that we have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence
- Build strong relationships with families, listen to, and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them
- Act early to address patterns of absence, develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance
- Ensure every student has access to full-time education to which they are entitled
- Regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify children and young people or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place

- Share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities, and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe.

Where parents decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly and on time. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school. The Department for Education (DfE) has produced statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities: Working Together to Improve School Attendance. It became statutory on 19 August 2024 and includes a National Framework in relation to absence, how children and young people with poor attendance should be supported, and the use of legal sanctions, where necessary. Our School Attendance Policy reflects the requirements and principles of that guidance. This policy aligns with the above guidance and underpins our school ethos to:

- Promote children's welfare and safeguarding,
- Ensure every student has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled
- Ensure that children and young people succeed whilst at school, and
- Ensure that children and young people have access to the widest possible range of opportunities at school, and when they leave school.

It seeks to ensure that all parties involved in the practicalities of school attendance are aware and informed of attendance matters in school and to outline the school's commitment to attendance matters. It details the responsibilities of individuals and groups involved and the procedures in place to promote and monitor student attendance. In addition, all schools follow the DfE's statutory safeguarding guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education, which emphasises the importance of understanding the potential vulnerabilities of children who are missing or absent from education.

Our policy aims to raise and maintain levels of attendance by:

- promoting a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which children and young people feel safe, secure, and valued,
- raising and maintaining a whole school awareness of the importance of good attendance and punctuality, and
- ensuring attendance is monitored effectively and reasons for absences are recorded promptly and consistently.

For our children to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend regularly and be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.

It is a rule of this school that children and young people must attend every day, unless there are exceptional circumstances. It is the Headteacher, not the parent, who can authorise the absence.

<u>Promoting Regular Attendance</u>

At Willow Vale School, we believe in developing good patterns of attendance and have high expectations for the attendance and punctuality of all our children and young people from the outset. Regular attendance is a central part of our school's vision, values, ethos, and day to day life. We recognise the strong connections between attendance, attainment, safeguarding and wellbeing.

We have high aspirations and high expectations of all our children and young people in all areas of school life, including their attendance. We expect all children and young people and their parents to strive for the highest level of attendance possible.

We appreciate that ensuring good attendance is not a discrete piece of work but rather it is an integral part of the school's ethos and culture.

In building a culture of good school attendance, we will:

- Be clearer on the link between improving attendance and wider school culture, including the importance of working in partnership with families to find supportive routes to improve attendance. Recognise the importance of good attendance and, alongside good behaviour, make it a central part of the school's vision, values, ethos, and day to day life.
- Escalate the relationship between attendance and wider school improvement efforts, building it into strategies on attainment, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, supporting children and young people with medical conditions or disabilities, safeguarding, wellbeing, and support for disadvantaged children and young people (including use of student premium).
- Understand that improving attendance is a school leadership issue and have a designated senior leader with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance in school. Responsibilities will include offering a clear vision for attendance improvement, evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes, oversight of data analysis, and communicating messages to children and young people and parents.
- Make sure all teaching and non-teaching staff know the importance of good attendance, are consistent in their communication with children and young people and parents, and receive the training and professional development they need.
- Make sure attendance support and improvement is appropriately resourced, including where applicable through effective use of student premium funding. Where possible this should include attendance or pastoral support staff can work with families, school leaders, the local authority's School Attendance Support Team and other partners.
- Set high expectations for the attendance and punctuality of all children and young people and communicate these regularly to children and young people and parents through all available channels. In doing so, schools should help parents to understand what is expected of them and why attendance is important to their child's attainment, wellbeing, and wider development. It should also include clarity on the short- and long-term consequences of poor attendance.
- Recognise children missing education can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, sexual abuse and child sexual and criminal exploitation.

Helping to create a pattern of regular attendance is the responsibility of parents, children and young people, and all members of school staff.

To help focus on this, we will:

- submit a daily attendance return to the Department of Education, in line with the legal expectations placed on all schools,
- build strong relationships and collaborate with children and young people and families,
- give parents/carers details on attendance in our newsletters,
- promote the benefits of high attendance,
- accurately maintain the school admission register
- accurately maintain the school attendance register,
- have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up student absence,
- celebrate excellent attendance and reward good or improving attendance,
- We will reach out to offer support early to parents as we are keen to work collaboratively with families to be able to support their child or young person to attend school.
- Work with parents to develop specific support approaches for attendance for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, including where applicable ensuring the provision outlined in the student's education, health and care plan is accessed.

- Establish strategies for removing the in-school barriers that some children and young people face, including considering support or reasonable adjustments for uniform, transport, routines, access to support in school and lunchtime arrangements.
- report to parents/carers regularly on their child's attendance and the impact on their progress,
- contact parents/carers if their child's attendance falls below the school's target for attendance.
- Upskill staff on the benefits of regular school attendance and this will be shared regularly in the staff bulletin.

3. Registration Times and Lateness

Poor punctuality is not acceptable and can lead to irregular school attendance patterns. Good timekeeping is a vital life skill which will help children as they progress through their school life and out into the wider world. Frequent lateness can seriously disadvantage children and disrupt the learning of others:

If a student is late each day by:	They will miss this many days of teaching:
5 mins	3
10 mins	6
15 mins	9
20 mins	12
30 mins	18

Children and young people who arrive late disrupt lessons and miss vital information and enrichment opportunities. Research shows that arriving late is one of the leading causes in children experiencing stress and feeling unsettled and embarrassed when they arrive in school.

Morning session Children and young people are expected to arrive at school by 8.50 am. Children and young people that arrive after 9.15 am will be recorded as late (L code) Children and young people that arrive after 9.30 am will be marked as late after registers have closed (U code). This counts as an unauthorised absence.

Afternoon session Children and young people are registered at 12.00 pm. Children and young people that arrive after 12.30 pm will be marked as late after registers have closed (U code). This counts as an unauthorised absence.

For children or young people placed on out-of-hours learning to support their reengagement—especially when this covers their first afternoon lesson—their attendance is documented for health, safety, and safeguarding purposes. The school's goal is for each child or young person to transition back to regular school hours as soon as they are ready.

Online Virtual Learning (OVL) – Online sessions are scheduled throughout the day between the hours of 8.50 am and 2.00 pm. Medical students attend between the hours of 12.30 pm and 3.30 pm. These sessions will be C2 coded.

Out of Hours (OOH) – Sessions will be from 2.30 pm to 3.30 pm. These sessions will be C2 coded.

If a student is frequently marked as late with either the L code or the U code, we will contact their Parents/carers to discuss the matter and identify any barriers that may require support. If a student is regularly marked as late with the U code, we will follow the process for children and young people with regular unauthorised absence. Support will be offered, where it is needed, but continued unauthorised absences may lead to the Local Authority putting in place legal sanctions. Parents/carers are always encouraged to contact our team to discuss any concerns about lateness and how improvements can be achieved.

4. Understanding Types of Absence

Any absence affects the routine of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning journey and ability to progress. Any student's absence or late arrival disrupts teaching routines and so may affect the learning of others in the same class.

Ensuring a child's regular attendance at school is a parental responsibility and allowing absence from school, without a good reason, is an offence in law and may result in prosecution.
For all children and young people, attendance is marked twice every day, and the school is open to children and young people: at the beginning of the morning and afternoon sessions. Every session that a student is absent must be classified by the school (not by the parent), as either **authorised** or **unauthorised.**

5. Authorised absences are morning or afternoon sessions away from school for a genuine reason such as illness, medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other unavoidable cause. In certain cases, we may ask for medical evidence before we are able to make the decision to authorise an absence.

6. Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable or unavoidable, or for which permission has not been given. This type of absence can lead to the school referring to the Local Authority for penalty notices and/or legal proceedings.

Unauthorised absence includes, but is not limited to:

- parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily (e.g. because they had a late night or for non-infectious illness or injury that would not affect their ability to learn),
- absences that are not properly explained by the Parents/carers,
- children who arrive at school after the close of registration are marked as late using a U code (this shows that they are in school for safeguarding purposes, but counts as an absence for that session)
- day trips or shopping trips,
- looking after other children or children going with siblings or parents to medical appointments,
- their own or family birthdays,
- holidays taken during term time that have not been authorised,
- any other leave of absence in term time that has not been agreed.

7. Appointments

All appointments such as Dentist and Doctor should be made outside of school hours where possible. If this is not possible, then the student should be out of school for as little time as possible. Advance notice should be given for this.

8. Religious Observance

Our school acknowledges the multi-faith nature of the community and recognises that on some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside of school holidays or weekends. In accordance with the law, the school will authorise one day's absence for a day exclusively set apart for each religious observance, by the religious body to which the parent belongs. This will only be authorised three times in a School year.

9. Traveller Absence

Willow Vale School will authorise the absence of a Traveller pupil of no fixed abode who is unable to attend school because they are travelling with their parent who is engaged in a trade or business of such a nature as to require him to travel from place to place. Individual cases will be discussed with parents as necessary. Where possible in these cases the child should attend the school where the family is travelling to and should be dual registered at that school.

10. Suspensions

If a student is sent home due to their behaviour this will be recorded as a suspension. The School will follow the current DfE's statutory guidance on Suspensions. Any suspension must be agreed by the Headteacher. Parents/Carers will be notified. If the student is under the care of the local authority (CLA) or on a child protection (CP) plan, their Social Worker will be notified.

11. Persistent and Severe Absence

A student becomes a persistent absentee when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year for any reason, whether absences are authorised or not.

Absence at this level will cause considerable damage to any student's education and we need the full support and co-operation of parents to resolve this. All children and young people who have attendance levels of 90% or below are persistent absentees.

A student becomes severely absent when their attendance falls below 50%. Children and young people within this group may find it more difficult to be in school or face bigger barriers to their regular attendance and, as such, are likely to need more intensive support.

An attendance level of:	Means a student will miss this many days
100%	0
95%	10
90%	19
80%	39
50%	95

12. Absence procedure

Parents/carers are expected to inform the school if their child is not – or will not be – in school for any reason. To do this, all parents should use the contact methods below:

Call the school: 01278 421148 for Bridgwater sites and 01823 349338 for Taunton sites and select 'Option 1'.

We monitor and review all children and young people' absences, and the reasons provided.

If a child is absent from school the parent must follow these procedures:

1. Ensure your Parents/carers and emergency contact information is up to date on our system.

2. Contact the school on the first day of absence before 9.15 am (the time we close our registers) providing your child's details and the reason for their absence. The school has an answer phone available to leave a message if nobody is available to take your call, or you may call into school personally and speak to the office staff. If you leave a voicemail to report your

child's absence, you may receive a call from the school to discuss the absence to ensure it is coded correctly on their register.

3. Contact the school on every further day of absence before 9.15 am providing your child's details and the reasons for their ongoing absence.
4. Minimise absence by ensuring your child returns to school as soon as possible. In some cases, your child may be well enough to come into school later in the day.
5. Provide any further information to support your child's absence if requested by our team.

We may request medical evidence if your child is having multiple periods of absence which are reported as being due to medical reasons. When deciding whether a child is too ill to attend school, both parents and school staff can consider the advice contained with NHS guidance on illness and school attendance.

If your child is absent we will:

1. Telephone twice if the student is attending a morning or afternoon session and three times if an all-day session.
2. After 2 days of no contact, if we are unable to contact you by telephone, we will telephone emergency contact numbers and send emails home. After three days of no contact, as part of our safeguarding processes, Willow Vale Staff will conduct an unannounced welfare visit to the home, even if this means seeing the child at the door if a parent is not home.
3. Students need to be physically seen by a member of staff at Willow Vale, every three educational days that they are not seen in School, if no good reason is given for their absence. This includes School refusal. So, the process set out in point 2 (above) will be followed if we have not seen them. This is the same for online students. If a student has online virtual learning and has not been seen in person (or virtually in an online lesson) and not attended their weekly 1-1 sessions with staff, if three days pass, then will do an unannounced visit to the home, even if this means seeing them at the door if a parent isn't home. Online students will therefore be expected to turn their cameras on at least twice a week, so we can see it is them that is learning and to check they are ok.
4. If we cannot verify the whereabouts and safety of any child through the process above (telephone contact and home welfare visit), this will be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as a cause for concern and we will call 101 to request a Police welfare check.
5. A referral will be made to the Local Authority to report them as a Child Missing in Education (CME) if no contact has been made with parents by the tenth consecutive day of absence (or sooner if deemed appropriate), and we are unable to verify whereabouts.

Following recent advice from a serious case review, if we do not verify the whereabouts and safety of any child, we will contact all other emergency contacts supplied to us. If we have no response, this will be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as a cause for concern and we will call 101 to request a welfare check.

If your child's absence continues, we will:

- send you letters outlining our concerns and expectations and offering support.
- arrange a meeting with you to discuss any barriers and understand how we can overcome them.
- create a personalised plan, such as an attendance contract, to address any barriers to attendance and make clear each person's role in improving the attendance patterns of your child,
- provide additional support in school to improve attendance,
- offer signposting support to other agencies or services, if appropriate

- refer the matter to the Local Authority for further support or relevant legal sanctions if attendance deteriorates following the above actions.

13. Understanding Barriers to Regular Attendance

We have high expectations of all our children and young people but also recognise that irregular school attendance is often an early indicator that a child needs additional support. While the most common cause of absence is illness, there can be underlying issues that are impacting a child's ability or willingness to attend regularly.

Any barriers preventing regular attendance need to be identified as quickly as possible and resolved through collaboration between the school, the parents, and the child. We will work with our children and young people and their family to understand the root problem and provide any necessary support.

Where needed, we will seek the support of outside agencies to support a child to get into school regularly. This may include services such as: school nursing, parent and family support advisors, Family Intervention Service. In some cases, it may be appropriate to work alongside Children's Social Care or specialist health services to understand and break down barriers.

Where outside agencies are supporting the family, you may be invited to attend a Team Around the Child (TAC) or Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting to consider what is working well and what needs to improve. An individual support plan will be agreed and subsequently reviewed, with school attendance playing a key role.

Some children and young people face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. These can include children and young people who suffer from long-term medical conditions or who have special educational needs and disabilities, or other complex needs or vulnerabilities. High expectations of attendance remain in place for all these children and young people; however, we will work with families and children and young people to support improved attendance whilst being mindful of the additional barriers faced. We will discuss reasonable adjustments and additional support from external partners, where appropriate.

In line with statutory guidance, schools must submit a sickness return to the Local Authority for all children and young people who have missed or are likely to miss 15 or more school days (consecutive or cumulative) due to medical reasons or illness.

We actively encourage all parents/carers to be proactive in seeking support for their child to ensure their regular attendance.

14. Safeguarding and Attendance

Knowing where children/ young people are during school hours is an extremely important aspect of safeguarding. Absence can be an indicator of abuse and neglect and may also raise concerns about other safeguarding issues, including the criminal exploitation of children/ young people.
We monitor attendance carefully and address poor or irregular attendance without delay. We will always contact parents when children and young people are not at school to ensure their whereabouts are known. It is essential that we have a least two up-to-date contact numbers for each student.

We are aware that sudden or gradual changes in a student's attendance may indicate additional and sometime significant safeguarding issues, where absence may place children and young people at additional risk.

Parents should remember to inform the school as soon as possible if their contact details change. This includes home addresses, email addresses and phone numbers.

Willow Vale School recognises that inappropriate authorisation of absence can be as damaging to a child's education as unauthorised absence as it will potentially send a message to parents that any reason for absence is acceptable and can render children extremely vulnerable to harm.

Where necessary, we will challenge parents about the reasons for their child/ young person's absence and will always encourage them to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a parent does not guarantee that the absence will be authorised.

The decision to authorise absences rests with the Headteacher and will be made depending on the reasons given. In some cases, evidence may be requested to support this decision. If no reason is given for an absence, it cannot be authorised.

At Willow Vale School we monitor trends and patterns of absence for all children and young people as a part of our standard procedures.

We hold weekly safeguarding and attendance meetings, attendance is discussed and tracked, so that suitable support and interventions are put in place as quickly as possible.

Children and young people whose attendance becomes a cause for concern will be supported by dedicated members of our staff who will make regular contact with them. This will support them to identify and remove any barriers, improve their attendance and to re-engage with learning. This work is robustly recorded and the impact of it is monitored regularly.

When a student's attendance continues to decline despite the support that is put in place, additional support may be requested from several support services.

In line with government guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education we will investigate and report any suspected safeguarding cases to the relevant authorities. As part of our safeguarding duty and our standard procedures, we will inform the Local Authority and/or the Police of the details of any student who is absent from school when the school has made all reasonable enquiries and cannot establish their whereabouts and is concerned for the student's welfare and safety.

Our latest safeguarding policy can be accessed on the school's website (www.willowvaleschool.org)

15. Working with the Local Authority

Parents, schools, governing bodies and the local authorities all have legal duties to ensure all children access a suitable, full-time education. This includes working together to support regular attendance.

Willow Vale School works closely with Somerset Council to promote and support regular attendance, and to take the relevant action when needed:

- Regular attendance data sharing for all children and young people in line with statutory guidance
- Regular attendance meetings with the Local Authority ensure we are reviewing our attendance data, processes, action taken when student attendance is irregular and identifying where support should be focused
- Requests for penalty notices, where a student's unauthorised absence meets the national threshold, and the Somerset Penalty Notice Code of Conduct applies

- Requests for support from services across the Authority, including health services and Somerset Council
- Requests for attendance support, where our efforts to support a child's improved attendance have not been successful, or where we feel the use of legal interventions or other statutory support may be appropriate.

Parents/carers are expected and encouraged to work with the school and Local Authority to address any attendance concerns. They are also encouraged to actively engage with the support offered, aiming to resolve any problems together. This is usually successful. If difficulties cannot be resolved in this way, the school should consider requesting formal attendance support or legal action.

We will always work with parents/carers and children to support regular attendance, but where this is not possible, Willow Vale School can request attendance support from the Local Authority without parental consent.

16. School Attendance and the Law

By law, all children of compulsory school age must receive an appropriate full-time education. All parents have a legal duty to ensure their child attends school regularly at the school at which they are registered.
New legislation was passed, The School Attendance (Student Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 which introduced a National Framework in England.

Duties and Responsibilities

The duties and responsibilities of parents, schools, governing bodies and local authorities are laid out in the statutory guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance, which is underpinned by the following legislation:

- The Education Act 1996
- The School Attendance (Student Registration) (England) Regulations 2024
- The Children Act 1989
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007
- Keeping Children Safe in Education

Willow Vale School will work continuously with children and young people, parents, the local authority and other partners to ensure we all continue to fulfil our statutory duties and support children and young people as fully as possible.

Definition of Regular Attendance

In 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that the definition of regular school attendance is "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school."

In 2024, paragraph 11 of Working Together to Improve School Attendance further clarifies the definition of regular attendance as follows:

A child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

Willow Vale School expects all children and young people to attend school every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable and unavoidable circumstances, as defined in Working Together to Improve School Attendance.

Definition of Parent

Under education law, a child's "parent" is defined differently than under family law.

Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 states that a "parent", in relation to a child or young person, includes any person who is not a parent (from which can be inferred biological parent) but who has parental responsibility, or who has care of the child.

A person typically has care of a child or young person if they are the person with whom the child lives, either full or part-time and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their biological or legal relationship is with the child.

National Framework for Penalty Notices

Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 gives schools and local authorities the power to prosecute parents when they have failed to ensure the regular attendance of their child at their registered school. Penalty notices can be used to give parents the opportunity to discharge their liability for this offence without being prosecuted.

All schools are required to consider whether a penalty notice would be appropriate where a child's absence from school meets the national threshold, which is defined in Working Together to Improve School Attendance:

- Where a child has ten or more unauthorised sessions of absence (usually equivalent to five days) on their register in a rolling ten school week period, schools are required to consider whether a penalty notice would be an appropriate tool to improve their attendance.
- The sessions of unauthorised absence do not have to be consecutive and can be made up of a combination of unauthorised absence codes, including unauthorised lateness and unauthorised term-time holidays.
- The rolling ten school week period can span different school terms, different school years and different educational settings.
- Penalty notices can be issued to each parent individually, and in relation to each child whose absence has met the national threshold. Each penalty notice is for £160. In some cases, a reduced amount of £80 is payable if paid within 21 days.
- If a second penalty notice is issued within a three-year period, the reduced rate does not apply.
- A parent cannot be issued with more than two penalty notices in relation to a child within a three-year period. Where this happens, the Local Authority is required to consider alternative sanctions, which may include prosecution.

Penalty notices and other sanctions are used, where appropriate, to improve a child's attendance and to protect their legal right to a full-time, suitable education.

17. Term-Time Leave

All children have a legal right to suitable, full-time education. There is no entitlement for children to have time off from school during term-time for the purposes of a holiday, recreational or protest activity.

The Supreme Court has ruled that the definition of regular school attendance is "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school."

The School Attendance (Student Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 set out the statutory requirements for schools:

- all references to family holidays and extended leave have been removed, including the removal of the H code for approved leave,
- Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are "exceptional circumstances",
- Headteachers do not have any discretion to authorise up to ten days of absence each academic year.

Willow Vale School expects all children and young people to attend regularly. As such, any requests for term-time leave will be considered but only approved if the reasons and circumstances for that leave are exceptional and unavoidable. This decision rests with the Headteacher.
All requests for term-time leave must be made in writing using the request form which is available from the school office **or appendix G** in this policy**.**

Any requests for leave that are not authorised will result in those absences being marked as unauthorised on the child's register.

Any leave taken during term-time without being requested will be unauthorised.

All unauthorised leave will be recorded on the child's register using the G code. Where those unauthorised absences hit the national threshold, Willow Vale School will normally submit a penalty notice request to the Local 21 Authority. Penalty notices may be issued to any Parents/carers that the school believes enabled their child to take leave from school.

Term-time leave cannot be authorised retrospectively for any reason other than to correct an administrative error (e.g. where the holiday had been authorized by the Headteacher but miscoded).

While it is not possible to provide a definitive list of exceptional circumstances, the following is a guide that Willow Vale School will use to make decisions based on the reasons for the request being made**:**

- the request is rare, or a one-off, significant, and unavoidable,
- the request is of unique and significant emotional, educational, or spiritual value to the child, which outweighs any loss of teaching time (as determined by the Headteacher),
- the request is unavoidable, and could not be reasonably scheduled during school holidays, irrespective of who has planned or paid for the holiday or absence.

The Headteacher may consult with other education settings or the Local Authority to decide whether specific circumstances are exceptional.
If a parent/carer reports their child as absent for reasons of illness (or otherwise) but there is reasonable evidence that those absences were for a holiday or recreational purposes, those absences may be unauthorised, and a penalty notice is likely to be requested if the national threshold is met.

In rare cases, requests for term-time leave may be authorised. When this happens, Willow Vale School will not provide any work for the child to complete during their absence.

18. Maintaining the School Admissions Register

The admission register (sometimes referred to as the school roll) must contain specific personal details of every student in the school along with the date of admission or re-admission to the school, information regarding parents and carers, and details of the school last attended.

The school will enter children and young people on the admission register at the beginning of the first day on which the school has agreed with, or been notified by the parent, that the student will attend.

A student's name can only lawfully be deleted from the admission register if a reason set out in Regulation 8 of the Education (Student Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, as amended, applies. 22 It is vital that the admission register is accurate and up to date. Therefore, we encourage parents to inform the school of any changes whenever they occur and ensure the admission register is amended as soon as possible.

19. Using Data to Improve Attendance

Any absence affects the pattern and rhythm of a child's education and regular absence may seriously affect their learning.

The Department for Education (DfE) defines persistent absence when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year, for any reason.

Where a student misses 50% or more of their schooling, they are severely absent.
Willow Vale School will ensure that data is routinely monitored to identify emerging attendance issues and will seek to prevent any student becoming persistently or severely absent using a support-first approach. This will include:

- identifying the individual needs of children and young people and barriers to attendance,
- working closely with children and young people, their families and wider support services to remove barriers to attendance,
- a formalised approach in conjunction with the Local Authority and, where appropriate,
- consideration of statutory frameworks to protect children and young people' right to education. In line with statutory guidance, Willow Vale School will regularly monitor attendance data to ensure the following children and groups are identified and appropriately supported:
- Children and young people at risk of being persistently absent (attendance is approaching 90%) Children and young people that are persistently absent (attendance is below 90%)
- Children and young people that are severely absent (attendance is below 50%) □ Children and young people with lower attendance than their peers
- Children and young people with SEND or medical conditions
- Children and young people that have a social worker □ Children and young people that are or have been a Child Looked After (CLA)
- Children and young people that have missed more than 15 whole days of attendance

These groups align with the table of responsibilities **in Appendix A**.

All schools are also required to submit children and young people' attendance data to the Local Authority and the DfE on a regular basis. This supports our collective efforts to understand attendance patterns and work together to improve school attendance.

20. Part-time Timetables

Pupils are entitled to a full-time education, suitable to their age, ability and aptitude, and any special educational needs or disabilities that they may have. If, for any reason, a pupil is unable to access full-time education due to the pupil's needs, we will work with the pupil, parent and other agencies where appropriate, to come to a mutually convenient arrangement. Any part-time timetables will be for the shortest amount of time possible, whilst arrangements are made to support

the pupil's return to a full-time timetable. Any part-time provision will be communicated with parents and agreed and a written, signed record will be kept and reviewed on a regular basis.

21. Children Missing Education (CME)

Our school will add and delete pupils from roll in line with the law. The school will follow Somerset Child Missing Education process and make CME referrals as appropriate.

22. Following up Unexplained Absences

Where no contact has been made with the school the school will contact parents by text, email, telephone or letter to try and establish the reason for a child's absence. When we establish the reason for the absence, we will mark it as authorised or unauthorised depending on the reason for the absence. If we are unable to establish the reason for absence within 1 school day, we will mark the absence as unauthorised, using the O code. If we are concerned about a pupil's absence and are unable to contact the parent/s, we may contact the pupil's emergency contacts and/or other professionals or contacts of the family who we reasonably expect may be able to advise us of the pupil's whereabouts. See protocol in section 4. We may also do a home visit.

23. Reporting to Parents

We report to parents on a regular basis about their child's attendance. Attendance is a key part of the termly review which also focusses on progress in other areas. Parents/carers will be contacted on a regular basis in addition to this by the key teacher to discuss progress in all areas.

24. Key Staff responsibilities

Those people responsible for attendance matters in the Centre are:

- Tutor/keyworker – It is the Tutor/keyworker who will make regular contact with parents/carers to discuss attendance alongside progress in other areas. Where there is a concern, the student will be discussed with other key teachers and a member of SLT. There is a weekly attendance meeting where students are discussed and strategies for improvement maybe suggested/put in place.
- Safeguarding Team and Attendance lead – This team lead by the Designated Safeguarding lead, have an overview of the attendance of all students and may follow up concerns with families or other agencies.
- SLT – The Deputy Head has an oversight of attendance and progress for students in the centres. This monitoring will raise concerns so that SLT ensure that there is a follow up plan
- Office staff take and make calls and messages. This will be logged on the school system.

Appendix 1

TERM TIME LEAVE - ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS AND PARENTS

Amendments to the 2006 regulations were made by the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 and came into force on 1 September 2013.

The amendments made it clear that Headteachers may only grant leave of absence during term time for exceptional circumstances. Any request for leave must be made in writing to the Headteacher in advance.

There is no formal definition offered for exceptional leave at present by the Department for Education. However, from discussion with the DfE and professional associations it is suggested that exceptional leave would be:

- Rare
- Significant
- Unavoidable
- Short

(NAHT, 2014)

Somerset County Council (SCC) supports schools:

- In expecting parents and carers to make sure that children and young people attend school regularly. Any absence from school will impact on educational achievement, success in later life and longer-term health and well being
- In ensuring the law is upheld. Parents and carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular and punctual attendance of their child at the school where they are on roll. Schools must explain their stance on term time leave in their attendance policy so that parents/carers are clear on expectations and potential consequences, such as **any unauthorised absence including taking term time leave not agreed with the school, can result in legal action being taken including Penalty Notices and court prosecution.**

SCC cannot override a school's decision not to authorise any term time leave.

Taking a child on holiday in term time interrupts the learning of the whole class and teachers have to spend time helping children catch up when they return. Parents should arrange holidays during the 13 week school holiday periods. Schools are open 190 days which leaves 175 days of the year for holidays.

Attached are suggested forms schools may wish to use when asked by parents/ carers for term time leave. Schools may wish to develop their own request forms.

REQUEST FOR TERM-TIME LEAVE

To the Headteacher

School/College	

I wish to apply for term time leave for my child

Name	Class
1.	
2.	

from | | to | | inclusive

The Exceptional Reasons for this request are:

Signature
(Parent/Carer) ..... Date .....

Please make your request prior to making any bookings and at least four weeks before the anticipated leave date.
NB. If the school refuses your request and the child is still taken out of school, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. This may result in a penalty notice being issued or legal action taken for poor attendance.

APPROVAL LETTER

Dear

Name of Child:

Re: Request for Term Time Leave

Thank you for your request for term time leave.

I am in agreement this is for exceptional reasons and have authorised this leave.

The leave is from | | to | |

Should the leave be extended for any reason, the extension may be regarded as unauthorised absence which may be used in any legal action for poor school attendance.

Signature
(Headteacher) ..... Date .....

LETTER OF REFUSAL

Dear

Name of Child:

Re: Request for Term Time Leave

You have requested ..... school days leave.

Your request for term time leave has been carefully considered but unfortunately it has not been possible to authorise it for the following reasons:

The reasons are not considered exceptional	
The leave has not been requested in advance	
Other	

Please be aware that if you decide to proceed with the Unauthorised term time leave the school may request a Penalty Notice to be issued by the Local Authority.

Signature
(Headteacher) ..... Date .....

Appendix 2

For any unauthorised leave absence during term time, the school can make a request to the education attendance service/Local Authority and a Penalty Notice may be issued as a result:

- **each parent** may be issued with a Penalty Notice for each child who is absent from school as a result of unauthorised leave of 10 sessions or more (5days)
- a maximum of one Penalty Notices may be issued per parent, per child in a 12 month period
- the legal definition of a parent is contained in Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 and refers to any adult who is a natural parent, someone with parental responsibility or someone who cares for a child
- the penalty notice is a fine of **£80 payable within 21 days** of its date of issue. If this payment is not received in full the amount payable will double to £160 payable in full within a further 7 days
- if the Penalty Notice is paid, no further action will be taken for that offence period. However, if no payment is made or if there are further unauthorised absences, the education attendance service/LA may take further legal action, which may result in court proceedings.

Appendix 3

With regards to children of compulsory school age found in a public place during the first 5 days of exclusion:

The Local Authority have powers to implement a Penalty Notice to those parents or carers whose children are seen in a public place without a justifiable reason. The amount is £80.00 as in appendix one. A police constable, local authority officer, Head teachers and those authorised by them are authorised to request Penalty Notices.

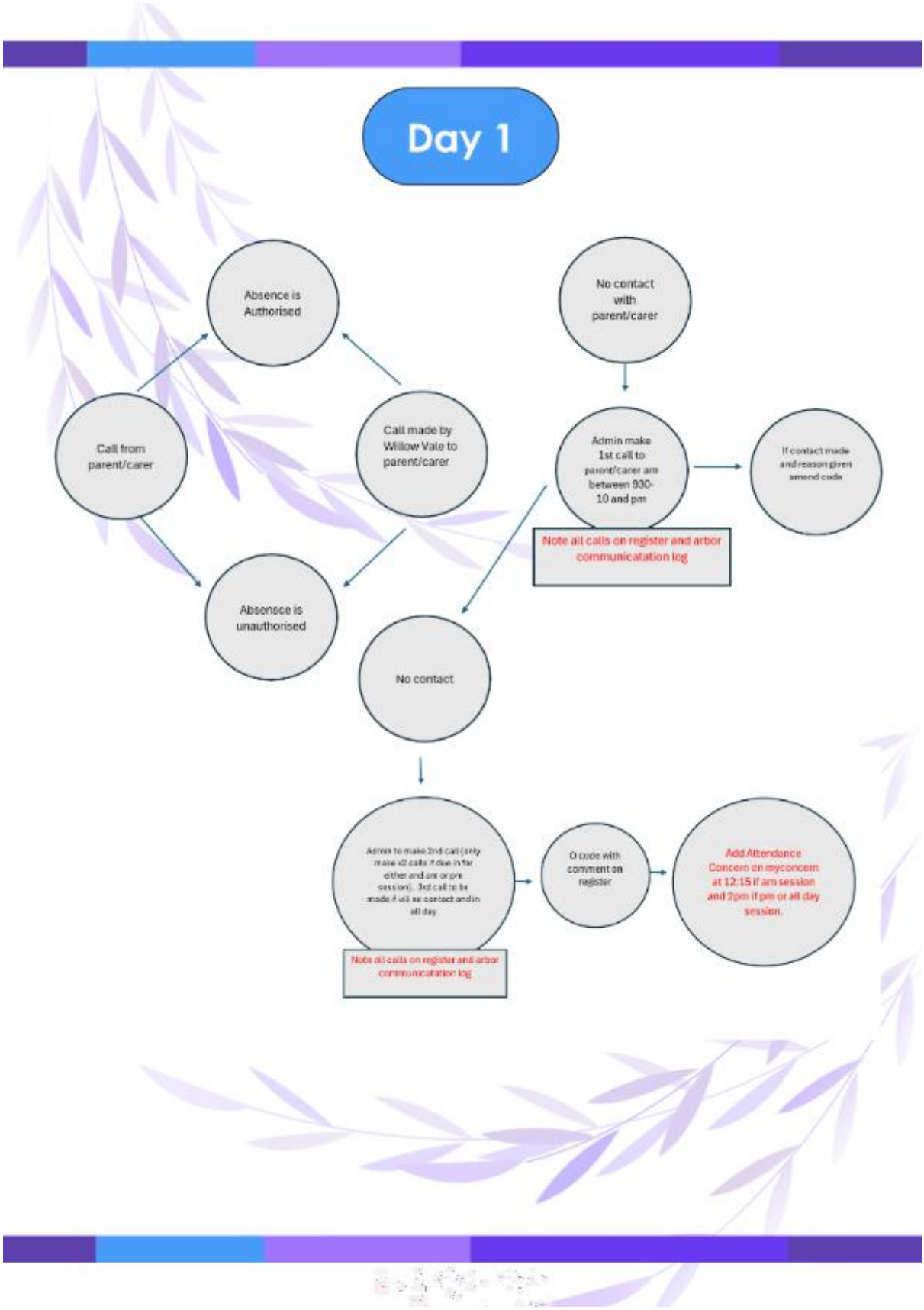
Centre Contacts	Holway Centre
Address	Byron Road, Taunton TA1 3JD
Contact Number	01823 349338
Contact email	office@willowvale.org.uk
Head teacher	Kim Lawrence

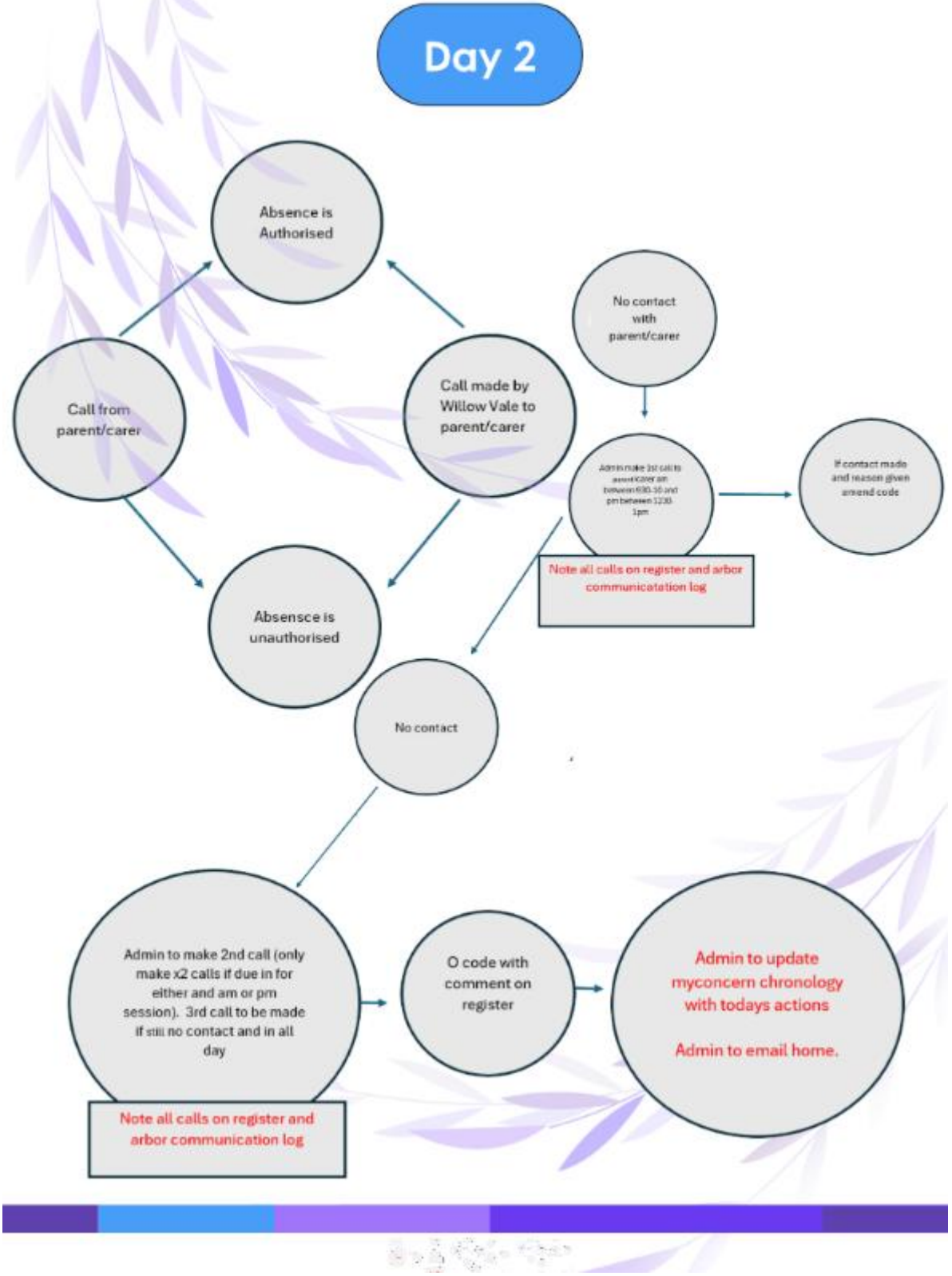
Attendance Policy Reply Slip

I have read and understood the terms and conditions of the Attendance Policy at The Centre.

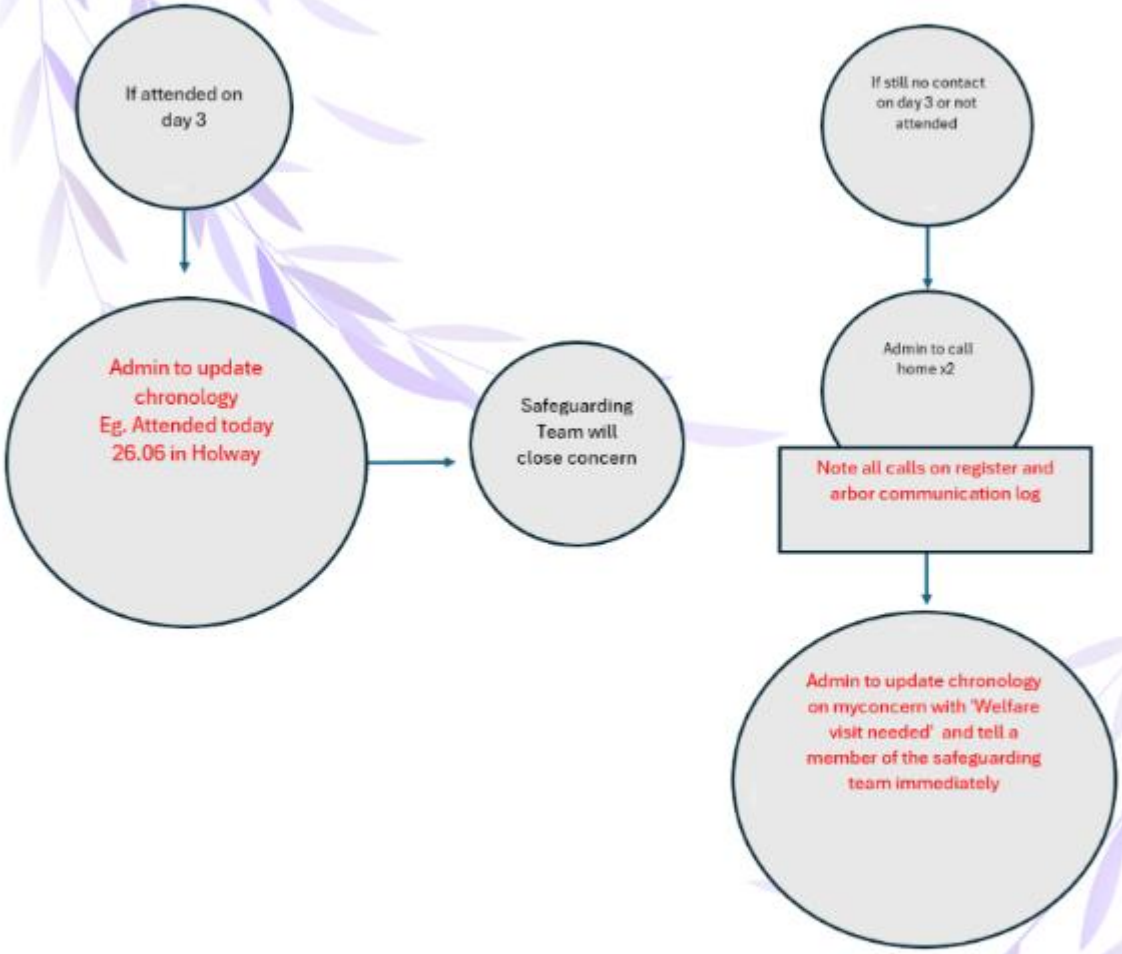
SIGNED	
PRINT NAME	
CHILD'S NAME	

Appendix 4 - Leave of Absence Flow Chart

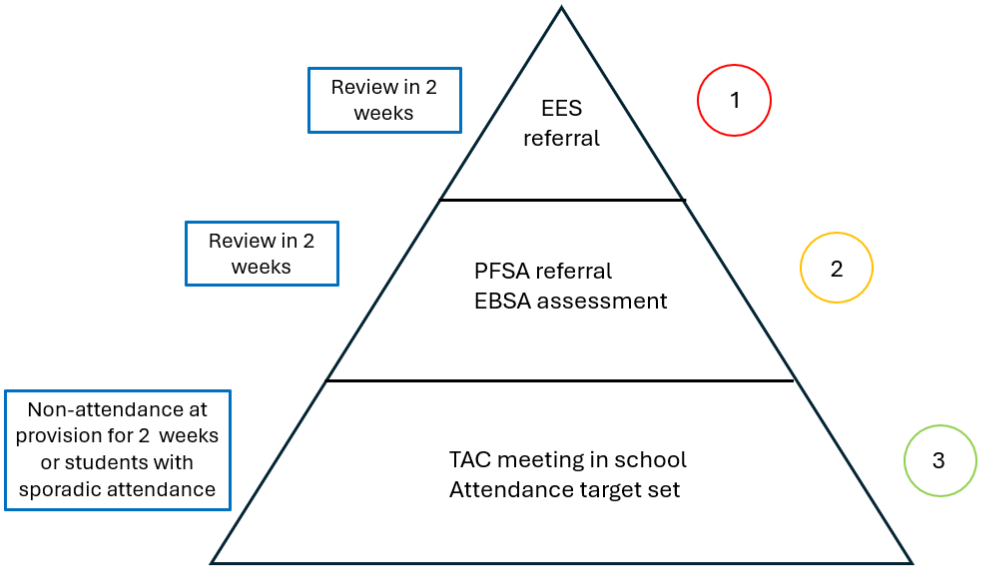



Day 2
Absence is Authorised
Call from parent/carer
Call made by Willow Vale to parent/carer
No contact with parent/carer
If contact made and reason given amend code
Note all calls on register and arbor communicatation log
Absensce is unauthorised
No contact
Admin to make 2nd call (only make x2 calls if due in for either and am or pm session). 3rd call to be made if still no contact and in all day
Note all calls on register and arbor communication log
O code with comment on register
Admin to update myconcern chronology with todays actions
Admin to email home.

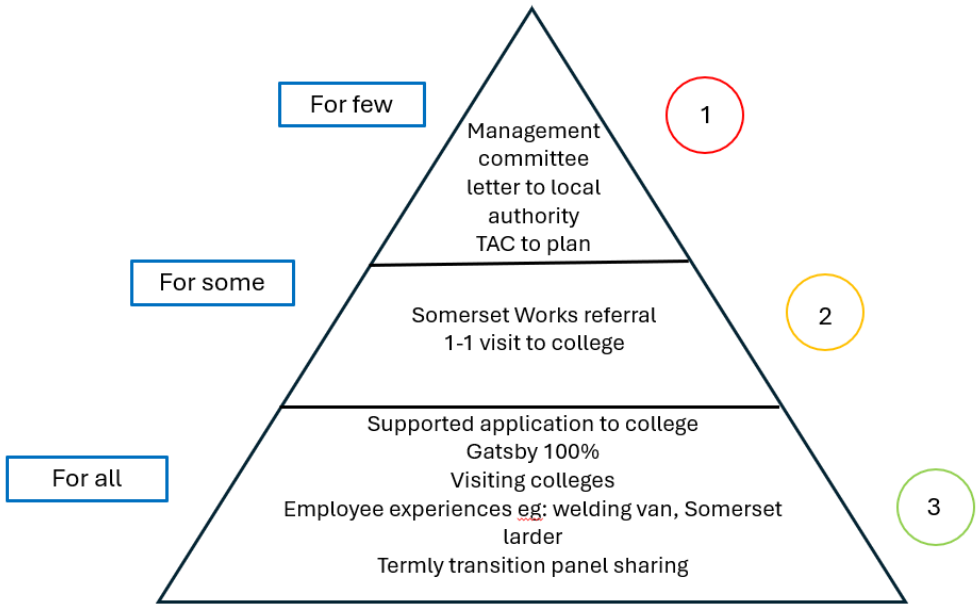
Day 3


If attended on day 3
Admin to update chronology Eg. Attended today 26.06 in Holway
Safeguarding Team will close concern
If still no contact on day 3 or not attended
Admin to call home x2
Note all calls on register and arbor communication log
Admin to update chronology on myconcern with 'Welfare visit needed' and tell a member of the safeguarding team immediately

Appendix 5 – Graduated Response



Graduated response to attendance concerns



NEET graduated response

Appendix 6 – Summary Table of Responsibilities

These following tables form part of the statutory guidance Working Together to Improve School Attendance.

Responsibilities for All Pupils			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
Ensure their child attends every day the school is open except when a statutory reason applies. Notify the school as soon as possible when their child has to be unexpectedly absent (e.g. sickness). Only request leave of absence in exceptional circumstances and to do so in advance. Book any medical appointments around the school day where possible.	Have a clear school attendance policy on the school website which all staff, pupils and parents understand. Develop and maintain a whole-school culture that promotes the benefits of good attendance. Accurately complete admission and attendance registers. Have robust daily processes to follow up absence. Regularly monitor data to identify patterns and trends and understand which pupils and pupil cohorts to focus on. Have a dedicated senior leader with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance.	Take an active role in attendance improvement, support their school(s) to prioritise attendance, and work together with leaders to set whole school cultures. Ensure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties. Use data to understand patterns of attendance, compare with other local schools, identify areas of progress and where greater focus is needed. Ensure school staff receive training on attendance.	Have a strategic approach to improving attendance for the whole area and make is a key focus of all frontline council services. Have a School Attendance Support Team that works with all schools in their area to remove area-wide barriers to attendance. Provide each school with a named point of contact in the School Attendance Support Team who can support with queries and advice. Offer opportunities for all schools in the area to share effective practice.

Responsibilities for Pupils at Risk of Becoming Persistently Absent			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance.	Proactively use data to identify pupils at risk of persistent absence. Work with each identified pupil and their parents to understand and address the reasons for absence, including any in-school barriers to attendance.	Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.	Hold a regular conversation with every school to identify, discuss and signpost or provide access to services for pupils who are persistently

Proactively engage with the support offered to prevent the need for more formal support.	Where out of school barriers are identified, signpost and support access to any required services in the first instance and act as a lead practitioner if attendance is the only issue and/or the local threshold for formal early help is not met. If the issue persists, take an active part in the multi-agency effort with the local authority and other partners. If a case meets the local threshold for formal early help/family support, this includes conducting the early help assessment and acting as the lead practitioner where all partners agree that the school is the best placed lead service. Where the lead practitioner is outside the school, continue to work with the local authority and partners.		absent, severely absent, or at risk or becoming so.

Responsibilities for Persistently Absence Pupils			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance. Proactively engage with the formal support offered – including any parenting contract or voluntary early help plan to prevent the need for legal intervention.	Continue support as for pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent and: Where absence become persistent, put additional targeted support in place to remove any barriers. Where necessary, this includes working with partners. Where there is a lack of engagement, hold more formal conversations with parents and be clear about the potential need for legal intervention in the future. Where support is not working, being engaged with or appropriate, work with the local authority on legal intervention. Where there are safeguarding concerns,	Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.	Continue support as for pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent and: Work jointly with the school to provide formal support options including attendance contracts and education supervision orders. Where there are safeguarding concerns, ensure joint working between the school, children's social care services and other statutory safeguarding partners. Where support is not working, being engaged with or appropriate, enforce attendance through legal intervention (including prosecution as a last resort).

Responsibilities for Persistently Absence Pupils			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
	intensify support through a referral to statutory children's social care.		

Responsibilities for Severely Absent Pupils			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance. Proactively engage with the formal support offered – including any parenting contract or voluntary early help plan to prevent the need for legal intervention.	Continue support as for persistently absence pupils and: Agree a joint approach for all severely absent pupils with the local authority.	Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.	Continue support as for persistently absence pupils and: All services should make this group the top priority for support. This may include a whole family plan, consideration of an education, health and care plan, or alternative form of educational provision. Be especially conscious of any potential safeguarding issues, ensuring join working between the school, children's social care service and other statutory safeguarding partners. Where appropriate, this could include conducting a full children's social care assessment and building attendance into children in need and child protection plans.

Responsibilities for Cohorts with Lower Attendance than their Peers			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
Not applicable.	Proactively use data to identify cohorts with, or at risk if, low attendance and develop strategies to support them. Work with other schools in the local area and the local authority to share effective practice where there are common barriers to attendance.	Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.	Track local attendance data to prioritise support and unblock area wide attendance barriers where they impact numerous schools.

Responsibilities for Pupils with Medical Conditions or SEND with Poor Attendance			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance. Proactively engage with the support offered.	Maintain the same ambition for attendance and work with the pupils and parents to maximise attendance. Ensure join up with pastoral support and where required, put in place additional support and adjustments, such as an individual healthcare plan and if applicable, ensuring the provision outlined in the pupil's EHCP is accessed. Consider additional support from wider services and external partners, making timely referrals. Regularly monitory data for such groups, including at board and governing body meetings and with local authorities.	Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.	Work closely with relevant services and partners, for example special educational needs, educational psychologists and mental health services o ensure joined up support for families. Ensure suitable education, such as alternative provision, is arranged for children of compulsory school age who because of health reasons would not otherwise receive a suitable education.

Responsibilities for Pupils with a Social Worker			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance. Proactively engage with the support offered.	Know who the pupils are who have, or who have had, a social worker are. Understand how the welfare, safeguarding, and child protection issues that they are experiencing, or have experienced, can have an impact on attendance – whilst maintaining a culture of high aspiration for the cohort. Provide additional academic support and make reasonable adjustments o help them, recognising that even when statutory social care intervention has ended, there can be lasting impact on	Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.	Ensure all Children's Social Care practitioners understand the importance of good school attendance for pupil's educational progress, for their welfare and their wider development – and understand their role in improving it. Through the work of virtual school heads, they should: • Undertake systemic monitoring and data sharing of the attendance of children with a social worker in their area: developing and

	children's educational outcomes. Work with the local authori8ty at a strategic and individual level, sharing data on attendance including, at an individual level, informing the pupil's social worker if there are any unexplained absences and if their name is to be deleted from the register.		implementing targeted cohort level interventions to improve attendance. • Provide advice, challenge and training to schools on how to promote and secure good attendance for children with a social worker. • Develop whole system approaches, with social care, to support the attendance of children in need.

Responsibilities for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance – including the development of Personal Education Plans. Proactively engage with the support offered.	Have high expectations for the cohort – with expert support and leadership provided by the designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after pupils. Work in partnership with the local authority Virtual School Head to develop and deliver high quality Personal Education Plans for looked after children that support good attendance. Work directly with parents to develop good home-school links that support good attendance. For previously looked-after pupils this could include discission on the use of Pupil Premium Plus funding managed by the school.	Designate a member of staff to the responsibility for the promotion of the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after pupils. Monitor and review attendance of the cohort and consider how school policies, including behaviour policies, are sensitive to their needs and support good attendance.	Promote the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children – doing everything possible to minimise disruption to education when a pupil enters care. (LA that looks after the child:) Appoint an expert Virtual School Head (VSH) that will: • Monitor, report on, and evaluate the education outcomes of looked after children, including their attendance, as if they attended a single school – wherever they live or are educated. • Ensure schools know when they have a pupils looked after by the local authority on their role and that information is shared with the school on issues that may impact on their attendance. • Ensure that all looked-after pupils have high quality, up to date, effective Personal Education Plans developed in partnership with schools, social workers and carers – including, where necessary, clear interventions and use of pupil premium plus. • Provide expert advice and information on the education of previously looked-after pupils to

Responsibilities for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
			schools and parents – including their attendance.

Monitoring Attendance			
Parents	**Schools**	**Governing bodies and Trustees**	**Local authorities**
Schools regularly update parents on their child's attendance. (If parents feel the school and or local authority have not delivered what they are expected to they should discuss the case with the school and/or the local authority's attendance support team.)	The school's Senior Attendance Champion will ensure all school-based staff complete their attendance responsibilities in line with the school's policies and procedures. The governing board or academy trust will hold the headteacher or executive leadership to account for their delegated responsibilities and for compliance with regulatory and statutory requirements. They will review progress and provide challenge when required. The board will help school leaders focus improvement efforts on the individual pupils or cohorts who need it and ensure that school staff receive adequate training on attendance. Ofsted will expect schools to do all they reasonably can to achieve the highest possible attendance as part of the behaviour and attitudes judgement. This includes, where attendance is not consistently at or above what could reasonably be expected, that schools have a strong understanding of the causes of absence (particularly for persistent and severe absence) and a clear strategy in place that takes account of those causes to improve attendance for all pupils.	DfE Regions Group considers multi-academy trusts' efforts on attendance as part of decision making. Ofsted considers governing bodies' efforts as part of inspections.	DfE Regions Group monitors local authority efforts as part of regular interaction. Ofsted may consider the local area partnership's approach to improving attendance of children and young people with SEND as part of the SEND Area Inspection, and the local authority's approach to improving attendance for children with a social worker through inspecting local authority children's services. Ultimately, in cases where a local authority has not met expectations or statutory duties, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or the Secretary of State can consider a complaint.

Appendix 7 – The Support-First Approach to Attendance

We have high aspirations for all our pupils. Where there are barriers to attendance, we will work with pupils, their families and other support services to ensure support is available to improve attendance. Where this support is not engaged with or fails, we will work with the Local Authority to consider formalised support and the appropriate use of statutory frameworks, including prosecution, to improve attendance.

This support-first framework forms part of the statutory guidance to support good school attendance.

EXPECT	Aspire to high standards of attendance for all pupils and parents and build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school ready to learn by prioritising attendance improvement across the school.
MONITOR	Rigorously use attendance data to identify patterns or poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched.
LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND	When a pattern is spotted, discuss with pupils and parents to listen and understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.
FACILITATE SUPPORT	Remove barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.
FORMALISE SUPPORT	Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or being engaged with, partners should work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. Depending on the circumstances this may include formalising support through a parenting contract of education supervision order.
ENFORCE	Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or being engaged with, enforce attendance through statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the child's right to education.

Appendix 8 – Information for Parents About Penalty Notices

Information for Parents about Penalty Notices for Unauthorised Absence from School

Following the introduction of the new National Framework for Penalty Notices, the following changes will come into force for Penalty Notices issued for unauthorised absences recorded after 19 August 2024. This information refers to penalty notices that are considered for irregular attendance and unauthorised term-time leave.

All penalty notices are issued within the Somerset Penalty Notice Code of Conduct.

Who can be fined?

Penalty Notices can be issued to each parent/carer of each child whose unauthorised absence meets the national threshold.

For example, in a family with two parents and three children taking unauthorised term-time leave, each parent could receive a penalty notice for each child absent from school, resulting in six penalty notices being issued.

The National Threshold

Schools are required to consider whether a penalty notice is appropriate when a child has 10 sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period. 10 sessions would typically be the equivalent of five days.

These sessions do not have to be consecutive and can be a combination of any unauthorised absence codes (G, O, N or U).

The rolling ten school week period can span terms, school years and schools.

The First Offence

The first time a parent is issued with a penalty notice in relation to a child's absence, they will be able to pay the reduced amount of £80 if they pay within 21 days, otherwise the full amount of £160 is payable within 28 days.

The Second Offence

If a parent is issued with a second penalty notice within three years the amount payable will be £160 within 28 days. The reduced amount will not be available.

The Third Offence

If a parent becomes eligible for a third (or more) penalty notice within three years of the first being issued, a penalty notice can not be issued and the Local Authority will consider other measures to address attendance concerns. This may include prosecution, which could result in a fine of up to £2,500 and the parent having a criminal record. If convicted, the offence will also show on any future DBS checks.

Not Paying a Penalty Notice

The Law

Penalty notices are only issued to parents when they have committed the offence of failing to ensure their child's regular attendance at school. A penalty notice gives the parent the chance to write the offence off without needing to go to court. It is not an offence not to pay a penalty notice, but the Local Authority may then prosecute the parent for the original offence.	Penalty notices are issued in line with Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 when a parent has failed to ensure their child's regular attendance at school. Penalty notices can only be issued when: ✓ A child's absence meets the national threshold ✓ Support has been attempted (if appropriate) ✓ Issuing a penalty notice is compliant with the Somerset Penalty Notice Code of Conduct

Appendix 9 – Additional Resources to Support Attendance

Guidance for Parents on School Attendance

Here, the Children's Commissioner provides information and resources to support parents with school attendance and school applications.

Visit the guidance for parents on school attendance website.

Is my Child too ill for School?

This website supports parents to understand whether their child is too unwell to go to school, including things to look out for, basic health advice and links to further information.

Visit Is my Child too ill for School on the NHS website.

Supporting Absence as a Result of Illness

This document outlines how you can work with schools and other agencies to support a child that is absent due to illness.

Open this PDF document on the Children's Commissioner website.

Somerset Early Help Assessment

This document can – and should – be used to support children and families experiencing significant barriers to attendance.

Open this Word document on the Professional Choices website.

Working Together to Improve School Attendance

This statutory guidance outlines how parents, schools and local authorities should work together to support children and their families.

Open this PDF document on the Department for Education website.

Emotionally Based School Avoidance

This website provides support, training and advice for parents whose children are experiencing emotionally based school avoidance.

Visit the Somerset website for Emotionally Based School Avoidance

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Connect Somerset

The Connect Somerset partnership provides a huge amount of information about the support available in your community and how to access it.

Visit the Connect Somerset website for local support and information.

Appendix 10 – Attendance Codes and Definitions

The table below shows all attendance and absence codes available to schools as of September 2024. All schools are required to mark every child's register twice a day using the appropriate code.

New codes have been introduced for September 2024, most notably the updated C1 and C2 codes, codes Y1 to Y7 and the K code.

✓ = Yes ✗ = No – = Not applicable (codes that do not count towards a child's attendance)

Code	Definition	Present	Authorised
/	Present (morning session)	✓	✓
\	Present (afternoon session)	✓	✓
B	Attending any other approved educational activity	✓	✓
C	Leave of absence for exceptional circumstance	✗	✓
C1	Leave of absence for the purpose of participating in a regulated performance or undertaking regulated employment abroad	✗	✓
C2	Leave of absence for a compulsory school age pupil subject to a part-time timetable	✗	✓
D	Dual registered at another school	–	–
E	Suspended or permanently excluded and no alternative provision made	✗	✓
G	Holiday not granted by the school	✗	✗
I	Illness	✗	✓
J1	Leave of absence for the purpose of attending an interview for employment or for admission to another educational institution	✗	✓
K	Attending education provision arranged by the local authority	✓	✓
L	Late arrival before the register is closed	✓	✓
M	Leave of absence for the purpose of attending a medical or dental appointment	✗	✓
N	Reason for absence not yet established	✗	✗

Code	Definition	Present	Authorised
O	Absent in other or unknown circumstances	✗	✗
P	Participating in a sporting activity	✓	✓
Q	Unable to attend the school because of a lack of access arrangements	–	–
R	Religious Observance	✗	✓
S	Leave of absence for the purpose of studying for a public examination	✗	✓
T	Parent travelling for occupational purposes	✗	✓
U	Arrived in school after registration closed	✗	✗
V	Attending an educational visit or trip	✓	✓
W	Attending work experience	✓	✓
X	Non-compulsory school age pupil not required to attend school	–	–
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 the whole school site being unexpectedly closed	–	–
Y5	Unable to attend as pupil is in criminal justice detention	–	–
Y6	Unable to attend in accordance with public health guidance or law	–	–
Y7	Unable to attend because of any other unavoidable cause	–	–
Z	Prospective pupil not on admission register	–	–
#	Planned whole school closure (e.g. school holidays, INSET days)	–	–

Deleted Codes

From September 2024 the following codes are no longer available and must not be used:

- H code – all authorised term-time must now be coded with the C code
- J code – replaced by J1
- Y code – replaced by Y1 to Y7

Use of the B Code

The Department for Education has clarified that the B code can only be used when a pupil is taking part in an approved educational activity and that they are physically supervised by an adult considered by the school to have the appropriate skills, training and knowledge. It cannot be used for remote learning, even if supervised by a parent.

Use of the Q Code

The Q code can only be used when a child is unable to attend because the local authority is responsible for arranging school transport and this has not yet been set up. Where local authority transport has been set up but fails (e.g. a taxi does not arrive or the bus breaks down), the Y1 code must be used.

Appendix 11 – Start of Term letter

Dear Parent and Carers

Focus on Supporting Good School Attendance

As we begin another school year, we continue to focus on attendance and how we can ensure all our pupils are in school as often as possible. Regular attendance is crucial for your child's academic success and overall well-being.

At Willow Vale School, we have high aspirations for all our pupils and expect them to be in school every day they can be.

Why Attendance Matters

Learning Continuity: Regular attendance ensures that your child in included in important lessons, activities and opportunities.

Social Development: Being in school helps your child build strong relationships with peers and teachers.

Future Success: Consistent attendance sets a positive pattern for future education and employment.

Our Attendance Expectations

- All pupils should be in school on time every day the school is open
- Notify us as soon as possible if your child is unable to attend school
- Ensure medical and dental appointments are arranged outside school hours wherever possible
- Work with us if your child is experiencing barriers to attendance so we can put the right support in place
- Holidays are not taken during term-time

Unauthorised Term-Time Leave

Children have a protected right to full-time education. Parents have a legal duty to ensure their child attends school regularly.

In line with statutory guidance, Willow Vale School will not authorise any requests for term-time leave unless the circumstances are both exceptional and unavoidable. Any unauthorised leave that meets the national threshold is likely to result in parents being issued with a penalty notice.

A Support First Approach

If your child is experiencing barriers to regular attendance, we will work with you so the right support can be offered and those barriers overcome. Where needed, we will also work with other services and the Local Authority to ensure the right support is available.

How You Can Help

Set a Routine: Establish a consistent morning routine to help your child get to school on time.

Stay Informed: Keep track of term dates to ensure your child is in school when they need to be. You can keep yourself up to date by using the following link to check the term dates for the year: **Willow Vale School - Term Dates**

Communicate: Let us know if your child is facing any challenges that may affect their attendance by calling **01823 349388**.

Collaborate: Work with us and engage with support to help your child attend regularly.

We are committed to supporting you and your child. Together, we can create an inclusive, positive and productive learning environment for all children.

Attendance and the Law

Where there are barriers to attendance, we will always aim to resolve them through support and collaboration before considering legal intervention.

Where necessary, however, Willow Vale School will take action to protect a pupil's right to their education. This may include the issue of a penalty notice or legal action being taken.

If you are worried about your child's attendance or feel there is something we need to be aware of, please contact us on 01823 349388.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 12

Supporting Good School Attendance

Attendance Letters for Schools

These template letters are for education providers to use and edit in line with their attendance processes and policies. They align with the support-first approach to improving attendance and should all be sent on the school's headed paper.

Text highlighted in red should be changed before letters are sent.

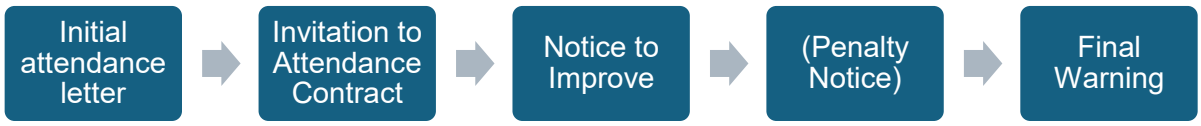
Letters can be sent to more than one parent/carer if they live at the same address. Parents living separately need to receive individual letters.

All letters should be addressed formally (using the parent/carer/s surname) to ensure they can be used as evidence, if required.

Contents

Stage 1 – Supporting Good School Attendance
Stage 2 – Attendance Contract Meeting
Stage 3 – Penalty Notice Requested
Stage 4 – Final Warning
Term-Time Leave – Request Declined
Term-Time Leave – Request Approved
Term-Time Leave – Taken without being Requested

A typical support-first approach may run as follows:



Additional letters are likely to be required depending on each pupil's circumstances and the type of support needed (e.g. invitations to a Team Around the Child meeting).

Additional templates are available on the Education Engagement Resources page, including:

- Attendance Contract
- Notice to Improve
- Attendance letter for health professionals

Appendix 13

Stage 1 – Supporting Good School Attendance

Dear Parent name

Supporting Good School Attendance

Pupil Name (DOB)

We are writing to you today as we have not seen student name in the last number educational days.

Absence from school impacts significantly on children's academic progress and wellbeing, and we know that absence from school is often a sign that additional support may be needed.

We work with pupils and parents to understand and overcome barriers to attendance and would welcome a conversation with you so we can begin to identify how we can support pupil name as fully as possible.

You can reach me by calling the school on **01823 349338** to arrange a convenient time to talk.

If we do not see student name within the next few days, either in centre or at a home visit, we may need to request that police do a welfare check.

If, after 10 consecutive days we have not seen student name, in line with our attendance policy, would have to report *him/her* as a child missing in Education. Please do get in touch.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 14

Stage 2 – Attendance contract meeting

Dear Parent Name

Invitation to an Attendance Contract Meeting
Pupil name (DOB)

We are concerned that pupil name continues to be absent too frequently, as their attendance is now 0.0 per cent.

Each absence is recorded on your child's register, which current shows they have 0 authorised and 0 unauthorised absences.

Regular absence from school is often a sign that additional support is needed, and we would like to ensure that this is put in place to support pupil name's improved attendance.

You are invited to attend an Attendance Contract Meeting on long date at time.

Attendance contracts allow us to work together to identify and understand barriers to attendance and agree a plan to overcome them.

We are keen to work collaboratively with you to improve pupil name's attendance and I would welcome you contacting me on phone number.

Please be aware, however, that unauthorised absences or non-engagement with this process may result in you being issued with a Notice to Improve or a request for support from the Local Authority being made.

I look forward to meeting you soon.

Yours sincerely

Enc. Registration Certificate

Appendix 15

Stage 3 – Penalty Notice Requested

Dear Parent Name

School Attendance Concerns – Penalty Notice Requested
Pupil Name (DOB)

I am writing to inform you that a request has been made to Somerset Council for a penalty notice to be issued to you in relation to pupil name's unauthorised absences from school.

Pupil name's attendance is currently 0.0 per cent and they have 0 unauthorised absences.

Penalty notices are issued to parents under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 when their child does not attend school regularly and those absences are unauthorised. They are also issued in line with statutory guidance and the Somerset Penalty Notice Code of Conduct.

Penalty notices are for a fixed amount of £160, but a reduced rate of £80 may be payable, if paid within 21 days.

Further information about penalty notices is available in our attendance policy, which is published on the school website.

If you would like to discuss ways to work together to improve pupil name's attendance, I would welcome a call from you on phone number.

Yours sincerely

Enc. Registration Certificate

Appendix 16

Stage 4 – Final Warning:

Dear Parent Name

School Attendance Concerns – Final Warning
Pupil Name (DOB)

I am writing to you in relation to ongoing, significant concerns about pupil name's attendance, which is currently 0.0 per cent.

Each absence is recorded on your child's register, which currently shows they have 0 authorised and 0 unauthorised absences.

We have attempted to engage with you through:

[Delete/edit as appropriate, consider adding any other key offers of support]

1. Attendance discussion on long date
2. Attendance meeting on long date
3. Notice to Improve, issued on long date
4. Attendance Contract, commenced on long date

Despite the above support being offered, we have not been successful in improving pupil name's attendance, therefore, a request is now being made to the Education Engagement Service for Formal Attendance Support.

The Education Engagement Service will work with us to support and promote good school attendance but may consider legal action against you if pupil name's attendance does not improve and further unauthorised absences occur.

While poor school attendance is often a sign that additional support is needed, parents are required by law to ensure their child attends school regularly. Failing to do so is an offence under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

Legal action is always a last resort in relation to poor school attendance and may be prevented by us working together to improve attendance and ensure the right support is in place for pupil name.

Yours sincerely

Enc. Registration Certificate

Appendix 17

Term-Time Leave – Request Declined

This letter is to be used when a parent requests term-time leave, and that request is not accepted. The leave, if taken, should subsequently be unauthorised with the G code on the pupil's register. This letter can reference more than one child, if necessary.

Dear Parent Name

Term-Time Leave – Request Declined
Pupil Name (DOB)

You submitted a request for term-time leave to be taken between start date and end date.

Schools are expected to authorise term-time leave only in exceptional circumstances and where taking leave is unavoidable.

In line with statutory guidance, your request for leave is not considered to be exceptional and cannot be authorised.

If this leave is taken those absences will be marked as unauthorised term-time leave and a penalty notice will be considered if the national threshold for penalty notices is met.

Please be aware that:

- the national framework for penalty notices allows each parent of a child to be issued with a penalty notice in relation to unauthorised absence from school,
- each parent may receive a maximum of two penalty notices in relation to a child within a three-year period,
- if the threshold is met for a third (or subsequent) times, the Local Authority will be required to consider alternative measures, which may include prosecution.

Further information about penalty notices can be found on our school website.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 18

Term-Time Leave – Request Approved

This letter is to be used when a parent requests term-time leave, and that request is accepted. The leave, as detailed in the letter should subsequently be authorised with the C code in the pupil's register.

Dear Parent Name

Term-Time Leave – Request Approved
Child Name (DOB)

You submitted a request for term-time leave to be taken between start date and end date.

Schools are expected to authorise term-time leave only in exceptional circumstances and where taking leave is unavoidable.

On this occasion, the decision has been made to authorise your request.

0 absences will be authorised between the dates outlined above.

Please be aware that delays to your child's return to school will result in those additional absences will be marked as unauthorised absence, unless you are able to evidence were unavoidable.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 19

Term-Time Leave – Taken without being Requested

This letter should be used if a pupil is taken out of school for term-time leave, which has not been requested and subsequently unauthorised. This can include absences reported as illness. In these cases, schools are expected to be able to evidence that leave was taken spanning 10 or more unauthorised sessions.

Dear Parent Name

Unauthorised Term-Time Leave
Pupil Name (DOB)

Your child was absent from school for 0 sessions between the dates of start date and end date.

It has come to our attention that these absences were due to term-time leave being taken. As we do not have any record of this leave being requested, these absences have been marked as unauthorised term-time leave.

Schools are required to consider the use of penalty notices when a child's unauthorised absences meet the national threshold.

EITHER (if national threshold has been met)
In line with statutory guidance, a request has been submitted to Somerset Council to issue a penalty notice in relation to your child's recent unauthorised absences.

OR (of national threshold not yet met)
Further unauthorised absences may result in a penalty notice being requested.

Please be aware that:

- the national framework for penalty notices allows each parent of a child to be issued with a penalty notice in relation to unauthorised absence from school,
- each parent may receive a maximum of two penalty notices in relation to a child within a three-year period,
- if the threshold is met for a third (or subsequent) times, the Local Authority will be required to consider alternative measures, which may include prosecution.

Further information about penalty notices can be found on our school website.

Yours sincerely

Enc. Registration Certificate