



THE ORCHARD SCHOOL

Attendance Policy

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Ratified: May 2026

Review: May 2027

Chair of Governors:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Smith', written over a faint horizontal line.

Headteacher:

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The Orchard School Attendance Policy

Ethos of The Orchard School

At The Orchard School, Everyone Matters, Everyone Cares. Our ethos is rooted in the belief that every child has the potential to grow, thrive, and succeed when provided with the right environment, relationships, and support. The Orchard Way guides everything we do, ensuring that our approach is therapeutic, inclusive, and centred on understanding behaviour as communication. We are committed to nurturing the social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs of our pupils, recognising their unique challenges while celebrating their individuality. Through strong relationships and a culture of care, we create a school where every pupil feels safe, valued, and empowered to reach their full potential.

Principles of Our Ethos:

1. Respect for the Individual: Every pupil deserves respect, dignity, and the opportunity to be heard.
2. Relationships at the Heart of Learning: Positive, trusting relationships form the foundation of our work.
3. Equity and Inclusion: We ensure all pupils have access to the support they need to succeed.
4. Therapeutic and Nurturing Approaches: We integrate therapeutic strategies to promote resilience.
5. High Expectations with Compassion: Balancing aspirations with understanding and personalisation.
6. Collaboration with Stakeholders: Families, carers, and agencies work together to support pupils.
7. A Safe and Predictable Environment: Structure and boundaries foster trust and confidence.
8. Restorative Practices: Addressing conflicts through understanding, accountability, and growth.

Mission Statement

At The Orchard School, Everyone Matters, Everyone Cares. Our ethos is rooted in the belief that every child has the potential to grow, thrive, and succeed when provided with the right environment, relationships, and support. The Orchard Way guides everything we do, ensuring that our approach is therapeutic, inclusive, and centred on understanding behaviour as communication. We are committed to nurturing the social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs of our pupils, recognising their unique challenges while celebrating their individuality. Through strong relationships and a culture of care, we create a school where every pupil feels safe, valued, and empowered to reach their full potential.

1. Aims

The Orchard School is committed to:

- Promoting a culture where attendance is valued as part of belonging and success
- Ensuring every pupil can access the education to which they are entitled
- Reducing absence, including persistent and severe absence
- Identifying and addressing barriers to attendance at the earliest opportunity
- Working in partnership with families and external agencies
- Using a graduated, needs-led approach to improve attendance
- Ensuring attendance is understood and addressed as a safeguarding priority

2. Legal Framework and Guidance

This policy is informed by:

- Department for Education: *Working Together to Improve School Attendance (2022)*
- Education Act 1996
- Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended)
- *Keeping Children Safe in Education*
- *SEND Code of Practice (2015)*

The school works in partnership with Kent County Council to fulfil its statutory responsibilities.

3. Principles of Attendance at The Orchard School

At The Orchard School:

- Attendance is understood within the context of SEMH need and lived experience
- Absence is explored as a signal of need, not simply non-compliance
- Relationships are central to improving attendance
- Support is prioritised before enforcement
- Responses are proportionate, personalised and graduated
- All staff share responsibility for attendance
- Families are partners in supporting attendance
- Parents have a legal duty to ensure their child attends school regularly and punctually, in accordance with Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

- The school expects all pupils to attend regularly and punctually unless prevented by unavoidable circumstances.

4. Understanding Barriers to Attendance

We recognise that pupils may experience a range of barriers, including:

- Anxiety and emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)
- Trauma and adverse childhood experiences
- Previous exclusion or negative school experiences
- Social, emotional and mental health needs
- Communication and interaction difficulties
- Family circumstances and contextual safeguarding factors

Attendance concerns are addressed through understanding these underlying factors and responding appropriately.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Governing Body

- Ensures the policy is implemented effectively
- Monitors attendance data and trends
- Holds leaders to account

Headteacher

- Has overall responsibility for attendance
- Ensures compliance with statutory duties
- Oversees use of legal interventions

Deputy Headteacher (Attendance Lead)

- Leads the strategic approach to attendance
- Ensures alignment with safeguarding, behaviour and SEND
- Oversees data, interventions and impact
- Works with the Local Authority and external agencies

Attendance Officer

- Monitors daily attendance
- Analyses data and identifies patterns
- Coordinates communication with families
- Supports intervention processes

Staff

- Build positive relationships with pupils
- Identify early signs of attendance difficulty
- Support reintegration and personalised plans
- Record attendance accurately

Parents and Carers

- Ensure their child attends regularly
- Communicate absence promptly
- Work in partnership with the school

6. Graduated Response to Attendance

The Orchard School adopts a graduated approach, aligned with SEND and therapeutic practice:

Universal (Whole School)

- Positive relationships and strong routines
- Clear expectations and consistent support
- Regular communication with families
- Promotion of belonging and engagement

Targeted (Early Intervention)

Triggered by emerging concerns (e.g. patterns of absence):

- Early conversations with families
- Identification of barriers
- Attendance monitoring
- Pastoral and therapeutic support

Personalised (Intensive Support)

For pupils with ongoing or complex absence:

- Individual attendance plans
- Multi-agency involvement
- Adjusted timetables where appropriate
- Reintegration planning
- Therapeutic and family support

Statutory (Last Resort)

Where supportive approaches have not secured improvement:

- Referral to Local Authority services
- Penalty notices
- Legal intervention

Movement between levels of support will be informed by attendance data, patterns of absence, and the impact of previous interventions. Examples of escalation may include continued absence below expected levels, lack of improvement following targeted support, or increasing safeguarding concerns.

These measures are used proportionately and in line with statutory guidance.

7. Monitoring and Thresholds

The school monitors attendance at individual, cohort and whole-school level.

Key Definitions

- Persistent Absence: below 90%
- Severe Absence: below 50%

The school may also use internal thresholds to trigger earlier support.

Attendance is reviewed:

- daily (operational monitoring)
- weekly (pastoral review)
- termly (strategic analysis)

8. Safeguarding and Attendance

Attendance is a key safeguarding indicator.

The school will:

- Follow up all unexplained absence on the first day
- Maintain regular contact with families
- Conduct home visits where appropriate
- Work with external agencies where risk is identified
- Escalate concerns in line with safeguarding procedures

Where a pupil is missing education, appropriate referrals will be made.

Where there are ongoing concerns about attendance and a pupil's welfare, the school will work with the Local Authority and other agencies to ensure appropriate safeguarding action is taken.

9. Recording Attendance

The school will:

- Maintain an accurate attendance register
- Record attendance twice daily
- Use appropriate DfE attendance codes
- Retain records in line with statutory requirements

10. Attendance Procedures

Parents and carers are expected to notify the school on the first day of absence, providing a clear reason for the absence.

- Contact should be made by telephone to the school office before the start of the school day.
- Where no contact is received, the school will make first-day contact with parents/carers as part of its safeguarding procedures.
- If no reason for absence is provided, the absence may be recorded as unauthorised.
- The school may request further information or evidence where there are concerns about the authenticity or frequency of absence.

The school will maintain clear records of all communication regarding attendance and absence. Where concerns about attendance persist, the school will initiate further support in line with the graduated response outlined in this policy.

11. Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

Absence will be authorised where there is a valid reason and evidenced reason, including:

- Illness (including mental health)
- Medical appointments
- Exceptional circumstances

The Headteacher has discretion to authorise absence and will consider each case individually. The school is not obliged to accept a parent's explanation and may request additional evidence where appropriate.

Absence may be recorded as unauthorised where:

- No reason is provided
- The reason given is not considered valid
- Absence is taken without prior agreement where required

Leave of Absence

In line with statutory guidance, leave of absence during term time will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances and must be requested in advance.

The Headteacher will determine whether the circumstances are exceptional, and the decision is final. Absence cannot be authorised retrospectively.

12. Punctuality

Punctuality is an important part of attendance and supports pupils to access learning effectively.

- Pupils are expected to arrive at school on time each day.
- Registers are taken at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions.
- Pupils arriving after the start of the school day will be recorded as late.
- Pupils arriving after the register has closed will be recorded as an unauthorised absence for that session in line with national guidance.

- The specific timings for the start of the school day and register closure are published on the school website and communicated to parents.

Frequent lateness will be monitored and addressed in line with the school's graduated response to attendance.

13. Supporting Reintegration

Where pupils have experienced absence, the school will:

- Plan reintegration carefully
- Work with families and external agencies
- Provide a gradual return where appropriate
- Use therapeutic and relational approaches
- Monitor and adapt provision

14. Part-Time Timetables and Alternative Provision

Where necessary:

- Part-time timetables may be used as a short-term measure
- These will be:
 - time-limited
 - regularly reviewed
 - clearly planned
- Full-time education remains the expectation

15. Legal Intervention

Where necessary, the school may:

- Request Local Authority involvement
- Support the issuing of penalty notices
- Contribute to legal proceedings

These actions will only be taken when supportive approaches have been exhausted.

16. Working with Families and External Agencies

The school works collaboratively with:

- Kent County Council
- Early Help
- Social Care
- Health services
- Other professionals

Families are central to all attendance work.

17. Monitoring and Review

The policy will be reviewed annually.

The Senior Leadership Team and Governing Body will evaluate:

- Attendance data and trends
- Effectiveness of interventions
- Alignment with safeguarding and SEND
- Impact on pupil outcomes

18. Further Information and Support

Parents and carers can access further advice and support regarding attendance, SEND and family support through:

- **Kent SENDIASS**

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/special-educational-needs/send-information-advice-and-support>

- **KELSI (Kent Education Learning and Skills Information)**

<https://www.kelsi.org.uk/special-education-needs>

- **Kent County Council Attendance Guidance**

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/school-attendance>

For support or to discuss attendance concerns, families are encouraged to contact the school directly.