



Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Minister for Schools

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfes

To all headteachers in England

February 2024

Dear colleagues,

RE: Further government action on school attendance, including making *Working together to improve school attendance* statutory

Thank you for everything you and your staff are continuing to do on pupil attendance. The pandemic was one of the biggest challenges ever posed to the education system and among its knock-on effects is an unprecedented impact on some parents' 'thresholds' around absence. Prior to the pandemic, absence had been gradually declining since 2010, from 6 per cent in 2009-10 to 4.7 per cent in 2018-19, and our goal is to build on the strengths of the current system to improve attendance levels to pre-pandemic levels and better as quickly as possible.

Although rates of absence remain too high, the concerted efforts of schools and local authorities across England are having a real impact with attendance rates 0.7 percentage points higher last term compared to the year before. This means pupils, on average, attending the equivalent of around a day and a half more across an academic year than they did last year. Around 380,000 fewer pupils were persistently off school last year than the year before but there are still far too many children who are regularly absent. Therefore, making sure all children access the full-time education to which they are entitled remains a top priority for all of us. That is why we're announcing major reforms to support you as you continue to drive up attendance. From the next school year:

- (1) Regulations to mandate data sharing and modernise school attendance and admission registers will give schools, local authorities and the Department of Education access to near-live high-quality data from all state-funded schools, allowing better, more targeted support to be put in place as early as possible.
- (2) The new National Framework for Penalty Notices will improve consistency of attendance enforcement in applicable cases across the country.
- (3) Updated *Working together to improve school attendance* guidance will become statutory, ensuring clearer roles for schools and local authorities.

The changes have all been designed to be as simple as possible. Although we expect them to provide increased clarity, they will of course require a period of adjustment, which is why we are sharing them with you well in advance of the new school year. The factsheet following this letter provides you with further information

on what each change means for you and your schools. Ahead of the new school year, we will also provide support through a series of webinars.

Of course we know that there is a wealth of expertise and best-practice in schools, which is why we recently announced an expansion of our attendance hubs. There will be 18 new hubs across 6 regions, bringing the total to 32 and seeing nearly 2,000 schools supported to tackle persistent absence. I'm also pleased to share with you that we are appointing a national attendance ambassador, who will work with schools to share effective practice to maximise the number of pupils regularly attending school. I am delighted that Rob Tarn, leader of Northern Education Trust, will be taking up this role shortly.



Damian Hinds
Minister for Schools



Attendance reforms 2024 – what they mean for schools

1. Revised *Working together to improve school attendance* guidance

The new statutory guidance published on 29 February is available for review at the same link as the existing guidance: [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance). It will replace the existing version from 19 August 2024, in time for the new school year.

In addition to reflecting the changes detailed in the rest of this document, the new guidance will also provide increased clarity on where the school's role starts and ends where physical or mental ill health prevents pupils from attending school, and further clarification around medical evidence, additional support for pupils with SEND, and part-time timetables. It also further clarifies the expectations of schools' senior attendance champions, and details of effective Targeting Support Meetings. The Department for Education will provide schools with support as they transition to the new guidance via a series of webinars.

2. Regulations to mandate attendance data-sharing by all schools

It is clear that robust data, used well, is critical to improving attendance outcomes. To support schools, we are mandating the provision of pupil level attendance data from all state funded schools from the beginning of school year 2024-25. For schools with a compatible management information system (MIS), the easiest way to meet this duty is to [share your daily school attendance data](#) with the Department. This should not place additional burdens on schools. In doing so, you will get access to secure attendance reports to support with identifying absence patterns relating to pupil cohorts in school and be able to compare your attendance outcomes locally and nationally. 89% of schools have already signed up but if you haven't done so we encourage you to take action as soon as possible ahead of the duty coming into force on August 19 2024.

3. Regulations to modernise school attendance and admission registers

The Department has laid regulations to revoke and replace the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. The changes follow extensive consultation with schools and local authorities and are designed to be as simple as possible, and to improve consistency and accuracy of attendance recording.

Although we expect them to provide increased clarity, they will of course require a period of adjustment, which why we are sharing them with you well in advance of the new school year. We have also been working closely with schools Management Information System suppliers to ensure that they are aware of and ready to make the necessary adjustments to systems in good time.

From next school year:

- Admission and attendance registers must both be kept electronically in line with the new School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024).
- For each session one of the new list of attendance and absence codes must be recorded for every pupil.
- Schools must inform their local authority when a pupil has, or will, miss 15 days due to illness.

Until then schools must continue to follow the existing coding.

Attendance and Absence Codes from school year 2024-25 (new codes shown in green)				
New Guidance - Chapter 8	Code	Description	Statistical Meaning	Pupil Registration Regulations 2024 Reference
Attending the school	/	Present at the school - morning session	Attending	Regulation 10(2) Table 1
	\	Present at the school - afternoon session	Attending	Regulation 10(2) Table 1
	L	Late arrival before the register is closed	Attending	
Attending a place other than the school	K	Attending education provision arranged by the local authority <i>Schools must also record the nature of the educational activity</i>	Attending approved education activity	Regulation 10(3) Table 2, 10(5) and 11(9)(b)
	V	Attending an educational visit or trip	Attending approved educational activity	Regulation 10(3) Table 2 and 11(9)(c)
	P	Participating in a sporting activity	Attending approved educational activity	Regulation 10(3) Table 2, 10(11) and 11(10)
	W	Attending work experience	Attending approved education activity	Regulation 10(2) Table 2, 10(11) and 11(10)
	B	Attending any other approved educational activity <i>Schools must also record the nature of the educational activity</i>	Attending approved educational activity	Regulation 10(3) Table 2, 10(5), 10(11) and 11(10)
	D	Dual registered at another school	Not counted as a possible session	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and 11(9)(a)
Absent – leave of absence	C1	Leave of absence for the purpose of participating in a regulated performance or undertaking regulated employment abroad	Authorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and 11(2)
	M	Leave of absence for the purpose of attending a medical or dental appointment	Authorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and 11(11)
	J1	Leave of absence for the purpose of attending an interview for employment or for admission to another educational institution	Authorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and 11(4)
	S	Leave of absence for the purpose of studying for a public examination	Authorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and 11(5)
	X	Non-compulsory school age	Not counted as a	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and

Attendance and Absence Codes from school year 2024-25 (new codes shown in green)

New Guidance - Chapter 8	Code	Description	Statistical Meaning	Pupil Registration Regulations 2024 Reference
		pupil not required to attend	possible attendance	11(7) or (8)
	C2	Leave of absence for compulsory school age pupil subject to a part-time timetable	Authorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and 11(6)
	C	Leave of absence for exceptional circumstances	Authorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and 11(11)
Absent – other authorised reasons	T	Parent travelling for occupational purposes	Authorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3
	R	Religious observance	Authorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3
	I	Illness	Authorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3
	E	Suspended or permanently excluded and no alternative provision made	Authorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3
Absent – unable to attend school because of unavoidable cause	Q	Unable to attend the school because of lack of access arrangements	Not counted as a possible attendance	Regulation 10(4) Table 3, 10(12) and (13)
	Y1	Unable to attend due to transport normally provided not being available	Not counted as a possible attendance	Regulation 10(4) Table 3
	Y2	Unable to attend due to widespread disruption to travel	Not counted as a possible attendance	Regulation 10(4) Table 3
	Y3	Unable to attend due to part of the school premises being closed	Not counted as a possible attendance	Regulation 10(4) Table 3
	Y4	Unable to attend due to the whole school sit being unexpectedly closed	Not counted as a possible attendance	Regulation 10(10)
	Y5	Unable to attend as pupil is in criminal justice detention	Not counted as a possible attendance	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and 10(14)
	Y6	Unable to attend in accordance with public health guidance or law	Not counted as a possible attendance	Regulation 10(4) Table 3
	Y7	Unable to attend because of any other unavoidable cause <i>Schools must also record the nature of the unavoidable cause</i>	Not counted as a possible attendance	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and 10(6)
Absent – unauthorised absence	G	Holiday not granted by the school	Unauthorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3
	N	Reason for absence not yet established	Unauthorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3, 10(7), (8) and (9)
	O	Absent in other or unknown circumstances	Unauthorised absence	Regulation 10(4) Table 3 and 10(9)(b)
	U	Arrived in school after registration closed	Unauthorised absence	Regulation 10(8)(b)
Administrative codes	Z	Pupil's name entered in advance of start date	N/A	N/A
	#	Planned whole school closure – no session to take place	N/A	N/A

4. **The new National Framework for Penalty Notices for absence**

The Department has laid regulations to amend the Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 to deliver on the Schools White Paper commitment to introduce a National Framework for Penalty Notices from September 2024. The framework embeds the 'support first' approach to managing attendance, ensuring that penalty notices are considered on a case-by-case basis, and only used where attendance support has already been provided and has not worked or been engaged with or where support is not appropriate (e.g. an unauthorised holiday in term time). It sets a single national threshold for considering a penalty notice of 10 sessions (typically, 5 days) within 10 weeks, replacing area by area thresholds. We are increasing the fine amount to £160 if paid within 28 days, reduced to £80 when paid within 21 days. Finally, we are supporting schools and local authorities to tackle repeated offences by introducing a flat rate of £160 for a second penalty notice within a three year period and not allowing more than 2 penalty notices, after which an alternative route (e.g. prosecution) should be considered instead as the penalty is clearly not working.

The National Framework does not prevent a penalty notice from being used in other cases where an offence has been committed, and discretion is retained to issue one before the threshold is met. Further details on the National Framework for penalty notices – including schools' role - are provided in the updated *Working together to improve school attendance* guidance (see point 1 above). Your local authority attendance team will also provide details on how the new National Framework will work in practice in your area, and should consult you on the development of its local code of conduct.

5. **New National Attendance Ambassador**

Rob Tarn (CEO of Northern Education Trust) will shortly be taking up the role of DfE's national attendance ambassador. As ambassador, Rob's key roles will include:

- Acting as a sector-facing lead for the attendance hubs programme, and of wider DfE attendance activity.
- Disseminating effective practice to improve school attendance with schools and trusts.
- Working with DfE's regional teams to support strong attendance regionally and nationally.