



Attendance Policy

Adopted by Utopia - for review by the Board of Directors and Governors
Adopted September 2026
For review - Annually - Review targets annually

School Overview

Utopia is an Independent Special School for students aged 13-19 with neurodiversity, high levels of anxiety and those experiencing emotional barriers to school attendance. We are a small setting providing intensive and personalised support for those with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who benefit from a nurturing environment.

Our Vision

A learning experience where students feel happy, safe, and create lasting memories, surrounded by people who appreciate their uniqueness, support their success, and foster their personal growth.

Our Mission

We balance the academic and personal development outcomes of students based on their individual needs and aspirations. Utilising parental engagement to ensure that each student is appropriately prepared for adulthood.

Our Ethos

Our school ethos of being accessible, approachable, and aspirational empowers staff to go above and beyond in supporting students' development, fostering strong relationships that drive exceptional progress.

Values

Respect, resilience, responsibility and kindness are the core principles woven throughout our curriculum to ensure students are prepared to meet the demands of life in modern Britain.

Essential Skills

Adaptability, communication, independence, motivation, problem solving and teamwork are fundamental skills we believe every student should embody to thrive both in school and in the wider world.

Introduction

At Utopia, we recognise that every student is unique, and many of our young people face complex emotional, social, and sensory challenges that impact their ability to engage with school life in a typical way. We are a small, nurturing community built on the core values of **resilience, respect, responsibility, and kindness**. Our attendance policy is designed to balance high aspirations for consistent attendance with empathy, flexibility, and individual support. We aim to work collaboratively with students, families, and professionals to understand each young person's unique needs and to remove barriers that may prevent them from engaging fully in school life. This policy outlines how we will monitor attendance, respond to concerns, and provide early, compassionate intervention—always focusing on understanding rather than blame, and on partnership rather than punishment.

Aims

We are committed to meeting our obligation with regards to school attendance through our whole-school culture and ethos that values good attendance, including:

- To promote a positive culture of attendance where every student feels safe, supported, and motivated to engage in school life.

- To recognise and respond sensitively to the individual needs, experiences, and challenges faced by students with autism, anxiety, and emotional barriers.
- To build trusting relationships between students, families, and staff to encourage open communication about attendance and wellbeing.
- To work in partnership with parents, carers, and external professionals to identify and address barriers to attendance at the earliest opportunity.
- Ensure that all attendance practices are consistent, fair, and informed by an understanding of previous negative school experiences, mental health, and neurodiversity

Objectives

- To monitor and track attendance accurately, using data to identify patterns, triggers, and areas for support.
- To develop individualised attendance support plans for students who experience difficulties attending regularly.
- To offer flexible and creative approaches to reintegration, such as reduced timetables, safe spaces, or supported transitions.
- To provide staff with ongoing training in autism awareness, anxiety management, and emotionally informed practice.
- To celebrate improvements in attendance and engagement, recognising effort as well as achievement.
- To review and evaluate attendance procedures regularly to ensure they remain responsive, compassionate, and effective.

Legislation and guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the [working together to improve school attendance](#) from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on [school attendance parental responsibility measures](#). These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- Part 6 of [The Education Act 1996](#)
- Part 3 of [The Education Act 2002](#)
- Part 7 of [The Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)
- [The Education \(pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006 \(and 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016 amendments\)](#)
- [The Education \(Penalty Notices\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2013](#)

This policy also refers to the DfE's guidance on the school census, which explains the persistent absence threshold.

Roles and responsibilities

The board of governors

The board of governors is responsible for:

- Promoting the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos
- Making sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
- Regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data
- Monitoring attendance figures for the whole school
- Making sure staff receive adequate training on attendance

- Holding the headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy

The Headteacher

The Headteacher is responsible for:

- Implementation of this policy at the school
- Monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to governors
- Supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual students
- Monitoring the impact of any implemented attendance strategies
- Issuing fixed-penalty notices, where necessary

The designated person responsible for attendance

The designated person is responsible for:

- Leading attendance across the school
- Offering a clear vision for attendance improvement
- Evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes
- Having an oversight of data analysis
- Devising specific strategies to address areas of poor attendance identified through data

The designated senior leader responsible for attendance is Fraser Dewar and can be contacted via fdewar@utopiaschools.co.uk or 07719084493

The Pastoral Lead

The pastoral lead is responsible for:

- Monitoring and analysing attendance data (see section 7)
- Arranging calls and meetings with parents to discuss attendance issues
- Delivering targeted intervention and support to students and families
- Benchmarking attendance data to identify areas of focus for improvement
- Providing regular attendance reports to school staff and reporting concerns about attendance to the designated senior leader responsible for attendance and the headteacher
- Working with education welfare officers to tackle persistent absence
- Advising the Head teacher when to issue fixed-penalty notices

The pastoral leads are Lydia Slane and Elisha Smith and can be contacted on lslane@utopiaschools.co.uk, esmith@utopiaschools.co.uk or via the school office on 07719084493

The office administrators are responsible for recording attendance on a daily basis, using the correct codes, and submitting this information on the school MIS by 9:15

The office administrator will:

- Take calls from parents and students about absence on a day-to-day basis and record it on the school system

- Transfer calls from parents to the appropriate person to provide them with more detailed support on attendance

Parents/carers

- Are expected to work closely with the school to support their child's attendance and engagement.
- Should inform the school as early as possible of any reasons for absence, including health, anxiety, or emotional factors.
- Are encouraged to collaborate in developing attendance support plans and to attend review meetings as needed.
- Will receive clear, compassionate communication from the school regarding attendance expectations and any concerns
- Ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day

Students

- Are encouraged to attend school regularly and arrive on time each day.
- Are supported to communicate any worries or difficulties that may affect their ability to attend.
- Will be included in discussions and decisions about their attendance in a way that feels safe and appropriate to their needs.

Intervention and Support

At Utopia, we recognise that barriers to attendance often stem from complex emotional, social, or sensory needs rather than a lack of willingness to attend. Our approach to intervention is therefore centred on **understanding, early support, and collaboration** rather than enforcement or sanction.

When a student experiences difficulties attending school, we act quickly to explore the underlying causes and to put supportive measures in place. Each situation is treated individually and sensitively, with the aim of helping the student re-engage at a pace that feels safe and manageable.

Our intervention and support process includes:

- **Early identification:** Monitoring attendance data to spot emerging patterns of absence or anxiety before they become entrenched.
- **Open communication:** Creating safe opportunities for students and families to share concerns without fear of judgement.
- **Individualised planning:** Developing a personalised attendance support plan that may include flexible timetables, gradual reintegration, sensory breaks, or adjustments to the learning environment.
- **Collaborative working:** Engaging with parents, carers, and relevant professionals to ensure a coordinated response.
- **Ongoing review:** Regularly evaluating the effectiveness of support strategies and adapting them as the student's needs change.
- **Positive reinforcement:** Recognising and celebrating small steps of progress in attendance, confidence, and emotional resilience.

Our goal is always to **rebuild trust, reduce anxiety, and nurture a sense of belonging** so that every student can attend and participate in learning to the best of their ability. Where a student has an EHCP which states that Utopia is the suitable placement, any attendance concerns or end of placement discussions will take place through the EHCP review process. However, the Headteacher still retains the right to end placements on attendance grounds

How we Implement this policy

We want our students to:

- Show **resilience** in attending even when they feel that they cannot
- Show **respect** for themselves by understanding the importance of regular attendance on academic and social progress
- Show **responsibility** by being - accountable, reliable and take ownership of their actions, choices, and learning.
- Be **kind** by promoting empathy, compassion, and positive, inclusive behaviour for all, creating an environment where attendance is celebrated.

How we promote these values:

- Through policy, staff CPD and general school life and behaviour
- Teaching of the 6 Essential Skills for life
- A whole school approach to attendance and engagement that is flexible and person centred
- Extra-Curricular activities and whole school initiatives

Objective	Success Criteria	Evidence	Frequency	Responsible Person
Monitor and track attendance accurately, using data to identify patterns, triggers, and areas for support	Office staff record attendance promptly and relay concerns to the Pastoral lead	Attendance Registers	Daily	Office Administrators
Develop individualised attendance support plans for students who experience difficulties attending regularly	The pastoral team have regular contact with parents to support student attendance in a responsive and flexible way	Attendance support plans, contact logs	Weekly	Pastoral Lead
Offer flexible and creative approaches to reintegration, such as reduced timetables, safe	Meetings take place regularly with parents for off track students.	Meeting minutes	Half termly	Deputy Head

spaces, or supported transitions				
Provide staff with ongoing training in autism awareness, anxiety management, and emotionally informed practice	Staff support students with anxiety around attendance by using social stories and wellbeing check ins following periods of absence	School MIS	As required	All staff
Celebrate improvements in attendance and engagement, recognising effort as well as achievement.	Students receive certificates and rewards for improvements in attendance that are shared with parents	Student files, whole school behaviour tracker	Weekly/ Half Termly	Pastoral Lead
Review and evaluate attendance procedures regularly to ensure they remain responsive, compassionate, and effective	Termly data analysis informs policy next steps	SLT and Governor meeting minutes	Half Termly/Termly	Deputy Head

Recording attendance

Attendance register

We will keep an attendance register and place all students onto this register.

We will take our attendance register as students arrive in the building and once during the afternoon session. It will mark whether every student is:

- Present
- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Any amendment to the attendance register will include:

- The original entry
- The amended entry

- The reason for the amendment
- The date on which the amendment was made
- The name and position of the person who made the amendment

See appendix 1 for the DfE attendance codes.

We will also record:

- Whether the absence is authorised or not
- The nature of the activity if a student is attending an approved educational activity
- The nature of circumstances where a student is unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

We will keep every entry on the attendance register for 3 years after the date on which the entry was made.

Students must arrive in school by 9am on each school day. They will be registered as they arrive in the building by the office administrator having signed in.

Unplanned absence

The student's parent/carer must notify the school of the reason for the absence on the first day of an unplanned absence as soon as practically possible by calling the school office (see also section 7).

We will mark absence due to illness as authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask the student's parent/carer to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents/carers will be notified of this in advance.

Planned absence

Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorised as long as the student's parent/carer notifies the school in advance of the appointment.

However, we encourage parents/carers to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the student should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

The student's parent/carer must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence

Lateness and punctuality

A student who arrives late:

- Before the register has closed will be marked as late, using the appropriate code
- After the register has closed will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code

Contact will be made daily by the office administrator to check on punctuality and in the event of persistent lateness a meeting will be arranged with the designated person responsible for attendance

Following up unexplained absence

Where any student we expect to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will:

- Call the student's parent/carer on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason. If the school cannot reach any of the student's emergency contacts, the school may complete a home visit
- Identify whether the absence is approved or not
- Identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained - this will be no later than 5 working days after the session
- Call the parent/carer on each day that the absence continues without explanation to ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary.
- Conduct a home visit if a student has not attended school for a period of 5 days

Reporting to parents/carers

The school will regularly inform parents about their child's attendance and absence levels via termly reports. Positive attendance will also be acknowledged with messages home, praise post cards and rewards where appropriate

Authorised and unauthorised absence

Approval for term-time absence

The Head Teacher will only grant a leave of absence to a student during term time if they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. A leave of absence is granted at the Head Teacher's discretion, including the length of time the student is authorised to be absent for.

However, at Utopia, we recognise that there are genuine SEND and mental health reasons why some of our students are unable to take holidays during the busier holiday period. Therefore, the Headteacher retains the right to use his discretion when considering the "Exceptional Circumstances" around a request for leave of absence. Each case will be dealt with based on its individual circumstances. In these cases, as in all schools, the maximum permissible leave of absence is five days

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and, where possible, at least 2 weeks before the absence, and in accordance with any leave of absence request form, accessible via the main office.

Legal sanctions

The school or local authority can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age.

If issued with a fine, or penalty notice, each parent must pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the local authority.

Penalty notices can be issued by a headteacher, local authority officer or the police.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice may take into account:

- The number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year
- One-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission

- Where an excluded student is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason

If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice.

Attendance monitoring

Utopia will monitor student attendance in weekly staff meetings, with data reported by the office administrator and have daily contact with parents/carers to support student attendance.

- Monitor attendance and absence data half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual student level
- Identify whether or not there are particular groups of children whose absences may be a cause for concern

Student-level absence data will be collected each term and published at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics. The school will compare attendance data to the national average, and share this with the governing board.

Analysing attendance

Utopia will

- Analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify students or cohorts that need additional support with their attendance, and use this analysis to provide targeted support to these students and their families
- Look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns
- Provide regular attendance reports to all staff and other school leaders, to facilitate discussions with students and families
- Use data to monitor and evaluate the impact of any interventions put in place in order to modify them and inform future strategies

Reducing persistent and severe absence

Persistent absence is where a student misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a student misses 50% or more of school.

The school will:

- Use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence
- Consider a flexible curriculum offer to increase engagement incrementally for example, part-time timetables, supported transitions, or safe spaces.
- Provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance
- Hold regular review meetings with the parents of students who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable, or are persistently or severely absent, to discuss attendance and engagement at school

Appendix 1: attendance codes

The following codes are taken from the DfE's guidance on school attendance.

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	Student is present at morning registration
\	Present (pm)	Student is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	Student arrives late before register has closed
B	Off-site educational activity	Student is at a supervised off-site educational activity approved by the school
D	Dual registered	Student is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
J1	Interview	Student has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
K	Off site arranged by LA	Attending a place other than school where they are registered, arranged by the LA.
P	Sporting activity	Student is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
V	Educational trip or visit	Student is on an educational visit/trip organised, or approved, by the school
W	Work experience	Student is on a work experience placement

Code	Definition	Scenario
Authorised absence		
C	Authorised other circumstances	Absent with leave for other circumstances
C1	Regulated performance	Absent for purpose of taking part in a regulated performance.

C2	Authorised leave of absence	Student has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances/reduced timetable
E	Excluded	Student has been excluded but no alternative provision has been made
H	Authorised holiday	Student has been allowed to go on holiday due to exceptional circumstances
I	Illness	School has been notified that a student will be absent due to illness
M	Medical/dental appointment	Student is at a medical or dental appointment
R	Religious observance	Student is taking part in a day of religious observance
S	Study leave	Year 11 student is on study leave during their public examinations
T	Gypsy, Roma and traveler absence	Student from a traveler community is travelling, as agreed with the school
Unauthorised absence		
G	Unauthorised holiday	Student is on a holiday that was not approved by the school
N	Reason not provided	Student is absent for an unknown reason (this code should be amended when the reason emerges, or replaced with code O if no reason for absence has been provided after a reasonable amount of time)
O	Unauthorised absence	School is not satisfied with reason for student's absence
U	Arrival after registration	Student arrived at school after the register closed

Code	Definition	Scenario
Q	LA lack to facilitate attendance	Unable to attend because of lack of access arrangements by LA to facilitate attendance
X	Not required to be in school	Student of non-compulsory school age is not required to attend
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances	School site is closed, there is disruption to travel as a result of a local/national emergency, or student is in custody
Y1	Transport unavailable	Unable to attend as school is not within walking distance of home and transport to/from school normally provided is not available.
Y2	Travel emergency	Unable to attend due to widespread disruption to travel caused by local, national, or international emergency.
Y3	School part closure (affects students needs)	Part of school premises is unavoidably out of use and student cannot be accommodated in parts of the premises that remain in use.
Y4	Authorised - session cancelled	Whole school closed when school was due to meet for a session, but session cancelled.
Y6	Infectious infection/disease	Travel to or attendance at school would be contrary/prohibited by guidance/law relating to incidence or transmission of infection or disease.
Y7	Authorised - unavoidable cause	Unable to attend because of any other unavoidable cause
Z	Student not on admission register	Register set up but student has not yet joined the school
#	Planned school closure	Whole or partial school closure due to half-term/bank holiday/INSET day