



# Attendance Policy

Approved by Board of Directors:	<b>11 September 2024</b>
Revision date:	<b>September 2027</b>
Version:	<b>4.0</b>

## **Contents**

<b>Introduction to MAT policy</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Aspire key principles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Roles and responsibilities</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Procedures</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Monitoring, evaluation and review</b>	<b>10</b>

# Attendance Policy

## 1. Introduction to MAT Policy

- 1.1. Whilst not required to produce a policy, we have chosen to do so to affirm our commitment to maintaining high levels of attendance and to set out some key principles according to which our academies will operate.
- 1.2. Each academy within the Aspire Multi-Academy Trust is committed to providing a full and efficient education to all pupils and embraces the concept of equal opportunities for all. We will endeavour to provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcome.
- 1.3. For a child to reach their full educational achievement, a high level of school attendance is essential. Our over-arching aim in this area is for each of our academies to have an attendance rate above the national average, which is currently 94%. Every opportunity will be used to convey to pupils and their parents or carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance.
- 1.4. Aspire staff understand that good attendance starts with close and productive relationships with parents and pupils. In line with our Take Care values, our academies treat all pupils and parents with dignity. We work in partnership with parents, explaining the link between attendance and attainment and wider wellbeing, and will challenge parents' views where they have misconceptions about what 'good' attendance looks like.
- 1.5. Academy attendance is subject to legislation and this policy is written to reflect this legislation and the updated guidance produced by the Department for Education. This policy should be read in conjunction with Working together to improve school attendance updated for August 2024.

## 2. Aspire Key Principles

- 2.1. We believe that high levels of attendance are best achieved by making our academies safe, happy and exciting places of learning and belonging.
- 2.2. Attendance is encouraged and achieved within the positive and spirited 'Take Care' ethos generated through our core purpose of Profound Personal Development and delivered through our guiding principles. Each academy is committed to nurturing a culture of opportunity – which makes school an exciting and motivating place to be a part of, rather than apart from – and promoting a climate of participation.
- 2.3. Academy leaders and other members of staff, in seeking to address issues of pupils' attendance, absence and lateness, will remember that, within a rigorous and conscientious approach, systems are intended to help children and families, not undermine or irritate them. For example, when we rightly emphasise the importance of keeping children at home for 48 hours after an episode of vomiting or diarrhoea, we will be careful not to send out letters seemingly criticising parents/carers for simply abiding by school rules.
- 2.4. If a reward system is used to promote good attendance, careful consideration will be given to issues of fairness – i.e., how does such a system accommodate those children who are absent due to ill health through no fault of their own or of their parents?
- 2.5. Aspire is committed to maintaining the autonomy of all successful academies; as such, this central policy constitutes a statement of intent and of key principles to which all our academies

adhere to. In all academies, close attention will be paid to the recommendations and suggested approaches in the updated Working Together to improve school attendance guidance. In line with this guidance, each academy is able to make its own decisions about, for example, the best way to address the poor attendance of a specific pupil. Academies will also decide upon the appropriateness or otherwise of reward systems for attendance. The MAT Board requires uniformity of commitment, not uniformity of processes, which are more effectively adapted to families and local contexts.

### **3. Roles and Responsibilities**

**3.1. Each academy will** annually examine its attendance figures and set attendance/absence targets. Responsibility for establishing, reviewing and amending systems for improving attendance lies with the academy Headteacher and the nominated attendance lead if this is not the Headteacher. The attendance lead will work in conjunction with their Local Governing Body and is expected to develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance by:

- Setting a clear vision for improving and maintaining good attendance and sharing it widely
- Establishing and maintaining effective systems for tackling absence
- Having a strong grasp of absence data, regularly monitoring, reviewing and challenging data (see additional appendix)
- Building strong relationships and working jointly with families,
- Listening to and understanding barriers and working in partnership with families to remove them
- Promoting the importance of attendance across the school's/trust's policies and ethos
- Ensuring school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
- Ensuring staff receive adequate training on attendance
- Working alongside class teachers, office and administrative staff in promoting high levels of school attendance for all pupils.

**3.2. The Aspire Trust will:**

- Identify and monitor attendance patterns across the trust to identify common issues and barriers, and to share effective practice
- Liaise with the DfE's regional teams for advice about wider support programmes
- Work more intensively with schools where necessary

**3.3. Registers**

- The law requires all schools to have an admission register and an attendance register. These registers must be kept electronically.
- Aspire schools will preserve every entry in the attendance or admission register for 6 years from the date the data was entered.
- As published in working together to improve school attendance 2024, Aspire schools will use the revised attendance and absence codes and follow all advice about amendments.

### **3.4. Supporting pupils with SEND.**

- We will work with parents/carers to develop specific support approaches for attendance, including provision outlined in the pupil's EHC plan. This will include establishing strategies for removing the in-school barriers SEND pupils face, such as support or reasonable adjustments for uniform, transport, routines, access to support in school and lunchtime arrangements
- We will consider adjustments to practice and policies to help meet the needs of pupils who are struggling to attend school, as well as making formal 'reasonable adjustments' under the Equality Act 2010 where a pupil has a disability. Any adjustments will be agreed by, and regularly reviewed with the pupil and their parents/carers
- Where needed, pastoral care will be provided including the application of a time-limited phased return to school when appropriate.

### **3.5. Supporting pupils with physical or mental ill health**

- Aspire academies recognise that many children will experience normal but difficult emotions that make them nervous about attending school, such as worries about friendships or schoolwork. It is important to note that these pupils are still expected to attend school regularly.
- Aspire staff will work alongside families to ensure that such circumstances do not act as a barrier to regular attendance by mitigating anxious feelings in school as much as possible.
- For any pupil with an education health and care plan, Aspire staff will communicate with the local authority where a pupil's attendance falls or they become aware of barriers to attendance that relate to the pupil's needs. As for all children, medical evidence for recording absences should only be needed in a minority of cases.

### **3.6. Pupils with a social worker**

- To facilitate effective working across the local authority, Aspire Academies will inform a pupil's social worker if there are unexplained absences from school or if their name is to be deleted from the school register.

### **3.7. Granting leave of absence:**

- In line with DfE guidance, updated in 2024, Aspire schools will only grant leave of absence for specific circumstances set out in regulation 11 of the 2024 attendance regulations.
- These circumstances are clearly set out in Working Together to improve school attendance, they include:
  - A temporary, time-limited part-time timetable: where the pupil is of compulsory school age and
  - Exceptional circumstances: All schools can grant a leave of absence for other exceptional at their discretion. It must be requested in advance by a parent who the pupil normally lives with.
- Generally, the DfE does not consider a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance. Term time holidays will not be permitted in any of our academies, unless the reasons are genuinely exceptional – for example, to visit a dying relative or attend a wedding of a close family member.

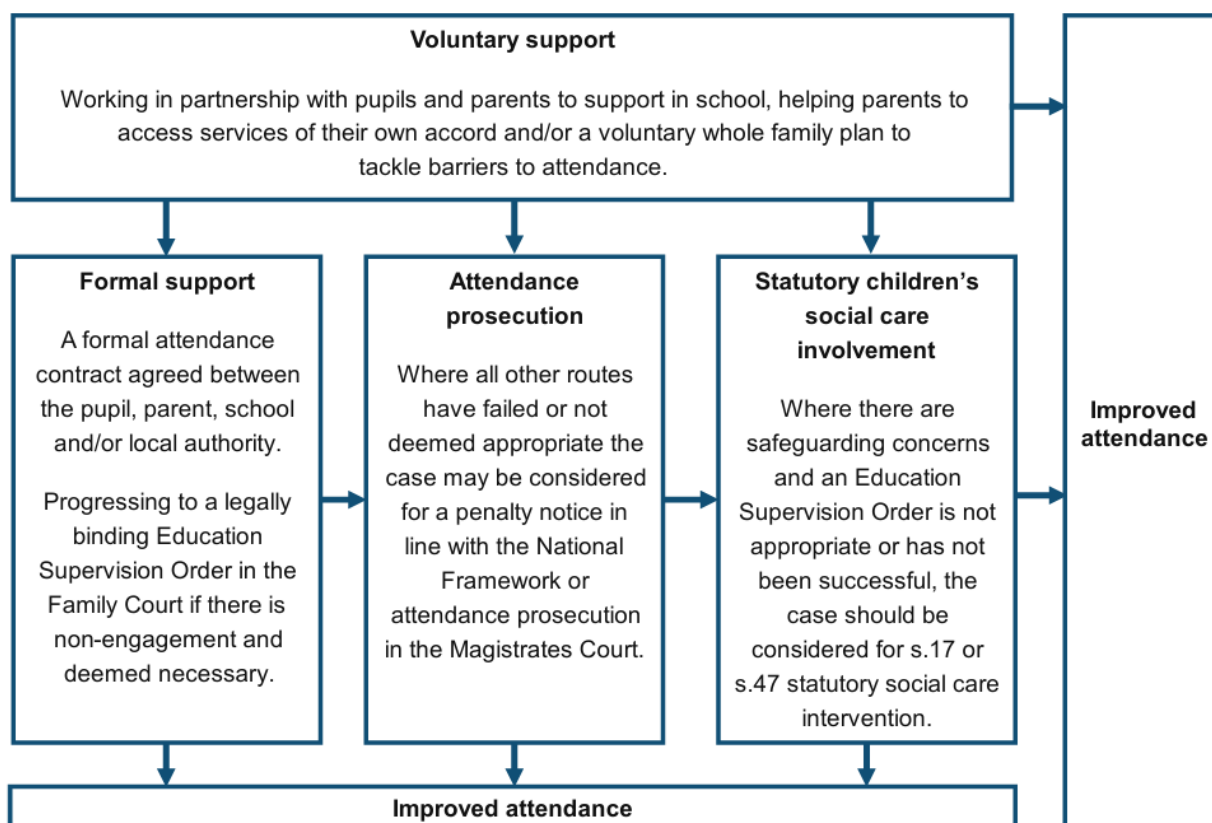
### 3.8. Education off site

- As well as the above leaves of absence, Aspire academies will also allow pupils to be
- absent from the school site for certain educational activities or to attend other schools or settings. These include:
  - To attend an offsite approved educational activity.
  - To participate in an approved sporting activity.

### 3.9. Penalty notices

- A penalty notice is an out of court settlement which is intended to change behaviour without the need for criminal prosecution. Our academy Headteachers reserve the right to issue penalty notices to parents/carers for unauthorised absences and will follow the local code of conduct for issuing fines for unauthorised absences. Aspire will comply with the new national framework to help ensure consistency across the country.
- Headteachers will issue penalty notices to parents as an alternative to prosecution where they have failed to ensure that their child of compulsory school age regularly attends school. These will usually only be issued to the parent or parents who have allowed the absence. They will be issued in line with Local Codes of Conduct which are drawn up and maintained by Nottinghamshire local authority.
- Aspire academies will consider whether a penalty notice is appropriate in each individual case where one of their pupils reaches the national threshold for considering a penalty notice and support will always be provided before legal intervention. In line with the DfE updated guidance, our academies do not have a blanket position of issuing or not issuing penalty notices and will make judgements on each individual case.

### Providing support first before attendance legal intervention



- The threshold for penalty notices is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks. A school week means any week in which there is at least one school session. This can be met with any combination of unauthorised absence (e.g. 4 sessions of holiday taken in term time plus 6 sessions of arriving late after the register closes all within 10 school weeks). These sessions can be consecutive (e.g. 10 sessions of holiday in one week) or not.
- The period of 10 school weeks can also span different terms or school years. When monitoring demonstrates that the threshold has been met, we will refer to the guidance as set out in Working together to improve school attendance to decide whether to issue a penalty notice in each individual case. Fines will follow the amount set out in the guidance which are set out below:
  - The first penalty notice issued to a parent in respect of a particular pupil will be charged at £160 if paid within 28 days. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days.
  - A second penalty notice issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil is charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.
  - In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time (or subsequent times) within those 3 years, alternative action should be taken instead. This will often include considering prosecution.

### 3.10. Notice to improve

- A Notice to Improve is a final opportunity for a parent to engage in support and improve attendance before a penalty notice is issued. If the national threshold has been met and support is appropriate but has not been engaged with or have not worked, a Notice to Improve, issued in line with processes set out in the Local Code of Conduct by the local authority, give parents a final chance to engage.
- The Notice to Improve should include:
  - Details of the pupil's attendance record and details of the offences.
  - The benefits of regular attendance and parents' duty under section 7 of the Education Act 1996.
  - Details of the support provided so far.
  - Opportunities for further support and the option to access previously provided support that was not engaged with.
  - A clear warning that a penalty notice may be issued or prosecution considered if attendance improvement is not secured within the improvement period.
  - A clear timeframe for the improvement period of between 3 and 6 weeks.
  - Details of what sufficient improvement within that timeframe will look like.
  - The grounds on which a penalty notice may be issued before the end of the improvement period.
- What sufficient improvement looks like is decided on a case by case basis by the academy and will be made clear in the Notice to Improve. Where it is clear that improvement is not being made, it may be appropriate to issue a penalty notice before the improvement period has ended. The parent should be informed before a penalty notice is issued if it is before the end of the improvement period.

### 3.11. Attendance contracts

- When necessary, Aspire academies shall consider using an attendance contract. An Attendance contract is a formal written agreement between a parent and the academy or local authority to address irregular attendance at school or alternative provision. Although not legally binding it allows a more formal route to secure engagement with support where a voluntary early help plan has not worked or is not deemed appropriate. Aspire academies will use attendance contracts as a tool to provide support and offer an alternative to prosecution. We recognise that parents cannot be compelled to enter an attendance contract, and we will not agree to proceed with one in a parent's absence.

## 4. Procedures

### 4.1. Aspire academies are committed to:

- Promoting good attendance
- Reducing absences, including persistent absence
- Making sure every pupil has access to full-time education
- Acting early to address patterns of absence
- Building strong relationships with families to ensure pupils have the support in place to attend school.

### 4.2. Any child who is absent from school at the morning or afternoon registration period must have their absence recorded as being authorised, unauthorised or as an approved educational activity [attendance out of school]. Only the Headteacher or a member of staff acting on their behalf can authorise absence. If there is no known reason for the absence at registration, then the absence must be recorded as unauthorised until authorisation is achieved. Before an absence is permanently recorded as unauthorised it must be brought to the attention of the Headteacher

### 4.3. Procedures for recording attendance and absence in all Aspire academies are in line with Working together to improve school attendance 2024. Attendance is recorded daily using the electronic register and all Aspire academies use the revised attendance and absence codes (Aug 2024) and adhere to authorised and unauthorised absence guidance.

### 4.4. Day to day processes

Aspire schools have robust day to day processes to track and follow up absence and poor punctuality. We expect parents to contact the school on day 1 when their child is absent to explain the reason so support can be put in place. Non-attendance will always be followed up as soon as possible after the morning register is taken. If academy staff members have not been informed of a child's absence, a phone call will be made to ensure that the child is safe. If absence continues without explanation, further contact should be made to ensure safeguarding.

- Third Day Absence - Parents are asked to contact school to provide updates as to their child's health or to check in on the ongoing reason.
- Continuing Absence [beyond 5 days] - The Headteacher is informed. A letter or direct contact or both may be initiated, dependent upon circumstances.
- Staff will identify absences that are not explained and will contact parents (foster carers and/or social workers) to understand why and when the pupil will return. Where absence is recorded as unexplained in the attendance register, the correct code should be inputted as soon as the reason is ascertained, but no later than 5 working days after the session.



- Academies hold more than one emergency contact number for each pupil where possible.
- Aspire academies make the necessary statutory data returns to the LA and Secretary of State.

#### **4.5. Frequent absence**

- Frequent absence – e.g. a day a week – is a significant indicator of concern and will always be acted upon. In cases where a pupil begins to develop a pattern of absences, the academy will try to resolve the problem with the parent/s. If this is unsuccessful, the academy will make the necessary referrals to wider partners, including referring to the School Health Adviser if the problem appears to be a medical one.

#### **4.6. Persistent and severe absence**

- Where absence escalates and pupils miss 10% or more of school (equivalent to 1 day or more a fortnight across a full school year), we will work with the relevant agencies to put additional targeted support in place to remove any barriers to attendance and reengage these pupils. In doing so, we will sensitively consider some of the reasons for absence and understand the importance of school as a place of safety and support for children who might be facing difficulties, rather than reaching immediately for punitive approaches. Particular focus will be given by all partners to pupils who are absent from school more than they are present (those missing 50% or more of school). Support may include specific support with attendance or a whole family plan or consideration for an education, health and care plan or an alternative form of educational provision where necessary to overcome the barriers to being in school.
- Aspire staff are committed to supporting pupils back into school following a lengthy or unavoidable period of absence to build confidence and bridge gaps.
- To avoid headline percentages, we regularly inform parents about their child's attendance and absence. We clearly explain the amount of time missed and the impact on the pupil's learning. Aspire schools are committed to holding regular meetings with the parents of pupils who we consider to be vulnerable or are persistently or severely absent to discuss attendance and engagement at school.

#### **4.7. Lateness**

- Morning registration will take place at the start of school. The registers will remain open for 30 minutes. Any pupil arriving after this time will be marked as having an unauthorised absence unless there is an acceptable explanation i.e. school transport was delayed. In cases for example, where the absence at registration was for attending an early morning medical appointment, the appropriate authorised absence code will be entered. Registers in the afternoon will also close 30 minutes after registration. Pupils arriving after the start of school but before the end of the registration period will be treated for statistical purposes, as present, but will be coded as late before registers close.

#### **4.8. Provision of work during absence**

- On occasions, children who are off long term for serious or unavoidable reasons (e.g. medical) may be provided with extra work at home, to be undertaken with a parent. However, in general, this provision will not be available for shorter term absence.

#### **4.9. Absence notes**

- Notes received from parents explaining absence should be kept for the remainder of the academic year. If there are attendance concerns about the pupil that may require further investigation, then the notes may need to be retained for a longer period.

#### **4.10. Attendance awards**

- The very best attendance is always encouraged. The vibrant and spirited life of the school, which drives a culture of opportunity, will motivate children to want to be at school. Praise for excellent attendance is given as are any rewards as appropriate. Currently we do not feel the need to operate a specific system of rewards/awards attached to attendance.

### **5. Monitoring, evaluation and review**

The Trust Board will review this policy at least every three years and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the Trust and its academies.