



ST MARY'S CofE PRIMARY SCHOOL
Islington, London
Let God's light shine through us

ATTENDANCE POLICY
2026–2027

Field	Detail
Policy name	Attendance Policy
Academic year	2026–2027
Statutory basis	Working together to improve school attendance (DfE, July 2026 — statutory); School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024; Education Act 1996
Senior Attendance Champion	Laura Myende
Designated Safeguarding Lead	Laura Myende
Attendance Governor	Rebecca Shillingworth
Approved by	Governing Body, September 23 rd 2026
Review date	Annually, and sooner if guidance or the barriers our families face change
Published	On the school website; sent to parents on joining and at the start of each year

1. Our vision for attendance

At St Mary's, we believe that everyone is precious and loved by God. We aspire to let our light shine in all that we do. We nurture and empower one another to flourish, showing compassion and serving others. Regular attendance is fundamental to this vision: children need to be here to learn, to build relationships, to belong and to experience the opportunities that help them shine.

Our values of Nurture, Aspire, Compassion and Empower shape our approach to attendance. Nurture means knowing children well enough to notice when something is getting in the way. Aspire means holding high expectations for every child and protecting their entitlement to an ambitious education. Compassion means listening carefully, understanding barriers and working alongside families. Empower means helping children and families develop the confidence, routines, voice and support they need for children to attend successfully.

Connection is central to this work. Children are more likely to attend when they feel known, safe and connected: to trusted adults, to friends, to learning, to their family and to the wider life of the school. When attendance becomes difficult, our first question is not simply 'Why is this child absent?' but 'What is getting in the way of this child being here?' We work with children and families to understand barriers, strengthen connection and provide support, while remaining clear that regular attendance is essential to education, wellbeing and safeguarding.

Absence is often a symptom of something else. We therefore work in partnership with families, not against them. Support and early help come first. Legal intervention is a last resort, used where support has not worked, has not been engaged with, or is not appropriate to the circumstances.

2. Legal framework

This policy is written in accordance with:

- Working together to improve school attendance (DfE, July 2026) — statutory guidance which the school must have regard to
- The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024
- The Education Act 1996, sections 434, 437–443 and 444 (the parental duty to secure regular attendance)
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations, as amended, and the National Framework for penalty notices
- The Equality Act 2010, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026

It should be read alongside the statutory guidance on children missing education, supporting pupils at school with medical conditions, arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs, alternative provision, and suspensions and exclusions.

3. The law on attendance: what parents need to know

Every child of compulsory school age has the right to an efficient, full-time education. It is the legal duty of every parent to make sure their child receives that education — and where a child is registered at a school, to ensure they attend that school regularly.

Regular attendance means attending every day the school is open, for the full duration of every session, unless the child is too ill to attend or the school has granted leave of absence in advance.

In this policy, “parent” has the meaning given by the Education Act 1996: all natural parents whether married or not, anyone with parental responsibility, and anyone who has day-to-day care of the child.

4. Attendance and punctuality expectations

4.1 The school day

Session	Time
Gates open / soft start	08:50
Morning register taken	09:00 — a child arriving after this is late
Morning register closes	09:30 — arrival after this is recorded as unauthorised absence (code U)
Afternoon register taken	At the start of the afternoon session
Afternoon register closes	30 minutes after the start of the afternoon session
End of the school day	15:30

The register is taken at the same time for all pupils. By law the register may not be left open for longer than 30 minutes. A child who arrives after the register has closed is recorded as absent for that session, and that absence is unauthorised unless there is an acceptable reason.

Lateness matters. Ten minutes late every day adds up to over six school days lost in a year, and a child who arrives late often misses the start of learning and the settled beginning to the day.

4.2 What we expect of parents

- Ensure your child attends school every day, on time, ready to learn.

- Contact the school on the first day of any absence, before 09:00, explaining the reason and the expected date of return, and contact us again on each subsequent day of absence unless we have agreed otherwise.
- Make medical and dental appointments outside the school day wherever possible, and bring your child in for the rest of the day where an appointment is unavoidable.
- Book holidays outside term time — leave of absence for a holiday will not be granted (see section 7).
- Provide the school with at least two emergency contact numbers, and tell us straight away if they change.
- Talk to us early if your child is finding it hard to come to school. We would much rather help.

4.3 What we expect of pupils

- Attend every day and arrive on time.
- Tell a trusted adult if something is making school hard to come to.

5. Who to contact

If you need to...	Contact
Report an absence or lateness	The school office, before 09:00
Talk about your child's attendance day to day	Class teacher or the Attendance Officer, Lorna Jones
Get more detailed support with attendance	Family Liaison, Bea Fenton
Request a leave of absence	Complete the form at Annex C and return it to the Headteacher at least [10] school days in advance
Raise a concern about how attendance has been handled	The Senior Attendance Champion, Laura Myende, and then the Complaints Procedure

6. Registers, codes and daily processes

6.1 Registers

We keep an admission register (the school roll) and an attendance register electronically, as the law requires. Registers are legal documents. Every entry is preserved for six years, and where an entry is amended the register shows the original entry, the amended entry, the reason, the date, and who made the change.

A child's name can only be removed from the admission register for one of the reasons set out in regulation 9 of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024. We notify the local authority whenever a pupil joins or leaves outside the normal transition points.

6.2 Our daily process

- Registers are taken at the start of the morning session and once in the afternoon, at the same time for every class.
- Where a child is absent and we have not heard from you, we will contact you on the first day — by [text and then telephone] — to find out why. This is a safeguarding measure as much as an attendance one.
- If we cannot reach you, we will work through all emergency contacts. Where we still cannot establish that a child is safe, we will consider a home visit and, if necessary, contact children's social care or the police.
- Any absence recorded as unexplained will be given the correct code as soon as the reason is known, and in any event no later than five school days after the session.
- We will keep you regularly informed about your child's attendance, in plain terms — the days of learning missed, not just a percentage.

6.3 Attendance codes

We use the national attendance and absence codes set out in regulation 10 of the 2024 Regulations. A summary of the codes used most often at St Mary's is at Annex A. Only the Headteacher can decide whether an absence is authorised. A reason given by a parent does not oblige the school to authorise the absence.

7. Illness and medical appointments

If your child is too ill to attend, tell us on the first day and each day thereafter. Code I is used for illness.

Medical evidence is needed only in a small minority of cases. We will not routinely ask for it. We may ask for it where a child's health needs are complex, long-term or frequently recurring, so that we can understand those needs and put the right support or reasonable adjustments in place — not to catch anyone out.

Where a child is absent through illness and we have reasonable grounds to believe they will miss 15 school days or more (consecutively or cumulatively across the year), we must make a sickness return to the local authority. This is so that the right education can be arranged for them, in line with the guidance on children who cannot attend school because of health needs.

The NHS guidance "Is my child too ill for school?" is a helpful starting point when you are unsure.

8. Leave of absence in term time

Leave of absence may only be granted in the specific circumstances set out in regulation 11 of the 2024 Regulations, and must be requested in advance by a parent the child normally lives with. For a primary school, the relevant circumstances are:

- taking part in a regulated performance or employment abroad, under a licence or body of persons approval;
- attending an interview for entry to another educational institution;
- a temporary, time-limited part-time timetable agreed with the school (see section 12);
- other exceptional circumstances, at the Headteacher's discretion.

Holidays in term time will not be authorised. The DfE does not generally consider a need or desire for a holiday, or absence for leisure or recreation, to be an exceptional circumstance. Leave cannot be authorised retrospectively.

Each request for exceptional circumstances is considered individually, on its own facts and background. We do not operate blanket rules under which leave is granted automatically for particular events, and we do not operate blanket rules under which it is refused without thought. Where leave is granted, the Headteacher decides how long it may be for.

The form at Annex C should be submitted at least [10] school days in advance. We will respond in writing. Where a request is refused and the child is taken out of school anyway, the absence will be unauthorised and may be referred to the local authority for a penalty notice.

9. Attendance is a safeguarding matter

A child who is not in school cannot be seen. Absence — and being missing from education — can be a warning sign of neglect, abuse, sexual or criminal exploitation, or a family in crisis. Keeping Children Safe in Education is clear that attendance and safeguarding cannot be separated.

- The Senior Attendance Champion and the Designated Safeguarding Lead meet regularly to discuss pupils causing concern.
- Where a pupil has a social worker or a youth offending team worker, we inform them of any unexplained absence, and if the child's name is to be removed from the register.
- Where a child of compulsory school age is absent for a continuous period of ten school days, or fails to attend regularly, we make an attendance return to the local authority.
- Where severe absence continues for unauthorised reasons after all avenues of support have been provided, this is likely to constitute neglect, and we will make a referral to children's social care.

- Where we cannot establish that a child is safe, or a child cannot be located, we follow the children missing education procedures and make reasonable enquiries jointly with the local authority.

10. Supporting children who find it hard to attend

10.1 Our approach

Some children find school harder to attend than others. Their right to an education is the same as any other child, and our ambition for their attendance is the same — but the support we provide will be different. We work with the child and the family to understand the barrier and remove it.

10.2 Anxiety and emotionally based school avoidance

Many children feel worried about school at times — about friendships, about work, about change. These children are still expected to attend: staying away usually makes the anxiety worse, not better, and a long absence makes returning harder. Our job is to reduce the anxiety in school so that attending becomes possible.

Staff are not expected to diagnose or treat mental health conditions. We will work with the family, and with health services where they are involved, and will consider a time-limited phased return where that is the right way back.

10.3 SEND, disability and medical conditions

- We consider reasonable adjustments to our practice and policies for any child struggling to attend, and make formal reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 where a child has a disability.
- We work in partnership with parents to identify and remove in-school barriers — which may include uniform, transport, routines, lunchtime arrangements, or access to support.
- Where a child has an EHC plan, we tell the local authority if attendance falls or if barriers emerge that relate to the child's needs, and we work with them to review the plan where needed.
- We encourage appointments and interventions to be scheduled outside the school day wherever possible.
- Adjustments are agreed with the child and their parents and reviewed regularly.

10.4 Young carers, children with a social worker, and other groups

Some children have responsibilities at home which make regular attendance harder. Young carers are recorded in the school census, and where a caring role is contributing to absence we work with the family and the local authority to put support in place, including a young carer's needs assessment where appropriate.

We pay particular attention in our data to children with a social worker, looked-after and previously looked-after children, children in kinship care, children eligible for free school meals, children with SEND, and any group in our community whose attendance has historically been lower than their peers'.

11. Using data to target support

- Attendance is monitored and analysed weekly, at individual, class, year group and cohort level, including punctuality — not just headline percentages.
- Half-termly, termly and annual analysis looks for patterns: particular days, particular codes, particular groups.
- We benchmark our attendance against local, regional and national figures and against similar schools.
- Class teachers receive regular attendance reports so they can have informed conversations with children and families. The DSL, SENCO and pupil premium lead receive the data relevant to their roles.
- We share daily attendance data with the DfE from our management information system, as state-funded schools are required to do, and use the View Your Education Data tool.
- The Senior Attendance Champion reports to the Governing Body each term.

12. Persistent and severe absence

Category	What it means and what we do
Attendance below 96%	Monitored. The class teacher or Attendance Officer will make early, supportive contact before a pattern sets in.
Persistent absence — below 90%	Missing a day or more a fortnight across the year. We meet the family, listen, agree an attendance support plan, and review it. Support is offered before any legal step is considered.
Severe absence — below 50%	The child is out of school more than they are in it. These children are our highest priority. We agree a joint plan with the local authority and other partners, and consider whether an EHC needs assessment, alternative provision or a social care assessment is required.

At every stage we consider the reasons for absence sensitively, and remember that school should be a place of safety and support rather than reaching immediately for punitive approaches.

13. Part-time timetables

Every child of compulsory school age is entitled to a full-time education. In very exceptional circumstances, and only where it is in the child's best interests, a temporary part-time timetable may be agreed. A part-time timetable will never be used to manage behaviour.

Any part-time timetable will: be agreed with the parent the child normally lives with; have a clear purpose and form part of a wider support, healthcare or reintegration plan; have regular review dates involving the child and parents; and have a proposed end date after which full-time attendance resumes. Where the child has a social worker or an EHC plan, we involve them and the local authority.

14. Working with the local authority and other partners

- We take part in Targeting Support Meetings with our named contact in the Islington School Attendance Support Team, at least termly, to agree joint action for severely absent pupils and for persistently absent pupils whose barriers need a multi-agency response.
- We make the statutory returns required of us: new pupil and deletion returns, attendance returns (pupils absent for a continuous period of ten school days, or failing to attend regularly, where the absence is unauthorised), and sickness returns (15 days or more).
- We refer families to early help and Family Help where the barriers to attendance sit beyond the school gates, and contribute to whole-family plans.
- Local authority officers are permitted by law to access our attendance and admission registers.

15. Legal intervention

Legal intervention is a last resort, used where support has not worked, has not been engaged with, or was never appropriate to the circumstances — for example an unauthorised term-time holiday. Decisions are made case by case, having regard to our safeguarding duties.

15.1 Support first

Before any legal step, we will normally have: met the family and listened to the barriers; agreed an attendance support plan; made referrals to any services that could help; and given the family a clear explanation of what will happen if attendance does not improve. Where a family engages and attendance improves, that is a success and no further action follows.

15.2 Formal support

Where voluntary support has not worked, support may be formalised through an attendance contract — a written agreement between the parent and the school or local authority, setting out what the parent will do and what support the school and local authority will provide. It is not legally binding and cannot be imposed. Where a contract is not appropriate or has not worked, the local authority may apply to the Family Court for an education supervision order.

15.3 Notice to Improve

Where a case would otherwise meet the threshold for a penalty notice but support has not yet been offered or fully exhausted, the local authority may issue a Notice to Improve. This is a final chance for a family to engage with support and improve attendance before a penalty notice is issued.

15.4 Penalty notices

Penalty notices are issued by the local authority. The national threshold at which a penalty notice must be considered is ten sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling ten school week period. A school day is two sessions, so ten sessions is usually five school days. The sessions do not have to be consecutive, they may be made up of any combination of unauthorised absence — including unauthorised holiday, and including arrival after the register has closed — and the ten-week period may span terms or school years.

Offence	Penalty
First penalty notice	£160 per parent, per child, payable within 28 days — reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days.
Second penalty notice within 3 years (same parent, same child)	£160 per parent, per child, payable within 28 days. No reduced rate.
Third offence within 3 years	No further penalty notice may be issued. The local authority must consider other action, including prosecution.

A penalty notice is issued to each parent, for each child. There is no right of appeal, and payment cannot be made in instalments. Paying the penalty discharges the offence and avoids prosecution.

15.5 Prosecution

Where a parent fails to secure their child's regular attendance, they commit an offence under section 444 of the Education Act 1996. Prosecution is a last resort, used where other routes have failed or are not appropriate. On conviction, a magistrates' court may impose a fine of up to £2,500, a community order, or a term of imprisonment of up to three months, and may make a parenting order. A conviction may appear on a future DBS certificate.

16. Promoting and rewarding good attendance

- Attendance is celebrated in assemblies and in class, at year group, class and individual level.
- We recognise improvement, not only high attendance — so that a child working hard to come back to school is not overlooked in favour of a child who has never found it difficult.
- Rewards are used sensitively and are never applied in a way that penalises a child for an absence outside their control, or that would disadvantage a child with a disability or long-term medical condition.

17. Roles and responsibilities

Who	Responsibility
Governing Body	Promotes attendance across the school's ethos and policies; ensures leaders meet their statutory duties; reviews and challenges attendance data at board meetings; ensures staff receive adequate training; ensures the policy is published.

Who	Responsibility
Headteacher	Overall accountability for attendance; decides whether an absence is authorised; decides on leave of absence requests; ensures the register is kept lawfully.
Senior Attendance Champion — Laura Myende	A member of the leadership team with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance. Sets the vision, maintains the systems, holds a strong grasp of the data, leads formal conversations with families, liaises with the local authority, and evaluates the impact of what we do.
Attendance Officer — Lorna Jones	Day-to-day management of registers, first-day calling, following up unexplained absence, maintaining records, preparing data.
Designated Safeguarding Lead — Laura Myende	Ensures attendance concerns are considered as safeguarding concerns; oversees children missing education; leads referrals to children's social care.
All staff	Take the register accurately and on time; model and communicate high expectations; notice and report changes in a child's attendance or demeanour; build the relationships with families that good attendance depends on.
Parents	Secure their child's regular attendance; report absence promptly; engage with support; request leave in advance.
Family Liaison — Bea Fenton	Works with children and families where wider family circumstances affect attendance; helps identify barriers, coordinates practical and relational support, and links families with appropriate services.
Attendance Governor — Rebecca Shillingworth	Provides strategic oversight and challenge on attendance, reviews patterns and impact, and assures the Governing Body that statutory duties and the school's support-first approach are being implemented.

18. Training

All staff receive training on attendance at induction and as part of ongoing professional development, covering the importance of attendance, the fact that absence is usually a symptom of wider circumstances, the law and the keeping of registers, our systems for following up absence, and how we work with partners. Staff with a specific attendance role receive additional training, including on analysing attendance data.

19. Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Headteacher, the Senior Attendance Champion and the Attendance Governor, and sooner if the law or statutory guidance changes or if the barriers our families face change. In reviewing it we will seek the views of pupils and parents. It is published on the school website, sent to parents when a child joins, and drawn to their attention at the start of each school year and whenever it is updated.

Annex A: Attendance and absence codes

The codes below are those used most often at St Mary's. The full list is in regulation 10 of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.

Code	Meaning	Counts as
/ \	Present (morning / afternoon)	Present
L	Late arrival, before the register closed	Present
B	Attending an off-site approved educational activity	Present (not an absence)
V	Educational visit or trip	Present (not an absence)
K	Attending provision arranged by the local authority	Present (not an absence)
I	Illness — unable to attend because of sickness	Authorised absence
M	Medical or dental appointment	Authorised absence
C	Leave of absence granted by the school for exceptional circumstances	Authorised absence
C1	Participating in a regulated performance or employment abroad	Authorised absence
C2	Part-time timetable — not expected to attend this session	Authorised absence
R	Religious observance — a day set apart by the child's religious body	Authorised absence
Y	Unable to attend because of an unavoidable cause (e.g. exceptional local conditions, transport failure)	Not counted as an absence
G	Holiday in term time not authorised by the school	Unauthorised absence
U	Arrived after the register closed	Unauthorised absence
O	Absent for a reason not accepted as valid by the school	Unauthorised absence
N	Reason for absence not yet provided	Unauthorised absence

Annex B: Escalation at a glance

Stage	Trigger	Action
1	Absence not explained by 09:00	Same-day contact by the office. All emergency contacts tried. Safeguarding check if the child cannot be accounted for.
2	Attendance drifting below 96%, or a pattern emerging	Early, friendly contact from the class teacher or Attendance Officer. Ask what is going on. Offer help.
3	Attendance below 90% (persistent absence)	Meeting with parents. Barriers identified. Written attendance support plan agreed, with a review date. Referrals made where needed.
4	Support plan not working or not engaged with	Formal meeting led by the Senior Attendance Champion, with the local authority contact. Consequences explained clearly, alongside the help still available. Case raised at the Targeting Support Meeting.
5	Still no improvement, or unauthorised holiday	Referral to the local authority for formal support (attendance contract), a Notice to Improve, or a penalty notice.
6	All routes exhausted, or severe absence with safeguarding concern	Education supervision order, prosecution, or referral to children's social care.

Annex C: Leave of absence request

Complete and return to the Headteacher at least [10] school days before the requested absence. Leave cannot be granted retrospectively. Holidays will not be authorised.

Field	Detail
Child's name and class	
Names of any siblings at the school	
First day of absence	
Date of return to school	
Total school days requested	
The exceptional circumstances relied on	
Parent name and signature	
Date of request	

School use only
Decision: Authorised / Not authorised
Reason for the decision: _____
Code to be applied: C / C1 / G
Headteacher signature: _____ Date: _____

Annex D: Legislation and guidance

- Working together to improve school attendance (DfE, July 2026) — statutory
- Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance (DfE)
- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024
- Education Act 1996, in particular sections 434, 437–443 and 444
- Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations, as amended — and the National Framework for penalty notices
- Children missing education (DfE) — statutory
- Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions (DfE) — statutory
- Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs (DfE) — statutory
- Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance (DfE) — non-statutory
- Suspension and permanent exclusion (DfE) — statutory guidance applying from 26 July 2026
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 — statutory
- Equality Act 2010
- Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026
- Islington local code of conduct for penalty notices

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 will introduce Children Not in School registers and related local authority duties, with commencement expected in 2027. This policy will be updated when those provisions and the accompanying statutory guidance come into force.

Related school policies

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Behaviour Policy
- SEND Policy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy
- Complaints Procedure