Westmorland & Furness Council

Model attendance policy for schools

June 2026

Adopted by St Martin and St Mary CofE Primary School – September 2026

Inclusion and Access to Education, Education and Inclusion, Children's Services,
Westmorland and Furness Council, South Lakeland House, Lowther Street, Kendal, LA9 4DQ

westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

CONTENTS

Page

1. Introduction 1

2. Legal framework 1

3. Safeguarding 2

4. Categorising absence 3

5. Deletions from the register 6

6. Roles and responsibilities 6

7. Using attendance data 8

8. Support systems 9

9. Legal interventions 10

1. Introduction

1.1 Regular school attendance is essential if children are to achieve their full potential.

1.2 St Martin and St Mary CE Primary School believes that regular school attendance is the key to enabling children to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who can realise their full potential and make a positive contribution to their community.

1.3 St Martin and St Mary CE Primary School values all pupils. As set out in this policy, we will build strong relationships with families to ensure pupils have the support in place to attend school and identify the reasons for poor attendance.

1.4 St Martin and St Mary CE Primary School recognises that attendance is a matter for the whole school community. Our Attendance Policy should not be viewed in isolation; it is a strand that runs through all aspects of school improvement, supported by our policies on admissions, safeguarding, anti-bullying, child protection, safeguarding and behaviour and inclusive learning. This policy takes into account the Human Rights Act 1998, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Race Relations Act 2000.

1.5 This policy aims to:

- promote good attendance;
- reduce absence, including persistent and severe absence;
- ensure every pupil has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled;
- promote early identification to address patterns of absence;
- promote and support punctuality in attending lessons.

2. Legal framework

2.1 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 School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 (legislation.gov.uk)

The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024 (legislation.gov.uk)

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

2.2 Legal proceedings are a statutory intervention used by the local authority against the parents of registered pupils who fail to attend regularly at school. Parents whose children are on a school register and fail to ensure the regular and punctual attendance of their child(ren), may be guilty of an offence under Section 444(1) or 444(1A) of the Education Act 1996 and the authority may take enforcement action through the courts to secure regular attendance.

2.3 Legal proceedings are not used as a punishment to parents for their pupil's absence from school; they are a supportive measure intended to make parents realise the importance of attendance and to avoid further absence from school.

2.4 Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act states that parents must ensure that children of compulsory school age receive efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. A prosecution can take place against any person who has parental responsibility for the child's education or who has care of the child. Parents have a legal duty to make sure that their children are properly educated. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly and arrive on time. If you allow your child to be absent from school without good reason, the school will not authorise the absence, you may be committing an offence, and you could be issued with a penalty notice or prosecuted.

2.5 A child is of Compulsory School Age at the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday. A child ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June of the school year in which they reach the age of 16.

2.6 Under the Education Act 1996, the local authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that parents secure education for children of compulsory school age and where necessary, use legal enforcement.

2.7 The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, require schools to take an attendance register twice a day, once at the start of the morning session and then again during the afternoon session.

2.8 The register must record whether the pupil was:

- present;
- absent;
- present at approved educational activity; or
- unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

3. Safeguarding

3.1 Every pupil should be able learn in an enjoyable and safe environment and be protected from harm. We respect and value all children and are committed to providing a caring, friendly and safe environment for all our pupils so they can learn and participate in all school activities in a relaxed and secure atmosphere.

3.2 Attending school regularly promotes the welfare and safety of children whilst they are not in the care of their parents/carers. Safeguarding is about offering early help and support to children and families and difficulties with attendance and lateness may be signs that something is worrying the child or that there are difficulties within the family. Poor or irregular attendance, persistent lateness, or children missing from education may be considered a safeguarding matter if this places a child at risk of harm.

3.3. Safeguarding the interests of each child is everyone's responsibility and within the context of this school, safeguarding and promoting the welfare and life opportunities for children encompasses attendance, behaviour management, health and safety, access to the curriculum and anti- bullying, protecting children from abuse and neglect, online safety, radicalisation and extremism, FGM and CSE.

3.4 More information on safeguarding and the protection of children can be found in the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

3.5 In order to allow us to safeguard the children in our care it is important that parents and carers provide the school with their current contact details and provide at least three other contact numbers in case of emergency.

3.6 It is also important for parents inform the school of any specific vulnerability in relation to their child or home circumstances.

4. Categorising absence

4.1 Where pupils of compulsory school age are recorded as absent, the register must show whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

4.2 Absence can only be authorised by the headteacher/principal and cannot be authorised by parents. All absences will be treated as unauthorised unless a satisfactory explanation for the pupil's absence has been received.

4.3 Parents must advise the school by telephone on the first day of absence and provide the school with an expected date of return. This should be followed up in the form of a written note from the parent/carer, though verbal explanations may be acceptable where this is considered appropriate.

4.4 Absence will be categorised as follows:

4.4.1 <u>Illness</u>
Parents may be asked to provide medical evidence to allow the headteacher to authorise absence where appropriate. This will usually be in the form of an appointment card, prescription, etc.

4.4.2 <u>Medical/dental appointments</u>
Parents are advised where possible to make medical and dental appointments outside of the school day. Where this is not possible, pupils must attend school for part of the day. Parents must show the appointment card to school.

4.4.3 Other authorised circumstances
This relates to where there is cause for absence due to exceptional circumstances.

4.4.4 Suspended or permanently excluded (no alternative provision made)
Suspension or permanent exclusion from attending school is counted as an authorised absence. The child's class teacher/form tutor/head of year will make arrangements for work to be sent home. Alternative provision must be arranged from the sixth consecutive school day of any suspension or permanent exclusion and the appropriate attendance code should be used to record this.

4.4.5 Religious Observance
St Martin and St Mary CE Primary School acknowledges the multi-faith nature of British society and recognises that on some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside school holiday periods or weekends and this necessitates a consideration, by written request by the parent, of authorised absence.

4.4.6 Study leave
Study leave may be granted for Year 11 pupils approaching GCSE examinations. School will offer in school study programmes during this period to reduce absence levels.

4.4.7 Traveller absence
It is expected that Traveller children, in common with all other children, are to attend school as regularly and as frequently as possible.

To protect Traveller parents from unreasonable prosecution for non-attendance, the Education Act 1996, section 444(6), states that a Traveller parent is safe from prosecution if their child accrues 200 attendances (ie 200 half days) in the year preceding the absence. To help ensure continuity of education for pupils, when their parent(s) is travelling for occupational purposes in England it is expected that the pupil should attend a mainstream school where their parent(s) is travelling and be dual registered.

St Martin and St Mary CE Primary School will be regarded as the base school if it is the school where the child normally attends when they are not travelling. However, the pupil must have attended in the last 18 months. Traveller children can register at other schools temporarily while away from their base school; in such cases, the pupil's school place at St Martin and St Mary CE Primary School will be kept open for them whilst travelling. This is to protect them from unfairly losing their place at their school of usual attendance.

St Martin and St Mary CE Primary School can only effectively operate as the child's base school if it is engaged in on-going dialogue with Traveller families. This means that parents must:

- advise of their forthcoming travelling patterns before they happen; and
- inform the school regarding proposed return dates.

St Martin and St Mary CE Primary School will authorise absence of Traveller children if we are satisfied that a family is travelling for work or trade purposes and has given indication that they intend to return.

Traveller children will be recorded as attending an approved educational activity when:

- the child is on roll and attending another visited school;
- the child is undertaking supervised educational activity under the jurisdiction of another local authority's Traveller Education Service;

Where Traveller children are registered pupils at a school and are known to be present either at a site (official or otherwise) or in a house and are not attending school, the absence will be investigated in the same way as that for any pupil and appropriate statutory action may be undertaken.

4.4.8 Late arrival

Registration begins at 8:40am; pupils arriving after this time will be marked as present but arriving late. The register will close at 9am *(no more than thirty minutes after the opening of the register)*; pupils arriving after the close of register will be recorded as late (code U). This is not authorised and will count as an absence for that school session and statutory action may be taken where appropriate.

On arrival after the close of register, pupils must report to the school office to ensure that we can be responsible for their health and safety whilst they are in school.

The absence will only be authorised if a satisfactory explanation for the late arrival can be provided, for example, attendance at a medical appointment.

The absence will be recorded as unauthorised if the pupil has arrived late without justifiable cause.

4.4.9 Unauthorised absence

Absence will not be authorised unless parents have provided a satisfactory explanation and that it has been accepted as such by the headteacher.

4.5 All requests for leave of absence will be responded to in writing outlining the conditions of leave granted. Please complete an absence request form. These can be downloaded from the website or requested from the school office.

4.5.1 If a pupil fails to return and contact with the parents has not been made or received, school may take the pupil off the school's roll in compliance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024. This means that the child will lose their school place.

4.5.2 If the permission to take leave is not granted and the parent takes their child out of school the absence will be unauthorised and the school may refer to the local authority. Fixed penalty notices will be issued in accordance with Westmorland and Furness Council's code of conduct.

5. Deletions from the register

5.1 **In accordance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, pupils will only be deleted from the register when one of the following circumstances applies:**

- **The school is replaced by another school on a School Attendance Order.**
- **The School Attendance Order is revoked by the local authority.**
- **The pupil has ceased to be of compulsory school age.**
- **Permanent exclusion has occurred and procedures have been completed.**
- **Death of a pupil.**
- **Transfer between schools.**
- **Parent notifies the school in writing they are withdrawing the child to be educated otherwise than at school.**
- **Failure to return from a period of leave after both the school and the local authority have tried to locate the pupil.**
- **Where a pupil has been detained under a sentence of detention and here are reasonable grounds to believe the pupil will not return to the school after the period of detention. This will be agreed in discussion with the Youth Justice Service.**
- **20 days continuous unauthorised absence and both the local authority and school have tried to locate the pupil and agree to deletion from the register.**
- **Left the school but not known where he/she has gone after both the school and the local authority have tried to locate the pupil.**

5.2 St Martin and St Mary CE Primary School will follow Westmorland and Furness Council's Children Missing Education Procedures when a pupil's whereabouts are unknown.

6. Roles and responsibilities

6.1 The governing board

The governing board 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.

If you have a link governor for attendance, or a committee responsible for attendance, add details of their role in the monitoring of pupil attendance (this will often be the governor responsible for safeguarding).

6.2 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 pupils.
- Monitoring the impact of any implemented attendance strategies.

6.3 The designated senior leader responsible for school attendance

The designated senior leader 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.
- Arranging calls and meetings with parents to discuss attendance issues.
- Delivering targeted intervention and support to pupils and families.
- Working with the named LA Attendance Support Officer to agree actions for pupils whose attendance is a concern and support strategies are not working.

The designated senior leader responsible for attendance is Charlotte Casey and can be contacted via 015394 43622 or ccasey@windermere.cumbria.sch.uk.

6.4 The attendance officer

The school attendance officer is responsible for:

- Monitoring and analysing attendance data (see section 7).
- 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 LA Attendance Support Officers to tackle persistent absence.

The team can be contacted at: Attendance@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

6.5 Class teachers

Class teachers are responsible for recording attendance on a daily basis, using the correct codes, and submitting this information to the school office via Arbor before 9am and 1pm.

6.6 School admin staff

School admin staff will:

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

6.7 Parents/carers

Parents/carers are expected to:

- Make sure their child attends every morning on time.
- Call the school to report their child's absence before 9am on the day of the absence and each subsequent day of absence, and advise when they are expected to return.
- Provide the school with more than one emergency contact number for their child.
- Ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day.

6.8 Pupils

Pupils are expected to:

- Attend school every day on time.

7. Using attendance data

7.1 The school will:

- Monitor attendance and absence data half-termly, termly, and yearly across the school and at an individual pupil level.
- Identify whether there are groups of children whose absences may be a cause for concern.

Pupil-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.

7.2 Analysing attendance

The school will:

- Analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify pupils or cohorts that need additional support with their attendance, and use this analysis to provide targeted support to these pupils and their families.
- Look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns.

7.3 Using data to improve attendance

The school will:

- Provide regular attendance reports to class teachers and other school leaders, to facilitate discussions with pupils 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.

7.4 Reducing persistent and severe absence

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

The school will:

- Use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence.
- Hold regular meetings with the parents of pupils who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable, or are persistently or severely absent, to discuss attendance and engagement at school.
- Provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance.

8. Support systems

8.1 Schools recognise that poor attendance is often an indication of difficulties and trauma in a child's life. This may be related to problems at home and/or in school. Parents should make school aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance and/or behaviour in school, for example, bereavement, divorce/separation, incidents of domestic abuse. This will help the school identify any additional support that may be required. It is expected that the child and their family work collaboratively with school to identify the anxiety-based school avoidance resources most appropriate for support and to accept the support that is offered or advised.

8.2 St Martin and St Marcy CE Primary School also recognise that some pupils are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance, for example, those pupils with special educational needs, those with physical or mental health needs, migrant and refugee pupils and looked after children.

8.3 The school will implement a range of strategies to support improved attendance for all pupils. Strategies used will include:

- Escalation of attendance approach / graduated approach.
- Attendance contracts.
- Attendance report cards.
- Referrals to support agencies such as early help or family hubs.
- Pupil Voice Activities.
- Anxiety-based attendance avoidance materials.
- Trauma-informed approaches.
- Time limited part-time timetables.
- Inclusion resources.
- Reintegration support packages.

8.4 Where parents fail or refuse to engage with the support offered and further unauthorised absence occurs, St Martin and St Mary CE Primary School will consider the use of legal sanctions.

9. Legal interventions

9.1 Prosecution

Where intervention fails to bring about an improvement in attendance, the local authority will be notified and legal action in the Magistrates' Court may be considered however; initiating prosecution proceedings is a serious step that is normally taken by an Attendance Support Officer or other relevant officer at the LA.

All alternatives to prosecution will be considered and discounted ahead of considering prosecution. These include Attendance Contracts, Penalty Notices or an Education Supervision Order.

9.1.1 Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 states that if a parent fails to ensure the regular school attendance of their child if he/she is a registered pupil at a school and is of compulsory school age, then they are guilty of an offence.

9.1.2 A parent found guilty of this offence can be fined up to £2,500 and/or be imprisoned for a period of up to three months.

9.1.3 Alternatives to Section 444 prosecution are Attendance Contracts, Penalty Notices or an Education Supervision Order.

9.2 Attendance contracts

An attendance contract is a voluntary agreement between school and the parent, it can also be extended to include the child and any other agencies offering support to resolve any difficulties leading to improved attendance.

9.2.1 The contract will outline attendance targets and will detail agreed actions that will help to achieve the target. The contract will be reviewed regularly.

9.2.2 The contract can be used as evidence in a prosecution should parents fail to carry out agreed actions.

9.3 Penalty Notices

Penalty Notices will be considered when:

- A pupil is absent from school and the absence has not been authorised by the school.
- A pupil has accrued unauthorised absence without reasons provided and/or accepted as exceptional by the headteacher/principal.

9.3.1 A Penalty Notice gives the parent the opportunity to discharge themselves of their legal responsibility if a £160 fine is paid within 28 days. For a first penalty notice there is usually the opportunity to pay a reduced amount of £80 if paid within 21 days of the date the Notice was issued.

9.3.2 Failure to pay the Penalty Notice may result in a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

9.3.3 Penalty Notices will be used in accordance with Westmorland and Furness Council's Penalty Notice Code of Conduct.