



Attendance Policy

Forest Oak School & Merstone School

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V2025.1 Author K Poxon

Contents

1. Policy Statement.....	3
2. Aims.....	3
3. Roles & Responsibilities.....	3
4. Registration Procedures.....	4
Forest Oak.....	4
Merstone.....	5
5. Authorised and Unauthorised Absence.....	5
6. Safeguarding & Attendance.....	5
7. Improving Attendance: Graduated Response.....	6
8. Leave of Absence in Term Time.....	6
9. Pupils with Medical Needs & SEND.....	7
10. Reintegration After Absence.....	7
11. Use of Data.....	7
12. Local Authority Involvement.....	7
13. Communication with Parents/Carers.....	8
14. Monitoring & Review.....	8
15. Barriers to Attendance & Learning.....	8
16. Children Missing Education (CME).....	9
17 Removal from Roll.....	11

1. Policy Statement

Forest Oak School and Merstone School are committed to promoting and sustaining high levels of attendance for all pupils. As special schools, we recognise that good attendance is essential to ensure pupils access a broad, balanced, and ambitious curriculum that meets their individual needs.

Regular attendance is also a key safeguarding expectation.

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2025 states that schools must “robustly monitor attendance as part of safeguarding practice” and “act promptly where patterns of absence indicate risk, vulnerability or unmet need.”

We work collaboratively with parents/carers, the Local Authority, and external agencies to remove barriers to attendance and ensure every child can attend school safely and consistently.

2. Aims

This policy aims to:

Promote high attendance and punctuality for all pupils.

Ensure attendance is understood as a safeguarding responsibility.

Identify concerns early and provide timely, graduated support.

Ensure statutory responsibilities are met in line with the **Education Act 1996, School Attendance Regulations**, and local authority procedures.

Follow best practice from **Working Together to Improve School Attendance (DfE 2022)** and **KCSIE 2025**.

Use a trauma-informed and inclusive approach that takes account of SEND and individual pupil needs.

3. Roles & Responsibilities

3.1 Governing Body

- Ensures attendance is monitored rigorously.
- Scrutinises data for persistent and severe absence.
- Ensures staffing, training, and systems support high attendance.

3.2 Executive Headteacher Kieran Grealish

- Ensures compliance with statutory and safeguarding expectations.

3.3 Strategic Attendance Lead Kendrick Poxon (Deputy Headteacher and Lead DSL Across Both Schools

- Holds overall responsibility for strategic attendance across both schools.
- Oversees policy implementation and consistent practice.
- Chairs attendance review meetings.
- Liaises with EPAS and external agencies.

3.4 School Attendance Leads Beverly Sharpe (Merstone); Sam Pitt (Forest Oak) & Administration Teams.

- Maintain accurate registers.
- Monitor late arrivals and absence patterns.
- Contact parents/carers daily to establish reasons for absence.
- Trigger Safe & Well checks where appropriate.

3.5 Teachers & Pastoral Staff

- Promote the importance of attendance within the school environment.
- Report absence concerns immediately.
- Support reintegration following periods of absence.

3.6 Parents/Carers

- Ensure their child attends regularly and punctually.
- Contact the school to report absence on the first morning.
- Engage with the school regarding support plans or interventions.

3.7 Pupils

- Attend school when well enough to do so.
- Engage in support offered to improve attendance.

4. Registration Procedures

Forest Oak

Doors open at 8:30am and close at 8:40am. After this time pupils should go to main reception. Morning registration is from 8:40 to 8:45am. After 8:45 a late mark will be given. After 9:10am a late mark and an unauthorized absence will be given.

Afternoon registration is from 1:55 to 2pm.

School finishes at 3pm.

Merstone

Doors open at 9am and close at 9:10am. After this time pupils should go to main reception. Morning registration is from 9 to 9:15am. After 9:15 a late mark and an unauthorized absence will be given.

Afternoon registration is from 1:30 to 1:35pm.

School finishes at 3:15pm.

5. Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

5.1 Authorised Absence

May include:

Illness (where the school is satisfied the child is too unwell to attend).

Medical or therapy appointments.

Exceptional circumstances authorised in advance by the Executive Headteacher.

Religious observance.

5.2 Unauthorised Absence

Includes:

Holidays in term time unless agreed by the Headteacher.

Absence without explanation or where reason is not accepted by school.

Persistent lateness after registers close.

Parental decisions to keep children at home without medical/ professional advice.

A pupil becomes a **Persistent Absentee** when their attendance drops below **90%**.

6. Safeguarding & Attendance

Under **KCSIE 2025**, attendance is a core safeguarding function.

Both schools:

- Treat **unexplained absence** as a safeguarding concern.

- Complete **daily first-day contact** checks.
 - Conduct **Safe & Well checks** where no contact is made within 3 days – sooner if concerns justify this.
 - Escalate to **MASH, Police, or EPAS** when a pupil cannot be located or risk indicators are present.
 - Monitor patterns such as avoidance, refusal, or unexplained repeated illness.
 - Attendance data feeds directly into safeguarding systems including chronology, MyConcern/CPOMS, TAF meetings, CIN/CP processes, and EHCP reviews.
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7. Improving Attendance: Graduated Response

Forest Oak and Merstone implement a structured, supportive, and consistent model (see **Appendix 1: Attendance Flowchart**).

Steps include:

- **Day 1–3:** First-day contact, repeated attempts, formal message.
- **Day 3+:** Safe & Well visit if no valid explanation.
- **Weekly Review:** Attendance Team analysis of persistent/erratic absence.

Support Plans:

- Attendance Support Plan
- Pastoral/ELSA support
- Reasonable adjustments
- Early Help referral
- **EPAS Engagement:** If attendance does not improve.

Formal processes:

- Penalty Notices
 - Attendance contracts
 - Legal intervention where statutory expectations not met.
 - **Placement Review:** Considered where attendance remains low over two terms and all support pathways have been exhausted.
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8. Leave of Absence in Term Time

In line with statutory regulations and Solihull Local Authority guidance:

- Leave will **not** be authorised except in **exceptional circumstances**.
- All requests must be submitted in writing at least 2 weeks in advance.

- Holidays in term time will not be authorized unless agreed with the Headteacher.
 - Ten or more unauthorised sessions may result in a **Penalty Notice**.
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9. Pupils with Medical Needs & SEND

Many of our pupils have complex needs. We follow DfE guidance on “Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions in Schools” and ensure:

- Reintegration plans where required.
 - Reasonable adjustments.
 - Flexible approaches informed by EHCPs.
 - Multi-agency collaboration with health and therapy teams.
 - However, high expectations for attendance remain for all pupils wherever possible.
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10. Reintegration After Absence

Where a pupil has a period away from school due to illness, anxiety, or another barrier, we provide:

- Staged reintegration timetable if needed.
 - Pastoral support and check-ins.
 - Wellbeing/ELSA sessions.
 - Catch-up learning opportunities.
 - Home learning during prolonged absence.
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11. Use of Data

Both schools will:

- Analyse attendance patterns weekly.
 - Track persistent absence and lateness.
 - Report concerns to governors termly.
 - Share information with EPAS, social care, and transport where appropriate.
 - Maintain accurate registers as legal documents.
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12. Local Authority Involvement

We work closely with:

- **EPAS (Education Participation & Advisory Service)**

- **MASH**
- **SEND & Inclusion Services**
- **Early Help**
- **Children's Social Care**

Schools will refer to EPAS where:

- persistent absence continues despite support;
 - families fail to engage;
 - statutory intervention may be required.
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13. Communication with Parents/Carers

Parents will be:

- Contacted on each day of unexplained absence.
 - Informed if attendance falls below expected levels.
 - Invited to attendance meetings where needed.
 - Supported to address barriers.
 - Escalated to statutory processes where attendance does not improve.
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14. Monitoring & Review

This policy will be updated immediately if **KCSIE** or DfE attendance guidance is revised.

15. Barriers to Attendance & Learning

Forest Oak and Merstone Schools recognise that pupils may face a wide range of barriers that affect their ability to attend regularly and engage in learning. As specialist settings, we work proactively to identify these barriers early and provide tailored interventions. This approach aligns with **Working Together to Improve School Attendance (DfE 2022)** and **KCSIE 2025**, which emphasise the importance of addressing unmet needs as part of safeguarding practice.

Barriers may relate to:

- **Medical or health needs**, including long-term or fluctuating conditions.
- **Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)**.
- **Emotional wellbeing or mental health difficulties**, including anxiety or school-based avoidance.
- **Family or social factors**, including changes in home life or external pressures.

- **Transport or logistical challenges**, including reliance on Local Authority transport.
- **Peer relationships, friendship breakdowns, or bullying concerns.**
- **Environmental or sensory factors**, including school transitions, classroom changes, or staffing changes.

To ensure a structured, consistent response, both schools use the **Barrier Mitigation Table** as an internal tool to identify barriers, plan interventions, and monitor progress.

Commitment to Inclusion

Forest Oak and Merstone Schools are committed to:

- removing obstacles to attendance;
- understanding the interaction between SEND, mental health, and attendance;
- providing trauma-informed, relational, and nurturing support;
- working collaboratively with families;
- ensuring that intervention is personalised but consistent across both schools.

16. Children Missing Education (CME)

Forest Oak and Merstone Schools recognise that children missing education are at significant risk of underachievement, disengagement, exploitation, and harm. In line with **Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2025**, both schools have robust procedures to identify, respond to, and prevent children from becoming missing from education.

As special schools, we understand that many of our pupils have complex needs, vulnerabilities, or circumstances that may increase their risk of going missing from education. Early identification, strong attendance monitoring, and timely intervention are therefore essential safeguarding responsibilities.

16.1 Definition

A child missing education is a child of compulsory school age who is:

- **not registered at any school or education provider, and**
- **not receiving suitable education otherwise.**

This includes pupils who:

- are absent from school for prolonged periods without explanation;
- have patterns of erratic or unexplained attendance;
- leave school unexpectedly;

- fail to arrive at school despite being expected (e.g., LA transport);
 - do not return from authorised or self-reported absences.
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16.2 Legal and Statutory Responsibilities

Both schools comply with:

Section 436A of the Education Act 1996

Children Missing Education (Statutory Guidance)

Solihull Local Authority CME procedures

KCSIE 2025 safeguarding expectations

Schools must inform the Local Authority when a child is removed from roll for any statutory reason, or has 10 or more consecutive sessions of unauthorised absence.

16.3 Prevention & Early Identification

To prevent CME, Forest Oak and Merstone Schools:

- maintain accurate, up-to-date daily attendance records;
- complete **first-day calling**, repeated attempts, and welfare checks;
- monitor transport-collection patterns and liaise with LA Transport;
- follow the **Attendance Practice Flowchart** for unexplained absences;
- use the Barrier Mitigation process to identify emerging concerns;
- escalate concerns promptly to the Attendance Team, DSL, and SLT.

Any unexplained absence is treated as a potential safeguarding issue.

16.4 Vulnerable Groups Most at Risk of CME

We recognise that certain groups may be disproportionately vulnerable:

- Pupils with EHCPs and complex medical needs
- Looked After Children (LAC) or Previously Looked After Children
- Pupils with social care involvement (CIN / CP / Early Help)
- Pupils experiencing trauma, domestic abuse, or instability at home

- Pupils with mental health difficulties or school-based anxiety
 - Those with attendance or transport challenges
 - Pupils subject to exploitation or online grooming
 - New arrivals and those from Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller communities
 - These pupils receive enhanced monitoring and early intervention.
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16.7 Reintegration After Missing Education

When a pupil returns after being missing from education:

- a **Reintegration Plan** will be developed;
 - the pupil's emotional wellbeing will be assessed;
 - pastoral support, ELSA, mental health input, or reduced timetable may be put in place;
 - agencies involved will be invited to a review meeting;
 - ongoing monitoring will continue for at least one term.
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16.8 Safeguarding and Record Keeping

All CME concerns are recorded on the school's safeguarding system and Chronologies are updated in real time.

The DSL ensures all CME incidents are reviewed through safeguarding procedures.

17 Removal from Roll

In line with statutory guidance, the school will only remove a child from roll if one of the legal grounds applies, including:

- parent notifies elective home education (EHE) and has received permission from the local authority;
- child moves out of area and new school confirmed;
- child has been permanently excluded;
- child fails to return from extended leave after 10 days and procedures have been followed;
- child is certified medically unfit for school;
- child is missing despite all enquiries, and CME protocols have been completed with the Local Authority.

The school will:

- notify the Local Authority **before** deletion from roll;
- provide the LA with all safeguarding concerns, addresses, contact details, and any relevant case notes;
- ensure all records are transferred securely once the new provision is confirmed.