East-the-Water Primary School

Attendance and Punctuality Policy

Every day matters • Every child belongs

Our approach

High expectations + early support + strong relationships

Senior Attendance Champion	**Clare Jackson, Deputy Headteacher**
Attendance contact	**Clare Jackson 01237475178**
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Based on current Department for Education statutory attendance guidance and the DfE Attendance Toolkit.

Parent and staff quick guide

This page summarises the key expectations. The full policy explains the school's procedures, support and legal framework in more detail.

Key point	What it means
Every day matters	Pupils should attend every day the school is open unless there is a legitimate reason for absence.
Tell us promptly	Parents must contact school by [time] on the first day of absence, giving the reason and expected return date.
95% is our early-support trigger	Below 95%, or when a concerning pattern develops, school may contact the family early to understand what is happening and offer support.
90% or below	A pupil missing 10% or more of possible sessions is nationally defined as persistently absent.
50% or below	A pupil missing 50% or more of possible sessions is severely absent and will require intensive support.
Lateness matters	Arrival after the register closes is normally recorded as an unauthorised absence for that session and can count towards the national penalty notice threshold.
Penalty notice threshold	Schools must consider a penalty notice when there are 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks.
Support comes first	We will listen, understand barriers and work with families. Formal or legal action is considered when support is not appropriate, has not worked or has not been engaged with.

Need help with attendance?

Please contact Clare Jackson, Attendance champion. The earlier we understand a barrier, the more effectively we can work with you and your child to address it.

1. Our commitment to attendance

At East-the-Water Primary School, we want every child to feel that they belong, are valued and are excited to come to school.

Regular attendance gives children the best possible opportunity to learn, develop friendships, build confidence and take part fully in school life. It is also an important part of safeguarding children.

We recognise that some children will find attending school more difficult than others. Our approach is therefore based on three principles:

> **High expectations + early support + strong relationships**
>
> We will work with pupils and families to understand barriers to attendance and, wherever possible, remove them. We will not wait until attendance has become a significant problem before offering help.

Attendance is everyone's responsibility. The school combines clear expectations with strong relationships, careful use of data, early intervention and support so that pupils are able to attend, feel that they belong and are ready to learn.

2. Our positive attendance culture: the Sea Creature Attendance Strategy

Attendance is promoted positively throughout school. Our Sea Creature Attendance Strategy gives children a fun and memorable way of thinking about attendance and belonging to their school community.

Sea creature mascots will be used to:

- celebrate classes demonstrating strong attendance;
- recognise classes or groups whose attendance has improved;
- promote positive routines and punctuality;
- celebrate children overcoming barriers to attendance;
- reinforce attendance messages through assemblies, displays and other school activities; and
- encourage a sense of teamwork and shared responsibility.

Children returning after absence will receive a warm welcome back. We will recognise both strong attendance and meaningful improvement, where appropriate.

3. What we expect

Every pupil should attend school every day that the school is open and for the full school day, unless there is a legitimate reason for absence.

For children of compulsory school age, parents have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child receives a suitable full-time education. Where a child is registered at school, parents have an additional legal duty to ensure regular attendance.

We expect parents and carers to:

- make school attendance a priority;
- make every reasonable effort to ensure their child arrives on time;
- contact school promptly when their child is absent and provide the reason;
- arrange routine medical and dental appointments outside school hours wherever possible;
- ensure children attend before or after an unavoidable appointment where possible;
- avoid holidays during term time;
- speak to school early if something is making attendance difficult; and
- keep school informed of changes to contact details and provide more than one emergency contact wherever possible.

High attendance and punctuality expectations apply to all pupils. Where legal enforcement provisions apply, the school will act in accordance with the pupil's age, individual circumstances and current legislation.

4. School times and punctuality

Children should arrive at school in good time to be ready to learn.

School day	Time
School gates open	8:40
School begins	9:00
Morning register taken	9:00
Afternoon register	1:05
School day finishes	3:20

The register closing time will be consistent for each session and will not be more than 30 minutes after the register is taken.

Arriving late

Arriving late can make the start of the school day difficult for a child. They may miss instructions, early learning, opportunities to talk with classmates and important classroom routines.

Before the register closes: a pupil arriving after registration begins but before the register closes will normally be recorded as L - late before the register closes. This counts as attendance, but the lateness is recorded.

After the register closes: a pupil arriving after the register has closed, without another authorised reason applying, will normally be recorded as U - arrived after registration closed. This is an unauthorised absence for that session.

Late each morning	Approximate learning time missed over 190 school days
5 minutes	15 hours 50 minutes
10 minutes	31 hours 40 minutes
15 minutes	47 hours 30 minutes
20 minutes	63 hours 20 minutes

Where lateness becomes a pattern, school will contact parents to understand the reasons and agree how punctuality can be improved. U codes are unauthorised absences and can contribute towards the national penalty notice threshold.

5. Understanding attendance thresholds

We want parents to understand attendance before it becomes a serious concern. The percentages below are useful thresholds, but when we communicate with families we will also explain how many days or sessions have actually been missed.

Attendance position	What this means	School response
95% and above	Generally fewer than 10 days missed across a full school year	Continue monitoring and positively recognising strong or improving attendance.
Below 95% or an emerging pattern	Around 10 or more days could be missed across a full year	School early-support trigger. We may contact the family to understand what is happening and offer support.
10% or more absence	Approximately 90% attendance or below; around 19 days missed over 190 days	Nationally defined as persistent absence. Targeted support will be put in place.
50% or more absence	The pupil is absent as often as, or more often than, they attend	Nationally defined as severe absence. Intensive support and multi-agency working may be required.
10 unauthorised sessions within 10 school weeks	Usually equivalent to 5 school days of unauthorised absence	National threshold at which a penalty notice must be considered.

Important distinction

The 95% threshold is East-the-Water Primary School's early-intervention point; it is not a national legal definition. We deliberately aim to intervene before pupils become persistently absent. Each pupil will be assessed on a case by case basis and judgement will be used whether intervention and support is necessary based on reasons for absence and time of year.

School may offer support at any attendance level where a concerning pattern is identified. Repeated Monday or Friday absence, regular lateness, frequent short absences or a sudden decline may prompt an earlier conversation.

6. What parents should do when their child is absent

Parents should contact school by 9:00 on the first day of absence using telephone or app.

Please provide:

- the child's name and class;
- the specific reason for absence; and
- when you expect your child to return.

Where the return date is not known, parents should continue to update school unless another arrangement has been agreed.

If school has not received a reason for absence, we will contact the parent or carer on the first day of absence. Where we cannot make contact, we may contact other emergency contacts and, depending on the circumstances, take further safeguarding action. This could include a home visit or contact with other professionals involved with the child.

Why we follow up

Unexplained absence is always followed up because attendance and safeguarding are closely linked. The school will use a respectful, curious and proportionate approach while making sure that a child's whereabouts and welfare are understood.

7. Illness

Children should not attend school when they are genuinely too unwell to do so. Parents should contact school on the first day and explain their child's symptoms.

School recognises that physical and mental health difficulties can both affect attendance. We will not routinely ask parents for medical evidence for ordinary illness. Medical evidence should only be needed in a minority of cases.

Where illness is prolonged, frequently recurring or where we need to better understand a child's needs so that appropriate support or reasonable adjustments can be made, we may discuss suitable evidence with the family. We will not operate a blanket requirement for a GP letter.

Parents can also refer to the NHS guidance "Is my child too ill for school?" where they are unsure whether their child should attend.

8. Medical and dental appointments

Where reasonably possible, appointments should be arranged outside the school day. Where an appointment during school time is unavoidable, parents should provide appointment details and ensure that their child attends school before and/or after the appointment wherever possible.

A whole day's absence should not normally be needed for a short medical or dental appointment.

9. Leave of absence and holidays during term time

Parents should not expect leave of absence to be granted during term time. Requests must be made in advance using S2 Absence Request Form.

The Headteacher will consider every application individually, taking into account the particular circumstances and relevant background. The school will not operate an automatic or blanket policy under which a particular circumstance always results in leave being granted.

> **Term-time holidays**
>
> Government guidance is clear that a holiday or other absence for leisure and recreation is not generally considered an exceptional circumstance.

Where leave has not been authorised, the absence will be recorded using the appropriate unauthorised absence code and may contribute towards the national penalty notice threshold. Leave cannot normally be authorised retrospectively.

10. How we support pupils and families

Our first response to an emerging attendance problem will normally be to listen and understand. We will try to identify what is preventing the child from attending and agree realistic steps with the pupil and family.

Possible barrier	Examples of support
Difficult morning routines	Named adult, morning check-in and practical routine planning.
Anxiety or emotional difficulties	Pastoral support, trusted adult and carefully planned reintegration where appropriate.
Friendship or bullying concerns	Prompt investigation and support through the school's behaviour and anti-bullying procedures.
SEND	SENCO involvement, review of provision and reasonable adjustments to routines or the environment.
Disability or health need	Reasonable adjustments, medical support planning and liaison with health professionals where appropriate.
Family difficulties	Family support, Early Help, signposting or referrals to appropriate services.
Transport or practical difficulties	Exploring available local or family support and realistic solutions.
Long period of absence	Reintegration plan, pastoral support and help to bridge learning gaps.
Difficult relationship with school	A named member of staff to rebuild communication and trust.

Support will normally be agreed with the pupil and family and regularly reviewed. Where appropriate, we will work with our SENCO, DSL, pastoral/family support staff, health services, Early Help, social care, the local authority School Attendance Support Team and other agencies.

11. Our graduated response to attendance concerns

The school's response becomes more targeted as concern increases. The purpose of escalation is to secure the pupil's right to education while continuing to identify and address barriers.

Stage	What this may look like
1. Universal: expect and promote	A safe, welcoming school; clear routines; warm relationships; consistent attendance and punctuality messages; Sea Creature Attendance Strategy.
2. Early concern: monitor and listen	Where attendance falls below approximately 95%, punctuality deteriorates or another pattern emerges, school may make an informal contact to understand the situation and offer help.
3. Significant concern: facilitate support	Parents may be invited to a meeting. An Attendance Support Plan may identify barriers, actions for school and family, any external support, a realistic goal and a review date.
4. Persistent absence: formalise support	When a pupil misses 10% or more of possible sessions, support becomes more targeted. The Senior Attendance Champion will have oversight and the school may work with the local authority and other professionals.
5. Severe absence: intensify support	When a pupil misses 50% or more of possible sessions, the case will be treated as a priority and may require a coordinated multi-agency and safeguarding response.

Stage	What this may look like
6. Enforcement where necessary	Where support is not appropriate, has not been successful or has not been engaged with, the school and local authority may consider formal and legal intervention.

12. SEND, disability and health needs

The school has high attendance aspirations for every pupil, but a one-size-fits-all response is not appropriate. When applying this policy, we will consider pupils' individual circumstances and any barriers linked to:

- special educational needs and/or disabilities;
- physical or mental health;
- medical conditions;
- safeguarding circumstances;
- caring responsibilities; and
- other significant individual or family needs.

We will consider reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 where appropriate and will work with parents and relevant professionals to support access to education.

A temporary part-time timetable will only be considered in very exceptional circumstances, where it is in the pupil's best interests and forms part of a wider support, health or reintegration plan. It will be time limited, reviewed regularly and used for the shortest period necessary. It will not be used simply to manage behaviour.

13. When support does not improve attendance

Most attendance concerns can be improved through partnership and support. However, parents also have a legal responsibility to secure regular attendance.

Where voluntary support has not been successful, is not being engaged with or is not appropriate, the school may work with the local authority to consider more formal measures. The response will depend on the individual circumstances and may include:

Possible formal pathway

Attendance support / agreed plan → Attendance Contract → Notice to Improve → Penalty Notice and/or other legal intervention

The school will continue to consider whether support is needed alongside any formal action.

14. National penalty notice framework

All state-funded schools must consider whether a penalty notice is appropriate when a pupil has accumulated 10 sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling period of 10 school weeks. Ten sessions normally equates to five school days.

The absences do not have to be consecutive and can include different types of unauthorised absence. For example, unauthorised holiday absence and repeated late-after-registration U codes can be combined. The 10-week period may span different terms or academic years.

Reaching the threshold does not automatically mean a fine will be issued

The circumstances must be considered. Where support is appropriate, it should normally be offered or continued. Where support is not appropriate - for example, an unauthorised term-time holiday - a penalty notice may be considered without an earlier support process.

Where support is appropriate but has not worked or has not been engaged with, a Notice to Improve would normally provide a final opportunity to improve. The improvement period is normally between 3 and 6 weeks.

Position	Current national framework
First penalty notice for the same parent and child within 3 years	£160, reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days
Second within 3 years	£160, payable within 28 days
Third offence within 3 years	A further penalty notice cannot be issued; prosecution or another legal intervention may be considered

Only two penalty notices can be issued to the same parent for the same child within a rolling three-year period. The school will follow the National Framework for Penalty Notices and Devon County Council's current Code of Conduct.

15. Roles and responsibilities

Who	Key responsibilities
Governing Body	Promote attendance across the school's ethos; ensure statutory responsibilities are met; review and challenge attendance data and strategy; ensure staff receive appropriate training.
Headteacher	Ensure this policy is implemented consistently; promote high expectations; make decisions concerning leave of absence; ensure appropriate resources and support are available.
Senior Attendance Champion	Provide strategic leadership for attendance; analyse data and identify priorities; oversee intervention; ensure systems are effective; liaise with pupils, families, governors, the local authority and external agencies.
Attendance / administrative staff	Monitor registers and absence daily; undertake first-day contact; record reasons and codes accurately; identify emerging patterns; maintain records and support attendance communication.
Class teachers	Complete registers accurately and promptly; promote the value of attendance and punctuality; build relationships with pupils and families; notice emerging concerns; warmly welcome pupils following absence.
SENCO / DSL / pastoral and family support staff	Help identify underlying barriers; coordinate appropriate SEND, safeguarding, health or family support; contribute to attendance plans.
All school staff	Understand that attendance is everyone's responsibility; promote belonging; communicate consistently; report attendance or safeguarding concerns promptly.
Parents and carers	Ensure regular and punctual attendance; notify school of absence; engage with school when concerns arise; request leave in advance; work with school and other agencies where support is offered.
Pupils	Attend regularly and on time; participate in school life; tell a trusted adult if something is making it difficult to attend.

16. Monitoring attendance

Attendance information will be monitored regularly. The school will analyse:

- individual pupil attendance and punctuality;
- persistent and severe absence;
- emerging patterns, including day-of-week or repeated short absence;
- year groups and classes;
- pupils with SEND;
- disadvantaged pupils;
- pupils with a social worker;
- young carers and other vulnerable groups where appropriate; and
- the impact of attendance interventions and attendance-promotion strategies.

Attendance will be discussed regularly by senior leaders and appropriate safeguarding and pastoral staff. Governors will receive attendance information regularly and will challenge leaders about trends, groups and the impact of school strategies.

How we use data

Attendance data is used to identify children who may need help, target resources, check whether support is working and evaluate the impact of school-wide attendance strategies - not simply to generate statistics.

17. Communication with parents

Parents will be regularly informed about their child's attendance. Our communication will be clear, respectful and proportionate to the circumstances.

We will try to make attendance information meaningful. Rather than communicating only a percentage, we will also explain the amount of school missed - for example, days, sessions or learning opportunities - where this helps parents understand the impact.

Whole-school communication will be warm and welcoming. Where concerns increase, communication may become firmer and more formal while remaining factual, collaborative and focused on helping the child attend.

Where appropriate, communication will be adapted for families with language, literacy, SEND, disability or other communication needs, and a named member of staff will be identified so that families know who to contact for help.

18. Safeguarding and children missing education

Attendance is closely linked to safeguarding. Unexpected or unexplained absence can sometimes be an indication that a child needs help or protection.

Where we cannot establish a child's whereabouts or have concerns about their welfare, the school will follow its safeguarding and children-missing-education procedures and work with appropriate agencies. Attendance information will be considered alongside behaviour, wellbeing, SEND, family circumstances and safeguarding information where relevant.

19. Registers and attendance records

The school will maintain its admission and attendance registers electronically and will take the attendance register at the start of each morning session and once during the afternoon session.

The school will use the national attendance and absence codes and will record the reason for absence as soon as it is known. Registers are legal records and will be retained and amended in accordance with statutory requirements.

Staff responsible for registers will receive appropriate guidance and training so that attendance is recorded accurately and consistently.

20. Policy publication and review

This policy will be:

- published on the school website;
- shared with new families;
- highlighted to parents at the start of each academic year;
- available to all staff; and
- reviewed whenever statutory guidance or local arrangements change.

The views of pupils and parents will be considered when reviewing the school's attendance approach. The policy will also be reviewed against attendance data and the impact of school strategies so that practice continues to develop.

Reference framework

This policy should be read alongside the school's safeguarding, SEND, behaviour, medical conditions and children missing education procedures and the following national guidance and legislation:

- Department for Education: Working together to improve school attendance - statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities (current version).
- Department for Education: Attendance toolkit for schools.
- Department for Education: A guide for schools on communicating with parents about attendance.
- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.
- Education Act 1996.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (current version).
- Children Missing Education - statutory guidance (current version).
- Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions - statutory guidance (current version).
- Devon County Council: current Code of Conduct for issuing penalty notices.