



WILLINGDON COMMUNITY SCHOOL

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Date adopted by the Governing Body: 30th September 2026

To be reviewed: September 2027

Staff Responsible: Helen Arnold

Link Governor: Jane Branson, Chair of Governors

1. Policy Statement

At Willingdon Community School, attendance is recognised as a core indicator of inclusion, wellbeing and educational quality. Attendance reflects students' access to learning, their relationships and their sense of belonging in our community.

This policy reflects our ethos of Personal Excellence - Ambition, Respect, Compassion, Courtesy and Honesty – and sets out a graduated, support-first approach to promoting excellent attendance and punctuality, alongside clear routines, responsibilities and escalation pathways when needed.

2. Vision, Ethos and Personal Excellence

We are Willingdon

We are a united, vibrant community which demonstrates personal excellence in all that we do. Learning at Willingdon transforms lives by igniting curiosity and expecting the very best from staff and students alike. We value opportunities, aiming for success today to prepare for challenges and opportunities tomorrow. We are respectful, honest and courteous to empower each other on our unique learning journeys. We look after ourselves and each other, and show empathy, respect and compassion to all people and our environment along the way. We encourage tolerance, resilience and reflection, which in turn allows everyone to make progress every lesson. We work together as a harmonious community to be the very best versions of ourselves.

This makes us Willingdon

Personal Excellence

At Willingdon Community School, we aim to develop Personal Excellence in all our students. Personal Excellence comprises five key values and behaviours:

Ambition: To strive to do your best on all occasions. Take on new challenges and challenge yourself to reach the highest possible standards and be personally successful.

Respect: To respect and value all members of our community, recognising and celebrating our differences. Respect ourselves, valuing what we can each bring to our community.

Compassion: Understand the needs of others and support those who sometimes need our help. Contribute to charitable work which supports those less well-off in the world.

Courtesy: Be well mannered in all situations, displaying the basic courtesies that we all value. Be particularly welcoming and polite to visitors and show appreciation for those who support and work closely with you.

Honesty: Always be honest, even when it may appear difficult. Be honest to yourself - know your strengths and your weaknesses.

3. Aims

- Promote high levels of attendance through belonging, engagement and strong relationships.
- Reduce persistent absence (below 90%) and severe absence (below 50%).
- Ensure equity in attendance outcomes across all groups, particularly SEND and disadvantaged students, prioritising those with a double disadvantage.
- Understand, identify and address barriers early through a graduated response.
- Prioritise attendance within safeguarding systems and professional curiosity.
- Ensure compliance with statutory guidance and local authority expectations.
- Ensure punctuality to school.

4. Principles

At Willingdon Community School, we are committed to helping every child achieve their full potential. Regular school attendance is one of the strongest factors in educational progress, wellbeing and positive outcomes. Regular attendance builds belonging, supports positive learning habits, strengthens friendships and lays the foundation for academic success and economic wellbeing. Any absence from school disrupts a child's learning, weakens routine and can damage confidence, connection and success.

We consider regular attendance to be 96% or higher, which equates to no more than seven school days of absence over one academic year. Excellent attendance improves students' outcomes and allows each child to fulfil their potential.

Children should be at school on time every day that the school is open, unless they have an unavoidable reason for absence. Parents have a legal duty under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 to ensure regular attendance to school; it is a criminal offence for parents to allow their child to be absent from school without a good reason.

Every half-day absence is classified by the school, not by the parents, as either authorised or unauthorised. Parents must provide information about the cause of absence for the child for each day of part-day of absence.

We are an inclusive school and we consider appropriate adaptations for students with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) who are experiencing barriers to attending school, as well as students with emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA). Adaptations could include phased starts, sensory adjustments, safe spaces and regulation support, flexible timetables, adapted curriculum pathways or alternative provision pathways. The attendance of alternative provision will be rigorously tracked and monitored to ensure engagement and safeguarding. Regular visits are tracked and monitored with the school's quality assurance cycle.

5. Understanding Attendance (Registers and Codes)

Present – The student is on the school site at the time of registration.

Approved Education Activity (B, J, P, V, W) – The student is engaged in an approved, supervised activity off site (for example, an educational visit, sporting activity or work experience).

Authorised absence (C, M, I, R) – Mornings or afternoons away from school for a genuine illness or other unavoidable cause. This includes illness, medical appointments, bereavement or other exceptional circumstances that the school deems appropriate.

Excluded (E) – Suspended from school.

Unauthorised absence (O) – Absences which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been given. This includes parents keeping children off school unnecessarily, truancy and absences which have not been properly explained.

The school does not authorise absences for shopping, looking after other children, day trips etc. Leave may be granted in an emergency or in clearly evidenced exceptional circumstances.

If difficulty with attendance reflects wider family, psychological or behavioural needs, the school will support the child using a support pathway and may seek local authority support where needed.

A consultant letter is needed to make a referral to Education East Sussex (formerly ISEND) Teaching and Learning provision. GP letters are insufficient for this.

6. Persistent and Severe Absence

The Government threshold for Persistent Absenteeism is 90% or lower. This includes all absence, whether caused by illness or for unauthorised reasons. Students with less than 50% attendance are categorised as severely absent and will receive interventions from the Team Around the School and Setting (TASS) and/or Early Help Key Workers (EHKW).

In line with Department for Education guidance, medical evidence is not routinely requested for short-term illness. Where a student's attendance drops below 90% (persistent absence) or where there are recurring short-term absences, the school may ask for medical evidence such as an appointment card, prescription or doctor's note to help us to put an appropriate healthcare support plan in place.

7. Holidays in Term Time

The DfE instructs schools to consider holidays in term time only in exceptional circumstances. There is no entitlement for parents to remove their child from school for a family holiday during term time. The Executive Headteacher has the sole authority to authorise a leave of absence and this will only be granted in rare and exceptional circumstances. Almost all holidays taken during term time will be coded as unauthorised absence and may be referred to the Local Authority for statutory enforcement.

Parents/carers who wish to request leave to remove their child from education in exceptional circumstances should complete the school's request form and return it to the Attendance Manager, ideally at least two months before the proposed holiday. A copy of the request form and an explanatory letter from the Headteacher are available on the website.

Under DfE guidance from 19 August 2024:

- A maximum limit of two penalty notices will be issued to the same parent for the same student within a 3-year rolling period.
- The first penalty notice is charged at £160 if paid within 28 days, reducing to £80 if paid within 21 days.
- The second penalty notice within 3 years is charged at a flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days, with no early payment discount.
- A third penalty notice will not be issued within that 3-year period; the case will be escalated to alternative legal measures, which may include prosecution.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

Attendance is a shared responsibility and is promoted through the school's Personal Excellence Values. Each member of the community is responsible for upholding the personal excellence values to ensure all students feel a sense of belonging and inclusion within our school community.

Students

- Students are expected to attend school on time every day that the school is open unless there is an unavoidable reason for absence.
- Students must arrive on time to tutor time and to every lesson.
- Students must follow procedures for signing in and out of school if they arrive late or are leaving early for an authorised reason.
- Students must speak to a trusted adult if they are finding school attendance difficult or if there is a barrier getting in the way of their ability to attend.
- Students must take increasing responsibility for their own punctuality, organisation and participation in school life.

Parents/Carers

- Parents have the main responsibility for ensuring that their child regularly attends school. Parents must ensure that their child attends school every day for the whole school day; this means that their child must be in school and ready to learn each day before 08:30 and must remain in school until 15:00.
- Parents must work in partnership with the school to support routines, punctuality, readiness to learn and commitment to our Personal Excellence Values.
- Parents must contact the school before 8.30am on each day of absence, giving the child's name, year group and reason for absence. This can be done by phoning the absence line

01323 483144, via the child's Arbor account or by emailing studentabsence@willingdonschool.org.uk.

- Parents must inform the school in advance of planned appointments that cannot be taken outside the school day.
- Parents must avoid requesting authorised absence except under exceptional circumstances.
- Parents must contact the school if their child is finding it hard to attend school. Children sometimes experience barriers to attending school. Any problems with regular attendance are best resolved in partnership between the school, the parents and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend, it is never better to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending.
- Parents must engage with meetings and support plans so that barriers can be understood and addressed early, and support successful reintegration after absence where needed.

Coaches

- Coaches must encourage all students to have regular attendance by frequent reminders and sharing attendance data with students.
- Coaches must celebrate good attendance with students.
- Coaches must hold conversations with students regarding absences, as directed by their Head of Year.
- Coaches must contact parents regarding wellbeing and attendance as directed by their Head of Year. Coaches are given time for this once per fortnight.
- Coaches must keep an overview of students' attendance and escalate concerns to Heads of Year.
- Coaches must inform students or parents of procedures regarding planned absence if required.

Teachers

- Teachers must understand that registers are legal documents. They must take an electronic register each lesson within five minutes of the start of the lesson and ensure in particular that the statutory register is taken at the start of lesson 1 and 4 and again in lesson 5 for safeguarding following the lunch break.
- Teachers must raise concerns about absent students within lesson time using the callout system and must inform the pastoral team of any concern about student truancy or absence.
- Teachers must use Arbor to record punctuality issues and share concerns with the tutor and Head of Year.
- If taking children off site, teachers must follow the protocol for recording attendance with the Attendance Manager and Pastoral Support Leaders.
- Teachers must inform the Attendance Manager and relevant staff of student absence due to off-site activities using the Daily Bulletin.

Pastoral Support Leaders / Student Support

- Provide positive reinforcement of good attendance and celebrate regular attendance.
- Provide support, establish connection, reduce anxiety and support a timely return to learning when needed.
- Contact the parent when a child is absent for a welfare check-in.
- Support the Attendance manager with welfare visits for prolonged absence, with a reduced response time for vulnerable learners when needed.
- Contact parents regarding lateness to lesson on the day of lateness; follow up if the problem persists.
- Track and monitor poor punctuality and inform Head of Year of patterns of lateness.
- Under the direction of the Head of Year, apply sanctions for students who are late to lessons and liaise with colleagues to support with punctuality across the school.

Support Staff

- Build a welcoming, safe and structured environment where students want to attend every day.
- Greet students with warmth and model positive, welcoming interactions at arrival points, gates and corridors to ensure students feel valued, safe and expected in school.
- Act as eyes and ears across classroom and non-classroom spaces to identify students showing signs of internal truancy, anxiety or reluctance to attend lessons; share these concerns with teaching, pastoral or attendance teams as appropriate.
- Foster belonging and purpose by building strong, positive relationships that boost student confidence and connection with the school community.

Head of Year

- Have an overview of the attendance of their year group and build partnerships with families, understand barriers and help students reconnect to school when needed.
- Use assemblies and the school reward system to promote and celebrate regular attendance.
- Track and monitor attendance for their year group.
- Direct tutors to contact parents of students via fortnightly tutor phone calls when a student's attendance declines.
- Use weekly year team meetings to liaise with tutors and highlight concerns requiring action.
- Liaise and meet with the Senior Leadership Team where there are concerns; report regularly on attendance and vulnerable groups to the Assistant Headteacher.
- Act on information from staff concerning attendance or poor punctuality; put interventions in place or sanction accordingly.
- Inform parents where punctuality or attendance are becoming a concern and arrange parent meetings as needed.

Attendance Manager

- Initiate and maintain warm, clear communication with families about student attendance.

- Track and monitor whole-school attendance and punctuality; initiate whole-school systems as required.
- Track and monitor attendance of vulnerable groups and share information with relevant staff.
- Support Heads of Year to lead their teams to promote regular attendance with their year teams.
- Liaise with external agencies and the Team Around the School and Setting (TASS) to devise interventions for persistent absence or severe absence.
- Contact parents on the first day of absence and every day thereafter.
- Compile attendance data for Headteacher, Governing Body, Heads of Year and Senior Leadership Team.
- Hold attendance meetings with parents, Heads of Year and Senior Leaders.
- Consider withdrawal-from-learning (holiday) applications and exceptional leave requests in line with attendance history and statutory guidance.

Senior Leader responsible for Attendance

- Provide strategic oversight of whole-school attendance and punctuality.
- Ensure that attendance systems are integrated across the school and are inclusive, rigorous and rational.
- Track and monitor whole-school attendance and punctuality and initiate policy and systems with the Senior Leadership Team and the pastoral team.
- Track and monitor attendance of vulnerable groups and share information with relevant staff.
- Support Heads of Year to lead their teams in promoting regular attendance.
- Liaise with the Attendance Manager regarding whole-school attendance, escalation and quality assurance.

Executive Headteacher / Head of School

- Ensure that high attendance is promoted across the school through strong relationships, clear routines and inclusive practice.
- Monitor the implementation of this policy and ensure it is adhered to across the school.
- Ensure attendance data is presented to the governing body and shared regularly with staff.
- Set attendance priorities and targets as part of the School Improvement Plan.

Governing Body

- Approve and review the attendance policy in line with statutory requirements and school priorities.
- Scrutinise attendance data and reports from the Headteacher; hold school leaders to account for the effectiveness of systems and interventions.
- Scrutinise the working of the policy in view of attendance data presented.
- Support the implementation of the policy.

9. Attendance Procedures

Notifying the School of a Child's Absence

If a child is absent from school, parents must contact the school before 8.30am on each day of absence, giving the child's name, year group and reason for absence. This can be done by phoning the absence line 01323 483144, via the child's Arbor account or by emailing studentabsence@willingdonschool.org.uk.

If no communication is received, the Attendance Manager will contact parents by phone or text to inform them that their child is absent and request the reason for the absence. If the school does not receive an explanation for absence on the first day, an email of enquiry will be sent home. The same procedure will be followed on each day of absence to ensure safeguarding of all students. The absence will be unauthorised if no reason is given.

Parents are expected to contact school at an early stage and work with staff to resolve attendance barriers and concerns. When necessary, the school may seek support from the Team Around the School and Setting (TASS). Legal interventions may be used when appropriate support has been offered, implemented and not engaged with. Legal interventions hold a maximum penalty on conviction of a fine of £2500 and/or 3 months' imprisonment.

Punctuality

Late arrival at school is recorded for all students regardless of reason. Parents have a legal obligation to ensure their child arrives before 8:30am ready for coaching time. Registration closes at 9:30am. Students arriving between 8:30am and 9:30am are coded as Late (L). Arrivals after this time are unauthorised (U) unless there is medical evidence or agreed special circumstances.

Parents will be notified when a student arrives late. Students may receive a same-day sanction in line with the school systems. Repeated lateness will lead to further intervention, discussion with families and, if needed, escalation to more formal attendance monitoring and support.

Students arriving after 8:30 must enter through the late gate at Student Support and sign in to ensure accurate safeguarding records. Heads of Year apply sanctions for lateness.

Medical Appointments During the School Day

Where a student needs to leave during the school day, parents must notify the Attendance Manager in advance. Students must sign out at Student Support. Appointments should be made outside of school hours where possible.

10. Tracking, Monitoring and Intervention (Graduated Response)

The pastoral team meets regularly with the Assistant Headteacher responsible for attendance and the Attendance Manager to discuss attendance and punctuality. Heads of Year track

attendance within their cohorts. Safeguarding leaders also review attendance trends regularly, and attendance is discussed fortnightly through safeguarding triangulation.

Intervention Stages

At each stage, the school balances compassion and support with clear expectations and accountability. The priority is to understand the individual barriers to attendance through direct engagement with students and families. The school's graduated response aligns with the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle so that attendance is addressed as part of a coherent, inclusive system of support.

- Universal expectation (96% and above): coaches speak to students, reinforce expectations and contact home as directed by their Head of Year during their allocated fortnightly phone call time.
- Stage 1 Monitoring (below 95.5%): Stage 1 letter to parents/carers; Head of Year or Attendance Manager meeting with student.
- Stage 2 Monitoring (below 94%): school meeting with parents/carers, student, Head of Year and Attendance Manager; Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle (APDR) or support plan agreed; disadvantaged students prioritised.
- Stage 3 Early Support (below 92%): second meeting; student voice completed; attendance support plan, APDR or SEND-aligned plan reviewed; parents informed of penalty notice threshold if attendance drops to 90% with unauthorised absence.
- Stage 4 Persistent Absence (below 90%): referral to TASS / EHKW; attendance meeting with family; penalty notice or further legal intervention considered where threshold is met and support has not secured improvement.
- Stage 5 Severely Absent (below 50%) intensified intervention and regular review by senior leaders.
- Below 50%: Legal Intervention.

11. Child Missing Education (CME)

If a child leaves school and is not enrolled at another school within the required period, a Child Missing Education (CME) notification is made. This notification may be made at an earlier point if there are safeguarding concerns.

12. Rewards and Incentives

Excellent and regular attendance is acknowledged in tutor time, assemblies and through the school rewards system. Students receive recognition for achieving good attendance (above 95%) each term. Heads of Year may also use events and activity trips to incentivise attendance.

Students do not have a study leave period before final examinations. Year 11 students remain on roll until the end of June and the school will publish the date at which students are no longer required to attend every day, determined in consultation with the local authority and neighbouring schools.

13. Reduced Timetables and Flexible Schooling

The school follows East Sussex County Council guidance on part-time timetables and flexible schooling. Part-time timetables and flexible schooling will be reviewed at least every six weeks and require a plan and attendance meeting. Both options are at the discretion of the Headteacher / Senior Leader for attendance. The school requires medical evidence before implementing a reduced timetable linked to medical issues.

14. Key Named Contacts for Attendance

Those people responsible for attendance matters in this school are:

- Emily May – Executive Headteacher
- Nadene Townsend-Smith – Head of School - Inclusion Leadership
- Helen Arnold – Assistant Headteacher – Attendance
- Nicola Holden – Attendance Manager
- Head of Year and Pastoral Support Leader

15. Summary and Definitions

The school has a legal duty to inform parents of their child's absence figures through our reporting system and to promote attendance. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend. School staff are committed to working with parents as the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible.

Abbreviations:

- HoY = Head of Year
- PSL = Pastoral Support Leader
- TASS = Team Around School and Setting
- EHKW = Early Help Key Worker
- SLT = Senior Leadership Team
- PP = Pupil Premium
- APDR = Assess, Plan, Do, Review
- PA/SA = Persistent Absentee / Severely Absent

Appendix 1 – Attendance Monitoring and Intervention Procedures

A. Punctuality

Action	Person Responsible
Students late due to buses: Coaches or teachers unlock the register and amend the mark to present on arrival to coaching time or lesson 1 where appropriate.	Coach / Teacher
Late to lesson 1 but not on late gate: teacher contacts parent/carer, records minutes late on Arbor, keeps Head of Year informed and escalates repeated lateness for further intervention.	Teachers / HoY Team
Late gate: late list handed to Student Support; amendments made at 9am; same-day parent communication; follow-up and sanctions applied in line with school systems; persistent patterns escalate to meeting and support.	Student Support / PSL / HoY / Coaches / Attendance Manager
Late after close of registration: parents informed; persistent poor punctuality may lead to meeting and penalty notice consideration where appropriate; Student Support manages sign in/out.	Attendance Manager / PSL / HoY / Student Support
Punctuality audited during attendance meetings.	Assistant Headteacher / HoY / Attendance Manager
Unexplained first-day absence followed up via phone or email; absence remains N until contact; further attempts made if no response.	Attendance Manager / PSL

B. Attendance

Action	Person Responsible
The Attendance Data spreadsheet is updated weekly for Heads of Year to complete feedback for the fortnightly attendance meeting.	Attendance Manager / HoY / Data Manager
Head of Year distributes the Attendance Data spreadsheet to Coaches where coach-level intervention is required.	HoY
Student attendance at 96% or first absence of the year: Coach speaks to student and contacts home as directed by Head of Year. Two phone conversations per fortnight with time given to complete.	Coach
Below 95.5% (Stage 1): letter sent to parent/carer; Head of Year / Attendance Manager meeting with student.	Attendance Manager / HoY / PSL

Below 94% (Stage 2): meeting with parent/carer, student, Head of Year and Attendance Manager; Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle (APDR) / support plan with targets agreed; SLT may be involved; disadvantaged students prioritised.	Attendance Manager / HoY / SLT
Below 92% (Stage 3): second meeting; medical evidence required; student voice completed; support plan reviewed; attendance team actions intensify including meetings, calls or visits as needed.	Attendance Manager / HoY / SLT
Below 90% (Stage 4): persistent absence; referral to TASS; attendance meeting with family; penalty notice threshold applied where relevant; further legal intervention considered if no improvement.	Attendance Manager / HoY / TASS
Attendance report reviewed fortnightly by Heads of Year and senior leaders, including intervention level, punctuality and vulnerable groups.	Attendance Manager / HoY / Senior Leadership