

# Attendance Policy



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# 1. Introduction

This is a successful college and every child plays their part in making it so. We aim for an environment which enables and encourages all students to achieve their potential and aspire to excellence.

For our students to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend regularly and every child should be at college, on time, every day the college is open unless they have an unavoidable reason to be absent. Any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning.

Absence or late arrival also disrupts teaching routines and so may affect the learning of others in the same class.

Government research shows a direct link between attendance and attainment and good attenders also make better progress socially, learn to work with others, and are better prepared for the transition to higher education, training and employment.

It is very important therefore that you make sure that your child attends regularly and this policy sets out how together we will achieve this.

Our attendance targets this year is 97%, but all students should strive to achieve 100% attendance if they can.

## 2. Responsibilities and Expectations

### 2.1 Families

Parents and carers have a legal duty to ensure that their children attend college regularly, if they are of compulsory school age and registered at a school (see appendix for details of how the law applies to college attendance and how 'parent' is defined in law).

Parents and students should know the times the College day starts and finishes and when the register closes (see Section 4, below); the processes for requesting leave (see Section 3.4, below); and the process for informing the College of the reason for unexpected absence (as follows).

If your child is going to be absent, parents must inform college as soon as possible, and at the latest by 8.45 am, on the first day of absence by telephoning 01282 683014.

Parents must also ensure that the College has up-to-date contact information for themselves and emergency contacts.

Students' responsibilities depend upon their age, maturity and capability but they too must do their best to attend college regularly and punctually.

Contact information for other attendance-related matters is given below, at the end of Section 2.2.

### 2.2 The College

#### Headteacher

- Lead on giving attendance a high profile
- Ensure there are designated staff with day-to-day responsibility for attendance matters and protected time allocated to discharge those responsibilities
- Take overall responsibility for ensuring the College conforms to statutory requirements regarding attendance
- Consider each request for leave against the College's criteria, decide whether some, all, or none of the leave will be authorised and notify parents of this decision

- Where there is uncertainty regarding an absence, make the decision whether or not to authorise an absence, or to request further evidence to support the decision-making process
- Provide regular reports to the governing body on school attendance, including persistent absence and vulnerable groups

#### **Attendance lead and other staff with designated responsibilities for attendance**

- First day response: contact parents if a reason for absence has not been provided and record this information accordingly. Contact emergency contacts if parents cannot be reached
- Update attendance registers
- Regularly monitor and analyse data to identify student, class and whole college attendance concerns and to target attendance improvement support for those who need it most, particularly vulnerable groups
- Regularly communicate student attendance and punctuality levels to parents
- Work with students and parents to remove barriers to regular and punctual attendance, using parenting contracts where appropriate
- Involve external agencies to support students and parents as appropriate to better understand and address the issues causing attendance concerns
- Promote regular attendance through the college website and displays and ensure the college's attendance policy is readily accessible
- Use projects and strategies to improve attendance and punctuality for groups, classes or the whole college (e.g., incentive and reward schemes, certificates, traffic light letters)

#### **All college staff**

- Provide a welcoming atmosphere for students and a safe learning environment
- Be aware of factors that can contribute to poor attendance and punctuality
- Adhere to the procedures in place within college to promote good attendance
- Promote the link between attendance and educational attainment to students and parents
- Complete attendance registers in accordance with the legislation and under the direction of the Headteacher
- Discuss attendance concerns at an early stage with students and parents
- Raise any concerns about attendance with the Head of Year

#### **Governors**

- Ensure compliance with The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, as amended
- Agree an attendance policy and review it annually
- Agree targets for attendance at Unity College
- Where the College is not meeting its attendance targets, or when governors believe there is cause for concern, instigate a review of the College's attendance procedures
- Authorise the Headteacher (or other designated person) to make decisions regarding leave of absence requests
- Work with the Headteacher in establishing equitable and consistent criteria against which leave requests will be considered

Schools are bound by a range of attendance legislation and guidance; please see the appendix for further details.

## Unity College Attendance Contacts

For parents to notify the College of a child's absence: Mrs L Dand and Mrs T Pickering, **Attendance Officers** (01282 683014)

Support for specific and more serious attendance concerns: Mrs J Beenham, **Director of Attendance** (01282 683014)

Senior leader responsible for the strategic approach to attendance: Mrs A Hodgson, **Deputy Headteacher** (01282 683010)

Form Tutors and Heads of Year can also be contacted for enquiries about attendance.

## 2.3 Lancashire County Council (the local authority)

### School Attendance Support Team

Each school has a named contact in the School Attendance Support Team who can advise schools on attendance related matters, and with whom termly Targeting Support Meetings will be held. For mainstream nursery, primary and secondary schools this will be a School Attendance Support Worker (SASW); for special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) this will be a School Attendance Consultant (SAC).

### School Attendance Legal Team (SALT)

Following requests from schools for legal interventions in the event of failure to attend school regularly, the SALT undertakes enforcement processes, including penalty notices, prosecutions, parenting orders, education supervision orders and school attendance orders.

### Children Missing Education (CME) Team

The CME Team ensures that the local authority fulfils its statutory duty to identify children in their area who are not registered pupils at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. For further information see section 7, below, regarding notifications schools must submit.

## 3. Types of Absence

Every half-day absence from college is classified by the College as either authorised or unauthorised. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required from parents/carers. As a college, we will always work with parents (and other agencies, as appropriate) to understand the reasons underlying absence.

### 3.1 Authorised absences

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from college for a good reason like illness, medical/dental appointments which unavoidably fall in college time, emergencies or other unavoidable causes.

### 3.2 Unauthorised absences

Unauthorised absences are those which the College does not consider reasonable. If the College has followed its attendance procedures and a student continues to have unauthorised absences, the College may request legal interventions from East Lancashire Court Officers.

Examples of unauthorised absences are:

- Parents/carers keeping students off college unnecessarily
- Truancy during the college day
- Absences which are not explained satisfactorily
- Students who arrive at college after the register has closed

- Days off for shopping, birthdays or looking after other students
- Day trips and holidays in term time which have not been agreed by the Headteacher
- Days that exceed the amount of leave agreed by the Headteacher

It is the Headteacher's responsibility to decide if an absence is authorised or unauthorised. Hence, if there is any ambiguity relating to an absence, the College may request further evidence from parents before an absence is authorised. This may be in the form of a prescription, appointment card or similar. Parents should not ask their doctor (GP) to provide "sick notes" to excuse absence.

Whilst any child may be off college because they are ill, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend college for other reasons. If your child is reluctant to attend college it is better to speak to college as soon as possible to resolve the issue, rather than trying to cover up their absence, or give in to pressure to let them stay at home. As a college, we will always work with parents (and external agencies as appropriate) to understand and address the reasons behind absence.

### 3.3 Persistent absence (PA)

Persistent absence is when a child misses 10% or more of their schooling across the school year for whatever reason, authorised and unauthorised (including illness, exclusion, holiday, etc). Absence at this level will damage any child's educational prospects and we expect parents' fullest support and co-operation to address this.

At Unity College, we monitor all absence thoroughly; therefore, any student whose attendance indicates they are likely to reach the PA threshold will be prioritised and parents will be informed of this promptly. Pupils who are persistent absentees are tracked and monitored carefully and the attendance procedures below (Section 5) will be followed.

### 3.4 Leave during term time

By law, maintained schools cannot authorise any leave in term time other than in exceptional circumstances. Taking a child out of college in term time will affect their education and progress as much as any other absence. If leave is being requested for a holiday or extended leave abroad, approval should be obtained from the Headteacher before making any bookings.

Leave of absence in term time **will not** be granted unless:

- a request for leave has been made in advance by a parent with whom the student normally resides (an email or letter addressed to the Headteacher requesting the leave of absence needs to be sent to head@unity.lancs.sch.uk or hand delivered to Unity College Reception), and
- the Headteacher considers that leave of absence should be granted due to the exceptional circumstances relating to the request.

Due to the need to evidence exceptional circumstances, parents are advised to provide the College with any relevant information regarding their request at the point of application if they believe the circumstances are exceptional.

In considering the request college will also consider other factors such as:

- The timing of the requested leave, e.g., *when a student is just starting at college or during assessment periods, such as examinations*
- Whether the student's attendance record already includes unauthorised absence
- Whether attendance is already a concern, or could become a concern, as a result of taking leave
- Other periods of leave which the student may have had, either during the current or previous academic year

Any period of leave taken without the agreement of the college, or in excess of that agreed, will be classed as unauthorised and may attract legal sanctions such as a penalty notice.

In certain circumstances, as outlined in regulation, parents risk losing their child's place on the college roll if leave is taken and the criteria governing removal from roll are met (see appendix).

### 3.5 Religious observance

The College will authorise one day of absence per religious festival, e.g., *Eid*, and this will be marked as code R in the register. The day authorised will be that set aside by the religious body of which the parent is a member.

Parents must request any additional leave in advance, and this can only be authorised if the Headteacher agrees that exceptional circumstances apply; this would be marked in the register as code C.

### 3.6 Participation in sporting events

Parents can request leave of absence for their child to take part in regional, national and international sporting events. However, as always, granting leave is at the Headteacher's discretion and the College will need to discuss with you the length and frequency of the absence(s) requested and how learning will continue if absence occurs, e.g., *the sports club or association providing an approved education tutor*.

Leave for a sporting activity that has been approved by the college and supervised by someone authorised by the college can be marked in the register as code P.

Permission for your child to leave early or arrive late in order to attend coaching and training sessions is also at the discretion of the Headteacher and is unlikely to be approved if it would occur regularly.

### 3.7 Participation in performances (e.g., theatre, television, modelling)

Parents of a child performer can request leave from college for their child to take part in a performance. A local authority licence must be obtained before a child can take part in a performance. Before a licence is granted, the College will be consulted and the Headteacher must be satisfied that the leave will not have a negative effect on the child's education.

Where the licence specifies the dates that the child is to be away from college, the Headteacher should authorise those days. However, where the licence does not specify dates, it is at the discretion of the Headteacher to authorise the leave request.

Any absence authorised for the child to take part in a performance will be recorded as code C.

Parents wishing to apply for a performance licence should go to the Lancashire County Council [Child performance licences webpage](#).

## 4. Registration

### 4.1 Attendance registration

**Morning registration** is between 8.50 am and 9.10 am.

**Afternoon registration** is between 1.30pm and 1.40pm.

The College day starts at 8.45am. Students are expected to be on the premises at that time and that is when the registration period starts (*i.e., when the register is taken and remains open*).

When the attendance register has been taken it remains open until 9.10 am in the morning and 1.40 pm in the afternoon.

College finishes at 3.10pm.

### 4.2 Late arrival

Students who arrive after 8.50 am (or 1.40 pm) must go straight to the Attendance Pod to sign in and give a reason for their lateness.

Students who arrive after the register has been taken (8.50 am or 1.40pm) but before it is closed (9.10 am or 1.40 pm), will be marked as code L. This is classed as late but present for the session (i.e., the morning or afternoon).

Students who arrive after the register has closed and without a valid reason for being late (such as attending a dental or medical appointment) will be marked as code U, which is classed as an unauthorised absence but indicates that the student was physically present in college for part of the session.

### 4.3 Punctuality

Poor punctuality is not acceptable. If your child misses the start of the day, they can miss work and do not spend time with their PD Tutor getting important news and information for the day. Students arriving late also disrupt lessons, which can be embarrassing for the child and can in turn, encourage absence. Being 10 minutes late every day throughout the academic year is the same as missing two weeks of college.

If your child is often late you will be asked to meet with your child's Head of Year or the Director of Attendance to discuss ways to improve punctuality, but you can approach us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to college on time.

Persistent lateness after the register has closed may result in further action, as outlined below, under section 5.

## 5. Unity College Attendance Procedures

### 5.1 First day of absence

If your child is absent and we have not heard from you, we will send an absence text message, alert you via the synergy app or telephone you on the first day of absence to find out what the reason is and when your child is expected to return. If we are unable to contact you, we will approach your emergency contacts and, if necessary, make a home visit. Please note that such home visits may be unannounced.

### 5.2 Attendance concerns

Parents are expected to contact the College at an early stage and to work with us in resolving any attendance problems together; this is nearly always successful. However, if concerns persist, the College will use the following procedures and interventions, as required, to support parents in improving their child's attendance and/or punctuality:

- Telephone calls, text messages and/or letters to make parents aware of college's concern about their child's attendance
- Invitation to meetings to discuss concerns with our Director of Attendance and/or Head of Year and/or Deputy Headteacher
- Parenting contracts to identify barriers to regular attendance, ways to overcome these and agree targets for improvement
- Incentive and reward schemes for individual students, if appropriate
- The Early Help Assessment (EHA) process and/or referral to other agencies and services, including College Nurses and Primary Mental Health Workers, if appropriate
- For unauthorised absences, request legal interventions by the local authority, such as penalty notices, prosecution or other attendance-related court orders

At any stage, we may seek advice from the local authority School Attendance Support Team.



### 5.3 Students with medical needs who have difficulty attending college

Government guidance on supporting students at college with medical conditions (see appendix) emphasises the role of governing bodies in ensuring that students with medical conditions are able to fully access education in the same way as other students. A key element of this responsibility is reducing the amount of time missed by these students, whether their condition is short or long term.

The College will work with parents and other relevant professionals to minimise absence for reasons of ill health. This may be in the form of specific support or resources used within college or by sourcing appropriate provision at another establishment. When education is to be provided at an alternative location, this should always be done via the use of a direction (please see section 6, below).

When a student has been absent from college for an extended period, the Head of Year and other support services will work with the family to ensure that a smooth reintegration is achieved.

### 5.4 Students refusing to attend college

At Unity College, we believe that every child has a right to a full-time education, and we would not accept 'school refusal' as a reason for non-attendance. In such cases, we will work with parents and carers to identify the reasons why a child may be reluctant to attend college. We may make referrals to external partners, such as the Children and Family Wellbeing Service, as appropriate to try to ensure the correct support is secured for the child and their family.

### 5.5 Promotion of good attendance

Unity College will promote and incentivise attendance by acknowledging and rewarding good attendance by all students and efforts to improve attendance by individual students who have additional needs or challenging circumstances.

#### **Attendance Reward System**

At the end of each week all students with 100% attendance for that week will receive 6 merits as part of the Whole College Reward System.

#### **Certificates and Prizes**

##### *Half termly*

Postcards for 100% attendance that half term will be awarded.

Postcards for improved attendance that half term will be awarded.

Postcard for hitting the College target (97%) that half term will be awarded.

##### *Annually*

Attendance and Punctuality will be considered with regards to students going on College trips, becoming a Student Leader, attending Prom etc.

There is a range of attendance competitions throughout the academic year for year groups and whole college.

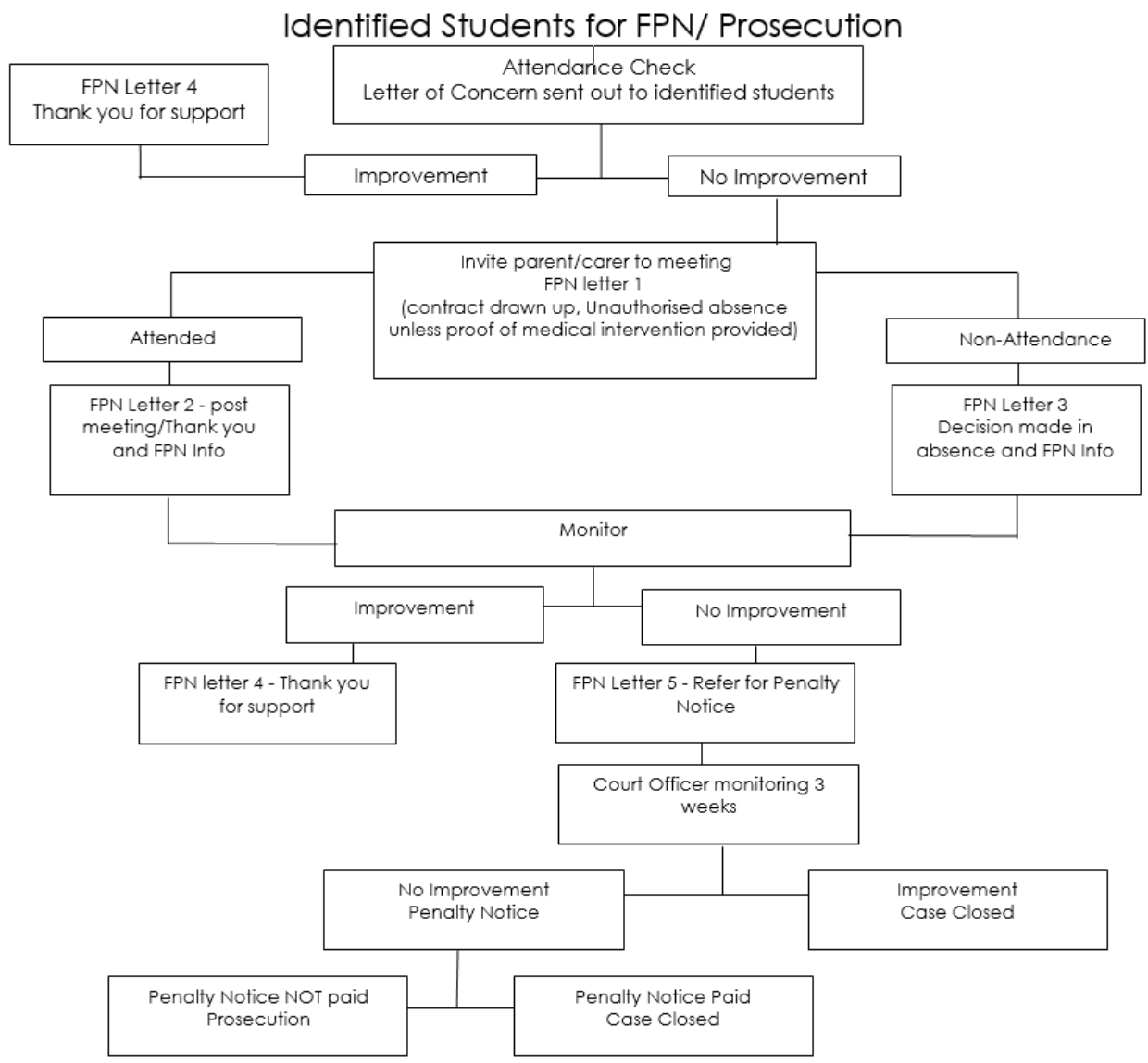
### 5.6 Use of penalty notices

In accordance with the Lancashire code of conduct, we may request that the local authority issue penalty notices for unauthorised absence. This includes:

- Leave of absence which is taken without a prior request being made
- Leave taken after a request has been declined
- Days taken in excess of an agreed period of leave, without good reason

- Other unauthorised absence that meets the required threshold, including sessions marked as late after the register has closed (code U)

The code of conduct for penalty notices and information and FAQs for parents can be found on the Lancashire County Council [education penalty notice webpage](#).



## 6. Alternative Provision and Use of Directions

There is a range of circumstances when students might be required to access educational provision at a venue other than their main school. The main reasons are:

- Students who have been excluded, either for a fixed period of more than 5 days or permanently
- Students unable to access provision at their main school for medical reasons
- Students required to attend another venue for the purpose of improving behaviour, either on a temporary basis or with a view to making a permanent move to the alternative provision (via a managed move)

When a student is required to attend alternative provision for the purposes of improving behaviour, the governors of the main school must issue a written direction or notice informing all parents of the alternative provision which their child is required to attend. Where a student is required to attend alternative provision for other reasons, the issuing of a written direction is considered best practice.

## **7. Local Authority Notifications**

The College must submit the following notifications to the Local Authority.

### **7.1 Admissions**

All schools must notify the local authority within five days of adding a student's name to the admission register and must provide the local authority with all the information held within the admission register about the student. This duty does not apply to students who are added to the admission register at the start of the school's youngest year unless the local authority also requests for such information to be provided (currently Lancashire does not).

### **7.2 Leavers**

All schools must notify the local authority when a student's name is to be deleted from the admission register under any of the grounds prescribed in regulation 8 of the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, as soon as the ground for removal is met and no later than the time at which the student's name is removed from the register. This duty does not apply where the student's name is removed after they have completed the school's final year, unless the local authority requests for such information to be provided (Lancashire currently does not).

Where a school notifies a local authority that a student's name is to be deleted from the admission register, the school must provide the local authority with the required information as laid out in regulation.

In addition to submitting a notification about removal from roll, some circumstances also require schools to make referral to other local authority teams such as the Elective Home Education Team or the Children Missing Education Team. Schools may also contact the School Attendance Support Team for advice on removing children from roll.

### **7.3 Students who fail to attend**

All schools (including academies) must inform the local authority of any student who fails to attend school regularly or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of 10 days or more. In Lancashire schools, this can be done via a variety of means and school can contact the School Attendance Support Team for further advice.

### **7.4 Children missing education (CME)**

Local authorities have a duty to put in place arrangements for identifying (as far as possible) those children of compulsory school age in their area who are not school registered or receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. Local authorities should trace those children and ensure they receive a full-time education.

If a student has stopped attending and her or his location is unknown, schools must make reasonable enquiries to establish the whereabouts of the child jointly with the local authority, before deleting the student's name from the register. In such cases, school should undertake a home visit, prior to a referral being made to the local authority Children Missing Education team.

## Appendix: School Attendance and the Law

There are many pieces of legislation and government regulations and guidance that are relevant to school attendance and to children and their parents and carers. The list below relates to this attendance policy but is not exhaustive.

### Parents and Carers

#### Duty to ensure children receive education

**Section 7 of the Education Act 1996** covers the duty of parents to secure the education of children in their care who are of compulsory school age and states:

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable—

- (a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and
  - (b) to any special educational needs he may have,
- either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

#### Offence if a child does not attend regularly

Under **Section 444 of the Education Act 1996**, if a child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly, their parent is guilty of an offence.

The offence is absolute as the only defences available to the parent are those statutory defences listed within that section of the Act, i.e.:

- the child was absent with leave granted by the school
- the child was prevented from attending by reason of sickness or any unavoidable cause;
- absence was on a day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which their parent belongs
- that the school is not within statutory walking distance and that the local education authority has made no suitable transport arrangements or enabled the pupil to become registered at an alternative nearer school

#### Compulsory school age

**Section 8 of the Education Act 1996** establishes that a child becomes of compulsory school age on the start date of the term following her/his fifth birthday, or that day if her/his fifth birthday falls on the day term starts.

A child ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June in the academic year in which he/she reaches the age of 16 or if he/she reaches 16 after the last Friday in June but before the start of the new school year.

#### Legal definition of "parent" in relation to attendance

The law requires that all "parents" are held responsible for their child's attendance. This definition can include any person who has care of the child. **Section 576 of the Education Act 1996** states:

*Meaning of "parent".*

*(1) In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires, "parent", in relation to a child or young person, includes any person—*

- (a) who is not a parent of his but who has parental responsibility for him, or*

(b) who has care of him.

Thus, the definition of “parent” means all natural parents, whether they are married or not, and includes any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility and/or care for a child or young person.

## Schools

### Attendance and absence registration codes

[Working together to improve school attendance](#), DfE, 2022, explains which codes schools should use to record attendance in their registers, and specifies the DfE's expectations of schools and local authorities with respect to school attendance.

### Data protection

Schools must ensure that personal data is handled in accordance with the [Data Protection Act 2018](#). See Unity College's Privacy Notice for information about how personal data will be used.

### Duty for schools to include attendance information in reports for parents

[The Education \(Pupil Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2005](#)

### Duty for schools to notify the local authority when pupils join or leave school

[Regulation 12 of The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)

### Duty for maintained schools to publish attendance data

[What maintained schools must publish online](#), DfE guidance

### Duty for schools to report attendance concerns about individual pupils to the local authority

[Regulation 12 of The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)

### Duty for schools to report attendance data to Government

[Section 537A of the Education Act 1996](#) and

[Complete the school census](#), DfE guidance for schools and local authorities on what data government requires

### Duty for schools to safeguard and promote the welfare of children

[Keeping children safe in education: Statutory guidance for schools and colleges](#), DfE, regularly updated

### Leave in term time \*

[September 2013 amendment to The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)

\* This regulation does not apply to academies, though many adopt this as good practice.

### Legal interventions

Parents/carers commit an offence if a child who is on a school roll fails to attend regularly and those absences are recorded by the school as unauthorised.

Legal interventions are available under the following Acts, Guidance and Regulations:

- [Section 444 of the Education Act 1996](#)

- [Section 36 of the Children Act 1989](#)
- [Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003](#)
- [The Education \(Penalty Notices\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)
- [The Education \(Penalty Notices\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2013](#)
- [School attendance parental responsibility measures 2015](#)

#### **Pupils experiencing social, emotional or mental health issues**

[Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools](#), DfE, 2023

#### **Pupils with health needs who cannot attend school**

[Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions: Statutory guidance](#), DfE, 2015

#### **Pupils with individual needs and specific barriers to attendance**

When considering the individual needs of pupils and families who have specific barriers to attendance, schools should be mindful of their obligations under the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [Equality Act 2010](#). Schools may wish to refer to the [Technical Guidance for Schools in England](#), published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which outlines the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 for schools.

#### **Regulations regarding participation in performances**

[The Children \(Performances and Activities\) \(England\) Regulations 2014](#)

#### **Regulations regarding removal from roll**

[Regulation 8 of The Education \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)

#### **Regulations regarding the school day and number of sessions**

[The Education \(School Day and School Year\) \(England\) Regulations 1999](#)

#### **Requirement for state-funded mainstream schools to deliver a school week of at least 32.5 hours by September 2023**

[Minimum expectation on length of the school week: information note](#)