Attendance Policy – SO 0022

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1. Purpose of this document

To outline the NAS Education Directorate's policy for NAS and NASAT schools' approach to supporting good attendance in our schools.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all schools and children's services within National Autistic Society and National Autistic Society Academy Trust.

3. Approach

We believe that in order to facilitate teaching and learning, good attendance is essential. Pupils cannot achieve their full potential if they do not regularly attend school.

We are committed to:

- Promoting and modelling good attendance.
- Have high expectations for good attendance and promoting a culture where all staff see a role in supporting good attendance.
- Ensuring equality and fairness for all.
- Communicating with pupils and where appropriate pupils about why good attendance is important
- Listening to parents about why their child is not attending and support them to act accordingly
- Challenging parents and communicating expectations clearly but also offering support where needed.

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- Intervening early and working with other agencies to ensure the health and safety of our pupils.
- Ensuing attendance is recorded and patterns are analysed and acted upon.
- Rewarding regular attendance.
- Ensuring parents follow the framework set in section 7 of the Education Act 1996 which states that:

"The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient full-time education suitable:

    a) to age, ability and aptitude and
    b) to any special educational needs, he/she may have

Either by regular attendance at school or otherwise".

Pupil/students with a diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder and related conditions may be extremely vulnerable in terms of lack of understanding of their own safety, and the significance of school rules relating to absconding. The NAS(AT) places high importance on training and awareness for staff regarding matters of safety, security and support for pupils.

Parents/carers have the prime responsibility for ensuring that registered pupils of compulsory school age attend school regularly. The school will encourage a good working relationship with parents/carers and will publicise the arrangements for notifying absence. Where patterns are noticed or pupils are at risk of becoming a persistent non- attendee then the school should work with the parents early on. It is essential parents are listened to, shown empathy and supported to find solutions. However , it is also important that parents are challenged and that expectations for improved attendance are made clear.

It is important the leaders create a culture where attendance is everyone's priority and seen as linked to safeguarding and wellbeing. Monitoring, understanding and improving attendance is vitally important. Poor attendance not only impacts on progress but it could mean something is wrong for that pupil. This could either be in the home environment or school environment, incidences of bullying for example can lead to pupils avoiding school. All staff should be vigilant to the other reasons besides ill health that lead to poor attendance.

The attendance of all pupils at NAS(AT) schools will be monitored and should there be concerns regarding the safety or welfare of a pupil by their absence both the Local Authority and Social Services will be contacted and Child Protection / Missing Child Procedures will be activated. The school will support parents/carers as necessary.

This policy meets the requirements of the school attendance guidance from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

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- [The Education Act 1996](#)
- [The Education Act 2002](#)
- [The Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)
- [The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006](#)
- [The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010](#)
- [The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2011](#)
- [The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013](#)
- [The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016](#)
- [The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013](#)

4. Operational delivery

4.1 Absence procedures

Parents will be required to contact the school office via telephone or via email by 8.30 or as soon as practicably possible on the first day of any absence.

Alternatively, parents may call into school and report to the school office where arrangements will be made to speak to a member of staff.

If a child is absent for more than one day, the parent should contact the school each day to provide an update on the child's condition, unless otherwise agreed by the school.

If a pupil's absence is unaccounted for at the close of registration, the absence will be recorded as 'unauthorised' and parents/carers of that child will be contacted by:

- Calling every contact number that we hold for that pupil.
- If there is no response from any of these numbers, we will carry out a home visit.
- If there is nobody at home, we will inform the police that there is a missing child.
- If the child is absent without explanation for more than 10 days, a report will be made to the Local Authority as 'missing from education'.

A telephone call will be made to the parent of any child who has not reported their absence on the first day that they do not attend school.

The school will always follow up any absences in order to:

- Ascertain the reason for the absence.
- Ensure that proper safeguarding action is being taken.
- Identify whether the absence is authorised or not.
- Identify the correct code to use to enter the data onto the school census system.

Absence due to illness will be authorised unless the school has a concern about the authenticity of the illness. If this is in doubt, the school may ask parents to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. The school will not ask for medical evidence

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unnecessarily. If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents will be notified accordingly.

The school will inform the LA, on a termly basis, of the details of pupils who fail to attend regularly, or who have missed 10 school days or more without permission.

If a pupil's attendance is of concern the local authority attendance officer and if appropriate social services will be informed, and a formal meeting may be arranged with the pupil's parent.

In order to keep pupils' safe, we require parents/carers to provide a minimum of three contact numbers for their child, at least one of which should be for a different household.

Residential pupils (Residential schools only)

Residential pupils/students will be checked safely in and out of the premises at the beginning and the end of the day, via the school's transportation/escort registers as well as in the formal twice-daily school register.

All staff will be vigilant in their recording of student attendance.

Staff will be designated specific pupil(s) for whom they are responsible for whilst travelling between school and residential settings. Attendance registers will be checked when going on and returning from educational visits.

4.2 Attendance Register

 The designated staff members will take the attendance register at the start of each school day and at the start of the afternoon session. This register will record whether pupils are:

Present.

Absent.

Attending an approved educational visit.

Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

4.3 Attendance codes

 The school will use the national attendance codes to enable the school to record and monitor attendance and absence in a consistent way. The following codes will be used:

/ = Present in the morning

\ = Present in the afternoon

L = Late arrival before the register has closed

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C = Leave of absence authorised by the school

E = Excluded but no alternative provision made

H = Authorised holiday

I = Illness (not medical or dental)

M = Medical or dental appointments

R = Religious observance

B = Off-site educational activity

G = Unauthorised holiday

O = Absent form School without authorisation

U = Arrived after registration closed

N = Reason not yet provided

X = Not attending in circumstances related to coronavirus (COVID 19)

S = Study leave

T = Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence

W = Work experience

V = Educational visit or trip

P = Participating in a supervised sporting activity

J = At an interview with prospective employers, or another educational establishment

D = Dual registered – at another educational establishment

Y = Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Z = Pupil not on admission register

= Planned whole or partial school closure

The codes used will be those that are mandated by the department for education. Updates to those codes should be adhered to and this policy will be updated.

4.4 Register amendments

All amendments made to the attendance register will include the original entry, the amended entry, the reason for the amendment, the date of amendment, and the name and role of the person who made the amendment.

4.5 Record retention and data management

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We will retain attendance records for a minimum of three years.

Data may be shared with the local authority, Ofsted and Department for Education.

4.6 Pupils at risk of persistent absence

The school will ensure it provides support to pupils at risk of persistent absence (PA), in conjunction with all relevant external authorities where necessary.

Persistent absenteeism (PA) is defined as missing 10 percent or more of schooling across the academic year for any reason.

In order to ensure the school has effective procedures for managing PA, the Senior Leadership team (SLT) will:

- Establish a range of evidence-based interventions to address barriers to attendance.
- Monitor the implementation and quality of escalation procedures and seek robust evidence of the escalation procedures that work.
- Attend or lead attendance reviews in line with escalation procedures.
- Establish robust escalation procedures which will be initiated before absence becomes a problem by:
  - Sending letters to parents / call the parents and arrange to meet.
  - Having a weekly tutor review.
  - Engaging with LA attendance teams and where appropriate following local procedures for managing attendance such as fixed penalty notices.
  - Creating attendance clinics.

Where a pupil becomes at risk of PA, the school will:

- Welcome the pupil back following any absence and provide catch-up support to build confidence and bridge gaps in learning.
- Meet with the pupil to discuss absence, patterns, barriers and problems.
- Establish plans to remove barriers and provide additional support.
- Lead weekly check-ins to review progress and assess the impact of support.
- Make regular contact with the pupil's parent to discuss progress.
- Consider what support for re-engagement might be needed, including with regard to additional vulnerability.

Where a pupil at risk of PA is also at increased risk of harm, the school will work in conjunction with all relevant authorities, e.g. social services, to support the pupil in line with the school's duty of care.

The school attendance system will be used to give an accurate and informative view of attendance, reasons for absence and patterns within groups, including:

- Children in need
- LAC
- Pupils who are eligible for FSM

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- Pupils learning ESL

4.7 Lateness

The school will regard punctuality as of utmost importance, and lateness will not be tolerated.

The school will communicate arrangements for start times and registration to pupils, parents and staff.

Attendance after the register closes will receive a mark to show that they are on site, but will count as an absent mark.

4.8 Missing Children

Pupils will not be permitted to leave the school premises during the school day unless they have the appropriate permission from the school.

See Missing Child policy for procedures to follow in the event of a child going missing.

4.9 Truancy

Because of the nature of our pupils and the likelihood of their journey to school being supervised truancy is extremely rare.

Immediate action will be taken when there are any concerns that a pupil might be truanting.

If truancy is suspected, the Principal will be notified and they will contact the pupil's parents, in order to assess the reasons behind the pupil not attending school. The Principal with will determine the relevant action to be taken.

4.10 Term time leave

Principals may not grant any leave of absence to pupils during term time unless they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'.

Please note that a family holiday is not normally considered to be an exceptional circumstance.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context underlying the request. A decision to grant a leave of absence will take into account past attendance and is granted entirely at the Principal's discretion.

This request must be made at least a week in advance and cannot be authorised retrospectively.

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If the leave is taken despite refusal it will be 'unauthorised' and might trigger sanctions, including referral to the Local Authority which may result in a penalty notice to be issued.

Valid reasons for an authorised absence include:

• **Illness and medical/dental appointments**

As far as possible, parents will be encouraged to book medical and dental appointments outside of school hours. Where this is not possible, parents will be required to send a note and appointment card to the school office. Pupils will attend school before and after the appointment wherever possible.

If the appointment requires the pupil to leave during the school day, the pupil must be signed out at the school office by a parent.

• **The funeral of a close family relative.**

• **Religious observance**

Not more than a single day where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart.

• **Other unavoidable and exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the school principal.**

4.11 Monitoring attendance

The School monitors pupil absence on a daily basis.

The School reports to parents/carers on a pupil's attendance at annual review. However, this can be sooner on request.

Due to the nature of our pupils' sometimes complex needs, each case will be individually considered. However, should absence be causing concern we will contact the parents to discuss the reasons for this. If after contacting parents a pupil's absence continue to rise, we will consider contacting the local authority involving an education welfare officer or attendance officer.

The school's attendance data is compared to the national average and is shared with governors. Our School collects and stores attendance data. It is used to track the attendance, identify whether or not there are particular groups of children whose absences may be a cause for concern, and monitor and evaluate those children identified as being in need of intervention and support.

Registers are a legal responsibility and the information collected is used to report census information.

4.12 Legal sanctions

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Legal sanctions Parents/carers may be prosecuted for failing to ensure their child's regular school attendance and can be issued with a penalty notice by the local authority for the unauthorised absence of their child.

If issued with a penalty notice, parents must pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days (per child).

Payments must be made direct to the local authority.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the Principal who will follow the local authority's code of conduct for issuing penalty notices.

Factors taken into account will include:

• The number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year.

• One-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The responsibilities of the NAS(AT) Board of Trustees
- Ratify and regularly review this policy to ensure it conforms to relevant law and guidance

The responsibilities of the Local Governing Body
- Monitoring the implementation of this policy and all relevant procedures across the school.
- Ensuring that this policy, as written, does not discriminate on any grounds including, but not limited to, ethnicity/national origin, culture, religion, gender, disability or sexual orientation.
- Handling complaints regarding this policy as outlined in the school's Complaints Procedures Policy.
- Having regard to 'Keeping children safe in education' when making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- Ensuring there is a Children Missing Education Policy in place and that this is regularly reviewed and updated.

The responsibilities of the Principal

- The day-to-day implementation and management of this policy and all relevant procedures across the school
- Ensuring all parents are aware of the school's attendance expectations and procedures.
- Ensuring that every pupil has access to full-time education and will act as early as possible to address patterns of absence.
- Liaising with local agencies including attendance officers as appropriate

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The responsibilities of staff

- Following this policy and ensuring pupils do so too.
- Ensuring this policy is implemented fairly and consistently.
- Modelling good attendance behaviour.
- Using their professional judgement and knowledge of individual pupils to inform decisions as to whether any welfare concerns should be escalated.
- Where designated, taking the attendance register at the relevant times during the school day.

The responsibilities of parents

- Providing accurate and up-to-date contact details.
- Providing the school with a minimum of three contact numbers.
- Updating the school if their details change.
- The attendance of their children at school.
- Promoting good attendance with their children.

The responsibilities of pupils

- Attending their lessons and any agreed activities when at school.
- Arriving punctually to lessons when at school.

6. Evaluation

The school will monitor attendance and punctuality throughout the year.
The school will set attendance targets each year.
The policy will be reviewed annually and evaluated for its effectiveness.

7. The legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Education Act 1996
- Equality Act 2010
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended)
- DfE (2020) 'School attendance'
- DfE (2016) 'Children missing education'
- DfE (2021) 'Keeping children safe in education'
- DfE (2021) 'Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities'
- Independent School Regulations 2014
- Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006
- Ofsted (Feb 2022) 'Securing Good attendance and tackling persistent absence'
- DFE (March 2022) 'School Attendance: Guidance for Schools'

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8. Related policies

This policy operates in conjunction with:

- Complaints Policy
- Missing Child policy
- Safeguarding Children Policy

9. Definitions

Absence is defined as:

- Arrival at school after the register has closed.
- Not attending school for any reason.

An **authorised absence** is inclusive of the following circumstances:

- An absence for sickness for which the school has granted leave
- Medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall during school time for which the school has granted leave
- Religious or cultural observances for which the school has granted leave
- An absence due to a family emergency

An **unauthorised absence** is inclusive of the following circumstances:

- Parents keeping children away from school without sufficient reason
- Truancy
- Absence which has not been sufficiently explained to the school's satisfaction
- Arrival at school after the register has closed without sufficient reason
- Absence due to shopping, looking after other children or birthdays
- Absence due to day trips and holidays in term time to which the school has not agreed
- Leaving school during the day without sufficient reason and agreement from the school

Persistent absenteeism (PA) is defined as:

Missing 10 percent or more of schooling across the academic year for any reason.

NAS(AT) - National Autistic Society and National Autistic Society Academy Trust free schools
LGB – Local Governing Body
SLT – Senior Leadership Team

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