



Attendance Policy 2026–27

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1. Policy Statement and Aims

1.1 ReFocus is committed to enabling every pupil to attend regularly and benefit from a safe, supportive and ambitious education. Many pupils placed at ReFocus have experienced barriers to attendance. Our response will combine high expectations with respectful relationships, early identification, practical support and effective partnership working.

1.2 Attendance is a safeguarding, inclusion and educational priority. Absence may be an indicator of unmet SEND, disability, ill health, anxiety, bullying, exploitation, family difficulty or another welfare concern. ReFocus will listen to pupils and families and seek to understand the reasons for absence before deciding the appropriate response.

1.3 This policy aims to:

- promote regular attendance and punctuality as part of the ReFocus values: Employable, Sociable and Ready;
- maintain accurate electronic admission and attendance registers;
- follow up unexplained absence promptly and safely;
- identify emerging patterns before absence becomes persistent or severe;
- remove barriers through reasonable adjustments and coordinated support;
- work effectively with parents, carers, commissioning schools, local authorities and relevant professionals; and
- use formal or legal intervention only when support is not appropriate, has not succeeded or has not been engaged with.

2. Status and Legal Framework

2.1 ReFocus is an independent alternative provision school. Working Together to Improve School Attendance, July 2026, is statutory guidance for independent schools. ReFocus must have regard to the relevant expectations for all schools, alongside its duties under the Independent School Standards.

2.2 This policy has regard, where applicable, to:

- Education Act 1996;
- Education Act 2002;
- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014;

- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024;
- Working Together to Improve School Attendance, July 2026;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026;
- Children Missing Education statutory guidance;
- Equality Act 2010;
- Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years;
- DfE guidance on mental health issues affecting attendance and education for children who cannot attend because of health needs; and
- DfE guidance on improving the attendance of children with a social worker, March 2026.

2.3 The proprietor/owners retain legal accountability for compliance. The Headteacher manages implementation and the governing board provides support, scrutiny and oversight.

3. School Day and Attendance Expectations

3.1 School starts at 9.15am and finishes at 2.30pm Monday to Thursday and 9.15am to 12.30pm on Friday.

3.2 Pupils are expected to attend every session identified in their placement and timetable, arrive by the start of the school day and remain on site unless authorised to leave.

3.3 ReFocus maintains a separate operational registration procedure which identifies when registers are taken and closed, who is authorised to amend them and how missing marks are escalated. Staff must follow that procedure consistently. Detailed registration timings are not reproduced in this policy.

3.4 Attendance expectations will reflect each pupil's registration and placement arrangements. A reduced or commissioned package does not lower the expectation that the pupil receives suitable full-time education across all responsible organisations.

4. Registration and Placement Arrangements

4.1 Before a placement begins, ReFocus and the commissioner will record whether the pupil is:

- sole registered at ReFocus;
- dual registered at ReFocus and another school; or
- attending under another clearly documented commissioning arrangement.

4.2 Written placement arrangements will identify the sessions expected at each setting, attendance-recording and coding responsibilities, same-day absence notification, responsibility for support and legal intervention, information-sharing contacts, transport arrangements and the procedure if the placement changes or ends.

4.3 Code D may be used only where the pupil is registered at both schools and is attending the other registered school for that session. It must not be used merely because a pupil receives unregistered provision elsewhere.

4.4 For dual-registered pupils, both schools will record the sessions for which they are responsible, share attendance information promptly and ensure that unexplained absence is followed up. The home or commissioning school retains overall responsibility for ensuring the pupil receives an appropriate full-time education.

4.5 Ending funding or a commissioned placement does not itself authorise removal from ReFocus's admission register. A pupil's name will be deleted only when a statutory ground under the 2024 Regulations is fully met. Deletion will not be retrospective and required local-authority returns will be made.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Proprietor/owners

The proprietor/owners ensure that ReFocus meets its legal duties, maintains effective attendance arrangements and provides sufficient leadership and resources.

5.2 Headteacher

The Headteacher manages implementation, ensures attendance and safeguarding arrangements work together, authorises leave and temporary part-time timetables, oversees escalation and ensures appropriate information is reported to the proprietor and governing board.

5.3 Senior Attendance Champion

Katie Close is ReFocus's Senior Attendance Champion and Designated Attendance Lead. She leads the attendance strategy, monitors patterns and cohorts, coordinates support, works with families and partners, assures register accuracy and oversees statutory returns. Liam Kerr provides deputy cover. Role-based school contact details will be published separately so that the policy remains current and staff privacy is protected.

5.4 Governing board

The governing board provides support and appropriate challenge, reviews anonymised attendance information and considers patterns, vulnerable groups, the impact of intervention and whether sufficient resources and training are in place.

5.5 Key workers and staff

Key workers build consistent relationships with pupils and families, identify barriers early, communicate concerns and monitor agreed actions. All staff must complete registers accurately, report missing pupils immediately, follow safeguarding procedures, promote attendance positively and avoid stigmatising pupils because of absence.

5.6 Parents, carers and pupils

Parents and carers are expected to support regular attendance, notify ReFocus promptly of absence, keep contact information current, provide relevant information and engage with reasonable support. Pupils are expected to attend their agreed sessions, arrive punctually, remain on site and speak to a trusted adult where they need help.

5.7 Commissioning schools, local authorities and professionals

Commissioners must provide complete registration, safeguarding, SEND, health, transport and attendance information; nominate a contact; maintain regular communication; attend reviews; and act promptly when ReFocus raises concern. ReFocus will work with local-authority attendance teams, social workers, Virtual School Heads, SEND teams, Youth Offending Teams and other professionals as appropriate.

6. Recording Attendance

6.1 ReFocus will keep electronic admission and attendance registers for every registered pupil in accordance with the 2024 Regulations. Registers are legal records.

6.2 The attendance register will record whether each pupil is present, attending an approved educational activity, absent or unable to attend because of an applicable statutory circumstance. The current DfE attendance codes will be used in accordance with their precise definitions.

6.3 ReFocus will not reproduce the full DfE coding schedule in this policy. A current controlled coding schedule will be held with the operational attendance procedures and updated when statutory guidance changes.

6.4 Where an entry is amended, the register will preserve the original entry, amended entry, reason, date and the name of the person making the amendment. Amendments will be made only by authorised staff and as soon as the correct reason is established.

6.5 Every admission- and attendance-register entry, including the amendment audit trail, will be retained for six years from the date the information was entered.

7. Daily Absence and Lateness Procedures

7.1 Reporting absence

Parents or carers should contact ReFocus before the start of the school day on the first and each subsequent day of absence unless another arrangement has been agreed. They should explain the reason and likely duration. Contact should be made through the published school telephone number or attendance email address.

7.2 Unexplained absence

Where a pupil expected at ReFocus does not attend and no explanation has been received, ReFocus will:

- check the register, timetable, transport and known information immediately;
- contact the parent or carer and relevant emergency contacts;
- notify the home or commissioning school promptly;
- inform the social worker, Virtual School Head or Youth Offending Team worker where applicable;
- consider the pupil's age, vulnerabilities, known risks and the circumstances of the absence;
- take proportionate safeguarding action, including home visits or police contact where risk requires it; and
- record enquiries, decisions, information shared and the outcome.

Police will not be contacted automatically merely because an adult cannot be reached. Contact will follow a safeguarding risk assessment and will be immediate where there is reason to believe the pupil may be at serious or imminent risk.

7.3 Lateness

ReFocus will establish the reason for lateness and consider transport, SEND, disability, medical, safeguarding and family circumstances. Pupils will not receive a behaviour consequence for circumstances outside their control. Deliberate or repeated failure to follow an agreed routine may be addressed proportionately alongside punctuality planning and support.

8. Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

8.1 Illness and medical appointments

A parent's notification will normally be sufficient for ordinary short-term illness. Medical evidence will be requested only in a minority of cases where there is genuine and reasonable doubt, illness is prolonged or recurrent, or evidence would help ReFocus understand needs, make reasonable adjustments or secure suitable provision. ReFocus will accept reasonable forms of evidence and will avoid asking families to incur a fee.

Medical and dental appointments should be arranged outside school hours where reasonably possible. Where this is not possible, absence will normally be authorised for the minimum necessary period when ReFocus has been informed.

8.2 Leave of absence

The Headteacher may grant leave only in accordance with the 2024 Regulations and, for other exceptional circumstances, after considering the individual facts and context. Holidays and leisure travel will not normally constitute exceptional circumstances. ReFocus will not operate a blanket rule that automatically approves or refuses every application of a particular type.

Applications should be made in advance using Appendix B. The Headteacher may request proportionate supporting information. Any period taken without permission or beyond the authorised period will be recorded using the appropriate code.

8.3 Other absence

Religious observance, interviews, approved off-site education, work experience, educational visits, dual registration, unavoidable causes and other circumstances will be recorded using the current statutory code and definition. Parents do not authorise absence; ReFocus determines the correct classification on the available evidence.

9. Safeguarding and Children Missing Education

9.1 Unexplained, repeated or concerning absence will be considered through the Safeguarding and Child Protection procedures. Attendance can be a warning sign of neglect, exploitation, abuse, mental ill health, unsafe transport, peer harm or another unmet need.

9.2 ReFocus will make reasonable enquiries and work with the commissioning school and local authority where a pupil's whereabouts, education or welfare are unclear. A pupil will not be removed from the register simply because they have stopped attending or because contact with the family has been difficult.

9.3 Home visits will be authorised and conducted under ReFocus's safeguarding and lone-working arrangements. Staff will undertake an appropriate risk assessment, use check-in and escalation arrangements, record pupil voice and outcomes, and will not enter premises where doing so would be unsafe.

9.4 Transport support will be agreed only where appropriate safeguarding, insurance, consent, driver, vehicle and risk-management arrangements are in place.

10. Supporting Attendance

10.1 ReFocus will follow an expect, monitor, listen and understand, facilitate support, formalise support and enforce approach. Support will intensify as absence becomes more persistent or severe, but percentage thresholds will not replace professional judgement or an individual assessment.

10.2 Support may include:

- a consistent key worker or trusted adult;
- pupil and family meetings and an attendance-support plan;
- reasonable adjustments and SEND review;
- reintegration planning following illness, suspension or extended absence;
- support with transport, routines, emotional wellbeing or peer concerns;
- liaison with health, Family Help, social care, youth justice or voluntary services;
- adapted curriculum, mentoring, careers support or additional tuition; and
- a formal attendance contract where voluntary support has not secured improvement.

10.3 Praise and incentives will recognise sustained attendance, individual improvement, improved punctuality and engagement with support. They will be applied sensitively and without discrimination. Pupils will not be denied an educational or enrichment opportunity solely because they have legitimate absence connected with disability, medical need, religious observance or another protected circumstance.

10.4 Attendance will not be treated as a simple behaviour matter. Mobile-phone access will not be used as an attendance consequence because ReFocus is mobile-phone-free throughout the school day.

11. Additional Needs and Vulnerable Pupils

11.1 ReFocus will apply the same ambition for attendance to all pupils while recognising that some require additional support or reasonable adjustments. The school will work with the pupil and family to understand barriers and review whether the provision, environment or timetable is contributing to absence.

11.2 Where a pupil has an EHC plan and attendance barriers relate to their needs, ReFocus will involve the responsible local authority, review access to the specified provision and request an early review where necessary.

11.3 Unexplained or concerning absence for a pupil with a social worker or Youth Offending Team worker will be shared promptly with that professional. For looked-after pupils, attendance will inform the PEP and multi-agency planning. ReFocus will liaise with the Virtual School Head where appropriate.

11.4 Where young-carer responsibilities contribute to absence, ReFocus will listen to the pupil and family, consider appropriate flexibility and work with the local authority and relevant services to secure support. Caring responsibilities will not be treated simply as misconduct.

12. Temporary Part-time Timetables

12.1 A pupil of compulsory school age is entitled to suitable full-time education. A temporary part-time timetable will be used only in very exceptional circumstances where it is in the pupil's best interests. It will not be used to manage behaviour, as an informal exclusion, because suitable staffing is unavailable or as an open-ended arrangement.

12.2 The arrangement must include:

- agreement with the parent or carer and involvement of the pupil;
- a clear reason, intended benefit and ambition to return to full-time education;
- the sessions the pupil will attend and how absence will be coded;
- education, welfare and safeguarding arrangements for time away from ReFocus;
- a proposed end date and frequent review dates;
- commissioning-school involvement;
- social-worker involvement where applicable; and
- discussion with the local authority where the pupil has an EHC plan.

12.3 Approval will be obtained promptly from the Headteacher and will not wait for a half-termly committee meeting. Any extension must be justified through review and recorded.

13. Formal and Legal Intervention

13.1 Legal intervention is a last resort and will be considered with the local authority when support is not appropriate, has not succeeded or has not been engaged with. ReFocus will follow the local authority's published code of conduct.

13.2 The national threshold for considering a penalty notice is generally ten unauthorised sessions within a rolling period of ten school weeks. Reaching the threshold does not make a notice automatic. The individual circumstances, support provided and likelihood that a notice will change parental behaviour must be considered.

13.3 Where appropriate, a Notice to Improve will set out the attendance concern, support offered, expected improvement and a review period normally between three and six weeks. A notice may not be appropriate in some cases, including certain unauthorised holidays.

13.4 Under the national framework:

- a first penalty notice for the same parent and pupil within three years is £80 if paid within 21 days, rising to £160 within 28 days;

- a second notice within three years is £160, payable within 28 days; and
- a third notice cannot be issued within that three-year period, so alternative action must be considered.

13.5 ReFocus will normally refer or request that the local authority considers formal intervention. The Headteacher or attendance staff will not describe a penalty notice or prosecution as automatic.

14. Attendance Information, Returns and Monitoring

14.1 ReFocus will make all required local-authority returns, including:

- new-pupil and deletion returns;
- attendance returns concerning pupils who fail to attend regularly or have ten continuous school days recorded using unauthorised-absence codes; and
- sickness returns where there are reasonable grounds to believe a pupil will miss 15 days consecutively or cumulatively because of illness.

14.2 ReFocus will participate in Targeting Support Meetings with the local authority at a frequency proportionate to need. Where attendance levels or individual cases require it, meetings should ordinarily be at least termly.

14.3 Attendance information will be analysed regularly by pupil, cohort, site, placement package, registration status, reason, code, day and session. Analysis will identify emerging absence, persistent absence of 10% or more, severe absence of 50% or more, repeated lateness and the impact of support.

14.4 Monitoring will include SEND, disability, looked-after status, social-worker involvement, young carers and protected characteristics. ReFocus will use reliable comparative information where available but will not assume access to DfE tools restricted to state-funded schools.

14.5 Information will be shared lawfully, securely and on a need-to-know basis with parents, commissioners, local authorities and relevant professionals. Attendance records and supporting case information will be retained in accordance with the statutory register requirement and ReFocus's records-retention arrangements.

15. Policy Availability, Monitoring and Review

15.1 The Senior Attendance Champion and Headteacher will review operational attendance information regularly. The governing board will receive anonymised information at least termly and will provide support and challenge. The proprietor will ensure that the policy is effectively implemented and reviewed annually or sooner where law, guidance or ReFocus arrangements change.

15.2 The policy will be made available to parents, carers, pupils and commissioners. Role-based contact details and current operational procedures will be published or provided separately.

Appendix A: Staged Attendance-support Framework

The stages below guide professional judgement. ReFocus may move between stages according to risk, need, context and the pupil's circumstances. Attendance percentages alone will not determine the response.

Stage 1 – Universal expectation: Clear expectations, accurate registers, positive relationships, same-day follow-up, routine praise and accessible help.

Stage 2 – Emerging concern: Key-worker discussion with the pupil and family, identification of barriers, agreed actions and close monitoring.

Stage 3 – Persistent concern: Attendance-support meeting involving the commissioner where appropriate, written plan, reasonable adjustments, targeted support and review dates.

Stage 4 – Intensive or multi-agency support: Senior Attendance Champion oversight, local-authority and professional involvement, consideration of Family Help, SEND or health review and a coordinated plan.

Stage 5 – Formal support: Attendance contract, Notice to Improve or other formal arrangement where voluntary support has not secured improvement or has not been engaged with.

Stage 6 – Legal intervention: Referral to the local authority for consideration of a penalty notice, education supervision order or prosecution where lawful, proportionate and necessary.

Appendix B: Application for Leave of Absence

Applications should be submitted as far in advance as reasonably possible. Contact the school with the following information. Please note providing this information does not mean that leave has been authorised.

- Pupil name:
- Parent/carers name:
- Dates and sessions requested:
- Reason for request and why the circumstances are exceptional:
- Supporting information attached (if applicable):
- Parent/carers signature and date:
- Headteacher decision: Authorised / Partly authorised / Unauthorised
- Attendance code(s):
- Reasons and any conditions:
- Headteacher signature and date:
- Parent/carers informed on/by:
- Commissioning school informed on/by (where applicable):