

Working together to improve school attendance

A quick guide for
parents, carers, schools,
trusts and governors



Wakefield's Children and Young People: Happy, Healthy, Safe

High levels of school attendance lead to improved educational outcomes for children and young people and therefore better life chances. Regular attendance, particularly for the most vulnerable, also helps to keep children and young people safe and provides better opportunities for identifying needs and providing support.

None of our aspirations for the children and young people of Wakefield will work without the support and involvement of our key partners. This quick guide sets out the basic responsibilities of parents, carers, schools, trusts and governing body based on Department for Education Guidance.

Wakefield Council's Attendance Strategy for 2023-26 is based on the Department for Education's recent guidance, 'Working together to improve school attendance' and associated documents.

The detail is contained in our 2023-26 strategy document, available online www.wakefield.gov.uk/attendance-strategy.

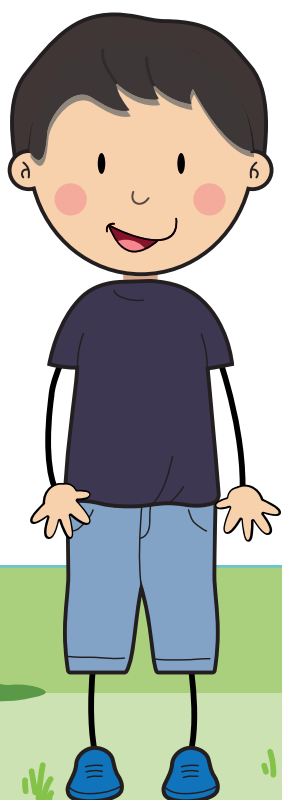


Our vision

Every child has a right to an education, and for the vast majority this education should take place within our schools. We and our partners are fully committed to this. Together, we will initiate and forge a cultural shift within our families, schools, communities and services to ensure that everyone takes responsibility for the attendance of Wakefield's children. We will jointly aim for 100%. No excuses.

Our approach

Wakefield's approach is designed to be graduated, responsive and partnership based, building on national guidance to ensure that local needs and context are met. Our approach is built around four key themes:



1

We are in this together:

Clear roles and responsibilities for all partners

2

We are consistent:

Recommendations for shared approaches

3

We recognise and support the most vulnerable:

Severe absence and groups

4

We are responsive:

Meeting need in the local context and contemporary world

Let's all work together to improve school attendance. **100% attendance. No Excuses.**

1. Key attendance responsibilities: **Parents and carers**

Parents and carers have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child attends school regularly. We expect every parent/carer to aim for their child to have 100% attendance.

Parents/carers must:

- Ensure their child attends every day except when there's a legal reason.
- Notify the school as soon as possible when their child has to be unexpectedly absent (e.g. sickness).
- Only request leave of absence in exceptional circumstances and do so in advance.
- Book medical appointments around the school day where possible.
- Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance.
- Proactively engage with the support offered to prevent the need for more formal support.
- Engage with formal support when it is offered, including parenting contracts and voluntary early help plans, to help prevent the need for legal intervention.

Cases of prolonged and/or repeated absence

Schools don't usually ask for proof of absences, but in some cases, they might need evidence for extended or recurring absences due to common reasons or medical appointments during school hours.

If your child will be absent for a long time, seek professional advice and support, provide evidence to the school to help them make necessary adjustments and find solutions to help your child attend. Parents/carers are expected to engage with this process, which might involve referrals to mental health services or consultations with a GP. Where particular support/advice for the family, including on attendance issues, is required, schools can refer the case to a Team Around the School meeting in order to offer further support for your child's attendance. You can engage with this process by requesting that a school does so, and/or by giving your consent and by further engagement with any recommendations and support that are offered.

Time away from school should be minimised, as the more time a child has away from school, the more difficult it becomes to engage them in a full return.

2. Key attendance responsibilities: Schools

Schools play a vital role in promoting and maximising attendance by creating a positive, inclusive environment where all students feel safe, welcome and engaged. The goal is to achieve 100% attendance for every pupil, no excuses.

Schools must:

- Have a clear school attendance policy on the school website.
- Regularly update parents/carers on their child's attendance.
- Foster a culture that emphasises the benefits of good attendance.
- Accurately complete admission and attendance registers.
- Have robust daily processes for addressing absence.
- Have a dedicated senior leader responsible for improving attendance.
- Use data to identify pupils at risk of poor attendance and develop support strategies.
- Collaborate with pupils and their parents to understand and address the reasons for absence, including any barriers.
- Provide support and referrals where out of school barriers are identified.
- Engage in multi-agency efforts with the local authority and partners where necessary.
- Provide targeted support for persistent absence, which may include working with partners.
- Hold more formal conversations with parents, be clear about legal requirement and possible intervention.
- Work with local authority on legal intervention where support is not working.
- Intensify support through statutory children's social care if safeguarding concerns arise.
- Work with other schools where required and share best practice.
- Agree a joint approach for all severely absent pupils with the local authority.

Where there are medical issues or special educational needs or disabilities, schools are also expected to:

- Coordinate pastoral support and provide additional adjustments like individual healthcare plans and if applicable, ensuring the provision outlined in the pupil's EHCP is accessed.
- Consider additional support from wider services and external partners.
- Monitor data for such groups, including at board and governing body meetings and with local authorities.

Where a child has a social worker, schools are also expected to:

- Inform the pupil's social worker if there are any unexplained absences and if their name is to be deleted from the register.

3. Key attendance responsibilities: **Governing bodies and academy trustees**

Governing bodies and academy trustees have an important statutory role in supporting attendance. This is monitored and evaluated externally by the DfE Regions Group and/or Ofsted.

Governing Bodies and Trusts should:

- Take an active role in attendance improvement, support their school(s) to prioritise attendance, and work together with leaders to set whole school cultures.
- Ensure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties.
- Ensure school staff receive training on attendance.
- Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.



4. Key attendance responsibilities: **Our whole school and district communities**

We encourage everyone in Wakefield, including families, communities, and authorities to actively support and engage in positive conversations about learning, education, and schools. This involvement can significantly enhance their educational experience, fostering a love of learning, improve academic skills and nurture overall development.

Questions that everyone can ask children and young people:

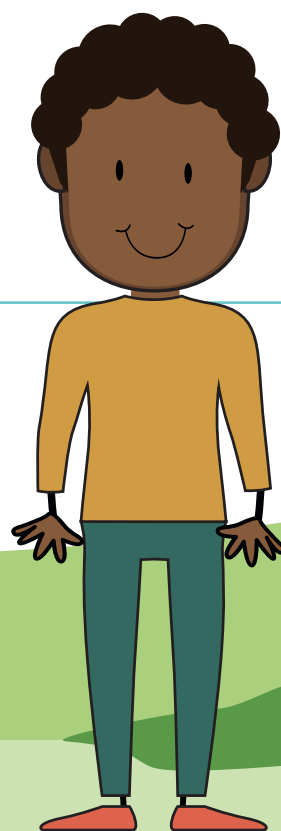
- What was the most exciting thing you learnt today?
- Did anything you learnt today surprise you?
- Can you share something you learnt today?
- Did you ask any questions in class today?
- Is there something you're curious about to learn more about in school or elsewhere?

Actively listen and show genuine interest in meaningful conversation about learning. Ask questions to stay connected and involved in their learning journey.

Let's collectively take responsibility for a cultural change around attendance, by asking 'How was school?'.

This should be in our everyday lives as well as children with whom we work professionally.

By showing we care about attendance and staying positive about education and schools, we can influence others to do the same, creating lasting cultural change for the benefit of our children, young people, families and communities.



The detail is contained in our
2023-26 strategy document, available online
www.wakefield.gov.uk/attendance-strategy

Department for Education Guidance can be found online
www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance

