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Attendance, Punctuality and Children Missing Education (CME) Policy

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Owner	Headteacher
Approved by	Proprietors / Governing Body
Applies to	All pupils (including those with SEND and EHCPs), staff, visitors, and contractors

Our ethos

Imagine Wellbeing School (IW) is a trauma-informed, communication-first independent SEND primary school. We recognise that attendance is both an educational and a safeguarding priority. For many pupils with autism, SEMH needs, complex communication needs, sensory processing differences, medical needs or school-based anxiety (including emotionally based school avoidance - EBSA), attending consistently can be hard. This policy sets out a relational, graduated, and evidence-led approach that: (a) removes barriers, (b) promotes belonging and safety, (c) meets statutory duties, and (d) secures the best possible outcomes for every child.

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1. Policy purpose, scope and principles

This policy explains how Imagine Wellbeing School promotes excellent attendance and punctuality, supports pupils and families in overcoming barriers, and meets statutory duties related to safeguarding, children missing education (CME), and pupil registration. It applies to all pupils on roll, including pupils attending through bespoke, graduated reintegration arrangements, off-site education or alternative provision commissioned by the school.

The policy is designed to be inclusive and proportionate for an independent SEND school. Our approach is consistent, transparent and compassionate: we recognise the impact of trauma, anxiety, sensory needs and communication differences, while also maintaining high expectations and legal compliance.

Our guiding principles are:

- Attendance is a safeguarding issue: absence can be an early indicator of harm, neglect, exploitation or unmet need.
- Relationships first: pupils attend when they feel safe, understood and successful; we prioritise belonging and trust.
- Remove barriers: we adapt provision, routines, communication and environment so pupils can access education.
- Early and graduated support: we intervene quickly and proportionately, using a clear escalation pathway and evidence.
- Multi-agency working: we collaborate with parents/carers, the Local Authority, health and social care as needed.
- Data with meaning: we monitor patterns, protected characteristics and vulnerability to ensure equity and accountability.
- High challenge, high support: we expect daily attendance wherever possible, but individualise how we achieve it.

2. Key definitions and attendance expectations

Attendance is measured as the proportion of possible sessions attended. Each school day consists typically of two sessions (morning and afternoon). Punctuality is an integral part of attendance.

We use the following key terms in this policy:

- Authorised absence: absence approved by the school because the reason is acceptable under registration guidance (e.g., illness) and evidence has been provided where required.
- Unauthorised absence: absence that the school has not approved (e.g., term-time holiday without exceptional circumstances).
- Persistent absence (PA): where attendance falls below 90% (or where patterns indicate emerging persistent absence).
- Severe absence: very low attendance (for example, around 50% or below) requiring urgent multi-agency response.
- CME (children missing education): pupils not receiving suitable education, and/or whose whereabouts are unknown, or engagement has broken down.
- EBSA (emotionally based school avoidance): school non-attendance associated with anxiety, distress or unmet need. EBSA is not truancy; it requires a therapeutic, personalised approach.

Our whole-school expectation is that pupils attend every day unless they are too unwell to participate in or there are exceptional, authorised reasons. As a working benchmark, we aim for at least 95% attendance across the school and for every pupil, where clinically and practically possible. We do not treat thresholds as a blunt instrument: pupils with complex needs may have a different journey, but every pupil will have a clear plan and ambitious improvement goals.

3. Statutory and regulatory framework

This policy is informed by the statutory duties and inspection expectations relevant to independent schools. It should be read alongside the school’s Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, Behaviour Policy, SEND Policy, Medical Needs/Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy, Positive Handling Policy and Data Protection arrangements.

Key sources include (non-exhaustive):

- Education Act 1996 (including parental duty for regular attendance).
- Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations (current).
- DfE statutory and non-statutory guidance on improving school attendance and children missing education (current).
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (current statutory guidance).
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (current).
- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISS) - particularly Parts 3, 4 and 5 regarding welfare, behaviour, safeguarding and information.
- Ofsted/ISI inspection handbooks and the inspection focus on attendance, behaviour, personal development and safeguarding.
- Equality Act 2010 - reasonable adjustments and non-discrimination for pupils with protected characteristics and disabilities.

Inspection evidence typically includes attendance tracking and analysis, first-day calling, CME records and escalation documentation, alongside wellbeing and safeguarding systems. Our record-keeping and QA model are structured to evidence these expectations (see sections 13-14 and the appendices).

4. Roles and responsibilities

Attendance is everyone’s responsibility. Clear roles ensure that pupils are safe, families are supported, and records are accurate and auditable.

Role	Key attendance responsibilities (summary)
Proprietors / Governing body	Strategic oversight; approve policy; receive termly attendance and CME reports; ensure resources and training are in place; challenge and support leaders.
Headteacher	Overall accountability for attendance strategy, culture, safeguarding response to absence, and compliance with statutory duties.
Attendance Lead / Attendance Officer	Daily monitoring; first-day response; data analysis; coordination of support and escalation; liaison with LA and agencies; record keeping.
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Safeguarding oversight; risk assessment where absence raises concern; decisions about home visits and referrals; oversight of CME processes.
SENDCo	Barrier removal for SEND, EBSA and medical needs; integration with EHCP outcomes; access arrangements; liaison with therapists and parents.
Class teachers / Tutors	Positive relationships, register accuracy, daily check-ins, return-to-school conversations, and maintaining communication with families.
Family Support / Pastoral team	Relational support, practical help, attendance plans, parent workshops, and early help coordination.
Transport provider / Escorts (where applicable)	Safe and reliable collection/drop-off; reporting non-collections; supporting pupils with anxiety and transitions.
Parents/carers	Ensure regular attendance; provide timely absence information; engage with support plans and meetings; keep contact details up to date.
Pupils	In an age-appropriate way, contribute to planning for attendance, transitions and wellbeing; use communication tools to express concerns.

5. Daily procedures: registers, punctuality and late collection

5.1 Registers

Registers are completed twice daily, promptly at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions, in line with registration requirements. Registers provide an immediate safeguarding 'snapshot' of where pupils are and must be treated as a legal document.

- Teachers/tutors take registers at the agreed times and immediately notify the Attendance Lead of any unexpected absence.
- Attendance is recorded using the school's management information system. Where electronic systems fail, a paper contingency register is used and later uploaded.
- All registers are retained securely and can be produced for inspection, audit or safeguarding review.

5.2 Punctuality

Punctuality supports learning, regulation, and predictability, which are significant for many SEND pupils. We work with families to ensure travel, routines and transition supports are in place.

- The school day start and 'register close' times are communicated to parents and reviewed annually.
- Late arrivals must sign in at reception; reasons are recorded.
- Where lateness is linked to SEND needs (e.g., anxiety, sensory overload), we agree adjustments such as staggered starts, supported entry or transport review.
- Persistent lateness triggers the graduated response in section 7.

5.3 Safe collection and late collection

Safe collection is part of safeguarding. Many pupils cannot safely leave the site independently.

- Parents/carers must ensure a named adult collects the pupil. Changes must be communicated to the office and verified.
- If a pupil is not collected on time, staff follow the school's late collection procedure: supervision, contact attempts, emergency contacts, and safeguarding escalation if needed.
- Where late collection becomes a pattern, the school will convene a meeting and may seek early help and support.

6. First-day response and safeguarding checks

Unexplained absence triggers a same-day safeguarding response. This includes first-day contact, welfare checks and escalation where we cannot confirm a child's safety.

First-day response (Day 1):

- If a pupil is absent without a prior message, the Attendance Lead contacts parents/carers by phone and text as early as possible.
- If no contact is made, we continue attempts across the day and check alternative numbers.
- If there are known safeguarding concerns or the pattern is high risk, the DSL is informed immediately for a risk assessment.
- Where required, a home visit is arranged by trained staff (following lone-working and risk assessment procedures).
- If the school cannot establish the child's whereabouts and there is a safety concern, the DSL will contact the Local Authority and/or Police as appropriate.

Our attendance processes are designed to demonstrate safeguarding expectations, including first-day calling logs, home-visit records, welfare checks, and escalation outcomes.

7. Attendance monitoring, thresholds and graduated response

IW uses a graduated, evidence-led response that combines support and appropriate challenge. We monitor attendance daily and review patterns weekly. We also analyse attendance by vulnerability and protected characteristics to ensure equity.

7.1 Monitoring

- Daily: registers checked, unexplained absence actioned, patterns flagged.
- Weekly: Attendance Lead reviews cohort and individual data; identifies emerging concerns; updates the attendance action tracker.
- Half-termly: attendance panel meeting (Headteacher, Attendance Lead, DSL, SENDCo, pastoral) to review targeted pupils and evaluate impact.
- Termly: report to Proprietors/Governing Body, including persistent absence, severe absence, CME and interventions.

7.2 Thresholds and triggers (with professional judgement)

Thresholds prompt a conversation and a plan; they are not automatic sanctions. SEND, and the medical context is always considered, alongside safeguarding risks.

- 95% and above: expected range; maintain and celebrate.
- Below 95%: early conversation; identify barriers; agree short actions.
- Below 92% or repeated patterns (e.g., Mondays, after holidays): targeted support plan; consider EBSA screening and wider needs.
- Below 90% (persistent absence): formal attendance improvement plan; multi-agency involvement as appropriate.
- Severe absence / safety concerns: urgent DSL-led review; referral pathways activated; consider CME processes.

7.3 Graduated response pathway (summary)

- Stage 1 - Universal: intense routines, welcoming culture, teaching for engagement, predictable transitions, celebration of effort and improvement.
- Stage 2 - Early help: attendance conversation, barrier check, adjustment to routine/transport, short-term targets, weekly check-ins.
- Stage 3 - Targeted: written attendance support plan, return-to-school meetings, pastoral/therapy input, SENDCo review, consider early help assessment.
- Stage 4 - Intensive: attendance panel, multi-agency meeting, risk assessment, consideration of enforcement pathways in line with Local Authority code of conduct (where appropriate).
- Stage 5 - CME / safeguarding: where whereabouts are unknown, or education is not being accessed, and engagement breaks down, follow CME procedures and safeguarding escalation.

8. Supporting SEND, EBSA and medical needs

As an independent SEND school, IW expects that many pupils will require reasonable adjustments and a bespoke pathway to secure attendance. Support is planned through the Assess-Plan-Do-Review cycle and aligned with EHCP outcomes.

8.1 Removing barriers

- Predictable routines and visual timetables; pre-teaching of transitions; social stories; supported arrivals.
- Sensory-informed environment and equipment (e.g., ear defenders, movement breaks, regulation spaces).
- Communication support (AAC, visual prompts, simplified language, key adult check-ins).
- Trauma-informed approaches and relational practice; consistent staffing; restorative, non-shaming conversations.
- Adjustments to curriculum access to ensure pupils experience success quickly (high nurture + high structure).

8.2 EBSA (emotionally based school avoidance)

Where attendance difficulties are linked to anxiety/distress, we adopt an EBSA-informed approach. This includes understanding triggers, co-producing plans with the pupil and their family, and gradually building attendance while maintaining ambition.

- Early identification using pattern analysis and conversation with pupils/parents.
- Functional assessment: what happens before, during and after non-attendance.
- An EBSA support plan with clear roles, adjustments, graded exposure steps, and review dates.
- Access to therapeutic support (where available) and coordination with health professionals.
- A focus on regulation, safety and belonging before academic demand increases.

8.3 Medical needs and healthcare plans

When pupils have medical needs, the school works with families and clinicians to ensure safe attendance. Individual Healthcare Plans (IHPs) and risk assessments guide adjustments, medication arrangements and emergency procedures.

- Medical appointments should be arranged outside school hours where possible; evidence may be requested for frequent appointments.
- For ongoing medical conditions affecting attendance, the school may request medical confirmation to plan appropriate support.
- Where a pupil is too unwell to attend, we maintain contact, plan reintegration and consider suitable education arrangements if absence becomes prolonged.

8.4 EQUALS and engagement

For some pupils, 'attendance' must be understood alongside engagement and regulation. IW draws on EQUALS principles for engagement and progress for learners working below age-related expectations. Attendance improvement plans, therefore, include measures of engagement, wellbeing and access, not just percentage figures.

- We track attendance alongside engagement indicators (settled arrival, time in learning, participation, communication attempts).
- We celebrate progress such as increased time on site, reduced distress, and improved regulation as steps towards full attendance.
- We evidence impact through observations, pupil voice (using AAC where needed), parent feedback and EHCP review information.

9. Authorised and unauthorised absence

The school decides whether to authorise an absence based on national registration guidance and the specific circumstances. Parents/carers must provide a reason for absence on the first day and keep the school informed.

9.1 Examples of authorised absence (subject to evidence where needed)

- Genuine illness or medical incapacity.
- Medical/dental appointments (where unavoidable during school hours).
- Religious observance (in line with agreed practice).
- Exceptional family circumstances such as bereavement (discretionary).
- Fixed-term exclusion or agreed alternative provision arrangements.

9.2 Examples of unauthorised absence

- Term-time holidays without exceptional circumstances.
- Shopping, birthdays, leisure activities.
- Oversleeping or missing transport without an exceptional reason.
- Parent refusal to send a child to school without a valid reason.
- Failure to provide a reason or evidence when requested.

If no acceptable reason is provided within five school days, the absence is generally recorded as unauthorised. However, safeguarding and the SEND context are constantly reviewed by the Attendance Lead and DSL.

10. Term-time leave and exceptional circumstances

The school strongly discourages term-time leave as it disrupts education, routines and therapeutic progress. Leave of absence during term time will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances and must be requested in advance using the school's form.

- Each request is considered individually by the Headteacher (or delegate) based on evidence and the impact on the pupil.
- Cheap travel, parental preference and holidays are not exceptional circumstances.
- Where leave is not authorised, absence will be recorded as unauthorised and may be subject to Local Authority enforcement processes.

11. Part-time timetables, reintegration and alternative provision

IW recognises that a small number of pupils may temporarily require a reduced timetable as part of a carefully planned reintegration strategy. Part-time timetables are exceptional, time-limited, and reviewed frequently.

11.1 Principles for part-time timetables

- Only used where it is in the pupil's best interests and supports a return to full-time education.
- Agreed in writing with parents/carers and (where appropriate) the Local Authority.
- Underpinned by a clear plan: rationale, targets, review dates, safeguarding considerations, and how education will be provided.
- Not used as a long-term solution or as a response to behaviour without support and intervention.

11.2 Reintegration planning

Reintegration plans may include: graded exposure, supported arrival, key adult greeting, calming routines, reduced demand initially, and a structured increase in time and curriculum access. Plans are co-produced with the pupil wherever possible.

11.3 Alternative provision and off-site education

Where education is delivered off-site or through an alternative provider, IW retains responsibility for safeguarding, quality and attendance oversight. The school ensures: written agreements, daily attendance confirmation, risk assessments, and regular review of progress and safety.

- Daily confirmation of attendance and safeguarding information-sharing with the provider.
- Clear procedures for unexplained absence from off-site provision mirroring the school's first-day response.
- Regular quality assurance visits/reviews and checks on staff suitability and safeguarding arrangements.

12. Children Missing Education (CME), missing child and removal from roll

IW follows robust procedures when a pupil is not attending, and we cannot confirm they are receiving a suitable education. CME processes are DSL-led and prioritise safeguarding.

12.1 When CME procedures may apply

- The school cannot locate a pupil and has concerns about their safety or whereabouts.
- The pupil has stopped attending, and the family is not engaging with support.
- There are repeated unexplained absences, and the pupil's safety cannot be confirmed.
- A parent indicates they no longer want the pupil to attend, but no suitable alternative education is confirmed.

12.2 CME actions (summary)

- Day 1: first-day response and DSL risk assessment.
- By Day 3 (or sooner for high risk): consider home visit(s) and multi-agency contact; record all actions.
- If thresholds for early help or social care are met: make a referral with evidence of actions taken.
- If enforcement thresholds are met and the pupil remains on roll: liaise with the Local Authority Attendance/Inclusion team.
- If removal from roll is being considered: follow registration regulations precisely and complete required notifications to the Local Authority.

Removal from roll is a legal process and must not be used to 'manage' attendance. IW will only remove a pupil from the roll in line with registration regulations, after appropriate safeguarding checks and Local Authority notifications have been completed.

13. Information sharing, data protection and record-keeping

Accurate records protect pupils and the school. Attendance records are stored securely and shared lawfully where there is a safeguarding or statutory need.

- Daily registers and attendance codes are retained in line with retention schedules.
- First-day calling logs, home visit records, meeting minutes and attendance plans are stored in the pupil file.
- Information may be shared with the Local Authority, health, social care and other agencies where required for safeguarding or statutory processes.
- All processing of personal data complies with UK GDPR and the school's Data Protection Policy.

14. Quality assurance, reporting and governance oversight

To meet inspection expectations, IW maintains a clear evidence trail for attendance, CME and safeguarding actions. Quality assurance focuses on impact, not just compliance.

- Attendance Lead maintains an attendance tracker with actions, dates and outcomes.
- DSL audits a sample of attendance and CME cases termly to ensure safeguarding quality.
- Senior leaders review attendance strategies half-termly, including analysis by vulnerability/protected characteristics.
- Proprietors/Governing Body receive termly reports and challenge leaders on trends, actions and impact.

Evidence sets often include attendance analysis, escalation records, first-day calling logs, and CME documentation, alongside wellbeing and safeguarding records that are consistent with inspection checklists and handbooks.

15. Staff training and culture

All staff receive induction and regular updates on attendance procedures, safeguarding links to absence, and trauma-informed practice. Training includes EBSA awareness, communication strategies, and the school's graduated response pathway.

- Induction: registration procedures, first-day response, safeguarding escalation, record keeping.
- Annual updates: attendance guidance changes, CME expectations, learning from audits and case reviews.
- Targeted CPD: EBSA, autism-informed transitions, sensory-informed practice, de-escalation, and family engagement.

16. Appendices (templates, flowcharts and forms)

The following appendices are included to support consistent practice and audit-ready evidence.

Appendix A: Attendance escalation pathway (summary table)

Stage	Typical actions	Trigger	Lead
Universal (all pupils)	Daily welcoming routines; consistent start/end; wellbeing check-ins; inclusive curriculum; communication-first practice; celebrate improvement.	Ongoing	Class teacher; Attendance Lead monitors.
Early concern	Conversation with parent/carer; barrier checklist; agree on quick adjustments; weekly monitoring for 3-4 weeks.	As soon as attendance dips below expected / patterns emerge	Attendance Lead + Class teacher.
Targeted support	Written attendance support plan; return-to-school meetings; SENDCo input; pastoral/therapy strategies; consider Early Help.	Attendance approaching PA threshold or repeated patterns	Attendance Lead; SENDCo; DSL informed.
Persistent absence	Attendance panel; multi-agency meeting; risk assessment; review provision; consider LA involvement.	Below 90% or severe patterns	Headteacher; Attendance Lead; DSL; SENDCo.
Safeguarding / CME	Welfare checks; home visits; referrals; LA CME notifications; ensure education is in place and the child is safe.	Whereabouts unknown/non-engagement/high risk	DSL leads; Headteacher oversight.

Appendix B: Attendance recording - quick guide

Staff must use the attendance codes available within the school's MIS in line with current registration guidance. The table below provides a simplified guide; the Attendance Lead maintains the complete code set and provides updates if guidance changes.

Category	Description
Present	The pupil is in school for the session.
Late before registers close	Pupil arrives after the start but before the register closes.
Late after registers close (unauthorised)	Pupil arrives after registers have closed; recorded as an unauthorised absence for that session.
Authorised illness	Illness reported and accepted; evidence may be requested for frequent absence.
Medical appointment	Unavoidable appointment during school hours; evidence may be requested.
Unauthorised absence	Reason not accepted or no reason provided in time.
Educated off-site / alternative provision	Pupil attends approved off-site provision; daily confirmation required.

Appendix C: Return-to-school meeting - prompt questions (staff)

- Welcome back: How are you feeling today? What do you need to feel safe and settled?
- What made it hard to come in? (Consider sensory, anxiety, relationships, transitions, sleep, transport, medical, and bullying concerns.)
- What helped you manage to come in today?
- Agree on next steps: one or two small actions for school, and one or two for home.
- Consider adjustments: supported arrival, reduced demand, regulation breaks, key adult, visual timetable, transport review.
- Set a review date and how we will check progress (daily/weekly).

Appendix D: Attendance support plan template (to be completed for targeted pupils)

Pupil: _____ Year Group: ____ Date opened: ____ Review date: ____

- Attendance summary and patterns (including days/lessons):
- Known needs (SEND, medical, SEMH, safeguarding context):
- Barriers identified (pupil voice/parent voice/staff view):
- Protective factors and what is working:
- Adjustments and support actions (school):
- Actions and support (home):
- Multi-agency involvement and contacts:
- Short-term targets (next 2-4 weeks):
- Longer-term aim (return to full attendance or agreed pathway):
- Safeguarding risk assessment summary (DSL):
- Review notes and impact evidence:

Appendix E: EBSA plan template (graduated exposure and regulation)

- Triggers and early warning signs:
- Regulation strategies that help (at home and at school):
- Key adults and safe spaces:
- Arrival plan (step-by-step):

- Demand adjustment plan (first week back):
- Graded exposure steps (e.g., 20 mins on site → 1 session → morning only → full day):
- Communication plan (daily check-in method, visual scale, home-school messages):
- Review schedule and success indicators (attendance %, distress reduction, engagement):

Appendix F: Term-time leave request form (parent/carer)

Pupil: _____ Class: ____ Dates requested: _____ Total school days: _____

Reason for request (attach evidence where relevant):

School decision: Authorised / Unauthorised Decision date: ____ Signed (Headteacher): ____

Appendix G: CME checklist (DSL/Attendance Lead)

1. Check contact details, emergency contacts and known addresses are up to date.
2. Day 1: complete first-day response and record all contact attempts.
3. Risk assess immediately if there are safeguarding concerns; consult DSL.
4. By Day 3 (or sooner if high risk): consider home visit and multi-agency checks.
5. Consider Early Help or Social Care referral if thresholds met; attach evidence of school actions.
6. Liaise with Local Authority Attendance/CME team as required; follow local processes.
7. If removal from the roll is considered, follow registration regulations precisely and submit required notifications.