Trust Attendance Policy

For all staff at Meridian Trust, to clarify the aims, procedures and actions for working together to improve attendance and manage student absence within adaptive and inclusive practices

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Contents

1. Introduction 3
Aims & Responsibilities 3
The Trust Attendance Engagement Framework....5
Parent/Carer/Family Responsibilities 6
2. Safeguarding and LA Responsibilities....7
3. Absence 8
4... The Law, National Framework for Penalty Notices and Legal Interventions 11
Legislation and Guidance 11
Registration and Punctuality....12
The National Framework for Penalty Notices and Legal Interventions....13
5. Day to Day Processes 15
Registration and Punctuality....15
Absence Exploration 16
Children Missing Education (CME) 17
Elective Home Education (EHE) 18
Requesting Exceptional Term Time Absence (ETTLA) incl. Religious Observance 19
Data Tracking & Monitoring....20
Promoting and Incentivising 21
6. Supporting Documents - Annexes 22
Annex A - The Attendance Engagement Framework: 22
Annex B -Exceptional Term Time Leave of Absence Request Form: 23
Annex C - Academy Contact Details and Registration Information:....25
Annex D - DfE Statutory Attendance Code Overview:....26

1. Introduction

This policy applies to all academies within Meridian Trust and it follows the Department of Education (DfE) Statutory Guidance on Working Together to Improve School Attendance ethos of building strong relationships with families, ensuring a **support first approach**, promoting the benefits of attending school, recognising absence as a symptom of barriers that cause absence and only using enforcement as a last resort.

We recognise that every child has a right to an education and research shows children who attend regularly have a much higher chance of achieving in line with, or above their potential. This reinforces that absence can disrupt learning, teaching routines, knowledge and development, and it can prevent both engagement and enjoyment - every moment matters!

We believe following this policy helps us all to keep children safe, healthy, and able to participate in their education and their community, which supports well-being, learning, achievement and transition into adulthood. The policy also ensures we follow the law and legal responsibilities that preserve every child's right to education.

This policy relates to all children of all ages within our academies however, where enforcement is mentioned, this only relates to compulsory school age children (see section 4 of this policy for a definition of this).

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Policy Annexes A-D and the legislation and guidance documents referred to in Section 4 of this policy.

Aims & Responsibilities

The aims of this policy are to clarify procedures and actions for staff to work together with families to improve attendance and manage student absence within adaptive and inclusive practices (e.g., SEND Access, Plan, Do, Review (APDR) and Therapeutic Thinking 'Respectful Relationships' practice) alongside clarifying the laws, guidance, duties and responsibilities regarding attendance.

The Trust is committed to ensuring that attendance is positively promoted and seen as a **safeguarding priority** and that our academy staff are trained to feel confident to support every child in feeling safe, welcome and included in their learning environment. We will ensure that processes are in place to provide strategic leadership in attendance improvement and quality assure all areas of attendance across the trust. This will enable the sharing of good practice and

ensure our academies are consistent in their approach and compliance with the law. We will use data to identify where support may be required and drive improvements forward in a supportive but outcome focused way.

We aim to support children to have the highest attendance and punctuality possible through developing environments that children want to attend because they feel they belong. To achieve this, all staff, inclusive of Academy Councils (governing bodies), Headteachers/Principals, Leadership Teams, Teachers and Support Staff:

- Make sure that attendance is **everyone's responsibility** ensuring all staff are trained to understand their role, which includes contributing to a welcoming, supportive and inclusive environment.
- Have an identified Senior Attendance Champion to lead on attendance and implement interventions to improve whole school and individual attendance levels (individual academy details are in Annex C of the policy).
- Have clear expectations and effective day-to-day systems to promote attendance, take accurate morning and afternoon registers and follow up on absence. Also ensuring where a child has a Social Worker or Youth Offending Officer, they are informed of all absence.
- Prevent children becoming persistently absent (see Section 3 for definitions) by identifying barriers that cause absence early through rigorous monitoring and analysis of data, followed up by connecting with children and parents, and exploring issues through conversations and supportive meetings where required.
- Work collaboratively with children and families and external practitioners in a child centric way to make reasonable adjustments where appropriate and provide targeted support for individuals, families and/or vulnerable groups. This will include sharing information within 'early help' and 'family plan' practices to support keeping children safe.
- Ensure children and families have information, advice, praise and support to achieve the highest levels of attendance and punctuality as possible. This starts with tutor/teacher conversations, pastoral/house/attendance teams discussions and where needed, support meetings to discuss and plan support that may be required.
- Follow their statutory duties in considering if legal action (enforcement) or intensive support is appropriate. This may be where support has been

exhausted, safeguarding concerns exist (especially where a child's attendance is 50% or less), or if an absence has been taken for the purposes of 'recreation or leisure', always following their Local Authority Code of Conduct.

The Trust Attendance Engagement Framework

The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the school gates, including but not limited to, physical and mental health, trauma, socio-economic circumstances and learning needs. Some pupils find it harder than others to attend school e.g., young carers, those with medical or health needs, additional learning needs, social or family needs etc. Meridian Trust's **Attendance Engagement Framework** (Annex A) has been developed to support both staff and families in early recognition of when support may be required, enabling a collaborative approach to identifying and removing barriers that cause absence. This contributes to helping students feel safe, engaged with their learning, and to want to be in school every day.

Our framework intentionally links with the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) APDR (Assess, Plan, Do, Review) process that supports the identification of barriers to learning. Additionally, this ensures staff understand that poor attendance can be a direct symptom of potential unmet need. As our staff are already familiar with the terminology and processes of therapeutic thinking as part of our Respectful Relationships practice, this also helps everyone to utilise the tools available within their attendance work, alongside the work they do to support SEND and APDR processes.

Our framework consists of four principles:

Principle 1 - **Notice & Connect** (APDR Assess) - staff are encouraged to NOTICE if attendance expectations are not being met, or there are patterns or trends indicating support may be required and CONNECT with information and people to gather information.

Principle 2 - **Explore & Understand** (APDR Assess) – staff are then encouraged to discuss what they are observing/seeing or hearing and EXPLORE what might be happening to UNDERSTAND what the root cause of the concern, challenge or struggle might be and consider what support might help.

Principle 3 – **Support & Action** (APDR Plan & Do) – staff are encouraged to collaborate with families and external practitioners to plan relevant SUPPORT and when agreed, put that support into ACTION.

Principle 4 – **Review & Decide** (APDR Review) – staff then monitor progress and REVIEW to evaluate the impact of the support that is in place, consider new or adapted support and DECIDE the next actions required.

Our framework is in line with the DfE's statutory guidance which states schools should Expect, Monitor, Listen and Understand, Facilitate Support, Formalise Support and Enforce which is what happens within our process; enforcement only being considered as a last resort.

We believe that our framework will support processes and 'curious thinking' around helping every child **aspire** to attend every day, on time and be ready to learn. Where this is prevented by an exceptional cause/reason, we want children and families to feel able to talk to us about what the challenges or worries are so that we can discuss what support might help prevent and reduce absence. We believe this approach supports us to avoid families being subjected to legal enforcement wherever possible and it achieves the best outcomes for children and families.

Parent/Carer/Family Responsibilities

The trust recognises that parents/carers are key partners in securing good attendance and we want to maintain clear and respectful communication. The term 'Parent/Carer' is used to address those with responsibilities for education and attendance matters and identifying those with legal responsibilities for a child's 'daily care', and therefore attendance; the definition of a parent is:

'Parents' are determined as per Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 which defines a parent as:

- *the natural parents of a child, whether they are married or not;*
- *anyone who although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child;*
- *any person who has care of a child or young person i.e., lives with and looks after the child.*

Parents/carers have a legal duty to ensure their child receives education, and where a child has been enrolled in a school, they **must** ensure the child has **regular attendance** – this means every day the school is open, except if a

statutory reason for absence applies. This also applies where appropriate alternative education is in place (e.g., where there are barriers to physically attending school or as part of meeting additional needs etc.).

Parents/carers play a vital role in encouraging their child's attendance, developing their attitude to learning, and working collaboratively with the academy, so it is important they:

- Ensure their contact information is kept up to date (especially for cases of emergency).
- Notify the academy (wherever possible, prior to the morning register time in Annex C) on the first day of absence and daily thereafter or as agreed, if their child needs to be absent due to illness etc.
- Promptly discuss any barriers, worries or challenges their child has.
- Work in partnership with staff in the exploration and planning of support.
- Engage in any agreed support.
- Arrange appointments involving the child wherever possible, outside of the school day and where this is not possible, work with the registration points to avoid an absence being recorded (we understand that some medical appointments have limited flexibility).

If a planned period of exceptional term-time leave of absence (ETTLA) is unavoidable, it **must** be requested in advance (the DfE state that absence cannot be authorised retrospectively), and there must be clear exceptional circumstances requiring the absence (please see Annex B for the ETTLA Request Form).

2. Safeguarding and LA Responsibilities

All schools/academies and Local Authorities have a continuing responsibility to manage and improve attendance across their community to safeguard the welfare of all students. Attendance is an essential foundation in the positive outcomes and safeguarding of children and all concerns about a child's attendance will be explored promptly to fulfil this duty.

Unexplained or extended absences will trigger safeguarding procedures, including home visits and communication with relevant agencies. These visits will be risk assessed and normally take place between day 1 and 5 of initial absence. Where illness is reported and/or long-term absence occurs, we will aim to do '**keeping in touch**' home visits regularly (generally we aim for every 10

school days but professional judgement will be made). Most visits will be face to face at the family home but on occasion can be by virtual means where agreed. We will work with Children's Social Care if required to acquire intense support and all staff have access to a trained Designated Safeguarding Lead to support this process.

The above is reinforced in the statutory guidance documents Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2026, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 (KCSiE) which states:

"Children being absent from education for prolonged periods and/or on repeat occasions can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, child sexual and child criminal exploitation - particularly county lines. It is important the school or college's response to persistently absent pupils, and children missing education (CME) supports identifying such abuse, and in the case of absent pupils, helps prevent the risk of them becoming a child missing education in the future."

Local Authorities (LA) have an additional statutory duty to ensure all children in their area are accessing appropriate education. They will provide our academies with support, information and guidance by meeting with the Senior Attendance Champion regularly to support reduction of absence, improvement of attendance interventions, and ensure that children who are unable to attend school due to health or additional needs can access education appropriately (section 19 Education Act 1996). They will also process legal action in line with their statutory enforcement duties if absence cases meet the threshold to do so.

3. Absence

A 'school day' has two sessions; each half-day (AM or PM) equals one session and one whole day equals two sessions. Absences from school must be classified by the school as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED and we must record this on the official register which is a legal document. We will always need to seek information from parents/carers about absences so that we can accurately record the reason for absence.

The government brought in national thresholds for determining when absence levels become a concern, at which point supportive action should be considered and if no support is required, enforcement action must be considered. These thresholds refer to absence levels overall and they can be authorised or unauthorised (see below for definitions). These thresholds are:

Persistent Absence (PA) – a level of '10% or above absence' (also often referred to as '90% or below attendance') and can be calculated as an overall (year to date) figure or for a specific period of 10 rolling school weeks. The PA threshold is equal to missing 10 sessions within a rolling period of 10 school weeks or 38 sessions within an academic year (equivalent to 1 day or more per fortnight across a full school year).

Severe absence (SA) – a level of '50% or above absence' is extremely concerning and guidance recommends that these children may need more intensive support across a range of services which is likely to involve a whole family plan. This is equal to missing 50 sessions within a rolling period of 10 school weeks or 190 sessions within an academic year.

The national threshold is also used for considering if legal action is required and part of that decision is the type of absence that has occurred. For absence to be considered for enforcement/legal action the absence must be a minimum of 10 unauthorised absences within the rolling 10 school-week period. Please see Section 4 of this policy for more details.

Unauthorised absence is where the Headteacher/Principal (or their designated staff member) does **not** consider it reasonable to be absent due to either the reason given, or the overall level of concern surrounding the child's absence level or pattern. It might also be due to a child arriving late after the register has closed or a parent/carer not requesting a planned absence in advance (i.e. an 'Exceptional Term Time Leave of Absence' request form has not been completed in advance). NB. the DfE "does not consider a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation" to be an exceptional circumstance. Please note that unauthorised absence can potentially lead to legal action being considered/taken.

Authorised absence may be for illness, medical/dental appointments (which unavoidably fall within the school day), specific days of religious observance, emergencies or any other exceptional circumstance that is deemed unavoidable. It is the Headteacher/Principal who decides if an absence is authorised as per the DfE Guidance. Where possible, it is always helpful and advisable for parents/carers to share **supportive information** to help them and the academy work together using relevant information that aids the decision-making process. This also helps to ensure absence is recorded accurately and ensures the most appropriate support can be put into place quickly where needed.

SEND, Medical & Illness Absence (including EBSA - Emotionally Based School Avoidance)

These absence reasons require robust partnership working. Although illness is a reason that can generally be authorised based on parental information, the DfE have made it clear in the 2026 updated statutory guidance that *"where there is genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the illness"*, or *"when supporting children with prolonged or repeated patterns of illness"*, supportive information can be requested *"to better understand the child's health needs and put support or reasonable adjustments in place"*.

It is important to understand that local authority processes almost always require academies to provide extra evidence to access external support that children and families may require due to reasons that fall into these categories of absence.

Our academies will not routinely request 'evidence' and we will not be 'rigid' about the type of evidence required; we will work collaboratively with everyone involved to achieve the best outcome for the child. Generally, 'medical evidence' will only be sought to clarify absences based on the length or frequency of the absence, to gain clarity around a medical or SEND need that may need support, as part of an Attendance Contract (used to support the information gathering process where Student Support Plans have not worked to improve a child's attendance level despite support) or where consideration for legal intervention i.e., where a Warning Letter has been issued, although professional judgement will be used in whether this needs to be enforced.

An absence 'concern' may be where absences have:

- become frequent
- a pattern/trend to them has become obvious
- reached the national threshold for PA overall or within 10 school weeks
- reached the national threshold for considering legal action due to absence being unauthorised overall or within 10 school weeks

EBSA is a term often used to describe absence *"that is rooted in emotional, mental health or wellbeing issues"* (Anna Freud). It is a growing area of research and development and as a trust, our Attendance Engagement Framework supports the exploration of all types of absence, including EBSA-related absence.

4. The Law, National Framework for Penalty Notices and Legal Interventions

Legislation and Guidance

This policy is underpinned by various pieces of legislation and statutory guidance documents. We also follow non-statutory guidance documents too wherever possible to ensure we utilise best practice recommendations. Children are supported 'in law' by the Children's Act 1989 & 2014 and the new Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026. Attendance is underpinned by various laws the main one being the Education Act 1996 and amendments. Section 7 of the act states that:

> *"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."*

Section 444 of the above law details the definition of an 'offence' as "failure to secure regular attendance at school of registered pupil".

A child is of **compulsory school age** from the term after their 4th birthday until the last Friday in June of their 16th year.

A child is of **non-compulsory school age** before and after the above dates/ages and they are normally learning within EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery & Reception) and 'Post-16' (6th Form) learning environments. Although there is no legislation to enforce attendance of non-compulsory school age children, guidance reinforces that attendance should be encouraged, absence should be reported by parents/carers, and absence should be followed up as per compulsory school age children to fulfil safeguarding duties.

The use of Penalty Notices as a legal intervention are under The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 and amendments and The Anit-Social Behaviour Act 2003. Where a Local Authority deems an investigation into whether an offence has been committed is required this will be done using the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE).

The responsibilities around admission, attendance registers, deletion from roll and exceptional leave of absence are governed by The School Attendance

(Pupil Regulations) (England) Regulations 2024. Legislation surrounding the employment and attendance of children involved in performances, modelling, and other activities outside of regular school hours feeds into the attendance laws and guidance from the Children and Young Persons Act and the Children (Performances) Regulations 1968.

This policy should be read alongside all of the above legislation and the statutory guidance documents on working together to improve school attendance, children missing education, supporting pupils at school with medical conditions, education for children with health needs who cannot attend school, suspensions and exclusions, alternative provision, and Keeping Children Safe in Education. Additional pieces of legislation and guidance that should be read alongside for EYFS (Nursery/Reception children) and Post 16 (Sixth Form) are Early Years Foundation Statutory Framework 2026, and the Participation of Young People in Education, Employment or Training (which is underpinned by the Education and Skills Act 2008).

Registration and Punctuality

Under Regulation 8 of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 all academies must keep accurate admission and attendance registers electronically and they must be kept for 6 years.

On admitting a pupil to their roll, in accordance with regulation 13(1) to (3) all schools must make a return to the LA within 5 days of the student starting when the start is outside of the normal admission round (e.g., Reception or Year 7).

A legal registration must also be taken twice during the academy day; at a morning session and afternoon session (both of which must not be open for longer than 30 minutes); this is for both compulsory and non-compulsory school age students. The afternoon registration used for DfE data purposes is the session that occurs after the last significant break.

Regulation 10 of the above regulations stipulates that the contents of the attendance register must be kept in accordance with the coding detailed in the statutory guidance.

Working Together to Improve School Attendance Statutory Guidance states that academies must report data to their Local Authority and the DfE. DfE data is automatically reported daily which is why ensuring registers are marked accurately is so important. The data reported to the LA is in respect of admission and leavers from roll (within 5 days when outside of standard transition times),

all students who have 10 consecutive days coded as unauthorised (O and/or G coded) absence, and all students who have 15 consecutive or cumulative (some authorities require just the consecutive to be reported) days of absence due to illness (I coded) recorded.

The National Framework for Penalty Notices and Legal Interventions

Prevention of absence is a key ethos of our policy and process, however, where the support first approach has been exhausted or more intense support is required to safeguard a child's attendance, we have a duty to consider if legal action is necessary.

Where the 'national threshold' of 10 sessions of absence in a rolling 10 school weeks (PA) also meets the threshold for the National Framework for Penalty Notices - 10 unauthorised sessions in a rolling 10 school weeks - schools must consider if support is required or if legal action is more appropriate. An example of where support is not required, so legal action would normally be automatic, is a period of absence due to an unauthorised exceptional term time leave of absence, or if the reason given for absence is a 'holiday', 'recreation/leisure' or similar.

A school week means any week in which there is at least one school session. The 10 sessions can be made up of one continuous period or sporadic absences across a 10 school-week period or less. It can include arriving late after the register has closed which is coded as a U code and means the child is recorded as absent for the whole session due to lateness (although for fire purposes they will have been signed into the building to show they are there physically after registration). The absence period can also span different terms or school years, e.g.:

- 4 sessions of holiday taken in term time plus 6 sessions of arriving late after the register closes all within 10 school weeks
- 10 sessions of holiday in one week
- 6 sessions of unauthorised absence taken in 1 week and 1 per week for the next 4 weeks.
- 2 sessions of unauthorised absence in the Summer Term and a further 8 within the Autumn Term.

If the level of absence continues to be a concern despite support (where support was deemed required) the DfE Statutory Guidance states that schools must ask

these questions in **REVIEWING AND DECIDING** the most appropriate course of action:

i. Is support appropriate in this case?
   - If yes, schools are expected to continue with the existing support without a penalty notice BUT if that support is not working or is not being engaged with, they should issue a notice to Improve. A penalty notice can be issued if either of the above have not worked.
   - If no, for example a holiday in term time, a penalty notice should be issued subject to the other conditions below.

ii. Is a penalty notice the best available tool to improve attendance and change parental behaviour for this family, or would further support or one of the other legal interventions (e.g., family court order) be more appropriate?

iii. Is issuing a penalty notice in this case appropriate after considering any obligations under the Equality Act 2010 such as where a pupil has a disability?

Where the answers to the above demonstrates that action is required, statutory guidance states the academy should request their Local Authority to issue a Penalty Notice. However, prior to do so, our academies will always ensure that:

- attendance concerns have been clearly **NOTICED** and communicated;
- barriers have been **EXPLORED**
- **SUPPORT** has been offered and actioned;
- actions have been **REVIEWED**;
- intervention **DECIDED** upon is proportionate.

Penalty Notices are not always an appropriate action. Guidance states that support must be considered first (with exception to unagreed Term Time Leave of Absence which does not require support) and the full range of legal interventions should be used rather than relying on penalty notices. These can include Attendance Contracts, prosecution in the Magistrates' Court under Section 444(1) or (1a) of the Education Act 1996 for failing to ensure a child of compulsory school age regularly attends their education, or Parenting or Education Supervision Orders through the Family Court system as an alternative to prosecution.

Where a Penalty Notice or Legal Action is being considered we will **always** ensure parents/carers have been made aware of concerns and warned prior to any action taken. This is not only fair and in line with statutory guidance but also gives the opportunity for attendance to be improved to prevent action.

5. Day to Day Processes

Registration and Punctuality

We will ensure that all register marks used are in accordance with the DfE Statutory Guidance (see Section 4). Once the registration has closed, if contact has been made by the parent/carer and a reason for absence is given, this will be recorded on the register as either an 'authorised' or 'unauthorised' absence code as appropriate, alongside a relevant 'comment' to detail the information received. We will ensure families know if an absence will be recorded as unauthorised so that discussion can take place.

Any child arriving after the school day has started/register opening but before the register closes (see Annex C for times of your academy), will be deemed as 'late' and therefore will be coded as 'L' on the register. Poor punctuality will be followed up in discussion with the child and may result in an appropriate consequence (e.g., time repayment) if reasons are persistently unacceptable.

Any child arriving after the register has closed for an unauthorised reason will be marked as 'unauthorised late' and coded as 'U' on the register. A 'U code' is a statistical absence for the whole session due to missing the legal registration period and counts towards the National Framework Threshold of 10 unauthorised sessions within a rolling 10 school-week period which can be included in any future legal action.

Where a student arrives late after the register has closed but for a specific authorised reason, their register will be marked using the statutory coding for authorised absence (e.g., an M for hospital appt, a C for Exceptional Circumstances, C2 if arriving for an agreed part-time timetable). Please note, these codes affect a child's attendance level negatively, but they would not be included in any future legal action.

When a child arrives late to school it is important they 'sign in' when arriving outside of registration times for safeguarding and fire regulation purposes.

If students are attending an alternative appropriate provision for education, Parent/Carers are required to notify the provision of the absence. The academy

will have daily arrangements with the provision to obtain the registration information so that the official register can be maintained accurately.

All unexplained absence requires the academy to follow up to consider if the absence is due to authorised or unauthorised reasons or if the child is potentially deemed a 'child missing education' which would require a referral to the Local Authority. Whilst absence reasons are established, an 'N' code can be used but must be removed from the register within 5 days of being entered and replaced with an appropriate absence code (See Annex D).

If no contact is received, for the purposes of keeping the child safe, it must be assumed that the child is on their way to school and if they do not arrive, the absence will be followed up by 10am. This may be by telephone, email, or text.

If the absence highlights a concern, due to reason given, frequency or patten of absence, or no contact received, we will assess if another action is required e.g., a conversation, a home visit, an email, or letter to advise of the concern and offer support or a meeting may be arranged. If it is suspected that term time leave has been taken without requesting it, a home visit may to be done and a warning letter will be issued to request evidence that it is not for that purpose.

During or after an absence we will ensure verbal reasons given for absence are recorded on the database, but it is helpful if parent/carers confirm the reason for the absence in a written format.

Absence Exploration

All absence will trigger a communication (text, email, letter, discussion, meeting etc.) as a form of preventative action. This is within our Attendance Engagement Framework **Principle 1 Notice & Connect**.

Where the above demonstrates that exploration of patterns, trends, absence reasons or wider concerns require a more detailed discussion, this will happen under **Principle 2 Explore and Understand**. This involves raising awareness of the 'risk of persistent absence (PA)' by email or letter and informal discussions to explore causes for absence e.g., EBSA (Emotionally Based School Avoidance) tools, Respectful Relationships Portal Tools, mentoring tools etc. These early discussions are vital to understand barriers for the child, preventing further absence and to ensure support is truly 'early'.

Where the exploration shows that a meeting would be beneficial to discuss and plan support more formally this will be done as part of **Principle 3 Support and**

Action which can be done via a Student Support Plan (SSP) or an Attendance Contract Plan (ACP). These can be done within a standalone meeting where no other targeted support meetings are already taking place but as we are conscious that parents/carers and staff may already be meeting to support the child, to preserve time, these may be done within other meetings already being held (e.g., meetings for early help 'team around the family', behaviour, SEND support, safeguarding/welfare meetings or academic support). This limits the number of meetings required and provides 'whole child' support more effectively, also ensuring attendance is not discussed or considered in isolation as per statutory guidance. Families will always receive a copy of any notes and agreed plan of action.

Any support used will aim to help reduce the underlying causes of absence, rebuild confidence, strengthen relationships, reduce emotional distress and/or anxiety, increase engagement with learning and friends and support a successful return to regular attendance wherever possible.

NB. An Attendance Contract is not a punitive action, it is a supportive, nurturing, voluntary process to provide clear actionable goals to improve attendance. The plan can last approx. 3-12 months with regular reviews (maximum 6 weekly), and it can be ended by either the academy or the parent/carer whenever it is not helping or not wanted.

Part of the above process will then be to consider our **Principle 4 Review and Decide** to ensure that support is impactful, still appropriate, and whether the agreed plan continues, is adapted or if different support is required. As support is normally effective at improving attendance, this cycle will keep repeating until barriers are resolved. However, If the support is proving ineffective, has been exhausted, it is felt more intense support via 'family help' is required, or that the threshold for considering legal action has been met, the decision may be to issue a Notice to Improve Warning Letter. This letter does not mean legal action is certain, it notifies parents that improvement is essential and that if no improvement is seen immediately, legal action may be considered. If legal action is going to happen, a letter will be sent to parents/carers to advise that a referral is being made to the LA to process the action.

Children Missing Education (CME)

Child Missing Education (CME) is where a child's whereabouts becomes unknown (address no longer confirmed), and the school does not have reason to believe the child is absent due to illness or unavoidable causes.

A CME child is a serious safeguarding concern and if there is reason to believe a child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, a referral to Children's' Social Care (or the Police if appropriate) will be considered.

We will follow our statutory duties regarding CME reasonable enquiries and reporting to the Local Authority as per statutory guidances (see Section 4 of this policy for guidance details). All removals from roll will be done legally and we will use the National School to School (S2S) DfE Portal to a child's record to be accessible where no destination has been obtained.

Elective Home Education (EHE)

A parent/carer's duty to ensure their child is educated is normally fulfilled through enrolling in a school/academy and attending that school however, they have a right to choose how they educate their child. If a parent/carer decides that they wish to take full responsibility for educating their child (this includes all costs associated with doing so) and the child is registered at a school/academy, this will involve withdrawing/de-registering their child by informing the school/academy of their intension to take responsibility for their child's education. We ask for this to be done in writing (email is sufficient) to administer the process as easily as possible.

There are legal responsibilities that must be fulfilled regarding EHE which is monitored by the LA. We are unable to encourage or discourage a decision to EHE and as an education establishment, we would hold the view that school is the best place for most children. However, where a parent advises they are thinking of/or taking this route, we will ensure we give parents/carers the appropriate information to make an informed decision and we will offer the opportunity to discuss the decision with the Principal/Headteacher prior to commencing any removal from roll, in line with best practice. Following this, we will then fulfil our duty to report the intended removal to the LA (under regulation 13(4) to (6) of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024) and Parents/carers will receive written notification when the removal has taken place.

Where a child is on a Special School roll, permission from the Local Authority must be obtained prior to the removal from roll.

Flexi-schooling is an arrangement where a child is educated full time but only part of their education in a school/academy. This can only be done with agreement of the academy and Principals/Headteachers are not obliged to

offer such arrangements. Flexi-school must not be confused with part-time timetables. If it is felt that the arrangement may harm the child's academic progress or welfare, it will not be agreed. Where it is rarely agreed, it will be recorded as an authorised absence using a C code for the sessions that the parent is taking responsibility for and are not attended; this contributes negatively to a child's overall absence level.

Requesting Exceptional Term Time Absence (ETTLA) incl. Religious Observance

Absence during term time is actively discouraged. Where planned absence is required, parents/carers must complete a request form (Exceptional Term Time Absence Request Form Annex B) in **advance** of the absence taking place (we request at least **three weeks** prior wherever possible, to enable the request to be considered, administered and responded to).

If absence is not requested in advance, the absence will not be retrospectively authorised as per DfE statutory guidance.

In accordance with *The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024,* we are unable to authorise any period of absence unless it is for exceptional circumstances, and in advance, as per the following extract from those regulations:

"Leave of absence from a school maintained by a local authority or a special school not maintained by a local authority may only be given by a person who the school's proprietor has authorised to do so (an "authorised person") if—

> *(a) an appropriate person has asked for the leave in advance; and*
>
> *(b) the authorised person thinks that leave should be given because of the exceptional circumstances of the request."*

When requesting absence, parents/carers must detail and demonstrate what is exceptional about the request, at the time of requesting the absence, or if subsequently requested by the academy, to enable thorough consideration.

The Principal/Headteacher (or other designated/authorised senior leader) of the academy will determine whether the request for leave meets "exceptional circumstances" criteria and if authorised, how long the absence can be. Parents/Carers may be required to attend a meeting to discuss the request in more detail.

Exceptional leave of absence will be coded as per the DfE Statutory Attendance Codes.

If the absence requested (or unrequested in the case of 'suspected' leave of absence) is below the national threshold of penalty notices or legal action (10 unauthorised sessions in a rolling 10 school weeks), meaning legal action for that single period of absence is not appropriate, absence prior to the requested period will be taken into account, and a period of 30 days monitoring will be put in place. This means if further unauthorised absence occur legal action may be considered for the whole period. **NB:** Where repeated single period absence events occur that are below the national threshold detailed above, the LA have the powers to issue legal action even if the absence does not meet the threshold on each occasion.

If a child fails to return within 10 school days of any given expected return date it may jeopardise the child's school place. In these circumstances there is a duty to report the child to the LA as a Child Missing Education (see Section 5 of this policy for CME reporting details) and any removal will be done in line with statutory guidance (see Section 4 of this policy).

Where leave of absence is stated as **'for the purpose of religious observance'** the academy will follow the statutory guidance which states *"As a general rule, 'a day exclusively set apart for religious observance' is a day when the pupil's parents would be expected by the religious body to which they belong to stay away from their employment in order to record the occasion"*. We will only authorise one day as per statutory guidance which states *"If a religious body sets apart a single day for a religious observance and the parent applies for more than one day, the school may only record one day".* We will generally allow a maximum of three single day events within an academic year (especially where this is advised by the academy's Local Authority) but as there is no legal limit to how many single days that can be allowed, this will be decided on an individual basis and with situational context. If more than one day is required on an individual event, they must be requested via submitting an Exceptional Term Time Leave of Absence Request Form. Please note, evidence from the religious body may be required.

Data Tracking & Monitoring

Attendance data of all students will be monitored and tracked to identify patterns and overall levels of absence. This is to identify individuals or specific groups of students who may need additional support to attend school, inform

strategic planning of incentives or interventions, or to change policies or practice to remove general barriers to accessing education.

Information will be distributed to Senior Leaders for strategic oversight and planning. Additionally, to the academy's learning and support teams e.g., SENDCo, Inclusion, Behaviour, Attendance, Safeguarding, Curriculum, Pastoral and House Teams and Tutors/Class Teachers, to raise awareness and encourage discussions to plan in-school support. Conversations (academic or welfare) will be held with students where appropriate (age allowing) to offer direct support and encouragement as well as with parents/carers to raise their awareness and be part of the support planning process as part of our Attendance Engagement Framework. We will report data to the DfE and Local Authorities as required (see Section 4 of this policy).

Promoting and Incentivising

We will promote the benefits of attending school positively within newsletters, letters home, conversations, meetings and on noticeboards. We will provide information to families and children on progress and the impact of attending regularly.

Rewards and incentives will be used to recognise effort in improving attendance, achieving specific goals in attendance and recognising sustainable improvements. We will aim to ensure our strategies are achievable, inclusive, and supportive of intrinsic/internal motivation wherever possible, ensuring careful use of extrinsic/external motivation (based on research that identifies 'overuse' as creating unhelpful effects). We will use strategies and interventions in a targeted way e.g., not just focus on certificates, we will use a range of ways to be inclusive of all including tutor group/class recognition, house competitions, whole school activities, pupil voice activities, celebrations, postcards, phone calls, letters of praise, lunch queue passes etc.

6. Supporting Documents - Annexes

These annexes are subject to change without official ratification of the whole policy as they will need to be altered locally to link with each Local Authority as appropriate:

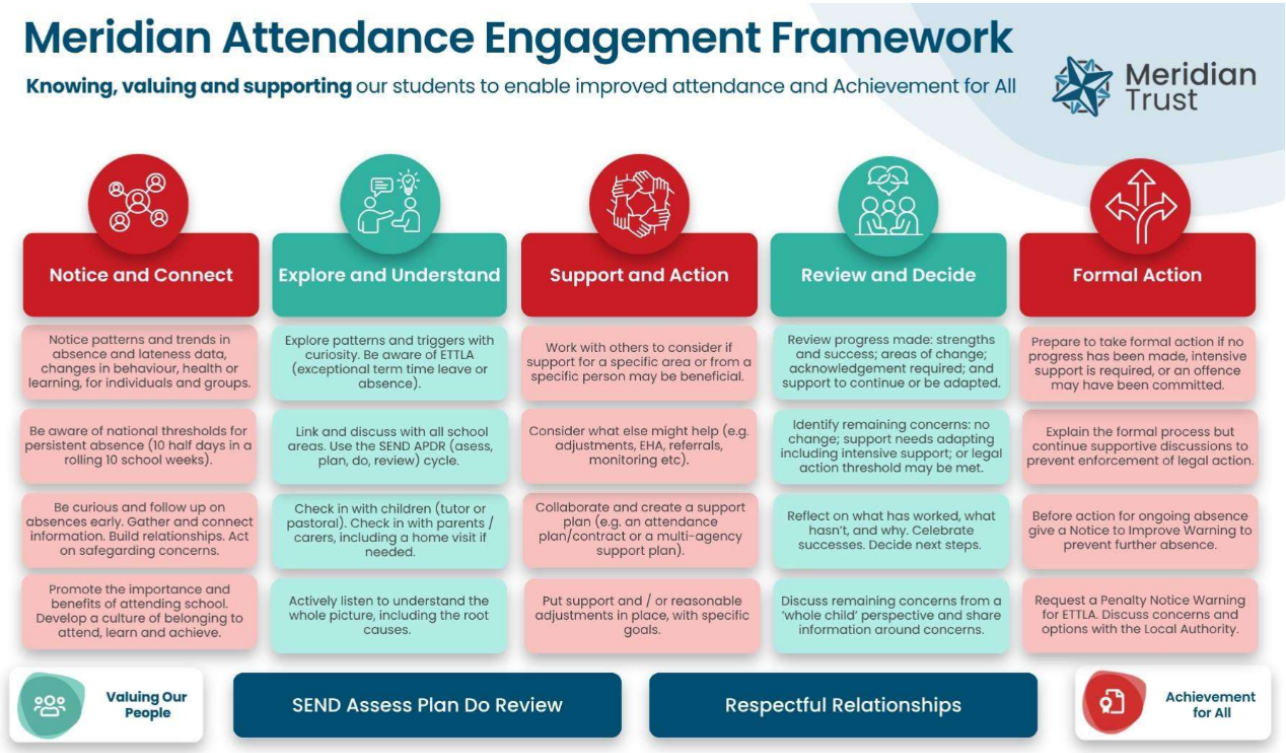
Annex A – The Attendance Engagement Framework

Annex B – Exceptional Term Time Leave of Absence Request Form

Annex C - Academy Contact Information & Registration Information

Annex D – DfE Statutory Attendance Code Overview

Annex A - The Attendance Engagement Framework:



Annex B -Exceptional Term Time Leave of Absence Request Form:

Meridian Trust	**EXCEPTIONAL TERM TIME LEAVE of ABSENCE (ETTLA) REQUEST FORM & PRE-REQUEST INFORMATION**

Child's Name: One form per child				**Date of Birth:**	
Class/House/Tutor Group:				**Year Group:**	
A Parent/carer is defined under Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 as: the natural parent of a child, whether they are married or not; anyone who although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility (**PR**) for a child; any person who has care of a child or young person by living with them.					
Adult applying for the ETTLA & thus 'allowing' absence:		**First Name:**		**Surname:**	
Going away with the child? Yes / No	**Do you live with the child?** Yes / No	**1st Line of Address & Postcode**		**Contact No:**	
Email Address:				**Written Language:**	
Where there are legal, court-ordered or safeguarding restrictions relating to another parent/carer, please notify the academy.					
Other Adult with PR (as per description above):		**First Name:**		**Surname:**	
Going away with the child? Yes / No	**Do you live with the child?** Yes / No	**1st Line of Address & Postcode**		**Contact No:**	
Email Address:				**Written Language:**	
Other Adult with PR (as per description above):		**First Name:**		**Surname:**	
Going away with the child? Yes / No	**Do you live with the child?** Yes / No	**1st Line of Address & Postcode**		**Contact No:**	
Email Address:				**Written Language:**	
Sibling(s) Name(s) (or other children in same household) & Year Group(s), House, Form/Class & School(s):		*For liaison under "Working Together to Safeguard Children"*			

Information provided on this form will be processed in accordance with the Trust Privacy Notice, available on the Trust website.

First date of absence:		**Last date of absence:**		**The date the child will be physically back in school is:**	

Purpose of Absence: Please detail below specific reasons for the absence and **what is exceptional** about the circumstance. You may also attach a separate longer explanation if you wish. Please **attach** all evidence or supportive information that demonstrates why the absence is exceptional, especially why the absence cannot be taken during any school holiday period during the year.
NB. Evidence can include, booking details, flight documents, booking cancellation details, certificates, appt letters etc., but submission of evidence does not mean the request will be authorised.

BEFORE SUBMITTING THIS REQUEST, PLEASE READ THE INFORMATION ON PAGE 2 & SIGN BELOW TO CONFIRM YOU HAVE DONE SO. THIS ENSURES YOU ARE MAKING AN INFORMED DECISION/CHOICE ABOUT TAKING YOUR CHILD OUT OF SCHOOL.

DECLARATION: I/We have read all the Pre-Request Information and understand legal action may be taken. I/We also understand that if this is a repeated request for leave under the 'National Threshold' (annually or multiple), the LA may choose to prosecute under s444(1)/(1a) of the Education Act 1996.

Name(s) of Adults:		**Signature(s) of adults:**			**Date:**		
Request Received:		**Received in advance of travel/absence?**	Yes / No	**Number of sessions:**		**Current Attendance:**	
Reason for Decision:				**Decision:**	**AGREED / REFUSED**		
Head/Principal's Signature:				**Date:**			

Meridian Trust	**EXCEPTIONAL TERM TIME LEAVE of ABSENCE (ETTLA) REQUEST FORM & PRE-REQUEST INFORMATION**

IMPORTANT: If a period of absence is **not requested in advance** and it is suspected that absence is due to unauthorised reasons e.g., holiday/recreation/leisure or unexplained, you will be required to provide **evidence** to prove the absence was for authorised exceptional reasons; failure to do so may result in a Penalty Notice (PN) or legal action being requested from the LA. A home visit may also be done where the reason for absence cannot be established or where safeguarding concerns might exist regardless of whether contact has been made.

1. There is no entitlement to leave of absence and Principals/Headteachers are unable to authorise absence unless it is for **exceptional circumstances** (The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024) AND it is requested in **advance**. Statutory DfE Guidance states absence cannot be authorised retrospectively - we ask for **3 weeks' notice** for admin and discussion wherever possible. Decisions will be notified in writing via email. You may be asked to supply further information or attend a meeting to discuss your request.
2. Term time absence is strongly discouraged as stated in the trust's **Attendance Policy** followed by all Meridian Trust Academies (available on the trust or academy's website). All requests will be considered **individually**, based on the information and evidence provided. Parents/Carers have a **legal duty** to ensure that their compulsory school age child attends regularly when enrolled at a school and failing to do this means they may be guilty of an offence (Section 444(1) Education Act 1996) – 'regular attendance' was determined in caselaw *IoW v Platt 2017* as *"in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school"* i.e., every day the school is open.
3. The **national threshold** for legal action is 10 unauthorised sessions of absence in a rolling 10-school week period, at this point schools must consider if referral for a PN or other legal intervention is appropriate in line with statutory guidance and LA protocols. The current PN payment rates are **£160 per parent, per child**; reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. If a **2nd offence** occurs within a rolling 3-yr period there is no reduction for the 2nd PN, it is a flat rate of **£160** per parent, per child. If a **3rd offence** occurs within a rolling 3-yr period, it is dealt with via **prosecution** in the Magistrates Court. Failure to pay a PN may result in court proceedings.
4. If the absence requested is **refused** the absence will be **recorded** as **unauthorised**. All unauthorised absence may cause legal action depending on the number of sessions (half days) requested. If the absence is below the above national threshold, a period of 30 days monitoring will be put in place, which may subsequently cause legal action to be considered. **NB.** LAs have discretion to not issue a PN and do a prosecution instead regardless of whether national threshold for legal action has been reached or not.
5. If the absence requested is **authorised**, the requested dates must be adhered to. Failure to do so will cause additional absences to be recorded as unauthorised, which may lead to the above actions if evidence of exceptional reasons (at your own cost) is not proven.
6. If unauthorised absence is **over 20 days** or a child fails to return after 10 days of expected return date, and your child's return to school cannot be confirmed, the academy may consider deletion from roll in accordance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 and local authority CME procedures.

Annex C - Academy Contact Details and Registration Information:

Trust Attendance Staff:

Name	Title	Email Contact
Sharon Templeman	Trust Attendance Welfare Leader & Designated Safeguarding Lead Trained	stempleman@meridiantrust.co.uk
Andy Daly	Executive Principal	adaly@meridiantrust.co.uk
Trust Attendance Policy can be found here:	Policies - Meridian Trust	
Attendance Support Information can be found here:	https://www.meridiantrust.co.uk/key-information/attendance/	

Trust Local Authority Areas:

Local Authority	**LA Penalty Notice Code of Conduct Link:** (This is the local protocol schools within the area are required to follow alongside the DfE Statutory Guidance)
Bedford Borough Council (BBC)	Non-school Attendance Local Penalty Notice Code of Conduct
Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC)	https://www.cambslearntogether.co.uk/asset-library/7.1-penalty-notice-code-of-conduct-august-2024.pdf
Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC)	centralbedfordshirecouncil.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/Communications/EYGbG6oPA7NEtxtN4JYtCtgBELP8wFSEgstjpwP8WLHAcEg
Lincolnshire County Council (LCC)	Penalty notices - code of conduct – Procedure for issuing penalty notices - Lincolnshire County Council
Peterborough City Council (PCC)	https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/asset-library/peterborough-city-council-code-of-conduct-for-issuing-fixed-penalties-regarding-school-attendance1.pdf
North Northamptonshire County Council (NNCC)	Penalty notices for non-school attendance | North Northamptonshire Council

Trust Academies:

Please see Our Academies Archive - Meridian Trust for a list of academies in Meridian Trust, and their contact details. All our academies follow the trust wide attendance policy. Each academy will have the following information displayed on their individual website:

Absence Reporting Email:					
Absence Reporting Tel Number:					
LA PN Code of Conduct Link:					
Gates Open:		Gates Close:		Must arrive in class or tutor grp:	
AM Official Register Opens/Is Taken at: (by law this cannot be left open for more than 30 mins & an absence must be recorded thereafter)					
Children who arrive during the AM registration period will be deemed late and coded 'L' after:					
AM Official Registers Close: Children who arrive after this time, will be recorded as **unauthorised late** (U code) or **authorised absence** (e.g. M code for medical) both of which affects % of attendance negatively. NB. U codes can contribute to potential legal action.					
PM Official Register Opens/Is Taken at: (by law this cannot be left open for more than 30 mins & an absence must be recorded thereafter – most academies only have a short 10-15 mins PM register period due to children already being on site)					
Children who arrive during the PM registration period will be deemed late and coded 'L' after:					
PM Official Registers Close: Children who arrive after this time, will be recorded as **unauthorised late** (U code) or **authorised absence** (e.g. M code for medical) both of which affects % of attendance negatively. NB. U codes can contribute to potential legal action.					

Main Roles Responsible for Attendance Improvement:	**Name:**	**Email Contact:**
Headteacher		
Senior Attendance Champion		
Attendance Officer		
Attendance Admin		
Designated Safeguarding Lead		
SENDCO		
Academy Councillor (Attendance)		
Other Roles: (attendance Day-to-Day)	**Name:**	**Email Contact**
E.g. Asst Prin, Snr Tutor, Student Support etc		

Annex D - DfE Statutory Attendance Code Overview:

DfE Attendance and Absence Codes Overview

PRESENT - Attending the school or other authorised physical place of education	
/ \	Present at the school / = morning session \ = afternoon session (child physically on site at time of reg)
L	Late arrival before the register is closed (arrives prior to schools advertised register closing time)
B	Attending another approved educational activity arranged by the school (must be taking place at any time **within** the AM or PM session for which it is recorded) **must** be face-to-face, not remote learning.
D	Dual registered at another school or registered provision (that submits a DfE Data Census)
K	Attending AP/approved education provision arranged (& funded) by the LA (behaviour, medical, SEND or EHCP) & **must** be face-to-face, not remote learning.
P	Participating in a sporting activity (must be taking place within the session for which it is recorded).
V	Attending an educational visit/trip organised by the school
W	Attending work experience, arrangements made by the LA or school.
ABSENT – AUTHORISED - Affects Attendance Data Negatively	
C	Leave of absence for exceptional circumstance agreed by school (requested exceptional leave (ETTLA) or other circumstances that has been deemed exceptional to be absent)
C1	Leave of absence for the purpose of participating in a regulated performance or undertaking regulated employment abroad (Performance Licence required from LA)
C2	Leave of absence for compulsory school age due to attending part time (not expected to attend) *If child is attending another AP or school, a B, K or D would be used instead for sessions attended.*
E	Suspended or permanently excluded (day 1-5 before alternative provision made – B or K should be used from day 6)
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointment which would be coded as M code)
J1	Leave of absence for the purpose of attending an interview for employment or for admission to another educational institution
M	Medical or Dental Leave of absence for appointments that are unavoidable (must be used even if child arrives during the AM or PM session but after reg has closed)
R	Religious observance on a day exclusively set apart by the religious body.
S	Leave of absence for the purpose of studying for a public examination (not mock exams)
T	Parent travelling for occupational purposes (traveller/mobile children must attend a minimum of 200 sessions in a 12-month period and should attend school in area of travelling if possible)
AUTHORISED ABSENCE - Not counted as a possible session	
X	Non-compulsory school age pupil not required to attend school - Can only be used where the pupil is below or over compulsory school age and not 'expected' to be in school on their timetable.
Q	Unable to attend the school because of a lack of access arrangements
Y1	Unable to attend due to transport normally provided not being available
Y2	Unable to attend due to widespread disruption to travel
Y3	Unable to attend due to part of the school premises being closed
Y4	Unable to attend due to the whole school site being closed
Y5	Unable to attend as pupil is in criminal justice detention
Y6	Unable to attend in accordance with public health guidance or law
Y7	Unable to attend because of any other unavoidable cause (this code will be monitored by DfE for over use) (e.g. staggered start of yr grp, child bailed out of area)
ABSENT – UNAUTHORISED - Affects Attendance Data Negatively	
G	Holiday not granted by the school (ETTLA for a specific requested period).
N	Reason for absence not yet established (must be removed from register after 5 days and replaced with correct absence code)
O	Unauthorised absence for unknown or other circumstances where the school is not satisfied with the reason given.
U	Arrived in school after registration closed (max 30mins from opening) - not physically on site at registration time (if absence was for authorised reason e.g. medical appt, specific authorised code would be used)
Administrative Codes - No statistical meaning for data purposes	
Z	Prospective pupil on admission register but not on attendance register as not yet started
#	Planned whole school closure (e.g. inset training, school holidays)