

Vanguard Learning Trust



The Vanguard Learning Trust is a group of local primary and secondary schools in Hillingdon. We strive to be a Trust that serves its local community and is pioneering in its approach to broadening our students' lives. We believe in effective teaching which allows our students to shine both in and out of the classroom and that intellectual curiosity is at the core of every learning experience. Whilst schools in the Trust have their own ethos and values, they share the common aspiration that all students can achieve their potential and life is a journey of discovery.

Attendance policy

Part A: Trust-wide

September 2024

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Part A: Trust-wide

1. Overview

1.1 Aims

This policy aims to demonstrate a commitment by Vanguard Learning Trust to meeting all of its obligations with regards to school attendance, including those laid out in the Department for Education's (DfE's) statutory guidance '*Working together to improve school attendance*' (updated 2024, [click here](#)). All schools have a culture and ethos that values good attendance, which includes:

- setting high expectations for the attendance and punctuality of all students;
- promoting good attendance and the benefits of good attendance;
- reducing absence, including persistent and severe absence;
- ensuring every student has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled;
- acting early to address patterns of absence; and
- building strong relationships with families to make sure students have the support in place to attend school.

Trust schools will also promote and support punctuality in attending lessons.

1.2 Legislation and guidance

This policy is based on the Department for Education's (DfE's) statutory guidance in '*Working together to improve school attendance*', which applies from 19 August 2024 ([click here](#)), as well as '*School behaviour and attendance: parental responsibility measures*' ([click here](#)). The guidance is based on the following pieces of legislation, which set out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- Part 6 of the Education Act 1996 ([click here](#))
- Part 3 of the Education Act 2002 ([click here](#))
- Part 7 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 ([click here](#))
- The Education (student Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, along with the 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2016 amendments ([click here](#))
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 ([click here](#))

It also refers to:

- School census guidance ([click here](#))
- '*Keeping children safe in education*' ([click here](#))
- '*Mental health issues affecting a student's attendance: guidance for schools*' ([click here](#))

1.3 Links with other policies

This policy links to the following policies:

- Safeguarding and child protection policy
- Behaviour policy

2. Roles and responsibilities

Although this section of the policy outlines specific duties, it is important to state that the attendance of children is **everybody's responsibility**. All schools within Vanguard Learning Trust will seek to develop a sense of belonging within their local community, fostering strong relationships between students and staff. Aligned with the Trust's values of aspiration, collaboration, and equity, the ongoing aim is to sustain supportive school environments where every child feels motivated to attend school every day and on time:

- Aspiration drives schools to set high expectations and inspire students to recognise their potential, knowing that regular attendance is a key factor in academic success and personal growth;
- Through collaboration, schools work closely with families, community members and local organisations to address barriers to attendance and ensure that every student receives the support they need; and
- Equity guides efforts to provide fair and inclusive opportunities, recognising and accommodating the diverse needs of students.

Together, the Trust is committed to creating a nurturing and equitable educational experience where every child is encouraged to aspire, participate fully and succeed.

2.1 Trustees and the local governing body

The trustees and local governing body (LGBs) of each school is responsible for:

- setting high expectations of all school leaders, staff, students and parents;
- making sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties, including:
 - making sure the school records attendance accurately in the register and shares the required information with the DfE and local authority
 - making sure the school works effectively with local partners to help remove barriers to attendance, and keeps them informed regarding specific students, where appropriate
- recognising and promoting the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos;
- making sure the school's attendance management processes are delivered effectively and that consistent support is provided for students who need it most by prioritising staff and resources;
- making sure the school has high aspirations for all students but adapts processes and support to students' individual needs;
- regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data and helping school leaders focus improvement efforts on individual students or cohorts who/that need it most;
- working with school leaders to set goals or areas of focus for attendance and providing support and challenge;
- monitoring attendance figures for the whole school and repeatedly evaluating the effectiveness of the school's processes and improvement efforts to make sure they are meeting students needs;
- working with school leaders where the school is struggling with attendance, to develop a comprehensive action plan to improve attendance;
- making sure all staff receive adequate training on attendance as part of the regular continued professional development offer, so that staff understand:
 - the importance of good attendance
 - that absence is almost always a symptom of wider issues
 - the school's legal requirements for keeping registers
 - the school's strategies and procedures for tracking, following up on and improving attendance, including working with partners and keeping them informed regarding specific students, where appropriate
- making sure dedicated training is provided to staff with a specific attendance function in their role, including in interpreting and analysing attendance data;
- supporting the sharing effective practice on attendance management and improvement across schools; and
- holding the headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy.

2.2 The headteacher

The headteacher of each school is responsible for:

- the implementation of this policy at the school;
- monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to governors;
- supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual students;
- monitoring the impact of any implemented attendance strategies;
- working with the parents of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to develop specific support approaches for attendance for students with SEND, including where school transport is regularly being missed, and where students with SEND face in-school barriers;
- working closely with the local authority to make use of the full range of legal interventions, where necessary, to formalise attendance improvement efforts. Alternatively, they may authorise the school's 'attendance champion' (see below) to be able to do so;
- communicating with the local authority when a student with an education, health and care (EHC) plan has falling attendance, or where there are barriers to attendance that relate to the student's needs; and
- communicating the school's high expectations for attendance and punctuality regularly to students and parents through all available channels.

2.3 The Trust attendance lead

The Trust attendance lead is responsible for:

- developing and maintaining a trust-wide attendance policy, which incorporates statutory guidance and best practice with regards to attendance processes and procedures;
- regularly monitoring and analysing attendance data at Trust level to identify trends, issues and areas that may need further intervention;
- driving attendance improvement across the Trust by acting as a central contact point and source of information and support with regards to attendance;
- working more intensively with schools who require support to improve attendance, developing intervention strategies to support individual students or groups of students with high levels of absence; and
- facilitating the trust's attendance forum, meeting once a term to share information and resources.

2.4 The designated senior leader ('attendance champion') responsible for attendance at each school

The designated senior leader for attendance, also known as the 'attendance champion', is responsible for:

- leading, championing and improving attendance across the school;
- setting a clear vision for improving and maintaining good attendance;
- evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes;
- having a strong grasp of absence data and oversight of absence data analysis;
- regularly monitoring and evaluating progress in attendance;
- establishing and maintaining effective systems for tackling absence, and making sure they are followed by all staff;
- liaising with students, parents/carers and external agencies, where needed;
- building close and productive relationships with parents to discuss and tackle attendance issues;
- creating intervention or reintegration plans in partnership with students and their parents/carers;
- delivering targeted intervention and support to students and families; and
- collaborating with external agencies and partners to address attendance issues and support students and families.

The name and contact details of the designated senior leader responsible for attendance at this school can be found in **Part B** of this policy.

2.5 School attendance team

The attendance team of each school is responsible for:

- monitoring and analysing attendance data (refer to Section 7);
- benchmarking attendance data to identify areas of focus for improvement;
- providing regular attendance reports to school staff and reporting concerns about attendance to the designated senior leader responsible for attendance and to the headteacher;
- working closely with other staff to tackle persistent absence - this could include wider pastoral teams, the school's special educational needs/disabilities co-ordinator (SENDCo), heads of year, family-liaison officers and welfare leads;
- arranging attendance meetings with parents/carers and developing support plans; and
- advising the headteacher/attendance champion when to issue fixed-penalty notices.

The name and contact details of the attendance team of this school can be found in **Part B** of this policy.

2.6 Staff responsible for completing registers

Each school has designated members of staff who are responsible for recording attendance on a daily basis, using the correct codes, and submitting this information to the school office. Details of when and how this is done can be found in **Part B** of this policy.

2.7 Office staff

Designated office staff will:

- take calls from parents/carers about absence on a day-to-day basis and record it on the school system; and

- transfer calls from parents/carers to relevant staff in order to provide them with more detailed support on attendance.

2.8 Parents/carers

Where this policy refers to a parent/carer, it refers to the adult the school and/or local authority decides is most appropriate to work with, including:

- all natural parents, whether they are married or not;
- all those who have parental responsibility for a child or young person; and/or
- those who have day-to-day responsibility for the child (i.e. lives with and looks after them).

Parents/carers are expected to:

- make sure their child attends every day and on time;
- notify the school (by the specific time and via the means stated in **Part B**) to report their child's absence on the day. This should be done on the first day of the absence as well as each subsequent day of absence. Parents should advise as to when the child is expected to return;
- provide the school with more than one emergency contact number for their child;
- ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day;
- keep to any attendance contracts, where necessary, that they make with the school and/or local authority; and
- seek support, where necessary, for maintaining good attendance, by contacting the relevant member of staff identified in **Part B** of this policy.

2.9 Students

The expectations for students are as follows:

- In primary school, students are expected to attend school every day on time.
- In secondary school, students are expected to attend every timetabled session on time.
- In sixth form, students are expected to call the school to report their absence as soon as possible on the day of the absence and each subsequent day of absence.

3. Recording attendance

3.1 Attendance register

Schools will take an attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark, using the appropriate national attendance and absence codes from the School Attendance (student Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, whether every student is:

- Present
- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

3.1.1 Amendments to the attendance register

Any amendment to the attendance register will include:

- The original entry
- The amended entry
- The reason for the amendment
- The date on which the amendment was made
- The name and position of the person who made the amendment

Appendix 1 outlines all the attendance codes accepted by the DfE.

3.1.2 Other information

The school will also record:

- For students of compulsory school age, whether the absence is authorised or not
- The nature of the activity if a student is attending an approved educational activity
- The nature of circumstances where a student is unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

The school will keep every entry on the attendance register for 6 years after the date on which the entry was made. Timings of the school day and when registers will be taken can be found in **Part B**.

3.2 Unplanned absence

The student's parent/carer must notify the school of the reason for the absence on the first day of an unplanned absence as soon as practically possible by calling the school. Notification procedures for this school can be found in **Part B**. The school will mark absence due to physical or mental illness as authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness. Where there are doubts about the authenticity of the illness, the school will ask for medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. The school will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily. If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parent/carer will be notified of this in advance.

3.3 Planned absence

Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorised as long as the student's parent/carer notifies the school in advance of the appointment. Details of how parents/carers should request leaves of absence can be found in **Part B**. However, the school encourages parents/carers to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the student should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary. The student's parent/carer must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence. Section 5 outlines which term-time absences that the school can authorise.

3.4 Lateness and punctuality

A student who arrives late:

- Before the register has closed will be marked as late, using the appropriate code
- After the register has closed will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code

Details of how the school identifies and responds to ongoing punctuality issues can be found in **Part B**.

3.5 Following up unexplained absence

The school's day-to-day process for following up on absence can be found in **Part B**. Where any student the school would normally expect to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will:

- call the student's parent/carer on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason. If the school cannot reach any of the student's emergency contacts, the school may phone the police or the local authority children's social care;
- identify whether the absence is approved or not;
- identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained; this will be no later than 5 working days after the session;
- call the parent/carer on each day that the absence continues without explanation to ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary. If absence continues, the school will consider involving an education welfare officer;
- report, where relevant, the unexplained absence to the student's youth offending team officer;
- offer support, where appropriate, to the student and/or their parents to improve attendance;
- identify whether the student needs support from wider partners as quickly as possible and make the necessary referrals; and/or
- where support is not appropriate, not successful or not engaged with, issue a notice to improve, penalty notice or other legal intervention (refer to Section 5.2), as appropriate.

3.6 Reporting to parents/carers

The school will regularly inform parents/carers (see definition of 'parent/carer', as outlined in Section 3.8) about their child's attendance and absence levels. More information can be found in **Part B** of this policy.

4. Authorised and unauthorised absence

4.1 Approval for term-time absence

The headteacher will allow students to be absent from the school site for certain educational activities, or to attend other schools or settings. The headteacher will only grant a leave of absence to a student during term time if the request meets the specific circumstances set out in the 2024 school attendance regulations ([click here](#)). These circumstances are:

- Taking part in a regulated performance, or regulated employment abroad
- Attending an interview
- Study leave
- A temporary, time-limited part-time timetable
- Exceptional circumstances

4.2 Granting a leave of absence

A leave of absence is granted at the headteacher's discretion, including the length of time the student is authorised to be absent for. Each school's definition of 'exceptional circumstances' is outlined in **Part B** of this policy. Leave of absence will not be granted for a student to take part in protest activity during school hours. As a leave of absence will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely a leave of absence will be granted for the purposes of a family holiday. The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant background context behind the request. Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and in accordance with any leave of absence request form; the specific details of how to access this can be found in **Part B**. The headteacher can request evidence to support any request for leave of absence. If a student is over compulsory school age (eg. sixth form), leave can be requested or agreed by the student or a parent they normally live with.

4.3 Other valid reasons for authorised absence

Other valid reasons for authorised absence include (but are not limited to):

- illness (including mental-health illness) and medical/dental appointments (refer to Sections 4.2 and 4.3 for more detail);
- religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the student's parent(s) belong(s). If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parent's religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart; or
- parent(s) travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh gypsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) and circus people, bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school, but it is not known whether the student is attending educational provision.

Other reasons the school may allow a student to be absent from the school site, which are not classified as absences, include (but are not limited to):

- attending an offsite approved educational activity, sporting activity or visit or trip arranged by the school;
- attending another school at which the student is also registered (dual registration);
- attending provision arranged by the local authority;
- attending work experience; or
- if there is any other unavoidable cause for the student not to attend school, such as disruption to travel caused by an emergency, a lack of access arrangements, or because the school premises are closed.

4.4 Sanctions

The school will make use of the full range of potential sanctions including, but not limited to, those listed in Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 in order to tackle poor attendance. Decisions will be made on an individual, case-by-case basis.

4.4.1 Notices to improve

If the national threshold has been met and support is appropriate, but parents do not engage with offers of support, the school may offer a notice to improve to give parents a final chance to engage with support. Notices to improve will be issued in line with processes set out in the local code of conduct for the local authority area in which the student attends school. They will include:

- details of the student's attendance record and of the offences;
- the benefits of regular attendance and the duty of parents under section 7 of the Education Act 1996 ([click here](#));
- details of the support provided so far;
- opportunities for further support, or to access previously provided support that was not engaged with;
- a clear warning that a penalty notice may be issued if attendance doesn't improve within the improvement period, along with details of what sufficient improvement looks like, which will be decided on a case-by-case basis;
- a clear timeframe of between 3 and 6 weeks for the improvement period; and
- the grounds on which a penalty notice may be issued before the end of the improvement period

4.4.2 Penalty notices

The headteacher (or someone authorised by them), local authority or the police can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age, by issuing a penalty notice. If the school issues a penalty notice, it will check with the local authority before doing so, and send it a copy of any penalty notice issued. Before issuing a penalty notice, the school will consider the individual case, including whether:

- the national threshold for considering a penalty notice has been met (10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks);
- a penalty notice is the best available tool to improve attendance for that student;
- further support, a notice to improve or another legal intervention would be a more appropriate solution; and/or
- any obligations that the school has under the Equality Act 2010 make issuing a penalty notice inappropriate.

A penalty notice may also be issued where parents allow their child to be present in a public place during school hours without reasonable justification during the first 5 days of a fixed period or permanent exclusion. The school will notify the parents of the days the pupil must not be present in a public place. The payment must be made directly to the local authority, regardless of who issues the notice. If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice. If issued with a first penalty notice, the parent must pay £80 within 21 days, or £160 within 28 days. If a second penalty notice is issued to the same parent in respect of the same student, the parent must pay £160 if paid within 28 days. A third penalty notice cannot be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child within 3 years of the date of the issue of the first penalty notice. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time within those 3 years, alternative action will be taken instead.

5. Strategies for promoting attendance

Details of the school's strategies for rewarding, incentivising and improving attendance can be found in **Part B** of this policy.

5.1 Supporting students who are absent or returning to school

Details of the school's approach to supporting the following students can be found in **Part B** of this policy. This includes:

- students with complex barriers to attendance, including how the school works with families and strategies for removing in-school barriers.
- students absent from school due to mental or physical ill health, or their special educational needs and/or disability/disabilities (SEND).

- students who are returning to school after a lengthy or unavoidable period of absence.

5.2 Attendance monitoring

Information about how the school monitors attendance and absence data (including punctuality data), and systematically and regularly analyses it can be found in **Part B**.

5.3 Monitoring attendance

The school will monitor attendance and absence data (including punctuality) half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual student, year group and cohort level. Specific student information will be shared with the DfE on request. The Department for Education has access to the school's management information system so the data can be accessed regularly and securely. Data will be collected each term and published at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics. The school will benchmark its attendance data at whole school, year group and cohort level against local, regional, and national levels to identify areas of focus for improvement, and share this with the governing board.

5.4 Analysing attendance

The school will:

- analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify students, groups or cohorts that need additional support with their attendance;
- identify students whose absences may be a cause for concern, especially those who demonstrate patterns of persistent or severe absence;
- conduct thorough analysis of half-termly, termly, and full-year data to identify patterns and trends; and
- look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns.

5.5 Using data to improve attendance

The school will:

- develop targeted actions to address patterns of absence (of all severities) of individual students, groups or cohorts that it has identified via data analysis;
- provide targeted support to the students it has identified whose absences may be a cause for concern, especially those who demonstrate patterns of persistent or severe absence, and their families (refer to Section 5.6 below);
- provide regular attendance reports to relevant staff in order to facilitate discussions with students and families, and to the governing board and school leaders (including the special educational needs co-ordinator, designated safeguarding lead and student premium lead);
- use data to monitor and evaluate the impact of any interventions put in place in order to modify them and inform future strategies; and
- share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the trust, local authorities and other partners where a student's absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe, including keeping them informed regarding specific students, where appropriate

5.6 Reducing persistent and severe absence

Persistent absence is where a student misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a student misses 50% or more of school. Reducing persistent and severe absence is central to the school's strategy for improving attendance. The school will:

- use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence;
- consider potential safeguarding issues and, where suspected or present, address them in line with *'Keeping children safe in education'*;
- hold regular meetings with the parents of students who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable or at risk of persistent or severe absence, or who are persistently or severely absent, to:

- discuss attendance and engagement at school
- listen, and understand barriers to attendance
- explain the help that is available
- explain the potential consequences of, and sanctions for, persistent and severe absence
- review any existing actions or interventions
- provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance, in conjunction with the local authority, where relevant;
- consider alternative support that could be put in place to remove any barriers to attendance and re-engage these students. In doing so, the school will sensitively consider some of the reasons for absence; and
- implement sanctions, where necessary (see section 5.2, above)

Further details of the school’s approach towards targeting unauthorised absence, for example – meetings, letters, closer monitoring can be found in **Part B** of this policy.

6. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed as guidance from the local authority or DfE is updated, and at a minimum annually by the attendance champion of the school. Following every review, the policy will be approved by the school’s local governing body.

Revision date	By	Summary of changes made
July 2024	BoT	New policy

Appendix 1: Attendance codes

The following codes are taken from the DfE's [guidance on school attendance](#).

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	Student is present at morning registration
\	Present (pm)	Student is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	Student arrives late before register has closed
Attending a place other than the school		
K	Attending education provision arranged by the local authority	Student is attending a place other than a school at which they are registered, for educational provision arranged by the local authority
V	Attending an educational visit or trip	Student is on an educational visit/trip organised or approved by the school
P	Participating in a sporting activity	Student is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
W	Attending work experience	Student is on an approved work experience placement
B	Attending any other approved educational activity	Student is attending a place for an approved educational activity that is not a sporting activity or work experience
D	Dual registered	Student is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
Absent - leave of absence		
C1	Participating in a regulated performance or undertaking regulated employment abroad	Student is undertaking employment (paid or unpaid) during school hours, approved by the school
M	Medical/dental appointment	Student is at a medical or dental appointment
J1	Interview	Student has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
S	Study leave	Student has been granted leave of absence to study for a public examination
X	Not required to be in school	Student of non-compulsory school age is not required to attend
C2	Part-time timetable	Student is not in school due to having a part-time timetable
C	Exceptional circumstances	Student has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances
Absent - other authorised reasons		
T	Parent travelling for occupational purposes	Student is a 'mobile child' who is travelling with their parent(s) who are travelling for occupational purposes
R	Religious observance	Student is taking part in a day of religious observance
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointment)	Student is unable to attend due to illness (either related to physical or mental health)

E	Suspended or excluded	Student has been suspended or excluded from school and no alternative provision has been made
Absent - unable to attend school because of unavoidable cause		
Q	Lack of access arrangements	Student is unable to attend school because the local authority has failed to make access arrangements to enable attendance at school
Y1	Transport not available	Student is unable to attend because school is not within walking distance of their home and the transport normally provided is not available
Y2	Widespread disruption to travel	Student is unable to attend because of widespread disruption to travel caused by a local, national or international emergency
Y3	Part of school premises closed	Student is unable to attend because they cannot practicably be accommodated in the part of the premises that remains open
Y4	Whole school site unexpectedly closed	Every student absent as the school is closed unexpectedly (e.g. due to adverse weather)
Y5	Criminal justice detention	Student is unable to attend as they are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · In police detention · Remanded to youth detention, awaiting trial or sentencing, or · Detained under a sentence of detention
Y6	Public health guidance or law	Student's travel to or attendance at the school would be prohibited under public health guidance or law
Y7	Any other unavoidable cause	To be used where an unavoidable cause is not covered by the other codes
Absent - unauthorised absence		
G	Holiday not granted by the school	Student is absent for the purpose of a holiday, not approved by the school
N	Reason for absence not yet established	Reason for absence has not been established before the register closes
O	Absent in other or unknown circumstances	No reason for absence has been established, or the school isn't satisfied that the reason given would be recorded using one of the codes for authorised absence
U	Arrived in school after registration closed	Student has arrived late, after the register has closed but before the end of session
Administrative codes		
Z	Prospective student not on admission register	Student has not joined school yet but has been registered
#	Planned whole-school closure	Whole-school closures that are known and planned in advance, including school holidays