



Department
for Education

A guide for schools on
communicating with
parents about attendance



UK Government

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Introduction

- ▣ This guide supports schools to communicate effectively with parents or carers about attendance. It is part of the wider Department for Education (DfE) [Attendance toolkit for schools](#).

Schools and parents share the same goal: happy, thriving children who feel they belong and achieve their potential. This guide is built on that common ground. It has been developed because we know that when schools and parents work together as partners – when parents feel connected, understood and part of the solution – attendance improves.

Effective communication with parents goes hand in hand with strong relationships; both should be developed and reflected upon together. Investing in relationships with parents up front will likely save time and support attendance in the long run.

How this guide supports your school

- ▣ Schools are already doing a huge amount to improve attendance. This guide does not try to replace any of that. It is here to complement and enhance what you already do.

This guide:

- ↪ Complements your existing attendance systems and policies
- ↪ Provides practical, evidence-based communication approaches
- ↪ Includes ready-to-use templates and resources
- ↪ Helps you tailor messages to different families and situations

DfE data tools are available to help you identify the pupils, families and cohorts that need support to attend. These insights will help you target communications most effectively and help monitor the impact.

Research consistently shows that parents expect to hear about attendance from their school first. You are the trusted messenger. This guide is here to help you make the most of that by supporting you with the messages that make the most difference.

What we learned from parents and schools

- This guide is the product of research and co-creation with those who will deliver it and those who it aims to influence.

We ran in-depth stakeholder workshops and focus groups with teachers and school leaders, parents from a range of backgrounds and parts of the country, including parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), to co-develop messaging around attendance. These messages were tested again with 40 parents in a 7-day online community, looking specifically at how the academic and social aspects of school played into parents' decision making and attitudes on going to school.

Many of these parents had children with 5-15% absence rates, where appropriate communications are more likely to make a meaningful difference to outcomes. Outside of this group, reasons for not being in school are often more complex, and where communication with parents must be embedded in deeper relationship building and support.

What messages work (and what doesn't)

- ↪ Messages about belonging, friendships and daily experience – when grounded in the child's real experience at school
- ↪ Tone that adapts to the situation – the child's age, SEND need, and past attendance pattern
- ↪ Academic outcomes, resilience and life skills become more relevant for older pupils
- ↪ Personalised, practical communication, not generic messages
- ↪ Clear routes to support, especially via a named contact
- ↪ Messages that imply poor parenting, impart blame or prioritise school metrics over the child, push families away.

Parents' beliefs and motivations

- ↪ Parents believe they are acting in their child's best interests
- ↪ Wellbeing and happiness are the primary drivers of decisions
- ↪ Some parents feel judged or misunderstood by schools

How parents understand absence

- ↪ Many underestimate how much school and learning is missed
- ↪ Missed lessons, days and experiences resonate better than percentages

- This research is supplemented and supported by larger surveys carried out by Parentkind ([here](#) and [here](#)) and a policy report from [Public First](#).

Guiding principles

▫ This translates into 9 key principles for communicating with parents:

01 Set clear expectations

Make sure parents understand what is expected of them by regularly communicating the school policy, thresholds, and their legal responsibilities.

02 Build relationships

Invest in relationships with parents from the start. Reinforce positive messages about their child and their efforts; then, if challenges emerge, there is a strong footing for working together.

03 Assume positive intent

Begin from the belief that parents want the best for their child and acknowledge them as experts on their child. Use supportive, non-judgemental language, grounded in shared aims and framed around working in partnership.

04 Share clear, relevant facts

Parents do not always realise how much school is missed. Simple facts, like lessons or days missed, help them understand without feeling criticised.

05 Understand what motivates parents

Focus on the benefits of school, such as friendships, enjoyment, belonging and learning. Persistent use of the word 'attendance' without acknowledging the wider context of school or individual circumstances could turn some parents off.

06 Keep communication practical

Give clear examples of what children gain from being in school. When signposting support, explain who to contact and what steps they can take to access help.

07 Match the tone to the situation

Whole-school messages should feel warm and welcoming. If concerns increase, communication can become firmer while still staying respectful and collaborative.

08 Recognise effort and improvement

Recognising small steps forward builds momentum. Celebrate improvements and ensure praise feels genuine.

09 Tailor communication for SEND and other vulnerable pupils

Attendance can be more complex for some families. Use welcoming language, celebrate progress and involve SEND or safeguarding staff when shaping your messages.

▫ In summary

Use human language, lead with support and collaboration, show parents you see the reality they live in, be explicit about the small, practical things that make attendance possible and celebrate the successes.

Messaging and methods

- Schools are expected to regularly communicate with families about attendance to:

Set attendance expectations and communicate the school policy

Follow up on absence

Inform parents about their child's attendance or absence, including celebrating improvement

Promote the benefits and importance of good attendance

Support and advise parents when attendance worsens to support improvement, including when legal action may be taken

- This section supports you to best fulfil these expectations by providing appropriate messages, tips and considerations of how best to deliver them.

Communications checklist

- Things to always consider when you communicate to make sure messaging is useful for parents:

01 Think carefully about your audience

- ↪ Are you engaging both parents or carers, where appropriate?
- ↪ How can you ensure effective communications for families with language barriers or low literacy (i.e. simple language, translations, visual, short documents, or face to face communication)?
- ↪ SEND needs or complex home pressures (may need phone calls or face-to-face contact instead of written messages).

02 Know your channels and think about which method is most appropriate

- ↪ Emails/newsletters: universal updates. For information - heavy updates, think about including key details in the email body, rather than in an attachment.
- ↪ Text messages or app messages: quick nudges or reminders. See EEF's evaluation of using text messages, which showed a small positive impact on attendance.
- ↪ Phone calls or check-ins at the school gates: to build a relationship and gain information; use a curious, not confrontational tone.
- ↪ Letters: where a formal tone is needed.
- ↪ In-person meetings: to build trust and problem-solve jointly.
- ↪ Home visits: for families who are hardest to reach or need more support.
- ↪ Coffee mornings or drop-in sessions: informal opportunities to build relationships.

03 Who is the most appropriate messenger?

- ↪ Consider which existing relationships might land the message best or whether escalation is needed.
- ↪ Messengers could be: member of the senior leadership team (SLT), special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), class teacher, attendance officer or designated safeguarding lead.

04 Use attendance data to inform communications

- ↪ Regularly analyse data, supported by the DfE [View Your Education Data \(VYED\)](#) tools, to segment and personalise communications.
- ↪ Consider adapting messages and methods of communication for different percentage absence bands or specific cohorts. For example, reinforce and celebrate strong and improved attenders and spot decline early with a light-touch nudge. Use data to personalise and target messages (such as days missed, lateness or Friday absence).

05 Create a communications calendar and consider frequency

- ↪ Plan communication across the year, rather than reacting in the moment.
- ↪ Too many messages overwhelm; too few mean missed opportunities.
- ↪ Use the calendar on page 14 and the DfE [Explore your attendance patterns tool](#) to guide sequencing and consistency.
- ↪ What day, and time of day are you planning to send the communication? Very early or busy times reduce open rates of messages. Sending late on a Friday closes any chance of dialogue with a parent or carer until the following week.

06 Ensure quality and consistency

- ↪ Consider a communications 'gatekeeper', as consistency and tone is important – one person with oversight of all attendance communications can support this.
- ↪ Staff need to be trained to have effective conversations; developing scripts and whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) will help.

07 Ask parents how it's going

- ↪ Feedback on communication should be routine.
- ↪ Invite parents to share what feels helpful, what feels frustrating, and what could be clearer.

A stepped messaging approach

- There are some messages that work well for most families, but others should only be used in specific circumstances. This list helps you pick one clear priority, the right tone and the right method for every moment of contact, so communications contribute to progress.

Universal messages

- 01** Reminding parents that going to school provides non-academic benefits, as well as academic ones. This is the single most widely accepted idea. It links everyday school life to non-academic benefits parents care about – like developing co-operation skills, confidence, routine and resilience – and works across ages when supported with believable examples.
- 02** Belonging and social experience. Be conscious that, for some parents, their child's well-being and social experience at school is their primary concern. Messaging about belonging, friendship and feeling safe lands well with many parents, providing it is realistic and acknowledges when a child does not yet feel that way.
- 03** Practical, named support. Parents need to see who to speak to – a person, not a department – and what will happen next. These messages build trust and open the door to shared problem-solving. Use this early and often when offering help.
- 04** Small, achievable steps and celebration of progress. Messages that emphasise small, achievable changes reduce defensiveness and build momentum. Celebrate small wins explicitly, especially with parents of children with SEND or other complex needs.
- 05** Tangible examples of what has been missed. Percentages rarely resonate, so translate absence into days or lessons missed or missed social moments and opportunities.

Messages to use when they apply

Anxiety or pastoral issues

- ↪ For absences caused by anxiety or bullying, acknowledge the emotion and offer clear support or adjustments tailored to the individual. This can open up lines of conversation when all else fails.

Guidance on illness

- ↪ If you are discussing illness, be clear on the school's policy and ask parents to be specific about symptoms. Signpost to official NHS guidance 'Is my child too ill for school?' to reassure parents that children with a cold or minor illness (as well as children feeling anxious or worried) can still come to school. Remind them that the school will keep an eye on their child.

Legal or enforcement messaging

- ↪ Absence is often a symptom of wider issues a family is facing. Where a support-first approach is not successful, not engaged with, or not appropriate (such as term-time holidays), messages at the relevant points about legal interventions will be necessary, and must be tailored to the specific case. Although they aim to secure a child's right to education, they could close down dialogue if used too early or for a family experiencing challenging circumstances.

Attainment and consequences

- ↪ Facts about attainment in exams, or future working life, mainly work for parents of older pupils or those approaching key assessments.

Adapted messages at different moments

- Use the DfE [school attendance data tools](#) to identify trends and patterns in absence for individuals and different groups of pupils. This will help you target and adapt your messages to have the biggest impact.

Whole-school or start-of-term communications



Tone: warm, invitational, inclusive. Lead with the child.

Examples

Primary: This term, we will be helping children grow friendships and confidence through weekly team projects. If mornings are tricky, speak to [name], our Family Support Lead, who can suggest small changes that might help.



Key messages: school is more than schoolwork, what school offers this term, named contacts and an invitation to work together on attendance.

Secondary: Being in school helps students keep on top of their learning, build their confidence and establish relationships that matter. For Years 10 and 11, being in school every day supports higher achievement in exams. Contact [name], our Attendance Lead, for tips on getting into good school habits.



Avoid: blaming parents or being too instructive.

SEND: We know every child's route to belonging is different. If your child, needs adjustments to help them feel safe and ready to learn contact our SENCO, [name], to make a plan together.

Class or year-group reminders, notes from teachers



Tone: personal, practical, routine-focused.

Examples

Primary: This week your child will take part in a group performance, helping them build confidence and resilience.



Key messages: examples of what's been missed, belonging and social experience.

Secondary: This week's project builds the team-working skills needed for upcoming work. Missing it will make lessons that follow harder.



Avoid: generic statistics or broad claims.

SEND: Today's small-group session helps with social skills. If your child needs support to join, let us know and we can make arrangements together.

Gentle nudges (text message or short email)



Tone: neutral, informative, low pressure.

Examples

Primary and Secondary (text message): Hello, [Parent]. We all missed [Child] at school today and hope they are well. They missed out on [lessons or activity]. Call [number] to speak to [Person] if you need help getting them back in.



Key messages: examples of what's been missed, specific offer of help.

SEND (text message): Hello, [Parent]. We all missed [Child] at school. If there's anything we can do to support their return, give [Person] a call on [number].



Avoid: 'we know it's difficult' messages can be seen as patronising.

Personal check-in (phone call)



Tone: curious, collaborative, understanding



Key messages: examples of what's been missed, practical next steps, acknowledge parents using their best judgement



Avoid: general 'we know it's difficult' messages can be seen as patronising.

Examples

Primary: I know you're doing your best, so we wanted to see what more we can do help [Child] settle back in. It's really important they get settled in the school routine so they can build confidence and keep up with the class.

Secondary: We want to help make this easier for you and for [Child]. We want to chat through anything we can do to get [Child] to school regularly so they don't fall behind. They've already missed 25 hours of lessons this term.

SEND: We completely appreciate how difficult this can be, so we wanted to check in and remind you that we're here to help in any way we can. Would it be useful to explore making adjustments to help [Child] settle into a routine with school? We don't want them to miss out.

Invitation to a meeting



Tone: collaborative, purposeful, time-bound



Key messages: specifics on what's missed, small realistic goals, named people and actions



Avoid: enforcement language or threats of escalation

Examples

Primary: We'd like to suggest a short meeting, in person or online, to agree two small steps we can work on together to help [Child] join us in school more often. Can you make [date and time]?

Secondary: We'd like to agree a plan to help [Child] with their school routine and staying on top of their studies. Can you make a short meeting, in person or online, on [date and time]? We'll bring a list of simple, practical things that might help.

SEND: We'd like to meet with you and our SENCO to look at the progress we've already made and agree small, realistic steps to make school more comfortable for [Child]. Could you make a meeting, in person or online, on [date and time]?

- ▣ Remember: Select the most appropriate member of staff to lead conversations, ideally someone who knows the family or child, and leave each meeting or conversation with a shared understanding of the next steps and who is responsible for them.

Tips for communication around formal processes

- ▣ You will need to be clear with parents through your policy what might happen if absence worsens, including a formal attendance plan or contract, and when legal action might be taken. If these steps are reached, the advice below can help these messages land better.

For children on an attendance plan

Keep the tone straight

Be practical and evidence-led

Name any next steps and the person who will do them

Measure time in days, lessons or hours, not percentages

Recognise incremental improvements

Avoid overpromising support you can't deliver

Make clear what good progress looks like

Formal letters or sanctions

Keep the tone formal, factual and unemotional

Stick to dates, absence record and tangible next steps

Be clear on the process and where to get help if needed

Do not use enforcement language before this point unless needed

Planning your messages across the year

- Planning your messages across the school year can be really beneficial. Too many messages in a short period can overwhelm parents, and longer emails will often not be read, so you'll need to find the sweet spot for your school. Using a range of channels will help you engage parents too.

The communications calendar below splits out the school year by term and maps:

- ↪ the 'moment' for comms (timely points where communicating with parents about attendance is most relevant)
 - ↪ the 'mindset' (what parents may be thinking and feeling in that moment and therefore the barriers or drivers we can address through communication)
 - ↪ the 'messaging' (what language will help improve attendance). We've provided guidance here and suggested messages in italics. We don't expect schools to copy and paste these messages, but they're here to give you a sense of what could land well
- Try to develop your own communications calendar using these suggested moments. They are opportunities to connect with parents when they're in the right headspace for open, constructive conversations. They are a starting point to build into your communications planning throughout the year. They sit alongside a regular 'drumbeat' of attendance messages on expectations and benefits.

These work best when tailored to your pupils and families. The DfE Explore your attendance patterns data tool help schools identify points in the year where attendance is typically higher or lower. Use this insight to plan communications that reinforce what is working and address where attendance might drop. DfE have also published insights showing the impact that birthdays, religious observance and broken weeks can have on school attendance and offers ideas on how other schools have managed them (refer to [Attendance toolkit for schools](#)).

You know your school community best, so use the resources in this guide to find the moments and messages that work for you and your families.

Ultimately, this calendar and other resources are here to support you in having the conversations that go beyond numbers.

Communications calendar

Autumn term and Christmas holidays

Moment	Mindset	Messaging for parents
Start of the new school year in September National data shows that pupils who miss school early are much more likely to struggle with attendance later. Analysis of attendance data show that of pupils who had at least one day of absence in the first week of the 2024/25 academic year, over half (57.4%) went on to be persistently absent.	Public First focus groups with parents across England found that daily attendance is no longer seen as automatic, and parents increasingly weigh tiredness, wellbeing and convenience when deciding whether to send a child to school. Parents are trying to enforce routines after the long summer break. Some will be thankful that they're back in school full-time, some will be facing resistance to go from their children. Barriers: It's sometimes easier to just keep them off school when they don't want to go rather than them getting upset. Motivations: Now is the time to start good habits and a positive routine for the rest of the year.	Remind parents that now is the time to set good intentions for the year ahead and highlight the positives of returning to school, like seeing friends, their favourite lessons and enjoyable routines like after-school activities. Outline what parents need to know for the year, including your term dates and attendance policy. <i>We can't wait to welcome all children/pupils back to school on XX. We know that returning to school means a shift in routines. Prepare for a strong start to the school year by resetting sleep schedules 3 to 5 days before school begins by moving bedtime and wake-up time earlier in small steps.</i> <i>Reintroduce familiar routines such as reading before bed, preparing clothes, or having breakfast at the table. Limit screens for at least an hour before bed to support sleep as overstimulation can affect sleep quality, and plan a calm, structured first morning back to help them feel more confident.</i>
Winter illness period In the UK, this typically runs from October to March, with cases of flu, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) peaking between December and February.	DfE data shows that illness is the single biggest reason for school absence in England, accounting for just over half of all absences between the start of December and end of February. Barriers: Some parents might not be aware of the NHS advice on when they can send their child in to school with mild symptoms or worry their children to be seen as a risk to others if they do go to school with a cold. Some parents who have jobs requiring them to go to their place of work will struggle when their children are sick and need to be kept off school. But those who work from home or don't work may be more lenient when their children are unwell, as keeping them off isn't as much of an issue.	Remind parents of the NHS guidance that states children can attend school with common cold symptoms like a sore throat, runny nose or cough unless they have a high temperature. <i>If you're not sure if your child is well enough to go come to school, check the NHS guidance for common illnesses at and let us know as soon as possible if they need to stay home.</i> <i>Remember, ahead of and during the winter illness period, all eligible school-aged children are offered an NHS flu vaccine. We'll be in touch with more information about this.</i>

Moment	Mindset	Messaging for parents
	Motivations: Coughs and colds are common, and getting children vaccinated keeps them safe from flu, as well as protecting others at high risk from getting seriously ill from flu.	<i>If your child has a medical appointment during school hours, it's important they attend school before and after the appointment. They can wear school uniform for the appointment.</i>
Parents' evening An opportunity for face-to-face conversations with parents to reiterate what good attendance looks like. Schools have their own cycles for parents' evening, so feel free to repeat this messaging at the time most relevant to your school.	Public First research found that parents often describe attendance as "very good" even when school data shows otherwise, indicating a perception gap rather than resistance. It also found that attendance conversations are most effective when they occur within trusted, relational contexts, rather than through sanctions or automated messaging. Barriers: Parents won't necessarily have built up relationships with their child's teacher at this point, depending on when the parents' evening takes place. Parents tend to underestimate how often their child misses school. Motivation: Parents care about their child's development and want to know where they're doing well, and where they could improve. Primary: They understand that their teacher spends a significant amount of time with their child, and that the teacher has their best interests at heart. Secondary: As they progress through secondary school, parents are more motivated by messages about how attendance can impact exam results. However, this might be seen as too far away for those in Years 7, 8 and 9.	Parents' evening may be an appropriate time to discuss attendance issues as part of a wider face-to-face meeting, without requesting this specifically for attendance. For those with higher than desired absence rates: <i>Are there any issues preventing your child from being in school? We can help and have support available.</i> For those with good attendance: <i>We're really pleased with their attendance so far. If you ever struggle with this, speak to us and we can help.</i> Specific messaging for secondary schools: <i>Those with 95 to 100% attendance are nearly twice as likely to achieve strong GCSE results (Grades 9-5) compared to those with 90 to 95% attendance. That means even five days out of school could make a difference to their future.</i> Discuss the options for removing barriers to attendance, such as check-ins with pupils, familiar faces at the gate (primary), regular meetings between a designated school contact and parent, approved early/late arrivals to avoid overwhelm, etc.

Moment	Mindset	Messaging for parents
End of term, pre-Christmas holidays	Mindset: Consider what day you break up as this can have an impact on attendance rates; in the final week of the 2024/25 academic year, schools that finished the academic year with a broken week had absence rates 2.6 percentage points higher for that week than those that finished with a full week. This will be relevant at the end of every term, when parents are planning holidays and trips to visit family and friends. Barriers: Parents’ attention is elsewhere – on family plans, logistics for the holidays and childcare while school is closed. They may think school is just about watching videos in the last week of term. Motivations: Many parents will be looking forward to a break with family. The Christmas period is a happy time for many putting parents in a good mood and providing an opportunity to remind them of the social and emotional benefits of school.	This is a good time to remind parents again about what you’re doing in the last week of term and why it’s important their children are in school at this time of year. You can bust the myth that they’re ‘just watching films’: show them the important mix of fun and learning. It’s also worth alluding to the next term ahead of the break. For example: <i>We hope you have restful breaks, and your children come back to school in the new year feeling refreshed. The new year is all about setting good intentions for the year ahead and this includes improving how often your child is in school.</i> <i>Starting the year with a strong routine will help them be in school more regularly, which, in turn, improves not only their learning but also their confidence, resilience, and friendships.</i>

Spring term and Easter holidays

Moment	Mindset	Messaging for parents
Start of the new term in January We know that comms can have limited impact when it comes to stopping term-time holidays, but that doesn't mean reminders about expectations for attending school every day aren't important.	The 'fresh-start effect' is a behavioural science principle whereby people are more motivated to change habits following 'temporal landmarks' that feel like new beginnings, such as New Year's Day and the start of a new school term. Some parents will be planning for the year ahead and already thinking about booking summer holidays. January is the peak booking time for summer holidays, when holiday companies offer discounts. Civil Aviation Authority data shows 4.3 million package holidays were booked in January 2025. Barriers: Term-time holidays are cheaper, and booking it now feels far off, so many parents will just accept that taking their child out of school is something to 'deal with later'. Motivations: The new year and setting resolutions are synonymous, so parents are already in an intentional mindset and open to changing behaviour. This provides an opportunity to reinforce good attendance habits.	A time to remind and reset expectations on attendance, for example: <i>The new year is all about setting good intentions for the year ahead, and this applies to your child's school record, too. Being in school regularly is important to help them develop and grow, and build friendships, confidence and resilience.</i> <i>Even just a few days off can make a difference – 5 days over the course of a year is equivalent to 25 lessons missed, 5 lunchtimes with friends and 15 playtimes.</i> <i>If you're thinking ahead to summer and planning holidays for the year, please keep these to school holidays to ensure your child can thrive in school. The summer term is filled with vital learning and fun activities.</i> <i>If you want to set good attendance habits for the year and you need support, speak to us. We're here to help.</i>
National secondary school offer day (first working day of March) Think about your first interaction with new parents, and what attendance messages are best to include.	DfE data shows that attendance patterns established in primary school often persist into secondary, so it is important schools and families work together early to support transition and routines. This is a moment that most parents are conscious of and eagerly awaiting. It's a milestone in their child's education, and once they know their child's secondary school, they will start planning travel, school clubs and other logistics. Barriers: Some children won't have received an offer from their preferred school and parents may feel frustrated. Some parents may be nervous about the change in routine and relationships.	Secondary schools will be communicating with parents of those joining the school in September. As part of this, include reference to the school's attendance policy, and wording relating to the support-first approach. Use year 6 absence reports to support relationship-building with the families that need it most on transition to secondary.

Moment	Mindset	Messaging for parents
	Motivations: Parents are already thinking ahead to when their child goes to school in September, providing an opportunity to reinforce good attendance expectations.	
Vaccines e.g. human papillomavirus (HPV) for year 8s or the 3-in-1 teenage booster and MenACWY (meningococcal bacteria) for year 9s	You may need to do some work with pupils and families who are worried about vaccines to ensure they come in on these days. Barriers: Some parents distrust vaccines and may keep them off school that day. Motivations: Parents ultimately want to keep their child safe. Normalise the fact that majority of students get the vaccine.	Reassure in advance and normalise that most students get these vaccines, e.g.: <i>We'll soon be organising for students to have [name of vaccine]. These vaccines are crucial for [insert relevant information] and are taken up by XX% of students.</i> <i>On the day, students will be called to the vaccination session during the school day, so they should attend their lessons as normal. Most students feel well enough to remain in school afterwards. If a student feels unwell, staff will support them.</i>
End of term pre-Easter holidays	Try to avoid ending on a broken week and remind parents and pupils what they will be doing in the final week to understand what they will miss if they take them out early. Barriers: Parents' attention is elsewhere – on family plans, logistics for the holidays and childcare while school is closed. They're focused on the immediate and may not be thinking about the following term yet. Motivations: There's lots of the school year left, so there's still chance to improve.	Attendance rates often dip in the summer term, so remind parents of expectations and the importance of coming to school. <i>Next term marks an important one for X [class/year/child] as we focus on X [add details of what they'll be learning or doing in the final term].</i> <i>Being in school regularly is important not only for learning, but to help your child build confidence, resilience and friendships.</i> <i>If they've missed school already this year, it's never too late to improve. If you need support getting your child into school more often, speak to us. We're here to help.</i> Specific messaging for secondary schools, where relevant: <i>Those in years 11, 12 and 13 all have periods of study leave next term and we want to remind you of the importance of being in school around study leave. Next term is crucial – the higher their attendance, the more likely they are to get better exam results.</i>

Summer term and summer holidays

Moment	Mindset	Messaging for parents
Moving-up day (often called an induction, transition or transfer day) where children in year 6 visit their new school to meet teachers and classmates and get familiar with the new environment)	Clear expectations and a sense of belonging during transition are important, as attendance patterns formed early in secondary school are linked to later outcomes. Year 11 pupils with near-perfect attendance have almost double the odds of achieving grade 5 in English and Maths GCSE compared to similar pupils attending 90 to 95% of the time. Barriers: Parents may feel nervous or apprehensive on behalf of their children on moving-up day. Motivations: Parents will naturally be thinking ahead to their child going to secondary school and we can use this moment in time to set out policies and outline what good attendance looks like.	This is another opportunity to set expectations and start building relationships as children move into year 7. Use the year 6 transition data to identify the families that might need more support and think about how you will tailor your communications to them. <i>Transitioning to secondary school is a big change. We're here to support you and your child with the move.</i> <i>[Insert information about the logistics of moving-up day, how they'll get there, what to expect, etc.].</i> <i>We expect all children to attend school on time, every day, and we're here to help with that.</i> <i>If you have any concerns about this, please do get in touch ahead of September to discuss ways we can help.</i>
Primary school offer day (around 16 April) onwards – welcoming new parents and setting expectations	Barriers: For parents and carers whose children are moving from the nursery to the primary in the same school, things will feel familiar. Parents whose children are moving to an entirely unfamiliar school, or who didn't get the place they wanted may be nervous, however, and will seek reassurance that the environment will be a positive one. As attendance can't be enforced until compulsory school age, your communications will need to make the new expectations at primary school clear. Motivations: Some parents will be delighted about getting their first-place offer, and we can use this wave of positivity to outline what the school expects when children reach compulsory school age.	<i>Your child is joining us next year, and we're thrilled to welcome them.</i> <i>Ahead of then, here's some information on our attendance policy [schools to add links or summarise].</i> <i>It's important that they're in school every day, not just for learning, but to build their confidence and friendships, so they can settle in and feel like they belong.</i> <i>Arriving at school on time helps start the day in a calm, ordered way. Some children feel anxious if they always arrive after their friends.</i> <i>Starting school could feel daunting, so if you're concerned, or if morning routines feel hard, speak to us. We're here to help.</i>

Moment	Mindset	Messaging for parents
Study leave Schools have discretion to grant absence for study leave for public exams (not internal or mock exams). If they do, provision must be made for those pupils who still want to attend to revise	Greater clarity around study leave and school attendance is needed. Barriers: Parents may assume that attendance is optional around exam periods even if the school hasn't granted study leave. If study leave is granted, they may not be aware of the benefits offered by still attending. Motivation: Parents want their children to achieve the best possible grades, and they value teacher expertise. Some parents understand that their child works better with structure and supervision.	Communication must be clear on when children are and aren't expected to be in school and reinforce the benefits of being there, e.g. <i>"Study leave will start for Y11s on X date, after which students can choose whether to study at home or come into school. If they come in to school during the study leave period x, y, z resources will be available to them (place to study, access to staff, revision classes etc). We strongly encourage students to make the most of the in-school provision during this time."</i> OR <i>"We believe there is value in students having access to specialist teachers and resources throughout the exam preparation and exam periods. That's why we have taken the decision not to have a study leave period and instead to offer a specialised revision programme for all Y11 students from X date to X date."</i>
End of school year	As the school year comes to a close, it's time to reflect on the past year, celebrate successes as well as think ahead to the future. Barriers: Parents will be focused on childcare, keeping their children entertained, and on their summer holidays. Motivations: There's an opportunity to celebrate the wins from the past year and reinforce good behaviours.	It's vital that messaging is personalised and celebrates improvements to ensure the parting moment from one year to the next is a positive one. Try to recognise the improvements of all students, not just those with 95% attendance or above. Congratulate and thank parents and students for their efforts and look to next year to replicate the same positive movements. <i>Thank you for getting [name of child] into school as much as possible this year. They have achieved X [add personalised details here of X% improvement on the previous year/term]. Being in school regularly is important to help them develop and grow, and build friendships, confidence and resilience.</i> <i>We hope you have a restful break, and your children come back to school in September feeling refreshed.</i>

Moment	Mindset	Messaging for parents
School holidays	Schools could consider scheduling communications to parents towards the end of the holidays, when they'll be starting to think about the start of the new school year. Barriers: Parents will be focused on childcare, keeping their children entertained, and on their summer holidays, so school – particularly at the start of the summer holidays – will be lower down the list. Motivations: Parents will be bombarded with marketing messages about new school uniforms and stationery, which, in turn, could prompt them to think about the start of the new school year.	During the holidays, routines change, so this is a chance to remind parents to get back into good habits ahead of the start of the new year. <i>It's almost back-to-school time. Start this school year with good intentions and build routines to help your child thrive.</i> <i>During the summer break, sleep patterns, mealtimes and daily structure become looser. This is completely normal, but this shift can make the return to school feel overwhelming.</i> <i>Start resetting sleep schedules 3 to 5 days before school begins by moving bedtime and wake-up time earlier in small steps. Reintroduce familiar routines such as reading before bed, laying out clothes or having breakfast at the table. Limit screens for at least an hour before bed, as overstimulation can affect sleep quality, and plan a calm, structured first morning back to help them feel more confident.</i>

Sources of inspiration – videos from schools

- ▢ Here are some attendance and behaviour hub schools that all do excellent work with parents to support attendance. Listen to them talk about their approach in this [YouTube playlist](#) or find the one most relevant to you below.

Marine Academy Primary, Plymouth

- ↪ 00:16 – having daily conversations
- ↪ 00:30 – engaging parents before their child starts school
- ↪ 01:04 – practical examples of how to get children into school
- ↪ 02:24 – the power of community events
- ↪ 02:52 – a personalised approach to getting children into school
- ↪ 03:38 – ways to communicate with parents
- ↪ 04:09 – celebrating good attendance

Co-op Academy Woodslee Primary, Wirral

- ↪ 00:16 – understanding why a child is missing school
- ↪ 00:46 – connecting with stakeholders to improve attendance
- ↪ 01:34 – demonstrating care to support children into school
- ↪ 02:10 – the power of face-to-face communication
- ↪ 02:40 – out-of-hours communication

Leigh Academy Cherry Orchard Primary, Ebbsfleet

- ↪ 00:26 – engaging parents from day 0
- ↪ 00:53 – celebrating improvements
- ↪ 01:17 – visualising the issue

Leigh Academy Rainham Secondary, Ebbsfleet

- ↪ 00:25 – developing individualised strategies
- ↪ 01:10 – being reflective and responsive
- ↪ 01:59 – a three-way relationship
- ↪ 02:42 – primary vs secondary attendance

Q3 Academy Langley, Sandwell

- ↪ 00:21 – daily action on attendance
- ↪ 00:36 – setting expectations from the beginning
- ↪ 01:27 – using social media
- ↪ 02:15 – incentivising good attendance
- ↪ 02:56 – term-time holidays

St James School, Exeter

- ↪ 00:18 – attendance handbook
- ↪ 00:47 – illness-related absence
- ↪ 01:26 – celebrating five days of attendance
- ↪ 02:20 – mistakes to avoid
- ↪ 03:07 – changing behaviour through understanding
- ↪ 03:35 – making sure communication reaches every parent

Sneinton C of E Primary, Nottingham

- ↪ 00:07 – individual barriers and relationships
- ↪ 00:51 – choosing channels based on what works for the parent
- ↪ 02:00 – the parent understanding their role
- ↪ 02:32 – choosing the right messenger for each family

Bluecoat Wollaton Academy, Nottingham

- ↪ 00:20 – what doesn't work
- ↪ 01:12 – modes of communication
- ↪ 02:44 – building trust and breaking down barriers
- ↪ 03:42 – know your data

10 top tips for communication about attendance

Clear. Supportive. Practical. Partnership-focused.



Build relationships

- ↪ Start from shared goals and wanting to working together
- ↪ Invest in relationships early to build trust
- ↪ Show understanding of challenge and avoid blame



Make messages specific and useful

- ↪ Use the child's name
- ↪ Give clear, practical information that parents can act on
- ↪ Name who to contact and what support is available



Focus on the child and their experience

- ↪ Focus on the the benefits of being in school
- ↪ Talk about learning, friendship, confidence and belonging



Communicate clearly and consistently

- ↪ Explain expectations and procedures early and often
- ↪ Use straightforward language
- ↪ Train staff so communications are effective and high quality



Use attendance data

- ↪ Personalise and target messages
- ↪ Frame absence in days and experiences missed, not percentages



Adapt for family circumstances

- ↪ Match tone, language and channel to the age, needs and circumstances of the child
- ↪ Consider SEND, language, literacy and home pressures



Recognise progress

- ↪ Celebrate improvements and small steps
- ↪ Positive feedback builds motivation and trust
- ↪ Thank parents for their efforts



Choose the right channel

- ↪ Match the message to the medium
- ↪ Take stock of the channels you have that work for your parents
- ↪ See the guide below for when to use each channel



Listen and respond

- ↪ Feedback on communications should be routine
- ↪ Ask parents what feels helpful or is frustrating
- ↪ Be open to feedback and adapt



Find the right time

- ↪ Plan ahead and use key moments in the year
- ↪ Sending messages very early or during busy times reduces open rates
- ↪ Don't wait until issues escalate

Channel guide



Text message - quick nudges or reminders



Emails/newsletters - updates, information and resources



Phone calls - sensitive issues; use a curious not confrontational tone



Home visits - for families who are hardest to reach or need more support



In person meetings - to build trust and problem-solve and strengthen relationships



Coffee mornings or drop-in sessions - informal opportunities to build relationships

Template resources for schools to adapt and use

- ▣ The following resource templates have been created for you to adapt and use in your communications with parents about attendance. Make sure you consider the principles and tips in this guide when using these resources.
 - a. **Email and letter templates**
 - ↪ Use these templates and tailor them to each individual child.
 - b. **Text message templates**
 - ↪ Use these message templates to send short messages or reminders to parents.
 - c. **Phone-call scripts for following up on absence**
 - ↪ Use these to help guide your conversations when you need to speak directly with a parent about why their child is absent.
 - d. **School attendance policy on one page**
 - ↪ A template to create a short-form, at-a-glance version of your attendance policy that outlines key points and can be shared with parents. It should signpost to further information or a more in-depth policy for those who need more information.
 - e. **Under-the-weather form**
 - ↪ Designed for children who don't feel 100% well, but want to give school a go. This form allows parents to give information about how they're feeling and who and when to contact if the child starts to feel worse. RISE attendance and behaviour hub schools have seen great success using this form – children who otherwise would have stayed off have managed to come into school for the day.
 - f. **Ready-to-use content**
 - ↪ Short written information that can be copy-pasted and used across different communications channels with parents, related to:
 - ↪ Illness and medical appointments
 - ↪ Requesting a leave of absence and absence for holidays in term time
 - ↪ Being on time
 - ↪ Absence for religious observance
 - ↪ Support with attendance

Ready-to-use assets schools can send to parents

The following assets have been created for schools to send directly to parents. Choose the most appropriate channel – be that email, newsletter, text message – as well as the most opportune time to share this information. These assets can be used at any time, but you may want to consider issuing them at the start of each year, or as periodical reminders.

a. **NHS Guidance – Is my child too ill for school?**

- Download or share with parents [this visual guide](#) to when children are well enough to be in school, as per NHS guidance.

b. **Tips for managing back to school worries**

- Clinical Psychologist Dr Nihara Krause has created [these top tips](#) to help parents manage concerns their child may have about returning to school after the holidays. Send them to parents as part of your pre-holiday communications.

c. **Animations**

- These [60 second animations](#) can be sent out directly to parents or used at events or attendance meetings with parents to stimulate discussion and reflection about challenges and strategies.

All animations finish with the advice for parents who are struggling with attendance to “speak to school, we’re here to help.”

The following animations are suitable for most parents and have been created for you to download and post on your social media channels. [Download them here](#), or watch them on YouTube via the links below.

↳ [Tips for how parents can support with good attendance in primary school](#)

Use throughout primary, or where parents need practical support.

↳ [Tips for how parents can support with good attendance in secondary school](#)

Use throughout secondary, or where parents need practical support.

↳ [Illness absence and staying healthy](#)

Use alongside school policy about illness absence and the NHS guidance ‘Is my child too ill for school?’.

The following animations have been created for you to share directly with parents (e.g. as part of text messages, emails or newsletters) at specific moments:

↳ [School attendance expectations for parents of those going into primary school](#)

Use for new parents with children starting in reception to set expectations and offer support around the transition.

↳ [School attendance expectations for parents of those going into secondary school](#)

Use for new parents with children starting secondary school to set expectations and offer support around the transition.

↳ [School attendance expectations for parents of those going into key stage 4](#)

Use to reinforce importance of attendance for exam success and building social skills and confidence.

 Why attending every day matters in primary school

Use throughout primary to remind parents of the social and academic impact of missing school

 Why attending every day matters in secondary school

Use throughout secondary to remind parents of the social and academic impact of missing school



Department
for Education

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