Castle School
Together We Learn

Attendance Policy

Autumn 2026

Key principle

Castle School has high expectations for attendance while recognising that many of our pupils have complex special educational needs, disabilities and health needs. We will apply this policy fairly and consistently, listen carefully to pupils and families, make reasonable adjustments where required, and work in partnership to remove barriers to attendance.

Be Confident | Be Kind | Be Creative

1. Purpose of this policy

Regular attendance is important to pupils' learning, wellbeing, safeguarding and wider life chances. At Castle School, attendance is everyone's responsibility. We want every pupil to access as much education as possible and to feel safe, supported and successful when they are in school.

This policy explains our expectations, how attendance is recorded and monitored, how we support pupils and families when attendance becomes difficult, and when formal or legal intervention may be considered.

The policy applies to all registered pupils at Castle School, including pupils below compulsory school age and pupils in the Sixth Form. Where this policy describes statutory parental duties, penalty notices or prosecution, those provisions apply to pupils of compulsory school age unless stated otherwise.

2. Legal and statutory framework

This policy has been written with regard to current legislation and statutory guidance, including:

- Education Act 1996, including sections 7, 19 and 444.
- Education Act 2002, including safeguarding duties.
- Children and Families Act 2014.
- Equality Act 2010.
- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.
- Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007, as amended.
- Department for Education: Working together to improve school attendance, July 2026.
- Department for Education: Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools, September 2025.
- Department for Education guidance on supporting pupils at school with medical conditions and education for children with health needs who cannot attend school.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.

The school will also follow Cambridgeshire County Council procedures and the current local code of conduct for penalty notices.

3. Our approach to attendance

Castle School will:

- ✓ set high expectations for attendance and punctuality for all pupils;
- ✓ recognise that absence is often a symptom of wider barriers or unmet need;
- ✓ build strong, respectful relationships with pupils and families;
- ✓ listen to and understand the reasons for absence before deciding what support or action is appropriate;
- ✓ respond early when patterns of absence or lateness emerge;
- ✓ consider pupils' individual needs, including SEND, disability, health, communication, sensory and emotional needs;
- ✓ make reasonable adjustments where required under the Equality Act 2010;
- ✓ work with the Local Authority and other relevant professionals when additional support is needed;
- ✓ use formal and legal attendance interventions only where they are appropriate, proportionate and in line with statutory guidance.

4. Roles and responsibilities

Parents and carers

Parents and carers are expected to:

- ✓ ensure that their child attends school regularly and arrives on time;
- ✓ contact school before 9.00am on the first day of an unexpected absence and on each subsequent day unless another arrangement has been agreed;
- ✓ tell school the reason for absence and, where possible, the expected date of return;
- ✓ keep school informed of changes to telephone numbers, email addresses and home address, and provide more than one emergency contact wherever reasonably possible;
- ✓ arrange routine medical and dental appointments outside the school day where possible;
- ✓ request leave of absence in advance and provide enough information for the Headteacher to consider the request;
- ✓ work with school and other services where support is offered to help overcome barriers to attendance;
- ✓ tell school promptly if their child is finding attendance difficult, including where emotional distress, transport, health, sensory, communication or other needs may be contributing.

Pupils

Pupils will be supported to attend school regularly and on time.

Where appropriate to their communication and understanding, pupils will be encouraged to tell a trusted adult if something is making it difficult for them to attend or remain in school.

Pupil voice will be considered when planning attendance support and reasonable adjustments.

School staff

All staff share responsibility for promoting attendance, noticing changes in patterns and passing concerns to the appropriate member of staff.

Class teams will support pupils to feel safe, known and ready to learn, and will communicate relevant concerns to families and the attendance team.

Office and attendance staff will maintain accurate registers, follow up unexplained absence and record contact with families.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will be involved where absence creates or indicates a safeguarding concern.

Senior Attendance Champion

The Senior Attendance Champion is Ellys Cutmore, a member of the Extended Leadership Team.

She can be contacted via office@castle.cambs.sch.uk or through the school office on 01223 442 400.

The Senior Attendance Champion will:

- ✓ set a clear vision for maintaining and improving attendance;
- ✓ oversee systems for tracking, analysing and responding to absence and lateness;
- ✓ work with families and staff to remove barriers to attendance;
- ✓ liaise with the Local Authority and other agencies where needed;
- ✓ report regularly to senior leaders and governors on attendance patterns, vulnerable groups and the impact of interventions.

Headteacher

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for attendance and for decisions about authorising leave of absence, alongside delegated operational arrangements.

Governing Body

Governors will recognise attendance as a leadership and safeguarding priority.

They will review attendance information regularly, provide support and challenge, and ensure the school fulfils its statutory duties.

They will ensure that staff with attendance responsibilities have access to appropriate training.

Local Authority

Cambridgeshire County Council provides attendance advice and support, works with the school on persistent and severe absence, supports pupils with health needs where statutory duties are engaged, and is responsible for decisions about prosecution. The Local Authority also administers or authorises penalty notices in accordance with its local code of conduct.

5. School day, registers and punctuality

School Day

Morning register: 9.00am to 9.30am.

End of school day: 3.15pm

The attendance register is taken at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session, at the same time for all registered pupils.

A pupil arriving after the morning register has been taken but before it closes will normally be recorded as late (L). A pupil arriving after the register has closed will be recorded using the appropriate absence code, usually U where there is no authorised reason for the lateness.

The school recognises that some pupils rely on Local Authority transport. Where lateness is caused by arranged school transport rather than by the pupil or family, the school will record the circumstances appropriately and will not treat the family as responsible for that lateness.

Registers are legal records. They are kept electronically and retained for six years from the date of entry. Where an amendment is required, the original entry, amended entry, reason, date and person making the amendment will be retained.

6. Reporting and following up absence

Parents/carers must contact school before 9.00am when their child will be absent unexpectedly. Unless another arrangement has been agreed, contact should be made on each day of continuing absence.

If a pupil is absent and school has not received an explanation, staff will make first-day contact with parents/carers and, where necessary, other emergency contacts. Where the reason remains unknown, further contact will be made and safeguarding procedures may be followed, including liaison with other professionals or a home visit where appropriate.

Where an absence is initially recorded as unexplained, school will update the register as soon as the reason is established and no later than five working days after the session.

7. How we monitor and improve attendance

The Attendance Team includes the Senior Attendance Champion, Headteacher, Family Support Workers, Learning Mentors, Positive Support staff and other relevant leaders.

The school will:

- ✓ monitor attendance and punctuality weekly at individual, class, pathway, cohort and whole-school level;
- ✓ identify emerging patterns early, rather than waiting for a pupil to become persistently absent;
- ✓ analyse patterns for vulnerable groups, including pupils with medical needs, SEND, social workers, young carers and other groups where barriers may be greater;
- ✓ share relevant information with class teams, senior leaders, the DSL and SEND staff so that support is coordinated;
- ✓ provide parents with clear information about attendance, including time missed rather than relying only on headline percentages;
- ✓ review the impact of attendance interventions and adjust them if they are not helping;
- ✓ report attendance information to the Governing Body and provide statutory attendance data to the Department for Education and Local Authority.

8. A graduated approach to support

Our approach follows the principles of: Expect → Monitor → Listen and Understand → Facilitate Support → Formalise Support → Enforce.

Expect: We communicate clear expectations about regular attendance and punctuality and work to make school a safe, welcoming and purposeful place.

Monitor: We use attendance data and day-to-day knowledge of pupils to identify changes and patterns early.

Listen and understand: We speak with pupils and families to understand the individual barriers behind absence or lateness.

Facilitate support: We agree practical support, reasonable adjustments and referrals to relevant services.

Formalise support: Where voluntary support has not secured improvement, we may use a written attendance support plan or attendance contract and work with the Local Authority.

Enforce: Where support is not appropriate, has not worked or has not been engaged with, and the legal criteria are met, formal legal intervention may be considered.

9. Medical needs, SEND and reasonable adjustments

Castle School is a special school and all pupils have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Many pupils have complex medical, communication, sensory, physical, emotional or mental health needs. Where these needs affect attendance, we will work with the pupil, family, SEN Caseworker and relevant health, social care and Local Authority professionals to identify barriers and agree appropriate support.

Support may include:

- adjustments to routines, transitions, environment, sensory demands, communication approaches or lunchtime arrangements;
- support with transport or liaison with transport services where this is a barrier;
- an Individual Healthcare Plan where appropriate;
- planned reintegration following illness or a long period of absence;
- liaison with health professionals and the Local Authority's services for pupils who cannot access education because of health needs;
- formal reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010.

Medical evidence will not routinely be required for ordinary short-term illness. In a minority of cases, where absence is prolonged or repeated and school needs further information to understand the pupil's needs and identify suitable provision, relevant medical information may be requested.

Where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a pupil will miss 15 consecutive school days because of sickness, or that the pupil's total sickness absence will reach or exceed 15 school days in the current school year, the school will make the required sickness return to the Local Authority.

10. Emotionally Based Non-Attendance (EBNA)

Castle School uses the term Emotionally Based Non-Attendance (EBNA) to describe situations where emotional distress creates a significant barrier to a pupil attending school, remaining in school or accessing particular aspects of the school day. This term is used by the school as a supportive description of need; it is not a statutory attendance category or attendance code.

We recognise that non-attendance may be a symptom of unmet need rather than a deliberate choice by the pupil. Where EBNA is suspected, we will work collaboratively with the pupil, parents/carers and relevant professionals to understand the individual barriers.

These may include:

- anxiety or emotional distress;
- communication difficulties;
- sensory needs;
- health or sleep needs;
- relationships or peer experiences;
- changes in routine or transition;
- transport;
- environmental demands;
- other SEND-related barriers.

Support will be individualised and may include reasonable adjustments, changes to routines or the environment, personalised pastoral support, positive support planning, a planned reintegration programme and liaison with the Local Authority and other professionals.

EBNA does not automatically mean an absence is authorised. Each session must be recorded using the national attendance code that most accurately reflects the reason for the pupil's absence. The school will focus first on understanding and addressing the barrier and will consider the pupil's SEND,

disability and health needs before deciding whether formal attendance intervention is appropriate.

11. Part-time timetables

All pupils of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. A part-time timetable will therefore be used only in very exceptional circumstances, where it is in the pupil's best interests and is needed temporarily to meet individual needs.

Any part-time timetable will:

- ✓ be agreed by the school and the parent with whom the pupil normally lives;
- ✓ have clear agreed attendance times and dates;
- ✓ form part of a wider support, healthcare or reintegration plan;
- ✓ have a clear ambition to return to full-time education as soon as possible;
- ✓ be time-limited and regularly reviewed;
- ✓ not be used as a behaviour-management measure;
- ✓ be discussed with the Local Authority where the pupil has an EHCP so that the support package can be reviewed;
- ✓ involve the social worker where the pupil has one.

Sessions which a compulsory-school-age pupil is not expected to attend because of an agreed temporary part-time timetable will be recorded using the appropriate national code.

12. Persistent and severe absence

A pupil is persistently absent when they miss 10% or more of school. A pupil is severely absent when they miss 50% or more of school. These are indicators that increasingly intensive support may be needed; they are not, by themselves, automatic triggers for a fine.

Where absence becomes persistent or severe, school will prioritise the pupil, work closely with the family, consider whether wider services are needed and work with the Local Authority to coordinate support. Severely absent pupils will be treated as a high priority because they may face significant barriers and safeguarding risks.

13. Leave of absence

Parents should not normally take pupils out of school during term time for holidays or leisure. For compulsory-school-age pupils at a maintained school, leave of absence may only be granted in the circumstances permitted by the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.

These include, where the relevant requirements are met:

- participation in a regulated performance or employment abroad;
- attendance at an interview for another educational institution or future employment;
- study leave for public examinations where agreed in advance;
- a temporary, time-limited part-time timetable in exceptional circumstances;
- other exceptional circumstances considered individually by the Headteacher.

Requests for leave in exceptional circumstances must be made in advance by a parent with whom the pupil normally lives. The Headteacher will consider each request on its individual facts, circumstances and relevant background context. The school will not operate a blanket policy which automatically grants or refuses leave solely because a particular event has occurred.

A holiday or other absence for leisure or recreation would not normally be considered an exceptional circumstance. Where leave is granted, the Headteacher will decide the number of school days for which the leave is authorised.

For pupils over compulsory school age, including pupils in the Sixth Form, leave may be requested or agreed by the pupil or a parent with whom the pupil normally lives. The school's attendance expectations continue to apply, but compulsory-school-age enforcement provisions do not.

14. Medical appointments and illness

Routine appointments should be arranged outside the school day where possible. Where this is not possible, pupils should attend school before and/or after the appointment if they are well enough to do so.

Parents may be asked for appointment information where this is reasonably necessary to confirm or understand an absence. The school will take a proportionate approach and will not routinely demand medical evidence for ordinary illness.

Pupils with vomiting or diarrhoea should remain away from school until they have been free from vomiting or diarrhoea for 48 hours. For other illness, parents should use NHS advice and consider whether the pupil is well enough to participate safely in the school day.

15. Attendance contracts, Notices to Improve and legal intervention

Support is our starting point. Where a pupil's attendance remains a concern, the school may formalise support through an attendance contract or other written plan. An attendance contract is intended to clarify barriers, support, expectations and actions; it is not itself a criminal sanction.

A Notice to Improve may be used as a final opportunity for a parent to engage in support and improve attendance before a penalty notice is issued. Where used, the improvement period will normally be between three and six weeks and will set out clearly what improvement is expected.

National Framework for Penalty Notices

For state-funded schools, the national threshold for considering a penalty notice is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence within a rolling period of 10 school weeks. The sessions may be consecutive or non-consecutive and may consist of different types of unauthorised absence. The 10-school-week period can span terms or school years.

Reaching the threshold does not mean that a penalty notice will automatically be issued. The school and Local Authority will consider the individual case, including whether support is appropriate, has been offered, has worked or has been engaged with, and whether a Notice to Improve is appropriate.

Where support would not be appropriate, such as in many cases of unauthorised term-time holiday, a penalty notice may be considered without an extended support process.

First penalty notice within a 3-year rolling period	£160 if paid within 28 days, reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days.
Second penalty notice to the same parent for the same child within 3 years	£160, payable within 28 days.

Third time the national threshold is met within 3 years	A third penalty notice cannot be issued. Alternative action must be considered; this will often include consideration of prosecution.
Who can be fined	A penalty notice may be issued to each parent who is liable for the offence.

Prosecution and other legal interventions

Only the Local Authority can bring a prosecution for school attendance offences. Prosecution is generally a last resort where voluntary and formal support or other legal intervention has failed, or where support is not appropriate.

Under section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996, failure to secure regular attendance may result in a fine of up to £1,000. Under section 444(1A), where a parent knows the child is failing to attend regularly and fails to ensure attendance, the maximum penalty may be a fine of up to £2,500 and/or a community order or imprisonment for up to three months.

Other legal interventions, including Education Supervision Orders and parenting orders, may also be considered by the Local Authority where appropriate.

16. Children Missing Education and removal from roll

A child who remains registered at Castle School is not classed as a Child Missing Education solely because they are persistently or severely absent. Children Missing Education are children of compulsory school age who are not registered at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise.

Where a registered pupil is absent without explanation and their whereabouts are unknown, the school will act promptly to safeguard the pupil, make reasonable enquiries and work with the Local Authority and other agencies as appropriate.

A pupil's name will only be deleted from the admission register where a statutory ground in regulation 9 of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 applies and all required conditions have been met.

Because Castle School is a special school, where a pupil of compulsory school age is registered under arrangements made by a Local Authority, the school will not remove the pupil from roll without the Local Authority's consent where the Regulations require that consent.

17. Elective home education and changes of school

If a parent tells the school that they intend to educate their child at home, the school will follow the statutory procedures and notify the Local Authority. For pupils placed at Castle School under Local Authority arrangements, the school will not simply delete the pupil from roll on parental request where Local Authority consent or another statutory condition is required.

Where a pupil moves to another school, the school will ensure appropriate transfer of information and follow statutory admission-register and safeguarding procedures.

18. Pupils below and above compulsory school age

Attendance is recorded for all registered pupils regardless of age. Castle School expects regular attendance from pupils in Early Years and the Sixth Form because continuity of education, therapy, preparation for adulthood, wellbeing and safeguarding remain important.

However, the statutory parental offence under section 444 of the Education Act 1996 and the National Framework for school attendance penalty notices apply to children of compulsory school age. Where a pupil is not of compulsory school age, the school will use supportive and educational approaches rather than compulsory-school-age enforcement.

19. Attendance and safeguarding

Attendance is a safeguarding matter. Unexplained or repeated absence can be an indicator of neglect, exploitation, abuse, family difficulty, unmet health needs or other harm. Where concerns arise, staff will follow the school's safeguarding procedures and may share information with the Designated Safeguarding Lead, children's social care, the Local Authority, health services, police or other relevant agencies in accordance with law and statutory guidance.

20. Promoting good attendance

Castle School promotes attendance through positive relationships, a safe and purposeful learning environment, clear communication, individual support and recognition of improvement.

Because of the complexity of pupils' needs, the school will avoid attendance approaches which shame pupils or families or which disadvantage pupils whose absence is linked to disability, SEND or health needs. Any recognition or celebration of attendance will be used sensitively and without discrimination.

21. Monitoring, governance and review

The Senior Attendance Champion and Headteacher will review attendance data and the impact of attendance strategies regularly. The Governing Body will receive attendance information at least termly and will provide support and challenge.

This policy will be published on the school website, shared with staff, made available to pupils and families in accessible formats where required, provided to new families and highlighted at the start of each school year and whenever it is updated.

The policy will be reviewed at least annually, and earlier where legislation, statutory guidance, Local Authority procedures or the needs of the school change.

Appendix 1 – Common attendance codes

Castle School uses the national attendance and absence codes required by the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 and current DfE guidance. The table below is a parent-friendly summary of commonly used codes and is not a substitute for the full statutory code set.

Code	Meaning
/ and \	Present at school
L	Late before the register closes
U	Arrived after the register closed, without an authorised reason
I	Unable to attend because of sickness
M	Leave of absence for a medical or dental appointment
R	Religious observance
C1	Leave of absence for participation in a regulated performance or employment abroad
C2	Leave of absence for a compulsory-school-age pupil on an agreed temporary part-time timetable
J1	Leave of absence for an interview for another educational institution or future employment
S	Study leave for public examinations
G	Holiday not granted by the school
O	Absent in other or unknown circumstances where no leave has been granted
N	Reason for absence not yet established
X	Non-compulsory-school-age pupil not required to attend
B	Attending an approved educational activity off site
D	Dual registered at another school
K	Attending education provision arranged by the Local Authority
P	Participating in an approved sporting activity
V	Attending an educational visit or trip
W	Attending work experience

Appendix 2 – Application for Leave of Absence in Exceptional Circumstances

This form should be completed before the proposed absence. For a compulsory-school-age pupil, leave of absence can only be granted in accordance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024. Requests will be considered individually. A holiday or absence for leisure or recreation would not normally be considered an exceptional circumstance.

Pupil name	
Class	
Parent/carer making request	
Dates requested	From: _____ To: _____
Number of school sessions requested	
Reason for request	
Relevant exceptional circumstances / supporting information	

Parent/carer signature and date	

For school use

Decision	Authorised / Not authorised
Number of sessions authorised	
Attendance code(s)	
Reason for decision	
Headteacher / authorised signatory and date	

References and statutory guidance

- Department for Education (2026), Working together to improve school attendance: statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities, July 2026.
- Department for Education (2025), Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools, September 2025.
- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.
- Education Act 1996.
- Equality Act 2010.
- Children and Families Act 2014.
- Cambridgeshire County Council current school attendance procedures and Local Code of Conduct for penalty notices.