



Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation

ATTENDANCE POLICY

1. Policy Aims

- 1.1. We are committed to meeting our obligations with regards to school attendance by:
- Promoting good attendance and reducing absence, including persistent absence;
 - Ensuring every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled;
 - Acting early to address patterns of absence.

We will also support parents to perform their legal duty to ensure their children of compulsory school age attend regularly, and will promote and support punctuality in attending lessons.

- 1.2. Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation (DCSF) commits in this policy to observing the principles of the Equality Act 2010 and does not discriminate on any grounds.

2. Policy Statements

- 2.1. It is vital that pupils are at school, on time, every day the school is open, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.

- 2.2. Good attendance is important because:
- statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and attendance below 95%;
 - regular attenders make better progress, both socially and academically;
 - regular attenders find school routines, school work and friendships easier to cope with;
 - regular attenders find learning more satisfying;
 - regular attenders are more successful in transferring between junior school, secondary school, and higher education, employment or training.

- 2.3. Every child has a right to access the education to which they are entitled.

- 2.4. Parents and teachers share the responsibility for supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and punctuality for all. It is our duty to consistently strive to achieve a goal of 100% attendance for all children.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 Pupils are expected to attend school every day for the entire duration of the academic year, unless there is an exceptional reason for the absence. There are two main categories of absences:
- **authorised absence:** is when the School has accepted the explanation offered as satisfactory justification for the absence, or has given approval in advance for such an absence. If no explanation is received, absences cannot be authorised.
 - **unauthorised absence:** is when the School has not received a reason for absence, or has not approved a child's leave of absence from school after a parent's request.
- 3.2 We will mark absence due to illness (both physical and mental health related) as authorised unless the School has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness. If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the School may ask the pupil's parent/carer to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. We 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 parents/carers will be notified of this.
- 3.3 DCSF can, if needed, change an authorised absence to an unauthorised absence and vice versa if new information is presented.

4. Procedure

4.1 Recording attendance

Legally, the register must be marked twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day and again for the afternoon session. In our Schools, registers are taken on iSAMS as follows:

	Register taken	Register closed	Register taken	Register closed
Chorister School	08:30	08:40	13:40	13:50
Durham School	08:30	08:40	14:25	14:35

4.2 Lateness/punctuality

It is important to be on time at the start of the morning and afternoon school sessions and to lessons, and in the Junior School, for children to be collected promptly at the end of the school day.

In our Schools, the school day starts and ends as follows (separate arrangements apply for boarders):

	Start of the school day	End of the school day	Additional provision
Chorister School, EYFS and KS1	08:30	15:20	Pupils may be on site from 08:00 to 18:00. After school care must be booked in advance.
Chorister School, KS2	08:30	16:10	Day pupils may be on site from 08:00 to 18:00. After school care must be booked in advance.
Durham School	08:30	16:20	Day pupils may be on site from 07:45 to 18:30.

All lateness is recorded daily.

Ongoing and repeated lateness may be considered as unauthorised absence. Parents/carers of pupils who have patterns of lateness will be contacted to discuss the importance of good time keeping and how this might be achieved. If lateness persists, parents/carers may be invited to attend the school and discuss the problem and support will be offered.

4.3 Reporting an unplanned pupil absence

A child not attending school is considered a safeguarding matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required.

In the case of an unplanned absence, parents/carers must:

- inform DCSF as soon as possible on the first day of absence, giving the reason for the absence;
- keep DCSF up-dated if the pupil will be absent for multiple days.

Absences may be reported as follows:

Chorister School	By phoning the DCSF school absence line – 0191 7319270 option 1	By emailing chorister@dcsf.org.uk
Durham School		By emailing the pupil's Senior Housemaster/ mistress

If a child is absent, DCSF will:

- telephone or text parents/carers on the first day of absence if we have not heard from them by 10.30am; this is because we have a duty to ensure pupils' safety as well as their regular school attendance;
- invite parents/carers in to discuss the situation with relevant pastoral staff if absences persist;
- refer the matter to the Local Authority if the relevant threshold is met.

Ten days' absence: We have a legal duty to report the absence of any pupil who is absent without an explanation for ten consecutive days. If the child is not seen and contact has not been established with the named parent/carer, then we will notify the Local Authority.

4.4 Requests for leave of absence (planned absences)

DCSF considers each application for term-time absence individually, considering the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request. However, a leave of absence during term time will only be granted if the circumstances surrounding the request are rare, significant, or unavoidable, which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. Therefore, in the majority of cases, requests for leave of absence to go on holiday during term time will not be authorised.

Requests for a leave of absence of no more than one day should be made to:

- The pupil's Senior Housemaster/mistress, for Durham School pupils; and
- The pupil's form teacher, for Chorister School pupils.

This may include:

- Illness and medical/dental appointments. Although please be advised that, where possible, doctor's and dentist's appointments are to be made outside of school hours or during school holidays.
- Religious observance.

All requests for a leave of absence of more than one day should be made in writing to:

- The Principal, in respect of Durham School pupils; and
- The Head Teacher, in respect of Chorister School pupils.

If term time leave is taken without prior permission, the absence will be unauthorised and if the number of sessions absent hits the thresholds set down by the Local Authority, this may be reported to them.

4.5 Sickness returns

DCSF must provide the local authority with the full name and address of all pupils of compulsory school age who have been recorded with code I (illness) and who the school has reasonable grounds to believe will miss 15 days consecutively or cumulatively because of sickness. Only one sickness return is required for a continuous period of sickness in a school year. This is to help the school and local authority to agree any provision needed to ensure continuity of education for pupils who cannot attend because of health needs, in line with the statutory guidance on arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs

4.5 Penalty Notices and other legal measures

In education law, parents/carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular attendance of their child of compulsory school age at the school at which the child is registered, unless the absence has been authorised by the school.

If a pupil:

- Has accrued ten sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of ten school weeks. A school week means any week in which there is at least one school session. This can be met with any combination of unauthorised absence (e.g. four sessions of holiday taken in term time plus six sessions of arriving late after the register closes all within ten school weeks). These sessions can be consecutive (e.g. ten sessions of holiday in one week) or not (e.g. six sessions of unauthorised absence taken in one week and one per week for the next four weeks). The period of ten school weeks can also span different terms or school years (e.g. two sessions of unauthorised absence in the Summer Term and a further eight within the Autumn Term). persistently arrives late after the register has closed; and/or
- has inappropriate, parentally condoned absence

DCSF may report this to the Local Authority. This may lead to parents/carers receiving a warning or a Fixed Penalty Notice. More information can be found on Durham County Council's website: <https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2339/Making-sure-your-child-attends-school>.

4.6 Record preservation

School registers are legal documents. DCSF will ensure compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for at least six years. Computer registers will be preserved as electronic back-ups.

5. Promoting and incentivising good attendance

- 5.1 DCSF recognises that the foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents/carers and a child.
- 5.2 DCSF will ensure that pupils are made aware of the importance of good attendance and how this will benefit them.
- 5.3 DCSF will celebrate good attendance on a regular basis. This will take a variety of forms including:
 - verbal congratulations from pastoral staff;
 - the awarding of house points/Lauds;

6. Using attendance data

- 6.1 Pupils' attendance will be monitored and may be shared with the Local Authority and other agencies if a pupil's attendance is a cause for concern. Any information sharing will be done in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.
- 6.2 Every week, attendance data will be reviewed by each pupil's Senior Housemaster/mistress (Durham School) or their form tutor (Chorister School). The data will be analysed to ensure that it is complete and accurate, and to see if attendance has improved, stayed the same or deteriorated. Where any concerns are identified, these will be shared with the appropriate senior members of staff.
- 6.3 Attendance data will also be used to identify emerging patterns and trends to inform whole Foundation strategies to improve attendance and attainment.

7. Reducing persistent and severe absence

- 7.1 DCSF recognises that poor attendance is often an indication of difficulties in a child's life. These may be related to problems at home and or in school. Parents/carers should make the School aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance and/or behaviour in school, for example, bereavement, divorce/separation, etc. This will help the School to identify any additional support that may be required.
- 7.2 DCSF also recognises that some pupils are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance, for example, those pupils with special educational needs, those with physical or mental health needs, migrant and refugee pupils and children in care.

- 7.3 In instances of repeated or long-term absences for the same physical or mental health reason, seeking medical evidence may be appropriate to assist in assessing whether the child requires additional support to help them to attend more regularly, and whether the illness is likely to prevent the child from attending for extended periods.
- 7.4 DCSF will implement a range of strategies to support attendance. Strategies used will include:
- Discussion with parents and pupils;
 - Support from the Senior Mental Health Lead;
 - Referrals to external support agencies;
 - Pupil voice activities;
 - Support with friendship groups;
 - LWE programme;
 - Time-limited part-time timetable;
 - Learning Support screening/intervention;
 - Support from the DCSF Medical Centre.
- 7.5 Support offered will be child-centred and planned in discussion and agreement with both parents and pupils.

8. Sponsored pupils

- 8.1 All pupils on a Tier 4 or Student Study Visa are required to have their attendance recorded for the duration of their study under DCSF sponsorship. Attendance will be recorded at, but is not limited to, morning and afternoon registration.
- 8.2 Sponsored pupils must maintain a minimum attendance of 80% during term time. Where pupil attendance falls below this level, sponsorship will be withdrawn unless there are exceptional and evidenced reasons for non-attendance. In addition, pupils who have been absent for a continuous period of ten school days, where their absence has been recorded with one or more of the codes statistically classified as unauthorised, will also be reported.

9. Responsibilities

Principal (Durham School)/Head Teacher (Chorister School)

The decision whether or not to authorise an absence rests with the Principal/Head Teacher. In some cases, this responsibility may be delegated to other pastoral staff.

Deputy Head (Pastoral) (Durham School and Chorister School)

- Oversee, direct and co-ordinate their School's work in promoting regular and improved attendance;
- Ensure the Attendance Policy is consistently applied throughout the School;

- Ensure that attendance is both recorded accurately and analysed;
- Ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties;
- Discuss with parents/carers the need and reasons for their child's absence if absence is frequent or continuous, except where a child is clearly unwell, and will encourage them to keep absences to a minimum.

The contact details for these members of staff, who are responsible for the strategic approach to attendance in our Schools are:

Deputy Head (Pastoral), Durham School	Ms Harriet Thompson h.thompson@dcsf.org.uk
Deputy Head (Pastoral), Chorister School	Mrs Joss Balfour j.balfour@dcsf.org.uk

Parents/carers are welcome to contact them for more detailed support with attendance.

Academic and pastoral staff

- Ensure that all students are registered accurately;
- Promote good attendance with students at all appropriate opportunities;
- Liaise with appropriate staff on matters of pupil attendance and punctuality;
- Communicate any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a child's absence;
- Support pupils with absence to engage with their learning once they are back in school.

The Absence Coordinator (Durham School) and administrative staff (Chorister School)

- Take, and if relevant, pass on messages regarding pupil absence received through either the School absence telephone line or email;
- Record information on pupil absences in the Schools' registers;
- Check the registers and contact parents/carers or staff with regards to any unrecorded marks or unexplained absences.

Pupils (depending on the pupil's age and level of development)

- Attend every day unless they are ill or have an authorised reason for absence;
- Arrive in school on time;
- Go to all their registrations and lessons on time;
- Take responsibility for signing in and out if they are late or are leaving the school site during school hours.

Parents/carers

Parents/carers have a legal responsibility to ensure their child's regular attendance at school (Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act) and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the School creates an offence in law.

Parents will:

- Inform DCSF on the first day of a pupil's absence, giving the reason for the absence;
- Request permission for any planned absences well in advance;
- Support their child in aiming for 100% attendance each year;
- Make the School aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance and/or behaviour in school;
- Avoid taking their child out of school for non-urgent medical or dental appointments;
- Only request leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance.

10. Cross reference to other policies and documents

This policy is linked to the following policies and documents:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Missing Pupil Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Special Educational Needs Policy
- International Pupil Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health Policy
- [*Working Together to improve school attendance*](#), DfE, February 2024 (applies from 19 August 2024)
- [*Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance*](#), DfE, February 2023

11. Oversight

Oversight of this Policy is undertaken by the Education Committee of the Governing Body, and the policy will be reviewed annually.

Policy last reviewed by

Harriet Thompson, Deputy Head (Pastoral) on 29 January 2026
Harriet Thompson, Deputy Head (Pastoral) on 4 June 2025
Harriet Thompson, Deputy Head (Pastoral) on 13 June 2024
Harriet Thompson, Deputy Head (Pastoral) on 24 May 2023
Harriet Thompson, Pastoral Lead on 15 June 2022