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## This forum



- ✓ NOT training. This is about networking & sharing.
- ✓ The quality of the session depends on you – please have cameras and audio on and participate
- ✓ Thematic
- ✓ Half termly
- ✓ Please look after yourselves
- ✓ Notes/Slides – <https://sendforum.lgfl.net>

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## Safeguarding SEND children and Attendance



**Keeping children safe in education 2026**

Statutory guidance for schools and colleges

September 2026



**Working together to improve school attendance**

Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities

July 2026

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## Relational Practice



**Build strong relationships and work jointly with families, listening to and understanding barriers to attendance and working in partnership with families to remove them**

15. Good attendance starts with close and productive relationships with parents and pupils. Schools should treat all pupils and parents with dignity and staff should model respectful relationships to build a positive relationship between home and school that can be the foundation of good attendance. In working in partnership with parents, schools should discuss the link between attendance and attainment and wider wellbeing, and challenge parents' views where they have misconceptions about what 'good' attendance looks like. Where a pupil or family needs support with attendance, it is important that the best placed person in the school works alongside and supports the family and wherever possible the person should be kept consistent.
16. Where a pattern of absence is at risk of becoming, or becomes, problematic schools should draw on these relationships and listen to and understand the barriers to attendance the pupil or family is experiencing. In doing so, schools should take into consideration the sensitivity of some of the reasons for absence and understand the importance of school as a place of safety and support rather than reaching immediately for punitive approaches.
17. In the first instance, all schools are expected to:
  - Support pupils and parents by working together to address any in-school barriers to attendance and where appropriate, arranging additional support or reasonable adjustments to overcome them.
  - Where barriers are outside of the school's control, all partners should work together to support pupils and parents to access any support they may need voluntarily. As a minimum, this should include meeting with pupils at risk of persistent or severe absence and their parents to understand barriers to being in school and agreeing actions or interventions to address them. This may include referrals to services and organisations that can provide support. These actions should be regularly discussed and reviewed together with pupils and families.

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## SEND Children and Absence Data



- **EHCP Absence Rate:** 36.9% of pupils with an EHCP are persistently absent (missing 10% or more of school), compared to 16.1% of pupils with no identified SEND.
- **Severe Absence (50%+ missed):** State special schools record a severe absence rate of 6.55%, more than triple the national average of 2.12%.
- **Disadvantage Gap:** Persistent absence sits at 33.8% for pupils eligible for Free School Meals. When SEND intersects with economic hardship, absence risk escalates sharply.

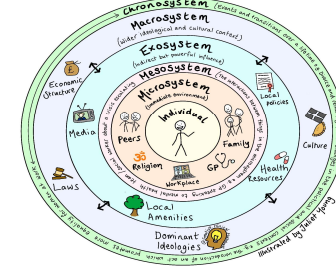
<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-attendance-in-schools/2026-week-6#section-academic-year-to-date>

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## Understanding why



### Ecological Systems Theory



Kingston Hospital

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## Such as?



- **Anxiety and Mental Health:** Many children with SEND may struggle with anxiety, which can make school attendance distressing.
- **Medical and Physical Health Issues:** Some conditions can lead to frequent absences due to ill health or numerous appointments.
- **Sensory Overload:** Bright lights, loud noises, and crowded spaces can be overwhelming, making school an uncomfortable environment.
- **Difficulty with Transitions:** Moving from home to school or between activities can be challenging, leading to reluctance or refusal to attend.
- **Inadequate Support:** A lack of appropriate support, such as an Education, Health and Care Plan, therapeutic input or reasonable adjustments, can make it harder for a child to engage with school life.

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## Evidencing Medical Absence



374. Schools are not expected to routinely request that parents provide medical evidence to support illness absences, and should not have blanket rules requiring this. In the majority of cases a parent's notification that their child is too ill to attend school can be accepted without question or concern. However, schools may request reasonable evidence where they have genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the illness, or when they are seeking to support pupils with prolonged or repeated patterns of illness. In such cases, medical evidence may play a role in supporting schools to better understand the pupil's health needs (see paragraph 62), inform what reasonable adjustment may need to be made and/or to accurately record absence in the attendance register – i.e. making a decision that code 1 is the absence code that accurately describes the reason the pupil is not in school for the session in question.

375. Where medical evidence is deemed necessary, schools should not be rigid about the form of evidence requested, and should be mindful that requesting additional medical evidence from health professionals can unnecessarily place pressure on health professionals, their staff and their appointment system, particularly if the illness is one that does not routinely require treatment by a health professional. As a starting point, schools should have a conversation with the parent, and pupil if appropriate, which may in itself be sufficient to identify the code which will allow for the accurate recording of the absence. They may also speak to the family about what wider evidence is available, including (but not limited to) prescriptions, medication and

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## Your turn



1. What reasonable adjustments have made a measurable difference to attendance in your setting?
2. How are you navigating threshold challenges with Local Authority attendance teams, health services, or EHCP annual reviews when attendance drops? What works? What remains challenging?
3. How do you safely monitor absence and capture the voice of all pupils, including those who struggle to articulate why they cannot attend? What has worked?

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## Ideas and responses



### 1. What reasonable adjustments have made a measurable difference to attendance in your setting?

- Individualised approach. Use of outdoor spaces, sensory rooms and animals
- Have a trusted adult waiting for the child in the morning
- One school has a farm, so pupils want to come in as they need to feed the animals or look after them. The need to care for something else provided need to be at school
- soft arrivals, sensory-neutral spaces, flexible transport, flexibility in uniform
- Good information sharing with parents about the school day, about the adults with the child, successes achieved
- Practical advice and support for parents, e.g. keep diary about good day/bad day, routine advice, signposting to support available to help with other stressors, understanding school's responsibilities and duties, support to know about and prepare for any meetings

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## Ideas and responses



### 3. How do you safely monitor absence and capture the voice of all pupils, including those who struggle to articulate why they cannot attend? What has worked?

- We have a pastoral person who works with the children only to get their voice as most of our pupils are non-speaking so she has a toolbox of communication
- Using photos of the environment and people at school, at home to build familiarity and see child's reaction.
- where appropriate talking to the student, wellbeing questionnaire, take pictures around the school/home with tracking document about how they react to seeing the picture either physical or choice of buttons, taking walkthrough videos for new students to get them used to the area and help them with any changes/new environments
- Use social stories and child's preferred method of communication (e.g. symbols, or a physical cue that tells a child it is home/school time)

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## Resources



### • Relational Practice



[relationalpractice.lgfl.net](http://relationalpractice.lgfl.net)

### • DfE Webinar



Monitor your school attendance: introduction and refresher webinar. Tickets, Tuesday, November 10 • 11 AM - 11:45 AM GMT | Eventbrite

**contact** For families with disabled children

<https://contact.org.uk/>

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**Beyond the Numbers**

Attendance, EBSA and belonging

22 Oct 2026 & 15 April 2027  
<https://lgfl.net/Attendance-EBSA-Belonging>

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Next Session



**SEND DSL Forum**

Share challenges, solutions and good practice related to safeguarding children with SEND

25<sup>th</sup> Nov 2026  
[sendforum.lgfl.net](https://sendforum.lgfl.net)

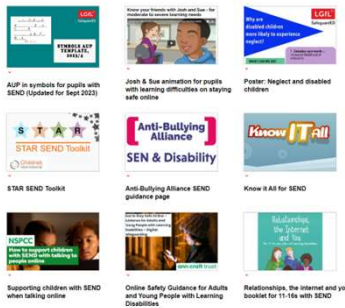
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