

Safeguarding Bulletin: Attendance Edition - 17 June 2026

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Safeguarding bulletin



Hello

from Southwark's Education Inclusion Team

We are taking over the safeguarding bulletin this week to shine a light on the topic of attendance as there is growing recognition of the intersection between absence and safeguarding. While not all absences are safeguarding concerns, monitoring attendance, tracking patterns of absence and observing changes in behaviour can help build a wider picture of a child's wellbeing and needs.

Southwark's Education Inclusion Team provides advice and intervention on attendance and inclusion, plus leads on statutory attendance processes across all schools and provisions in Southwark with children of statutory school age. The [Education Inclusion Handbook](#) explains more about our work and the support we can offer. We take a [Three Stage Approach to managing attendance](#), including using [penalty notices](#) when needed.

Schools can access an EIT consultation by emailing earlyhelp@southwark.gov.uk or by calling the Family Early Help duty line: 0207 525 1922.

We hope you find the information in this bulletin helpful, and we look forward to seeing you at our upcoming virtual attendance and curriculum forums (Thursday 18 June 11am for secondary schools and Wednesday 24 June 11am for primary

schools). If you have not received an invite, please contact taia.eilertsen@southwark.gov.uk



Our top tips for supporting good attendance

✓ **Focus on patterns of non-attendance over percentage thresholds.** Patterns of absence may indicate specific barriers such as morning routines, transport, specific lessons or peer challenges. Applying curiosity can help learn more.

✓ **Use positive reinforcement and recognition for improvements,** no matter how small they are.

✓ **Consider 'front door' behaviour when students do arrive.** How students are greeted and the feedback they receive can be the difference between an emotional deposit or withdrawal, plus set the tone for the day.

✓ **Utilise multi-agency support where appropriate.** This can be discussed in your target support meeting.

✓ **Hold regular meetings with the governor responsible for attendance** to conduct cohort analysis and identify pupils in need of additional support.

Key Policies

>> Working Together to Improve School Attendance

- Create a whole-school culture of attendance and take a support-first approach to absence.
- We know that persistent illness can be a huge challenge for attendance, particularly around the Autumn term. Schools are not expected to routinely request that parents provide medical evidence to support illness absences. Doing so unnecessarily places pressure on health systems, particularly if the illness has not required treatment. In most cases, a parent's notification that their child is too ill to attend school is sufficient and can be accepted without question or concern. Only where the school has genuine and reasonable doubt

about the authenticity of the illness should medical evidence be requested to support the absence.

- When a child is routinely off because of either physical or mental health, schools are expected to work with the multi-agency network to create an individualised healthcare plan to formalise any reasonable adjustments around the illness. You can refer students to the school nurse to support with this or discuss this at your target support meeting.
- Persistent illness without clear medical evidence or where health is not engaged may indicate emerging safeguarding concerns. Where concerns about safety or wellbeing arise, follow safeguarding procedures and escalate as appropriate.

>> Suspension and Permanent Exclusion from maintained schools, academies and pupil referral units in England, including pupil movement

- Updated guidance comes into force 26 July 2026, to be more aligned with the new legal framework introduced by the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act, with specific changes about off-site direction.

Training opportunities, resources & support

>> The Mindworks project: new programme for secondary students at risk of exclusion

The MindWorks project is a collaboration between Anna Freud, the Ending Youth Violence Lab and the Youth Endowment Fund and will launch in Autumn 2026. The project aims to develop and evaluate a new school-based programme to support young people aged 11–16 at risk of exclusion by equipping them with the tools to better manage their emotions and behaviour, with the support of a link-teacher and a family member. The programme runs for one school term and is delivered in school by an Anna Freud wellbeing practitioner.

They are looking for 30 secondary schools (Mainstream and Alternative Provision who have at least 25 pupils who fit the profile of being at risk of exclusion) in Greater London to take part. All participating schools will receive £500 in financial recognition. Schools not allocated to the programme can also receive free, high-quality CPD training.

>> Southwark e-learning: Keeping Children in Education - to support inclusion and attendance

>> DfE Live Training events and Courses

>> DfE video about monitoring school attendance around points of transition

>> DfE video about monitoring school attendance according to cohorts

Research

>> **Who is losing learning? Finding solutions to the school engagement crisis**

The IPPR report found that schools face a growing “lost learning” crisis in which absence, exclusions and off-rolling have risen sharply since Covid (with lost learning days up around 67%), disproportionately affecting disadvantaged pupils (especially those with SEND, in poverty or known to social care). It concludes that attendance cannot be solved through compliance alone but must be addressed through a whole system, inclusion-led approach. We found the attendance continuum a particularly interesting point where children may oscillate between exclusions and self-exclusionary behaviours.

>> **DFE research on the link between attainment and attendance**

The Department for Education’s 2025 research shows a strong link between attendance and attainment across all pupil groups, even after controlling for factors like prior attainment and disadvantage. Pupils with higher attendance are significantly more likely to achieve expected standards at KS2 and strong GCSE outcomes at KS4, with the relationship particularly pronounced in exam years: for example, Year 11 pupils with near-perfect attendance have almost double the likelihood of achieving Grade 5+ in English and maths compared to similar peers attending 90–95%, meaning relatively small amounts of absence (around 10 days) can halve success rates.

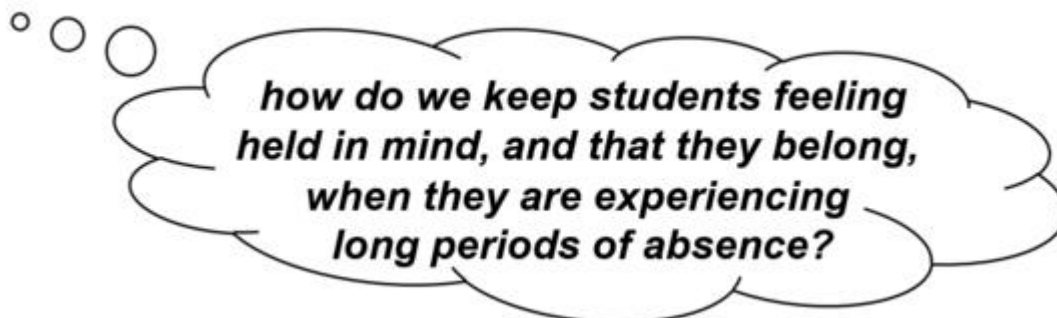
>> **The impact of school absence on lifetime earnings**

DfE research (2025) shows that school absence has a significant and measurable long-term economic cost: each additional day of absence in secondary school is associated with around £750 lower lifetime earnings for the average pupil, driven primarily by its negative impact on GCSE attainment. The study finds absence directly affects early adult outcomes, with higher absence linked to lower earnings at age 28 and increased likelihood of sustained benefit claims and unstable employment. The evidence demonstrates that attendance is not only an educational issue with even small reductions in absence impacting outcomes for individuals and our wider economy.

>> **ImpactEd Understanding Attendance Insights**

The February 2026 *Understanding Attendance* Insights Update confirms that while family context remains the strongest overall driver of attendance, pupil relationships—especially peer relationships—are a critical lever for improvement in school attendance. We already know that absence can be a contagious force amongst peer groups and this insight highlights that stronger peer connections are consistently associated with higher attendance, with particularly pronounced gains for disadvantaged pupils (Pupil Premium) and those with SEND. This reframes attendance not simply as an engagement challenge but as a relational one—highlighting that pupils on the margins are significantly more likely to attend when they feel that they have membership to their school and that they belong.

Schools should focus on relational strategies when it comes to increasing attendance. The question key is...



If you have any questions, you can contact:

earlyhelp@southwark.gov.uk

Or the EIT managers:

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Find out more about support from [Southwark's Safeguarding in Schools Team](#).

For safeguarding resources and training information visit [Safeguarding in Education](#).