ALMA EDUCATION

Attendance & Absence Policy

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Approved by:	 Melanie Steel, Director of Education
Approved by:	Laura Kay, Advisory Board

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Statement of Intent

Regular attendance at sessions is essential for every learner's progress, wellbeing and re-engagement with education. Learners placed with Alma Education are often those who have found mainstream attendance very difficult, and Alma recognises that barriers to attendance are complex and that some learners will need significant support to attend consistently.

Alma Education takes a whole-provision approach to securing good attendance. Alma promotes the value of sessions, builds strong relationships with learners and their families, works in close partnership with commissioning schools and local authorities, and intervenes early when patterns of concern emerge. Alma's approach is relational and supportive, not punitive.

Alma Education is committed to promoting the benefits of regular attendance and positive engagement, ensuring equality and fairness for all learners, intervening early and working with commissioning bodies, families and other agencies to understand and remove barriers to attendance, and regularly monitoring and analysing attendance data to identify learners who need additional support.

The Senior Attendance Lead is Melanie Steel, Director of Education, who can be contacted at melanie@alma-education.co.uk.

Legislation and Statutory Guidance
Education Acts 1996 and 2002
Children Act 1989
Crime and Disorder Act 1998
Equality Act 2010
The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024
The Education (Information about Individual Pupils) (England) Regulations 2013
Working Together to Improve School Attendance (DfE, Jul 2026)
Keeping Children Safe in Education (2026)
Working Together to Safeguard Children (2026)
Children Missing Education (DfE)
Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026
Non-School AP Voluntary National Standards (Aug 2025)

1. Legal Framework and Related Policies

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance, including, but not limited to, the legislation and guidance listed in the table above.

The legal duty to ensure a child of compulsory school age receives a suitable full-time education rests with the child's parent or carer, and the legal accountability for the learner's education during their placement with Alma Education rests with the commissioning school or local authority. Alma Education is not a school and does not hold that statutory duty independently.

Alma Education nonetheless has a duty of care to every learner during sessions, and a responsibility to maintain accurate attendance records, report promptly and fully to commissioning bodies, and take appropriate action where attendance gives rise to safeguarding concerns.

This policy operates in conjunction with the following Alma Education policies:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- SEND Policy
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health Policy
- Complaints Policy

2. Definitions

The following definitions apply for the purposes of this policy:

Absence

Not being present at a scheduled Alma Education session, whether or not the absence has been notified in advance. Absence is either authorised or unauthorised (see section 7).

Authorised absence

An absence that has been approved by the Director of Education in advance, or where an acceptable reason has been provided by the parent, carer or commissioning body. Examples include illness, medical appointments, and significant family events.

Unauthorised absence

An absence that has not been approved, or where no acceptable reason has been provided. This includes instances where the family has not made contact and no explanation has been established.

Persistent absence

Missing 10 percent or more of scheduled sessions for any reason, across any rolling period. Persistent absence is a trigger for early intervention and review.

Severe absence

Missing 50 percent or more of scheduled sessions for any reason. Severe absence requires immediate escalation to the commissioning body and may indicate a safeguarding concern.

Children missing education

A learner who is not registered with any school or provision and is not receiving suitable education elsewhere. Where Alma Education has reason to believe a learner may be missing education, it will notify the commissioning body and, where appropriate, the local authority without delay.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The Advisory Board

The Advisory Board, in its advisory role, will:

- Monitor the implementation of this policy and all relevant procedures across Alma Education's provision.
- Promote the importance of good attendance through Alma Education's ethos and approach.
- Ensure that the Director of Education fulfils expectations and responsibilities under this policy.
- Ensure that Alma Education works effectively with commissioning bodies and other partners to help remove barriers to attendance.
- Regularly review attendance data, including recent and historic trends.
- Ensure this policy, as written, does not discriminate on any grounds, including but not limited to ethnicity, nationality, disability, religion, sex or sexual orientation.
- Handle any complaints regarding this policy as outlined in the Complaints Policy.

The Director of Education

The Director of Education will be responsible for:

- The day-to-day implementation and management of this policy and all related procedures.
- Monitoring attendance data and reporting regularly to the Advisory Board.
- Acting as the Senior Attendance Lead, with overall responsibility for championing attendance improvement across all placements.
- Sharing attendance information with commissioning bodies at least monthly, and promptly where concerns arise.
- Ensuring all learning mentors are aware of and follow the attendance procedures set out in this policy.
- Ensuring that every learner has access to their full planned provision and acting as early as possible to address patterns of absence.
- Working with families, commissioning bodies and relevant agencies where attendance gives cause for concern.
- Ensuring that a learner's social worker, where applicable, is informed of any unexplained absence.

Learning Mentors

Learning mentors will be responsible for:

- Following this policy and its procedures consistently.
- Recording session attendance accurately at the start of every session.
- Notifying the Director of Education immediately if a learner does not attend a session without prior notice.
- Using professional knowledge of the individual learner to identify any welfare concern that may be connected to absence.
- Building positive, trusting relationships with learners and families that support consistent attendance.
- Raising attendance concerns with the Director of Education at the earliest opportunity.

Commissioning Schools and Local Authorities

The commissioning school or local authority will be responsible for:

- Retaining legal accountability for the learner's attendance and education throughout the placement.
- Notifying Alma Education promptly of any planned absence or change in the learner's circumstances.
- Recording Alma Education sessions in their own attendance systems in line with statutory requirements.
- Working collaboratively with Alma Education to address attendance concerns and implement appropriate support.
- Escalating concerns where a learner's attendance may indicate a safeguarding risk.

Learners

Learners will be responsible for:

- Attending all scheduled sessions and arriving on time.
- Following any support put in place by Alma Education or the commissioning body to improve their attendance.
- Communicating any concerns about sessions to their learning mentor or the Director of Education.

Parents and Carers

Parents and carers will be responsible for:

- Providing accurate and up-to-date contact details.
- Notifying Alma Education before or on the day of any unexpected absence, providing the reason and advising when the learner is likely to return.

- Promoting the value of sessions and good attendance with their child.
- Proactively engaging with any attendance support offered by Alma Education or the commissioning body.
- Booking medical appointments outside session times wherever possible.

4. Attendance Expectations

Alma Education has high expectations for learners' attendance at all planned sessions. Session schedules are agreed with the commissioning body and the learner's family at the start of each placement, and are reviewed at regular intervals.

Learners are expected to attend every scheduled session punctually and ready to engage. Where a session cannot take place for any reason, whether on the learner's side or Alma Education's, this will be recorded, communicated to the commissioning body, and where possible rescheduled.

Alma Education actively encourages timely communication from families where any absence is anticipated. Unexplained absence is followed up on the day it occurs, without exception.

Alma Education will monitor attendance patterns and seek to understand the reasons behind them. Attendance information is shared with commissioning bodies in regular reports and at placement reviews.

5. Absence Procedures

Where a learner is absent from a scheduled session and no advance notice has been given, the learning mentor will attempt to contact the learner's parent or carer within 30 minutes of the session start time. Where contact cannot be established with the family, the learning mentor will notify the Director of Education immediately.

The Director of Education will follow up any unexplained absences in order to:

- Ascertain the reason for the absence.
- Ensure appropriate safeguarding action is taken if necessary.
- Determine whether the absence should be recorded as authorised or unauthorised.
- Notify the commissioning body on the same day.

Where a learner is absent for more than two consecutive sessions, or where there is a recurring pattern of unexplained absence, the Director of Education will contact the commissioning body to review the situation and agree next steps.

Alma Education will not routinely request medical evidence where a learner is absent due to illness. Where there is reason to question the stated reason for absence, or where illness-related absences form a pattern, the Director of Education may ask for appropriate supporting information.

Where a learner does not return following a period of planned or unexpected absence, the Director of Education will work with the commissioning body to establish whether the placement should continue and what support the learner needs to re-engage.

Contact us on the day of any absence
If a learner cannot attend a session for any reason, please contact Alma Education before the session start time. Contact Melanie Steel, Director of Education: melanie@alma-education.co.uk. Unexplained absences are followed up on the day.

6. Recording Attendance

The learning mentor records attendance at the start of every session. Alma Education uses the following session attendance codes:

- P: Present, learner attended the session as planned.
- A: Authorised absence, notified in advance with an acceptable reason.
- U: Unauthorised absence, not notified, or reason not acceptable.
- M: Medical or dental appointment.
- I: Illness (not a medical appointment).
- C: Leave for exceptional circumstances, approved in advance.
- X: Session cancelled by Alma Education.

All amendments to attendance records will include the original entry, the amended entry, the reason for the amendment, and the identity and date of the person making the amendment. Attendance records are retained for a minimum of six years.

Attendance data for each learner is shared with the commissioning body at least monthly, and at every placement review. Commissioning schools and local authorities are responsible for recording Alma Education sessions in their own statutory attendance systems.

7. Authorising Absence

All requests for planned absence must be made to the Director of Education in advance. The Director of Education will consider requests on an individual basis, taking account of the learner's overall attendance record and the reason given.

Medical and Dental Appointments

Parents and carers are asked to arrange medical and dental appointments outside session times wherever possible. Where this is not possible, notification should be given to Alma Education in advance and the absence will be recorded as authorised (Code M). Only the portion of the session missed for the appointment will be recorded as absent.

Illness

Where a learner is absent due to illness, the parent or carer should contact Alma Education on the first day of absence. The absence will be recorded as authorised (Code I) once the reason has been provided. Alma Education will follow up if contact is not received.

Exceptional Circumstances

Alma Education may grant an authorised absence for exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis. Requests should be made in advance by the parent or carer or commissioning body. General leisure, recreation or holidays do not constitute exceptional circumstances. The Director of Education will communicate the decision in writing.

SEND and Part-Time Arrangements

In very exceptional circumstances and where it is in a learner's best interests, Alma Education may agree a temporary adjusted session schedule with the commissioning body. This will always be documented in the learner's individual plan, time-limited, and reviewed regularly. Where a learner has an EHC plan, any adjustment to the session schedule will be discussed with the local authority's SEND team.

8. SEND and Health-Related Absence

Alma Education recognises that learners with SEND, mental health difficulties or long-term health conditions may experience higher levels of absence. Attendance expectations will always take account of a learner's individual needs and any provisions set out in their EHC plan or individual plan.

The Director of Education will work with the commissioning body and the learner's family to put in place appropriate support. This may include:

- Adjusting the session schedule, location or format to reduce barriers.
- Agreeing a phased return following a period of absence.
- Incorporating pastoral support planning or specialist referral.
- Identifying unmet needs through relevant assessment frameworks.
- Working with health professionals, educational psychologists or other specialists.
- Agreeing a temporary part-time programme only in very exceptional circumstances, documented and time-limited.

Where a learner is unable to attend sessions for a significant period due to their health, Alma Education will notify the commissioning body and work with them to consider alternative or supplementary provision where appropriate.

Attendance data for learners with SEND will be reviewed with appropriate sensitivity, taking account of the nature of their needs.

9. Persistent Absence

Alma Education will identify persistent absence as missing 10 percent or more of scheduled sessions for any reason. Severe absence is defined as missing 50 percent or more.

Learners who may be at higher risk of persistent absence include:

- Learners with a social worker, including those subject to a child protection plan.
- Looked-after children.
- Young carers.
- Learners with SEND.
- Learners with physical or mental health conditions.
- Learners who have experienced bullying or discrimination.
- Learners whose previous engagement with education has been significantly disrupted.

Where a learner's attendance is at risk of becoming persistent, the Director of Education will:

- Contact the commissioning body to review the placement and discuss barriers.
- Arrange a meeting with the learner and their family to understand their concerns.
- Agree a support plan with the commissioning body, the family, and where appropriate the learner.
- Review progress against the support plan at regular intervals.
- Refer to relevant external services where appropriate.

The Director of Education will ensure that patterns of persistent and severe absence are a standing item at placement reviews and are reported to the Advisory Board.

10. Working with Families to Improve Attendance

Building strong, respectful relationships with learners and their families is central to Alma Education's approach. The learning mentor is the primary day-to-day point of contact for each family, and will maintain regular communication to support attendance and identify emerging concerns early.

Alma Education will ensure that:

- Families have at least two reliable contact methods on record for emergency use.
- Families are made aware of Alma Education's attendance expectations at the start of every placement.
- Any agreed attendance support, actions or interventions are reviewed regularly with the learner and their family.
- Where barriers to attendance are related to the learner's experience of sessions, concerns are taken seriously and addressed promptly.

Where voluntary support has not been effective and attendance remains a significant concern, the Director of Education will work with the commissioning body to consider what further formal action or referrals may be appropriate. Legal intervention regarding attendance, including penalty notices and prosecution, is the responsibility of the commissioning school or local authority, not Alma Education.

11. Safeguarding and Children Missing Education

Unexplained or persistent absence may indicate that a learner is at risk of harm. Alma Education treats attendance monitoring as an integral part of its safeguarding responsibilities. Where there are concerns that a learner's absence may be linked to safeguarding risk, the Director of Education will act in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Where a learner is absent and contact with the family or commissioning body cannot be established, the Director of Education will treat this as a potential welfare concern and escalate accordingly:

- Notify the commissioning school's designated safeguarding lead (DSL) immediately.
- Where the learner has an allocated social worker or youth offending team worker, notify them of the unexplained absence.
- Where safeguarding concerns cannot be resolved through the commissioning body, refer directly to children's social care or the police.

Alma Education is alert to indicators that a learner may be missing education entirely. Where a learner appears to have disengaged from their placement and cannot be contacted, the Director of Education will treat this as a potential children missing education case and notify the commissioning body and the local authority without delay.

All safeguarding actions taken in connection with attendance are recorded and retained in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

12. Monitoring and Analysing Attendance

The Director of Education will ensure that attendance and absence data is collected, recorded and reviewed on a regular basis. Attendance will be monitored at individual learner level and reviewed across the provision as a whole.

Analysis of attendance data will include:

- Patterns in the types of absence recorded.
- Particular days or sessions where absence is comparatively high.
- Historic trends for individual learners.
- Attendance rates for learners with SEND or other identified needs.
- Comparison with data provided by commissioning bodies.

The Director of Education will provide regular attendance reports to the Advisory Board, and will share attendance data with each commissioning body at least monthly and at all placement review meetings.

Where Alma Education identifies systemic barriers to attendance across its provision, these will be reported to the Advisory Board and addressed through a targeted improvement plan.

13. Staff Training

Alma Education recognises that early identification and intervention are essential to preventing patterns of poor attendance from becoming entrenched.

All learning mentors receive training on attendance procedures as part of their induction. This training covers:

- The importance of good attendance for learner progress and wellbeing.
- Understanding that absence is often a symptom of wider difficulties, not simply a choice.
- The legal and procedural requirements relating to attendance recording.
- Alma Education's procedures for monitoring, following up and escalating absence.
- How to have sensitive, supportive conversations with learners and families about attendance.
- The connection between attendance and safeguarding.

Attendance training is reviewed with all staff at least annually. The Director of Education will communicate any updates to attendance legislation, guidance or procedures to all staff promptly.

14. Monitoring and Review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Director of Education and the Advisory Board, or sooner if required by changes in legislation or statutory guidance. Any necessary amendments will be communicated to all staff. This policy was approved by Melanie Steel, Director of Education, in August 2026 and is due for review in August 2027.