St Bernard's Catholic High School

Attendance Policy

2026/2027

Policy Name	Attendance Policy
Policy Approved By	Matt Cush - Chair of Governors
Date Policy Produced	September 2026
Date of Next Review	September 2027
Named Persons in this policy	D Vince: Headteacher

Attendance Policy: Every Day Counts

1. **Our Shared Mission** At our school, we believe that consistent attendance is the foundation for a child's academic success, personal growth, and future happiness. It's a journey we take together as a whole school community. We're committed to helping every student become a committed learner and an exceptional person, and that journey starts with being in school, every day.
2. **Our Shared Commitment to a Culture of Attendance**

Creating a culture of strong attendance is a team effort involving students, staff, and families. Our commitment to you includes:

- Celebrating high attendance (96% and higher) with regular recognition, awards, and school-wide praise.
- Making our attendance data transparent, so we can all see the progress we are making together.
- Encouraging all students to be in school every day they are well enough to attend.

3. **Legal Framework and Statutory Guidance**

This policy has been developed in accordance with:

- The Education Act 1996
- The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024
- DfE statutory guidance 'Working together to improve school attendance' (July 2026)

We have regard to this statutory guidance in our efforts to maintain high levels of school attendance and ensure every pupil receives their entitlement to a full-time education.

4. **Registration Times and Procedures**

Morning Session:

- The school day starts at 8:45am
- The morning register opens at 8:45am and closes at 9:15am (30 minutes)
- Pupils arriving after 8:45am but before 9:15am will be marked as late (Code L)
- Pupils arriving after 9:15am will be marked as absent (Code U - unauthorised absence)

Afternoon Session:

- The afternoon register opens at 12:45pm and closes 30 minutes later
- Pupils arriving after the register closes will be marked as absent (Code U - unauthorised absence)

On Wednesdays, when the school day finishes at 2:40pm, the afternoon register timing is adjusted accordingly.

5. First Day Contact and Follow-Up

If your child is absent:

- Please contact the school **as soon as possible** on the first day of absence to inform us of the reason
- If we have not heard from you by 9:00am, we will contact you by telephone to:
    - Check on your child's welfare
    - Understand the reason for absence
    - Identify and remove any barriers preventing attendance
    - Confirm when your child will return to school

For unexplained absences:

- We will make contact on the first day of absence for both morning and afternoon sessions
- If we cannot establish a reason for the absence, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised (Code O)
- Where absence continues without explanation, we will make further contact to ensure your child's safety and wellbeing

Emergency contacts:

- We ask all families to provide at least two emergency contact numbers where possible
- Please keep us informed of any changes to your contact details

6. Our Tiered Support Framework

We believe in a supportive, proactive approach. Our tiered framework is designed to help families at every stage and ensure no student falls through the cracks. We intervene early to prevent absence becoming persistent or severe.

Understanding attendance definitions:

The Department for Education defines:

- **Persistent absence** = 90% attendance or below (missing 10% or more of school - approximately 19 days or more per year)
- **Severe absence** = 50% attendance or below (missing 50% or more of school)

Our school intervenes much earlier than these thresholds to prevent attendance reaching these levels. We have a 4-wave strategy that provides increasing levels of support as attendance declines.

Wave 1 – Celebrating Success and Early Monitoring

Focus: 97% and above (less than 5 days absence per year - approximately 1.2 days per half term)

At this level, students have excellent attendance that gives them the best chance of success. We celebrate this achievement while monitoring to ensure attendance remains strong.

What we do:

- Students record their own attendance weekly on trackers during class.
- Pastoral staff have weekly 1:1 conversations with targeted students using attendance data
- We update our attendance intervention caseload weekly

How we celebrate:

- Weekly praise in line-ups for 100% attendance and improved attendance
- Half-termly praise letters home to parents
- Praise postcards for improved/sustained attendance

Review: At the end of each half term, we review whether attendance has been maintained. If attendance remains above 97%, we continue Wave 1 monitoring.

<u>Wave 2 – Early Support and Partnership</u>

Focus: 94% to 96.9% (less than 10 days absence per year - approximately 1.6 days per half term)

Who leads: Head of Year (HOY)

At this stage, we provide early intervention to prevent attendance declining further and to address any emerging barriers.

What we do:

- Head of Year ensures a phone call or email is made to parents when attendance falls below 96.9%
- Students identified to receive a letter home
- Weekly 1:1 conversations with targeted students, with attendance recorded during Attendance Monday in lessons
- In our fortnightly Attendance Meetings, we identify students who need our 3 Houses intervention or early help support
- Parental meeting arranged before attendance drops to 95%

How we record:

- Update attendance intervention caseload
- Record all phone calls and emails home on Arbor
- Document 1:1 student conversations
- Complete 3 Houses intervention forms
- Record informal meetings with parents

How we celebrate:

- Weekly praise in line-ups for improved attendance
- Improved attendance postcard after 2 weeks of sustained improvement
- Postcard home once improvement is sustained

Review: At the end of each half term:

- If attendance has improved to above 97%, we continue Wave 1 monitoring
- If attendance remains below 96.9%, we continue Wave 2 actions

Wave 3 – Intensive Support and Collaboration

Focus: 90.1% to 93.9% (less than 15 days absence per year - approximately 2.5 days per half term)

Who leads: Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) / Heads of Year

At this stage, students are at significant risk of becoming persistently absent (below 90%). We provide intensive support and involve external agencies where appropriate.

What we do:

- Ensure a phone call or email is made to parents when attendance falls below 94%
- Weekly 1:1 conversations with targeted students, with attendance recorded on tracker during lessons on Monday
- Identify students who need a 3 Houses intervention and action this
- Complete necessary referral forms for early help agencies - Grownd is our first priority for external support
- Parental meeting arranged before attendance drops to 93% - we use the 3 Houses parent form if necessary and complete referral forms for early help and external support if needed

How we record:

- Update attendance intervention caseload
- Record all 1:1 parental or student contact via phone call or email

How we celebrate:

- Weekly line-up praise for improved attendance
- Postcards for improved attendance
- Phone calls home for any attendance improvement

Review: At the end of each half term:

- If attendance has improved to above 93.9%, we continue Wave 2 monitoring
- If attendance remains below 93.9%, we continue Wave 3 actions

Wave 4 – Critical Intervention and Local Authority Partnership

Focus: 90% and below (19 days or more absence per year - approximately 3.1 days per half term)

Who leads: Senior Leadership Team (SLT) / Educational Welfare Officer (EWO)

Your child is now persistently absent as defined by the DfE (missing 10% or more of school).

At this stage, attendance is a serious concern and we work in close partnership with the Local Authority. Legal intervention may be necessary if attendance does not improve.

What we do:

- Deputy Headteacher and EWO identify parents and invite them to a formal meeting in our fortnightly Attendance Meeting
- We complete a School Attendance Review Meeting where we:
    - Set specific attendance targets
    - Agree a detailed action plan
    - Set review dates
- We monitor attendance daily and respond quickly to any further dips

How we record:

- Update attendance intervention caseload
- Send formal letters for LA meetings
- Record all 1:1 parental or student contact via phone call or email

How we celebrate:

- Weekly postcards home for improved attendance
- Phone calls home for any attendance improvement

Review:

At the end of each half term:

- If attendance has improved to above 93.9%, we continue Wave 2 monitoring
- If attendance remains below 93.9%, we continue Wave 3 actions
- If attendance remains at or below 90%, we continue Wave 4 intensive support and legal intervention

7. Critical Priority: Severe Absence (Below 50%)

Pupils attending less than 50% of the time are severely absent and are our absolute top priority.

For severely absent pupils, we will:

- Work urgently with the Local Authority and other partners to put intensive, multi-agency support in place immediately
- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of needs, including:
    - Whether an Education, Health and Care Plan assessment is needed
    - Whether alternative provision would be appropriate
    - Assessment of any safeguarding concerns - severe absence may constitute neglect
- Prioritise the pupil for immediate safeguarding review

- Take urgent legal action where all support has been provided but severe absence continues for unauthorised reasons

8. Leave of Absence During Term Time

All pupils are entitled to a full-time education, and we expect pupils to attend school every day it is open, except in specific circumstances.

Permitted circumstances for leave of absence:

We can only grant leave of absence in the following circumstances:

1. **Taking part in a regulated performance or employment abroad** - where a licence has been issued by the Local Authority or other appropriate body
2. **Attending an interview** - for entry into another educational institution or for future employment (application must be made in advance)
3. **Study leave** - for public examinations only (not internal or mock exams)
4. **Temporary part-time timetable** - in exceptional circumstances where it is in the pupil's best interests and has been agreed with parents (see separate section below)
5. **Exceptional circumstances** - Each application will be considered individually, taking into account:
    - The specific facts and circumstances of the request
    - The relevant background context
    - The pupil's overall attendance record
    - The timing and duration of the absence
    - The pupil's age and stage of education

Important information:

- We do **not** operate blanket policies that automatically grant or refuse leave in particular circumstances
- Each request is considered on its individual merits
- Generally, the DfE does not consider a need or desire for a holiday to be an exceptional circumstance
- Applications must be made **in advance** using the school's leave of absence request form
- We cannot authorise leave retrospectively
- If leave is granted, we will determine how many days can be taken
- Leave of absence should not be used for protest activity during school hours

9. Term-time holidays:

- Term-time holidays will not normally be authorised
- Taking a holiday during term time without authorisation may result in a penalty notice (fine) being issued by the Local Authority
- See the section on penalty notices below for more information

Prosecution for extended or repeated holidays:

- Where you take leave of absence of **more than 5 consecutive days**, the Local Authority can consider prosecution rather than issuing a penalty notice

- Where you take more than one holiday within an academic year, the Local Authority can consider prosecution rather than issuing a penalty notice
- Prosecution under section 444 of the Education Act 1996 could result in:
    - A fine of up to £2,500 per parent
    - A community order
    - Imprisonment of up to 3 months
    - A criminal record, which will impact future employment checks

Aggravating factors:

The following will be considered as aggravating factors by the Local Authority when deciding whether to issue a penalty notice or pursue prosecution:

- You did not seek permission for the absence in advance
- The holiday was for more than 5 consecutive days
- You have taken more than one holiday in the academic year
- You have received previous penalty notices for this child within the past 3 years
- Your child's overall attendance is a concern

10. Medical Evidence for Absence

Our approach:

- We do not routinely request medical evidence for illness absences
- In the majority of cases, we will accept a parent's notification that their child is too ill to attend school
- We will not have blanket rules requiring medical evidence

When we may request evidence:

- Where we have genuine and reasonable doubt about the authenticity of an illness
- Where there are prolonged or repeated patterns of illness and we need to better understand your child's health needs to provide appropriate support

What evidence we accept:

- We will not be rigid about the form of evidence
- We recognise that requesting evidence from GPs and other health professionals can place unnecessary pressure on health services
- We will start with a conversation with parents (and the pupil where appropriate)
- Evidence may include (but is not limited to):
    - Prescriptions or medication
    - Appointment cards or letters
    - Letters from medical professionals (for ongoing conditions)
    - Other reasonable evidence you can provide

Purpose of requesting evidence:

- To help us understand your child's health needs
- To identify what reasonable adjustments may be needed
- To ensure we record absence accurately in the register
- To access appropriate support for your child

If we need to request medical evidence, we will discuss this with you first and explain why it would be helpful.

11. Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Health Needs

We recognise that some pupils face more complex barriers to attendance, including those with:

- Long-term physical or mental health conditions
- Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Social, emotional and mental health needs

Our commitment:

- The attendance expectation for these pupils is the same as for all pupils - regular attendance at school
- However, we recognise that additional support may be needed to achieve this
- We will work in partnership with pupils, families and other agencies to remove barriers to attendance

How we will support pupils with SEND:

1. **Individual support approaches:**
    - Work with parents to develop specific attendance support strategies
    - Ensure provision outlined in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) is delivered
    - Consider reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010, including for:
        - School uniform
        - School transport
        - Daily routines
        - Access to support in school
        - Lunchtime arrangements
2. **Removing in-school barriers:**
    - Identify and address any aspects of school life that create barriers to attendance
    - Provide joined-up pastoral care
    - Consider whether a time-limited phased return would be appropriate
3. **Working with external agencies:**
    - Liaise with the Local Authority's SEND team
    - Work with health services including school nursing and CAMHS
    - Coordinate support with educational psychologists
    - Ensure appointments are scheduled outside school hours where possible

How we will support pupils with health needs:

1. **Physical health conditions:**
    - Work with families and health professionals to understand needs
    - Put appropriate support in place to enable attendance
    - Consider reasonable adjustments where needed
    - For pupils absent for 15 days or more due to illness, we will notify the Local Authority so appropriate educational provision can be arranged
2. **Mental health and wellbeing:**
    - Recognise that many children experience normal emotions that may make them nervous about school
    - Understand that attending school often helps with underlying issues
    - Provide pastoral support to address anxious feelings about attendance
    - Work with Mental Health Support Teams and school nursing where available
    - Make referrals to appropriate external services (CAMHS, GPs, other health services)
    - Consider whether a time-limited phased return would help

12. Part-time timetables:

In very exceptional circumstances, we may agree to a temporary part-time timetable for a pupil of compulsory school age. This will only happen when:

- It is in the pupil's best interests
- Both school and parents agree
- It is part of a wider support, healthcare or reintegration plan
- There is a clear ambition to return to full-time attendance
- Regular reviews are scheduled (typically every 2 weeks)
- An end date is agreed (though this can be extended if needed)

Part-time timetables will **not** be used to manage behaviour.

Important: If your child has an EHCP and their attendance is a concern, we will work with the Local Authority to review whether the plan needs to be amended to provide additional support.

13. Penalty Notices for Unauthorised Absence

What is a penalty notice? A penalty notice is a fine issued as an alternative to prosecution where a parent has failed to ensure their child attends school regularly.

When can a penalty notice be issued?

A penalty notice may be considered when the national threshold has been met. The national threshold is met when a pupil has been recorded as absent for 10 sessions (5 days) within a rolling 10-week period with one of, or a combination of, the following absence codes:

- **Code G** - the pupil is absent without leave for the purpose of a holiday

- **Code N** - the circumstances of the pupil's absence have not yet been established
- **Code O** - none of the other authorised absence reasons apply
- **Code U** - the pupil attended after the register closed but before the end of the session, where no other code applies

Important information about the 10-week period:

- These sessions do not have to be consecutive
- The 10-week period can span different terms or academic years (for example, 2 sessions of unauthorised absence in the Summer Term and a further 8 within the Autumn Term)
- A school week means any week (Monday to Sunday) in which there is at least one school session

Circumstances where a penalty notice may be issued even if the threshold is not met:

The school can request that the Local Authority considers issuing a penalty notice even if the national threshold has not been met, where circumstances may justify it. This includes:

- Repeated unauthorised leaves of absence during term time
- Repeated absences for birthdays or other family events
- A pattern of unauthorised absences that is impacting your child's education

In these cases, we will discuss with our Attendance Support Officer whether issuing a penalty notice is appropriate.

Consideration of individual circumstances:

Before requesting that the Local Authority issue a penalty notice, we will consider:

- **Whether support is appropriate:** In cases where support is not appropriate (for example, for holidays in term time), we will consider:
    - Is a penalty notice the best available tool to improve attendance and change parental behaviour for this particular family, or would one of the other legal interventions be more appropriate?
    - Is issuing a penalty notice appropriate after considering our obligations under the Equality Act 2010?
    - Is it in the public interest to issue a penalty notice in this case?
- **Where support is appropriate:** We will consider:
    - Have you been made aware of the attendance concerns and given the opportunity to engage with support (through letters, phone calls, invitations to meetings, referrals to other services)?
    - Has tailored support already been provided, with evidence of an assess, plan, do, review approach?

- Is a penalty notice the best available tool to improve attendance and change parental behaviour for your family, or would one of the other legal interventions be more appropriate?
- Is issuing a penalty notice appropriate after considering our obligations under the Equality Act 2010?
- Is it in the public interest to issue a penalty notice?

All decisions will be made with full consideration of our obligations under the Equality Act 2010, ensuring that individual circumstances (including special educational needs, disabilities, and health needs) are properly considered.

14. Partnership with the Local Authority

We work closely with the Local Authority's School Attendance Support Team to ensure pupils receive the support they need to attend school regularly.

Targeting Support Meetings:

- We meet with the Local Authority monthly to discuss pupils whose attendance is a concern
- These meetings help us to:
  - Identify pupils who need additional support
  - Agree joint action plans
  - Access multi-agency support for families
  - Decide when legal intervention may be appropriate

Information sharing:

- We share attendance data with the Local Authority to help identify patterns and trends
- This includes information about:
  - Pupils who are persistently or severely absent
  - Pupils with unauthorised absences
  - Pupils who have been absent for 15 days or more due to illness
  - When pupils join or leave the school

Multi-agency support:

- The Local Authority can help us access support from other services, including:
  - Early help and family support
  - Children's social care
  - Health services
  - Housing support
  - Youth justice services
  - Educational psychology

Legal intervention:

Where support has been provided but attendance remains below 90% with unauthorised absences, the following legal action may be taken:

Notice to Improve:

If the national threshold for a penalty notice has been met and support is appropriate but has not been engaged with or has not worked, the Local Authority may issue a Notice to Improve before issuing a penalty notice. See the section on Notice to Improve in Wave 4 for full details.

Penalty Notices:

- When a pupil has 10 sessions (5 days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10-week period, a penalty notice may be issued
- First penalty notice (per parent, per child):
    - £80 if paid within 21 days
    - £160 if paid within 28 days
- Second penalty notice (per parent, per child within 3 years):
    - £160 if paid within 28 days (no reduction for early payment)
- **Maximum of 2 penalty notices:** A maximum of 2 penalty notices per child, per parent, can be issued within a rolling 3-year period
- Third offence within 3 years:
    - A penalty notice cannot be issued
    - The Local Authority may prosecute instead under section 444 of the Education Act 1996, or consider other measures such as an Education Supervision Order or parenting contract
    - This could result in a fine of up to £2,500, a community order, imprisonment of up to 3 months, or a criminal record

Important: If repeated penalty notices are being issued and they are not working to change behaviour, they are unlikely to be the most appropriate tool. After 2 penalty notices, the Local Authority will consider alternative action based on individual circumstances.

Attendance Review Conference (ARC):

The Local Authority may determine that an Attendance Review Conference is necessary before issuing a penalty notice. This meeting will:

- Explore whether further support or engagement with your family is appropriate
- Ensure all reasonable efforts at support and engagement have been exhausted
- Involve school staff, LA officers, and yourselves as parents
- Result in agreed actions and outcomes

A penalty notice will only be issued once all reasonable efforts at support and engagement have been made through the ARC process.

15. How We Monitor and Analyse Attendance

We take a proactive approach to monitoring attendance to identify pupils who need support as early as possible.

Daily and weekly monitoring:

- Attendance is monitored every day for every pupil
- We analyse weekly patterns to identify:
    - Pupils whose attendance is declining
    - Patterns of absence (e.g., particular days of the week)
    - Emerging concerns that need early intervention

Regular analysis:

We conduct thorough analysis of attendance data: Half-termly, termly and at the end of each academic year

What we look for:

- Individual pupils who need support
- Patterns across different groups, including:
    - Year groups
    - Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities
    - Pupils eligible for free school meals (disadvantaged pupils)
    - Pupils with a social worker
    - Young carers
    - Different ethnic or religious groups
    - Boys and girls

Benchmarking:

- We compare our attendance data against:
    - Local schools
    - Regional averages
    - National averages
    - Similar schools
- This helps us identify areas where we need to improve

Using data to improve:

- Our analysis informs specific strategies to improve attendance
- We monitor the impact of these strategies
- We adjust our approach based on what the data tells us
- We report regularly to governors on attendance patterns and improvement strategies

Sharing information:

- We provide regular reports to staff to support discussions with pupils
- We share data with the Local Authority to access support for pupils and families
- We inform parents regularly about their child's attendance, explaining:
    - The number of sessions missed
    - The impact on their child's learning
    - What support is available

16. Safeguarding and Attendance

Attendance and safeguarding are closely linked:

- Poor attendance can be a sign that a child is experiencing difficulties or harm
- Children missing education can be at risk of:
    - Neglect
    - Sexual abuse
    - Child sexual exploitation
    - Child criminal exploitation
    - Other safeguarding concerns

Our safeguarding procedures:

Home visits:

- We may conduct home visits when a child does not attend school
- We aim to complete home visits by day 5 of unexplained absence and will make contact from day 1.
- If we have concerns about a child's wellbeing, we will visit earlier.
- If we are unable to see the child during a home visit and we have concerns for their welfare, we may make a referral to:
    - The police and/or children's social care

For pupils with extended medical absence:

- We will arrange home visits to support the pupil's and family's wellbeing
- We will work with the Local Authority to ensure appropriate educational provision

Working with children's social care:

- Where attendance is a concern and there are safeguarding issues, we will:
    - Work with the pupil's social worker
    - Ensure attendance is built into Child in Need or Child Protection plans
    - Intensify support through statutory children's social care where needed
    - Prioritise severely absent pupils for safeguarding assessment

Severe absence and neglect:

- Where a pupil is severely absent (attending less than 50% of the time) and:

    - All appropriate support has been provided
    - Educational provision (including EHCP support) is in place
    - Absence continues for unauthorised reasons
- This may constitute neglect, and we will work with children's social care to safeguard the child

If you have concerns:

- If you have any concerns about your child's safety or wellbeing, please contact:
    - Our Designated Safeguarding Lead: Jeni Marshall (Deputy Headteacher)
    - Or any member of staff

We are here to support you and your child.

17. Key staff for attendance

Sue Mallinson - Education Welfare Officer

Jeni Marshall - Deputy Headteacher

Heads of Year:

Year 7 - Marc McAloone

Year 8 - Charlotte While

Year 9 - Pam Aspinall

Year 10 and 11 - Lucy Nayman