



ALTERNATIVE ACRES

Attendance and Absence Policy

Academic Year 2026/27

Policy owner	Head of Provision
Head of Provision	Gemma Robertson
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Daun Beresford
Deputy DSL	Gemma Robertson
Recording system	Alternative Acres attendance record; CPOMS for safeguarding concerns
Date reviewed	01/09/2026
Next review	01/09/2027 or sooner if guidance, commissioning arrangements or practice changes
Approved by	Gemma Robertson

This policy relates to attendance at commissioned Alternative Acres sessions. It does not replace the statutory attendance duties of a learner's registered school or local authority.



1. Purpose

Alternative Acres recognises that regular engagement with education is important for learning, wellbeing, safeguarding and successful outcomes. Many learners referred to Alternative Acres have SEND, SEMH needs, anxiety, emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), previous disrupted attendance or other barriers to education. Attendance will therefore be managed in a child-centred, supportive and safeguarding-informed way.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Alternative Acres records attendance accurately, responds promptly to unexpected absence, shares information with commissioners appropriately, identifies patterns of concern and takes immediate safeguarding action when required.

2. Status of Alternative Acres and responsibilities

Alternative Acres is a non-school alternative provision commissioned by schools, local authorities and other placing bodies. Alternative Acres records attendance at the sessions it has been commissioned to provide and reports this information to the relevant commissioner.

Alternative Acres is not the learner's registered school simply because the learner attends a placement here. Where a learner remains on a school's roll, the school retains its statutory school attendance and registration responsibilities. Local authorities also retain their statutory functions. Alternative Acres will cooperate fully by supplying timely and accurate attendance information and by escalating concerns.

Alternative Acres uses the principles within Department for Education attendance, alternative provision, safeguarding and children missing education guidance as appropriate to its role. It will not describe school-specific statutory duties as though they automatically transfer to Alternative Acres.

3. Principles

- Attendance concerns will be approached with curiosity, support and a focus on the individual learner's needs.
- Absence will never be viewed only as an administrative matter where there may be a safeguarding, health, SEND, family or welfare concern.
- Staff will avoid punitive responses that fail to consider the reason for absence.
- The learner's voice will be considered wherever possible.
- Alternative Acres will work in partnership with parents/carers, commissioning schools, local authorities and relevant professionals.
- Information will be shared promptly where necessary to safeguard a child.
- Patterns and changes in attendance will be considered alongside other safeguarding information.



4. Expected attendance

Learners are expected to attend the Alternative Acres sessions agreed within their commissioned placement, individual timetable or placement plan.

The number of days or sessions commissioned varies between learners. Attendance at Alternative Acres should therefore be assessed against the learner's own agreed timetable rather than against a standard five-day Alternative Acres week.

Parents/carers and commissioners should inform Alternative Acres as early as possible if a learner will not attend a planned session and provide the reason where known.

5. Daily attendance recording

Alternative Acres will maintain an accurate record for every commissioned session. The record will show, as a minimum:

- Learner name.
- Date and expected session.
- Whether the learner attended.
- Arrival and departure information where relevant.
- Reason for absence where known.
- Any contact made with the parent/carer or commissioner.
- Any follow-up or safeguarding action required.

Attendance records will be completed promptly and must reflect what actually occurred. Staff must not mark a learner as attending simply because the learner was expected or transport had been arranged.

6. Arrival and lateness

Where a learner arrives later than expected, the actual arrival will be recorded. Staff will respond proportionately and sensitively, taking account of the learner's individual circumstances, transport arrangements, SEND, anxiety and other known barriers.

Repeated lateness or a significant unexplained change in arrival patterns will be discussed with the Head of Provision/DSL and commissioner where appropriate, particularly where it may indicate a safeguarding or welfare concern.



7. Planned or notified absence

Where Alternative Acres is told in advance that a learner will be absent, staff will record the absence and the reason provided. Alternative Acres will share attendance information with the commissioning school/local authority in accordance with the placement arrangements.

A notified absence is not automatically free from safeguarding concern. Staff must still act if the explanation, frequency, circumstances or wider information causes concern.

8. Unexplained absence: same-day response

If a learner who is expected at Alternative Acres does not arrive and no satisfactory explanation has been received, Alternative Acres will act on the same day.

- Check the learner's agreed timetable and any messages already received.
- Confirm whether transport or another known arrangement explains the absence, where applicable.
- Contact the parent/carer or agreed responsible adult using the placement contact arrangements.
- Notify or seek information from the commissioning school/local authority as appropriate.
- Record the absence and contact attempts.
- Inform the DSL or Deputy DSL without delay where there is any safeguarding concern, unusual circumstance or inability to establish that the learner is safe.

Alternative Acres will not assume that another agency has checked the learner's welfare. Where responsibility for a same-day welfare check or follow-up needs to be agreed, staff will communicate clearly with the commissioner and record who is taking the action.

9. When contact cannot be made

If the learner's whereabouts or welfare cannot be established, the response will be based on the individual level of risk rather than waiting for a fixed number of days.

The DSL/Deputy DSL will consider:

- The learner's age, SEND, communication needs and vulnerability.
- Any known risk of exploitation, abuse, self-harm, domestic abuse, going missing or criminal/sexual exploitation.
- Recent disclosures, incidents or changes in behaviour.
- Whether the absence is unusual for that learner.
- Whether the learner is known to children's social care or other services.
- Information from the parent/carer, commissioner and other professionals.



- Whether immediate contact with children's social care or the police is required.

If a child is believed to be in immediate danger, staff will call 999. Safeguarding action must never be delayed simply to complete attendance processes.

10. Safeguarding and attendance

Changes in attendance can be an indicator that a child may need help or protection. Alternative Acres staff will remain alert to absence or changing attendance alongside other indicators such as changes in behaviour, presentation, disclosures, peer relationships, online activity or family circumstances.

Examples that may require safeguarding consideration include:

- A sudden or unexplained deterioration in attendance.
- Repeated absence with unclear or changing explanations.
- A learner who cannot be located or whose welfare cannot be established.
- Absence following a disclosure, safeguarding incident or concerning event.
- Concerns about exploitation, domestic abuse, neglect, abuse, radicalisation or harmful relationships.
- A learner being prevented from attending or appearing fearful about attending.
- Patterns suggesting the learner is spending time in unsafe places or with unsafe adults/peers.

Where absence creates or contributes to a safeguarding concern, staff will report it to the DSL/Deputy DSL immediately and record the safeguarding concern on CPOMS in accordance with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

11. Persistent or repeated absence

Alternative Acres will review patterns of repeated absence rather than treating each missed session in isolation. The purpose of review is to understand the barrier and support engagement, not simply to count missed sessions.

Where attendance becomes a concern, Alternative Acres may:

- Speak with the learner and seek their views.
- Discuss barriers with the parent/carer.
- Review the learner's timetable, transition arrangements, sensory or environmental needs and support.
- Consider whether anxiety, SEND, SEMH, health, transport, relationships or other factors are affecting attendance.
- Share attendance information and concerns with the commissioner.
- Contribute to multi-agency, EHCP, placement or education review meetings.



- Agree a support or re-engagement plan with the commissioner and family.
- Escalate safeguarding concerns through the appropriate safeguarding route.

12. SEND, SEMH and EBSA

Alternative Acres recognises that some learners experience significant barriers to attendance connected with SEND, SEMH, anxiety or EBSA. Staff will seek to understand these barriers and avoid approaches that increase distress or disengagement.

Support may include predictable routines, trusted adults, gradual transitions, reasonable adjustments, adapted activities, reduced demands where appropriate to the agreed plan, clear communication and coordinated work with the family and commissioner.

Any proposed change to a commissioned timetable or placement should be agreed with the relevant commissioner and, where appropriate, parent/carer and other professionals. Alternative Acres will not independently reduce a learner's entitlement to education.

13. Children Missing Education (CME)

A learner missing an Alternative Acres session is not automatically a 'child missing education'. Department for Education guidance defines CME as a child of compulsory school age who is not a registered pupil at a school and is not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school.

A child who remains registered at a school is not CME solely because they are persistently or severely absent, although the absence may still present serious safeguarding and educational concerns. Suitable education delivered through alternative provision can also mean a child is not CME.

If Alternative Acres becomes concerned that a learner may not be registered at a school, may no longer be receiving suitable education, cannot be located, or may otherwise meet the CME definition, it will promptly share the concern with the commissioning/home local authority and relevant school where applicable. Alternative Acres will cooperate with any CME enquiries and provide attendance/placement information requested lawfully.

14. Learner leaves the site or is missing during a session

If a learner leaves the Alternative Acres site unexpectedly, cannot be located during a commissioned session or fails to arrive following circumstances that create an immediate risk, this will be treated as a safeguarding matter rather than ordinary absence.



Staff will follow the learner's risk assessment and safeguarding procedures, alert the DSL/Head of Provision, contact the parent/carer and commissioner as appropriate, and contact the police or emergency services where the level of risk requires it. Staff must not place themselves or other learners at unreasonable risk while attempting to locate a child.

15. Transport-related absence

Where transport is arranged by a parent/carer, commissioner or another service, Alternative Acres will record whether the learner actually attended. If a transport failure causes non-attendance, the reason will be recorded and the relevant responsible party/commissioner informed.

A transport difficulty does not remove the need to consider safeguarding where the learner's whereabouts or welfare is uncertain.

16. Medical absence

Medical needs will be approached sensitively and in conjunction with the learner's individual arrangements. Alternative Acres may request information necessary to understand how the learner can be supported safely, but will not create unnecessary barriers to re-engagement.

Where a learner has significant or recurring health-related absence, Alternative Acres will share relevant attendance information with the commissioner and contribute to planning for suitable education and support.

17. Information sharing and commissioners

Alternative Acres will provide commissioners with attendance information at the frequency required by the placement agreement and will communicate significant concerns without waiting for routine reporting.

Where a learner is registered at a school, Alternative Acres will provide accurate information so the school can fulfil its own attendance and registration responsibilities. Alternative Acres will not assign statutory school attendance codes on behalf of a school unless an agreed system specifically requires information to be supplied for the school's coding decision.

Safeguarding information will be shared where necessary and proportionate to protect a child. Data protection law does not prevent appropriate safeguarding information sharing.



18. CPOMS and recordkeeping

CPOMS is Alternative Acres' authoritative safeguarding record. Routine attendance data may be held within the provision's attendance/placement records. An absence should also be recorded on CPOMS where it forms part of a safeguarding concern, pattern or action.

Safeguarding records should include a clear summary of the concern, actions taken, decisions made, the rationale for those decisions and outcomes where known.

19. Roles and responsibilities

19.1 Head of Provision – Gemma Robertson

- Ensures effective attendance recording and commissioner reporting arrangements.
- Works with commissioners and families to address barriers to engagement.
- Ensures staff understand this policy and their responsibilities.
- Supports escalation and placement review where attendance becomes a significant concern.

19.2 DSL – Daun Beresford

- Provides safeguarding oversight where absence or attendance patterns raise concern.
- Ensures safeguarding concerns are acted upon and recorded appropriately on CPOMS.
- Coordinates or contributes to referrals and information sharing where required.
- Reviews attendance information alongside other safeguarding intelligence.

19.3 Deputy DSL – Gemma Robertson

- Acts in the DSL's absence and supports safeguarding decision-making relating to attendance.

19.4 All staff

- Record attendance accurately and promptly.
- Report unexplained absence through the agreed process.
- Remain alert to changes and patterns in attendance.
- Listen to learners and report safeguarding concerns immediately.
- Do not assume that someone else has acted where a child's welfare is uncertain.

20. Attendance review and quality assurance

Attendance will be reviewed proportionately by the Head of Provision and/or DSL to identify individual concerns, repeated absence, changes in patterns and any wider provision issues.



Where appropriate, Alternative Acres will use attendance information as part of placement reviews, impact reporting and discussions with commissioners. Attendance data will be interpreted in context, particularly for learners with complex needs or individualised timetables.

21. Related policies and procedures

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy 2026/27.
- Children Missing Education Policy/Procedure.
- Admissions Policy.
- SEND Policy and SEND Information Report.
- Behaviour Policy.
- Needs and Risk Assessment procedures.
- Medical / First Aid policies.
- Off-Site Visits Policy.
- Transport / Travel Policy.
- Data Protection Policy.

22. Quick staff procedure: learner does not arrive

1. Check	Confirm the learner was expected and check messages/timetable/known transport information.
2. Contact	Contact the parent/carer or agreed responsible adult and, where appropriate, the commissioner.
3. Record	Record the absence, reason if known, and contact attempts.
4. Consider risk	Ask whether this absence is unusual or creates a concern about the learner's safety or welfare.
5. Safeguard	If concerned, tell the DSL/Deputy DSL immediately and record the safeguarding concern on CPOMS.
6. Escalate	If the child may be in immediate danger call 999; otherwise follow safeguarding/children's social care procedures as directed by the DSL.

23. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where legislation, statutory guidance, commissioning requirements, safeguarding practice or Alternative Acres' operating arrangements change.