Attendance, Punctuality and Absence Policy

Sir James Knott Nursery School and the Nest

Achieve | Belong | Thrive

Policy Devised: October 2026

Review: October 2027

Policy owner: Headteacher | Operational lead: Behaviour, Guidance and Support Lead | Applies to: Nursery School and the Nest

1. Purpose and principles

We believe that even when children are very small, good attendance makes a BIG difference. Regular participation in high-quality early education and care strengthens relationships, routines, confidence, wellbeing and progress. We promote attendance through warm, respectful partnerships with families, with a child-centred, inclusive and non-punitive approach. Our vision is for every child to Achieve, Belong and Thrive.

2. Scope and legal context

This policy covers children attending funded and/or paid sessions at the Maintained Nursery School and the Nest, including extended provision where relevant. Children below compulsory school age are not subject to the parental legal duty to secure regular attendance applicable to compulsory school age pupils. The school will not use penalty notices for ordinary nursery absences below compulsory school age. For any child who has reached compulsory school age, leaders will confirm the applicable school registration and attendance requirements with the local authority and follow statutory rules. The September 2026 EYFS framework requires effective safeguarding and child absence follow-up. DfE Working together to improve school attendance (July 2026) informs supportive practice where relevant; its compulsory school age enforcement provisions must not be applied indiscriminately to nursery children. Funded entitlements are governed by local authority provider arrangements and the DfE Early education and childcare guidance (April 2026).

3. Agreed sessions and family responsibilities

Families are expected to bring children for their agreed days and hours, arrive and collect punctually, keep telephone numbers and emergency contacts up to date, and tell the school promptly of changes to circumstances. Attendance is monitored against each child's individual booked timetable, not an assumed five-day week. Funded hours must be accurately reflected in the parental declaration; changes to planned patterns must be agreed and recorded. Optional paid additional hours and extras are subject to separate published terms and must not be made a condition of accessing free entitlement.

4. Reporting absence and lateness

Parents/carers must notify the school as soon as possible and no later than 9:30am on each day of absence, by telephoning the school office or using the student absence mailbox (telephone option 1), giving the child's name, reason and anticipated return. Families must update the school if absence continues and advise of planned late arrival. For a child whose booked session begins later, families should nevertheless communicate an anticipated absence before the session begins. Advance notification of planned holidays or other absence is requested, although nursery leave is not governed by compulsory school age term-time leave rules. The school records reasons sensitively and does not discourage appropriate illness-related absence.

5. Registration and recording

Staff record attendance promptly at each scheduled session and document actual arrival/departure, lateness and reported reasons for absence. Records distinguish illness, appointments, holidays/family circumstances, other explained absence, unexplained absence, setting closure and sessions not booked. Staff reconcile registers with the expected child list and report discrepancies immediately. The school maintains records securely, shares them only where lawful and necessary, and uses its management system and safeguarding records appropriately. School statutory registers and codes will be used where legally required; internal nursery monitoring codes are not presented as statutory attendance codes.

6. First-day response to unexplained absence

Where a child is unexpectedly absent without explanation, staff check the agreed timetable and messages, then telephone the parent/carer promptly on the first day.

If there is no answer, they attempt other parental numbers and authorised emergency contacts, document each attempt and alert the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) where contact remains unsuccessful or there is a concern. A home visit may be arranged in line with the school's existing attendance agreement, risk assessment and lone-working procedures. The DSL decides whether same day safeguarding escalation, children's social care contact or a police welfare check is required; staff must not wait for an attendance percentage threshold where safety may be at risk. Particular care is taken for children with known vulnerabilities, including those subject to safeguarding plans or multi-agency support.

7. Prolonged or repeated absence

Staff consider the child's age, development, medical circumstances, disability, family context, safeguarding information and known risks. The Key Person and Behaviour, Guidance and Support Lead contact families supportively, seek to understand barriers and agree proportionate steps, such as a phased return, reasonable adjustments, signposting or coordination with health and early help services. Repeated unexplained absence, significant changes in patterns or inability to contact a family are discussed promptly with the DSL and, where appropriate, partner agencies. Every safeguarding referral is based on assessed risk, not attendance percentage alone.

8. Attendance review and escalation

The Behaviour, Guidance and Support Lead reviews individual and group attendance regularly and produces a half-termly dashboard for leaders. Below 90% attendance against booked sessions triggers an informal supportive telephone discussion, consistent with the school's published Attendance Agreement; this is a review threshold, not an automatic judgement of parenting or safeguarding risk. Where attendance remains below 90% following discussion, a written invitation to a formal meeting may be issued, with adjustments for illness, SEND and family circumstances. A brief agreed support plan should identify barriers, actions, responsibilities and review date. Leaders may seek local authority advice for persistent non-attendance or significant mismatch with claimed funded hours, but no withdrawal or recovery of funded entitlement is automatic: the school must first check the current North Tyneside provider agreement, funding rules, reasons for absence and equality duties.

9. Inclusion, health and equality

No child or family will be disadvantaged because of disability, SEND, long-term illness, protected characteristics, family circumstances or language barriers. The school will make reasonable adjustments and work with parents, SENDCo, health professionals and relevant services to support safe attendance. For infectious illness, staff follow current UKHSA exclusion advice and the school's illness policy. Children must not be pressured to attend when unwell. Attendance discussions are private, respectful and trauma-informed; interpretation or accessible formats will be offered when needed.

10. Punctuality, arrivals and collection

Punctual arrival enables a calm welcome and a secure start to learning. Families should follow their individual session times and published gate/arrival arrangements; the main school's standard morning start is 8:30am, with the gate arrangements communicated separately to families. The school also operates extended provision from 7:30am where booked. Staff record persistent lateness and discuss barriers supportively. Children must be collected by an authorised adult at the agreed time; late or uncollected children are managed under the separate safeguarding/uncollected-child procedure and applicable booking terms.

11. Roles and accountability

Parents/carers: maintain accurate contacts, report absence, and work with the setting on agreed support. Key Persons and Room Teams: take registers, notice changes, communicate sensitively and escalate concerns. Office/administration: log calls, reconcile unexplained absence and maintain records. Behaviour, Guidance and Support Lead: analyse attendance, make below-90% contacts, coordinate plans and report trends. DSL/Headteacher: oversee safeguarding decisions, complex cases, referrals and policy compliance. SENDCo: advise on inclusive attendance plans and reasonable adjustments. Governing Body: approve and review the policy, scrutinise anonymised trends and ensure safeguarding, equality and funding compliance.

12. Monitoring, reporting and improvement

The half-termly attendance dashboard will include overall attendance against booked sessions; weekly trends; attendance by room and funded/paid pattern where appropriate; explained and unexplained absence; punctuality; below-90%

review cases; actions and impact. Small-group data must be handled carefully to avoid identification. Families receive attendance information at the end of each half term in line with the published agreement, using a supportive explanation of the calculation and context. Leaders evaluate whether actions improve engagement and wellbeing, not simply percentages. Governors receive aggregated termly updates.

13. Attendance calculation (Sir James Knott Nursery School Site)

Attendance percentage = attended booked sessions ÷ all booked sessions expected during the monitoring period × 100. Sessions not booked are excluded. Setting closures are excluded from the denominator. For part sessions and flexible attendance patterns, the school may also calculate booked hours attended ÷ booked hours expected × 100, applying one method consistently and explaining it in reports. Illness and other absence remain visible in the denominator for participation monitoring but are contextualised; attendance is not used to penalise children or families.

14. Related policies and review

Read alongside: School Attendance Agreement; Safeguarding and Child Protection; Admissions; SEND; Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; Illness; Uncollected Child; Privacy/Data Protection; and funded entitlement/parental declaration terms. This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if national guidance, local authority arrangements or safeguarding procedures change.

Appendix A. Practical response pathway

1. Check booking and register; confirm child is expected. 2. Review absence messages. 3. Contact parent/carer on first day of unexplained absence. 4. Attempt emergency contacts and record times/outcomes. 5. Refer promptly to DSL if no contact, prolonged absence or any welfare concern. 6. DSL assesses home visit, multi-agency referral or police welfare check. 7. Record resolution, actions and follow-up. 8. Review patterns at least half-termly; below 90% triggers supportive contact.