Attendance Policy

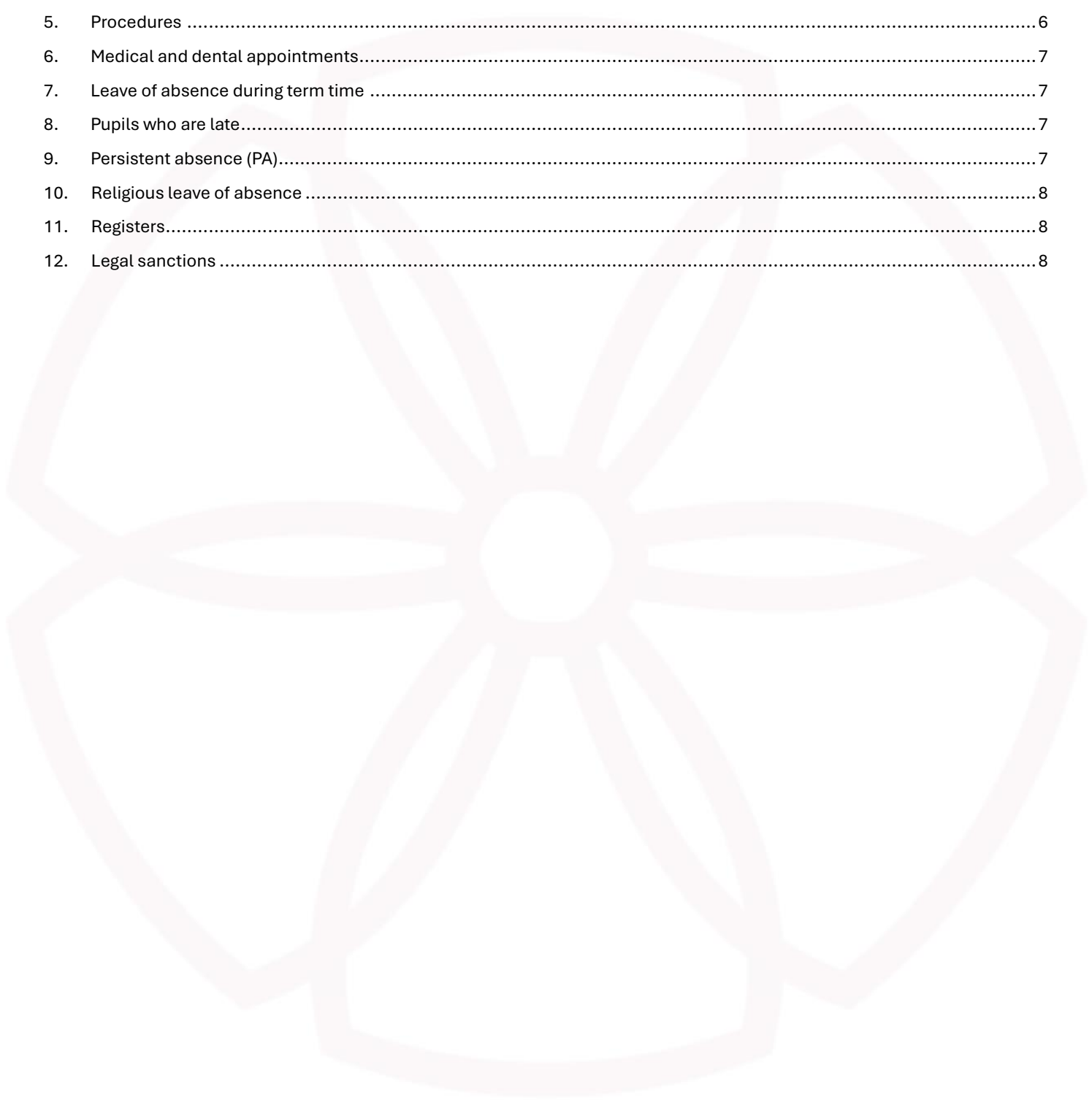| Author	CEO
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DOCUMENT CONTROL

Unless there are legislative or regulatory changes in the interim, this policy will be reviewed every year. Should no substantive changes be required at that point, the policy will move to the next review cycle.

Version	Date	Reviewer	Changes
1.0	09/2024	N Miley	• New trust-wide policy created to reflect national changes

1. What to do as a parent/carer if your child is unable to attend school

1.1. Please see the attendance guidance document on the policies page of the relevant school website for details of how to report a pupil's absence.

2. Policy statement

2.1. Mercia Learning Trust is committed to ensuring that pupils and parents/carers understand the absolute importance of full attendance at school.

2.2. Absence has a detrimental effect on a pupil's academic progress; indeed, it is the greatest determinant of under-achievement at all phases.

2.3. Poor attendance or sporadic absences may also be an indicator of underlying issues that need resolving either inside or outside of school. Absence from school may also mean that a young person is more vulnerable to safeguarding risks, such as sexual and criminal exploitation, including county lines activity.

2.4. As such, all our schools invest time and money in working with families to make pupil attendance a top priority.

2.5. As a trust, we take our duty to safeguard children seriously, securing great attendance for all pupils is at the heart of this work.

2.6. We work tirelessly to create a culture in our schools where pupils want to attend and we see great attendance as a benchmark of our positive culture.

2.7. This policy is underpinned by the following legislation and guidance:

2.7.1. Working together to improve school attendance 2024

2.7.2. The Education Act 1996 and 2002

2.7.3. Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023

2.7.4. School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024

2.7.5. Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

2.7.6. The Equality Act 2010

2.7.7. Education (Information about Individual Pupils) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

2.8. Additionally, this policy relates to many other trust policies, specifically:

2.8.1. Child Protection and Safeguarding

2.8.2. Behaviour

2.8.3. Child Missing in Education

3. Scope and purpose

3.1. Create an environment in which pupils are enabled to become mature and industrious, accepting responsibility for their own actions and preparing for future success.

3.2. Form an active partnership with parents / carers to support the learning of their children.

3.3. Ensure regular contact with pupils in order to safeguard their well-being.

3.4. Provide every opportunity for our pupils to secure outstanding outcome.

3.5. Raise attendance of all children. If a child misses school on a regular basis, they are damaging their future life choices. Nationally, it has been proven that children with poor attendance in primary school miss out on making the expected progress in vital literacy and numeracy skills, and find it difficult to catch up. In secondary school, 19 days absence correlates, on average, to a grade at GCSE in all subjects.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1. Our trust board is will:

4.1.1. recognise the importance of school attendance and promoting it across our trust's ethos and policies.

4.1.2. ensure effective practice on attendance management and improvement across all schools.

4.1.3. ensure there are suitable policies in place and that these are regularly reviewed and updated.

4.1.4. monitoring attendance figures for our trust.

4.1.5. regularly review and challenge attendance data.

4.1.6. hold trust leaders to account for the implementation of this policy.

4.2. Our trust leadership team will:

4.2.1. design an attendance strategy with the aim of improving attendance across all schools within our trust.

4.2.2. ensure that school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties.

4.2.3. Monitor school compliance with statutory duties and trust strategy.

4.2.4. make sure that the attendance strategy is resourced appropriately (including through effective use of pupil premium funding) to create, build and maintain systems and performance.

4.2.5. ensure each school has a designated attendance lead in the senior leadership team with clearly assigned responsibilities.

4.2.6. ensure that headteachers and the designated attendance lead receive training and professional development to deploy attendance systems effectively.

4.2.7. monitor attendance figures for individual schools: regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data.

4.3. Our local governing boards (LGB) will:

4.3.1. monitor the implementation of this policy and all relevant procedures across the school.

4.3.2. promote the importance of good attendance through the school's ethos and policies.

4.3.3. work with the school leaders to set goals for attendance and provide support and challenge around delivery against those goals.

4.3.4. ensure that this policy, as written, does not discriminate on any grounds including, but not limited to, ethnicity/national origin, culture, religion, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

4.3.5. handle complaints regarding this policy as outlined in our Trust's Complaints Policy.

4.3.6. have regard to 'Keeping children safe in education' when making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

4.4. Our headteachers will:

4.4.1. establish a culture where high attendance is expected and accepted as the norm.

4.4.2. expect good attendance and punctuality from all pupils and ensure that all understand the importance of good attendance.

4.4.3. manage the day-to-day implementation and management of this policy and all relevant procedures across the school.

4.4.4. ensure accurate completion of admission and attendance registers.

4.4.5. arrange attendance training for all relevant staff that is appropriate to their role.

4.4.6. develop a clear vision for improving attendance.

4.4.7. monitor attendance and the impact of interventions.

4.4.8. analyse attendance data and identify areas of intervention and improvement.

4.4.9. appoint a member of the SLT to take the strategic lead on attendance.

4.4.10. ensure all parents are aware of the school's attendance expectations and procedures.

4.4.11. ensure that every pupil has access to full-time education and will act as early as possible to address patterns of absence.

4.4.12. informing the LA of any pupil being deleted from the admission and attendance registers.

4.4.13. oversee any arrangements where pupils are not attending the school on a full-time basis.

4.5. Our schools will:

4.5.1. accept that outstanding attendance is everyone's responsibility.

4.5.2. formally recognise good attendance and punctuality (above 97%).

4.5.3. challenge attendance that is less than good and set targets for pupils to improve.

4.5.4. intervene when poor attendance/punctuality becomes a problem and before it becomes a habit.

4.5.5. follow up on any non-attendance with no contact on the first day of absence with a phone call and / or home visit.

4.5.6. deal sympathetically with any problem a pupil may have which is causing attendance/punctuality to decline and always stay in regular contact with parents/carers.

4.5.7. act swiftly to reduce absence, in particular persistent absence, with a specific focus on immediate support for vulnerable learners.

4.5.8. work actively with children and families in nursery and reception classes to emphasise the benefits of high attendance; to instil and reinforce good habits of attendance from the start of their educational journey.

4.5.9. ensure every child of statutory school age has access to full-time education.

4.5.10. communicate a clear and transparent process around the management of attendance to families following the listed process: prevention and reward/recognition; support and challenge with punitive measures where necessary; and legal action and / or external agencies when other measures have no impact.

4.5.11. not grant extended leave during term time and will automatically refer to the local authority to fine.

4.5.12. ensure that all appropriate staff are aware of any potential safeguarding issues, ensuring joint working between the school, children's services and other statutory safeguarding partners.

4.5.13. keep parents informed on a regular basis of their child's attendance and absence record.

4.5.14. develop and implement strategies to support pupils to return successfully to school after lengthy or unavoidable periods of absence.

4.6. Families will:

4.6.1. encourage their child to attend the school daily, be punctual and inform the school immediately if their child is absent.

4.6.2. provide accurate and up-to-date contact details, including more than one emergency contact number.

4.6.3. inform the school of any hospital appointment in advance unavoidably scheduled during school time.

4.6.4. inform the school of any problems which might affect their child's attendance.

4.6.5. cooperate with the school if their child's attendance/punctuality is unsatisfactory.

4.6.6. make requests for special leave of absence for their child during term time by completing in advance an 'Application for Leave in Exceptional Circumstances' form which is available from the attendance team.

4.7. Pupils will:

4.7.1. always attend the school unless prevented by a specific illness or unavoidable circumstances.

4.7.2. always arrive to the school and lessons on time.

5. Procedures

5.1. All our schools have in place a coherent system of rigorously monitoring pupil attendance.

5.2. Class teachers, subject teachers, form tutors, middle leaders, senior leaders, home link officers and the education welfare officer all play key roles in this system and our MIS is used to manage this information.

5.3. If a telephone call is not forthcoming, then the absence will be treated as unauthorised.

5.4. The school will call the pupil's parent/carer on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason. If staff are unable to reach any of the pupil's emergency contacts, we may visit the pupil's home or in exceptional circumstances, contact police.

5.5. We will identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained – this will be no later than 5 working days after the session.

5.6. Schools will call the parent/carer on each day that the absence continues without explanation to ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary. If absence continues, the school will involve other agencies as and when it becomes appropriate. Please note, unexplained absences will always be recorded as unauthorised.

5.7. If no contact has been made by day 3 (at the very latest) of the absence, the home link officer, the education welfare officer or a member of staff will visit the home of the pupil.

5.8. This will be an opportunity to explain the possible consequences of a fine if attendance does not improve.

5.9. If there is a history of poor attendance, the visit may be earlier.

5.10. Social Services will be contacted by a member of the safeguarding team on the first day of an unexplained absence for any child with a Child Protection Plan.

5.11. At the end of the week, an unauthorised absence report is generated and a letter or text correspondence asking for an explanation is sent home.

5.12. The list of pupils with unauthorised absences is also printed and passed to the staff member with responsibility for the cohort.

5.13. If there is a suspected pattern developing in the absences of a particular pupil, or group of pupils, then a registration certificate can be printed. This is a record of attendance for the whole year and it is sent home periodically in the pupil's annual report for parents' information.

5.14. It is a confidential document and, therefore, should be kept carefully and only shown to the pupil and/or their family.

6. Medical and dental appointments

6.1. These should be made outside school hours.

6.2. Any urgent medical and dental appointments will only be authorised if proof (appointment card, letter or electronic/text confirmation) is provided to the school attendance team.

6.3. If the absence is authorised, families must ensure they collect the pupil from visitors' reception as no pupil will be allowed out of the school unaccompanied unless there is prior agreement with the school.

6.4. Families must also ensure that the pupil is aware of the appointment and is ready waiting at the authorised time. It is not the responsibility of the school to inform pupils of appointments.

6.5. In emergency situations, we will ensure the pupil is aware of the appointment.

6.6. For pupils with long term illness / medical needs or those that suffer an illness for a period of time, please speak directly to the school for further guidance.

7. Leave of absence during term time

7.1. Leave of absence during term time will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances, based on a case-by-case decision by the headteacher.

7.2. Any extended absence from the school will be counted as unauthorised and will normally lead to a fixed penalty notice from the local authority in line with their code of conduct and the national framework for penalty notices.

7.3. In order to avoid personal opinion and to ensure complete fairness for all, we refer all planned leave of absence to the authority.

7.4. Local authorities may choose to prosecute in instances of repeated or prolonged leave of absence.

8. Pupils who are late

8.1. Pupils who are absent when the register started being taken but arrive before the register is closed are defined as late.

8.2. Pupils who arrive late after the register has closed but before the end of the session receive an unauthorised code of 'U' unless another absence code is more appropriate.

8.3. The cutoff time will be determined by the individual school and will be the same for every session and not longer than 30 minutes.

8.4. We ask that all pupils are in the school building no later than 10 minutes before the official start time so that they can get prepared and organised for the learning that day.

8.5. The attendance team will send a text message to parents / carers informing them when their child is late.

9. Persistent absence (PA)

9.1. Any pupil who has an overall attendance of below 90% is considered by the government to be in the persistent absence category.

9.2. Any pupil who is PA will be monitored and put on an action plan.

9.3. The education welfare officer / attendance team will meet with pupils, and their families whose attendance cause concern.

9.4. Where necessary, home visits are made. In situations of persistent unauthorised absence a referral will be made to the local authority to consider a penalty notice fine or legal proceedings for a prosecution under s.444 of the 1996 Education Act.

10.   Religious leave of absence

10.1.   For a day set aside exclusively for religious observance by the religious body the parent(s) belongs to pupils will be granted one day for each occasion of religious observance with a maximum of three days over one academic year.

10.2.   As a rule, 'a day set apart for religious observance' is a day when the pupil's parents would be expected by the religious body to which they belong to stay away from their employment in order to mark the occasion.

10.3.   These absences, if granted, will be recorded as authorised using the 'R' code.

10.4.   These are the codes as stipulated by the Department for Education and whilst absence is authorised, it does count against the child's attendance. This is the DfE national policy.

11.   Registers

11.1.   The register is a legal document which must be completed fully and on time at AM and PM registration and then for every lesson throughout the day.

11.2.   Should a pupil not be in registration, they should be marked absent; however, if form tutors/class teachers are aware of any appointments elsewhere, in or out of school, these should be recorded using the relevant code.

11.3.   All schools follow the Department for Education guidance on the use of attendance codes and do not deviate from this.

11.4.   There is very little post-registration truancy in any of our schools; however, staff must take a register in every lesson at secondary and after any unstructured time (break/lunch) at primary.

11.5.   If a member of staff suspects that a pupil is missing from the lesson, then they should notify the attendance team and DSL immediately. The absence register is emailed out to all key staff.

12.   Legal sanctions

12.1.   Our schools will work hard to engage with all our families to ensure that, where a pupil has low attendance, support is identified and implemented, where appropriate and where possible.

12.2.   We expect that all families will engage positively with support and that attendance will improve as a result.

12.3.   However, as a last resort, the school will refer to the local authority who can issue a fixed penalty notice under the national framework.

12.4.   If the unauthorised absence exceeds the local authority threshold for a fixed term penalty notice the LEA may instigate legal proceedings for an offence under s.444(1) and (1A) of the 1996 Education Act.

12.5.   In exceptional cases this can lead to a custodial sentence of up to three months and / or a fine up to £2,500 (where the child is of compulsory school age).

12.6.   From the 19 August 2024, if issued with a penalty notice, families must pay £160 within 28 days. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. The payment must be made directly to the local authority.

12.7.   A second penalty notice issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil is charged at flat rate of £160 if paid within 28 days.

12.8.   Where the national threshold is met for a third time within three years, alternative action will be considered. This will often include considering prosecution but may include other legal interventions.

12.9.   The decision on whether to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the headteacher, following the local authority's code of conduct for issuing penalty notices. This will take into account:

12.9.1.   whether support is appropriate, whether families have engaged in support and whether further support to improve attendance is necessary

12.9.2.   whether another form of legal intervention is more likely to improve attendance

12.9.3.   the national threshold of 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks

12.9.4.   one-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission

12.9.5.   where an excluded child is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason

12.10. If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the Local Authority can decide whether to prosecute the parent or withdraw the notice.

Appendix 1 - Attendance Codes

The following codes are taken from the DfE's guidance on school attendance.

Present mark

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	Child is present at morning registration
\	Present (pm)	Child is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	Child arrives late before register has closed

Attending a setting other than their school

Code	Definition	Scenario
B	Off-site educational activity	Child is at a supervised off-site educational activity approved by the school
D	Dual registered	Child is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
K	Attending an approved educational activity arranged by the local authority	Child attending provision arranged by LEA
P	Sporting activity	Child is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
V	Educational trip or visit	Child is on an educational visit/trip organised, or approved, by the school
W	Work experience	Child is on a work experience placement

Absent - leave of absence (authorised)

Code	Definition	Scenario
C	Regulated performance/employment	Child has been granted a leave of absence to participate in regulated performance or regulated employment abroad
C1	Authorised leave of absence	Child has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances
C2	School age pupil has a part time timetable	School aged child with temporary part-time timetable
E	Suspended or permanently excluded	Child has been suspended or permanently excluded but no alternative provision has been made
I	Illness	School has been notified that a child will be absent due to illness
J1	Interview	Child has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
M	Medical/dental appointment	Child is at a medical or dental appointment
Q	Unable to attend because of lack of access arrangements	Child is unable to attend school because an LEA has a duty to make access arrangements but has failed to do so
R	Religious observance	Child is taking part in a day of religious observance set aside by the religious body the parent(s) belong to
S	Study leave	Year 11 child is on pupil leave during their public examination
T	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence	Child from a Traveller community whose parents are travelling for occupational purposes and have been granted leave of absence by the school

Code	Definition	Scenario
X	Not required to be in the school	Child of non-compulsory school age is not required to attend
Y1	Unable to attend due to normal transport not being available	Child is unable to attend due to school not being within walking distance and transport normally provided by school or LEA not being available (walking distance via nearest available route for a child under the age of 8 is 2 miles and 3 miles for 8 and over)
Y2	Unable to attend due to widespread disruption to travel	Child is unable to travel due to disruption caused by a local, national or international emergency
Y3	Unable to attend due to part of school premises being closed	Part of school premises is unavoidable out of use and child cannot be practicably accommodated in parts of premises in use
Y4	Unable to attend due to whole school site being closed	School was planned to be open but closed unexpectedly
Y5	Unable to attend due to pupil criminal justice detention	Child is unable to attend due to police detention, youth detention or detained under a sentence of detention
Y6	Unable to attend in accordance with public health guidance or law	Child is prohibited from travelling or attending due to legislation or guidance relating to the transmission of infection or disease
Y7	Unable to attend due to any other avoidable cause	Child is prevented from attending by an unavoidable cause not covered by code Y1 – Y6 (nature of unavoidable cause will be recorded)

Unauthorised absence

Code	Definition	Scenario
G	Unauthorised holiday	Child is on a leave of absence that was not approved by the school
N	Reason not established	Child is absent for an unknown reason (this code will be amended when the reason emerges or replaced with code O if no reason for absence has been provided within five school days)
O	Unauthorised absence	The school is not satisfied with reason for child's absence or reason for absence is not established
U	Arrival after registration	Child arrived at the school after the register closed but before the end of the session