



Best Foot Forward Student Attendance Policy

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Date Approved: November 2024
Assigned Review Period: 1 Year Review Date – Due November 2025

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1. Introduction

For the purpose of this guidance, a parent means:

- all natural parents, whether they are married or not;
- any person who has parental responsibility for a child or young person; and,
- any person who has care of a child or young person (i.e. lives with and looks after the child).

Improving attendance is everyone's business. The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex, both within and beyond the Best Foot Forward provision, and are often specific to individual students and families. The foundation of securing good attendance is that the Best Foot Forward provision provides a calm, orderly, safe, and supportive environment where all students want to be and are keen and ready to learn.

This policy is easily accessible to leaders, staff, students, and parents, including being published on the Best Foot Forward's website. Parents will be sent it with any initial information when students join the Best Foot Forward provision and reminded of it at the beginning of each Best Foot Forward year and when it is updated.

As the barriers to attendance evolve quickly, the policy will be reviewed and updated as necessary. In doing so, Best Foot Forward will seek the views of students and parents.

This policy is informed by guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE): 'Working together to improve school attendance' and 'Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-schoolattendance>

2. Policy and Practice

The attendance and punctuality expectations of students and parents, including start and close of the sessions and the processes for requesting leaves of absence and informing Best Foot Forward of the reason for an unexpected absence.

- Session start times are usually at 9:00am, 11:30am and 2:00pm.
- Registers will be closed 15 minutes after the start of the session time.
- For morning and afternoon sessions, students are registered by the Tutor / mentor working with them. The relevant codes are always applied.
- If a student engages after 15 minutes of the start of the session they will be marked with an L code for that session.
- Students who refuse to engage with the session will be marked as an unauthorised absence using the U code.

When a Child is Absent

Parents/carers should make every effort to let BEST FOOT FORWARD know why their child is not attending, at the earliest opportunity by contacting the CEOs at Best Foot Forward. If no contact is made by parents/carers, BEST FOOT FORWARD CEOs, or the relevant staff member working with the student, will contact the parent/carer for an explanation as to why their child is absent.

If there is any doubt about the whereabouts of a student, BEST FOOT FORWARD will contact the parent/carer straight away, in order to check on the safety of the student. Calls will be made to the parents/carer of an absent student after 15 minutes of the start of the session.

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Should any student abscond, a phone call home will be made immediately followed by a call to the DSL.

If the level of attendance does not improve, BEST FOOT FORWARD will investigate the reasons for poor attendance and implement basic strategies to support improved attendance. If the basic strategies do not result in an improvement in attendance, interventions outlined in the BEST FOOT FORWARD Persistent Absence Triggers will be implemented.

A Plan for Success will be created to formally record the actions being taken to support improved attendance. Plans will be reviewed on a regular basis to monitor impact and revise strategies where necessary. This will be done by the relevant staff member at Best Foot Forward (SLT lead for Behaviour and Attendance).

If the strategies employed within the plan fail to have an impact due to a lack of support from families, a formal route may be initiated, and this could include ending the student's provision with Best Foot Forward.

Requests for Leave of Absence

We would ask, where possible, that all medical appointments be made outside Best Foot Forward hours.

We believe that students need to attend BEST FOOT FORWARD, so that they can make the most progress possible. However, we do understand that in exceptional circumstances there are times when a parent/carer may legitimately request leave of absence. This will only be granted in exceptional circumstances and will be at the discretion of the Best Foot Forward CEOs. In the case of a Looked After Child, the child's respective Social Worker is the only person who can request such leave during term time.

Enforced Closure of Best Foot Forward

DfE School Attendance Guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities (August 2020) allows for the closure of Best Foot Forward in exceptional circumstances:

Examples of circumstances in which students could be unable to attend Best Foot Forward sessions because of serious disruption to travel caused by:

- a weather-related emergency, such as snow or flooding,
- a natural disaster, such as the impact on air travel of a volcanic eruption,
- a health-related emergency, such as restrictions on travel in certain areas related to a COVID-19, travel disruption caused by the rationing or non-availability of fuel.

In the case of a student for whom transport to Best Foot Forward sessions is provided by the parent school or a local authority, and whose home is not within walking distance of the Best Foot Forward sessions, that the transport is not available.

Best Foot Forward will work with students and parents to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong and trusting relationships and working together to put the right support in place.

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The law entitles every child of compulsory school age (age 5+) to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education.

Where parents decide to have their child inducted into the Best Foot Forward provision, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends Best Foot Forward sessions regularly. This means their child must attend every day that Best Foot Forward sessions are scheduled, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend.

This is essential for students to get the most out of their Best Foot Forward experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances. The students with the highest attainment at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 4 have higher rates of attendance over the key stage compared to those with the lowest attainment.

The name and contact details of the senior leader responsible for the strategic approach to attendance in Best Foot Forward.

Andrew Russell (Best Foot Forward CEO) andrew@bestfootforward.org.uk 07538 719783

Information and contact details of the Best Foot Forward staff who students and parents should contact about attendance on a day-to-day basis and for more detailed support on attendance.

BEST FOOT FORWARD's day-to-day processes for managing attendance, for example first day calling and processes to follow up on unexplained absence.

BEST FOOT FORWARD will take the attendance register at the start of each session.

We have developed processes that meet the needs of the students.

- We:
- Proactively manage lateness and set out in their attendance policy the length of time the register will be open, after which a student will be marked as late. The register opens at the start of the session and closes 15 minutes after the start of the session.
 - Expect parents to contact BEST FOOT FORWARD when their child is absent to explain the reason and put in place processes to contact parents on the first day of absence where a reason has not been provided. If absence continues without explanation, further contact will be made to ensure safeguarding.
 - Expect parents to understand their responsibility to keep BEST FOOT FORWARD up to date with at least two emergency contact details as required by the Children Missing Education requirements and in line with the Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance.
 - Identify any absences that are not explained for each session and contact parents to understand why and when the student will return.
 - Regularly inform parents about their child's attendance and absence levels, based on the amount of time missed and the impact on the student's learning.
 - Hold regular meetings with the parents of students who BEST FOOT FORWARD (and/or Local Authority) consider to be vulnerable or are persistently or severely absent to discuss attendance and engagement at Best Foot Forward.
 - Identify students who need support from wider partners as quickly as possible and make the necessary referrals.

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- Support students back into the Best Foot Forward provision following a lengthy or unavoidable period of absence and provide support to build confidence and bridge gaps.

How BEST FOOT FORWARD is promoting and incentivising good attendance.

- To provide a stimulating and accessible curriculum, which ensures personalised learning is successful.
 - To secure and analyse individual student attendance data to inform the behaviour target setting process.
 - The views of each student and their parent(s)/carer(s) will be sought regarding their attendance and, this will also inform the behaviour target setting process.
 - To ensure accurate attendance records are kept and analysed to determine the necessity to develop attendance improvement targets for specific students.
 - BEST FOOT FORWARD staff will give attendance a high profile through implementation of daily and weekly attendance rewards. Attendance will be given a high profile with regard to rewards.
 - BEST FOOT FORWARD will manage multi-agency networks, which support the attendance improvement targets for individual students.
 - To ensure clear communication and guidance to students and parents/carers regarding the importance of good attendance and the implications and consequences of absence. This will be clearly communicated to all parents / carers each half term, including their current percentage and what this means in terms of the days missed of education.
 - To discuss attendance at each Senior Leadership Team meeting as a standing item.
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- To regularly review attendance in order to identify any patterns and plan actions to impact on this.
 - The Attendance Policy will be included in the induction pack for all students/parents.

BEST FOOT FORWARD's strategy for using data to target attendance improvement efforts to the students or student cohorts who need it most.

BEST FOOT FORWARD will treat all students and parents with dignity and staff will model respectful relationships to build a positive relationship between home and Best Foot Forward that can be the foundation of good attendance. In communicating with parents, BEST FOOT FORWARD will discuss the link between attendance and attainment and wider wellbeing, and challenge parents' views where they have misconceptions about what 'good' attendance looks like.

BEST FOOT FORWARD's strategy for reducing persistent and severe absence, including how access to wider support services will be provided to remove the barriers to attendance and when support will be formalised in conjunction with the local authority.

The point at which Termination of Provision for absence and other sanctions will be sought if support is not appropriate (e.g. for an unauthorised holiday in term time), not successful, or not engaged with.

In the first instance, BEST FOOT FORWARD will support students and parents by working together to address any Best Foot Forward barriers to attendance.

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Only exceptional circumstances warrant a leave of absence. BEST FOOT FORWARD will consider each application individually considering the specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind the request.

If a leave of absence is granted, it is for the Best Foot Forward CEO to determine the length of the time the student can be away from Best Foot Forward. As leaders within education should only grant leaves of absence in exceptional circumstances it is unlikely a leave of absence will be granted for the purposes of a family holiday.

Where engagement in support is proving challenging, BEST FOOT FORWARD will hold more formal conversations with the parents (and student where they are old enough to understand). This is likely to be led by the senior leader responsible for attendance and may include BEST FOOT FORWARD's point of contact in the local authority. These meetings will clearly explain the consequences of persistent and severe absence to the student and family and the potential need for legal intervention in future; but will also be an opportunity to continue to listen to and understand the barriers to attendance and explain the help that is available to avoid those consequences.

Where voluntary support has not been effective and/or has not been engaged with all Best Foot Forwards should work with the local authority to:

- Put formal support in place in the form of a parenting contract or an education supervision order.

Where barriers are outside of Best Foot Forward's control, all partners will work together to support students and parents to access any support they may need voluntarily. As a minimum, this should include meeting with students and parents at risk of persistent or severe absence to understand barriers to attending Best Foot Forward sessions and agreeing actions or interventions to address them. This may include referrals to services and organisations that can provide support.

These actions will be regularly discussed and reviewed together with students and families.

Where absence intensifies, so will the support provided, which will require BEST FOOT FORWARD to work in tandem with the local authority and other relevant partners:

- Intensify support through statutory children's social care involvement where there are safeguarding concerns, especially where absence becomes severe (below 50% attendance).
- Prosecute parents where all other routes have failed or are not deemed appropriate. This could include making the case for a community or parenting order where the parent is convicted to secure engagement with support.

In all cases, BEST FOOT FORWARD will monitor the impact of any intervention(s) and make adjustments where necessary in discussion with the student, parents and any other partners involved as part of any whole family plan or team around the family. Where interventions are failing, all parties will work together to identify the reasons why and either adjust or change the approach.

Best Foot Forward Ethos and Culture

Good attendance is a learned behaviour, and as an effective education provision we recognise the importance of students/students developing good patterns of attendance from the outset. We recognise that it is not a discrete piece of work but rather it is an integral part

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of BEST FOOT FORWARD's ethos and culture. In building a culture of good Best Foot Forward session attendance, we:

- Recognise the importance of good attendance and, alongside good behaviour, make it a central part of BEST FOOT FORWARD's vision, values, ethos, and day to day life.
- Recognise the interplay between attendance and wider Best Foot Forward improvement efforts, building it into strategies on attainment, behaviour, bullying, special educational needs support, supporting students with medical conditions or disabilities, safeguarding, wellbeing, and support for disadvantaged students (including additional support from external agencies).
- Recognise improving attendance is a Best Foot Forward leadership issue and have a designated senior leader with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance at Best Foot Forward.
- Responsibilities should include offering a clear vision for attendance improvement, evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes, oversight of data analysis, and communicating messages to students and parents.
- Make sure all teaching and non-teaching staff know the importance of good attendance, are consistent in their communication with students and parents and receive the training and professional development they need.
- Make sure attendance support and improvement is appropriately resourced, including where applicable through effective use of local authority funding. Where possible this should include attendance or pastoral support staff (either Best Foot Forward based from the parent school) who can work with families, conduct home visits and work in partnership with Best Foot Forward leaders, the Local Authority, parent school and other partners.
- Set high expectations for the attendance and punctuality of all students and communicate these regularly to students and parents through all available channels. In doing so, Best Foot Forward should help parents to understand what is expected of them and why attendance is important to their child's attainment, wellbeing, and wider development. It should also include clarity on the short- and long-term consequences of poor attendance.
- Visibly demonstrate the benefits of good attendance throughout Best Foot Forward life. This may include in displays, assemblies or in registration periods. Where used sensitively and without discrimination, this may also include praising and rewarding improvements in attendance at year group, class/form and individual level.
- Recognise that attendance is never 'solved' and is a continuous process by regularly reviewing and updating messages, processes, and strategies.
- Recognise children missing education can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, sexual abuse, and child sexual and criminal exploitation.

In addition, we:

- Have a clear Best Foot Forward attendance policy which all staff, students and parents understand.
- Accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence.
- Regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify students or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place.
- Build strong relationships with families, listen to, and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them.
- Share information and work collaboratively with other Best Foot Forwards in the area, local authorities, and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe.

We will work with partners to:

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Some students face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. These can include students who suffer from long term medical conditions or who have special educational needs and disabilities. Their right to an education is the same as any other student and therefore the attendance ambition for these students will be the same as they are for any other student. That said, in working with their parents to improve attendance, BEST FOOT FORWARD will be mindful of the barriers these students face and put additional support in place where necessary to help them access their full-time education.

All students of compulsory school age are entitled to a full-time education. In very exceptional circumstances, where it is in a student's best interests, there may be a need for a temporary part-time timetable to meet their individual needs. For example, where a medical condition prevents a student from attending full-time education and a part-time timetable is considered as part of a re-integration package. A part-time timetable will not be used to manage a student's behaviour. A part-time timetable will only be in place for the shortest time necessary and not be treated as a long-term solution. Any pastoral support programme or other agreement will have a time limit by which point the student is expected to attend full-time, either at Best Foot Forward and/or an alternative provision.

3. Safeguarding

BEST FOOT FORWARD recognises that children may be at risk of harm if they do not attend Best Foot Forward regularly. Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility. The Attendance Policy has a direct link to the Child Protection policy; the Behaviour policy; Anti-Bullying strategies and the Health and Safety Policy.

BEST FOOT FORWARD has also adopted the Local Authority Policies on Children Missing Education and Elective Home Education. BEST FOOT FORWARD also follows Local Authority guidance in relation to coding absence for families who travel as part of their culture.

Development and implementation of this policy will be considered under obligations from the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

4. Data

We use attendance data to:

- Monitor and analyse weekly attendance patterns and trends and deliver intervention and support in a targeted way to students and families.
- Use this analysis to provide regular attendance reports to tutors / mentors to facilitate discussions with students and to parents.
- Identify the students who need support and focus staff efforts on developing targeted actions.
- Conduct thorough analysis of half-termly, termly, and full year data to identify patterns and trends.
- Benchmark our attendance data (at the whole of Best Foot Forward, year group and cohort level) against local, regional, and national levels to identify areas of focus for improvement.
- Devise specific strategies to address areas of poor attendance identified through data.
- Monitor in the data the impact of Best Foot Forward-wide attendance efforts, including any specific strategies implemented.
- Provide data and reports to support the work of the Local Authority and parent school.

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5. Other Points to Note

Whilst every student has a right to a full-time education and high attendance expectations should be set for all students, the attendance policy accounts for the specific needs of certain students and student cohorts. The policy will be applied fairly and consistently but considers the individual needs of students and their families who have specific barriers to attendance. In development and implementation of the policy, BEST FOOT FORWARD considered our obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The roles of the Local Authority and parent schools are outlined in guidance from the Department for Education - *Working together to improve school attendance* - available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

6. Further Information

Guidance for parents on school attendance (Department for Education)

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/aaa-guide-for-parents-onschool-attendance.pdf>

Resources for families (Children's Commissioner)

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/back-into-school/resources-for-families/>

Working together to improve school attendance (Department for Education)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>

Student attendance in Best Foot Forward data (Department for Education)

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/student-attendance-in-school>

Improving attendance: good practice for Best Foot Forwards and trusts (Department for Education)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/improving-attendance-good-practice-for-schoolsand-multi-academy-trusts>

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