



New River College
Attendance Policy

Reviewed by School governors in **March 2026**

Statement of Intent

At New River College we want the very best for our pupils, so that they leave us as confident learners, prepared for further education, employment or training and in a position to make the best of their lives. We have a hard working and committed staff team who are dedicated to raising achievement and ensuring the best possible school experience for our pupils. We recognise that regular attendance is critical for academic progress, personal development and the overall well-being of our pupils.

All staff at New River College are committed to ensuring regular school attendance for all pupils. We understand that poor school attendance not only negatively impacts educational outcomes but also increases the risk of involvement with the youth justice system and potential criminal exploitation. Many of our pupils have a variety of social, emotional and mental health concerns which affect their emotional wellbeing and are barriers to attendance. Students who are persistently absent are at a higher risk of dropping out of education altogether, consequently limiting their employment prospects.

1. Policy Aims

The aim of this policy is placing great emphasis on the need to encourage and support full attendance amongst all pupils but aligned with their individualised timetable. This is achieved through:

- ☐ Fostering positive teacher-pupil relationships;
- ☐ Developing and maintaining close home-school links to promote a joint commitment to learning;
- ☐ Providing access to a needs' focused curriculum;
- ☐ Developing good relationships with other pupils and adults within the school community, thus developing their social skills and enhancing their emotional wellbeing;
- ☐ Rewarding regular attendance;
- ☐ Ensuring prompt follow-up in cases of non-attendance, to develop personalised strategies;
- ☐ Collaborative working with other external professional and voluntary agencies involved in a pupil's care;
- ☐ Working in partnership with the Local Authority
- ☐ Meet the statutory requirements for pupil attendance while adhering to the principles set out in the Working Together Framework.

2. Attendance in Islington

London Borough of Islington Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee report into attendance and persistence absence in Islington secondary schools (May 2025) highlights how Islington is facing one of the lowest school attendance rates in the country. Figures show that the number of severely absent pupils, those attending school less than half the time, has continued to increase, with Islington ranked 135 out of 150 local authorities. Since the pandemic, New River College have seen a significant rise in anxiety and mental health struggles among children and young people. This is reflected in the growing number of young people on waiting lists for counselling and mental health support. There has also been an increase in emotionally based school avoidance amongst our young people in secondary school.

Therefore, the majority of pupils arrive at New River College having poor experiences of education and learning. This often means their attendance prior to arrival is very low, with some having been out of education for long periods of time or are severely absent. All of NRC pupils have social,

emotional and mental health concerns with many being complex and multi-faceted which are major contributors to pupils poor attendance.

In addition, absence is very often a symptom of wider issues a family is facing. New River College will work in collaboration with parents, students, the Local Authority and team around the school partners to remove barriers to attendance and ensure support is provided. If these steps are not successful, or where the family have not engaged, the law protects pupils' right to an education and provides an array of legal interventions, when all other pathways are exhausted, will enforce it through prosecuting parents/carers.

Attendance legal interventions may only be used with children of compulsory school age and interventions will be made on an individual case by case basis.

3. Legislation and guidance

This policy is based on the DfE's statutory guidance on [Working Together to Improve School Attendance](#). The guidance is based on the following pieces of legislation, which set out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- › Part 6, Part 7 and Section 444 of the [Education Act 1996](#)
- › [Part 3 of the Education Act 2002](#)
- › Part 7 of the [Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)
- › [The School Attendance \(Pupil Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2024](#)
- › [The Education \(Penalty Notices\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2013](#)
- › [The Children Act 2004](#)
- › The [Equality Act 2010](#)

It also refers to:

- › [School census guidance](#)
- › [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#)
- › [Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools](#)
- › [Ofsted's 2025 framework toolkit](#)

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The whole New River College community – pupils, parents/carers, teaching and support staff and members of the Management Committee – have a responsibility to ensure good school attendance and they all have important roles to play.

Parents/carers:

Rights

- ☐ Parents have the right to be kept fully informed of their child's attendance/ punctuality record
- ☐ Parents can expect support from the school if they are finding it difficult to get their child to attend regularly or be on time.

Responsibilities

- Parents have a legal responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly and on time.
- Parents are also responsible for contacting the school, by telephone, email or in person, to report their child's absence and the reason for it. This should be done on the first day of absence.
- Parents are required to provide supporting evidence for any prolonged absence.
- Engage with NRC to address any concerns about their child's attendance and/or punctuality or any barriers to regular attendance.
- Parents must ensure that all holidays are taken during school holiday periods and not in term time.
- Parents must ensure that all contact details are kept up to date including mobile phone number, email and two emergency contacts.

Pupils:

- All pupils attend school regularly and arrive on time.
- All pupils should be aware of the importance of regular attendance. If they are having difficulties that might prevent them from attending regularly, they should speak to their form tutor.
- Pupils should attend all their lessons on time, ready to learn. If they have been absent they should give their Form Tutor a note from a parent/care to explain the absence. Pupils have a responsibility for following the New River College's procedures if they arrive late.

New River College:

The College has a responsibility to:

- Maintain clear records of attendance and punctuality and investigate any unexplained absenteeism.
- Encourage, support, celebrate and reward high standards of attendance and punctuality of a pupils' individual timetable.
- Identify early signs of attendance and/or punctuality issues and meet with the pupil and parents to support pupils to improve attendance and punctuality.
- Build strong relationships with families, listen to and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them.
- Support pupils and their families in overcoming challenges that may impact their ability to attend school, particularly those related to mental health, safeguarding, or other personal experiences.
- Work in partnership with team around the school partners to support a pupil and their family in overcoming barriers to regular attendance and punctuality
- Refer any issues relating to attendance and punctuality that give cause for concern to either/or the senior attendance lead, education welfare officer or designated safeguarding lead.
- Refer any unauthorised term time holidays to the educational welfare officer, with a view to issuing a fixed penalty notice.

Executive Headteacher:

- The executive headteacher is responsible for ensuring the attendance policy is implemented and adhered to across the NRC campus of schools. This includes
 - o Overseeing the monitoring of attendance data
 - o Ensuring attendance is regularly reviewed and strategies are in place to improve it.
 - o Leading NRC's work with our Team Around the School partners to support pupils who are persistently absent.
 - o Reporting data to the Management Board and Islington Council as required.

- o Authorise any exceptional leave

Staff:

- Each of NRC schools have a named senior attendance lead (named co-head of centre) who maintains all records, formulates and implements the attendance strategies and is responsible for their schools' attendance, punctuality and communication with pupils, parents, staff and external partners
- The school's administrator is the first point of contact for parents in relation to attendance and punctuality where they triage the call and make the referral to the necessary staff member.
- The school has a designated education welfare officer whose duties include;
 - Day to day monitoring of procedures being implemented across all sites including being based at all sites throughout the week
 - Conduct home visits
 - Checking morning and afternoon registers are completed
 - Analysing attendance data to identify patterns of non-attendance in line with New River College attendance guidelines
 - Liaison with other staff in school, parents, carers and other external support agencies, including Local Authority
 - Promoting attendance e.g. through projects, displays campaigns, reward schemes, (prospectus, website, etc.)
 - Meetings with parent and carers, linking to achievement for all
 - Leading on attendance improvement plans, where there are concerns of ongoing absenteeism following numerous interventions with NRC staff and external partners and before moving to potential statutory action.

New River College Management Board:

- Recognising the importance of school attendance and promoting it across the school's ethos and policies
- Making sure your school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
- Regularly reviewing attendance data and helping leaders to focus improvement efforts on the pupils who need it
- Making sure school staff receive adequate training on attendance

5. Tracking and Monitoring attendance and punctuality

Daily Registration:

- All pupils are registered twice daily, and the appropriate attendance code used to record attendance, authorised absence or unauthorised absence. This includes if a pupil is late (as defined by DfE guidance).
- Where a pupil is on an off-site or hybrid timetable, the specialist intervention team liaises with the site's admin to update a pupil's registration.
- Where a pupil is attending an alternative provision, NRC ensure they gain attendance marks and where necessary the support put in place to improve a pupil's attendance at the AP. This will include NRC staff meeting with the pupil and family around the barriers to their attendance.
- Where a pupil is absent, calls are made to the parents to establish the reason and reaffirming the importance of attending and strategies to ensure regular attendance.
- Where pupils are known to CSC, NRC staff will ensure professionals are updated with regards any absence.

- The senior attendance lead will track and monitor absence and the support provided to improve attendance. This is undertaken daily and includes conversations with pupils and parents initially via phone but if continued in person meetings, home visits, letters outlining concerns and support and home visits by staff, referrals to agencies and if necessary following continued poor attendance the EWO involvement.
- For secondary age pupils, attendance is recorded at every lesson.

Weekly attendance reviews

- The senior attendance lead reviews the weekly attendance data to analyse patterns or emerging issues and the strategies which were successful in this or where strategies were not and agree different strategies to improve attendance.
- Senior attendance leads meet with the EWO to formulate next steps for targeted pupils and their families where there continue to be concerns regarding persistent absence.
- Attendance is an agenda item for all weekly leadership team meetings.

6. Supporting attendance

At NRC we understand the barriers some of our pupils and their families face with regards to attendance and punctuality. And we understand the necessity of trauma informed approaches to the support offered to pupils and their families, to enable systemic improvements in attendance and punctuality. In addition, we understand the importance of ensuring the support from all partners including sending schools. In line with the DfE Working Together Framework, we will ensure the following:

- Individualised attendance improvement plans: Trauma informed tailored support is provided for pupils with attendance challenges. This may include mentoring internally and/or externally, or other agencies and team around the school external support services.
- Early intervention: Where a pupil's attendance has not improved following interventions by school staff a referral will be made to NRC Family Support Team to offer whole family support, exploring solutions to the ongoing barriers to engagement and attendance.
- Team Around the School agencies: All NRC schools work closely with multi-agency teams including children's social care, CAMHS, exploitation teams, SEND and others local authority services to support underlying issues faced by pupils and their families which may affect attendance and punctuality.
- Local Authority: Attendance and Inclusion Service meet termly with the executive leadership team to monitor and review attendance progress and support NRC in overcoming barriers, for example support from a specific service.

NRC will implement a range of strategies to meet pupils' individual needs to improve engagement and attendance. These include individualised timetables, mentoring, short term collection and drop offs, provision of transport (where this is approved by the SEN transport) and if necessary, engagement of an alternative provision.

7. Promoting and Rewarding High Standards of Attendance and Punctuality

New River College works hard to promote and reward good attendance and punctuality. Strategies include:

- ☐ Regularly reviewing the curriculum to ensure that it is exciting and stimulating, making pupils eager to come to school.
- ☐ Group and individual rewards are awarded on a regular basis. These are most often agreed in consultation with pupils.

- ☐ Presenting individual awards to those pupils who achieve 100% attendance over each term and those who have demonstrated positive improvements in their attendance and/or punctuality.
- ☐ Including guidance, advice and information about attendance and punctuality on a regular basis in newsletters.
- ☐ Reporting on a pupil's attendance and punctuality on a regular basis
- ☐ Holding well-structured meetings with parents / guardians and the education welfare officer to support improved attendance and any returns to school following extended periods of absence.

8. Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

In every instance when a child is absent from school, **it is the school**, not the parent/carer, **who makes a decision as to whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised**. A letter from home explaining an absence does not necessarily mean that it is authorised by the school.

Examples of absences that the school could **authorise** include;

- ☐ Illness or sickness
- ☐ **Unavoidable** medical appointments
- ☐ Days of religious observance - up to a maximum of 3 days per academic year.
- ☐ Interviews or entrance exams for secondary schools
- ☐ Exceptional Circumstances – up to a maximum of 3 days – as authorised by the executive head teacher.

Examples of absences which the school **will not authorise** include;

- ☐ The pupil is staying at home to mind the house
- ☐ The pupil is shopping during school hours
- ☐ The pupil is absent for an unexceptional reason such as a birthday
- ☐ Holidays taken in term time
- ☐ The pupil has been stopped during a truancy sweep and is unable (or the parent/carer is unable) to give a satisfactory reason for the absence.

9. Requests for family holidays during term time

The executive head teacher will only grant a leave of absence in exceptional circumstances, but it is unlikely that absence will be granted for a family holiday. The school will consider leaves of absence on a case-by-case basis and all requests should be put in writing and in person to the executive head teacher

Financial penalties can also be imposed by the Local Authority if holidays are taken during term without the consent of the executive head teacher.

10. Children missing in education

Where a child is not attending school, has moved without a forwarding address or school, or cannot be traced, or contact cannot be made with the parent, the school is required to inform the local authority that the child is missing. The school will carry out a home visit and refer the family to social care and the police to ensure any concerns for the child's welfare have been thoroughly investigated.

Pupils will not be removed from the school roll until notified by the local authority that their enquiries are complete. A referral will be made to Local Authority if no contact has been made with parents

by the 10th day of absence (or sooner if deemed appropriate), at which point your child will be considered to be “missing from education.”

11. Legal sanctions

By Law a child of compulsory school age who fails to attend regularly at a school at which they are registered, or at a place where alternative provision (NRC) is provided for them, their parents may be guilty of an offence and can be prosecuted by the Local Authority.

Parents may be recognised differently under education law, than under family law. Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 states that a ‘parent’, in relation to a child or young person, includes any person who is not a parent (from which can be inferred ‘biological parent’) but who has parental responsibility, or who has care of the child.

Unauthorised absence may result in the school referring to the Local Authority for sanctions and/or legal proceedings. This may include issuing each parent with a Penalty Notice for £120, reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days or referring the matter to the Magistrates Court whereby each parent may receive a fine up to £2500 and/or up to 3 months in prison. If a parent is found guilty in court, they will receive a criminal conviction.

If a child is persistently absent, or persistently late after the registers have closed, the adult with parental responsibility can be prosecuted under Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act.

Local authorities have the power to prosecute:

- Parents who fail to comply with a school attendance order issued by the local authority to require a parent to get their child registered at a named school (under section 443 of the Education Act 1996). This may result in a fine of up to level 3 (£1,000).
- Parents who fail to secure their child’s regular attendance at a school, for which there are 2 separate offences: section 444(1) where a parent fails to secure the child’s regular attendance; and section 444(1A) where a parent knows that the child is failing to attend school regularly and fails to ensure the child does so. The section 444(1) offence may result in a fine of up to level 3 (£1,000) and the section 444(1A) offence may result in a fine of up to level 4 (£2,500), and/or a community order or imprisonment of up to 3 months.
- Parents who fail to secure the regular attendance of their child at a place where the local authority or governing body has arranged **alternative provision** (under sections 444 and 444ZA). This may result in a fine of up to level 3 (£1,000), or if the parent is found to have known the child was not attending regularly and failed to ensure that they did so, a fine of up to level 4 (£2,500), and/or a community order or imprisonment of up to 3 months.
- Parents who persistently fail to comply with directions under an Education Supervision Order (under Schedule 3 to the Children Act 1989) or breach a Parenting Order or directions under the order (under section 375 of the Sentencing Act 2020). These may result in a fine of up to level 3 (£1,000).

12. Expectations

New River College has a very high level of expectation with regards to attendance and provides a single clear message to pupils and parents/carers regarding the link between attendance and achievement through a clear reporting system. The DfE highlights attendance below 96% is

considered unacceptable. NRC will set individual attendance targets according to a pupil's individual barriers and needs.

13. Persistent and Severe absence

When a pupil misses 10% or more of school, they are considered persistently absent. Those missing 50% or more are considered severely absent. NRC will work with the local authority to ensure additional targeted support is in place to remove any barriers to attending and reengage the pupil.

Particular focus will be placed on pupils who are severely absent as they may find it even more difficult to reengage and will require intensive support. These groups should be a top priority and may require a family plan to overcome barriers to attending.

DfE guidance states that; If all avenues of support have been facilitated by NRC, local authority, and other partners, and the appropriate educational support or placements (e.g. an education, health and care plan) have been provided but severe absence for unauthorised reasons continues, it is likely to constitute neglect. NRC and the local authority should be especially conscious of any potential safeguarding issues in these cases and where these remain, a referral to children's social care will be submitted. Further information is available in the statutory guidance on Keeping Children Safe in Education.

14. Punctuality and persistent lateness

Persistent lateness will also provide cause for concern and will be addressed through personalised strategies. All pupils who arrive more than 20 minutes following the end of morning or afternoon registration will be marked as absent, unless the NRC has been notified in advance. Pupils on individualised reduced timetables will be marked with a C2 code indicating an authorised absence. Where a pupil does not engage with the lessons on the reduced timetable, they will be marked as absent.

NRC will consider issuing Fixed Note Penalties where there is persistent lateness.

15. Conclusion

At New River College we want the very best for our pupils, so that they leave us as confident learners, prepared for further education, employment or training and in a position to make the best of their lives. We recognise that regular attendance is critical for academic progress, personal development and the overall well-being of our pupils. To achieve this NRC will work with its team around the school partners to offer trauma informed approaches to working with each individual pupil and their family to remove barriers and improve attendance and punctuality.