

The Willows School Academy Trust



Educational Neglect Policy

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Contents

1. Purpose and Scope
2. Legal and Statutory Framework
3. Definition of Educational Neglect
4. Attendance and Safeguarding Thresholds
5. SEND SEMH Health and Disability
6. School Response and Graduated Support
7. Unexplained Absence and Children Missing Education
8. Referral and Escalation
9. Family Help and Children's Social Care
10. Roles and Responsibilities
11. Recording Information Sharing and Confidentiality
12. Monitoring Governance and Review
13. Helpful Links and Contacts

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 This policy sets out how The Willows School Academy Trust identifies and responds to concerns that a child may not be receiving suitable education because of persistent parental or carer failure to meet the child's educational needs. It should be read alongside the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, Attendance Policy, Children Missing Education procedures, SEND Policy, Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy and information-sharing arrangements.

1.2 The policy applies to all pupils, including pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), pupils receiving alternative provision, pupils on a temporary part-time timetable and pupils receiving education otherwise than at the school.

1.3 Absence is not, by itself, proof of neglect. The school will take a child-centred and professionally curious approach, consider the child's lived experience and assess the reasons, duration, pattern and impact of absence. Poverty, disability, illness, unmet SEND, transport difficulties, anxiety or a breakdown in provision must not be treated automatically as parental neglect.

1.4 Nothing in this policy prevents immediate safeguarding action. Staff must not wait for an attendance percentage, the completion of school support or parental consent where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

2. Legal and Statutory Framework

2.1 Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 places responsibility on parents to ensure that a child of compulsory school age receives efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

2.2 The academy trust must have regard to Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 and must make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Attendance and safeguarding practice must also follow Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 and Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2026.

2.3 This policy has also been prepared with regard to the Children Act 1989 and 2004, the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Equality Act 2010, the Children and Families Act 2014, the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, statutory Children Missing Education guidance and the SEND Code of Practice.

2.4 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises every child's right to education and requires decisions affecting children to give primary consideration to their best interests.

3. Definition of Educational Neglect

3.1 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 defines neglect as the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may include a parent or carer failing to provide suitable education.

3.2 Where children are persistently missing school, or are not registered at a school and are not receiving suitable education otherwise, this may be an indicator of neglect, abuse or exploitation. In severe and sustained cases, failure to secure suitable education may itself constitute neglect.

3.3 Possible indicators include a persistent pattern in which a parent or carer, without adequate reason:

- fails to secure access to suitable education or to apply for an appropriate school place;
- fails to ensure regular and punctual attendance by a registered pupil;
- repeatedly fails to respond to contact, meetings, welfare checks or reasonable enquiries about absence;
- prevents the child from accessing agreed education, support, assessment or provision within an EHCP;
- fails to provide a reason for absence or knowingly provides information that is false or materially misleading;
- does not engage with reasonable support intended to remove attendance barriers; or
- fails to establish reasonable routines and boundaries despite support and an assessed ability to do so.

3.4 Indicators must be considered cumulatively and in context. The school will distinguish unwillingness from inability, consider parental capacity and recognise that non-engagement may itself arise from trauma, disability, language, fear, domestic abuse or other unmet need.

4. Attendance and Safeguarding Thresholds

4.1 A pupil is persistently absent when they miss 10% or more of possible sessions. A pupil is severely absent when they miss 50% or more of possible sessions. These definitions support monitoring and intervention; they are not minimum thresholds for safeguarding action.

4.2 The school will respond before absence becomes persistent and intensify support as absence increases. Any pattern of repeated or prolonged absence may be a safeguarding warning sign, including absence associated with neglect, sexual or criminal exploitation, county lines, domestic abuse or mental ill health.

4.3 Where all appropriate educational provision and avenues of support have been facilitated, but severe absence for unauthorised reasons continues, this is likely to constitute neglect. The DSL will consider a referral for a full children's social care assessment and will not rely only on the attendance percentage.

4.4 The DSL may refer at any earlier point where the child's circumstances, cumulative harm, parental behaviour, known safeguarding risks or the impact on the child indicate a need for Family Help, section 17 support or section 47 enquiries.

4.5 Attendance legal intervention is separate from safeguarding decision-making. It will be considered individually, normally after support has been offered, and must never be used in place of a safeguarding referral or appropriate SEND, health or educational provision.

5. SEND SEMH Health and Disability

5.1 Pupils with SEND, SEMH needs, disabilities or physical or mental ill health may face complex barriers to attendance. Their attendance ambition remains high, but the school will provide additional support and reasonable adjustments and will avoid punitive or discriminatory responses.

5.2 Before concluding that parental failure may amount to educational neglect, the school will consider whether:

- the pupil's needs are accurately identified and the school is delivering the special educational

provision in the EHCP;

- reasonable adjustments, pastoral support, sensory regulation and an accessible curriculum are in place;
- the pupil is experiencing anxiety, bullying, unmet communication needs, trauma, school-based distress or an unsuitable environment;
- school transport or other local authority arrangements are contributing to absence;
- a review or early review of the EHCP is needed, including consultation with the local authority;
- education should be arranged under section 19 of the Education Act 1996 or sections 42 or 61 of the Children and Families Act 2014; and
- the pupil's and parent's views have been heard and recorded using communication methods appropriate to the child.

5.3 Medical evidence will only be requested where it is genuinely needed to understand the pupil's needs or identify suitable provision. It should be required in only a minority of cases and must not be used as an automatic barrier to authorising illness absence.

5.4 A temporary part-time timetable may be used only in very exceptional circumstances, where it is in the pupil's best interests, agreed with parents, time limited, regularly reviewed and accompanied by a plan to return to suitable full-time education. It must not be used to manage behaviour or as an informal exclusion.

6. School Response and Graduated Support

6.1 The school will use attendance and safeguarding information together and will act early. The response will be proportionate to risk and will normally include:

- speaking with the pupil privately and recording their wishes, feelings and lived experience;
- contacting parents promptly and meeting with the pupil and family to understand barriers;
- reviewing session-level attendance data, punctuality, patterns, authorised and unauthorised absence and relevant safeguarding chronology;
- checking SEND, EHCP, health, transport, bullying, behaviour, exclusions and alternative-provision factors;
- agreeing a written attendance support plan with clear actions, responsible persons, timescales and frequent review dates;
- offering school-based and multi-agency support, making reasonable adjustments and escalating support as absence intensifies;
- undertaking a risk-assessed home visit when contact cannot be established or welfare needs to be seen; and
- discussing appropriate cases with Hillingdon's School Attendance Support Team through Targeting Support Meetings.

6.2 A standard review period must not delay urgent action. The frequency of review will reflect the child's level of absence, vulnerability and safeguarding risk. Where support is ineffective, the school will revise the plan rather than repeatedly restarting the same intervention.

6.3 Where parents find engagement difficult, the school will use accessible communication, interpreters where needed, flexible meeting arrangements and support from trusted professionals. All offers, responses and barriers will be recorded.

7. Unexplained Absence and Children Missing Education

7.1 The school will check registers promptly and make same-day enquiries for every unexpected or unexplained absence in accordance with its first-day response procedures. Contact will be attempted using all appropriate emergency contacts.

7.2 If the child's whereabouts are unknown, the school will immediately begin reasonable enquiries with the local authority. Enquiries may include contacting parents and relatives, checking with involved agencies and siblings' schools, undertaking a risk-assessed home visit and checking School to School or Get Information About a Pupil through the appropriate authorised route.

7.3 If there is reason to believe the child is in immediate danger or at risk of harm, the school will refer

immediately to children's social care and contact the police where appropriate. Where the child cannot be located, reasonable enquiries will continue with the local authority until both parties agree that they are concluded or there are no further reasonable actions for the school.

7.4 The school will make the required statutory returns to the local authority, including:

- new-pupil and deletion returns at non-standard transition points;
- attendance returns for pupils who fail to attend regularly or have ten continuous school days recorded with one or more of codes G, N, O or U; and
- a sickness return where code I absence is reasonably expected to reach 15 consecutive school days or 15 school days cumulatively in the school year.

7.5 Code N will not remain on the register indefinitely. Where the reason has not been established within five school days, it will be amended to code O in accordance with the attendance regulations.

7.6 A pupil's name will be removed from the admission register only when a ground in regulation 9 of the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 is fully met. Required joint reasonable enquiries and local authority consultation will be completed. Off-rolling is unacceptable.

8. Referral and Escalation

8.1 Where a child may benefit from voluntary or targeted Family Help, the DSL will consider a referral to Hillingdon's Stronger Families Hub using the current online referral route. The referral will set out the attendance pattern, the child's voice, the impact on the child, parental capacity and engagement, provision and adjustments offered, multi-agency information, risks and desired outcomes.

8.2 For a child-protection concern, the DSL or deputy will telephone the Stronger Families Hub on 01895 556006 and confirm the referral in writing urgently on the same day using Hillingdon's online process. If there is immediate danger, the police will be contacted on 999.

8.3 Where there is reasonable cause to suspect significant harm, a referral must be made without delay. The school does not require parental consent to make a safeguarding referral or to share information necessary to protect the child. Parents should normally be informed unless doing so may place the child or another person at increased risk, impede an investigation or is otherwise not in the child's best interests.

8.4 If the school disagrees with a decision or considers that the response does not adequately protect the child, the DSL will use the Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership escalation and professional-differences procedure. The child will continue to be monitored and supported while concerns are escalated.

9. Family Help and Children's Social Care

9.1 The school will participate fully in Family Help and statutory assessments, share relevant information, attend meetings and contribute clear, measurable and time-bound education and attendance actions to plans.

9.2 The school will support social workers and Family Help practitioners to see the child in school, provide updated attendance and welfare information and report new or escalating concerns without waiting for the next scheduled meeting.

9.3 When a plan is reviewed or closure is proposed, the school will provide an evidence-based view of progress, remaining risks and whether improvements are sustained. Disagreement will be escalated through the relevant professional-differences procedure.

10. Roles and Responsibilities

10.1 Academy Trust Board

- Ensure that the trust meets its safeguarding, attendance, equality and SEND duties.
- Review attendance and safeguarding information, with particular attention to pupils with SEND, social workers, persistent or severe absence and part-time timetables.
- Provide appropriate challenge, resources and training and review the effectiveness of this policy at least annually.

10.2 Headteacher and Senior Attendance Champion

- Maintain a whole-school culture in which attendance is understood as part of safeguarding and pupil welfare.
- Ensure attendance processes, statutory returns, staffing, training and partnership arrangements are effective.
- Oversee support and legal-intervention decisions and ensure that no pupil is unlawfully excluded or removed from roll.

10.3 Designated Safeguarding Lead

- Assess safeguarding risk, advise staff and decide when Family Help or statutory referrals are required.
- Ensure the child's voice and the complete safeguarding chronology inform decision-making.
- Work with children's social care, police, health, the Virtual School and other partners and use escalation procedures when necessary.

10.4 Attendance Lead

- Monitor daily, weekly, half-termly and termly attendance information and identify emerging patterns early.
- Coordinate contact, meetings, support plans, reviews, statutory returns and Targeting Support Meetings.
- Share concerns promptly with the DSL and SENCO and maintain accurate records of actions and outcomes.

10.5 SENCO

- Identify SEND-related barriers and coordinate appropriate provision and reasonable adjustments.
- Ensure EHCP provision is implemented and seek an early review or local authority involvement where provision may require amendment.

10.6 All Staff

- Record registers accurately and report unexplained absence and safeguarding concerns immediately through the school's agreed systems.
- Listen to pupils, remain professionally curious and never assume that absence is simply a parenting or attendance issue.

11. Recording Information Sharing and Confidentiality

11.1 Attendance contacts, meetings, home visits, the child's voice, support offered, professional analysis, decisions, referrals and outcomes will be recorded promptly on the school's attendance system and CPOMS, as appropriate. Records must distinguish fact, professional opinion and information reported by others.

11.2 Information will be shared lawfully, proportionately and securely under the Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025. Data protection law does not prevent information sharing for safeguarding purposes. The school will record the rationale for sharing or not sharing information.

11.3 Information will be limited to those who need it for the child's support or protection. Safeguarding records and child-protection files will be stored, transferred and retained in accordance with the school's safeguarding and records-management procedures.

12. Monitoring Governance and Review

12.1 The DSL and Attendance Lead will review pupils of concern together at an agreed frequency and immediately when risk escalates. Monitoring will include persistent and severe absence, repeated or prolonged absence, unexplained absence, pupils with social workers, SEND and EHCP cohorts, part-time timetables and alternative provision.

12.2 The trust board will receive appropriately anonymised information about patterns, actions and impact. Monitoring will test whether support is timely, provision and reasonable adjustments are effective, referrals are appropriate and pupils are safe and receiving suitable education.

12.3 This policy will be reviewed annually and sooner following a statutory or local guidance change, a safeguarding incident, learning review, audit finding or identified weakness in practice.

13. Helpful Links and Contacts

- [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026](#)
- [Working Together to Improve School Attendance 2026](#)
- [Children Missing Education statutory guidance](#)
- [School Attendance Pupil Registration England Regulations 2024](#)
- [SEND Code of Practice](#)
- [Hillingdon Stronger Families Hub for professionals](#)
- [London Safeguarding Children Procedures Continuum of Help and Support](#)
- [Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

13.1 Current Hillingdon Contacts

- Stronger Families Hub and child-protection referrals: 01895 556006
- Stronger Families Hub email: strongerfamilieshub@hillington.gov.uk
- Attendance Support Team: attendancesupport@hillington.gov.uk
- Hillingdon Virtual School Cared for Children: virtualschooladmin@hillington.gov.uk
- Hillingdon Virtual School Extended Duties: virtualschoolcsw@hillington.gov.uk
- SEND support: sensupport@hillington.gov.uk
- Emergency police: 999

Approval

Headteacher: Mr. M. Shaw

Chair of Trustees: Mrs. B. Grant

Designated Safeguarding Lead and Attendance Lead: Ms. K. Trzaska

Date: September 2026