



South Lee Prep School Bury St Edmunds

Attendance Policy September 2026

ISI Reference	
Key Author	Head
Reviewed by	Attendance Champion
Approval Body	Board of Governors
Approval Frequency	Annual
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Attendance Policy

This policy has been reviewed for September 2026 and reflects the statutory requirements that apply to South Lee Prep School & Nursery as an independent school in England. It should be read alongside the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection, Admissions, SEND, Behaviour, Anti-Bullying, Medical and Health, and Missing Child procedures.

Legal and Regulatory Framework

This policy has regard to the following legislation and statutory guidance, where applicable to an independent school:

- Education Act 1996, including sections 7 and 444.
- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024.
- Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, in particular the welfare, health and safety requirements.
- Working together to improve school attendance, Department for Education, July 2026.
- Children missing education: statutory guidance for local authorities and schools, Department for Education, September 2025.
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026.
- Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework for group and school-based providers, effective from 1 September 2026.
- Equality Act 2010, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils.

Independent School Status

South Lee Prep School & Nursery is an independent school. The school follows the parts of Department for Education attendance guidance that apply to independent schools and complies with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024. Some requirements that apply specifically to state-funded schools do not apply to South Lee.

South Lee is not required to submit daily pupil attendance data to the Department for Education through the national daily attendance data collection arrangements for state-funded schools. This does not remove the school's other attendance reporting responsibilities. South Lee keeps accurate electronic registers, provides the statutory information and returns required by the Local Authority, and follows any additional individual or local reporting arrangements that apply to its pupils.

The National Framework for Penalty Notices does not apply to independent schools. Where there are serious or persistent concerns about the attendance of a pupil of compulsory school age, the school will work with Suffolk County Council and other agencies as appropriate. The Local Authority retains its statutory powers in relation to school attendance and prosecution. The Head meets with the Local Educational Welfare at least termly to discuss attendance issues and attendance and lateness are first on the agenda in our bi-weekly Early Help meetings.

Rationale

Regular attendance and punctuality are essential if pupils are to benefit fully from the education, pastoral care and wider opportunities offered by South Lee. Good attendance supports academic progress, friendships, routines, wellbeing and safeguarding.

The school expects pupils to attend every session for which they are required, unless there is a valid reason for absence. We aim for the highest possible attendance for every pupil while recognising that illness, disability, medical needs, authorised leave and other individual circumstances must be considered fairly and sensitively.

Attendance is also a safeguarding matter. Changes in attendance, repeated lateness, unexplained absence or a pattern of absence can be an early indication that a pupil or family requires support. The school will respond promptly, proportionately and in partnership with families wherever possible.

Attendance Registration Procedures and Timings

In accordance with the Department for Education's statutory guidance, Working Together to Improve School Attendance, and the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, South Lee Prep School maintains an electronic attendance register for all registered pupils.

The attendance register is taken twice daily, at the beginning of the morning session and once during the afternoon session. To ensure consistency and statutory compliance, the school operates the following registration windows across the whole school site, including Pre Prep and Prep.

Registration Session	Registration Window
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Morning Registration	8.30am to 9.00am
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Afternoon Registration	1.35pm to 2.05pm
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Each registration window remains open for a maximum of 30 minutes. These timings apply consistently to all registered pupils across the school.

All statutory attendance registers are completed electronically using ENGAGE, the school's Management Information System (MIS). Staff are responsible for ensuring that registers are completed accurately and within the designated registration windows, using the appropriate Department for Education attendance and absence codes.

Additional Safeguarding Registration in Pre Prep

Due to the different lunchtime arrangements within Pre Prep, an additional safeguarding register is taken immediately following the children's lunch break at 13.15. This enables staff to account for all pupils promptly and ensures effective safeguarding and supervision arrangements.

This additional register is undertaken for safeguarding purposes only and does not replace the statutory afternoon attendance register.

The official afternoon attendance register for Pre Prep is completed on ENGAGE during the school's designated afternoon registration window of 1.35pm to 2.05pm, in line with the arrangements for the rest of the school.

Late Arrival and Registration Closure

Pupils arriving after registration has commenced but before the register closes will be recorded using the appropriate late attendance code (L).

Pupils arriving after the register has closed will be recorded using code U, unless another authorised or unauthorised absence code is applicable. Their arrival time must also be recorded to ensure accurate attendance and safeguarding records.

The school monitors punctuality and attendance regularly and follows up any unexplained absences promptly in accordance with its safeguarding and attendance procedures.

Promoting Good Attendance and Punctuality

The foundation of good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and pupils. South Lee will:

- set clear expectations for regular attendance and punctuality;
- make school a safe, supportive and welcoming place where pupils want to attend;
- communicate attendance expectations through Parent Briefings, the school website, reports and direct communication;
- recognise positive attendance habits and improvement sensitively and without disadvantaging pupils who have medical conditions, disabilities or other legitimate reasons for absence;
- identify emerging patterns early and work with pupils and families to understand and remove barriers to attendance;
- consider attendance alongside pastoral care, safeguarding, SEND, mental health, behaviour and academic progress.

Roles and Responsibilities

Senior Attendance Champion

The Senior Attendance Champion is Mrs Jen Arnold. She may be contacted through the School Office on 01284 754654 or at j.arnold@southlee.co.uk. The Attendance champion is supported by the Head, DSL, Deputy Heads, School Office and relevant pastoral staff.

The Senior Attendance Champion will oversee the school's attendance systems, ensure that registers are accurate, review attendance information, identify concerns promptly and coordinate support. Attendance concerns are also considered at the school's bi-weekly Early Help meetings where appropriate.

Classroom and Form Staff

- Complete registers accurately and promptly at the required time.
- Promote good attendance and punctuality in a positive and proportionate way.
- Notify the School Office promptly of any known absence, late arrival or discrepancy.
- Share concerns about a pupil's attendance, wellbeing or barriers to attendance with the Senior Attendance Champion, DSL or relevant member of SLT.
- Work with families and pastoral staff where support is required.

Pupils

- Attend school regularly and arrive on time.
- Attend registration and all lessons or activities for which they are required.
- Report to the School Office if they arrive late, leave the site during the school day or return after an appointment.

- Speak to a trusted adult if there is anything making attendance difficult.

Parents and Carers

For children of compulsory school age who are registered at school, parents have a legal responsibility to ensure regular attendance. Parents and carers are expected to:

- ensure their child attends regularly and arrives on time;
- contact the school before 8.00am on the first day of an unexpected absence, and on subsequent days if the absence continues, unless another arrangement has been agreed;
- provide a clear reason for absence and keep the school updated about the expected return date;
- avoid arranging non-urgent medical or dental appointments during the school day where reasonably possible;
- request any planned leave from the Head in advance and before making travel arrangements;
- work with the school where attendance or punctuality becomes a concern and engage with support offered.

Early Years Foundation Stage and Nursery

This is a whole school policy and it also applies to the Early Years Foundation Stage. The legal duty on parents to secure regular school attendance applies once a child is of compulsory school age. However, the school expects regular attendance from younger pupils because continuity and routine are important for learning, development, relationships and safeguarding.

For children in the registered Nursery provision, the Nursery maintains a daily record of the children being cared for, their hours of attendance and their key person in accordance with the EYFS statutory framework. Attendance is monitored against booked sessions and unexplained absence is followed up promptly. Where a Nursery child is also a registered pupil of the school, the relevant statutory admission and attendance register requirements also apply.

Recording Attendance

The school keeps its admission register and attendance register electronically. The attendance register is a legal record and is taken at the beginning of each morning session and once during the afternoon session, at the same time for all registered pupils.

The school uses the national attendance and absence codes set out in the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024. The appropriate code is recorded for every registered pupil, including pupils below compulsory school age, unless the pupil is a boarder.

Where the reason for an absence is not known when the register is taken, the school will record the appropriate unexplained absence code and update it as soon as the reason is established, normally within five working days.

Lateness and Punctuality

The school day begins at 8.30am. The morning register opens at 8.30am and closes at 8.50am. The afternoon register is taken at 1.50pm and closes at 2.10pm. The register is therefore open for the same period in each session and for less than the statutory maximum of 30 minutes.

A pupil arriving after 8.30am, but before the morning register closes will be recorded as late before the register closes..

Where a pupil arrives late because they have attended a medical or dental appointment, the appropriate authorised absence code will be used for the part of the session missed. Parents are asked to arrange routine appointments outside school hours wherever reasonably possible.

Patterns of lateness will be discussed with parents. The school will seek to understand the cause, agree practical support and monitor improvement. Repeated lateness may be considered alongside wider attendance concerns and referred to the Local Authority or other services where appropriate.

Unexpected Absence and First Day Response

Parents must contact the school before 8.00am, or as soon as reasonably possible, on the first day of absence by telephone or email and provide the reason for absence.

Where a pupil is absent and no explanation has been received, the School Office will contact the parent or carer on the first day. If contact cannot be made, the school will use the additional emergency contacts held for the pupil and will continue to make reasonable enquiries. The response will be escalated according to the pupil's vulnerability, the circumstances and any safeguarding concerns.

If absence remains unexplained, or if the school has concerns about a pupil's welfare or whereabouts, the DSL or another member of SLT will consider further action. This may include contacting relatives or other known professionals, a home visit, contacting the pupil's social worker, seeking advice from Suffolk County Council, or making a safeguarding referral or contacting the Police where there is an immediate concern for safety.

Safeguarding and Children Missing Education

A pupil who is absent from school is not automatically a child missing education. A child missing education is a child of compulsory school age who is not registered at a school and is not receiving suitable education otherwise. However, frequent, prolonged or unexplained absence can be a significant safeguarding indicator and will be treated seriously.

The school will follow Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, Suffolk County Council procedures and the statutory Children Missing Education guidance. The school will not remove a pupil from the admission register unless a lawful ground in the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 applies and the required enquiries and notifications have been completed.

Monitoring Attendance and Providing Support

Attendance is monitored regularly at individual, year group and whole school level. The school looks beyond headline percentages and considers patterns of absence, punctuality and the circumstances of individual pupils. Particular attention is given to pupils whose attendance is declining, pupils with SEND or disabilities, pupils with long-term health needs, pupils with a social worker, young carers and any other pupils who may face additional barriers to attendance.

A pupil is considered persistently absent when they miss 10% or more of possible school sessions. Severe absence is generally attendance below 50%. These thresholds are used as indicators for action and support, not as automatic triggers for punishment.

Where attendance is causing concern, the school will normally:

- speak with the pupil and parents to understand the reasons and any barriers;
- consider reasonable adjustments or pastoral, SEND, medical or wellbeing support;
- agree clear actions and review dates;
- involve the DSL, School Nurse, SENDCo, Deputy Heads or other appropriate staff;
- use the school's Early Help process where wider family support may be helpful;
- work with Suffolk County Council, health services, social care or other agencies where additional support is required;
- keep the impact of support under review and adjust the plan where necessary.

Illness, Medical Needs, SEND and Mental Health

The school recognises that some pupils experience genuine barriers to attendance arising from physical health, mental health, SEND or disability. High expectations for attendance will be maintained while support is adapted to the pupil's individual needs and reasonable adjustments are considered where required by the Equality Act 2010.

Medical evidence will not be requested routinely for ordinary short-term illness. It may be sought where absence is complex, long-term or frequently recurring and the evidence is necessary to understand the pupil's needs or to identify appropriate support.

Where the school has reasonable grounds to believe that a pupil of compulsory school age will miss 15 school days consecutively or cumulatively in the school year because of illness, the school will make the required sickness return to the Local Authority so that education and support needs can be considered.

Pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

For pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan, South Lee reports the pupil's attendance to Suffolk County Council by telephone each school day, in accordance with the reporting arrangements currently in place for the school. This daily reporting is separate from the Department for Education national daily attendance data collection for state-funded schools.

The school will also work closely with parents, the SENDCo, the Local Authority and any other relevant professionals where absence may affect the provision set out in a pupil's EHCP, or where additional support or reasonable adjustments may be needed to enable attendance.

Temporary Part-Time Timetables

A part-time timetable will only be used in very exceptional circumstances where it is in the pupil's best interests. It must be temporary, agreed with the parent, form part of a wider support or reintegration plan, include regular review dates and have a proposed end date. A part-time timetable will not be used as a behaviour management tool. Where a pupil has a social worker or an Education, Health and Care Plan, the relevant professional or Local Authority will be involved as appropriate.

Requests for Leave of Absence

Requests for planned leave must be made to the Head in advance and before travel or other arrangements are made. The Head will consider each request individually, taking account of the specific facts, the pupil's attendance, the length and timing of the proposed absence and any relevant family circumstances.

As an independent school, South Lee retains discretion in relation to leave of absence. In exercising that discretion, the school follows the principles in Department for Education attendance guidance. Leave for holidays or leisure during term time will not normally be authorised, but ultimately it is up to the Head to decide if it is authorised. The school does not operate a blanket policy that automatically grants leave for a particular event or circumstance.

If leave is granted, the Head will determine the period of authorised absence. If a pupil is absent without permission, or remains absent beyond the period authorised, the absence will be recorded using the appropriate unauthorised code and may be discussed with Suffolk County Council where there are wider attendance concerns.

Types of Absence and Attendance Codes

The school uses the statutory national attendance and absence codes. The most common categories include:

- Present at school, including present or late before the register closes.
- Attending an approved educational activity away from the school site, including an approved sporting activity, educational visit or other supervised educational activity where the relevant code conditions are met.
- Authorised absence, including illness, certain medical or dental appointments, religious observance and leave granted by the school in accordance with the regulations and this policy.
- Unauthorised absence, including unexplained absence, absence without leave, arriving after the register has closed without an authorised reason, and leave taken after permission has been refused.

An attendance code may be amended where further information is received, but the register must retain the original entry, the amended entry, the reason for the amendment, the date and the name of the person making the amendment.

Information Sharing with Suffolk County Council

South Lee will comply with the statutory information sharing requirements that apply to all schools, including independent schools. The school will provide the Local Authority with required information from its admission and attendance registers. This includes, where applicable:

- new pupil and deletion returns when a pupil is added to or removed from the admission register outside standard transition points;
- attendance returns for pupils of compulsory school age who fail to attend regularly or who have been absent for a continuous period of 10 school days where the absence is recorded using one or more of the unauthorised codes G, N, O or U;
- sickness returns for pupils of compulsory school age who are expected to miss, or have missed, 15 school days consecutively or cumulatively in the school year because of illness;
- other information from the registers that the Local Authority is lawfully entitled to request in order to carry out its education and safeguarding functions.

Independent schools are not included in the Department for Education statutory daily attendance data collection that applies to state-funded schools. However, this is separate from South Lee's local reporting arrangements. For pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan, the school reports attendance to Suffolk County Council by telephone each school day. South Lee will also cooperate with the Local Authority and other agencies where information sharing is lawful, necessary and in the pupil's interests.

Leavers

When a pupil is leaving South Lee, parents should provide the School Office with the leaving date, new home address and contact details where relevant, the name of the new school or education provision and the expected start date. This information should be provided in writing as early as possible.

Where the destination is unclear, the school will make reasonable enquiries and work with Suffolk County Council. A pupil will not be removed from the school's admission register unless one of the lawful grounds for deletion applies. Where required, the Local Authority will be notified so that any necessary Children Missing Education enquiries can be undertaken.

Approved Sporting Activity and High-Level Competition

Parents of pupils who compete at regional, county, national or international level may request permission for absence connected with an approved sporting activity or competition. The Head will consider the nature and frequency of the activity, supervision, the pupil's attendance and progress, and how learning will continue. Where the statutory conditions for an approved sporting activity are met, the appropriate attendance code will be used and the activity is not treated as an absence for statistical purposes.

Regular early departure or late arrival for coaching or training will not normally be agreed unless the arrangements are clearly in the pupil's educational interests and can be managed without unreasonable disruption to their education.

Late Collection

Parents and carers are expected to collect pupils promptly at the end of the school day or booked session. Where collection is persistently or significantly late, the school will follow its late collection and safeguarding procedures. Where available, a pupil may be placed into after-school care and the relevant charge may apply.

Record Preservation

Admission and attendance registers are legal records. In accordance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, the school will preserve every entry in the admission and attendance registers for six years from the date on which the entry was made.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if legislation, statutory guidance or local procedures change. The Senior Attendance Champion will monitor the effectiveness of the school's attendance arrangements and will report significant patterns or concerns to the Senior Leadership Team and Governors as appropriate.