Wittersham Church of England Primary School - Children With Health Needs Who Cannot Attend School Policy 2026

We strive to cooperate and work alongside all members of our community to feel valued, nurtured, and empowered as they embark upon their journey to become the very best that God intended. Throughout their voyage of discovery with us, we ensure all children are provided with a rich curriculum, and experiences that promote courage and a strong moral purpose underpinned by our Christian values; preparing them to become compassionate citizens within our rural community and the wider world

Revision History

Version	Date	By	Description
V02	October 2022	G. Hawkins	Policy update
V03	October 2023	G.Hawkins	Annual Review

V04	October 2024	Stella Coulson	Annual Review
V05	September 2025	Stella Coulson	Annual Review
V06	September 2026	Stella Coulson	Policy update - please see below
Updated for the 2026–2027 academic year to reflect current DfE statutory guidance, including arrangements for children who cannot attend school because of physical or mental health needs. Clarified the Local Authority's Section 19 duty and the 15-school-day threshold, strengthened expectations around school support, attendance, SEND, safeguarding and reintegration, and updated guidance relating to mental health and reduced timetables.			

1. Aim

Wittersham Church of England Primary School is committed to ensuring that children with physical or mental health needs continue to receive a suitable education when they are unable to attend school.

Our aims are to:

- support children to attend school wherever their health allows;
- identify barriers to attendance early and provide appropriate support;
- minimise disruption to children's education;
- ensure children remain connected with their school, class and peers;
- work effectively with parents/carers, health professionals and the Local Authority;
- ensure appropriate education is arranged where a child cannot attend because of health needs;
- support successful reintegration into school when the child is able to return; and
- ensure that pupils, parents/carers and staff understand the respective responsibilities of the school and Local Authority.

The needs and best interests of the individual child will remain central to decisions.

2. Legislation and Statutory Guidance

This policy has regard to:

- section 19 of the Education Act 1996;

- section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014;
- the Equality Act 2010;
- current pupil registration legislation;
- DfE statutory guidance, Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs;
- Working Together to Improve School Attendance, updated July 2026;
- Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions;
- Alternative Provision statutory guidance;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026;
- SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years; and
- relevant Kent County Council procedures.

The current DfE statutory guidance applies to children of compulsory school age who cannot attend school, or can attend only intermittently, because of physical or mental health needs.

This policy should be read alongside the school's:

- Attendance Policy;
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy;
- SEND Policy;
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy;
- First Aid Policy;
- Behaviour Policy;
- Equality Policy;
- Accessibility Plan; and
- Remote Education arrangements.

3. Principles

Wittersham believes that children with health needs should have access to education that is:

- suitable to their age, ability and aptitude;
- appropriate to any SEND they may have;

- flexible enough to respond to changes in their health;
- ambitious and capable of supporting good educational progress;
- sensitive to their physical and emotional well-being; and
- designed, wherever appropriate, to support their return to full-time education at school.

Physical and mental health needs will be treated with equal importance.

Each child's circumstances will be considered individually.

Children will be involved in decisions about their education and support in a manner appropriate to their age, maturity and communication needs.

4. Supporting Attendance Wherever Possible

The starting point will normally be to consider how the child can continue accessing education at Wittersham safely and successfully.

The school will work with the child and their family to understand barriers to attendance and consider appropriate support.

This may include:

- reasonable adjustments;
- adaptations to the school day;
- changes to the learning environment;
- pastoral support;
- SEND support;
- an Individual Healthcare Plan;
- adjustments to activities;
- support with medication;
- access to quieter or alternative spaces;
- support from external professionals; and
- other reasonable individual arrangements.

Where a child is disabled, the school will consider its duty to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010.

Health needs should not automatically be regarded as a reason why a child cannot attend school.

5. Responsibilities of Wittersham

Where a pupil is unable to attend school because of health needs, Wittersham will:

- identify the child's needs as early as possible;
- maintain appropriate communication with the child and family;
- consider reasonable adjustments and school-based support;
- monitor attendance carefully;
- liaise with relevant health professionals where appropriate and consent allows;
- notify and work with Kent County Council where alternative education may be required;
- provide information about the child's needs, abilities and programme of study;
- cooperate with alternative education providers;
- maintain appropriate safeguarding oversight;
- help the child remain connected with school life;
- support reintegration when the child is able to return; and
- ensure appropriate records are maintained.

Government guidance specifically identifies the school's role in notifying the LA where prolonged absence is anticipated, sharing information about the child's needs and curriculum, supporting reintegration and helping children remain connected with school life.

The SENCO will normally coordinate provision where SEND or additional educational needs are involved, working with the Headteacher, DSL, class teacher and other appropriate staff.

6. The Local Authority's Section 19 Duty

Under section 19 of the Education Act 1996, the Local Authority is responsible for arranging suitable education for children of compulsory school age who, because of illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education.

This includes children who:

- cannot attend school at all because of their health; or
- can attend school only intermittently.

The duty to arrange section 19 provision rests with the Local Authority rather than the school.

Wittersham will work cooperatively with Kent County Council to ensure that children are identified and appropriate arrangements are considered promptly.

7. The 15-School-Day Threshold

Where it becomes clear that a child is likely to be absent because of health needs for 15 school days or more, whether consecutive or cumulative during the school year, the school will liaise with the Local Authority promptly.

The school should not wait until the fifteenth day before taking action where it is already clear that the child is likely to reach this threshold.

Where a long or recurring absence is known about in advance, appropriate arrangements should begin as soon as possible.

Current DfE guidance states that the LA should arrange education as soon as it is clear that a child will be absent for 15 school days or more, whether consecutive or cumulative.

8. Medical Evidence

The school will work constructively with parents/carers and relevant professionals to understand a child's health needs.

Medical evidence may be helpful in determining:

- the impact of the child's condition;
- what the child can reasonably manage;
- appropriate adjustments;
- whether alternative provision is necessary; and
- arrangements for reintegration.

However, the school will consider all available evidence and will not unnecessarily delay appropriate support while awaiting specialist appointments.

Where further professional advice is necessary, this will be discussed with parents/carers.

9. Mental Health

Mental health needs can be a legitimate reason why a child is unable to attend school or is able to attend only intermittently.

The school will respond sensitively and individually to children experiencing mental-health difficulties.

Support may involve:

- the child's parents/carers;
- the SENCO;
- the DSL;
- pastoral staff;
- the Family Liaison Officer;
- the Local Authority;
- CAMHS;
- the child's GP;
- other health professionals; and
- other relevant services.

The school will not require a child routinely to obtain a mental-health diagnosis before support is considered.

Where there are safeguarding concerns, these will be managed under the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

10. Individual Healthcare Plans

Where appropriate, an Individual Healthcare Plan may be developed to help the school effectively support a pupil with a medical condition.

The plan may identify:

- the child's medical needs;
- medication;
- reasonable adjustments;
- emergency arrangements;
- attendance considerations;
- educational arrangements;
- relevant staff responsibilities;
- communication arrangements; and
- plans for review.

An Individual Healthcare Plan does not replace SEND provision or a child's EHC plan where these are also required.

11. Suitable Education

Where the Local Authority's section 19 duty applies, education should be suitable to the child's:

- age;
- ability;
- aptitude; and
- SEND, where applicable.

The expectation is normally for suitable full-time education.

However, where full-time education would not be in the child's best interests because of their physical or mental health, part-time education may be appropriate.

The provision should still be capable of supporting good educational progress.

The law does not prescribe a fixed number of hours that constitutes full-time education in these circumstances. For example, fewer hours of individual tuition may provide an equivalent educational experience because teaching is more concentrated.

12. Remote Education

Remote education may form part of an individually agreed programme where a child cannot physically attend school because of health needs.

It should not automatically replace attendance at school where appropriate support could enable the child to attend.

Remote education may form part of:

- short-term support;
- a flexible programme;
- alternative provision;
- reintegration arrangements; or
- provision coordinated with the Local Authority.

The DfE recognises that programmes for children with health needs may include agreed periods of remote education as part of a flexible approach.

Any remote education will be appropriately safeguarded and regularly reviewed.

13. Alternative Provision

Where alternative provision is required, the school will work with the Local Authority and other relevant professionals.

Provision may include:

- home teaching;
- hospital education;
- specialist teaching services;
- appropriately commissioned alternative provision;
- remote education as part of a wider package; or
- a combination of approaches.

The precise provision will depend upon the individual child's needs.

The school will satisfy itself that any provision it commissions directly is appropriate and meets relevant safeguarding requirements.

14. Keeping the Child Connected to Wittersham

A child who is temporarily unable to attend remains an important member of the Wittersham community.

Where appropriate and consistent with the child's health, the school will seek to maintain their connection with school.

This may include:

- regular contact with an agreed member of staff;
- information about school events;
- communication with classmates;
- opportunities to participate remotely where appropriate;
- invitations to suitable activities;
- sharing class or school news; and

- maintaining relationships with trusted adults.

The approach will be determined with the child and family and will take account of whether particular contact supports or adversely affects the child's health.

DfE advice specifically encourages schools to keep children informed about school events and clubs and help them maintain contact with other pupils.

15. Curriculum and Educational Progress

The school will provide relevant information to the Local Authority or education provider about:

- the child's curriculum;
- current attainment;
- learning needs;
- SEND;
- appropriate learning objectives;
- resources;
- assessment; and
- other relevant educational information.

The school and alternative provider should work together to minimise unnecessary gaps or duplication in learning.

Priority will be given to maintaining progress and supporting successful reintegration.

16. SEND and EHC Plans

A child with health needs may also have SEND.

The school will continue to use its best endeavours to secure appropriate SEND provision within its responsibilities.

Where the child has an EHC plan, the school will work with the Local Authority and relevant professionals to ensure that the child's needs and provision are appropriately considered.

Where a prolonged health-related absence materially affects the suitability of existing EHC provision or placement, the school will liaise with the Local Authority about whether review of the EHC plan is required.

17. Reduced or Part-Time Timetables

All pupils of compulsory school age are ordinarily entitled to full-time education.

A reduced or part-time timetable will therefore not be used as a long-term solution or simply as a means of managing behaviour or attendance.

Where a temporary reduced timetable is considered appropriate because of a child's health needs, it should:

- be in the child's best interests;
- form part of an agreed support or reintegration plan;
- have clearly defined objectives;
- have a planned timescale;
- be reviewed regularly;
- involve the parent/carer and child as appropriate; and
- aim towards increased attendance and full-time education where the child's health allows.

The school will follow current attendance guidance and Kent procedures when implementing and recording any reduced timetable.

18. Attendance Recording

Attendance will be recorded in accordance with current statutory attendance guidance and pupil-registration requirements.

The school will ensure that:

- absences are recorded accurately;
- appropriate attendance codes are used;
- authorised absence is distinguished appropriately from approved educational activity or alternative provision;
- safeguarding follow-up continues where required; and
- attendance information is shared with the Local Authority where necessary.

Working Together to Improve School Attendance was updated in July 2026 and remains statutory guidance for maintained schools and local authorities.

19. Working with Parents and Carers

Parents/carers are essential partners.

The school asks parents/carers to:

- keep the school informed about their child's health;
- provide relevant information from health professionals where available;
- communicate changes in the child's condition;
- engage with support and planning;
- help maintain communication between the child and school;
- attend relevant meetings; and
- work collaboratively towards appropriate attendance or reintegration.

The school recognises that caring for a child with significant health needs can be difficult and will approach conversations sensitively.

20. Pupil Voice

Children should be involved in decisions about their education wherever possible.

Their views will be sought about:

- barriers to attendance;
- what helps them feel safe and supported;
- communication with school;
- learning arrangements;
- contact with peers;
- reintegration;
- reasonable adjustments; and
- other matters affecting them.

The way pupil voice is gathered will be adapted according to the child's age, maturity, needs and communication preferences.

21. Working with External Organisations

Depending upon the child's needs, the school may work with:

- Kent County Council;
- relevant health-needs education services;
- NHS services;

- GPs;
- paediatricians and other specialists;
- CAMHS;
- hospital education services;
- educational psychologists;
- therapists;
- social care;
- SEND services; and
- other appropriate education or health professionals.

Information will be shared lawfully, proportionately and in accordance with safeguarding and data-protection requirements.

22. Safeguarding

Children who are absent from school because of health needs remain subject to the school's safeguarding responsibilities.

The school will remain professionally curious and recognise that prolonged or repeated absence can increase vulnerability.

Where appropriate, the school will consider:

- frequency and nature of contact;
- safeguarding arrangements within alternative provision;
- online safety;
- changes in the child's circumstances;
- concerns arising during home or remote education;
- information from other professionals; and
- whether a referral or other safeguarding action is necessary.

Safeguarding concerns will be reported immediately in accordance with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

23. Reintegration into School

Planning for reintegration should begin as early as reasonably possible rather than waiting until a child is ready to return fully.

The school will work with:

- the child;
- parents/carers;
- the Local Authority;
- health professionals;
- the alternative education provider; and
- other relevant professionals.

A reintegration plan may include:

- a phased return;
- temporary adjustments to the school day;
- reasonable adjustments;
- changes to workload;
- access to a safe or quiet space;
- pastoral support;
- SEND support;
- arrangements for medication;
- peer support;
- regular review meetings; and
- gradually increasing attendance.

The plan will be flexible and responsive to the child's health.

24. Return Following Mental-Health Difficulties, Self-Harm or Eating Disorders

Where a child has experienced significant mental-health difficulties, self-harm, an eating disorder or another condition that may affect their safety at school, reintegration will be carefully planned.

The school may seek appropriate advice from relevant health professionals to understand:

- the child's current needs;
- any risks;
- reasonable adjustments;
- emergency arrangements; and
- support required within school.

Attendance at a CAMHS appointment or receipt of formal "medical clearance" will not automatically be made a blanket condition of returning to school.

Decisions will instead be based upon an individual assessment of the child's needs and safety, drawing on appropriate professional advice where necessary.

25. Life-Limiting or Terminal Illness

Where a child has a life-limiting or terminal illness, arrangements will be compassionate, flexible and centred upon the child and family's wishes.

The school will work closely with parents/carers, the Local Authority and relevant health professionals.

Education should continue for as long as it remains appropriate and is wanted by the child and family.

If education is no longer appropriate because of the child's health or the family wishes to reduce or discontinue it, this will be discussed sensitively with relevant professionals.

The child's comfort, dignity, relationships and well-being will be paramount.

26. Complaints and Concerns

Where parents/carers have concerns about school-based support, they are encouraged to discuss these initially with the Headteacher or SENCO.

Concerns about provision arranged by the Local Authority should be raised through the relevant Local Authority procedures.

The school's Complaints Policy remains available where appropriate.

27. Roles and Responsibilities

The Governing Board will:

- oversee the school's compliance with its statutory responsibilities;
- monitor implementation of this policy; and
- ensure appropriate policies are in place.

The Headteacher will:

- oversee implementation;
- ensure appropriate referrals and liaison take place;
- ensure staff understand their responsibilities; and
- maintain appropriate oversight of provision.

The SENCO will:

- coordinate support where SEND or additional educational needs are involved;
- liaise with families, staff and professionals;
- support planning and review; and
- contribute to reintegration arrangements.

Class teachers will:

- support continuity of learning;
- provide appropriate curriculum information and resources;
- maintain appropriate contact;
- contribute to reintegration; and
- monitor educational progress.

The DSL will maintain oversight of safeguarding considerations.

28. Monitoring and Review

The Headteacher will monitor implementation of this policy.

The policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner where:

- legislation changes;
- DfE statutory guidance changes;
- Kent County Council procedures change;
- attendance guidance changes;
- SEND reforms affect the arrangements; or
- an individual case identifies a need for review.