



STARFISH AP
The Starfish Way
Attendance, Engagement & Belonging Policy
Academic Year: 2026–2027

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Policy Owner	Chloe Fox
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)	Chloe Fox – Director & Head of Provision
Applies To	All employees, volunteers, agency staff, contractors, pupils, parents/carers, commissioning schools, Local Authorities and professionals working with or on behalf of The Starfish Hub, where applicable.
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Document Purpose

This policy outlines The Starfish Hub's approach to promoting excellent attendance, meaningful engagement and a strong sense of belonging for every child attending our Alternative Provision. We recognise that many of the children referred to The Starfish Hub have experienced disrupted education, emotionally based school avoidance, exclusion, trauma, unmet additional needs or other barriers that have impacted their relationship with education.

Our approach is therefore built upon the understanding that sustainable improvements in attendance begin with positive relationships, emotional safety and meaningful engagement. This policy establishes clear expectations and procedures for promoting attendance, monitoring engagement, responding to absence and working collaboratively with parents/carers, commissioning schools, Local Authorities and partner agencies to remove barriers to learning.

The Starfish Way

At The Starfish Hub, we believe that every child deserves to feel safe, welcomed and that they belong. We understand that children are far more likely to attend consistently when they experience education as a place where they are known, valued and understood. Attendance is therefore viewed not simply as physical presence, but as the outcome of trusting relationships, emotional safety and positive engagement. Many children attending The Starfish Hub have experienced challenges that have affected their confidence in education. For this reason, we seek to create an environment where children reconnect with learning through consistency, compassion and high expectations.

The Starfish Way is built upon eight guiding principles:

- **Safety** – Every child has the right to feel physically, emotionally and psychologically safe.
- **Trust** – Consistent relationships enable children to feel secure and supported.
- **Attunement** – We seek to understand the experiences and needs that may influence attendance and engagement.
- **Regulation** – Emotional wellbeing is recognised as fundamental to successful learning.
- **Flexibility** – We adapt our practice to remove barriers whilst maintaining high expectations.

Inclusion – Every child has the right to belong and participate fully in their education.

Support – We work collaboratively with families, schools and partner agencies to help children succeed.

humanity – Every interaction is underpinned by dignity, empathy and hope.

These principles guide every aspect of our attendance practice and reinforce our belief that improving attendance begins with strengthening relationships.

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Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear and consistent approach to attendance that reflects The Starfish Hub's relational, child-centred ethos. We recognise that attendance is fundamental to children's safety, wellbeing, learning and personal development. Equally, we recognise that attendance cannot be viewed in isolation from the individual experiences of the child.

Our approach seeks to promote excellent attendance by:

- fostering a strong sense of belonging
- building trusting relationships with children and families
- identifying and removing barriers to attendance at the earliest opportunity
- working collaboratively with commissioning schools and Local Authorities

- ensuring attendance is monitored consistently and accurately
- responding promptly to concerns in a supportive and proportionate manner
- recognising attendance as an important aspect of safeguarding and promoting children's welfare.

Whilst we maintain high expectations for attendance, our response to absence is rooted in curiosity, collaboration and early intervention, recognising that sustainable improvements are achieved through partnership rather than punishment.

Attendance, Engagement & Belonging

At The Starfish Hub, attendance is about much more than being present. We believe that children are most likely to attend consistently when they feel safe, valued and connected to the adults and peers around them.

For this reason, attendance, engagement and belonging are viewed as inseparable. Children who experience positive relationships, consistent routines and meaningful opportunities for success are more likely to develop confidence in education and sustain positive patterns of attendance.

As an Alternative Provision, we recognise that many children joining The Starfish Hub have experienced barriers to attending school regularly. These barriers may include trauma, emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA), unmet special educational needs, anxiety, bullying, family circumstances, medical needs or previous negative educational experiences.

Rather than asking, "Why isn't this child attending?", we ask:

"What barriers are preventing this child from attending, and how can we work together to overcome them?"

This strengths-based approach underpins our work with children, families, commissioning schools and Local Authorities and reflects our commitment to ensuring that every child feels able to reconnect with education, develop positive relationships and experience success.

Attendance Through Relationships

At The Starfish Hub, we believe that positive attendance is built through positive relationships. Children are significantly more likely to engage with education when they feel safe, understood and genuinely connected to the adults around them.

For many of the children attending The Starfish Hub, previous educational experiences may have been characterised by anxiety, exclusion, disrupted relationships or unmet needs. Our priority is to rebuild trust and create an environment where children feel that they belong. Every member of staff plays a role in promoting attendance by creating a welcoming, consistent and nurturing environment in which children feel valued from the moment they arrive.

Attendance is therefore promoted through:

- warm and consistent welcomes
- trusted relationships with Key Adults
- predictable routines
- emotionally safe learning environments
- high expectations alongside high levels of support
- regular communication with families
- collaborative working with commissioning schools and Local Authorities
- celebrating progress and engagement through The Starfish Recognition & Growth Framework
- identifying and responding to barriers at the earliest opportunity.

We recognise that sustainable attendance is achieved through partnership, consistency and a shared commitment to helping every child experience success.

Roles and Responsibilities

Promoting excellent attendance is a shared responsibility.

The Starfish Hub works collaboratively with children, parents/carers, commissioning schools, Local Authorities and partner agencies to ensure every child can access education consistently and safely.

The Starfish Hub will:

- provide a safe, welcoming and inclusive learning environment
- promote positive attendance through trusted relationships and consistent routines

- record attendance accurately using Arbor
- monitor attendance and engagement daily
- communicate concerns promptly with parents/carers and commissioning schools or Local Authorities
- identify emerging attendance concerns at the earliest opportunity
- work collaboratively to remove barriers to attendance
- contribute to attendance reviews, safeguarding meetings and multi-agency planning where appropriate
- support reintegration following periods of absence.

Children and Young People will be supported to:

- attend regularly and punctually
- engage positively in learning
- communicate any worries or barriers affecting attendance
- work alongside trusted adults to develop strategies that support successful attendance
- contribute to discussions regarding their own attendance and engagement.

Parents and Carers are expected to:

- promote regular attendance and punctuality
- notify The Starfish Hub of any absence as soon as possible
- provide the reason for the absence and, where known, the expected date of return
- work collaboratively with The Starfish Hub, commissioning schools and other professionals where attendance concerns arise
- attend meetings and reviews where appropriate.

Information explaining how to report an absence, including contact methods and reporting procedures, is shared with all parents and carers as part of The Starfish Hub Welcome Information prior to a child starting their placement.

Commissioning Schools and Local Authorities will:

- retain responsibility for statutory attendance processes where applicable
- work collaboratively with The Starfish Hub to promote positive attendance
- coordinate transport arrangements where appropriate
- share relevant attendance and safeguarding information
- participate in attendance reviews and planning meetings
- work alongside The Starfish Hub to remove barriers preventing children from engaging successfully in education.

As an Alternative Provision, attendance is a shared responsibility. The Starfish Hub works in partnership with commissioning schools and Local Authorities to promote regular attendance and engagement whilst recognising that statutory attendance responsibilities remain with the home school.

Session Times

The Starfish Hub operates separate learning sessions for primary-aged and secondary-aged pupils to provide age-appropriate learning environments and maximise engagement.

Secondary Provision

Morning Session

9.00am – 12.00pm

Primary Provision

Afternoon Session

12.15pm – 3.15pm

Children are expected to arrive promptly so they can begin their session positively and participate fully in learning. Where patterns of lateness emerge, staff will work proactively with families, commissioning schools and Local Authorities to understand and address any underlying barriers.

Transport Arrangements

Transport arrangements are coordinated by the commissioning school or Local Authority, as appropriate to the individual placement. The Starfish Hub works closely with commissioning schools, Local Authorities, transport providers and families to ensure that transport arrangements support children to attend safely and consistently. Where transport difficulties impact attendance, these concerns will be communicated promptly to the relevant organisation so that appropriate action can be taken.

Whilst transport is arranged externally, The Starfish Hub remains committed to working collaboratively with all partners to minimise disruption to children's education and wellbeing.

Recording Attendance

Accurate attendance recording is essential to safeguarding, monitoring engagement and supporting children to achieve positive educational outcomes. Attendance at The Starfish Hub is recorded electronically using Arbor.

Registers are completed promptly at the beginning of every session and provide an accurate record of:

- attendance
- authorised absence
- unauthorised absence
- late arrival
- early collection
- participation within the session where appropriate.

Attendance information is reviewed daily and monitored over time to identify patterns, emerging concerns and opportunities for early intervention.

Attendance records may also contribute to:

- safeguarding assessments
- behaviour support planning
- multi-agency meetings
- Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) reviews
- reintegration planning
- reports shared with commissioning schools and Local Authorities.

The Starfish Hub recognises that attendance data should always be considered alongside the wider context of the child's circumstances and should never be viewed in isolation.

Reporting Absence

Parents/carers, commissioning schools or Local Authorities (as appropriate to the individual placement) are expected to notify The Starfish Hub of a child's absence as soon as possible on the day of the absence.

Where possible, information provided should include:

- the reason for the absence
- the expected date of return
- any relevant medical or welfare information.

Information explaining how to report an absence, including contact methods and procedures, is provided as part of The Starfish Hub Welcome Information issued before a child's placement begins.

Prompt communication enables The Starfish Hub to provide appropriate support, maintain safeguarding oversight and ensure that any concerns are identified at the earliest opportunity.

Unexplained Absence

Where a child does not arrive for their session and no reason for their absence has been received, The Starfish Hub will make every reasonable effort to establish the child's whereabouts.

For children attending the Secondary Session (9.00am–12.00pm), unexplained absences will be followed up with parents/carers and the commissioning school or Local Authority by 9.30am.

For children attending the Primary Session (12.15pm–3.15pm), unexplained absences will be followed up with parents/carers and the commissioning school or Local Authority by 12.45pm.

All communication and actions taken will be recorded appropriately.

Where concerns remain regarding a child's welfare or whereabouts, the matter will immediately be considered through a safeguarding lens and managed in accordance with The Starfish Hub's Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy.

Attendance as a Safeguarding Priority

The Starfish Hub recognises that attendance and safeguarding are closely linked.

Children who are absent from education are at increased risk of:

- abuse and neglect
- child criminal exploitation (CCE)
- child sexual exploitation (CSE)
- county lines activity
- radicalisation
- poor mental health
- social isolation
- missing education
- reduced educational outcomes.

For this reason, attendance concerns are never viewed solely as an educational issue. Instead, staff remain professionally curious and seek to understand whether absence may indicate that additional support or safeguarding intervention is required.

Where attendance concerns arise, staff will consider:

- previous attendance patterns
- safeguarding history
- emotional wellbeing
- changes in behaviour
- family circumstances
- transport issues
- medical needs
- special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA)
- any other barriers affecting engagement.

Attendance concerns will be discussed with the Designated Safeguarding Lead where appropriate to determine whether further safeguarding action is required.

Removing Barriers to Attendance

At The Starfish Hub, our first response to attendance concerns is always to understand the barriers affecting the child and work collaboratively to overcome them. We recognise that sustainable improvements in attendance are achieved through partnership rather than enforcement. Where attendance begins to decline, The Starfish Hub will work alongside the child, their family, the commissioning school and the Local Authority (where appropriate) to identify the underlying reasons and develop an agreed plan of support.

Support may include:

- regular communication with families
- attendance review meetings
- Team Around the Child meetings
- Early Help involvement
- adjustments to support strategies
- reviewing Behaviour Support Plans
- reviewing Risk Assessments
- graduated reintegration plans
- additional pastoral support
- liaison with external professionals.

Where appropriate, members of The Starfish Hub team may undertake home visits, in partnership with the commissioning school or Local Authority, to strengthen relationships, understand barriers to attendance and support the child's successful return to education. Home visits will always be planned, risk assessed where necessary and undertaken in accordance with The Starfish Hub's safeguarding procedures.

Persistent and Repeated Absence

Where attendance concerns persist despite supportive intervention, The Starfish Hub will continue to work collaboratively with parents/carers, commissioning schools and Local Authorities to identify further strategies that may improve attendance.

This may include:

- multi-agency meetings
- review of support plans
- safeguarding discussions
- Early Help referrals
- consideration of additional assessments
- enhanced communication with the child and family.

The Starfish Hub recognises that statutory attendance processes remain the responsibility of the commissioning school. However, we remain fully committed to contributing to attendance improvement strategies and providing relevant information to support decision-making.

The Starfish Commitment

At The Starfish Hub, we believe that attendance is built on relationships. When children feel welcomed, understood and valued, they are more likely to attend, engage and succeed. Our response to absence is therefore rooted in curiosity rather than assumption, collaboration rather than blame, and a shared commitment to helping every child reconnect with education.

We will always strive to remove barriers, strengthen relationships and work in partnership with families, schools and Local Authorities to ensure that every child has the opportunity to belong, engage and thrive.

Reintegration Following Absence

The Starfish Hub recognises that returning to education following a period of absence can be an anxious and challenging experience for many children and young people. Where a child has experienced a prolonged or repeated period of absence, we will work collaboratively with the child, parents/carers, commissioning school and Local Authority (where appropriate) to plan a successful return. Reintegration planning will always be child-centred and proportionate to the child's individual circumstances.

Support may include:

- pre-return meetings
- graduated reintegration timetables
- additional Key Adult support
- review of Behaviour Support Plans
- review of Risk Assessments
- additional regulation opportunities
- enhanced communication with families
- attendance review meetings
- multi-agency planning where appropriate.

The pace of reintegration will be determined by the child's needs whilst maintaining high aspirations for full engagement wherever possible. Children will be supported to experience a positive and successful return to learning, recognising that confidence and attendance are often rebuilt gradually.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Quality Assurance

The Starfish Hub is committed to continuously reviewing attendance practice to ensure it remains effective, responsive and reflective of the needs of our children and young people.

Attendance information is monitored regularly to identify:

- emerging attendance concerns
- patterns of absence
- persistent lateness
- safeguarding risks
- successful interventions
- barriers affecting attendance
- opportunities to improve engagement.

This information informs:

- individual support planning
- safeguarding discussions
- behaviour support planning
- Team Around the Child meetings
- Early Help planning
- staff training
- policy review
- organisational development.

Attendance information is considered alongside safeguarding, behaviour and wellbeing information to ensure that decisions are made with the fullest possible understanding of each child's circumstances.

Quality Assurance

Senior Leaders regularly review attendance procedures to ensure they remain:

- child-centred
- relational
- legally compliant
- safeguarding-focused
- effective in improving outcomes.

This includes reviewing:

- Arbor attendance records
- communication with families
- attendance interventions
- safeguarding concerns linked to attendance
- feedback from children
- feedback from parents/carers
- feedback from commissioning schools and Local Authorities.

Lessons learned from attendance practice are used to strengthen systems and improve the experiences of children attending The Starfish Hub.

Review of this Policy

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Director & Head of Provision or sooner where:

- there are changes to legislation or statutory guidance
- there are changes to Department for Education guidance
- local safeguarding arrangements are updated
- organisational changes require amendment
- monitoring identifies a need for review.

The Starfish Hub is committed to ensuring that attendance practice remains consistent with current legislation and reflects the evolving needs of the children and families we support.

Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy
- Behaviour, Relationships & Relational Practice Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Positive Handling, Physical Intervention & De-escalation Policy
- SEND & Inclusion Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct

The Starfish Commitment

At The Starfish Hub, we believe that every day matters.

Every session attended is an opportunity to build confidence, strengthen relationships and experience success. We understand that for many children, attending education consistently is not simply a matter of routine—it is the result of feeling safe, understood and valued. Our commitment is to work alongside children, families, commissioning schools and Local Authorities to remove barriers, celebrate progress and ensure that every child has the opportunity to reconnect with learning.

Attendance is not just about being present. It is about belonging. Through trusted relationships, consistent routines and a shared commitment to every child's wellbeing, we will continue to create an environment where children want to attend, feel able to engage and are supported to flourish.

Every child. Every session. Every opportunity.

Appendix A – Attendance Pathway

Step 1 – Daily Attendance

- Attendance recorded on Arbor
- Warm welcome from staff
- Key Adult check-in
- Positive recognition for engagement



Step 2 – Absence Reported

- Parent/carer, commissioning school or Local Authority notifies The Starfish Hub as soon as possible
- Reason for absence recorded
- Attendance monitored



Step 3 – Unexplained Absence

- Secondary session followed up by 9.30am
- Primary session followed up by 12.45pm
- Contact with parents/carers and commissioning school/Local Authority
- Record actions taken



Step 4 – Attendance Concerns Identified

- Review attendance patterns
- Consider safeguarding
- Speak with child and family
- Liaise with commissioning school



Step 5 – Support & Intervention

- Attendance meeting
- Home visit (where appropriate)
- Team Around the Child
- Early Help
- Behaviour Support Plan review
- Risk Assessment review
- Reintegration planning



Step 6 – Ongoing Monitoring

- Regular review of attendance
- Partnership working
- Celebrate improvements
- Continue support until attendance is secure