



Children with Health Needs Who Cannot Attend School Policy

**St Matthew's Catholic Primary School
2026–2027**

“Love, Learn and Shine Together with Jesus.”

Policy lead	Mrs Jen Evans, Deputy Headteacher
Headteacher	Mrs Claire Sime
SENDCo/Inclusion Lead	Mrs Alison Roberts-Mosaid
Approved by	Governing Body
Approval date	September 2026
Review date	September 2027, or sooner following statutory or local-authority change
Applies to	All pupils of compulsory school age who cannot attend school because of physical or mental health needs
Status	School policy informed by statutory guidance and Section 19 of the Education Act 1996

1. Purpose and principles

St Matthew's Catholic Primary School is committed to ensuring that children with physical or mental health needs continue to receive a suitable education when they cannot attend school. The child's welfare, education, voice and best interests will remain central to every decision.

This policy clarifies the school's responsibilities, Liverpool City Council's statutory responsibilities and the arrangements for identification, referral, safeguarding, review and reintegration. It applies to long-term, recurring and intermittent health-related absence, whether a child is receiving treatment at home, in hospital or elsewhere.

- Children should remain connected to their school community and experience the least possible disruption to education.
- Support will be individual, inclusive, timely and informed by the child, parents or carers, relevant professionals and the local authority.
- Physical and mental health needs will be treated with equal seriousness.
- Absence due to health needs must never be treated automatically as non-engagement, poor parenting or a disciplinary matter.
- Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns must be acted upon without delay.

2. Legal and statutory framework

This policy has regard to the following legislation and statutory guidance, as amended:

- section 19 of the Education Act 1996;
- section 175 of the Education Act 2002;
- section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014;
- the Equality Act 2010;
- the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024;
- Arranging education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs (DfE statutory guidance);
- Working together to improve school attendance (DfE statutory guidance);
- Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions (DfE statutory guidance);
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026; and
- the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years.

3. The Section 19 duty and the 15-day point

Under section 19 of the Education Act 1996, the local authority is responsible for arranging suitable education for a child of compulsory school age who, because of illness or another reason, would not otherwise receive suitable education. This duty applies whether or not the child remains on the roll of a school.

The education arranged must be suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs. It should normally be full-time unless the local authority determines that full-time education would not be in the child's best interests for reasons relating to the child's physical or mental health.

St Matthew's will seek advice from, and make an appropriate referral to, Liverpool City Council as soon as it is clear that a child may be unable to access suitable education at school and the absence is likely to reach 15 school days, whether consecutive or cumulative across the school year. The school will not wait until the fifteenth day and will not require its own resources or support options to be exhausted first.

Where the local authority's Section 19 duty is engaged, provision should begin as soon as possible. In line with statutory guidance, arrangements should normally be in place by the sixth day of absence once it is clear that the child will be away for 15 days or more. For a planned hospital admission or other planned absence, suitable provision should be arranged from the beginning of the absence where practicable.

4. Remote learning and work packs

Remote education, online lessons or work packs will not be used by the school as a substitute for suitable education arranged under Section 19, and they will not be used to delay seeking local-authority advice or making a referral.

The school will provide the local authority or commissioned education provider with curriculum information, relevant resources and assessment information so that provision is coherent with the child's learning. Where a child and family would welcome occasional optional activities to maintain connection with school, these may be offered without pressure; they do not constitute the child's alternative education programme and completion will not be treated as an attendance requirement.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 Governing Body

- ensure that the school meets its safeguarding, equality, medical-needs, SEND and attendance duties;
- approve and review this policy at least annually;
- receive assurance that referrals, provision, attendance and reintegration are monitored; and
- challenge leaders where delays or gaps in provision are identified.

5.2 Headteacher and named policy lead

- ensure that staff understand this policy and that a named leader coordinates each case;
- seek early advice from Liverpool City Council and approve Section 19 referrals;
- ensure that the school does not attempt to replace local-authority provision with remote learning;
- escalate concerns where local-authority provision is delayed, unsuitable or insufficient;
- ensure appropriate information sharing, record keeping and communication; and
- report significant issues to governors while protecting confidentiality.

5.3 SENDCo/Inclusion Lead

- identify SEND and disability-related barriers and advise on reasonable adjustments;
- liaise with the local authority SEND team and request an early or emergency EHC plan review where needed;
- ensure provision takes account of the child's needs, communication profile and outcomes; and
- support planning for reintegration.

5.4 Designated Safeguarding Lead and attendance/pastoral staff

- assess safeguarding risk and coordinate proportionate welfare contact;
- ensure unexplained absence is followed up under first-day response procedures;
- record safeguarding concerns on CPOMS and routine attendance actions on Arbor;
- liaise with Children's Social Care, health and other agencies where appropriate; and
- ensure that inability to attend because of health needs is not confused with unexplained or unauthorised absence.

5.5 Class teachers

- maintain appropriate contact with the child and family as agreed in the plan;
- share curriculum, assessment and transition information with the named provider;
- help the child remain part of the class community without placing demands on the child;
- report concerns about progress, wellbeing or reintegration to the named leader; and
- support a safe and planned return to school.

5.6 Parents, carers and pupils

- provide accurate and timely information about absence, treatment and professional involvement;
- consent to proportionate information sharing where consent is required and keep contact details current;
- engage with planning and reviews as far as possible;
- tell the school and provider promptly about changes in the child's health or capacity; and
- share the child's views, preferences and concerns.

6. Identification, early response and referral

1. Record the absence correctly and complete normal first-day response and safeguarding checks.
2. Identify a named school leader to coordinate the case and make early contact with the family.
3. Meet with the child and parents or carers, where appropriate, to understand health needs, barriers, likely duration and the child's views.
4. Gather proportionate information from health, SEND, social-care and other professionals, with appropriate consent or another lawful basis.
5. Consider reasonable adjustments and whether the child can safely access some or all education on site. A reduced timetable must follow section 12 of this policy.
6. Seek Section 19 advice from Liverpool City Council immediately where the child cannot access suitable education and absence may reach 15 days, consecutive or cumulative.
7. Submit the local-authority referral promptly with the attendance chronology, professional information, school support and risk information available at that time.
8. Continue to cooperate with the local authority and provider, monitor the child's welfare and escalate delay or concern.

7. Evidence and information sharing

Decisions will be based on the child's individual circumstances and the best available evidence. A formal diagnosis is not a prerequisite for advice, referral or consideration of provision. The school will not repeatedly request medical evidence without good reason and will not allow the absence of a particular letter or form to cause avoidable delay.

The school may seek information from the child, parents or carers, GP, consultant, mental-health practitioner, hospital education service, social worker, SEND professionals or other relevant professionals. Information will be limited to what is necessary, shared securely and processed in accordance with data-protection law and safeguarding requirements. Where consent cannot be obtained, information may still be shared where there is a lawful basis, including to protect a child from harm.

8. Suitable local-authority provision

The local authority determines and commissions Section 19 provision. The school will advocate for provision that:

- is suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude, health needs and any SEND;
- is normally full-time, unless health evidence and the child's best interests require fewer hours;
- contains direct teaching and meaningful educational activity rather than reliance on worksheets;
- offers a broad, balanced and ambitious curriculum, so far as the child's health permits;
- is safe, accessible and delivered in an appropriate location by suitably qualified and checked staff;
- includes arrangements for assessment, feedback, progress reporting and review;
- supports social connection, wellbeing and eventual reintegration; and
- is reviewed regularly, with a clear plan to increase provision when the child's health allows.

Where the child is in hospital, school will liaise with the hospital education service and Liverpool City Council. Where provision is part-time for health reasons, the reasons, intended hours, review dates and pathway towards increased education must be clearly recorded.

9. Attendance, registration and school roll

- Morning and afternoon registers will be completed accurately and the correct statutory attendance codes used.
- Health-related absence and attendance at approved alternative provision will be recorded in accordance with current registration regulations and DfE guidance.
- Routine calls, messages, decisions and attendance actions will be recorded on Arbor. CPOMS will be used for safeguarding concerns, not as the routine attendance record.
- The pupil will remain on the school roll unless a lawful ground for deletion applies. A pupil will not be removed from roll simply because of prolonged or complex health-related absence.

- The school will share attendance information promptly with Liverpool City Council and the provider and will reconcile registers where required.

10. Safeguarding, welfare and contact

A child who cannot attend school remains part of the school community and remains subject to the school's safeguarding arrangements. The DSL will consider the child's vulnerabilities, known risks, family circumstances and professional involvement. Any immediate risk of significant harm will be referred without delay through safeguarding procedures.

Welfare contact will be purposeful, proportionate and agreed wherever possible. Its frequency and method will reflect risk and the child's needs rather than a rigid daily-call requirement. Home visits will be risk assessed, completed under school procedures and recorded. A child will never be asked to attend school solely to collect or return work when health needs prevent attendance.

If the child cannot be contacted, circumstances change, or concerns increase, the DSL will review the risk and consider emergency contacts, other professionals, a welfare visit, Children's Social Care or police assistance as appropriate.

11. SEND, disability and children with additional vulnerabilities

The school will comply with the Equality Act 2010, including its duties not to discriminate and to make reasonable adjustments. The school will work with the child and family to remove avoidable barriers and will not assume that health-related absence removes the need for adjustments at school.

For a child with an EHC plan, the SENDCo will liaise promptly with Liverpool City Council. The local authority remains responsible for securing the special educational provision in the plan. An early or emergency review will be requested where health needs, placement or provision have changed significantly. Section 19 provision is not a substitute for reviewing or securing an EHC plan.

For a child who is looked after or previously looked after, the Designated Teacher will work with the Virtual School Head, social worker and carers. Where a child has a social worker or other lead professional, they will be included in planning and review as appropriate.

12. Reduced or part-time timetables

A reduced timetable is not a long-term solution and must not be used to manage behaviour, disguise exclusion, avoid Section 19 duties or place responsibility for education on parents. It may be used only in exceptional circumstances, when it is in the child's best interests and forms part of a clear plan to return to suitable full-time education.

- The arrangement must be agreed with parents or carers and, where appropriate, the child and relevant professionals.
- It must include a written rationale, risk assessment, hours, support, start and end dates and frequent review dates.
- Attendance must be coded correctly and the local authority informed where required.
- The plan must set out how education will increase as health allows.
- Where a child would otherwise be without suitable education, Section 19 advice and referral must proceed without delay.

13. Individual education, health and reintegration plan

For each child requiring longer-term or recurring support, the school will contribute to a written multi-agency plan. The plan should record:

- the child's and parents' views, desired outcomes and communication preferences;
- health needs, functional impact, reasonable adjustments and relevant risk information;
- the named school lead, local-authority officer, provider and professional contacts;
- the education to be delivered, where, by whom, for how many hours and from what date;

- curriculum priorities, assessment, SEND support and access arrangements;
- attendance and safeguarding arrangements, including missed sessions and welfare concerns;
- how the child will maintain safe links with school and peers;
- review frequency, criteria for increasing provision and escalation routes; and
- the reintegration plan, including staff preparation and support after return.

14. Maintaining belonging and reintegration

Subject to the child's wishes, health and safeguarding considerations, the school will help the child remain part of the school community through appropriate contact, invitations, celebration of achievements and safe opportunities to maintain relationships. Contact must be supportive and must not create pressure to complete school-set remote work.

Reintegration will be planned with the child, parents or carers, local authority, provider and relevant professionals. It may include a visit before return, named adult, reasonable adjustments, pastoral support, SEND support, a time-limited phased increase, staff briefing and regular reviews. The child will not be expected simply to catch up all missed work; priorities will be agreed carefully to rebuild confidence, attendance and access to learning.

15. Review, escalation and complaints

The named school leader will review each case at an interval proportionate to need and at least whenever provision, health, risk or attendance changes. Reviews will consider whether provision remains suitable, whether hours can increase and whether reintegration is possible.

If the school believes that Section 19 provision has not begun promptly, is insufficient, is unsafe or is not suitable, the Headteacher or named lead will raise this with Liverpool City Council's responsible officer and escalate through the council's education and complaints arrangements where necessary. Safeguarding concerns will be escalated through safeguarding procedures and will not wait for an educational review.

Concerns about the school's actions should first be raised with the Headteacher and may be pursued under the school's Complaints Policy. Concerns about local-authority decisions or provision should be directed to Liverpool City Council using its published complaints route. Families may also seek independent advice.

16. Records, confidentiality and monitoring

- A clear chronology of absence, contact, evidence, referrals, decisions, provision, reviews and reintegration will be retained securely.
- Information will be shared only with those who need it for education, health, safeguarding or statutory functions.
- Leaders will monitor the timeliness of referrals, the quality and amount of provision, progress, attendance, safeguarding and successful reintegration.
- Governors will receive anonymised assurance information and will review this policy annually.

17. Related school policies

- Attendance Policy
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- SEND Policy and SEN Information Report
- Equality Policy and Accessibility Plan
- Behaviour Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Complaints Policy and
- Alternative Provision procedures.

Appendix 1: Section 19 referral and case-management checklist

Area	Evidence and action
Identification	Date health-related absence began; whether absence is consecutive or cumulative; expected duration; current attendance and register codes.
Child and family voice	Child's views, parent/carer views, communication needs, wishes about contact and reintegration.
Health information	Functional impact on attendance and learning; relevant professional advice; treatment or appointments; no diagnosis required before action.
Safeguarding	DSL risk review; contact plan; vulnerabilities; social worker or other professional involvement; urgent action where needed.
SEND and equality	SEND/EHC plan status; reasonable adjustments tried or required; need for early review; accessibility and transport considerations.
School action	Named lead; chronology; meetings; adjustments; attendance support; what education the child can currently access.
Section 19 action	Date advice sought; date referral submitted; Liverpool City Council contact; confirmation of decision and start date; escalation if delayed.
Provision plan	Provider, location, hours, subjects, teaching, assessment, safeguarding, reporting and review dates.
Belonging	Agreed school contact; class links; events or activities the child can access safely; no pressure to complete remote work.
Reintegration	Health-led return plan; named adult; adjustments; phased increase if needed; progress and review measures.

Appendix 2: Key decision points

Act early. Seek local-authority advice as soon as absence may reach 15 school days, consecutive or cumulative; do not wait for day 15.

Keep education suitable. The local authority's duty is to arrange suitable education, normally full-time. Any reduced provision must reflect the child's health and be reviewed.

Do not substitute remote work. Online learning and work packs are not the school's replacement for Section 19 provision and must not delay referral.

Protect the child. Maintain proportionate welfare contact, follow safeguarding procedures and record information accurately.

Plan the return. Keep reintegration under review from the start, with the child's voice and best interests central.

Signed (Headteacher)	
Signed (Chair of Governors)	
Date approved	September 2026
Next review	September 2027