August 2026 Issue 6

Attendance Magazine

The Empty Chair

What absence really costs — and what it takes to bring every child back

THE LAUNCH OF THE NEW NATIONAL ATTENDANCE PORTAL

The UK's leading publication for attendance professionals, school leaders and everyone who believes every child deserves to be there.

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

A new term, across every nation

August is around the corner — and with it, the corridors of Scotland and Northern Ireland will be alive again, registers being called, new chapters beginning, while England and Wales prepare to follow in September as summer takes its final bow. It feels like exactly the right moment for two things we've been building towards to arrive together: the return of Attendance Magazine, now publishing every month, and the launch of something genuinely new — the National Attendance Portal. Two significant things, one extraordinary moment at the start of a new academic year. I won't pretend I'm not excited — because I really, really am.

That contrast matters. It is a reminder that the UK's attendance community is not one thing — it is four nations, hundreds of local authorities, thousands of schools, and an extraordinary community of professionals who carry this work with them wherever they go. This magazine is for all of them. Always has been.

And what a moment to be carrying it.

Because beneath the fresh-start energy of a new term, the challenges haven't changed. If anything, they've sharpened. This edition of Attendance Magazine faces them head-on — not with platitudes, but with rigour, honesty and the kind of thinking that actually moves things forward.

We are living through a decade defined by five challenges that every attendance professional knows intimately. **Mental health** — the anxiety, the school avoidance, the emotional weight that now sits at the centre of so many conversations about why children aren't coming in. **SEND** — because too many of our strategies still aren't working for all children, and that has to change. **Belonging** — the quiet, foundational question of whether every child in every school genuinely feels that this place is theirs. **Public health** — because absence is not simply a school problem; it is a societal one, and we cannot solve it by looking only inward. And **partnership** — the messy, essential, irreplaceable work of bringing families, schools and agencies together, even when it's hard. Especially when it's hard.

These are not new problems. But they are the problems of our time. And they deserve our very best thinking.

That is why this edition is built around a single, powerful idea: **The Empty Chair**. Not as a symbol of failure. As a call to action. Every empty chair has a story. A family. A reason. And somewhere behind it — a professional who hasn't given up. That professional might be you. This magazine is for you.

Inside, you will find thought leadership that challenges comfortable assumptions, case studies that turn inspiration into something you can actually use on Monday morning, and research that sharpens the way we work. You will hear voices from across the profession — from England and Scotland, from Wales and Northern Ireland — because this work is bigger than any one of us, and better for it.

And something else is launching alongside this edition. On **24 August** — chosen with deliberate care — the **National Attendance Portal** goes live. That date is not an accident. It is the precise moment when Scotland and Northern Ireland are already into their new term, and England and Wales are on the cusp of theirs. The whole UK attendance community, at its most active and most alert. We wanted to be there, ready, when it mattered most. The portal has been built for every nation — not just England. It is a home that belongs to all of us. I hope you'll explore it, make it your own, and share it far and wide.

Every child deserves to be there.

Let's make sure they are.

With warmth and determination,

Colin Cattanach
Editor, Attendance Magazine
National Attendance Portal

FREE & PREMIUM ACCESS

Everything You Need. All in One Place.

The National Attendance Portal is free — because the professionals working hardest for children shouldn't face a paywall. And for those ready to go further, membership unlocks a deeper level of support: richer resources, structured professional learning, and a community that moves with you.

Free for Everyone

- Every edition of Attendance Magazine — read it, share it, use it
- Parent Hub — clear, practical guidance families can actually use
- School Hub — strategies, frameworks and the latest policy updates
- Resource Library — a growing toolkit built for the real world
- Nationwide community — connect, collaborate and learn from peers
- News and research that keeps you sharp and ahead of the curve

Members Get More

- Full Professional Learning Hub — structured CPD that fits your day
- Training content created by practitioners who know the work
- Premium resources and ready-to-use downloadable toolkits
- Early access to new content before anyone else
- Member-only spaces for deeper discussion and shared thinking
- Priority places at events, webinars and live sessions

Join the Nation's Attendance Community

Free to join. Powerful to use. Built for everyone who believes every child deserves to be there.

START FREE TODAY EXPLORE MEMBERSHIP

www.nationalattendanceportal.uk

The National Attendance Portal

One Destination. One Community. One Mission.

For too long, the people working hardest to keep children in school have had to piece together their own answers — searching across scattered websites, inconsistent guidance, and resources that were never built with them in mind. Parents looking for help found jargon. Schools seeking strategy found confusion. Attendance professionals doing vital, often invisible work found themselves without a national home. That fragmentation has a cost — and it is children who pay it.

The National Attendance Portal exists to change that. Built from the ground up as a single, trusted platform, it brings together everything that parents, schools, attendance professionals and policymakers need — in one place, under one roof, with one clear purpose. No more searching. No more second-guessing. Just practical, authoritative support that meets you where you are and helps you move forward with confidence.

This is a platform built for everyone who plays a part in a child's attendance journey. For the parent who doesn't know where to turn. For the headteacher carrying the weight of complex cases. For the attendance officer working across dozens of families with limited time and fewer resources. For the local authority leader trying to understand what is actually working. Every voice matters here. Every role is valued. And every feature has been designed with the real world — and real children — in mind.

More than a platform, the National Attendance Portal is the beginning of a movement. A national community forming around a shared belief: that every child deserves to be in school, and that the people supporting them deserve better than the status quo. Something significant is arriving. And it is being built for all of us.

LAUNCHING 24 AUGUST 2026

UK'S MOST TRUSTED ATTENDANCE PLATFORM

The Problem We Are Solving

The Parent's Experience

A parent worried about their child's attendance searches online. One website says one thing. Another says something different. A third offers guidance written in language that feels impossible to understand. They leave more confused than when they began — without the support they desperately needed.

Perhaps they turn to the school, only to receive a letter that feels more like a warning than an offer of help. Perhaps they find a forum where other parents share their own conflicting experiences. They wonder whether their child's situation counts as a genuine reason for absence, or whether they are somehow failing. The guilt is real. The uncertainty is exhausting. And through all of it, no single, trustworthy voice cuts through to say: *here is what you need, and here is how we can help.*

For parents navigating difficult circumstances — a child with anxiety, a family going through a crisis, a young person with medical needs — the current landscape can feel actively hostile. The information exists somewhere, in theory. But finding it, understanding it, and knowing what to do next is a task that requires time, confidence, and literacy that not every family has. The system was never designed with them in mind. And they feel it.

The Professional's Experience

A school attendance leader searches through multiple websites, several trusts, a range of organisations, and various social media groups. Hours are spent looking for information that may already exist elsewhere. Time is lost. Energy is drained. And the children who need support wait longer.

An attendance officer carrying a caseload of dozens of families has no single place to turn for up-to-date guidance, template letters, legal clarity, or professional development. They piece things together — a resource shared in a WhatsApp group, a document downloaded from a trust website, advice passed down informally from a colleague who has since moved on. It works, until it doesn't. And when it doesn't, the cost is borne by the families least equipped to absorb it.

For local authority leads trying to understand what strategies are actually working, the picture is even harder to read. Data sits in silos. Good practice is rarely shared at scale. The professionals doing the most important work in this space are, in too many cases, operating without a professional home — without a community, without consistent standards, and without the recognition their role deserves. That isolation has consequences that stretch far beyond inconvenience.

These two experiences — the overwhelmed parent and the overstretched professional — are not separate problems. They are symptoms of the same systemic failure. When attendance support is fragmented, the people closest to struggling children lose time, clarity, and confidence at precisely the moment when speed and certainty matter most. Fragmentation is not merely inconvenient. It delays intervention. It erodes trust. And in the gap between a family that needs help and a system that cannot clearly offer it, children fall further behind — sometimes irreversibly so.

> Attendance support has become fragmented. The National Attendance Portal aims to change that.

Our Vision

The National Attendance Portal exists to create the UK's most trusted attendance platform. A place where parents, schools, trusts, attendance professionals, SEND leaders, pastoral teams and policymakers can access practical support, guidance and insight — all in one place.

Accessible

Not hidden behind complex navigation or buried within endless documents.

Practical

Designed for real people facing real challenges every single day.

Useful

Built to save time, improve practice and make a genuine difference.

What Will You Find at Launch?

The National Attendance Portal has been designed around the needs of those who use it. Every section, every resource, and every piece of guidance has been shaped by the professionals, parents and practitioners who know what good attendance support looks like in practice. From day one, visitors will be able to access a rich and growing collection of hubs, resources, training and inspiration.

Parent Hub

Guidance and tools for families

School Hub

Policies and best practices

Professional Learning

Training for practitioners

Resource Library

Searchable evidence and tools

Each section serves a distinct audience, but all are united by a single purpose — making it easier for every child to attend school, thrive, and build their future.

PARENT HUB

A Dedicated Space for Parents and Carers

Parents deserve information that is clear, supportive and completely free from jargon. Too often, families find themselves navigating guidance written for professionals, using terminology that is confusing and inaccessible. The Parent Hub changes that. It has been built with families in mind, offering straightforward, compassionate support on some of the most challenging aspects of school attendance.

Whether a parent is trying to understand their child's attendance record, seeking advice around anxiety and school avoidance, or navigating the complex intersection of SEND and attendance, the Parent Hub provides honest, practical guidance rooted in empathy.

The Parent Hub has been designed to feel welcoming and non-judgmental from the very first click. We know that school attendance is rarely straightforward, and that behind every absence is a story — a child struggling, a family under pressure, or a situation that needs understanding rather than blame. Parents should never feel ashamed to seek help, and the Hub reflects that belief at every turn. It is a space built on trust, where families can explore guidance at their own pace without fear of criticism or consequence.

The Hub will not stand still. It will be regularly updated with new guidance, seasonal advice tailored to key moments in the school year — such as back-to-school transitions, exam periods, and holiday times — as well as timely responses to emerging issues affecting families across the country. As the national conversation around attendance evolves, so too will the resources available here, ensuring that parents always have access to the most relevant, up-to-date support.

Plain-English Attendance Guidance

Clear, jargon-free explanations of attendance rules, what the law requires, and what schools expect — written for families, not professionals.

Anxiety & School Avoidance Support

Practical advice and compassionate resources for families whose children are struggling with anxiety, school avoidance, or emotionally-based non-attendance.

SEND and Attendance Rights

Guidance on how special educational needs and disabilities intersect with attendance, and what rights and support families are entitled to.

Penalty Notices — What to Do

Step-by-step advice for parents who have received a penalty notice, including what it means, your options, and where to turn for further help.

PARENT HUB

What Parents Will Find

The Parent Hub has been carefully designed so that every piece of content is written from a family's perspective, not a policy perspective. Whether you are visiting for the first time and are not quite sure where to begin, or returning for ongoing support as your situation develops, you will always find something useful and relevant. Every page has been written to inform, reassure and empower — because parents who feel confident and supported are better placed to help their children thrive.

Understanding Attendance

Clear explanations of attendance thresholds, expectations and how the system works in plain, accessible language.

Attendance and Anxiety

Practical guidance for families supporting children with anxiety, emotional-based school avoidance and related challenges.

SEND and Attendance

Tailored support for families of children with special educational needs and disabilities, helping them navigate the system with confidence.

Frequently Asked Questions

Honest, clear answers to the questions parents ask most — without the waffle or confusion.

Holiday and Term-Time Absence

Guidance on how to request leave during term time, what the rules actually say, and what may happen if an absence is recorded as unauthorised — including a clear-eyed look at when penalty notices can and cannot be issued.

Attendance and Mental Health

Advice on how to open a conversation with your child's school about mental health concerns, what reasonable adjustments might look like in practice, and how to advocate effectively for your child's wellbeing within the school system.

When to Seek Further Help

Signposting to specialist organisations, charities and services for families who need support that goes beyond what a school can provide — because sometimes the right next step is connecting with someone who can offer more.

The Parent Hub will continue to grow. New guidance will be added regularly, and existing content will be updated as rules, policies and circumstances change. If there is something you cannot find, or a topic you feel should be covered, we would love to hear from you — this resource exists for families, and your feedback helps shape what it becomes.

SCHOOL HUB

Designed for Schools and Trusts

The School Hub has been created to save schools time whilst improving practice. School and trust leaders, attendance officers and pastoral teams spend considerable time searching for strategies, templates and resources that meet their specific needs. The School Hub brings the most valuable of these together in one professionally curated space, reducing duplication of effort across the sector.

Whether a school is developing a new attendance strategy, looking for communication templates to use with families, or seeking an audit tool to benchmark current practice, the School Hub will become an indispensable professional resource. It is built for busy people who need practical answers quickly.

For multi-academy trusts, one of the most persistent challenges is ensuring that attendance practice is coherent and consistently high-quality across every school in the portfolio. Without a shared foundation, individual schools can drift toward very different approaches — creating inequity for pupils and making it difficult for trust leaders to identify where support is most needed. The School Hub addresses this directly by providing a shared evidence base and a suite of common frameworks that can be adopted trust-wide and then sensitively adapted at school level. This means trust attendance leads no longer need to build everything from scratch for each setting; instead, they can establish a consistent baseline and invest their energy in the areas where local context genuinely requires a tailored response.

Keeping pace with a rapidly changing policy landscape is another significant pressure for schools and trusts. Guidance from the Department for Education is updated regularly, penalty notice thresholds and processes have been subject to recent revision, and expectations around persistent absence continue to evolve in response to post-pandemic patterns of attendance. In this environment, schools need a reliable, up-to-date source they can turn to with confidence — one that translates policy changes into clear, actionable guidance rather than leaving practitioners to interpret dense official documents alone. The School Hub is committed to being that source, with content reviewed and refreshed whenever the landscape shifts.

Ready-to-Use Communication Templates

A comprehensive library of professionally written letters, emails and parent-facing resources that schools can adapt and use immediately, saving time and ensuring consistent, supportive messaging.

Attendance Audit and Self-Evaluation Tools

Structured frameworks that allow schools and trusts to benchmark current attendance practice, identify gaps, and prioritise areas for development with confidence and clarity.

Evidence-Informed Strategy Guides

In-depth guides grounded in the latest research and sector expertise, helping attendance leads and senior leaders design and implement strategies that genuinely improve outcomes.

Policy Updates and DfE Guidance Summaries

Clear, timely summaries of changes to DfE guidance, penalty notice frameworks and national expectations — so schools always know where they stand without having to wade through official documents alone.

SCHOOL HUB

What Schools Will Find

The School Hub has been built with the realities of school life firmly in mind. Attendance leads and pastoral teams are among the most stretched professionals in any school — carrying significant responsibility while juggling competing demands on their time and attention. Time is the scarcest resource in any school, and that reality has shaped every decision made in curating this library. Every item included in the Hub has been selected or created because it has genuine practical value. There is no filler here, no resources included simply to add volume. Each piece has been chosen because it addresses a real challenge that schools and trusts face, and because a busy practitioner can pick it up and use it — or adapt it for their context — without needing to do significant additional work first. That commitment to practical usefulness is the founding principle of the School Hub.

Attendance Strategies

Evidence-informed approaches that schools can adapt and implement to improve their attendance outcomes.

Templates and Tools

Ready-to-use templates, audit tools and checklists designed to support attendance practice at every level.

Communication Resources

Letters, scripts and frameworks for engaging families in positive, productive conversations about attendance.

Professional Articles

In-depth articles written by experienced practitioners, offering insight and ideas grounded in real practice.

Case Studies

Real examples from schools and trusts who have improved attendance outcomes, sharing what worked and why.

School Improvement Resources

Structured tools and frameworks to support school improvement planning with attendance at its heart.

Data Interpretation Guides

Practical guides that help schools make sense of their attendance data — identifying patterns, understanding what the numbers are telling them, and pinpointing the right pupils for timely early intervention before absence becomes entrenched.

Multi-Agency Working Resources

Frameworks and guidance for working effectively with external partners including social care, health services and local authority teams — helping schools navigate complex multi-agency processes with confidence and clarity.

Persistent Absence Deep-Dives

Focused resources specifically addressing the challenge of persistent absence, covering identification of at-risk pupils, structuring effective interventions, and building robust review processes that keep momentum and accountability in place.

Trust-Wide Implementation Guides

Resources designed specifically for multi-academy trusts looking to build coherent, consistently high-quality attendance practice across multiple schools — establishing a shared foundation while preserving space for local context and need.

The School Hub library will grow continuously as new resources are developed, as the policy landscape evolves, and as the sector's understanding of effective attendance practice deepens. We are committed to ensuring it remains a genuinely useful, up-to-date professional resource for every school and trust that uses it. If there is something you would find valuable that is not yet here — a particular type of template, a guide to a specific challenge, or a resource tailored to a context we have not yet addressed — we would very much welcome your suggestions. This library belongs to the sector, and the schools and trusts who use it are best placed to shape what it becomes.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING HUB

Training Designed by Practitioners

The Professional Learning Hub is where attendance professionals can develop their knowledge, skills and confidence in a structured, meaningful way. Unlike generic training programmes, every module within the hub has been designed by practitioners — people who understand the day-to-day reality of attendance work in schools and local authorities. The emphasis throughout is on practical improvement rather than theory alone.

Attendance leadership has become an increasingly sophisticated discipline. Professionals are now expected to navigate mental health, SEND, data analysis, family dynamics and policy change simultaneously. The Professional Learning Hub recognises that complexity and responds to it with training that is directly applicable to the work.

The Professional Learning Hub fills a genuine gap in the sector. Until now, attendance professionals have had to piece together their own development from generic safeguarding courses, informal peer networks, and occasional conferences. There has been no dedicated, structured pathway for attendance professionals to grow their expertise in a coherent, progressive way. The Hub changes that by offering a learning experience that recognises attendance leadership as a specialism in its own right — not an add-on to another role, but a discipline that deserves its own professional development infrastructure.

Modules are designed to be completed at the learner's own pace, making the Hub accessible to busy practitioners who cannot commit to fixed schedules or lengthy programmes. The training is suitable for those new to attendance work who are building their foundational knowledge, as well as experienced leaders looking to deepen their expertise and extend their thinking into more complex territory. As the profession evolves, so will the Hub — with new modules added in response to policy changes, emerging research, and the shifting demands placed on attendance professionals across all phases and contexts.

Practitioner-Designed

Every module has been created by people with direct, hands-on experience of attendance work in schools and local authorities — ensuring training reflects the realities of the job.

Practically Focused

The emphasis is firmly on skills and strategies that can be applied immediately — equipping professionals to make a difference in their setting from the moment they complete each module.

Progressively Structured

A clear learning pathway runs from foundation knowledge through to advanced leadership, allowing professionals to build their expertise systematically at whatever stage they are starting from.

Continuously Updated

Content is regularly reviewed and refreshed to reflect changes in policy, emerging research, and evolving best practice — so the training remains relevant and current at all times.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING HUB

Training Modules at a Glance

The Professional Learning Hub is built around five core modules, each representing a fundamental pillar of effective attendance practice. These modules have been sequenced deliberately — not assembled at random, but ordered so that each one builds on the thinking and skills developed in the last. Taken together, they form a complete picture of what it means to lead attendance well in a modern school or trust: from the strategic foundations of leadership, through the relational work with families, to the cultural conditions that make attendance sustainable, the targeted interventions that address the most complex cases, and the data literacy that drives intelligent decision-making. Whether professionals work through all five or focus on the areas most relevant to their current context, the modules are designed to develop rounded, confident attendance leaders.

Attendance Leadership

Parental Engagement

Belonging and Culture

Persistent Absence

Attendance Data

Each module is focused on building capability that translates directly into improved attendance outcomes for children and young people. Professionals leave with tools, strategies and confidence they can apply from the very next day.

What Each Module Includes

Attendance Leadership

Strategic planning for attendance improvement, self-evaluation frameworks, and approaches to building a whole-school culture of attendance. Learners explore how to lead change effectively, secure stakeholder buy-in, and embed attendance as a shared professional responsibility across the entire organisation.

Parental Engagement

Communication frameworks for engaging families at every stage of the attendance journey, including guidance on conducting difficult conversations with skill and compassion. The module addresses how to build genuine trust with hard-to-reach families and how to identify and respond to the practical, emotional and circumstantial barriers that prevent regular attendance.

Belonging and Culture

An exploration of the powerful link between a pupil's sense of belonging and their attendance patterns. Learners develop practical culture-building strategies for creating inclusive environments where all children feel known, valued and motivated to attend — with particular attention to those most at risk of disengagement.

Persistent Absence

A structured approach to identifying persistent absence early, designing and delivering tiered interventions, and conducting meaningful review processes. The module also equips professionals to work effectively with the most complex and entrenched cases, drawing on multi-agency collaboration and a detailed understanding of need.

Attendance Data

The skills to interpret attendance data with confidence — identifying patterns, anomalies and trends that would otherwise go unnoticed. Learners develop the ability to use data to target support precisely and to present findings clearly and persuasively to senior leaders, governors and external partners.

The Professional Learning Hub continues to grow. Further modules are currently in development, covering areas including SEND and attendance, emotionally based school avoidance, and the legal framework for attendance enforcement. The Hub will expand its offer significantly over the coming months, ensuring that professionals at every stage of their career have access to the specialist development they need.

RESOURCE LIBRARY

A Growing Collection of Practical Resources

The Resource Library is exactly what it sounds like — a comprehensive, well-organised and ever-expanding collection of resources designed to support busy attendance professionals. Every item has been selected or created with practical utility in mind. No filler. No duplication. Just high-quality materials that save time and improve practice.

The library will continue to grow over time as contributors from across the attendance community add their own materials. It is designed to become the definitive home for attendance resources in the UK — a reference point that professionals return to again and again.

- Downloadable resources and presentations
- Checklists and meeting templates
- Communication materials for families
- Attendance improvement planning tools
- Data analysis frameworks
- Audit instruments and self-evaluation tools

The Resource Library is structured to make navigation as straightforward as possible. Resources are categorised in three ways: by audience — whether materials are intended for parents and families, for schools and leadership teams, or for specialist attendance professionals; by topic — covering areas including mental health, SEND, persistent absence, data and communication; and by type — distinguishing between templates, guides, audit tools and presentations. This three-way organisation means that professionals can navigate directly to exactly what they need, without having to scroll through unrelated materials or waste time browsing.

Designed for Busy Professionals

Every resource is immediately ready to use. Each item is formatted for the real world — ready to be opened, adapted and applied on the same day it is downloaded.

Resources are clearly labelled, searchable and organised so professionals can find what they need in moments, not hours.

Every resource in the library has been reviewed before inclusion. The portal does not simply aggregate whatever happens to be available online — it curates with genuine care and professional judgement. Materials are assessed for accuracy, relevance, practical utility and appropriateness before they are made available to users. Where resources have been created specifically for the portal, they have been developed with direct input from experienced attendance practitioners, ensuring that the guidance reflects real-world conditions rather than theoretical ideals. Professionals can use resources from the library with confidence, knowing that everything they access has met a consistent quality standard.

Key Resource Categories Available at Launch

Attendance Strategy Resources

Frameworks, planning tools and evidence-based guides for developing and reviewing whole-school attendance strategies. Designed to support senior leaders and attendance leads in building coherent, sustainable approaches to improvement.

Family Communication Resources

Letters, scripts, meeting frameworks and practical guidance for engaging parents and carers at every stage of the attendance journey — from early conversations to formal processes — with skill, empathy and consistency.

Data and Analysis Tools

Templates and frameworks for collecting, interpreting and presenting attendance data to a range of audiences, including governors, senior leaders and external partners. Supports professionals to move from numbers to meaningful insight.

SEND and Inclusion Resources

Specialist materials supporting attendance professionals to work effectively with children with additional needs and their families. Covers a range of conditions, adjustments and multi-agency approaches relevant to complex attendance cases.

ATTENDANCE MAGAZINE

The Home of Attendance Magazine

The National Attendance Portal is proud to be the home of Attendance Magazine — a publication dedicated to thought leadership, case studies, research summaries and practical ideas from across the attendance profession. All current and future editions will be hosted in one location, making it simple for readers to access the full archive and stay up to date with the latest thinking.

Attendance Magazine has become a valued voice in the profession, bringing together writers and practitioners from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. By hosting the magazine within the portal, we ensure that its content reaches the widest possible audience and sits alongside the tools and resources that can help turn ideas into action.

The editorial vision of Attendance Magazine has always been clear: this is not a newsletter, and it is not a collection of updates. It is a genuine publication with genuine editorial ambition — one that takes the attendance profession seriously as a field of expertise and gives its practitioners a platform to share ideas, challenge assumptions and contribute to a growing body of knowledge. Every edition is shaped by the conviction that the people working in attendance every day have something important to say, and that the profession as a whole is strengthened when those voices are heard, debated and built upon.

One of the most significant benefits of hosting Attendance Magazine within the portal is the creation of a permanent, searchable archive. Previously, editions of the magazine were difficult to find once published — content that had taken considerable effort to produce could quickly become inaccessible, buried in inboxes or lost across disparate platforms. That changes now. Hosting everything in one place means that a practitioner looking for an article on a specific topic — whether that is persistent absence, parental engagement or attendance data — can find it in moments rather than hours. The archive will only grow more valuable over time, becoming an increasingly rich record of professional thinking and practice across the field.

What Readers Can Expect Going Forward

Regular New Editions

Published on a consistent schedule so that readers always know when to expect new content. No long gaps, no uncertainty — just reliable, high-quality editions arriving as promised.

Guest Contributors

A growing roster of writers from schools, trusts, local authorities, research institutions and beyond — bringing fresh perspectives, diverse experience and genuine expertise to every edition.

Special Focus Editions

Themed issues that go deep on a single topic, such as persistent absence, mental health, or attendance and SEND — providing sustained, substantive coverage of the issues that matter most to the profession.

Reader Submissions

An open invitation for practitioners to share their own writing, case studies and ideas with the wider community — because the best insights in attendance often come from the people doing the work every day.

What Makes the Magazine Unique

Most education publications treat attendance as one topic among many — a section in a broader journal, an occasional feature in a newsletter, or a column that appears when the news cycle demands it. Attendance Magazine is different. It is entirely dedicated to attendance, which means that every article, every case study and every research summary is directly relevant to the people reading it. There is no skimming past content that does not apply. No filtering out the pieces aimed at a different audience. Every page is written with attendance professionals in mind, and every edition is shaped around the questions, challenges and opportunities that define the work. That singular focus is what makes the magazine genuinely useful — not just interesting to read, but practically valuable in ways that broader publications cannot replicate.

Thought Leadership

Articles that challenge, provoke and inspire — written by those shaping the future of attendance improvement nationally and locally.

Case Studies

Real stories from schools, trusts and local authorities sharing honest accounts of what worked, what did not and what they learned.

Research Summaries

Accessible summaries of the latest academic and policy research, translated into practical implications for schools.

Practical Ideas

Ready-to-implement strategies, interventions and approaches that attendance professionals can apply immediately.

Every edition of Attendance Magazine is available in one location — unlimited inspiration, whenever you need it.

Editorial Standards

Written by Practitioners, for Practitioners

Every contributor to Attendance Magazine is someone who understands the work from the inside. These are not commentators writing from a distance or generalists offering observations from the outside. They are attendance officers, family support workers, headteachers, local authority leads and researchers who have spent years immersed in the same challenges that readers face every day. That proximity to practice is not incidental — it is what gives the writing its credibility, its texture and its usefulness. When a contributor describes a problem, readers recognise it. When they describe a solution, readers can picture it working in their own context.

Editorially Independent

Attendance Magazine is not a platform for any single organisation's agenda. It does not exist to promote a particular programme, product or policy position. It is a genuinely open space — one where diverse voices from across the sector can share their perspectives, challenge received wisdom and contribute to a broader conversation about what good attendance work looks like. That independence matters because it means readers can trust that what they are reading reflects genuine professional thinking, not a message that has been shaped by commercial or institutional interests. The magazine's value depends on that trust, and the editorial team works hard to protect it.

Grounded in Evidence

Where claims are made in Attendance Magazine, they are supported — by research, by data or by documented practice. Contributors are expected to show their working, and the editorial process is designed to ensure that assertions are tested rather than simply published. This does not mean that the magazine is dry or academic. It means that readers can apply what they read with confidence, knowing that the ideas they are taking back to their schools and settings have a solid foundation. In a field where practitioner time is limited and stakes are high, that standard of evidence is not a luxury — it is a responsibility.

Attendance Magazine is always looking for new voices from across the attendance community. If you have a story to tell, a lesson to share, or an idea you believe the profession needs to hear, we want to hear from you. Contributions from practitioners at every level and in every role are welcome — because the magazine is only as rich as the community it serves.

Why This Matters

The attendance profession has changed — dramatically and fundamentally. A decade ago, attendance work was narrowly focused on data monitoring and parental contact. Today, attendance leaders are expected to navigate mental health, SEND, alternative provision, family support, data analysis, policy changes, inspection frameworks and parental engagement — often simultaneously, often with limited resources, and often without the professional recognition they deserve.

Few roles in education have become more complex in such a short period of time. The skills, knowledge and emotional intelligence required of today's attendance professional are extraordinary. Yet attendance professionals often receive less support, less training and less professional visibility than colleagues in other specialist roles.

The consequences of that gap are not abstract. When attendance professionals are under-resourced, under-trained and under-recognised, it is ultimately children who pay the price. The professional who might have identified a struggling child earlier — who might have noticed the pattern behind the absences, who might have found the right intervention at the right moment, who might have built the relationship that made the difference — is less effective when they are isolated, unsupported and working without access to the knowledge and tools they need. Every child who slips through the net does so not because the people working with them did not care, but because those people were not given what they needed to succeed. That is a systemic failure with very real human consequences.

> The National Attendance Portal seeks to change that — by creating a national community, by sharing expertise, and by championing those working tirelessly to improve attendance outcomes for children and young people.

The attendance profession is at an inflection point. The combination of post-pandemic urgency, significant policy reform and growing public awareness of the attendance crisis means that there has never been a better time to invest seriously in the people doing this work. The political will is there. The evidence base is growing. The profession itself is more connected, more vocal and more determined than at any point in its history. What is needed now is the infrastructure to support that momentum — the communities, the resources and the platforms that allow attendance professionals to learn from one another, to develop their practice and to advocate for the children they serve. The National Attendance Portal is part of that investment.

From Data Monitoring to Whole-Child Support

Attendance work has shifted from tracking numbers to understanding the complex lives behind them — recognising that absence is rarely simple and almost always tells a deeper story.

From School-Level to System-Level

Attendance is now understood as a shared responsibility across education, health, social care and families — requiring collaboration and coordination that extends far beyond the school gate.

From Compliance to Culture

The most effective attendance improvement is no longer driven by enforcement alone, but by creating schools where children genuinely want to be — where they feel safe, valued and connected.

The Complexity of Modern Attendance Work

The diagram below does not represent a theoretical model or an academic framework. It represents the lived reality of attendance professionals working in schools, trusts and local authorities across the United Kingdom — every single day. These are not separate workstreams that attendance leaders can address in turn, in sequence, or in isolation. They are simultaneous, overlapping and often urgent demands that must be held together at once, often within a single conversation, a single case or a single morning. A child presenting with persistent absence might, in the same moment, require a response to mental health concerns, consideration of an unmet SEND need, liaison with a family in crisis, a check against data patterns that suggest something systemic, and a question about whether the school's approach aligns with current policy and inspection expectations. Unlike most specialist roles in education, attendance professionals rarely have the luxury of focus. They must be generalists with specialist depth — moving fluidly between domains, adjusting their lens constantly, and doing so with a quality of empathy and rigour that the complexity of the work demands.

Each of these domains requires dedicated expertise and ongoing professional development. Attendance leaders must hold all of them simultaneously whilst maintaining empathy, rigour and compassion in their daily work with children and families.

What this complexity demands — and what the sector has been slow to provide — is a fundamentally different approach to professional development. Generic training, however well-intentioned, cannot address the breadth and depth of what attendance professionals need to know. A half-day safeguarding refresher, a one-off data workshop or an annual conference session cannot build the kind of integrated, adaptive expertise that this work requires. Yet for too long, that has been the extent of what has been available. The result has been a generation of attendance professionals who have largely had to develop their knowledge through trial and error, through informal peer support, and through personal initiative — reading policy documents late in the evening, seeking out colleagues on social media, piecing together understanding from whatever fragments of guidance they could find. It is a testament to their commitment that so many have built such deep expertise in spite of the system, rather than because of it. But it is not good enough. A profession this complex, serving children this vulnerable, deserves something far better.

Specialist Knowledge

Access to deep, domain-specific expertise across all the areas attendance work encompasses — from mental health and SEND to safeguarding, policy and data — so that professionals are equipped to respond with confidence in every dimension of their role.

Peer Connection

The ability to learn from colleagues facing the same challenges across schools, trusts and local authorities — sharing what works, what doesn't, and what the system still needs to understand about the realities of attendance work on the ground.

Structured Development

A clear, progressive pathway for building expertise over time — not isolated, one-off training events, but coherent professional development that recognises where practitioners are starting from and supports them to grow in a sustained and meaningful way.

Professional Recognition

Acknowledgement that attendance leadership is a skilled, complex and vital role — deserving the same professional status, the same investment and the same visibility as other specialist education roles whose importance to children's outcomes is equally significant.

A Profession That Deserves More

Official guidance on attendance does exist, and it matters. The Department for Education has produced substantial resources — from the statutory guidance *Working Together to Improve School Attendance* to data frameworks, coding guidance and inspection materials — and these form an important foundation for the work. No attendance professional should be without them. But many practitioners will recognise an honest tension: that official guidance, however thorough, is written primarily to serve a compliance and accountability function. It is oriented around data returns, audit trails and legal duties — necessarily so, because those things are real and important. What it is less well-equipped to do is speak directly to the practitioner standing in a corridor at 8.45am, trying to support a family in crisis whilst also preparing for an afternoon safeguarding referral and a governor meeting at 4pm. The National Attendance Portal exists not to replace statutory guidance — it complements and signposts it — but to sit alongside it as something genuinely different: practical, energising and built around what professionals actually need to do their jobs well, rather than what the system requires them to document.

What Attendance Leaders Give

- Daily case management for vulnerable children
- Complex family support and safeguarding decisions
- Data analysis and strategic reporting
- Policy implementation and training delivery
- Multi-agency collaboration and coordination
- Pastoral care and emotional support

What the Portal Gives Back

- A national professional community
- Curated resources and training
- Shared expertise and case studies
- Recognition and celebration of innovation
- A platform to contribute and be heard
- Practical tools for immediate use

When we say the portal is practical, we mean that word precisely and without reservation. Every resource, every training module and every piece of guidance on the portal has been designed with a single test in mind: can a professional use this today? Not after a policy meeting. Not once it has been adapted for their context, reformatted for their trust template or approved by a senior leader. Today. The portal is built on the conviction that attendance professionals are skilled, busy and already stretched — and that what they need is not more material to file away, but tools and knowledge they can reach for and immediately put to work. That is the standard the portal holds itself to, and it is the standard by which every piece of content is evaluated before it is published.

People-First, Not Process-First

Designed around the real needs of practitioners and families — not compliance frameworks, audit requirements or data return schedules. The portal starts with the human being at the centre of every case.

Inspiring, Not Just Informing

Content that motivates and energises as well as guides. Attendance work is demanding and emotionally complex — the portal aims to remind professionals why it matters and to give them the confidence to keep going.

Immediately Usable

Every resource is ready to apply from the moment it is accessed. No bureaucratic overhead, no adaptation meetings required. Visit the portal, find what you need, and use it the same day.

The National Attendance Portal is built in recognition of everything attendance professionals bring to their schools, their communities and the children they serve.

COMMUNITY

Meet the Community

The National Attendance Portal is not about one person, one organisation or one perspective. It is about a community — a rich, diverse and growing community of professionals and families united by a shared belief that every child deserves the opportunity to attend school, to belong, and to thrive.

Every individual within that community brings valuable experience. Every voice matters. Whether you are a classroom teacher navigating the complexities of persistent absence for the first time, or an experienced trust leader developing a multi-academy attendance strategy, you have something to offer — and something to gain.

What makes this community distinctive is the breadth it encompasses. It spans every phase of education, every type of setting and every level of seniority — from the newly appointed attendance officer in their first term, still finding their footing and building their confidence, to the national expert who has spent decades shaping policy and practice and whose knowledge has touched thousands of children's lives. What unites them is not their role or their experience, but their commitment to the children they serve. That shared commitment — steady, principled and deeply felt — is the foundation on which the portal's community is being built, and it is what gives that community its distinctive character and its genuine strength.

Attendance professionals have historically worked in relative isolation. Often the only person in their school or trust with their particular combination of responsibilities, many practitioners have navigated complex caseloads, difficult conversations and significant emotional weight without colleagues who truly understand what that work involves. The portal changes that by creating the infrastructure for genuine professional connection: a place where practitioners can find colleagues who understand the work, share what they have learned, and draw strength from knowing they are part of something larger than their individual setting. Connection, at scale and with purpose, is one of the most powerful things the portal exists to provide.

Shared Learning

Access to the collective knowledge and experience of attendance professionals from across the country — resources, case studies and insights drawn from every type of setting and every phase of education.

Mutual Support

A network of colleagues who understand the pressures, the complexity and the emotional weight of the work — people who can offer perspective, encouragement and solidarity when it matters most.

Collective Voice

The opportunity to contribute to a growing body of professional knowledge and to help shape the future of attendance practice nationally — ensuring that the expertise of practitioners is heard and valued.

Who Is the Community?

The National Attendance Portal has been built for and by a wide, diverse community of professionals, families and advocates. It is not a resource designed for a single type of setting, a single phase of education or a single professional role. From the very beginning, the portal has been shaped by a simple but powerful conviction: that the knowledge and experience needed to improve attendance is already out there, distributed across thousands of schools, trusts, families and organisations across the country. The portal exists to bring that knowledge together — and to put it to work for children. Every member of this community, regardless of their role or their background, is united by a shared belief that every child deserves to be in school, safe, supported and ready to learn.

Each of these ten groups brings something distinct and irreplaceable to the community. **Teachers** bring daily classroom insight — the lived experience of relationships, routines and the subtle signals that tell you when a child is beginning to disengage. **Attendance officers** bring frontline expertise: a detailed, practical understanding of the systems, conversations and interventions that make the difference between a child returning and a child lost to the rolls. **Pastoral leaders** bring knowledge of the whole child — the family circumstances, the friendships, the anxieties and the aspirations that sit behind every register mark. **SEND professionals** bring a nuanced understanding of complex needs and the ways in which barriers to attendance can be invisible to those without specialist knowledge. **Headteachers and trust leaders** bring strategic vision: the capacity to build cultures, allocate resource and create the conditions in which attendance can genuinely improve across a setting or system. **Parents and carers** bring the family perspective — the insight that no school can replicate and without which any picture of a child's attendance will always be incomplete. **Researchers** bring evidence, rigour and the analytical tools needed to understand what works, for whom and in what circumstances. **Health professionals** bring multi-agency insight and an understanding of the medical, emotional and developmental factors that so often underlie persistent absence. And **local authority colleagues** bring system-level knowledge: an understanding of the communities, the pressures and the infrastructure within which schools are working every day.

The portal will provide opportunities for contributors from all of these groups to share ideas, resources, examples of practice and thought leadership. This is not a passive audience waiting to receive information — it is an active, contributing community, one in which every member has both something to offer and something to gain. The goal is not simply to aggregate knowledge, but to create the conditions in which that knowledge can be refined, challenged, built upon and translated into meaningful change for children. Together, this community has the knowledge, experience and passion to build something truly remarkable for attendance improvement in the UK.

Building Together

The National Attendance Portal is not simply a place to consume information — it is a place to contribute to it. From the very beginning, the portal has been designed as a two-way space: one where the community does not just benefit from what is shared, but actively shapes what the portal becomes. Every professional, parent and practitioner who engages with the portal brings something that cannot be replicated by any editorial team working alone. The collective knowledge of this community — accumulated across thousands of schools, families and organisations — is one of the most powerful resources in UK education. Building Together means putting that knowledge to work.

Share Ideas

Contributors will be able to submit articles, case studies and resources that showcase innovative practice and inspire others across the attendance community.

Share Resources

The portal grows stronger with every contribution. Resources, templates and tools shared by the community enrich the library for everyone who uses it.

Share Expertise

Thought leadership from a wide range of voices — practitioners, researchers, health professionals and policymakers — helps to shape the national conversation about attendance.

Celebrate Innovation

The portal is a place to recognise and celebrate the extraordinary work taking place in schools and trusts across the UK every single day.

The portal's editorial team will work alongside contributors to ensure that everything shared meets the standards the community deserves. Submissions will be reviewed, supported and — where appropriate — developed into fully published pieces. This is not a notice board. It is a professional platform, built to the same standard as the resources it hosts.

How to Contribute

- Submit an article or case study through the portal's contact form
- Share a resource, template or tool for inclusion in the Resource Library
- Propose a topic for the magazine or professional learning content
- Connect with the editorial team to discuss ideas

What We're Looking For

- Honest accounts of what has worked — and what hasn't
- Research-informed perspectives from across the sector
- Practical tools that save time and improve outcomes
- Voices that are not yet well represented in the national conversation

LOOKING AHEAD

Five Challenges for the Next Decade

As we look ahead, attendance leaders face five defining challenges that will shape the profession for the next decade and beyond. These challenges are interconnected, complex and cannot be solved by schools alone. But with the right support, the right community and the right resources, they can be addressed — one child, one school, one community at a time.

The National Attendance Portal has been built with these challenges in mind. Every section, every resource and every conversation hosted on the platform will contribute, in some way, to meeting them. This is not a passive resource — it is an active part of the solution.

Mental Health

Anxiety, emotional dysregulation and school-based distress are now among the most common drivers of persistent absence. Attendance professionals must be equipped to recognise, respond to and work alongside mental health services in ways that were not expected of the role a decade ago.

SEND

Children with special educational needs and disabilities are disproportionately represented in absence data, yet attendance strategies are too often designed without them in mind. Inclusive practice is not an add-on — it is a foundation.

Belonging

A child who does not feel safe, valued or connected will find reasons not to attend. Building cultures of genuine belonging requires whole-school commitment, not just pastoral intervention.

Public Health

From pandemic recovery to the ongoing impact of poverty, housing instability and health inequality, attendance is shaped by forces that extend far beyond the school gate. Persistent absence is not simply an education problem — it is a public health indicator. Children who miss school are more likely to experience poor health outcomes, social isolation and reduced life chances. The profession must engage with public health partners, local authorities and NHS services to address root causes rather than symptoms. Attendance data, when understood through a public health lens, can become an early warning system — identifying communities and cohorts in need of targeted support long before crisis point is reached.

Partnership

No single agency can solve persistent absence alone. The most effective attendance work happens when schools, families, health services and local authorities are working from the same page, with shared goals and genuine trust.

These five challenges are not new — but the urgency around them has never been greater. The National Attendance Portal has been built to support the profession in meeting each of them: with evidence, with community, and with the practical tools that make a difference in the day-to-day reality of attendance work.

Challenge One: The Mental Health Challenge

Mental Health

Challenge #1 of 5

Supporting children whose attendance is affected by anxiety and emotional wellbeing is now one of the most pressing challenges in education. Rates of anxiety, school refusal and emotionally-based school avoidance have risen sharply in recent years, and schools are on the front line of a challenge that extends far beyond their gates.

Attendance professionals must understand the distinction between school avoidance rooted in anxiety and straightforward disengagement. They must engage compassionately with families whilst also working within the expectations of policy and inspection frameworks. This requires specialist knowledge, emotional intelligence and a clear understanding of therapeutic and systemic approaches.

What the Evidence Tells Us

The scale of the challenge is significant. Research consistently shows that anxiety is now the most commonly cited reason for emotionally-based school avoidance, with many children experiencing physical symptoms — headaches, stomach aches, sleep disruption — that are real, not fabricated. These children are not choosing to miss school in any meaningful sense. They are caught between a genuine desire to attend and a physiological response that makes doing so feel impossible. Understanding this distinction is not just important for compassion — it is essential for effective intervention.

What Good Practice Looks Like

Early Identification

Recognising the early signs of anxiety-related absence before patterns become entrenched. This means looking beyond the data and listening to what children, families and teachers are saying.

Graduated Reintegration

Supporting children back into school through carefully planned, phased approaches that reduce anxiety rather than compound it. One size does not fit all.

Family Partnership

Working with families as partners, not adversaries. Parents of anxious children are often exhausted and frightened. A supportive, non-judgemental approach is more likely to result in progress than a punitive one.

Multi-Agency Working

Connecting with CAMHS, educational psychologists, GPs and social care to ensure that children with complex needs receive coordinated support rather than fragmented responses.

The National Attendance Portal will provide resources, training and community support specifically focused on the mental health challenge — helping attendance professionals to develop the knowledge and confidence they need to respond effectively, compassionately and in line with the best available evidence.

Challenge Two: The SEND Challenge

SEND

Challenge #2 of 5

Ensuring attendance strategies work for all children — including those with special educational needs and disabilities — requires a fundamental shift in how we think about attendance improvement. A one-size-fits-all approach will never serve the full range of needs that schools encounter every day.

Children with EHCPs, autism, sensory processing difficulties, and other needs often face barriers to attendance that are invisible to those unfamiliar with their diagnoses. The SEND Challenge calls on attendance professionals to develop bespoke, person-centred approaches that account for individual need, and to work in genuine partnership with families, SEND teams and external agencies to remove those barriers where possible.

Understanding the Barriers

The barriers that children with SEND face in attending school are often systemic as much as they are individual. A child with autism may find the sensory environment of a busy corridor overwhelming. A child with ADHD may struggle with the rigid structure of a school day. A child with a physical disability may face practical obstacles that have never been properly addressed. These are not failures of the child — they are failures of the system to adapt. Attendance professionals who understand this are better placed to advocate for the changes that will make a genuine difference.

What Good Practice Looks Like

Person-Centred Planning

Every child with SEND is different. Effective attendance support starts with understanding the individual — their needs, their strengths, their triggers and their aspirations — rather than applying a generic intervention.

Working with SEND Teams

Attendance professionals and SENCOs must work in genuine partnership. Shared information, joint planning and coordinated communication with families are the foundations of effective support.

Reasonable Adjustments

Schools have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils. Attendance professionals should be confident in identifying where adjustments are needed and advocating for them within their setting.

Transition Planning

Periods of transition — between year groups, key stages or schools — are particularly high-risk for children with SEND. Proactive planning and early communication can prevent absence from becoming entrenched at these critical moments.

The National Attendance Portal will provide dedicated resources and guidance for attendance professionals working with children with SEND — helping to build the specialist knowledge and collaborative practice that this challenge demands.

Challenge Three: The Belonging Challenge

Belonging

Challenge #3 of 5

Creating cultures where every child feels valued, connected and safe is not a soft aspiration — it is a strategic imperative. Research consistently shows that a strong sense of belonging is one of the most powerful predictors of positive attendance. Children who feel known, respected and genuinely included are far more likely to come to school each day.

The Belonging Challenge asks schools and trusts to go beyond attendance monitoring and to ask deeper questions about culture, relationships and identity. It requires honest reflection on whether every child — regardless of background, need or circumstance — truly feels that they belong in their school community. And it challenges leaders to build the conditions in which belonging is not an accident, but a deliberate and sustained achievement.

It is also worth noting the growing overlap between the Belonging Challenge and emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA). For many children who struggle to attend, the absence of a felt sense of belonging — of being known, accepted and safe — is a significant contributing factor. Addressing belonging is therefore not separate from addressing EBSA; in many cases, it is central to it.

Challenge Four: The Public Health Challenge

Public Health

Challenge #4 of 5

Recognising attendance as a wider societal issue — not simply a school problem — is central to the Public Health Challenge. Persistent absence is concentrated in the most disadvantaged communities. It is shaped by poverty, housing instability, domestic adversity, health inequalities and the cumulative impact of multiple deprivation. Schools cannot address these root causes alone.

A public health framing of attendance asks us to consider the social determinants of school non-attendance and to build responses that are proportionate, evidence-informed and genuinely systemic. It calls for stronger partnerships between education, health, social care and the voluntary sector — and it demands that policymakers treat attendance improvement as a multi-agency endeavour, not a narrow educational outcome.

Attendance as a Public Health Indicator

When we look at persistent absence data through a public health lens, patterns emerge that go far beyond individual behaviour. Absence clusters in communities experiencing high levels of deprivation, poor housing, food insecurity and limited access to healthcare. Children in these communities are not less motivated to learn — they are navigating circumstances that make regular attendance genuinely difficult. Recognising this is not about lowering expectations; it is about understanding what effective support actually requires.

What Good Practice Looks Like

Community-Level Analysis

Looking beyond individual pupil data to identify patterns across year groups, cohorts and communities. Where absence is concentrated, the response must be proportionate and systemic, not just individual.

Cross-Agency Collaboration

Building genuine working relationships with public health teams, NHS services, housing authorities and voluntary sector organisations. Attendance professionals who are connected to the wider system are better equipped to address root causes.

Trauma-Informed Practice

Many children with persistent absence have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). A trauma-informed approach recognises this and ensures that school responses do not inadvertently compound harm.

Advocacy and Voice

Attendance professionals are uniquely placed to advocate for the children and families they work with. Raising concerns, escalating need and ensuring that vulnerable families receive the support they are entitled to is a core part of the role.

The National Attendance Portal will support attendance professionals in developing a public health perspective on their work — providing resources, research and community connections that help to situate attendance improvement within the broader context of child and family wellbeing.

Challenge Five: The Partnership Challenge

Partnership

Challenge #5 of 5

Bringing together families, schools and agencies around a shared purpose is perhaps the most complex challenge of all — and arguably the most transformative. Attendance improvement does not happen in isolation. It is the product of relationships: between schools and families, between professionals across different organisations, and between national policy and local practice.

The Partnership Challenge calls on the entire attendance community to resist the temptation to work in silos and to build genuine, trust-based partnerships that keep the child at the centre. It requires humility, transparency and a willingness to share both successes and failures. The National Attendance Portal is itself a response to this challenge — a platform designed to make partnership easier, more visible and more impactful.

Why Partnership Is So Hard

Partnership is easy to endorse and difficult to sustain. The barriers are real: different professional cultures, competing priorities, data-sharing constraints, funding pressures and the simple reality that busy professionals do not always have time to build relationships across organisational boundaries. Add to this the frequent turnover of staff in schools and local authorities, and the challenge of maintaining consistent, trust-based partnerships becomes even more acute. Acknowledging these barriers honestly is the first step towards overcoming them.

What Good Practice Looks Like

Shared Language

Effective partnership begins with a shared understanding of the problem. When schools, health services and local authorities are using different frameworks, different data and different definitions, collaboration becomes difficult. Building a common language around attendance is foundational.

Family-Centred Approaches

The most effective partnerships place the family at the centre, rather than treating them as the subject of professional discussion. Involving families in planning, decision-making and review is not just good practice — it is more likely to result in sustained improvement.

Information Sharing

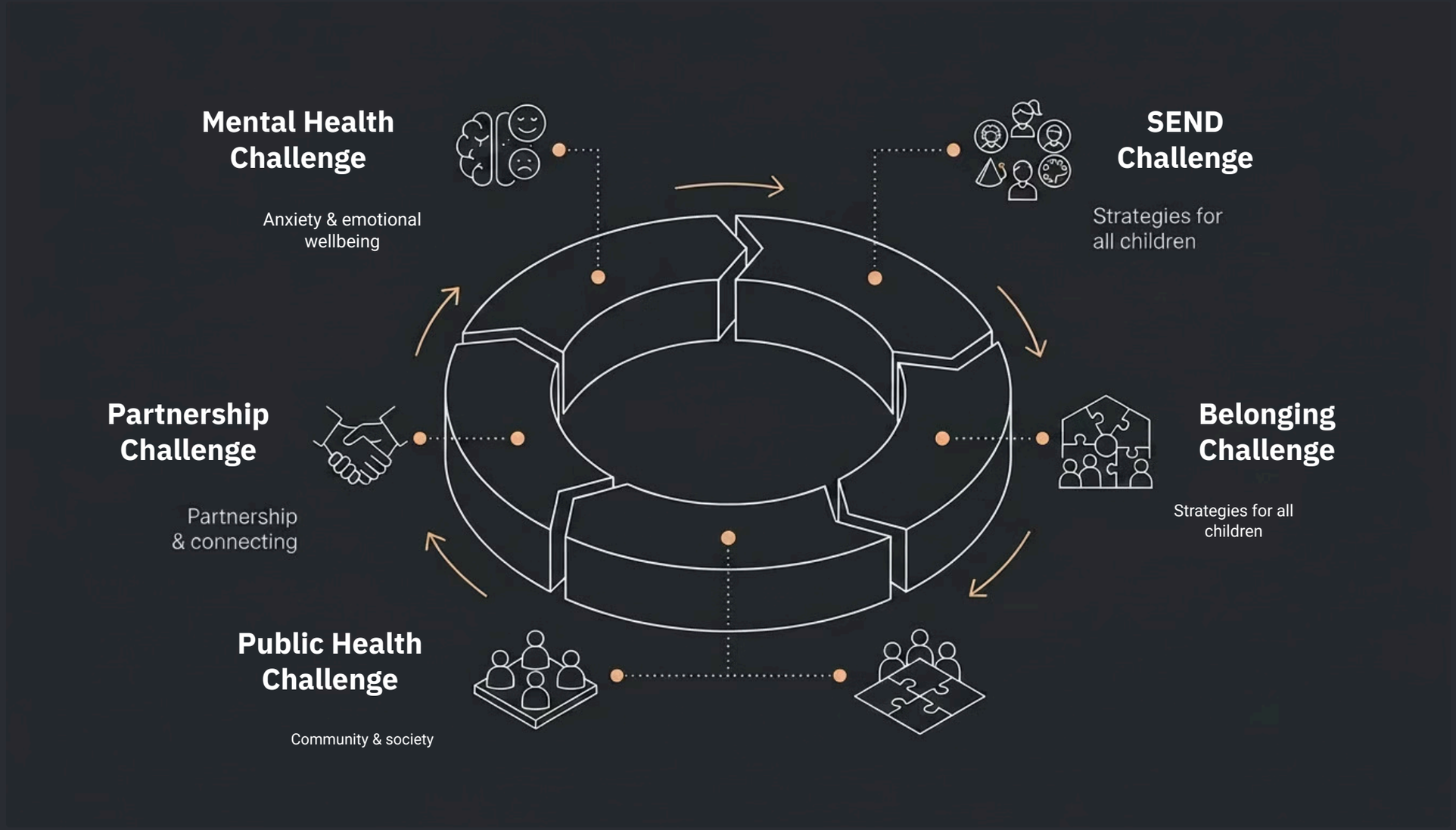
Too often, concerns about data protection prevent the sharing of information that could make a real difference to a child's life. Attendance professionals need clarity, confidence and practical support to navigate information-sharing frameworks effectively.

Sustained Commitment

Partnership is not a one-off meeting or a referral. It is an ongoing commitment to working together, reviewing progress and adapting approaches in response to what the evidence shows. The most effective multi-agency work is built on relationships that have been invested in over time.

The National Attendance Portal will provide resources, guidance and community connections specifically designed to support partnership working — helping attendance professionals to build, sustain and learn from the collaborative relationships that make the biggest difference to children.

Five Challenges, One Direction



These five challenges cannot be solved in isolation. They are interconnected, mutually reinforcing and require a whole-system response. The National Attendance Portal exists to support that response — by equipping the attendance community with the knowledge, tools and connections needed to make progress on every one of them.

LAUNCH

The Countdown Begins

Attendance has long deserved better infrastructure. The professionals working to keep children in school — navigating complex needs, fractured systems and inadequate data — have done so without a shared space built specifically for them. That changes on **24 August 2026**, when the National Attendance Portal officially goes live.

What we're launching isn't a website. It's a professional home for the attendance community — a place where knowledge is held, connections are made and the work gets easier because the right support is finally in reach. This moment matters. We've built it to last.

24 Aug

Launch Date

The National Attendance Portal goes live.

2026

The Year It Changes

A professional home for the attendance community — finally in reach.

The National Attendance Portal goes live on **24 August 2026**. Follow us to be the first to know when registration opens.

What Launches on 24 August

The Parent Hub

Clear, jargon-free guidance for families navigating attendance concerns — written from a family's perspective, not a policy one.

The School Hub

Practical resources, tools and guidance for attendance leads, pastoral teams and school leaders working to improve outcomes.

The Professional Learning Hub

Structured training modules designed by practitioners, for practitioners — building knowledge, confidence and expertise.

The Resource Library & Magazine

A comprehensive, searchable collection of resources alongside the full archive of Attendance Magazine.

Mark the Date

24 August 2026 falls at the start of the new academic year — a deliberate choice. The portal launches at the moment when attendance professionals are preparing for the year ahead, when families are thinking about the return to school, and when the conversation about attendance is at its most active. It is the right moment to begin.

Who Is This Portal For?

The National Attendance Portal has been built for everyone who has a stake in children's attendance — and that is a wider group than many people realise. It is not a portal for one profession, one phase of education or one type of user. It is a shared space, designed to serve the full range of people who care about whether children are in school, safe and ready to learn. Whether you are a parent trying to understand your rights, a teacher looking for practical tools, a trust leader building a system-wide strategy or an attendance professional seeking a community that understands your work — this portal has been built with you in mind.

Parents and Carers

Seeking clear, jargon-free advice about their child's attendance, rights and responsibilities — and finding it in one trusted place. Whether navigating a first conversation with school, understanding the rules around term-time holidays, or supporting a child who is struggling to attend, the Parent Hub is written for families, not for professionals.

Teachers and School Staff

Looking for practical strategies, templates and professional articles that can be applied directly to improve attendance in their setting.

Trust Leaders

Developing system-level attendance strategies and seeking the evidence base, tools and community connections to make them succeed.

Attendance Professionals

Searching for ideas, training, resources and a professional community that understands and values the complex work they do every day.

A Note on Inclusion

The portal has been designed with accessibility and inclusion at its core. Content is written in plain English, free from unnecessary jargon, and structured to be navigable by users with a wide range of needs and levels of familiarity with attendance policy. Whether you are visiting for the first time or returning as a regular contributor, the portal is designed to feel welcoming, useful and worth coming back to.

Free to Access

The core portal — including the Parent Hub, School Hub and Student Hub — is completely free. Because the professionals and families who need this most should never face a paywall. Attendance Magazine will always be free. Guranteed.

Premium Membership

A premium membership tier will offer additional features, including full access to the Professional Learning Hub, CPD certification and exclusive community content. Details will be announced at launch.

Who Else Will Benefit

Health Professionals

School nurses, CAMHS and community health teams looking for clear pathways and shared language around attendance support.

Local Authority Colleagues

Teams in education welfare, early help and children's services seeking resources to align practice across schools and settings.

Researchers and Policy Leads

Those exploring evidence, implementation and system design who want a window into lived practice.

Governors and Trustees

Board members seeking clarity on strategic responsibilities, oversight and what good looks like.

Typical Questions We Help Answer

For families

How do we start a constructive conversation with school about worries or barriers to attendance?

For teachers

What practical, low-burden strategies improve day-to-day attendance in the classroom?

For attendance leads

What does a graduated reintegration plan look like in practice?

For school and trust leaders

How do we build a whole-organisation attendance strategy that people can actually implement?

For multi-agency partners

How do we share information lawfully and work together without duplication?

For everyone

Where can we find clear, plain-English guidance we can share with confidence?

Getting Started

Create your free account

Set your role and interests so the portal can surface the most relevant content first.

Explore your hub

Dive into the Parent Hub or School Hub and bookmark resources you'll return to.

Join the community

Follow updates, contribute ideas and connect with others facing the same challenges.

And Anyone Who Believes...

> Every child deserves the opportunity to thrive. This portal is being built for you.

Every Child

Regardless of background, need, circumstance or challenge — every child has the right to attend, to belong and to achieve. Not just children who find school easy. Not just children whose families have navigated the system before. Every child: those facing poverty, those managing anxiety, those whose home lives are complicated, those who have slipped through the gaps. Attendance is not a privilege for the fortunate. It is a right for all, and this portal exists to help make it a reality.

Every Day

Attendance matters each day. Every lesson missed is an opportunity lost — not just academically, but socially, emotionally and developmentally. Every day present is a step forward: a connection made, a concept understood, a sense of belonging reinforced. The cumulative power of showing up cannot be overstated. This portal is built on the belief that every single day in school is worth fighting for — and that the people closest to children deserve the tools and knowledge to make that happen.

Every Future

Attendance is not an end in itself. It is the gateway to opportunity, aspiration and the future that every child deserves. The research is unambiguous: children who attend regularly are more likely to achieve, more likely to progress, and more likely to look back on their school years as a foundation rather than a gap. Behind every attendance statistic is a young person whose future is being shaped, day by day. This portal exists to keep that future in sight — for everyone who works with children, and for the children themselves.

This portal is for every parent who has lain awake worrying about their child's reluctance to go to school. It is for every teacher who has noticed a student slipping away and wondered what more they could do. It is for attendance professionals who carry the complexity of this work every day, often without the recognition they deserve. It is for trust leaders building systems that are genuinely humane. It is for local authority colleagues, school governors, health teams, social workers and multi-agency partners who understand that attendance is everyone's business. It is for policymakers and researchers who want to understand what is actually happening in schools and families across the country. And it is for advocates — people in every role and every setting — who believe, without reservation, that showing up matters: for children, for communities and for the society we are all trying to build together.

> The National Attendance Portal exists because children's futures are worth showing up for — and because no one who shares that belief should ever have to work alone.

A Final Thought

> "There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in." — Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Downstream

Supporting the children who are struggling today — with empathy and practical intervention. Reaching those already in the river, meeting them where they are, and helping them find their way back to school and to belonging.

Upstream

Tackling the barriers — structural, social and systemic — that create absence tomorrow. Understanding why children fall in, and changing the conditions so that fewer do. Knowledge, community and insight to address the root causes.

The National Attendance Portal is built to support both missions simultaneously.

Attendance Is About More Than Presence

Opportunity

Every day in school opens a door. Every absence closes one.

Future

Ultimately, attendance is about what every child can become when given the chance.

Belonging

The feeling of being known, valued and connected to a community.

Connection

Relationships with peers, teachers and the wider world that shape who children become.

Hope

The belief that tomorrow can be better, and that school is part of how we get there.

The Portal at a Glance

5

Core Hubs

Parent Hub, School Hub, Student Hub, Professional services, Attendance Magazine — all in one place.

1

Trusted Platform

One destination replacing hours of fragmented searching across multiple websites, organisations and resources.

10+

Audience Types

Built for parents, teachers, attendance officers, trust leaders, SEND professionals and many more.

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Growing Resources

The library, magazine and community will continue to grow with every contribution from the attendance community.

From Fragmentation to Unity

Before

Fragmented search across many websites and organisations

After

One trusted portal with all resources in one place

The shift from a fragmented landscape to a single, trusted national portal is not just a convenience — it is a transformation in how the attendance community works, learns and grows together. Time saved searching is time invested in children. Energy redirected from frustration to action. That is the change the National Attendance Portal is here to deliver.

Championing the Attendance Profession

One of the most important things the National Attendance Portal will do is simply this: make the attendance profession more visible. The extraordinary skill, compassion and dedication of attendance professionals across the UK deserves to be recognised, celebrated and shared. The portal will be a platform through which that recognition can grow.

By hosting thought leadership, case studies, professional learning and community conversations, the portal will elevate the status of attendance work and ensure that those who dedicate their careers to improving outcomes for children are given the professional platform they deserve. This is a community that has too often worked in the background. The National Attendance Portal brings it to the foreground — proudly and permanently.

A Public Platform for the Profession

The portal will give attendance professionals a visible, respected space to share their expertise, publish their thinking and have their voices heard. Practitioners who have long worked quietly behind the scenes will be able to contribute to a national conversation — and be recognised for doing so. Expertise that was previously invisible will become a shared professional resource.

Connecting Isolated Practitioners

Many attendance professionals work alone or in small teams, without easy access to peers who understand the nuances of their role. The portal will change that — creating a genuine national community where practitioners can connect, share challenges and learn from one another. No one in this profession should feel isolated, and the portal is designed to ensure they do not.

Surfacing the Complexity of the Work

Attendance work demands a rare combination of legal knowledge, safeguarding awareness, relational skill and persistent compassion. The portal will make that complexity visible — through case studies, professional learning and the authentic voices of practitioners themselves. Helping the wider education sector understand what this work truly involves is a crucial step towards the recognition it deserves.

Advocating for Greater Recognition

The portal will play a role in shaping how attendance work is understood at a sector and policy level. By amplifying the evidence, the stories and the impact of the profession, it will make the case that attendance professionals are not peripheral to education — they are essential to it. Greater recognition at every level, from senior leadership to national policy, begins with making the profession impossible to overlook.

Championing the attendance profession is not a secondary ambition of the National Attendance Portal — it is central to its purpose. When attendance professionals are valued, supported and connected, they are better equipped to do the work that matters most: keeping children in school, engaged in learning and on the path to a fulfilling future. Investing in the profession is, ultimately, investing in children.

What Makes This Portal Different

Built by Practitioners

Not developed in isolation from the profession it serves. Every section has been shaped by the knowledge and experience of those who do this work every day — people who understand not just the theory of attendance, but the reality of it. The result is a resource that speaks directly to the challenges practitioners face, in the language they actually use.

Free from Jargon

Accessible to parents and professionals alike. Plain language throughout, without compromising depth or quality of content. Whether a family is trying to understand their child's attendance record or a senior leader is reviewing statutory guidance, they will find what they need here — clearly explained, honestly presented and easy to act on.

Community-Powered

The portal grows stronger with every contributor. It is a living, evolving platform shaped by the people who use it. As practitioners share their thinking, their case studies and their hard-won insights, the whole community benefits — and the collective knowledge of the profession becomes something far greater than any single individual or organisation could build alone.

Action-Oriented

Everything on the portal is designed to lead to action — better conversations, stronger practice, improved outcomes for children. There is no content here simply for the sake of it. Every resource, every article and every tool has been chosen or created because it helps someone do something better: have a difficult conversation more confidently, understand a complex regulation more clearly, or support a family more effectively.

Truly National

Designed to serve the whole of the UK — schools, trusts, local authorities and families across every region and context. The portal does not speak only to those in well-resourced settings or familiar urban contexts. It recognises the diversity of the education landscape and is built to be relevant whether you are working in a rural primary school, a large multi-academy trust or a local authority in any corner of the country.

What makes the National Attendance Portal genuinely different is not any single feature — it is the sum of everything it represents. For the first time, attendance professionals, families and school leaders have a dedicated national home: a place built with them, for them, and sustained by them. This is not simply a website. It is the beginning of a movement — one that takes the quiet, essential work of improving children's attendance and gives it the visibility, the infrastructure and the shared sense of purpose it has always deserved.

GET INVOLVED

How to Be Part of This

The National Attendance Portal is only as strong as the community behind it. No single organisation or individual can hold all the knowledge, experience and insight that this work demands — but together, practitioners, families, researchers and leaders across the country can build something genuinely powerful. Whether you have five minutes or five hours to give, whether you are an individual practitioner or a large organisation, there is a meaningful way for you to be part of what this becomes. The more people who engage, contribute and share, the more useful the portal becomes for everyone.

For Individuals

- Follow the portal's channels to receive the launch announcement first — and stay connected as new resources, tools and conversations are added after launch.
- Share this document with colleagues who would benefit from the platform — a single conversation could introduce the portal to someone who genuinely needs it.
- Consider becoming a contributor — sharing resources, articles or case studies — because your experience and knowledge have real value to the practitioners and families who will use this space.
- Engage with the community as it grows and develops after launch — your feedback, questions and ideas will help shape what the portal becomes over time.

For Organisations

- Explore partnership and collaboration opportunities with the portal team — there are meaningful ways to work together that benefit your organisation and the wider community.
- Encourage your staff to access training through the Professional Learning Hub — and consider how your organisation's expertise might contribute to what is offered there.
- Share the portal with the families and communities you serve — making it easier for them to access clear, honest information about attendance.
- Contribute resources, research and expertise to the growing library — helping to ensure the portal reflects the full breadth of experience and knowledge across the sector.

ⓘ The portal is stronger when more voices contribute. We welcome practitioners, researchers, health professionals, families and policymakers to engage with and shape what it becomes.

Ways to Get Involved

Not everyone can contribute in the same way — and that is exactly as it should be. The portal is designed to welcome involvement at every level, from simply staying informed to building a formal partnership. Here are three ways to find your place in this community.

Follow & Share

Stay connected by following the portal's channels and sharing news of the launch with your network. Spreading the word is one of the simplest and most powerful contributions you can make — every new person who discovers the portal strengthens the community it is building.

Contribute

Share your resources, articles, case studies or practical insights with the portal's growing library. Whether you have something ready to share now or an idea you would like to develop, your professional knowledge and lived experience are exactly what this platform is built on.

Partner

Organisations looking to work more formally with the portal are warmly encouraged to reach out and explore what collaboration might look like. From co-developing resources to supporting the Professional Learning Hub, formal partnerships help give the portal the depth and reach it needs to serve the whole country.

A Message to the Community

You have arrived here by different routes. Some of you have been working in attendance for years and are looking for a place where that experience is recognised and shared. Some of you are newer to this work, trying to find your footing. Some of you are parents, navigating a system that can feel overwhelming. Some of you are researchers, policymakers, health professionals — people who understand that attendance is not a simple problem and does not have a simple solution. What unites everyone reading this is a belief that children's presence in school matters, and that the people around them — in whatever role — have a genuine part to play in making that possible.

> Whether you are a parent seeking advice, a teacher looking for practical resources, a trust leader developing strategy, an attendance professional searching for ideas, or simply someone who believes every child deserves the opportunity to thrive — this portal is being built for you.

You Are Welcome Here

The National Attendance Portal is open to everyone with a stake in improving attendance outcomes for children and young people across the UK. There is no membership requirement, no professional threshold to cross, and no hierarchy that places one role above another. A parent advocating for their child belongs here as much as a senior leader developing whole-school strategy. The portal has been built on the understanding that the work of improving attendance happens at every level — and that every level deserves a place at the table.

Your Voice Matters

This community is shaped by the people within it. Your experience, your ideas and your expertise have a home here. The portal does not exist to tell practitioners and families what to think — it exists because practitioners and families already carry knowledge that the wider sector urgently needs to hear. When you share a resource, ask a question, contribute a case study or simply offer a perspective shaped by your own experience, you are not adding a minor detail. You are helping to build something that works better for everyone who comes after you.

Together We Are Stronger

No single organisation, professional or approach holds all the answers. But together, this community holds something remarkable. When a practitioner in one part of the country shares what has worked for them, it reaches a colleague elsewhere who needed exactly that insight. When a family's experience is heard and taken seriously, it changes the way professionals understand the barriers they are working to address. The collective knowledge of a genuinely diverse community — different roles, different contexts, different perspectives — is one of the most powerful resources this portal can offer. That knowledge only becomes available when people choose to share it.

Thank you for being here — and for the work you do, in whatever form that takes. Improving attendance for children and young people is not straightforward work. It asks a great deal of the people committed to it. This portal exists because those people deserve better support, better connection and better access to the knowledge that is already out there. What this community becomes will depend on the people within it — and there is every reason to believe it will become something genuinely worth being part of.

Launching Soon

The Future of Attendance Support Is Almost Here.

The National Attendance Portal. One destination. One community. One mission.

EVERY CHILD EVERY DAY EVERY FUTURE