



Understanding Attendance Data & Bandings

From numbers to action

SEEING PATTERNS

ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS

ACTING EARLIER

Why Attendance Data Matters

Attendance data is not about accountability spreadsheets or hitting arbitrary targets. It is fundamentally about understanding pupils' lived experience and the barriers they face each day.

When we engage with data meaningfully, it reveals critical insights that transform our approach to pastoral care and intervention.

Data tells us:

- Who is drifting away from consistent attendance
- Who is stuck in patterns of absence
- Who is improving and what's working

Good data use leads to:

- Earlier intervention before problems escalate
- Better conversations with families
- Fairer decisions based on evidence

 Data doesn't improve attendance. Adults using data well do.

What Attendance Data Is NOT

Before we explore what effective data use looks like, let's strip away some persistent myths that undermine meaningful practice.

Not about league tables

Your attendance data exists to help pupils, not to compare you with other schools in ways that lack context or nuance.

Not about averages alone

A single percentage figure masks the individual stories and patterns that require your attention and action.

Not about naming and shaming

Data should inform support strategies, not create cultures of blame for staff, pupils, or families.

Not about retrospective explanations

Looking backwards to justify what happened is far less valuable than looking forwards to prevent it happening again.

Attendance data is about timely insight, not hindsight. It should drive proactive responses, not reactive justifications.

The Problem with Averages



School attendance averages hide more than they reveal. A seemingly acceptable figure can mask urgent safeguarding concerns and severe absence patterns.

Consider this example:

- School average: 92%
- Sounds reasonable on the surface
- But could include a small group at 50–70%
- Masked severe absence across multiple pupils
- Hidden safeguarding risk requiring immediate response

Always ask: Who is missing from the average?



Introducing Attendance Bandings

Bandings help us see risk clearly and consistently across the school community. They provide a shared language for understanding need and prioritising support.

Green: Secure Attendance

Pupils attending consistently with minimal concern. Focus: maintaining engagement and celebrating success.

Amber: Emerging Concern

Early signs of drift or pattern development. Focus: light-touch intervention to prevent escalation.

Red: Persistent Absence

Below 90% attendance requiring targeted support. Focus: structured intervention and regular review.

Dark Red: Severe Absence

Below 50% attendance with significant safeguarding implications. Focus: multi-agency response and intensive support.

❏ Bandings are not labels — they are signals for action. They help us respond proportionately and consistently.

Why Bandings Matter



Spot drift early

Bandings reveal patterns before they become entrenched, allowing us to intervene when change is still relatively straightforward to achieve.



Prioritise workload

With finite time and resources, bandings help us direct our efforts where they will have the greatest impact on pupil outcomes.



Target support fairly

Consistent criteria ensure we respond to need rather than noise, avoiding the trap of helping only those who shout loudest.



Avoid last-minute panic

Clear thresholds prevent us from reaching crisis point before taking action, reducing stress for everyone involved.

Bandings move us from "Why didn't we notice sooner?" to "We acted early — and that mattered."

Persistent vs Severe Absence

Clarity about definitions matters because it shapes our response and ensures appropriate escalation.



Persistent Absence

Below 90% attendance

Equivalent to missing approximately one day per fortnight across the year. Requires structured monitoring and intervention.



Severe Absence

Below 50% attendance

Missing more days than attending. Significant safeguarding concern requiring immediate multi-agency response.



Key insight:

Most severe absence starts as persistent absence. The trajectory from emerging concern to crisis is often predictable and preventable.

Early action prevents entrenchment. The longer patterns persist, the harder they become to shift.

Patterns Matter More Than Percentages

The story behind the numbers is often more revealing than the figure itself. Look beyond the percentage to understand what's really happening.



Mondays and Fridays

Consistent absence on specific days suggests difficulty with routine re-establishment or weekend impacts.



Specific lessons or subjects

Absence during particular sessions may indicate academic struggle, peer difficulties, or teacher relationship issues.



Post-holiday dips

Difficulty returning after breaks can signal anxiety, family circumstances, or school-based concerns.



Medical patterns without evidence

Repeated illness claims without supporting documentation may mask other underlying issues requiring exploration.



Gradual decline

Slow deterioration is often missed but indicates growing disengagement that needs early attention.



Reflection prompt: What pattern is this attendance telling us? What might be happening in this young person's life?

Cohort Analysis

This Is Where Impact Lives

Individual pupil data matters, but cohort analysis reveals systemic issues requiring strategic responses rather than individual fixes.

Ask better questions:

- Pupil Premium vs non-PP

Are disadvantaged pupils experiencing additional barriers? What extra support might address this?

- SEND vs non-SEND

Are we making appropriate adjustments? Do our systems inadvertently create barriers?

- Year groups

Which year groups struggle most? What changes at transition points?

- Transitions (Y6–7, KS4–5)

How do pupils cope with change? What preparation and support do they need?

- New joiners and movers

How quickly do new pupils settle? What induction processes support attendance?



Cohort gaps tell you where strategy, not sympathy, is needed. They reveal where whole-school approaches must change.



Attendance & SEND

Data with Care

Important balance:

SEND pupils often experience lower attendance and face more complex barriers to consistent school attendance. This is a reality we must acknowledge.

However, we must resist the dangerous assumption that SEND automatically equals absence by default. Low expectations worsen outcomes and become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Data should drive:

- Better adjustments that remove barriers rather than lower expectations
- Earlier support when patterns begin to emerge
- Clear accountability for making reasonable adjustments effective
- Honest conversations about what's possible with appropriate support

❏ Every SEND pupil deserves the same ambition for their attendance as their peers. The question is: what must we do differently to make that possible?

Using Your MIS Effectively

Your Management Information System should work for you, not create additional workload. If you're fighting your system, that's the problem — not you.

Who moved bands this week?

Real-time monitoring of pupils crossing thresholds allows immediate response.

Who is drifting, not yet critical?

Early identification of emerging patterns prevents escalation to persistent absence.

Which interventions are working?

Evidence-based evaluation ensures we invest time in strategies that actually improve attendance.

Where are we spending time with no impact?

Honest appraisal of ineffective activity frees capacity for more productive work.

Your MIS should answer these questions easily through reports, dashboards, or alerts. If it can't, consider how you might configure it differently or whether training would help unlock its functionality.

From Data to Action

Every banding requires a different response. Clear thresholds prevent both under-intervention and wasted effort on inappropriate support.



Green: Secure Attendance

How do we protect this? Celebrate success, maintain engagement, notice early if patterns begin to slip.



Amber: Emerging Concern

What light-touch action prevents escalation? Brief conversation, quick check-in, remove small barriers before they grow.



Red: Persistent Absence

What targeted support is in place? Structured intervention plan, regular review, clear expectations and support offer.



Severe Absence

What multi-agency response is active? Safeguarding protocols, external services, intensive family support, statutory intervention if needed.

No data point should exist without a response. If you're tracking it, you must be prepared to act on it.

Avoiding Common Data Traps

Waiting too long to act

The data was clear weeks ago, but we hoped it would improve by itself. It rarely does. Early intervention is almost always more effective and less intensive.

Over-intervening too early

Deploying intensive support for minor dips wastes resources and can damage relationships. Match intervention intensity to need.

Doing everything for everyone

Attempting to support all pupils equally means insufficient support for those who need it most. Differentiate your response.

Confusing activity with impact

Lots of meetings and paperwork can create the illusion of progress while attendance continues to decline. Focus on outcomes.

📌 More meetings ≠ better attendance. What matters is whether your actions are actually changing behaviour and removing barriers.

Measuring Impact Properly

Impact is NOT:

- Letters sent to families
- Meetings held with parents
- Attendance plans written
- Hours spent in case conferences
- Number of interventions running

These are *activities* — they may or may not lead to better outcomes.

Impact IS:

- Movement between bands (especially amber to green)
- Sustained improvement over time
- Reduced severity of absence patterns
- Improved routines and family engagement
- Pupils successfully back in education

These are **outcomes** — measurable changes that improve pupils' lives.

Honest evaluation requires us to stop celebrating effort and start measuring effectiveness. Are pupils attending more consistently? If not, something must change.



Reflection

Five Minutes to Consider Your Current Practice

Take a moment to reflect honestly on your school's current attendance data use. There are no right or wrong answers — this is about identifying where to focus improvement efforts.

“

Which pupils are drifting right now in your school? Can you name them? Do others know?

“

Which cohort worries you most? What does the data reveal about this group?

”

”

“

Where are you intervening too late? What early warning signs might you have missed?

“

Where are you overworking for little gain? What could you stop doing to create capacity?

”

”

If working in groups: spend 3–4 minutes discussing one of these questions with a colleague. Share one insight or action you might take differently.



What Comes Next

This module has provided clarity on understanding and interpreting attendance data. The subsequent modules will equip you with practical tools and strategies to act on these insights.

1

Module 3: Daily Routines

Practical systems and routines that prevent absence before it happens through consistent, sustainable whole-school practice.

2

Module 4: Working with Parents

Effective communication strategies that build partnership rather than confrontation, even in challenging circumstances.

3

Module 5: EBSA & Anxiety-Informed Practice

Understanding emotionally-based school avoidance and how to respond with empathy and appropriate boundaries.

4

Module 6: Targeted Interventions

Matching intervention intensity to need, knowing when to escalate, and measuring what actually works.

This module gives you clarity. The next modules give you tools.

Key Takeaways



Data reveals patterns

Look beyond averages to understand individual and cohort needs. Ask: who is hidden by the headline figure?



Bandings drive action

Clear thresholds help us respond proportionately and consistently, intervening early before patterns become entrenched.



Match response to need

Different levels of absence require different interventions. One-size-fits-all approaches waste time and diminish impact.



Measure outcomes, not activity

Focus on whether pupils are attending more consistently, not how many meetings you've held or letters you've sent.

Building Your Data Routine

Effective data use requires regular, manageable routines — not exhaustive analysis. Consider establishing these simple practices in your school.

1

Weekly band movement check

10 minutes every Monday to identify who has crossed a threshold. Immediate brief interventions where needed.

2

Fortnightly pattern review

20 minutes to spot emerging trends by day, lesson, or cohort. Adjust approaches based on what you notice.

3

Half-termly impact evaluation

30 minutes to assess which interventions are working. Stop what isn't effective; do more of what is.

4

Termly cohort analysis

60 minutes to examine gaps between groups and identify strategic priorities for whole-school improvement.

These routines prevent crisis management and embed proactive, sustainable practice. Small, regular investments of time create significant long-term impact.

Questions for Your Leadership Team

Use these prompts to drive strategic conversations about attendance data use in your school context.



Can we answer the critical questions?

Does our MIS allow us to quickly identify who moved bands, which patterns are emerging, and which interventions are working? If not, what needs to change?



Do we have shared understanding?

Could every member of staff explain our bandings and what actions each triggers? How do we build this consistent language?



Are we acting early enough?

What evidence do we have that our interventions prevent escalation? Where might we need to act sooner?



Are we differentiating our response?

Do we match intervention intensity to need, or are we either doing too little or trying to do everything for everyone?

Closing Message

Attendance data is not about judgement, performance management, or bureaucratic box-ticking. It exists to serve one purpose: helping us care for young people more effectively.

Good data use means noticing early, acting proportionately, and supporting consistently. It means having difficult conversations before they become crisis conversations. It means treating absence as communication — a signal that something needs attention.

When we use data well, we prevent problems rather than reacting to them. We create space for support before situations become entrenched. We act with compassion informed by evidence.

Thank you for engaging with this module. The insights you've gained today will inform everything that follows in our work together on attendance.

"Data should help us care sooner — not react later."