

Attendance Policy and Procedure

Review Date: September 2027

1. Purpose

Dedham Therapy Farm CIC is committed to promoting good attendance as a key safeguarding responsibility. Regular attendance is essential to ensure the safety, wellbeing and progress of children and young people attending the farm.

This policy is informed by Working Together to Improve School Attendance (statutory guidance, effective 19 August 2024) and reflects the shared responsibility between:

- Dedham Therapy Farm CIC
- Schools and educational settings
- Local authorities
- Parents and carers

Attendance: The act of being present at a place or event, the regularity of going to a preagreed place e.g. school/farm session.

Attendance concerns are approached with a support-first, problem-solving mindset, recognising that absence is often a sign of unmet need.

Attendance Promotion Strategies: Interest checklists, regular review meetings, Farm Assistant feedback forms, therapeutic approach during conversations directly with Farm Assistants, initial assessment planning, all support high attendance levels from Farm Assistants. Dedham Therapy Farm values are Adapt, Collaborate, Empower ensure staff work with Farm Assistants and their support networks to overcome any barriers to engagement which can lead to reduction in attendance.

2. Safeguarding

Attendance monitoring forms part of Dedham Therapy Farm CIC's safeguarding arrangements.

Essex & Suffolk County Council, schools and Ofsted require all Farm Assistants' attendance to be recorded accurately and promptly. Attendance is monitored by:

- The local authority
- The school the Farm Assistant is on roll with

Timely recording enables:

- Swift follow-up of unexplained absence
- Early identification of safeguarding concerns
- Appropriate multi-agency response where required

Failure to attend sessions without explanation will always be treated as a potential safeguarding concern.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Dedham Therapy Farm CIC

- Records attendance accurately and in real time
- Escalates non-attendance promptly

- Shares attendance information appropriately with schools and local authorities
- Works collaboratively with families, schools and professionals to support attendance

Attendance officer

- Monitoring attendance data reporting potential engagement issues to primary staff members and the Lead OT
- Ensuring staff compliance with attendance policy
- Ensure welfare checks are completed and any concerns followed up via safeguarding procedures
- Completing virtual welfare checks where primary staff member is not available.

Lead OT

- Supervising primary staff members to support positive engagement of Farm Assistants
- Ensuring DSL responsibilities are followed to provide early help where required.

Primary staff members

- Reporting attendance drops through designated channels
- Recording concerns as per safeguarding policy
- Completing welfare checks as required per the attendance policy
- Sending feedback questionnaires and interest checklists to ensure activities are enjoyable and motivating to Farm Assistants.
- Ensuring goals are achievable and that activities are graded to meet the needs of their caseload.

Schools and Local Authorities

- Monitor attendance patterns
- Provide oversight and guidance
- Support early help and intervention where attendance concerns arise

Parents/carers/Farm Assistants

- Inform Dedham Therapy Farm CIC of absence as early as possible
- Work with professionals to address barriers to attendance
- Providing honest feedback when there may be a difficulty with attendance beginning
- Working with Dedham Therapy Farm staff to ensure high attendance levels
- Being proactive in their own development and progress.

4. Attendance Records – New Farm Assistants

For all new Farm Assistants:

- Attendance sheets must be generated on Excel at the point of referral. In addition to this Essex County Council funded, Farm Assistants are accepted onto Different Class. Suffolk County Council Farm Assistants are inputted manually onto Study Bugs.
- Excel attendance records must clearly include:
 - Farm Assistant name
 - Session day and time

- Attendance records must be shared with the relevant contact listed on the referral form before sessions begin

Information Sharing

- School-funded placements:
Attendance must be reported to the school attendance officer or pastoral staff via live attendance records
- Local authority-funded placements:
Essex attendance must be recorded via the IPES framework software Different Class. Suffolk attendance must be recorded via the rolling select list software Study Bugs.
- Parent funded placements:
Attendance must still be recorded via our internal excel spreadsheet; permission must be sought before sharing records externally unless safeguarding concerns apply

5. Attendance Procedure for Staff

On Arrival

1. On arrival of your Farm Assistant, ask them to wait while attendance is registered
2. If you are unable to register attendance immediately, request support from the office team

Non-Arrival/Lateness Procedure

1. If a Farm Assistant does not arrive within 15 minutes of the session start time and has not made contact: **Radio, the office immediately to notify them. An N code must be marked on DC and EXCEL at this point.**

1:1 Sessions

Continue attempts to contact via:

- Phone
- Text
- Email

Update the office either when contact is made or if no contact can be made by end of session.

Group Sessions

The office will continue to contact home on your behalf and provide updates

If contact has not been made within 30 minutes of the session start time:

School-funded:

Notify the school by phone and log non-attendance on their attendance record

Local authority-funded:

Log non-contact and non-attendance on: (EEC) Different Class using N code/ (SCC) Study Bugs

If by the end of the session still no contact has been made, an update on MYCONCERN must be logged and monitored.

If contact is later made:

- Update the office
- Update record with:
 - Reason for non-attendance

- Method of contact (phone, email, text)
- If they eventually attend after 15 minutes but before 30 minutes. Mark them Late before register closes
- If they eventually arrive after 30 minutes. Mark them as Late after register closes.

6. Early Support and Attendance Concerns

Dedham Therapy Farm CIC recognises that low attendance is often linked to wider needs and is rarely caused by a single factor and often caused by an overlapping of multiple factors..

Where attendance:

- Falls below three sessions within a half term block, or
- Involves three consecutive missed sessions

Primary staff members must investigate to understand the reasons for absence. This will include the following support actions:

- Discussion with parents/carers
- A welfare check weekly until the Farm Assistant returns to their sessions
- Liaise with the wider support network
- Primary staff members discussing their concerns within the weekly team meeting and the information brought to the Lead OT & the Attendance officer.
- Where it is unclear what the contributing factors are the following could be used either with the Farm Assistant during session or sent home to the Farm Assistant parents/carers. Interest checklist and or Farm Assistant feedback questionnaire
- Video messaging, letters, photos, graduated return plans can be used to encourage return the farm

The focus will be on early support and problem-solving, not blame.

Barriers to attendance could include but are not limited to;

- Transport issues
- Scheduling changes/conflicts
- Accessibility difficulties
- Financial difficulties
- Resource shortages – e.g. food, clothing, parent/carer support
- Illness – physical and mental.
- Lack of a sense of belonging e.g. Peer relationship difficulties
- Low perceived value – e.g. unclear benefits, interests have changed
- Cultural misalignment e.g. religious holidays
- Institutional mistrust – e.g. a break down in trust of supporting organisations

7. Information Sharing and Confidentiality

Attendance information will be shared:

- In line with safeguarding duties
- With schools and local authorities where required
- In accordance with data protection legislation

Where safeguarding concerns arise, information may be shared without consent to protect the child or young person.

8. Monitoring, Oversight and Review

- Attendance patterns must be monitored by the Farm Assistant primary staff member and overseen by the attendance officer and Lead OT
- Concerns are escalated in the weekly team meeting after 2 missed session. Or safeguarding concerns after a welfare check via usual safeguarding procedures.
- Attendance data informs safeguarding discussions and service improvement
- This policy is reviewed annually to ensure compliance with statutory guidance and best practice.

9. Commitment Statement

Dedham Therapy Farm CIC is committed to:

- Promoting regular attendance
- Identifying and addressing barriers early
- Working collaboratively with families and professionals
- Ensuring every child and young person is safe, supported and accounted for

Links to Related Policies

- Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- SEND Policy