

Trainee Attendance & Engagement Policy

Audience:	Trainees on REAch Teach Primary Partnership Initial Teacher Training courses REAch2 Staff
Ratified:	SCITT Oversight Board June 2024
Other related policies:	Safeguarding, including Safer Recruitment Disciplinary Health and Safety Complaints Admissions Trainee Progress and Assessment Trainee Attendance and Engagement
Policy owner:	Gill Ellyard, Director of Education
Review:	Every 3 years

At REAch2, our actions and our intentions as school leaders are guided by our Touchstones.



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Policy Overview

The REAch Teach Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programme is designed to enable trainees to achieve Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) within an academic year. Given the intensive nature of the programme, high levels of attendance and punctuality are essential to ensure that trainees can sufficiently demonstrate their proficiency against the REAch Teach Assessment Framework throughout the year, and against the Teachers' Standards at the end of the training year in order to be recommended for Qualified Teacher Status in line with programme design.

This process should be read in conjunction with REAch2 policies including:

- Safeguarding, including Safer Recruitment
- Disciplinary
- Health and Safety
- Complaints

And other REAch Teach policies:

- Admissions
- Trainee Progress and Assessment
- Trainee Attendance and Engagement

Trainees must agree to adhere to the *professional* requirements of the course prior to commencement, outlined in the Trainee Contract and the Code of Conduct which are agreed and signed by the trainee on commencement of their training. The requirements that pertain to Fitness to Practice include (but are not limited to):

- Disclosure of any relevant previous convictions. The relevance of a conviction will be determined based on the nature of the course, the conviction itself, and the time elapsed since the conviction;
- Any historic or ongoing safeguarding concerns involving the trainee
- Past instances where the trainee may have been deemed not fit to practise or unsafe to work with children;
- Existence of any physical, mental, or cognitive impairments or health conditions that might impact their ability to meet the professional standards required by the course;
- Relevant aspects of personal history

Policy in Detail

Attendance Expectations

The guiding principle behind REAch Teach expectations on attendance is that trainees must maintain an exemplary attendance record during all school placements and training sessions, as this is essential for their professional development. By design, the training programme allows for trainees to be in school placements for over and above the minimum 120 days stipulated in [DFE ITT compliance criteria](#) and trainees will be expected to complete these days as a minimum expectation. To enable this to be possible, trainees must ensure that they familiarise themselves with course dates and structure of training, and placement school and programme expectations around absence, as well as transparent about any health needs and possible reasonable adjustments at the earliest possible point in the recruitment and onboarding process. Trainees will undertake rigorous Fitness to Practise checks as part of onboarding as well as a period of comprehensive induction before commencing on the programme, and it is imperative that

trainees make any health disclosures necessary to the Occupational Health partner for reasonable adjustments to be considered and put in place. Trainees are expected to pay due care and attention to joining instructions for in-person training, including bringing appropriate identification documentation and learning resources.

The Equality Act 2010 defines a person with a disability as a person with a physical impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long term' negative effect on their ability to undertake normal daily activities and provides protection against discriminatory treatment. As a provider, REAch Teach primary partnership is committed to making reasonable adjustments to support trainees through all aspects of the training. If the recommended or requested adjustments are not considered reasonable, this will be discussed with the trainee and an explanation provided. Alternatives for the employee, if adjustments cannot be accommodated, may include an alternative placement school, and/or an agreed temporary readjustment or re-prioritisation of workload and requirements. On occasions, this may impact a trainee's pace of development and timeline for the award of QTS and this will be discussed with trainees as needed.

REAch Teach expects trainees to be in school as per their placement school's term-times, including any INSET days, from the start to the end of the academic year. If a trainee misses sufficient days that they do not complete 120 days in school, they are likely to be required to complete additional days at the end of the training, delaying the award of QTS. By design, after May half-term, REAch Teach have identified 6 weeks where trainees will teach an 80% timetable. If trainees are absent for more than two weeks of this teaching block, they are likely to need to make-up this time which will result in an extension into the following academic year (see Trainee Transfer, Extension, Deferral and Withdrawal policy). Trainees are expected to arrive promptly (whether in placement schools or training session) with all associated learning materials and to engage fully with learning in line with the engagement expectations detailed below. For online sessions, 'attendance' is defined as full engagement in the session, as also defined below.

Authorised Absences

An absence for illness supported by self-certification (for 7 days in a row or fewer) or a medical fit note (for more than 7 days in a row) is automatically authorised. Absence for other legitimate reasons, including attendance at medical appointments, bereavement or a sudden, unexpected change in caring responsibilities, will be considered for authorisation by the trainee's Lead Mentor.

Trainees may request authorisation for absence for another reason e.g., to attend a wedding or other significant life event (as outlined in Appendix 1). However, the REAch Teach stance on absence is designed to support trainees in meeting the rigorous standards of attendance for qualified teachers, and all absence requests will be considered with this principle in mind and in consultation with the placement school. The process for requesting absence is detailed later in this document and in Appendix 1.

If a trainee expects to have frequent absences or to be absent for more than 7 days in a row, they must consult with their mentor and Lead Mentor to assess the potential impact on their training. There may also be a Management Referral to Occupational Health to address the reasons for absence and assess any new adjustments that may be necessary.

Should a trainee's authorised absence mean that they do not complete 120 days in placement, or miss more than 10% of training, it may be necessary for them to repeat the missed period, which may result in extension of the training programme timeline into a second academic year. This decision will be made by the Lead Mentor and Regional ITT Lead who will together evaluate the trainee's specific circumstances and progress on the programme, in order to decide whether the trainee is able to catch up on missed learning without detrimentally jeopardising their recommendation for QTS and readiness to teach by the end of the training year. This will be supported by the National ITT Lead to ensure consistency across the cohort.

Unauthorised Absences

Unauthorised absences are considered a breach of the professional expectations of trainees as outlined in the Trainee Code of Conduct. Failure to comply with the programme's attendance requirements (including dishonest practices such as falsifying attendance records or reasons for absence) will lead to disciplinary action in line with the Disciplinary policy.

Engagement Expectations

During all training and tutorial sessions (online and in-person), trainees are expected to be respectful, presentable, and not hinder others' learning or safety.

Full engagement in online sessions is expected in line with the professional expectations of the programme and Trainee Code of Conduct, including the online learning agreement outlined at the start of the year. Full online engagement is characterised by:

- full participation in the session (e.g., responding to questions, contributing to discussions, working collaboratively with peers in breakout room activities, making notes to support learning, completing off-camera tasks etc.)
- joining from a suitable study setting
- activating camera and microphone as required by the session facilitator.

Where issues with technology affect full engagement, the trainee will be expected to take steps for this issue to be resolved as soon as possible to return to full and active engagement in sessions.

A suitable study setting is defined by REACh Teach as an environment not distracting for peers and facilitators (e.g., sitting upright in a learning space that supports the device to remain upright without manual assistance, the ability to take full notes and the ability to participate fully in the session). Where there are exceptional extenuating circumstances that might prevent this, trainees are expected to be proactive in contacting the facilitator of the session to alert them to the issue and the expected resolutions.

Trainees are expected to uphold professional conduct, honesty, integrity, and ethical standards in line with the teaching profession and the expectations of their behaviour while in school.

Reporting Absences

Trainees must notify all appropriate parties as soon as possible of any unplanned absences. Trainees are expected to commit to catching up on any missed learning, proactively drawing on available support.

Absence from placement

Trainees must follow their **placement school's absence policy**, which usually includes informing school colleagues by a specified time each day, using a communication method specified by school. This is essential for the safe and smooth running of schools, and breaches of school policy will be classed as a breach of professional behaviours on the REAch Teach programme. It is good practice for absent trainees to also let their mentor know even if they are not noted within the school policy. Trainees are expected to ensure they make themselves aware of their placement school's absence policy as part of induction, and partnership schools are asked to facilitate this in line with the trainee's induction checklist.

Trainees are asked to email their Lead Mentor and the REAch Teach team (reachteach@reach2.org) to let them know on the first day of absence and any subsequent days. Calculations of days absent will also be recorded in the trainee's online portfolio on the weekly mentor meeting record and the impact of this on professional development may be discussed at Progress Review points.

Absence from an in-person or online training day

These days are held in partnership schools who will be expecting the full list of trainees for the training day. Therefore, any unavoidable absence (or lateness) from an in-person training day should be **communicated by email to the REAch Teach team** (reachteach@reach2.org) **by 8.15am at the latest**, copying in their Lead Mentor for their information and monitoring. This information will then be shared with the hosting school and/or facilitator by the REAch Teach team.

Communicating absence

If REAch Teach or placement school colleagues are not informed as per the policy and are unable to get in contact with the trainee, a member of the team may contact the trainee's designated Emergency Contact/s for a welfare check.

Should there be no communication from the trainee within 10 working days, REAch Teach SCITT will pause the trainee's studies and may notify Student Finance England of a Change of Circumstances, impacting the Student Loan payment. A failure to re-establish contact within another 15 days may lead to being considered as having withdrawn from the programme (see Trainee Transfer, Extension, Deferral and Withdrawal policy).

Attendance at placement school In-Service Training ('INSET') days

On school INSET days, trainees are expected to attend school to take part in the INSET session alongside school colleagues, with the agreement of the head teacher, or to work independently in the classroom on planning, preparation or assessment tasks on the rare occasion that permission is not given to join the INSET. If the school is closed on an INSET day, trainees may work from home.

Industrial action

Strike action is taken against an employer; as the REAch Teach training programme is unsalaried, there is no right to strike for trainees. Therefore, in the event of industrial action, all trainee teachers should expect to continue to engage fully in their training programme, including full attendance in schools (where they are open).

In the event of a school closure due to industrial action, trainee teachers should work from home, utilising this time for placement work (e.g. planning, preparation and assessment) or if that is not necessary, then professional study (e.g. reading for their academic assignments, subject knowledge enhancement, professional record keeping).

Ongoing Sickness Absences

It is important to note that there is a cap on self-certified absences, set at 7 days in a row (5 working days). If a trainee accumulates three repeated instances (5 days of self-certified absence), this may warrant further investigation by the REAch Teach team in line with REAch Teach Health and Capacity to Teach (Fitness to Practice) processes. Where the absence has impacted the trainee's development on the programme, it may delay recommendation for QTS.

If a trainee is absent for more than 5 days, they are required to provide REAch Teach with a fit note from a healthcare professional, as soon as possible. Should the trainee continue to be unwell beyond the duration specified in the initial fit note, an additional fit note will be necessary.

For significant absences that impact a trainee's progress and development on the programme (and the breadth and depth of evidence for QTS), the REAch Teach support team will determine whether the trainee needs to consider an Extension or Deferral from that point of the programme. This will be suggested in situations where it is felt by the REAch Teach team that the trainee is unable to make the necessary progress or provide the necessary evidence by the point of final recommendation for QTS. In these cases, Student Finance England will be informed of the break in study which will pause student loan payments at that point.

Trainees dealing with ongoing illnesses or conditions such as depression, arthritis, unstable diabetes, ME, etc are strongly encouraged to disclose this at the outset of the programme so that reasonable adjustments can be made to the programme as appropriate, in line with Occupational Health advice. Trainees with medical conditions that result in a higher level of absence will be monitored to ensure the impact of absence does not jeopardise their development and evidence for QTS, and if it does, the REAch Teach Team will review the situation to decide if the trainee needs to extend or defer on medical grounds.

As part of the ongoing Fitness to Practice processes, REAch Teach SCITT utilises Occupational Health referrals to support the physical and mental health of our trainees, ensuring expert medical advice on health and/or disability issues that may affect a trainee on the programme. Occupational Health referrals are typically made where a trainee discloses a health condition (either at the start or mid-programme) or when it is deemed by the programme team that a trainee's health or disability is impacting their performance or attendance. The aim of these referrals is to facilitate the trainee's return to the programme with suitable support, where the Occupational Health provider assesses that the trainee is fit to undertake the programme, with or without adjustments. On rare occasions, the Occupational Health process may determine that the trainee is no longer fit to undertake the programme. This recommendation will be dealt with in line with the REAch Teach Fitness to Practice process (Fitness to Practice process).

Most periods of sickness absence result in the trainee being able to return to their training. However, there are some occasions when the level and duration of an absence is such that this may ultimately result in the termination of a trainee's place on the programme due to them being

unable to fulfil the demands and expectations of the programme despite reasonable adjustments and adjusted timelines. This would be considered as a last resort and after alternatives have been considered.

Return To Work

In the case of long-term absences from the programme (10 working days or more), REAch Teach commit to keeping in touch with trainees to ensure that those away from the programme do not feel disconnected or isolated. Lead Mentors or Regional ITT Leads will allocate a specific time to meet with a trainee returning from a longer period of absence in order to cover several key areas such as welcoming the trainee back, updating them on any developments that occurred during their absence, verifying the suitability of their return to the educational setting, considering any medical advice from the GP noted on the medical certificate, addressing any personal or educational challenges affecting the trainee's health and attendance, and establishing the tasks and priorities upon their return. It is good practice for this meeting to also include the trainee's mentor so all are informed, but if this is not possible, REAch Teach will liaise with the school to support a smooth transition back to school for the trainee with a clear plan.

Authorised Leave of Absence

REAch Teach acknowledges that there are occasional, unavoidable instances of exceptional absence. Requests for any leave of absence for reasons other than illness should be submitted on the Absence Request Form and sent to the REAch Teach team for review (Appendix 1). These will be reviewed by the trainee's Regional ITT lead, in consultation with the National ITT Lead to ensure equity across all trainee requests.

A trainee must notify REAch Teach in advance of any appointments that necessitate taking leave and provide additional supporting documentation if requested (see Appendix 1). REAch Teach recognises the challenges in scheduling GP and hospital appointments and these will be accommodated wherever feasible and in agreement with the placement school. However, in a similar way to qualified teachers, trainees are encouraged to arrange appointments in a way that minimises disruption to their training and attendance in school placements, utilising school holidays or after-school hours wherever possible.

Other Permitted Leave

If the absence is pre-planned:

There are a small number of permitted reasons for exceptional absence to be requested in advance, as set out below. Trainees must contact their Regional ITT Lead as early as possible to request and seek approval for the absence and no travel or other arrangements should be made until the trainee has received a response to their request. REAch Teach would encourage trainees to submit these requests at the earliest possible opportunity to allow time for requests to be approved in good time.

Reason for requested absence	Maximum time to be approved
Religious observation	1 day
Graduation Day	Up to 2 days (2 days only permitted if long travel – over 2 hours one way – is needed) – confirmation of attendance at

	graduation and any necessary travel must be attached as part of this request
Significant personal event e.g., direct family wedding, funeral, baptism	Up to 2 days (2 days only permitted if long travel – over 2 hours one way – is needed) – confirmation of attendance any necessary travel must be attached as part of this request
Specific caring responsibilities (not childcare)	1 day – details needed as part of the request.
Pre-booked holidays	To approve this, evidence must be presented that the holiday was booked prior to acceptance on the course.
School visits and interviews for ECT positions	As needed. Evidence of invitation to interview to be included in the request as appropriate.

Requests that are likely not to be authorised include (not limited to):

- Birthdays – self/others
- Family get-togethers
- Other outside work commitments
- Festival attendance (where booked after acceptance onto the programme)
- Hen/stag do (where booked after acceptance onto the programme)
- Booked holidays (where booked after acceptance onto the programme)

The timetable for the year includes additional ring-fenced time out of school in term-time in the form of Wellbeing Time, and REAch Teach would encourage trainees to schedule other events such as above within that time rather than seek additional time off the programme to complete them.

Compassionate Leave

In cases of unexpected emergencies like bereavement or severe accidents or illness affecting immediate family members or dependents, REAch Teach acknowledges the need for compassion. Trainees may be considered for a period of leave in the event of a family loss, with the duration varying depending on the circumstances.

Requests for additional compassionate leave or cases where the cumulative leave duration is extensive are likely to impact on timely completion of the programme and may result in an extension or deferral. This decision will be taken on a case-by-case basis.

Carer and Parental Leave

REAch Teach recognises that trainees may have responsibilities as carers for family members or dependents. Trainees are encouraged to discuss their caring responsibilities leave needs with their Lead Mentor, who will work with the trainee to find suitable solutions that allow the trainee to fulfil their caregiving responsibilities while minimising disruption to their training and education. In exceptional cases, trainees may request carer's leave to fulfil these responsibilities where they are the sole carer available. Carer's leave will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the individual circumstances of the trainee, including attendance history, and the placement school's policy on carer's leave. Trainees seeking carer's leave should follow the established procedure for requesting leave, which includes notifying REAch Teach and/or the placement school headteacher as far in advance as possible. The duration of authorised carer's leave will be determined based on the specific situation, the needs of the trainee's caregiving

responsibilities and the impact on the trainee's progress towards QTS. It is important to note that carer's leave is subject to the same cumulative leave limits as other types of leave.

Extended periods of leave

If after ten working days REAch Teach is unable to contact the trainee or the named representative, they will invoke a suspension of studies, informing Student Finance England (SFE) as required. This may have an impact on any Student Finance agreements in place. If there is no contact in the following ten working days, the trainee will be deemed to have withdrawn from the course and the relevant authorities will be informed, including the Department for Education.

For any absence, it is the expectation that a trainee makes up the lost learning in whatever way is appropriate, making use of relevant support structures. If a trainee persistently fails to follow the programme of study with reasonable diligence and communication, this may trigger the start of the Support Plan Process in order to address the issues and provide support. Please see the REAch Teach Trainee Progress and Assessment policy for more information on this.

Maternity / Paternity Leave

REAch Teach offers a one-year course during which paid maternity leave is not available, but REAch Teach will strive to provide as much flexibility as possible within the course structure to enable trainees to achieve Qualified Teacher Status. Should the expected duration of absence necessitate it, the course may need to be extended into the following year, provided there is no substantial change in QTS requirements. A trainee who becomes pregnant after being offered a place and before enrolling on the programme, may request to defer the course for one year only, contingent upon no changes to QTS requirements during the deferment period. This may affect the financial support from Student Finance England (SFE) and it is the trainee's responsibility to investigate financial implications.

Where it can be facilitated, the preferred approach is for a trainee to return from their deferred study in the academic year following their leave, at a start time agreed between trainee and REAch Teach staff. This start time should allow trainees to join at a point whereby they can access any missed curriculum or trainee programme activity. Trainees must notify Reach Teach as soon as practicable, but no later than 14 weeks prior to the expected week of childbirth, of their intention to take maternity leave. Absences due to pregnancy-related illness or miscarriage outside the maternity leave period are treated as regular sick leave, subject to usual conditions.

Maternity leave should not normally start more than 11 weeks before the expected week of childbirth. Upon the start of maternity leave, REAch Teach will formally suspend the trainee's studies and notify SFE. The trainee must inform REAch Teach of the child's birth date and must not resume studies less than two weeks post-birth. Subsequently, the trainee should discuss their return and course completion timeline with REAch Teach. If the trainee does not make contact, Reach Teach may contact the trainee no earlier than 21 days before the maternity leave anniversary to confirm the birth date and return intentions. A response is required within 14 days; failure to respond may lead to withdrawal from the course.

If reliant on student finance, the trainee will need to reapply for finance as a returning student repeating Year 1, and REAch Teach will continue to suspend studies at the start of the term, notifying SFE. Any trainee requesting maternity leave **must complete the course within six**

terms. One of those terms must be the final term of an academic year. If this does not take place, REAch Teach may request 25% of the total tuition fees directly from the trainee.

Paid paternity leave is similarly unavailable on this one-year training course, but REAch Teach aims to allow brief absences within the course framework to facilitate a period of unpaid paternity leave of 1-2 weeks depending on the point in the year and course requirements met. Extended absences may necessitate extending the course into a second year, which could have financial implications. Trainees are advised to consult with their Regional ITT Lead regarding any maternity or paternity leave plans, so that advice can be given based on the trainee's progress and evidence for QTS at that point in time.

Punctuality

Punctuality is of utmost importance as it reflects a trainee's professional commitment and supports their preparation and organisation for the day. Furthermore, arriving late to school can have safeguarding implications for the children under the trainee's supervision.

If a trainee anticipates lateness for either their placement school or training, they should make reasonable efforts to inform both their placement school or the REAch Teach team as per the guidelines above, as early as possible.

Consistent lateness will be viewed as a matter of concern and will prompt a discussion with the trainee's Lead Mentor as to the reasons and intended resolutions. The Lead Mentor will determine the appropriate course of action, which may include the initiation of support measures. Unless the trainee has made prior arrangements with their mentor and Lead Mentor, arriving more than 30 minutes late for a training or school session will be considered as an absence for that session (AM or PM) and will be followed up in line with absence procedures.

Record Keeping

Attendance records are kept by the placement schools and submitted to the REAch Teach ITT Team as part of mentor meeting notes. These records are essential for monitoring attendance patterns and identifying any concerns that may require intervention.

Any fraudulent activities concerning attendance, whether it involves the falsification of signatures or any other deceptive practices, will incur disciplinary measures in line with the Disciplinary policy.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed **every 3 years** or sooner, taking into account any legislative changes. Any changes made to this policy will be communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - ABSENCE REQUEST FORM

This form is to be completed when you need to request planned time off from the training programme (either a training session/day or during school placements) in emergency/exceptional circumstances (e.g. medical appointment, funeral, childcare, interview etc). No leave should be taken prior to your leave of absence request being approved.

For planned absences, **at least five working days' notice is required**. For emergency situations, the form should be completed as soon as possible.

Trainee name:

Placement school:

Date of submission of request:

Date/s of absence requested	Reason for absence	Total number of days (note placement/training)	Details of supporting documentation (e.g. appointment letter)

Please provide accurate details of your absence history to date for the current training year:

Please send completed form to reachteach@reach2.org. Incomplete forms will be returned which may cause a delay.

Approver name and date	Approved in line with REAch Teach Attendance & Engagement policy?		Any actions for trainee/mentor/programme team?
	Yes	No (details below)	

If not authorising request, please give reason:

Appendix 1 – WHAT TO DO IF...

...You Are Ill

1. Follow the school's absence policy and notify school colleagues on each day of absence.
2. Email REAch Teach team (reachteach@reach2.org) on the first day of absence and subsequent days.
3. Documentation – Self-Certification: For up to 7 days and Medical Fit Note: For over 7 days.
4. Consult with mentor and Lead Mentor if absences exceed 7 days.
5. Disclose early to arrange adjustments if the illness is considered chronic.

...You Are Late

1. Notify placement school or REAch Teach team as early as possible. Over 30 minutes late without prior notice counts as an absence.

If absence is consistent, a conversation will be arranged with your Lead Mentor.

...You Need Authorised Absence

1. Submit Absence Request Form to REAch Teach team. Include supporting documents.
 - Permitted Absences:
 - Religious Observation: 1 day
 - Graduation Day: Up to 2 days
 - Significant Personal Event: 1 day
 - Specific Caring Responsibilities: 1 day
 - Interviews for ECT positions
 - Non-Permitted Absences: Birthdays, family gatherings, other work commitments, festivals, hen/stag dos, holidays booked post-acceptance.

...You Have an Unplanned Absence

1. Follow the school's absence policy and notify school colleagues on each day of absence.
2. Email REAch Teach team (reachteach@reach2.org) on the first day of absence and subsequent days.
3. Proactively catch up on missed learning.

...You Miss an Online or In-Person Training Day

1. Email REAch Teach team by 8.45am.

...You Need Compassionate Leave

1. Inform Lead Mentor as soon as possible. Leave duration varies; extended leave may require programme extension or deferral.

...You Need Maternity/Paternity Leave

1. Inform REAch Teach at least 14 weeks before expected childbirth. Maternity Leave must start no more than 11 weeks before childbirth.
2. Discuss return timeline with REAch Teach.
3. For Paternity leave, 1-2 weeks unpaid leave may be allowed; extended leave may require programme extension.