AMDG

DONHEAD PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Attendance Policy

Approved by: Kate Donaghy
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1. Aims

This policy aims to demonstrate our commitment to meeting our school attendance obligations, including those set out in the Department for Education's statutory guidance, Working together to improve school attendance (July 2026), through a whole-school culture and ethos that values good attendance.

- Setting high expectations for the attendance and punctuality of all pupils
- Promoting good attendance and the benefits of good attendance
- Reducing absence, including persistent and severe absence
- Ensuring every pupil has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled
- Acting early to address patterns of absence
- Building strong relationships with families to make sure pupils have the support in place to attend school

We will also promote and support punctuality in attending lessons.

2. Legislation and Guidance

This policy is based on the Department for Education's statutory guidance, Working together to improve school attendance (July 2026), and the guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. The principal legislation governing school attendance and registration includes:

- Part 6 of the Education Act 1996
- Part 3 of the Education Act 2002
- Part 7 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (and 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2016 amendments)
- The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024
- https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1751/contentsThe Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 and the 2024 amendment

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/757/regulation/2/madeIt also refers to:

- School census guidance
- Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Mental health issues affecting a pupil's attendance: guidance for schools

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 The Governing Body

The governing body is responsible for:

- Setting high expectations of all school leaders, staff, pupils and parents
- Making sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties, including:

    - Making sure the school records attendance accurately in the register, and shares the required information with the DfE and local authority
    - Making sure the school works effectively with local partners to help remove barriers to attendance, and keeps them informed regarding specific pupils, where appropriate
- Recognising and promoting the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos
- Making sure the school's attendance management processes are delivered effectively, and that consistent support is provided for pupils who need it most by prioritising staff and resources
- Making sure the school has high aspirations for all pupils, but adapts processes and support to pupils' individual needs
- Regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data and helping school leaders focus improvement efforts on individual pupils or cohorts who need it most
- Working with school leaders to set goals or areas of focus for attendance and providing support and challenge
- Monitoring attendance figures for the whole school and repeatedly evaluating the effectiveness of the school's processes and improvement efforts to make sure they are meeting pupils needs
- Where the school is struggling with attendance, working with school leaders to develop a comprehensive action plan to improve attendance
- Making sure all staff receive adequate training on attendance as part of the regular continued professional development offer, so that staff understand:
    - The importance of good attendance
    - That absence is almost always a symptom of wider issues
    - The school's legal requirements for keeping registers
    - The school's strategies and procedures for tracking, following up on and improving attendance, including working with partners and keeping them informed regarding specific pupils, where appropriate
- Making sure dedicated training is provided to staff with a specific attendance function in their role, including in interpreting and analysing attendance data
- Holding the headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy

3.2 The Headteacher

The headteacher is responsible for:

- The implementation of this policy at the school
- Monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to governors
- Supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual pupils
- Monitoring the impact of any implemented attendance strategies
- Liaise with SENCO to work with the parents of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to develop specific support approaches for attendance for pupils with SEND, including where school transport is regularly being missed, and where pupils with SEND face in-school barriers
- Supporting the SENCO in communicating with the local authority when a pupil with an education, health and care (EHC) plan has falling attendance, or where there are barriers to attendance that relate to the pupil's needs
- Communicating the school's high expectations for attendance and punctuality regularly to pupils and parents through all available channels

3.3 Designated Safeguarding Lead

The senior leader responsible for attendance is responsible for:

- Leading, championing and improving attendance across the school
- Setting a clear vision for improving and maintaining good attendance
- Evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes
- Having a strong grasp of absence data and oversight of absence data analysis
- Regularly monitoring and evaluating progress in attendance
- Establishing and maintaining effective systems for tackling absence, and making sure they are followed by all staff
- Liaising with pupils, parents/carers and external agencies, where needed
- Building close and productive relationships with parents to discuss and tackle attendance issues
- Creating intervention or reintegration plans in partnership with pupils and their parents/carers
- Delivering targeted intervention and support to pupils and families
- Reviewing attendance concerns through a safeguarding lens and identifying pupils whose attendance may indicate abuse, neglect, exploitation, mental health concerns or wider family vulnerabilities.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead is Kate Donaghy and can be emailed: k.donaghy@donhead.org.uk

3.4 The Senior Attendance Champion

The Senior Attendance Champion is responsible for:

- Monitoring and analysing attendance data (see section 7)
- Benchmarking attendance data to identify areas of focus for improvement
- Providing regular attendance reports to school staff and reporting concerns about attendance to the designated senior leader responsible for attendance, and the headteacher
- Working with education welfare officers to tackle persistent absence
- Authorising absence requests and liaising with all parties

The Senior Attendance Champion is Kate Donaghy and can be contacted emailed: k.donaghy@donhead.org.uk

3.5 Form Tutors

Form Tutors are responsible for recording attendance for both morning and afternoon sessions on a daily basis, using the correct codes (see Appendix 1), and submitting this information to the school office via the Engage Portal: https://portal.donhead.org.uk/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fDefault.aspx

3.6 School Admin Staff

- Take calls from parents/carers about absence on a day-to-day basis and record it on the school system
- Transfer calls from parents/carers to the Assistant Head of Pastoral: Niamh Canavan where appropriate, in order to provide them with more detailed support on attendance

3.7 Parents

Where this policy refers to a parent, it refers to the adult the school decides is most appropriate to work with, including:

- All natural parents, whether they are married or not
- All those who have parental responsibility for a child or young person
- Those who have day-to-day responsibility for the child (i.e. lives with and looks after them)

Parents are expected to:

- Make sure their child attends every school day on time
- Call the school to report their child's absence before 8:45am on the day of the absence (and each subsequent day of absence), and advise when they are expected to return
- Provide the school with more than 1 emergency contact number for their child
- Ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day
- Parents may seek support with maintaining good attendance by contacting the Senior Attendance Champion at k.donaghy@donhead.org.uk or the Assistant Head for wellbeing, Niamh Canavan, at n.canavan@donhead.org.uk.

3.8 Pupils

Pupils are expected to:

- Attend school every day, on time

4. Recording Attendance

4.1 Attendance Register

We will keep an electronic attendance register on Engage Portal and place all pupils onto this register.

We will take our attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and the first session after lunch. It will mark, using the appropriate national attendance and absence codes from the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024, whether every pupil is:

- Present
- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Office staff are available to amend the register when reasons arise, for example absence cause by illness or due to medical appointments or school visits.

See Appendix 1 for the DfE attendance codes.
We will also record:

- Whether the absence is authorised or not
- The nature of the activity, where a pupil is attending an approved educational activity
- The nature of circumstances, where a pupil is unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

We will keep every entry on the attendance register for 6 years after the date on which the entry was made.

The school day starts at 08:30 for all pupils and ends at:

- Pre-School & Reception: Mon – Thurs – 15:00; Fri – 14:45
- Pre-Prep 1 & Pre-Prep 2: Mon – Thurs – 15:15; Fri – 14:45
- Lower Prep 1: Mon – Thurs – 15:30; Fri – 15:00
- Lower-Prep 2: Mon – Thurs – 15:35; Fri – 15:00

- Prep: Mon – Thurs – 15:40; Fri – 15:00
- Elements: Mon – Thurs - 15:45; Fri – 15:00

Pupils must arrive in school by 08:30 on each school day.

The register for the first session will be taken by 8:30 and will be kept open until 8:45. The register for after lunch will be taken at 12:30.

4.2 Unplanned Absence

Any pupil arriving at school after 8:30am should report to the School Office where we will record their attendance in the register.

If a child is ill and absent from school, please telephone or email the School Office before 8:45am to inform us of their absence or email to absences@donhead.org.uk. A telephone call from the office will be made if no explanation for absence is received by 9:15am.

We will mark absence due to physical or mental illness as authorised, unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

Where an absence is prolonged or recurrent, or where the school has a genuine and reasonable concern about the reason provided, the school may ask for appropriate supporting information. Evidence may include a prescription, appointment communication or other suitable information; a letter from a doctor will not routinely be required. The school will consider each case individually and will not request medical evidence unnecessarily.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents will be notified of this.

4.3 Planned Absence

Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorized, as long as the pupil's parent notifies the school in advance of the appointment.

If a child has a medical appointment or any other routine appointments, parents must notify the School Office in advance by email to absences@donhead.org.uk. Pupils must be signed in and out of school to attend appointments.

However, we encourage parents to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

The pupil's parent must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence. Go to section 5 to find out which term-time absences the school can authorise**.**

If a parent needs to request absence from school for family reasons, a parent must email the Senior Attendance Champion in advance to request permission. Please remember that every effort should be made

not to disrupt term-time attendance and that such requests should only be made in exceptional circumstances. Please email absence requests to Headteacherpa@donhead.org.uk.

4.4 Lateness and Punctuality

A pupil who arrives late:

- Before the register has closed will be marked as late, using the appropriate code
- After the register has closed will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code

Any pupil arriving at school after 8:30am should report to the School Office where we will record their attendance in the register.

If the school becomes aware of a pattern of lateness, it will be necessary for a member of the Senior Leadership Team to meet with the parents to discuss options for supporting the family to arrive at school on time.

4.5 Following Up Unexplained Absence

Where any pupil we expect to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will:

- Call the pupil's parent on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason. If the school cannot reach any of the pupil's emergency contacts, the school may need to contact the Police, in line with the guidance published by the London Borough of Merton Guidance
- Identify whether the absence is approved or not
- The school will use code N only temporarily while establishing the reason for absence. The correct attendance code will be entered as soon as the reason is established and, in any event, normally within five school days. If no reason can be established, the absence will be recorded using code O.
- Call the parent on each day that the absence continues without explanation, to make sure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary. If absence continues, the school will consider involving an education welfare officer
- Where appropriate, offer support to the pupil and/or their parents to improve attendance
- Identify whether the pupil needs support from wider partners, as quickly as possible, and make the necessary referrals

4.6 Children Missing in Education (CME)

The school recognises that children who are absent from education for prolonged periods, repeatedly absent, or whose whereabouts become unknown may be at increased risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation, child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, mental health difficulties, radicalisation, forced marriage or female genital mutilation.

The DSL will review concerns regarding repeated absence and unexplained absence.

Where appropriate, referrals will be made to Children's Services, the Police or other safeguarding partners.

Where a pupil leaves Donhead and the destination school is unknown, the school will comply with Children Missing Education requirements and notify the Local Authority as required.

4.7 Reporting to Parents

The school will regularly inform parents (see definition of 'parent', as used in this policy, in section 3.7 above) about their child's attendance and absence levels termly written reports.

5. Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

5.1 Approval For Term-Time Absence

The Senior Attendance Champion will allow pupils to be absent from the school site for certain educational activities, or to attend other schools or settings.
The Senior Attendance Champion will only grant leave of absence during term time where the request meets the circumstances permitted by the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024. These circumstances include:

- Taking part in a regulated performance
- Attending an interview
- A temporary, time-limited part-time timetable due to health concerns
- Exceptional circumstances

A leave of absence is granted at the Senior Attendance Champion and Headteacher's discretion, including the length of time the pupil is authorised to be absent for.

We define 'exceptional circumstances' as rare, significant, unavoidable and short-term.

Leave of absence will not be granted for a pupil to take part in protest activity during school hours.

As a leave of absence will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely a leave of absence will be granted for the purposes of a family holiday.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant background context behind the request.

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and, where possible, at least 3 weeks before the absence. The Senior Attendance Champion may require evidence to support any request for leave of absence. Please email absence requests to Headteacherpa@donhead.org.uk.

Other valid reasons for authorised absence include (but are not limited to):

- Illness (including mental-health illness) and medical/dental appointments (see sections 4.2 and 4.3 for more detail)
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parent(s) belong(s). If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parent's religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart
- Parent(s) travelling for occupational purposes
- If the pupil is currently suspended or excluded from school (and no alternative provision has been made)

Other reasons the school may allow a pupil to be absent from the school site, which are not classified as absences, include (but are not limited to):

- Attending an offsite approved educational activity, sporting activity or visit or trip arranged by the school
- Attending provision arranged by the local authority
- If there is any other unavoidable cause for the pupil not to attend school, such as disruption to travel caused by an emergency, a lack of access arrangements, or because the school premises are closed

5.2 Sanctions

Our school will make use of the full range of potential sanctions – including, but not limited to, those listed below – to tackle poor attendance. Decisions will be made on an individual, case-by-case basis.

Notices to improve

If the national threshold has been met and support is appropriate, but parents do not engage with offers of support, the school may offer a notice to improve to give parents a final chance to engage with support.

Notices to improve will be issued in line with processes set out in the local code of conduct for the local authority area in which the pupil attends school.

They may include:

- Details of the pupil's attendance record and of the offences
- The benefits of regular attendance and the duty of parents under section 7 of the Education Act 1996
- Details of the support provided so far
- Opportunities for further support, or to access previously provided support that was not engaged with
- A clear warning that a penalty notice may be issued if attendance doesn't improve within the improvement period, along with details of what sufficient improvement looks like, which will be decided on a case-by-case basis
- A clear timeframe of between 3 and 6 weeks for the improvement period
- The grounds on which a penalty notice may be issued before the end of the improvement period

6. Supporting Pupils Who Are Absent or Returning To School

6.1 Pupils Absent Due to Complex Barriers to Attendance

Where absence or a pattern of absence appears to be at risk of becoming problematic, the school will meet with the parents to discuss how to support the pupil and remove barriers to attendance where possible. This may include referrals to external services and other organisations. These actions will be regularly reviewed, and stepped up if there is no improvement to the situation.

Where a whole family response is appropriate, this is likely to include a voluntary Family Help or Early Help assessment.

Ultimately if voluntary support is not effective the school will work with the local authority to put more formal measures in place. Persistent or severe absence is always treated as a safeguarding risk.

Pupils who are subject to a Child Protection Plan, Child in Need Plan, have a social worker, are looked after, previously looked after, or are otherwise identified as vulnerable will receive enhanced attendance monitoring. Any unexplained absence for these pupils will be followed up immediately and may result in safeguarding action.

6.2 Pupils Absent Due to Mental Illness or Physical Ill Health or SEND

Where a pupil has an education health and care (EHC) plan and their attendance falls, or the school becomes aware of barriers to attendance that related to the pupil's needs, the school will inform the local authority. The school recognises that attending school may be more of a challenge for some pupils, including those with special educational needs or disabilities, or those suffering from long term medical conditions or mental health issues. The school will allow for these circumstances when working with such pupils and their parents, and will develop individualised support approaches that meet their specific needs where appropriate.

The SENCO – Magdalena Plech-Blair - and DSL – Kate Donaghy – will contact the families and work closely with parents in these incidences.

6.3 Vulnerable Pupils

The school recognises that some groups of pupils face additional barriers to attendance, including:

- Pupils with SEND
- Young carers
- Pupils with a social worker
- Looked after and previously looked after children
- Pupils experiencing mental health difficulties
- Pupils experiencing family adversity or domestic abuse

Attendance support will be tailored to individual needs and monitored through safeguarding and pastoral processes where appropriate.

6.4 Pupils Returning To School After A Lengthy Or Unavoidable Period Of Absence

In some circumstances, a pupil who has been absent for an extended period of time, returning to school may require some logistical arrangements. In such circumstances the DSL – Kate Donaghy –, the SENCO – Magdalena Plech-Blair – or the Assistant Head for Pastoral – Niamh Canavan - will work with the pupil and parents to support reintegration and we may take the following actions:

- The DSL, SENCO or Assistant Head for Pastoral will organise a meeting with the pupil and family to discuss concerns and agree on a plan for the first day
- Preparing a welcome pack: The class teacher can prepare a welcome pack for the student to receive before they return. This could include a timetable for their first day, a reading book, or messages from the class
- Informing teachers of special requirements: The school should inform teachers of any special requirements
- Updating the Educational Health Care (EHC) Plan, if in place
- Setting up a soft start: The school can allow the pupil and their parents to arrive through the school office, where a known adult will welcome them

- Establishing a clear guidelines for communication following the absence: The school can set up a home-school book or specific times for check-ins in the first few weeks after the return between the parent and form tutor to maintain communication
- Providing ELSA sessions: The school can provide ELSA to support the student's return

7. Attendance Monitoring

7.1 Monitoring Attendance

The school will monitor attendance and absence data (including punctuality) half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual pupil, year group and cohort level.

Specific pupil information will be shared with the DfE on request.

Data will be collected each term and published at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics.

The school will benchmark its attendance data at whole school, year group and cohort level against local, regional, and national levels to identify areas of focus for improvement and share this with the governing board.

7.2 Analysing Attendance

The school will:

- Analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify pupils, groups or cohorts that need additional support with their attendance, and
- Identify pupils whose absences may be a cause for concern, especially those who demonstrate patterns of persistent or severe absence
- Conduct thorough analysis of half-termly, termly, and full-year data to identify patterns and trends
- Look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns

7.3 Using Data to Improve Attendance

The school will:

- Develop targeted actions to address patterns of absence (of all severities) of individual pupils, groups or cohorts that it has identified via data analysis
- Provide targeted support to the pupils it has identified whose absences may be a cause for concern, especially those who demonstrate patterns of persistent or severed absence, and their families (see section 8.4 below)
- Provide regular attendance reports to form tutors, during Pupil Progress or EYFS Supervision meetings to facilitate discussions with pupils and families, and to the governing board and school leaders (including Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinators, Designated Safeguarding Lead and Assistant Head Teacher)
- Use data to monitor and evaluate the impact of any interventions put in place in order to modify them and inform future strategies

- Share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities and other partners where a pupil's absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe, including keeping them informed regarding specific pupils, where appropriate

7.4 Reducing Persistent and Severe Absence

Persistent absence is where a pupil misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a pupil misses 50% or more of school. Reducing persistent and severe absence is central to the school's strategy for improving attendance.

The school will:

- Use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence
- Consider potential safeguarding issues and, where suspected or present, address them in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and local safeguarding procedures.
- Hold regular meetings with the parents of pupils who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable or at risk of persistent or severe absence, or who are persistently or severely absent, to:
    - Discuss attendance and engagement at school
    - Listen, and understand barriers to attendance
    - Explain the help that is available
    - Explain the potential consequences of, and sanctions for, persistent and severe absence
    - Review any existing actions or interventions
- Provide access to wider support services to remove the barriers to attendance, where relevant
- Consider alternative support that could be put in place to remove any barriers to attendance and re-engage these pupils. In doing so, the school will sensitively consider some of the reasons for absence
- Implement sanctions, where necessary (see section 5.2)

8. Monitoring Arrangements

This policy will be reviewed as guidance from the local authority and/or DfE is updated, and as a minimum every 2 years by the Designated Safeguarding Lead. At every review, the policy will be approved by the full governing board.

9. Links with Other Policies

This policy links to the following policies:

- Child Protection And Safeguarding Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) Policy

Appendix 1: Attendance Codes

The following codes are taken from the Engage Portal, which is the electronic system which we use for recording attendance and are in line with the DfE's guidance on school attendance.

Code	Definition	Scenario
present	Present (am)	Pupil is present at morning registration
present pm	Present (pm)	Pupil is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	Pupil arrives late before register has closed
Attending a place other than the school		
K	Attending education provision arranged by the local authority	Pupil is attending a place other than a school at which they are registered, for educational provision arranged by the local authority
P	Participating in a sporting activity	Pupil is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
B	Attending any other approved educational activity	Pupil is attending a place for an approved educational activity that is not a sporting activity or work experience
Absent – leave of absence		
C	Participating in a regulated performance or undertaking regulated employment abroad	Pupil is undertaking employment (paid or unpaid) during school hours, approved by the school
M	Medical/dental appointment	Pupil is at a medical or dental appointment
J1	Interview	Pupil has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
C	Exceptional circumstances	Pupil has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances

Absent – other authorised reasons		
T	Parent travelling for occupational purposes	Pupil is a 'mobile child' who is travelling with their parent(s) who are travelling for occupational purposes
R	Religious observance	Pupil is taking part in a day of religious observance
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointment)	Pupil is unable to attend due to illness (either related to physical or mental health)
E	Suspended or excluded	Pupil has been suspended or excluded from school and no alternative provision has been made
Absent – unauthorised absence		
G	Holiday not granted by the school	Pupil is absent for the purpose of a holiday, not approved by the school
N	Reason for absence not yet established	Reason for absence has not been established before the register closes
O	Absent in other or unknown circumstances	No reason for absence has been established, or the school isn't satisfied that the reason given would be recorded using one of the codes for authorised absence
U	Arrived in school after registration closed	Pupil has arrived late, after the register has closed but before the end of session

Appendix 2: Courtesy Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

Courtesy Letter Regarding School Attendance

I am writing to share our expectations for attendance and to provide a clear outline of the absence procedures at Donhead. Both the School and the Local Authority have a legal duty to monitor pupil attendance. We are keen to promote high levels of attendance, as regular absence can have a significant impact on your child's learning. That said, we fully understand there will be times when absence is unavoidable or acceptable, and on such occasions, we will always be sympathetic.

At Donhead, our target is for every pupil to achieve the highest attendance possible across the school year, with attendance above **96%** regarded as outstanding. Attendance below **90%** is a cause for concern, and if it falls under **90%**, it is classified by the Department for Education as *persistent absence*.

For this reason, we monitor attendance each term. At the end of every half term, we identify pupils whose attendance has dropped below 90% and issue this courtesy letter if we are concerned about the reasons why they are not attending school.

We have identified that **[NAME]** has an attendance rate of **[XX.X%]** this term. We will continue to monitor attendance on a weekly basis, and, with your support, we hope to see an improvement to above 95%.

We appreciate that many absences are due to illness or have been authorised by the Headteacher. While such absences are, of course, noted, they must still be recorded and tracked in line with statutory requirements.

We trust this letter helps to clarify the school's expectations and our duty of care. We are committed to working with you to support your child's attendance and progress. Should you have any questions, or if you would like to discuss your child's absences with the Headteacher, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Donaghy
Deputy Headteacher
Designated Safeguarding Lead