

## Pupil Attendance Policy

|                       |                                    |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Version</b>        | 1.0                                |
| <b>Approving Body</b> | Trust Board                        |
| <b>Date ratified</b>  | April 2018                         |
| <b>Date issued</b>    | April 2018                         |
| <b>Review date</b>    | April 2021                         |
| <b>Owner</b>          | Chief Executive Officer            |
| <b>Applies to</b>     | All Trust Schools, all Trust staff |

| <b>Version</b> | <b>Date</b> | <b>Reason</b>                    |
|----------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 1.0            | April 2018  | To establish a Trust wide policy |

## Introduction

Punctuality and regular attendance are crucial to children's achievement at school. Schools within Wimborne Academy Trust will work in collaboration with parents and carers to ensure that all children benefit from regular attendance. Attendance is shared with parents/stakeholders. Good attendance is celebrated as part of our Trustwide vision. Trust schools staff communicate to pupils that their contribution to the school community is valued; furthermore staff endeavour to make school a fruitful and enjoyable place to be so that a positive attitude to school and learning is fostered: through this, we aim to ensure that children want to attend school regularly in the first place.

In law, parents are responsible for ensuring that their children attend school and are punctual. It is the responsibility of the school to support attendance and to take seriously problems which may lead to non-attendance.

Trust schools will endeavour to:

- Emphasise the positive reasons for full attendance;
- Recognise and acknowledge good attendance, including infrequent attendance achieved in very difficult circumstances (e.g. chronic illness);
- Through careful and systematic monitoring of attendance, identify and act upon difficulties at the earliest stage, working closely with parents/guardians; and
- Avoid acrimony and disappointment in connection with requests for absence through clarity and consistency in dealing with children and families.

## Why is regular attendance so vital?

There is a clear link between low attendance at school and low achievement. Whilst the secondary education system of measuring attainment has since changed from GCSE to a points system, the key principle remains: *attendance affects achievement*.

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| <b>95%: 10 days absence a year</b><br>These children benefit from strong overall attendance and are well placed to make good progress at school.  |
| <b>90%: 19 days absence a year</b><br>Young people in this group are missing a month of school per year; it will be difficult for them to achieve their best.   |
| <b>85%: 29 days absence a year</b><br>Young people in this group are missing six weeks of school per year; there is a real risk that this lower attendance will hinder children's progress. This level of absence is seen as persistent absenteeism.                    |
| <b>80%: 38 days absence a year</b><br>Young people in this group are missing a year of school over five years of education and are not benefitting from their entitlement to an education. Parents of young people in this group could be issued with a penalty notice. |

| Minutes late per day | = days of learning lost per year |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 5                    | 3.2                              |
| 10                   | 6.5                              |
| 15                   | 9.5                              |
| 20                   | 12.5                             |
| 30                   | 19                               |

### Monitoring attendance and responding to concerns

All staff have a duty to informally monitor the children's attendance and to report any concerns they may have. In this way, pupil attendance is being monitored in the schools at all times. Schools will follow formal procedures for the regular and systematic monitoring of pupil attendance. Schools will identify appropriate key staff to undertake attendance monitoring and adhere to the following key principles:

- There will be a School Attendance Officer, usually within the administration team, who will ensure that careful records of attendance are maintained and provide information as requested by staff and certainly at least three weekly disadvantaged and half termly whole school attendance monitoring meetings;
- The School Attendance Officer will have a close link with the allocated Lead within the school;
- Schools will work in close partnership with the Local Authority School Attendance Service through their appointed School Attendance Worker;
- Monitoring of attendance is a continual process and action may be triggered at any point where a concern is raised;
- Formal monitoring of disadvantaged pupils will take place by the school on at least a three week basis through meetings typically attended by the School Attendance Officer and the allocated lead within the school. The whole school will be monitored in the same format on a half termly basis; and
- Formal monitoring of attendance will include analysis of absence levels for specific vulnerable groups including disadvantaged and SEN children as a cohort compared to other children within the school. Such analysis will also consider other trends such as by year group and gender.

There is a tiered system to respond to low and/or falling attendance levels:

Attendance below 95%: A standard letter (see **APPENDIX A**) is typically sent to any parent/carer whose child's attendance has dropped just below 95%. This letter is for information – it notifies the parent of this attendance level and explains that the school will continue to monitor the child's attendance. (Where the cause for a child's attendance dropping below 95% is very specific and clearly known and evidenced to the school, we may decide that such a letter is not required or appropriate. For example, where a child has had a known and confirmed medical issue and where this is the only substantial cause for the lower attendance. In such circumstances, the child's attendance will be closely monitored – further reduction in attendance may prompt this initial letter, without the need to wait for the next formal half-termly audit).

Attendance between 90% and 94%: The standard letter described above may be used again where a child's attendance sits at this level. This letter may be used twice in succession but if attendance remains at this level for a third time, it will be treated as for attendance which is below 90%.

Attendance which is below 90%: Attendance at 90% equates to 19 days absence through a year and is therefore a cause for concern. In such circumstances, parents will receive a specific letter (**see APPENDIX B**) which very clearly identifies that the attendance level is a significant cause for concern (except for in exceptional circumstances where the attendance is not a cause for concern such as known medical condition). Parents are requested to attend a meeting, the purpose of which is to explore the reasons for the child's low attendance and formulate a plan for improvement (**see APPENDIX C**). The content of this meeting will be used to draw up an attendance improvement plan which will be shared with the parents and a review date will be agreed. Participants in that meeting may vary according to the circumstances but may often involve staff such as the allocated lead within the school, class teacher, SENDCo and Pastoral Manager. The school may also invite the Local Authority School Attendance Worker. At this stage, schools should make it known and confirm in writing that absences cannot be authorised without medical evidence unless there are exceptional reasons which render this inappropriate (for example, a known medical condition); schools cannot routinely authorise absence where a child's attendance has reached this level of concern.

Attendance which continues to decline from below 90%: Unless there are specific circumstances, the school will not be authorising absences at this stage because attendance at 90% equates to 19 days absence through a year. If attendance is not showing reasonable improvement within three weeks of the last communication to parents, then schools will take further action which will involve further meetings with the parents. It is likely that a referral for intervention by the Local Authority School Attendance Service will be appropriate; certainly, advice from this team will be sought.

These figures expressed as % attendance levels are intended as a guide. However, a decision may be made to intervene earlier if there are specific concerns. Communication with the assigned Local Authority School Attendance Worker may occur at any stage if there is particular concern about a child's attendance.

### **Working with the Local Authority**

Schools will work in close partnership with the Local Authority School Attendance Service through their appointed School Attendance Worker. The School Attendance Worker will undertake an audit of each school, usually on a termly basis. During these sessions, the School Attendance Worker will typically meet with the Attendance Officer and review the attendance levels of pupils at the school, discussing in particular those cases where attendance has become a cause for concern. During these meetings, the School Attendance Worker can provide further advice and guidance relating to specific children and, as a consequence, it may be decided that further action is required leading to intervention by the School Attendance Service.

## **Managing lateness**

If a child arrives at school after the start of the school day but within 30 minutes, they will be registered as 'late'; this is not an unauthorised absence and the child is counted as present for the morning session. Lateness beyond 30 minutes will be counted as an absence. This will be an unauthorised absence unless parents provide the school with an acceptable reason.

Schools will also contact parents if a child regularly arrives at school late. Teachers and other staff who notice a problem with punctuality will consult with the Leader for Pupil Wellbeing before communication is made with parents regarding the matter.

Persistent lateness will be addressed according to the particular circumstances; it is likely that persistent lateness will have triggered the previous low attendance measures. Advice regarding persistent lateness may be sought from the Local Authority School Attendance Worker.

## **Parents notifying the school of absence and 'first day contact'**

Parents are required to contact their child's school on the first day of their child's absence and every day thereafter. This is an important aspect of the schools' safeguarding procedures: if a child is not registered at school in the morning, then schools must satisfy themselves that the child is safe. It is therefore necessary for parents to telephone their child's school by 9am, giving a reason for their child's absence. This absence will then be recorded as authorised, provided that the reason for absence is significant and that there are no current concerns about the child's attendance.

Administrative staff will contact parents on the first day a pupil is absent without explanation. This contact will usually be via text message in the first instance, requesting a call from the parent. If no response is obtained, the school will endeavour to reach the parent via telephone.

The flow chart at [APPENDIX D](#) outlines the steps that schools will take if they are unable to account for a child's safety following their unexplained absence from school. At each stage of unsuccessfully attempting to contact parents, schools should also use other registered contacts for the child in an effort to get hold of the parents.

If the allocated lead within the school has any cause for concern about the reason given for any absence, it will remain unauthorised until the matter has been discussed with the parents and a satisfactory explanation secured. If the reason given is not acceptable, the absence will remain unauthorised. For the absence to be authorised, there must have been no reasonable way in which the child could have come to school.

## **Appointments during the day**

Parents must avoid arranging appointments for their child during the day. However, if it is unavoidable, parents must notify the school of the appointment details. A child should only be taken out of school for his/her own appointment, not because another family member has an appointment. This includes collecting a child early so a parent can attend an appointment for someone else.

## **Leave of Absence during term time**

Following amendments to the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 which came into effect 1st September 2013, Headteachers<sup>1</sup> are only allowed to grant leave of absence from school in exceptional circumstances. The decision as to whether any request is considered as 'exceptional circumstances' rests solely with the Headteacher.

The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short; 'unavoidable' should be taken to mean an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time.

In considering whether or not to authorise a request for exceptional leave of absence in term time the Headteacher will look at each individual case and only grant authorisation if the circumstances are truly exceptional. Additionally, any request should be made prior to the leave of absence and should be submitted to the school via a letter addressed to the Headteacher. Parents/Carers may be asked to provide additional information/evidence or meet with the school to discuss the circumstances.

Only the parent the child resides with can make an application for a leave of absence.

The following are examples of situations which could be considered as exceptional:

- Return of parent from active service (Forces);
- Death or terminal illness of a parent, step-parent or sibling;
- Young Carers;
- Disability or respite leave; and
- Periods of obligatory religious observance.

The following are examples of situations which would not typically be considered as exceptional:

- Family holiday/cheaper holiday dates;
- Educational visits arranged by family members during school time;
- Attendance at a wedding or christening;
- Visiting relatives either abroad or in the UK;
- Limitations on parents leave' entitlement or dates/parents' profession or place of work making it difficult to coincide school and work holidays; and
- A family member going for medical treatment abroad.

Parents/carers will be notified of the Headteacher's decision at the earliest opportunity. When a leave of absence is taken and the school has not authorised the absence because the reasons are not considered 'exceptional', the school will request that the Local Authority issues a Penalty Notice. In considering whether to request a Penalty Notice, the school will consult the latest advice given from the LA Attendance Service. If the absence meets the threshold in this document, the school will request that a Penalty Notice is issued.

Schools will make parents aware of these arrangements for requesting leave of absence, including the implications of taking unauthorised absence, through publication of this policy on the school website and also through other opportunities including information packs for new parents and regular newsletters.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the document Headteacher also refers to Head of School

**Off-site education or specialist provision**

Where a child's special educational needs are recognised by the school, and special tuition/therapy not available in school is required, the allocated lead within the school may authorise absence for specific times when such tuition or therapy may be given outside school.

**Absence for performance**

The Headteacher may grant leave of absence for approved public performances provided that clear evidence is issued of the approved nature of this activity. The following will also be taken into account in reaching a decision:

- The nature and purpose of the performance;
- The frequency of absence requested and the likely impact on the child's education and progress; and
- The child's attendance record

Where licenses are issued by the Local Authority, absences will be monitored to ensure that they comply with the permissions given in the license. Any concerns will be communicated to the School Attendance Worker.

## APPENDIX A

*Model letter notifying a parent that a child's attendance has fallen below 95%*

Name – DOB - Class

Dear

At the beginning of the school year you received a letter informing you about the importance of regular school attendance and our aim to ensure good attendance for all students. Good attendance helps a child to reach their full potential as a learner.

The government says that 96% attendance should be the minimum expected for a child at school. At the moment, **Name** has been identified as having an attendance level below the government expectation; it currently stands at **...%**.

Non-attendance can be for a variety of reasons and there is no reason to believe that your child's attendance is not authorised. In fact, if you have informed the school with a valid reason for absence, then we would authorise it. The figure above is merely for your records. Obviously, by making you aware we hope to work together to ensure that your child's attendance does not fall further. Whilst we would never advocate that a child comes to school when they are genuinely ill, we would encourage appointments that could be made outside of the school day to remain outside of school hours.

Please also note that the attendance level above is proportionate to the number of sessions that have been available to the children in school so far and, providing there is no more absence, this figure should go up as the year progresses.

We have to inform you that we will monitor attendance over the next half term and be in touch to arrange a meeting with you if attendance does fall further.

There are many reasons why students may have poor attendance. We value the working partnership we have with parents, therefore, if there are specific circumstances that have contributed to **Child's Name's** attendance percentage that you feel we haven't considered please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Yours sincerely



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## APPENDIX B

*Sample letter for attendance below 90% (or repeated attendance between 90 and 95%)*

Following our letter/meeting regarding **Child's Name** attendance we regret to inform you that **his/her** attendance has fallen further and is currently at **\_%**.

Parents/Carers have a legal responsibility to ensure that their child is receiving an education and attends regularly at the school at which he/she is registered. You also have a responsibility to contact the school each day should **Child's Name** be unable to attend with a valid reason for their non-attendance. Whilst we would never advocate a child coming to school whilst unwell, there may be other issues that are preventing attendance from improving.

Therefore, we would like you to attend an Attendance Meeting at school on **date, time and venue** to see if we can work out a way forward to ensure that attendance does not fall further. You are welcome to bring a friend/colleague to support you.

Present at this meeting will be one of the attendance team as well as **Child's name** Head of Year (delete as appropriate for the school). It is important that you attend this meeting so that any issues or concerns which may be contributing to **Child's Name** non-attendance can be discussed.

This meeting is an opportunity for the school and family to meet together to discuss why a child has attendance below that which the government expects and, hopefully, to seek solutions to any problems. It is also an opportunity for the support that the school can give to be explained.

Please telephone the school office on **(01202) 882379** to confirm receipt of this letter and your intention to attend the meeting. We have had to make Dorset Attendance Services aware of **Child's Name's** current attendance.

Yours sincerely

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## APPENDIX C

### Attendance Improvement Plan

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 stated:

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his/her age, ability and aptitude and any special educational needs he/she may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Name and DOB of Pupil</b>        | <b>Name of Parent/Carer(s)</b>                |
| <b>Class</b>                        | <b>Parent Contact Phone Number</b>            |
| <b>Class Teacher</b>                | <b>Staff in Attendance</b>                    |
| <b>Attendance % at notification</b> | <b>Total Lates: Before/After Registration</b> |
| <b>Reasons for Absence:</b>         |   |

| Strategies to Improve Attendance: | Review Date |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
|                                   |             |

| Current Attendance | Target Attendance | Review Date |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|
|                    |                   |             |

Any absence due to illness must be supported by medical evidence within the monitoring period.

| Signature | Date |
|-----------|------|
| Parent    |      |
| School    |      |

## APPENDIX D

### DAILY ABSENCE PROCEDURE

