



**LEADING THE WAY**  
FOR GENERATIONS

Attendance  
Policy

April

2019

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## 1. Introduction

Regular and punctual school attendance is important. Pupils need to attend school regularly if they are to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them by law. Schools within the Stanley Learning Partnership (SLP) fully recognise their responsibilities to ensure pupils are in school and on time, therefore having access to learning for the maximum number of days and hours.

Our policy applies to all children registered at schools within the SLP and this policy is made available to all parents/carers of pupils who are registered at one of the schools within the partnership. This policy has been written to adhere to the relevant Children Acts, Education Acts, Regulations and Guidance from the Department for Education in addition to guidance from the Local Authority.

Although parents or primary care givers have the legal responsibility for ensuring their child's good attendance, the Senior Leadership Team, Attendance and Welfare Officer and Governors within our individual schools work together with other professionals and agencies to ensure that all pupils are encouraged and supported to develop good attendance habits. Procedures in this policy are followed to ensure this happens.

Children who are persistently late or absent soon fall behind with their learning. Children who are absent from school frequently develop large gaps in their learning which will impact on their progress and their ability to meet age related learning expectations. A child whose attendance drops to 90% each year will, over their time at primary school, have missed two whole terms of learning.

It is every child's right to an education and, as a partnership, we are committed to deliver this to our most important stakeholders.

## 2. Aims and Objectives

This attendance policy ensures that all staff and governors within our schools are fully aware of and clear about the actions necessary to promote good attendance.

### **Through this Policy we aim to:**

- Improve pupils' achievement by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality.
- Achieve a minimum of 96.1% attendance for all children in line with the government guidance.
- Create an ethos in which good attendance and punctuality are recognised as the norm and seen to be valued as highly as academic achievement.
- Raise awareness of parents, carers and pupils of the importance of uninterrupted attendance and punctuality at every stage of a child's education.
- Ensure that our policy applies to EYFS aged children in order to promote good habits at an early age.
- Work in partnership with pupils, parents, staff and Durham LEA so that all pupils realise their potential, unhindered by unnecessary absence.
- Promote a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which pupils feel safe, secure, and valued, and encourage in pupils a sense of their own responsibility.
- Establish a pattern of monitoring attendance and punctuality ensuring consistency in recognising achievement and dealing with difficulties with pupils needs and circumstances in mind.
- Recognise the key role of all staff, but especially class teachers, in promoting good attendance.

### **We maintain and promote good attendance and punctuality through:**

- To maintain appropriate registration processes.
- To maintain appropriate attendance data
- Record all concerns and contact with parents regarding attendance and punctuality on Cpoms.
- To report attendance statistics to Durham LEA and the DfE where requested.



- Raising awareness of attendance and punctuality issues among all staff, parents and pupils.
- Issuing all parents with an attendance guidance leaflet at the beginning of each term, which outlines our expectations, points of contact, benefits, rewards and consequences of poor attendance and punctuality.
- Ensuring that parents have an understanding of the responsibility placed on them for making sure their child attends regularly and punctually.
- Equipping children with the life skills needed to take responsibility for good school attendance and punctuality appropriate to the child's age and development.
- Developing and implementing procedures for identifying, reporting and reviewing cases of poor attendance and persistent lateness.
- Supporting pupils who have been experiencing any difficulties at home or at school which are preventing good attendance.
- Developing and implementing procedures to follow up non-attendance at school.
- Fostering and maintaining good relationships and communication with parents regarding all aspects of attendance and punctuality.
- Being proactive when early signs of poor punctuality or attendance are identified by contacting parents on the first day of absence and, where necessary, attending the home address.
- Meeting with parents.
- Issuing warning letters and parental contracts.
- Strongly discouraging unnecessary absence through holidays taken during term time.
- All staff should be aware that they must raise any attendance or punctuality concerns to the Attendance and Welfare Officer, but still maintain responsibility for monitoring attendance on a day-to-day basis.
- Using social media and individual school websites to regularly update, celebrate and inform parents of attendance and punctuality.

### 3. Definitions

#### Authorised Absence

An absence is classified as authorised when a child has been away from school for a legitimate reason and the school has received notification from a parent or carer. For example, if a child has been unwell and the parent telephones the school to explain the absence.

Only the school can make an absence authorised. Parents do not have this authority. Consequently, not all absences supported by parents will be classified as authorised.

#### Unauthorised Absence

An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of the school. Therefore, the absence is unauthorised if a child is away from school without good reason, even with the support of a parent (See Section 11 Parental Request for Leave of Absence).

### 4. Celebrating Good Attendance and Punctuality

At the SLP, we strongly believe that rewarding pupils for great attendance is key in reaching our targets. We also understand however, that not all pupils are able to attend school as much as they want for reasons beyond their control such as chronic medical issues. This is why we have a number of initiatives so that as many children as possible have an opportunity to contribute to our attendance target and be rewarded for their efforts. Schools in the SLP have autonomy on how they reward and celebrate attendance and punctuality in their schools which are suitable for their setting, parents and pupil profile.

### 5. Responsibilities



All members of teaching staff within our schools have a responsibility to monitor their individual class attendance and punctuality but there are additional staff who have a particular focus on the attendance of individuals, siblings, families and groups. Below are the responsibilities which these key members of staff have in monitoring, reporting, improving and celebrating attendance within their schools. Some responsibilities are shared between individuals.

### Attendance and Welfare Officer

As Attendance and Welfare Officers work across more than one school some of the following tasks can only be fulfilled in the school which they are situated in at that time. Many of the duties listed below will be carried out by other relevant staff in the absence of the Attendance and Welfare Officer.

- Build relationships with all parents but especially those whose children have a history of poor attendance
- Have a regular visual presence on the school gate during mornings and home time
- Attend to parents/children at the main entrance once school gates are closed
- Endorse the 'late' and 'leaving early' register
- In the absence of Admin staff, take and record messages from parents regarding absence
- Use SIMs to check registers have been completed by staff and confirming absences
- Make phone calls to parents and carers targeting those pupils with persistent absenteeism first with immediate requests for explanation which should be noted on Cpoms
- Look particularly for either; poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/carers
- Where possible or necessary, collect those pupils up who are able to attend but are having difficulty getting to school
- Visit properties of non-contactable parents after telephone contacts have been exhausted
- Identify trends in authorised and unauthorised absence
- Contact families where concerns are raised about absence including arranging meetings to discuss attendance issues
- Publish attendance and punctuality documents and distribute these on a termly basis
- Creating attendance contracts, in consultation with parents
- Report attendance trends, facts and figures to the Head Teacher of their school through tagging in Cpoms
- Communicate and meet regularly with school leaders and other Attendance and Welfare Officers, across the trust, to discuss all issues of attendance
- Attend TAF meetings

### Class teacher

Class teachers should:

- Complete and close accurate registers of pupils' attendance within 10 minutes of the official school start time
- Use the symbol / to indicate present, or N to indicate not present
- Inform the Attendance and Welfare Officer of any attendance concerns
- Provide background information to support referrals
- Monitor and communicate with the Attendance and Welfare Officer following any formal monitoring which has been put in place
- Emphasise, incentivise, praise and reward good attendance and punctuality
- Discuss attendance issues at parent consultation evenings where necessary



## Head Teacher

The Head Teacher should:

- Have an up-to-date overview of current school attendance
- Liaise regularly with the Attendance and Welfare Officer, when required, regarding reports and providing background information to inform discussion with other agencies where required
- Liaise with other professionals to determine potential sources of difficulties and reasons for absence
- Communicate and meet regularly with other school leaders and Attendance and Welfare Officers, across the trust, to discuss all issues of attendance

**Administration staff** – many of the responsibilities listed are carried out in conjunction with the Attendance and Welfare Officer depending on the school setting. Some tasks may also be carried out by other appropriate staff in school.

Administration staff may:

- Collate and record registration and attendance information
- Take and record messages from parents regarding absence
- Endorse the 'late' and 'leaving early' register
- Contact parents of absent children when no reason for absence has been given
- Record details of children who arrive late or go home early
- Keep an overview of class and individual attendance looking particularly for either poor overall attendance, anomalies in patterns of attendance and/ or unusual explanations for attendance offered by children and their parents/carers and report concerns to the Attendance and Welfare Officer
- Liaise with the Attendance and Welfare Officer to ensure that dinner and attendance registers align
- Send out standard letters regarding attendance

## Parents

Parents/Carers should:

- Ensure that their child attends school regularly and punctually unless prevented from doing so by illness, a medical appointment or provided with advance permission by the Head Teacher
- Contact the school office on the first morning of absence then each day of absence thereafter
- Inform the school in advance of any medical appointments which are to be taken in school time
- Provide accompanying evidence for medical appointments
- Where possible, make requests for a Leave of Absence in term time 5 days before the date of absence
- Communicate with school as soon as possible about a child's reluctance to come to school so that problems can be quickly identified and dealt with
- Report absence to school in person or via telephone only
- Not use any forms of social media, text, or email to report a child's absence for safeguarding reasons

## Governors

Governors should:

- Be updated on the attendance figures for their setting, given context and what the school are doing to improve, maintain and target attendance in their setting
- Support the school in any initiatives they have regarding attendance and punctuality
- Hold the school accountable for the attendance figures



## 6. Registration

Across the Partnership schools have their own arrangements for opening gates to allow pupils onto the school grounds, including into breakfast clubs. Schools also have autonomy regarding when they allow pupils into classrooms, begin registration and the time which they officially close their registers.

Each class teacher has the responsibility for keeping an accurate record of attendance using SIMs (including those schools using Fast Track). Any pupil who is absent must be recorded at the beginning of the morning and afternoon session. The attendance register must be completed by the class teacher within 10 minutes of the school's official start time for both morning and afternoon registers.

All attendance records are documented using SIMs software, which is supported by the Local Authority. Attendance registers are legal documents, and these must be kept secure and preserved for a period of seven years from the date of the register in line with changes to GDPR.

## 7. Monitoring Attendance

The school Attendance and Welfare Officer and the office staff have the responsibility for ensuring that all of the attendance data is accurately recorded on the SIMs attendance software. Regular meetings are held with the Head Teacher or members of the SLT to discuss all attendance concerns and appropriate actions are taken following these meetings such as letters sent to parents or meetings arranged to discuss attendance concerns with parents.

## 8. Lateness

Children who are persistently late miss a significant amount of learning, often the most important aspect, as the beginning of the day is where the teacher explains the learning and what each child is expected to achieve.

Once the school gates or entrance doors are closed the only way to access school is via the school office. Any pupil who comes into school this way after 9:00am will be marked as late in the attendance register. Records are kept of those pupils who are late, this is documented on the electronic register for each pupil (Attendance code L). Any child who arrives for school later than 9:30am will be marked as having an unauthorised absence for the morning. (Attendance code U).

Children who have attended a medical appointment and subsequently come to school later than 9:30am will have the absence recorded as a medical absence (Attendance code M).

Where there have been persistent incidents of lateness parents/carers will receive a letter to inform them of our concerns and information on how school can assist them in getting their child to school on time.

## 9. Absences

Parents/carers should contact the school on the first day of their child's absence and then each day thereafter. When parents/carers notify us of their child's absence it is important that they provide us with details of the reason for this absence. After 3 days of consecutive absence a welfare visit will be made by the Attendance and Welfare Officer, however a welfare visit may be done during any time of absence depending on individual circumstances.

All absences are recorded as either authorised or unauthorised absences. It is important that we receive accurate information from parents with reasons for their child's absence. This information is used to determine whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised. The Attendance and Welfare Officer, administrative or management staff have the responsibility to determine whether absences are authorised or unauthorised.

Where school have not received reasons for a child's absence before 9:15am, then we use details listed on SIMs to make initial contact to establish the reason for absence. A follow-up call will be made if this was unsuccessful,



where no reason for absence can be confirmed then a home visit will be made to the child's main address or any additional addresses provided by parents or main care givers. If no reason can be established for absence, then it will be recorded as an unauthorised absence (Attendance Code O) and the information will then be passed on to the police or First Contact as a safeguarding concern.

## 10. Long Term Illness

When children have an illness that means they will be away from school long term, the school will do all it can to send material home, so that they can keep up with their school work. If the absence is likely to continue for an extended period, or be a repetitive absence, the school will contact the appropriate support services to see if arrangements can be made for the child to be given some home tuition outside school.

Where over the course of an academic year a child has repeated periods of illness the school will write to parents to ask them to provide medical evidence for each future period of illness related absence. This evidence could be a Doctor's note, appointment card or copy of a prescription.

It is important that all children feel included and we feel that children who have long term illnesses which negatively affect their attendance are not penalised for this by missing out on any incentives, celebration or rewards. If pupils have attended all sessions which it was physically or logistically able to do so then this would mean they would be included in any initiatives schools may be running with the aim of improving attendance and punctuality.

## 11. Parental Request for Leave of Absence (LOA)

With effect from September 2013 the government abolished the right of Head Teachers to authorise absence specifically for holidays of up to 10 days per year if special circumstances exist. Instead, Head Teachers will only be allowed to grant LOA if they are satisfied exceptional circumstances exist. In circumstances where a parent or carer has children across different schools in the trust these schools will liaise with each other so that the decision whether to issue a leave of absence is the same in all schools.

Schools in the SLP will only normally consider a parental request for LOA if the attendance of the pupil in question is above 96.1%. There is also consideration for those pupils below 96.1% whose reasons for absence have been due to a longstanding medical issue. **Any request for LOA must be, where possible, submitted 10 school days before the first date of the request.** Satisfaction of the above criteria does not guarantee that a request will be granted as the Head must be convinced that there are exceptional circumstances in place. If a leave of absence is granted it will only be for the period of time specified on the original request. A Head Teacher can seek advice from the SLP trustees if they are unsure as to the validity of the request but this is not expected in most cases.

If a parent is unhappy that a LOA has been denied they can appeal to the SLP trustees who will consider the request and the reasons for it not being issued. Once this appeal has been considered by the trustees the decision made will be final and not subject to further appeals.

## 12. Addressing Attendance Concerns

We understand that families have unique circumstances and our first approach is to always support our families in improving attendance before using sanctions. However, it is important for children to establish good attendance habits early on in their school career, including those settings within the SLP which operate a nursery. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to support good attendance and to identify and address attendance concerns promptly. Parents and carers should ensure their child attends school regularly and punctually and therefore we will inform parents at the earliest opportunity if we have concerns. Initial concerns regarding attendance are raised with parents either in a letter or with a home visit. There will be opportunities for the parent/carer to discuss reasons for absence and kind of support which we can offer as a school with the aim



of improving attendance or punctuality. Where a child's attendance record does not improve over a period of time then the school has a responsibility to make a referral to the Educational Welfare Service (EWS).

### 13. Sanctions

Sanctions begin when a child has 7 days of unauthorised attendance within a 12-week period. In those cases, where a child's attendance has normally been above 96.1% (the national average) and their punctuality would be considered good then an informal meeting will be arranged in school to discuss this. However, if a child's attendance history has been consistently below 96.1%, without a medical or other exceptional reason, then parents will be issued with a formal warning letter. This will inform them of their legal responsibilities and that we will be monitoring their child's attendance until such time that improvement is made towards the national average or an agreed percentage figure.

Penalty Notices are issued by the local authority to parents for their child's irregular attendance at school. A Penalty Notice is an alternative to prosecution. Receiving a notice means parents have to pay a fixed amount of money for their child's non-attendance at school, and avoids court action as long as it is paid in full. If the Penalty Notice is paid within 21-days, the fine amount is £60. Payment doubles to £120 when paid between 21 and 28 days. If the penalty notice is not paid in full by the end of the 28-day payment period, the Local Authority will bring a prosecution against them for failing to ensure their child's regular attendance at school during the period. As the notices are 'fixed,' the legislation does not allow part payments to be made, or payment by instalments. It is important to note that any fixed penalty notice is issued to both liable parents or carer.

### 14. Monitor and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, with opportunities for consultation with staff, trustees, Governors, pupils and parents.

Policy to be reviewed September 2019



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