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Attendance and Punctuality Policy and Procedures

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Introduction

The school's policy has been written following the principles and procedures outlined in the Staffordshire Attendance and Behaviour Policy produced by Staffordshire County Council and reflects the DFE's requirements for behaviour and attendance.

Principles

Promoting positive behaviour and excellent attendance is the responsibility of the whole school community.

The school promotes positive behaviour and good attendance through its use of curriculum and learning materials. Good attendance and behaviour by students are recognised appropriately. All children are expected to be at school, on time, every day the school is open, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.

We accept that all children may sometimes be reluctant to attend school. Any problems that arise with attendance will be resolved between the school, the parents and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend, we advise parents not to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and may make things worse. We recognise that permitting absence from school without a good reason is an offence by the parent.

The attendance and behaviour policy includes procedural referral agreements that are designed to promote and safeguard the welfare of students. We have a duty in law to refer any absence where we have been unable to make contact with the parent/child or have general concerns about the absence to the Education Welfare Service.

We use an electronic based registration system (WISE). This allows us to take the register every lesson. We use tutorial time and lesson 4 as the AM/PM registration, this shows whether a student is present, engaged in an approved educational activity off-site, or absent. If a student of compulsory school age is absent every half-day absence is classified by the school, as either **AUTHORISED** or **UNAUTHORISED**. Only school can authorise the absence, not parents. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required, preferably in writing.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been given. This includes:

- **parents keeping children off school unnecessarily**
- **truancy before or during the school day**

- **absences which have never been properly explained**
- **children who arrive at school too late to get a mark**
- **holidays taken without prior agreement from school**

The Local Authority has the statutory powers under the Education Act 1996 to ensure children attend school and if they cannot successfully engage with the family to achieve this, they may use the many statutory powers to enforce the parents/carers responsibility regarding their child's school attendance.

Department for Education (DfE) regulations relating to parents taking their children out of school during term time mean that parents risk receiving a penalty notice (fine) issued by the Local Authority for taking their child out of school in term time unless there are exceptional circumstances and permission has been given by the Head teacher.

Penalty Notice for leave of absence (including holiday) in term time

Parents who want the school to consider granting leave of absence in school term time should read these notes carefully, **write a letter explaining the reasons for the absence and send it to the Principal**. This form should be sent to the school in time for the request to be considered **well before** the desired period of absence. Parents are strongly advised not to finalise any booking arrangements before receiving the school's decision regarding their request. Headteachers cannot authorise any leave of absence unless the request is received before the period of absence begins.

The Department for Education makes it clear that headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are **exceptional circumstances**. Headteachers now also determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted.

There is no automatic right to any leave in term time.

The school understands the challenges that some parents face when booking holidays particularly during school holidays. However, we believe that, in order to ensure children receive the best education and prospects, that they should be in school during term time.

Each case will be considered individually and on its own merits. Parents need, therefore, to consider very carefully before making any request for leave of absence. In considering a request, the school will take account of: -

- the **exceptional** circumstances stated that have given rise to the request
- the stage of the child's education and progress and the effects of the requested absence on both elements
- frequency of similar requests
- whether the parent made the request in advance
- students/pupils on examination courses or due to take exams will **not** normally be granted leave of absence.

Where parents have children in more than one school a separate request must be made to each school. The headteacher of each school will make their own decision based on the factors relating to the child at their school. However, headteachers may choose to liaise with each other as part of their decision-making process.

Should the school decide to grant leave of absence, but the child **does not return to school at the time s/he was expected to** (i.e. following the expiry of the granted leave of absence period) and no information is available to the school to explain/justify the continuing absence this absence will be recorded as unauthorised.

Should the school decide **not to grant leave of absence** and parents still take their child out of school, the absence will be recorded as **unauthorised**, which may be subject to a Penalty Notice fine of £60 **per parent* per child if the child's absence is already a cause for concern**. This fine will increase to £120 if not paid within 21 days. Failure to pay the £120 fine within the period 22 to 28 days may lead to Court proceedings.

* Generally the DfE states that parents include all those with day to day responsibility for a child.

Previously only one Penalty Notice per pupil was issued within an academic year. This limit has been removed so more than one Penalty Notice could be issued for repeated absence without permission during term time.

A combined total of ten sessions (not necessarily grouped as 5 consecutive days) could trigger a Penalty Notice. Instead of monitoring and totalling holiday absences taken across each academic year, they will now be monitored across the previous three terms, regardless of academic year

Penalty Notice for persistent absence

Parents whose child is repeatedly absent will now only receive one warning notice period to bring about improvement in attendance in a single academic year. If attendance deteriorates again then no further formal warning notice will be issued and the Local Authority can automatically consider other statutory actions if unauthorised absence re-occurs.

A penalty notice is initially for £60. If this £60 (per parent, per child) is not paid within 21 days from the date of issue it rises to £120. If, after 28 days of the date of issue the £120 is not paid the Local Authority will prosecute the parents under section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996. This will lead to a hearing in the Magistrates Court and may result in a fine of up to £1,000 per parent

Parents whose children are experiencing difficulties are advised to contact the school at an early stage and work together with the staff to resolve any problems. This is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be sorted out in this way, the school or the parent may refer the child to the Education Welfare Officer from the County Council. He/she will also try to resolve the situation with voluntary support, if other ways of trying to improve the child's attendance have failed, these Officers can issue Penalty Notices or use court proceedings to prosecute parents or to seek an Education Supervision Order on the child. The maximum penalty on conviction is a fine of £2500 and/or 3 months imprisonment.

Alternatively, parents or children may wish to contact the EWW themselves to ask for help or information. They are independent of the school and will give impartial advice. Their telephone number is available from the school office or by contacting the Local Education Authority.

Procedures

The school applies the following procedures in deciding how to deal with individual absences:

- Parents are advised that students are expected to be in school for the full 190 days that we are open to students. The importance of good attendance is stressed through written and oral communications with students and parents.
- Termly reminder letters are sent out to parents where their child's attendance is under 95% and reward letters for 98%+.
- Students who arrive late are expected to sign in at the school office giving reasons for their lateness (see below for late sanctions)
- Parents are discouraged from making non urgent medical and dental appointments during school time.
- Students who need to leave school during the day must have a note explaining the reasons for this and this should be counter-signed by their Form Tutor
- Students should not contact their parents if they are ill or have a problem during the day but should speak to the Attendance Officer or Student Support team member first so that issues can be investigated and parents contacted if necessary.
- All requests for known absences from school must be made in writing.
- Holidays during term time are actively discouraged and will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances.
- All absences through illness must be backed up by a note or email explaining the nature of the illness or a telephone call to the Attendance Officer each day that the child is absent
- We have a system of truancy sweeps and also act promptly if it becomes evident that a child is not where they should be to ensure children have not left the site and are safe
- Attendance is regularly monitored by the Attendance Officer, Vice Principal Student Support and Heads of House.
- For any unauthorised absences a letter is sent out (weekly) asking parents to explain the reasons for their child's absence. If there is no response from parents the case is referred to the EWW and a meeting arranged
- Where concerns about individual students occur these are addressed with parents through the Student Support System in the first instance. If concerns about attendance persist then the school will then involve the Education Welfare service. Throughout this process the staff will be looking to identify and address the reasons for attendance issues so that the student can return to school (with support if necessary) as quickly as possible.
- When an individual student's attendance level falls below 85% in any term without good reason, a referral to the EWS will be made by the school. Following investigation any unresolved issues could result parents receiving a Penalty Notice or ultimately a prosecution under the Education Act 1996 s.444.

Persistent Absence (PA)

The school is committed to reducing persistent absence (less than 85% attendance) and has specific procedures for dealing with this.

1. PA data is monitored weekly to track and review the attendance of PA students so that concerns can be addressed
2. The Attendance Officer contacts the parents of PA students as soon as they are absent.
3. Weekly meetings are held with the EWW to discuss existing cases and any new concerns
4. Parents, the child, the Student Support Leader and EWW are all spoken to about concerns relating to PA
5. Actions are taken by EWW in line with Staffordshire Policy

Information about individual school targets for attendance

The school has adopted the following attendance targets and special projects:

- We aim for an attendance rate above national average
- We are committed to reducing any gaps in attendance rates for students who are disadvantaged compared to their peers
- We are committed to significantly reducing persistent absence to below the national average
- We are committed to reducing the number of holidays taken within school time

Where a child is absent and the school has received no notification from parents the Attendance Officer contacts parents to identify the reason for absence. The Attendance Officer also has a priority list of students for whom attendance has been identified as an issue and these are contacted first where possible. Students identified as truanting are dealt with through the Student Support system and Education Welfare Workers may become involved if the problem persists.

Those people responsible for attendance matters in this school are:

The Vice Principal (Student Support), who leads the Student Support Team and has strategic responsibility for monitoring and improving school attendance as part of her role

Student Welfare Lead
Head of Year 11
Heads of House
Head of Sixth Form

All of the above will monitor and address attendance issues as part of their role

The school's Attendance Officer provides administrative support for attendance, first day contact and communications/queries regarding attendance from parents.

Punctuality

Students are expected to arrive at school on time. Where students arrive late in the morning they are issued with a 10 minute detention for that evening and a text is sent to parents. Students who do not attend late detention or are persistently late will be issued with a 40 minute Leadership Group

detention. Parents whose child is late for a legitimate reason should contact the school office to explain the exceptional circumstances.

From January 2018 the parents of students who are persistently late may also be issued with a penalty notice if their attendance and punctuality are a cause for concern and they are marked late on 10 occasions. Students are required to be in school by 8.40am and if they arrive in school or their tutor room after 8.45am will be marked late.

Summary

The school recognises its legal duty to publish its absence figures to parents and to promote attendance and attendance information for the previous year is published in the school prospectus. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend school on time. School staff are committed to working with parents as the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance and punctuality as possible.