

Attendance Policy

May 2018

Witchford Village College



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Attendance Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy applies to all students of compulsory school age at any school within the Morris Education Trust (MET) and will be used to inform attendance practice in relation to any MET Post-16 provision.
- 1.2 Key Principles
- Students at Morris Education Trust schools have the right to education that is 'excellence as standard'.
 - In order for students to access the best possible education, a high level of attendance is essential.
 - Students' ability to stay and feel safe, enjoy and achieve and to make a positive contribution may be jeopardised by poor attendance.
- 1.3 All schools in the Morris Education Trust endeavour to provide a safe learning environment in which students can enjoy and achieve. We acknowledge the proven correlation between high level attendance and student outcomes. This Attendance Policy emphasises positive strategies and a range of interventions to ensure the highest levels of attendance. However, when normal school procedures do not result in good attendance, a range of further measures, including legal action, have to be considered.
- 1.4 Morris Education Trust aims to
- emphasise the importance, to all students, of maximum attendance at school as an essential pre-requisite for making full use of all educational opportunities and to maximise individual achievement;
 - make explicit to all relevant parties (teachers, parents/carers and students) the Trust's expectations on attendance levels;
 - promote a consistent approach across the Trust towards all matters relating to attendance;
 - clarify the roles and responsibilities of all parties with respect to attendance;
 - communicate to all relevant parties the legal position with respect to attendance and the categories of absence which are deemed "authorised";
 - stress the need for home and school to work in close partnership to achieve high attendance.

2. Requirements/ Legal Responsibilities

- 2.1 It is a legal requirement that students of compulsory school age receive a full-time education and this, with the exception of those educated at home or elsewhere, means regular attendance at school. Irregular attendance leads to students missing important lessons and therefore not fulfilling their true potential; it also places children at risk and may result in their being drawn into patterns of anti-social or criminal behaviour. **Therefore we take the issue of attendance very seriously and do all we can to obtain very high attendance from all our students.**

3. What is an acceptable attendance rate?

- 3.1 Attendance is a national priority; national data clearly shows a correlation between high attendance rates and high achievement and examination performance. In addition, all

schools must submit data electronically every term. It is a key indicator of an effective school and, as such, will be scrutinised by OFSTED.

3.2 **Morris Education Trust expect attendance at school to be 100%, unless there are exceptional or unavoidable reasons for absence.**

3.3 **The simple facts:** Students attend school for **190** days each year

- (Using existing evidence/data), at **96%** attendance, **73%** of students achieve **5** 9-5 grades GCSEs including English and Maths but even at 96% a student would have missed **45 lessons**
- **17** days off school every year means that a student will probably obtain a whole grade lower in each exam than they are really capable of
- **19 days** off per school year means that a student has **90%** attendance. At 90% attendance you will have missed **95 lessons** in one year. 90% attendance throughout a student's secondary education is **half a year absent**
- At **80%** attendance a student will have missed **38 days** of school. This means that a student will probably be underachieving by two whole grades in each subject; only **35%** of those with attendance between 80-90% **will achieve 5** 9-5 grades at GCSE including English and Maths.

3.4 Sickness comes usually in a block of time over a continuous period; what we look for are unbroken weeks (i.e. those where the student is marked present on all ten sessions); students should **not** have more than one or two broken weeks in the course of an academic year. Regular broken weeks are a cause for concern and will be followed up by the school.

4. Authorised Absences

4.1 The School cannot legally authorise **any** leave of absence unless there are **exceptional circumstances**. The Department for Education (DfE) has issued guidelines to all schools detailing valid reasons for **authorised** or **justified** absences:

- a child is ill or receiving medical attention;
- days of religious observance, notified in advance;
- absence due to family circumstances (e.g. bereavement, serious illness).

4.2 There are other absences, such as **approved sporting activities** that can be authorised and there will be events affecting families, some unforeseen, which will necessitate absence from school; professional discretion will need to be used in these cases as to whether the absence can be authorised.

4.3 If exceptional circumstances are being applied for an **Application for Leave of Absence for Exceptional Circumstances form** (see Appendix 1) is to be completed and submitted to the Principal/Headteacher for approval at least **two weeks** prior to the absence.

4.4 Forms are available on the school website and from the Attendance Administrator or House teams.

- 4.5 We expect absences to be kept to a minimum; routine medical and dental appointments should be arranged out of school hours, wherever possible.

5. Unauthorised Absences

- 5.1 These are absences where:

- no letter or acceptable explanation is provided by parent(s)/carer(s);
- the reason for the absence does not fall into one of the categories of **authorised** absence above.

- 5.2 DfE guidelines state that the following activities would be classified as **unauthorised**;

- minding the house;
- caring for relatives;
- awaiting repair people;
- shopping;
- a birthday or family celebration.

- 5.3 There are clearly some grey areas. The DfE guidelines look at the area of Special Occasions and make clear that only truly exceptional occasions should be classified as authorised; for example, absence resulting from a student attending the wedding of a parent could be counted as authorised; a birthday treat to a theme park would not.

6. Holidays during term time

- 6.1 In line with Government guidelines, where parents/carers are strongly discouraged from taking students out of school during term time, the Principal/Headteacher may not grant absence for any reason unless there are exceptional circumstances. If exceptional circumstances are being applied for an **Application for Leave of Absence for Exceptional Circumstances form** (see Appendix 1) is to be completed and submitted to the Principal/Headteacher for approval at least **two weeks** prior to the absence. Failure to comply with these guidelines may result in a Penalty Notice of £60, for each parent, for those who pay within 21 days and £120 for those who pay within 28 days.

- 6.2 Forms are available on the school website and from the Attendance Administrator or House/pastoral teams.

7. Persistent Lateness to School

- 7.1 It is the duty of parents to ensure that children attend school regularly and punctually. This encourages habits of good timekeeping and lessens any possible classroom disruption. If you are experiencing any difficulties regarding your child's education, we would welcome the opportunity of meeting with you to discuss this.

8. Home/School Partnership

- 8.1 Securing a high level of attendance requires the school and home to work closely together. To this end, we ask parents to:
- do all you can to ensure their child arrives **on time** for morning and afternoon sessions; morning registration begins at 08.30am. We will monitor persistent late

comers and action will be taken; **parents can be prosecuted if their child persistently arrives late;**

- if your child is ill, notify the school **on the each day** of absence.
- get in touch at an early stage about any concerns you have about their child's attitude towards school.

8.2 In return we will:

- contact home on each day of absence if no message has been received from home;
- contact home over any unexplained absences;
- follow up promptly any concerns parents pass on to us that may be affecting their child's attitude to, or feeling of wellbeing in school;
- involve the pastoral teams to help students re-integrate into school after illness or other individual circumstances;
- regularly and consistently remind students of the importance of good attendance and punctuality;
- reward excellent or improving attendance and action any concerns promptly.

9. Rewards for Good Attendance

9.1 To promote good attendance and to emphasise its importance each school within the MET will have its own rewards system which may include:

- Rewards/merits for weekly 100% attendance
- Celebration in Tutor Time and Assemblies
- Attendance rewards
- Letters from the Principal/Headteacher for long term exceptional attendance and overcoming long term non-attendance will become part of the student's records and make a meaningful contribution to their reference for further education or the world of work. Prospective employers, Sixth Form Colleges and Colleges of Further Education view attendance and punctuality as important indicators of motivation/attitude and our records and references are very valuable evidence of reliability. **The majority of Cambridgeshire Sixth Form providers expect at least 96% attendance when offering places.**

10. Roles and responsibilities

10.1 High attendance levels are achieved as a result of staff working closely together and knowing where their responsibilities lie. The outline of respective roles of the Form Tutor, House/Student Manager, Attendance Administrator and the School procedures are explained in Appendix 2.

11. Education Welfare

11.1 Education Welfare is a statutory service and a legal requirement. Education Welfare involvement is triggered by an unacceptable level of:

- Unauthorised absence
- Persistent absence
- Lateness

11.2 At Witchford Village College the Attendance Officer specifically targets the students whose attendance falls below acceptable levels working with the Pastoral teams. The Principal is responsible for ensuring that the school's strategy and practice is compliant with the local authority's legal duties and processes. This includes ensuring that only the Principal authorises legal action.

12. Legal action

12.1 All parents have a legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school on a regular and punctual basis. Should any student's attendance or punctuality become a concern, they will be subject to an Education Welfare investigation. Where necessary the College will recommend legal action. The school and Local Authority work together in partnership where legal action is required.

12.2 Legal action includes:

- **Penalty Notice:** A Penalty Notice may be issued to each parent for each student who has unauthorised absence or lateness. The penalty is a £60 fine, if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice, rising to £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days. If the penalty is not paid in full within the 28 day period, a prosecution will be sought.
- **Prosecution for unauthorised absence:** It is a criminal offence under Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act to fail to secure regular attendance of a registered student at Witchford Village College. Magistrates can issue fines of up to £2,500 per child, impose Parenting Orders and impose period of imprisonment of up to 3 months.

12.3 Any prosecution will appear on a criminal record.

13. A Final Word

13.1 We feel attendance levels are an indicator of how effective and caring a school is. Failure to attend can be an indication that all is not well at home so that there is a welfare aspect to attendance as well. Equally, it is clear that regular, consistent attendance is an essential pre-requisite for effective learning.

13.2 We take attendance seriously and have put a lot of time and energy into getting our procedures as efficient and effective as possible. We urge you to give this matter the priority it deserves.

Appendix 1

ABSENCE REQUEST FORM (exceptional circumstances only)

To: The Principal/Headteacher

I wish to apply to have an 'unavoidable' absence authorised, for:

Child's name Year Form

Date from date to (inclusive)

Name of Parent(s)/Carer(s):

Address:

.....

Please fully explain the exceptional circumstances that you would like the school to consider. This section must be completed. Please continue on a separate sheet if needed.

Signature of Parent(s)/Carer(s)

.....

Office use only			<input type="checkbox"/> Absence authorised Code ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Absence unauthorised SIGNED _____ Principal/Headteacher
Date form received	No of school days absence requested	% Attendance	

NOTES TO PARENTS/CARERS

The law does not grant parents/carers an automatic right to take their children out of school during term time. If the request is for an absence in term time you must have Parental Responsibility and be the parent/carer with whom the child normally lives. Permission **must** be sought in **advance**. If the circumstances relating to this request are considered exceptional and the absence is authorised by the school, the authorising of the absences will be conditional on the child's(ren's) attendance being satisfactory up to the date covered by this request.

Warning: If the school refuses your request and the child is still taken out of school, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. A significant amount of unauthorised absence may make you liable to a Penalty Notice for each child, payable by each parent/carer, or the subject of court proceedings which could result in a fine of up to £2,500 and/or a term of imprisonment of up to 3 months.

AVOIDABLE ABSENCE IN TERM-TIME

IMPORTANT: Please read carefully the information below.

WARNING: If you allow your child to miss school in term time for an avoidable reason without obtaining the prior approval of the school, you may be issued with a Penalty Notice* per parent per child, or made the subject of court proceedings under section 444 Education Act 1996.

As a parent/carer, you can demonstrate your commitment to your child's education by not allowing your child to miss school for anything other than an exceptional and unavoidable reason.

THE FACTS	THE LAW
<p>School aged pupils in maintained schools are expected to attend punctually on the 190 days that the school is open. Whilst there are a number of unavoidable reasons why a pupil might be away from school (illness, medical appointments, exclusions etc), the legislation is clear that any avoidable absence may only be authorised by a school if there are exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>WHAT YOU SHOULD CONSIDER</p> <p>Research suggests that children who are taken out of school may never catch up on the learning they have missed. This may affect test results and can be particularly harmful if the child is studying for final year examinations.</p> <p>Children who struggle with English or Mathematics may also find it even harder to cope when they return to school, while younger children may find it difficult to renew friendships with their classmates.</p>	<p>The law allows schools to consider individual requests to authorise a future avoidable absence. However before the school can authorise any such requests, they must satisfy themselves that there are exceptional circumstances which justify such a decision. It is entirely the responsibility of the parent submitting the request to provide sufficient information/evidence in order to establish this fact. The request for leave must come from a parent with whom the child normally resides</p> <p>If a child then stays away from school for more than the authorised period this must be recorded as unauthorised absence and could be quoted in a prosecution for poor attendance.</p> <p>If the child is away from school for a total of four weeks or more, the school may have the option to take the child off roll subject to the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.</p> <p>In the case of unexpected extended absence, it is advisable that the parent fully</p>

<p>If the school is unable to authorise the absence and the child is still taken out of school, this will be recorded as unauthorised absence and you may receive a £60* fine per parent for each child.</p>	<p>informs the school as to the reasons. If a child is removed from roll, there is no guarantee that the child will regain a place at the school.</p>
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<p>Unavoidable absence from school will be authorised if it is for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Genuine illness ▪ Unavoidable medical / dental appointments (but try to make these after school if at all possible) ▪ Days of religious observance ▪ Seeing a parent who is on leave from the armed forces ▪ External examinations ▪ When Traveller children go on the road with their parents 	<p>Other examples of absence from school that <u>will not</u> be authorised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Any type of shopping ▪ Looking after siblings or unwell parents ▪ Minding the house ▪ Birthdays ▪ Resting after a late night ▪ Relatives visiting or visiting relatives
<p>Please contact your child's principal/headteacher if you wish to discuss this issue.</p> <p>The law requires parents to ensure their children receive an efficient full time education, and every minute of every day is important. Please help them not to miss any of this valuable time.</p> <p>We hope that when you have read this leaflet you will consider that your child's education is too important to allow them to miss school for avoidable reasons.</p>	

*Penalty Notice £60 if paid within 21 days, increasing to £120 if paid after 21 days and before 28 days