



Attendance Policy

**February 2019
Review February 2021**

Attendance Policy

Rationale

At Westhoughton High School we **LEARN**:

- Look after each other
- Enjoy our school
- Aim high
- Respect each other
- Never stop learning

"Poor attendance at school can have a hugely damaging effect, and children who attend school regularly are nearly four times more likely to achieve five or more good GCSEs than those who are regularly absent." (Department for Education).

Aims of this policy:

Westhoughton High school 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 maximising individual achievement;
- make explicit to all relevant parties (teachers, parents/carers and students) our school's expectations on attendance levels;
- promote a consistent approach across our school 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.

Attendance Rationale

There is a strong and obvious link between school attendance and student achievement. If students are not in the school, they cannot do the work and it may be very difficult for them to make up lost ground. Regular attendance at school is vital. Put simply, *absence* means *missed learning*; without it the learning process becomes fragmented and unsatisfactory.

It is a legal requirement that students of compulsory school age receive 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.***

What is an acceptable attendance rate?

Attendance is a national priority. All schools must submit data electronically (both in an aggregated form and on an individual pupil basis) every term. It is a key indicator of an effective school and, as such, will be scrutinised by OFSTED. National data clearly shows a correlation between high attendance rates and high examination performance.

The vast majority of our students achieve over 96% attendance and this is what we expect from all of our students as a **minimum**. 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 as part of our attendance protocols.

Authorised Absences

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:

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

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; the Headteacher will use professional discretion in these cases to make a decision as to whether the absence can be authorised.

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

Unauthorised Absences

These are absences where:

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

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.

Holidays

We strongly discourage holidays being taken in term time as learning is disrupted and the lost time is detrimental to the educational progress of the child (*this message is conveyed in our information leaflet to parents/ carers and in letters home*).

We ask parents who feel it is absolutely unavoidable that they take their annual holiday (or any other proposed special occasions) during term time to notify the school by completing a holiday request form **at least four weeks in advance of the proposed date**, explaining the circumstances. Information about holiday requests and a copy of the holiday request form can be found on the school's website.

The DFE guidelines make it plain that, in the final analysis, it is the **school** that judges whether an absence is authorised or not. With regard to holidays, the Headteacher must determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted. **A note from home therefore does NOT automatically make an absence or holiday valid, justified or authorised.**

Please note: Westhoughton High school will **not** authorise holidays retrospectively. Any requests for term time holidays will necessitate a formal request to the Headteacher.

Working within our Home/School Partnership

Securing a high level of attendance requires the school and home to work closely together. To this end, we ask parents/carers to:

- Do all you can to ensure your child arrives **on time** for morning and afternoon school sessions; morning registration begins at 8:50am. There is an afternoon registration period in addition to this session. We will monitor persistent late comers and action will be taken on the day of lateness. Please note: parents / carers can be prosecuted if their child persistently arrives late;
- If your child is ill, notify the school **on the first day** with an estimation of the likely length of absence;

- Notify the school of each day of absence if the absence continues;
- Send in a written note with your child on the first day s/he is back at school. This should be taken to the form tutor who will pass this on to the attendance team. This is needed for our records and also authenticates the telephone message.
- Get in touch with the Student Support Leader at an early stage about any concerns you have about your child's attitude towards school.

In return, school will:

- Contact home on day 1 of absence if no message has been received from home;
- Contact home over any unexplained absences;
- Follow up promptly any concerns parents/carers pass on to us that may be affecting their child's attitude to, or feeling of wellbeing in school;
- Support students to 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.

Rewards for Good Attendance

To promote good attendance and to emphasise its importance Westhoughton High school offers the following rewards:

- Half Termly, students in Years 7-11 with 100% attendance in their form receive a group reward of a non-uniform day and a letter of congratulation; this achievement is also recognised in school assemblies;
- Termly, those students with 100% attendance receive recognition though assemblies and, at the end of each year, through a prize and certificate at the school's Presentation Evening.

High attendance levels are part of the student's records and make a meaningful contribution to their reference for further education or the world of work. Prospective Colleges of Further Education and employers view attendance and punctuality as important indicators of motivation/attitude and our records and references are very valuable evidence of reliability.

Attendances and absences are included in termly assessments, which are also sent home.

Roles and responsibilities

High attendance levels are achieved as a result of staff working closely together and knowing where their responsibilities lie. The respective roles of the form tutor, Student Support Leader and Integrated working officer (Attendance) are explained in **Appendix 1**. The administrative support provided by the Attendance Officer is absolutely key. It is important that **all** members of staff are aware of the responsibilities as form tutors so that when they take on the role permanently or in a temporary capacity, they know what is expected of them: **a robust system is dependent upon everyone playing his/her part in our Attendance Matters drive.**

Integrated Working

Our Integrated working officer has oversight of attendance and works closely with other agencies around welfare issues. Students who are giving cause for concern around attendance are discussed as a matter of course each week. This may result in staff visiting homes, or seeing and supporting students in school. This work is a vital component in our efforts to secure high attendance. The Student Support Leader is available to assist parents / carers where difficulties arise and can be contacted at the school. In extreme cases the school also initiates legal proceedings against parents who have not fulfilled their responsibility for getting their child to school. Before a case goes to court, parents / carers will be contacted in order to set targets to improve attendance levels; there may also be interviews which could lead to a fixed penalty notice. The prime aim of all action is to get the child attending school on a regular basis.

Summary

We feel attendance levels are an indicator of how effective and caring a school is. High attendance levels are part of our school's LEARN ethos. 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.

We take attendance seriously across all year groups and have put a lot of time and energy into getting our procedures as efficient and effective as possible. We urge all staff / parents/ carers to give this matter the priority it deserves.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Absence Codes – Recorded on registers
- Appendix 2 Staff Guide to Registers and Associated Procedures
- Appendix 3 Attendance - Roles & Responsibilities
- Appendix 4 Stages of Intervention
- Appendix 5 Bolton's penalty notice code of conduct – information for parents/carers

APPENDIX 1

Absence Codes – Recorded on registers

∧	Present at registration
B	Educated Off Site (Not dual registered)
C	Other authorised circumstances (not covered by another appropriate code/description)
D	Dual registered (ie present at another school or at a PRU)
E	Excluded but no alternative provision made
G	Family holiday (not agreed or sessions in excess of agreement)
H	Agreed holiday
I	Illness
J	Interview
L	Late but arrived before the register closed
M	Medical or dental appointment
N	No reason for the absence provided yet
O	Other unauthorised (not covered by other codes or descriptions)
P	Approved sporting activity
R	Day set aside exclusively for religious observance
S	Study Leave
T	Traveller absence
U	Late and arrived after the register closed
V	Educational visit or trip
W	Work experience (not based working)
X	Un-timetabled sessions for non-compulsory school age pupils
Y	Partial and forced closure
Z	Pupil not on roll yet
#	School closed to pupils
AEA	Authorised Educational Activity - counted as present.

APPENDIX 2

Staff Guide to Registers and Associated Procedures: Updated September 2016

This section complements the Attendance Policy and should be read in conjunction with it. It deals with the practicalities of completing the registers and associated procedures to do with attendance. Registers are recorded in SIMS and are important legal documents. We rely on accurate input in order to follow up any concerns as well as for data analysis.

Marking the register

Form Tutors will be responsible for flagging absences and communicating reasons to the Attendance Officer. **All staff** are responsible for flagging changes in attendance with the school office through every session of the school day. If there is a change in attendance and a student is missing from a class, all staff have a duty to report this.

Reading the registers

The registers information is read every morning during registration. It is imperative that the data entered is accurate and that there is a mark for **EVERY** student (everyone **must** fall into one of the three categories of present, absent or late). Staff must enter either 'present', 'absent' or 'late' (+ how many minutes late). A student who arrives late will arrive to the form room with a late slip from the office. **Schools have a responsibility for safeguarding the children in their care and it is vital that the information we have is as accurate as possible.**

We operate a policy of 1st day response regarding absence across the school. The Attendance team contacts parents of any child not registered in Lesson 1.

Communication with/from parents or carers

The policy of same-day contact as this has been shown to be the single most effective strategy in improving rates of attendance; it is also important from a Child Protection perspective.

We ask all parents and carers to contact the school as early as possible on the **first** day of absence to notify us of their child's absence; there is a dedicated line on which parents can leave messages about absence.

We do, however, require **ALL** absences to be covered by a letter, e-mail, phone call or note in the planner from parents/carers in addition to the initial telephone contact. Communication is required for every day of a period of absence. The Student Support leader will meet weekly with tutors to provide them with a list of students whose absence has yet to be authorised with a communication from home. The Student Support leader must chase these absences, see students and follow up for a response from home. All absence notes should be initialled and dated by the form tutor when received and should relate to precise periods of absence. **All notes must be sent in the form bag to the Student Reception Office and given to the Attendance Officer.**

Lates

- Statutory Registration starts at 8:50 am and students should be in form rooms by this time. Our registers close after 30 minutes. Thereafter students' absence will be recorded as unauthorised (U) unless a valid reason is provided such as a medical or dental appointment.
- A student should only be marked as **late** when the teacher has completed the whole register and a student arrives after the register has been "sent" through the SIMS system (electronically).

- It is important that we are consistent in our procedures across the school: parents with siblings in the school do sometimes cross-check to see that the same standards are being applied and we are consistent in our approach to latecomers. Staff should record the late mark and the number of minutes late then re-send registers.
- Students who are late for afternoon registration should be reported to the Student Support leader. The form tutor should record their attendance and discuss the reasons for their lateness. If the reason given is not satisfactory then students will return for a detention.
- Lates are counted as present when the data is collected; however, parents have been successfully prosecuted for failing to get their child to school consistently on time. Therefore we will take a robust response to those who are regularly arriving late.

N.B. If for any reason staff are unable to take an electronic register, a paper register must be taken and given to the Attendance Officer. Staff must record details of the group, time, etc. or keep a SIMS print out paper copy of the paper register to use in this event.

Attendance Data provided to form tutors

Form Tutors have access to any student's attendance data via SIMS. In addition, summary data is provided on each set of assessments which go home termly. Form tutors are provided with weekly data from the Student Support Leaders so that patterns can be picked up and addressed.

During reviewing and mentoring time, we expect all form tutors to refer to a range of performance data on their tutees, including that pertaining to attendance.

Use of Form Time for Attendance Matters

Summary of Procedures:

- Staff take accurate registers during am and pm registration, making use of appropriate codes (present, absent, late).
- Monitor attendance of individuals.
- Raise issues of attendance and punctuality with student, parents and Student Support leaders or Student progress leaders as necessary.

APPENDIX 3

Attendance: roles, responsibilities and related tasks

Form Tutor/Teacher.

We are all responsible for safeguarding children in our school; therefore you must:

- Mark registers accurately in tutor time and in all subject lessons;
- Report any changes in attendance to the attendance office immediately
- Practise good housekeeping – ask for absence letters for coding, pass on letters for filing: communicate concerns to Student Support / progress Leaders
- Inform the Student Support leader of any students giving cause for concern in the weekly tutor team meeting, or earlier if needed;
- Assist students in recording attendance targets in their planners, where necessary;
- Keep attendance high profile by discussing attendance data with students and parents/carers during mentoring, Parents' Evenings and academic reviewing / mentoring sessions.

Attendance Officer

You are responsible for the attendance aspects of safeguarding children across the school; therefore you will:

- Read and check SIMS mark sheets as a priority task;
- Liaise with Student Support Leaders regarding students who are late;
- Ensure all registers are complete and follow-up and log, where necessary informing the Deputy Headteacher (Student Support & Progress) on the day;
- Ensure codes are recorded accurately (**see Appendix 2**);
- Input all missing marks after returns from Form Tutors and teaching staff;
- First day contact made – vulnerable students checked and referred for home visit where necessary;
- Liaise with Integrated Working Officer weekly and monitor those students giving cause for concern.

Student Support Leaders

You are responsible for your team of form tutors; therefore you must:

- Ensure your form tutors are operating to our agreed procedures
- Ensure high overall attendance across your year group and low absence rates
- Liaise with form tutors over students who are late
- Liaise with Integrated Working Officer over targeted / vulnerable students on 90% attendance or below;
- Use assemblies regularly to reinforce the importance of punctuality and good attendance and praise students with consistently high punctuality and/or attendance;
- Monitor students and raise any concerns around attendance / welfare issues with Integrated working officer;
- Hold meetings with students and/or parents/carers, liaising with Integrated working officer as appropriate;
- Complete EHA with family
- Conduct home visits and hold meetings according to need

All Support Staff - Overview of attendance

We are all responsible for safeguarding students and ensuring high attendance levels across our school; therefore we all need to liaise and talk to each other about attendance and families to ensure a consistent and caring approach

- **Check daily** – with the Attendance Officer, to investigate any immediate causes for concern;
- **Check weekly**, with Integrated working officer to:
 - Discuss cause for concern cases on attendance ladders and general attendance issues, high persistence absence, vulnerable student focus;
 - To analyse weekly and termly attendance data;
 - To ensure the appropriate level of response to attendance concerns;
 - To ensure all meetings take place in an efficient and impactful manner.

(Continued)

Integrated Working Officer (IWO)

You are responsible for working with our vulnerable young people, supporting families and ensuring a multi-agency approach is taken to care when appropriate; therefore you must:

- Prepare, analyse and bring relevant data to weekly meeting with Student Support Leader
- Liaise with Attendance Officer to produce a list of vulnerable families
- Liaise with Student Support Leader to discuss causes for concern and decide appropriate level of intervention and action(s);
- Support students and families, conducting home visits as appropriate;
- Follow appropriate escalation process with students and families giving cause for concern including the tracking of Fixed Penalty notices and fines;
- Set targets for those students whose attendance is 90% and below;
- Liaise with Early Intervention Team when absences persist and as letters/meetings and home visits have not had the desired impact (attendance levels falling into fixed penalty warning criteria);
- Prepare half-termly report summarising individual cases, level(s) of intervention and impact for Deputy Headteacher, Student Support & Progress;
- Prepare case studies on 3 individual cases (including PA and FSM) on a termly basis showing impact of work of the team
- Update EHA with actions following CAM to raise concern
- Prepare any documentation needed for a court route if other interventions fail

Deputy Headteacher, Student Support & Progress

You are responsible for behaviour, attendance and safeguarding procedures across our school; therefore you must:

- Ensure the team follows these procedures so that attendance levels are high and absence is low, with no child missed out
- Meet Integrated Working Officer regularly (minimum twice per half term) to discuss individual cases and overview of attendance data;
- Collate summary cumulative % sessions missed (high PA) and school attendance data;
- Analyse data to identify trends, areas of improvement and areas needing improvement;
- Investigate strategies to improve attendance of all students;
- Liaise with Integrated Working Officer and wider student support team regarding individual cases and trends in sub-groups (Below 90%/PA, CLA, FSM, gender, year group);
- Report impact of strategies to Headteacher, wider SLT, Governing body (Community Students and Inclusion) and School Improvement Partner.

APPENDIX 4

Guidelines for Intervention

Stage	Triggers Term 1	Triggers Term 2	Triggers Term 3	Intervention by:	Suggested menu of interventions. NOTE: intended impact is for students to return to school and regular attendance
0	0 to 5 sessions of absence in a term	0-10 sessions of absences during the year	0 – 15 sessions of absence during the year	Office staff – query absence and flag SSL	GREEN: First day calls for any absence Home visit as appropriate – see the child Congratulation if improvement – letter
1	6-10 sessions of absence in a term / broken week pattern 8 sessions + 93%	11 – 19 sessions of absence during the first 2 terms / broken week pattern 20 sessions + 93%	16 – 23 sessions of absence during the school year / broken week pattern 23 sessions + 93%	SSL meeting SSL / IWO - HV Referral to school nurse Early Intervention Team (advice / guidance)	AMBER: Tracking letter – no more authorisation letter this term Invitation to come into school to meet with SSL (and IWO) Home visits as appropriate – essential to see the child School nurse health check / referral for drop in Pre-warning letter if appropriate – gather information with family.
2	11-15 sessions of absence in a term 15 sessions + 90%	20-28 sessions of absence during the first 2 terms 28 sessions + 90%	24-37 sessions of absence 37 sessions + 90%	SSL intervention IWO intervention School nurse Early Intervention Team (EIT)	RED: Issue RED letter and FPW letter if appropriate and within timescales (Term 2 PLUS) Attendance now at / below 90% - no more authorisation of absences – medical note / appointment card required Home visit as needed`- see the child Meeting with parents in school Complete early help assessment and get signed * Hold meeting of concern - CAM 1 - involve EIT as appropriate
3	16- 19 sessions of absence 19 sessions + 87%	29 – 37 sessions of absence during first 2 terms 37 sessions + 87%	38-57 sessions of absence during the year 57 sessions + 87%	DHT and IWO EIT involvement	RED: Issue FPF as appropriate Home visits as needed Issue court warning letter and hold CAM 2 as meeting of concern with parents and EIT
4	20+ sessions of absence in first two terms Below 87% and falling	38+ sessions of absence during the year Below 87% and falling	58+ sessions of absence during the year Below 87% and falling	Governors DHT, IWO, EIT	Complete referral for medical assessment. CAM 3 - meeting of concern to discuss all issues and multi – agency support / court route to ensure high attendance levels

**Please note: The above are intended as guidelines. Student Support Leaders know the families and individual circumstances may need to be considered around attendance issues including attendance history & vulnerability of young person/wider family. All students with history of poor attendance/ CLA or FSM status are automatically placed on attendance ladders for weekly discussion and monitoring. Early Help assessments can be used to record meetings and obtain consent for information sharing at an early stage. A clear process and escalation of interventions must be followed to ensure young people are safeguarded.*

DHT: Deputy Headteacher / DCPO, SSL: Student Support Leader. IWO: Integrated working officer

HV: Home visit

School Attendance and Penalty Notices

Information for parents and carers

Your child's education is really important. Regular attendance at school increases your child's chance of getting good qualifications and a good job.

Children need to attend school regularly to benefit from their education. Missing out on lessons leaves children vulnerable to falling behind. Children with poor attendance tend to achieve less in primary and secondary school.

The Law

You are responsible for:

- Ensuring your children receive full time education
- Their regular and punctual attendance at school

As the parent you are committing an offence if you fail to make sure that your child attends school regularly and the absence is unauthorised by the Headteacher, even if they are missing school without your knowledge.

If you fail to ensure your child's regular attendance at school the Local Authority may issue a penalty notice or instigate legal proceedings for an offence under section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

What is regular attendance?

In April 2017, the Supreme Court held that attending school "*regularly*" means attendance in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school and not "*sufficiently frequent attendance*". This means that a child must attend school on every day that the school requires him or her to do so and failure to do this may lead to the commission of an offence.

What counts as unauthorised absence?

- Any absence from school that the school has not given permission for
- Truancy from school, with or without parent's knowledge
- Parentally-condoned absence (i.e. you know your child is absent from school and you do nothing about it)
- Delayed return from a period of leave of absence
- Arriving late at school after the register has closed

Can I take my child out of school for a holiday during term time?

You should not expect your child's school to agree to an absence for a holiday in term time.

In 2013 amendments to the Pupil registration regulations removed all reference to family holidays and made clear that Headteachers should not approve any absence unless in exceptional circumstances.

The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short.

If you feel there are exceptional circumstances why your child needs to be absent from school, you should apply in advance, by writing to the Headteacher explaining clearly the dates and reasons you are requesting leave of absence.

It is at the discretion of the Headteacher whether or not to authorise the absence. If the school refuses a request for leave of absence and the child is still taken out of school this will be recorded as unauthorised absence.

What is a Penalty Notice?

A Penalty Notice is an alternative to prosecution and can be issued when there has been 10 sessions of unauthorised absence (equivalent of 5 days consecutive or otherwise) over two consecutive half terms. A separate Penalty Notice can be issued for each parent per child.

You have to pay a fine but you do not have to appear in Court. You also have to make sure that your child's attendance at school improves.

Payment of a Penalty Notice enables parents to discharge potential liability for conviction.

Is a warning given?

The school will send you a formal letter of warning telling you that a Penalty Notice may be issued. This warning letter will also include details of your child's absences. If you receive a warning letter this is an opportunity for you to work with the school to improve your child's attendance and avoid the need to issue a Penalty Notice.

Your child must have no further unauthorised absences from school from the date of the letter. If your child's unauthorised absence continues and reaches 10 sessions (5 school days) or more, a Penalty Notice will be issued.

There is no limit to the number of times a formal warning may be issued. This depends on each individual case. ***However, the school is not required to send a warning letter where the absence is due to an unauthorised holiday during term time.***

What are the costs?

£60 if you pay within 21 days of receipt of a Penalty Notice or £120 if you pay after this but within 28 days. (Per parent, per child).

Is there an appeal process?

There is no right of appeal by parents against a Penalty Notice.

What happens if I don't pay?

If you don't pay in full within 28 days, Bolton Council is required to commence proceedings in the Magistrates' Court under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 for the original offence of failing to ensure the regular attendance of your child.

If proven this can attract a range of fines up to £1,000 and/or a range of disposals such as Parenting Orders or Community Sentences depending on individual circumstances.

Can I be prosecuted if I pay the Penalty Notice but my child is still missing school?

Not for the period included in the Penalty Notice – payment discharges your liability in this respect. A prosecution might be considered for further periods of poor attendance not covered by the Penalty Notice, depending on your circumstances.

The Local Authority can also prosecute parents for non-attendance without issuing a Fixed Penalty Notice.

If the poor school attendance persists the Local Authority may also consider prosecution under Section 444 (1A) of the Education Act 1996, which can carry a fine of up to £2500 and/or up to three months imprisonment.

What can I do?

Ensure your child attends school regularly and arrives on time. Lateness can be very disruptive for the class and for your child.

Make sure your child understands that you do not approve of them missing school. If you suspect your child is not happy in school you should contact the school as soon as possible.

Take an interest in your child's education, ask about their day, praise and encourage achievements at school.

Can I get help if my child is not attending regularly?

If you are experiencing problems with your child's attendance at school, it is really important that you work closely with school to resolve the matter. Alternatively, for further guidance and support you can contact:

**Child Employment and Enforcement Officer
Early Intervention Service
2nd Floor, BASE
Marsden Road
Bolton
BL1 2PF
Tel: 01204 338173**

Every lesson counts. Improving attendance, raising attainment

The legal definitions of 'parent' are:

- Any natural parent, whether married or not
- Any parent who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility as defined in the Children's Act (1989)
- Any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person