



# Student Attendance Policy

Policy Date:	December 2019		
Reviewed:	June 2022 / June 2024	Next planned review	June 2026

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## **Rationale**

Pield Heath House School is committed to providing all students with an appropriate and effective education in a safe and happy environment. We believe that education is essential for all and to achieve their full potential students need to attend regularly and punctually.

We are committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all our students and endeavour to provide an environment where all students feel valued and welcome. We aim to empower all students to gain the essential skills both academic and social that will equip them for life. Every child / young person has a right to access the education to which he / she is entitled.

Parents and teachers share the responsibility for supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and punctuality for all. It is our duty to consistently strive to achieve a high level of attendance for all children / young people.

This policy reflects the responsibilities of the school (DfE 2016) in respect of student attendance through:

- Promoting good attendance and reducing absence, including student absence.
- Ensuring every student has access to full-time education to which they are entitled and act early to address patterns of absence.
- Encouraging staff, parents and children / young people to maximise the learning experience in order that all children / young people reach their full potential.
- Providing clear procedures for involving parents/carers relating to school attendance.

Good attendance is important because of:

### The impact on learning

- Any absence affects the pattern of a student's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning.
- Any student's absence disrupts teaching routines so may affect the learning of others in the same class.
- Ensuring regular attendance at school is a legal responsibility and permitting absence from school without a good reason creates an offence in law.

### Safeguarding

- Students may be at risk of harm if they do not attend school regularly.
- Failing to attend school on a regular basis will be considered as a safeguarding matter.

## **Promoting Regular Attendance**

Helping to create a pattern of regular attendance is everybody's responsibility - parents, students and all members of school staff.

To help us all to focus on this the school will:

- Report to parents/carers at least on a termly basis on how students are performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainments. This may be through Parent's Evenings, Review Meetings or phone calls.

## **Registration and Punctuality**

Registers will close at 9.25am and 1.55pm.

Any student arriving after this time, without a valid reason, will be marked as late with the reason given. If a student is consistently late the school will:

- Contact parents or the Local Authority to discuss the situation.
- If the student is late 10 or more times over the course of a term and students are transported by parents, a letter will be sent to parents.
- If transport is consistently late contact will be made with the appropriate Local Authority Transport Service.

### **Absence Terms**

Every half-day absence has to be classified by the school, as either authorised or un-authorised. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a reason such as genuine illness or other unavoidable cause.

Examples of 'authorised' absence:

- Sickness
- Unavoidable medical or dental
- Exceptional family circumstances e.g. bereavement
- School visits
- An immediate family member is critically/terminally ill
- Families who have been through a traumatic event
- Families where a parent/carer is able to demonstrate clearly (e.g. a letter from an employer which can be verified) that they are restricted to all annual leave within school term time
- Transport arranged by the LA has failed to arrive
- A student attends a respite provider like Westbrook where structured activities are arranged
- Where a LAC child / young person attends a residential with their LAC provider
- Where a child / young person attends a planned transition visit
- Where families ask for an extension on school holiday periods, this must be agreed in advance.

Un-authorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no "leave" has been given. This might include:

- Parents keeping their child / young person off school unnecessarily
- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Children / young people who arrive at school too late to get a mark
- Holidays in term time (unless there are exceptional circumstances)
- Shopping
- Haircuts
- Missed bus
- Slept late
- No uniform
- Birthdays
- Holidays not agreed in advance

Children / young people are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents and the student. If a student is reluctant to attend, it is never better 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 exacerbate the problem.

### **Leave of Absence**

Requests for leave of absence must be made in writing to the Principal at least two weeks before the date of request for absence. Absence for the observance of a religious festival will be authorised for a maximum of 2 days.

### Students with Complex Medical Needs

The school recognises that some students attending Field Heath House School have complex medical needs which may on occasions prevent them attending school for frequent or prolonged periods of time. Where a student is not able to attend school but is able to access educational activities within their home context, the School will:

Maintain regular contact with the home

- Provide educational support for the student at home
- Facilitate / enable where it is required the family / carers to be involved in the child / young person's education and to deliver activities when the student is well enough

### Holidays During Term Time

Taking holidays in term time will affect a student's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by doing their best not to take child / young person away in school time. There is no automatic entitlement in law to time off in school time to go on holiday.

All applications for leave must be made in advance and are always at the discretion of the school. In making a decision the school will consider the circumstances of each application individually, including any previous pattern of absence in term time.

Any period of leave taken without the agreement of the school, or in excess of that agreed, will be classed as unauthorised and the Local Authority will be notified.

### Persistent Absenteeism

A student becomes a 'persistent absentee' (PA) when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year for whatever reason. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to any child / young person's educational prospects and parents' / carers' fullest support and co-operation is required to tackle this.

All absence is monitored thoroughly. Any case that is seen to have reached the PA mark or is at risk of moving towards that mark is given priority and parents / carers will be informed of this immediately. PA students are tracked and monitored carefully through the school management system.

### School Procedures

If students are absent parents / carers must:

- Contact the school prior to 9.00am or as soon possible on the first day of absence.
- Parents / Carers should ring the school on **01895 258507**.
- Parents / Carers should **also** inform the Local Authority taxi/minibus company that transports their child / young person (if applicable).
- If no contact with parents by lunchtime of the second day an email will be sent out asking for a reason for absence and up to date contact telephone numbers.
- If an illness extends beyond 3 consecutive days or 5 odd days in any half term school may, at their discretion, not authorise any further absence without a medical note.
- Where a student's attendance falls below 95% over a half term period school will contact parents by phone to draw their attention to the situation, to discuss problems and encourage improvement.
- Where a student's attendance falls below 90% over a half term period special measures will be taken. Parents will be informed, by letter, of their child / young person's poor attendance figure and of the school's concern. Parents will be invited to contact school to discuss the situation. The letter will also point out what will happen next if attendance does not improve.
- Send a note in the Home/School Diary on the first day they return with an explanation of the absence even if a telephone conversation has taken place.

- For medical appointments that are taking place within school time parents should send in evidence of the medical appointment with the letter or appointment card. These will be photocopied by school and returned the same day in the Home/School Diary.
- For a persistent illness lasting over a period of one week at the school's discretion we may ask for a medical certificate, from the student's doctor or other medical professional certifying that the student's absence is due to illness.

**If a student is absent the school will:**

- Telephone parents / carers on the first day of absence if no message has been received in school. Calls will continue until contact with parent / carer is made.
- Work with parents in resolving any issues together.
- If student's absence is moving towards 'persistence' without a satisfactory explanation, then the school will work with parents / carers to decide on the best course of action to take with individual students in a particular case.

This may involve:

- Arranged meetings between parents, students, school staff and health professionals to decide on the appropriate strategy
- Home visits
- Alternative transport arrangements temporarily being put in place, if possible
- Referral to outside agencies for support
- Agreeing and arranging alternative or reduced Curriculum provision as may be **temporarily** required.

If absences persist and issues cannot be resolved:

- Each student will have an individualised programme of support, worked out in consultation with the home and other relevant professionals
- The school may refer the child / young person to the Local Authority SEND Provision / Case Officer. They will also try to resolve the situation by agreement but, if other ways of trying to improve the child / young person's attendance have failed, these Officers can use court proceedings to prosecute parents or to seek an Education Supervision Order on the child / young person.

**Procedures for re-integration following long term absence**

- Where a child / young person has a prolonged absence from Pield Heath House School, regular contact will be maintained through phone calls / home visits where appropriate and work will be provided to ensure the child / young person does not fall too far behind.
- Students, on some occasions, may return to school part time initially, gradually building up to full time so they have time to adjust.
- The class tutor will keep in regular contact with the student and their family to support their return.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

Those people responsible for attendance matters in this school are:

Principal: Natasha Johnson

Senior Leaders: Nicky Chance, Karolina Pelikan

Inclusion Coordinator: Netta Hill

Attendance Officer: Viktorija Berica

Take the lead in ensuring attendance has a high profile in the school

- Ensure there are designated staff with day to day responsibility for attendance matters.
- Take overall responsibility for ensuring the school conforms to all statutory requirements in respect of attendance.

- Monitor student attendance and support Class Teachers to support regular student attendance.

Parents / Carers who will:

- Ensure students attend school regularly and punctually
- Avoid holidays during term time
- Keep school informed of absences
- Participate and co-operate in support and interventions offered by school and other agencies

All staff who will:

- Provide a welcoming atmosphere for children / young people and provide a safe learning environment
- Ensure an appropriate and responsive curriculum
- Provide a sympathetic response to any student concerns
- To be aware of contributory factors to non – attendance

### **Monitoring Procedure**

Daily attendance will be monitored by the Attendance Officer who will make contact with families if the school has not been contacted regarding the students absence.

After 3 occasions of absence, the Class Tutor will be made aware and will speak with parents/carers to provide support for regular attendance.

Ongoing absence will be monitored by the Inclusion Coordinator who will work with families to identify strategies to support student attendance.

If persistent absence continues the Assistant Principal responsible for the students Key Stage will work with the Inclusion Coordinator and parents/carers to improve and support attendance.

If persistent absence does not improve contact will be made by the Head of School who will review and refer to the appropriate supporting agencies as needed.

### **Summary**

The school has a legal duty to publish its absence figures to parents / carers and to promote attendance.

Equally, parents / carers have a duty to make sure that all students attend school.

School staff are committed to working with parents / carers as the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible.

### **Letters to parents about their child's absence, attendance and punctuality**

Use these 8 sample letters to help communicate with parents about absence, attendance and punctuality.

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The letters cover the following scenarios:

- Letter 1 – Concerns about a student's high level of absence
- Letter 2 – Concerns about a student's un-authorised absence
- Letter 3 – Accepting a request for a holiday in term-time
- Letter 4 – Declining a request for a holiday in term-time
- Letter 5 – After an un-authorised holiday
- Letter 6 – Accepting a request for absence for religious observance
- Letter 7 – Concern about punctuality



## Letter 1 – Concerns about a student's high level of absence

*Use this letter in situations where a student's absence has been authorised, but absence levels are still high.  
For example:*

- *A student is regularly ill, but doesn't have an identified medical need*
- *Combined circumstances (such as a family bereavement and student illness) means the student has missed a lot of lesson time*

Dear Parent/Carer,

### Absences from school

I'm writing to express my concern at [name's] recent high levels of absence from school.

[His/her] current attendance has fallen to [percentage]. Falling below 95% attendance will likely have an impact on [his/her] academic achievement.

We acknowledge that each family's circumstances are different and we aim to work with parents to provide the best education for every child/young person.

Our students' welfare is of paramount importance to us and we believe that regular attendance throughout the year is essential for their success and fulfilment.

We want to make sure that we can support [name's] education in the best way possible, including looking into how we can help [him/her] to address gaps in learning due to absence.

Please contact the school on 01895 258 507 as soon as you can so we can arrange a time to discuss this in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

## Letter 2 – Concerns about a student's un-authorised absence(s)

*Use this letter as the first step to address un-authorised absence.*

Dear Parent / Carer,

### Un-authorised absences from school

I'm writing to express my concern at [name's] recent unauthorised [absence/absences] from school. [Name] has been absent from school for a total of [number] un-authorised sessions ([number] days) on the following dates:

[date]

[date]

[date]

We acknowledge that each family's circumstances are different and we aim to work with parents to provide the best education for every child/young person.

Our students' welfare is of paramount importance to us and we believe that regular attendance throughout the year is essential for their success and fulfilment.

Please contact the school on 01895 258 507 as soon as you can so we can arrange a time to discuss this in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

### Letter 3 – Accepting a request for a holiday in term-time

Dear Parent / Carer,

#### **Your request for a holiday absence**

Thank you for your request to take [name(s)] out of school between [date] and [date].

Having considered the exceptional circumstances set out in your application, I'm able to agree to your request.

I have not come to this decision lightly. Our school is dedicated to the education of all our students, and believes regular attendance throughout the year is essential to every child's success and fulfilment.

Each request for a holiday absence is considered on its merits at the time. Please note that my decision in this instance does not mean I will be able to agree to similar requests in the future.

Yours sincerely,

#### Letter 4 – Declining a request for a holiday in term-time

Dear Parent / Carer,

##### **Your request for a holiday absence**

Thank you for your request to take [name(s)] out of school between [date] and [date].  
In this case I regret I cannot consent to your request.

Our school, while acknowledging that each family's circumstances are different, is dedicated to the education of all our students and believes regular attendance throughout the year is essential to every child's/young person's success and fulfilment.

I have not made this decision lightly. A request for an absence is considered on its merits at the time and many variables are taken into consideration. Because each request is unique, my decision in this instance cannot be directly compared with decisions made by the school in the past, and nor does it set a precedent for the future.

I'm sorry to have to disappoint you on this occasion.

Yours sincerely,

## Letter 6 – After an unauthorised holiday

Dear Parent /Carer,

### Holiday absence

I'm writing about your action in taking [name(s)] out of school for a family holiday between [date] and [date].

We will have to treat this as an un-authorised holiday because [explain the evidence you have].

Our school works with parents to provide the best education for each child/young person and believes that regular attendance throughout the year is essential to every child's success and fulfilment.

We would normally expect you to consult the school before booking holidays that mean your child will be absent, or before making any plans that will involve your child's absence from lessons or other commitments.

Absences like these could have a detrimental effect on [name(s)] education.

We would like to arrange a meeting so that we can discuss this further. Please contact the school office urgently on 01895 258 507.

Yours sincerely,

**Letter 7 – Accepting a request for absence for religious observance**

Dear Parent / Carer,

**Your request for absence for religious observance**

Thank you for your request to take [name(s)] out of school on [date] because of [religious occasion].

In this case, I'm prepared to agree to your request and it will be considered an authorised absence.

Each request for an absence is considered on its merits at the time. We recognise that a family's religious beliefs and traditions are intrinsic to their sense of identity.

Yours sincerely,

## Letter 8 – Concern about punctuality

Dear Parent / Carer,

### Poor Punctuality

I'm writing to you because [name] has been late to school [number] times in [timeframe].

[He/she] arrived at school after the register had closed on the following dates:

[date]

[date]

[date]

[He/she] also arrived at school late (but before the register had closed) on the following dates:

[date]

[date]

[date]

The school day begins promptly at [time] and registration closes at [time]. Afternoon registration takes place between [time slot].

Arriving promptly makes sure that your child doesn't miss work, and that disruption to the teacher and other students is minimised. Persistent lateness can lead to a significant loss in learning time.

We're committed to working with families to make sure every student gets the support they need. We would therefore like to arrange a meeting to discuss how we can work with you to help improve [name's] punctuality.

Please contact the school on 01895 258 507 to arrange a meeting to discuss this in more detail.

Yours sincerely,