

Attendance Policy

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Date	Version No	Brief detail of change
September 2022	2.1	Updated following “Working together to improve school attendance” publication.
June 2023	2.2	Annual review. Changed reference from AS1 to statutory attendance intervention.
January 2024	2.3	Addition of ‘Removing a Pupil from Roll’ & Education for Health Needs including Mental Health
July 2024	2.4	Reviewed for annual review. Updates made following government guidance updates for September 2024. Name change of academy.

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1. Statement of Intent

Leigh Academy Dartford is committed to the continuous raising of achievement of all of our pupils and recognises the impact that physical illness and mental health can have on children's attendance. Regular attendance is critical if our pupils are to thrive from the opportunities presented to them.

One of our basic principles is to support our families to secure outstanding attendance. This is fundamental to a successful and fulfilling school experience in which pupils progress emotionally, physically and academically. We actively promote 100% attendance for all of our pupils but understand there are some circumstances in which parents/carers and pupils will need extra support in order to achieve this. We recognise that parents/carers have a vital role, and a legal responsibility to ensure good attendance and we aim to work in partnership with parents/carers, pupils and other agencies to resolve attendance problems and support where needed.

Good attendance is vital because:

- It improves children's mental health and wellbeing
- Children learn more and enjoy their learning
- It helps children to make and keep friends
- Children are not as at risk of underachievement
- Children do not miss out on enrichment opportunities that are vital to their development
- Children thrive on routines

The Governing Body and Principal, in partnership with parents, have a duty to promote full attendance at school.

As a academy we aim to:

- promote and expect full time attendance for all of our pupils (Pupils not of statutory school age will be subject to the same procedures as the whole school.)
- ensure that attendance is regularly monitored in order to offer support where needed
- follow up and closely monitor the absence of persistent non-attenders who are not engaging with the support offered
- reduce the rates of holiday absence and ensure that unauthorised absence is below 1%
- maintain parents' and pupils' awareness of the importance of regular attendance.

2. Parental Responsibility

The responsibility for ensuring children attend school regularly and punctually rests with parents and carers. To this end, it is desirable that parents/ carers should be the first line of contact whenever the child is absent from school.

It is the parents'/ carers' responsibility to contact the school whenever the child is absent and on the first day of absence.

Pupils are expected to arrive at school by 9am. All pupils who arrive late must report to the school office, where the reason for lateness is recorded.

Parents can help us by:

- telephoning the school on 01322 224453 or messaging our Attendance FLO (07483168314), on the first morning of all absences before 8.45am with the reason;
- informing the school further on the 3rd, 5th, 7th and so on days of absence, before 8.45am with the reason;
- arranging dental and doctor's appointments out of school hours or during school holidays;
- emailing the office at attendance@dartfordprimary.org.uk explaining the reason for absence;
- keeping us updated by telephone, letter or email if your child has an extended period of absence due to illness;
- discuss with the school Attendance Officer/Family Liason Officers any planned absences well in advance and only request leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance.
- keep us informed of changes in their child's behaviour or any worries they may be experiencing at school in order that we can offer support to avoid absence.

We will:

- promote good attendance with pupils at all appropriate opportunities;
- follow our procedure for checking and marking registers;
- follow up unexplained absences by phone calls to parents on the first day of absence;
- log any reasons for absence received by phone or personal visit;
- consider any absence in line with this policy and Government guidance before authorising or not;
- offer a meeting with the Vice Principal responsible for inclusion and attendance in order to support the family;
- refer to Kent PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service (PIAS) if a pupil has absence below 90%;
- PIAS may then request a meeting with parents to investigate reasons for low attendance if it gets below 85% and signpost support.

3. The Role of the School Staff

It is the responsibility of the Attendance Officer to ensure:

- Attendance and lateness records are up to date
- If no reason for absence has been provided, parents are contacted on the first day of absence
- Where there has been no communication, emails are sent or a phone call is made to parents requesting reasons for absence
- The appropriate attendance code is entered into the register
- Home visits are carried out in accordance with academy attendance protocols, following discussion with the DSL and Inclusion leads.

Teachers or Teaching Assistants will complete a register at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session. They will identify unauthorised absences and bring them to the attention of the Attendance Officer as soon as possible in order that support can be offered at the earliest possible opportunity.

Frequent absence is also a cause for concern.

It is the school who authorises absence, not the parent/carer.

4. Timeline for School Action for Low Attendance

The school acknowledges that no one standard response will be appropriate in every case. Consideration is given to all factors affecting attendance before deciding what support to offer: In every case, early

intervention is essential to prevent the problem from worsening. It is essential that parents keep the school fully informed of any matters that may affect their child's attendance.

- 90-95% attendance - monitored through weekly meetings with the Leigh Trust Attendance Officer and attendance reviews with PIAS.
- Below 90% - Vice Principal for Inclusion and/or the The Leigh Trust Attendance Officer will write to parents requesting a meeting or an improvement in attendance. Referral may also be made to KCC PIAS or a penalty notice issued where the absences have not been authorised and there is no improvement.
- For the cases that require intensive family support, the school may make an Early Help Referral to support the family

Attendance Thresholds

Gold Level 1 Above 97%	This means that your child is absent for less than 6 days a year. <i>Your child has every chance of meeting and possibly exceeding target levels.</i>
Green Level 2 95% - 96%	Absent for less than 10 days in the school year, therefore missing up to 50 hours of learning. <i>Your child will probably achieve their target levels if they catch up on lost learning.</i>
Yellow Level 3 90.1% - 94.9%	Absent for up to 20 days in the school year which is a month's lost learning of potentially 100 hours. <i>The amount of absence may make progress in learning difficult.</i>
Amber Level 4 85 - 90%	Absent for up to 30 days in the school year – 6 weeks which is potentially 120 hours of lost learning. <i>Missing this much time will make it extremely difficult for your child to keep up in lessons, make progress and reach their target levels. The Leigh Education Welfare Officer and the Local Authority will become involved.</i>
Red Level 5 Below 85%	This amount of absence will seriously affect your child's learning potential and life chances. Parents/Carers may face court action. <i>Your child is missing 180 hours+ of learning and unlikely to reach target levels and fulfil potential.</i>

5. Authorising Absence

Definitions

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

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 messages, emails or telephones the school to explain the absence.

Unauthorised Absence

An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of the Principal. Unauthorised absences are those that the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'authorisation' has been given. Unauthorised absences are an offence and can be liable to legal action or a fixed penalty fine. The following reasons are examples of the kinds of absence that will **not** be authorised:

- parents keeping children off school unnecessarily,
- absences that have not been properly explained,
- travel during term-time, including family holidays, that have not been agreed,
- repeated or persistent non-specific illness, for example, 'poorly/unwell',
- absence of other siblings if one child is ill,
- absence because a parent is ill (alternative arrangements should be made to get children to school),
- oversleeping,
- inadequate clothing/uniform,
- confusion over school term and holiday dates,
- medical and/or dental appointments of more than half a day without very good reason,
- child's and/or family birthdays,
- any routine family event or trip, for example, shopping.

Only the Principal can authorise absence using a consistent approach. The Principal is not obliged to accept a parent's explanation. A letter or telephone message from a parent does not in itself authorise an absence. If absences are not authorised, parents will be notified.

If no explanation is received, absences will not be authorised.

Persistent unauthorised absence (10% or more of the school year) may result in a referral to the Local Authority School Liaison Officer to request a statutory attendance intervention (previously known as an AS1).

PIAS and/or Local Authority Action may include:-

- Attendance Improvement Meeting
- Home visits
- Liaison with other agencies
- Fast Track to Prosecution

6. Punctuality

As we are aware of the impact being late can have on a child's wellbeing, focus and progress, we have implemented the following procedures:

- The Register will officially close at 9:00am - if a child arrives after this time they will be marked as arriving after the register has closed and this may be recorded as an unauthorised absence.
- Parents/carers need to record the name of their child and reason for being late with the school office
- Monitoring of punctuality will take place regularly and letters will be sent by the school where appropriate.
- Parents of pupils who have patterns of lateness will be contacted to discuss the importance of good time-keeping and how this may be achieved. Support can be offered, such as short-term use of breakfast club.

7. Penalty Notice Proceedings for Lateness

Penalty Notices are issued in accordance with Kent County Council's Education Penalty Notices Code of Conduct effective from January 2016, as revised in June 2020, when:

- Ten unauthorised sessions of absence (including Holiday (G) / Unauthorised Absence (O) / Unauthorised Late (U)) may result in a request to the Local Authority for a Penalty Notice to be issued. Penalty Notices are issued to each parent of each child and the amount of the penalty will be £160 if paid within 28 days, reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days. Failure to pay the penalty in full at the end of the 28 day period may result in prosecution through the Magistrates Court.

8. Leavers and Children Missing in Education & Removing a Pupil from Roll

The school has a responsibility to safeguard pupils from harm. This includes knowing and taking reasonable steps to check the destinations of leavers. If your child is leaving other than at the end of Year 6 to go to Secondary School, parents are asked to:

- give the school full information about their plans including date of move, new address, new school and start date when known, and reasons for moving. When pupils leave and parents have not given us the above information, and we cannot contact the parent, then the child is considered to be a Child Missing Education. This means that the Local Authority has a legal duty to carry out investigations to try to track and locate the child. By giving us the above information, unnecessary investigations can be avoided.

As per The School Attendance (Pupil Registration)(England) Regulations 2024 - Section 9, when all possible actions have been taken we will remove the student from the academy roll due to continued serious absence.

- The pupil has not attended the school within the ten school days immediately after the end of the period of leave and the proprietor does not have reasonable grounds to believe that the pupil is unable to attend because of sickness or an unavoidable cause; and the proprietor and the local authority have jointly made reasonable efforts to find out the pupil's location and circumstances. If unable to establish the pupil's whereabouts we will remove from roll.
- The pupil has been continuously absent from the school for at least twenty school days and the proprietor does not have reasonable grounds to believe that the pupil is unable to attend because of sickness or an unavoidable cause; and the proprietor and the local authority have jointly made reasonable efforts to find out the pupil's location and circumstances. If unable to establish the pupil's whereabouts we will remove from roll.
- <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2024/208/regulation/9/made>

9. Penalty Notice Proceedings for Poor Attendance

Penalty Notices are issued in accordance to DfE Working together to Improve Attendance documentation.

The threshold is 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks. A school week means any week in which there is at least one school session. This can be met with any combination of unauthorised absence (e.g. unauthorised holiday, unauthorised late and/or unauthorised absence) The period of 10 school weeks can also span different terms or school years (e.g. 2 sessions of unauthorised absence in Summer Term and a further 8 within the Autumn Term). [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65f1b048133c22b8eecd38f7/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_applies_from_19_August_2024 .pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65f1b048133c22b8eecd38f7/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_applies_from_19_August_2024.pdf)

Exceptional circumstances could include:

- Service personnel returning from a tour of duty abroad where it is evidenced the parent will not be in receipt of any leave in the near future that coincides with school holidays.
- Where an absence from school is recommended by a health professional as part of a parent's or child's rehabilitation from a medical or emotional issue.
- The death or terminal illness of a person close to the family.
- To attend a wedding or funeral of a person close to the family.
- Any strong personal reasons why a family might need to take a child away from school for a short break.

Any examples provided are illustrative rather than exhaustive. It is acceptable to take a pupil's previous record of attendance into account when the school is making decisions. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short. And by 'unavoidable' it implies that an event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. It is important to note that Principals can agree to the absence of a child in exceptional circumstances and this discretion can be used also to determine the length of the authorised absence.

Where Penalty Notices are imposed, the regulations state that the penalty will be £120 to be paid within 28 days, reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days. Penalty Notices are issued to each parent of each child. Failure to pay the penalty in full by the end of the 28 day period will result in prosecution by the Local Authority.

Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 says that parents are guilty of an offence of failing to secure regular attendance at school unless they can prove that the child was absent:

- with leave (the school has given permission)
- due to sickness or any unavoidable cause (the sickness or unavoidable cause must relate to the child, not the parent)
- religious observance
- failure by the Local Authority to provide transport

In law, these are the only acceptable reasons for a child being absent from school.

The Principal may authorise absence in "exceptional circumstances" but this must be requested in advance and agreement to each request is at the discretion of the Principal, acting on behalf of the Governing Body (Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006). Each case will be judged on its merits and the Principal's decision is final. Once the decision not to authorise leave is taken, it cannot be authorised retrospectively.

If the absence is not authorised and the holiday is taken anyway, the case may be referred to the PRU, Inclusion and Attendance Service who may issue a Penalty Notice to each parent for each child taken out of school.

Failure to pay the penalty in full by the end of the 28 day period will result in prosecution by the Local Authority.

10. Request for Leave of Absence

Term time holiday can no longer be authorised by the Principal. The Principal may grant 'Leave of Absence' but only in exceptional circumstances.

Exceptional circumstances could include:

- Service personnel returning from a tour of duty abroad where it is evidenced the parent will not be in receipt of any leave in the near future that coincides with school holidays.
- Where an absence from school is recommended by a health professional as part of a parent's or child's rehabilitation from a medical or emotional issue.
- The death or terminal illness of a person close to the family.
- To attend a wedding or funeral of a person close to the family.
- Any strong personal reasons why a family might need to take a child away from school for a short break.

Decisions on whether or not a pupil is given permission for 'leave of absence' rest with the Principal who acts on behalf of the Governing Body. Parents/carers are required to contact the School Office at least four weeks in advance of the absence.

If the absence is not authorised and the holiday is taken anyway, the case will be referred to the Attendance Service who will issue a Penalty Notice to each parent for each child taken out of school.

Leave during SATs:

Under no circumstances will the school authorise an absence during the Y6 SATs week in May. Absence during this period will result in lack of attainment and progress data for your child. Year 6 tests are statutory and pupils must attend them.

11. Rewards for Attendance

The main benefit of regular attendance is that children feel safe and secure and have an understanding of responsibilities and boundaries. Their mental health will be better supported and they will have emotional stability that comes from routine. Children will benefit from everything that is available through our curriculum, including high quality teaching, outdoor learning, sports, trips and social interactions. Children with low attendance miss out on all of these opportunities.

To promote equality and to safeguard those pupils with medical or SEND, we do not advocate the use of reward for good attendance, as we understand that there are exceptional circumstances under which excellent attendance cannot always be achieved. Instead, our reward comes in the form of our aforementioned curriculum that all children benefit from as a member of Leigh Academy Dartford.

12. Education for Health Needs including Mental Health

This guidance relates to local authorities statutory duties under section 19 of the Education Act 1996. The section 19(1) duty states that local authorities are responsible for arranging suitable and (normally) full-time education for children of compulsory school age who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not receive suitable education without such provision.

This means that where a child cannot attend school because of a physical or mental health need, and cannot access suitable full-time education, the local authority is responsible for arranging suitable alternative provision.

Where possible, the child's health needs should be managed by the home school so that they can continue to be educated there with support, and without the need for the intervention of the local authority. However, as soon as it is clear that the home school can no longer support the child's health needs and provide suitable education, the school should speak to the local authority about putting alternative provision in place.

There is no absolute legal deadline by which local authorities must start to arrange education for children with additional health needs. However, as soon as it is clear that a child will be away from school for 15 days or more because of their health needs, the local authority should arrange suitable alternative provision. The 15 days may be consecutive or over the course of a school year.

Where full-time education would not be in a child's best interests for reasons relating to their physical or mental health, local authorities must arrange part-time education on whatever basis they consider to be in the child's best interests.

Statutory guidance sets out that local authorities should provide education as soon as it is clear that the child will be away from school for 15 school days or more during the school year, whether consecutive or cumulative. While the section 19 duty sits with the local authority, schools should work closely with them and any relevant medical professionals to ensure that children with health needs are fully supported at school, including putting in place individual healthcare (IHC) plans if appropriate. This may involve, for example, programmes of study that rely on a flexible approach which include agreed periods of remote education.

Local authorities should be aware that under the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, a school can only remove the name of a pupil who is unable to attend school because of additional health needs from its register in certain circumstances. These include where:

- the pupil has been certified by the school medical officer as unlikely to be in a fit state of health to attend school, before ceasing to be of compulsory school age; and
- neither the pupil nor their parent has indicated to the school the intention to continue to attend the school, after ceasing to be of compulsory school age.

13. Furthering Support Resources for Parents and Families

Further governmental support and advice can be found in the 'Working together to improve school attendance - Parental Responsibilities', which can be found on the [Children's Commissioners](#) webpage. This guidance contains further information on frequently asked questions, such as *My child has a short term illness. Do they have to go to school, and will I be penalised if they don't?*