



**Northern Lights**

LEARNING TRUST

# ATTENDANCE POLICY

<b>Review Date:</b>	<b>Autumn 2021</b>
<b>Next Review Due:</b>	<b>Autumn 2022</b>
<b>Person in Charge:</b>	<b>CEO</b>
<b>Governance:</b>	<b>Chair of Board</b>

**The aim of this policy**

To promote high rates of attendance and punctuality in order to provide each child with every opportunity to access the curriculum to raise their achievement; to protect every child by ensuring school know where a child is at all times; to encourage dialogue with parents/carers to determine ways to support children to be in school.

The Trust has a rigorous procedure for seeking information from parents when a child is absent from school. All parents /carers are required to ring the Academy before 9.30am, for every day the child is absent, to indicate why a child will not be in school [followed by letter/ email on return].

Any child who is absent where a phone call has not been received shall be deemed to be missing and the Academy will pursue information [after 9.30am] from the parents/carers etc using all numbers available. Staff from the Academy may also leave a text message using our messaging service to ask parents to ring to let school know where their child is and the reason for absence. Staff from the Academy may make a home visit if no contact is made.

There may be a number of families who allow their children to walk to and from school alone [permission slips in school] – this system is effective in identifying children who “dawdle “ to school and alerting parents to potential problems, so that parents and staff from the Academy work together to safeguard all children at all times.

The Head of School/ Headteacher monitors absence on a daily basis so possible patterns and difficulties are identified and resolved at an early stage. This is one way to reduce or minimise the number of children who are absent persistently.

### **Why is attendance important?**

A good education is every child’s right and provides the best possible start in life. Good attendance and punctuality are crucial if children are to keep up with their work. Good habits are formed in primary school, and work opportunities later in life will be difficult if children have not attended school regularly and on time. There is also a link to: achievement, with those children achieving more if they are regularly in school; strong friendship groups, it is sometimes difficult to form lasting friendships when children are regularly absent.

### **Academy procedure**

The Academy will raise the awareness of the implications of poor school attendance through:

- Newsletters;
- Parents Evenings;
- Induction Meetings;
- Home-school agreements;
- Rewarding good attendance and punctuality;
- Acknowledging improved attendance;
- Periodically reminding parents of the Academy's procedures for notification of absences.
- Information letters outlining current attendance and thresholds

- Holiday absence meetings

The Academy will actively pursue “truancy” whether it is intentional on the part of the child or is condoned by parents (i.e. unauthorised absence). If the Academy has evidence of truancy, the Head of School/ Headteacher will confirm the absence as “unauthorised” to the parents in writing.

The procedure outlined below is a staged response to irregular school attendance and poor punctuality. The Academy works hard to regularly monitor attendance and punctuality. It is hoped that problems about attendance can be resolved by Stage 2.

Concerns raised about a child’s absence are discussed. Information is shared openly and reasons for absence are discussed. The DfE also indicate to school those children whom they consider are “at risk” from becoming persistent absentees, following the termly Census. Where this is the case the Academy will inform parents immediately.

### **Children subject to a child protection plan**

Where the Academy has concerns about a child’s attendance, the Academy will notify Children’s services and report the concern to the identified person for the child immediately. If the family cannot be contacted that day a home visit will be made by 2 senior staff at the earliest opportunity.

### **Looked After Children**

Where the Academy has concerns about a child’s attendance, the Academy will notify the relevant team and report the concern to the identified person for the child immediately.

### **Children with Medical Needs [See Statutory Guidance]**

The Academy recognises that for some children coming to school, there are challenges due to certain medical conditions. There are trained staff to administer medication under strict guidance. We have Education Health Plans in place for some children and for others there are Medical Care Plans fully supported by Pediatricians. These plans are carefully monitored and regularly reviewed.

### **Vulnerable children**

This group of young people are particularly vulnerable. They include those who are frequently absent, transfers, exclusions, dual registration, Child Sexual Exploitation, Female Genital Mutilation, runaways and young carers. [ this includes all groups KCSIE 2018] Special procedures will be in place to ensure they are supported and monitored. Information will be shared with relevant services should there be any concerns.

### **Expected level of attendance**

The expected level of attendance is 95%.

Attendance is reviewed daily to ensure children are in school.

There is a more formal tracking of attendance every half term. The stages of attendance monitoring are explained below.

## **Pre-Stage One**

The trigger points for action of attendance monitoring could be any or a combination of the below:

- attendance falls below 95%;
- absence of 4 broken weeks in any 10 week period;
- parents/carers have not contacted the Academy during any absence.

At this stage, the appropriate in-school person will address the attendance pattern of the pupil. If appropriate, plans for dealing with the problem should be devised with the involvement of parent(s) and any support agencies available to the Academy, depending on the pupil and their circumstances (e.g. this could be due to illness or a hospital stay). A letter of concern will be sent to parents immediately to inform them that the child's attendance is being more formally tracked. In the case where there are specific medical issues this will be taken into account, however letters will still be sent as we understand that parents prefer to know about this monitoring regardless.

Where there is no improvement over the next 4 weeks the child will move to Stage One.

## **Stage One**

There may be exceptions for medical reasons, and where absence has been authorised. However, no exception will be allowed where there has been unauthorised absence.

The Academy will write to/telephone parents/carers and try to offer support and guidance on how to improve the child's attendance. There are a range of strategies that may be offered including (but not limited to):

- Writing to parents/carers to ensure they are aware of a potential attendance issue if there are underlying health problems;
- Arrange meetings in the Academy with parents/carers to discuss attendance and associated problems;
- Formal contact on first day of any absence;
- Requesting medical verification of each absence;
- School/Home contract to encourage an improvement in attendance/punctuality;
- Where the absences are authorised send a *Concern Letter* from the Head teacher to parents/carers;
- Where the absences are justified or because of genuine illness, no immediate action may be taken but there would be further monitoring of the situation. Even absences that have been authorised need to be carefully monitored by the Academy, especially if illness is continually given as a reason.

If this contact is not successful or if the attendance does not improve during the next 4 weeks then the Academy will refer the child to Stage Two and inform parents by telephone or in writing.

## **Stage Two**

The attendance will be monitored for 4 weeks as above, at the end of which there will be a formal meeting. This may be sooner if attendance deteriorates. **The Academy is responsible for arranging these meetings.**

The Academy's Attendance Lead will organise the meeting. The parent will be interviewed and an individual pupil attendance action plan (parenting contract) will be completed including the setting of an attendance target. A copy of the minutes will be shared with the appropriate Governor and CEO.

One of the following recommendations will be made:

- a. If improvement had been noted the absence will be monitored at Stage One;
- b. That the matter be referred to Stage 3 of the procedures immediately (if attendance is so low or is declining);
- c. Issue a Fixed Penalty Warning Notice;
- d. That the situation should be monitored and a review date set to allow for an improvement in the pupil's attendance.

**If the attendance target is not reached within the agreed timescales, the case will automatically be referred to Stage Three.**

**Where a Fixed Penalty Warning Notice has been issued the case should be monitored for 15 school days and if the attendance has not improved the case should be handed to the Enforcement Team.**

**The Local Authority, enforcing their statutory duties will complete the request for Formal Notices to Attend.**

**If the situation is resolved, monitoring will continue for 4 weeks then the case will be closed.**

## **Stage Three**

Attendance will be monitored within school for 4 weeks. This may be sooner if attendance deteriorates.

The Head of School/ Headteacher will meet with the parents/carers and pupil and member[s] of the Local Governing Body, who have been identified to deal with Stage 3. The individual pupil attendance action plan will be reviewed.

One of the following recommendations will be made;

- a. If the level of unauthorised absence is sufficient the matter should be referred to Stage 4 of the procedures immediately and the case passed to the Enforcement Team.
- b. Issue a Fixed Penalty Warning Notice.

- c. That the situation should be monitored and a review date set to allow for sufficient improvement in the pupil's attendance. If there is no improvement or there is a subsequent deterioration, the matter should be referred to Stage 4.

A copy of the minutes will be given to the parents and the Academy representative.

If a parent/carer fails to attend the meeting a questionnaire will be sent requiring them to complete and return it by a specific date. The questionnaire, or the absence of the questionnaire, will be used to inform the Stage 3 decision. If the situation is resolved, monitoring will continue for 8 weeks then the case will be closed.

**It is not considered appropriate to offer more than two appointments to parents. The Head of School/ Headteacher will be responsible for arranging the Attendance Review and for recording the outcome.**

**Where Fixed Penalty Warning Notice has been issued the case should be monitored for 15 school days and if the attendance has not improved the case should be handed to the Enforcement Team.**

**Following the interview, if the pupil's attendance does not improve immediately or continues to cause concern, the Local Authority will oversee the completion of the Formal Attendance Review paperwork prior to handing over the case to the Enforcement Team.**

**The Local Authority/Attendance Development Officer will request a Final Notice to Attend.**

#### **Stage Four**

If there has been no satisfactory improvement a formal letter will be sent to the parents/carers inviting them to attend a formal attendance review with a representative of the Attendance Enforcement Team. They will be advised that they can seek legal advice and can bring legal representation to the meeting.

A record will be kept of the meeting and all parties will be required to sign the minutes.

Following the formal review the representative from the Attendance Enforcement Team will make one of the following decisions:

- a. Consideration to the suitability of the case for placing before the Family Court with regard to an Education Supervision Order;
- b. Recommend immediate prosecution of the responsible parents/carers; or
- c. Recommend that the parents/carers be given a short period, usually no more than four weeks, to improve the pupil's attendance.

If a parent/carer fails to attend the Stage Four meeting a letter will be sent which will include a questionnaire, which the parent/carer will be required to complete and return within seven days. The letter

will advise the parent/carer that there will be no further involvement from the Attendance Team unless specifically requested.

**If the Stage Four recommends immediate prosecution the Enforcement Team will prepare the appropriate documentation within one week.**

**If the recommendation is to monitor and there is no improvement or deterioration after the Stage Four interview, legal proceedings will be initiated against the responsible parent/carer.**

**If the attendance has improved during the agreed monitoring period the Enforcement team will continue to monitor for a further 8 weeks and if the attendance is sustained the case will be closed by the Enforcement Team and returned to the Attendance Development Officer.**

**Reactivated cases re-enter the process at Stage Three.**

### **Stage Five**

The Attendance Enforcement Team will prepare the papers for legal proceedings against the responsible parent. The Attendance Enforcement Team will use the information submitted by the Head of School/ Headteacher and Attendance Development Officer to prepare summonses. The magistrate's court will be contacted for the next available court date. The Attendance Enforcement Team will keep the Head of School/ Headteacher and Attendance Development Officer informed of the current status of the case.

Following a conviction if the pupil's attendance does not improve the Attendance Enforcement Team will return the case to the magistrate's court under Section 444(1A) of the Education Act 1996 (where, if found guilty, the penalty is greater).

**The Enforcement Team will monitor the case for 12 weeks, if the attendance improves the case will be returned to the Head of School/ Headteacher and Attendance Development Officer.**

**Reactivated cases re-enter the process at Stage Three.**

**For the avoidance of any doubt, the Local Authority responsible for the attendance of the child will lead the Enforcement Order and issue any fixed penalty notices.**

**The following applies to punctuality, recognising this as an attendance issue.**

### **Punctuality [Lateness]**

**Stage 1: 10 morning sessions late for start of school day.**

- Letter from the Academy

**Stage 2: No improvement following Stage 1 i.e. 5 further late sessions (15 in total) ○**

- Letter from the Academy ○ Meeting with Head of School/ Headteacher



**Stage 3: No improvement following Stage 2 i.e. 5 further late sessions (20 in total)** ○ Referral to Local Governing Body for a group of Governors to consider.

- Meeting with Head of School/ Headteacher and Governors
- Continued lateness will be marked as Unauthorised following this meeting and procedures implemented

**Stage 4: No improvement following Stage 3 i.e. 5 further late sessions (25 in total)**

- Monitored by Head of School/ Headteacher ○ Meeting with parent and Head of School/ Headteacher ○ Referral to full Governing Body ○ Children's services referral

### **How Can Parents Help?**

- Make sure that your child comes to school regularly and arrives on time. Lateness is disruptive to your child and also to other children in the class.
- If your child starts missing school, help us to put things rights. Make sure your child understands that you do not approve of him/her missing school.
- If your child is ill and to be absent, contact school on every day of your child's illness, before 9.30 am if possible.
- If your child is ever absent from school, you must tell us why in writing (letter or email) on return to school. If there is no explanation you will be contacted by a member of staff.
- If you want permission for your child to miss school, for example, because of a medical appointment you should send in a copy of the appointment form or card before the event.
- Take an interest in your child's school work and attend open evenings.
- Support the Academy's behaviour policy.

### **Family Holidays**

- When you accept a place in the Academy you should take your holidays during school holidays.
- You should not expect the Academy to agree to a family holiday during term time. A week missed in school, amounts to approximately 6 hours per day, 30 hours per week. This is a tremendous amount of missed learning opportunity not only academically but socially and emotionally.
- **We will not agree to your child missing any school time for holidays, in any one Academy year under any circumstance.**

- Following such a request an appointment will be sent by the Head of School/ Headteacher (within 7 days where possible) for you to discuss your request. Holiday absence will not be granted.
- If you keep your child away from school the information will be referred to the Academy Attendance team as is consistent with legislation under Section 44a Education Act 1996. Your child's attendance will be monitored which could result in a fixed penalty notice being issued by the Local Authority under statutory measures.
- If the absence is for 10 days or more [ie 20 sessions] then the governors will refer to the Local Authority. The Local Authority will then move forward with a fixed penalty notice. The Local Authority will collect the fines from both parents [at present £60 per parent] and they will retain the fines.
- It should be noted that the school does not benefit financially from this process as the fines are retained by the statutory body ie Local Authority responsible for the child's attendance.

### **Leave of absence requests**

- Occasionally children will need leave of absence to attend events which occur infrequently (e.g. observance of a religious event, a wedding of a parent, a funeral, a parent returning from Armed service or an examination), parents need to apply in writing and if agreed a mark of C = circumstances, will be registered on your child's attendance record, indicating that the absence has been authorised.

**All parents will receive an annual statement of attendance and will be informed by teaching staff if absence is impacting on progress.**

Where children are absent due to illness, if appropriate, the Academy may provide a home learning programme which could include on line learning. This can be monitored in school and is an effective way for keeping children in touch with learning.