

Attendance Policy

1. Introduction

The Blue School is committed to providing high quality inclusive learning opportunities for all students. We believe that if students are to reach their full potential then excellent attendance is crucial. Any problems that impede full attendance will be identified and addressed as quickly as possible.

The Governing Body, Head Teacher and staff wish to ensure that every child at The Blue School benefits from regular and punctual attendance at school in order to fulfill the aims of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda and to ensure continuity in the learning process. To this end parent/carers will be informed of the school policy on attendance and encouraged to understand the importance of good attendance and punctuality. Regular and punctual attendance is the legal responsibility of the parent/carer.

It is the policy of The Blue School to celebrate achievement. Full attendance is a critical factor in ensuring positive educational outcomes for our students. Our school will actively promote and encourage excellent attendance (above 98%) for all our students. We recognise that parents/carers have a vital role to play and that there is a need to establish strong home-school links and communication systems that can be utilised whenever there is concern about attendance.

If there are problems which affect a student's attendance then we will investigate the matter and attempt to work in partnership with parents/carers, students and the Education Attendance Service to resolve those problems as quickly and efficiently as possible. We will adopt a clearly focused approach aimed at returning the student to full attendance at all times.

Students will have expectations regarding attendance and punctuality regularly addressed through the school assemblies and rewards systems so that the importance of good attendance is given a high profile within the school. The aim of this policy is to raise levels of achievement by ensuring high levels of attendance, punctuality and involvement in the school.

2. Purpose of this policy

- To improve the overall percentage of students at school
- To make attendance and punctuality a priority for all those associated with the school including students, parents/carers, teachers and governors
- To develop a framework which defines agreed roles and responsibilities and promotes consistency in carrying out designated tasks
- To provide support, advice and guidance to parents/carers and students
- To develop a systematic approach to gathering and analysing attendance related data
- To further develop positive and consistent communication between home and school
- To promote effective partnerships with the Education Welfare Service and with other services and agencies
- To recognise the needs of the individual student when planning reintegration following significant periods of absence.

3. Principles

- Regular and full attendance at school is an essential part of being able to deliver a good education to students.
- Parents/carers have a legal duty under The 1996 Education Act to ensure that children of compulsory school age attend school on a regular and full-time basis.

- The school has a legal duty to ensure the registration of students for morning and afternoon sessions of the school. If a student of compulsory school age is absent, every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school, as either authorised or unauthorised. Only the school can authorise the absence, not parents/carers. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required.
- Parents/carers do not have the right to take children out of school for a family holiday.
- Unauthorised absence from school is an offence and parents/carers can be reported to the Education Welfare Service when there are persistent attendance problems.
- We have a duty to validate absence due to on-going medical issues. This may involve parents/carers meeting with a member of staff and the school nurse. At this meeting we will draw up a medical action plan to ensure that time in school is maximised. We may also discuss with parents/carers regarding our wish to liaise with medical professionals to ensure that absences from school due to medical reasons are reasonable.
- Problems with attendance are best resolved by discussion between the school, parents/carers and the student.
- Pastoral Team Leaders, Pastoral Support Staff and the Education Attendance Service are available to help the school, the parents/carers and students resolve problems with attendance.

4. Promoting good attendance

Our policy is to place more emphasis on rewards rather than sanctions although we recognise that in a minority of cases effective sanctions are necessary. We will encourage good attendance by:

- Accurately completing attendance registers at the beginning of each session and within 10 minutes of the start of lessons.
- Following-up absences as part of our safeguarding procedures.
- Undertaking attendance checks at appropriate times.
- Recording attendance on student records.
- Acknowledging individual's improvements in attendance.
- Providing feedback on individual attendance data to students and where necessary, parents/carers.
- Encouraging informal liaison between the school, Education Welfare Service and other agencies wherever possible.
- Welcoming and supporting children returning to school after a long term absence and, where necessary, provide work and support via our Parent Family Support Advisers (PFSAs) and pastoral staff, prior to re-entry to help students keep up to date.
- Identifying children 'at risk' as quickly as possible for special monitoring.
- Rewarding attendance for individual students on a regular basis
- Ringing the parents/carers of students where attendance is a concern and invite them to an 'Attendance Meeting' with Pastoral Team Leaders.
- Recording all holidays taken in term time as unauthorised absence unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- Working with the Education Welfare Service to address sustained periods of unauthorised absence.

5. Roles and responsibilities

In order for this policy to be successful, every member of staff must make attendance a high priority and convey to the students the importance of the education being provided.

Governors

- To ensure that the school has in place a whole school attendance policy
- To receive regular reports from the Headteacher in respect of attendance data
- To monitor the effectiveness of the whole school policy.

Headteacher

- To oversee the whole policy
- To monitor the attendance of different groups of students
- To report to Governors on attendance issues on a termly basis.

These tasks may be delegated to the Deputy or Assistant Headteacher (Pastoral) or other member of the Leadership Team.

Deputy and Assistant Headteacher (Pastoral)

- To liaise with Subject Leaders and Pastoral Team Leaders
- To oversee the collation and analysis of attendance data
- To produce an attendance profile for the whole school
- To report to the school's leadership team on attendance matters and trends
- To ensure liaison with the education attendance service
- To collate attendance data for each year
- To oversee the registration process and ensure that registers are completed accurately and on time
- To ensure a tracking process is in place for vulnerable students.

Pastoral Team Leaders

- To oversee and monitor overall year attendance
- To ensure that reasons for absence are coded in the register and follow-up any unexplained non-attendance
- To reinforce good practice at meetings and have a standing attendance agenda item
- To raise the profile of attendance at appropriate times (eg assemblies)
- Meet with and inform Parent/Carers regarding attendance and punctuality matters
- Meet regularly with Deputy or Assistant Headteacher (Pastoral) on matters of problematic attendance
- To liaise with the education attendance service on a regular basis
- To organise the reintegration of long-term absentees

- Reward students who have excellent attendance (98-100%).

The Pastoral Support Staff

- To be the main point of contact for all parents regarding absence
- To compile the registration data on a daily basis including recording accurate information from parents/carers
- To contact parents/carers to ascertain reasons for absence on the first day of absence via text and/or follow up phone call
- To liaise with Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral), Assistant Headteacher (Pastoral) and PTLs on a regular basis to share information on absentees, holiday applications and other concerns
- Liaise with Pastoral Team Leaders about absences that do not warrant authorising or any absence that is cause for concern
- Liaise with Deputy and Assistant Headteacher (Pastoral) in the early identification of problematic attendance and punctuality issues.

Tutors / Teachers

- Keep an accurate record of tutor group attendance by marking the register accurately for each lesson and Tutor session
- Place all notes from parent/carers explaining child's absence in register
- Monitor patterns of attendance in tutor group and inform the Pastoral Team Leader of any problem areas of attendance
- Provide a supportive environment for students who need welcoming back to school
- Following up non-attendance as part of our Safeguarding Procedures.

Parents/Carers

- Ensure that children leave for school on time
- Ensure children attend school regularly and punctually
- Contact the school on the first day of absence
- Notify school of duration of absence or on every day of absence
- Provide a written letter of explanation or phone call to the school for all absence
- Ensure this letter is returned to school on first day child returns after absence
- Not to take holidays during term time
- Endeavour, where possible, to make appointments for students out of school hours
- Support the school in all matters to ensure a punctual and regular attendance
- Ensure the school has the correct contact information
- Seek permission from the school before planned holiday by completing request form

- Attend meetings regarding attendance.

Students

- Ensure that his/her attendance is maintained at the highest level possible
- Be responsible for ensuring that they receive their attendance mark, especially when arriving late and for bringing notes into school regarding planned absences
- Aim to arrive at registration and lessons on time
- Provide written confirmation and sign in and out at the Pastoral office if they need to leave site for an appointment.

6. Monitoring attendance

Targets for improved attendance will be set annually by the Deputy and Assistant Headteacher (Pastoral) and the school Governing Body. Rewards will be issued for excellent or improved attendance. The targets will be aspirational but achievable.

During the summer term each year, the Governors' Learning and Teaching Committee will check whether these targets were met and, if not, try to establish why. Part of the evaluation process will be to look at what interventions have been successful, this will include considering:

- Attendance data for individual students, tutor groups and the school as a whole
- Has the school been successful in raising the profile of attendance both within the school and the community?
- How well informed are new students about the importance of attendance and the policy and procedures operating within the school?
- Have attendance issues been included as topics in school assemblies, tutor periods or as a theme for any other curricular lessons?

We will strive to raise the profile of attendance through the issue of individual certificates for 98-100% attendance and improved attendance and through the monitoring of tutor group attendance.

The Blue School believes that it is essential to keep this policy "alive". Consultation and communication are key factors that will ensure that the Policy has impact in raising attendance. Vigilance is essential if we are to maintain and improve our attendance figures.

7. Procedures for registering students at The Blue School

7a. Registration

Registration will take place at the start of the day and at the beginning of each lesson using the school's recognised method of registration.

7b. Marking the register in Lesson 1 and Tutor Period.

Procedure for Registration and the Duty of Tutors.

These are the procedures and routines which The Blue School employs to monitor and improve attendance and the responsibilities of key staff in the recording and monitoring of attendance.

Pastoral Team Leaders and tutors play a major role in attempting to promote good attendance, but will only be successful with the support of all the teaching staff following procedures and identifying concerns. Not only is accurate monitoring of attendance a legal responsibility it is also one of the most important child protection procedures that we carry out on a daily basis.

Students have to value and see the purpose of coming to our school. Whole school issues such as the learning environment, lunchtime arrangements, how we deal with bullying, teacher student relationships, teaching styles, rewards and sanctions play a most crucial role in determining whether students attend school. The support of parents/carers is extremely important and the role of the Education Attendance Service is crucial in encouraging parents/carers to ensure their children attend school every day.

7c. Daily procedures and routine for registering student attendance in the morning

Registration should be amongst the first events of tutor period and in each subsequent lesson. It sets the tone for the rest of the lesson and the learning that will follow. It is vital that registration is conducted punctually, and in a positive, purposeful and business-like climate.

- Teachers/Tutors will take the register using SIMS Lesson Monitor. Students are marked present (P) or absent (N) on the screen. If students arrive after being marked absent then the teacher should change the mark to late (L). If a student is late, the tutor should also enter the number of minutes late by using the 'minutes late' facility. As soon as the register has been taken the teacher/tutor should ensure that the register is saved so that the data is stored.
- Students arriving after 09:05 in the morning or 14:10 in the afternoon must be marked as an unauthorised absence using the code U by members of the pastoral support staff.
- Prior to morning registration the tutor must collect their tutor group information folder from outside the pastoral office and check their pigeon hole each day. This will contain any notices for the tutor group and for individuals within the group.
- Supply teachers will be given login details for SIMS and will use the Lesson Monitor system to take the register in every lesson they teach.
- Teachers covering for absent colleagues are expected to take the register for the cover lesson. The details of the group being covered will appear on the timetable bar when the teacher signs in to SIMS.
- Students who fail to be punctual for registration of lessons on a regular basis will be placed on punctuality or lateness report to be monitored by Pastoral Team Leaders which will be signed daily by parents/carers. Pastoral Team Leaders run detentions on Wednesdays and can place students who are regularly late in this detention. Lunchtime detentions can also be used for students who are consistently late.
- Letters received from parents/carers should be handed to the Pastoral Office and absences will be coded as appropriate. If after a week a student fails to provide notes for absence then tutors must contact the Pastoral Office with relevant details. The staff will then contact home.
- If no contact can be made or reason given is unacceptable then students will be given an unauthorised absence.
- Tutors will be asked to follow up absences promptly so that records are kept up to date. Notes should be retained in registers. These will be periodically emptied and stored in the pastoral office.
- Parents/carers are reminded regularly of the importance of informing the tutor of any reason for absence and are encouraged to telephone the school so that messages can be passed onto the tutors. Notes can also be written into the Student Planner.

7d. Late after registration closes

The registration will close at 09:05. Any student who is late after the registration period has closed should register with the Pastoral Office. Any student whose lateness does not carry an acceptable reason in the judgement of the Pastoral Staff will have their names passed to the relevant Pastoral Team Leader.

Students who are late, for no acceptable reason, may have a detention set as a sanction. Parent/Carers may also be informed of the reason for this detention and asked to support the school in re-enforcing the need for punctuality.

8. Absences from school (first day)

Parent/carers should notify the school every day their child is absent. This should be done in advance of the school day, if possible, using the school's answering machine service. Where a student's absence is a cause for concern the school's Pastoral Staff may contact the parent/carers of that student after 9.30am to receive an explanation for the absence on that day of absence. On return from absence, all absence must be explained by a letter from parent/carers.

9. Authorising absence

If a Tutor has a suspicion regarding a note explaining an absence then it should be referred to the Pastoral Team Leader who will make enquiries. The Pastoral Team Leader may choose to liaise with the Pastoral Support Staff, Assistant Headteacher (Pastoral), Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral) or Headteacher who will decide on any subsequent action.

In cases of regular absence, the school may insist that all absences need to be supported by appropriate medical evidence.

10. Term time leave – holidays and extended leave

The school can only grant leave of absence during term time for exceptional circumstances. Any request for leave must be made in writing for the attention of the Deputy Headteacher Pastoral in advance. The Blue School intends to follow the Local Authority's guidelines to address attendance which may include the use of statutory powers which involves the use of Penalty Notices and Court prosecution.

Both the school and Somerset County Council:

- expect parents and carers to make sure that children and young people attend school regularly. Any absence from school will impact on educational achievement, success in later life and longer term health and well being;
- wish to ensure the law is upheld. Parents and carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular and punctual attendance at school of their child.

Taking a child on holiday in term time interrupts the learning of the whole class. Teachers have to spend time helping children catch up when they return. Parents should arrange holidays for the 13 week school holiday periods. Schools are open 190 days which leaves 175 days of the year for a holiday.

11. Appointments

The school asks that parent/carers try to make medical/dental appointments out of school hours but understands that sometimes this is impossible. Preferably a student will come to school to obtain their present mark. Students should report to school with a note from their parent/carer on the day of the appointment and sign in/out as appropriate at the Pastoral Office.

12. Improving attendance

In cases where student's attendance causes the school concern, The Blue School will undertake a series of steps to ensure that the situation is rectified.

1. When attendance drops below 93% in a 12 week period, the school will usually issue a standard letter of concern regarding poor level of attendance. This information will include the attendance percentage and the number of unauthorised absences.
2. If the attendance drops below 90% in a 12 week period, the school will issue a second letter of concern stating the requirement that any future absences will need to be supported by medical evidence. If no evidence is provided, the absence will be unauthorised.
3. If there are 10 or more unauthorised absences in a 12 week period, a referral will be made to the Education Welfare Officer. At this point a Warning Penalty Notice may be issued or a Parent Contract Meeting arranged.

If parents/carers are concerned about their child's attendance, they will be invited to meet with Pastoral Team Leader to discuss how best to deal with the issue.

It may also be necessary to involve the Education Welfare Service before all these stages have been completed if the school has concerns over truancy or absences.

13. Rewarding attendance

Excellent attendance needs to be an intrinsic part of each student's approach to his or her learning. The Blue School recognises the part it plays in motivating young people and helping them to understand the many benefits that attendance has on improving life chances. An essential part of this is celebrating and rewarding individuals where appropriate. This may include:

- Fortnightly awards for attendance in tutor period.
- Letters to students and parents to acknowledge significant improvement in attendance
- End of year rewards for students with particularly high attendance
- Inter-group attendance competitions.

14. Note on unauthorised attendance

An unauthorised absence is when parents/carers do not provide a reason that the school believes to be justifiable.

15. Re-integrating students who have been absent for a significant length of time

Students who have been absent for a period of time for no justifiable reason will have a reintegration programme designed by their Pastoral Team Leader and Deputy or Assistant Headteacher (Pastoral) in liaison with the Education Welfare Service and other agencies, as appropriate. This will be designed to meet their needs and allow a smooth re-integration into school.

16. Exceptional circumstances

The Blue School recognises that there can be, from time to time, circumstances that affect a student's attendance that cannot be foreseen and those not covered normally in this policy:

- Days of religious observance
- Traveller children
- Young carers
- Family bereavements
- Other circumstances deemed 'exceptional' by the school.

In these circumstances the school asks that Parent/Carers keep the school informed regularly in order to allow us to support the student as best as possible. Pastoral Team Leaders will take the appropriate decisions on authorising absence in these situations.

17. Penalty notices (see appendix 1)

Accumulated unauthorised absences may result in a Penalty Notice being issued.

A Penalty Notice is a fine issued to each parent or carer of £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt or £120 if paid after this, but within 28 days (NB: it is one Penalty Notice per parent, per child). If the penalty is not paid and the notice is not withdrawn the Parent/Carer will be prosecuted for the offence of failing to ensure their child's regular attendance at school.

Penalty Notices will only be issued after a series of strategies have been tried and no improvement seen. The decision to issue a Penalty Notice is taken jointly by the Education Attendance Service and the school. Copies of paperwork sent to Parents/Carers are also issued to the school and kept on student files.

The Law

Under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, parents or carers may be prosecuted if they fail to ensure their child's regular school attendance and those absences are unauthorised (the school has not accepted the reasons for absence).

Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 provides an alternative means of tackling unauthorised absence from school. It gives powers to issue Penalty Notices as an alternative to taking legal action. Penalty Notices are issued to parents or carers who are considered capable of, but unwilling to work towards improving their child's attendance.

The issuing of Penalty Notices is detailed in the Local Authority's Code of Conduct.

When will a penalty Notice be issued?

Penalty Notices may be issued if a pupil has at least 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in the last 12 weeks.

In most cases parents/carers will receive a written warning explaining the extent of their child's absence and the possibility of receiving a Penalty Notice. The warning will give 15 school days to effect change and ensure there is no unauthorised absence during that period.

If there are no further unauthorised absences within the 15 days a Penalty Notice will not be issued. **But**; the option to issue a Penalty Notice will remain in force for a further 3 months should the attendance slip.

What is a Penalty Notice?

A Penalty Notice is a fine issued to each parent or carer of £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt or £120 if paid after this, but within 28 days (**NB**: it is one Penalty Notice per parent, per child).

Penalty Notices are issued by first class post to the home and will explain how and where to send payment.

Payments must be in full; instalments are not possible.

What happens if the Penalty Notice is not paid?

If a Penalty Notice is not paid in full by the 28th day of its receipt the Local Authority is required to start legal proceedings against the parent/carer for the original offence of failing to ensure their child attends school regularly. This may lead to a fine of up to £1000 if found guilty in Court.

Payment of a Penalty Notice means that a parent/carer cannot be prosecuted for the period covered by the Penalty Notice. However, the Local Authority will consider prosecuting parents/carers should further unauthorised absence occur.

What to do to avoid a Penalty Notice.

Parents/Carers must:

- ensure their child goes to school each day and arrives on time.
- contact the school on the first day of absence and explain why.
- agree with the school in advance if there are exceptional reasons why their child may miss school.
- not take term time leave without school's agreement.
- talk to school about any problems with school attendance.

Why is attendance so important?

A child whose attendance is under 90% is termed a Persistent Absentee. Missing school for any reason can impact on a pupil's attainment. The more school a child misses, the harder it is for them to get into a routine of attending regularly and catch up on any work missed.

Missing school can leave a child more open to becoming involved in anti-social and criminal behaviour, both as an offender and as a victim.

Research shows that a year 11 pupil who misses 17 days during the school year will probably achieve one grade less than they would have had they attended regularly. A few days of absence now could have a huge impact on a child's future opportunities.

EVERY DAY COUNTS!