

# Attendance Policy



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**The policy to be reviewed on: September 2015**

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## Introduction

This is a successful school and every pupil plays their part in making this so. We aim for an environment which enables and encourages all members of the community to reach out for excellence.

Regular and punctual attendance at school is key to the academic and social development that will that will improve the life chances of children and young people.

Parents and carers have a duty to ensure that their children attend school regularly and punctually in order to get the most benefit from the opportunities.

Westminster City Council and Ark Schools is committed to supporting all schools, children, young people and families to achieve and maintain good attendance at school.

## Why regular attendance is so important

Any absence affects the pattern of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning. Children and young people who do not attend school regularly are at risk from a whole range of factors that may lead to poor outcomes in terms their educational achievement and future employment and financial security and citizenship.

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is your legal responsibility and if you permit absence from school without a good reason is an offence in law and may result in prosecution.

## Promoting regular attendance

Creating a learning environment where all pupils can achieve is everyone's responsibility. Establishing positive patterns of regular attendance is vital and everyone has a responsibility to help. This includes parents, children and all members of staff.

## What we will do

- Keep you up to date with attendance levels in the school newsletter;
- Inform you regularly on your son's/daughter's attendance, punctuality, and how this relates to their academic progress;
- Celebrate good attendance by displaying individual and class achievements;

- Reward good or improving attendance through class competitions, certificates and outings or events;
- Organise promotional events when parents, pupils and staff can work together on raising attendance levels across the school.

## Understanding types of absence

Every half -day absence from school has to be recorded and classified with a code by the school, as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. **Only the school** can make this decision and record it.

This is why information about the cause of any absence **is always** required, preferably in writing.

**AUTHORISED** absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness, medical/dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other unavoidable cause.

**UNAUTHORISED** absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which “leave” of absence has not been given. This type of absence can lead to the Local Authority using sanctions and/or legal proceedings. Some examples of this include:

- Parents/carers keeping their child away from school unnecessarily;
- Truancy before or during the school day;
- Absences that have not been properly explained;
- Late arrival **after** the close of registration (morning or afternoon);
- Shopping trips, looking after other children or adults, or birthdays;
- Day trips and holidays in term time that have not been agreed.

## Illness

Whilst it is understood that any child can have an illness and be away from school for a given period, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are always best sorted out by the parents/carers contacting school immediately to discuss the issues.

If your child is reluctant to attend:

- Please do not cover up the absence;
- Please do not give in to pressure to excuse them from attending.

If you do either of these things, the situation will only worsen and become a habit and the causes will be harder to find and the resolution difficult.

The school needs to give careful consideration to the authorisation of absence for some pupils.

Where a pupil has frequent absences the school may decide to ask for evidence such as a medical certificate, appointment card, or a label from prescription medication.

Additionally the school may wish to refer to the school nursing service where there are health concerns or if there is a view that illness is being used as an excuse to cover other reasons for absence.

The school may also wish to seek the advice of the family GP having first discussed the matter with parents/cares to seek their permission to do this.

### Dental/medical appointments

Wherever possible, parents/cares should make every effort to avoid making medical or dental appointments during the school day. It is preferable to try and arrange these during holiday periods or at the beginning or end of the school day. An appointment at the beginning of the school day should not result in a whole day's absence from school.

### Persistent Absenteeism (PA)

A pupil becomes a 'persistent absentee' when they are absent from school for 15% or more across the school year for whatever reason. The reasons can be both authorised and unauthorised.

Absence at this level will do considerable damage to any child's educational achievement and future prospects. We will need the full support and co-operation of all parents to tackle this.

- We will monitor all absence thoroughly;
- If your child's attendance has reached or is in danger of reaching the PA level we will inform you immediately and make the case a priority;
- Pupils who have reached the PA level will be tracked and monitored carefully through our pastoral system and we will combine this with academic mentoring where absence is seen to affect progress and attainment;
- All PA pupils and their parents will be subject to an Action Plan and the plan may include: the allocation of additional support through a mentor or a connexions worker, individual programmes and participation in group activities around raising attendance;
- All PA pupils will be made known to the Education Welfare Officer.

### Absence Procedures

#### If your child is absent you must:

- Contact us as soon as possible on the **first day** of absence;
- Send a **note** or **email** on the **first day** your child returns with an explanation of the absence – you must do this even if you have already telephoned us;
- Or, you can call into the school and report to reception.

### **If your child is absent we will:**

- Telephone or text you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you;
- Invite you in to discuss the situation with our Attendance Officer and/or Pastoral Leaders, Headteacher if absences persist;
- Refer the matter to the Education Welfare Officer if attendance falls below 85%.

### **Lateness**

Poor punctuality is not acceptable. If your child misses the start of every day they can miss work and the opportunity of hearing vital information and news, and sharing class time with their friends.

Late arriving pupils also disrupt lessons. Your child may also be embarrassed by arriving late and may fall into absenteeism in order to avoid the ordeal.

### **What we will do:**

- The school day begins at **8.30am** and we expect your child to be in class at that time.;
- Registers are marked at **8.40am** and your child will receive a late mark if they are not in by that time;
- At **9.00am** the registers will be closed;
- In accordance with the Regulations, if your child arrives after 9.00am they will receive a late mark that shows them to be on site, but this will **not** count as a present mark and means that they will have an unauthorised absence;
- If the problem persists this may mean that you could face the possibility of a penalty notice.
- Two late marks in a fortnight will result in a letter being sent asking for a noticeable improvement.

If your child has a persistent late record you will be asked to meet with the Headteacher and or Attendance Officer to resolve the problem, but you can approach us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to school.

You may also wish to seek advice from the Education Welfare Officer.

### **Leave during term time (Exceptional leave of absence)**

Taking leave in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking their child away in school time.

This school and the LA actively discourages holidays in term time. There is **no** automatic entitlement in law to time off in school time to go on holiday.

The Head teacher has the final decision as to whether to authorise leave or not and will consider the individual circumstances of each case:

- All applications for leave must be made in advance and in writing using the form provided (available from the school office);
- In exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of the Head teacher, a **maximum of 10 days in any one academic year** maybe authorised but the following will be considered:
  - Your child’s overall pattern of attendance;
  - Any previous pattern of leave in term time;
  - The age of your child;
  - Whether or not your child has recently started school;
  - The time of year and whether there are examinations;
  - The length, destination and purpose of the holiday and whether it is likely to be a rare event in the child’s life;
  - Family circumstances and the parents/carers reasons for wanting to take a leave of absence during term time.

If the holiday or leave of absence is taken without the agreement of the Headteacher or is in excess of what has been agreed, your child’s absence will be marked as **unauthorised** and you may be served with a **Penalty Notice**.

Failure to return after a date has been agreed may result in your child losing their school place.

### **The Attendance Service**

Parents are expected and encouraged to contact the school at an early stage and work together with school staff in resolving problems together. This approach is nearly always successful.

If this does not resolve the problem, the school will refer your child to the **Education Welfare Officer (EWO)** from the local authority. They are independent of the school and can provide impartial advice.

The EWO will work together with you and the school in order to resolve the difficulty and return your child to regular attendance.

In this school, to ensure that we promote early intervention and prevent absence from becoming chronic, this school together with the LA, will make use of the **Fast Track to Attendance** process. This means that you and your child will work together with the EWO over a 12 week programme of strategies and support in order to improve attendance.

It is important to note that once your child has been accepted on the Fast Track to Attendance Programme **no further absence will be authorised without medical evidence**.

If, after all efforts have been tried, the unauthorised absences persist; these officers can use sanctions such as Penalty Notices or prosecution in the Magistrates Court.

Full details and information leaflets are available from the school and from the Local Authority.

## Telephone numbers/contact details

There are times when we need to contact parents/carers in an emergency and about other things including absence from school. We must have contact telephone numbers and parental /carer details.

We need your help in ensuring that you have provided us with up to date telephone numbers and contact details – if we don't then something important may be missed.

We will make regular checks on telephone numbers and contact details throughout the year.

## School targets, projects and initiatives

The school has targets to improve attendance and your child has an important part to play in helping us to meet these targets and to aim higher in all aspects of their education.

Targets for the whole school and for the classes are displayed in the school and we hope you will take the opportunity to study them.

The **minimum level of attendance** for this school is **96%** and we will keep you updated regularly about the progress to this level and how your child's attendance compares.

Our aim is to achieve better than this because we know that good attendance is the key to successful schooling.

Through the school year we monitor absences and punctuality to show us where improvements need to be made.

Information on any projects or initiatives that will focus on these areas will be provided in our regular newsletter and we would ask for your full support.

The school has a legal duty to publish its absence figures to parents and to promote attendance. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend.

All school staff are committed to working with parents and pupils as the best way to ensure as high level of attendance as possible.