



---

DOWNHAM MARKET  
ACADEMY

## **Downham Market Academy**

### **Attendance and Punctuality Policy**

**September 2021**

# Downham Market Academy

## Attendance and Punctuality Policy

### 1 Why we have this policy

Regular attendance at school is vital. Put simply, absence means missed learning; without it the learning becomes fragmented and unsatisfactory. It is a legal requirement that students of compulsory school age receive a full-time education and this, with the exception of those educated at home or elsewhere, means regular attendance at school. Irregular attendance leads to students missing important lessons and therefore not realising their potential.

We therefore take the issue of attendance very seriously and do all we can to obtain very high attendance for all of our students. We aim to:

- emphasise the importance to all students of maximum attendance at school as an essential pre-requisite for making the full use of all educational opportunities and to maximising individual achievement
- make explicit to all relevant parties (teachers, parents/carers and students) the school's expectations on attendance levels
- raise levels of achievement by ensuring the highest possible levels of attendance, punctuality and involvement in the school
- ensure that every student has access to the education to which they are entitled
- promote a consistent approach across the school towards all matters relating to attendance and have a proactive approach to addressing early patterns of absence

### 2 What is an acceptable attendance percentage?

Attendance is a national priority. All schools must submit data electronically (both in an aggregated form and on an individual student basis) every term. It is a key indicator of an effective school and, as such, will be scrutinised by OFSTED. National data clearly shows a correlation between high attendance rates and high examination performance. Research shows that student attendance of less than 96% can impact on student attainment by as much as a whole GCSE grade.

The expectation for attendance is 100%, the vast majority of our students achieve good attendance of 96% or higher, . This is what we expect from all of our students as a minimum and attendance which falls below this target will be challenged.

We understand that occasionally a student may be legitimately absent from school due to illness. However, illness comes usually in a block of time over a continuous period. What we want to see is unbroken weeks (i.e. those where the student is marked present for all ten half-day sessions). **Students should not have more than one or two broken weeks in the course of an academic year.** Regular broken weeks are a cause for serious concern and will be followed up by the school, and triggers the implementation of the three-letter monitoring process (described in section 4.4)

If mitigating circumstances have not been identified and a student's attendance continues to fall and drops below 90% this means the student falls into the category of persistent absence and the Local Authority may be requested to take more formal action.

### 3 Absence

#### 3.1 Legal and National Context

Amendments to the Education (Student Registration) Regulations 2012 make it clear that schools may not grant leave of absence during term time unless there are very exceptional circumstances.

Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996 provides that a parent commits an offence if his or her compulsory school age child who is a registered student fails to attend school regularly. This can result in the school offering the parent the opportunity to enter into a parenting contract following a student's truancy or non-attendance under section 19 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 or the school instigating a Penalty Notice under section 23 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 (instigated by the member of the senior leadership team with responsibility for attendance).

#### 3.2 Authorised absences

The Department for Education (DFE) have issued guidelines to all schools detailing valid reasons for authorised or justified absences:

- (i) a child is ill or receiving medical attention;
- (ii) days of religious observance, notified in advance;
- (iii) absence due to family circumstances (e.g. bereavement, serious illness).

There are other absences, such as approved sporting activities, that can be authorised; and there will be events affecting families, some unforeseen, which will necessitate absence from school. Professional discretion will need to be used by the school in these cases as to whether the absence can be authorised. However, the DFE guidelines make it clear that:

- It is the school who judges whether an absence is authorised or not. A note from home therefore does not automatically make an absence authorised.
- Only truly exceptional occasions should be classified as authorised.

#### 3.3 Unauthorised absences

An absence is unauthorised if:

- no letter or acceptable explanation is provided by parents/carers;
- the reason for the absence does not fall into one of the categories of authorised absence.

For example, DFE guidelines state that the following activities would be classified as unauthorised:

- minding the house;
- caring for relatives;
- awaiting repair people
- shopping;
- a birthday or family celebration.

### 3.4 Late arrival to school

Statutory registration starts at 8:55am and 1:20pm and closes after 30 minutes. Thereafter students' absence will be recorded as unauthorised (U) unless a valid reason is provided such as a medical or dental appointment that is supported by appropriate medical evidence.

The register will be completed at the start of each session. A student will be marked late (L) when the teacher has completed the whole register and the student arrives after the register has been submitted electronically.

### 3.5 Holidays

As mentioned above, a school may not grant leave of absence during term time unless there are very exceptional circumstances, and even under these circumstances schools are advised not to authorise any absence of 3 days or more in duration. The school upholds these regulations, and applications for term time holidays **will not** be authorised.

To avoid difficulty or disappointment, parents are asked to refrain from such requests. We strongly discourage holidays from being taken during term time as learning is disrupted and the lost time is detrimental to the educational progress of the child. **Penalty notices will be requested from the Local Authority for any unauthorised term time holidays taken.**

### 3.6 Special leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances

Where parents/carers feel it is absolutely unavoidable to take their child/children out of school during term time due to very exceptional circumstances, an application for term time leave must be submitted a minimum of 2 weeks in advance of the proposed date clearly explaining the circumstances. The leave of absence form, which must be completed, can be found on our website under the attendance information tab.

A leave of absence will not be authorised retrospectively.

### 3.7 Absence for medical reasons

Initially when a student has an illness, parents are asked to notify the school on the first day their child is unable to attend and then every subsequent day their child will be absent. The school will authorise this absence unless there is a genuine cause for concern about the veracity of the illness. In such cases the school may request that parents provide medical evidence to support the reason for absence; this can be in the form of a prescription or appointment card. Students will be required to catch up on work missed upon returning.

Routine medical and dental appointments should be arranged outside of the school hours wherever possible. If appointments take place during the school day parents will be asked to provide the appointment card prior to the child leaving the school site. This needs to be submitted electronically to our attendance officer. Students are not permitted to leave the school site without the school being informed in advance of the time and nature of the appointment by the parent/carer.

### 3.8 Extended absence due to a medical condition(s)

Occasionally, a child may suffer from a medical condition, affecting their physical or mental health, that makes it impossible for them to attend school for an extended period; specifically, their attendance will fall below the 90% minimum attendance threshold, and is unlikely to improve. In

these cases the school requires medical evidence, in the form of a written letter from an appropriate healthcare professional

- outlining the cause of the absence,
- stating that at this current time the child is not fit to be at school, and
- stating the anticipated duration of the absence.

The letter does not need to offer a diagnosis; it simply offers a medical judgement that the child is not fit to attend school. The school can offer support in requesting such evidence if required.

The school will not be able to authorise the absence unless this evidence is provided. In these circumstances the school and the family would need to work closely together in partnership to formulate an Individual Alternative Education Plan to support the student with their recovery and to support them returning to full time education.

## 4 Home/School Partnership

Securing a high level of attendance requires the school and home to work closely together. To this end, we ask parents to:

- do all they can to ensure their child arrives on time every day for morning and afternoon school sessions; morning registration begins at 8:55am and afternoon registration is at 1:20pm. We will monitor persistent late comers and action will be taken: parents can be prosecuted if their child persistently arrives late;
- if their child is ill, notify the school on the first day their child is unable to attend and then every subsequent day their child will be absent;
- Get in touch at an early stage about concerns they have about their child's attitude towards school.

In return the School will:

- contact parents/carers on day 1 of absence if we have not already been informed the reason;
- contact home over any unexplained absences;
- follow up promptly any concerns parents pass on to us that may be affecting their child's attitude to, or feeling of wellbeing in, school;
- involve support from external agencies, where appropriate, to help students to re-integrate into school after illness or other individual circumstances;
- recognise outstanding or improving attendance via our rewards system

### 4.1 Support for Students and Parents

Each school provides support for parents and students if students are struggling to attend school. Measures include the following:

- Attendance Reports
- Attendance interviews and regular reviews with pastoral leads
- Meetings with pastoral leads and other relevant external agencies to provide support for children and their parents
- Re-integration programme arranged between students, parents, pastoral leads, SLT, Inclusion and SENDCO if appropriate after long-term absence
- Individualised curriculum where appropriate

## 4.2 Rewards for good attendance (96% or above)

To promote good attendance and to emphasise its importance the school offers the following rewards:

- half termly, students with 100% attendance and perfect punctuality will receive 3 House points each; this achievement is also recognised in school assemblies;

## 4.3 Sanctions for Poor Attendance and Punctuality

The school reserves the right to sanction students who fail to meet school attendance requirements, with any of the following:

- Detention for being late to school without a good reason
- Appropriate Report for attendance/punctuality
- Other, more serious sanctions, for repeated defiance of school attendance rules
- Poor attendance or punctuality may lead to students having an extended day to catch up on work missed

## 4.4 Three-letter monitoring process

The three-letter system is intended to enable schools to continuously and consistently monitor and address poor school attendance. The system targets non-attendance methodically and progressively up to and including the point at which a referral to the Local Authority for legal intervention may be necessary. The system is designed to identify patterns of absence, either authorised or unauthorised, which are beginning to cause concern.

To maintain 'good' attendance of 96% a student would need to miss no more than 4 whole school days (8 sessions) within an academic year. Beyond this point attendance becomes a cause for concern and the following system would be implemented:

- Stage One Letter. A stage one letter would be issued notifying parents/carers of our concerns. Our expectation at this point is that there are no further absences but if there are, they will be supported by medical evidence in order to be authorised
- Stage Two Letter. If attendance continues to fall then a stage two letter would be issued and parents/carers would be called in for a meeting to discuss concerns and to identify any support needed in an action plan
- Stage Three Letter. If, following the stage two meeting, there again is no improvement and attendance continues to fall then a stage three letter will be issued.
- Fast Track to Attendance. A meeting will be called with parents/carers to draw up a legal document where attendance will be monitored over a 6 week period. If at any point during this period attendance does not improve then a referral will be made to the Norfolk County Council for legal intervention.

## 5 Implementation – Roles and responsibilities

The school has a legal obligation to ensure high levels of attendance. To that end, the school will:

- regularly and consistently remind parents/carers and students of the importance of regular, uninterrupted school attendance and punctuality, for instance through assemblies, awards, parent information evenings, Parent Induction Packs, and letters.
- ensure that school advice with regards to term-time holidays is clearly stated on the school website and is regularly communicated to parents;
- actively discourage parents from arranging holidays during term-time;
- unequivocally remind parents that they do not have any right or entitlement to expect term time leave to be granted and that all leave is granted at the discretion of the member of SLT in charge of attendance;
- advise parents that non-attendance or absence that is unauthorised that is 90% or less could result in parenting contracts, or legal enforcement including Penalty Notices, School Attendance Orders, Education Supervision Orders or prosecution;
- provide attendance data on the termly report;
- report on attendance to Governors;
- pass on attendance data to 16+ providers/centres as required.

In addition the following personnel have a key role in supporting good attendance:

### 5.1 Pastoral Teams

Pastoral leaders will:

- give attendance a high profile during assemblies and school events
- monitor attendance targets and record keeping
- implement the system of rewards and sanctions
- meet with parents/carers to discuss attendance problems as soon as they are identified
- meet regularly with the member of SLT responsible for attendance
- work with the SENCO and relevant agencies to create individual packages and reintegration plans, where appropriate
- ensure work is provided for excluded students and long-term absentees
- look for patterns of absence and consider impact of curriculum upon attendance alongside other possible causes
- lead on strategies to improve attendance of students who are identified as being a concern through meetings with students and parents
- implement the three letter warning system
- support Tutors on issues of non-attendance and with internal truancy, remedying causes and applying sanctions
- ensure that students who are unable to attend school due to short-term illness are provided with work to complete at home as appropriate
- work with appropriate internal senior staff and external agencies with regard to providing packages of support for students with medical needs in accordance with relevant LA medical needs guidance

### 5.2 Form tutors

Form Tutors will:

- keep accurate registers

- be a good role model for students
- give attendance a high profile
- praise students for arriving on time
- take prompt action where students are late or absent without explanation, recording lateness and referring to Pastoral Leaders
- inform the Pastoral Leaders when absence is causing concern
- make contact with parents regarding attendance is appropriate

### 5.3 Attendance Officer

The Attendance Officer will:

- oversee administration of the Register system;
- streamline and make adjustments to systems and procedures;
- keep parents informed of any unexplained absences before they become unauthorised
- support the work of the Senior Leadership Team, pastoral leaders and Form tutors, by:
  - providing regular attendance information
  - contacting parents on first day of absence
  - monitoring attendance and punctuality
  - alerting Form Tutors and Pastoral Leaders when concerns arise
  - liaising with pastoral leaders to monitor accuracy of record keeping
  - keeping the member of SLT responsible for attendance informed of attendance issues
  - keeping the member of SLT responsible for attendance informed of inaccurate marking of staff registers as part of an alert system for staff who may not be maintaining accurate recording of registers
  - monitoring applications for leave.

### 5.4 Class Teachers

Teachers will:

- maintain an accurate class register through the Management Information System, following internal procedures if a student is missing
- praise students for their punctuality to lessons
- alert the Attendance Officer if there are concerns over student absence.

### 5.5 Parents

Parents will:

- ensure that children leave for school on time every day
- provide a written explanation for children's absences from school (this includes medical evidence if requested)
- endeavour not to take children out of school in term time
- notify the school as soon as problems arise with child's attendance, and
- if no letter has been sent in advance, telephone the school on the first morning the child is absent

### 5.6 Students

Students will:

- arrive punctually for registration every morning and every afternoon
- be punctual for lessons
- 
- sign in at the main reception if they are late arriving for school
- sign out at the main reception if they leaving school at any point before the end of the day
- tell their Tutor or Pastoral Leader if they are having any problems attending school

Member of SLT responsible for attendance The member of SLT responsible for attendance will:

- maintain oversight of whole school attendance including data relating to persistent absenteeism;
- maintain oversight of key cohorts of students who are likely to have attendance difficulties e.g. Disabled students, students with complex medical needs;
- ensure that students who are unable to attend school for prolonged periods, are provided to with work to complete at home as appropriate