

Athena
Sixth Form College



Athena Sixth Form College
Attendance and Punctuality Policy
September 2023

Approved by: Local Governing Body

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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. Although there is no legal requirement for students in post-16 education to receive a full-time education, regular attendance is an expectation for students attending Athena Sixth Form College. 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 Athena Sixth Form College as an essential prerequisite 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) Athena Sixth Form College'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 attending Athena Sixth Form College receives a high quality education
- Promote a consistent approach across Downham Market Academy and Athena Sixth Form College towards all matters relating to attendance and have a proactive approach to addressing early patterns of absence

2: What is an acceptable attendance percentage?

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 and a similar pattern can be expected in A-Level grades.

The expectation for attendance at Athena Sixth Form College is 100% and 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 Athena Sixth Form College 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, triggering the implementation of the Athena Sixth Form College attendance monitoring process (described in section 4.11)

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. This may ultimately result in the student being removed from roll in Athena Sixth Form College.

3: Absence

3.1 Legal and National Context

Although there is no legal framework regarding attendance for students in post-16 education, at Athena Sixth Form College we base our attendance policy on the regulations and frameworks that are mandatory for children of compulsory school age. This ensures a consistency in approach and expectations for students and their families. The following information summarises the documents that we have used as a basis for this attendance and punctuality policy:

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.

In May 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) published 'Working together to improve school attendance' (summarised in the 'Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance' (May 2022)) which provides guidance to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance. From September 2022, this document replaces all previous guidance on school attendance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities with the exception of the existing statutory guidance on parental responsibility measures.

Sections 28 to 30 of this guidance make it clear that schools may not grant leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.

3.2 Authorised absences

Absences in Athena Sixth Form College follow the guidelines from the Department for Education (DfE) to all schools (for children of compulsory school age) 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 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

Reasons for unforeseen absences must be provided to the school within 5 school days otherwise they will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. This follows the guidance in Section 31 of 'Working together to improve school attendance' from the DfE.

3.4 Late arrival to school

Statutory registration starts at 8:50am 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

DfE guidelines state that 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. Athena Sixth Form College follows these regulations, and applications for term time holidays **will not** be authorised.

3.6 Special leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances

We strongly discourage taking students out of the Athena Sixth Form College during term time but appreciate that under some circumstances this is unavoidable. For any non-medical, planned absences, please complete the online absence request form found on the school website at the following location:

<https://dma.tela.org.uk/life-at-dma/absence/request-form/>

An application for term time leave must be submitted a minimum of 2 weeks in advance of the proposed date clearly explaining the circumstances.

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 Athena Sixth Form College on the first day their child is unable to attend and then every subsequent day their child will be absent. Athena Sixth Form College 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 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 the Athena Sixth Form College attendance officer. This can be achieved on Edulink by selecting the 'Absence Reporting' icon or by emailing:

hello@asf.tela.org.uk

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 Athena Sixth Form College for an extended period; specifically, their attendance will fall below the 90% minimum attendance threshold, and is unlikely to improve. In these cases Athena Sixth Form College 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
- 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 Athena Sixth Form College. Athena Sixth Form College can offer support in requesting such evidence if required through the use of a Joint Medical Protocol.

Athena Sixth Form College 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.

3.9 Reporting Absence

If a student is unwell and cannot attend, the absence must be explained by the student's parent or carer. All absences must be reported before 8:30am on the day of the absence with the following information:

- Name of student
- Student's Personal Development Form
- Reason for absence
- Expected date of return if known

Sixth form:

Telephone: 01366 389100 (select option 5 when prompted)

Email: hello@asf.tela.org.uk

Alternatively, absence can be reported on Edulink by selecting the 'Absence Reporting' icon

4: Home/School Partnership

Athena Sixth Form College expects high levels of attendance. To that end, Athena Sixth Form College will:

- Regularly and consistently remind parents/carers and students of the importance of regular, uninterrupted school attendance and punctuality, for instance through assemblies, awards, information evenings 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 Director of Athena Sixth Form College
- Report on attendance to Governors
- Pass on attendance data other 16+ providers/centres as required

Securing a high level of attendance requires Athena Sixth Form College and home to work closely together. To achieve this, the following personnel have a key role in supporting good attendance:

4.1 Parents:

Parents will:

- Ensure their child attends Athena Sixth Form College on time every day except when a statutory reason applies
- 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
- Notify the school if their child is ill on the first day they are unable to attend and then every subsequent day their child will be absent
- Provide a written explanation for children's absences from Athena Sixth Form College (this includes medical evidence if requested)
- Only request leave of absence in exceptional circumstances and do so in advance
- If no letter has been sent in advance, telephone the school on the first morning the child is absent
- Get in touch at an early stage about concerns they have about their child's attitude towards Athena Sixth Form College and/or attendance issues
- Proactively engage with the support and advice offered by Athena Sixth Form College and seek additional support for their children if needed

- Monitor their child's attendance percentage; up-to-date attendance information is available on Edulink so that parents can always know up to date attendance data
- Book medical appointments around the school day where possible

4.2 Athena Sixth Form College Pastoral Teams

Athena Sixth Form College 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 Director of Athena Sixth Form College
- Work with the SENDCO 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
- Support Athena Sixth Form Tutors on issues of non-attendance and with internal truancy, remedying causes and applying sanctions
- Ensure that students who are unable to attend Athena Sixth Form College due to short-term illness are provided with work to complete at home as appropriate
- Follow up concerns parents pass on to the school that may be affecting their child's attitude to, or feeling of wellbeing in, school
- 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

4.3 Athena Sixth Form Tutors

Athena Sixth 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 Athena Sixth Form College Pastoral Leaders when absence is causing concern
- Make contact with parents regarding attendance is appropriate

4.4 Assistant Director of Athena (Attendance)

The Assistant Director of Athena (Attendance) 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 Athena Sixth Form Tutors, by:
 - providing regular attendance information
 - contact home regarding any unexplained absences
 - monitoring attendance and punctuality
 - alerting Athena Sixth Form Tutors and Athena Sixth Form College Pastoral Leaders when concerns arise
 - liaising with Athena Sixth Form College Pastoral Leaders to monitor accuracy of record keeping
 - keeping the Director of Athena Sixth Form College informed of attendance issues
 - keeping the Director of Athena Sixth Form College 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

4.5 Class Teachers

Class Teachers will:

- Maintain an accurate class register through the Management Information System (SIMS or Edulink), following internal procedures if a student is missing
- Praise students for their punctuality to lessons
- Alert the Assistant Director of Athena (Attendance) if there are concerns over student absence

4.6 Students

Students will:

- Arrive punctually for registration every morning and every afternoon
- Be punctual for lessons
- Sign in on the Athena Sixth Form College ipad if they are late arriving for school
- Sign out on the Athena Sixth Form College ipad if they leaving school at any point before the end of the day
- Tell their Athena Sixth Form Tutor or Athena Sixth Form College Pastoral Leader if they are having any problems attending school

4.7 Director of Athena Sixth Form College

The Director of Athena Sixth Form College has responsibility for attendance and will:

- Maintain oversight of Athena Sixth Form College's 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
- The member of SLT responsible for attendance is George Pettitt who can be contacted via email at gpettitt@dma.tela.org.uk

4.8 Support for Students and Parents

Athena Sixth Form College 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 Athena Sixth Form College pastoral leads
- Meetings with Athena Sixth Form College 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
- Involve support, where appropriate, from external agencies to help students re-integrate into school after illness or other individual circumstances.

4.9 Sanctions for Poor Attendance and Punctuality

Athena Sixth Form College reserves the right to sanction students who fail to meet school attendance requirements, with any of the following:

- Appropriate Report for attendance/punctuality
- Removal of free periods and implementation of supervised study in place of these
- 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
- Withdrawal of the place offered at Athena Sixth Form College.

4.10 Attendance monitoring process

Athena Sixth Form College uses a three-letter system to continuously and consistently monitor and address poor attendance. The system targets non-attendance methodically and progressively up to and including the point at which a student may be taken off roll and have their place at Athena Sixth Form College withdrawn.

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. At this point a formal meeting with the Director of Athena Sixth Form College will be arranged and an attendance support plan put in place. Attendance will be monitored over a period of 4 to 6 weeks with an attendance target of 100%. If there are further unauthorised absences in this period, the student may have their place at Athena Sixth Form College withdrawn.