

Fairfield High School for Girls

Policy for Pupil Attendance and Punctuality



Approved by:	Full Trust Board	Date: January 2022
Last reviewed:	May 2016	
Next review due by:	January 2025	
Person Responsible:	SLT responsible for Pastoral	

Outstanding progress for all

Pupil Attendance and Punctuality Policy

Introduction

Every pupil has a right to access an outstanding education to which they are entitled. Fairfield High School for Girls aims to work together with parents*, teachers and outside agencies to ensure that all pupils, registered at the school, attend both regularly and punctually.

Our aim is to ensure that each pupil reaches their full potential and in order to achieve this aim, we promote high levels of attendance and excellent punctuality.

*reference to parents throughout this report also includes carers.

Parental Responsibilities

If a child is registered at a school, it is the parent's legal responsibility to ensure that the child attends school punctually, every day. Parents are committing an offence if they fail to ensure their child's regular attendance at school.

The Department for Education says: *"If your child fails to attend regularly – even if they miss school without you knowing – the Local Authority may take legal action against you."*

The consequence of this may be a Fixed Penalty Notice (fine) or prosecution in the Magistrate's Court (fine, court costs and a criminal record). (Please note that non-payment of a Fixed Penalty Notice can also lead to prosecution in the Magistrate's Court).

School Responsibilities

All school staff are committed to working with parents and pupils to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible. Regular attendance optimises your child's attainment and prepares them for a life after school. If your child misses school, then they are missing out on their education.

Why is regular attendance at school so important?

Any absence affects the pattern of a pupil's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning. Any pupil's absence disrupts teaching routines and so may affect the learning of others in the same class.

The link between a pupil's attendance and attainment is irrefutable – pupils who miss school do not achieve as well as those who attend regularly.

Unless addressed early, poor attendance habits tend to escalate during secondary school and then lead to bigger problems during further education and ultimately, employment. We are normally asked for attendance and lateness percentages when writing references for pupils who are applying for college, apprenticeships or university, and attendance and punctuality marks can cause prospective organisations to reconsider such applications.

It is important that parents understand the effect of absences on their child's educational attainment, and the following information puts into context the number of lessons missed over the course of one school year, in relation to overall attendance:-

- 95% attendance means 50 lessons missed.
- 90% attendance means 100 lessons missed.
- 85% attendance means 150 lessons missed.

- 80% attendance means 200 lessons missed.
- 75% attendance means 250 lessons missed.

Promoting regular attendance

Helping to create a pattern of regular attendance is everybody's responsibility – parents, pupils and all members of school staff.

To help us all to focus on this we, the school will:

- Expect pupils to attend school at least 97% of the year.
- Monitor attendance and contact parents whose child's attendance is giving cause for concern.
- Celebrate excellent or improving attendance by rewarding individual and class achievements.
- Promote excellent attendance, and its positive effects, in our home/school planner.
- Work with our Local Authority to promote excellent attendance and challenge poor attendance.
- Contact you if your child does not attend school and no messages have been left to explain their absence.

Parents can help their child to achieve an excellent attendance rate by:

- Ensuring regular and early bed times.
- Helping with homework.
- Having uniform and equipment prepared the night before.
- Providing a healthy breakfast.
- Reporting any academic or social concerns promptly.
- Retaining open and honest communication with the school.
- Being positive about school.

Understanding the different types of absence

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school (not by the parents), as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required, preferably in writing.

Authorised Absences

These are mornings or afternoons away from school, which the school considers are a legitimate reason for a pupil to miss their education, such as illness, emergencies or medical/orthodontic appointments, which unavoidably fall during school time.

It is important to note that if any medical or dental appointments occur in the morning, the pupil should first attend school to obtain their morning attendance mark. The pupil should then return to school immediately following the appointment, in order to get their afternoon attendance mark.

Only a limited number of absences will be authorised without medical evidence, following which medical evidence will be required in order to authorise further absences for the remainder of the Academic Year.

It is important to note that only the school, not parents, can authorise any absences.

Unauthorised Absences

These are mornings or afternoons away from school, for which the school considers does not justify a pupil missing their education. This type of absence can lead in the first instance to a Fixed Penalty Notice, and if such absences continue, can lead to the involvement of the Local Authority using sanctions and/or legal proceedings. Examples of absences that are unauthorised include:-

- Parents keeping pupils off school unnecessarily.
- Truancy before or during the school day.
- Absences which have never been properly explained.
- Pupils who arrive at school too late to get a mark.
- Shopping, weddings, looking after other pupils or birthdays.
- Day trips and holidays in term time.
- Excessive illness without medical evidence to justify the absences from school.

We advise all parents to send their children to school when feeling unwell, unless they are so poorly that they must see the doctor, in which case medical evidence (such as an appointment card or a prescription) to justify the absence can be obtained.

Inclusion and Pastoral Support

Fairfield High School for Girls does recognise that occasionally, external factors may influence pupil attendance. Any problems regarding regular attendance can be sympathetically addressed between the school, the parents and the child, as long as school are kept informed on a regular basis.

This school has excellent inclusion and pastoral strategies, to ensure that all our pupils feel safe and welcome, and can remain within an educational setting, during any times of difficulty.

School is well equipped to accommodate pupils with a range of difficulties and has skilled in-house staff who are able to support pupils with emotional needs, together with maintaining close links with external support agencies.

It is therefore extremely important that parents do not cover up their child's absences or give in to pressure to excuse them from attending. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and can escalate the problem, which is completely unnecessary.

Procedures for Absence

If your child is absent you must:

- Contact us as soon as possible on each day of absence so that we know you are aware that your child is not in school.

If your child is absent we will:

- Send you an email/text and/or telephone you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you, to secure an explanation.
- Record the absence with an absence code that depends on the pupil's overall attendance and circumstances, if an explanation from the parent is received.
- Make a home visit as soon as possible, following the third day of your child's absence if medical evidence or a reason for the absence has not been provided.
- Automatically, record the absence with an unauthorised absence code, if no explanation from the parent is received.

- Invite you in to discuss the situation with appropriate members of school staff and external agencies if the absences persist.
- Refer the matter to the Local Authority if attendance continues to decline.

Emergencies

It is important, for safeguarding procedures, that we have up to date emergency telephone numbers.

There are times when we need to contact parents about lots of things, including absence, so we need to have your contact numbers at all times.

Please help us to help you and your child by making sure that we always have an up to date number – if we don't then something important may be missed. We do understand that some parents do not have telephones, therefore if this is the case, please let us have the telephone number of a friend or relative, who will be able to assist us or contact you in an emergency. There will be regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

Punctuality to school

Poor punctuality is unacceptable. If your child misses morning registration, which is at the start of the day, they miss vital instructions, information and news for the day from their Form Teacher. If they miss the start of a lesson, they miss the lesson objectives and any links with previous lessons, as well as any other work that is done. Late arriving pupils also disrupt lessons, which can be embarrassing for the pupil and can also encourage absence.

The start of the school day

Pupils should arrive at school no later than **8.10 am**. The school day starts at 8.15 am, at which time we expect your child to be in their form room unless directed otherwise.

Registers are taken at **8.15am** prompt, and your child will receive a late mark if they are not in their form room by that time.

At **9.00 am**, the registers are closed. In accordance with the Pupil Registration Regulations, if your child arrives after that time they will receive a mark that shows them to be on site, but this will not count as a present mark and it will mean they have an unauthorised absence. This may mean that you could face the possibility of receiving a fixed penalty notice if the problem persists.

How we manage lateness:

The school operates a system where for every three lates your child has they will receive a whole school detention.

If your child has a persistent late record, you will be asked to meet with appropriate members of school staff. Persistent lateness may result in your child being asked to stay behind to catch up with work that they have missed. Other measures may be put in place to support your child including being placed on report.

Please note that you can approach us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to school on time.

Attendance Concerns

Parents have a duty to ensure that their children attend school. All school staff are committed to working with parents and pupils as this is the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible.

- **Responsibility for Attendance in School**

The following members of staff are responsible for attendance matters in this school:

Learning Mentors
Attendance and Inclusion Manager
Form Tutors
Heads of Year
Pastoral Managers
Senior Assistant Headteacher/School Attendance Leader
Headteacher

- **Repeated unauthorised absences**

If a pupil has a repeated number of unauthorised absences, the parent will be contacted by the school to discuss the problem. If the school is unable to make contact with the parent, procedures will be implemented in accordance with statutory guidance relating to children who are missing education.

- **Persistent Absenteeism (PA)**

Persistent Absentees are pupils whose attendance is 90% or below **for whatever reason**. This is a very serious matter and absence at this level is doing considerable damage to any pupil's educational prospects and we need parents' fullest support and cooperation to tackle this.

Any pupil whose absences are seen to have reached the PA mark, or are at risk of moving towards that mark is given priority and you will be informed of this immediately. PA pupils are tracked and monitored carefully through our pastoral system and we also combine this with academic mentoring where absence affects attainment.

In the case of persistent non-attendance, and following a set period of intervention by the school's Pastoral Faculty, it is regrettable, but the appropriate statutory action will have to be taken.

Holidays in Term Time

Any application for leave must only be in exceptional circumstances. The Headteacher must be satisfied that the circumstances are exceptional and warrant the granting of leave. Headteachers are not expected to class any term time holiday as exceptional. Parents can be fined by the Local Authority for taking their child on holiday during term time without consent from school.

The Local Authority fully appreciates the financial difficulties that some parents face when booking holidays, particularly during school holidays. However, they expect all schools in Tameside to implement firm policies and stringent checks to ensure that there is a significant reduction in the number of absences being authorised by school during term time. Accordingly, Fairfield High School for Girls will not consider applications for holidays in term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Applications will only be considered when a formal Leave of Absence form is completed and submitted. It is important that holidays are not booked until a decision has been made by the Headteacher.

It is also important to note that if your child is absent on the days immediately preceding or following a designated school holiday, medical evidence will be required to authorise the absence.

Children Missing from Education

Fairfield High School for Girls wants all our pupils to benefit from the excellent learning and enrichment facilities that we can provide within school. All of our pupils, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to

a full time education which is suitable to their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs they may have.

We work closely with outside agencies including Children's Social Care, Education Welfare Department, Greater Manchester Police and the School Nurse Service (this list is not exhaustive) to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our pupils.

If any of our pupils are missing from education, particularly on repeat occasions, we will attempt to contact parents. If we are unsuccessful, procedures will be implemented in consultation with the local authority and in accordance with statutory guidance relating to children who are missing education.

Local Authority Intervention

- **Fixed Penalty Notices**

Education-related Fixed Penalty Notices were introduced to discourage parents from failing to ensure regular school attendance for their child. A Penalty Notice may be issued in the following circumstances:

- Overt truancy
- Parentally-condoned absences
- Holidays in term time
- Persistent late arrival after the Register has closed at 9.00am

Section 444(A) of the Education Act 1996, empowers a Local Authority to issue Fixed Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absences from school. The pupil's parents may each receive a Penalty Notice fine of £60, which must be paid within 21 days. If the payment is made after 21 days, but within 28 days, the penalty is increased to £120. Where a fine remains unpaid, the matter will be referred to the Magistrates Court to instigate criminal proceedings.

Full payment of the penalty, within the designated timescale, discharges the parent from liability for conviction following a prosecution. The use of Fixed Penalty Notices is intended as an early intervention to improve attendance.

If the Local Authority issues a Fixed Penalty Notice, school urges parents to pay within the specified timescales as some parents who have been adamant that they will not pay the fine have unwittingly been prosecuted, and have consequently received a larger fine, court costs, and a criminal record.

- **Prosecution**

If a pupil's attendance is so low that it is beyond the threshold for the use of Fixed Penalty Notices, it is the duty of the school to inform the Local Authority, who may implement legal action against parents in the Magistrates Court if it considers that prosecution may bring about an improved attendance.

It is important to note that that if found guilty, the parents will have a criminal record.

Reintegration

The return to school for a pupil after long-term absence can be particularly stressful, and requires special individualised planning. The school will decide on the support programme for return and the management of that programme.

Support programmes will be tailored to individual needs and may involve phased, part-time re-entry with support in lessons as appropriate.

Parents will be involved and informed at each stage of the planned reintegration.

Summary

This is a successful and popular school and your child plays their part in making it so. We aim for an environment which enables and encourages all our pupils to achieve excellence.

For our pupils to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend regularly and your child should be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.

We reserve the right to update our policy and practise in line with changes to legislation and guidance.

We look forward to working with you in achieving our goals.