

The Lighthouse Schools Partnership Attendance Policy

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1. Introduction

The Lighthouse Schools Partnership is committed to providing a high quality and inclusive education for all pupils. We believe that if pupils are to reach their full potential, then excellent attendance is crucial.

The expected attendance level for schools across the Trust is 100%. However, we recognise that children do occasionally get ill, therefore ***the Trust is concerned about any attendance below 96%.***

All staff, parents/carers and the Local Authority share a legal responsibility in ensuring full attendance at school for our students.

To achieve this:

- Parents must ensure regular and punctual attendance (they risk prosecution if they fail in this duty);
- Schools must provide access to a child's full entitlement to education.

The Trust recognises that a school's effectiveness across all areas can be an important element in promoting positive attendance. Therefore, the Trust will provide stimulating teaching and an ethos in which all members of the school community are valued, to encourage high levels of attendance.

We understand that parents 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.

It is the policy of our schools to celebrate achievement. Good attendance is a critical factor in ensuring positive educational outcomes for our pupils.

If there are problems which affect a pupil's attendance we will investigate, identify and strive in partnership with parents, pupils and our Education Welfare Officers to resolve those problems as quickly and efficiently as possible. We will adopt a clearly focused approach aimed at returning the pupil to full attendance at all times.

Children may be at risk of harm if they do not attend school regularly. Safeguarding the interests of every child is everyone's responsibility. Failing to attend school on a regular basis may be considered a safeguarding matter.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

Parents

Parents have a duty to educate their children "*suitable to their age, aptitude, ability and any special educational needs which they may have*" either by regular attendance at school or otherwise under Section 7 of The Education Act 1996. Parents whose children are registered at school are then responsible for ensuring that they attend punctually, regularly and stay at school.

Schools

Schools have a number of legal responsibilities relating to attendance:

- to call the attendance register twice per day – at the start of the morning session and once during the afternoon session;
- to ensure that attendance registers are kept, in accordance with legal requirements and the policy of the school;
- to inform the Local Authority about pupils who do not attend school regularly or who have been continuously absent for two weeks or more (unless the absence is covered by a medical certificate);
- and to include data on authorised and unauthorised absence in the school profile, in accordance with Department for Education and Skills (DfE) requirements.

Local Authorities

Local Authorities are required to ensure parents carry out their responsibilities, with regard to their children's education. In North Somerset, the Local Authority fulfils this requirement through the Education Welfare Service (EWS) whose primary responsibility is to enforce the regular and punctual school attendance of all pupils. In Bath and North East Somerset, the Local Authority fulfils this requirement through the Children Missing Education Service and will consider legal action where other strategies to improve attendance have failed.

3. Times of the School Day

Lateness can have a detrimental effect on the learning of a child and is disruptive to a class. Often, important information is shared at the beginning of the school day, which when missed may cause difficulties for the child in trying to catch up.

The Trust therefore is very clear in the expectations relating to punctuality, and will take relevant steps to address absence relating to unauthorised lateness including:

- informing parents when a pupil is late more than 5 times in a half-term (this will be done by the Attendance Officer/relevant personnel);
- requesting a meeting with parents to discuss lateness;
- and requesting a Penalty Notice for unauthorised lateness to be issued by the Local Authority. (In the case of North Somerset the threshold is 10 or more of these absences within six months. In Bath and North East Somerset the threshold is 10 or more unauthorised absences in the 100 sessions prior to the request for a penalty notice to be issued.)

Each school will publish on its website the timings for the school day including the period of expected arrival at school, the timings of registers being taken and the time that morning register closes. They will also use other opportunities to publicise these timings to parents such as notices posted in reception and reminders published in newsletters.

It is expected that all children attend prepared to start their day with the right equipment and on time.

The school registers will close 45 minutes after they have opened, and any child arriving after this time will be marked as an unauthorised absence.

Each school will implement its own strategy to address lateness and especially persistent lateness.

4. Absence from School

First day Contact

First day contact is an integral part of the Attendance Policy. Parents and pupils must realise that whenever possible a student's absence will be noted and acted upon swiftly. First day contact sends a clear message to students and parents that attendance is very important.

If a child is going to be absent, parents/carers must contact the school office on the first day of absence by 9.30am at the latest. (Schools in the trust may ask parents to inform them of an absence by an earlier time to support their administrative arrangements.)

It is expected that parents/carers explain in full the reasons for absence. Simply advising 'ill' is not acceptable and may result in follow up communication.

- If the School has not received contact by 9.30am. The school will attempt to contact the family by telephone and/or email.
- Any unexplained absences of one week or longer will be reported to the Local Authority. Any child missing for over 10 days will be reported as a Child Missing Education.

It is the view of the Trust that first day contact works to:

- raise awareness of the importance of attendance;
- address attendance problems before they become serious;
- alert parents who may be unaware that their child is truanting or missing and therefore may be at risk;
- and assist parents and pupils to develop habits that reduce casual absence and encouraging early contact from parents.

Authorisation of Absence

It is the responsibility of the Headteacher of any school to decide on how to code an absence. In our schools, staff will consult with the Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher when there are any causes for concern. This may be after a period of absence, a pattern of missed absences or continued lateness.

Authorised Absence: an absence with an accepted explanation from parents

Unauthorised Absence: an absence not agreed or unexplained. The school will attempt to obtain reasons for unexplained absence but where parents fail to respond, any unexplained absence will be deemed as unauthorised.

Medical: an appointment such as hospital, doctor or dentist. This will usually be authorised although school may request supporting information from the parents for any absence exceeding 5 consecutive days.

Illness: illness identified by a parent/carers or upon receipt of supporting medical information if required (see Flowchart for managing absence).

Full guidance on attendance codes is available from each school.

Holidays in term time

Since September 2013 Headteachers have been prohibited from granting leave of absence except where **an application has been made in advance and the Headteacher considers that there are exceptional circumstances**. This applies to all pupils of statutory school age within the Trust. Therefore, **any term-time leave**

must be requested in advance, in writing, direct to the Headteacher, and this should come from the person with whom the child normally resides. The Headteacher will then determine whether the reason is exceptional.

'Student Leave Request For Exceptional Circumstances Forms' can be obtained from a school's General Office or Attendance Officer.

The Government have provided guidance on what is deemed to be exceptional:

- forces' Personnel on leave from a foreign posting;
- parents' employment restrictions – evidence will be requested from employers to prove that none of the school holidays can be used;
- significant family events or circumstances – these will need to be considered individually.

The Government have also noted areas which would not be considered exceptional:

- relatives visiting;
- cheaper holidays in England and abroad;
- family day trips;
- visiting friends/family that have different half terms or holidays;
- because a child has good attendance;
- employment restrictions during the summer holiday.

Penalty Notices

Leave taken without a request being made in advance is likely to be classed as an unauthorised absence and, where there are 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence, this will result in the request for a Penalty Notice.

Other unauthorised absence amounting to 10 or more sessions over the time period referred to in the Local Authority Penalty Notice Code of Conduct will also result in the request for a Penalty Notice.

If a student has been absent and the reason has been reported as illness but the school has reason to believe this not to be the case and the student is actually attending a family holiday evidence of illness may be required. If illness cannot be proved, the school will take action by way of a Penalty Notice.

Penalty Notices are £60 per parent per child, if paid within 21 days; or £120 per parent per child if paid between 21- 28 days. Failure to pay a Penalty Notice will result in the Local Authority prosecuting for the failure to ensure regular attendance.

Roles relating to Attendance

In our schools, it is the responsibility of:

- The Attendance Officer or other Admin Staff to record attendance onto the SIMS system. These staff will also ring to check on the reasons for absence and will send out letters to request information.
- The Class Teacher or any other relevant member of staff to notify the Attendance Lead of any concerns about a child's attendance. They will be available to discuss any issues relating to attendance with parents and feedback to the Attendance Lead.
- The Attendance Lead to regularly view the attendance data and discuss issues with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO). The Attendance Lead will decide upon relevant actions and they (or another suitable staff member) will chair Parent Contract Meetings. The Attendance Lead will be available to offer support to parents relating to attendance. They will request action from the Local Authority where necessary.
- The Headteacher to take decisions about coding (this may be delegated for day to day management). The Headteacher will be the owner of the registration certificates. The Headteacher/ Attendance Lead will meet with the EWO and Parents at Pre-Court Investigation Meetings.

5. Monitoring of Attendance and Intervention

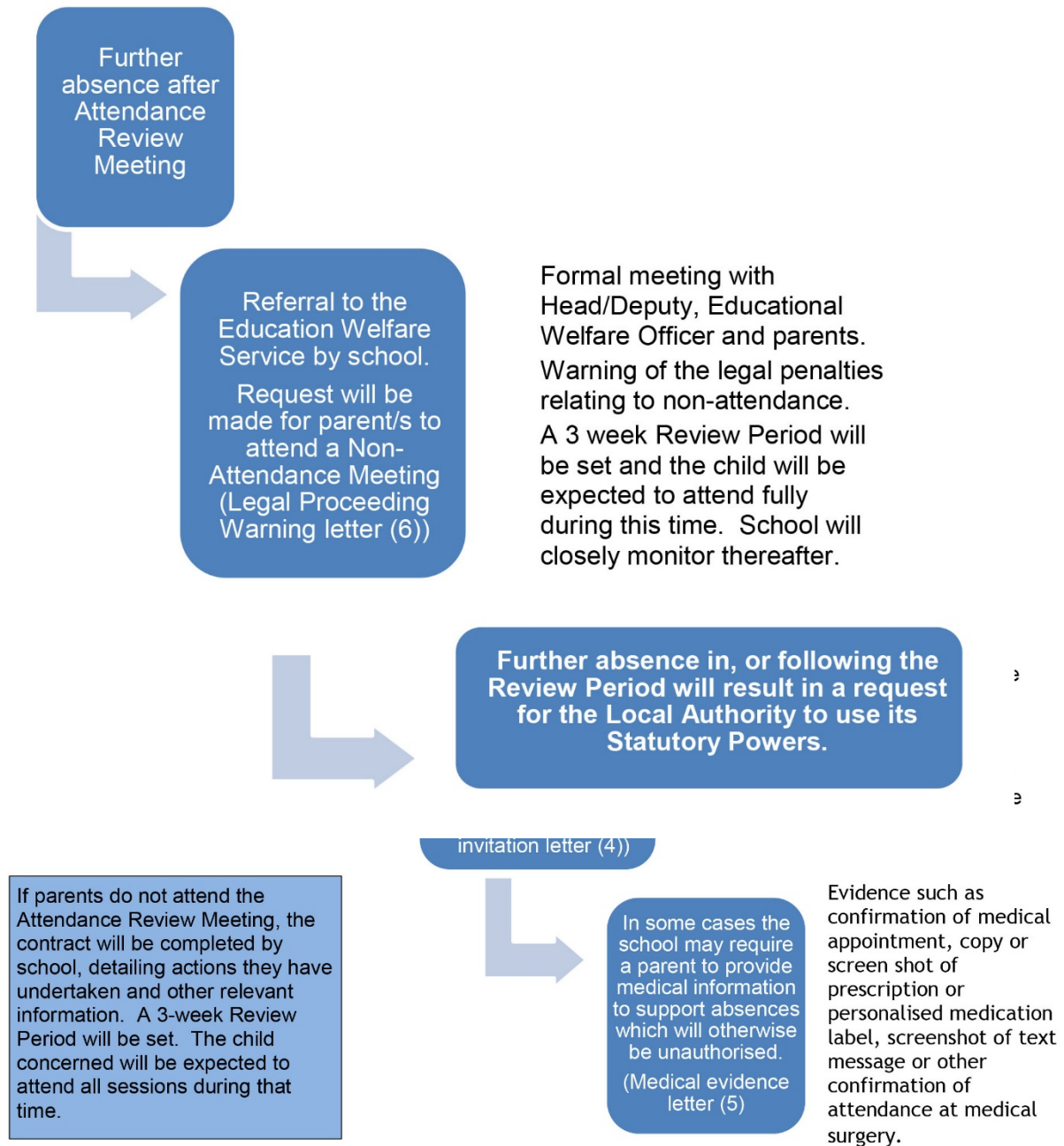
The Lighthouse Schools Partnership will work towards ensuring that all pupils feel supported and valued.

The Trust has procedures that allow absentees to catch up on missed work without disrupting the learning of other class members.

Below is a chart which outlines the steps that will be taken to ensure every child can access their full entitlement to education.

At any point in the process, if full attendance is achieved and sustained, the case will return to the fortnightly monitoring meeting.

Non-attendance action chart



Flowchart continues overleaf

6. Policy Update and Evaluation

Targets for improved attendance will be set annually. Each year the governors will check whether these targets were met and, if not, try to establish why not.

Part of the evaluation process will be to look at what interventions have been successful.

We will consider:

- Overall School attendance rate
- Number of Individual pupil's attendance rate being over 96%
- Number of Persistently Absent students (under 90%)
- Attendance of children in vulnerable groups

Our schools believe 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. We will ensure that we take a pro-active approach to supporting the needs of all pupils and are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity to all.