

Attendance Policy

Smith's Wood Academy

Part of Fairfax Multi-Academy Trust

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Page 3	Introduction
Page 3	Legislation and Guidance
Page 5	Roles and Responsibilities
Page 8	Absence
Page 10	Lateness and Truancy
Page 11	Rewards

Rationale

To ensure robust and thorough systems and procedures are in place, safeguarding all students at Smith's Wood Academy. The content of this policy is in line with *Keeping Children Safe in Education* and *Working Together to Improve School Attendance*.

1. Introduction

Smith's Wood Academy is committed to providing a full and effective educational environment for all our students to thrive in. We believe if students are to be successful and benefit from their education, both punctuality and excellent attendance are important. The attendance pattern for all students is monitored weekly, with the academy seeking to work actively with parents to ensure a regular pattern is maintained.

It is important that each student attends school regularly and on time. Parents/carers have a vital role to play to support and encourage good attendance, fulfilling their legal responsibility. The academy encourages parents to work in partnership to ensure their child receives a full education.

To encourage high attendance across school, both staff and students will work within the '5 Foundations to Attendance' framework and in line with both local authority and Department for Education (DfE) guidance.

School will continue:

- To develop supportive strategies to encourage attendance
- To maintain parents, students and staff awareness of the importance of regular attendance and good punctuality
- To raise levels of student attainment
- To maximise opportunities both in school and later life
- To develop strategies to reduce authorised and unauthorised absences
- To develop an efficient monitoring system
- To develop and communicate procedures for attendance and punctuality to all key staff within the academy
- To develop and create opportunities for both parents and students to raise concerns and work together in addressing attendance issues

2. Legislation and Guidance

Regular attendance at school is an important legal responsibility which is shared amongst schools, parents and the Local Authority. This is further emphasised by The Children Act 1989 which highlights the need for schools to work in partnership with parents and the support services of the Local Authority to promote and maintain the regular attendance of all students.

Keeping Children Safe in Education also refers to Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities.

This guidance summarises the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance and explains how they apply to local authorities, school staff, governing bodies, students and parents. These requirements are contained in:

- The Education (Provision of Full-Time Education for Excluded Pupils) (England) Regulations 2007
- Section 10 of the Children Act 2004
- Section 437 (1) of the Education Act 1996
- Section 437 (3) of the Education Act 1996
- Section 443 of the Education Act 1996
- Prosecution under section 444 of the Education Act 1996 and penalty notices under section 444A (as amended by section 23 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003)
- Section 447 of the Education Act 1996
- Section 47 of the Pupil's Act 1989
- Section 7 of the Education Act 1996

Student registration: The statutory requirements

Parents, schools and the local authorities share legal responsibilities in respect of school attendance:

Parents of children of compulsory school age must ensure that they receive an efficient and suitable full-time education (Section 7 Education Act 1996)

All schools (other than independent schools for boarders only) must keep an attendance register on which, at the beginning of each morning and during the afternoon session, a student should be marked present or absent.

LAs must ensure that parents are fulfilling their statutory obligations as to their children's education including, where necessary, by action through the Courts. (Sections 437-448 Education Act 1996)

Schools should ensure that registers are properly kept. (Pupil's Registration Regulations 1995)

Schools are required to collect and publish data on their rates of all absences for the preceding year. "All schools must distinguish in their attendance registers between authorised and unauthorised absences of students of compulsory school age; school prospectuses and annual reports must include specified information on rates of unauthorised absence".

(The Pupil's Registration Regulations, the Education (School Information) Regulations 1981)
(The Education (School Curriculum and Related Information) Regulations 1989)

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The Attendance Team monitor attendance regularly, looking closely at lateness, absences in each year and persistent absentees, through information on the registers and through communication from members of staff, parents and students in school.

Phone calls and/or MCAS messages are sent every morning in the event of a student's absence. If no contact is made with the parent/carer within 3 days, a home visit will be carried out. If there is still no contact with parent/carer and school have not been able to establish the safety of the student, the police will be contacted to complete a safe and well check at the home. If a child is absent from school and their whereabouts is unknown, we have a duty to carry out reasonable enquires jointly with the local authority to ascertain the whereabouts. This may include a Child Missing in Education referral.

If there are any on-going absence or punctuality concerns, the student's home is contacted either through a phone call, a home visit or by sending a letter/email. These can be conducted by the Attendance Team or the Achievement Leader. For families with safeguarding concerns, home visits and intervention may be conducted by the Safeguarding Team. This may be on the first day of absence. If there is no improvement in the student's attendance or punctuality, parents are asked to come in to discuss their child's attendance. This may be with a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

The academy works closely with the LA. If the student's attendance does not improve then each parent with parental responsibility may receive a Penalty Notice for each child. If there is still no improvement, a referral may be made to Children's Services on the grounds of educational neglect. In some circumstances, if a student does not attend school for a period of time, and after checks, school are unable to locate where they are, school will make a referral to the Children Missing in Education Team as stated in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' guidance.

We have a dedicated Senior Attendance Champion, Miss Yazmin Akay, who oversees attendance and supports students and families in maintaining good attendance.

If you have any concerns or require support regarding your child's attendance, please contact Miss Akay using this email address y.akay@smithswood.fmat.co.uk.

GOOD ATTENDANCE MEANS BEING IN SCHOOL AT LEAST 98% OF THE TIME

Attendance during the school year	Equates to days absent	Action
Below 98%	4 school days missed	Notification sent home - below Local Authority target (98%)
96%	7 school days missed	First letter sent home, your child is now at risk of being persistently absent. Meeting will be arranged with Pastoral team to offer support and identify barriers.
95%	10 school days missed	Second letter sent home, your child's attendance will continue to be monitored. If your child has one more absence then you will be invited in for a formal meeting with the attendance team.
93%	15 school days missed	Absences will not be authorised without medical evidence, you will be invited in for a formal attendance meeting to complete an attendance contract.
90%	19 school days missed	You will be invited in for a second meeting to review the attendance contract, one more days absence will trigger Local Authority involvement and you may be at risk of receiving a penalty.

3.1 Parental Responsibility

Parents/carers have a legal duty to ensure their child attends school regularly and arrives on time.

The role of the parent/carer in supporting the school's efforts in securing high levels of attendance and punctuality is critical. At Smith's Wood Academy, staff will maintain close, effective and positive relations with parents and ensure that they are contacted at an early stage to deal with unexplained absences.

Parents are expected to support school by:

- Informing school of any absences by a telephone call or an MCAS message before 08:30am
- Discussing with the school any concerns or difficulties that may affect their child's attendance or punctuality
- Arrange holidays outside of term time
- Arrange medical appointments for outside of school hours
- Ensure school has more than 1 emergency contact number for their child

The school day finishes at 3pm. Students must not leave during school hours without a valid reason approved by the attendance team, all students are expected to be off school premises by 3:05pm except for students attending after school provisions, detentions and meetings.

3.2 Role of Student

Students must attend school regularly so that they can benefit from their education and be part of positive social interactions with peers and staff. Research shows that students who miss out on lessons and lack a pro-active learning culture may be vulnerable to falling behind and potentially damaging their chances for future successes. Students with poor attendance tend to achieve less in both primary and secondary school which is something Smith's Wood Academy endeavour to challenge and overcome.

Students should:

- Be aware of the importance of regular attendance and punctuality
- Be engaged in improving their own attendance and punctuality
- Be aware of the expectations, incentives and the support on offer regarding attendance and punctuality
- Be encouraged to raise concerns proactively related to their safety, attendance and punctuality, wherever possible.

3.3 Governing Board

The school governing board are responsible for:

- Promote the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos
- Make sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
- Regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data
- Monitoring attendance figures for the whole school
- Making sure staff receive adequate training on attendance
- Holding the headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy

4. Absence

Every absence from school must be classified by the school, (not by the parents), as either **AUTHORISED** or **UNAUTHORISED**. This is why information about the reason for each absence is always required.

Authorised absences must have a valid reason, such as illness or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been given. This includes:

- Parents keeping children off school unnecessarily (i.e. birthday treat, shopping trip etc)
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Absences which have not been properly explained
- Children who arrive 30 minutes or more after the register opens, without good cause
- Holidays or extended leave in term time

Where school staff have concerns about a child, they should use their professional judgement and knowledge of the individual student to inform their decision as to whether welfare concerns should be escalated (DfE Attendance guidance 2024)

4.1 Illness and Medical Appointments

When a student is unwell, parents must contact the school before 08:30am on the first day of absence. This is to ensure school knows that the student is safe.

Not all illness requires an absence from school. For minor childhood ailments such as coughs, colds, earaches we would not expect children to be absent. However, when a parent makes the assessment that their child is unfit for school they should follow the absence process.

In circumstances where there are concerns about a child's attendance or reason for absence, further evidence of a child's illness may be requested.

At Smith's Wood Academy, we understand that schools are not expected to routinely request medical evidence to support illness-related absences. In most cases, a parent's notification that their child is too ill to attend school will be accepted. However, if clarification is needed to accurately record the absence in the attendance register, reasonable medical evidence may be requested. If deemed necessary, the Attendance Team will consult with the family to understand what evidence is available. In cases where parents are unable to provide the specific evidence requested but offer other forms of proof, this will be considered. If no written evidence can be provided, a conversation between the Attendance Team and parent/carers, where appropriate, may suffice to document the absence.

Parents should avoid making routine medical appointments and dental appointments during the school day. In most cases, appointments can be made outside of the school day/during the school holidays.

Where appointments must be taken during the school day, only the time for the appointment and travel to and from will be classed as an authorised absence. Students are expected to return to school for the remainder of the day/attend school prior to the appointment.

If a medical appointment cannot be booked outside of school hours, parents/carers are required to provide a copy of the appointment letter, card or text prior to the appointment. This can be communicated to the Attendance Team

4.2 Other reasons for absences

Other reasons for absence must be discussed with the school on each occasion. Notes will not necessarily be accepted as providing valid reasons. The school will follow DfE guidance and not authorise absences for shopping, birthdays or child minding.

4.3 Religious Observance

School acknowledges the multi-faith nature of British society and recognises that on some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside school holiday periods or weekends, and this necessitates a consideration of authorised absence or special leave for religious observance. It is reasonable for a parent to allow their children not to attend school on any day of religious observance if recognised by the parent's religious body.

However, parents are requested to give advance notice to the school if they intend their child to be absent. Religious bodies may be contacted to verify these occasions.

4.4 Traveller Absence

The aim for the attendance of Traveller children, in common with all other children, is to attend school as regularly and as frequently as possible.

School can only effectively operate as the child's base school if it is engaged in on-going dialogue with Traveller families. This means that parents must advise school of their forthcoming travelling patterns before they happen; and inform the school regarding proposed return dates.

School will authorise absence of Traveller children if their parent(s) are engaged in a trade or business that requires them to travel from place to place and has given indication that they intend to return.

Where Traveller children are registered students at a school and are known to be present either at a site (official or otherwise) or in a house and are not attending school, the absence will be investigated in the same way as that for any student.

4.5 Leave of Absence/Term Time Holidays

Smith's Wood Academy does not authorise any term-time holidays, in line with local authority guidance. This is due to the significant negative effect these have on a child's progress. All requests will be looked at on an individual basis and in some exceptional circumstances, some days may be authorised by the Principal.

Students only attend school for 195 days out of 365. If parents do take their child on extended leave, this will be unauthorised unless there are exceptional circumstances. If a parent plans to take their child/ren out of school for extended leave, parents will need to fill in a leave of absence form (available from the main school office) at least 4 weeks before travelling, in addition to speaking to the Attendance Team.

In some circumstances, if a student does not return to school in the timescale originally given by parents, or there has been no return date given, a letter will be sent advising a date that we expect them to return by. If the student does not return by this date, and we have had no contact from parents, then a referral is completed to the LA Child Missing in Education Team.

A penalty notice will be issued if a child is taken on unauthorised leave.

5. Lateness and Truancy

5.1 Persistent Lateness

It is the responsibility of the school to be aware of and begin dealing with any concerns emerging around punctuality.

If students arrive after the register is opened, they will be marked as late. The lateness will be recorded and monitored. An unauthorised absence will be given to students arriving after the registers have closed unless there is an evidenced medical appointment or an exceptional circumstance that may require an authorised mark.

5.2 Truancy

Smith's Wood Academy monitors attendance on a lesson-by-lesson basis during the school day using registers. This is part of the school's safeguarding protocols to ensure the whereabouts of students is known. If a student does not present to their lesson, the Attendance Team is informed, and staff will be alerted to locate the missing students. If school are unable to locate the missing student, and there is suspicion that they may no longer be on the school site, parents/carers will be informed.

The Achievement Leads will investigate the whereabouts during the truant lesson and feed back to the Attendance Team accordingly.

If a student truant a lesson, then a sanction will be issued in-line with the academy's Behaviour Policy. Parent/Carer will also be contacted, and the student will be placed on an Attendance Report.

If any further truancy occurs, the academy will consider what type of support is necessary: early intervention, referrals to external agencies and/or further sanctions.

6. Rewards

At Smith's Wood Academy, we recognise that regular attendance plays a part in every student's success, and we are committed to creating a positive environment that encourages students to attend school consistently. To support this, we have implemented a variety of reward systems aimed at celebrating good attendance. Students who maintain good attendance are awarded weekly positive points, and we regularly communicate with parents and carers to acknowledge their child's efforts. Students who attend school regularly or show improvement in attendance earn entries into prize draws, and during our weekly rewards assemblies, students are recognised with certificates for their achievement. Our staff play an active role in motivating students by encouraging and celebrating their attendance. By working together, we strive to emphasise the importance of regular attendance and support every student's success.