



The Willows School
Academy Trust
Learning - Achieving - Succeeding

Attendance Policy

Introduction:

The Governors and staff of The Willows School Academy Trust are committed to promoting excellent attendance to ensure that pupils receive a full-time education that maximizes their potential. For children to gain the greatest academic and social benefit from their education, it is vital that they attend regularly and on time, every day the Academy is open, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. Academy staff will work with pupils, their families and multi-agencies to ensure that each pupil attends regularly and punctually.

This policy has been agreed by the Governors and staff of The Willows School Academy Trust and it sets out the principles, procedures and practice the school will undertake. Strategies, sanctions and possible legal consequences of poor attendance and punctuality are also detailed, as well as rewards for, and benefits of good attendance. This policy will be reviewed, amended as necessary and published annually in accordance with current legislation and guidance.

Principles:

- Receiving a full-time, suitable education is a child's legal entitlement.
- It is parents'/carers' legal responsibility to ensure this happens.
- Attending school regularly aids intellectual, social and emotional development
- Attending school regularly safeguards the welfare of children whilst they are not in the care of their parents.
- All children whose attendance is poor will be treated as vulnerable.

These principles are enshrined in British law, within the Education Act 1996, the Children Act 1989, and other associated pieces of legislation.

Aims of the Policy

- To ensure that all children attend as near full-time as possible, in order to maximise their educational achievement and social development.
- To discharge the school's duty to safeguard its pupils to be best of its ability
- To ensure that all those responsible for children's education, including parents, carers, staff, governors and multi-agency key workers understand and accept their responsibilities in relation to attendance.
- To minimise absence from school, thereby reducing levels of persistent absence, by maintaining positive and consistent communication between home and the Academy.
- To maintain effective partnerships with The Participation Team, Education Welfare Services and other appropriate support services and agencies to ensure pupils with poor attendance are supported.

Promoting Attendance:

The Governors, Head Teacher and staff at The Willows School Academy Trust will use all possible opportunities to promote the importance of good attendance and punctuality. These will include the home/school agreement, letters home, rewards and incentives for good or significantly improving attendance.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS/CARERS

Ensuring regular attendance at The Willows School Academy Trust is the legal responsibility of parents/carers in the first instance.

Understanding 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.

An absence will be classified as authorised if the school is given advanced notice of:

- Attendance of a medical appointment at the hospital, clinic, dentist etc.
- Attendance of an appointment with other professional's e.g. Educational Psychologist, Therapist, Psychiatrist etc.
- Observance of a religious festival.
- The school is notified by telephone or letter of absence through illness.

Circumstances the school consider constitute an acceptable absence:

- Illness/injury
- Medical appointments which must be made in term time
- Appointments with other professionals e.g. Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Therapist.
- Religious observance
- Bereavement
- Holiday which has been approved by the Head Teacher

There is no automatic entitlement for pupils to be granted leave of absence for holidays with parents during term time. Heads have discretion to grant up to ten days leave per school year if appropriate. If permission has been requested by parents and approved by the Head Teacher this will be classed as an authorised absence. All other absences will be classed as unauthorised.

If parents wish to take their child on holiday during term time, permission must be requested in writing from the school prior to the event. Any holiday can only be authorised by the Head Teacher.

Where unauthorised holiday has been taken, this will be referred to the Participation Team or Education Welfare Service who may issue a fixed penalty notice, for each parent.

Where a holiday has been taken and authorised by the Head Teacher and the pupil fails to return on the agreed date, the school reserves the right to remove the child from the school roll.

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

- Parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Shopping, looking after other children or birthdays
- Day trips and holidays (exceptional leave) in term time which have not been agreed with the Academy.
- Excessive illness without medical evidence
- Children acting as carers

Reluctant attenders/school refusal:

Whilst any child may be off school because they are ill, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. If their reluctance appears to be school-based, such as difficulty with work, or bullying, please discuss this with the Academy at the earliest opportunity; any problems with regular attendance are best resolved between the Academy, the parents / carers and the child. Colluding with your child's reluctance to attend is likely to make the matter worse.

School refusal/ school phobia is a psychological condition that usually has been medically diagnosed. Other arrangements may be put in place for a child with genuine school phobia.

Parents/carers can support their child by:

- Ensuring regular and early bed times
- Having uniform and equipment prepared the night before

- Providing a healthy breakfast
- Ensuring your child is ready for transport
- Reporting any academic or social concerns promptly
- Retaining open & honest communication with the Academy
- Being positive about school (even if their own experience was less than positive)

SCHOOL PROCEDURES

Registration and punctuality procedures:

Registers are taken twice a day, once at the start of the school day at 9:00 a.m., and once during the afternoon session. The register in the morning will remain open for 35 minutes and 15 minutes in the afternoon. Pupils arriving before the end of the registration period will be coded L (Late before registers close) which is a present mark. The number of minutes late will be recorded in the register. Pupils arriving after the registers have closed will be coded U (Late after registers close) which counts as an unauthorised absence.

Only the Head Teacher or designated member(s) of staff acting on their behalf can authorise absence. If there is no known reason for the absence at registration, then the absence will be recorded as unauthorised, until a satisfactory reason is provided. If the reason given is not satisfactory in the school's view, and/or evidence of the reason cannot be provided, the absence will be coded as O (Unauthorised absent). Absence notes received from parents/carers will be kept for the remainder of the academic year; or longer if there are concerns that require further investigation or legal action.

First day contact:

Parents are expected to notify the Academy on the first day of absence if their child is unable to attend for any unavoidable reason, such as illness. If the Academy does not receive notification it will telephone on the first day of absence, to try to ascertain the reason.

Parents/ carers need to be aware of the following:

- When contacting the Academy regarding your child's absence, details should be given of the nature of the illness and the predicted time of return.
- Infectious or contagious diseases must be notified to the Academy immediately.
- When the pupil returns to school, if notification of the reason for absence has not already been given to the school by telephone, he/she should bring a written note signed by a parent stating the reason for the absence.
- Parents should give the school advanced notice if their child is to be absent from school to attend an appointment (for example at the hospital, clinic, dentist or with other professionals).
- The school should also be informed, in advance, of absence resulting from participation in a day set aside exclusively for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong.
- When a pupil is absent, on arrival at the Academy the Coach Escort records in the Absence Book (kept in the School Office) the reason the child was not picked up that morning.
- A message sent via an escort will not be accepted as an official notification of the reason for absence.
- If confirmation of the reason for absence, either by letter or telephone, has not been received on the pupil's return to school, the absence will remain as unauthorised and will be followed up by a member of staff.

Continuing Absence Procedures:

In the event of an absence of five or more days without contact from the family, a home visit may be made by The Willows Family Support Worker. Any child who is absent without explanation for 8 consecutive school days, who has a pattern of erratic attendance (less than 90%), or persistent lateness after registers close will be asked to come in for a meeting at the Academy and may be referred to the Participation Team or Education Welfare Services in order that further investigations can be made. If such cases meet the threshold for support, a key worker would be allocated who will visit the home, set targets for improvement, signpost sources of support if needed, and ultimately recommend court action or a Penalty Notice if there is no improvement.

Frequent/ persistent absence procedures:

The Willows School Academy Trust has an effective tracking and monitoring system which identifies pupils with a pattern of absences that may lead to Persistent Absence (PA), that is to say absence of 10% or more. Initially the school will try to resolve the problem with parents/carers, but if the pattern continues the school will request that parents/ carers take their child to see the GP if the problem appears to be a medical one. In cases where there appear to be issues requiring outside intervention to support the family and the child, a referral may be made through the Triage system for external agency support. Where appropriate, PA pupils and their parents will be subject to an Attendance Action Plan and will receive a letter to meet with Academy staff to put these in place. Such a plan or contract may include allocation of additional in-school or external support. Where it is not possible for parents/carers to meet with staff in school, a home visit will be conducted by The Willows Family Support Worker.

All PA cases are also automatically made known to the Participation Team at the London Borough of Hillingdon via the Monthly Return Form. Cases of unacceptable levels of attendance will be referred to the Participation Team or Education Welfare Services for follow up and assessment through contact with the family.

Consequences of Poor Attendance /Punctuality

For pupils whose attendance and/or punctuality fails to improve, after a range of interventions and support measures have been tried by the school, the ultimate consequences may be one of the following:

- The school may ask the Council to issue a Penalty Notice on its behalf. A Penalty Notice carries a fine of £60, per parent, per child. If the fine is not paid within 20 days it rises to £120 per parent, per child. If not paid at all, court action will be initiated.
- The school may ask the Council initiate court action under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, which could lead to fines of up to £2,500, or even imprisonment.
- In some cases, action may be taken under the Children Act 1989 to protect the welfare and development of the child.

Children who Cease to Attend without Prior Notification (CME) procedures:

Procedures for trying to trace children who cease to attend without prior notification are covered in detail in the CME Policy and Procedures. However, if, after ten days continuous absence school has been unable to ascertain the whereabouts of a pupil, they will refer the child's details to the Local Authority for it to perform further checks that are not available to school. If after 20 days continuous unauthorised absence, their whereabouts cannot be traced, they will be removed from the school roll.

Non starters:

Pupils who are allocated places but fail to start are also treated as CME. If the school has been unable to make contact with the family during a ten-day period after their expected arrival, they will refer the pupils to the local authority CME team for further checks.

Vulnerable Children:

Children who are Looked After (LAC), subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP), Children in Need (CIN) will be treated with highest priority. Any unexplained absence will be followed up immediately by a telephone call to the home, and where communication is failed to be established, a call to the Child Protection duty team, in order that a same-day visit may be made.

Staff responsible for attendance matters at The Willows School Academy Trust:

- Mr Malcolm Shaw, Head Teacher
- Mr Paul Gregory Hunt, Deputy Head Teacher
- Mrs Debbie Downie, Family Support Worker

Summary:

The Academy has a legal duty to publish its absence figures and its Attendance Policy to parents/ carers and to promote attendance. Academy attendance data must be available to the Local Authority and the DCSF. Equally, parents/carers have a duty to make sure that their children attend. All Academy staff are committed to working with parents / carers and pupils to ensure the highest possible level of attendance.

Legal References:

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states that

the 'parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient full time education suitable to his/her age, ability and aptitude, and to any special educational needs he/she may have, either by regular attendance at school, or otherwise.'

Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities and governing bodies to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State with regard to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and students under the age of 18.

The Children Act 1989 provides for a number of actions that can be taken to protect children's safety and welfare, on the premise that the welfare of the child is paramount

Section 441 and 441a of the Education Act 1996 states that

"If any child of compulsory school age who is a registered student at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, his/her parent is guilty of an offence."

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MS' with a flourish underneath.

Mr Malcolm Shaw
Headteacher

Date: June 2018

Date to be reviewed: June 2019

Responsibility of: Mr Malcolm Shaw