



**Federation of
Westminster Special Schools
& Bi-Borough Inclusion Service**

Attendance Policy

Approved by: Full Governing Board December 2023

Due for Review: December 2024

STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Federation of Westminster Special Schools is committed to the continuous raising of achievement of all its children and young people (CYP). Regular attendance is critical if (CYP) are to be successful and benefit from the opportunities presented to them.

One of our basic principles is to celebrate success. Good attendance is fundamental to a successful and fulfilling school experience. We actively promote 100% attendance for all our CYP. The schools celebrate success and actively promote 100% attendance in a variety of ways such as newsletters, discussions with parents, assemblies etc.

The Governors, Executive Head, Headteachers and staff in partnership with parents have a duty to promote full attendance at College Park and Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee schools. More information on attendance can be found on the website. This policy be read in conjunction with other policies such as Supporting Children with Medical Conditions, Child Protection and Safeguarding.

1 LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

This policy meets the requirements of the school attendance guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- The Education Act 1996 - sections 434(1)(3)(4) & (6) and 458(4) & (5)
- The Education (CYP Registration) (England) Regulations 2023
- Working together to improve school attendance

This policy also refers to the DfE's guidance on the school census, which explains the persistent absence threshold.

2 PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child(ren) attend school regularly and arrive on time. Regular attendance is essential to the all-round development of CYP and they should be allowed to take full advantage of educational opportunities available to them. Poor attendance undermines their education.

It is the parents' responsibility to contact the school on the first day their child is absent. This is a safeguarding requirement so that all parties know that the child is safe. Parents should regularly update the school and inform them when their child is returning.

Children and young people are expected to arrive by 8.55am

3 THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL STAFF

At College Park and QE II there is a whole school responsibility and approach for improving school attendance, with specific staff taking individual responsibility.

The Assistant Head (Pastoral) has overall responsibility for monitoring attendance issues.

Class teachers complete a register at the beginning of each morning and during the afternoon session. Marking the attendance registers twice daily is a legal requirement. (The Education (Pupils Registration) (England) Regulations 2023) Teachers mark students present, absent or late. The class teacher or admin team notifies the Assistant Head (Pastoral) of children whose attendance is causing concern.

It is the responsibility of Assistant Head (Pastoral) to ensure:

- Attendance and lateness records are up to date
- If no reason for absence has been provided, parents are contacted on the first day of absence by phone call
- Where there has been no communication, contact is made with parents requesting reasons for absence
- The appropriate attendance code is entered in the register (National Attendance Codes)

4 SCHOOL PROCEDURES

4.1 Attendance register

By law, all schools are required to keep an attendance register, and all CYPs must be placed on this register. The register must show a child or young person's given name but also the name by which they are known in school. There is now a requirement that this register is kept electronically and is backed up at least once a month electronically or by printed copy.

The attendance register will be taken at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark whether every CYP is:

- Present
- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Any amendment to the attendance register will include:

- The original entry
- The amended entry
- The reason for the amendment
- The date on which the amendment was made
- The name and position of the person who made the

See Appendix 1 for the DfE attendance codes.

Every entry in the attendance register will be preserved for 6 years after the date on which the entry was made. Any back up copies must be retained for six years.

4.2 Unplanned Absence

Parents must notify the school on the first day of an unplanned absence – for example, if their child is unable to attend due to ill health – by 8.15am or as soon as practically possible.

Absence due to illness will be authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask parents to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. The school will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents will be notified of this in advance.

4.3 Medical or dental appointments

Missing registration for a medical or dental appointment is counted as an authorised absence; advance notice is required for authorising these absences.

However, we encourage parents to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the CYP should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary. Parents/carers are asked to provide evidence of medical appointments.

4.4 Lateness

At College Park and QEII the register is taken at 9.30am and again at 1.30pm. CYP arriving after 9.30am must enter school by the main entrance and report to reception where their name and reason for lateness will be recorded. They will be marked as late before registration has closed (Code 'L').

The register will close at 9.45am and 1.45pm. CYP arriving after the register has closed will be marked as late after registration (Code 'U') and this will count as an unauthorised absence.

Frequent lateness after the register has closed (U) will be discussed with parents and may result in an agreed action plan between the school and parents/carers.

Where a CYP's lateness is due to their transport arriving late this will be taken into consideration and discussions with transport providers will be a first step in resolving persistent lateness.

4.5 Action for Poor Attendance

CYP absence rates will be checked on a monthly basis by the Assistant Head (Pastoral). Daily a member of the Business Support team checks all registers and alerts the Assistant Head (Pastoral) or a member of SLT to any concerns.

The schools review attendance data across both schools as a benchmark and comparison to other local SEN provisions and national figures.

In addition, any general concerns about CYP absence the Assistant Head (Pastoral) or class teacher will raise it directly with parents. If a CYP's attendance falls below 90% an alert will be sent to the Assistant Head (Pastoral) and the following process will be triggered. This is a staged approach and will be halted as soon as attendance improves:

1. Discussion with class teacher to establish if there is any reason why the CYP's attendance is low
2. Decision made between Assistant Head (Pastoral) and class teacher as to how this will be raised with parents.
3. Meeting or discussion with parents
4. Target for improvement in attendance rate to be set with parents for improvement and plan of support if required.
5. Review date for agreed plan set with parents

Regular absence from school will always be followed up by staff. The following protocol should always be adhered to:

1. On the first day of a CYP's absence if the parent/carer has not contacted the school by 10am, the Business Support team should check with the class group if any expected absence is known about.
2. If there is no known cause for absence Business Support team should ring parents/carers to enquire as to why the CYP is not in school. If the Business Support team has tried all named contacts in the morning and were not able to speak to someone, then they will try again in the afternoon or a daily basis if they have not spoken to parents/carers.
3. If a CYP is absent from school due to ill health and parents have informed school on the first day of absence, but they continue to be absent from school for more than 3 days, the school nurse or a member of the Business Support Team may contact the parents to enquire about the CYP's health. Parents should contact the school office each day of absence unless the school has been informed that the CYP will be off for a set period.
4. If any CYP is absent due to a significant illness or medical crisis the nurse will contact parents as soon as it is appropriate to offer support and enquire after the child.

5. If a CYP is sent home during the school day by the nursing team, the nurse will inform the office of reason, however if absence continues beyond the specified time parents should contact the school office on each day of absence

4.6 Children Missing Education (CME)

All schools have statutory safeguarding responsibilities and must have regard to Keeping Children Safe in Education. Schools must investigate any unexplained absences. If a CYP fails to attend school, school staff must try to establish the family's whereabouts before making a CME referral.

If a CYP is missing from education the school must in the first instance contact the child's SEN caseworker to inform them that they are not in school and the school despite following its attendance process has been unable to make contact with the family via any of the known contacts for that CYP.

Persistent absence is defined as CYPs who take time out of school persistently and their attendance is under 90%. A CYP is classified as a severely persistent absentee if they miss 50% or more of their own possible sessions.

Children with SEND where a school is named on their EHCP **CANNOT** be off rolled by that school. At annual reviews CYPs attendance is reviewed and discussed at annual reviews. If attendance is identified to be an issue the schools will look at what support can be put in place to improve attendance.

There must be a conversation with SEN caseworker in the first instance who will follow the Bi-borough protocol.

The lead for the CME team and Assistant Director for SEN and Educational Psychology, Bi-Borough Children's Services, will liaise over all children with SEND reported as CME.

CYP with SEND will only be removed from the roll of their current school placement when a suitable alternative placement has been agreed or they are found to be attending an alternative SEND provision at which point their EHCP will be amended and their new school placement will replace the FWSS provision.

5 AUTHORISING ABSENCE

5.1 Granting approval for term time absence

Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence to CYPs during term time unless they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, considering the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the Headteacher's discretion.

Valid reasons for **authorised absence** include:

- Illness and medical/dental appointments
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the CYP's parents belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart. There can only be **three** authorised days for the academic year (September to July).
- Traveller CYP travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers, Showmen (fairground people) and Circus people, Bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and New Travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a Traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school, but it is not known whether the CYP is attending educational provision

The following reasons are examples of absence that **will not be authorised**:

- Persistent nonspecific illness e.g. poorly/unwell
- Absence of siblings if one child is ill
- Oversleeping
- Inadequate clothing/uniform
- Confusion over school dates
- Medical/dental appointments of more than half a day without very good reasons
- Child's/family birthday
- Shopping trip
- Family Holidays

The Headteacher is not obliged to accept a parent's explanation. A letter or telephone message from a parent does not in itself authorise an absence. If absences are not authorised, parents will be notified. If no explanation is received, absences will not be authorised. Parents will need to complete the request for leave form if they would like to take their child out of school during term time.

Persistent unauthorised absence may result in a

Further action may include: -

- Attendance Improvement Meeting
- Home visits
- Penalty notice referral which may result in a fine issued by the local authority
- Liaison with other agencies
- Local Authority involvement

Exceptional circumstances could include:

- Service personnel returning from a tour of duty abroad where it is evidenced the individual will not be in receipt of any leave in the near future that coincides with school holidays
- Where an absence from school is recommended by a health professional as part of a parent or CYP's rehabilitation from a medical or emotional issue
- The death or terminal illness of a person close to the family
- To attend a wedding or funeral of a person close to the family
- Any strong personal reasons why a family might need to take a CYP away from school for a short break

Any examples provided are illustrative rather than exhaustive. It is acceptable to take a CYP's previous record of attendance into account when the school is making decisions. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short. By 'unavoidable' it implies that an event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. It is important to note that Headteachers can agree the absence of a CYP in exceptional circumstances and this discretion can be used also to determine the length of the authorised absence.

Section 44 of the Education Act 1996 says that parents are **guilty** of an offence of failing to secure regular attendance at school unless they can prove that the child was absent:

- with leave (the school has given permission)
- due to sickness or any unavoidable cause (the sickness or unavoidable cause must relate to the, CYP not the parent)
- religious observance
- failure by the Local Authority to provide transport

In law, these are the only acceptable reasons for a child being absent from school.

The Executive Head / Headteachers may authorise absence in "exceptional circumstances" but this must be requested in advance and agreement to each request is at the discretion of the Executive Head Teacher / Headteacher, acting on behalf of the Governing Board. Each case will be judged on its merits and the Executive Head teacher's / Headteacher's decision is final. Once the decision not to authorise leave is taken, it cannot be authorised retrospectively.

APPENDIX 1. ATTENDANCE CODES

The following codes are taken from the DfE's guidance on school attendance.

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	CYP is present at morning registration
\	Present (pm)	CYP is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	CYP arrives late before register has closed
B	Off-site educational activity	CYP is at a supervised off-site educational activity approved by the school
D	Dual registered	CYP is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
J	Interview	CYP has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
P	Sporting activity	CYP is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
V	Educational trip or visit	CYP is on an educational visit/trip organised, or approved, by the school
W	Work experience	CYP is on a work experience placement
X	Non-compulsory school age absence	

Code	Definition	Scenario
Authorised absence		
C	Authorised leave of absence	CYP has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances
E	Excluded	CYP has been excluded but no alternative provision has been made
H	Authorised holiday	CYP has been allowed to go on holiday due to exceptional circumstances

I	Illness	School has been notified that a CYP will be absent due to illness
M	Medical/dental appointment	CYP is at a medical or dental appointment
R	Religious observance	CYP is taking part in a day of religious observance
S	Study leave	Year 11 CYP is on study leave during their public examinations
T	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence	CYP from a Traveller community is travelling, as agreed with the school
Unauthorised absence		
G	Unauthorised holiday	CYP is on a holiday that was not approved by the school
N	Reason not provided	CYP is absent for an unknown reason (this code should be amended when the reason emerges, or replaced with code O if no reason for absence has been provided after a reasonable amount of time)
O	Unauthorised absence	School is not satisfied with reason for CYP's absence
U	Arrival after registration	CYP arrived at school after the register closed

Code	Definition	Scenario
X	Not required to be in school	CYP of non-compulsory school age is not required to attend
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances	School site is closed, there is disruption to travel as a result of a local/national emergency, or CYP is in custody
Z	CYP not on admission register	Register set up but CYP has not yet joined the school
#	Planned school closure	Whole or partial school closure due to half-term/bank holiday/INSET day

APPENDIX 2. CHILDREN MISSING FROM SUITABLE EDUCATION

What do we mean by Children Missing from suitable Education (CME)?

A compulsory school-age child or young person who is not on the roll of a school, not placed in alternative provision by a local authority, and who is not receiving a suitable education at home.

Why do children and young people go missing from education?

There are a number of reasons, including:

- they don't start school at the appropriate time and so they do not enter the educational system
- they are removed by their parents for a range of reasons
- they cease to attend due to exclusion, illness or bullying
- they fail to find a suitable school place after moving to a new area
- the family move home regularly or there are problems at home

APPENDIX 3. LEAVE IN TERM TIME REQUEST FORM

APPLICATION FOR LEAVE DURING TERM TIME

Parents/guardians must ask permission, where the situation is **exceptional or urgent**, for their child to be absent during term time, and it is at the Headteacher's discretion to decide whether or not the absence will be authorised. If leave is taken without permission, or no application is made, **parents risk** being issued with a **Penalty Notice or being prosecuted** on their return. Parents wishing to apply for their child to have leave from school should complete this form and return it to school for authorisation where possible, 2 weeks before the proposed leave.

PARENTS SECTION (to be completed first)				
Surname of Child:		First Name of Child:		
Date of Birth:		Class:		
Full Name of Parent/Guardian:				
Address of Child:				
Postcode:		Telephone Number:		
Reason for Request:				
Departure Date	FROM (date):		TO (date):	

Is your child's attendance above 95% over the past 12 months?	Yes / No
Has your child previously had leave during term-time in the last 12 months? (If YES, please give dates, reasons and number of school days leave taken:	Yes / No

SCHOOL SECTION		
Leave during Term Time	Approved _____ Days	Not Approved _____ Days
Reasons:		
Date of Meeting with Parents:		
Headteacher Signature:		
Date:		