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Attendance and Punctuality Policy

Scope and publication

This policy applies to all pupils, parents and staff at St Mark’s Academy.

Copies of the policy are available on request, in large print or other accessible formats if required.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school’s Registration of Pupils Policy.

Statement of intent

For a child to reach their full educational achievement a high level of school attendance is essential.

We are committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all our pupils and endeavour to provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcome. Every child has a right to access the education to which he/she is entitled. Parents and teachers share the responsibility for supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and punctuality for all.

It is our duty to consistently strive to achieve a goal of 100% attendance for all children but have set an annual school target of 95.7% for 2018-19.

Every opportunity will be used to convey to pupils and their parents or carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

For our children to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered, it is vital every child is at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. The routines children develop around attendance and punctuality at school are the same as the expectations of any future employer in the world of work. High attainment, confidence with peers and staff, and future aspirations depend on good attendance.

Department for Education (DfE) guidance -*School Attendance (2016)*

The DfE states that schools should:

- promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence
- ensure every child has access to full-time education
- act early to address patterns of absence

And that parents must:

- perform their legal duty by ensuring children of compulsory school age who are registered to a school must attend regularly

And that pupils must:

- be punctual to their lessons.

We believe good attendance is important because:

- statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and attendance below 95%
- regular attenders make better progress, both socially and academically
- regular attenders find school routines, school work and friendships easier to cope with

- regular attenders find learning more satisfying
- regular attenders are more successful in transferring between primary school, secondary school and higher education, employment or training.

Promoting good attendance

The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child.

To help us all to focus on this we will:

- Provide information on all matters related to attendance in our regular/weekly home school bulletin/newsletter/website.
- Report to you on how your child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainment and progress.
- Celebrate good attendance by displaying individual and class achievements.
- Reward good or improving attendance through class competitions, certificates and outings/events.
- Set targets for the school and for classes for attendance and display these in the school.
- Run events when parents, pupils and staff can work together on raising attendance levels across the school
- Liaise closely with the families of children with low or declining attendance in order to bring about improvements.

Roles and responsibilities

Headteacher and Education Director

The Headteacher has overall responsibility for attendance in this school. The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented consistently across the school, and for monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to the Education Director via the Headteacher's termly summary. The Headteacher also supports other staff in monitoring the attendance of individual pupils and may issue fixed-penalty notices, where necessary.

The Education Director will monitor and oversee the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance by reviewing the weekly SIMS reports and the Headteacher's termly summary. (S)he will ensure that any negative patterns of attendance are challenged and provide support to remedy this.

School attendance lead

A member of the senior leadership team will oversee, direct and coordinate the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and will ensure the attendance policy is consistently applied throughout the school. This person will also ensure that attendance is both recorded accurately and analysed. (S)he will ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties.

If absence is frequent or continuous, except where a child is clearly unwell, staff will discuss with parents/carers the need and reasons for their child's absence and will encourage them to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a pupil's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence will always rest with the school.

Classroom staff

- Ensure that all students are registered accurately.
- Promote and reward good attendance with students at all appropriate opportunities.
- Liaise with the attendance lead on matters of attendance and punctuality.
- Communicate any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a child's absence.
- Support pupils with absence to engage with their learning once they are back in school.

Pupils

- Attend every day unless ill or have an authorised absence.
- Arrive in school on time.
- Go to all registrations and lessons on time.
- Take responsibility for registering with the attendance officer if late or leaving the school site during school hours.

Parents/carers

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carer's legal responsibility and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

Parents must:

- inform the school on the first day of absence
- discuss with the tutor/class teacher any planned absences well in advance
- support the school with their child in aiming for 100% attendance each year
- make sure that any absence is clearly accounted for by telephone or text on the first and subsequent days of absence, or by letter if a phone is unavailable
- avoid taking their child out of school for non-urgent medical or dental appointments
- only request leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance.

Request for leave of absence

Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.

The length of the authorised absence, as well as whether absence is authorised at all is at the Headteacher's discretion. The fundamental principles for defining *exceptional* are rare, significant, or unavoidable, which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. There is no legal entitlement for time off in school term time to go on holiday and in the majority of cases holiday will not be authorised.

Parents/carers wishing to apply for leave of absence need to fill in an application form (available from the Attendance Officer, Ms Drewett, in advance and before making any travel arrangements.

If term-time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised - see the section below on legal sanctions.

Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking children out during school time.

Absence through child participation in public performances, including theatre, film or television work and modelling

Parents of a child performer can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in a performance. They must contact the Headteacher to discuss the nature and frequency of the work, whether the child has a valid performance licence and whether education will be provided by the employer during any future leave of absence. It is, however, down to the Headteacher's discretion as to whether to authorise this and they will wish to discuss with you the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning will continue if absence occurs. Any absence recorded as part of a child's participation in a public performance is recorded as *C*, an authorised absence.

Absence through competing at regional, county or national level for sport

Parents can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in regional, county, national and international events and competitions. It is, however, down to the Headteacher's discretion as to whether to authorise this and they will wish to discuss with you the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning will continue if absence occurs. Permission for your child to leave early or arrive late to attend coaching and training sessions is also at the discretion of the headteacher and is not likely to be approved if it is a regular event, unless the sports club or association is providing an education tutor as part of their coaching.

Recording attendance

Legally the register must be marked twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day, and again at the start of the afternoon session.

Authorised and unauthorised absence

Pupils are expected to attend school every day for the entire duration of the academic year, unless there is an exceptional reason for the absence. There are two main categories of absences:

- **Authorised absence:** is when the school has accepted the explanation offered as satisfactory justification for the absence or given approval in advance for such an absence. If no explanation is received, absences cannot be authorised.
- **Unauthorised absence:** is when the school has not received a reason for absence or has not approved a child's leave absence from school after a parent's request. This includes:
 - parents giving their children permission to be off school unnecessarily, such as for shopping, birthdays, to look after siblings
 - truancy before or during the school day
 - absences which have not been explained.

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. We 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.

A school can, if needed, change an authorised absence to an unauthorised absence and vice versa if new information is presented. Any changes will be communicated to parents/carers. An example of this would be where a parent states a child is unwell but on return to school there is evidence they have been on holiday.

Please see Registration of Pupils Policy for further guidance on the recording of absence.

Lateness/punctuality

It is important for pupils to be on time at the start of the morning and afternoon school sessions and to lessons. The start of school/lessons is used to give out instructions or organise work. If a child is late they can miss work time with their class teacher getting vital information, cause disruption to the lesson for others, and it can be embarrassing leading to possible further absence.

- The school day begins at 8.25am and ends at 2.45pm
- Morning registration is at 8.30am and it closes at 8.50am
- Afternoon registration for years 7, 8 and 11 is at 1.00pm and it closes at 1.05pm
- Afternoon registration for years 9 and 10 is at 2.00pm and it closes at 2.05pm

DfE guidance suggests all official registers should be closed a maximum of 30 minutes after the start of school.

- All lateness is recorded daily. This information will be required by the courts, should a prosecution for non-attendance or lateness be necessary.
- Arrival after the close of registration will be marked as unauthorised absence and coded U as per DfE guidance. This mark shows them to be on site but is legally recorded as an absence.
- If a pupil is late due to a medical appointment, they will receive an authorised absence, coded M.
- Please be advised that, where possible, doctors and dentists appointments are to be made outside of school hours or during school holidays.

Pupils who are consistently late are disrupting not only their own education but also that of the other pupils. **Ongoing and repeated lateness is considered as unauthorised absence and may be subject to legal action.**

How to report a pupil absence – information for parents

A child not attending school is considered a **safeguarding** matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required.

If your child is absent you must:

- Contact us by phone as soon as early as possible on the first day of absence call into school and report to reception.
- Send a note in on the first day they return with an explanation of the absence – you must do this even if you have already telephoned us.

Responding to pupil absence

If your child is absent:

- We will telephone or text you on the first day of absence if we have not heard from you – this is because we have a duty to ensure your child's safety as well as their regular school attendance.
- If absence continues on the second day, then a second attempt to call will be made.
- If absence continues for a third day, then the school will make a home visit. If no contact is made, then a letter will be left.
- Where appropriate a request for a safe and well check conducted by the Police/PCSO will be made. If a Social Worker is involved with the family then they will be informed. If there are concerns relating to safeguarding, then a CSC referral will be made.
- We will invite you in to discuss the situation with our attendance officer and/or pastoral leaders or senior member of staff if absences persist.

- We will refer the matter to the local authority's Attendance Legal Panels if absence is unauthorised and falls below 90%.

Child missing in education

If your child is not seen and contact has not been established with any of the named parents/carers, after the first day we will make all reasonable enquiries to establish contact with parents/carers and the child, including making enquiries to known friends, wider family, and visiting the family home to try to establish contact.

If there has been no contact after three days of absence, the school will start the *child missing in education* procedures and notify relevant agencies such as the relevant LA Child Missing in Education team, the Education Welfare Officer or Police or Social Services. If the pupil is a Looked After Child, or has been identified as a vulnerable pupil, these agencies may be notified on the first day of absence.

If your child is leaving our school other than when transferring to secondary school or leaving at the end of Year 11 parents are asked to give the attendance officer comprehensive information about their plans, including any date of a move and your new address and telephone numbers, your child's new school and the start date when known. This should be submitted to our school in writing.

If pupils leave and we do not have the above information, then your child is considered to be a *child missing in education*. This requires schools and local authorities to then carry out investigations to try and locate your child, which includes liaising with Children's Services, the Police and other agencies. By giving us the above information, these investigations can be avoided.

10 days' absence

We have a legal duty to report the absence of any pupil who is absent without an explanation for 10 consecutive days. If the child is not seen and contact has not been established with the named parent/carer then the local authority is notified that the child is *at risk of missing*. Please be aware that the Trust expects its schools to report this unexplained absence sooner than the 10-day period, if it is deemed that there are significant concerns of harm. Children's Services staff will visit the last known address and alert key services to locate the child. Parents are expected to help us by making sure we always have an up-to-date contact number. There will be regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

Persistent absence

We understand that some absence is unavoidable due to chronic illness for example. However, if a child misses 10% (three weeks/sessions) or more schooling across the school year, for whatever reason, they are defined by government as *persistent absentees*.

As such, we monitor all absence thoroughly and all attendance data is shared with the Trust, local authority and the DfE.

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school for a variety of reasons. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents/carers and the child. **If a child is reluctant to attend, it is never better to cover up their absence or to give in to pressure to excuse them from attending.** This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and may make things worse.

Parents should contact their child's class teacher/coach/progress leader/attendance officer, immediately and openly discuss any worries. Your child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with school work, bullying, friendship problems, family difficulties. **It is**

important that we identify the reason for your child’s reluctance to attend school and work together to tackle the problem.

If your child has had absence and their attendance level is falling towards 90% we will contact you and, depending on the reasons for the absence. The following will be implemented at the various stages outlined below...

Attendance Expectations			
Level	Action	Potential trigger	Owner (All actions logged on SIM's)
1	Truancy Call Communication with home via student planners to clear 'N' code	Each day of absence	Attendance Office / COACH
2	Pastoral team phone call / tutor report	1. After 6 absences (AM or PM registration - separate) per term *Total of 3 Days (ANY AM or PM) 2. Coach to meet student for all absences between 95-93%. 3. Coach to ring home /meet parents for absences from 93%-91%.	COACH
3	Attendance warning letter 1	8 absences and/or initial lack of support from home regarding tutor intervention	Attendance Office
4	Progress Leader phone call / Progress leader report	10 absences (AM or PM registration - separate) per term	Progress Leader
5	Attendance warning letter 2	13 absences and/or lack of support from home	Attendance Office
6	Attendance panel / Home visit Potential CAF referral, early intervention meeting with allocated worker / TAF meeting	If attendance falls below 15 sessions missed	Attendance Officer and Progress Leader/ linked SLG (Safeguarding officer informed)
7	Attendance warning letter 3 (final)	If attendance does not improve in light of level 6	Attendance Officer/ EWO
8	Pre-court panel meeting and caution	Attendance has failed to improve following series of interventions and support mechanisms	Attendance Officer & EWO
9	Court proceedings	Attendance continues not to improve following series of interventions and support mechanisms	Attendance Officer & EWO
Safeguarding	CAF referral to MASH team	Child missing from education with no response from family for 10 days	Attendance Officer and safeguarding officer

Absence linked to anxiety or SEND

We understand that for some children absence can be due to anxiety and other mental health difficulties. These children may need adjustments to their daily routines, timetables or other school environment factors to support their needs. We aim to work with parents and other support agencies in order to understand and support these children rather than taking a punitive approach. Parents who are concerned their child may be suffering from school-related anxiety should speak to the school SENCO or student wellbeing coordinator in the first instance.

Legal sanctions

Schools can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age.

If issued with a penalty notice, parents must pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the local authority.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the Headteacher, following the local authority's code of conduct for issuing penalty notices. This may take into account:

- A number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year.
- One-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission.
- Where an excluded pupil is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason.

If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute the parent or withdraw the notice.

Record preservation

School registers are legal documents. We will ensure compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for at least three years. Computer registers will be preserved as electronic back-ups or microfiche copies (if schools are not SIMS centrally hosted and do not have secure electronic server back-up they must print hard copies of the official registers and bind into annual volumes).

There are key policies that are relevant to pupil attendance, registration procedures, and following up on pupil absence which, for your convenience, are listed below:

- Anti-bullying
- Behaviour
- Child protection and Safeguarding
- Exclusions
- Registration of Pupils
- Missing Children

Study leave

We believe that pupils/students' needs are best met if they attend school every day in the period leading up to examinations. NO study leave will be granted during this period, therefore, and pupils/students will be expected to attend school in the usual way. Students have a comprehensive

after school enrichment offer and holiday offer to complement their lesson time and will be invited to attend should they fall behind. During the GCSE examination period, a programme of revision days will be created for all students to attend, as well as their timetabled lessons. The school will work within the legal requirements, i.e.

- Study leave should only be granted to Year 11 pupils and never to those in other year groups.
- It should never exceed 15 school days in a year and is most appropriately granted during the examination period itself, i.e. not before the beginning of that period.
- It should always be granted sparingly, taking account of an individual pupil/student's ability to manage and benefit from unsupervised study.
- Any pupil has the right to attend school during study leave and a parent has the right to insist he/she does so.
- Any session given to pupils as study leave has a statistical meaning of authorised absence (it is not an *approved educational activity* as it is unsupervised) and should be recorded and reported on by the school as such.

Teenage pregnancy

Support will be directed to keeping a pupil in school and, wherever possible, her return to full-time education as soon as possible after the birth. A pupil who becomes pregnant should be allowed no more than 18 weeks' authorised absence to cover the time immediately before and after the birth of the child. After that time, any absence should be treated as unauthorised.

Appendix 1

ABSENCE AND EXCEPTIONAL LEAVE PROCEDURE

St Mark's CofE Academy believe that leave of absence during term time should be avoided as it can have a damaging effect on a student's education and overall achievement. However, it is recognised that on occasions there may be extenuating or compassionate reasons that justify such leave.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Amendment Regulations 2013 state that head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Head teachers should determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted.

With regard to the regulation outlined above the school policy is as follows:

1. Parents must request leave for exceptional circumstances as far in advance as possible.
2. The request should be made in writing using the leave of absence form. (Available from the school office) Verbal requests will be recorded in writing.
3. This must include the reason why you feel that it is necessary to take a leave of absence. This may include any extenuating or compassionate reasons, including evidence of circumstances such as medical certificate or letter from employers.

On receipt of an application for leave on the appropriate form together with any supporting documentation, consideration will be given to the circumstance. A letter outlining the decision of the school will be sent to you within 7 days.

Any leave of absence that is not authorised is very likely to result in a Penalty Notice being issued by the London Borough of Merton. The Penalty Notice carries a fine of £120