

SKYLARK FEDERATION ATTENDANCE POLICY

Section 1: 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. Parents and pupils play a part in making our school so successful. 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.

For our pupils to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered it is vital your 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.

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.

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend, covering up their absence or to giving in to pressure to excuse them from attending should be avoided. This gives the impression that attendance does not matter and may make things worse.

Section 2: 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 newsletters
- report to you on how your child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rates are and how these relate to their attainment
- celebrate good attendance in assemblies and publish in newsletters
- reward good or improving attendance

- set targets for the school and for classes for attendance and display these in the school

Section 3: Legislation and guidance for parents and carers

Every half-day absence has to be classified by the school, (not by the parents), as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required, (preferably) in writing.

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carer's legal responsibility (Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act). The law does not grant parents an automatic right to take their child out of school during term time and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

Amendments to school attendance regulations were updated and enforced from September 2013. The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations state that head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. It is important to note that head teachers can determine the length of the authorised absence, as well as whether absence is authorised at all. The fundamental principles for defining exceptional are: *rare, significant, or unavoidable*, which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. There are no rules on this as circumstances vary from school to school and family to family.

Therefore, the DfE only allows a head teacher the discretion to authorise an absence if there are **exceptional circumstances**.

Section 4: School procedures

4.1 Registration

By law, all schools are required to keep an attendance register, and all pupils must be placed on this register. Registers are taken twice each day, at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions.

Pupils must arrive at school by **8:40am** on each school day.

The register for the first session will be taken by **8:55am** and will be kept open until **9:15am**. The register for the second session will be taken at **1:00pm**.

4.2 Lateness and punctuality

It is important to be on time at the start of the morning and afternoon school sessions. The start of school/lessons is used to give out instructions or organise work. If your child is late, they can miss this valuable time, cause disruption to the lesson for others and it can be very distressing or embarrassing for your child.

A child who arrives after **8:50am** but before the registers close at **9:20am** will be marked as **Late**, using the appropriate code - **(L before reg close)**. A child who arrives after the register has closed at **9:20am** will be marked as **U = (Late after registers have closed)**.

If a child arrives late to school they must enter the building via the main school office and the accompanying adult must sign their child in.

Ongoing and repeated lateness is considered as unauthorised absence. Lateness is monitored weekly and if a pattern of lateness is identified then parents will be contacted by the school and support put in place to ensure that it is addressed. If parents fail to engage or lateness does not improve, a more formal procedure will be put in place setting targets and consequences for the parents, which may result in a penalty fine being issued.

4.3 What to do if your child is absent:

A child not attending school is considered a safeguarding matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required. As a school we recognise that there are going to be a small number of occasions when children are unable to attend school, for example due to ill health.

If your child is absent you must:

1. contact us as soon as possible on the first day of absence or you can call into school and speak to a member of the office staff.

If your child is absent and we have not heard from you *by 9.30am* we will telephone you on the first day of absence (and each subsequent day). This is because we have a duty to ensure your child's safety as well as their regular school attendance.

2. Notify school *by 9.30am* **each day** that your child remains absent
3. Once your child has returned to school, send a note in giving an explanation of the absence – **you must do this even if you have already telephoned us**. Alternatively, you can complete the 'return to school' form available in the school office.

Absence due to illness will only be authorised once written confirmation or the 'return to school' form has been received. If authenticity of the illness is in doubt the school may ask parents to provide medical evidence such as a GP appointment card, a prescription or other form of appropriate evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily. 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.

Keep in touch:

It is very important that you notify us each day that your child remains absent (unless for example, it is known from the outset that they will be absent for a certain period during a hospital stay, for example).

4.4 If we don't know why your child is absent:

We will attempt to contact you on the first day of absence if we haven't heard from you. Please note: If your child is not seen and contact has not been established with any of the named parents/carers, **after three days** of absence the school is required to start child missing in education procedures as set down by East Sussex County Council guidance. We will make all reasonable enquiries to establish contact with parents/carers and the child, including making enquiries to known friends, wider family and we will visit the family home to try to establish contact.

After ten 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. Children's Services staff will visit the last known address and alert key services to locate the child. So, help us to help you and your child by making sure we always have an up-to-date contact number. There will be regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

4.5 Persistent absence:

If your child misses 10% (the equivalent of three weeks) or more schooling across the school year, **for whatever reason**, they are defined as persistent absentees. Absence for whatever reason disadvantages a child by creating gaps in his or her learning. Research shows these gaps affect attainment when attendance falls below 95%. We therefore monitor all absence thoroughly and regularly, and all attendance data is shared with the local authority and the Department for Education. If, at any point, your child has had absence and their attendance level falls below **95%** we will contact you and, depending on the reasons for the absence, decide how to proceed.

Section 5: Medical and dental appointments

We ask that where possible, medical and routine dental appointment are arranged outside of school hours. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary. Missing registration for a medical or dental appointment is counted as an authorised absence; advance written notice and a copy of the appointment card is required for authorising these absences.

Section 6: Authorised and unauthorised absence

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.

6.1 Granting approval for term time absence

The Executive Head Teacher will not grant any leave of absence for children during term time, including for holidays, unless they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'.

We define exceptional circumstances as unavoidable and a rare circumstance such as a family bereavement or a close family wedding. Such absences would not be expected to be more than one or two days. Holidays attached to such events will not be authorised. Some time away from school due to unavoidable illness already impacts on the child's learning and, so, to choose to withdraw your child for a reason that is not an exceptional circumstance on top of this means that your child has even less education. The school year is only 39 weeks which leaves 13 weeks in which holidays can be taken without your child missing school.

Children returning from a term time holiday are also unprepared for the lessons which build on the teaching they have missed. This poses a potential risk of the under achievement of other children in the class. This is something we *all* have a responsibility to avoid.

If we suspect a child has been absent from school due to a holiday that we have not been informed about, the absence will be unauthorised and it is the responsibility of the parent(s) to provide evidence to the contrary (a doctor's certificate, for example).

We hope you will support our efforts to raise attendance and attainment at our school.

6.2 Valid reasons for authorised absence

Valid reasons include:

- Illness or medical appointment – as explained in Sections 2.2 and 2.3
- Bereavement of an immediate family member
- To attend the funeral service of a close family member
- To visit a seriously ill relative (in particular, if they are not local).
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the children parents belong to. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart.
- Service personnel on active service who are prevented from taking holidays outside of term time if the holidays will have minimal disruption to the child's education. We are unable to authorise holiday for any other job or business.

Traveller children travelling for occupational purposes- this cover Roma, English and Welsh Gypsies, Irish and Scottish traveller, 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 pupil is attending educational provision. To help ensure continuity of education for Traveller children it is expected that the child should attend school elsewhere when their family is travelling and be dual registered at that school and the main school.

Children from these groups whose families do not travel are expected to attend school as normal. They are subject to the same rules as other children in terms of the requirement to attend school regularly once registered at school.

The circumstances detailed above are not exhaustive. Such absences would not be expected to be more than one or two days. Holidays attached to such events will not be authorised. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are rare, significant, unavoidable and short. This might mean that only part of the absence may be authorised. By 'unavoidable' we mean an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time (for example, during school holiday time). If a child's level of absence is 10% or higher they are classed as a persistent absentee and action will be taken to improve their levels of attendance – see Section 2.

6.3 Examples of what are not considered to be exceptional circumstances?

- Taking additional days at the beginning or end of a scheduled school holiday
- A birthday
- Availability of cheaper holidays
- Tickets to sports/culture events

Section 7: How do I request an absence?

The school will provide you with a 'Withdrawal from Learning Application' which you should complete and return **at least 14 days before the proposed absence if possible**.

Parents are strongly advised not to make any bookings or incur holiday –related costs before approval for exceptional absence is granted. The school considers each application for term time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the Executive Head Teacher's discretion.

Section 8: What if my request is not authorised?

If you feel you have exceptional circumstances, have you ensured that the school are fully aware of these?

Have you supplied all required information and any supporting documentation?

If you have any queries in relation to why your absence was unauthorised you must refer these to the Executive Head Teacher.

9 Legal Sanctions

9.1 Sanctions for unauthorised absences

If term-time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised. East Sussex County Council is responsible for issuing fines to parents. However, the decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the Executive Head Teacher, following the local authority's code of conduct for issuing penalty notices. This may take into account:

- number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year, where the child is of compulsory school age (5 years old).
- one-off instance or irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission
- where an excluded child is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason

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

In education law, parents/carers are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular attendance of their child of compulsory school age at the school at which the child is registered, unless the absence has been authorised by the school.

9.2 Legal measures for tackling persistent absence or lateness

East Sussex schools and East Sussex County Council will use the full range of legal measures to secure good attendance. Legal measures will only be considered when there is unauthorised absence and:

1. the child or family do not require or accept the support from the school outlined in Section 3.4 above and/or from any other agency to improve the attendance
2. the child has 10 or more sessions of unauthorised absence and parents are complicit in the child's absence.

The following legal measures will be used for pupils of compulsory school age who are registered at a school:

- parenting contracts set at Education Planning Meetings
- parenting orders
- Penalty Notices

Section 10: What to do if your child is leaving to attend another school

If your child is leaving our school (other than when moving on to secondary school), parents are asked to:

- Give the office staff 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 your child leaves us 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.

Section 11: Other types of absence

11.1 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 Executive Head Teacher 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 Executive Head Teacher'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.

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

Parents of able sportsmen and women 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 Executive Head Teacher'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 Executive Head Teacher 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.

Section 12: My child is trying to avoid coming to school. What should I do?

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. As above, any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents/carers and the child together. If your 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.

If your child is reluctant or refusing to attend school, contact your child's Class Teacher immediately and openly discuss your worries. Your child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with school work, friendship problems or 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. In some cases you may find it helpful to discuss the circumstances of your child's difficulties with another professional.

Section 13: What can I do to encourage my child to attend school?

Make sure your child gets enough sleep and gets up in plenty of time each morning. Ensure that he/she leaves home in the correct clothes and properly equipped. Show your child, by your interest, that you value his/her education. Be interested in what your child is doing in school, chat to them about the things they have learnt, what friends they have made and even what they had for lunch!

For many parents, your child attending school may be your first experience of being separated from them. This can seem daunting at first for both of you, but consistency and a caring, supportive home and school life will make the transition a quick and easy experience for you both.