



Attendance policy September 2020

Office use

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Associated documents:			
Guidance on School attendance – September 2018 DfE		Academy local appendices	
Links to:			
www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance www.gov.uk/government/publications/parental-responsibility-measures-for-behaviour-and-attendance www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-attendance-recording-for-educational-settings https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance/framework-for-securing-full-attendance-actions-for-schools-and-local-authorities			

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1 Policy statement and introduction

Diverse Academies are committed to supporting children to ensure that everyone achieves the highest level of attendance at school.

Children for the purposes of this policy includes all attendees at Diverse Academies – from primary through to Post 16.

- It is recognised that poor attendance can result in restricted access to the curriculum, disaffection from school, lowered academic success and loss of educational opportunity.
- Good attendance means children at all ages and stages achieving their potential.
- Partnership with parents is greatly appreciated. The children are our priority, when home and school work together we get the best possible outcomes.
- All staff work closely with children and their families to ensure that they attend regularly and punctually and that all understand the link between attendance and attainment.
- Diverse Academies have a system of rewards which acknowledge good attendance, improved attendance and good timekeeping.

2 Scope and purpose

2.1 Implementation and enforcement of this policy applies to all employees, including volunteers, agency workers, consultants or self-employed contractors.

Through this policy we:

- aim to improve achievement by ensuring high levels of attendance and punctuality.
- expect to exceed the current published national average (2018-19) for secondary schools of 94.5% and 96% for primary schools.
- expect very high attendance for all children; apart from those with diagnosed serious health issues which is likely to lead to time off school.
- create an ethos in which good attendance and punctuality are recognised as the norm and seen to be valued by the school.
- raise awareness of parents, carers and children of the importance of uninterrupted attendance and punctuality at every stage of a child's education.
- ensure that our policy applies to children of all ages in order to promote good habits at an early age.
- work in partnership with children, parents, staff and the external agencies so that all children realise their potential, unhindered by unnecessary absence.

- promote a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which children feel safe, secure, and valued, and encourage in them a sense of their own responsibility.
- establish a pattern of monitoring attendance and ensure consistency in recognising achievement and dealing with difficulties.

2.2 Legal requirements:

- a) Parents have a duty to ensure that their children receive full time education; (The Education Act 1996). Legal action may be instigated against parents/carers whose child's attendance is at an unacceptably low level and where parents/carers are failing to fulfil their responsibility. (Section 444(1) and 1(a)).
- b) The Academy will seek legal action through the local authority for continued poor attendance. This could result in a penalty notice (PN) being issued.
- c) It is the parent/carer's responsibility to contact the academy on the first and each subsequent day of absence, unless a definite date of return is known. The academy will reach a decision whether the absence is authorised or not.
- d) From the 3rd day of unauthorised absence depending on the circumstances of the absence a designated member of staff may carry out a home visit.
- e) If your child's attendance falls below 96% (secondary) or 97% (primary), whether absences are authorised or not, they will be closely monitored.
- f) The academy may request medical evidence for an absence. We accept appointment cards or letters and prescribed medication cartons with the child's name.
- g) An Academy is required to maintain an accurate register as a legal document on a session by session basis. A hard copy of the legal register must be processed.

Ours academies will report all aspects of attendance through the Diverse Academies ERM (Educational Review Meeting) process.

Reports will prioritise identified children with less than 90% attendance, these children are referred to as Persistent Absentees (PA).

3 Responsibility for implementing the policy

Diverse Academies, through the relevant Strategic Development Leader, has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy and for ensuring compliance with the relevant statutory framework. The Trust has delegated day-to-day responsibility for operating the policy and ensuring its maintenance and review to the Principal of each academy.

4 Authorised and unauthorised absences

Authorised absence is where the academy accepts there is good reason for an absence.

Consideration for an authorised absence requires a written, or telephone communication, from the parent.

Children who return to school following an absence without an explanation will be deemed to have had an 'unauthorised absence' until a suitable explanation has been given.

Where explanations are not forthcoming, the explanations are deemed unacceptable, or unreliable; these will be explored by the academy and if deemed as unauthorised may result in the issuing of a penalty notice (PN).

Unauthorised absence is any absence which for example **does not** fall into the following categories:

(This list is not exhaustive)

- an absence caused by genuine illness or other unavoidable cause
- an absence for an agreed religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong
- family bereavement
- situations where the academy authorises absence, e.g. study leave, work experience, interviews and special occasions such as theatre/sporting/musical performance
- medical appointments where proof is available
- fixed term exclusion

Examples of unacceptable reasons for absence:

(This list is not exhaustive)

- truancy
- minding the house / caring for younger siblings
- shopping
- no school uniform
- to do homework / coursework
- lateness
- holidays
- birthdays

5 School holidays

- a) Parents/carers are not entitled to remove children from the school for holidays as a right.
- b) Children should not have holiday time in addition to the normal school holidays.
- c) Notice of your intentions to take your child out during term time should be made in writing to the Principal.
- d) Holidays will not be granted retrospectively, based on an existing booking.
- e) Diverse Academies do not authorise holiday absences unless the request meets the exceptional circumstances outlined below, the *exceptional circumstances will only be granted at the discretion of the Principal*:

These exceptional circumstances are:

- where families are service personnel
- when a family needs to spend time together to support each other during or after a crisis
- other compassionate circumstances that can be confidentially shared with the academy

The application letter must outline precisely what the exceptional circumstances are:

- If you take your child on holiday during term time you may be liable for a penalty notice being issued. With or without prior notice by parents/carers.
- There is a 3.5 days threshold for all Nottinghamshire schools and 4.5 days in Lincolnshire.

6 Support

6.1 Diverse Academies expects each academy to:

- a) regularly and promptly record attendance
- b) contact parents early when a child fails to attend school without a good reason
- c) closely monitor students whose attendance falls below 97% in primary and 96% in a secondary, and put in place early intervention for those between 90-93% (those at risk of PA)
- d) take into account any family bereavement
- e) take into account medical and dental appointments when an appointment card is submitted
- f) take into account Fixed Term Exclusions, if absence is also consistently low

6.2 Working with the Local Academy Committee

Each full term the designated person in each academy (usually a member of the leadership team or Attendance Officer) will report on attendance levels, sessions missed and reasons for the

authorised and unauthorised absence for each year group/house to the Local Academy Committee. Any appropriate comments on action taken will also be reported.

Attendance may also be reported to the Trustees via the relevant committee from the Strategic Development Leader and / or Senior Executive Lead with oversight of attendance.

6.3 Working with the pastoral teams

- a) Pastoral / attendance teams will monitor attendance daily and at the end of the week.
- b) Class teachers in primary and Form Tutors in secondary will initially identify absence which causes concern, monitor and then discuss with Pastoral Team.
- c) Pastoral Team will liaise with the designated member of staff, who will then contact parents through telephone or letter regarding concerns.
- d) Pastoral Teams and the designated member of the attendance team will refer to outside agencies if attendance continues to cause concern.
- e) Pastoral teams will ensure that all the appropriate procedures are followed.

6.4 Working with the pastoral support administrators in student services

- a) An Attendance Officer (or equivalent) will, during the morning session, access the list of absent children, check that no contact has been made by parents/carers.
- b) As part of the first day absence protocol, they will then contact the parent/carers of all absentees where no knowledge of why they are absent is recorded. An outcome of the contact is recorded on the academy management system (SMS).
- c) If it is impossible to contact by electronic means or telephone calls, a designated member of staff may carry out a home visit.
- d) Diverse Academies will, through termly attendance monitoring, communicate children's attendance / absence to parents. Academies may use online apps / VLE's to communicate attendance daily.

6.5 Effective partnerships with outside agencies

We make great efforts to work alongside other agencies to bring about the best resolutions for children with attendance issues. To this end, we:

- provide designated staff including where possible, a family support worker, for liaison with Family Services and other agencies
- carry out initial enquiries/intervention prior to referral
- gather and record relevant information to assist support and intervention with relevant agencies
- refer cases to Family Services when a pupil continues to have excessive amounts of unauthorised absence and/or lateness, despite interventions made

- hold termly attendance reviews with key school staff and our Family Services link worker for school attendance
- arrange multi-agency liaison meetings as appropriate
- establish and maintain a list of named contacts within the local community police force
- actively encourage the involvement of other services and agencies in the daily routines of the academy

6.6 Working with parents/carers

- a) Parents/carers are expected to provide the academy with a minimum of TWO up to date home and emergency contact details.
- b) Parents/carers must ensure that their child arrives in the academy on time and prepared for the academy day. Punctuality is monitored and may be subject to PN (penalty notices) for persistent lateness to school.
- c) In the immediate post-Covid lockdown re-opening phase from September to November (the start of half term 2), academy leaders and attendance teams are committed to working closely with parents to allay anxieties and arrest concerns concerning their child's / children's attendance. Diverse Academies expect academies to exercise discretion and proportionality at all times when addressing absence, and especially so in term 1 of the new academic year.
- d) Parents/carers are expected to support their child in maintaining at least the academy expectation for attendance for the duration of the academic year, unless medical or exceptional circumstance such as a local, regional or national lockdown due to Covid-19 prevent this.
- e) Diverse Academies recognises that attendance below 90% is poor and a child below this figure is treated as a Persistent Absentee (PA) by all academies and the DfE.
- f) Attendance teams in Diverse Academies are committed to working closely and proactively with families where PA is a risk – and will be particularly sensitive in the national Covid climate.
- g) Taking into account all of the above, and in circumstances where it is justified, failure to co-operate with an outside agency could lead to the Local Authority prosecuting parents of children with poor attendance. This could lead to the issue of a penalty notice or a 'fast track' to prosecution, (where parent(s) may be summoned to a magistrate's court in just 12 weeks).
- h) The academy designated person will determine in any cases where there is doubt whether an absence may be authorised.
- i) The role of parents/carers is crucial in ensuring that children achieve high levels of attendance.

6.7 Rewards and recognition

- a) Each half term, communication is made to parents / carers of all children with 100% attendance. This may be a letter, certificate or e-communication.
- b) Individual attendance targets are agreed and, in some cases, awards are made for children working with designated staff in the respective academy.
- c) Special recognition is given to good attendance (individually and by form) in class, House, year group or whole academy assemblies.
- d) For students in Year 11 (if applicable), invitation to the respective academy prom is closely linked to attendance.

7 Implementation of the policy

The designated person in each academy produces a termly report for the academy committee on Attendance levels, sessions missed and reasons for the authorised and unauthorised absence for each year group.

- The Principal is given weekly updates.
- Attendance is routinely reported through Trust quality assurance (ERM process).
- Trust-wide attendance is monitored half termly and reported at least annually through the Strategic Development Leader, Safeguarding.

8 Covid-19 arrangements

- Until such time as the Covid-19 pandemic necessitates any change to the usual attendance protocols; from September 2020 Diverse Academies will be adopting the principles laid out in this Attendance Policy, with an expectation of full attendance from the vast majority of children, other than those few, with critical underlying medical conditions and who are still covered by government shielding advice.
- Attendance coding has followed the DfE guidelines, and will continue to do so in the event of any Covid related absence, either from individuals, siblings or wider family groups (who have been instructed to self-isolate) or in the event of lockdowns - local, regional or national.
- Children absent from DAT academies for any Covid related reason such as shielding, quarantining upon return from holiday or who have actual symptoms will be coded X in accordance with the DfE guidance – August 2020

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance

- From September 2020, in the event of a further localised or even national lockdown after full re-opening, the Trust will invoke the *latest* Covid guidance from the government. Adapting our attendance policy and protocols accordingly via an appendix.
- Any new expectations or government advice will be communicated to parents via each local academy.

9. Review of the Policy

This policy is reviewed annually in September by the Strategic Development Lead – Safeguarding. It may be revised through 2020-21 to reflect any changes in legislation – specifically regarding Covid-19 – to ensure it is working effectively.