



Student Attendance Policy

Yew Tree Farm School
Bredgar and Wormshill Light Railway
Swanton Street
Sittingbourne
ME9 8AT

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Reviewed by - Edwina Grix
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Introduction

Regular school attendance is essential if children are to achieve their full potential.

Yew Tree Farm School believes that regular school attendance is the key to enabling children to maximise the educational opportunities available to them and become emotionally resilient, confident and competent adults who are able to realise their full potential and make a positive contribution to their community.

Yew Tree Farm School values all learners. As set out in this policy, we will work with families to identify the reasons for poor attendance and try to resolve any difficulties.

Yew Tree Farm School recognises that attendance is a matter for the whole school community. Our Attendance Policy should not be viewed in isolation; it is a strand that runs through all aspects of school improvement, supported by our policies on safeguarding, bullying, behaviour, the curriculum for example.

This policy also takes into account the Human Rights Act 1998, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Race Relations Act 2000.

Legal Framework

Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act states that parents must ensure that children of compulsory school age receive efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude to any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.

A child is of Compulsory School Age at the beginning of the term following their 5th birthday. A child ceases to be of compulsory school age on the last Friday in June of the school year in which they reach the age of 16.

Under the Education Act 1996, the Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that parents secure education for children of compulsory school age and where necessary, use legal enforcement.

The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, require schools to take an attendance register twice a day, once at the start of the morning session and then again during the afternoon session.

The register must record whether the pupil was:

- present;
- absent;
- present at approved educational activity; or
- unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Categorising absence

Where pupils of compulsory school age are recorded as absent, the register must show whether the absence is authorised or unauthorised.

Absence can only be authorised by the Headteacher and cannot be authorised by parents. All absences will be treated as unauthorised unless a satisfactory explanation for the learner's absence has been received.

Parents should advise the School's Administration Assistant by telephone on the first day of absence and provide an expected date of return. This should be followed up in the form of a written note from the parent/carer, though verbal explanations may be acceptable where this is considered appropriate. Alternative arrangements will be agreed with non-English speaking parents/carers.

Absence will be categorised as follows:

- Illness In most cases a telephone call or a note from the parent informing the School that their child is ill will be acceptable. Parents may be asked to provide medical evidence where there are repeated absences due to reported illness. This will usually be in the form of an appointment card, prescription etc.
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- Medical/Dental Appointments Parents are advised where possible to make medical and dental appointments outside of the school day. Where this is not possible, pupils should attend school for part of the day. Parents should show the appointment card to the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher.
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- Other Authorised Circumstances: This relates to occasions where there is cause for absence due to exceptional circumstances, for example family bereavement, visiting a parent in prison or part time timetable agreed as part of a reintegration package.
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- Excluded: Exclusion from attending school is counted as an authorised absence. The child's class Teacher/Learning Support Assistant/Headteacher will make arrangements for work to be sent home.
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- Family Holidays and Extended Leave: Parents are strongly advised to avoid taking their children on holiday during term time. Parents do not have an automatic right to remove their child from Yew Tree Farm School during term time for the purpose of a holiday and should be made aware that if their child is absent for 10 school days they will miss 5% of their education during that academic year. However, up to 5 school days leave in any one school year **may** be granted at the discretion of the Headteacher.

Parents wishing to take their child on holiday during term time must send a written request to the Headteacher before holiday arrangements are made. Retrospective requests will not be considered and therefore will result in the absence being categorised as unauthorised. Each request will be considered individually and will take the following factors into account

- Length of the proposed leave
- Age of the pupil

- The pupil's general absence/attendance record
- Proximity of important work / public examinations
- Pupil's ability to catch up the work missed
- Pupil's educational needs
- General welfare of the pupil
- Circumstances of the request
- Purpose of the leave
- Previous term time holidays taken
- When the request was made
- The Referring School's Opinion

All requests for leave of absence will be responded to in writing. Where a request has been granted the letter should state:

- The expected date of return
- That parents must contact school should any delays occur
- That the child's place may be withdrawn if the family do not return as expected

If a pupil fails to return and contact with the parents has not been made or received, the referring school may take the pupil off the school's roll in compliance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. This means that the child will lose their school place.

If the permission to take leave is not granted and the pupil still goes on holiday, the absence will be **unauthorised**. In such cases the referring school may issue a Penalty Notice.

Only in **exceptional circumstances** will absence of more than 10 school days be agreed. In such cases, consideration will also be given to cultural needs and family circumstances, such as minority ethnic children returning to their country of origin. In these cases granting leave for longer periods than normal may be considered justified. In all cases though, parents will be required to justify why the holiday needs to be taken during term time.

Religious Observance:

Yew Tree Farm School acknowledges the multi-faith nature of British society and recognises that on some occasions, religious festivals may fall outside school holiday periods or weekends and this necessitates a consideration of authorised absence or special leave for religious observance.

It is reasonable for a parent to allow their children not to attend school on any day of religious observance if recognised by the parent's religious body.

Parents are requested to give advance notice to the Headteacher if they intend their child to be absent.

However, in the interests of fulfilling the academic requirements of the School and limiting the authorised absence rate, it is identified as reasonable that no more than one day be designated for any individual occasion of religious observance/festival and no more than three days in total in any academic year. Any further absence will be categorised as unauthorised.

Traveller Absence:

The aim for the attendance of Traveller children, in common with all other children, is to attend Yew Tree Farm School as regularly and as frequently as possible.

To protect Traveller parents from unreasonable prosecution for non-attendance, the Education Act 1944, section 86, states that a Traveller parent is safe from prosecution if their child accrues 200 attendances (i.e. 200 half days) in a year. This is only when the family are engaged in a trade or business that requires them to travel and when the child is attending Yew Tree Farm School as regularly as that trade permits.

It does not mean that part-time education for Traveller children is legally acceptable, nor does it relieve parents of their duties to ensure that their children are receiving suitable education when not at school.

When local, if a family can reasonably travel back to their Base School (see below) then the expectation is that their child will attend full-time.

Yew Tree Farm School will be regarded as the base school if it is the school where the child normally attends when they are not travelling. However, the learner must have attended in the last 18 months. Traveller children can register at other schools temporarily while away from their base school, in such cases, the learner's school place at Yew Tree Farm School will be kept open for them whilst travelling. This is to protect them from unfairly losing their place at their school of usual attendance.

Yew Tree Farm School can only effectively operate as the child's base school if it is engaged in on-going dialogue with Traveller families. This means that parents must:

- advise of their forthcoming travelling patterns before they happen; and
- inform the school regarding proposed return dates

Yew Tree Farm School will authorise absence of Traveller children if we are satisfied that a family is travelling and has given indication that they intend to return.

Traveller children will be recorded as attending an approved educational activity when:

- The child is on roll and attending another visited school
- Undertaking supervised educational activity under the jurisdiction of another Local Authority's Traveller Education Service
- The child is undertaking computer based distance learning that is time evidenced

Where Traveller children are registered learners at a school and are known to be present either at a site (official or otherwise) or in a house and are not attending school, the absence will be investigated in the same way as that for any pupil.

Late Arrival Registration begins at 09.30am, learners arriving after this time will be marked as present but arriving late. The register will close at 9.45am. Learners arriving after the close of register will be recorded as late, this will not be authorised and will count as an absence for that school session.

On arrival after the close of register, learners must immediately report to the administration office to ensure that we can be responsible for their health and safety whilst they are in the school.

The absence will only be authorised if a satisfactory explanation for the late arrival can be provided, for example, attendance at a medical appointment.

The absence will be recorded as unauthorised if the learner has arrived late without justifiable cause, for example, if they woke up late or were waiting for their uniform to dry.

Unauthorised absence:

Absence will not be authorised unless parents have provided a satisfactory explanation and that it has been accepted as such by the Headteacher.

Examples of unsatisfactory explanations include:

- A pupil's/family member's birthday
- Shopping for uniforms
- Having their hair cut
- Closure of a sibling's school for INSET (or other) purposes
- "Couldn't get up"
- Illness where the child is considered well enough to attend school
- Holidays taken without the authorisation of school

Deletions from the Register

In accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006, learners will only be deleted from the register when one of the following circumstances applies:

- The referring school is replaced by another school on a School Attendance Order
- The School Attendance Order is revoked by the local authority
- The learner has ceased to be of compulsory school age
- Permanent exclusion has occurred and procedures have been completed
- Death of a learner
- Transfer between schools
- Learner withdrawn to be educated outside the school system
- Failure to return from an extended holiday after both the school and the local authority have tried to locate the pupil

A medical condition prevents their attendance and return to the school before ending compulsory school-age

- In custody for more than four months (in discussion with The Youth Offending Team)
- 20 days continuous unauthorised absence and both the local authority and school have tried to locate the pupil
- Left the referring school but not known where he/she has gone after both the referring school and the local authority have tried to locate the learner
- The referring school no longer funds a placement

Yew Tree Farm School has a separate Missing Child Policy.

Roles and Responsibilities

Yew Tree Farm School believes that improved school attendance can only be achieved if it is viewed as a shared responsibility of the referring school, parents/carers, learners and the wider school community. As such, Yew Tree Farm School will:

- Ensure that the importance and value of good attendance is promoted to learners and their parents/carers
- Annually review the Attendance Policy and ensure the required resources are available to fully implement the policy
- Ensure that the Registration Regulations, England, 2006 and other attendance related legislation is complied with
- Agree attendance targets and submit these to the referring school within the agreed timescale each year and where appropriate link these to the Performance Management of Senior Leadership within the school
- Monitor the school's attendance and related issues through termly reporting at Staff and at Senior Team meetings
- Ensure that the Headteacher leads on attendance
- Ensure that the school has clear systems to report, record and monitor the attendance of all learners, including those who are educated off-site
- Ensure that there are procedures for collecting and analysing attendance data frequently to identify causes and patterns of absence
- Ensure that data is understood and used to devise solutions and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions

The Headteacher will:

- Actively promote the importance and value of good attendance to learners and their parents/carers
- Form positive relationships with learners, parents and carers
- Ensure that there is a whole school approach which reinforces good attendance; with good teaching and learning experiences that encourage all learners to attend and to achieve
- Monitor the implementation of the Attendance Policy and ensure that the policy is reviewed annually
- Ensure that all staff are aware of the Attendance Policy and adequately trained to address attendance issues
- Ensure that the Registration Regulations, England, 2006 and other attendance related legislation is complied with
- Return attendance data to the referring school as required and on time
- Report attendance and related issues through termly reporting to the board of Directors
- Ensure that systems to report, record and monitor the attendance of all pupils, including those who are educated off-site are implemented
- Ensure that attendance data is collected and analysed frequently to identify causes and patterns of absence
- Interpret the data to devise solutions and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions
- Develop a multi-agency response to improve attendance and support learners and their families
- Document interventions used to a standard required by the local authority should legal proceedings be instigated

Request that Parents will:

- Talk to their child about Yew Tree Farm School and what goes on there. Take a positive interest in their child's work and educational progress
- Instill the value of education and regular attendance within the home environment.
- Encourage their child to look to the future and have aspirations
- Contact the School if their child is absent to let them know the reason why and the expected date of return. Follow this up with a note where possible
- Try to avoid unnecessary absences. Wherever possible make appointments for the Doctors, Dentists etc outside of school hours
- Ask the School for help if their child is experiencing difficulties
- Inform the School of any change in circumstances that may impact on their child's attendance
- Support the School; take every opportunity to get involved in their child's education, form a positive relationship with Yew Tree Farm School and acknowledge the importance of children receiving the same messages from both the School and home
- Encourage routine at home, for example, bedtimes, homework, preparing work bag and uniform the evening before
- Not keep their child off from School to go shopping, to help at home or to look after other members of the family
- Avoid taking their child on holiday during term-time, where this is unavoidable, send a written leave request to the Headteacher in advance of booking the holiday

Using Attendance Data

Learner's attendance will be monitored and may be shared with the Local Authority and other agencies if a learner's attendance is a cause for concern.

Every half term, the Administrator/ Headteacher will provide all educational staff with attendance data for the previous half term for each learner during their review.

Attendance data will also be used to identify emerging patterns and trends to inform whole school strategies to improve attendance and attainment.

The Headteacher will share attendance data with the referring school and the local authority as required.

All information shared will be done so in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Support Systems

Yew Tree Farm School recognises that poor attendance is often an indication of difficulties in a child's life. This may be related to problems at home and or in their personal life. Parents should make the School aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance and or behaviour. For example, bereavement, divorce/separation, incidents of domestic abuse. This will help the School identify any additional support that may be required.

Yew Tree Farm School also recognises that some learners are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance, for example, those learners with BESD, special educational

needs, those with physical or mental health needs, migrant and refugee learners and looked after children.

Yew Tree Farm School will implement a range of strategies to support improved attendance.

Strategies used will include:

- Attendance leaflets for parents/carers
- Attendance trips
- Certificates & well done postcards
- Lesson plans & work booklets
- Whole school assemblies
- First day response
- The late book
- Home visits
- Learner end of term reviews
- The School Newsletter
- Displays around the center
- Attendance notice board

Support offered to families will be child centered and planned in discussion and agreement with both parents/carers and learners during review time.

Where parents fail or refuse to engage with the support offered and further unauthorised absence occurs, Yew Tree Farm School will consider the use of legal sanctions in conjunction with the referring school.

Legal Sanctions

Prosecution where intervention fails to bring about an improvement in attendance, the Local Authority will be notified and legal action in the Magistrates' Court may be taken. The referring school will provide the Local Authority with evidence required for a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 and will appear as a prosecution witness if required by the court. This is to ensure that parents realise their own responsibilities in ensuring attendance at Yew Tree Farm School and most importantly about returning children to education.

Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 states that if a parent fails to ensure the regular school attendance of their child if he/she is a registered pupil at a school and is of compulsory school age, then they are guilty of an offence.

A parent found guilty of this offence can be fined up to £2500 and or be imprisoned for a period of three months.

Alternatives to Section 444 prosecution are Parenting Contracts, Penalty Notices or an Education Supervision Order.

Parenting Contracts (Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003) A Parenting contract is a voluntary agreement between school and the parent, it can also be extended to include the child and any other agencies offering support to resolve any difficulties leading to improved attendance.

The contract will outline attendance targets and will detail agreed actions that will help to achieve the target. The contract will be reviewed regularly.

The contract can be used as evidence in a prosecution should parents fail to carry out agreed actions.

Parenting Contracts will be used in accordance with the Local Authorities Parenting Contract Protocol.

Penalty Notices (Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003) Penalty Notices will be considered when:

- A learner is absent from the School for the purpose of a holiday in term time and the absence has not been authorised by the Headteacher.
- A learner has accumulated at least ten sessions of unauthorised absence and further unauthorised absence has occurred following written warning to improve.

A Penalty Notice gives the parent the opportunity to discharge themselves of their legal responsibility.

Failure to pay the Penalty Notice may result in a prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

Penalty Notices will be used in accordance with the Local Authority's Penalty Notice Protocol.