



SOUTH DOWNS
— LEARNING TRUST —

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Date Approved	March 2023
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Status	Non-Statutory
Lead Author/s	Executive Headteacher

OUR VISION

A community of primary and secondary academies that are the first choice for students and families in Sussex, with an outstanding reputation for high aspiration and high achievement

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Introduction

The South Downs Learning Trust (SDLT) is committed to providing a full and efficient educational experience to all pupils/students and recognises this can only be achieved by supporting and promoting excellent school attendance for all. All Trust schools will employ a wide range of strategies to do all they can to ensure maximum attendance for all pupils/students. Any problems that impede punctuality and regular attendance will be identified and addressed as a priority.

It is a fundamental part of SDLT ethos to celebrate success and achievement. Excellent attendance and punctuality are integral to a productive and successful education and career. SDLT schools will actively promote and encourage 100% attendance of all pupils/students.

SDLT is committed to promoting race, disability and gender equality within all practices and procedures related to attendance and punctuality.

It is only the Headteacher of each school in the Trust who can authorise absence.

Throughout this policy the term 'parent' represents one parent, either parents, or carer with whom the child resides.

Principles

Good levels of attendance are a priority at our schools. We consider good attendance to be 96% or above. It is vital that children attend regularly if they are to have access to the curriculum and achieve their full potential. Schools have a legal duty to promote attendance and to publish absence figures.

Children should be at school, on time, every day school is open, unless the reason for absence is unavoidable. Permitting absence from school without a good reason is an offence by the parent.

Any issues regarding regular attendance are best resolved between school, the parents/carers and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend, it is unacceptable 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. It is recognised that children who do not attend school regularly are liable to become disaffected and may be drawn into anti-social activities.

We record morning and afternoon attendance. Non-attendance is classified as authorised or unauthorised. We will follow up any cases of concern and attempt to resolve any issues with the co-operation of the parents.

Parental Responsibility

Parents/carers have a vital role, as well as a legal responsibility, to ensure good attendance. SDLT schools will give high priority to developing effective links and conveying to parents/carers and pupils/students the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

Procedures for Recording Attendance, Absence and Punctuality

Parents/carers and pupils/students should be aware of the school times to ensure punctuality. These can be found on the schools' websites.

The statutory recording of attendance and absence at the start of each session is known as Roll Call. This is undertaken within the first 30 minutes of the morning and afternoon sessions and after this time the pupil/student will be registered as late (L). If they arrive after the first 30 minutes, it is recorded as an unauthorised absence (U).

If the lateness becomes persistent the circumstances are investigated and followed up with parents as appropriate. If the lateness still continues, school may choose to begin recording 'late' arrival as an 'unauthorised absence' at an earlier time. Parents would be informed at this stage. After 10 such unauthorised absences the matter would be referred to the East Sussex, Behaviour and Attendance Service (ESBAS).

Pupils/students regularly arriving to school late may incur appropriate sanctions, including detention. Parents/carers will be contacted to discuss the matter further.

Each Trust school will provide a dedicated telephone recording facility to enable parents/carers to effectively communicate an absence.

When a pupil/student does not arrive at school and there has been no message from the parents/carers, concern about the welfare of the pupil/student will necessitate immediate contact with home. In the first instance a text message will be sent to the parent/carer informing of their child's absence and requesting they contact school by 10.00am. If we get no response to this text within a reasonable time frame, manual telephone calls will be made in order to ascertain the reason for absence and to ensure the safety of the child. If contact fails to be made the attendance administrator will discuss the next steps with senior management. This may result in a letter being sent or a home visit.

When a pupil/student falls ill whilst at school contact will be made with parents/carers to confirm that they may leave the school site. If parents/carers are unable to collect their child and they are of secondary school age and have given verbal permission for the pupil/student to leave the school, they will be issued with an exit pass which confirms they have permission to leave the site. This requires the parents/carers to contact the relevant administration office as soon as the pupil/student arrives home.

Absence during term time

There is not an entitlement for parents to remove their child from school during term time. However, in exceptional circumstances parents/carers can request to remove their child for a special event or other reasons. These could include service personnel returning from a tour of duty, absence recommended by a health professional as part of a parent's or the child's rehabilitation, 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. The 'exceptional circumstances' must be clearly stated on the form. Governors have agreed that lower costs/cheaper fares etc for holidays will **not** be accepted as an 'exceptional circumstance'.

All such requests must be made on the school's official 'Withdrawal from Learning Request' which must be returned to the school office at least two working weeks before the start date of the requested withdrawal from learning (except in cases where this is not possible eg the death of a person close to the family). Returning the form does not guarantee that a request will be approved.

The Headteacher will make the decision of acceptance or refusal and can take into account the pupil/student's previous record of attendance including any patterns of absence, whether the child will miss any preparations for tests and exams and the reasons for the absence. The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are 'rare, significant, unavoidable and short'.

By signing the form, parents/carers are confirming they understand the following:

- If a child is removed for a family holiday, the absence will be marked as 'unauthorised' in the register. Schools are required to report this absence to ESBAS who may issue a Penalty Notice to each parent for each child taken out of school for more than 5 days (10 half day sessions). Where penalty notices are imposed, the regulations state that the penalty will be £120 to be paid within 28 days, reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days. Penalty notices are issued to each parent of each child. Failure to pay the penalty in full by the end of the 28-day period may result in prosecution by the local authority.
- A child who is removed for a prolonged period in term time, other than for sickness, will miss a large amount of schoolwork and will be unprepared for the work on returning to school.
- SDLT schools cannot guarantee that staff will be able to spend time helping the child to catch up on work missed during the absence.
- Asking for extra work to do at home may not be appropriate as the child may have missed the initial teaching.

Procedures SDLT schools will take in the event of Attendance Concerns

If we are concerned about a child's attendance, we will initiate one or more of the following actions:

- Send letter of concern stating attendance statistics.

- Discuss the situation with parents, which may involve an initial informal meeting with the school and ESBAS.
- Ask for medical evidence regarding certain absences.eg letter from doctor/medical certificate.
- If no improvement is seen we will make a referral to ESBAS who will also attempt to resolve the situation but may also seek to use court proceedings to prosecute parents, or to seek an Education Supervision Order on the child. The maximum penalty is a fine of £2,500, 3 months' imprisonment and a criminal record.

Attendance Policy – Notes for Parents

The regular attendance of a child at school is the responsibility of the parents/carers who should actively promote and encourage 100% attendance.

1. Children are expected to arrive at school on time.
2. Notification of the reason for a child's absence is expected before the start of the first day and should be followed by a further call to school on subsequent days unless the length of absence is clear to the school.
3. If school does not receive any notification regarding a child's absence, parents will receive a text message or phone call that morning to seek clarification.
4. When a child is absent for longer than a week it is expected that the parents will notify school regularly by letter of the continuing reasons for an absence and provide medical evidence if appropriate.
5. Any level of absence falling below 90% is considered to be persistent absence and schools must complete a weekly return to East Sussex County Council highlighting those pupil/students. For persistent absentees, SDLT schools may request a doctor's certificate or letter before any absence is authorised.
6. When Senior Leaders have concerns about a child's attendance, they may refer the child to ESBAS.
7. There is an absence form which should be used when parents wish to request 'authorised withdrawal from learning'. Please note that absence in term time is only authorised in very exceptional cases, and all other cases will receive a fine.

If you have any other queries about registration and attendance, please contact your child's school office.