

Attendance and Absence From School Policy

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Introduction

The Government set clear targets for attendance for all schools and the governors support the drive to make every lesson and every day count.

At the White Horse Federation we expect children to attend school every day and on time, unless absence is authorised by the school. Parents/carers have a legal duty to ensure that their children attend full-time.

We encourage good communication with our families and aim to work with them to support in overcoming any potential barriers to attending school. We have a dedicated Education Welfare Team who can be contacted by parents/carers should they require support relating to their child's time at school, they will also work with families that school consider attendance to be a cause for concern (every child whose attendance falls below 95% will be monitored and may be referred for one to one casework).

Absence from School during Term Time

Legal Background and DfE Guidelines:

Whilst schools are required to consider parental requests for absence from school in term time, it still remains the legal duty of parents/carers to ensure the regular attendance of a child of compulsory school age. Meaning that every session of unauthorised absence could constitute a criminal offence. Failure to do so could result in the Local Authority issuing a penalty notice or prosecuting the parents/carers in the Magistrates Court.

DfE guidelines clearly state that absence from school can be taken in exceptional circumstances and this means that the parent/carer must make a strong case for taking a child out of school in an academic year. Exceptional circumstances must be explained fully to the school who will then consider the request. Any medical appointments/procedures during school time are always authorised but school does require evidence such as appointment cards or letters.

Parents/carers should not expect that schools would automatically agree to an absence from school during term time. All requests are at the discretion of the Principal and can only be authorised by the Principal or member of staff with designated authority in the absence of the Principal.

Consideration of Absence from School requests. The Principal or delegated member of staff is advised to treat each application individually and will consider the following factors when making a decision.

- The child's overall attendance record
- Whether the absence falls during a year when public examinations are due or government tests.
- The effect on the child's continuity of learning
- The family circumstances
- Sibling attendance at other WHF school (heads will make a joint decision if there is a sibling attending another WHF school)

When an absence is approved then it is an authorised absence. Should parents/carers keep their child away in excess of the agreed period, then the extra time will be treated as an unauthorised absence. Where parents/carers take the child out of school without permission, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised. Parents/carers will be informed in writing that such an absence is recorded as unauthorised and a fixed penalty fine will be considered, this may be issued without prior warning. For information regarding fixed penalty notices please refer to your local authority's website.

An absence request can only be made by the parent/carer with day-to-day care and in some circumstances this parent/carer may have to request an absence on behalf of other adults. This safeguards against an estranged parent/carer making a request without the knowledge of the parent/carer who has care and control.

The school reviews all reasons for a child's absence which may result, in some circumstances, a child being removed from the school roll if they are absent for a period of 10 days or more. It will then be the parent's/carers' responsibility to contact school admissions to find a place at a school for their child.

Daily absence procedures

It is the responsibility of parents/carers to inform the school if their child is unable to attend school, this should be done before the start of the school day and can be done by telephoning the school office, in line with school's process for reporting absence.

A failure to inform the school will result in contact to the main contact, and, in the event they are not contactable, each contact thereafter in order of priority, will be contacted to ascertain the reason why the child is absent.

The school has a duty of care to all pupils and will make first day absence contact for all children for whom no explanation has been received and every subsequent day until a reason is obtained. If school is not able to ascertain the reason for the child's absence a member of the senior leadership team or an Educational Welfare Officer will visit the child's home to find out the reason for their absence. Every effort will be made to know the whereabouts of the child and, if necessary, school will refer the child to the Educational Welfare Service as Missing in Education. The referral will be actioned following discussion with the Senior Leadership Team and in conjunction with statutory guidance; a referral can be actioned earlier if deemed necessary.

Follow up calls will be completed for children where the parent/carer has advised that their child will be absent for a long period due to their illness, for example: chicken pox, measles, etc.

For our primary schools we expect a written explanation for the child's absence on the day they return to school. All letters received are filed in the child's personal file.

A failure to explain absence will be recorded as unauthorised. The school has a duty to monitor patterns of absence and reasons for absence. The school reserves the right to request medical evidence (this can be a label from prescribed medication, or a signed appointment card for the GP/dental surgery etc. it doesn't need to be a doctor's note) for persistent/long periods of absence, in order for the absences to be recorded as authorised. The school also reserves the right to refer a child who has a pattern of unauthorised or authorised absence to the Education Welfare Service and a Penalty Notice may be issued. This could be the issuing of a Penalty Notice or prosecution through the Magistrates Court.

Arriving late for School/Leaving early

It is the responsibility of parents/carers to ensure their children are at school on time and ready to learn.

It is not expected that children should need to arrive late for school or to leave early. Parents/carers should try to make appointments for dentists and doctors and opticians etc. outside of school hours.

All children arriving late must be signed in to the main school office and a reason must be given as to why the child is late. A failure to explain a late arrival will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

All reasons are recorded and monitored regularly as part of our normal school practice. In some exceptional circumstances, children may have to be collected early from school.

Parents/carers who wish to collect their children early must inform the school by telephone or in writing, stating clearly the reason why the child is leaving school.

Requests and collections may only be made by the parent/carer with day-to-day care. This safeguards against an estranged parent/carer making a request without the knowledge of the parent who has care and control. If there are other arrangements for the child to leave the school premises, such as another adult will collect the child, the school must be informed.

It is the responsibility of the parents/carers to keep the school fully aware of contact details of named and responsible adults.

When the child is collected, they must be signed out and the person collecting them must write the reason for the early collection in the school record book. This allows the school to protect the child and to ensure robust procedures for health and safety and wellbeing as well as safeguarding against an estranged parent/carer making a request without the knowledge of the parent/carer who has care and control. The school reserves the right to refer a child who has a pattern of late arrivals or persistent early finishes with or without explanations, to the Education Welfare Service and a Penalty Notice may be issued.

Collection at the end of the School day

We do recognise that some of our students do have permission to leave school independently at the end of the school day however, in the instance where arrangements are in place for a child to be collected, the following will apply:

Children should be collected promptly at the end of the school day.

If someone other than the usual parent/carer is collecting the child, we ask that the school office be notified in advance.

Any child who is not collected at the end of the school day will be directed to the school office and contacts will be telephoned in order of priority to find out the reason for this. After 15 minutes' children will then be put into after school care, whereby parents/carers will be charged for this service. If parents/carers fail to collect their children by 5pm with no contact from the parents/carers, then the local authority children's services team may be contacted.

