



Unity Academy

Attendance for Learning Policy

Good attendance is everyone's business, all the time.

Unity Academy is committed to providing a full and efficient educational experience to all students. We believe that if students are to benefit from education, punctuality and good attendance are crucial. As a school, we will do all we can to ensure maximum attendance for all students and will identify and address any problems that impede punctuality and regular attendance as soon as possible.

It is the policy of our school to celebrate achievement. Attendance is the most critical factor to a productive and successful school career. Unity Academy will actively promote and encourage 100 per cent attendance for all our students.

Unity Academy will give a high priority to building positive, respectful relationships and to conveying to students and parents the importance of regular and punctual attendance. We recognise that parents/carers have a vital role to play and to support partnership working to improve attendance and will endeavor to establish effective home-school links and communication.

If there are problems that affect a student's attendance we will investigate, identify and strive in partnership with parents and students to resolve these problems as quickly and efficiently as possible. We will adopt clear, targeted intervention aimed at returning a student to sustained full attendance as soon as possible and in the event of no improvement or further decline will rapidly escalate intervention.

Attendance interventions and the effectiveness of systems to improve attendance will be monitored by the Unity Academy Attendance Champion.

Rationale

Good attendance and punctuality are unequivocally linked to student progress. All children are encouraged to target and achieve 100% attendance and to make every effort to sustain attendance over 98%. Our whole school attendance aim is at least 96% across each academic year.

Regular attendance and punctuality are essential prerequisites of successful learning. They are also an important training and preparation for the world of work. Ensuring good attendance must, therefore, be a high priority for the academy, parents and carers and everyone's business, all of the time. The efforts of students to achieve full attendance will be recognised and rewarded. Consistent procedures for responding to poor/irregular attendance and persistent lateness both to the Academy and to lessons will be implemented. It is vital that everyone works together to achieve success.

Definitions

Unity Academy is required to classify any absence as either **authorised** or **unauthorised**. In order to classify absence parents and carers are always required to provide a reason or cause for an absence via telephone and the school Absence Line, email or a written note.

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from the Academy for a good reason such as illness or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the Academy does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been granted.

These include:

- parents/carers keeping their children off from the Academy unnecessarily
- truancy before or during the academy day
- absences which have never been properly explained

Leave of any kind can only be granted in exceptional circumstances and any absences cannot be authorised retrospectively.

Holidays will be unauthorised for all children. Fixed Penalty Notices will be utilised for requests of 5 days or more even if attendance is 100%. As a Trust, FCAT expect parents to use school closure times for holidays. In very exceptional circumstances, holidays may be authorised at the discretion of the Headteacher.

Only exceptional circumstances warrant authorised leave of absence. Unity Academy considers each request carefully taking into account circumstances, such as:

- the nature of the event for which leave is sought
- the frequency of the request; whether the parent/carer gave advance notice
- a student's attainment, progress, attendance to date and ability to catch up on missed schooling

Authorising Absence

Parents and Carers must be aware that the decision to authorise an absence lies with the school. A note from home does not necessarily guarantee that the absence will be authorised. Any absence must be **unavoidable** to warrant authorisation (e.g. absence to go shopping is an **avoidable absence** in law). If absences are repeated or prolonged or formal intervention is underway e.g. by the Pupil Welfare Officer (PWO), the Academy will ask for further information such as medical evidence.

Parents and carers are expected to make arrangements for the supervision of children who have been excluded from school on any day which is one of the first five school days of any exclusion.

Parents/carers are encouraged and expected to contact Unity Academy at an early stage and to work with pastoral support staff, Attendance Officer, Head of Year, Inclusion Manager, Form Tutor and any other staff necessary to resolve any attendance problems together, sometimes with the help of other agencies.

Students are sometimes reluctant to attend school for a variety of reasons. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between Unity Academy colleagues, parents/carers and the student working together. If a student is reluctant to attend, it is better not to cover up the 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. Support systems exist to help with and effectively resolve such problems.

Persistent Absence (PA)

'Persistent absence' refers to absence of more than 10%, whether authorised or unauthorised. The Department for Education states that students with persistent absence are often those unlikely to attain at the Academy and stay in education after the age of 16 years. They are also significantly more likely to engage in anti-social behaviour and youth crime and are more at risk of other negative outcomes, such as drug and alcohol abuse.

Registration

The academy uses a digital registration system to receive and store data and information, generate attendance records, produce statistical analyses and reports. Registration is a legal requirement. There are two legal registration sessions during a school day. These are taken during Form/Class tutorial and at the end of (secondary) period 4. Further registers will also be taken during every other lesson. If a student does not attend either of the morning or afternoon session registration sessions, they will be marked absent and will lose half a day of attendance (1 session).

Attendance and Registration Procedures

The academy will:

- ensure that all staff know registration procedures and registration regulations
- complete registers accurately at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session
- complete electronic registers at the beginning of each lesson
- stress to parents/carers the importance of contacting staff early on the first day of absence
- display current attendance in school and reward good and improved attendance in all students
- set attendance targets for all students and use attendance action plans, as required
- promote the role of the Form Tutor/Class Teacher in monitoring and rewarding good attendance
- promote positive staff attitudes to students returning after absence
- consult with all members of the school community and the PWO service in developing and maintaining the whole school attendance policy
- ensure regular evaluation of attendance procedures by Senior Leaders and Governors
- include attendance and related issues in newsletters sent to parents and students.
- give supportive messages to students to encourage attendance and a return to school, if absent
- report to the Governors each half term
- enable absentees to catch up on missed work without disrupting the learning of others.

A range of strategies will be deployed to secure good attendance from all children. These will be refined and targeted for children at risk of PA, those in PA and the severely absent.

School strategies to encourage attendance include:

For all children

- publishing a clear attendance policy and supporting information via the school website
- developing and maintaining a whole-school culture that promotes the benefits of good attendance
- accurately completing admission and attendance registers
- using consistent and robust daily processes to follow up absence
- identifying a senior leader with responsibility for championing and improving attendance

For children at risk of persistent absence (PA) - at or below 90%

- proactively use data to identify children at risk of poor attendance
- work with each identified child to understand and address reasons for absence, removing barriers to attendance
- signpost and support access to external services, where out of school barriers to attendance exist
- work with other agencies in a multi-agency approach to deliver help to improve attendance

For children who are persistently absent - at or below 90%

- offer continuing and additional targeted support, including working with partners
- address a lack of engagement from parents with more formal conversations and clarity as to the potential for legal intervention
- work with the local authority on legal intervention
- Where safeguarding concerns exist, intensify support through children's social care
- Work with other schools such as those previously attended and where there are sibling links

For children who are severely absent - at or below 50%

- continue support as for children who are persistently absent
- agree a joint approach with the local authority for all severely absent children

Expectations of Parents and Carers

It is vital that the school works in partnership with parents/carers to ensure that good attendance is maintained. Parents are asked to support this by:

- ensuring that their children attend regularly and arrive punctually
- informing the school by telephoning the designated Absence Line, or by other means such as email if their child is unable to attend due to illness. This should be done **on the first day of absence**. An indication should be given as to the likely duration of the absence
- providing a dated note explaining the absence when the student returns to the Academy if the information has not been communicated by other means, in addition to any medical or other evidence required for authorisation (see published requirements for absence authorisation). These vary with attendance and intervention level
- completing the pro-forma requesting future leave of absence in good time. These forms can be obtained from the main school office
- informing the Academy as soon as possible about any unexpected lateness

and specifically:

For all children

- ensure that children attend school every day the school is open
- notify the school as soon as possible when their child is unexpectedly absent e.g. through illness
- only request leave of absence in exceptional circumstances and in advance wherever possible
- book medical appointments around the school day where possible

For children at risk of persistent absence (PA) – at or below 90%

- work with the school and local authority to help them understand your child's barrier/s to attendance
- proactively engage with the support offered to prevent the need for more formal support and intervention

For children who are persistently absent – at or below 90%

- work with the school and local authority to help them understand your child's barrier/s to attendance
- proactively engage with the support offered, including any parenting contract or voluntary early help plan to prevent the need for legal intervention

For children who are severely absent – at or below 50%

- work with the school and local authority to help them understand your child's barrier/s to attendance
- proactively engage with the formal support offered including any parenting contract or voluntary early help plan to prevent the need for legal intervention

Responsibilities of students

- accept responsibility for their own attendance and punctuality
- attend registration and lessons on time and in the place indicated, for example, their designated Form room or assembly
- enter via the designated entrance if arriving late for the Academy **before 9.00 am** to be recorded as late by reception staff. Students in the secondary years arriving late in this manner will also receive an after-school detention of 1 hour on the same day as the lateness
- report to main reception if arriving late between 9.00am and 9.30am must to be recorded as late. Students in the secondary years arriving late in this manner will also receive an after-school detention of 1 hour on the same day as the lateness
- bring a note from a parent explaining the reason for the absence **on the day that they return to the Academy**, if the information has not been communicated previously by other means
- bring a note from a parent if arriving at the Academy after 9.30 am as arrival after this time is classified as absence

Strategies for responding to persistently poor attendance

In addition to the strategies already outlined, other possible actions that might be taken include:

- pastoral support
- Early Help
- Behaviour Improvement Plan
- intervention by the Pupil Welfare Officer (PWO)
- referral to other agencies including Children's Social Care
- the use of Penalty Notices (see information below)
- formal intervention and/or prosecution

If attendance difficulties cannot be resolved out using any of the above strategies, Unity Academy may bring the student and their attendance to the attention of a Court Officer of the Local Education Authority. Court proceedings can be used to prosecute parents where the maximum penalty on conviction is a fine of £2500 and/or three months imprisonment. Other disposals such as Parenting Orders or Community Sentences can be imposed depending upon the circumstances. Costs may also be imposed.

A range of supportive early interventions led by the Pupil Welfare Officer will seek to improve attendance and avoid the need for prosecution.

Appendix 1: Penalty Notices

Penalty Notices will be considered for:

- persistent** and/or unauthorised late arrival at the academy (** persistent lateness refers to students who arrive after the school register has closed more than 3 times per half term)
- persistent unauthorised absence from the academy (see Appendix 1)

Penalty Notices may also apply for unauthorised leave of absence, including holidays.

- Penalty Notices can be applied for when a student has 10 sessions (5 days) of unauthorised absence in a term or 14 sessions (7 days) over two successive terms. Penalty Notices can be applied for when absences cross two academic years (as per the trigger across two consecutive terms)
- parents may now be issued with up to 3 Penalty Notices in a year
- penalty notices can be issued when students are located in a public place without justification during the first five days of any period of exclusion

Appendix 2: Penalty Notices – information

**PENALTY NOTICES Tackling
Poor School Attendance**
The Education (Penalty Notices) (England)
(Amendment)
Regulations 2013
**The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 and the Education Act
1996**
**Information for Parents and
Carers**

Introduction

The law gives powers to the Local Authority and other designated bodies to issue Penalty Notices where a parent/carer is considered able but unwilling to ensure their child's school attendance. Reducing absences from school is a key priority nationally and locally because missing school damages a pupil's attainment levels, disrupts school routines and the learning of others, and can leave a pupil vulnerable to anti-social behaviour and youth crime.

What is a Penalty Notice?

Parents/carers commit an offence if a child fails to attend school regularly and those absences are classed as unauthorised. Depending on the circumstances, such cases may result in prosecution under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

A Penalty Notice is an alternative to prosecution, which does not require an appearance in Court unless the fine is unpaid after 28 days. Full payment of the penalty means that parents/carers can avoid being prosecuted and convicted.

What is the cost?

Penalty Notices are issued at £120 however, if paid within 21 days of being issued the cost is £60.

How are they issued?

Penalty Notices will always be issued by post to your home and are issued to each parent individually in respect of each child.

When are they issued?

Blackpool Council considers that regular attendance at school is of such importance that Penalty Notices may be used in a range of situations where unauthorised absence occurs, such as:

- unauthorised absence
- truancy (including pupils found during truancy sweeps)
- parentally condoned absence without good reason
- persistent late arrival at school
- unauthorised holidays in term time
- delayed return from an extended holiday without prior school permission
- relating to the whereabouts of excluded students (see rationale below)

Penalty Notices for the whereabouts of excluded pupils

Parents are expected to make arrangements for the supervision of children who have been excluded from the academy on any day which is one of the first five academy days to which any exclusion relates. Where the LA is notified that a parent is believed to be failing in their statutory duty to ensure such children are not in a public place, an investigation will be undertaken to establish the basic facts of the case in each instance in order to determine whether an offence is likely to have been committed.

It is expected that in the first instance parents would be reminded of their duty under this legislation and warned as to future behaviour, but subsequently a Penalty Notice could be issued where the criteria set out in the relevant code of conduct have been met. However, where a child is reported on more than one occasion during any single episode of exclusion, the LA will only consider a Penalty Notice for any one offence.

Where there is evidence of repeat episodes which suggest parenting is a significant contributory factor to the pupil's continuing behaviour concerns, schools will be expected to have considered / offered a parenting contract for behaviour before the LA will consider more than three requests for Penalty Notices in any one academic year.

In every case a pupil must have had a minimum of five school days lost to unauthorised absence during the current term or 7 school days lost to unauthorised absence over two consecutive terms before a Penalty Notice is considered. The Authority never takes such action lightly, and would far rather work with parents/carers to improve attendance without having to resort to any enforcement action. However, school attendance is of such importance to all of us that the Authority will use these powers if it is felt that it can secure a child's schooling.

Is a warning given?

In cases of unauthorised absence and persistent lateness**, parents/carers will receive a written warning of the possibility of a Notice being issued. This will tell you the extent of your child's absences and give you 15 school days in which to bring about an improvement. In that time, your child should have no unauthorised absences from school.

In cases of an unauthorised holiday, warnings will be issued where sufficient notice of the intended absence has been given. This means that in some cases, Penalty Notices may be issued without a warning.

Is there an appeal process?

There is no statutory right of appeal once a Penalty Notice has been issued, but on receipt of a warning, you can make representations should you wish.

How do I pay?

Details of payment arrangements will be included on the Penalty Notice. You need to be aware that payment in part or by installments is not an option with Penalty Notices. No reminders will be sent.

Can I be prosecuted if I pay the Penalty but my child is still missing school?

Not for the period stated in the Penalty Notice, since payment of the penalty discharges your liability for that period. However, it could be the case that a prosecution might be considered for further periods of poor attendance not covered by the Notice, depending on the circumstances. If this is an issue, it is vital that you work closely with your child's school.

What happens if I do not pay?

You have up to 28 days from receipt to pay the Penalty in full, after which the Authority is required in most instances to commence proceedings in the local Magistrates' Court for the original offence of failing to ensure your child attends school regularly.

If proven, this can attract a range of sentences including fines up to £2,500 and/or up to three months imprisonment. Other disposals such as Parenting Orders or Community Sentences can be imposed depending upon the circumstances. Costs may also be imposed.

Can I get help if my child is not attending school regularly?

Yes, Blackpool and/or Lancashire Children's Services Authority and your child's school will give you advice and support if you need help to secure an improvement in your child's attendance. It is very important that you speak with the school or with Blackpool Council and/or Lancashire County Council at the earliest opportunity if you have any worries at all about securing your child's school attendance.

Appendix 3: External Educational Provision

Parents and carers are legally responsible for ensuring that their child attends any arranged (external) provision. In the event of a refusal to attend, a direction to attend may be issued on behalf of the Headteacher.

Any such 'direction':

- will be provided to parents in writing and must be given not less than two school days before the start date of the provision
- will be issued by the Headteacher
- must be confirmed to the LA and/or Virtual School if the student has a Education, Health and Care Plan and/or is Looked After

The 'direction' must state:

- the address of the provider(s)
- the contact name and details at the provision
- the number of days that the direction is in place
- the reasons for and objectives of imposing the direction
- daily start and end times (including lunch time) for the provision

Policy reviewed – July 2022

Next review – July 2025