



Unity Academy

Attendance for Learning Policy

Philosophy

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 a 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 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 a clearly, focused, approach aimed at returning the student to sustained full attendance as soon as possible.

Rationale

At Unity Academy we wish to maintain a high level of attendance and punctuality as we believe that these are both unequivocally linked to student progress. All children are encouraged to target and achieve 100% attendance and to take robust steps to sustain attendance above 98%. Our is for whole school attendance to be at least 96% in 2017/18 and beyond.

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. The efforts of students to achieve full attendance should be recognised and rewarded. There must also be identified procedures for responding to poor and irregular attendance and persistent lateness both to the Academy and to lessons. 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. 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
- the student's attainment, attendance and ability to catch up on missed schooling

Students are sometimes reluctant to attend the Academy. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between Unity Academy, parents/carers and the student. 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

'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 (including teenage pregnancy and drug and alcohol abuse).

DCSF – Improving attendance and Reducing Persistent Absence

The Registration System

The academy's digital registration system (SIMS) is its vehicle for:

- ☒ receiving and storing information and data
- ☒ generating attendance records, producing statistical analyses and reports

Registration

Registration is a legal requirement. There are two legal registration sessions during a school day which are at the start of lesson 1 and at the start of the lesson after the lunch break. Registers will also be taken during every subsequent lesson and/or Class or Form tutorial. 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 attendance (1 session).

Attendance and Registration Procedures

The school 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 for students in their form
- 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.
- send supportive messages that if a student is absent, she/he is valued and will be missed.
- report to the Governors each half term
- enable absentees to catch up on missed work without disrupting the learning of others.

Responsibilities - parents and carers

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

- ☒ ensuring that their children attend regularly and arrive punctually
- ☒ informing the Academy by telephoning the designated Absence Line, by fax or by email if their son/daughter is unable to attend due to illness. This should be done **on the first day of absence**. Some indication should be given of the likely length 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

Responsibilities of students

- ☒ students must accept responsibility for their own attendance and punctuality.
- ☒ students must attend registration and lessons on time and in the place indicated to them, for example, their designated Form room or assembly
- ☒ students arriving late for the Academy **before 9.00 am** must enter via the designated entrance and will be recorded as late by staff. Students in the secondary Phases arriving late in this manner will also receive an after-school detention of 1 hour on the same day as the lateness.
- ☒ students arriving late between 9.00am and 9.30am must report to main reception and be recorded as late. Students in the secondary Phases arriving late in this manner will also receive an after-school detention of 1 hour on the same day as the lateness
- ☒ students returning to the Academy following an absence should bring a note 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
- ☒ students who arrive at the Academy after 9.30 am must also bring a note since, after this time, they are classified as absent

The Government has amended key legislation relating specifically to the authorisation of leave in term time which came into force on 1st September 2013. Every year a significant amount of learning time is lost to students taking holidays in term time.

Schools and academies can no longer authorise holiday requests. Parents/Carers may request a leave of absence in term time but this may only be authorised by the Principal in exceptional circumstances. The Principal is unable to authorise any exceptional leave that is not requested in advance of the absence.

Parents/Carers must also be aware that the decision to authorise an absence from the Academy lies with the Academy. 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 medical evidence.

Alternative Provision

Parents and carers are legally responsible for ensuring that their child attends any arranged alternative provision. In this situation, a 'direction' will be issued by the Academy.

The Direction:

- ☐ will be provided to parents in writing and must be given not less than two school days before the start date of the alternative provision
- ☐ will be issued by a member of the Senior Leadership Team
- ☐ must be confirmed to the LA if the student has a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education, Health and Care Plan

The Direction must state:

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

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

Strategies for responding to persistently poor attendance

Excellent attendance leads to excellent achievement and progress. In addition to the strategies already outlined, other possible actions that might be taken are as follows:

- ☐ students whose poor attendance is linked to disaffection should receive prompt attention. Where appropriate, they should be placed on a Behaviour Management Plan
- ☐ students should be referred to the Initial Assessment and Support Team (Children's Social Care) where appropriate, following safeguarding guidelines
- ☐ when appropriate, students should be referred to pastoral support staff and/or the School Nurse for discussions about their attendance
- ☐ the use of Penalty Notices (see information below)

Penalty Notices

These will be considered for:

- ☐ persistent** 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 (please see attached information sheet for further details 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

If attendance difficulties cannot be sorted 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.

Policy reviewed – May 2017

Next review – May 2019

APPENDIX 1
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)

Rationale – Penalty Notices for 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 you 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, 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 Lancashire County Council at the earliest opportunity if you have any worries at all about securing your child's school attendance.