



# Westminster Primary Academy Attendance for Learning Policy



# WESTMINSTER PRIMARY ACADEMY BLACKPOOL

Review: November 2024  
Next review: November 2025

## Philosophy

Westminster Primary 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. Westminster Primary Academy will actively promote and encourage 100 per cent attendance for all our students.

Westminster Primary 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 endeavour 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 Westminster Primary 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 target is for whole school attendance to be at least 96% in 2023 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

Westminster Primary 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, Dojo, voicemail message or email.

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
- Holidays / Leave taken during term time.

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.

Westminster 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 Westminster Primary 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 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 / paper 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 - **PLEASE NOTE** - absence of 93% or under due to illness requires medical evidence to be provided so that this can be authorised in most circumstances.
- promote the role of the Class Teacher in monitoring and rewarding good attendance for students in their class.
- 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 Academy Council
- 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 Academy Council as required.
- 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, 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, **PLEASE NOTE** - absence of 93% or under due to illness requires medical evidence to be provided so that this can be authorised in most circumstances.
- 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 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, gates close at **8.55am**, must enter via the designated entrance and will be recorded as late by staff if later than the start of lessons at **9am**
- 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 9.30am must also provide a reason/bring a note since, after this time, they are classified as absent

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 Headteacher in exceptional circumstances. The Headteacher 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 Education Need 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 Westminster Primary Academy at an early stage and to work with the pastoral support staff, Attendance Officer, Head of Phase, Inclusion Manager 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 PWO 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**

- **Penalty notices issued for offences that take place after 19 August 2024 will be charged at a new rate of £160 per parent per child. This can be paid at £80 if paid within 21 days.**
- **Any second penalty notice issued to the same parent for the same child within a rolling 3-year period will be issued at the rate of £160 to be paid within 28 days with no option for a discounted rate.**
- **The threshold at which a penalty notice must be considered is set at 10 sessions (equivalent to 5 days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10-school week period.**
- **This may include absences as a result of arriving late after the register closes (9.30am).**
- **The 10 school weeks may also span different terms or school years.**
- **A maximum of 2 penalty notices may be issued to a parent for the same child within a rolling 3 year period, so at the 3rd (or subsequent) offence(s) another course of action will need to be considered (such as prosecution).**
- **Only penalty notices issued for absences taking place after 19 August 2024 will count towards the above thresholds.**
- **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, Westminster Primary 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.

Next review –Sept 2025

## **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 initially at £160 however, if paid within 21 days of being issued the cost is £80. Further information above.

#### **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.

Westminster Primary Academy, Attendance Policy



It is expected that in the first instance parents would be reminded of their duties 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.

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 instalments 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, 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.

