

Lark Hall Infant & Nursery Academy & Flax Hill Junior Academy



Attendance Policy

Policy Status and Review

Date:	July 2024
Review Date:	July 2025
Signed by Governor:	Marion Couchman
Date Signed:	11/07/2024

Attendance Policy

The Mercia Primary Academy Trust follows all DFE and Local Authority advice regarding Attendance and any information from them runs in concurrence with the below.

The schools in Mercia Primary Academy trust set a minimum attendance target of 96%

This policy aims to raise the profile of attendance by encouraging and promoting a positive attitude in order that all children can achieve a good rate of attendance throughout their time at school. Promoting positive behaviour and excellent attendance is the responsibility of the whole school community. The school will promote positive behaviour and good attendance through its use of curriculum and learning materials. Good attendance and behaviour by pupils will be recognised appropriately.

All children should be at school, on time, every day the school is open. Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school. Any problems that arise with attendance are best resolved between the school, the parents/carers and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend, it is never better 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. Permitting absence from school without a good reason is an offence by the parent/carer.

The attendance and behaviour policy must include procedural referral agreements that are designed to promote and safeguard the welfare of pupils. Schools have a duty in law to refer any absence of 20 sessions (10 days) or more over a 12-week period where they have been unable to make contact with the parent/carer, their child or have general concerns about the absence. Schools will refer to the Education Welfare Service (Families First) and you may receive a penalty warning notice and also potentially a fine.

Schools are required to take an attendance register twice a day, and this shows whether the pupil is present, engaged in an approved educational activity off-site, or absent. Only school can authorise the absence, not the parent/carer. This is why information about the cause of each absence is always required. Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a good reason like illness or other unavoidable cause. Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no "leave" has been given. This includes:

- Parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily
- Truancy before or during the school day
- Absences which have never been properly explained
- Children who arrive at school too late to receive a mark

Parents/carers whose children are experiencing difficulties should contact the school at an early stage and work together with the staff in resolving any problems. This is nearly always successful. Our Attendance Officer will work with parents/carers to resolve problems which may affect the child's attendance. We may involve representatives of other agencies that work within the school i.e. the School Nurse, the Early Help Team etc. where required in order to ensure all children benefit from consistently good punctuality and attendance. If difficulties cannot be resolved in this way, the school will refer the child to an Education Welfare Worker (Families First), who may issue Penalty Notices or instigate court proceedings.

School Attendance and the Law

Under Section 44 of the Education Act 1996, parents/carers of a child of compulsory school age are under a legal duty to ensure the regular attendance of that child at the school where he/she is a registered pupil. Failure to discharge this duty may result in the LA prosecuting the parents/carers. This policy reflects the most up to date legal powers and duties that govern school attendance in accordance with The Education Act 1996 and subsequent regulations and amendments.

- **Authorised absence** means that the school has given approval in advance for a pupil of compulsory school age to be absent from school.

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- **Unauthorised absence** is where a school is not satisfied with the reasons given for the absence.

Authority to decide whether to authorise an absence can only be given by the Headteacher or a person acting in the absence of the Headteacher. This is to agree that there was a legitimate reason for a child not to be in school.

Illness

Parents/carers are required to notify the school on the first day the child is absent due to illness. The school will record the absence as unauthorised if they are not satisfied of the authenticity of the illness.

Pre-booked Medical or dental appointments

Where appointments are unable to be made out of school hours the pupil should only be out of school for the required time for the appointment. Authorisation of the appointment will be marked with an 'M' where medical evidence is provided. If no medical evidence is provided the child will be marked with a 'U' (Late after registration has closed) or 'O' (an unauthorised absence) if the child does not attend school for the whole session or full day.

Religious observance

The day must be exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the parents belong. Advice is sought from parents' religious body about whether it has set the day apart for religious observance. The Headteacher may request proof that the child will be attending a religious observance.

Leave of absence authorised by the school

Each request will be considered individually taking into account the circumstances, i.e. the nature of the event for which leave is requested; the frequency of the request; whether advance notice has been given by the parent/carer; pupil's attainment, attendance and ability to keep up to date with missed schooling.

Holiday authorised by the school

Leave of absence will not be granted by the Headteacher unless in exceptional circumstances. To make a request the parent must complete a Request for Leave Form, and this must be signed by both parents/legal guardians who hold parental responsibility and anyone who has day to day responsibility for the child. This request must be made in advance. The Headteacher must be satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances to warrant granting the leave of absence. If a leave of absence is approved, the Headteacher will determine the number of days the pupil can be absent from school. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the Headteacher's discretion.

Holiday not authorised by the School or in excess of the period determined by the Headteacher

Where the Headteacher has not authorised a leave of absence for the purpose of a holiday and the parents/carers still take the child out of school or extend the agreed leave of absence, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised in the register and . Regulations do not allow for retrospective approval.

Leave of absence will also be recorded as unauthorised where parents did not apply for leave of absence in advance.

Elective Home Education

If a school receives written notification from parents/carers that they wish to home educate their child then the school will inform the Local Authority of the parents/carers decision to remove their child's name from the admissions register. Whilst school will not seek to prevent parents/carers from choosing to electively home educate their child, neither will they seek to encourage them to do this – particularly as a way of avoiding exclusion or due to a poor attendance record.

Penalty Notice

If your child has 10 sessions (5 days) unauthorised absences or is late 10 times over a 10-week period, you will receive a Penalty Warning Notice, and potentially a fine.

Additionally, after completing a Request for Leave Form regarding holidays, should the schools decide not to grant leave of absence, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence. This may also lead to a Penalty Warning Notice, and potentially a fine.

If a child is still obtaining unauthorised marks and a parent/legal guardian still choose to take their child out of school, this may be subject to a Penalty Notice fine of £80 per parent/legal guardian* per child. This fine will increase to £160 if not paid within 21 days. Failure to pay the £160 fine within the period 22 to 28 days may lead to Court proceedings. Non-payment of a Penalty Notice will result in the withdrawal of a penalty notice and will trigger the fast track prosecution process under the provisions of section 444(1) of the Education act 1996.

*Generally the DfE states that parents include all those with day to day responsibility for a child.

The Code of Conduct

The Education (Penalty Notices) Regulations 2007 set out the details of how the penalty notice scheme must operate. This includes a requirement that every local authority must draw up and publish a Code of Conduct for issuing penalty notices, after consulting all schools, including academies, and the police. The code should set out the criteria that will be used to trigger the use of a penalty notice.

Please see Appendix 1 for Staffordshire Local Authority Code of Conduct for issuing Penalty Notices September 2017. www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education

Dealing with late arrivals

Flax Hill Junior Academy

- The school gates are opened at 8.30 am to allow pupils to go directly to their classroom.
- At 8.40 am the school gate is closed and any pupils arriving after this time will need to enter school using the main school entrance.
- At 8.40 am the register is taken in class by the Teacher and any pupils not in class by 8.50 am will be recorded as 'N' and the school office will contact parents to ascertain the reason for the pupil's absence.
- The parents of pupils arriving after 8.50am will be asked the reason for the lateness which will be recorded on Arbor. If no parent is present, they will be telephoned to ensure they know their child has got to school.
- A late mark will be recorded in the Arbor class register, and this includes the amount of minutes lost in any one session. (Please refer to the SCC Code of Conduct regarding fines issued to parents whose child is persistently late).
- The register will be monitored regularly by the office and reported on to the Headteacher.
- Once a child has accumulated 10 late marks 'U' or unauthorised marks 'O' a fine may be issued.
- Children will be classed as late if they arrive at school between 9.00 am – 9.20 am and this will be recorded as 'L'. The late book will need to be completed in the school foyer with reason for lateness.
- Any child arriving after 9.20 am will be recorded as late after register has closed 'U' (unauthorised mark), this mark affects the child's attendance percentage.
- Registers are taken at 1.15 pm in the class by the Teacher.

Lark Hall Infant & Nursery Academy

- The school gates are opened at 8.50 am to allow pupils to go directly to their classroom.
- At 9.00 am the school gate is closed and any pupils arriving after this time will need to enter school using the main school entrance.
- At 9.00 am the register is taken in class by the Teacher and any pupils not in class by 9.10 am will be recorded as 'N' and the school office will contact parents to ascertain the reason for the pupil's absence.
- The parents of pupils arriving after 9.10am will be asked the reason for the lateness which will be recorded on Arbor.
- A late mark will be recorded in the Arbor class register, this includes the amount of minutes lost in any one session. (Please refer to the SCC Code of Conduct regarding fines issued to parents whose child is persistently late).
- The register will be monitored regularly by the the office and reported on to the Headteacher.
- Once a child has accumulated 10 late marks 'U' or unauthorised marks 'O' a fine may be issued.
- Children will be classed as late if they arrive at school between 9.10 am – 9.40 am and this will be recorded as 'L'. The late book will need to be completed in the school foyer with reason for lateness.
- Any child arriving after 9.40 am will be recorded as late after register has closed 'U' (unauthorised mark) , this mark affects the child's attendance percentage.
- Registers are taken at 12:45 pm in the class by the teacher.

Dealing with unauthorised absence

- Until a legitimate reason is provided, all absence will be recorded as unauthorised.
- Parents/carers are expected to provide a reason for absence by phoning or emailing the school before 9.00 am on the first day of absence.
- In the first instance a text will be sent requesting a reason for absence. If no reply is received from the text message this will be followed up with a phone call for parents/carers to provide reason for absence. .
- If no response is received from the parent to our attempts to contact you, your child will receive an unauthorised absence mark in the register.
- The LA regularly monitors attendance figures.
- Please see SCC Code of Conduct for issuing fines for any unauthorised absence.

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Register Code List

/	Present (AM)
\	Present (PM)
B	Educated off site (not Dual reg)
C	Leave of absence for exceptional circumstance
C1	Leave of absence for the purpose of participating in a regulated performance or undertaking regulated employment abroad.
C2	Leave of absence for a compulsory school age pupil subject to a part-time timetable
D	Dual registration
E	Suspended or permanently excluded and no alternative provision made
G	Holiday not granted by the school
I	Illness (not medical or dental appointment)
J1	Leave of absence for the purpose of attending an interview for employment or for admission to another educational institution
K	Attending education provision arranged by the local authority
L	Late (before registers closed)
M	Medical/Dental appointment
N	No reason yet provided for absence
O	Unauthorised absence
P	Approved sporting activity
Q	Unable to attend the school because of a lack of access arrangements
R	Religious observance
S	Study leave
T	Parent travelling for occupational purposes
U	Late (after registers closed)
V	Educational visit or trip
W	Work experience
X	Non-compulsory school age absence
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances
Y1	Unable to attend due to transport normally provided not being available
Y2	Unable to attend due to widespread disruption to travel
Y3	Unable to attend due to part of the school premises being closed
Y4	Unable to attend due to the whole school site being unexpectedly closed
Y5	Unable to attend as pupil is in criminal justice detention
Y6	Unable to attend in accordance with public health guidance or law
Y7	Unable to attend because of any other unavoidable cause

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Procedures

The school applies the following procedures in deciding how to deal with individual absences:

Where possible we use the child's attendance from last year as our starting point when calculating any child's attendance, especially during the first term of a new academic year.

When an individual pupil's attendance level falls below 90% in any term without good reason, a referral may be made for the parent to meet with the Senior Leadership Team, to discuss any individual issues and how the school can support the improvement in their child's attendance. Termly letters will be sent out to parents/carers whose child's attendance is below 90%. For any pupil who has an attendance percentage of under 90% the school will record any absence as unauthorised.

Following investigation, any unresolved issues may result in a referral to the Early Help Team / Education Welfare Worker. This may result in the parent receiving a Penalty Notice or ultimately a prosecution under the Education Act 1996 Section 444.

Parents/carers are informed by text between 9.30am and 10.00 am if their child is absent from school and no reason has been given. By contacting the parent/carers, both schools hope to ensure that the parent/carer is aware their child is not in school, enabling the parent/carer where necessary to establish their child is safe.

It is the responsibility of the school office with the support of the headteacher to ensure that these policies and procedures contained within this document are followed.

Rewards and incentives for attendance

The classes with winning attendance are mentioned on the weekly newsletters/update video.

At Lark Hall any children who attend school for the full week with no late marks will receive an attendance sticker at the end of the week. Children who attend for a full half term will receive an attendance certificate and children who attend school every day for a full term will receive an extra playtime.

At Flax Hill any children who attend school for the full week with no late marks will receive 2 Class Dojo points. Children who attend for a full half term will receive 10 points and children who attend school every day for a full term will receive an extra playtime.

Each class with a weekly attendance of 96% and above will receive a certificate to display in their classroom.

Summary

The schools have a legal duty to publish its absence figures to parents/carers and to promote attendance. Equally, parents/carers have a duty to make sure that their children attend school. All staff are committed to working with parents/carers to support a high level of attendance throughout both schools.

Appendix

Appendix 1 Staffordshire County Council's Code of Conduct (01.01.2018) – See below link

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Education-welfare/Documents/Code-of-Conduct-From-1.1.2018.pdf>

Appendix 2 Under 90% attendance letter

Appendix 3 Under 80% attendance letter

Appendix 4 Education Act 1996 – School Attendance – See below link

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/contents>

Appendix 5 Request for Leave Form

Appendix 6 Guidance Notes for Parents requesting Leave in Term Time

Appendix 7 Holiday Declined Letter

Appendix 8 Suspected Holiday During Term Time Letter

Appendix 2 – Under 90% Attendance Letter

Under 90% Attendance Letter

Dear <Recipient(s) letter addressee>,

Since the start of the academic year <students first name>'s attendance percentage was <percentage>. This means your child is missing at least one day of school every two weeks.

As <students first name>'s attendance is currently under 90%, they are now categorised as a "Persistent Absence Pupil" by the Local Authority. Any parent whose child gains 10 days (20 sessions) over a 12-week period of unauthorised absences or is late 10 times after register closes, may receive a penalty notice from the Local Education Authority who may then issue a Penalty Notice or Court action.

All children should have an attendance percentage of 96% or above, unless there are exceptional circumstances, this means missing one day every half term. If you require any support to help with this issue, please do not hesitate to contact Michelle Booth our Attendance Officer, who will be happy to assist with any concerns you may have.

Yours Sincerely,

Richard Lane
Headteacher

Appendix 3 – Under 80% Attendance Letter

Under 80% Attendance Letter

Dear <Recipient(s) letter addressee>,

Since the start of the academic year <students first name>'s attendance percentage was <percentage>. This means your child is missing at least one day of school every week.

As <students first name>'s attendance is currently under 90%, they are now categorised as a "Persistent Absence Pupil" by the Local Authority. Any parent whose child gains 10 days (20 sessions) over a 12-week period of unauthorised absences or is late 10 times after register closes, may receive a penalty notice from the Local Education Authority who may then issue a Penalty Notice or Court action.

All children should have an attendance percentage of 96% or above, unless there are exceptional circumstances, this means missing one day every half term. If you require any support to help with this issue, please do not hesitate to contact Michelle Booth our Attendance Officer, who will be happy to assist with any concerns you may have.

Yours Sincerely,

Richard Lane
Headteacher

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Appendix 5 – Request for leave during term time form

Child's Full Name _____ Date _____

Child's Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

I request leave of absence from **school (exceptional circumstances only)** during term time for the period from _____ to _____ (Dates).

Total number of school days requested for leave _____ (Days).

Reason for request for leave during term time. Please include supporting evidence (This section must be answered in full with as much detail as possible and supporting evidence must be provided along with this application). _____

I have other children in different schools:

Childs Full Name _____ School Attending _____

Childs Full Name _____ School Attending _____

Childs Full Name _____ School Attending _____

Any adults with Parental Responsibility must sign this form

Signature of 1st Parent/Guardian _____ Print Name _____

Signature of 2nd Parent/Guardian _____ Print Name _____

Please return completed form to the school office. The school will write to you and inform you of the decision on whether the request is authorised or not. Unauthorised absences of 5 days or more within a 10-week period will incur a penalty fine from the Local Authority.

Office use only

Current Attendance _____ % Last Year's Attendance _____ % **Agreed / Not Agreed**

Signed _____ (Headteacher) Date _____

Notification of decision: Date letter sent to parent/guardian _____

Signed _____ Mr R Lane (Headteacher) Date _____

Appendix 6 - Guidance Notes for Parents requesting Leave of Absence during term time

1. Parents who want the school to consider granting leave of absence in school term time should read these notes carefully, complete the attached form and return it to the school office. This form should be returned to school giving enough time for your request to be considered and well before the desired period of absence. Parents are strongly advised not to finalise any booking arrangements before receiving the school's decision regarding their request. Head teachers are unable to authorise any leave of absence unless the request is received before the period of absence begins.
2. **The Department for Education makes it clear that Head teachers may not grant leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.** Head teachers now also determine the number of school days a child can be away from school if the leave is granted.
3. There is no automatic right to any leave in term time.
4. Mercia Primary Academy Trust understands the challenges that some parents face when booking holidays particularly during school holidays. However, we believe that, in order to ensure children receive the best education and prospects, they should be in school during term time.
5. Where parents have children in more than one school, a separate request must be made to each school. The Head teacher of each school will make their own decision based on the factors relating to the child, their school and their stage of education. However, Head teachers may choose to liaise with each other as part of their decision-making process.
6. Should the school decide to grant leave of absence, but the child does not return to school at the same time they were expected to and no information is available to the school to explain and justify their continuing absence, they will be recorded as unauthorised. The school must be satisfied with any reason justifying the absence, if they are not, then the absence will also be recorded as unauthorised.
7. **Should the school decide not to grant leave of absence and parents still take their child out of school, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised. If your child has 10 sessions (5 days) unauthorised absences over a 10-week period you will receive a Penalty Warning Notice fine from the Local Authority of £80 per parent* per child. This fine will increase to £160 if not paid within 21 days. Failure to pay the £160 fine within the period 22 to 28 days may lead to Court proceedings.**
8. The Local Authority will continue to monitor all school absences during term time and support Head teachers in challenging parents who ignore the law.

*Generally the Department for Education states that parents include those who hold Parental Responsibility for the child and those with day to day responsibility for the child.

Appendix 7 – Holiday Declined Letter

Dear (Both parents should receive individually named letters)

CHILDS NAME / DOB

Thank you for your leave of absence request informing us that CHILD will be absent from school from ABSENCE DATES.

You will be aware that the Department of Education made important changes to the law for families wanting to request leave of absence in term time. The changes made it clear that head teachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. The Local Authority and school governors support this; therefore, students will only be given permission to take leave in term time if there are exceptional circumstances.

I have considered your application very carefully. Although I understand the reason for your request, I am unable to approve leave of absence in this instance, as I believe the circumstances are not exceptional or in line with school policy. **Therefore, your child's absence from school during this period has been recorded as Unauthorised Absence and will be recorded in the attendance register with the "G" code.**

As a school we are obliged to inform you that you may be subject to a Penalty Notice if your child's absence from school is unauthorised. This is in line with Staffordshire County Councils Code of Conduct and the "Working Together to Improve School attendance" statutory guidance (effective 19th August 2024). The penalties for unauthorised leave of absence in term time will be:

For a **First** offence the Penalty Notice fine would be: -

- £80 per parent, per child if paid within 21 days, rising to
- £160 per parent, per child if paid between 21-28 days.

For a **Second** offence within 3-years of the first penalty notice being issued, the penalty notice fine would be:

- £160 per parent, per child if paid between 28 days.

Following the second offence **every new offence within the 3-year period, will be prosecuted** under S444.1 of the Education Act 1996. I must advise you that if the prosecution takes place, the maximum fine is **£1,000 per parent, per child**. This reflects the seriousness of unauthorised absence from school.

Our key priority is to ensure that your child is as successful as possible and can achieve their full potential.

I would hope that upon reflection you are able to support this decision in line with the Local Authority and Government policy, that leave should be planned for the 13 weeks school holidays except in exceptional circumstances.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix 8 – Suspected Holiday During Term Time Letter

Parents address

Dear (both parents should receive an individual copy)

CHILDS NAME / DOB

We have reason to believe that **CHILDS NAME** absences during **DATES** were due to unrequested leave. The reason for this is because: (select which is appropriate or enter your own)

- School CALLED & RECEIVED A FOREIGN DIAL TONE,
- School CALLED YOU & YOU INFORMED US YOU WERE ON HOLIDAY,
- CHILD TOLD TEACHER,
- HOME VISITS COMPLETED NO ANSWER

As a school we want to make every effort to establish the reason for a pupil's absence. Where no reason for absence is provided within 5 school days or the school is not satisfied that the reason given is legitimate the school is required to amend the pupil's attendance to be recorded as unauthorised.

We understand that you may wish to offer an alternative explanation for your child's absence. We will, therefore, allow you 5 school days from the date of this letter to provide evidence to us that supports a legitimate reason for the absence. **If we do not receive appropriate evidence, by this time, then we will continue to code your child's absence as an unauthorised.**

As a school we are obliged to inform you that you may be subject to a Penalty Notice if your child's absence from school is unauthorised. This is in line with Staffordshire County Councils Code of Conduct and the "Working Together to Improve School attendance" statutory guidance (effective 19th August 2024). The penalties for unauthorised leave of absence in term time will be:

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Our key priority is to ensure that your child is as successful as possible and can achieve their full potential.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

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This information can be made available in a range of formats and languages, including Braille and large print. If this would be useful to you or someone you know, please contact your Directorate HR Unit.

A signed copy of this document is available from the school office.

Version Control

Version	Date Approved	Changes	Reasons for Alterations
V2	24.10.2018	No Changes	
V2	12.11.2019	Updated to include Lakeside	
	01.03.2021	Appendix to add additional COVID codes	Covid amendment
	24.03.2021	Added a range of different formats.	Accessibility.
	05.11.2021	Removed Appendix 5 Removed traffic light letters from Appendix 2 and replaced with under 90% letter Amended Rewards and Incentives Changed local support team to early help team	Covid codes no longer in use Traffic light system no longer in use, letter changed to under 90%. Change in rewards procedures
	28.06.2022	Changes made to attendance officer name Changed Appendix 2 Removed Lakeside from policy Changed SIMS to Arbor Changes made to rewards	Change in staffing Change in staffing Adopted their own attendance policy Change in MIS Change in policy

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		Changes made to attendance officer name	
	September 23	<p>Changes to Lark Hall timings</p> <p>Added new appendix</p> <p>Removed all mentions of requiring medical proof for absences</p> <p>MAT Attendance goal changed from 97% to 96%</p> <p>Added in new attendance incentives</p>	<p>To bring in line with Flax Hill</p> <p>Under 80% attendance letter</p> <p>No longer best practice</p> <p>To come in line with schools from local area.</p> <p>Change in rewards procedures</p>
	February 24	Lark Hall timings	Typing error
	June 2024	<p>Change in penalty fee</p> <p>Added new attendance codes/removed codes no longer in use</p> <p>Changes to appendix 5 & 6</p>	<p>Government changes</p> <p>Change in wording due to new government changes</p>
	July 2024	Added appendix 7 & 8 to policy	Letter templates sent out for use by Staffordshire County Council.