



PS02 ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCE POLICY

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1. Introduction

This policy sets out the expectations and procedures for learner attendance and timekeeping and therefore aims to support and contribute to high levels of learner retention and achievement. At Portfield School, we are committed to meeting our obligation with regards to school attendance through our whole-school culture and ethos that values good attendance, including:

- Promoting good attendance
- Reducing absence, including persistent and severe absence
- Ensuring every learner has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled
- Acting early to address patterns of absence
- Building strong relationships with families to ensure learners have the support in place to attend school

We will also promote and support punctuality in attending lessons and recognise that in order for learners to be successful, it is essential that they engage fully with their school lives. This engagement includes:

- Attending all class sessions
- Completing directed, group-based and independent study activities outside of scheduled teaching
- Attending work and community placements
- Undertaking all school-based academic assessments

All staff at Portfield School regularly monitor learner attendance, making use of attendance registers completed by class teachers. Where some learners may face difficulties that hinder their attendance, Portfield School offers a wide range of individual support to re-engage them into education.

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the [working together to improve school attendance](#) from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on [school attendance parental responsibility measures](#). These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:

- Part 6 of [The Education Act 1996](#)
- Part 3 of [The Education Act 2002](#)
- Part 7 of [The Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)
- [The Education \(Learner Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006 \(and 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016 amendments\)](#)
- [The Education \(Penalty Notices\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2013](#)

This policy also refers to the DfE's guidance on the school census, which explains the persistent absence threshold.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 The governing board

The governing board is responsible for:

- Promoting the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos
- Making sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties
- Regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data
- Monitoring attendance figures for the whole school
- Making sure staff receive adequate training on attendance
- Holding the headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy

3.2 The headteacher

The headteacher is responsible for:

- Implementation of this policy at the school
- Monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to governors
- Supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual learners
- Monitoring the impact of any implemented attendance strategies
- Issuing fixed-penalty notices, where necessary

3.3 The designated senior leader responsible for attendance

The designated senior leader is responsible for:

- Leading attendance across the school
- Offering a clear vision for attendance improvement
- Evaluating and monitoring expectations and processes
- Having an oversight of data analysis
- Devising specific strategies to address areas of poor attendance identified through data
- Arranging calls and meetings with parents to discuss attendance issues
- Delivering targeted intervention and support to learners and families

The designated senior leader responsible for attendance is Anna Hewitt and can be contacted via anna.hewitt@autism-unlimited.org

3.4 Class teachers

Class teachers are responsible for recording attendance on a daily basis, using the correct codes, and submitting this information to the school office.

3.6 School administration staff

School administration staff will:

- Take calls from parents [and learners] about absence on a day-to-day basis and record it on the school system
- Transfer calls from parents and learners to the Assistant Headteacher for the relevant phase in order to provide them with more detailed support on attendance

3.7 Parents/carers

Parents/carers are expected to:

- Make sure their child attends every day on time
- Call the school to report their child's absence before 9am on the day of the absence and each subsequent day of absence), and advise when they are expected to return
- Provide the school with more than 1 emergency contact number for their child
- Ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day

3.8 Learners

Learners are expected to:

- Attend school every day on time
- Attend every timetabled session on time
- Where age-appropriate, call the school to report their absence before 9am on the day of the absence and each subsequent day of absence

4. Recording attendance

4.1 Attendance register

The school keeps an attendance register and place all learners onto this register.

Class teachers take an attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark whether every learner is:

- Present
- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Any amendment to the attendance register will include:

- The original entry
- The amended entry
- The reason for the amendment
- The date on which the amendment was made

- › The name and position of the person who made the amendment

Staff will also record:

- › Whether the absence is authorised or not
- › The nature of the activity if a learner is attending an approved educational activity
- › The nature of circumstances where a learner is unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

The school will keep every entry on the attendance register for 3 years after the date on which the entry was made.

Learners must arrive in school by 9:00am on each school day.

The register for the first session will be taken at the start of the morning session and will be kept open for not longer than 30 minutes after the session begins.

5. Unplanned absence

The learner's parent/carer must notify the school of the reason for the absence on the first day of an unplanned absence by 9:00am or as soon as practically possible by calling the school office.

Staff will mark absence due to illness as authorised, unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask the learner's parent/carer to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily.

If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents/carers will be notified of this in advance.

6. Authorised Absence

It is recognised that there are occasions for some learners where absence cannot be avoided and in these cases, learners and/or their families can request for an absence to be authorised. It is expected that these cases will be rare and as such, the frequency of such absences will be monitored by the school's senior staff. The headteacher will only grant a leave of absence to a learner during term time if they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. A leave of absence is granted at the headteacher's discretion, including the length of time the learner is authorised to be absent for.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request.

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and, where possible, at least two weeks before the absence, and in accordance with any leave of absence request form, accessible via the school office. The headteacher will require evidence to support any request for leave of absence.

Valid reasons for **authorised absence** include:

- › Illness and medical/dental appointments
- › Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the learner's parents belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart
- › Traveller learners travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh gypsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) and circus people, bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a traveller family is known to be

travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school, but it is not known whether the learner is attending educational provision

Absences that may be authorised in advance:

Reason	Evidence needed
Observation of a religious holiday	Letter
Funeral	
Occasional care for a person if a learner has a caring responsibility	
Driving test (but not driving lesson)	Letter from Test Centre confirming time and date
Medical appointments which cannot be arranged outside Portfield School hours	Letter Appointment card/letter
Court attendance or interview with probation officer	Appointment card/letter
Severe disruption to normal means of transport, e.g. rail strike	Local/national media

Staff at Portfield School will not authorise absences where there appears to be a pattern of non-attendance and do not expect to authorise absence for any of the reasons below more than three times each term:

- Illness
- Transport problems where there is no other option at short notice (if this happens regularly, the learner must find another means of transport)
- An emergency involving a family member, depending on the situation.

Sickness

If a learner becomes unwell during the school day, they must speak to their class teacher and the school nurse to seek advice before they can be authorised to be collected from the school site.

Absences which cannot be authorised

- Holidays
- Shopping
- Work
- Driving Lessons
- Birthday Celebrations
- Leisure Activities
- Caring for younger family members on a regular basis

7. Lateness and punctuality

A learner who arrives late:

- Before the register has closed will be marked as late, using the appropriate code
- After the register has closed will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code

Any ongoing or persistent lateness will be recorded and followed up with an individual meeting to include the learner, their parent/carers and the class teacher. Where concerns cannot be resolved, a member of the senior team may also be involved.

8. Following up unexplained and/or persistent absence

As a special school, Portfield School recognises that for some learners with autism, regular school attendance can cause challenges and that a 'graduated' approach is required to ensure that individual learners are not penalised for their personal challenges that are directly linked to their learning difficulty and/or disabilities. However, the school defines persistent absence as where a learner misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a learner misses 50% or more of school.

In these cases, the school will:

- Use attendance data to find patterns and trends of persistent and severe absence
- Hold regular meetings with the parents of learners who the school (and/or local authority) considers to be vulnerable, or are persistently or severely absent, to discuss attendance and engagement at school
- Provide access to a wide range of support services to remove the barriers to attendance

Where any learner who is expected to attend school does not attend, or stops attending, without reason, the school will:

- Call the learner's parent/carer on the morning of the first day of unexplained absence to ascertain the reason. If the school cannot reach any of the learner's emergency contacts, school staff will refer to the Designated Safeguarding Lead for escalation and in urgent circumstances, may contact the police.
- Identify whether the absence is approved or not
- Identify the correct attendance code to use and input it as soon as the reason for absence is ascertained – this will be no later than 5 working days after the session
- Call the parent/carer on each day that the absence continues without explanation to ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary. If absence continues, the school will consider involving an education welfare officer

9. Reporting and analysis

The school will regularly inform parents/carers about their child's attendance and absence levels via termly written reports. The school will:

- Monitor attendance and absence data half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual learner level
- Identify whether or not there are particular groups of children whose absences may be a cause for concern

Learner-level absence data will be collected each term and published at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics. The school will compare attendance data to the national average, and share this with the governing board.

Policy Review

Annually.