

Widford Lodge

PREPARATORY SCHOOL



Policy on Attendance

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers and pupils in the school, including in the EYFS

Reviewed and approved by Proprietor September 2024
Next Review September 2025

Widford Lodge School is committed to working with parents to support their children's attendance at school and recognises that positive behaviour and good attendance are essential for pupils to make the most of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing and wider life chances. We are required to have our attendance records available for inspection and to pass these on to pupils' next schools and we aim to act in collaboration with parents to facilitate the highest possible levels of attendance and benefit to our pupils. We report attendance data annually to parents in the end of year pupil reports.

This policy is written with the Department for Education's (DfE) statutory guidance "Working together to improve school attendance 2024" in mind and in line with our school aims to educate our pupils through a broad and balanced curriculum so that they can meet the challenges of the wider world, in a purposeful, safe and secure environment and with an emphasis on honesty, courtesy and respect.

Sam Pawsey, the Deputy Head Pastoral and Designated Safeguarding Lead, is our Attendance Champion. Her email address is spawsey@widfordlodge.co.uk

We are required to follow the DfE's statutory safeguarding guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education, which emphasises the importance of understanding the potential vulnerabilities of children who are missing or absent from education.

We aim to raise and maintain levels of attendance by:

- Promoting a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which pupils feel safe, secure and valued;
- Raising and maintaining a whole school awareness of the importance of good attendance and punctuality;
- Ensuring that attendance is monitored effectively and reasons for absences are recorded promptly and consistently.

For our children to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend regularly and be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. Only the Headteacher can authorise a pupil's absence.

Helping to create a pattern of regular attendance is the responsibility of parents, pupils and all members of school staff. We will provide parents with details of our attendance policy in our information meetings in September 2024 and regularly in newsletters. We will discuss punctuality and attendance concerns in our staff meetings and will contact parents where their child's punctuality or attendance reaches our thresholds as detailed below.

Understanding Types of Absence

Any absence affects the routine of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning journey and ability to progress. Any pupil's absence or late arrival disrupts teaching routines and so may affect the learning of others in the same class. Ensuring a child's regular attendance at school is a parental responsibility and allowing absence from school, without a good reason, creates an offence in law and may result in prosecution.

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school (not by the parent), as either **authorised** or **unauthorised**. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required. Each half-day is known as a 'session'.

Authorised absences are morning or afternoon sessions away from school for a genuine reason such as illness (although you may be asked to provide medical evidence for your child before this can be authorised), medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other unavoidable cause. We may ask for medical evidence where pupils are absent for three or more consecutive days.

All requests for absence, including those for medical appointments, visits to new schools etc should be made in advance via the form available from the school website or the office. The Headteacher reviews all such requests, with attendance levels being a contributory factor, and the outcome is communicated to parents.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no leave has been granted. This type of absence can lead to the school referring to the Local Authority for penalty notices and/or legal proceedings. Unauthorised absence includes: non-infectious illness or injury that would not affect pupils' ability to learn; absences which have never been properly explained; children who arrive at school after the close of registration are marked using a 'U'. This indicates that they are in school for safeguarding purposes, however is counted as an absence for the session; birthdays; holidays or day trips taken during term time, not deemed 'for exceptional purposes' by the Headteacher. See guidance in Appendix B regarding childhood illnesses and the need for absence from school.

Persistent Absenteeism

A pupil is defined by the Government as a '**persistent absentee**' when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year for any reason; this can be authorised or unauthorised absence. Absence at this level will cause considerable damage to any pupil's education and we need the full support and co-operation of parents to resolve this. All pupils who have attendance levels of 90% or below are considered to be a persistent absentee.

We monitor pupils' attendance rates formally each half term and will make contact with parents where pupils are in the low 90% range. We may contact parents in between this formal review where we are aware of absences or late attendance, to offer support.

Where attendance falls below 90% we will arrange to meet with parents if this hasn't already happened. Where pupils' attendance falls below 85% we will liaise with the Council's Attendance Compliance team and may issue a legal action warning letter, with legal action being a last resort.

Absence Procedures

We monitor and review all pupils' absence, and the reasons that are given, thoroughly.

Our registers open at 8.40am, the morning bell is rung and the gate is closed. Registers close at 9am. Any child arriving after the gate has closed must report to the office and will be marked as late before registers closed between 8.40-9am and late after registers close after 9am, with the latter counting as unauthorised absence. Regular lateness will be followed up with parents as it can be unsettling for the child.

If your child has an unplanned absence from school, please telephone the office between 8am and 8.30am to speak to a member of staff, giving the reason for the absence. Alternatively you can email the office on admin@widfordlodge.co.uk before 8.30am. Please see our "Missing Child and Child not Collected" policy for details of the action we take where we have not had any communication from a parent regarding the unplanned absence of a pupil, which includes us contacting all emergency contact numbers and possibly making a home visit or contacting Social Care/the police if we cannot make contact.

Unless the absence on the first day is known to be more than one day, eg for sickness/chicken pox, parents should contact the school office on every further day of absence before 8.30am.

Understanding barriers to attendance

Whilst any child may occasionally have time off school because they are too unwell to attend, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any barriers preventing regular attendance are best resolved between the school, the parents and the child. If a parent thinks their child is reluctant to attend school, then we will work with that family to understand the root problem and provide any necessary support, including using outside agencies as appropriate.

Some pupils face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. These can include pupils who suffer from long-term medical conditions or who have special educational needs and disabilities, or other vulnerabilities. High expectations of attendance remain in place for these pupils, however we will work with families and pupils to support improved attendance whilst being mindful of the additional barriers faced. We can discuss reasonable adjustments and additional support from external partners, where appropriate.

There is no entitlement in law for pupils to take time off during the term to go on holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure or recreation, or to take part in protest activity in school hours. In addition, the Supreme Court has ruled that the definition of regular school attendance is "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school."

The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 set out the statutory requirements for schools. All references to family holidays and extended leave have been removed. The amendments specify that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are "exceptional circumstances" and they do not have any discretion to authorise up to ten days of absence each academic year.

Annex A: DfE guidance Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance. From 19th August 2024

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65e8ae343649a2001aed63aa/Summary_table_of_responsibilities_for_school_attendance_applies_from_19_August_2024_.pdf

All pupils

Parents are expected to:	Schools are expected to:	Academy trustees and governing bodies are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:
<p>Ensure their child attends every day the school is open except when a statutory reason applies.</p> <p>Notify the school as soon as possible when their child has to be unexpectedly absent (e.g. sickness).</p> <p>Only request leave of absence in exceptional circumstances and do so in advance.</p> <p>Book any medical appointments around the school day where possible.</p>	<p>Have a clear school attendance policy on the school website which all staff, pupils and parents understand.</p> <p>Develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of good attendance.</p> <p>Accurately complete admission and attendance registers.</p> <p>Have robust daily processes to follow up absence.</p> <p>Regularly monitor data to identify patterns and trends and understand which pupils and pupil cohorts to focus on.</p> <p>Have a dedicated senior leader with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance.</p>	<p>Take an active role in attendance improvement, support their school(s) to prioritise attendance, and work together with leaders to set whole school cultures.</p> <p>Ensure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties.</p> <p>Use data to understand patterns of attendance, compare with other local schools, identify areas of progress and where greater focus is needed.</p> <p>Ensure school staff receive training on attendance.</p>	<p>Have a strategic approach to improving attendance for the whole area and make it a key focus of all frontline council services.</p> <p>Have a School Attendance Support Team that works with all schools in their area to remove area-wide barriers to attendance.</p> <p>Provide each school with a named point of contact in the School Attendance Support Team who can support with queries and advice.</p> <p>Offer opportunities for all schools in the area to share effective practice.</p>

Pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent

Parents are expected to:	Schools are expected to:	Academy trustees and governing bodies are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:
<p>Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance.</p> <p>Proactively engage with the support offered to prevent the need for more formal support.</p>	<p>Proactively use data to identify pupils at risk of persistent absence.</p> <p>Work with each identified pupil and their parents to understand and address the reasons for absence, including any in-school barriers to attendance.</p> <p>Where out of school barriers are identified, signpost and support access to any required services in the first instance and act as lead practitioner if attendance is the only issue and/or the local threshold for formal early help is not met.</p> <p>If the issue persists, take an active part in the multi-agency effort with the local authority and other partners. If a case meets the local threshold for formal early help/family support, this includes conducting the early help assessment and acting as the lead practitioner where all partners agree that the school is the best placed lead service. Where the lead practitioner is outside of the school, continue to work with the local authority and partners.</p>	<p>Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.</p>	<p>Hold a regular conversation with every school to identify, discuss and signpost or provide access to services for pupils who are persistently or severely absent or at risk of becoming so.</p> <p>Where there are out of school barriers, provide each identified pupil and their family with access to services they need in the first instance.</p> <p>If the issue persists, and there are multiple needs consider whether the threshold for early help is met and facilitate access where it is. Regardless, take an active part in the multi-agency effort with the school and other partners. Provide the lead practitioner in cases where threshold is met and all partners agree that a local authority service is best placed to lead. Where the lead practitioner is outside of the local authority, continue to work with the school and partners.</p>

Persistently absent pupils

Parents are expected to:	Schools are expected to:	Academy trustees and governing bodies are expected to:	Local authorities are expected to:
<p>Work with the school and local authority to help them understand their child's barriers to attendance.</p> <p>Proactively engage with the formal support offered – including any parenting contract or voluntary early help plan to prevent the need for legal intervention.</p>	<p>Continue support as for pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent and:</p> <p>Where absence becomes persistent, put additional targeted support in place to remove any barriers. Where necessary this includes working with partners.</p> <p>Where there is a lack of engagement, hold more formal conversations with parents and be clear about the potential need for legal intervention in future.</p> <p>Where support is not working, being engaged with or appropriate, work with the local authority on legal intervention.</p> <p>Where there are safeguarding concerns, intensify support through a referral to statutory children's social care.</p> <p>Work with other schools in the local area, such as schools previously attended and the schools of any siblings.</p>	<p>Regularly review attendance data and help school leaders focus support on the pupils who need it.</p>	<p>Continue support as for pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent and:</p> <p>Work jointly with the school to provide formal support options including attendance contracts and education supervision orders.</p> <p>Where there are safeguarding concerns, ensure joint working between the school, children's social care services and other statutory safeguarding partners.</p> <p>Where support is not working, being engaged with or appropriate, enforce attendance through legal intervention (including prosecution as a last resort).</p>

Annex B – Illness Absence Guidance

<https://seureschools.essex.gov.uk/DisplayDocument.aspx?DocID=276>

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/626669cb8fa8f523b7221b98/UKHSA-should-I-keep-my-child-off-school-guidance-A3-poster.pdf>

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