

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Review Body:	Development & Admissions
Leadership Group Responsibility:	Assistant Headteacher
Type of Policy:	Statutory
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Definitions

AAP - Attendance Advisory Service

Medway Council

SIMs - School Information Management System

DfE - Department for Education

CME – Children Missing Education

N.B. The term ‘parent’ should also be taken to mean the person with day-to-day care and responsibility of the child.

Section 1: Rationale

Introduction

This Policy represents our commitment to striving for 100% attendance, which is achievable, and achieved by many children. It sets out the principles, procedures and practice the Rainham Mark Education Trust (RMET) will undertake. Strategies, sanctions and possible legal consequences of poor Attendance and Punctuality are also detailed, as well as rewards for, and benefits of good attendance. This policy will be reviewed, amended as necessary and published annually in accordance with current legislation and guidance. The DfE guidance school attendance (2014), states schools should promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence, ensure every child has access to full-time education and act early to address patterns of absence.

Principles

- Receiving a full-time, suitable education is a child’s legal entitlement.
- It is a parent’s /carer’s legal responsibility to ensure this happens.
- Attending school regularly aids intellectual, social and emotional development and is essential if children are to benefit fully from their school life.
- Attending school regularly safeguards the welfare of children whilst they are not in the care of their parents.
- All children whose attendance is poor will be treated as vulnerable.

These principles are enshrined in British law, within the Education Act 1996, the Children Act 1989, and other associated pieces of legislation.

Aims of the Policy

- To ensure that all children attend school regularly and punctually, in order to maximise their educational achievement and social development. Statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and absence below 96%.
- To discharge the RMET duty to safeguard its pupils to the best of its ability.
- To ensure that all those responsible for children’s education, including parents, carers, staff and governors understand and accept their responsibilities in relation to attendance.
- To minimise absence from school, thereby reducing levels of persistent absence.

- To improve the life chances of the children attending The RMET and prepare them to be fully contributing citizens when they reach adulthood. Regular attenders are more successful in transferring between primary school, secondary school, higher education and employment or training.

Policy objectives:

- To safeguard the welfare, health, social and emotional development of children
- To reduce persistent absence
- To reduce or eliminate term time holidays/leave of absence
- To promote commitment to education and high achievement
- To maximise the potential of every individual pupil
- Ensure robust systems are in place to monitor and manage attendance and punctuality throughout the RMET

Section 2: Operating the Policy

Promoting Attendance

The RMET will use all possible opportunities to promote the importance of good attendance and punctuality. These will include the home/school agreement, newsletters, and incentives for good or significantly improving attendance. The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents and the child.

The RMET will:

- Provide and promote a welcoming and positive atmosphere so that children feel safe, and know that their presence is valued.
- Raise awareness of the importance of full attendance and punctuality, using newsletters and other communications to parents; making attendance a high priority.
- Employ a key member of staff with responsibility for monitoring, improving and evaluating school attendance. At The RMET, this role is fulfilled by the Attendance Administrator. Encourage parents to fully support the policy as a vital contribution towards their child's education. All new parents are introduced to the Policy and information on attendance in the RMET Planner. It is also accessible on the RMET website.
- Encourage the children to have a positive attitude towards attendance and punctuality so that they can retain this into adult life.
- Celebrate good attendance by rewarding students in line with the schools reward system.
- Ensure that attendance is effectively monitored, using SIMs registration system, and absences are followed up promptly.
- Communicate effectively with other agencies (AAP, Medway Council, School Health, Traveller Education, Social Services etc).
- Meet the legal requirements with the use of correct codes for absence, with particular reference to authorised and unauthorised absence.
- Ensure that all staff comply with the school policy and deal consistently with absence and punctuality.
- Ensure attendance information is available for Governors and parents.
- Share good practice with other schools.

- Have procedures in place to help children settle in after a long absence. It is important that on return from an unavoidable absence all pupils are made to feel welcome. This should include ensuring that the pupil is helped to catch up on missed work and brought up to date with any information that has been passed to the other pupils. The RMET will support students with a phased return after a long absence.
- Make every effort to meet the individual needs of the pupils with SEND

We expect the parent to:

- Provide up to date contact numbers and changes of address.
- Notify the RMET when their child is unable to attend, with a reason, on the first day of the absence.
- Telephone the RMET after the first day of absence to advise the RMET if the absence is continuing.
- Keep the RMET well informed, in cases of lengthy absence. Parents/carers will be encouraged to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a child's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence will always rest with the RMET.
- Provide medical evidence indicating attendance at the dentist, doctor or optician before the arranged appointment unless an emergency situation has arisen. Whenever possible all appointments should be made outside of school hours.
- Ensure that their child arrives at school on time each day.
- Let the RMET know if their child is going to be late, e.g. if a car breaks down; if an urgent appointment has been made.
- Understand the importance of good attendance and punctuality and promote this with their child, aiming for 100% attendance each year.
- Provide written explanations of any absence and medical evidence for whole day appointments as well as medical evidence for persistent absence from school due to alleged illness (see 3.1).
- Only request leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance.

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carer's legal responsibility (Section 444 of the 1996 Education Act) and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

We expect students to:

- Attend every day unless they are ill or have an authorised absence.
- Arrive in school on time.
- Go to all their registrations and lessons on time.
- For Secondary Age students: Take responsibility for registering at the RMET's reception if they are late or are leaving the school site during school hours.

Section 3: Recording attendance

Understanding types of absence coding

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the RMET as AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required, preferably in writing. Medical evidence may also be required in the form of a copy of a prescription, GP note, etc. Types of absence that are likely to be authorised are illness, medical or dental appointments that unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies.

Examples of types of absence that are **not** considered reasonable and which will **not** be authorised under any circumstances are:

- Going shopping with parents, Birthdays
- Minding other younger children in the family
- Staying at home because other members in the family are unwell
- Day trips and holidays in term time unless there are exceptional circumstances that have been approved by the Headteacher/Principal
- Arriving at school too late to get a present mark (After the close of registration)
- Truancy
- Death of a pet

A school can, if needed, change an authorised absence to an unauthorised absence and vice versa, if new information is presented. Any changes will be communicated to parents/carers. An example of this would be where a parent states a child is unwell but on return to school, there is evidence they have been on holiday.

RMET PROCEDURES:

Registration and punctuality procedures

Legally the register must be taken twice a day, once at the start of the school day and once during the afternoon session. The registers will remain open for 20 minutes. Pupils arriving before the end of the Registration period will be coded L (Late before registers close) which is a present mark. Pupils arriving after the registers have closed will be coded U (Late after registers close) which counts as an unauthorised absence for the whole morning session. See Appendices for each school in the Trust

Only the Headteacher/Principal can authorise absence. If there is no known reason for the absence at registration, then the absence will be recorded as unauthorised, until a satisfactory reason is provided. If the reason given is not satisfactory in the RMET's view, and/or evidence of the reason cannot be provided, the absence will be coded as O (Unauthorised absent). It is reasonable for members of staff to ask questions regarding a child's attendance and punctuality and when appropriate, request evidence to support the reason for absence from school.

Pupils who are consistently late are disrupting not only their own education but also that of the other pupils. Ongoing and repeated lateness after the close of registration is considered as **unauthorised absence and may be subject to legal action.**

If a pupil's attendance falls below the expected target of 96%, parents will be contacted regarding their child's school attendance.

First Day Absence Contact

Parents are expected to notify the RMET if their child is unable to attend for any unavoidable reason, such as illness. Parents are requested to inform the RMET before 9:00 am if their child is too unwell to attend school. If the RMET does not receive notification, it will telephone on the first day of absence, to try to ascertain the reason. First day contact will be carried out as early as possible in the school day, in order to notify parents whose children may have set off for school, but not arrived, as quickly as possible. If the child is still too unwell to attend the

following day, parents will need to telephone the school again before 9:00 am to inform of them of this 2nd day of absence. If a child is absent for longer than 3 days due to ill health, medical evidence will need to be provided in order that the RMET can authorised the absence. On return to school, the parent must put in writing the reason for absence in addition to telephoning the RMET on the days of absence.

Continuing Absence Procedures

If after 3 days of absence, your child has not been seen and contact has not been made with the RMET, we will make all reasonable enquiries to establish contact with parents/carers and the child, including making enquiries to known friends and wider family. In the event of an absence of three or more days without contact from the family, a home visit will be made, either by the Attendance Improvement Manager or Safeguarding Officer, or other local authority professional, to ascertain the safety and well-being of the child and in addition to the reason for absence from school.

Ten days' absence

We have a legal duty to report the absence of any pupil who is absent without an explanation for 10 consecutive days. If the child is not seen and contact has not been established with the named parent/carer then the local authority is notified that the child is at risk of missing from education (CME). The Attendance Advisory Service staff will visit the last known address and alert key services to locate the child. So help us to help you and your child by making sure we always have an up-to-date contact number. There will be regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

Frequent/Persistent Absence Procedures

Regular monitoring of the registers will be made by the Attendance Manager, to identify pupils with a pattern of absences that may lead to Persistent Absence (PA). The Attendance Manager will be responsible for putting in place actions for each pupil of concern. Initially the RMET will try to resolve the problem with parents/carers and this may involve requesting medical evidence in order for the school to authorise any further absence due to ill health and/or an Attendance clinic with the Attendance Manager and the Trust Lead for Safeguarding and Attendance, however, if the pattern continues the RMET will make a referral to the Local Authority.

Parents/Carers of children whose attendance drops to below 96%, will receive a percentage information letter. In the event that there is then further absence from school, a letter to parents will now request that medical evidence is provided by the parent to enable the RMET to authorise any further absences due to ill health. Further unauthorised absence will result in a parental meeting to allow a plan of support to encourage regular attendance. Further unauthorised absence can result in a referral to the Local Authority for consideration of a Fixed Penalty Notice/Court action.

Reluctant attenders/school refusal

You should do everything possible to encourage your child to attend. However, if the reason for their reluctance appears to be school-based, such as difficulty with work, or bullying, please discuss this with the RMET at the earliest opportunity and the RMET will do everything possible to resolve. Colluding with your child's reluctance to attend is likely to make the matter worse.

School refusal/school phobia is a psychological condition that usually has been medically diagnosed. Other arrangements may be put in place for a child with genuine school phobia.

Consequences of Poor Attendance /Punctuality

For pupils whose attendance and/or punctuality fails to improve, after a range of interventions and support measures have been tried by the RMET, the ultimate consequences may be one of the following:

- 1) The Parents/Carers may be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice, which carries a fine of £60, per parent, per child. If the fine is not paid within 20 days, it rises to £120 per parent, per child. If not paid at all, court action will be initiated.
- 2) The Local authority may initiate court action under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, which could lead to fines of up to £2,500, or even imprisonment.
- 3) In some cases, action may be taken under the Children Act 1989 to protect the welfare and development of the child.

Leavers and children who cease to attend without prior notice (CME) procedures

Parents must inform the RMET in writing if they are planning to remove their child from The School/ Academy. This must include the details of the new school the child is planning to attend or that they are exercising their right to educate their child otherwise (home educated). All Education Otherwise information will be passed into the Inclusions Team at Medway Council, who are responsible for monitoring all children who are educated otherwise. If after ten day's continuous absence the school has been unable to ascertain the whereabouts of a pupil, they will refer the child's details to the Local Authority, in order to perform further checks that are not available to school.

Non-starters

Pupils who are allocated places but fail to start are also treated as CME. If the RMET has been unable to make contact with the family during a ten-day period after their expected arrival, they will refer the pupils to the Local Authority for further checks.

Vulnerable Children

Children who are Looked After (LAC), subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP) or Children in Need (CIN) will be treated with highest priority and will be known to the Attendance Manager. Any unexplained absence will be followed up immediately by a telephone call to the home. Any outside professionals who are also working with the children and family will also be notified of the absence (Social worker, AAP etc). Children with Special Educational Needs (SEND) will be treated with similar priority in order that their time in school can be maximised, and their learning supported to the greatest extent possible.

USEFUL INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

For this to be a successful school, you and your child play a part in making it so. We aim to encourage all members of the school community to reach out for excellence. For children to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend regularly, and your child should be at school in good time for the start of the school day, every day the school is open, unless they are genuinely ill or there is some other unavoidable reason.

Some children are reluctant to go to school and say they do not feel well. It is for you as the adult, to judge whether they are genuinely unwell, or just unwilling. It will be better for them in the long run to go to school rather than avoid it, as days off mean they will fall further behind and make them even more reluctant. Your job as the parent is to encourage them to attend.

Medical evidence may be any of the following:

- Hospital discharge letter
- Note from your GP
- Copy of your appointment card from your GP

Copy of the prescription or copy of the medication label

Note from a pharmacist

Note from any other health care professional (e.g. physiotherapist, optician, podiatrist etc).

My child is trying to avoid coming to school. What should I do?

Contact the Attendance Manager immediately and openly discuss your worries. Your child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with schoolwork, bullying, friendship problems, family difficulties. It is important that we identify the reason for your child's reluctance to attend school and work together to tackle the problem. In some cases, you may find it helpful to discuss the circumstances of your child's difficulties with another professional.

What can I do to encourage my child to attend school?

Make sure your child gets enough sleep and gets up in plenty of time each morning. Ensure that he/she leaves home in the correct clothes and properly equipped. Show your child, by your interest, that you value his/her education. If child brings home a school diary each evening, please ensure you look at it with your child and sign it ready for the next day. Be interested in what your child is doing in school, chat to them about the things they have learnt, what friends they have made and even what they had for lunch!

EARLY HELP and COMMON ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (CAF)

Early identification of needs and support required can prevent concerns escalating. Early help plans should have focused outcomes for children and families, and should be actively planned with them. Plans should deliver evidence based interventions using single agency or common assessment frameworks, and clear thresholds for specific agency intervention e.g. Social care, housing, mental health services. We see how early help can transform a child in school, not just what they are able to achieve academically, but how their personal, social and emotional development can thrive with the right support. We are committed to early help because it is the right thing to do for our children to give them the best start in life.

For infant and primary schools:

For many parents, your child attending school may be your first experience of being separated from them. This can seem daunting at first for both of you, but consistency and a caring, supportive home and school life will make the transition a quick and easy experience for you both.

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is YOUR legal responsibility and permitting absence without good reason is an offence in law and may result in legal action being taken, or a Penalty Notice being issued.

Any absence affects the child's learning, and the more they miss the harder it will be for them to catch up. Research has shown that for every percentage point of absence, attainment is significantly lower.

There is extensive research linking poor school attendance and exclusion with crime and anti-social behaviour, and risk of exploitation by unsuitable adults. For this reason, failure to attend regularly will be regarded as a safeguarding issue.

Understanding absence percentages:

You may wonder why a school would be concerned if your child's attendance is 95%. This may make it easier to understand:

95% equates to half a day off every two weeks

90% equates to a day off every two weeks

85% equates to one and a half days off every two weeks

80% equates to one whole day off every week

A secondary age child whose attendance is 80% will have missed ONE WHOLE YEAR of education by the time they leave school

Even the brightest and most enthusiastic learner will find it hard to keep up with their work with these levels of absence. That is why we encourage the highest attendance possible.

Persistent Absence

A pupil is classed as a persistent absentee when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year, **for whatever reason, whether it be authorised or unauthorised, or a mixture of both**. Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to a child's educational prospects and we need parents' full support and encouragement to tackle it. PA pupils are tracked and monitored carefully through our pastoral system, and we combine this with tracking academic progress to assess the effect on the pupil's attainment. If your child misses 10% (three weeks/sessions) or more schooling across the school year, for whatever reason, they are defined as persistent absentees. Absence for whatever reason disadvantages a child by creating gaps in his or her learning.

Reporting your child's absence

If your child is absent, you must:

- Contact the RMET as early as possible, but before 9.00 am, on the first day of absence, either by telephone or in person, and
- Send a note in on the first day they return with an explanation of the absence

Applications for leave of absence in term time (includes Holidays in term time)

All pupils are encouraged to attend school every day of the 190 days that school is open. The register is called twice daily and pupils are expected to be present for the 380 sessions, or half days. That leaves 175 days for family holidays, shopping trips and other needs.

Parents of a child performer can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in a performance. They must contact the Headteacher/Principal to discuss the nature and frequency of the work, whether the child has a valid performance licence and whether education will be provided by the employer during any future leave of absence. It is, however, down to the Headteacher/Principal's discretion as to whether to authorise this and they will wish to discuss with you the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning will continue if absence occurs.

Parents of able sportsmen and women can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in regional, county, national and international events and competitions. It is, however, down to the Headteacher/Principal's discretion as to whether to authorise this and they will wish to discuss with you the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning will continue if absence occurs. Permission for your child to leave early or arrive late to attend coaching and training sessions is also at the discretion of the Head teacher/Principal and is not likely to be approved if it is a regular event, unless the sports club or association is providing an education tutor as part of their coaching.

As a school we prioritise teaching and learning, therefore, in accordance with the local and National guidelines, the RMET does not authorise holidays during term time.

Permission, however, may be granted only in exceptional circumstances, when the benefit of the absence far outweighs the benefit of school attendance. A request for such absence should be made in writing to the Headteacher/Principal. When requesting leave of absence during term time may you be reminded that 10 days of absence equates to 20 sessions missed schooling, which is equivalent to 5.2% of absence.

Please note: any child who has taken a term time holiday will be required to provide medical evidence for any further absences during the remainder of the academic year. Any absences due to ill health either directly before or after a school holiday will need to provide medical evidence in order for the school to authorise the absence.

NOTES:

- The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 has made it possible that certain cases of unauthorised absence can be dealt with by way of a penalty notice. These penalty notices will require the recipient to pay a fine, currently £60.00 if paid within 21 days or £120.00 if paid within 28 days.
- A penalty notice will be issued to each parent/ carer that resides with the child.
- Non-payment of these fines will result in application to Criminal Court.
- If a Parent/Carer requests for a term holiday is refused, but the holiday taken, it will be classified as unauthorised absence and may be subject to a penalty notice being served to each parent/ carer that resides with the child by Medway's Attendance Advisory Service for Schools and School/RMET (AASSA)
- A formal application must be made in writing, IN ADVANCE and returned to the Attendance Manager.
- Permission sought after a holiday has been taken will not be granted.
- If the parent/carer removes a student from their education for the purpose of a suspected holiday without advising the school this will be referred to the Attendance Advisory Practitioner (AAP). On the third day of absence a letter will be sent requesting that the parent/ carer contacts the school within 2 days to confirm the reason for absence. No response will assume to be a holiday absence and penalty notice(s) may be issued.

The RMET policy is not to authorise holidays during term time. Any applications for leave in term time must be made in writing to the Headteacher/Principal. There is no automatic right to term time leave of absence, and your request is likely to be declined except in the most exceptional circumstances. Each application will be considered on its own merit, and the attendance record(s) of the children concerned will be taken into account when making a decision.

Penalty Notices

Penalty Notices can now be issued for a range of attendance-related offences, including unauthorised term-time holidays, poor attendance and poor punctuality, a child coming to the attention of the police in school time, or located twice or more in truancy sweeps in six months.

Your contact details

Please make sure that the contact details you have given to the school are kept up to date, so that in the event of an accident, emergency or any other need to contact you we have the correct details.

Record preservation

School registers are legal documents. We will ensure compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for at least three years. Computer registers will be preserved as electronic back-ups or microfiche copies (if schools are not SIMS centrally hosted and do not have secure electronic server back-up they must print hard copies of the official registers and bind into annual volumes).

For national guidance, refer to: Parental responsibility measures for behaviour and attendance, which covers legal measures for non-attendance: www.gov.uk/government/publications/parental-responsibility-measures-for-behaviour-and-attendance.

96% - 100%

Celebrate good attendance

85% - 95%

Cause for concern, track any relevant patterns, request medical evidence, meeting with parents/carers, consideration for AAP and/or other outside agencies, attendance contract, offer CAF for relevant other agency support. In school support and resources. Early Help Assessment.

Below 85%

Possible statutory action/court warning/penalty notice through AASSA

Home visit if no contact over three days, consideration for consultation with social care. Ensure pupil is seen and listened to.

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states that the 'parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient full time education suitable to his/her age, ability and aptitude, and to any special educational needs he/she may have, either by regular attendance at school, or otherwise.'

Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities and governing bodies to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State with regard to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and students under the age of 18. The Children Act 1989 provides for a number of actions that can be taken to protect children's safety and welfare, on the premise that the welfare of the child is paramount.

Appendix A – Rainham Mark Grammar School

Registration and punctuality procedures

- Legally the register must be taken twice a day: once at the start of the school day and once during the afternoon session.
- The registers will remain open for 25 minutes at AM registration.
- AM registration is from 8.35am-8.45am and PM registration is from 1.35pm-1.40pm.
- Students arriving after in school after 8.35am but before 8.45am should go straight to their form room where their form tutor will mark them with an L code meaning late before registration closed. This counts as a present mark.
- Students who arrive after 8.45am but before 9.00am must sign in at main school office and will be coded L. This counts as a present mark.
- Students arriving after 9.00am must sign in at the main school office where they will be coded “U” meaning late after registers closed. This counts as an unauthorised absence for the morning session.
- The school will use its behaviour system to deal with persistent lateness to registration.

Appendix B – Riverside Primary School

Registration and punctuality procedures

- Legally the register must be taken twice a day: once at the start of the school day and once during afternoon registration.
- The registers will remain open for 30 minutes at morning registration.
- The school gates open at 8.45am. Morning registration is from 8.55am-9.25am and afternoon registration is between 1.15pm and 1.20pm.
- Pupils arriving in school after 8.55am must sign in at the school office and will be recorded as “L” meaning late. This counts as a present mark.
- Pupils who arrive after 9.25am must sign at the school office and will be recorded as a “U” meaning late after registers closed. This counts as an unauthorised absence.
- Unauthorised absences and a failure to improve may lead to the Attendance Advisory Service to Schools & Academies issuing a fixed penalty notice per “Consequences of Poor Attendance/Punctuality” on page 6 of this policy.

Appendix C – Twydall Primary School

Registration and punctuality procedures

- Legally the register must be taken twice a day: once at the start of the school day and once during the afternoon session.
- The registers will remain open for 20 minutes at AM registration.
- AM registration is from 8.45-9.00 and PM registration is from 1.05pm-1.10 pm.
- KS2 pupils arriving in school after 8.50 am but before 9.00 am should go straight to their form room where their home teacher will mark them with an L code meaning late before registration closed. This counts as a present mark.
- KS1 pupils who arrive after 8.50 am but before 9.00am must sign in at main school office and will be coded L. This counts as a present mark.
- Pupils arriving after 9.00 am must sign in at the main school office.
- Pupils arriving after 9.20 Upper School or 9.25 Lower School will be coded “U” meaning late after registers closed. This counts as an unauthorised absence for the morning session.
- The school uses the APP service from Medway to monitor absence and punctuality. Regular letters are sent out for U codes and unauthorised absence. After 10 sessions of authorised absence the AAP requires the child to be put on medical evidence.
- All holiday requests must be authorised by the Head teacher and will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.