

# **RMET ATTENDANCE POLICY**

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## Definitions

AASSA - Attendance Advisory Service to Schools and Academies (Formerly EWS) 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 students 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 ensure readiness for future employment/training by establishing high expectations around attendance. 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 student
- Ensure robust systems are in place to monitor and manage attendance and punctuality throughout the RMET

## Section 2: Operating the Policy

### Promoting Attendance

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.

#### 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.
- Deploy key member/s of staff in each school, with responsibility for monitoring, improving and evaluating school attendance.
- 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 via parental communications and within each school 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 each school's reward system.
- Ensure that attendance is effectively monitored, using SIMS registration system, and absences are followed up promptly.
- Communicate effectively with other agencies (AASSA, Medway Council, School Health, , Social Services, Early Help).
- 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 Trustees and parents.
- Share good practice with other schools/Trusts.
- Have procedures in place to help children settle in after a long absence. It is important that on return from an unavoidable absence all students are made to feel welcome. This should include ensuring that the student is helped to catch up on missed work and brought up to

date with any information that has been passed to the other students. We will support students with a phased return after an authorised long absence.

- Make every effort to meet the individual needs of the students with SEND

We expect the parent to:

- Provide up to date contact numbers and changes of address.
- Notify the school directly when their child is unable to attend, with a reason, on the first day of the absence.
- Telephone the school after the first day of absence to advise the school if the absence is continuing.
- Keep the school 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 Headteacher/Head of school.
- 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 school 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 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.
- Take responsibility for registering at the school's reception if they are late or are leaving the school site during school hours.

## Section 3: Attendance monitoring procedures

### Understanding types of absence coding

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school 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, i.e emergencies as opposed to routine appointments that can be scheduled outside school time.

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 of the family are unwell
- Day trips and holidays in term time
- 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 a set time (see attached appendix for each school). Students arriving before the end of the Registration period will be coded L (Late before registers close) which is a present mark. Students 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.

Only the Headteacher/Head of School 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 school's view, and/or evidence of the reason cannot be provided, the absence will be coded as O (Unauthorised absence). 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.

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

If a student'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 school if their child is unable to attend for any unavoidable reason, such as illness. Parents are requested to inform the school before 9:00 am if their child is too unwell to attend. If the school 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.

### **Continuing Absence Procedures**

If after 3 days of absence, your child has not been seen and contact has not been made with the school, 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 may be made, either by a member of staff with responsibility for attendance and/or safeguarding, 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 student 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. It is therefore important that school always has 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 staff with designated responsibility for attendance, to identify students with a pattern of absences that may lead to Persistent Absence and actions will be put in place for any causing concern. Initially the school will try to resolve the problem with parents/carers and this may involve requesting additional supporting medical evidence. However, if the pattern continues the school will make a referral to the AASSA.

### **Persistent Absence**

A student 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 students are tracked and monitored carefully through our pastoral system, and we combine this with tracking academic progress to assess the effect on the student'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.

### **Reluctant attenders/school refusal**

You should do everything possible to encourage your child to attend. However, if the reason for their absence appears to be school-based, such as difficulty with work, or bullying, please discuss this with the school at the earliest opportunity and the school will do everything possible to resolve.

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

If your 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 usually makes things worse. You can help your child attending school by:

- Making sure they understand the importance of good attendance and punctuality taking an interest in their education:
- Ask about school work and encourage them to get involved in school activities –
- Ensuring regular and reasonable bed times
- Having uniform and equipment prepared the night before
- Providing a healthy breakfast
- Reporting any academic or social concerns promptly
- Advising of any family changes which may impact on your child's wellbeing or mental health
- Retaining open and honest communication with your child's school
- Being positive about school (even if your own experience was less than positive)
- Not letting them take time off school for minor ailments - particularly those which would not prevent you from going to work
- Schedule medical appointments outside of school time where possible
- For many parents of primary aged children,, it 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.

**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).

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.

Parents/carers should be familiar with the following documents to support their understanding of school expectations around attendance:

Statutory Guidance from the DfE on Supporting Students at School with Medical Conditions - [www.gov.uk/government/publications/parental-responsibility-measures-for-behaviour-and-attendance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/parental-responsibility-measures-for-behaviour-and-attendance).

### **Consequences of Poor Attendance /Punctuality**

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

- 1) The Parents/Carers may be issued with a 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 school in writing if they are planning to remove their child from the School. 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 onto 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 student, 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**

Students who are allocated places but fail to start are also treated as CME. If the school has been unable to make contact with the family during a ten-day period after their expected arrival, they will refer the students 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 school Attendance team. 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, AASSA 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.

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

Contact the school 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.

### **Understanding absence percentages:**

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.

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.

## Section 4: Requests for Leave of absence unrelated to health

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

### **Religious Observance**

The working pattern of our school year takes account of most of the western Christian festivals and religious days. Important days of religious observance in the calendars of other religious traditions and denominations, however, often fall in term time and specifically on school days. Those parents who are nurturing young people within a faith tradition understandably want them to be able to engage in those key events which involve corporate worship and celebration and which affirm their religious beliefs. RMET will be sensitive to parental requests for the authorisation of absence for religious observance because they recognise that a family's religious beliefs and traditions are intrinsic to their sense of identity and contribute to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Whilst sympathetic to the need of families to remain in contact with relatives and their heritage overseas, RMET will not authorise exceptional leave of absence for extended visits abroad because of the consequences for students' attendance and learning. The Headteacher/Head of School decides whether or not to authorise absence for religious observance, balancing religious requirements with the importance of regular attendance. It is a matter for the Headteacher whether to authorise an absence for religious observance. The Headteacher should be satisfied that the request demonstrates exceptional circumstances to justify the authorisation of any absence. SACRE has published an annual list of religious festival dates on which absence might be authorised.

### **Performance and filming**

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/Head of School 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's/Head of School'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. Absence for these types of events will not be authorised if a child's attendance is below our expected threshold of 96%. Competitions that are arranged by the school/RMET will not affect a student's attendance.

### **Sporting Competitions**

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/Head of School'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/Head of

School 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. Absence for these types of events will not be authorised if a child's attendance is below our expected threshold of 96%. Competitions that are arranged by the school/RMET will not affect a student's attendance.

### **Holidays in term time**

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/Head of School. If a parent/carer removes a student from their education for the purpose of a suspected holiday without advising the school this will be followed up internally and referred to the Attendance Advisory Service to Schools and Academies (AASSA), with the possibility of a fixed penalty notice.

## **Section 5: Lateness**

Poor punctuality is not acceptable and is disruptive to learning. If your child misses the start of the day they can miss work and vital updates. Late arriving students also disrupt the learning of others and it can be embarrassing for the student themselves, often then encourage absence. Penalty notices can also be issued for lateness in line with Local Authority thresholds. To illustrate the impact of regular lateness on learning, please see below:

Minutes late per day	Equivalent of missing
5 Minutes	3.4 school days a year
10 Minutes	6.9 school days a year
15 Minutes	10.3 school days a year
20 Minutes	13.8 school days a year
30 Minutes	20.7 school days a year

## **Section 6: Summary of attendance thresholds**

### **96% - 100%**

Celebrate good attendance

### **85% - 95%**

Cause for concern, track any relevant patterns, request medical evidence, meeting with parents/carers, consideration for AASSA and/or other outside agencies, attendance contract, offer Early Help for relevant other agency support. In school support and resources. Early Help Assessment. If appropriate, a senior member of staff can refer the case to the AASSA. Under certain circumstances the AASSA may decide to issue a penalty notice from September 2021.

### **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 student is seen and listened to.

**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 those repeatedly truanting.

## Section 7: Use of data

**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 via electronic back-ups.

## 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 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.
- Unauthorised absences and a failure to improve may lead to the Attendance Advisory Service to Schools & Academies issuing a penalty notice per “Consequences of Poor Attendance/Punctuality” on page 6 of this policy.

## Appendix B – RMET Primary Schools

### 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 30 minutes at AM registration.
- AM registration is from 8.55am-9.25am and PM registration is from 1.15pm-1.20pm.
- Students arriving in school after 8.55am but before 9.25am must sign in at main school office and will be coded L. This counts as a present mark.
- Students arriving after 9.25am 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.
- Unauthorised absences and a failure to improve may lead to the Attendance Advisory Service to Schools & Academies issuing a penalty notice per "Consequences of Poor Attendance/Punctuality" on page 6 of this policy.

***\*\*\*School timings are currently under review in line with the White Paper***