

Working Together to Improve Attendance

Attendance matters!

In the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust we believe that regular attendance at school is one of the keys to students gaining the greatest benefit from their education. It is also an important part of their preparation for the world of work. Our students should arrive on time and be in school unless absence is unavoidable and we know that the support of their families and carers is important to achieve this.

Gaining 90% in an exam is great! But for attendance it is not very good at all.

X 90% attendance = $\frac{1}{2}$ a day a week missed

X 90% attendance = 4 weeks missed every year (which is almost 100 hours of missed learning)

X 90% attendance = $\frac{1}{2}$ school year missed every 5 years

From September 2015, if a child's attendance becomes 90% or below this is considered persistent absence.

How you can help

There are a number of things you can do to help your son/ daughter and the school.

- If your son/daughter is going to be absent, inform the school before 8.30am to advise us of the reason for his/her absence and when you expect them to return.
- Where at all possible, make medical appointments outside of school hours.
- Provide medical evidence to confirm the reasons for absence, particularly if there is a persistent or repeated health issue. This evidence can be one of the following: medical appointment card, letter from a health professional, doctor's note, medication provided by a doctor, copy of prescription, print screen of medical notes, letters concerning hospital appointments.
- Ensure that holidays are taken in school holidays only, rather than term time. A fixed penalty notice may be issued if students take holidays in term time.
- Where you need to ask for leave of absence for your son/daughter, complete the *Leave of Absence Request Form* and send it to school, where possible at least 4 weeks before the planned start of the absence.
- Let us know about any supervised sporting events or trials, theatre performances (which must be licensed) or acts of religious worship in which your son/ daughter will be participating in advance of the event.
- Contact the school's attendance officer if you have concerns about your son/ daughter's attendance.
 - Let the school know if there is any change to your contact details.

In essence, good communication between home and school helps!

When we are concerned about attendance

The attendance of all students is reviewed regularly. Where we have concerns about a student's attendance level or pattern of attendance, we may:

- write to you and include a copy of their attendance record and monitor their attendance prior to the next review
- write to you including a copy of their attendance record and ask for medical evidence be provided to explain absences (see above for what constitutes medical evidence)

- invite you into school to talk about your son/daughter's attendance to see what support/ strategies can be put in place to improve attendance, which will include situations where there are longer term medical needs
- make a referral to Grey's medical needs service if your son/ daughter has an ongoing or chronic illness

Where we continue to have concerns about a student's attendance and in particular where it falls below 90% for a longer period of time, we may involve the Education Welfare Service provided by Bedford Borough Council. This could result in a penalty notice being issued by the service.

To guide you about expected attendance

We hope that the following guidelines will help you understand the importance of regular attendance to school.

Excellent attendance	Attendance above 97%	Missing up to 5.5 days/ 27.5 hours of learning time	As well as being an excellent attender, a student will almost certainly achieve the best grades for their ability and have real opportunity in further education or in the world of work
Good attendance	Attendance between 96-97%	Missing up to 7.5 days/ 37.5 hours of learning time	A student is likely to achieve grades that will give them real opportunities to continue their studies and in the world of work
Satisfactory attendance	Attendance at 95%	Missing up to 9.5 days/ 47.5 hours of learning time	Whilst meeting the government target of 95%, students are missing an average of ½ a school day a week.
Concern about attendance - being monitored Action likely	Attendance at 92-94%	Missing up to 15 days/ 65 hours of learning time	Attendance is now below the government target. At this level, it will be difficult for students to achieve their best and improvement is needed.
Serious concern about attendance – being closely and regularly monitored. Action taken	Attendance at 90-92%	Missing up to 19 days/ 95 hours of learning time	Students are in danger of being 'persistent absentees' and the EWS may be involved. They will be missing so much school that it will be difficult to keep up with work/ lessons. Action is needed.

Persistent absence Action taken	Attendance below 90%	Missing more than 20 days/ 100 hours of learning time	Urgent action is needed to improve attendance. It will be almost impossible for students to keep up with work/lessons.
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Frequently asked questions

Q: What is good attendance?

A: Our advice is to aim for 100%! Attendance of 97% or better will put your son/ daughter in a good position to achieve their potential at school and maintain healthy friendships. Anything below 90% is a real cause for concern as this amounts to over 100 missed lessons. We will contact you if we have concerns about your son/ daughter's attendance. We will also recognise the achievement of students who attend well.

Q: When can my child miss school?

A: You can only allow your son/ daughter to miss school if:

- they are too ill to go in
- they are undertaking religious observance
- you've got permission from the school **in advance** of the absence

Q: What should I do if my child can't attend school for health reasons?

A: If your son/ daughter is absent due to illness you should contact the school on the first day of absence and keep the school informed. If your son/ daughter cannot go to school for an extended period of term, the school will make arrangements to deal with this.

Q: What is meant by 'medical evidence'?

A: Medical evidence can be one of the following: medical appointment card, letter from a health professional, doctor's note, medication provided by a doctor, copy of prescription, print screen of medical notes, letters concerning hospital appointments.

Q: Can our family take term-time holidays?

A: The law changed in September 2013, so that students can only be taken out of school if there are **exceptional circumstances**. A family holiday will not normally be considered exceptional circumstances. **Q:**

How do I ask for leave of absence?

A: Complete a *Leave of Absence Request Form*. If you wish to take your son/ daughter out of school, you should complete the form and return it to the school. If you have children at more than one of the Federation's schools, please complete a form for each child.

Q: What is 'persistent absence'?

A: The Department for Education states that persistent absence is anything below 90%. As a result, the school will monitor your son/ daughter's attendance if they are at risk of falling below this point and take action to ensure that attendance improves.

Q: What happens if I take my child out of school without permission?

A: This will be treated as unauthorised absence and the Local Authority can issue a penalty notice which attracts a fine of £60 per child, if paid within 21 days or £120 per child if paid between 21 and 28 days. Nonpayment can result in prosecution.

Q: What is the legal action to enforce school attendance?

A: Schools can use various legal powers if your child is missing school without good reason. These range from parenting orders to penalties and fines of up to £2500.