

4th October 2024

Dear Parents/Carers

Attendance Matters

Welcome to the Autumn Term and a big thank you for your ongoing support to help us maximise your child's attendance to access their learning. You will know from our July trust letter, there have been some significant changes this year with attendance, so we thought it would be helpful to do a reminder following the summer break.

The changes are due to the introduction of the statutory guidance, *Working Together to Improve School Attendance August 2024*, which was underpinned by the new legislation *The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024*.

We are pleased that the 'support first' relational approach to attendance that we have developed over the last decade links very well with the new guidance and legislation. They all reinforce positive relationships being key to everyone's success and we know that this helps us to celebrate the positives with you, as well as being here to ensure supportive, early action can be taken if concerns arise.

What does the new DfE Guidance mean in a practical sense?

- We must follow the guidance, have a dedicated Senior Attendance Champion/Leader in each school/academy, have an [attendance policy](#) in place and use the statutory coding for absences.
- We must ensure a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of attending school, that reinforces attendance is an 'all-staff responsibility' like safeguarding, and we must make sure everyone is aware of their role in attendance.
- We must not keep our AM and PM registration periods open for more than 30 minutes and if students arrive after that point they **must be marked absent** for the whole session, using an authorised or unauthorised absence code (students must sign in to be counted for fire registers).
- We should work collaboratively with others (parents, local authorities, health and other agencies) to promote the expectation of good attendance, support students to attend school and/or access the education they are legally entitled to by helping to remove barriers to education.
- The new legislation reinforces that all absence must be requested in advance and a national threshold was set at **10 unauthorised sessions of absence in a rolling 10 school weeks**.
- It also reinforces that early intervention is essential and we should prevent students reaching the above threshold by monitoring and exploring **all types** of absence earlier, offering both informal and formal support where it is required, but where the threshold is reached, we must explore and offer that support prior to considering legal action.
- The exception to the above are absences that would not be deemed exceptional circumstances e.g., for the purpose of holidays, recreation or leisure, which carry an automatic consideration of legal action. Also, if these types of absence are repeated, legal action can be taken for the 'pattern' even if the 10-session threshold is not met for an individual absence event.
- Support should be done using in-school reasonable adjustments, local authority early help pathways, whole family plans and the newly introduced Attendance Contract process which are all there to nurture, support and remove barriers to attending school and promote well-being.
- Where support does not lead to improvement in attendance, we **must** formally warn parents/carers to give the opportunity to improve the situation but where subsequent improvement does not occur, we **must** consider either intense support through statutory agencies or consider legal action.

What can you do to help?

- Ensure you request all planned absence in advance and only do so for absence that can be demonstrated as exceptional circumstances - plan family trips, holidays, or events outside of term time.
- Ensure you notify us as soon as possible in the case of an emergency/illness absence.
- Where possible arrange health appointments at times that prevent absence from the AM or PM registration periods.
- Encourage and reinforce positive thinking about school and its importance with the understanding that regular attendance means attending every day the school is open unless an exceptional or statutory reason applies.
- Talk openly about school and/or any worries that occur to build self-awareness, encourage problem solving skills and boost confidence to know it is normal to be worried about things, but that we can help ourselves by sharing those worries with others.
- Proactively engage with us in supporting the removal of barriers to attendance and education.

As always, we welcome you to discuss any concerns that arise as soon as possible with a member of staff at your child's academy so that early action can be taken to avoid absence. You can also find helpful information on our trust website: [Attendance - Meridian Trust](#)

Yours faithfully



Sharon Templeman
Meridian Trust Attendance Welfare Leader

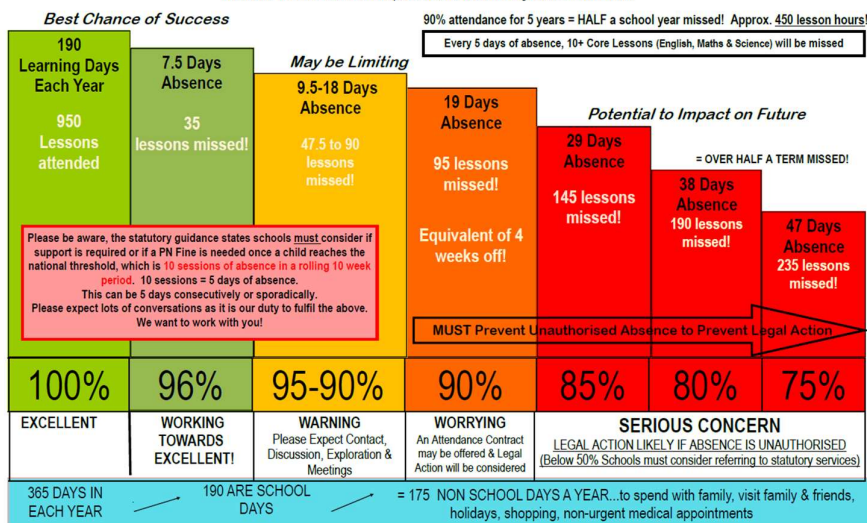
Encl. Attendance Chart, Meridian Roadmap for Attendance.



IMPORTANT: Support is Available at ANY % Level. Please Talk To Us.

ATTENDANCE & LEARNING MATTERS!

Please note: This Demonstration is in Respect of Absence Where Learning Provision is NOT in Place.



Attendance Roadmap

In line with the DfE Statutory Guidance (in force from 19th August 2024) we offer a supportive attendance process based on a relational, needs-led, stepped approach. Our academies will offer a welcoming ethos with high expectations for all. We will assess data to identify absence trends & use preventative discussion/meetings with families to listen, understand & support to remove barriers. Where needed, we will formalise support to nurture improvement with Attendance Contracts & as a last resort we will consider intensifying support &/or enforce legal sanctions.

STEP 1 - Identify, Assess & Prevent

Our daily actions & processes aim to promote relationship building with children & families to prevent absence. This involves monitoring data trends & absence patterns to inform our conversations with you (& your child where age allows) as we have a duty to explore all absence (unauthorised or authorised), but especially where absence is at risk of reaching the new National Threshold (10 unauthorised sessions (10 half days/5 days) within a 10 week rolling period). Other daily actions involve promoting attendance positively, using praise & incentives, swift absence follow up, email &/or letter communication to raise your awareness of emerging concerns, processing requested or unrequested 'Term Time Exceptional Absence' & doing Home Visits to meet our safeguarding duties as required.

STEP 2 - Early Absence Support

We move to this step if concerns continue. To prevent further absence occurring, discussions & meetings will be offered to identify if early support or reasonable adjustments are needed. This will be done using Student Success Discussions (Student &/or parent) & Student Support Plan Meetings. An Early Help Assessment (EHA) & Team Around the Family (TAF) Meeting Process may be required for support to be obtained.

Please talk to us about how we can support you &/or your child at any time.

STEP 3 - Formalised Support

Where absence continues & initial support needs to be increased an Attendance Contract (AC) may be offered to formalise support. This is a 3-6 month nurturing plan of improvement to prevent further escalation. Achievable & individual targets will be set & reviewed regularly. Medical &/or other supportive information will be actively sought at this point to work collaboratively. An AC can run alongside other meetings/processes.

STEP 4 - Warnings - Concerns Remain

Where STEP 2 or STEP 3 support has not been required, been unsuccessful &/or declined, a 'Formal Warning' (if AC has failed) or a 'Notice to Improve' Warning Letter will be issued reinforcing the need for immediate improvement. An alternative Family Court Order e.g., an ESO, will also be considered.

STEP 5 - Legal Action - No Improvement

Legal action (Penalty Notice or Prosecution) MAY be requested from the Local Authority (LA) if Unauthorised Term Time Absence is taken, or if overall absence continues to occur & reaches or exceeds the National Threshold for absence, despite STEPS 1-4 being attempted. Statutory Guidance States a Referral to Children's Social Care for children with 'Severe Absence' (less than 50%) should be considered to obtain 'Intense Support'.

PENALTY NOTICES & LEGAL ACTION

1st Offence (after 19th August 2024) of Term Time Leave &/or Irregular Attendance (10 sessions of Unauthorised Absence or more) = Fine of £160 per parent, per child if paid within 28 days. If paid within 21 days fine is reduced to £80 per parent, per child.
2nd Offence within 3 years (from 19th August 2024) = Fine of £160 per parent, per child payable within 28 days, no reduction available. Failure to pay the above results in the case going to Magistrates' Court.
3rd Offence within 3 years (from 19th August 2024) NO PENALTY NOTICE considered. The case will be presented to Magistrates' Court under s444(1) or (1a) of the Education Act. If found guilty, a fine of up to £2500 per parent, per child can be issued. Convictions for s444(1a) offences will show on DBS record.