



Attendance and Punctuality Policy

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ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY POLICY

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1. Statement of Intent

For a child/young person to reach their full educational achievement a high level of school attendance is essential.

Discovery Educational Trust (DET) and St. Martin's School (SMS) are committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all pupils and endeavour to provide an environment where all pupils feel valued and welcome. Every child/young person has a right to access the education to which they are entitled. Parents/carers and teachers share the responsibility for supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and punctuality for all.

It is DET's and SMS' duty to consistently strive to achieve a goal of 100% attendance for all children, but have set an annual school target of 96.5% for 2021/22.

Every opportunity is used to convey to pupils and their parents/carers the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

For SMS children to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered, it is vital that every child is at school, on time, every day the school is open, unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable.

The routines that children develop around attendance and punctuality at school are the same as the expectations of any future employer in the world of work. High attainment, confidence with peers and staff, and future aspirations depend on good attendance.

2. Introduction

Department for Education (DfE) guidance - [School Attendance \(2020\)](#) states that schools should:

- promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence;
- ensure that every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled;
- act early to address patterns of absence.

And that parents/carers must:

- perform their legal duty by ensuring that their children of compulsory school age, who are registered at school attend regularly.

And that pupils must:

- be punctual to their lessons.

DET and SMS believe good attendance is important because:

- statistics show a direct link between under-achievement and attendance below 95%;
- regular attenders make better progress, both socially and academically;
- regular attenders find school routines, schoolwork and friendships easier to cope with;
- regular attenders find learning more satisfying;

- regular attenders are more successful in transferring between primary school, secondary school and higher education, employment or training.

3. Promoting Good Attendance

The foundation for good attendance is a strong partnership between the school, parents/carers and the child.

To help focus on this SMS:

- Provides information on all matters related to attendance in its newsletter and on its website.
- Reports to parents/carers on how a child is performing in school, what their attendance and punctuality rate is and how this relates to their attainment and progress.
- Celebrates good attendance by displaying individual achievements.
- Rewards good or improving attendance through class competitions, certificates and outings/events.
- Sets targets for the school, and for classes, for attendance and display, these in school.
- Runs events when parents/carers, pupils and staff can work together on raising attendance levels across the school.
- Liaises closely with the families of children with low or declining attendance in order to bring about improvements.
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4. Roles and Responsibilities

Headteacher

The Headteacher (HT) has overall responsibility for attendance in SMS. The HT is responsible for ensuring that this Policy is implemented consistently across the school, and for monitoring school-level absence data. The HT also supports other staff in monitoring the attendance of individual pupils and may issue fixed-penalty notices, where necessary.

The HT monitors and oversees the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance by reviewing the weekly School Information Management System (SIMS) reports and the HT's termly summary. They will ensure that any negative patterns of attendance are challenged and provide support to remedy this.

The pastoral team oversees, directs and coordinates the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and ensures that the Attendance and Punctuality Policy is consistently applied throughout the school. This person also ensures that attendance is both recorded accurately and analysed. They ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties.

If absence is frequent or continuous, except where a child is clearly unwell, staff discuss, with parents/carers, the need and reasons for their child's absence and encourage them

to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a pupil's home does not mean that an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence always rests with the school.

Classroom Staff

- Ensure that all pupils are registered accurately.
- Promote and reward good attendance with pupils at all appropriate opportunities.
- Liaise with the relevant year team on matters of attendance and punctuality.
- Communicate any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a child's absence.
- Support pupils with absence to engage with their learning once they are back in school.

Pupils

- Attend every day unless ill or have an authorised absence.
- Arrive in school on time.
- Take responsibility for registering at their year office if late or leaving the school site during School hours.

Parents/Carers

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is a parent/carer's legal responsibility and permitting absence from school that is not authorised by the school creates an offence in law.

Parents/carers must:

- inform the school on the first day of absence;
- discuss with the senior leadership team any planned absences well in advance via the year office;
- support the school with their child in aiming for 100% attendance each year;
- make sure that any absence is clearly accounted for by telephone or text on the first and subsequent days of absence, or written correspondence (e.g. email) if a phone is unavailable;
- avoid taking their child out of school for non-urgent medical or dental appointments;
- only request leave of absence if it is for an exceptional circumstance.

5. Absences

5.1 Requests for Leave of Absence

HTs may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.

The length of the authorised absence, as well as whether absence is authorised at all, is at the HT's discretion. The fundamental principles for defining *exceptional* are rare, significant, or unavoidable, which means that the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. There is no legal entitlement for time off in school term-time to go on holiday and, in the majority of cases, holiday is not authorised.

Parents/carers wishing to apply for leave of absence need to make a request in writing in advance to the relevant year office and before making any travel arrangements.

If term-time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence is unauthorised – refer to the section below on Legal Sanctions.

Taking holidays in term-time affects your child's schooling as much as any other absence and DET and SMS expect parents/carers to help the school by not taking children out during term-time.

5.2 Absence through child participation in public performances, including theatre, film or television work and modelling

Parents/carers of a child performer can seek leave of absence from school for their child to take part in a performance. They must contact the Director of Key Stage/ Deputy Headteacher (pastoral) to discuss the nature and frequency of the work, whether the child has a valid performance licence and whether education is to be provided by the employer during any future leave of absence. It is, however, down to the HT's discretion as to whether to authorise the absence and they will wish to discuss with parents/carers the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning is to continue if absence occurs. Any absence recorded as part of a child's participation in a public performance is recorded as "C", an authorised absence.

5.3 Absence through competing at regional, county or national level for sport

Parents/carers 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 HT's discretion as to whether to authorise the absence and they will wish to discuss with parents/carers the nature and frequency of the absence and how learning is to continue if absence occurs. Permission for a child to leave early or arrive late, to attend coaching and training sessions, is also at the discretion of the HT and is unlikely to be approved if it is a regular event, unless the sports club or association is providing an education tutor as part of its coaching.

5.4 Recording Attendance

Legally, the register must be marked twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day, and again at the start of the afternoon session.

5.5 Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

Pupils are expected to attend school every day for the entire duration of the academic year, unless there is an exceptional reason for the absence. There are two main categories of absences:

Authorised absence: is when SMS has accepted the explanation offered as satisfactory justification for the absence or given approval in advance for such an absence. If no explanation is received, absences cannot be authorised.

Unauthorised absence: is when SMS has not received a reason for absence or has not approved a child's leave of absence from school after a parent/carer's request. This includes:

- parents/carers giving their children permission to be off school unnecessarily, such as for shopping, attending parents' appointments, visiting family, birthdays, to look after siblings;
- truancy before or during the school day;
- absences, which have not been explained.

Absence due to illness is authorised unless SMS has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness. If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, SMS may ask parents/carers to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. SMS does not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily. If SMS is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence is recorded as unauthorised and parents/carers are notified of this in advance.

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

Please refer to the Registration of Pupils Policy for further guidance on the recording of absence.

See

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1039223/School_attendance_guidance_for_2021_to_2022_academic_year.pdf

6. Lateness/Punctuality

It is important for pupils to be on time at the start of the morning and afternoon school sessions and to lessons. The start of school/lessons is used to give out instructions or organise work. If a child is late, they can miss work time with their class teacher getting vital information, cause disruption to the lesson for others, and it can be embarrassing leading to possible further absence.

The SMS school day begins at **8.25am** and ends at **3.15pm**.

Morning registration is at **8.25 am** and it closes at **8.55 am**.

DfE guidance suggests that all official registers should be closed a maximum of 30 minutes after the start of school.

All lateness is recorded daily. This information is required by the courts, should a prosecution for non-attendance or lateness be necessary.

Arrival after the close of registration is marked as unauthorised absence and coded U as per DfE guidance. This mark shows a child to be on site, but is legally recorded as an absence.

If a pupil is late due to a medical appointment, they receive an authorised absence, coded M.

Please be advised that, where possible, doctor and dentist appointments are to be made outside of school hours or during school holidays.

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

7. Reporting Absences – Information for Parents/Carers

A child not attending school is considered a **safeguarding** matter. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required.

If a child is absent, a parent/carer must:

- Contact SMS by phone or call into school and report to Reception, as early as possible on the first day of absence.
- Send a note to the school on the first day that the child returns, with an explanation of the absence – parents/carers must do this even if they have already telephoned us.

8. Responding to Pupil Absences

If a child is absent:

- SMS telephones or texts you on the first day of absence if it has not heard from you – this is because the school has a duty to ensure your child's safety as well as their regular school attendance. This will typically be using the 'truancy call system'
- If absence continues on the second day, a second attempt to call is made.
- If absence continues for several days, SMS makes a home visit. If no contact is made, then a letter is left.
- Where appropriate, a request for a safe and well check conducted by the Police/PCSO is made. If a Social Worker is involved with the family, they are informed. If there are concerns relating to safeguarding, then a Children's Social Care (CSC) referral is made.
- SMS invites parents/carers in to school to discuss the situation with the pastoral Leaders or senior member of staff, if absences persist.
- SMS refers the matter to the Local Authority (LA) Attendance Legal Panels if absence is unauthorised and falls below 90%.

9. Ten Days' Absence

SMS has a legal duty to report the absence of any pupil, who is absent without an explanation for ten consecutive days. If the child is not seen and contact has not been established with the named parent/carer, the LA is notified that the child is *at risk of missing*. Please be aware that DET expects its schools to report this unexplained absence sooner than the ten-day period, if it is deemed that there are significant concerns of harm. Children's Services staff visit the last known address and alert key services in order to locate the child. Parents/carers are expected to help the school by making sure that it always has an up-to-date contact number. There are regular checks on telephone numbers throughout the year.

10. Persistent Absence

SMS understands that some absence is unavoidable due, for example, to chronic illness. However, if a child misses 10% (three weeks/sessions) or more schooling across the school year, for whatever reason, they are defined by Government as *persistent absentees*.

As a result, SMS monitors all absence thoroughly and all attendance data is shared with DET, the LA and the DfE.

Children are sometimes reluctant to attend school for a variety of reasons. Any problems with regular attendance are best resolved between the School, the parents/carers and the child. **If a 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 may make things worse.

Parents/carers should contact their child's Class Teacher, immediately, and openly discuss any worries. A child could be avoiding school for a number of reasons – difficulties with schoolwork, bullying, friendship problems, family difficulties. **It is important that SMS identifies the reason for a child's reluctance to attend school and work together to tackle the problem.**

If a child has been absent and their attendance level is falling towards 90%, SMS contacts parents/carers and, depending on the reasons for the absence, invites them to meet with a member of the pastoral team where the reasons for the absence and, if necessary, strategies to complete missed work, are discussed.

11. Absence linked to Anxiety or SEND

SMS understands that, for some children, absence can be due to anxiety and other mental health difficulties. These children may need adjustments to their daily routines, timetables or other school environment factors to support their needs. SMS aims to work with parents/carers and other support agencies in order to understand and support these children rather than taking a punitive approach. Parents/carers, who are concerned that their child may be suffering from school-related anxiety, should speak to the school SENDCo in the first instance.

12. Child Missing in Education

If a child is not seen and contact has not been established with any of the named parents/carers, after the first day, SMS makes all reasonable enquiries to establish contact with parents/carers and the child, including making enquiries to known friends, wider family, and visiting the family home to try to establish contact.

If there has been no contact after three days of absence, SMS starts the *Child Missing in Education* procedures and notifies relevant agencies such as the relevant LA Child Missing in Education team, the Education Welfare Officer or Police or Social Services. If the pupil is a Looked After Child, or has been identified as a vulnerable pupil, these agencies may be notified on the first day of absence.

If a child is leaving SMS, parents/carers are asked to give the Attendance Officer comprehensive information about all plans, including any date of a move and the new address and telephone number, the child's new school and the start date, when known. This should be submitted to SMS in writing.

If pupils leave and SMS does not have the above information, a child is considered to be a *Child Missing in Education*. This requires schools and LAs to carry out investigations to try and locate a child, which includes liaising with Children's Services, the Police and other agencies. By providing SMS with the above information, these investigations can be avoided.

13. Legal Sanctions

Schools can fine parents/carers for the unauthorised absence of a child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age.

If issued with a penalty notice, parents/carers must pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the LA.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the HT, following the LA's Code of Conduct for issuing penalty notices. This may take into account:

- A number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year.
- One-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term-time without permission.
- Where an excluded pupil is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason.

If payment is not made after 28 days, the LA can decide whether to prosecute the parents/carers or withdraw the notice.

14. Record Preservation

School Registers are legal documents. SMS ensures compliance with attendance regulations by keeping attendance records for, at least, three years.

There are key policies that are relevant to pupil attendance, registration procedures, and following up on pupil absence, which are listed below:

- SMS Anti-Bullying Policy;
- SMS Student Rewards, Behaviour and Support Policy and Procedure;
- DET Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- DET Exclusions Policy.