

Engagement and Access to Learning Attendance Policy

Attendance is the essential foundation to positive outcomes for all learners and should therefore be seen as everyone's responsibility in Centre

DESC values the mental health and wellbeing of every member of its community.

Our policies reflect the core values of respect and support for each other in every aspect of life. Our aim is that all in our community, through working together, to feel safe and secure in an environment, which enables and equips every individual to thrive and be respectful of each other's strengths and differences.

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November 2024

Context

Dacorum Education Support Centre (DESC) offers educational provision for learners from Key Stage 1 - 4 who, for a variety of reasons, have not flourished in mainstream education. The learners may have a range of social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs that often impair their ability to take part in sustained and active learning.

Vision

DESC's over-arching aim is to enable all learners to re-engage in the process of education and learning. We are committed to supporting all learners to achieve their full potential. This is what we pride ourselves in. We recognise that for some learners there have been many previous barriers to attendance and engagement in school. However, we are committed to finding the best ways of supporting, inspiring and motivating learners to attend and engage. Learners are encouraged to understand the importance of good attendance and time-keeping as this sets good habits for future employment and training as a key life skill. To this end we devise and develop personalised learning programmes to meet the individual needs of our learners.

At DESC, the staff and the Management Committee are committed to this cause. We work tirelessly with parents/carers to join us in this community commitment. Creating an environment where learners enjoy attending is of vital importance to us and we will work collaboratively with each learner, their family and any other relevant professionals to this goal.

Responsibilities and Expectations

The responsibility for attendance is shared between the parent/carer, learner, DESC and the Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAAO). It is important that we all understand the expectations and we are all committed to raising levels of attendance and punctuality.

Responsibilities of DESC

- We will provide a safe learning environment and maintain records of attendance according to legislation and guidance on a daily basis
- We will clearly distinguish between absences which are authorised and those which are unauthorised (it is the decision of the Head of Centre as to whether or not an absence will be authorised)
- We will follow up all instances of poor attendance and punctuality

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- We will keep parents/carers informed of the learner's attendance/punctuality and work with parents/carers should either give cause for concern
- We will monitor attendance and punctuality levels and report to the Management Committee on a termly basis
- We will liaise regularly with the Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAAO) over attendance and punctuality issues relating to individual learners
- We have a responsibility to safeguard all learners and therefore will take all appropriate steps to make sure a learner is safe if they are not in Centre

Responsibilities of the Parents/Carers

- Ensure the learner attends Centre regularly and on time
- Ensure the learner is dressed according to the dress code and equipped and in a fit condition to learn
- Be positive about the importance of good attendance
- Work with the Centre to resolve attendance problems
- If a learner is ill, parents are required to inform the Centre on the first day of absence and everyday thereafter until they are well enough to return
- Family holidays are never taken during term time
- Avoid arranging non-urgent medical appointments during Centre hours/term time
- Inform the Centre immediately of any change to contact details

Responsibilities of the Learner

- Attend Centre and all of their lessons regularly and on time
- Be ready to learn
- Engage in discussions and meetings to improve their attendance where necessary
- *'Be in the right place at the right time'*
- Come appropriately dressed with the right equipment

Responsibility of the Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAAO)

- Regular consultation visits meeting with the Deputy Head of Centre Attendance Lead (Naomi Walker) to identify learners experiencing attendance difficulties
- Pre-referral work prior to a case being accepted, which may include telephoning or writing to parents/carers about the learner's absences or lateness

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November 2024

3

- Attending meetings with parents/carers arranged by the Centre to emphasise the need for improved attendance and the possibility that, if this does not occur, the LAAO will become involved
- Casework with learners and parents/carers which may include making home visits, offering specific support to individual learners or parents/carers, facilitating case conferences and other meetings or enabling the learner and parents/carers to access appropriate support from other services and agencies
- The LAAO will follow up all instances of learners who are absent from Centre for more than 4 weeks and who subsequently cannot be traced

Registration

- Registers will be taken as the learner arrives in Centre, this will then be inputted on an electronic system (SIMs)
- Registers are marked consistently by staff using attendance codes in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 2006
- Learners will not leave the Centre site without permission
- All learners must be signed in and out at reception. This is a Health & Safety and Safeguarding requirement
- The Centre will liaise with Alternative Providers to obtain the correct register mark

Lateness

- First contact home will be made if a learner fails to arrive **10 minutes after** their expected start time
- Any learner arriving **Late** will be marked as 'L'
- Parents/Carers will be contacted if the learner is regularly late for Centre, the Link Mentor will contact to work towards a way forward
- In the unlikely event that a learners' attendance and punctuality do not improve this may result in a Fixed Penalty Warning Notice (FPN) being issued

Absence

- Parents/carers must keep DESC well informed on a daily basis of circumstances relating to attendance
- Parents/carers are expected to keep absences to a minimum. Any absence explanation will be authorised at the discretion of the Head of Centre
- All medical/dental appointments should be made, whenever possible, out of Centre hours. If an appointment is made during the Centre day medical evidence will be required, it is then the decision of the Head of Centre to authorise the absence or not

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- If a learner is ill, parents/carers are required to inform the Centre on the first day of absence and everyday thereafter until they are well enough to return. It is important that communication is maintained

Authorised Absence

Authorised absences are sessions away from Centre for a legitimate reason including, but not limited to;

- Sickness
- Medical appointments which are unavoidable
- Days of religious observance
- Exceptional close-family circumstances such as bereavement
- Approved sporting activities

Unauthorised Absence

Absence will be unauthorised by the Head of Centre when;

- No explanation has been provided by parents/carers following a request from Centre
- Attendance levels are below 85%. The Government classifies the learner with attendance below 85% as a Persistent Absentee, whatever the reason for absence. Therefore, medical evidence or copies of appointment letters/cards will be requested
- The Head of Centre is dissatisfied with the explanation provided
- The reason for the absence is not directly related to the learner e.g. parent/carer is ill
- Leave of absence is taken without the agreement of the Head of Centre

Truancy

Truancy is recorded as an unauthorised absence. Learners are made aware that this behaviour is unacceptable. A record will be made in the learner's Centre file. The local Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) may be informed of any truancy and the PCSO and LAAO will work together with the Centre on serious cases of repeated truancy.

Continuing Absence Procedures

In the event of an absence of three or more days without contact from the family, a home visit will be made.

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Any learner who is absent without explanation for 10 consecutive or who has a pattern of erratic attendance will be referred to the LAAO. Such cases may result in a case being opened by the LAAO and targets will be set for improvement.

Frequent/Persistent Absence Procedures

Regular monitoring of the registers will be made by Centre to identify learners with a pattern of absences. Whilst school attendance requires a whole Centre approach, the Centre Attendance Improvement Officer will be responsible ensuring that plans are in place for each learner of concern.

Parents and carers will be informed that any future absences will only be authorised where official supporting documentation is received by the Centre i.e., medical appointment cards etc.

Initially the Centre will try to resolve the problem with parents/carers, but if the pattern continues the Centre will offer further support to the learner. i.e. a request to Early Help via the local MASH Team in the Local Authority for the family.

Leave of Absence During Term Time

There is no automatic entitlement in law for time off during term time. In accordance with DfE guidance, requests for leave of absence will only be given in **exceptional circumstances**. Requests will be considered on an individual basis and must be made in writing to the Head of Centre at least 4 weeks prior to the commencement of the requested leave of absence. An Absence Request Form must be completed by parents/carers and returned to the Head of Centre for approval. **See appendix A for the leave of absence form.**

Should the leave of absence not be requested, or requested and not agreed by the Head of Centre and taken, the leave will be unauthorised, putting the parents/carers at risk of the Centre applying to the Local Authority for a 'Notice to Improve' to be issued to the parents. Should the absence be part of on-going poor attendance, this may result in the involvement of a Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAAO).

In addition

- Retrospective permission will not be granted for leave of absence already taken
- Parents/carers are expected to contact the Centre if they are unable to return from leave of absence on the agreed date, providing a reason for the delay. They may be required to provide confirmation of the reason for the delay

Reduced timetables

Reduced timetables are only considered if it is in the best interests of the learner's physical or mental health. In this case the following procedure will be followed:

- Consult with relevant agencies to determine the education and support provision that would best meet the learner's individual need
- Obtain written consent to the arrangements from the learner's parents/carers. (Should parents/carers not agree to the reduced timetable it cannot be implemented)
- Confirm in writing, which adults will be responsible for the duty of care for the learner during sessions when they are not attending Centre
- Review meetings conducted over a six-week period including both the learner and parents
- Submit the reduced timetable to the Local Authority and subsequently inform them when the learner returns to full time education or there is a change to their timetable
- Record the learner's absence from Centre for sessions when he/she is not in attendance as authorised (register code C)

Child Missing in Education CME

Should a parent/carer proceed with leave of absence when permission has not been granted and the absence exceeds 4 weeks, the Head of Centre may remove the learner from the roll of the Centre.

Children missing education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, child sexual exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) later in life.

In both circumstances, the Centre must notify the LAAO. A learner will only be removed from roll should the Centre and Local Authority be unsuccessful in locating the family, at which time, the learner will be referred to the Children Missing in Education Officer (CMEO).

Fixed Penalty Notices

As a final and last resort where all other avenues of support have been exhausted, we may have re-course to the use of Fixed Penalty Notices being issued by the local authority.

The New National Framework for Penalty Notices for school absences has been increased from £60 to £80 per child, per parent if paid within 21 days. If the fine is not paid within 21 days, it will increase to £160 if paid with 28 days of being issued.

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If a second fixed penalty notice is issued to the same parent for the same child within a 3 year rolling period, the fine will automatically rise to £160 with no option to pay the lower rate of £80. If a parent then commits a further offence in a 3 year rolling period, the Local Authority will need to consider other enforcement options available to them.

Notice to Improve

The Centre may issue a Notice to Improve to any parent whose child's absence levels have triggered the national threshold for a penalty notice – i.e., 10 sessions of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks.

- The Notice to Improve may be used to offer parents/carers a final opportunity to engage with support and improve the attendance levels of the child concerned. Where a parent/carer fails to engage with the offer of support during the Notice to Improve validity period and/or further unauthorised absences are recorded for the learner and/or the learner fails to make significant improvements in their attendance patterns, a penalty notice may be issued in line with this code of conduct
- All Notices to Improve issued by Hertfordshire schools will have a validity period of 6 school weeks (a maximum of 30 school days) and will clearly list the attempts which have been made and support which has already been offered to resolve the absence concerns. Parents/carers should be provided with clear contact details for the staff member/s within the school that they should contact to access the support that remains available during the Notice to Improve validity period
- Attendance records will be reviewed daily throughout the improvement period and, where further unauthorised absence is recorded, consideration will be given as to whether a penalty notice is to be issued. Schools are not required to wait until 30 school days have passed before considering a penalty notice – decisions will need to be taken on a case by-case basis, based on the level of parental/learner engagement and/or level of attendance improvement noted
- Sufficient improvement during the Notice to Improve validity period may include evidence of no further unauthorised absences within the improvement period or enough improvement tailored to the specific family circumstances

This policy has been written and updated in line with the following:

- School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024
- Pupil Regulations 2006
- DFE Working together to improve school attendance, published 29th February 2024
- Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance, published 29th February 2024
- Toolkit for schools: communicating with families to support attendance, updated 7th March 2024
- Is my child too ill for school, NHS UK

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- Health protection in children and young people settings, including education, Gov.uk, Updated June 2024
- Penalty Notices Unauthorised Absence (Truancy) Hertfordshire Code of Conduct, July 2024,
- Emotionally Based School Avoidance – A Guide for Parents, ISL for HCC, November 2021

Appendix A

Application for Learner Leave of Absence from School

Full name of Learner	
Address	
Explanation of exceptional circumstances:	
Absence dates required:	
Signature of parent / carer	
Date	

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY	
Current attendance of learner:	
Present:	
Authorised absence:	
Unauthorised absence:	
Response to request for leave of absence	
Number of requested sessions authorised	
Number of requested sessions unauthorised:	
Date learner expected to return to Centre	
Head of Centre Signature	
Head of Centre Name	
Date	

Centre will copy and return copies of the Application for Leave of Absence

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Statutory Attendance Support Team Penalty Notice Fines – Sept 2024



Helping Parents understand Penalty Notice Fines for School Attendance

From 19 August 2024, there is a National Framework for Penalty Notice Fines being issued for unauthorised absences recorded by schools.

National Threshold

A single consistent national threshold for when a Penalty Notice **must** be considered by **ALL** schools in England, this is:

- 10 sessions (usually equivalent to 5 school days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period.
- These sessions do not have to be consecutive and can be made up of a combination of any type of unauthorised absence.
- For example, a 5-day unauthorised leave of absence would meet the national threshold.
- The 10-school week period can span different terms or school years.

Who may be fined?

- Penalty Notice Fines are issued to each parent who allows their child to be absent without authorisation from school.
- For example, 3 siblings absent for unauthorised leave during term-time would result in each parent/carer receiving 3 separate fines.

Definition of Parent

- Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 states that, in relation to a child or young person, a 'parent' includes any person who is not a parent (from which can be inferred 'biological parent') but who has parental responsibility for or care of the child.
- Parent refers to a person who typically has care of a child or young person if the child lives with them either full or part time and they look after them, irrespective of what their biological or legal relationship is with the child.

First Offence

The first time a Penalty Notice is issued for unauthorised absence, the fine amount will be:

- £80 per parent, per child if paid **within 21 days**.
- If **not paid within 21 days**, the fine will increase to **£160 per parent, per child**, payable between the 22nd and 28th day.

Second Offence (within 3 years)

The second time a Penalty Notice is issued for unauthorised absence, a reduced rate is not available. The amount therefore will be:

- £160 per parent, per child – payable within 28 days.

Third Offence and Any Further Offences (within 3 years)

The third time an offence is committed, a Penalty Notice **WILL NOT** be issued, and the case will be presented **straight to the Magistrate's Court**:

- **Prosecution** can result in criminal records and fines of up to £2,500.
- Cases found **guilty** in a **Magistrates Court** can show on the parent's future DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) certificate (Disclosure and Barring Service) due to a **'failure to safeguard a child's education'**