

# **James Cook Learning Trust**



## **Attendance Policy**

**May 2019**

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

### **STATEMENT OF INTENT**

At the James Cook Learning Trust we believe that regular school attendance cannot be overestimated. Regular attendance is vital to a good education. Securing it must therefore be a high priority of the school, governors, parents and pupils themselves. By failing to attend school regularly, pupils lessen the impact of the education provided for them. Pupil absence may seriously disrupt the continuity of teaching and learning for themselves and others.

The aim of the school is to facilitate our pupils' regular and sustained attendance by providing a full and efficient educational experience for all pupils.

Parents have a vital role to play and there is a strong emphasis on maintaining home-school links and good communication systems that can be utilised whenever there is concern about attendance.

### **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE – THE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK**

All pupils of statutory school age who are registered at a school must attend regularly, in line with the relevant legislation (Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2013). Any absence from school can have a detrimental effect on a child's future progress and continuity of learning. Regular absence for such reasons as holidays taken in term time can have a significant impact on achievement.

### **REGISTRATION**

There is a legal requirement upon schools to keep an attendance register on which, at the beginning of each morning and afternoon session, pupils are marked present or absent. The Education Regulations 1991 introduced a further requirement that attendance registers must show whether an absence of a pupil of compulsory school age is authorised or unauthorised. This is shown on our computer records.

Staff, pupils and parents should see the taking of the register as an integral part of the day, as was indeed intended in law. Particular attention should be paid to accurate registration and to the preservation and security of registers.

Monitoring and encouraging attendance is an integral part of the each schools Head Teacher's role. The Head Teacher has the primary responsibility for monitoring the attendance of pupils in the classes and for contacting home with concerns about attendance and punctuality also ensuring notes explaining absences are collected and maintain an accurate register of attendance. At James Cook Learning Trust each Head Teacher has overall responsibility for managing attendance at their school; however this is delegated to the School Attendance Officer, employed Education Welfare Officer (if relevant) and class teachers. All of whom have their part to play in being responsible for ensuring attendance is a key priority in their day to day work.

In accordance with current legislation, each class in the School has an electronic attendance register. It is each school's policy that registers be completed by the times as set by their individual school policy. When they will be saved and closed so that the Administration Team and Attendance Officer can access them.

It is our policy to record a late mark (L) for children who arrive at school after class registration has taken place.

Children who arrive at school after 9am or 1pm will have a late after registration mark recorded (U).

## ABSENCE

It is the parent's responsibility to inform school of the reason for a child's absence. We would like to receive notification as soon as the child is absent from school. We ask that the parent telephones the school office before 9.00 am each morning their child is absent to discuss the reason for the absence. We need to receive information when the child returns to school, in the form of a note and any medical evidence such as prescription, appointment card etc.

It is a fact that parentally-condoned unjustified absence is a serious problem in some schools. This can be every bit as damaging as the more traditional forms of truancy.

Only the Head Teacher of the School, within the context of the law, can approve absence, not parents. The fact that a parent has offered a note or other notification in relation to a particular absence does not, of itself, oblige the school to accept it if the school does not accept the explanation offered as a valid reason for absence. If, after further investigation doubt remains about the explanation offered – or where no explanation is forthcoming at all, the absence must be treated as unauthorised. Where parentally-condoned unjustified absence appears to be a problem in relation to a particular pupil, school will involve the School's Attendance Officer and employed Education Welfare Officer at an early opportunity.

An excessive amount of authorised absence can also seriously disrupt continuity of learning and encourage disaffection. We must alert to emerging patterns of authorised absence. We may authorise absence retrospectively where we are satisfied as to the explanation offered. Absences of pupils of compulsory school age without valid reason or for which no explanation has been provided will be treated as unauthorised and attendance procedures will be followed. Section 444 of the Education Act 1992 provides that no offence is committed where a pupil of compulsory school age is prevented from attending school by reason of illness. If school is satisfied that a pupil is absent as a result of illness the absence will be treated as authorised. Where we have reason to doubt the validity of an explanation offered in respect of a particular absence, further information will be requested by the School's Attendance Officer or the employed Education Welfare Officer, from the child's parents. If the school continues to be dissatisfied then the absence will be treated as unauthorised.

Where there is doubt about the authenticity of absence attributed to illness, the School's Education Welfare Officer may attempt to refer the matter to a doctor working in the School Health Service to arrange a special medical, or to make contact with the pupil's GP. If a pupil is absent for a prolonged period or the School notices a pattern emerging, early contact will be made with the Local Authority Education Welfare Service and/or School Health Service. We will not authorise leave of absence for the purpose of a family holiday apart from in the most **exceptional of circumstances**. Any leave of absence request that is declined by the Head Teacher may result in the school Attendance Officer issuing a warning letter and subsequent unauthorised absence may result in a referral to the Local Authority for the issue of a Penalty Notice.

Leave of absence during term time is at the Head Teacher's discretion and should not be considered a parental right.

Decisions made in relation to leave of absence, whether granted or not, will be applied equitably and consistently.

## REPORTING ABSENCE

Once we receive a reason for an absence, we may authorise that absence by inserting the correct symbol on the computer records.

Reporting reasons for absence by telephone, verbally to a member of the Reception Team/Attendance officer or a note are all acceptable. We expect parents will contact the school and report the reason for absence on the first day of the absence and subsequent days before 9am. James Cook Learning Trust operates a first day calling system. If we have not received a reason for absence by 9.30 am on the first day of absence a member of the Attendance Team will contact the home contact number to try and ascertain the reason for absence. If the absence continues to the second day then all contact information will be used to attempt to discuss the absence with the parent. If however the absence continues these will be followed up by the School's Attendance Officer and / or paid Education Welfare Officer. Where concerns continue and/or a pupil has had 10 consecutive days or more of unauthorised absence from school and no contact is made, a referral will be made to the Local Authority Education Welfare Service under Children Missing Education/attendance procedures. Where it is suspected that a pupil may be at risk of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), sexual exploitation, radicalisation, or is a runaway or young carer safeguarding procedures will be followed.

Local Authority attendance procedures will be followed in relation to school transfers, exclusions and pupils' who are dual registered and attending alternative educational provision.

The Attendance Team will keep all notes and notes of telephone messages and any verbal explanations. These will all be dated.

Where a pupil is present for registration but then has to attend an appointment, the School need take no action beyond the staff in school recording the fact in the Signing out Book for the purpose of emergency evacuation. The pupil although registered is not physically present. Similarly the School must note the presence of a pupil (again for emergency evacuation) who was not there when the register was being taken but returns later from an appointment.

## **LEAVE OF ABSENCE IN TERM TIME INCLUDING FAMILY HOLIDAY**

The Pupil Registration Regulations 2013 state that Head Teachers may not grant any leave of absence unless there are **exceptional circumstances**. The legislation makes it clear that parents do not have an automatic right to take their child out of school for holidays in term time. Parents are strongly urged to avoid making requests for leave of absence for the purpose of a family holiday during term time due to the disruption and impact of the missed education on the child. If parents wish to take their child out of school in term time, then they should complete a Leave of Absence form and must state in full their reasons for the absence, why they feel it is essential that it takes place during term time and if appropriate accompanied by evidence. An example of evidence in the case of a family holiday being a signed letter from an employer on letter headed paper, which states the reason why the applicant is unable to take a Leave of Absence for a family holiday during school holiday. The evidence will be taken into consideration when a decision is made. However, applicants must be aware that the submission of evidence does not automatically guarantee that the absence will be authorised or that penalty notice procedures will not be followed.

The leave of Absence form can be obtained from the main office of each school. It should be completed and returned to the office at least four school weeks prior to the leave been taken and marked for the attention of the Head Teacher for individual consideration. The Head Teacher will inform the parent of their decision.

At James Cook Learning Trust, exceptional circumstances have been determined as:

- Any exceptional circumstance arising, at the Head Teacher's discretion.

Parents have been made aware that the Local Authority will decide to issue penalty notice fines to parents. Currently the amounts are £60 per child for each parent where the fine is paid within 21 days, and £120 per child for each parent where the fine is paid between the 21st day and the

28th day. Parents should be aware that this means a family of 2 parents and 2 children will be fined £240 if the fine is paid within 21 days or £480 if the fine is paid from 21-28 days. For families with 3 children, these amounts would be £360/£720.

If the penalty notice is not paid in full by the end of the 28<sup>th</sup> day period, then the Local Authority will either prosecute for the offence to which the notice applies or withdraw the notice. Late submissions of leave of absence forms and/or leave of absence taken without schools prior knowledge and permission may also be subject to penalty notice procedures.

Pupils who have 20 consecutive school days of unauthorised absence may be at risk of losing their school place.

## **CATEGORISING ABSENCE**

Our policy in general with the categories of absence cannot cover every eventuality. It will be necessary on occasion to exercise reasonable discretion when investigating some absences.

Some Key Points:

- Registered pupils of compulsory school age are required by law to be in school.
- Whilst it is right that schools and Academies should recognise that individual pupils and families have problems the aim should always be to expect regular attendance.
- Lateness should be actively discouraged.
- Where a pupil is absent without prior authorisation an explanation is required. If one is not forthcoming (for whatever reason) it must be treated as unauthorised and the register recorded accordingly.
- Schools are not obliged to accept parental notes where there is reason to doubt the validity of the explanation offered.
- Explanations such as minding the house, birthdays, looking after other children, or shopping trips within school hours will not normally be acceptable reasons for absence.
- Even when an absence is authorised, schools should be alerted to emerging patterns of absence which may seriously disrupt continuity of learning.
- In promoting regular attendance, schools should work closely with appropriate education department staff.

## **PUNCTUALITY**

It is James Cook Learning Trust's policy to actively discourage late arrival. A pupil arriving late may seriously disrupt not only his or her continuity of learning but also that of others. In recognition of local circumstances (such as bad weather), we may keep registers open for a reasonable period.

For registration to mean anything at all, a firm line must be taken on late arrivals. To do otherwise undermines the whole purpose of registration and may serve to encourage other pupils to arrive late. Particular attention will be paid to emerging patterns of late arrival.

Where a pupil does arrive late and misses registration, his or her presence on site will still need to be noted. Anyone arriving late must report to the office. Office staff and the Attendance Team will be there to challenge the lateness. Office staff will amend the child's presence on the electronic register and in the late book.

In responding to lateness, we will of course need to take account of the individual circumstances of each case. In some instances enquires may reveal that the late arrival stems from difficulties at

home or other genuinely unavoidable circumstances. The School's Attendance Officer /paid Education Welfare Officer may need to seek an early meeting with parents of pupils who persistently fail to arrive on time without valid reason whilst keeping the Head Teacher informed. If the parents do not have any valid reason for the child's persistent lateness the School's Attendance Officer/paid Education Welfare Officer will consult with the Local Authority.

## **ROLE OF THE ATTENDANCE OFFICER/ PAID EDUCATION WELFARE OFFICER**

The role of our designated Attendance Officer/ paid Education Welfare Officer is to:

- Liaise, where appropriate, between home and school.
- Investigate irregular attendance or lateness which may rise to concerns that a child may be at risk.
- Complete a regular register check.
- Provide advice and support to parents through the initiation of attendance procedures.
- Work with children who are experiencing problems with attendance and/or punctuality, especially those who are preparing to transfer to secondary school.
- Assist school in setting attendance targets.
- Follow Local Authority attendance procedures through to prosecution and possible court action.

## **REFERRAL TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITY EDUCATION WELFARE SERVICE**

Referral to the Local Authority Education Welfare Service will be made in the following circumstances:

- The absence is unauthorised, regular and/or repeated and therefore affecting the child's education.
- The intervention by the School has failed to secure a pupil's regular attendance.
- The intervention by the School has failed to secure a pupil's punctual attendance.

Referrals can only be made after discussion with the Head or Deputy Head Teacher. A referral form will be completed for each pupil and given to the Local Authority Education Welfare Service.

When making a referral to the Local Authority, the following information may be included:

- Action taken to date by the school.
- Parents/Pupils' attitudes towards the School and the School's intervention.
- Parental reasons for non-attendance.
- Action taken by the School to resolve any identified problems.
- Information regarding any special educational needs the pupils may have, academic attainments and support being provided by the school.
- Information regarding potential aggression from the parents.

## **ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES**

### Intervention at School Level

#### Stage 1 – Monitor

This section describes the role of school in relation to improving attendance. Pupil's attendance is monitored on a weekly basis, by the School's Attendance Officer and paid Education Welfare Officer

The class teacher has primary responsibility for monitoring attendance of the pupils in the class group and for collecting notes explaining absence, maintaining an accurate register and informing the Head Teacher/Deputy Head Teacher and/or someone from the Schools' Attendance Team with concerns about attendance and punctuality.

Where possible James Cook Learning Trust operates a first day response to absence system, and where this has failed to make contact with the parent of the absent child a home visit maybe the next step.

#### Stage 2 – Attendance Concerns

Home is contacted by phone if no reason for absence is received by the school office by 9.30am. A record is kept by the school of all contacts and conversations relating to reasons for absence from school.

Parents are encouraged to visit the school to discuss attendance and strategies to improve, with the School's Attendance Officer/ paid Education Welfare Officer.

Where attendance is at 90% or below the paid Education Welfare Officer discusses the pupil with the school's Attendance Team and/or Head Teacher. The parent will be invited in to meet with the Education welfare Officer. It is important to establish the reason for poor attendance, the general health of the pupil, home circumstances etc. The parent will then be involved in writing an Attendance Plan and given a target to improve the pupil's attendance, which is higher than their normal attendance rate to be achieved over an agreed timescale.

Attendance for that pupil is then monitored for the duration of the plan and appropriate action taken if attendance remains a concern.

If attendance has not improved then options include:

- Contact home to discuss attendance either by letter or phone. If contacted by phone or in person areas of concern should be discussed with the parent and appropriate advice and support offered. For example, if the parent reports absence to be due to a recurring medical condition such as asthma the school could offer assistance by putting the parent in touch with the School Health Service and suggesting a referral be made.
- Referral to the Local Authority Education Welfare Service, which may result in a Penalty Notice, or legal action under the Act. It is the Local Authority who decide to issue penalty notice fines to parents or take legal action.

The Education Welfare Officer will prioritise the list of pupils to be referred to the Middlesbrough Local Authority Education Welfare Service. These circumstances include:

- When the school despite several attempts by phone and also by letter is unable to make contact with the parent.
- If attendance continues to cause concern and the absence is unauthorised.
- When the School has offered all support available but attendance fails to improve.
- When the School has reason not to accept the parents' justification for absence on a regular basis.

Each school within the Trust will have its own means of encouraging and rewarding good attendance. Along with other school specific aspects of managing good attendance, these will be set out in each schools individual attendance policy.