

HARRIS MIDDLE SCHOOL

ATTENDANCE POLICY

SPRING TERM 2009

CHAIR OF GOVERNORS: _____

MINUTED: _____

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HARRIS MIDDLE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Harris Middle School is committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all its pupils and recognises this can only be achieved by supporting and promoting excellent school attendance for all. This is based on the belief that only by attending school regularly and punctually will children and young people be able to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. High attainment depends on good attendance.
- 1.2 The whole school community – pupils / students, parents and carers, teaching and support staff and school governors – have a responsibility for ensuring good school attendance and have important roles to play. The purpose of the policy is to clarify everyone's part in this.
- 1.3 The policy has been drawn up after consultation with the whole community and is based on current government and Local Authority guidance and statutory Regulations. The school will ensure that all members of the committee know of the policy and have access to it.

2. School's roles and responsibilities

- 2.1 All staff (teaching and support) at Harris Middle School have a key role to play in supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and will work to provide an environment in which all our pupils are eager to learn, feel valued members of the school community and look forward to coming to school every day. Staff also have a responsibility to set a good example in matters relating to their own attendance and punctuality.
- 2.2 Attendance Leader
Year Heads as part of the Senior Management Team, will oversee, direct and co-ordinate the school's work in promoting regular and improved attendance and will ensure the Attendance Policy is consistently applied throughout the school. They will also ensure that up-to-date attendance data and issues are shared with the Senior Leadership Team, are made regularly available to all staff, pupils / students and parents (who will regularly be reminded about the importance of good school attendance). They will ensure that attendance issues are identified at an early stage and that support is put in place to deal with any difficulties.
- 2.3 Registration
 - i) The school is required to mark the attendance register twice each day; once at the start of the day and once during the afternoon session. Form tutors are responsible for completing the attendance registers using the prescribed codes (shown overleaf).

REGISTER CODES

CODE	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
/	Present (AM)	Present
\	Present (PM)	Present
B	Educated off site (NOT Dual registration)	Approved Education Activity
C	Other Authorised Circumstances (not covered by another appropriate code/description)	Authorised absence
D	Dual registration (i.e. pupil attending other establishment)	Approved Education Activity
E	Excluded (no alternative provision made)	Authorised absence
F	Extended family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
G	Family holiday (NOT agreed <u>or</u> days in excess of agreement)	Unauthorised absence
H	Family holiday (agreed)	Authorised absence
I	Illness (NOT medical or dental etc. appointments)	Authorised absence
J	Interview	Approved Education Activity
L	Late (before registers closed)	Present
M	Medical/Dental appointments	Authorised absence
N	No reason yet provided for absence	Unauthorised absence
O	Unauthorised absence (not covered by any other code/description)	Unauthorised absence
P	Approved sporting activity	Approved Education Activity
R	Religious observance	Authorised absence
S	Study leave	Authorised absence
T	Traveller absence	Authorised absence
U	Late (after registers closed)	Unauthorised absence
V	Educational visit or trip	Approved Education Activity
W	Work experience	Approved Education Activity
X	Non-compulsory school age absence	Not counted in possible attendances
Y	Enforced closure	Not counted in possible attendances
Z	Pupil not yet on roll	Not counted in possible attendances
#	School closed to pupils	Not counted in possible attendances

- ii) The register will be called promptly at **8.45 am** and **1.50 pm** by each form tutor and a mark will be made during the registration period in respect of each child.
- iii) The registers will close at **9.15 am** and **2.20 pm**. Any pupil who arrives **after** the closing of the register will count as **absent**. Pupils who arrive before the register closes will be counted as **present** but will be dealt with under the school's policy on punctuality and lateness (see para 4.4 on page 6).

2.4 Categorising absence

- i) A mark will be made in respect of each child during registration. Any child who is not present at this time will be marked unauthorised absence unless leave has been granted by the school in advance or the reason for absence is already known and accepted by the school as legitimate. Where a reason for absence is given and accepted by the school at a later stage, the register will be amended in such a way that the original entry and the amendment / correction are distinguishable. The decision about whether the absence should be authorised or unauthorised rests with the form tutor/year head.
- ii) Harris Middle School recognises the clear links between attendance and attainment, and attendance and safeguarding children. It recognises that inappropriate authorisation of absence can be as damaging to a child's education as authorised absence, will potentially send a message to parents that any reason for non-school attendance is acceptable and can render children extremely vulnerable to harm. If absence is frequent or continuous, and except where a child is clearly unwell, staff at Harris Middle School will therefore challenge parents about the need and reasons for their child's absence and will encourage them to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a pupil's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence **will always rest with the school**.
- iii) If no explanation about an absence is received by the school **within 2 weeks**, the absence will remain unauthorised;
- iv) Absence will be authorised in the following circumstances:
 - (a) where leave has been granted by the school in advance, for example –
 - a pupil is to participate in an approved performance for which a licence has been granted by the Local Authority,
 - a pupil is involved in an **exceptional** special occasion – in authorising such an absence the individual circumstances of the particular case and the pupil's overall pattern of attendance will be considered,
 - in **exceptional** circumstances, permission has been granted for a family holiday for which the parents have sought permission in advance;
 - (b) where the school is satisfied that the child is too ill to attend;
 - (c) where the pupil has a medical appointment (although parents should be encouraged to make these out of school hours wherever possible, and to return their child to school immediately afterwards – or send him / her to school beforehand;
 - (d) where there is an unavoidable cause for the absence which is beyond the family's control, eg extreme weather conditions;

- (e) the absence occurs on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong;
 - (f) the pupil lives more than three miles away and no suitable transport arrangements have been made by the Local Authority;
 - (g) in other **exceptional circumstances** (eg a family bereavement) and **for a very limited period**.
- v) Except in the circumstances described above, absences will be unauthorised. Some examples of reasons for **not** authorising absence would be:
- no explanation has been given by the parent;
 - the school is not satisfied with the explanation;
 - the pupil is staying at home to mind the house;
 - the pupil is shopping during school hours;
 - the pupil is absent for **unexceptional** reasons, eg a birthday;
 - the pupil is absent from school on a family holiday without prior permission;
 - the pupil has been stopped during a truancy sweep and is unable (or the parent is unable) to give a satisfactory reason for the absence.

2.5 Approved educational activity

Where a student is engaged in off-site approved educational activities, the school will check his/her attendance on a daily basis before entering the appropriate code in the register.

2.6 Post Registration Truancy

Any sudden absences that occur during the day should be reported to the school office who will take the necessary measures to locate the pupil and inform parents.

2.7 Staff Training

Year Heads will ensure that all staff responsible for taking registers within their year group, including any temporary or supply staff, receive sufficient training to enable them to perform the task accurately.

3. **Collection and analysis of data**

- 3.1 Year Heads will ensure that attendance data is complete, accurate, analysed and reported to the senior leadership team, parents and the governing body. The report should include commentary on the trajectory and the school target. The data will inform the school's future practice to improve attendance and prevent disaffection.
- 3.2 Attendance is monitored by year group, tutor group, at subject level and by reasons for absence. It is also analysed by gender, ethnicity, pupils with special educational needs and those who are vulnerable to poor attendance.
- 3.3 Accurate attendance returns are made to the DfES within the stipulated time frame.

4. Systems and strategies for managing and improving attendance

- 4.1 Attendance has a very high profile at Harris Middle School and is regularly discussed at assemblies and in tutor groups. Parents are regularly reminded in newsletters and school meetings about the importance of good attendance and its links to attainment, and weekly attendance figures are displayed prominently in school.
- 4.2 Harris Middle School has procedures for dealing with unexplained absences which include a letter being sent home to parents on a fortnightly basis.
- 4.3 First-day calling
Harris Middle School has in place a system of first-day calling. This means that parents will be telephoned on the first day a pupil is absent without explanation to establish a reason for the absence. This helps to identify at an early stage pupils who do not have a good reason for absence or who may be absent without their parents' knowledge. Where it is not possible to make contact with parents on the first day of absence, on the second day of absence, the emergency contact numbers will be used to establish the reason for absence
- 4.4 Meetings with parents
Where there is an emerging pattern to a pupil's absence over a 4 - 6 week period (or sooner if staff are particularly concerned), with or without explanation, the school will invite parents to a meeting to discuss the reasons for the absences. Plans should be put in place with the parents and pupil to resolve any difficulties and improve the attendance within a specified time limit – usually no more than 6 weeks. It will be explained to parents that any future absences will be unauthorised unless there is clear evidence of a good reason for them.
- 4.5 Referral to the Education Attendance Service
If there continue to be unauthorised absences by the end of the specific time (or sooner if the pupil is failing to attend school at all), the matter will be referred to the Education Attendance Service.
- 4.6 Lateness and punctuality
Pupils are expected to arrive at school, and be in the correct room for registration, on time every day. It is very disruptive to their own education and that of others in their class, if they are late. Pupils who arrive after the register closes will be marked absent for the whole session (a session being a morning or an afternoon). This absence will be unauthorised unless the school is satisfied that there is a legitimate reason for the pupil to be late. Such a reason will not include things such as missing the bus, clothes in the washing machine or lost shoes. A pupil who is persistently absent by reason of lateness will be dealt with in the same way as other students with an emerging pattern of absence. If the matter is not resolved quickly, it will be referred to the Education Attendance Service.
- 4.7 Pupils who arrive late for school but before the register closes will be recorded in the late book and regular reports made available to year heads
- 4.8 For health and safety reasons it is important that the school knows who is in the building. Pupils arriving late should therefore report to the school office. **It is important that all pupils / students arriving late following this procedure.**
- 4.9 For the same reason it is important that pupils leaving the premises legitimately (eg for a medical appointment), or returning to school later in the day are signed out/in at the school office by office staff.

4.10 Post-registration truancy

Post-registration truancy occurs when a pupil goes missing from school having previously registered for the session. This behaviour not only means the pupil will not be receiving a full-time education, it also potentially renders him/her vulnerable to harm. Harris Middle School takes this very seriously and will endeavour to ensure it does not happen. If, however, a pupil appears to have left the premises without authorisation, the school will try to make contact with his/her parents immediately. If this proves not possible, or in discussion with parents if there is still concern, the police will be contacted in line with safeguarding the child.

5. **Term-time Holidays**

5.1 Term-time holidays are intended for children whose parents are unable to take holiday at any other time. A general letter is sent to parents on an annual basis, explaining the guidelines for term-time holidays.

5.2 Harris Middle School will consider every application individually, and in most circumstances will only authorise 10 days holiday in any one academic year and this will depend upon the child's age, the time of year and the pupil's overall attendance pattern. Time off school for family holidays **is not a right**. A holiday form, available from the school office, must be completed and returned to the school at least three weeks in advance of the intended holiday.

5.3 Harris Middle School will respond to all requests for a leave of absence in writing giving the reasons for the decision.

5.4 Harris Middle School will NOT authorise a holiday during periods of national tests, ie SATS.

6. **Extended leave of absence**

6.1 In considering absence for extended trips overseas Harris Middle School will take account of the following:

- a visit to family overseas has a very different significance from a normal 'holiday';
- such visits may be important in terms of children's identity and self-esteem as they grow up;
- parents may feel that the reasons for their visit outweigh the importance of their child's uninterrupted attendance at school (although parents could be encouraged to use the school holiday periods for at least part of their trip);
- the reasons for wishing to make a visit is more difficult, particularly for minority ethnic families, where huge distances and high costs are involved;
- where extended leave of absence is granted there will be an expectation that the pupil undertakes some school-set work during this period.

7. **Parents' / carers' responsibilities**

7.1 The prime responsibility for ensuring children receive an appropriate and full-time education rests with parents / carers (defined by the Education Act 1996 as those with parental responsibility and those who have the care of a child), who will be supported and encouraged by Harris Middle School.

7.2 Harris Middle School expects parents / carers will:

- ensure their children attend the school regularly;
- support their children's attendance by keeping requests for absence to a minimum;
- not expect the school to automatically agree any requests for absence, and not condone unjustified absence from school.

7.3 Parents will also be expected to:

- notify Harris Middle School on the first day of absence;
- ensure their children arrive at school on time, properly dressed and with the right equipment for the day;
- work in partnership with the school, for example by attending parents' meetings and consultations, signing homework diaries when asked to do so, taking an interest in their children's work and activities;
- contact the school without delay if they are concerned about any aspects of their children's school lives. Harris Middle School will endeavour to support parents to address their concerns.

8. Pupils' responsibilities

8.1 All pupils should be aware of the importance of regular school attendance. If they are having difficulties that may prevent them from attending school regularly, they should speak to their class teacher or form tutor.

8.2 Pupils should attend all their lessons on time, ready to learn. If they have been absent from school they should give their form tutor a note from their parents to explain the absence. Pupils also have a responsibility for following school procedures if they arrive late.

8.3 A Guide for Pupils and Parents/Carers is attached.

9. Governors' responsibilities

Section 175 (2)

9.1 The governing body of a maintained school shall make arrangements for ensuring that their functions relating to the conduct of the school are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are pupils at the school.

10. Conclusion

10.1 Regular school attendance is a necessary contributor to ensuring the outcomes of *Every Child Matters*:

Be healthy –

- attendance at school supports children’s emotional and social health and development
- the school curriculum teaches children to be healthy

Stay safe –

- schools and the LA have a statutory duty to promote the safety and welfare of children
- the best way to safeguard children is to ensure they attend school regularly

Enjoy and achieve –

- good school attendance supports children in reaching their maximum potential and enjoying the fulfilment this brings

Make a positive contribution –

- membership of a school community builds confidence, gives children a sense of belonging and teaches them to contribute to and be responsible for the well-being of others

Achieve economic well-being –

- good school attendance supports engagement in further education, employment or training in the future, which in turn helps to support a prosperous and fulfilling life-style

Reviewing the policy

The school will review this policy every two years, or as required, with its allocated Education Welfare Officer.

Fast-track to Prosecutions Framework

The school in conjunction with the LEA, now uses a fast-track approach to case management and, where appropriate, to prosecution.

The aim of Fast-track is to ensure that schools and LEA's deal with attendance cases quickly and in the most effective way to get the child back into school. It is a mechanism for ensuring that, where appropriate, parents are prompted to focus on their responsibilities to ensure their children's regular attendance at school.

The Fast-track framework promotes early intervention both by the school and the LEA. It aims to ensure that appropriate action is taken to tackle non-attendance as soon as attendance problems become apparent. The action involved engaging the parent and specifying what improvements need to be made over a set time-frame (ideally 12 weeks).

Where the parent fails to take their responsibilities seriously and no improvement is made in the child's attendance within the specified time-frame, prosecution proceedings are initiated.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the framework are:

- To bring consistency across LEAs to the prosecution process while still enabling local decisions;
- To ensure that intervention strategies are put into place early to tackle school attendance problems; and
- To ensure that parents who fail to cooperate or are unwilling to work with the school/LEA are identified sooner and action is taken to make sure that they take responsibility for their child's school attendance.

There are various components of the Framework that must be put into practice that may lead to prosecution.

- School – first day contact, informing LEA after 10 consecutive days of unauthorised absence for 80% or less attendance over a month, a case assessment made with the LEA.
- LEA – action plan put in place signed by all parties reviewed during week 6, summons applied for no later than week 6, attendance monitored throughout and beyond prosecution.

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