

Whitecross Hereford: High School & Specialist Sports College

Policy: Attendance

Reviewed by: Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare Committee
Approved by Full Board: 27 February 2017

School attendance is subject to various education laws and this School Attendance Policy is written to reflect these laws and the guidance produced by the Department for Education.

Introduction

Whitecross Hereford is committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all its students 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.

The whole school community – students, parents and guardians, teaching and support staff and school governors have a key role to play in supporting and promoting excellent school attendance and Whitecross Hereford staff work to provide an environment in which all our students are eager to learn, feel valued members of the school community and look forward to coming to school every day. For our children to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered it is vital your child is at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. The routines 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.

Safeguarding and Attendance

Whitecross Hereford recognises the clear links between attendance and **safeguarding** children. If a child does not attend school it is considered a potential **safeguarding** matter. This is why information about the reason of any absence is always required.

Attendance registers are scrutinised on a daily basis. Should contact with a parent not be established and a satisfactory explanation for the absence not be obtained, then safeguarding procedures will commence. A risk assessment is conducted which determines the level of intervention needed. We will make all reasonable enquiries to establish contact with parents/guardians and the child, including making enquiries to known friends and wider family members. We may visit your family home and if not satisfied with information a request will be made to the Police for a 'safe and well' check.

School Attendance Target

Whitecross Hereford has high expectations for attendance. The governing body has set an overall attendance target of 97%. It would be lovely if we could achieve 100% attendance for all students but we appreciate that there are, sometimes, exceptional circumstances. Every opportunity will be used to convey to students and their parents/guardians the importance of regular and punctual attendance.

Persistent Absentees

If your child misses 10% or more schooling across the school year, for whatever reason, they are defined as *persistent absentees*. Absence for whatever reason disadvantages a child by creating gaps in his or her learning. Research shows these gaps affect attainment when attendance falls below 95%. Regular attenders make better progress, both socially and academically; they find school routines, school work and friendships easier to cope with and find learning more satisfying.

Registration

Legally the register must be marked twice daily. This is once at the start of the school day, **8.45am**, and again for the afternoon session at **1.45pm**. (**1.25pm** on Mondays). All students are expected to be in school by this time

The registers are completed using the prescribed codes. Information about registration codes can be found on the following website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance

The registers will close at **9.00am** and **2.05pm** (**1.40pm** Mondays).

Lateness/Punctuality

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

Arrival after the close of registration will be marked as unauthorised absence and coded *U* in line with Department of Education guidance. This mark shows them to be on site, but is legally recorded as an absence.

For health and safety reasons it is important that the school knows who is in the building. Students arriving late should therefore report to the school office. **It is important that all students arriving late follow this procedure.**

For the same reason it is important that parents of students leaving the premises legitimately (e.g. for a medical appointment), or returning to school later in the day inform the school office. The school office will record that the child has left the school site and will mark them back in when they return.

If a student is late due to a medical appointment please provide evidence to support the absence or late arrival. They will receive an authorised absence, coded *M*. Please be advised that, where possible, doctors and dentists appointments are to be made outside of school hours or during school holidays.

If your child is absent

A mark will be made in respect of each child following the close of the registers. Any child who is not present will be marked "*No reason yet provided for absence (N)*" 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.

If no explanation about an absence is received by the school within **5 working days**, the absence will be unauthorised.

If your child is absent we:

- will telephone or text you if we have not heard from you – this is because we have a duty to ensure your child's safety as well as their regular school attendance;
- may invite you in to discuss the situation with our Attendance Coordinator and Attendance

Welfare Officer;

- will refer the matter to the Herefordshire Council if there are 10 or more unauthorised absences.

If absence is frequent or continuous, except where a child is clearly unwell, school staff will 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 student's home does not mean an absence becomes authorised. The decision whether or not to authorise an absence **will always rest with the Headteacher**.

What to do if your child is absent

Let us know! Remember, a child not attending school may be considered a safeguarding matter and we may need to consult with other agencies if we have not heard from you.

Please let us know each day your child is absent. Please do this by 9.15am each morning. Please give as much information as possible as the Headteacher must make the decision if the absence is authorised or unauthorised. We may contact you for more information to support the absence. You may be required to provide evidence to support the absence.

You can text, phone, email or call in to Reception. Our text number is 07624808599; dedicated phone number is 08442393069; email is Reception@whitecross.hereford.sch.uk . Alternatively, please phone Reception on 01432 376080.

Understanding types of absence

Students 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 the school 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 the school has not received a reason for absence or has not approved a child's leave of absence from school after a parent's request. This includes: parents giving their children permission to be off school unnecessarily, such as for shopping, birthdays or to look after siblings;
- truancy before or during the school day;
- absences which have not been explained.

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

We will refer the matter to Herefordshire Council if there are 10 or more unauthorised absences.

Absences due to illness

Where the school is satisfied that the child is too ill to attend (*work will not be sent home during illness - students should concentrate on getting well and returning to school as soon as possible*). Persistent illness without medical evidence will not be authorised. Medical evidence could take the form of a prescription, the label on medication prescribed by the child's GP, an appointment card or a medical certificate from the child's GP to indicate he/she has had a GP consultation. We also offer a service to parents where you give permission for a member of staff to contact the surgery to ask if contact has been made with the surgery.

Welcome back

When a student returns from a period of absence they are welcomed back by their Form Tutor and presented with a 'catch-up' form for them to complete. Students are expected to obtain a written summary from all their teachers of the work that they have missed and need to catch up. This is then checked by a member of the pastoral team and checked again when it has been signed off as done by the teacher in question.

Exceptional circumstances

In **exceptional** circumstances, permission may be granted for leave of absence for which the parents have sought written permission in advance, such as:

- where the student 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 before and after the appointment. Where this is not possible, the student should only be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary for the appointment);
- where there is an unavoidable cause for the absence which is beyond the family's control, e.g. extreme weather conditions (If public transport is running and school is able to open students are expected to attend);
- the absence occurs on a day exclusively set aside for religious observance by the religious body to which the student's parents belong. Where necessary, we may seek advice from the parents' religious body about whether it has set the day apart for religious observance. (You may be requested to provide evidence to support this);
- approved educational activity;
- absence through child participation in public performances, including theatre, film or television work and modelling;
- absence through competing at regional, county or national level for sport;
- in other **exceptional circumstances** (e.g. a family bereavement) and **for a very limited period**.

Internal absences

Any sudden absences that occur during the day will be reported to the school office. If a student leaves the school premises the parents will be contacted and it is their parental responsibility to return their child back to school. Please ensure you keep us updated with any change of address and phone numbers (home and work) and names of other family members/ friends we may contact if necessary.

Request for Leave of Absence

Amendments to school attendance regulations were updated and enforced from September 2013: The Education (Student Registration) (England) Regulations state that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. It is important to note that Headteachers can determine the length of the authorised absence, as well as whether absence is authorised at all. The fundamental principles for defining *exceptional* are rare, significant, or unavoidable, which means the event could not reasonably be scheduled at another time. There are no rules on this as circumstances vary from school to school and family to family. There is, however, no legal entitlement for time off in school term time to go on holiday and in the majority of cases holiday will not be authorised. Parents/guardians wishing to apply for leave of absence need to write to the Headteacher in advance and before making any travel arrangements.

If term-time leave is taken without prior permission from the school, the absence will be unauthorised and if the number of sessions absent meet the thresholds set down in Herefordshire Council's *Code of Conduct*, parents/guardians will be notified that the matter is being referred to Herefordshire Council who may take legal proceedings against the parents/guardians.

Taking holidays in term time will affect your child's schooling as much as any other absence and we expect parents to help us by not taking children out during school time.

Whitecross High School will consider each application individually. Our policy is **NOT** to grant leave of absence for a holiday other than in the **most exceptional circumstances**). An application must be made in writing to the Headteacher with appropriate evidence, **well in advance** of the intended holiday. Authorised absence will only be granted where the correct procedures have been followed and the permission given. It will not be granted retrospectively and remains at the discretion of the Headteacher to authorise the absence

Managing and improving attendance

Attendance has a very high profile at Whitecross High School. Parents are regularly reminded in newsletters and school meetings about the importance of good attendance and its links to safeguarding and attainment.

In education law, parents/guardians are committing an offence if they fail to ensure the regular attendance of their child of compulsory school age at the school at which the child is registered, unless the absence has been authorised by the school.

The school makes use of a range of measures including praise and rewards, truancy sweeps and meetings with parents/guardians to support good attendance at school. We also work closely with Herefordshire Council when considering appropriate legal action such as Penalty Notice Warnings, Penalty Notices and alternative legal measures.

Meetings with parents/guardians

Where there is an emerging pattern to a student's absence 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 student to resolve any difficulties and improve the attendance within a specified time limit – usually no more than 6 weeks. We are keen to offer sensitive and appropriate support and guidance to parents concerning student attendance.

Referral to the Attendance Welfare Officer

If we continue to have concerns the matter may be referred to the Attendance Welfare Officer who will offer help, support and guidance. The school may also refer the matter to Herefordshire Council if there are 10 or more unauthorised absences and liaise with them if a parent fails to engage with guidance and support. The Council may consider appropriate legal action in line with Herefordshire Council's Guidance and Code of Conduct.