



**Cornerstone Academy Trust**

**Attendance Policy**

## Introduction

The Board of Trustees are committed to providing a full and effective educational experience for all pupils. We believe that if pupils are to benefit from education, punctual, daily attendance is crucial. Irregular attendance undermines the educational process and can lead to educational and social disadvantage. A culture of high attendance and full engagement in school life is essential in order for children to progress and benefit from all school has to offer.

The Trust actively promotes and encourages 100 per cent attendance for all our pupils. We recognise that parents have a vital role to play and that there is a need to establish strong home-school links and communication systems that can be utilised whenever there is concern about attendance.

If there are problems which affect a pupil's attendance, we will investigate, identify and strive in partnership with parents and pupils to resolve those problems as quickly and efficiently as possible. We will adopt a clearly focused approach aimed at returning the pupil to full attendance.

## Scope and Purpose

### At Cornerstone Academy Trust we:

- expect pupils to attend school regularly and to arrive in a fit condition to learn
- encourage good attendance and will investigate all absenteeism
- ensure school staff set a good example in matters of attendance and punctuality and will promptly investigate all absenteeism and lateness
- will work closely with parents should attendance / punctuality give cause for concern

### Pupils:

- will ensure that they attend regularly, on time and in a fit condition to learn

### Parents:

- are responsible for ensuring their children attend school regularly, punctually, are properly dressed and in a fit condition to learn
- are responsible for informing the school as early as possible of the reason for any absence
- are required to complete an **Absence Request Form (for exceptional circumstances)** if they wish to take their children out of school (including medical appointments)
- can expect the school to keep them fully informed of their child's attendance

### Absence from school will be authorised if it is for the following reasons:

- Sickness
- Unavoidable medical / dental appointments
- Days of religious observance
- Exceptional circumstances, such as bereavement
- Seeing a parent who is on leave from the armed forces just before or just after an overseas duty
- External examinations
- Traveller children go on the road with their parents to enable their parents to work, only 180 sessions will be authorized. They need to attend school for 200 sessions.

Parents should note that even if the reason for requesting absence falls within the exceptional circumstances listed above, the Head of School will still consider the following before deciding on whether the request will be authorised:

- If your child has an attendance level below 95% calculated over the previous twelve months.
- In the **first two weeks of the school year** (this is a crucial time when all children should be settling in to their new classroom routines and missing this time is detrimental to forming new relationships and routines in a new class)
- **During key assessment points within the school year such as SATs** (this is a time when it is important that all Year 6 children are in school as it is a week of examinations organised by the Department for Education and these tests cannot be taken at any other time)

### **Absences during Term Time**

A parent must complete an **Absence Request Form (for exceptional circumstances)** from the school office or school website when asking for absence to be authorised. Permission must be sought in advance to take a pupil out of school during term time, which can only be requested from a parent with parental responsibility and with whom the child normally lives.

If the circumstances relating to this request are considered exceptional and the absence is authorised by the Trust, the authorising of the absences will be conditional on the child's attendance being satisfactory up to the date covered by this request. If the Trust withdraws the authorisation due to the attendance dropping to an unacceptable level, the parent will be informed of this in writing.

If a request is refused and the child is taken out of school, this will be recorded as an unauthorised absence, which may then be liable to a penalty notice, payable by each parent/carer, or the subject of court proceedings which could result in a fine or a term of imprisonment.

### **Medical Appointments**

Medical and dental appointments should be avoided during the school day but when this is unavoidable an Absence Request Form must be completed at least 3 weeks in advance. Any Absence Request Form for medical or dental appointments must be accompanied by the appointment card and letter confirming the appointment. In the event of an emergency appointment an absence request form still needs to be completed with confirmation of the appointment. It is the Trust's discretion whether the appointments will be authorised, the Trust will take in to account any previous appointments, on-going medical needs and the individual child's attendance.

### **Punctuality**

It is the responsibility of parents to ensure their child attends full time education and arrives at school on time. Punctuality is monitored and parents will be contacted if their child is not arriving to on time. If a child persistently arrives after the registers close, cases will be referred to the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) who may consider issuing a Penalty Notice.

**The Trust will always put the education of the child first when deciding whether or not to authorise an absence.** In doing so, school will also take into account the child's age, stage of education, internal assessment weeks and educational progress when making a decision. It is not the school's decision to fine parents for unauthorised absences but is at the discretion of Devon's Educational Social Welfare Service.

It is Devon County Council policy to issue Penalty Notices or fines for unauthorised absence. Details of the implementation of fines can be found in Devon County Council's Penalty Notice Code of Conduct.

Unauthorised absences may well result in the instigation of parental responsibility measures which could be a penalty notice, or a fine of up to £2,500 and/or a term of imprisonment of up to 3 months. These Penalty Notices can be issued for unauthorised holidays within term time and unauthorised absence from school when the circumstances appear to have been avoidable.

### **When Attendance Causes Concern**

If a child of compulsory school age fails to attend regularly at a school at which they are registered, or at a place where alternative provision is provided for them, the parents may be guilty of an offence and can be prosecuted by the local authority.

Cornerstone Academy Trust will utilise the support of the Education Welfare Service (EWS), where attendance is a concern. The School and EWS can support and advise parent who may be experiencing difficulties with their child's attendance through Early Help.

For continued unacceptable attendance the local authority may make the decision to issue a Penalty Notice, requiring a parent to pay a fine of up to £120 per parent. In certain circumstances, a parent may be prosecuted and be required to attend the Magistrates Court where they could face up to 3 months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £2,500. The parent/carer will be given every opportunity to improve their child's attendance and they will receive a written warning before any legal action is taken.

### **Medical Reasons for Absence**

Where a child has an on-going medical condition that is affecting their attendance in school, the school as a responsibility to support the child and the family with the situation. The condition should be shared with the school at the earliest possible time and with information detailing the condition. The school will create an individual **Health Care Plan** that supports the child's medical needs whilst remaining in school. It is imperative that communication between home and school is regular and both parties work together to ensure the Health Care Plan is followed to enable the child to successfully attend school on a regular basis.

### **Absence for Suspected Holiday**

If a parent takes their child out of school for a holiday even if an Absence Request Form has been completed for more than 10 sessions, the school has a duty to inform Devon County Council. The school complete the form and submit it along with the Absence Request Form, if applicable, a certificate of registration, 6-8 weeks of attendance data bridging the holiday period. This will trigger legal proceedings, this remains the decision of Devon County Council whether to start legal proceedings which may result in a fine or imprisonment.

### **Child Missing in Education**

If a child leaves the school and the school is unaware of the new school the child is going to, the school must inform Devon County Council that the child is Missing in Education. If the school becomes aware of the new school the child is at, the school must inform Devon County Council.

The school is able to remove the child from role after 20 days of them leaving providing the school has completed a **Missing in Education** form.

## Appendix 1

### Trust Attendance Management Procedures

#### 1. Registration:

Registration is between 9.00am and 9.10am in all schools. Pupils arriving after 9.00am but before 9.10am are deemed as late 'before registration closes'. Pupils arriving after 9.10am are considered late 'after registration has closed', they then lose their mark for the whole session and it is recorded as 'unauthorised'.

#### 2. Absence:

If your child is ill, or absent from school for any reason, it is expected that parents will ring the school office in the morning before 9.15am to inform the school of the reason for absence. If your child is unwell, please give details of the illness.

The school has a voicemail and it is acceptable for a parent to leave a message. If no message has been received, the office staff will contact the parent.

If the absence is for more than one day the school should be kept informed on a daily basis. If a pupil is absent due to illness for more than three days, the parent will be asked to provide an appointment card/prescription indicating that the pupil has been seen by a medical professional. This is to ensure that the school can accurately monitor pupil attendance and can explain the circumstances surrounding a pupil's attendance or prolonged absences.

#### 3. Appointments:

Routine appointments i.e. dental check-ups, eye tests should be made out of school hours or during school holidays. For any unavoidable appointments during the school day, please bring in your child's appointment card/letter; the office staff will take a copy.

#### 4. Attendance Causing Concern

Parents will be contacted on the first day of absence whenever any student is absent without reason, or persistently late, and when necessary will be reminded of their legal responsibility for ensuring that a child of compulsory school age attends school regularly.

The Attendance Lead or Deputy Head of School has responsibility for following up any concerns for attendance, informing parents where there are concerns regarding attendance, and for recording and reporting persistent problems.

Warning letters will be sent home where a child's attendance drops below an acceptable standard and if not addressed this will lead the school involving the EWO and possibly prosecution.

## Appendix 2

### Escalation Process

#### Stage 1:

If a child's attendance falls below 95% or has 3 separate bouts of illness, the class teacher will talk to the parent either via the phone or in person.

The focus should be concern on:

- How the child is doing
- What can we do to help in school?
- Support on how they can catch up on missed work
- Any medical reason that will lead to further absence

Class teacher will feed back to attendance lead and SENCo where appropriate.

At this point the Deputy Head of School needs to be informed if the child is unwell at school and they will make the decision to send them home or not.

NB: If a consistent significant illness or medical condition has been diagnosed or under diagnosis then the child should be moved to a Health Care Plan.

#### Stage 2:

Continue to track attendance of all children who have an attendance of below 95%.

Send letter 1 at the next absence after the class teacher has spoke to the parent. This letter details concerns around falling attendance and the school offering support.

#### Stage 3:

If absence persists, send letter 2 that informs parents that any further absence will be recorded as unauthorised.

This will be accompanied by a phone call from the Deputy Head of School to discuss the absence and the impact it is having on the child's education. At this point the Deputy Head of School will also offer additional support to increase the child's attendance rate.

All absences after letter 2 will be recorded as unauthorised unless there has been a suitable gap in since the last absence and a legitimate reason provided.

#### Stage 4:

When poor attendance persists, the attendance lead will speak to the EWO to seek advice.

Letter 3 will be sent home inviting parents to come in to school and meet with the Deputy Head of School or the Attendance lead.

Parents will be offered Early Help.

The EWO may also be invited to this meeting.

#### Stage 5:

At the next absence the Attendance lead will organise a meeting with the parent and EWO to begin legal proceedings.

Attendance will continue to be monitored.

No absence will be authorised.

### Appendix 3

#### Exceptional Circumstances Absence Request Form Process

<p><b>Stage 1:</b> Parents will fill in an absence request form for all absences to be taken during the school day that can be pre-empted. These are available from the office and on the website. Parents need to hand these in to the relevant school office at least 3 weeks before the absence.</p>
<p><b>Stage 2:</b> The administrator team will log receipt of the form on OneNote (attendance) and then pass the form to HoS for authorising/ unauthorising.</p>
<p><b>Stage 3:</b> The HoS will consider authorising under the following guidance:</p> <p><b>Forces family:</b> If an Absence Request Form is completed for a holiday that directly before or after active duty then the absence considered even if the child's attendance is less than 95%.</p> <p><b>Traveller family:</b> If an Absence Request Form is completed as the parents need to go on the road to fulfil work commitments and the child is on track to complete 200 school sessions, the absence will be considered.</p> <p><b>Performances:</b> If an Absence Request Form is completed so the child can participate in a performance or sporting event this will be considered. The Trust would consider the amount of time needed for the performance/ rehearsal and the amount of time being requested and the overall impact of the performance and the absence upon the child.</p> <p><b>Diagnosed medical condition:</b> If a child is diagnosed with a condition or illness that impacts attendance, they will have a Health Care Plan irrelevant of their stage of the attendance process and the attendance may then be authorised.</p> <p><b>Medical Appointments</b> Any medical or dental appointments that are unavoidable during the school day must have an Absence Request Form completed with the appointment card or letter confirming the appointment. It is the Trust's discretion whether these appointments will be authorised, the Trust will take in to account any previous appointments, on-going medical needs and the individual child's attendance.</p>
<p><b>Stage 4:</b> The Absence Request Form must be returned to the parent within a week. The HoS will return the form to the administrator team. The administrator team will copy the form and keep one copy on file and return the other copy to the parent confirming whether the absence has been authorised or unauthorised.</p>
<p><b>Stage 5:</b> The administrator team will complete the OneNote tracking document to ensure the process has been completed to include the time taken out of school, the number of sessions taken and authorised or unauthorised.</p>
<p><b>Stage 6:</b> If the child has been away on holiday during term time and has returned to school, the PR forms will be completed and sent to Devon County Council for them to pursue- this will be returned after the child has been back in school for two weeks and before the end of four weeks.</p>