PORTICO
ACADEMY TRUST

opening doors, unlocking potential

Attendance Policy

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Person (s) Responsible:	S.Halls in collaboration with Portico Attendance Group

Introduction and Background

Portico Academy Trust recognises that positive behaviour and good attendance are essential in order for pupils to get the most of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing and wider life chances.

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

Where parents decide to have their child registered at one of our schools, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly, on time. This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

The Department for Education (DfE) has statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities. It is called "Working together to improve school attendance" and it includes a National Framework in relation to absence and the use of legal sanctions. Our Trust Attendance Policy reflects the requirements and principles of that guidance.

This policy is written with the above guidance in mind and underpins our Trust ethos to:

- promote children's welfare and safeguarding;
- ensure every pupil has access to the full-time education to which they are entitled;
- ensure that pupils succeed whilst at school;
- ensure that pupils have access to the widest possible range of opportunities at school, and when they leave school.

It has been developed in consultation with school leadership teams across the Trust. It seeks to ensure that all parties involved in the practicalities of school attendance are aware and informed of attendance matters in school and to outline the Trust's commitment to attendance matters. It details the responsibilities of individuals and groups involved and the procedures in place to promote and monitor pupil attendance.

In addition, all our schools follow the DfE's statutory safeguarding guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education, which emphasises the importance of understanding the potential vulnerabilities of children who are missing or absent from education.

keeping-children-safe-in-education

Our policy aims to raise and maintain levels of attendance by:

- Promoting a positive and welcoming atmosphere in which pupils feel safe, secure and valued;
- Raising and maintaining a whole school awareness of the importance of good attendance and punctuality;
- Ensuring that attendance is monitored effectively and reasons for absences are recorded promptly and consistently.

For our children to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend regularly and be at school, on time, every day the school is open unless the reason for the absence is unavoidable. **It is a rule of our schools that pupils must attend every day, unless there are exceptional circumstances, and it is the *Headteacher/Principal*, not the parent, who can authorise the absence.**

Promoting Regular Attendance

At Portico schools, we believe in developing good patterns of attendance and set high expectations for the attendance and punctuality for all our pupils from the outset. It is a central part of our school's visions, values, ethos and day to day lives. We recognise the strong connections between attendance, attainment, safeguarding and wellbeing.

Our Senior Leadership Steering Group, made up from senior staff from each school and members of the Portico Executive Team, take the lead on the strategic approach to attendance in our schools.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Academy Trustees

The Academy Trustees are responsible for monitoring attendance figures for the whole school on at least a termly basis. It also holds the Headteacher/Principal to account for the implementation of this policy.

The Senior Attendance Champion (Headteacher/Principal and/or other member of the Senior Leadership Team)

The Senior Attendance Champion is responsible for:

- Implementation of this policy at the school
- Monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to trustees
- Supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual pupils
- Considering the issuing of fixed-penalty notices, where necessary

The Attendance Officer

The school Attendance Officer:

- Monitors attendance data across the school and at an individual pupil level
- Reports concerns about attendance to the Headteacher/Principal
- Works with The Trust attendance lead and Local Authority Access and Inclusion officers (where appropriate) to tackle persistent absence
- Arranges calls and meetings with parents to discuss attendance issues
- Advises the Headteacher/Principal when to consider issuing fixed-penalty notices

Class teachers

- Class teachers are responsible for recording attendance on a daily basis, using the correct codes.
- Promoting good attendance and challenging non-attendance.
- Liaising with Attendance Officer about Persistent Absence and ensuring they know the intervention in place to support each pupil.

School administration staff

School administration staff are expected to take calls from parents about absence and record it on the school system.

Portico Academy Trust also has an attendance leadership group, made up of the Attendance leads and Attendance officers from each school. This group meets termly and their role includes;

- To monitor attendance patterns across their schools to identify common issues and barriers and share effective practice between schools.
- To share resources between schools
- To help school leaders focus improvement efforts on the individual pupils or cohorts who need it most.
- To liaise with the Portico Leadership Steering Group and feedback on current developments or initiatives.
- Work effectively with local partners to help remove the barriers to attendance that go beyond the school gates, including building strong links with local statutory services (including social care, health and police) and the voluntary and community sector.
- Working with school leaders to set goals or areas of focus for attendance and providing support and challenge around delivery against those focus areas.

Helping to create a pattern of regular attendance is the responsibility of parents, pupils and all members of school staff.

To help us all to focus on this, we will:

- Submit a daily attendance return to the Department of Education, in line with the legal expectations placed on all schools
- Build strong relationships and work jointly with families
- Give parents/carers details on attendance in our newsletters
- Promote the benefits of high attendance
- Accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence as required by law
- Celebrate excellent attendance by displaying and reporting individual and class achievements

- Reward good or improving attendance
- Report to parents/carers regularly on their child's attendance and the impact on their progress
- Contact parents/carers should their child's attendance fall below the school's target for attendance.

Understanding Types of Absence

Any absence affects the routine of a child's schooling and regular absence will seriously affect their learning journey and ability to progress. Any pupil's absence or late arrival disrupts teaching routines and so may affect the learning of others in the same class. Ensuring a child's regular attendance at school is a parental responsibility and allowing absence from school, without a good reason, creates an offence in law and may result in prosecution.

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school (not by the parent), as either **authorised** or **unauthorised**. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required. Each half-day is known as a 'session'.

Authorised absences are morning or afternoon sessions away from school for a genuine reason such as illness (although you may be asked to provide medical evidence for your child before this can be authorised), medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time (proof of appointments to be shown to the school), emergencies or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been granted. This type of absence can lead to the school referring to the Local Authority for penalty notices and/or legal proceedings.

Unauthorised absence includes, (please note this list is not exhaustive):

- parents/carers keeping children away from school unnecessarily e.g. because they had a late night or for non-infectious illness or injury that would not affect their ability to learn
- absences which have never been properly explained
- children who arrive at school after the close of registration (30 minutes after arrival time) are marked using a 'U'. This indicates that they are in school for safeguarding purposes, however is counted as an absence for the session
- shopping trips
- looking after other children or children accompanying siblings or parents to appointments
- their own or family birthdays

- holidays taken during term time, not deemed 'for exceptional purposes' by the Headteacher/Principal, including any arranged by other family members or friends
- day trips
- other leave of absence in term time which has not been agreed

Persistent Absenteeism (PA) and Severe Absenteeism (SA)

A pupil is defined by the Government as a **'persistent absentee'** when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year for any reason; this can be authorised or unauthorised absence. Absence at this level will cause considerable damage to a pupil's education and we need the full support and co-operation of parents to resolve this. All pupils who have attendance levels of 90% or below are considered to be a persistent absentee.

A pupil who has missed 50% or more schooling is defined by the Government as '**severely absent'**. Pupils within this cohort may find it more difficult to be in school or face bigger barriers to their regular attendance and, as such, are likely to need more intensive support.

Absence Procedures

Each school has a dedicated Attendance officer that deals with attendance issues on a day-to-day basis. They can be contacted by calling or emailing the details below;

School	Senior Attendance Champion	Attendance Officer	Email	Phone Number
Friars Primary School	Mrs S Halls	Mrs C Blake Ms K Stephens	office@fps.porticoacademytrust.co.uk	01702 294837
Hamstel Infant School	Mr S Roche	Mrs M Barrand	office@his.porticoacademytrust.co.uk	01702 468461
Hamstel Junior School	Mrs C Farrell	Miss J Williams	office@hjs.porticoacademytrust.co.uk	01702 468048
Porters Grange Primary School	Mrs D Morris	Mrs S Parsad	office@pgps.porticoacademytrust.co.uk	01702 468047
West Leigh Junior School	Mr M Aggus	Mrs A Atkin	office@wljs.porticoacademytrust.co.uk	01702 478593

We monitor and review all pupils' absence, and the reasons that are given, thoroughly.

If a child is absent from school the parent must follow these procedures:

- Contact the school on the first day of absence before 9.00am
- The school has an answer phone available to leave a message if nobody is available to take your call, or you may call into school personally and speak to the office staff. Please be aware that, if you leave a voicemail to report your child's absence, you may receive a call from the school so that we may discuss the absence before making a decision as to whether the absence is to be recorded as authorised
- Contact the school on every further day of absence, again before 9.00am
- Ensure that your child returns to school as soon as possible and you provide any medical evidence, if requested, to support the absence. Medical evidence may be requested where your child is having multiple periods of absence which are reported as being due to medical reasons. When determining whether a child is too ill to attend school, both parents and school staff can consider the advice contained within the NHS and Essex County Council Guidance on School Absence and Childhood Illness

NHS guidance - is my child too ill for school?

Essex school attendance and absence

If your child is absent we will:

- Telephone you on the first, and every subsequent day of absence, if we have not heard from you. However, it is your responsibility to contact us;
- If we are unable to make contact with parents by telephone, we will telephone emergency contact numbers, send emails home and a home visit may be made, in the interests of safeguarding;
- Make home visits if the school is concerned about the number of sessions missed due to illness;
- A referral will be made to Local Authority if no contact has been made with parents by the 10th day of absence (or sooner if deemed appropriate), at which point your child will be considered to be "missing education."

If absence continues we will follow an escalation pathway.

Level 1

We will:

- Write to you if your child's attendance is below 90% causing a concern and/or where punctuality is a concern;
- Offer support to help improve attendance
- Set a review date to see an improvement in attendance and engagement in support if appropriate

Level 2

If at the review date set above attendance has not improved we will:

- Arrange an Attendance Support Meeting so that you may discuss the situation with the school's attendance officer or a member of the Local Authority.
- Create a personalised action/support plan, such as an attendance contract, to address any barriers to attendance and make clear each person's role in improving the attendance patterns of your child
- Offer support and signpost to other agencies or services, if appropriate

Level 3

If at the review date set above attendance has not improved we will:

- Continue to offer support through a personalized action/support plan and continue to signpost to other agencies or services, if appropriate
- Refer the matter to the Local Authority (if relevant for the school) for intervention work in the home

Level 4

Should there still be concerns around attendance with no mitigating factors parents will be referred to the Local Authority for a Pupil Planning Meeting or a Fixed Penalty Notice for irregular attendance.

Punctuality

Poor punctuality is not acceptable and can sometimes lead to irregular school attendance patterns. Good time-keeping is a vital life skill which will help children as they progress through their school life and out into the wider world.

Pupils who arrive late disrupt lessons and, if a child misses the start of the day, they can feel unsettled and embarrassed and risk missing vital work and important messages from their class teacher.

The times of the school day:

	Friars Primary School and Nursery	**Hamstel Infant School and Nursery**	**Hamstel Junior School**	**Porters Grange Primary School and Nursery**	**West Leigh Junior School**
Gates Open	8.30am	8.30am	8.40am	8.40am	8.40am
School Start Time/Registers	8.45am	8.45am	8.50am	8.55am	8.55am
Register Closes	9.15am	9.15am	9.20am	9.25am	9.25am
End of the School Day	EYFS&KS1 3.00pm	3.15pm	Lower School 3.20pm	Reception: 3.20pm KS1: 3.25pm	3.25pm

	KS2 3:15pm		Upper School 3.25pm	KS2: 3.30pm	

How we manage lateness:

- Once the children enter school, registers are taken.
- Children arriving after the gates are closed are required to come into school via the school office. If accompanied by a parent/carer they must sign them in and provide a reason for their lateness.
- 30 minutes after the gates close, the registers will be closed. In accordance with the Regulations, if your child arrives after that time, they will receive a mark that shows them to be on site – 'U', but this will **not** count as a present mark and it will mean that they have an unauthorised absence;
- The school may contact parents/carers regarding punctuality concerns;

Unauthorised lateness could result in the school referring to the Local Authority for sanctions and/or legal proceedings. If your child has a persistent lateness record, you may be asked to meet with a member of senior school staff or a local authority attendance officer, but you can approach us at any time if you are having difficulties getting your child to school on time. We expect parents and staff to encourage good punctuality by being good role models to our children and, our schools celebrate good class and individual punctuality.

Understanding barriers to attendance

Whilst any child may occasionally have time off school because they are too unwell to attend, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any barriers preventing regular attendance are best resolved between the school, the parents and the child. If a parent thinks their child is reluctant to attend school, then we will work with that family to understand the root problem and provide any necessary support. We can use outside agencies to help with this, such as the School Nurse, Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing support services, a Child and Family Support Worker or the relevant Local Authority team/s. Where outside agencies are supporting the family, you may be invited to attend a Team Around the Family meeting (TAF) to consider what is working well and what needs to improve. An individual support plan will be agreed and subsequently reviewed.

Vulnerable Pupils

Some pupils face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. These can include pupils who suffer from long-term medical conditions or who have special educational needs and disabilities, or other vulnerabilities. High expectations of attendance remain in place for these pupils, however we will work with families and pupils to support improved attendance whilst being mindful of the additional barriers faced. We can discuss reasonable adjustments and additional support from external partners, where appropriate.

Under the DfE's statutory guidance, schools are required to submit a sickness return to the Local Authority for all pupils who have missed/are likely to miss 15 or more school days (consecutive or cumulative) due to medical reasons/illness.

Parents should contact the attendance officers at each school for more detailed support on attendance.

Local Authority attendance support services

Local Authority Attendance Specialists work strategically by offering support to schools, to reduce persistent absence and improve overall attendance.

Parents are expected to work with the school and local authority to address any attendance concerns. Parents should proactively engage with the support offered, aiming to resolve any problems together. This is nearly always successful. If difficulties cannot be resolved in this way, the school may consider more formal support and/or refer the child to the Local Authority. If attendance does not improve, legal action may be taken in the form of a Penalty Notice as suggested by the Southend City Council's code of conduct or prosecution in the Magistrates Court. SOSCC Code of Conduct

School Attendance and the Law

Schools follow the statutory guidance 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance.' By law all children of compulsory school age must receive an appropriate full-time education (Education Act 1996). Parents have a legal duty to ensure their child attends school regularly at the school at which they are registered.

Parents may be recognised differently under education law, than under family law. Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 states that a 'parent', in relation to a child or young person, includes any person who is not a parent (from which can be inferred 'biological parent') but who has parental responsibility, or who has care of the child.

A person typically has care of a child or young person if they are the person with whom the child lives, either full or part time and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their biological or legal relationship is with the child.

National Framework for Penalty Notices

There is a single consistent national threshold for when a penalty notice must be considered by all schools in England, of 10 sessions (usually equivalent to 5 school days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period. The 10 sessions of absence do not have to be consecutive and can be made up of a combination of any type of unauthorised absence (G, O and/or U coded within the school's registers). The 10 school week period can span different terms, school years or education settings.

Sanctions may include issuing each parent (for each child) with a Penalty Notice for £160, reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days (for the first offence). A second Penalty Notice issued

within a three year period will result in a fine of £160 per parent, per child. If a third offence is committed the matter may be referred to the local authority for consideration of prosecution via the Magistrates Court. If prosecution is instigated for irregular school attendance, each parent may receive a fine of up to £2500 and/or up to 3 months in prison. If a parent is found guilty in court, they will receive a criminal conviction.

There is no entitlement in law for pupils to take time off during the term to go on holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure or recreation, or to take part in protest activity in school hours. In addition, the Supreme Court has ruled that the definition of regular school attendance is “in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school.”
The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 set out the statutory requirements for schools. All references to family holidays and extended leave have been removed. The amendments specify that headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are "exceptional circumstances" and they do not have any discretion to authorise up to ten days of absence each academic year.
It is a rule of this Trust that a leave of absence shall not be granted in term time unless there are reasons considered to be exceptional by the Headteacher/Principal, irrespective of the child’s overall attendance. Only the Headteacher/Principal or his/her designate (not the local authority) may authorise such a request and all applications for a leave of absence must be made in writing, in advance, on the prescribed form provided by the school. The school will usually consider that the parent who has made the application is therefore allowing the leave of absence, and also that all parents who are on the holiday are allowing the leave. Where a parent removes a child after their application for leave was refused or where no application was made to the school, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised. It is likely that penalty notices will be requested, in line with the National Framework and Southend-on-Sea’s Code of Conduct, in respect of each parent believed to have allowed the absence.

At Portico Academy Trust 'exceptional circumstances' will be interpreted as:
... being of unique and significant emotional, educational or spiritual value to the child which outweighs the loss of teaching time (as determined by the Headteacher/Principal). The fundamental principles for defining ‘exceptional’ are events that are “rare, significant, unavoidable and short”. By 'unavoidable' we mean an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time, outside of school term time, regardless of who has planned or paid for the holiday or absence (including grandparents or other family or friends).

The Headteacher/Principal/school may discuss the leave of absence request with other education settings and/or the Local Authority to determine any exceptional circumstances. If leave of absence is authorised, the school will not provide work for children to do during their absence. Parents are however advised to read with their children and encourage them to write a diary while they are away.

We will not normally agree to any leave during term time under the following circumstances, unless, in very rare and exceptional cases, an absence has been approved by the Headteacher/Principal:

- at any time in September, this is a crucial transition time for all pupils to settle into their new classes as quickly as possible:
- during assessment and test periods (including internal school tests/assessments) in the school's calendar that affect your child;
- when a pupil's attendance record already includes any level of unauthorised absence or they have already been granted authorised leave within that academic year; and •
- where a pupil's attendance record falls below 95%.

If you are requesting your child to have leave during term time, you should contact the school office for a Request for Leave of Absence form. Please note that requests relating to exceptional circumstances should normally be submitted at least one calendar month before the first day of absence. We understand that some exceptional circumstances, such as funerals, may arise with less notice and these will be considered on an individual basis.

Where sufficient notice can reasonably be given, requests received less than one calendar month before the first day of absence may not be considered and any resulting absence could be recorded as unauthorised. This may then be referred to the local authority for a Fixed Penalty Notice.

Deletion from Roll

For any pupil leaving one of our schools, parents/carers are required to give written notice to the school office via letter or email. Parents should provide school with the following information: Child's name, class, current address, date of leaving, new home address, name of new school, address of new school. This information is essential to ensure that we know the whereabouts and may appropriately safeguard all of our pupils, even those who leave us.

It is crucial that parents keep school updated with current addresses and contact details for the pupil and key family members, in case of emergency.

Under Pupil Regulations 2006, all schools are now **legally required** to notify their Local Authority of **every new entry** to the admission register **within five days** of the pupil being enrolled. In addition to this, **every deletion** from the school register must also be notified to the Local Authority, as soon as the ground for deletion has been met in relation to that pupil, and in any event no later than the time at which the pupil's name is deleted from the register. This duty does not apply when a pupil's name is removed from the admission register at a standard transition point – when the pupil has completed the final year of education normally provided by that school.

Child Missing Education

Child Missing Education (CME) is a child missing from education who is of compulsory school age who is not on a roll at a school or a child that has unauthorised leave for a long

period of time (10 days) from school and cannot be contacted. It is vital we identify and report children who may be missing education as these are children who are at risk and may be living a life of abuse. All schools have a responsibility for ensuring they are aware of their Local Authority's guidance and have procedures in place for making a referral. The school will refer to the Southend CME guidance for further information or to make a referral.

If a pupil fails to return and contact with the parent/carers has not been made, the school may take the pupil off-roll (after being told to do so by the local authority) in compliance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006. This means the child will lose their school place.

Useful links

Addendum: recording attendance in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19) during the 2021 to 2022 academic year - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Absence data

We use data to monitor, identify and support individual pupils or groups of pupils when their attendance needs to improve, and schools are required to submit pupil attendance data to the Department for Education on a daily basis Education (Information about Individual Pupils) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024. Persistently and severely absent pupils are tracked and monitored carefully. We also combine this with academic tracking, as increased absence affects attainment.

We share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities, and other partners, when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe.