



Attendance Policy

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Approved by:	Steve Broderick, Principal

School Attendance

At The Orchard we recognise the need for excellent attendance for our learners to achieve and meet their full potential. Attendance is essential for our learners to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances. Having been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, many learners have already missed time from school which will affect their ability to achieve their potential. For the most vulnerable learners, regular attendance is also an important protective factor and the best opportunity for needs to be identified and support provided. Research has shown associations between regular absence from school and a number of extra-familial harms. This includes crime (90% of young offenders had been persistently absent) and serious violence (83% of knife possession offenders had been persistently absent in at least 1 of the 5 years of study). At KS4, learners not achieving grade 9 to 4 in English and maths had an overall absence rate of 8.8%, compared to 5.2% among those achieving grade 4 to 1. The overall absence rate of learners not achieving grade 9 to 4 was over twice as high as those achieving grade 9 to 5 (8.8% compared to 3.7%).

Aim of Policy:

- To promote good attendance and reduce absence including persistent absence.
- To ensure every learner has access to full-time education to which they are entitled.
- To act early to address patterns of absence.
- To highlight what actions the school takes in managing attendance at each stage.
- To inform parents of their legal duty by ensuring their children of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend regularly.
- To ensure all learners are punctual to their lessons.

This policy has been reviewed and amended to consider new advice from the Department for Education.

[Working together to improve school attendance guidance](#) for maintained schools, academies, independent schools, and local authorities. Published May 2022.

Overview

Our purpose is to provide high quality education for each learner according to their individual needs within a caring and nurturing environment.

The Orchard is a small specialist school that caters for learners with additional learning needs, and we work to provide a bespoke environment based around continual positive reinforcement. In many cases learners arrive at The Orchard with long standing attendance issues from previous schools.

All systems, teaching and management of the school, focus on the promotion, establishment, and internalisation of socially acceptable and appropriate behaviours. Through an individualised approach, in a consistent, caring, and supportive environment, each learner will be given opportunities which encourage them to develop their knowledge skills, qualities and self-esteem.

With this positive behaviour management each learner will be empowered as their confidence, ability and self-control is enhanced. Learners are encouraged to develop appropriate behaviour patterns within the school. There is a warm caring attitude in adult-child relationships and the systematic use of incentives. Learners are respected as individuals, and this facilitates pastoral care.

To this end the school will do as much as it can to ensure that all learners achieve maximum possible attendance and that any problems, which may impede full attendance, are acted upon as quickly as possible.

Our School Recognises That:

- All learners of school age have an equal right to access an education.
- No learners should be deprived of their opportunity to receive an education that meets their needs and personal development.
- It is the responsibility of learners and their parents/carers to ensure attendance at school.
- Learners and parents/carers may, at some stage, need to be supported in meeting their attendance obligation.
- Situations beyond the control of learners and/or parents/carers may impact on attendance. The school will, with the agreement and support of parents/carers, work with other agencies, if necessary, to resolve these.

Expectations

What We Expect

The Orchard has high expectations for attendance and any attendance that falls below 95% will be reviewed to support regular attendance. Any learner whose attendance falls between 90-95% will be monitored internally where welfare and attendance support will be provided to build on our learner's attendance. Persistent absence (under 90%) without justifiable cause (such as illness) will result in a referral to the EWO/LAP for support.

Parents/Carers Should

- Contact the school on the first day of absence.
- Support their child and school in achieving maximum attendance.
- Ensure their child attends school regularly and punctually.
- Ensure they contact school as soon as is reasonably practical whenever their child is unable to attend.
- Ensure that their child arrives at school well-prepared for the school day and to check that any homework given has been completed.
- Contact the school in confidence whenever a problem occurs that may affect their child's performance in school.

Learners Should:

- Attend school regularly.
- Arrive on time and appropriately prepared for the day.
- Tell a member of staff about any problem or reason that may prevent them from attending school.

What our Parents/Carers and Learners can expect from The Orchard to Support Attendance:

As a school where learners often must travel some distance to attend, communication between home and school is vitally important. School will, wherever possible, assist learners in the transport to school by way of a pick-up and drop-off service, however, this service will be withdrawn if poor behaviour is evidenced. Where transport is provided, school drivers can wait for a very short period for learners to get ready, however, learners should endeavour to be ready and waiting at their allocated collection time. In addition, we will ensure that:

- An emergency number for all learners is available so that regular contact can be maintained.
- Regular, efficient, and accurate recording of attendance.
- Early contact with parents/carers is made when a learner fails to attend school without providing a good reason (such as illness or significant life event).
- Recognition and reward for good attendance is celebrated.
- Access to a broad and balanced curriculum designed to cater for individual needs thus promoting academic achievement, skills, creativity, imagination and initiative for all learners.
- Accurate records of classroom absence are retained and monitored as this will support decisions for learner interventions.
- Where problems are identified, support is provided by our welfare lead.
- You will receive excellent communication with the school to resolve any issues you may have.

We Expect the Following from our Learners:

- That they attend school regularly.
- That they arrive on time and appropriately prepared for the day.
- That they will tell a member of staff about any problem or reason that may prevent them from attending school.
- That they work with our staff and school to build a positive environment for all our learners.

Encouraging Attendance

- We will celebrate good attendance.
- We will monitor attendance and raise concerns early.
- We will support families by raising attendance problems early so a solution can be agreed.

Responding to Non-Attendance:

When a learner does not attend, the school needs to respond effectively.

- We will telephone the parent/carer/emergency contact on the first day of absence if we do not receive confirmation of a reason for absence.
- All telephone/text messages received will be recorded on the school's management information system.
- Where non-attendance continues, the case will be discussed, and the appropriate action taken. Parents/carers will be invited to attend a meeting to discuss strategies for re-engagement. This will be reviewed within a nominated time to check on progress to ensure success.
- If there is no further improvement, we will seek support and work in partnership with the other relevant agencies. This may result in the referring school/agency seeking Education Welfare involvement for legal proceedings to be considered.

Guidelines for Staff Dealing with Attendance and Absence

For this policy to be successful every member of staff must make attendance a high priority and should convey to learners the importance and value of education.

Teachers/Tutors/Learning Support Staff

- Liaise with administration staff to accurately record attendance.

Administration Team

- Telephone parent/carer/emergency contacts on first day of absence.

- Report any concerns about absences to the principal.
- Record all reasons given for absence in the daily communications log. Collect and check absence letters and appointment cards received.
- Accurately record attendance on the attendance sheets for the referring agency/school.
- Complete registers.
- Monitor long term attendees, inform principal, who will consider the level of action to be taken.
- Issue letters to parents advising them of their attendance at The Orchard each half term so parents know what to expect.
- Work with the school and local authority Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) to support re-engagement/legal proceedings.

Guidance on Categorising Absence as Authorised or Unauthorised

The main areas where The Orchard will authorise absence are given below.

Illness

Where schools accept that a learner is ill, they must authorise the absence. Parents should telephone The Orchard on 01472 898498 before 9.30am on the first day of illness. Regular illness will require proof from either prescription, appointment cards or medical notes.

Appointments

Dental and doctor's appointments are authorised absences. Parents must confirm these appointments in writing. Parents may be asked to provide evidence (i.e., appointment cards or letters etc) if absences become too frequent or if requested by the referring school or agency or the Education Welfare Officer. We request that these appointments be booked out of school time, where possible, or only impact on a short proportion of the school day.

Holidays

Only exceptional circumstances warrant a leave of absence. We will consider each application individually taking into account the specific facts and circumstances and relevant background context behind the request. The regulations state that: 'the principal should only authorise leave of absence in exceptional circumstances.' If a leave of absence is granted, it will be for the principal to determine the length of time the learner can be away from school. Leave is unlikely, however, to be granted for the purpose of a family holiday.

Any absence requests should be submitted to the principal for consideration (Appendix A). Requests will only be considered in exceptional circumstances such as weddings, requests to see family in the forces or other extenuating circumstances. Each case will be considered individually and will be subject to prior excellent attendance and the learner's ability to progress despite the requested absence.

The Orchard will not give permission for learners to have holidays during examinations periods.

Exceptional Circumstances/Unavoidable Causes

These are classed as catastrophic events at home or learners held in custody rather than shopping trips or birthday treats. There may be extenuating or compassionate reasons for authorising absences.

Learners Arriving Late

Learners who arrive at school after 9.15 a.m. are deemed to be late. The appropriate marks will be entered to record these situations. Between 9.15 a.m. and 9.45 a.m. the mark will be recorded as 'L' and after 9.45 a.m. the mark will be recorded as 'U'. Parents/carers should provide an explanation for late attendance. Parents/carers will be informed of late attendances. If learners arrive late, they should report to the reception where their attendance will be recorded, and they will be escorted to class.

The Orchard is open for 192 full days per academic year and is required by law (Education (Learner Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016) to keep accurate registers of learner's attendance. Activities outside the normal school day are not recorded in the statutory attendance register.

There is a strong statistical link between attendance and attainment.

Learners join the school roll on the agreed admission date and are listed in both the admissions and attendance registers from that day.

At registration it is recorded whether every learner was:

- Present.
- Absent.
- Present at an approved educational activity.
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances.

The attendance register is a legal document which must be accurately maintained and will always be kept securely.

Persistent Absence

From the beginning of the academic year 2015/16 the government reduced the persistent absence threshold from 15% to 10%. This now means that a learner will be classified as a persistent absentee if they miss 10 % or more of their own possible sessions, rather than if they reach a standard threshold of absence sessions (*A Guide to Absence Statistics DfE Updated May 2023*) In response to this and to try and prevent learners from falling into this category, the school's Attendance and Welfare Manager tracks and monitors any learners who have an attendance figure of 90% and under. These checks are done on a regular basis. Learners are closely monitored, and appropriate interventions are made. This includes, letters, phone calls, home visits and meetings with the Attendance and Welfare Manager and / or members of the senior leadership team in school. After all appropriate interventions have been sort alongside parents/carers and attendance remains a concern, we may refer to the local authority EWO.

Improving, Supporting and Challenging Absences

School will always look to support our learners with managing attendance. We offer a very supportive network with additional pastoral support available. However, on occasions we may need to challenge poor attendance and school will follow appropriate methods to try and improve poor attendance. The minimum standards School will follow for all learners in improving, supporting, and challenging attendance will be as follows:

Transport

Transport is generally viewed as being a positive way in helping improve learner's attendance at School. However, there are a small number of learners who have this privilege withdrawn due to behaviour in vehicles. We know this presents a real challenge for some of the learners in that they will not routinely use other methods of transport available (bus pass provided). If transport is withdrawn school will look to seek ways in which transport can be reinstated by restorative actions.

Half Termly Review

Administration staff will be informed by the school's Attendance and Welfare Manager to write to the home address of any learner who have been identified on the school attendance at risk register, to give formal notification of the half termly attendance to parents/carers. Any learners below an agreed level without authorised reason (agreed with EWO) will receive notification and a follow up call from senior school staff. The letter will inform the parent/carer of any actions or resultant prosecution that will follow for low/non-attendance.

Education Welfare Officer

We will utilise [Attendance Matters](#) as a supporting measure to improve school attendance strategy and assist in any formal proceedings that may take place. EWO will also send out penalty notice warning letters.

Rewarding Good Attendance

We will continue to focus on positive rewards for learners who attend school regularly and will organise trips or other learner-initiated rewards to motivate good attendance.

Prosecution

School will be proactive in the SAP/LAP/PN process. We will look to target all learners and families of ALL learners whose attendance falls below school expectations.

Data

We will remain focused on being data driven, providing all the information for learners, staff, managers, and leadership team. By remaining focused throughout the school, we will make sure that we have every chance of improving on poor attendance. We will also make sure staff are focused and understand the processes that follow for poor attendance so that they can also explain and help learners understand.

Flexible/Personalised Learning Patterns

School will understand that issues may present themselves whereby full-time attendance might pose a barrier for the learners attending School. When used sensitively, over the short term with appropriate targets this may be used to reintegrate learners.

Learners Voice/Council

Throughout all the interventions it is vitally important that we give the learners a voice. Trying to understand the issues surrounding each learner will no doubt help in trying to promote and increase attendance. Making the learners council part of the school attendance process has helped focus learners on attendance.

Learners Moving to a New Address and/or School

Where the parent of a learner notifies the school that the learner will live at another address, schools must record in the admission register: (a) the full name of the parent with whom the learner will live, (b) the new address, and (c) the date from when it is expected the learner will live at this address.

Where a parent notifies the school that the learner is registered at another school or will be attending a different school, schools must record this in the admission register: (a) the name of the other school, and (b) the date of when the learner first attended, or is due to start attending, that school.

Appendix A

Holiday Request Form – The Orchard

Please note that there is no automatic right for learners to be granted authorised absences for family holidays. Orchard Education considers every request for holiday leave in relation to the criteria below.

Learner Details	
Name	
Date of Birth	
Class Group	
Address	

Holiday Request Details	
Start date of requested holiday	
End date of requested holiday	
Return to school date	
Reason for request: 	
Name of Parent/Carer	
Signature	
Date	

For School Use		
Current attendance % (in current academic year, or if holiday request is in the first term of current academic year consider previous academic year's attendance). Consider the further criteria below if attendance is below 95%.		
Previous holidays leave this academic year.		
Does the holiday request time coincide with SATS / other examination periods.		
Any mitigating / aggravating circumstances which indicate a holiday should be authorised / not authorised? (Including any ongoing medical issues).		
Learner's current level of achievement?		
Given information above and reason for request is the holiday approved?	YES	NO
Signature of Principal		
Date		
Register Code to be used for this holiday *		

The Orchard reserves the right to refuse holidays that are not considered beneficial to the wellbeing of its learners.

Appendix B

Dear Parent/Carer,

Education Penalty Notice Warning for Non-School Attendance

Under the Education Act 1996, parents and carers have a duty to make sure their children regularly attend school. If parents or carers fail to do this, they can be prosecuted. Working within a Code of Conduct the Local Authority can issue an Education Penalty Notice to parents or carers if a child has missed several sessions without permission from the school. If your child falls within one or more of these categories within a 12-week period:

- 10 sessions (5 days) of unauthorised absence with under 90% attendance
- 20 sessions (10 days) of unauthorised absence
- persistently arrives late for school after the close of registration.

You could receive an Education Penalty Notice of £60 which will increase to £120 if not paid within 21 days.

The Education Penalty Notice will need to be paid in full before 28 days of the notice being served. Failure to pay an Education Penalty Notice may result in prosecution (a separate Education Penalty Notice may be issued to each parent for each child). In law, an offence is committed if a parent fails to secure a child's regular attendance at school.

You may also receive an Education Penalty Notice for the offence of failing to secure regular school attendance under the following circumstances:

- Your child is stopped on a truancy sweep.
- You fail to ensure that your child is not in a public place during the first 5 days of a fixed term or permanent exclusion.

The Local Authority and school are committed to providing the best possible future for your child. If you have concerns about your child's attendance at school or if you are experiencing any difficulties, please contact school and ask for support which is readily available should it be needed.

Where possible, we would much prefer to work with our learners and families to avoid any penalty notices but are governed by the law stated above and should this be required the EWO will be informed.

We hope to see all our learners regularly attending so they can achieve the success they deserve.

Kind regards

Steve Broderick

Principal

Orchard Independent School

Appendix C - School's Actions in Recording Absence and any Further Action that may be Required

Attendance Flow Chart
Stage 1 First day of absence (and each subsequent day): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Driver to leave note.• Call will be made to parents and carers to ascertain the reason for absence.• Administration team will leave a voice message to any unanswered call and a second call attempted (<i>if the phone call has answer machine option</i>).• If contact isn't returned by 10:30 am the DSL will be made aware.• Decision to authorise will be made.
Stage 2 After 3 days absence: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• School DSL will contact parent/carer via telephone or where this is not possible, a home visit will be carried out.• Any support needs will be identified if needed.
Stage 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• After each period of 5 days where reason for absence is not sickness, a home visit will be completed by the EWO or senior leadership team, followed by subsequent home visits every 5 days until the learner returns to school.• Any support needs will be identified, where practicable, and a plan created.
Stage 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where attendance falls below the schools agreed expectations a letter will be sent home highlighting the next steps or potential prosecution if attendance does not immediately improve.
Stage 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where attendance has not improved and no acceptable reason, formal prosecution will begin SAP-LAP-PN.

*These timescales are recommended minimum standards, school staff may bring each stage forward if necessary. EWO may support at earlier stages of the process working with the DSL to improve attendance and safeguarding of learners.
School will not look to delay any of the strategies highlighted above.*

Appendix D - Attendance Expectations and Actions

