ATTENDANCE POLICY

2026/27

Written by:	Fergus Reid
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Introduction

Unified Academy is committed to providing outstanding educational opportunities for all our students. We recognise the importance of regular attendance in maximising the benefit of any educational opportunity. Encouraging and supporting excellent attendance is a crucial part of supporting our pupils/students to learn effectively.

This policy is written with reference to DfE guidance on 'Working together to improve school attendance' and 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' as well as 'Children Missing Education'.

Aims

The aim of this policy is to ensure that all members of the Unified Academy community including students and parents/carers understand the importance of regular attendance at school and their roles and responsibilities regarding attendance. Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between school absence and overall achievement. Poor attendance also affects young people's ability to make and sustain friendships and can interrupt the routine of school life, making it hard to settle when they do attend.

Parental Responsibility

Parents/carers have the primary responsibility for ensuring that children of compulsory school age (5 to 18 year olds) with a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan attend an establishment authorised by their Local Authority (LA). This includes a legal obligation to ensure children attend regularly and on time. Ensuring regular attendance is essential; permitting absence from school without good reason is an offence by law and may result in prosecution.

Unified Academy will always seek to work collaboratively with families in order to support regular attendance.

Roles and responsibilities

The Local Governing Body (LGB)

The LGB is responsible for:

- Promoting the importance of school attendance across the school's policies and ethos.
- Making sure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties.
- Regularly reviewing and challenging attendance data.
- Monitoring attendance figures for the whole school.
- Holding the Principal to account for the implementation of this policy.

The Principal

The Principal is responsible for:

- Implementation of this policy at the school.
- Monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to governors.
- Supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual pupils/students.
- Monitoring the impact of any implemented attendance strategies.
- Issuing fixed-penalty notices, where necessary.

The designated senior leader responsible for attendance

The designated senior leader is responsible for:

- Setting a clear vision for improving and maintaining good attendance
- Establishing and maintaining effective systems for tackling absence
- Evaluating and monitoring progress, expectations and processes
- Having a strong grasp of absence data and analysis
- Devising specific strategies to address areas of poor attendance identified through data
- Arranging calls and meetings with parents to discuss attendance issues
- Delivering targeted intervention and support to pupils/students and families

The designated senior leader responsible for attendance is Fergus Reid and can be contacted via freid@unifiedacademy.org

The Office Team

The school office team is responsible for:

- recording attendance on a daily basis, using the correct codes, and submitting this information to the school MIS system (Arbor)
- Monitoring and analysing attendance data
- Providing regular attendance reports to senior school staff and reporting concerns about attendance to the designated senior leader responsible for attendance and the Principal.
- Working with attendance, advice and intervention officers to tackle persistent absence.
- Working with the Safeguarding Team and Home School Link Workers to ensure support is in place for students who are not attending and/or absent from school.

The office team can be contacted at info@unifiedacademy.org

Parents/carers

Parents/carers are expected to:

- Make sure their child attends every timetabled session on time.
- Notify the school in the event of lateness e.g. delayed transport.
- Call the school to report their child's absence as soon as possible on the first day of the absence, each subsequent day of absence, and advise when they are expected to return.
- Provide the school with at least three emergency contact numbers for their child.
- Ensure that, where possible, appointments for their child are made outside of the school day.

Recording attendance

Attendance register

We will keep an attendance register and place all students onto this register. Attendance registers will be kept electronically and daily attendance data will be shared with the DfE.

We will take our attendance register at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark whether every student is:

- Present

- Attending an approved off-site educational activity
- Absent
- Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

Any amendment to the attendance register will include:

- The original entry
- The amended entry
- The reason for the amendment
- The date on which the amendment was made
- The name and position of the person who made the amendment

All entries will be made using the DfE attendance codes as set out in Working Together to Improve School Attendance.

We will also record:

- (For students of compulsory school age) Whether the absence is authorised or not
- The nature of the activity if a student is attending an approved educational activity
- The nature of circumstances where a student is unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances

We will keep every entry on the attendance register for 6 years after the date on which the entry was made.

Students must arrive in school by 9.00am (unless agreed otherwise). The register for the first session will be taken at 9.00am and will be kept open until 9.30am. The register for the second session will be taken at 12:30pm and will be kept open until 13.00pm.

Unplanned absence

The student's parent/carer must notify the school of the reason for the absence on the first day of an unplanned absence as soon as practically possible by calling the school admin staff. A call must be made for each day of absence.

When a student is absent due to illness or a medical appointment, this will be marked as authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness. Evidence may be requested e.g. appointment card, letter, prescription, prescribed medication packs or boxes with the student's name printed on them. We will not ask for medical evidence unnecessarily. If the school is not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised and parents/carers will be notified of this in advance.

Should school staff become concerned about the amount of school missed due to illness, information may be shared with external agencies such as social services (see 'Safeguarding', below).

Planned absence

Attending a medical or dental appointment will be counted as authorised as long as the student's parent/carer notifies the school in advance of the appointment.

Parents/carers should ensure that every effort is made to make or arrange medical appointments outside school hours. Where this is not possible, the student should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

The student's parent/carer must also apply for other types of term-time absence as far in advance as possible of the requested absence.

Unified Academy recognises students' additional needs may include significant physical or mental health concerns and involve regular or unexpected medical support e.g. admission to hospital or attendance at specialist clinics. We will always seek to work with our students and their families to support good attendance, and to work in partnership with other external agencies (e.g. local authority/healthcare providers) as required. Where students are temporarily unable to attend onsite, we will seek to support continued learning through initiatives such as home learning programmes or temporary reduced timetables. Any such initiative will:

- have the agreement of both the school and the parent the pupil normally lives with.
- have a clear ambition and be part of the pupil's wider support, health care or reintegration plan.
- have regular review dates which include the pupil and their parents to ensure it is only in place for the shortest time necessary.
- have a proposed end date that takes into account the circumstances of the pupil, after which they are expected to attend full-time.

Lateness and punctuality

All students must arrive for school on time. If students arrive 5-30 minutes after their start time they will be marked as late (L Code). If they arrive after 30 minutes of their start time they will be marked as unauthorised (U or O code). In circumstances such as bad weather or transport difficulties, the register may be kept open for a longer period of time.

If a start time has been agreed that is later than when the school register closes students will be marked as unauthorised until they arrive for their session – at which point the mark will be changed to 'present' if they have attended on time.

Following up unexplained absence

Safeguards in place to prevent children missing education at Unified Academy include:

- Unified Academy holds a minimum of three emergency contact numbers for each student, unless there is a genuine reason why this is not possible e.g., parent fleeing domestic violence.
- Any child going missing from education will always get immediate attention from the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Staff are trained to be alert to signs to look out for and the individual triggers to be aware of when considering the risks of potential safeguarding concerns such as travelling to conflict zones, FGM and forced marriage.
- When a student is absent without notification, the attendance officer will record the absence in the register and the school will endeavour to contact the parents/carers and other emergency contacts in order to determine the reason for the absence. This will happen for every day of non-attendance where no call has been received informing the school of absence and reasons why.
- Any unexplained absence of a student with a Child Protection Plan will be reported to the student's social worker within one day.
- Where a student does not present for school as expected, the school will endeavour to ascertain that student's whereabouts and wellbeing without delay, using all available parent/carer and secondary/emergency contact details. Where no contact can be made with either the student or any named emergency contacts, a member of school staff should generally attend the student's home. If the student or a named contact still

cannot be contacted, the school must report this to relevant personnel in the Local Authority and, where deemed necessary, the police. However, it is acknowledged that in some exceptional, local circumstances, such action may be counter-productive and it is for the school to risk assess such a scenario on the first day. Regardless of this, if a student is absent for a second consecutive day without notification from a named contact, the school **must** report this to relevant personnel in the Local Authority and, where necessary, the police.

- Staff will always report to the Local Authority the name of any child who has been newly registered to attend the school but does not arrive on the expected day.
- Staff will always report to the Education Welfare Service the continued absence of a child known or thought to have been taken overseas if the child does not return to school on the expected return date.
- Unified Academy maintains accurate attendance and admissions registers (all students are on both), in line with statutory requirements. This includes paying careful attention to off-rolling pupils/students in association with the Local Authority and knowing, and recording, pupil/student destinations consistently on the admissions register. Where a student destination is unknown, and unable to be established after significant follow-up, the Local Authority, Education Welfare Service and/or Social Care Services will be informed.
- Students will not be deleted from the admissions register. Staff will alert the child's Local Authority immediately if:
    - the student has been taken out of school by their parents/carers and is being educated outside the school system e.g., home education
    - the student has ceased to attend school.
    - the student has been certified as medically unfit to attend school or is in custody.

Keeping Local Authorities up to date is crucial so that they can check if children of compulsory school age are missing education, and might therefore be in danger of not receiving an education and be at risk of abuse or neglect.

On the rare occasions that Unified Academy students are suspended for a fixed term, the school will confirm this in writing to both the family (and the placing Local Authority). While staff will provide the student with work to complete during their suspension (and mark it). Unified Academy is not responsible for the student's safety and welfare during their time at home.

Reporting to parents/carers

The school will regularly inform parents about their child's attendance and absence levels via termly written reports.

Authorised and unauthorised absence

Approval for term-time absence

The Principal will only grant a leave of absence to a student during term time if they consider there to be 'exceptional circumstances'. A leave of absence is granted at the Principal's discretion, including the length of time the student is authorised to be absent for.

We define 'exceptional circumstances' as are one off events which are unavoidable, examples may include the death of a close relative, attendance at a funeral, respite care of a looked after child, a housing crisis which prevents attendance.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request.

Any request should be submitted as soon as it is anticipated and, where possible, at least 2 weeks before the absence. The school may require evidence to support any request for leave of absence.

Valid reasons for **authorised absence** include:

- Illness and medical/dental appointments.
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the student's parents belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart.
- Traveler student travelling for occupational purposes – this covers Roma, English and Welsh gypsies, Irish and Scottish travellers, showmen (fairground people) and circus people, bargees (occupational boat dwellers) and new travellers. Absence may be authorised only when a traveller family is known to be travelling for occupational purposes and has agreed this with the school, but it is not known whether the student is attending educational provision.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider essential and for which no authorisation has been given. This type of absence can lead to the Local Authority becoming involved. Support will be offered initially but if unauthorised absences continue, the LA has the right to apply a fine or legal proceedings.

Examples of unauthorised absence include:

- Parents/carers keeping children off school to go shopping, to care for a sibling, for a family birthday.
- Refusal by the student to attend an allocated session.
- Absences that have never been explained.
- Children who arrive too late to get a mark.
- Illness without medical evidence.
- Holidays in term-time.

If a child is reluctant to attend school, parents/carers must communicate this as soon as possible to their school's Senior Leadership Team in order that support strategies can be put in place.

Parents/carers can support their child's attendance by:

- Ensuring regular and early bedtimes, appropriate to the age of the child.
- Having uniform and equipment prepared the night before.
- Reporting any academic or social concerns promptly.
- Retaining open and honest communication with the school.
- Having a positive attitude towards school attendance.

Legal sanctions

The school or local authority can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age.

Penalty notices can be issued by a Principal, local authority officer or the police.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice may take into account:

- The number of unauthorised absences occurring within a rolling academic year
- One-off instances of irregular attendance, such as holidays taken in term time without permission
- Where an excluded pupil is found in a public place during school hours without a justifiable reason

If the payment has not been made after 28 days, the local authority can decide whether to prosecute or withdraw the notice.

Penalty Notices

The Surrey Attendance Service, acting on behalf of Surrey County Council may issue a Penalty Notice as an alternative to the prosecution of a parent/carer for their child's unauthorised absence from school and require the recipient to pay a fixed amount.

Circumstances when a Penalty Notices may be issued

1. Pupils identified by police and Surrey Attendance Advice Officers engaged on Truancy Patrols and who have incurred unauthorised absences.

2. **The School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024 state that Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.**

Where a child is taken out of school for 10 sessions or more and the 'leave of absence' is without the authority of the head teacher, each parent is liable to receive a penalty notice for each child who is absent. In these circumstances, a warning will not be given where it can be shown that parents had previously been warned that such absences would not be authorised and that they will be liable to receive a Penalty Notice if the leave of absence is taken.

3. The issue of a Penalty Notice will also be considered where a pupil has incurred 10 or more unauthorised sessions during the preceding 10 school weeks. The parents' failure to engage with supportive measures proposed by the school will be a factor when considering the issue of a Penalty Notice. Unauthorised absence will include late arrival after the close of registration without good reason.

4. Section 103 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 places a duty on parents to ensure that their child is not in a public place without justifiable cause during school hours when they are excluded from school. This duty applies to the first five days of each exclusion. Failure to do so will render the parent liable to a Penalty Notice. If the Penalty Notice is not paid, the recipient will be prosecuted for the offence under Section 103. Alternative education provision will be made from the sixth day of any exclusion and failure to attend such provision without good reason will be treated as unauthorised absence.

With the exception of unauthorised leave of absence taken in term time (Paragraph 2 above) parents will be sent a 'Notice To Improve' their child's attendance, warning them of their liability to receive such a notice before it is issued.

Amount Payable Under a Penalty Notice: The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

1. If a parent/carer has not incurred a penalty notice relating to the relevant child/children since 19 August 2024, then the penalty notice will be charged at the rate of £160.00, **per parent/carer per child,** if paid within 28 days. This will be reduced to £80.00 if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice. Failure to pay the Penalty Notice will result in Surrey County Council considering legal proceedings against you in the Magistrates Court.

2. If you have incurred a penalty notice relating to these child/children since 19 August 2024, the rolling 3 year period will be activated from the date of the first penalty notice and the second penalty notice will be charged at the flat rate of £160.00, **per parent/carer per child**, if paid within 28 days. There will be no reduction for payment within 21 days. Failure to pay the Penalty Notice will result in Surrey County Council considering legal proceedings against you in the Magistrates Court.

3. If you have incurred 2 penalty notices relating to this child/children in the rolling 3 year period since the first penalty notice was issued, then you will NOT receive a third penalty notice – Surrey County Council will have no option but to consider a prosecution, **per parent/carer per child**, in the Magistrates Court under s 444 Education Act 1996.

Attendance monitoring

Monitoring attendance

The school will:

- Monitor attendance and absence data half-termly, termly and yearly across the school and at an individual pupil/student level.
- Identify whether or not there are particular groups of children whose absences may be a cause for concern.

Pupil/student-level absence data will be collected each term and published at national and local authority level through the DfE's school absence national statistics releases. The underlying school-level absence data is published alongside the national statistics. The school will compare attendance data to the national average, and share this with the governing board.

Analysing attendance

The school will:

- Analyse attendance and absence data regularly to identify pupils/students or cohorts that need additional support with their attendance and use this analysis to provide targeted support to these pupils/students and their families.
- Look at historic and emerging patterns of attendance and absence, and then develop strategies to address these patterns.

Using data to improve attendance

The school will:

- Provide regular attendance reports to form tutors, and other school leaders, to facilitate discussions with students and families
- Use data to monitor and evaluate the impact of any interventions put in place in order to modify them and inform future strategies

Reducing persistent and severe absence

Persistent absence is where a pupil/student misses 10% or more of school, and severe absence is where a pupil/student misses 50% or more of school.

Those students deemed to be persistently absent will receive support from the school. In addition, we may involve external agencies including social services and Surrey Inclusion Team. Parents/carers are expected work with staff in resolving any problems together. This is nearly always successful.

However, parents and carers need to be aware that if other ways of trying to improve the child's attendance have failed and unauthorised absences persist, officers from the LA can use sanctions such as a Fixed Penalty Notice (this includes going on holiday in term time).

Safeguarding and confidentiality

Unified Academy has a duty to effectively safeguard all our students. Supporting regular attendance is part of this safeguarding duty. Poor attendance and unexplained absence can indicate a possible safeguarding concern including (but not limited to) physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect, female genital mutilation (FGM), child sexual exploitation, radicalisation, substance misuse or peer on peer abuse.

Unified Academy staff will always seek to work with families to minimise absence and ensure clear communication regarding any absence that might occur. Where safeguarding concerns are raised, these will be managed in accordance with the Child Protection Adult Protection & Safeguarding Policy.

Monitoring arrangements
This policy will be reviewed annually by the Principal and approved annually by the Local Governing Body.

Related policies and procedures
Attendance Procedure
Anti-Radicalisation Policy
Child Protection Adult Protection & Safeguarding Policy
Suspension and Permanent Exclusion Policy
Behaviour Policy
Remote Education Policy
Safeguarding and Wellbeing Offer
Supporting Students with Medical Conditions in Education Policy