



The North & South West Durham
LEARNING FEDERATION

Attendance Policy

Approved by:	Children's Committee	Date: 8 July 2024
Signed by:		(Chair)
Last reviewed on:	May 2023	
Next review due by:	Summer 2025	

The Oaks Secondary School, Evergreen Primary School and Croft Community School are committed to providing a full and efficient educational experience for all pupils. We believe that if pupils are to benefit from education, good attendance is crucial. Regular attendance at school encourages positive and regular routines as well as a positive work ethic which our young people can then transfer into their adulthood. The three schools do all that they can to ensure maximum attendance for all pupils. Any problems that prevent full attendance will be identified and addressed as speedily as possible.

It is the policy of our schools to celebrate achievement and attendance. Our schools actively promote and encourage 100% attendance for all our pupils, however we recognise that some of our pupils with medical conditions or life limiting illnesses are unable to achieve this.

Our schools will highlight to parents and pupils the importance of regular and punctual attendance. 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, other than an identified and documented medical condition, we will investigate, identify and strive in partnership with parents and pupils to resolve those problems as quickly and efficiently as possible.

MAKE EVERYDAY COUNT
ATTEND TODAY
ACHIEVE TOMORROW

Equal opportunities

For children to have equal opportunity to succeed at school, they must have equal access to the curriculum. The Oaks Secondary School, Evergreen Primary School and Croft Community School are committed to providing all pupils with a suitable and effective education in a safe and happy environment. Each child is welcomed, valued, and encouraged to respect themselves and others.

Our expectation is that all children will attend school every day and on time unless they are unwell or there are exceptional circumstances

Objectives

- To encourage full attendance and punctuality
- To monitor attendance and apply appropriate strategies to minimise absenteeism
- To acknowledge and celebrate a successful record of attendance
- To ensure a consistent approach throughout the Federation
- To make attendance and punctuality a priority for those associated with the school including pupils, parents, teachers and governors.
- To provide support, advice and guidance to parents and pupils
- To work effectively with other services and agencies to support these objectives.

To ensure that good attendance is priority for all those associated with the school including pupils, parents and staff we:

1. Identify mechanisms of support available to families struggling with school attendance
2. Provide a framework which defined the respective roles and responsibilities of all interested parties and ensures consistency in dealing with issues of attendance and punctuality.
3. Ensure the maintenance of accurate registers which allows the school to account for the whereabouts of each pupil at any given time
4. Gather reliable data in line with Government guidelines for the purposes of reporting on individual and whole school attendance.

School Information

The Oaks Secondary School will be open from 08.50am. External gates will be closed by 9.15 am. Registers will be taken between 09.05 and 09.15 and afternoon registers are taken between 13.00 pm and 13.10 pm

Evergreen school will be open from 08.40 pm. Morning registers are taken between 08.50am and 09.10am and afternoon registers are taken between 13.00 pm and 13.30 pm.

Croft Community School will be open from 08.50 am. Morning registers are taken before 09.20 am. Afternoon registers are taken between 13.00 pm. and 13.15 pm.

As the majority of our pupils come to school on transport provided by Durham County Council there is some flexibility in these times. Parents and carers should ensure that their child is ready in time for their taxi pick up.

Parents/carers should take all reasonable steps to notify the school of the reason for a child's absence **on the first day of absence**. Notification should be by, a telephone call or personal contact with the school front office.

- There should be daily contact between parents and school when a child is absent.
- In line with Health Protection Agency guidelines, a period of 48 hours absence is required for any pupil with vomiting or diarrhoea. Such absence due to illness is authorised.
- Head teachers may not grant leave of absence during term time unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- Staff are aware of referral routes and the staff with roles and responsibilities for pupils with emerging attendance problems.

Parents of pupils with attendance below 90% will be contacted by the attendance champion / staff with attendance responsibility.

- Attendance issues are included as topics in school assemblies, form time etc.
- Attendance levels form part of a pupil's EHCP review meeting and are commented upon by form tutors in their annual school report. Attendance improvement targets can be set at these meetings

Authorised and Unauthorised Absences

An absence is classed as authorised when a child is away from school for a legitimate reason and the school has received notification or a request from a parent/carers, e.g. if a child has been unwell. Evidence may be required in order to authorise an absence, e.g. hospital appointment letter. There may be other occasions where the school will authorise an absence e.g. family wedding/funeral; any requests of this type must be made in writing to the Head of School.

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 unnecessarily e.g. 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 term time without permission by Head of school.

Holidays

Absence during term time can seriously disrupt pupils'/students' continuity of learning. Parents/carers should avoid booking family holidays in term time. Parents/carers do not have an automatic right to withdraw pupils/students from school for a holiday and must apply in writing for permission in advance. Holidays in term time will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances and this must be started with a request in writing to the Head of School.

The Law

Parents and carers need to make sure children attend school regularly and on time. Because parents are responsible for this duty in law, they will be breaking the law if there are no good reasons for missing school.

The school and Local Authority want to help families if they have a problem. If attendance does not improve or the help and support offered is not accepted, the Council may issue a Warning Notice, Penalty Notice or ask parents/carers to attend an interview to ask questions about whether the law has been broken.

If a family goes to court and are found guilty of an offence, they could be fined up to £1,000 for a less serious offence or up to £2,500 if the law breaking is more serious. In very serious cases, the court may involve the probation service or consider up to 3 months in prison.

Penalty Notices

Continuous absences will affect a student's overall attendance. When attendance falls below 85% (with 50% or more of the absences being recorded as unauthorised for any 6-week period, our procedures for persistent absence (see below) will be followed. This could result in parent(s)/carer(s) being issued with a Penalty Notice and further legal action.

Unexplained Continuous Absence

1st Day of Absence

All students not seen at registration should be marked as an unexplained (N) absence, unless form tutor have prior knowledge and proof of the reason for the absence – which should be advised to the Attendance Officer immediately. The Attendance Officer will phone home on the first day of absence if no explanation has been received.

3rd Day of Continuous Absence

The attendance officer will phone home to follow up on the absence and a communication will be sent via text or email, requesting explanation for the absence. If no contact with family is made to obtain a reason for absence on the third day of absence, the school will call all contacts listed on child's profile to raise concern and obtain information of student whereabouts and home visit will be arranged.

5th Day of Continuous Absence

If no contact with the family has been made for 5 consecutive days and no information was obtained following home visit(s) the school will raise concern and obtain information of student whereabouts to Attendance Improvement team, an absence letter will be sent via post or email and penalty notice will be issued.

10th Day of Continuous Absence

If the student has been absent for 10 consecutive days and no update provided to school in all the steps above the child will be referred to 'Children Missing in Education' to Local Authority. No child is removed from the school roll without first notifying the local authority and receiving their approval. For children where there are concerns regarding wellbeing or welfare, or for children who are subject to any safeguarding plan, we may conduct a home visit at any time to ensure that the child remains safe.

Monitoring and Evaluation

At The Oaks, Evergreen and Croft we acknowledge that it is important to set realistic targets. We recognise the individual needs of our pupils and the significant social, emotional and health issues which some of them have.

However, as special schools we have excellent support facilities both in terms of equipment and staff training. Therefore, it is important to make a distinction between a child's medical condition and an actual illness, injury or infection. Pupils should not miss school due to their special educational needs.

Individual and whole school targets may be set in consultation with the Local Authority or with the Governing Body or with senior management team. The school will look at those interventions which have been successful as part of the evaluation process.

Monitoring

At The Oaks, Evergreen and Croft regular meetings are held between the senior leader, HLTA (where applicable) and the school secretary responsible for attendance. In these meetings attendance is analysed and vulnerable children are targeted to improve attendance. Parents are routinely informed of their child's attendance if they fall below 90% with a high proportion of unauthorised absences. Staff employ a traffic light system.

Green – Attendance over 93% - no concerns about attendance, please keep it up!

Amber – Attendance of 90% - 93% - potential cause for concern, needs improvement.

Red - Attendance below 90% - this is classed as 'Persistent Absence' by the government and requires action

Persistent Absence

If any child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, his/her parent is guilty of an offence.' (Education Act 1996). From September 2015, Persistent absence has been defined by the Department for Education as all attendance falling below 90%.

Severe Absence

Severe absence is classified as those students missing 50% or more of school (Working together to improve attendance, 2022). A concerted effort will be made by all partners to prioritise support for these students in order to improve their attendance. If all avenues of support have been facilitated by schools, local authorities and other appropriate education support has been provided but severe absence for unauthorised reason continues, it is likely to constitute neglect and be referred to AIT and LA.

School staff will follow a flow chart of support with the aim to improve attendance of persistent and severe absentees (Please see appendix 1).

Roles and Responsibilities

School Names	Attendance Lead (Champion)	Attendance Link
The Oaks Secondary School	Martin Broom (Deputy Head)	Air Emmerson (HLTA)
Croft Community School	Vaness Elcock (Deputy Head)	Alex Raine (HLTA)
Evergreen Primary School	Judith Benson (Head of School)	Lisa Laverick (AHT)

Class teachers take the register each session.

The School Office or HLTA contact parents/carers if children are absent without prior notification.

The SLT and Governing Body monitor patterns and trends over time.

The Head of School is responsible for decisions about any leave of absence requested for exceptional circumstances during term time.

Good Practice

The school will recognise the importance of good practice by:

- Keeping and maintaining registers accurately
- Maintaining a consistent approach to marking registers
- Regularly analysing attendance data
- Ensuring prompt follow-up action in cases of non-school attendance
- Reporting missing children to the LA
- Rewarding and celebrating good and improving attendance.

It is essential that everyone involved in promoting attendance is clear about the important role that must be carried out in order to raise standards. Promoting good attendance is the responsibility of the whole School.

Any unauthorised absence is damaging to a child's education as well as reflecting badly on the school. It also gives children the wrong messages about the importance of education which may lead to problems later in schooling. Good attendance and punctuality are important values for later in life.

Durham County Attendance Procedures

Information for Parents/Carers

a) On the first day off and any further absence

If a child is ill or is absent for any reason, parents or carers are asked to phone the School Office giving a reason for the child's absence. If a child is absent from school and there is no phone call from home, then school will phone home to inform parents that the child is not in school and enquire about a reason why.

Doctor and dentist appointments should be made outside of school time. If this is not possible, your child should miss the minimum amount of school time necessary. If they are well enough to come back to school following the appointment they need to.

b) Periods of extended absence

If a child's absence continues beyond 3 days, then parents are requested to notify the school to update them. If a phone call is not received, then the school will contact home to verify the absence.

If the school receives no reason for any absence, then an unauthorised absence will be recorded. Continued absenteeism and unauthorised absences could result in further action such as referral to the Attendance Improvement Team to consider enforcement action and possibly a fixed penalty notice (this includes unauthorised absences accrued through leave of absence taken during term time).

If your child is absent from school more than they should be:

At the end of each month the School Office uses its computer system to analyse absence across the school. As a result of this, some families will receive letters to inform them if their child's absence is lower than it should be if no prior discussion has taken place (unless this is due to frequent hospital appointments and/or long term medical needs).

c) Help & Support:

If you need help with attendance, it is important that you talk to the school about the issues as soon as possible. You may need to attend a meeting in school to talk about the problems and to put a plan in place to help. Sometimes, school may need to involve other services to help.

d) Communication:

The school will always try to communicate with you regarding your child's attendance if it declines. This communication may involve explaining that attendance is a cause for concern by letter, making telephone calls to you, and inviting you to attend a meeting in school depending on the circumstances. The school will work with you to discuss ways that we can offer support in finding a way to improve the situation.

e) Enforcement Action:

If, following the school's attempts to intervene there is no significant improvement and no good reasons for absences (i.e. absences are not supported by relevant evidence), or you have not co-operated with the school's attempts to improve the situation the school are required to consider referring the matter to the Local Authority for enforcement action.

The High Court has confirmed that the school's Head Teacher authorises absences. If your child misses school a lot because of illness, or if school do not know of any serious health issue that would mean your child could miss school a lot, the school may ask to you to provide medical evidence to authorise absences.

We are committed to supporting your child effectively, to ensure that they get the very best education possible and therefore have the best life chances. All challenges made concerning persistent absences, will be handled sensitively and in confidence.

f) Punctuality:

All children arriving late at school will be asked the reason for their lateness and this will be recorded on the school's attendance data base (SIMs). If lateness becomes persistent with no identifiable reason and over a period of time, then a referral may be made to the Attendance Improvement Team to consider if enforcement action is required.

g) Leave of Absence in Term Time

Head teachers are no longer able to grant leave of absence during term time **unless there are exceptional circumstances**. The school will consider each request of absence individually; taking into account the circumstances, such as; the nature of the event for which leave is sought, the pupil's prior attendance and any important events taking place in school at that time e.g. exams.

An application for leave of absence must be made well in advance via a form which is available from the school website or in person from the school office. Where a leave of absence is granted, the head teacher will determine the number of days a pupil can be away from school. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the head teacher's discretion. As stated in the most recent DfE guidance on attendance, if an application for leave of absence is not made prior to the time of the required absence then the absence will be recorded as unauthorised regardless of circumstances.

Please note that absence will not be authorised under any circumstances during any period of public examinations or internal assessments.

Promoting good attendance and punctuality

In order to promote attendance and punctuality the school will periodically celebrate the class, year group and house who have the best attendance. Further to this, any pupils who achieve 100% attendance over a whole or half year will receive a certificate in assembly. We will also celebrate improved attendance.

Children Missing from Education:

Generally, if a family move from the area and their whereabouts are unknown, the school can, in conjunction with Durham County, legally remove the child from the roll after 20 school days of unauthorised absence. However, this is not always the case for pupils with an EHCP who attend special schools. It is **vital that families keep school informed of any change of details** and regularly update them if details change. A child may be at risk of losing their school place if their whereabouts are not known.

It is also important that emergency contact information is kept up to date and that if carers are leaving the area, they provide details of where and how they can be contacted. If the school is unable to trace a child, this would be treated as a **safeguarding matter**.

Roles and Responsibilities

Governing Body:

As part of our school approach to maintaining high attendance, the governing body will:

- Ensure that the importance of attendance is made clear by promoting the relevant school policies and guidance directed to parents and staff.
- Annually review the school's attendance policy and ensure that all provisions are in place to allow school staff, parents, and students to implement the policy effectively.
- Take the lead role in monitoring attendance and coordinating provision and policies for attendance. Governors' meetings will review and discuss attendance issues that have arisen in order to be fully aware and supportive of expected attendance targets for the year.
- Ensure that the school is implementing effective means of recording attendance and organising that data, including for children who are educated off site.

School Leadership Team:

As part of our school approach to maintaining high attendance, the leadership team will:

- Be active in their approach to promoting good attendance with students and their parents.
- Ensure the school's teaching and learning experiences encourage regular attendance and that students are taught the value of high attendance for their own progression and achievement.
- Coordinate with the governing body to monitor the implementation of the policy and its effectiveness, with annual review of full policy.
- Ensure that all staff are up to date with the school's attendance policy and that staff are fully trained to recognise and deal with attendance issues.
- Ensure government legislation on attendance is complied with and that the leadership team are up to date with any legislation changes and how to implement them.
- Nominate a senior manager to take responsibility for overseeing and monitoring attendance provision and that this person has sufficient time and resources to give to the job.
- Report to the Governors Sub Committee meeting regularly on attendance records, data and provision.
- Ensure that systems to record and report attendance data are in place and working effectively.

- Ensuring regular celebrations of good attendance take place.

Teachers and support staff:

- Ensuring that an accurate and timely register is taken in all lessons.
- Publicly praising those students who attend well, or make an effort to improve their attendance.
- Using the school registration system accurately to record authorised absences.
- Referring unexplained absences or patterns of absence to the relevant Pastoral Lead.
- Identifying students who are beginning to develop, or have developed a pattern of absence and refer to the Pastoral Team.
- Welcoming children back after they have been absent because of illness.
- Taking specific steps to assist children returning to school when they have been absent.
- Providing a positive role model through their own attendance and punctuality.
- Referring their concerns to the relevant Pastoral Leader.

School Secretary/Administrative Staff

Our administrative staff provide a great deal of valuable support in promoting attendance by:

- Passing information received from parents/carers at the school to the tutors regularly and consistently.
- Using the school registration system accurately to record authorised absences and unauthorised absences.

Attendance Officer/Pastoral Team

- Making calls to parents when students are absent.
- Taking specific steps to assist children returning to school when they have been absent.
- Meeting with parents/carers of children who are developing or have developed a pattern of absences and agreeing actions which may lead to the child beginning to attend more regularly.
- Ensuring that there are clear and understood attendance procedures in place for their areas of responsibility.
- Agreeing attendance action plans with the child's parents/carers and individual students where a pattern of absence is a cause for concern.

Parents/Carers:

We believe that its students are able to achieve success when:

- School and family work in partnership.
- Parents/carers Engage with their children's education – support their learning and take an interest in what they have been doing at school.
- Parents/carers ensure that their child attends school regularly and do not allow time off from school for unnecessary reasons.
- Parents/carers contact the school on the first day of absence by 9.00am and provide the reason for absence and intended return date.
- Parents/carers avoid taking their children on holiday during term time. Government legislation identifies that schools may no longer approve requests for holiday leave. An exceptional circumstance pro forma is available from the school. Parents/carers must appreciate that booking holidays during term time because they are less expensive does not constitute an exceptional circumstance.

- Parents/carers attend any necessary meetings and respond as quickly as possible to any letters and information about their child's attendance.

Pupils:

We expect the following from all of our pupils:

- To attend school regularly.
- To arrive on time and appropriately prepared for the day.
- To talk to a member of staff about any problem or reason that may prevent them from attending school.

This policy has been reviewed and rewritten in line with the DFE 'School attendance Departmental advice for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities' (July 2019 update) , 'School attendance parental responsibility measures' (May 2020 update) and 'Working together to improve attendance', 2022.

This policy is supported by our policies on safeguarding, bullying, behaviour and inclusive learning.

Appendix 1 – Persistent / Severe Absentee Intervention Flow Chart

Expect

Aspire to high standards of attendance from all pupils and parents and build a culture where all can, and want to, be in school and ready to learn by prioritising attendance improvement across the school.



Monitor

Rigorously use attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance (at individual and cohort level) as soon as possible so all parties can work together to resolve them before they become entrenched.



Listen and Understand

When a pattern is spotted, discuss with pupils and parents to listen to and understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.



Facilitate support

Remove barriers in school and help pupils and parents to access the support they need to overcome the barriers outside of school. This might include an early help or whole family plan where absence is a symptom of wider issues.



Formalise support

Where absence persists and voluntary support is not working or not being engaged with, partners should work together to explain the consequences clearly and ensure support is also in place to enable families to respond. Depending on the circumstances this may include formalising support through an attendance contract or education supervision order



Enforce

Where all other avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with, enforce attendance through statutory intervention: a penalty notice in line with the National Framework or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education.