Woodland Academy Trust

Attendance Policy

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Contents

1. Aims

Our Trust aims to meet its obligations with regards to school attendance by:
- Promoting good attendance and reducing absence, including persistent absence
- Ensuring every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled
- Acting early to address patterns of absence

All children are entitled to receive an effective full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude. It is the joint responsibility of the school and parents/carers to ensure that our children receive that education.

We will also support parents to perform their legal duty to ensure their children of compulsory school age attend regularly and will promote and support punctuality in attending lessons. We aim to support the removal of barriers to good attendance, and, seek to work collaboratively together.

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 patters of poor attendance 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 children and parents to listen to understand barriers to attendance and agree how all partners can work together to resolve them.

FACILITATE SUPPORT
Remove barriers in school and help children 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 a parenting 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 or prosecution to protect the child's right to an education.

From Working together to improve school attendance, 2022

The Strategic Approach
Our schools adopt the 5 Foundations of Effective Attendance Practice framework, this is modelled on the work of Professor Katherine Weare. The emphasis is on developing a school culture and climate which builds a sense of

connectedness and belonging to ensure all children can attend school and thrive. The approach ensures we prioritise building solid working relationships with children/parents prior to any escalation. The staged approach we use ensures we identify triggers early that can lead to poor attendance issues such as mental health issues, lack of trust, communication and relationship breakdowns and the possible lack of networking opportunities both internal (in-school) and external (external agencies).

The Foundations framework was reviewed by the Department for Education in 2022. The Foundations framework received an excellent report following the four-day review.

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy meets the requirements of the school attendance guidance from the Department for Education (DfE), and refers to the DfE's statutory guidance on school attendance parental responsibility measures. These documents are drawn from the following legislation setting out the legal powers and duties that govern school attendance:
- The Education Act 1996
- The Education Act 2002
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2010
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013
- The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016
- The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013
- DfE (2022) Keeping children safe in education
- DfE (2022) Working together to improve school attendance
- DfE (2022) Summary table of responsibilities for school attendance
- DfE (2023) Summary of responsibilities where a mental health issue is affecting attendance

This policy also refers to the DfE's guidance on the school census, which explains the persistent absence threshold. This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

DFE: Working Together To Improve Attendance 2022.
From September 2022 the *DFE: Working Together To Improve Attendance* paper will replace all previous guidance on school attendance except for statutory guidance for parental responsibility measures. The Secretary of State has committed to it becoming statutory when parliamentary time allows (this will be no sooner than September 2023).

The table below identifies how the 5 Foundations of Effective Attendance Practice will underpin the DFE 2022 paper in meeting the summary of expectations.

DFE Summary of Expectations	Foundation 1 Whole School Thinking Culture & Climate	Foundation 2 Supportive Policies, Systems and Processes	Foundation 3 Professional Learning Staff Development	Foundation 4 Implement Targeted Programmes And Intervention	Foundation 5 Connect Appropriately With Approaches To Behaviour Management
Develop a whole-school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Have a school attendance policy		✓			
Have day-to-day processes to follow up absence	✓	✓	✓		
Monitor and analyse data to identify those that need support		✓	✓	✓	
Engage with families, understand barriers to attendance and work together to remove them	✓			✓	✓
Provide additional support for pupils with medical conditions or SEND			✓	✓	✓
Share information and work collaboratively with others	✓	✓	✓	✓	
A new focus on persistent and severe absence		✓	✓	✓	✓
Find out what the DFE expects from other stakeholders		✓	✓	✓	

3. School procedures

3.1 Attendance register

By law, all schools (except those where all pupils are boarders) are required to keep an attendance register, and all pupils must be placed on this register.

The attendance register will be taken at the start of the first session of each school day and once during the second session. It will mark whether every pupil 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

See Appendix 1 for the DfE attendance codes.
Every entry in the attendance register will be preserved for 3 years after the date on which the entry was made.
Please see the school website for arrival times at each school.

3.2 Unplanned absence

Parents must notify the school on the first day of an unplanned absence – for example, if their child is unable to attend due to ill health.

Children should remain at home if they are unwell. After diarrhoea and sickness, a minimum of twenty-four hours without symptoms should elapse before returning to school.

All absences should be notified to the office by telephone on the first day. A letter of explanation should be returned with the child on return to school. If a letter is not received, parents will be contacted asking for the reason for absence. Alternatively, parents can notify the schools via email to the front office.

The school is very concerned for the welfare of our children. Where there are persistent or prolonged periods of sickness, the school may refer the matter to the educational welfare officer so that the correct advice and assistance can be put in place to support the family through this difficult period.

Absence due to illness will be authorised unless the school has a genuine concern about the authenticity of the illness.

If the authenticity of the illness is in doubt, the school may ask parents to provide medical evidence, such as a doctor's note, prescription, appointment card or other appropriate form of evidence. 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 will be notified of this in advance.

Who should parents/carers contact:
In our schools, our Community Liaison Officers primary focus is on supporting and improving school attendance for our children. They should be contacted in the first instance regarding unplanned absence on a daily basis.

3.3 Medical or dental appointments
Missing registration for a medical or dental appointment is counted as an authorised absence; advance notice is required for authorising these absences.

However, we encourage parents to make medical and dental appointments out of school hours where possible. Where this is not possible, the pupil should be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary.

Applications for other types of absence in term time must also be made in advance. Information relating to whether the school can authorise such absences can be found in section 4.

3.4 Lateness and punctuality
Punctuality is very important. Arriving late for school is a poor start to the day, causing embarrassment to your child, disruption to the class, unnecessary difficulties for teachers who are teaching, and most importantly, disturbance to learning for other children.

A pupil who arrives late but before the register has closed will be marked as late, using the appropriate code.
A pupil who arrives after the register has closed will be marked as absent, using the appropriate code.
If your child is late, please inform the school office. Additionally, if you have a crisis before school which means that you are definitely going to be late then do telephone the school as this will also give you the opportunity to book a lunch for your child if he/she arrives after the dinner register has closed.

3.5 Following up absence
The school will follow up any absences to ascertain the reason, ensure proper safeguarding action is taken where necessary, identify whether the absence is approved or not and identify the correct attendance code to use. We follow our Local Authority's Children Missing in Education (CME) guidance.

Our process:
We follow the process outlined below in identifying where a child may be at risk of poor attendance and/or persistent absence:

Everyone	5 days absence	8 days absence	10 days absence	14 days absence	16 days absence	19 days absence or more.
Our school is a place where every child belongs. We create welcoming environments to allow all children to gain a sense of belonging and ultimately achieve academically through regular school attendance.	Concerning levels of child absence. Internal monitoring and communication with parents. Stage 1 letter may be sent to parents. Early intervention considered as a preventative measure. Possible early help support offered.	Serious concerns regarding attendance. Stage 2 letter may be sent to parents. Meeting with DHT Inclusion. Explore barriers and implement a programme to remove barriers. Early help support reviewed or offered.	The child is a high risk of Persistent Absence. Stage 3 letter may be sent to parents. DHT Inclusion meeting with parents. Review of early help and intervention programmes. Consider the support of external services.	The child is at serious risk of Persistent Absence. Formal warning notice may be sent to parents. Continued internal and external programmes of support. Parenting contract or supervision order considered at this stage. A multi-disciplinary approach to be considered and offered.	The school will work closely with the LA. All avenues have been exhausted and support is not working or not being engaged with. The school will now enforce attendance through statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education. All support, and offer of support, to be reviewed. Continued support of the child and family.	The child is now considered a Persistently Absent child. Persistent Absence is when a pupil enrolment's overall absence equates to 10 per cent or more of their possible sessions. Over an academic year this equates to 19 days. At this stage the child will be PA for the remainder of the school year. Safeguarding referrals at this stage can be made. The child and family will continue to be supported.

EXPECT	MONITOR	LISTEN & UNDERSTAND	FACILITATE SUPPORT	FORMALISE SUPPORT	ENFORCE
A culture where all children can, and want to, be in school.	Use attendance data to identify patterns of poor attendance.	Understand barriers to attendance, work together to remove them.	Access support to overcome barriers outside of school.	This may include formalising support through a parenting contract or education supervision order.	Statutory intervention or prosecution to protect the pupil's right to an education - when there is no other option.

3.6 Reporting to parents

Parents are informed about their child's attendance via termly and annual reports.

If there are any concerns regarding a child's attendance parents will be contacted by the Community Liaison Officer (CLO) as soon as the matter arises.

3.7 Parental Involvement

- The school will build respectful relationships with parents and families to ensure their trust and engagement.
- The school will communicate openly and honestly with pupils and their families about their expectations of school life, attendance and performance so that they understand what to expect and what is expected of them.
- The school will liaise with other agencies working with pupils and their families to support attendance, e.g. if a pupil has a social worker.

Parents will be expected to:
- Actively support the work of the school.
- Call staff for help when they need it.
- Communicate with the school about possible circumstances which may affect their child's attendance or require support.

3.8 Pupils at risk of persistent absence

The SLT will:

- Establish a range of evidence-based interventions to address barriers to attendance
- Monitor the implementation and quality of escalation procedures and seek robust evidence of the escalation procedures that work; including attendance reviews.
- Establish robust escalation procedures which will be initiated before absence becomes a problem.
- Support pupils potentially at greater risk of harm who need a social worker through pastoral and academic support, alongside action by statutory services in response to any unauthorised absences.

Designated Staff members will:

- Welcome pupils back following any absence and provide catch-up support to build confidence and bridge gaps.
- Establish plans to remove barriers and provide additional support.
- Be part of regular check-ins to review progress and the impact of support.
- Consider what support for re-engagement might be needed, including for vulnerable groups.

4. Authorised and unauthorised absence

4.1 Granting approval for term-time absence

Headteachers may not grant any leave of absence to pupils during term time unless they consider there to be exceptional circumstances. Please see Appendix 2 for agreed exceptional circumstances.

The school considers each application for term-time absence individually, taking into account the specific facts, circumstances and relevant context behind the request. A leave of absence is granted entirely at the Headteacher's discretion, as long as the child's attendance is above 96%.

Valid reasons for **authorised absence** include:
- Illness and medical/dental appointments – as explained in sections 3.2 and 3.3
- Religious observance – where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents belong. If necessary, the school will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart.
- Traveller pupils 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 pupil is attending educational provision.
- If a parent/carer wishes to take a child out of school during term time, they should seek permission, in writing, from the Headteacher at the earliest opportunity. Each case will be treated on its merits, but it is not the policy of this school to authorise such absences, except in the most exceptional circumstances.

4.2 Legal sanctions

Schools can fine parents for the unauthorised absence of their child from school, where the child is of compulsory school age.

If issued with a penalty notice, parents must pay £60 within 21 days or £120 within 28 days. The payment must be made directly to the local authority.

The decision on whether or not to issue a penalty notice ultimately rests with the Headteacher, following the local authority's code of conduct for issuing penalty notices. This may take into account:
- A 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 the parent or withdraw the notice.

5. SEND and health-related absence

Our schools recognise that pupils with SEND and/or health conditions, including mental health issues, may face greater barriers to attendance than their peers, and will incorporate robust procedures to support pupils who find attending school difficult.
In line with the SEND Policy and Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy, the schools will ensure that reasonable adjustments are made for disabled pupils to reduce barriers to attendance, in line with any EHC or support plans that have been implemented. The school will secure additional support from external partners to help bolster attendance where appropriate.
Where the school has concerns that a pupil's non-attendance may be related to mental health issues, parents will be contacted to discuss the issue and whether there are any contributory factors to their child's lack of attendance.

Where staff have a mental health concern about a pupil that is also a safeguarding concern, they will inform the DSL and the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy will be followed.

If a pupil is unable to attend school for long periods of time due to their health, the school will:

- Inform the LA if a pupil is likely to be away from the school for more than 15 school days.
- Provide the LA with information about the pupil's needs, capabilities and programme of work.
- Help the pupil reintegrate at school when they return.
- Make sure the pupil is kept informed about school events and clubs.
- Encourage the pupil to stay in contact with other pupils during their absence.

The school will incorporate an action plan to help any pupils with SEND and/or health issues cope with the stress and anxiety that attending school may cause them. Such plans will be regularly monitored and reviewed until the pupil is attending school as normal and there has been signs of significant improvement.

To support the attendance of pupils with SEND and/or health issues, the school will consider:

- Holding termly meetings to evaluate any implemented reasonable adjustments.
- Incorporating a pastoral support plan.
- Carrying out strengths and difficulties questionnaire.
- Identifying pupils' unmet needs through the Common Assessment Framework.
- Using an internal or external specialist.
- Enabling a pupil to have a reduced timetable.
- Ensuring a pupil can have somewhere quiet to spend lunch and breaktimes.
- Implementing a system whereby pupils can request to leave a classroom if they feel they need time out.
- Temporary late starts or early finishes.
- Phased returns to school where there has been a long absence.
- Small group work or on-to-one lessons.
- Tailored support to meet their individual needs.

6. Persistent Absentees

There are various groups of pupils who may be vulnerable to high absence and PA, such as:
- Children in need
- LAC
- Young carers
- Pupils who are eligible for FSM
- Pupils with EAL
- Pupils with SEND
- Pupils who have faced bullying and/or discrimination

Our schools will use a number of methods to help support pupils at risk of PA to attend school. These include:
- Offering catch-up support to build confidence and bridge gaps.
- Meeting with pupils to discuss patterns of absence, barriers to attendance, and any other problems they may be having.
- Establishing plans to remove barriers and provide additional support.
- Leading regular check-ins to review progress and the impact of support.
- Making regular contact with families to discuss progress.
- Assessing whether an EHC plan or SEND support may be appropriate.
- Considering what support for re-engagement might be needed, including for vulnerable groups.

Where a pupil at risk of PA is also at increased risk of harm, the school will work in conjunction with all relevant authorities, e.g., social services, to support the pupil in line with the school's duty of care. The school will also bear in

mind that the continuation of severe PA following intervention may, in itself, constitute neglect, and will escalate any concerns in this regard in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

7. Strategies for promoting attendance

The school Community Liaison Officer and Inclusion Team are available daily to provide support to parents to ensure regular attendance. There are a variety of systems at each school within our trust to reward attendance.

8. Attendance monitoring

The Community Liaison Officer monitors pupil absence on a daily basis.

Parents are expected to call the school in the morning if their child is going to be absent due to ill health (see section 3.2).

While we expect all pupils, including those in the Nursery and Reception classes to have good school attendance, the Education Act 1996 provides prescribed dates when a child becomes of compulsory school age.

A child is of compulsory school age from the prescribed date following their 5th birthday or if the child's birthday is on one of the prescribed dates, they are of compulsory school age from that date.

The dates are: 31st March, 31st August, and 31st December.
The school and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) monitor the attendance and punctuality of each child on a regular basis. Parents will be notified by the school when attendance is less than 97% or a regular pattern of absence is noted and you will be invited to discuss any concerns or problems that you have.

Pupil-level absence data is 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. We compare our attendance data to the national average and share this with Trustees.

The Community Liaison Officer the responsibility for ensuring that all of the attendance data is accurately recorded on the MIS system.

9. Roles and responsibilities

9.1 Trustees
The Board of Trustees or its committees maintain an overview of school attendance on at least a termly basis. They also hold the Headteacher to account for the implementation of this policy.

9.2 The Headteacher
The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented consistently across the school, and for monitoring school-level absence data and reporting it to the local academy committee.

The Headteacher also supports other staff in monitoring the attendance of individual pupils and issues fixed-penalty notices, where necessary.

9.3 The Community Liaison Officer (CLO)
The CLO:
- Monitors attendance data at the school and individual pupil level
- Reports concerns about attendance to the Headteacher
- Works with education welfare officers to tackle persistent absence
- Arranges calls and meetings with parents to discuss attendance issues
- Advises the Headteacher when to issue fixed-penalty notices.

9.4 Class Teachers
Class teachers are responsible for recording attendance on a daily basis, using the correct codes, and submitting this information to the school office.

9.5 Office Staff
Office staff are expected to take calls from parents about absence and record it on the school system.

9.6 The School
The school will ensure that absence procedures are understood by pupils, parents and carers.

9.7 Parents
Parents are responsible for:
- Providing accurate and up-to-date contact details.
- Providing the school with more than one emergency contact number.
- Updating the school if their details change.

10. Links with other policies

This policy is linked to our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, Children Missing Education Policy and Complaints Procedures Policy.

Appendix 1: attendance codes

The following codes are taken from the DfE's guidance on school attendance.

Code	Definition	Scenario
/	Present (am)	Pupil is present at morning registration
****	Present (pm)	Pupil is present at afternoon registration
L	Late arrival	Pupil arrives late before register has closed
B	Off-site educational activity	Pupil is at a supervised off-site educational activity approved by the school
D	Dual registered	Pupil is attending a session at another setting where they are also registered
J	Interview	Pupil has an interview with a prospective employer/educational establishment
P	Sporting activity	Pupil is participating in a supervised sporting activity approved by the school
V	Educational trip or visit	Pupil is on an educational visit/trip organised, or approved, by the school
W	Work experience	Pupil is on a work experience placement

Code	Definition	Scenario
Authorised absence		
C	Authorised leave of absence	Pupil has been granted a leave of absence due to exceptional circumstances
E	Excluded	Pupil has been excluded but no alternative provision has been made
H	Authorised holiday	Pupil has been allowed to go on holiday due to exceptional circumstances
I	Illness	School has been notified that a pupil will be absent due to illness
M	Medical/dental appointment	Pupil is at a medical or dental appointment
R	Religious observance	Pupil is taking part in a day of religious observance

S	Study leave	Year 11 pupil is on study leave during their public examinations
T	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller absence	Pupil from a Traveller community is travelling, as agreed with the school
Unauthorised absence		
G	Unauthorised holiday	Pupil is on a holiday that was not approved by the school
N	Reason not provided	Pupil is absent for an unknown reason (this code should be amended when the reason emerges, or replaced with code O if no reason for absence has been provided after a reasonable amount of time)
O	Unauthorised absence	School is not satisfied with reason for pupil's absence
U	Arrival after registration	Pupil arrived at school after the register closed

Code	Definition	Scenario
X	Not required to be in school	Pupil of non-compulsory school age is not required to attend
Y	Unable to attend due to exceptional circumstances	School site is closed, there is disruption to travel as a result of a local/national emergency, or pupil is in custody
Z	Pupil not on admission register	Register set up but pupil has not yet joined the school
#	Planned school closure	Whole or partial school closure due to half-term/bank holiday/INSET day

Appendix 2: Exceptional Circumstances Guidance

There is some debate about what 'exceptional circumstances' means when deciding whether to grant absence for students during term time. At WAT, we believe it is valuable to have some guiding principles to back schools in their decisions and provide consistency. However, the decision to authorise absence is at the Headteacher's discretion based on their assessment of the situation. Circumstances vary from school to school and so there can be no absolute rules on this subject.

Term times are for education. This is the priority. Children and families have 175 days off school to spend time together, including weekends and school holidays. Headteachers will rightly prioritise attendance. The default school policy should be that absences will not be granted during term time and will only be authorised in exceptional circumstances. If an event can reasonably be scheduled outside of term time, then it would not be normal to authorise absence. Absence during term time for holidays is therefore not considered an exceptional circumstance.

Before exceptional circumstances are granted, the child's current attendance will be taken into account. If it is below the target of the school (96%), then the request will be unauthorised, regardless of the reason.

- Absences to visit close family members are not normally granted during term time if they could be scheduled for holiday periods or outside school hours. Children may however need time to visit seriously ill relatives. This will equate to 1 day for the visit and 1 day either side for travelling.

- Absence for a bereavement of a close family member is usually considered an exceptional circumstance but for the funeral service only, not extended leave. If the funeral is abroad or a significant distance away, 1 day on either side of the funeral service can be granted. Religious observances in the run up to the funeral can be granted, though this should only be for a day.

- Absences for important religious observances are often taken into account but only for the ceremony and travelling time, not extended leave. This is intended for one off situations rather than regular or recurring events.

- Families of service personnel can have time authorised if they are returning from long operational tours that prevent contact during scheduled holiday time. The amount of time off authorised will be agreed on a case-by-case basis.

- Families may need time together to recover from trauma or crisis. The amount of time off authorised will be agreed on a case-by-case basis.

- Absence for a prison visit can be authorised if it is not possible to be held on a non-school day.

- Absence for a parental wedding is considered an exceptional circumstance, although only the day of the wedding, as well as a day either side for travelling, can be authorised.

- Absence due to the serious illness of a close family member will be considered an exceptional circumstance. The amount of time off authorised will be agreed on a case-by-case basis, when other avenues of attendance have been explored.