



Wessex
Learning Trust
We Learn Together!

Attendance Policy

2023 -2024

Date approved by Trust Board: February 2023
Review Date: February 2024

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Wessex Learning Trust

All children and young people will have the same protection regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation, or identity. We are committed to anti-discriminatory practice and recognise the additional needs of children from minority ethnic groups and disabled children and the barriers they may face, especially around communication.

This policy will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees annually.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gavin Ball". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'G'.

Signature:

Name: Mr Gavin Ball

Position: Chief Executive

Date: 09/02/2023

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Kirkup". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'B'.

Signature:

Name: Mr Brian Kirkup

Position: Chair of the Board

Date: 09/02/2023

Policy Statement

The Wessex Learning Trust is committed to providing an education of the highest quality for all its learners and recognises this can only be achieved by supporting and promoting excellent school attendance for all.

This is based on the belief that only by attending school regularly and punctually will children and young people be able to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. High attainment depends on good and regular attendance.

It is the policy of the Wessex Learning Trust to celebrate both.

All staff within every school will work with learners and their families to ensure each learner attends school regularly and punctually.

We recognise that parents and carers have a vital role and there is a need to establish strong home-school links and communication systems. All schools will provide effective and efficient communications with learners, parents/carers, and appropriate agencies to provide mutual information, advice, and support to meet our objectives.

Schools will:

- develop and maintain a whole school culture that promotes the benefits of high attendance
- ensure all staff, learners and parents/carers understand our expectations for attendance
- accurately complete admission and attendance registers and have effective day to day processes in place to follow-up absence
- regularly monitor and analyse attendance and absence data to identify learners or cohorts that require support with their attendance and put effective strategies in place
- build strong relationships with families, listen to, and understand barriers to attendance and work with families to remove them
- share information and work collaboratively with other schools in the area, local authorities, and other partners when absence is at risk of becoming persistent or severe.

This policy is based on current government guidance, [Working Together to Improve School Attendance](#) (May 2022) and other statutory regulations.

Definitions

In this policy there are some key definitions which will be used. We have referenced the meaning of these terms below for ease of understanding:

Persistent Absence

When a learner's attendance figure reaches 90% or below, they are deemed as 'persistently absent' from school. Children whose attendance is below 90% are likely to achieve lower educational

outcomes and are at increased risk of harm and exploitation. A learner with 90% attendance will be absent for the equivalent of: one session per week, six sessions per six-week half term or 38 sessions per school year.

Severe Absence

When a learner is absent from school with an attendance figure of 50% or below, they are deemed as 'severely absent'. Children in this group are at increased risk of exploitation and education outcomes are poor. A learner with 50% attendance will be absent for the equivalent of: five sessions per week, 30 sessions per six-week half term or 190 sessions per school year.

Parent/Carer

Within this policy, a parent/carer is defined as: all natural parents, whether they are married or not or any person who has parental responsibility for a child or young person and any person who has care of a child or young person (i.e., lives with and looks after the child).

Vulnerable learners

Within this policy, vulnerable learners are defined as those that: have a social worker or have previously had a social worker; are a Child Looked After (CLA); have an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan); are severely absent, as defined above.

Local Authority

Within this policy the Local Authority refers to North Somerset Council and Somerset County Council. From 1 April 2023, the Somerset County Council will be named Somerset Council.

Session

Schools are required to take attendance registers twice a day for all learners. Each of these attendance marks counts for one session. Each day is made up of two sessions: morning and afternoon. In a typical school year, a learner can attend for a maximum of 190 days, or 380 sessions.

Statutory and Legal Guidance

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

When parents and carers decide to have their child registered at school, they have an additional legal duty to ensure their child attends that school regularly.

This means their child must attend every day that the school is open, except in a small number of allowable circumstances, such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

This policy aligns with the following statutory guidance and regulations:

- [The Education Act 1996](#)
- [The Education \(Learner Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2006](#)
- [The Education \(Learner Registration\) \(England\) Regulations \(Amended\) 2013](#)
- [Working Together to Improve School Attendance](#)

The Education (Learner Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 was amended by Education (Learner Registration) (England) Regulations in 2013 only allowing Headteachers to authorise leave of absence in exceptional circumstances.

In line with these regulations, requests for term-time leave will not be granted.

Additional legal requirements relating to school attendance can be found in The Education (Learner Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.

Safeguarding

Knowing where children are during school hours is an extremely important aspect of safeguarding. Absence can be an indicator of abuse and neglect and may also raise concerns about other safeguarding issues, including the criminal exploitation of children.

We monitor attendance carefully and address poor or irregular attendance without delay. We will always contact parents/carers when learners are not at school to ensure their whereabouts are known. It is essential that we have a least two up-to-date contact numbers for each learner.

Parents/Carers should remember to inform their child's school as soon as possible if their contact details change. This includes home addresses, email addresses and phone numbers.

The Wessex Learning Trust recognises that inappropriate authorisation of absence can be as damaging to a child's education as unauthorised absence as it will potentially send a message to parents/carers that any reason for absence is acceptable and can render children extremely vulnerable to harm.

Where necessary, the Wessex Learning Trust will challenge parents/carers about the reasons for their child's absence and will always encourage them to keep absences to a minimum. A note or explanation from a parent/carer does not guarantee that the absence will be authorised.

The decision to authorise absences rests with the Headteacher of the individual schools within the Wessex Learning Trust and will be made depending on the reasons given. In some cases, evidence may be requested to support this decision. If no reason is given for an absence, it cannot be authorised.

Children Missing Education

In line with the statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education, school leaders have ensured that:

- all members of staff are aware of attendance guidance and expectations
- all members of school staff understand what to do when a child's attendance becomes a concern
- the school has in place required and appropriate policies, and robust procedures and responses for learners who go missing from education (especially on repeat occasions)
- all staff are aware of the risks of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the legal requirement to take immediate action if there is reason to believe a child is at risk or that it has taken place.

Removing Learners from the School Roll

Schools within the Wessex Learning Trust are required to inform their local authority when a learner is removed from roll.

Procedures are in place to ensure this information is shared in a timely manner when we plan to take learners off-roll, or when they:

- leave the school to be home educated
- move beyond a reasonable distance from the school
- remain medically unfit beyond compulsory school age
- are in custody for four months or more (and will not return to school afterwards)
- are expelled (permanently excluded).

Learners who are expected to start attending a school within the Wessex Learning Trust but fail to take up the place will be referred to the Local Authority.

When a learner leaves a school within the Wessex Learning Trust, the learner's new address, school, and expected started date will be recorded. This information will be passed to the Local Authority.

The School's Responsibilities

All learner attendance and absence levels are monitored on a regular basis. When a learner's attendance becomes a concern, a graduated and supportive response will be put in place, to support improved attendance. In some cases, this may result in multi-agency support being requested, including the Education Safeguarding Service, who uphold the Local Authority's statutory duty to improve school attendance.

Vulnerable Learners

The Wessex Learning Trust and its schools routinely monitors the attendance of vulnerable learners. If we have concerns about a learner, we work closely across our staff and with support services to ensure parents/carers understand the importance of good attendance and attendance procedures.

Additional measures are in place to monitor the attendance of vulnerable learners.

- Vulnerable learners are included on the school's internal Attendance Monitoring List. The attendance of these learners is monitored on a lesson-by-lesson basis and absences are reported to the appropriate staff member immediately to ensure contact is made with their parent/carer as quickly as possible.
- Daily school contact with parents/carers (and any external professionals such as social workers) in relation to absences of vulnerable learners or those at risk of persistent or severe absence.
- Learners with complex needs (including those with medical needs) will be supported to ensure their attendance is maximised and its improvement is planned for. The attendance of learners in this group will be monitored daily.
- When a learner is dual registered or accessing learning off-site, their attendance at that provision will be monitored daily. The individual schools within The Wessex Learning Trust holds the legal responsibility for these learners' attendance and safeguarding.
- Learners with Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND) whose attendance is poor are monitored through the internal school processes and offered additional support in line with their needs.

The leadership and staff supporting attendance at the schools within the Wessex Learning Trust will hold regular meetings, where attendance is discussed and tracked, so that suitable support and interventions are put in place as quickly as possible.

Learners whose attendance becomes a cause for concern will be supported by dedicated members of our staff who will make regular contact with them. This will support them to identify and remove any barriers, improve their attendance and to re-engage with learning. This work is robustly recorded and the impact of it is monitored regularly.

When a learner's attendance continues to decline despite the support that is put in place, additional support may be requested from several support services. This may include the use of multi-agency work and support being discussed at a Team Around the School meeting or Inclusion Panel meeting. These discussions can lead to additional support being identified and support from the Education Safeguarding Service being agreed.

The Education Safeguarding Service (ESS) forms part of Local Authority's Early Help Framework. It supports schools and families to improve attendance and fulfils the Local Authority's statutory duties to improve and promote school attendance. The ESS may consider legal action against parents in line with Section 444 of the Education Act 1996. North Somerset schools can also access this service for some duties.

How we monitor attendance and the support that is offered is determined on a case-by-case basis. These decisions are regularly reviewed between the attendance, safeguarding and pastoral teams in school. Support from Team Around the School or Education Safeguarding Service may also be requested and implemented.

Daily Attendance Procedures

Schools are required to take a register twice a day for every learner. This happens at the beginning of our morning and afternoon sessions. These sessions form the basis of each learner's attendance record.

When children with a social worker are absent and no reason provided, the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead will inform their social worker.

Absence and Punctuality

Parents/Carers are required to inform the individual schools within The Wessex Learning Trust as soon as possible if their child is absent or due to be absent. This should be done on every day of absence.

Each school day is split into two sessions: morning and afternoon. Registers are opened at the beginning of each session and closed 30 minutes later.

Learners' punctuality will be regularly monitored. Sanctions will be put in place when it is appropriate to do so. Parents/carers will be contacted to discuss persistent lateness and lateness after the close of the registers could result in a request for support from the Education Safeguarding Service.

When parents/carers make daily contact regarding their child's absence, that contact and the reasons for absence will be recorded. Absences will be coded on the child's register in line with the reason for that absence.

The decision about how absences are coded rests with the Headteacher in the individual school and in some cases, absences may not be authorised even when a reason is provided.

Additional information or evidence may be requested before an absence is authorised. This may occur when there are concerns about a learner's attendance, even if it is related to illness, or when the reason provided is believed to be false.

Unexplained absences may result in contact being made with parents and a home visit being made to speak with the parent or the learner and put support in place, as needed.

Authorisation of Absence

In line with legislation and Local Authority guidance, learner absences can only be authorised when:

- a learner is too unwell to attend school
- a learner is attending a medical appointment that is unavoidable
- a learner is taking part in a recognised religious observance
- a learner is prevented from attending due to school transport not being available (this only applies to transport that is arranged by the Local Authority or the school)

Absences may also be authorised at the discretion of the Headteacher when:

- term-time leave is requested, and its circumstances are exceptional
- a learner has one or more medical appointments
- the parent/carer of a learner is engaged in a trade that requires them to travel and they have previously attended school as often as the nature of that trade permits (this relates only to families with Traveller status)
- other exceptional circumstances (e.g. a close family bereavement)

Medical Appointments

Where possible, medical appointments should be made outside school hours or in school holidays. However, we realise this is sometimes not possible. Learners should come into school before and after appointments to ensure they miss as little lesson time as possible. Learners should sign out before leaving for appointments and sign in when they return.

Term-Time Leave

Arranging holidays or planned absence during term time causes issues for many reasons:

- the learner's education suffers; lessons and extra-curricular activities are missed
- there is no opportunity for teachers to set additional work or to assist a child in catching up on their return from holiday
- parents/carers may be in breach of their legal obligation to send their child to school.

The Government issued new regulations in September 2013 that placed greater restrictions on families and schools in relation to planned term-time leave.

The Education (Learner Regulations) (England) Regulations 2006 as amended by Education (Learner Regulations) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 state:

Headteachers shall not grant any Leave of Absence during term time unless they consider there are exceptional circumstances relating to the application.

Parents/carers do not have any entitlement to take their children on holiday during term time. Any application for leave must establish that there are exceptional circumstances, and the Headteacher of the individual school with the Wessex Learning Trust must be satisfied that the circumstances warrant the granting of leave.

The school can only consider applications for Leave of Absence which are made by the resident parent/carer (the parent/carer with whom the child normally resides).

Applications for term-time leave must be made in advance and in writing. Failure to do so will result in the absence the resulting absences being unauthorised.

When an application for term-time leave is declined, any resulting absences will be unauthorised.

Unauthorised absence relating to term-time leave being taken will be sent to the Local Authority for consideration of a Penalty Notice when 10 or more sessions are unauthorised.

Unauthorised absences resulting from term-time leave being taken is likely to result in the Local Authority issuing each parent with a Penalty Notice for each child absent from school.

The Education Safeguarding Service issues penalty notices on behalf of the Local Authority in line with the Somerset Penalty Notice Code of Conduct, which is available at www.somerset.gov.uk.

If a Penalty Notice is issued and not paid, the Local Authority will consider prosecuting parents in line with Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996. This can result in a fine of up to £1,000 for each offence.

In exceptional cases, the Local Authority may seek to prosecute parents in line with Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996 without issuing a Penalty Notice.

Attendance Support and Intervention

The Wessex Learning Trust monitors the attendance of all learners regularly and will put in place varying levels of support and intervention.

The strategies, support and interventions put in place and offered will vary depending on each learner's attendance and the circumstances resulting in their absences.

Early intervention and support is the most effective approach to improving attendance. Parents are strongly encouraged to engage with any support offered, as this may improve attendance quickly and prevent the need for requests for support from statutory services.

While the use of statutory and legal interventions is always a last resort, they may be put in place by the Education Safeguarding Service on behalf of the Local Authority.