



# Soham Village College

## Attendance Policy

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# Contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. Legal and National Context.....	3
3. Implementation .....	4
4. Promoting Attendance .....	5
5. The Local Authority Attendance Service (LAAS).....	7
6. The Attendance Team.....	7
7. Support for Students and Parents.....	8
8. Sanctions for Poor Attendance and Punctuality .....	8
Appendix A: Procedure for Reporting Absence at School.....	10
Appendix B: Punctuality .....	12
Appendix C: Understanding Types of Absence.....	13
Appendix D: Attendance System Flowchart.....	14

# 1. Introduction

At Soham Village College we understand the importance of a student's attendance on their progress and emotional wellbeing. We monitor attendance and punctuality regularly and offer support through our pastoral system for any student who may find attending school a challenge.

Soham Village College aims to:

- ensure that every student, irrespective of their background or educational needs, has access to the education to which they are entitled.
- raise levels of achievement by ensuring the highest possible levels of attendance, punctuality and involvement in the school.
- be proactive to address early patterns of absence.
- support students, and their families, so they can achieve an overall attendance above the national average.
- encourage parents to use the Go4Schools system to monitor their child's attendance.

# 2. Legal and National Context

The law regarding **regular attendance and punctuality**:

Under Section 7 of the Education Act 1996, parents of a child of compulsory school age are under a legal duty to ensure that their children receives full-time education; and, that they have a legal duty to ensure the regular attendance and punctuality of that child at the school where they are a registered student. If a child of compulsory school age who is registered at a school fails to attend regularly at the school, then the parent is guilty of an offence under Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996. Since March 2001 there has been a further offence where a parent, knowing that their child is failing to attend regularly at school, fails without reasonable justification to cause them to attend (Education Act 1996, section 444(1A) as amended by the Criminal Justice and Court Service Act 2000).

The law regarding **term time leave (planned absences)**:

We are obliged to follow the government guidelines, clarified in 2017, which state that any time taken off during term time will be unauthorised and parents or carers liable to a penalty notice unless exceptional circumstances apply.

Such circumstances might include children taking time to see a family member who is forces personnel on leave from a foreign posting; a parent, grandparent or other close relative being seriously or terminally ill and the term time leave proposed is likely to be the last such term time leave; or if there has recently been a death or significant other trauma in the family and it is felt that immediate term time leave might help the child concerned better deal with the situation. If leave is taken without authorisation it will be recorded in the school attendance register as unauthorised absence. A Penalty Notice, if issued, is per parent per child. The amount is £60 if paid within 21 days, increasing to £120 if paid after 21 days and before 28 days. After 28 days the case is forwarded to the Magistrates' Court.

If you are uncertain as to whether a planned term time absence might be classed as being an exceptional circumstance, please contact the school and ask to speak to the Attendance Officer. To apply for an authorised leave of absence during term time, please complete the *'Application for Leave of Absence Letter'* which can be found on the school website:

[www.sohamvc.org/attendance](http://www.sohamvc.org/attendance). This will then be reviewed by the Headteacher, or Senior Lead on Attendance (SLA) that acts on their behalf, and a decision made whether or not the leave should be authorised. We ask that parents/carers do not make travel arrangements before the planned absence has been authorised.

If unauthorised absences are recorded, a Penalty Notice Fine can be issued by the Local Authority to each parent/carer in respect of each child who is absent from school. Failure to pay will result in legal proceedings being initiated under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996.

If 3 or more term time leave Penalty Notices have been issued over a 3-year period then prosecution in relation to Section 444 Education Act 1996, may be considered as an alternative to a Penalty Notice fine being issued. Where a parent takes a child out of school during term time for an extended period (20 days or more), not authorised by the school, prosecution in relation to Section 444 Education Act 1996, may also be considered by the Local Authority.

Further guidance for families: When **sporting activities** are likely to be authorised:

Over recent years, the school has seen an upturn in the number of requests from families for students to be absent from school due to sports training camps and competitions. Although each case will be considered individually, we have created the following guidance to give an indication of the likely decision by the school when deciding to authorise or unauthorise the planned absence.

- up to 2 days of absence, due to a student taking part in a major sporting event or special training opportunity, will usually be authorised.
- 3 days or more of absence will usually only be authorised if it is for a major national or international competition, when the dates are set by a recognised governing body. Training camps, whether inside or outside the UK, are usually unauthorised as the dates could have been organised for during a school holiday.
- students attending a sporting event, who are not competing but wish to attend to support a competitor (e.g. sibling), will usually be unauthorised.

### 3. Implementation

The school will:

- remind parents of the importance of ensuring their children's regular, uninterrupted school attendance.
- provide attendance data on the termly report and encourage parents to track weekly attendance via Go4Schools.
- ensure that school policy with regard to term-time leave is clearly stated on the school website and is regularly communicated to parents.
- actively discourage parents from arranging term time leave during term-time.
- inform parents that they do not have any right or entitlement to expect term-time leave to be granted and that all leave is granted at the discretion of the Headteacher (or those authorised to exercise discretion on their behalf).
- advise parents that if leave is taken without authorisation it will be recorded in the school attendance register as unauthorised absence.

- advise parents that non-attendance or absence that is unauthorised that is 90% or less could result in legal enforcement including Penalty Notices or prosecution.
- report on attendance to the Advisory Body members.

## **4. Promoting Attendance**

The school uses opportunities as they arise to remind parents and students of the importance of attendance (e.g. parent information evenings), the student planner and the 'Parent and Carer Guide to Soham Village College', given to new students and their families. Attendance is also celebrated through assemblies, certificates and attendance awards. Students and parents are encouraged to use Go4Schools.

In addition, the following personnel have a key role in supporting good attendance.

### **4.1. Senior Lead on Attendance (SLA)**

The SLA will:

- give attendance a high profile at staff briefings and school events.
- monitor whole school absence and persistent absence data and regularly update the Senior Leadership Team.
- meet with the Attendance Officer regularly to review attendance of students at the school and plan interventions for students causing concern. This process of 'regular monitoring' and the system of attendance support and intervention is outlined in Appendix D.
- communicate and support the implementation of these interventions with Year Heads and other stakeholders.

### **4.2. Attendance Officer**

The Attendance Officer will:

- oversee administration of the Go4Schools system.
- keep parents informed of any unexplained absences before they become unauthorised.
- oversee administration of the 3-letter warning system.
- refer to the Local Authority Attendance Service (LAAS) if a student fails to meet an Attendance Target set following a Parent Contract Meeting.
- collate evidence that may be required by the Local Authority Attendance Service.
- streamline and adjust systems and procedures when necessary.
- support the work of the SLA, Year Heads and Form tutors by:
  - providing regular attendance information
  - messaging parents/carer on 1st day of absence using IRIS Reach
  - telephone parents when there is no reply received from the IRIS Reach message
  - if the child is absent for 2 days and there is no reply from parents, a MyConcern entry will be completed
  - if the child is absent for 3 days and there is no reply from parents, a home visit will be considered

- alerting the SLA, Year Heads, or other stakeholders when concerns arise
- monitor Go4Schools to ensure accuracy of record keeping
- keeping the SLA informed of inaccurate marking of staff registers as part of an alert system for staff who may not be maintaining accurate recording of registers.

### **4.3. Year Heads**

Year Heads will:

- give attendance a high profile at assemblies and school events.
- monitor year group attendance.
- implement a system of rewards and sanctions.
- support Form Tutors on issues of non-attendance and with internal truancy, remedying causes and applying sanctions.
- review the weekly attendance intervention list generated by the Attendance Officer and SLA and complete any necessary actions within two weeks when possible.
- publish attendance data from Go4Schools in Head of Year weekly bulletins.
- lead on strategies to improve attendance of students who are identified as being a concern through meetings with students and parents.
- co-ordinate work packs when appropriate for excluded students and long-term absentees.
- support the implementation of beneficial 'school actions' identified during parent contract meetings.

### **4.4. Form Tutors**

Form Tutors will:

- be a good role model for students.
- give attendance and punctuality a high profile.
- praise students for arriving on time.
- take prompt action where students are late or absent without explanation, recording lateness and referring to Year Head.
- keep an accurate register.
- inform the Year Head and Attendance Officer when absence and/or punctuality is causing concern.

### **4.5. Class Teachers**

Teachers will:

- praise students for their punctuality to lessons.
- maintain an accurate class register.
- alert the Attendance Officer if there are concerns over student absence.
- send a 'missing student' email if a student is missing from class but has previously been present that day.

## 4.6. Parents

Parents will:

- ensure that children leave for school on time every day.
- contact the school every morning a child is absent by 8.30am.
- endeavour not to take children out of school in term time.
- notify the school as soon as problems arise with their child's attendance/punctuality.

## 4.7. Students

Students will:

- arrive in time for registration every morning at 8.30am and for afternoon registration as follows;
  - Years 9 - 11, afternoon register starts in period 4 at **12.20pm** and closes at **12.30pm**.
  - Years 7 & 8, afternoon register starts in period 4 at **1.00pm** and closes at **1.10pm**.
- be punctual for lessons.
- sign in at Reception if they are late arriving for school.
- sign out at Reception if they leave school during any part of the school day other than 3.00pm.
- tell their Form Tutor or Year Head if they are having any problems attending school.

## 5. The Local Authority Attendance Service (LAAS)

The school and LAAS always endeavour to work with students and parents at an early stage to resolve problems. This is nearly always successful. However, the LAAS also has a legal role and if other ways of resolving attendance have failed, the LAAS can use legal sanctions such as Penalty Notices or prosecutions in the magistrates' court.

## 6. The Attendance Team

- Attendance Officer
- Senior Lead on Attendance (SLA)
- Year Heads
- Mental Health Lead
- Healthcare Plan Co-ordinator
- Student Services team
- Advisory Body member for Attendance
- Local Authority Attendance Officer (LAAO)
- Education Inclusion Officer (EIO)

## **7. Support for Students and Parents**

The school provides support for parents and students if they are struggling to attend school, including the following:

- Accurate attendance reports through Go4Schools, which parents/carers can check daily to ensure they are fully informed of their child's attendance record.
- Informal phone calls and meetings with appropriate staff members to discuss emerging/ongoing issues, with agreed 'school actions' that should help support attendance.
- When appropriate, the school can complete an Early Help Assessment (EHA) that may lead to local authority support, such as a Family Support Worker and/or Young People's Worker.
- When appropriate, the school can arrange an Individual Alternative Education Plan (IAEP) for a student. This can lead to a reduced timetable/curriculum if required to support attendance.
- For students with physical or mental health conditions that impact their school attendance, support may be offered to ensure their education is not disadvantaged. Further details of these systems can be found in the 'Supporting Students with Medical Conditions policy' and the 'Children with health needs who cannot attend school' policy available on the school website.

## **8. Sanctions for Poor Attendance and Punctuality**

The school reserves the right to use any of the following sanctions to fulfil its obligations with respect to school attendance:

- Year Head detention.
- Subject department detention for punctuality.
- Use of Exclusion Room for truancy or consistent poor punctuality.
- Other, more serious sanctions, for repeated defiance of school rules.

Local Authority Attendance Service (LAAS) involvement and referral:

- generally, the school will instigate at least 3 interventions, whose purpose is to improve a student's attendance, before referring the case to the LAAS (for example; an attendance phone call or email; a letter from the 3-letter system; a Parent Contract Meeting).
- before referral to the LAAS, the school will offer the parent(s) a Parent Contract Meeting in which school actions may be agreed, before an attendance target and monitoring period is set.

Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996 states that a parent commits an offence if their compulsory school age child who is a registered student fails to attend school regularly. This can result in the school offering the parent the opportunity to enter into a parenting contract following a student's truancy or non-attendance, under section 19 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003.

Section 444(1) of the Education Act 1996 states that a parent commits an offence if their compulsory school age child who is a registered student fails to attend school regularly. This can result in the school instigating a Penalty Notice under section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003

- parenting orders, Education Supervision Orders or Penalty Notices can also be issued by the Local Authority Attendance Service (LAAS).

- prosecution by the Local Authority Attendance Service (LAAS).

## **Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually. This review may be brought forward as required by the school to reflect changes in supporting advice/guidance.

# Appendix A: Procedure for Reporting Absence at School

## 1. If a child is absent from school the following procedures are required to ensure the school is fully informed.

### 1.1. Short term absence

- The school's Attendance Officer is contacted by the parent on 01353 724100 or email [attendance@soham-college.org.uk](mailto:attendance@soham-college.org.uk) by 8.30am on every day that the student is absent.
- Information is provided, including the reason for absence, student name and form group.

### 1.2. Continued absence

- In the case of longer term absence, the Attendance Officer is informed so that appropriate support can be provided.

### 1.3. Ten days' absence

- A student who is absent without an explanation for 10 consecutive days will be notified to the Local Authority, by submitting a "request for a child missing from education investigation". This is a legal requirement. This can be done immediately if a student is vulnerable or open to Social Care.

### 1.4. Twenty days' absence

- The school is permitted to take action if your child(ren) have been continuously absent from school for a period of not less than 20 school days and;
  - (i) at no time was the absence during that period authorised by the school in accordance with regulation 6 (2);
  - (ii) the school does not have reasonable grounds to believe that the pupil(s) is/are unable to attend the school by reason of sickness, or any exceptional circumstance.
  - (iii) both the school and the local authority have failed, after reasonable enquiry, to ascertain where the pupil(s) is/are.

## 2. If a child needs to be absent during the school day the following procedures are required

- The school attendance officer is contacted by the parent on 01353 724100 or email [attendance@soham-college.org.uk](mailto:attendance@soham-college.org.uk) to inform of reason for absence during the day, e.g. dental appointment.
- The student must sign out before they leave the school premises and sign in on their return.

## 3. School action in the case of student absence

- On the first day of absence, the Attendance Officer will use the 'IRIS Reach' text service to confirm absence with the parent if contact has not already been made.

- In the case of student attendance that is deemed 'at risk', the parent may be contacted by the school, by letter or phone, to discuss absence and actions for improving attendance.
- In the case of a student whose attendance is persistently below the 90% Persistent Absence (PA) level, the parents/carers may be contacted by the school and asked to attend a Parent Contract Meeting, where a formal attendance target and monitoring period will be set.

## **Appendix B: Punctuality**

**Poor punctuality is not acceptable at Soham Village College. If a child misses the start of the day, they can miss vital work and information. Lateness is also disruptive to lessons.**

### **1. The school day**

The school starts with a form registration at **8.30am**. Any student who arrives after this time is registered as late.

Form registers are closed by **9.00am**. A student who is late after this time should sign in at Reception, where they will be given a mark to show they are on site. However, this will be counted as an unauthorised absence for the morning session (coded as 'U' on the register) unless they have a genuine reason for lateness provided by the parent i.e. illness, medical.

For Years 9 - 11, afternoon register starts in period 4 at **12.20pm** and closes at **12.30pm**.

For Years 7 & 8, afternoon register starts in period 4 at **1.00pm** and closes at **1.10pm**.

If a child arrives late to school, for example due to a dental appointment, a note must accompany the child on their return when they sign in. In this case the absence will be recorded as authorised.

### **2. Lesson monitor**

Every lesson is registered through the school internal system. Teachers are expected to ensure that the register is taken as promptly as possible. The reason for this is to track punctuality and in-school truancy. It is essential that registers are recorded accurately, using the internal system. On the rare occasion that the register is not accessible on the system, a paper copy of the register should be used. In this case the teacher is expected to complete the register, not the students, and return it to the Attendance Officer, promptly.

If a student is late in arriving to lesson, the teacher will record lateness on the system. In this case, an N should be changed to an L.

The Year Head has the overview of punctuality and will follow up lateness with individual students, who will be expected to make up the time lost. In cases of persistent lateness, parents/carers will be contacted by the school to remind them of their legal obligation to ensure their child attends school regularly and punctually. If lateness fails to improve, then a formal attendance target and monitoring period may be put in place following a Parent Contract Meeting.

## **Appendix C: Understanding Types of Absence**

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school, either as authorised or unauthorised absence.

### **1. Authorised absences**

Authorised absences are approved by the Year Head, SLA or Attendance Officer on behalf of the Head teacher. An example of an authorised absence that may be approved would be a student observing a religious event or a morning or afternoon away from school for a reason such as illness or medical/dental appointments that unavoidably fall within the school day. We do ask that families organise medical/dental appointments outside of the school day whenever possible.

All absence must be communicated by direct communication with the Attendance Officer on 01353 724100 or email [attendance@soham-college.org.uk](mailto:attendance@soham-college.org.uk)

### **2. Unauthorised absences**

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which permission has not been given. This includes:

- parents keeping children off school unnecessarily.
- students who regularly arrive late, after registration has closed.
- truancy before or during the school day.
- unexplained absence.
- holidays/days off school.
- students staying off school for invalid reasons i.e. shopping, caring for siblings.

This type of absence can lead to the LAAS using sanctions and/or legal proceedings. The school reserve the right to unauthorise absence if given a reason to dispute authenticity of the reason provided, for example; the student has a history of truancy or unusual patterns of absence.

### **3. Persistent Absenteeism (PA)**

A student becomes a 'persistent absentee' (PA) when they miss 10% or more schooling across the year for whatever reason. Absence at this level is likely to have a significant negative impact to a child's educational progress. The school monitors all absence thoroughly. If a child's absence is deemed to be 'at risk' of PA, the parent will be informed of this by the school.

# Appendix D: Attendance System Flowchart

Although we would never wish for a parent/carer to face legal action, the school may need to refer a case to the Local Authority if a student has too many absences from school. This can result in a Penalty Notice or prosecution through the Magistrates court for failing to ensure the regular school attendance of a child under **Section 444 Education Act 1996**.

To avoid such action, Soham Village College attempts to support families and students who are finding regular attendance challenging. We follow an established system, that is approved by the Local Authority, to regularly monitor the attendance of all students and communicate with families if concerns arise. This is outlined in the flowchart below. Further details of certain stages can be found in associated school policies and upon request.

