Attendance Policy

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STEEL RIVER
ACADEMY TRUST

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1 Introduction

1.1 Steel River Academy Trust's expectation is that all children on roll attend school every day, when the school is in session, as long as they are fit and healthy enough to do so. We do all we can to encourage the children to attend, and to put in place appropriate, consistent procedures. We believe that the most important factor in promoting good attendance is the development of positive attitudes towards school. To this end, we strive to make our schools a happy and rewarding experience for all children. We will reward those children whose attendance is very good and we will also make the best provision possible for those children who, for whatever reason, are prevented from coming to school. We take a whole-Trust approach to maintaining excellent attendance and it is the joint responsibility of parents or carers, pupils and all members of staff that children are attending school as often as they should be.

1.2 Under the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995, the Local Governing Committee is responsible for making sure schools keep an attendance register that records which pupils are present at the start of both the morning and the afternoon sessions of the school day. This register will also indicate whether an absence was authorised or unauthorised.

2 Definitions

2.1 Authorised Absence

- Authorised absence means that the school has either given approval in advance for a pupil to be away or has accepted an explanation offered as justification for absence. For example, if a child has been unwell, the parent contacts the school on the first day to explain the absence.

- Only the school can make an absence authorised. Parents or carers do not have this authority. Consequently, not all absences supported by parents or carers will be classified as authorised. For example, if a parent or carer takes a child out of school to go on holiday during school hours, or there is doubt about an illness, the absence won't be authorised.

2.2 Unauthorised Absence

- An absence is classified as unauthorised when a child is away from school without the permission of both the school and a parent or carer. Therefore, the absence is unauthorised if a child is away from school without good reason, even with the support of a parent or carer.
- If a child is 30 minutes late after registration closes, with no good reason, this is classified as an unauthorised absence.

2.3 Medical or Dental Appointments

- Parents/Carers should make every effort to ensure appointments are made outside of school hours. Where this is not possible, children should only be out of school for the minimum amount of time necessary for the appointment.
- If registration is missed due to a medical or dental appointment, the absence will be authorised when medical evidence has been seen.

3 Absence Procedures for Parents

3.1 If a child is going to be absent from school, the child's parent or carer must contact the school before 9.00am on the first day of absence. The parent or carer can either leave a message detailing the name, year group and reason for absence or report this information to a member of staff in the school's office. Parents must call school on each day of absence. The school's telephone number is available off the school's website.

3.2 Notification may be given to school prior to the day of absence if, for example, a child has a medical appointment.

3.3 If a parent or carer does not call the school to report an absence, the school will telephone them to determine their child's whereabouts in compliance with the school's safeguarding procedures.

3.4 Regular absence due to illness may require parents to provide the school with medical evidence such as an appointment card or a prescription note. If these items are not presented, it may result in the absence being classified as unauthorised.

4 Absence Procedures for School Staff

4.1 When a child is absent unexpectedly, the class teacher will record the absence in the register to inform the school office staff, who will endeavour to contact a parent or carer on the first day of absence by 9:30am.

4.2 If the school is unable to contact the parent or carer, they will use the other contacts that are recorded on our system. If the school is still unable to make contact, the Trust's Attendance and Welfare Officer or a member of school staff will make a home visit within 72 hours (24 hours if the school has concerns about the child's welfare) to ascertain the safety of the child in compliance with the school's safeguarding procedures. If contact has been made with parents/carers, but the school have safeguarding or attendance concerns, a home visit may still be made as part of our statutory responsibility

4.3 Attendance is monitored half-termly by the Headteacher in conjunction with the Trust's Attendance and Welfare Officer.

5. Persistent Absenteeism (PA):

5.1 A pupil becomes a 'persistent absentee' when they miss 10% or more of schooling across the academic year for whatever reason. Absence at this level will damage the child's education and the school needs parent's support and co-operation to tackle this.

5.2 The school, alongside the Trust's Attendance and Welfare Officer, thoroughly monitors all absence and the reasons given on a half-termly basis. When pupils who are persistently absent or in danger of being persistently absent are identified, the school takes action as detailed below.

5.3 If a child's attendance falls below 95% within any academic year, parents will receive a slip informing them of how many sessions have been missed and how close their child is to becoming a persistent absentee. The child's attendance will be closely monitored by school until attendance improves to above 95%.
If a child's attendance falls below 96% they will receive a letter from the Headteacher, if attendance continues to decline and falls below 92% they will receive a second letter detailing that medical evidence will need to be produced for all absences. If we see no improvements, a meeting will be held with the Attendance and Welfare Officer

5.4 If a child's attendance falls below 92% in an academic year, parents will receive a Letter from the Headteacher and will be invited to a meeting with a representative from the school. During the meeting, attendance over the next six weeks will be agreed and a document specifying the target attendance of 95% for the next six weeks will be signed by both the school and the parents. Attendance and Welfare Officer and School will then monitor the child's attendance on a biweekly basis. School's will use their discretion and knowledge of families during the first half term of each academic year when deciding whether letter is necessary as a single bout of illness can significantly reduce attendance figures during this short period

5.5 If the child's attendance does not improve or stays the same, an immediate referral will be made to the Trust's Attendance and Welfare Officer. The AWO will contact the parents or carers of the child to discuss the issue and to offer any support needed. All our persistent absentee pupils and their parents will have a personalised action plan created by the school which may include allocation of additional support from School Staff and external agencies through a 'Our Family Plan'. This is also combined with academic tracking where absence affects attainment.

5.6 If the child's attendance does not improve or continues to stay the same, a formal Attendance Case Conference meeting will be arranged by the Attendance and Welfare Officer with parents or carers.

5.7 The Attendance and Welfare Officer can use sanctions such as penalty notices or prosecutions in the Magistrates Court. Full details of the options open to enforce attendance at school are available from the Trust's Attendance and Welfare Officer.

5.8 The school, supported by the Local Authority, reserves the right to consider taking legal action against any parents or carers who repeatedly fails to accept their responsibility for sending their children to school on a regular basis.

6. Repeated Unauthorised Absences

6.1 The school will contact the parent or carer of any child who has an unauthorised absence. If a child has a repeated number of unauthorised absences, the school will contact the parents or carers to discuss the problem. If the situation does not improve, the school may then refer to the Trust's Attendance and Welfare Officer, who will visit the home and seek to ensure that the parents or carers understand the seriousness of the situation.

7. Long-term Absence

7.1 When children have an illness that means they will be away from school for several days, the school will do all it can to send material home, so that they can keep up with their school work, if parents and carers feel that this is appropriate.

7.2 If the absence is likely to continue for an extended period, or be a repetitive absence, the school will contact relevant support services to explore temporary arrangements for alternative forms of education.

8. Lateness

8.1 Poor punctuality is not acceptable. If a child misses the start of the day, they can miss learning and vital information for the day ahead. Late arriving pupils may disrupt lessons which can be embarrassing for the child and can also encourage absence. Good time keeping is a vital life skill which will help children as they progress through their school life and out into the wider world.

8.2 If a child arrives later than the start of the school day but within the first 30 minutes, they will be marked in the register as late. If a child arrives at school after the first 30 minutes of the school day, they will be marked as 'U' in the register (an unauthorised absence) and a reason for their lateness will be recorded by office staff. Regular lateness may result in a referral to the Attendance and Welfare Officer.

9. Children Leaving School During the School Day

9.1 Children are not allowed to leave the school premises without prior permission. Children must be signed out on leaving school. If a child leaves school without permission, their parents will be contacted and then the police to report the child as missing.

10 Requests for Leave of Absence

10.1 Since September 2013, Headteachers have been unable to grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are 'exceptional circumstances'.

10.2 Requests should be made **at least four weeks before the intended absence.** Parents and carers should not risk making any arrangements before a school decision is made on their leave of absence request application.

10.3 The exceptional circumstances of the request must be given in writing on the correct form issued by the school office and consideration will be given to the individual circumstances and the time of school year, as well as the child's attendance, progress, behaviour and wellbeing. Any requests for exceptional circumstances such as: Parents with allocated leave outside the school holidays that cannot be changed and is not a result of a rolling shift pattern **(letter from employer will need to be presented with the exceptional circumstances request).** Issues around critical illness within immediate family (Parent/step parent/main carer, siblings and step parents) and children who have been

removed from the care of parents. Incidents of exceptional leave (with evidence) may be granted at the discretion of the Headteacher and should be discussed with him/her in advance of the leave.

10.4 When deciding on the issue of a Penalty Notice for unauthorised Leave of Absence we apply the child's attendance within a full academic year prior to/or including the current academic year (depending on timing of the request). For example, if an application is made in September, the school will consider the child's attendance throughout the last academic year. However, if the request is made later in the year, the child's current attendance will be considered.

1**0.5** The Trust will permit up to 10 sessions per year for term time holidays without penalty notice referrals being made. Once 10 sessions have been taken, the Trust will follow Local Authority procedures. The Local Authority can issue a £80 Penalty Notice for each parent in these circumstances. If you request another leave of absence within the next 36 months a referral will be made to the Local Authority.

Where leave of absence is taken without authorisation, a referral will be made to the Attendance and Welfare Officer. When determining whether a fixed penalty notice will be issued, the Academy Trust will consider a number of factors:

- The child's attendance for the previous academic and current academic year
- The number of days holiday taken in the previous and current academic year
- The personal circumstances of the family requesting the leave of absence
- The Time of year – e.g. during statutory assessment periods
- Any significant medical issues of the child or family member

Parents will generally not incur a fixed penalty notice when taking their child out of school for family holidays up to a maximum of 5 school days in any full academic year as long as the holiday does not result in their attendance falling below 90% and their attendance remained above 90% in the previous year. If attendance does fall below 90% as a result of holiday absence, then a fixed penalty notice will be issued. If the holiday exceeds 5 school days then the school will request that the Local Authority raises a penalty notice. In addition, if unauthorised absence is taken at the following critical times:

- During testing periods (e.g. the Year 1 Phonics Screening Test or Year 6 SATs)

All schools within Redcar and Cleveland are encouraged to adopt a common leave of absence policy to ensure legal compliance.

- Parents should provide at least 4 school weeks advance notice in writing of any planned absence; the Head Teacher has the discretion to authorise leave of absence in exceptional circumstances.
- The Local Authority may consider taking further action when unauthorised leave of absence is taken at the following critical times and circumstances, **if deemed to be in the public interest.**

a) Where there are more than 10 sessions (usually equivalent to 5 school days) of unauthorised absence within a rolling 10 school week period.

The above is a non-exhaustive list and the local authority retain the discretion to issue a penalty notice before the threshold is met.

The school should publish the formal leave of absence (holiday) policy on an annual basis to all parents. Leave of absence taken without approval for the purposes of a holiday will be recorded as an unauthorised holiday absence.

11 Pupils with Medical Conditions

11.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's policy on 'Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions' which sets out how the school will provide support.

11.2 The school is committed to ensuring, upon notification of a medical condition that arrangements are in place to support pupils so that they have full access to education. With this in mind, Headteachers have discretion in applying this policy where children have medical conditions which have been notified to us.

12 Attendance Targets

12.1 The school sets internal attendance targets each year, which are challenging yet realistic, and based on attendance figures achieved nationally, including groups, such as disadvantaged children and persistent absentees.

13 General Reporting to Parents

13.1 All parents will receive information regarding their child's attendance on their annual report using the following statements:

- Excellent attendance – Above 96%
- Good attendance – 96% – 94%
- Cause for concern – 93.9% - 90%
- Persistent absence – 89.9% - 85%
- Serious concern – Below 85%

14. Rewarding Good Attendance

14.1 Each school within Steel River Academy Trust rewards children for good attendance.

15. Monitoring and Review

15.1 It is the responsibility of the school's Local Governing Committee to monitor overall attendance and thus they receive a termly update in the Headteacher's Report. The school governors examine closely the information provided to ensure that the school's attendance figures are as high as they can be and that this attendance policy is being adhered to by the school. The Trust board will also monitor overall attendance across all schools.

15.2 The school's office staff will be responsible for monitoring attendance daily throughout the school, and for following up absences in the appropriate way. If there is concern about a child's absence on a particular day by any member of staff, the member of staff should contact the school office immediately and they will take the appropriate action. If there is a longer-term general worry about the attendance of a particular child, this will be reported to the Headteacher.

15.3 This policy will be reviewed by the Local Governing Committee, in consultation with the Trust's Attendance and Welfare Officer, biannually or earlier if considered necessary.

15.4 The Trust will follow guidance and support from the Department for Education & Public Health England in respect to Coronavirus (Covid 19). Head Teachers will decide if an absence is unauthorised on an individual basis and will refer if necessary to the Trust's Attendance and Welfare Officer for further action.

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