



Attendance Policy

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Introduction

At Ivel Valley, we recognise the strong connections between attendance, attainment, safeguarding and wellbeing. As a special school and college, our pupils face an increased number of barriers to good attendance. We maintain high ambitions for attendance; therefore it is particularly important that we have a clear approach to supporting pupils to have the best possible attendance.

We acknowledge that some of our pupils have needs related to their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) which prevent them from achieving 100% attendance. We aim to ensure that these families don't feel penalised but feel supported in enabling their child to have the best attendance possible.

As all our pupils have SEND, our approach to supporting attendance needs to be highly individual, rooted in understanding the individual needs of the pupil and their family.

Note: we have the same aspirations for high attendance and attendance processes in place for both school pupils and college students, so this policy applies in majority to both. However, as college students are no longer statutory school-age, processes involving the local authority and National Penalty Framework do not apply to them.

The purpose of this policy

This policy is in place to clearly outline our attendance procedures and what systems we have in place to support our pupils.

Supporting good attendance

We are committed to a supportive approach, which includes:

- Making pupils feel valued, welcome and safe whilst at Ivel Valley
- Ensuring every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled, and which enables them to achieve their full potential
- Having a holistic and creative attitude to supporting our pupils
- Working in partnership with families to enable the best possible attendance for all pupils, and to properly understand any barriers to attendance
- Involvement and support from our Family Support Team or Positive Behaviour Support Team to help to meet any emotional or wellbeing needs
- Working with other agencies, such as the Special Needs Nursing team, other health services, social care, and the local authority SEND / EHC team to ensure that the right support is in place for individual pupils
- Having a Senior Attendance Champion, who is part of the Senior Leadership Team.

We encourage families to have proactive, open and honest conversations with Ivel Valley regarding attendance. In the first instance, parents and carers should contact their child's teacher or the main office to share information about attendance. If the matter is more complex, they can contact the Senior Attendance Champion - Emily Sidhu - directly via Class Dojo or email: emily.sidhu@ivelvalley.beds.sch.uk.



Recording attendance & lateness

Every half-day absence from school has to be recorded on the register as either authorised or unauthorised. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required. Each half-day is known as a 'session'.

Pupils and students at Ivel Valley start at 9am and finish at 3.30pm. We keep an electronic attendance register using an electronic system; we place all pupils on the register. At Ivel Valley the register will be taken for the morning session before 9.30am, and again at the beginning of the afternoon session at 1.30pm, following attendance codes set by the Department for Education (DfE).

Any lateness is recorded:

- Arrival after the close of registration will be marked as unauthorised absence and coded *U* in line with the DfE guidance. This mark shows them to be on site but is legally recorded as an unauthorised absence.
- If a pupil is late due to a medical appointment, they will receive an authorised absence, coded *M*.

Further information about register codes can be found in DfE's document 'Working together to improve school attendance' - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-improve-school-attendance>.

Authorised absences

Absences that can be authorised are morning or afternoon sessions away from school for a genuine reason such as illness (parents/carers may be asked to provide medical evidence for their child before this can be authorised), medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been granted. This type of absence can lead to the school referring to the Local Authority for penalty notices and/or legal proceedings.

Unauthorised absence includes, (however this list is not exhaustive):

- parents/carers keeping children off school unnecessarily e.g. because they had a late night or for non-infectious illness or injury that would not affect their ability to learn;
- absences which have never been properly explained;
- children who arrive at school after the close of registration are marked using a 'U'. This indicates that they are in school for safeguarding purposes, however is counted as an absence for the session;
- shopping trips;
- looking after other children or children accompanying siblings or parents to medical appointments;



- their own or family birthdays;
- holidays taken during term time, not deemed 'for exceptional purposes' (see guidance below);
- day trips;
- other leave of absence in term time which has not been agreed.

Absence processes – unplanned absence

Parents/carers must notify Ivel Valley when a pupil has to take an unplanned absence (for example, due to illness) as soon as possible by contacting the main office.

Parents/carers can:

- Ring Ivel Valley on 01767 601010 and press option 1
- Send the 'admin' Dojo account a message
- Use the 'report attendance' option on ParentMail

It is important to contact the office every day that a pupil is absent.

If it is reported that a pupil is poorly, we will need to ask for detail so that we understand the nature of their illness.

We will mark absence due to illness as authorised; in some circumstances, we may ask the pupil's parent/carer 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 we are not satisfied about the authenticity of the illness, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised.

A child not arriving in school or college where the parents/carers haven't informed us of the reason for absence is considered a **safeguarding** matter, therefore information about the reason for any absence is always required.

These are our processes if a pupil is absent and we haven't heard from parents/carers:

- we will telephone home on the first day of absence. This is to establish the reason for the absence and consider whether it is authorised or unauthorised;
- If we are unable to get hold of parents/carers, we will work through our list of agreed emergency contacts;
- If we still have not established contact with parents/carers after **three** days of absence, we will consider implementing Central Bedfordshire's Child Missing Education procedures, including making all reasonable enquiries to establish contact;
- If we still have not established contact with parents/carers after **ten** days of absence, the local authority will be notified that the pupil is a Child Missing Education;
- If we have made contact with parents / carers, but the absence is unauthorised, we will consider arranging a meeting with parents / carers to plan how to support the pupil to return to school;
- If absence is unauthorised and we have offered support but the absences still persist, we may refer the matter to Central Bedfordshire's Access and Inclusion Service.



Absence processes - planned absence

All schools can grant a leave of absence when a pupil needs to be absent from school with permission, but these must be restricted to specific circumstances. Only the Headteacher can authorise an absence, not a parent/carer.

Medical or dental appointments: these will be recorded as authorised as long as the pupil's parent/carer notifies the school in advance of the appointment, which can be done by contacting the office. We encourage parents/carers 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 before and after the appointment. In some circumstances, we may need to ask for evidence of medical appointments.

Religious observances: this will be authorised where the day is exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which the pupil's parents/carers belong. If necessary, Ivel Valley will seek advice from the parents' religious body to confirm whether the day is set apart.

Holidays: the code to approve a holiday has been removed from school registers. The DfE state that: *"the DfE does not consider a need or desire for a holiday or other absence for the purpose of leisure and recreation to be an exceptional circumstance."* They specify that headteachers may not grant any leave of absence during term time unless there are "exceptional circumstances".

Exceptional circumstances: 'exceptional circumstances' will be interpreted as being of unique and significant emotional, educational or spiritual value to the child which outweighs the loss of teaching time (as determined by the Headteacher). The fundamental principles for defining 'exceptional' are events that are 'rare, significant, unavoidable and short'. By 'unavoidable' we mean an event that could not reasonably be scheduled at another time, outside of school term time, regardless of who has planned or paid for the holiday or absence (including grandparents or other family or friends). Examples of exceptional circumstances might be time needed to respond to a family crisis, attending private therapy sessions, or attending a sporting competition.

Only the Headteacher (not the local authority) may authorise such a request and all applications for a leave of absence must be made in writing, in advance by the parent/carer with whom the child normally lives with. The school will usually consider that the parent/carer who has made the application is therefore allowing the leave of absence, and also that all parents/carers who are on the holiday are allowing the leave. Where a parent/carer removes a child after their application for leave was refused or where no application was made to the school, the absence will be recorded as unauthorised. It is likely that penalty notices will be requested, in line with the National Framework and Central Bedfordshire Code of Conduct for Fixed Penalty Notices, in respect of each parent/carer believed to have allowed the absence.

Monitoring attendance

We have the current monitoring systems in place:

- Our Senior Attendance Champion (who is also the Designated Safeguarding Lead) has lead responsibility and oversight of attendance and draws on support from other Ivel Valley staff as appropriate.
- The admin team check the class registers after they close every morning and afternoon to ensure that they are completed correctly and that we have the right information about the attendance of every pupil on our roll.



- We use an electronic programme called Studybugs to provide key staff (including the Designated Safeguarding Lead, designated teacher for Children who are Looked After and Key Stage Leaders) with weekly attendance data, enabling analysis and understanding of attendance patterns, meaning that support can be implemented effectively.
- We meet regularly throughout the year with our named Central Bedfordshire Attendance Officer, who carries out a register check and offers advice.
- We provide the local authority with information when a pupil hasn't attended continuously for either 10 school days when an absence is unauthorised, or 15 school days if the absences are unauthorised OR authorised.
- We submit a daily attendance return to the Department of Education and Local Authority, in line with the legal expectations placed on all schools.

Persistent and severe absence

The persistent absence threshold is 10%. If a pupil's individual overall absence rate is greater than or equal to 10% (i.e. below 90% attendance), the pupil will be classified as a persistent absentee. Ivel Valley will work closely with parents/carers to understand the cause of any persistent absenteeism, and where appropriate, will work closely with the pupil and their parents/carers to identify solutions. We may refer the matter to Central Bedfordshire's Access and Inclusion Service for support. They may suggest a penalty notice. We recognise that national absence rates are higher in special schools due to increased barriers to good attendance that children and young people with SEND face. These barriers are very varied, based on the pupil's individual needs; we therefore take a very personalised approach to supporting pupils identified as persistent absentees.

If a pupil's individual overall absence rate is greater than or equal to 50% (i.e. below 50% attendance), the pupil will be classified as a severe absentee. All severely absent pupils will need to be referred to the Access and Inclusion Service.

Penalty notices

In an update to Working Together to Improve School Attendance in 2024, the Department for Education (DfE) established a National Framework for penalty notices. In summary:

- Penalty notices are £160 for each parent / carer, for each child
- **Parents/carers can be fined if their child has a total of 5 days of unauthorised absence in 10 school weeks**, for reasons such as:
 - Being late after the register has closed
 - Truancy
 - Taking a holiday without permission from school
 - If the Headteacher isn't satisfied with the reason given for missing school
- Over a rolling 3 year period, the sanctions are:
 - 1st offence: £160 reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days
 - 2nd offence: £160
 - 3rd offence: court hearing and up to £2500 fine, or up to 3 months in prison



Detailed information about this can be found in Appendix A, the Central Bedfordshire Council Penalty Notice Code of Conduct.

DfE state that: *“All state funded schools must consider whether a penalty notice for absence is appropriate in each individual case where one of their pupils reaches the national threshold for considering a penalty notice. Schools should not have a blanket position of issuing or not issuing penalty notices and should make judgements on each individual case to ensure fairness and consistency across the country”.*

DfE also state that: *“Penalty notices are intended to prevent the need for court action and should only be used where it is deemed likely to change parental behaviour and support to secure regular attendance has been provided and has not worked or been engaged with, or would not have been appropriate in the circumstances of the offence (e.g. an unauthorised holiday in term time)”.*

Part-time timetables

In very exceptional circumstances, we can implement temporary part-time timetables. This must be in the pupil’s best interests and in agreement with Ivel Valley and the parent/carer who the pupil normally lives with. A part-time timetable should be used to help the pupil access as much education as possible and should be regularly reviewed, with the aim to increase to full-time education as soon as possible.

Roles and responsibilities

The governing board is responsible for monitoring attendance figures for the whole school on at least a termly basis and for holding the leadership team to account for the implementation of this policy.

The Senior Attendance Champion is responsible for:

- Setting a clear vision for improving and maintaining good attendance
- Regularly monitoring and evaluating absence data and reporting it to governors
- Supporting staff with monitoring the attendance of individual pupils
- Considering whether additional support is required for a family
- Liaising with the Headteacher to decide whether an absence is authorised or not
- Liaising with the Headteacher regarding issuing penalty notices, where necessary
- Working with the local authority Attendance Officers to manage persistent absence, through Targeted Support Meetings
- Issuing attendance letters, as advised by Attendance Officers
- Having discussions - through calls, Dojo or meetings - with parents/carers to explore attendance issues
- Working with other services to secure the right support to improve attendance for individual pupils
- Working with Ivel Valley colleagues to delegate the tasks above as appropriate.

Teachers are responsible for recording attendance accurately on a daily basis, using the correct codes, and submitting this information on the electronic register. They are also expected to:

- Promote and praise attendance at all appropriate opportunities
- Liaise with office staff and the Senior Attendance Champion on matters of absence and punctuality



- Communicate any concerns or underlying problems that may account for a pupil's absence
- Provide a supportive approach for pupils who have been absent
- Provide reasonable support for pupils refusing to attend school/college, such as making phonecalls, helping to write social stories or sending photos of the classroom.

The admin team take responsibility for ensuring that registers are completed accurately for both sessions, every day. They are expected to take calls and messages from parents/carers about absence and record it on the electronic register. They will endeavour to contact parents/carers if no contact has been made regarding an absence. They are also responsible for following safeguarding procedures if they learn anything that raises a concern.

Parents / carers are responsible for:

- Ensuring the attendance of their child – this is a legal requirement
- Supporting Ivel Valley in aiming for the best possible attendance each year
- Contacting Ivel Valley as soon as possible on the first day of an absence via the office **and each subsequent day**, and keeping us updated regarding their child's return to school
- Requesting a leave of absence for an absence due to exceptional circumstance with as much notice as possible
- Advising the office if their child will be attending a medical appointment during school hours
- Avoiding taking their child out of school for non-urgent medical or dental appointments where possible
- Contacting their child's teacher for support in the first instance if the pupil is refusing to attend.

Legal framework & statutory guidance

Linked national guidance: The Children Act 1989; The Children and Young Persons Act 1933 & 1963; The Education Acts 1996 & 2002; The Education Regulations 2007; The Equality Act 2010; Keeping Children Safe in Education (current version) The School Attendance Regulations 2024; the SEND Code of Practice; Working Together to Improve School Attendance (DfE guidance; current version)

Linked policies: Safeguarding & Child Protection policy, Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions policy

Equalities & inclusion

We recognise that due the wide-ranging SEND of our pupils, there can be numerous complex barriers to good attendance that our pupils face. Our pupils have the same right to education as pupils without SEND, therefore it is vital that we maintain high ambitions for their attendance and that we endeavour to provide the right support that is tailored to the needs of the individual pupil, working in partnership with their families and any other relevant agencies.



Safeguarding implications

Attendance is a safeguarding matter – we must know where our pupils are and that they are safe. Children missing education can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues including neglect, sexual abuse, and child sexual and criminal exploitation. Ensuring that attendance improvement is prioritised and strategies and action plans are put in place for pupils with persistent and severe absence is crucial to safeguarding and improving pupils' overall welfare in both the short and long term.

Appendix One

Central Bedfordshire Council

Non-school Attendance – Fixed Penalty Notices

Code of Conduct

RATIONALE

1. Regular and punctual attendance at school is both a legal requirement and essential for pupils to maximise their educational opportunities. In law an offence occurs if a parent* fails to secure a child's attendance at school at which they are a registered pupil, and that absence is not authorised by the school. Parents are supported by school, Local Authority Services and Partner Agencies to overcome barriers to regular attendance.
2. Section 23 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 empowers designated Local Authority (LA) Officers, Head Teachers (& Deputy and Assistant Head Teachers authorised by them) and the Police to issue Penalty Notices in cases of unauthorised absence from school. The Education (Penalty Notices) (England) Regulations 2007 govern the use of Fixed Penalty Notices. These regulations will be amended by the Education (Penalty Notices) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024, which will come into force on 19th August 2024.
3. Penalty Notices supplement the existing sanctions to enforce attendance at school currently available under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 and Section 36 of the Children Act 1989.
4. The issuing of Penalty Notices must conform to requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010.
5. The LA has the prime responsibility for developing a protocol within which all partners named in the Act will operate and has responsibility for the overall administration of the Penalty Notice Scheme.



6. This local code sets out the procedures and terms under which Penalty Notices can be issued in Central Bedfordshire. Authorised persons should issue Penalty Notices in compliance with this code in order to ensure that the powers are consistently applied.

PROCEDURES FOR ISSUING PENALTY NOTICES

7. Central Bedfordshire Access and Inclusion Service (AIS), in consultation with schools (and other agencies where appropriate) will be responsible for the decision to issue Penalty Notices. This will ensure consistency in the delivery of the scheme; avoid school-home conflicts and ensure that the Penalty Notices are not being issued when the process towards court prosecution has already started. The AIS will receive requests to issue Penalty Notices from schools, the police and neighbouring LAs. These requests will be considered provided that:

- all relevant and evidential information is supplied.
- the circumstances of the pupil's absence meet the requirements of this protocol.
- the issuing of a Penalty Notice does not conflict with other intervention strategies or other enforcement sanctions already being processed.
- The AIS is satisfied that the referrer has supplied information which evidences that appropriate support has been offered to the child/family prior to referral.

8. The AIS will aim to action all Penalty Notice Referrals within 10 school days of receipt and where sufficient evidence of prior actions is included in the School Intervention Record which is required to be submitted alongside the Penalty Notice Referral:

- Where information is available that indicates the child has moved into the Local Authority, contact the previous authority to check whether previous Penalty Notices have been issued within the 3-year period.
- Where appropriate, issue a Notice to Improve to the parent* of the possibility that a Penalty Notice will be issued;
- in the same letter, where relevant, set a period of 30 school days within which the pupil must have no unauthorised absence;
- issue a Penalty Notice through the post at the end of the 30-day period if the required level of improvement has not been achieved.

9. There is no right of appeal by parents against a penalty notice.

CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE A PENALTY NOTICE MAY BE ISSUED

10. A Penalty Notice can only be issued in cases of unauthorised absence.

11. The issuing of a Penalty Notice will usually be restricted to one in an academic year (this does not apply to Unauthorised Leave of Absence in Term Time). If a Penalty Notice has been issued and has been either paid or has led to a prosecution for non-payment, except in exceptional circumstances, no further Penalty Notice will be issued for the remainder of that academic year (this does not apply to Unauthorised Leave of



Absence in Term Time). If the child concerned continues to accrue unauthorised absences the case should be considered for referral to the Access and Inclusion Service.

12. If in an individual case the local authority (or other authorised officer) believes a penalty notice would be appropriate, they retain the discretion to issue one before the threshold is met.

13. The national framework for penalty notices sets out that a maximum of 2 penalty notices per child, per parent can be issued within a rolling 3-year period. If the national threshold is met for a third time (or subsequent times) within 3 years, then legal action under Section 444 Education Act 1996 will be initiated.

14. If more than one parent* has parental responsibility, both parents will receive a Penalty Notice (i.e. 1 per parent per child). In situations where there is more than one pupil in a family with irregular school attendance, multiple Penalty Notices can be issued to the same parents during the year.

15. A Notice to Improve is a final opportunity for a parent to engage in support and improve attendance before a Penalty Notice is issued. If the national threshold has been met and support is appropriate, but offers of support have not been engaged with by the parent or have not worked, a notice to improve should usually be sent to give parents a final chance to engage in support. An authorised officer can choose not to use one in any case, including cases where support is appropriate, but they do not expect a notice to improve would have any impact on a parent's behaviour (e.g. because the parent has already received one for a similar offence). There will be no restriction on the number of times a parent may receive a Notice to Improve of the possible issuing of a Penalty Notice. A Notice to Improve will not be issued for absences related to unauthorised leave of absence in term time.

16. The issuing of a Penalty Notice is considered appropriate:

- When the pupil has taken Unauthorised Leave of Absence during term-time and the absence has not been authorised by the school, providing the school has taken into account DFE guidance to inform its decision making.
- Following a Truancy Patrol when the school has recorded the absence of the pupil as unauthorised.
- In the early stages of intervention where the School or AIS believes that the sanction may lead to an improvement in attendance, e.g. persistent late arrival at school; parents' failure to attend/co-operate at an Attendance Contract meeting.

17. To ensure consistent delivery of Penalty Notices, the following criteria will apply:

- At least 10 sessions (equal to 5 school days) lost to unauthorised absence by the pupil during the previous 10 school weeks. The period of 10 school weeks can also span different terms or academic years.
- Except in exceptional circumstances, the parent* will receive a Notice to Improve (advising of the possibility of a Penalty Notice being issued) and a maximum of 30 school days to affect an improvement. Improvement is defined as no further unauthorised absence within the Notice to Improve period unless there are exceptional circumstances.

PROCEDURE FOR WITHDRAWING PENALTY NOTICES

18. A Penalty Notice can only be withdrawn in the following circumstances:



- When it has been issued to the wrong person
- When the use of the Penalty Notice did not conform to the terms of this protocol
- It contains a material error.
- Not paid, and the LA has not and does not intend to instigate proceedings.

INFORMING SCHOOLS OF THE OUTCOME OF A PENALTY NOTICE

19. The AIS will inform a Headteacher on a termly basis of the outcome of referrals made for an FPN to be issued.

PAYMENT OF PENALTY NOTICES

20. The arrangement for the payment will be detailed on the Penalty Notice.

- The first Penalty Notice issued to a parent in respect of a particular pupil will be charged at £160 if paid within 28 days. This will be reduced to £80 if paid within 21 days beginning with the date on which the notice is received.
- If a second penalty notice is issued to the same parent in respect of the same pupil, this penalty notice will be charged at a flat rate of £160. There will not be a reduction of the penalty notice if paid any earlier, this notice should be paid within 28 days.
- A third penalty notice will not be issued to the same parent in respect of the same child where two previous penalty notices have been issued within a 3 year period of the date of the first penalty notice. In a case where the national threshold is met for a third time (or subsequent times) within those 3 years, alternative action should be taken instead. This will often include considering prosecution but may include other tools such as other attendance legal interventions i.e. School Attendance Order or an Education Supervision Order.

21. Monies collected will be used for administration of the penalty notice system and prosecution.

22. Non-payment of a Penalty Notice will result in the immediate prosecution of parents* under the provisions of Section 444 of the Education Act 1996 unless;

- It has been issued to the wrong person.
- The use of the Penalty Notice did not conform to the terms of this protocol.
- The notice was materially defective.
- The LA has not started legal proceedings and has no intention of doing so.

POLICY AND PUBLICITY

23. The deployment of Penalty Notices as a sanction is included in the Authority's Attendance Strategy. All school attendance policies should include information on the deployment of Penalty Notices which should



be brought to the attention of parents. The LA will include information on the use of Penalty Notices and other attendance enforcement sanctions in promotional information material.

REPORTING AND REVIEW

24. A review of the deployment of the Penalty Notices will be undertaken at regular intervals and the strategy amended as appropriate.

***Definition of a parent**

Section 576, Education Act 1996 defines a parent as:

- all natural parents, whether named or not.
- any person who although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility (as defined in Children Act 1989) for a child or young person.
- any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of the child or young person. A person with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child, is considered a parent in education law.

Throughout this document 'parent' means each and every person referred to within this definition.

July 2024