



The  
**Ongar**  
Academy

## Attendance Policy 2019

Date the policy has been reviewed and adopted by the Governing Body	PENDING APPROVAL
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This policy links to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Behaviour for Learning Policy</li><li>• Safeguarding Policy</li><li>• Child Protection Policy and Procedure</li><li>• E-Safety Policy</li><li>• Pupil Premium Policy</li></ul>

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## **INTRODUCTION**

At The Ongar Academy (TOA) we believe that children and young people's attendance is paramount to their life chances. Good attendance is the responsibility of all members of staff at TOA.

All pupils should be encouraged to attend school regularly and punctually by the implementation of specific measures outlined in this policy, alongside school intervention strategies.

### **1. AIMS**

The aim of this attendance policy is to enable the school to provide a consistent practice that encourages and facilitates the regular attendance of all students. Regular attendance at school is key to steady student progress and enjoyment of learning, and for this reason the school is dedicated to ensuring its attendance policy is adhered to.

The Ongar Academy takes a whole-school approach to maintaining excellent attendance and it is the joint responsibility of parents, carers students and staff members to ensure that children are attending school. We endeavour to work with families to make sure that any problems or circumstances which could lead or be leading to poor attendance are given the right attention and appropriate support.

### **2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The Ongar Academy is dedicated to complying with attendance laws set out by the legal framework and has set out this attendance policy accordingly.

### **3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **3.1 Governing body**

As part of our whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, the governing body will:

- ensure that the importance of attendance is made clear by promoting the relevant school policies and guidance directed at parents and staff
- annually review the school's attendance policy and ensure that all provisions are in place to allow school staff, parents and children to implement the policy effectively
- nominate or identify a member of the governing body who will take the lead role in monitoring attendance and coordinating provision and policies for attendance
- ensure that all legislation regarding attendance is complied with and that up-to-date guidelines are communicated to parents, children and staff
- review annual attendance numbers and future attendance targets

- take time at governors' meetings to review and discuss attendance issues that have arisen in order to stay on top of expected attendance targets for the year
- ensure that the school is implementing effective means of recording attendance and organising that data, including for children who are educated off-site
- ensure that they are clear on how to analyse attendance data and how to communicate the findings effectively to parents and staff
- use any data gathered to devise solutions to problems, make the proper adjustments to attendance coordination and target set for the future.

### **3.2 Head leadership team**

As part of our whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, the Head leadership team will:

- be active in their approach to promoting good attendance to students and their parents, which includes forming positive relationships with families
- ensure that the school's teaching and learning experiences encourage regular attendance and that students are taught the value of high attendance for their own progression and achievement
- coordinate with the governing body to monitor the implementation of the attendance policy and its effectiveness, with an annual full policy review
- ensure that all staff are up to date with the school's attendance policy, legislation and government guidance, and that staff are fully trained to recognise and deal with attendance issues
- ensure that legislation and government guidance on attendance is complied with and that they (the leadership team) are up to date with any legislative changes and how to implement them
- nominate or appoint a senior leader to take the responsibility of overseeing and monitoring attendance provision and that this person has sufficient time and resources to give to this job
- report to the governing body each term and the lead governor for attendance half-termly on attendance records, data and provision
- ensure that systems to record and report attendance data are in place and working effectively
- develop multi-agency relationships to help with poor attendance and support families who are having difficulties getting their child to attend
- document any specific interventions or steps taken to work with families to improve their child's attendance in case of future legal proceedings.

### **3.3 Teachers and support staff**

As part of our whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, the school's teachers and support staff will:

- be active in their approach to promoting good attendance to students and their parents, which includes forming positive relationships with families

- ensure that the school's teaching and learning experiences encourage regular attendance and that students are taught the value of high attendance for their own personal progression and achievement
- ensure that they are fully aware and up to date with the school's attendance policy, legislation and government guidance, and that they will speak to another member of staff or seek support if they are unsure how to deal with an attendance issue
- ensure that they are following the correct systems for recording attendance and that attendance is taken daily
- to communicate with parents/carers on a regular basis about attendance. Every term a letter will be sent to all parent/carers outlining current attendance percentages. Further letters to support attendance will be sent out if a child attendance falls below the trust target of 96% or falls into persistent absent category (below 90%) in line with statutory requirements.
- contribute to strategy meetings and interventions where they are needed
- work with external agencies to support students and their families who are struggling with regular attendance.

### 3.4 Parents and carers

As part of our whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, we request that parents:

- engage with their children's education – support their learning and take an interest in what they have been doing at school
- promote the value of good education and the importance of regular school attendance at home
- To check current attendance on termly letters home and via the online portal MILK.
- encourage and support their children's aspirations
- follow the set school procedure for reporting the absence of their child from school (see section 7), and include an expected date for return
- do everything they can to prevent unnecessary school absences, such as making medical and dental appointments outside school hours
- use the school as a support when they or their child are having difficulties, and work to form a positive relationship with the school so that there is easy communication when a problem arises
- keep the school informed of any circumstances which may affect their child's attendance
- enforce a regular routine at home in terms of homework, bedtime, etc. so that the child is used to consistency and the school day becomes part of that routine. It is vital that the child receives the same message at home as they do at school about the importance of attendance
- do not take their children out of school for holidays during term time. If parents would like to make a special request for this, they may do so to the Headteacher (see section 7.5)
- sign a home-school agreement.

### 3.5 Students

As part of our whole-school approach to maintaining high attendance, we request that students:

- be aware of the school's attendance policy, and when and what they are required to attend. This will be communicated to them through the school staff, parents and the school timetable
- speak to their form tutor or another member of staff if they are experiencing difficulties at school or at home which may impact on their attendance
- attend all lessons ready to learn, with the appropriate learning tools requested and on time for the class. Lesson times will be made clear through their school timetable
- bring a note of explanation from their parents or carers to explain an absence that has happened or is foreseen
- follow the correct set school procedure if they arrive late (see section 7.8). Students are held responsible for this and it is made clear to all students what this procedure is by their form tutors. This will help the school to monitor attendance and keep accurate records for the child's individual attendance, and is also vital for health and safety in the event of a school evacuation

## 4. ATTENDANCE MONITORING

Specific measures to monitor attendance must be embedded and regularly checked to ensure the safeguarding of all pupils through specific and tailored interventions.

- Registering pupils accurately and efficiently – recording within the first 5 minutes of every lesson on SIMs. If this system is down a paper register must be sent to the attendance officer.
- Setting attendance targets for individual pupils and year groups, in line with national expectations
- Monitoring attendance of vulnerable groups in relation to national figures for all pupils
- Using Pupil Premium funding to address persistent absence of Pupil Premium pupils, regularly monitoring the impact of such interventions
- Contacting parents, the same day when reasons for absence are unknown or unauthorised
- Regularly monitoring pupil attendance and punctuality, reporting overall absence and persistent absence rates for all pupils to the Governing Board and Bridge Academy Trust (BAT)
- Persistently monitoring low attenders over time to ensure rigorous intervention strategies are provided
- Reporting school attendance statistics to parents, Local Authority (LA) and DfE as appropriate.

## 5. ENCOURAGING GOOD ATTENDANCE

TOA proactively reinforces good attendance and encourages improved attendance by using such measures as;

- Verbal encouragement and praise
- Formal recognition, such as attendance certificates and assemblies
- TOA rewards systems
- Seeking good practice from other BAT schools.

## 6. ABSENCE AND ATTENDANCE CODES

The national absence and attendance codes enable schools to record and monitor attendance and absence in a consistent way which complies with the regulations. They are also used for collecting statistics through the School Census System. The data helps Schools, Trusts, local authorities and the Government to gain a greater understanding of the level of, and the reasons for absence

Details of the codes and Government guidelines regarding school attendance can be found in the following document:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/564599/school\\_attendance.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564599/school_attendance.pdf)

## 7. PROCEDURES FOR TRACKING ATTENDANCE

Absences will be treated as unauthorised unless a satisfactory explanation for the student's absence is given to the school. Parents cannot authorise absences.

Staff should make it clear on the school register when taking attendance whether a child's absence is authorised or unauthorised. Where staff have concerns regarding absences they should follow the school's child protection and safeguarding procedures.

When a child is to be absent from school without prior permission, parents should inform the school by **telephone on the first day of absence by 8.30am** and every subsequent day of absence by 8.30am.

### 7.1 Illness

Most cases of absence due to illness are short term, but parents will need to make a phone call to alert the school on the first day/each day of absence by 8.30am. When the child returns to school they should bring a note from their parent explaining the absence – this is for the school records.

For prolonged absence due to illness of longer than three days or when a Persistent Absent (PA) student is absent, parents will be asked to provide the school with medical evidence such as planned operation information, planned therapy letter, a note from the child's doctor, an appointment card or a prescription paper or medication prescribed for the illness to authorise any absences. If medical evidence is not provided then attendance will be unauthorised.

## **7.2 Medical or dental appointments**

Parents should make every effort to ensure these appointments are made outside school hours. Where it cannot be avoided, children should attend school for as much of that day as possible. Please evidence medical or dental appointments by showing the school a copy of the appointment card or letter in order to authorise this absence.

## **7.3 Authorised absences**

There may be some instances where the school will authorise absence such as for a family bereavement or specific special circumstances.

### **7.31 Bereavement/Funerals**

In this case of a close family bereavement\*, absence will be authorised for 3 days. However, this can be extended at the discretion of the Head teacher dependent on the specific circumstances and the pupils needs. Pupils following any bereavement will be supported by the Pastoral Leader on their return and counselling will be offered if required. For bereavements of non-immediate family members, the pupil is expected to attend school, but we ask that you make the school aware so we can support their emotional well-being following this bereavement if required. Request to attend funerals of non-immediate family members or friends must be put into writing to the Attendance officer to be authorised. Close family bereavements will always be authorised.

\*\* Parent/Carer, Siblings, Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, Cousins.

## **7.4 Exclusion**

Exclusion is treated as an authorised absence. The school will arrange for work to be sent home during this time. A meeting must be held to reintegrate any pupil after a fixed term exclusion. This is usually held at 8am on the morning of their reintegration unless otherwise arranged with parents/carers in advance.

## **7.5 Family holidays and extended leave**

Parents should make every effort to ensure that family holidays and extended leave are arranged outside of school term time. Parents may request a leave of absence during term time. Requests for leave of this type must be made in writing to the Headteacher ideally at least half a term in advance of the leave being taken. In the case of unforeseen circumstances, such as a family bereavement that requires the child to travel to another country, this will be taken into consideration. Retrospective

applications will not be considered and this time taken will be processed as unauthorised absence.

The Headteacher may only grant such requests in exceptional circumstances and the Headteacher's decision is final on whether the request is approved and the length of absence approved.

All requests for authorised absence will be responded to in writing, and will outline the details of when the child is expected to return to school. Parents should contact the school immediately if there will be a cause for delay from the stated date of return.

If permission is not granted, but the child is still absent, the absence is classed as unauthorised and parents may be subject to further action by the school or prosecution by the local authority.

## **7.6 Religious observance**

The Ongar Academy recognises that there may be times where children of different faiths observe religious festivals that fall outside of school holidays and weekends, and will allow authorised absence for these times.

Parents will be aware of these dates and should give the school written notification in advance.

## **7.7 Late arrival**

Formal teaching begins at 8.45am. Students who arrive after this time but before 9.00am will be marked as Late. Names of pupils arriving to school after 8.45 will be taken by the attendance officer at the gate and sanctioned by their Standards Progress Leader if persistent.

Students who arrive after 9.00 should go straight to the school office to sign in and give a reason for their lateness. Any unjustifiable reason for absence will be marked as unauthorised. It is vital that students sign in at the office to ensure that appropriate health and safety regulations are followed and that all students are accounted for. Students arriving after 9.00am will be coded differently and this code can impact on student attendance.

A register is taken at the start of all lessons, if a student is late to the lesson this will be recorded on the register.

Persistent lateness may result in disciplinary action.

## 8. SCHOOL ACTION: FOLLOWING UP ABSENCES

### Absence Procedures

**8.1** In the event of a daily absence that has not been reported by parents/carers by the expected time of 8.30am. First day calls will be made by the **attendance officer** to ensure the absence of a child is made known to the parent/carer immediately. The school will continue to contact home and additional contacts held on the school system until 9.30am to ensure they have a reason for the absence. If no explanation has been sought with the parent/carer by 9.30am, then a home visit will be conducted by the **attendance officer** and a card will be left by the school at the home. The school may then inform external agencies such as the police and family operations hub if they have concerns about the safety and well-being of any child.

**8.2** For absences of three or more days without contact from the family, a further home visit will be made. Any child who is absent without explanation for 8 consecutive school days will be referred to the Local Authority Education Welfare Officer (LAEWO) in order that further investigations can be made. Police will also be notified where the school has concerns.

**8.3** Where there are unexplained or unauthorised absences, the school will contact the parents or carers. If a pattern of unauthorised absences emerges, the school will contact the parent or carer to discuss possible reasons and school support systems that could help.

**8.4** Parents will be contacted if a student gives a reason for an unauthorised absence and there is doubt about the truth of the explanation.

**8.5** Where a child has been absent from school for a **consecutive** period of 10 school days, and where the absence was unauthorised and both the school have been unable to contact the parents and the family do not appear to be living at the home address, a child missing in education (CME) referral will be made, the school may remove the child from the school roll after 20 days and the school will notify the local authority when such action is taken.

**8.6** The school will take disciplinary action against any students who are discovered to be truanting and parents or carers will be contacted to discuss possible reasons and school support systems that could help. Truancy may be the student absconding from lessons and absconding from school.

## 9. Persistent Absence (PA)/school refusal (below 90% attendance)

The school may take further action, including referring the case to the local authority to begin criminal proceedings if attendance drops below 90%.

Communication in writing will be received by parents/carers every half term if their child/children's attendance falls below 96% and warning letters will be sent prior to

any legal action being taken to ensure the school can support the family and the declining attendance.

Parents / Carers should do everything possible to encourage all school-age children to attend. However, if the reason for their reluctance appears to be school-based, such as difficulty with work, or bullying, please discuss this with the school at the earliest opportunity and the school will do everything possible to resolve the problem. Colluding with your child's reluctance to attend is likely to make the matter worse.

School refusal/school phobia is a psychological condition that usually has been medically diagnosed. Other arrangements may be put in place for a child with a genuine school phobia diagnosis and referrals to external agencies will be sought to support the pupil in receiving their education.

## **10. Consequences of Poor Attendance /Punctuality**

For pupils whose attendance and/or punctuality fails to improve, after a range of interventions and support measures have been tried by the school, the ultimate consequences may be one of the following:

- 1) The school may ask the Council to issue a Penalty Notice on its behalf. A Penalty Notice carries a fine of £60, per parent, per child. If the fine is not paid within 21 days it rises to £120 per parent, per child. If not paid at all, court action will be initiated.
- 2) The school may ask the Council initiate court action under Section 444 of the Education Act 1996, which could lead to fines of up to £2,500, or even imprisonment.
- 3) In some cases, action may be taken under the Children Act 1989 to protect the welfare and development of the child.

## **11. Children Missing in Education (CME) procedures**

**11.1** If, after ten days of continuous absence the school has been unable to ascertain the whereabouts of a pupil, they will refer the child's details to the Local Authority for it to perform further checks that are not available to school. If after 20 days continuous unauthorised absence, their whereabouts cannot be traced, they will be removed from the school roll.

### **11.2 Non starters**

Pupils who are allocated places but fail to start are also treated as CME. If the school has been unable to make contact with the family during a ten-day period after their expected arrival, they will refer the pupils to the local authority CME team for further checks.

### **11.3 Vulnerable Children**

Children who are Looked After (LAC), subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP), Children in Need (CIN) will be treated with highest priority and will be known to the Attendance

Officer. Any unexplained absence will be followed up immediately by a telephone call to the home, a home visit or by a call to the LAEWO duty line in order that a same-day visit can be made. Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) will be treated with similar priority in order that their time in school can be maximised, and their learning supported to the greatest extent possible.

## Appendix A

### USEFUL INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

The Ongar Academy aims to encourage all members of our community to aspire to greatness and strive for excellence.

For children to gain the greatest benefit from their education it is vital that they attend regularly, and your child should be at school in good time for the start of the school day, every day the school is open, unless they are genuinely ill or there is some other unavoidable reason.

Some children are reluctant to go to school and say they do not feel well. It is for you as the adult to judge whether they are genuinely unwell, or just unwilling. It will be better for them in the long run to go to school, rather than avoid it, as days off mean they will fall further behind and may make them even more reluctant. Your job as the parent is to encourage them to attend.

Ensuring your child's regular attendance at school is **YOUR legal responsibility** and permitting absence without good reason is an offence in law and may result in legal action being taken, or a Penalty Notice being issued.

#### Penalty Notices

Penalty Notices can now be issued for a range of attendance-related offences, including unauthorised term-time holidays, poor attendance and poor punctuality, a child coming to the attention of the police in school time, or located twice or more in truancy sweeps in 6 months.

#### Learning

Any absence affects the child's learning, and the more they miss the harder it will be for them to catch up. Extensive research shows that academic performance at GCSE is considerably lower for students who have missed school frequently.

## **Safeguarding**

There is extensive research linking poor school attendance and exclusion with crime and anti-social behaviour, and risk of exploitation by unsuitable adults. For this reason, failure to attend regularly will be regarded as a safeguarding issue.

## **Understanding absence percentages**

You may wonder why a school would be concerned if your child's attendance is less than 96%.

This may make it easier to understand:

95% equates to half a day off every two weeks
90% equates to a day off every two weeks
85% equates to one and a half days off every two weeks
80% equates to one whole day off every week

**Therefore, a secondary age child whose attendance is 80% will have missed ONE WHOLE YEAR of education by the time they leave school.**

Even the brightest and most enthusiastic learner will find it hard to keep up with their work with these levels of absence. That is why we encourage the highest attendance possible.

## Understanding types of absence coding

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school as AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. This is why information about the cause of any absence is always required, preferably in writing. Medical evidence may also be required in the form of a copy of a prescription, GP note, etc. Types of absence that are likely to be authorised are illness, medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies.

The following are a few examples of unjustifiable reasons for absence from school which will always be classified as Unauthorised:

- Going shopping with parents
- Birthdays and other family celebrations
- Minding other younger children in the family
- Staying at home because other members in the family are unwell
- Day trips and holidays in term time that have not been agreed
- Arriving at school after 9.00am
- Truancy
- Bereavement of a non-immediate family member or pet.

## Reluctant attenders

You should do everything possible to encourage your child to attend. However, if the reason for their reluctance appears to be school-based, such as difficulty with work, or bullying, please discuss this with the school at the earliest opportunity and the school will do everything possible to sort the problem out. Colluding with your child's reluctance to attend is likely to make the matter worse.

## Persistent Absence **(A student below 90% attendance)**

A pupil is classed as a persistent absentee when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year, **for whatever reason, whether it be authorised or unauthorised, or a mixture of both.** Absence at this level is doing considerable damage to a child's educational prospects and we need parents' full support and encouragement to tackle it.

PA pupils are tracked and monitored carefully through our pastoral system, and we combine this with tracking academic progress to assess the effect on the pupil's attainment. All our PA pupils and their parents may be subject to an Action Plan, which may include allocation of some kind of support or external intervention.

## School Attendance Meetings

You may be asked to participate in School Attendance Meeting (SAM) and a parenting contract may be implemented to support your child's attendance.

These are initiated where the school feels you may need help in influencing your child to attend properly. They have no force in law, and are entered into voluntarily. The problems will be discussed and agreement reached as to what the school will do, the child will do and what you as parents/carers will do to try to improve the situation. You may be offered some form of support such as counselling or parenting classes to assist you in setting boundaries and enforcing expectations of your child.

### **Reporting your child's absence**

If your child is absent you must:

- Contact the school as early as possible on the first day of absence, either by telephone or in person, this needs to be received by the school by 8.30am.
- Contact the school on **every** subsequent day of absence via the same methods, and
- Send a note in on the first day they return with an explanation of the absence.

### **Applications for leave of absence in term time**

This school's policy is not to authorise holidays during term time. Any applications for leave in term time must be made in writing to the Head teacher.

There is no automatic right to term-time leave of absence, and your request is likely to be declined except in the most exceptional circumstances. Each application will be considered on its own merit, and the attendance record(s) of the child/ren concerned will be taken into account when making a decision.

### **Your contact details**

Please make sure that the contact details you have given to the school are kept up to date, so that in the event of an accident, emergency or any other need to contact you we have the correct details.

### **Legal references made within this policy:**

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states that *the 'parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him/her to receive efficient full time education suitable to his/her age, ability and aptitude, and to any special educational needs he/she may have, either by regular attendance at school, or otherwise.'*

Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities and governing bodies to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State with regard to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and students under the age of 18.

The Children Act 1989 provides for a number of actions that can be taken to protect children's safety and welfare, on the premise that the welfare of the child is paramount.