



BALLYMENA ACADEMY

EST. 1828

Pupil Attendance Policy

Policy ratified by Board of Governors: August 2024
Date of next Review: August 2026

“Ballymena Academy cares for the Individual and Inspires Learning and Achievement”

RATIONALE

It is the policy of Ballymena Academy to promote an ethos and culture which encourages good attendance and in which the pupils feel valued and secure. The School seeks to maximise the attendance of each pupil. Regular attendance is essential if each young person is to achieve his or her potential and have full access to the School Curriculum. There is a high correlation between attendance at school and the realisation of the school's aims of supporting pupil self-esteem, well-being and high academic achievement.

AIMS

In addition to discharging legal obligations to record attendance accurately in the morning and afternoon, it is our intention, in partnership with parents, to encourage full attendance and punctuality of arrival at school in order that pupils may:-

- take full advantage of their educational and developmental opportunities
- establish good patterns of attendance and punctuality to carry forward into adult and working life
- be discouraged from truancy, which may lead to anti-social or criminal behaviour

It is also our aim to:-

- foster, in conjunction with the Education Authority (EA) initiatives such as “Miss School, Miss Out”, a positive approach to attendance.
- be proactive in identifying and resolving any problems or potential problems of which absence or lateness may be an indicator or precursor
- provide advice, support and guidance to Parents/Guardians and pupils
- ensure not only that staff roles and responsibilities are known and implemented but also that the roles and responsibilities of Parents/Guardians and pupils are clearly understood

OBJECTIVES

In pursuance of these aims, it will be considered normal good practice to:-

- keep detailed records of pupil attendance (morning and afternoon) in line with the school's policies and procedures
- inform parents as quickly as possible, where appropriate, if a pupil fails to attend school/class
- identify patterns of non-attendance at an early stage and work to resolve any personal/social difficulties, supporting young people through interventions to achieve good levels of attendance and punctuality
- regularly discuss, in liaison with the Education Welfare Service (EWS), matters pertaining to attendance at the school or pupils who may individually present concerns.
- inform the Educational Welfare Officer (EWO) when pupil attendance is deemed unsatisfactory
- keep a record of lateness to school and, where appropriate, inform parents
- apply such sanctions as are deemed appropriate, in line with Pupil Regulations and the Positive Behaviour Policy
- regular attendance reports to the Board of Governors using Benchmark Attendance Data supplied by the Department of Education

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of this policy depends upon pupils and their parents and a wide range of staff, each with their specific roles:-

Parents have a legal duty to ensure their child of compulsory school age receives efficient full-time education suitable to age, ability and aptitude and any special educational needs they may have, by regular school attendance or otherwise.

Parents/Guardians should:

- emphasise the importance of attendance to their child!
- ensure that their child attends school regularly!
- ensure that their child arrives on time for registration!
- require that their child attends all classes!
- avoid taking their child on holiday during term time as this cannot be authorised by the School and is actively discouraged
- avoid, where possible, arranging appointments (e.g. medical/dental) or engagements (e.g. driving lessons) during the school day
- notify the school, by telephone, on their child's first day of absence, if not for a pre-agreed reason
- notify the school if a pupil is likely to be absent for more than three days
- provide a letter to their child's tutor explaining absence on the first day he/she returns to school to support the School in meeting DENI requirements
- provide a letter to their child's Head of Year (HOY) at least two days before a planned absence
- sign and return, when required, pro-formas regarding absence or lateness
- co-operate with the school in seeking to overcome problems of non-attendance or lateness
- discuss issues with the HOY where a child appears reluctant to attend school
- liaise with the HOY on issues around long term absence

Pupils should:

- make every effort to attend school regularly and not take days off unless it is unavoidable
- make every effort to arrive at school in time for registration
- fulfil their timetable by attending every class punctually
- where absence has occurred, bring to their tutor a letter of explanation from their parent/guardian on the first day back after absence
- ensure subsequently that they show their absence slip to those teachers whose classes they have missed
- where absence is planned (e.g. for an appointment), bring a letter from their parent/guardian to their HOY at least two days in advance
- ensure subsequently that they show their planned absence slip to those teachers whose classes they will miss

- where lateness has occurred, sign in on arrival at the appropriate place (Office) and explain their lateness to their tutor at their next registration
- when issued with a Confirmation of Attendance slip, have it completed and returned promptly to their HOY
- avoid using class time, where possible, for dental/medical appointments
- understand that if they fail to comply with the provision of this policy that appropriate sanctions may be applied
- complete work provided during periods of longer absence, as agreed with the school
- catch up with work on their return to school
- absence from class for participation in co-curricular activities is considered a privilege, not a right, and all pupils are expected to catch up on missed work and meet all scheduled deadlines
- not leave school at any time during the school day without first receiving permission from their HOY/Pastoral Adviser (PA) or, failing that, a Vice-Principal or the Principal. In the case of illness, permission may be given by the person in charge of sick-bay. In all cases the Office should be informed by the member of staff.

Tutors should:

- mark their register daily
- transfer attendance information to the School Information Management System (SIMS) – record attendance accurately in line with the school's policies and procedures
- receive letters of explanation from pupils who have been absent
- satisfy themselves as to the authenticity of the parental signature
- continue to ask each day for such letters until provided
- return letters to the office dated, coded and signed (codes to be in line with those listed under DENI guidance)
- note in their register that a letter has been received
- provide the pupil with an absence slip completed in pen
- inform the HOY if a pattern of absence is detected
- check SIMS for 'late' pupils and adjust their personal register accordingly
- request reasons from pupils who have been late
- where a pupil has been marked absent when present, check their register and require the pupil to complete a Confirmation of Attendance slip and return it to the HOY
- closely monitor the attendance of individual pupils as requested by the HOY/PA and report any concerns immediately

Class Teachers should:

- register each class/period using SIMS
- record lateness to class on SIMS and/or exiting class to toilet
- inspect and initial pupils' absence slips
- record in their register if pupil has no absence slip
- continue to ask the pupil for an absence slip until one is provided
- initial planned absence slips
- check posted "out-of-class" forms in staffroom to correlate against class absence

Heads of Year (HOYs) and/or Pastoral Advisers (PA) /Pastoral and Learning Support Teachers (PALS) should:

HOYs and PAs/PALS have an important role in fostering good attendance within their year groups through engaging pupils on the benefits of good attendance in Year Assemblies and tutor group work, as well as individual work with pupils presenting specific concerns.

Absences

They should:

- inspect letters and provide planned absence slips, if appropriate
- forward these letters to the office on day of receipt with appropriate codes applied
- check print-outs of pupils absent for 3 days and telephone parents, if necessary
- check weekly print-out of unexplained absences and ensure each tutor is aware of which pupils have not provided letters explaining absences
- apply the Positive Behaviour Policy for those pupils who fail to provide letters explaining absences
- check for patterns of absence or truancy
- phone or write to parents informing them of problematic absences
- discourage pupils from using class time for dental/medical appointments
- forward to the Principal, as appropriate, letters requesting family holidays
- in particular cases request all teachers to inform them when a pupil misses any class or there are patterns of lateness or regular requests to exit to toilet where there is no known medical concern
- monitor, via SIMS, patterns of lateness or exiting to toilet
- check weekly print-out of percentage attendance and discuss with the Vice-Principal those pupils with low attendance in order that appropriate action may be taken (e.g. parental interview, EWO visit, home tuition)
- speak to pupils whose attendance is giving cause for concern, offer support and encouragement and monitor closely
- request tutors to monitor closely pupils with low attendance and to report any concerns immediately
- commend pupils for improved attendance
- distribute end of year 100% attendance certificates
- identify to all parents through 'termly' attendance report, level of attendance and lateness

Lateness

- check weekly print-out of 'lates' and monitor pupils
- apply agreed sanctions for those pupils who are late on a regular basis or who accumulate a number of lates during the year
- return reply slips to Office

Office Staff should:

- daily check that attendance AM/PM has been completed and that action has been taken towards resolving unexplained absences
- forward first day of absences messages to home

- daily enter codes from letters received from tutors/pastoral staff
- file the letters
- provide each HOY with a weekly print-out of unexplained absences
- provide each HOY with a print-out of pupils absent for 3 days
- on request from the HOY, despatch letters re unexplained absence and receive replies
- on request from the Vice-Principal or HOY, provide a print-out of pupil attendance
- provide each HOY with a weekly print-out of 'lates'
- provide each HOY with a weekly print-out of percentage attendance
- provide the Vice-Principal, HOYs and PAs with a monthly print-out of all pupils whose attendance is less than 90% and individual print-outs for those whose attendance is 85% or less
- provide monthly overview and attendance trends analysis for pastoral VP

Vice-Principal (Pastoral) should:

- liaise with Head of 6th Form regarding matters relating to attendance of pupils in Years 13-14
- with the help of the HOY/PA, monitor the attendance of all pupils in Years 8 - 14
- discuss with the HOY/PA those pupils with low attendance in order that appropriate action may be taken (e.g. letters home, parental interview, EWO visit, home tuition)
- meet with the EWO regularly to discuss the attendance of pupils in Years 8 – 12 and, where appropriate, request home visits, medical referrals and/or home tuition
- following the monthly meeting with the EWO, report back to HOYs
- keep the Principal fully informed of all pupils whose attendance is giving cause for concern so that appropriate action may be taken
- provide regular attendance reports to the Board of Governors using Benchmarked Attendance Data supplied by the Department of Education

The Education Welfare Service [EWS]:

The EWS has a legal duty to make sure that parents meet their responsibility towards their child's education. Where, through regular meetings with school representatives, a pupil's pattern of attendance or percentage attendance brings cause for concern, they will be referred to the EWS. The EWS will support staff and parents in developing and implementing strategies to address or improve or improve attendance.

Principal should:

- liaise with Vice-Principal (Pastoral) in monitoring of attendance and decide on appropriate action
- liaise with HOYs, VP and parents in providing support in cases of difficulty
- keep the Board of Governors informed of cases which give rise to particular concern.

Board of Governors should:

Review attendance on a regular basis (minimum of once per term).

This policy will be kept under review.