

Date of last review:	June 2024	Review period:	1 year
Date of next review:	June 2025	Owner:	Director of Education



Attendance Policy

Enabling a world of freedom, opportunity and fulfilment

History of Policy Changes:

Date	Page	Change	Origin of Change
June 2024	All	Academy procedures removed and now sit outside of the policy. Aligned to DfE attendance expectations from September 2024	Feedback from stakeholders DfE

Policy Aims

Magna Learning Partnership is committed to providing a positive and productive learning environment for all pupils. Regular attendance is crucial for personal development and academic success, as it ensures pupils have access to the full range of educational opportunities and resources. This attendance policy is designed to promote a culture of good attendance, punctuality, responsibility, and engagement among stakeholders.

By adhering to this attendance policy, Magna Learning Partnership aims to create a supportive and accountable learning community where every pupil has the opportunity to succeed.

Legal Framework – Information for parents

The Education Act 1996 states that parents¹ must ensure that their children, or the children in their care, of compulsory school age receive appropriate full-time education according to their age, ability, and aptitude. As you have chosen to register your child at this Academy this involves ensuring your child attends regularly and punctually. "Regularly" means every day the Academy is open. "Punctually" means on time. Magna Learning Partnership deems 97% as the benchmark for good attendance as it accepts that some level of absence due to illness may be unavoidable but is certainly not inevitable.

A parent is guilty of an offence if their child of compulsory school age, who is a registered pupil at a school or Academy, fails to attend regularly – Section 444(1) Education Act 1996. In such a situation if the parent knows that their child is not attending, they may be prosecuted for a more serious offence – Section 444 (1) (a) Education Act 1996.

All state funded schools must consider whether a penalty notice is appropriate in each individual case where one of their pupils reaches the national threshold for considering a penalty notice. The national threshold is 10 sessions (5 days) of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks. These sessions can be consecutive or not. The period of 10 school weeks can also span different terms or school years (e.g. 2 sessions of unauthorised absence in the Summer Term and a further 8 within the Autumn Term). In accordance with the guidance given by the DfE - schools within the Magna Learning Partnership do not have a blanket position of issuing or not issuing penalty notices and will make judgements on each individual case to ensure fairness.

Leave of absence

There is no entitlement in law to time off in term time. Magna Learning Partnership Academy Leaders will not authorise leave of absence in term time unless there are exceptional circumstances. Whilst there is not a definitive list of circumstances these are typically for the following reasons:

- Unavoidable medical appointments
- Close immediate family bereavement
- Matters relating to a child's welfare

¹ A "parent" is a person who has parental responsibility for, or one who cares for, a child or young person.

Individual cases will be addressed by the Academy Leader, their decision is final. Should a parent need to apply for leave of absence they are required to apply directly to the Academy Leader, completing the Leave of Absence (LoA) Request Form which is available to download on the Academy website. A decision will be made in writing at the earliest opportunity.

Where a pupil has been absent and the Academy has not been able to make contact to explain the absence within a 10-day period (5 days for a vulnerable pupil), the child missing in education procedures will be actioned by the designated safeguarding lead and relevant agencies notified.

Expectations of Trustees and Governors

Trustees and governing bodies will:

- recognise the importance of school attendance and promote it across the school;
- ensure school leaders fulfil expectations and statutory duties;
- regularly review attendance data, discuss and challenge trends and help school leaders focus improvement efforts on the individual pupils or cohorts who need it most;
- ensure school staff receive adequate training on attendance.

Expectations and responsibilities of the Academy

At all times we will:

- have high expectations for every pupil's attendance at the Academy;
- set expectations about attendance from the outset through the transition process;
- demonstrate an understanding that good attendance does not happen in isolation – there is an interrelationship between attendance and the quality of the Academy's curriculum, ethos, behaviour, and inclusivity;
- not stop pushing for whole-Academy improvement once attendance reaches the national average;
- see the process of securing good attendance for all pupils as an ongoing process, never something that is 'finished'.

Expectations for the Attendance Champion (A member of the leadership team)

We recognise that improving attendance is a school leadership issue and have a designated senior leader with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance and liaising with pupils, parents and external agencies where needed.

The Attendance Champion is expected to:

- set a clear vision for improving and maintaining good attendance;
- establish and maintain effective systems for tackling absence and make sure they are followed by all staff;
- have a strong grasp of absence data to focus the collective efforts of the school
- regularly monitor and evaluate progress, including the efficacy of the school's strategies and processes.

Recording keeping

At all times we will:

- ensure that attendance is always recorded accurately as it is a legal document;
- systematically analyse attendance information looking for patterns and trends;
- use this analysis to target actions, both for individuals and at a whole-Academy level.

Work with pupils parents

At all times we will:

- regularly communicate our expectations clearly and consistently to parents and to pupils;
- explain to parents and pupils why good attendance is important and how it helps pupils to achieve;
- provide advice to parents in supporting good attendance;
- report to parents their child's current attendance regularly and with increased frequency if attendance drops below the expected standard;
- listen to parents to find out why their children are not attending well enough so that we can work together in acting accordingly. At all times we will listen, understand, empathise, and support but not tolerate;
- challenge parents who do not make sure that their children attend, but also offer support where needed;
- have the right people in place to have these conversations with parents.

Expectations and responsibilities of pupils and parents

Pupils are expected to attend every day the Academy is open for pupils. Pupils must arrive on time. Late arrivals not only disrupt the learning experience for other pupils but also impacts a pupil's ability to fully engage with the lesson.

Reporting Absence

If your child is unwell and cannot attend the Academy, you are required to inform the Academy at the earliest opportunity and seek authorisation for that absence, which is an Academy-based decision. Information on how to do this can be found on the Academy's website. The Academy Leaders decision to authorise attendance is final.

Authorised Absence

The Academy will only authorise an absence if:

- Your child is too ill to attend, and the Academy accepts this as valid. If the authenticity of illness is in doubt, the Academy can request you to provide medical evidence to support illness. It should be noted that GPs do not provide sick notes for children. If your child suffers from a long-term medical condition, any certification will be provided by the responsible specialist.
- You have the advance permission of the Academy Leader. This must be requested and agreed through the Leave of Absence request form;
- Your child is being educated off-site;
- Your child has been suspended.

Unauthorised Absence

If the Academy has not agreed with the reason your child is not at the Academy, then they will record it as an unauthorised absence. If your child has 10 sessions, or 5 days, of absence unauthorised over a 10 week rolling period the Academy will consider a fixed penalty notice.

Completion of work

It is the pupil's responsibility to make up any missed work due to absence however, it is not possible to routinely set work for pupils who are absent.

Support systems for pupils and parents

At Magna Learning Partnership we recognise that poor attendance can be an indication of difficulties in a child's life. This may be related to problems at home and or in school. Parents should make school aware of any difficulties or changes in circumstances that may affect their child's attendance and or behaviour in school, for example: bereavement, divorce or separation, incidents of domestic abuse, anxiety. This will help the school identify any additional support that may be required.

The Academy will work with pupils and parents to remove any barriers to attendance by building strong, trusting relationships, and working together to put the right support in place.

Magna Learning Partnership also recognises that some pupils are more likely to require additional support to attain good attendance, for example, those pupils with special educational needs, those with physical or mental health needs, and looked after children.

The Academy will implement a range of strategies to support improved attendance.

Strategies used may include:

- Discussions with parents and pupils
- Counselling or mentoring
- Attendance contracts
- Referrals to support agencies
- Pupil voice activities
- Friendship group support
- Peer support
- Restorative meetings
- Personal, Social, Health & Citizenship Education - PSHCE
- Rewards
- Time limited part-time timetables (in exceptional circumstances)
- Additional learning support
- Behaviour support
- Mental health and wellbeing support and signposting
- Reintegration support packages following suspensions or following long absences

Where absence means pupils have missed 10% or more of school, the Academy will work together with pupils and parents to put additional targeted support in place to remove any

barriers to attendance and reengage these pupils. In doing so, the Academy will sensitively consider some of the reasons for absence and understand the importance of school as a place of safety and support for children who might be facing difficulties, rather than reaching immediately for punitive approaches. Where pupils become severely absent they are likely to need more intensive support across a range of partner agencies.

Support offered to families will be child centred and planned in discussion and agreement with both parents and pupils. Where parents fail or refuse to engage with the support offered and further unauthorised absence occurs, the Academy will consider the use of legal means.

Attendance affected by mental health issues

All Academy's will set and maintain high expectations for the attendance, engagement and punctuality of pupils who are anxious about attending school. It is important to recognise that, in many instances, attendance at school may serve to help with the underlying issue as much as being away from school might exacerbate it, and a prolonged period of absence may heighten their anxiety about attending in future.

Staff will recognise that there can be attendance challenges where a child has a social, emotional or mental health issue, particularly a severe issue for which the child is receiving clinical treatment.

Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is a *'broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school'* (West Sussex EPS 2018). Terminology varies in the literature and it is recognised that there are tensions over the most suitable terminology. MLP academies have decided to use the term EBSA in preference to other terminology, e.g., 'School Phobia', 'School Refusal'. 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance' is used as this seems to be the most commonly used term. However, we recognise that often 'avoidance' is an emotional response to an aversive situation rather than a conscious choice.

We recognise that in addition to those pupils not attending for extended periods of time, there are many other pupils who experience an aversion to aspects of the school experience. For example, an aversion to attending specific lessons or feeling overwhelmed in busy environments.

Magna Learning Partnership academies are aware of the following factors and data demonstrating the prevalence of EBSA within our local communities:

- Implementation of reduced school timetables
- Parent/carer feedback surveys
- Elective Home Education
- Requests for professional involvement

The MLP approach to supporting children and young people who experience EBSA is underpinned by the following principles associated with positive outcomes:

Early Intervention	Working with parents and staff as well as the pupil themselves
A focus on a rapid return to school alongside intervention, support and adaptations within the school and home environment	Working flexibly with a focus on understanding the function of the avoidance behaviour being shown by a pupil

School staff should work quickly to communicate this expectation to parents, and work together with them to ensure that such circumstances do not act as a barrier to regular attendance.

Any associated anxiety about attending should be mitigated as much as possible by creating a plan to implement reasonable adjustments to alleviate specific barriers to attendance.

These adjustments should be agreed by and regularly reviewed with all parties, including parents. Any actions taken to support attendance are referred to as “reasonable adjustments”. In developing a plan to support attendance through reasonable adjustments, school staff will need to take into account the individual circumstances of the child, being mindful of safeguarding responsibilities as set out in the Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance.

Consequences for excessive absence

The attendance lead will monitor attendance regularly and intervene where absence is excessive using a five-stage process. Parents are expected, and required by law, to engage with the Academy in addressing ongoing and excessive absence.

Parents will be notified of excessive absences, and a School Attendance Meeting (SAM) will be scheduled to discuss and agree strategies for improvement, targets, and timescales.

If the parent does not attend, or if absence does not improve following the meeting, the child will be referred to the Local Authority Welfare Service. This is likely to result in a fixed penalty notice. A fixed penalty notice is an alternative to being taken to court by the Local Authority. **If a child has 10 or more sessions (am/pm) of unauthorised absence, the Academy will inform the Education Welfare Service and may issue a penalty notice for each child to each parent.**

The penalty is £120 per child per parent if paid within 28 days. The penalty is reduced to £60 per child per parent if paid within the first 21 days

If a parent fails to pay the fine within 28 days, the Local Authority will have no option but to prosecute a parent in the Magistrates' Court. This could lead to a fine of up to £1000 per parent per child.

Leaving school before the end of the day

(Not applicable at Post 16)

It is not expected that pupils should need to leave early. However, in some exceptional

circumstances, children may have to be collected early from school.

Parents who wish to collect their children early must inform the Academy by telephone or in writing, stating clearly the reason your child is leaving school.

Requests may only be made by the parent with day-to-day care. This safeguards against an estranged parents making a request without the knowledge of the parent who has care and control. If there are other arrangements in place for the child to leave the school premises, such as another adult will collect the child, the Academy must be informed in writing.

It is the responsibility of parents to keep the Academy fully aware of contact details of named and responsible adults.

Collection at the end of the school day

(Not applicable at Secondary or Post 16)

We do recognise that some of our pupils do have permission to either leave school independently at the end of the school day or are transported home via pre-arranged taxi or bus. However, in the instance where arrangements are in place for a child to be collected, the following will apply:

- Children should be collected promptly at the end of the school day.
- If someone other than the usual parent is collecting the child, we ask that the school office be notified in writing, in advance.
- If parents fail to collect their children by 5.00pm with no contact from the parents, then the local authority children's safeguarding team, along with the police may be contacted.

Policy Review

This attendance policy is subject to an annual review. This includes gathering the views of stakeholders when and where appropriate. Any significant changes will be communicated to pupils, parents, and staff.