



# Attendance Policy

*This policy has been approved by the Board of Trustees with reference to the academy's Equality Policy. The aims of the Equality Policy are to ensure that Plume Academy meets the needs of all, taking account of gender, gender identity, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, sexual orientation, age, ability, disability and social circumstances. It is important that in this academy we meet the diverse needs of students to ensure inclusion for all and that all students are prepared for full participation in a multi-ethnic society.*

Reviewed: April 2020  
Next full review due: April 2021

# Attendance Policy

## Statement of Intent

Being absent from education means a lost learning opportunity. It is vital that students, parents/carers, staff and trustees recognise the importance that good attendance plays in the life of all students. Without a high level of attendance, a student's level of progress and attainment is likely to slow down and drop.

If there are problems which affect a student's attendance, we will investigate, identify and, in partnership with the respective parent/carer and student, attempt to resolve those problems as quickly as possible. Meetings are an essential form of support and parents/carers are expected to attend meetings with Aquinas/Plume Academy/Essex Local Authority where attendance is of real concern. Intervention letters will also be sent to parents/carers when attendance falls below 95% as part of Plume Academy's attendance procedure.

## Attendance Targets

Plume Academy has an annual attendance target set by the Board of Trustees. It is expected that the whole academy community will work together to achieve this target. The current attendance target is **95.5%**. Plume Academy also continually aims to reduce the number of students who are Persistently Absent (below 90% attendance).

## Application for Leave of Absence

**There is no automatic entitlement in law to time off during term time.**

A leave of absence is not a legal right. Plume Academy strongly discourages parents/carers from taking their children out of the academy during term time. If, under '*Exceptional Circumstances*' parents/carers wish to request a leave of absence, they should write to the Executive Principal at least four school weeks in advance of the proposed date, stating the exact circumstances relating to the request.

Whilst the Executive Principal can authorise requests which are deemed 'exceptional', please be aware that the vast majority of time taken out of the academy will be classified as **unauthorised**. Should a parent/carer wilfully remove their child after the Executive Principal declines the leave of absence request, the Executive Principal will refer the case to Aquinas or Essex Local Authority – Attendance Compliance Team, who will decide whether to issue a Penalty Notice of £120. If the leave is then taken with disregard to the outcome of the application, the academy will seek to apply for a Penalty Notice in accordance with Education (Penalty Notices) Regulation 2004.

## Procedures - Parents/Carers

- If a student is unwell and unable to attend the academy, parents/carers should contact Plume Academy and explain the reason for absence – reasons such as 'unwell', 'poorly' etc. will result in an unauthorised absence. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, contact should be made with the academy on a daily basis to keep them informed of the absence. Failure to contact the academy to report absences may result in a Children Missing Education referral being made to the Local Authority and/or the academy requesting a Police Welfare Check be undertaken. When students return to the academy, they should bring in a signed note explaining the reason for absence and specifying the dates the student has missed.
- Medical – Students must report to the medical area and follow the medical procedure if they are feeling ill.

The procedure is as follows:

- If a student feels ill s/he must get an 'exeat' from the class, they are in and then report to the medical area of the respective campus they are on. A member of the medical staff will assess him/her and if s/he deems it necessary, will contact a parent/carer to collect them.

Students must not call parents/carers to come and collect them. A parent/carer can only collect the student if a member of staff has contacted them to do so. Otherwise the absence, as a result of collection, will be deemed as unauthorised.

- Medical Appointments - Please note that for medical appointments, we will authorise a morning or an afternoon session. If circumstances dictate that a whole day is required, please provide evidence to support this. If there are any further problems, please contact the Attendance Officer in the first instance. It is expected that students attend school around medical appointments.

## Absence due to illness

- Where there are persistent concerns, Plume Academy will require supporting evidence of medical intervention. This may take the form of:
  - ✓ A note from the Practice Nurse.
  - ✓ Proof of prescription.
  - ✓ Packaging for prescribed medication.
  - ✓ Medical card stamped at the Doctor's Practice – this will only authorise the day of the appointment.
- There is an expectation that parents/carers provide Plume Academy with regularly updated medical evidence to support those students with long term medical conditions.

## Punctuality

- Students should arrive by 8:25am and registration will commence at 8:30am. Registration closes at 9:10 am. Any student who arrives after 9:10am will be marked on the register as 'U'. This code means 'Late (After registration closes)' and is an unauthorised absence.
- The academy operates a 'late gate' system. Students who are late without an authorised reason will receive a lunchtime detention. Failure to attend this detention will result in an afterschool detention.
- Parents/carers should be aware that Penalty Notices could also be issued if punctuality does not improve and continues to be a persistent problem.

## Examples of authorised or unauthorised absences

Absences can only be authorised by the academy.  
Legitimate reasons for absence:

- Sickness
- Medical or dental appointments\*
- Exceptional family circumstances e.g. bereavement
- Days of religious observance

\* Wherever possible these should be arranged outside of school hours.

The following absences will not be authorised by the academy:

- Looking after the house
- Looking after brothers and sisters or sick relatives
- Shopping
- Birthdays
- Translating
- Attending relatives' medical appointments

## **Missed work due to absence**

When students are unable to attend Plume Academy as a result of illness, it is acknowledged that students are unlikely to be able to complete work and may be unable to do so as a result of missing crucial aspects of a lesson.

Plume Academy expects that students who have missed work must catch up upon their return. This includes copying up missed notes and asking the teacher if there is anything that they do not understand.

### **Authorised absence due to sickness for 1 or 2 days**

If a student is absent due to sickness for up to 2 consecutive days, it is his/her responsibility to liaise with subject teachers on his/her return to catch up on any missed work.

### **Authorised absence due to sickness for 3 days or more**

If a student is sick for more than 3 days, his/her parent/carer must contact the relevant Assistant Head of Year to request the missed work. They will endeavour to reply within 48 hours. If a student is sick for more than five days, his/her parent/carer must contact the Attendance Officer to discuss the specific requirements of their return.

### **All other authorised absences**

If a student knows that he/she will be missing one or more days of education, he/she must collect his/her work from the subject teachers prior to the absence.

### **Unauthorised absence**

Staff will not provide any work missed in cases of unauthorised absences.

## **Circumstances in which a Penalty Notice may be issued**

Penalty Notices apply to students of statutory school age (which ends in Year 11). Aquinas and the Local Authority have agreed to use Penalty Notices for the following circumstances:

### **Penalty Notices for Truancy**

Penalty Notices may be issued where there has been unauthorised absence. Parent/carers will receive a warning letter at least 10 days prior to the issue of a Penalty Notice. If the law continues to be broken around school attendance, the legal intervention process will be used. The penalty for each parent/carer is £60 for each child if paid within 21 days of receipt of the notice, rising to £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days of receipt of the Notice. Failure to ensure that the child attends school punctually and regularly could lead to legal action being taken against the respective parent/carer. This could result in **each** parent/carer receiving a fine of up to £2,500 for each time or up to 3 months' imprisonment.

## **Rewards**

Various reward systems exist to recognise and encourage good attendance.

## **Summary**

Plume Academy has a legal duty to publish its absence figures to parents/carers and to promote attendance. Equally, parents/carers have a duty to make sure that their children attend. All members of staff are committed to working with parents/carers and students as this is the best way to ensure the highest level of attendance for our academy community.

## **Review of the Attendance Policy**

This policy will be reviewed annually but may be subject to changes in local and national policy.

## Appendix 1 – Roles

The Department for Education (DfE) has set out clear expectations for both schools/academies and parents/carers<sup>1</sup> -

*Schools/academies are expected to:*

- 1. Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence;*
- 2. Ensure every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled; and,*
- 3. Act early to address patterns of absence.*
- 4. Promote children's welfare and safeguarding*

*Parents/carers are expected to:*

- 1. Perform their legal duty by ensuring their children of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend regularly.*

### All Staff

All members of staff are responsible for promoting good levels of attendance and reducing absence at Plume Academy. SIMS is used to accurately maintain attendance records for both registration periods and lessons. All members of staff are required to take registration of their lessons and form times. Staff who may be asked to cover for colleagues either at registration or in lessons should also register the class using SIMS.

### Attendance Officer

Plume Academy has an Attendance Officer. This role involves managing first day call back, identifying students with attendance issues, liaising with Heads/Assistant Heads of Year, Aquinas and the Missing Education and Child Employment Service (MECES). The Attendance Officer will also track and monitor students, particularly those in the category of Persistently Absent (below 90%).

### Senior Member of Staff

A member of the Senior Leadership Team will oversee strategy regarding attendance. S/he will liaise with Aquinas and Attendance Compliance to agree attendance targets, devise and implement strategies/development plans to raise attendance and review and evaluate procedures. The role also entails linking with Heads/Assistant Heads of Years, trustees and relevant attendance personnel.

### Link Trustee

The trustees are required to have a link person for attendance and through linking with the local authority, be aware of developments locally and nationally and to report back to the Board of Trustees on attendance at the Academy. The Link Trustee will also advise the Board of Trustees on annual attendance target figures which will be set and suggested to the DfE for use in the following academic year.

On an annual basis, the Link Trustee will review the Attendance Policy. Where necessary, in conjunction with the Attendance Officer and senior member of staff overseeing whole academy attendance, changes will be made to the policy and then circulated to the above groups for approval and ratification.

## **Appendix 2 - School Attendance and the Law – Roles of External Agencies and Education Welfare Service**

Under the 1996 Education Act, parents and carers are responsible for ensuring their children attend school regularly and punctually. Failure to do so could result in legal action being taken against them by the Local Authority. The Supreme Court has ruled that the definition of regular school attendance is 'in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school'.

The register is a legal document and schools/academies must, under the Education (Student Registration) Regulations 2006, take a register at the start of the morning session, and again during the afternoon session. Since September 2006, schools/academies have been required to use statutory registration codes.

Under the Education (Student Registration) Regulations 2006, only the school/academy (and not parents/carers) can authorise an absence. Where the reason for a student's absence cannot be established at the time the register is taken, that absence shall be recorded as unauthorised. If a reason for absence is provided by the parent/carers, the school/academy may decide to grant leave of absence, which must be recorded as authorised using the appropriate national code.

- Parents/carers who are found guilty of breaking the law on attendance may be taken to court and face fines of up to £2500, and in some cases, imprisonment.
- MECES can also use court proceedings to seek an Education Supervision Order or Attendance Order on the child.
- During these court proceedings, the magistrates may consider issuing a Parenting Order which would include parents/carers attending parenting skills session.

Under the Education Act 1996, a parent is defined as the biological parents of a child; anyone who, although not a biological parent has parental responsibility for a child; or any person who, although not a biological parent and who does not have parental responsibility, has care of a child.

### **Aquinas**

Parents/carers are expected to contact Plume Academy at an early stage and to work with staff in resolving any problems together. This is usually successful, however, if the attendance issues are not sorted out in this way, the academy may refer the child to Aquinas. Aquinas works alongside the academy's internal attendance team to help promote good attendance and reduce absence, including Persistent Absence, and to act early to address patterns of absence.

They conduct weekly attendance reviews for all students, identify individual concerns and recommend the appropriate action. The process of intervention implemented by Aquinas, is solely designed to overcome any identified barrier to a student's attendance without the need for pursuing a legal pathway. The process is primarily aimed at working with parents/carers to firstly inform them of the concern (via an initial concern letter), and then engage with them to identify and resolve any barriers affecting an individual student's attendance where attendance remains a concern (via a School Attendance Meeting). Parents are advised to attend School Attendance Meetings when invited to do so. If attendance remains a concern after a School Attendance Meeting, a Legal Action Warning Letter will be issued to parents/carers, which will be followed by an Attendance Review Meeting if attendance does not improve. It is only where all support-centred measures have failed to make an impact and the unauthorised absences continue that legal action in the form of Penalty Notice will be considered. Aquinas may alter the intervention process where necessary, which may involve additional meetings, home visits, requests for medical evidence, and/or undertaking an interview directly with the student.

Aquinas is accredited by Essex Police under the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) with the power to issue Penalty Notices'. Aquinas also works very closely with the Essex Attendance Compliance Team, is a member of The National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE) and a signed member of a Whole Essex Information Sharing Framework (WEISF).

### **Attendance Compliance Team (ACT) formerly known as Missing Education and Child Employment Service (MECES)**

This carries out statutory duties on behalf of the Local Authority to ensure parents/carers fulfil their legal requirements in relation to school attendance.

The academy may refer a student to MECES where attendance remains a concern following school intervention by Aquinas. The MECES team will work with schools/academies and families to address serious attendance issues., however, if attendance fails to improve, legal action may be taken against the respective parents/carers.

Further details of the options open to enforce attendance at school are available from [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) .

This Attendance Policy was reviewed and ratified by the Board of Trustees of Plume Academy.