

20th September 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

Attendance Matters

I would like to thank you for your continued support in helping your child to access and engage with their learning by attending their school as regularly as possible. It is important to acknowledge that the last couple of years have been challenging for all, and as we start this new academic year, we must appreciate that it will remain less easy for some.

The staff at all our academies are looking forward to continuing to build on the strong positive relationships that have been forged through the adversity of the pandemic. We want each of our academies to continue to offer a welcoming, nurturing and supportive environment to enable all students to learn and be successful.

You may be aware, the Government have released new attendance guidance for September 2022 which we welcome because it places emphasis on parents, local authorities, other agencies and schools/academies to work **collaboratively** together to support students' education and wellbeing. There are other key messages in the guidance which are also important to note:

- Attendance should never be viewed in isolation as it affects, and is affected by, **all** parts of a child's life, therefore whole family plans are crucial to supporting them and their families.
- If a child is not accessing high quality education outside of a school environment, then **attending** school regularly is important for them to learn and achieve.
- Where a child is enrolled in a school they **must** attend regularly and although this guidance states legal action is a last resort, it is still a consideration if support to improve attendance is not engaged with.
- Schools are expected to **promote** attendance and **explore** absence when it falls below 96%, ensuring they offer support and interventions to students and families to prevent absence occurring or deteriorating.

What does this mean in practice?

Meridian Trust academies/schools follow a relational approach to attendance procedures with 'supporting a child to attend' being the first aim. This includes analysing and following up on absence to explore why it is occurring (both authorised and unauthorised absences). We hope that having built strong relationships with you, our academy staff will be able to do this sensitively and helpfully, thus ensuring we can really understand 'how' any barriers are a problem to support you to resolve them.

Why? It is important we are **all** working with the child or young person's best interests at heart, celebrating the positives but also sharing any concerns so we can all act accordingly. This means support (which can be as simple as small conversation, time out card or adjustment within school) can be done as early as possible. This also means where needed, the Local Authority Early Help Pathways can be used to put support in place; either within school or from external partners.

What does this holistic attendance approach mean for you and your family?

You will notice an increase in regular conversations and communication from the staff at your child's school, and we welcome you to take the lead on **starting** these conversations at any point. This **proactive** early action

approach means children and families are more likely to feel supported and they are less likely to face enforcement discussions or action later, which is best for all.

Using a 'stepped' process (see diagram below) where attendance levels fall **below 96%** initial conversations will take place, along with emails. If absences continue to occur, you may receive letters further raising your awareness (STEP 1). Informal meetings (STEP 2) to discuss concerns and support will also be more frequent as often, this helps us all to solve things and achieve desired outcomes quickly which benefits everyone, especially your child/young person.

Please note, the above actions are NOT a sign of legal action; they are to prevent escalation towards it. Working together to support your child to access their education is always the main objective.

What happens if the support doesn't work?

We would always endeavour to make sure the support offered for your family/child works to improve your/their wellbeing and their ability to attend school and/or access their education.

As you likely already know, our academies are required to code absences as **authorised** or **unauthorised** depending on the reasons given and as stated above, both must be explored. Absences are authorised where **genuine** reasons or exceptional circumstance is demonstrated. Where absences are frequent, seem to have a pattern or there is dissatisfaction with the authenticity of explanations, you **may** be requested to provide evidence to verify the reasons or circumstances.

Where absences continue to occur, academies must continue to keep the lines of discussion open to continue to explore and support. The discussions will be supportive, but we also recognise they may feel challenging; please know that the challenge is for a positive purpose. It is normal that making changes feels less easy and it can feel uncomfortable, it often doesn't feel helpful until the positive effects that the change creates, are noticed; we want to be able to support you and your child through this growth process as it helps us to learn too.

If the agreed actions or support in place should cause an improvement, but doesn't, and the reasons given are not deemed acceptable, this **may** cause absences to be 'unauthorised' (e.g. if absence is persistent and ongoing with no exceptional reason) our process escalates to a formal meeting (STEP 3) to make you aware of potential consequences and to complete a Parental Attendance Agreement (voluntary parent contract); at this stage it is important to demonstrate everything agreed is being done as this prevents escalation later towards a financial penalty (Penalty Notice) or legal action. This is never a course of action we want to happen but occasionally we are unable to prevent it.

Single Period Term Time Absence (e.g. an exceptional event within one unbroken period of absence, not multiple sporadic absence days over a longer period of weeks).

Head Teachers must **only** approve absence if it is for '**exceptional circumstances**' and a request is received in advance. I am sure you will agree, given the disruption to education over the last 2 years, it is important that absence is kept to a minimum. Please note, that if your child has an unauthorised single period of absence a Penalty Notice Fine may be requested.

What can you do to help?

The biggest and most helpful thing you can do is help your child to think and feel positive about attending school. Helping them to understand the importance of learning and being with their friends will boost their confidence; it will also help them to build resilience and self-esteem. Talk to them about school in a positive

way, highlighting the good things and exploring their worries then, where needed, discuss any concerns that arise as soon as possible with a member of staff at your child's academy. You can also find helpful information on our trust website: [Attendance - Meridian Trust](#)

Yours faithfully



Sharon Templeman
Trust Attendance Welfare Lead
Meridian Trust

Brief Overview

We want to:

- Encourage all children to attend school ready and able to learn or access their education, feeling safe, happy and motivated.
- Support you to ensure your child accesses and attends their education by regularly talking, meeting or communicating with you to explore absence or concerns.
- Recognise all children's effort to achieve the expectation of attendance (ideally 100% with a minimum 96%) to access their learning and do their best.
- Work together with you and anyone else who is involved in supporting your family.
- Prevent unnecessary absence and escalation towards legal actions.

We will do the above by:

- Using phone calls, letters and meetings to have open and honest discussions with you to explore absence and offer your family support, using in-school and 'whole family plans' where needed.
- Discouraging all Term Time Absence and have whole school cultures across the trust of promoting the benefits of good attendance and access to learning.
- Ensuring the accurate recording of registers and robust follow up of absence.
- Using a system of recognition and incentives for attendance efforts.
- Having an attendance policy available on our trust and academy websites.
- Tracking and monitoring absence data to identify students who may need support to improve their attendance.
- Ensuring all academies have a designated senior person to lead attendance.
- Using legal action as a last resort whilst ensuring we use it and our safeguarding processes where required.

SUMMARY OF ATTENDANCE WELFARE PROCEDURES (STEPS 1-5)



The trust procedures are based on a *relational needs-led approach* focused on communication, discussion & support using early help pathways with a 'staged' process to identify concerns & take action to prevent escalation.

Attendance % is used as a guide, we will have a specific **TRIGGER** to justify an action e.g. Frequency or reasons for absence are concerning. We will do each **ACTION ASAP**. We will **MONITOR** & decide next action **weekly/fortnightly**.

STEP 1
ASSESS & MONITOR
 IS AN ACTION NEEDED? DO...
ALL STUDENTS
 WHO? Tutor, Class Teacher, Mentor, House/Year Team, Pastoral
 Below 97%

DAILY/WEEKLY ACTIONS:
 Create a Chronology - to Log Interventions & Support
 Daily Absence Calls & Emails - to Explore Absence
 Conversations & Praise - Daily Consistent & Clear Conversations with Students & Parents – to identify potential concerns, offer support & encourage.
 Home Visits/Safe & Well Checks (1-5days based on vulnerability/concern)
 Calling Card/Note/Absence No Contact Letter
 Data Tracking of Attendance % Level & Patterns of absence - Weekly/Fortnightly
 Optional- Attendance Level Notification Letter/Email
 Processing of Term Time Absence Requests (& subsequent Penalty Notices where required)

STEP 1 actions will continue as needed throughout STEPS 2-5

STEP 2
ABSENCE SUPPORT & INTERVENTIONS
 SPECIFIC % or PATTERN
 WHO? Tutor, Class Teacher, Mentor, House/Year Team, Pastoral
 Below 96%

WEEKLY ACTIONS:
 Data Tracking identifying Initial Concerns
 Student Success Discussions (SSD) with Students or Parents
 T/call Discussions & Emails with Parents
 Attendance Awareness Letter (emailed or posted)
 Early Help Pathway Interventions (via school e.g. mentoring, or community using Early Help Assessments (EHA) where required)
 Weekly Monitoring
 Student Support Plan (SSP) Meeting (authorised absence exploration) Repeat as needed.

STEP 3
ESCALATION & FORMAL SUPPORT PLAN
 INDIVIDUAL
 WHO? ST/HOY/HOH (supported by SSA), AO/Pastoral
 Below 92%

ACTIONS THAT WILL BE CONSIDERED:
 Student Support Plan (SSP) Meeting with Parental Attendance Agreement (PAA) (unauthorised absence exploration) Medical Evidence to enable authorisation of future absences. Verbal warning given.
 Support & Interventions as required (may include EHA)
 Follow up for Failure to Attend meetings (may include a written legal warning)
 Weekly Monitoring
 Review Meetings.
 Optional Harboursing Letter (if child is being harboured by an adult during school hours)

STEP 4
LEGAL CONSIDERATION UNRESOLVED CONCERNS
 INDIVIDUAL
 WHO? ST/HOY/HOH/Asst Principal (supported by SSA), AO/EWO
 Below 90%

Written Legal Warning
 Monitoring period (for up to 30 days)
 Support & Interventions as required (may include EHA)
 Significant Improvement (but still monitoring) Letter
 2nd Legal Warning (if required by LA)
 Legal Prevention Meeting (LPM) with PAA - FINAL actions & support that is required.
 Notification of Legal Action to Parent
 Daily & Weekly Monitoring

STEP 5
LEGAL ACTION FAILURE TO IMPROVE
 INDIVIDUAL
 WHO? ST/HOY/HOH/Asst Principal (supported by SSA), AO/EWO

Notification of Legal Action to Parent (if not already sent)
 Collation of Evidence Pack
 Local Authority Request for Penalty Notice or Legal Action
 Pre-Legal Interview (PLI) for PACE Caution Interview (where required).
 Daily Monitoring
 Student Record Updated with Actions