

12th September 2023

Dear Parents/Carers

Attendance Matters Trust Letter

Thank you for your continued support in working with us to maximise your child's attendance. We know that good attendance supports effective learning and future success in school.

We aim to offer welcoming, nurturing, and supportive environments to enable all students to learn and be successful but there is a strong reliance on positive relationships with you. We always look forward to celebrating the positives, but we are also here to ensure supportive, early action can be taken if concerns arise. We encourage you to work with us to help address any attendance concerns.

The September 2022 DfE Attendance Guidance remains non-statutory but with an expectation that all schools and academies follow it. We welcomed the emphasis it placed on parents, local authorities, other agencies, and schools/academies to work collaboratively together to support students' education and wellbeing. It also gave some useful key messages to remember:

- Attendance affects, and is affected by, all parts of a child's life, it should not be viewed in isolation, and whole family plans are crucial to supporting children and families.
- Unless a child is accessing high quality education outside of a school environment, attending school regularly is important for learning and is the law.
- Schools are expected to promote attendance and explore all absence (authorised and unauthorised) if it falls below 96% to support students and families to prevent further absence.
- Where a child is enrolled in a school they must attend regularly and although legal action is a last resort, it will be considered if the support to improve attendance is not engaged with.
- Parents are required to ensure their child receives full time education under *Section 7 of the Education Act 1996*. Legal Action for failing to do so is used under *Section 444 of the Education Act 1996* and/or *Section 23 of Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003* for Penalty Notices (fines).

Additionally, the updated 2023 Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) statutory Guidance for safeguarding in schools reinforces that:

- absence from school, particularly repeatedly
- absence from school that is for prolonged periods
- children missing education

can, act as a vital warning sign of a range of safeguarding possibilities which may require early intervention.

How do we do all the above?

We follow a relational approach to attendance with processes that aim to 'support a child to attend'. We do this by trying to remove barriers to attend school (see below summary diagram). This involves lots of conversations which you may have already noticed. We welcome you to take the lead on starting these conversations at any point.

This proactive early action approach aims to ensure children and families feel listened to and supported. We endeavour to make sure the support offered for your family/child works to improve overall wellbeing and maximise school attendance and/or access education. Please refer to 'Actions Overview' below for more detailed information.

All Meridian Trust Academies have a duty to use legal sanctions when appropriate for unauthorised absence which is why working together is so important. The above approach helps to prevent unauthorised absence occurring meaning it is less likely that enforcement discussions or legal action is required later. This course of action is something we are keen to avoid.

Unfortunately, we are sometimes unable to prevent the use of legal sanctions if agreed actions or support that has been put in place does not lead to an improvement in attendance.

We discourage absence during term time which is demonstrated in our [Attendance Policy](#) which all of our academies follow. Head Teachers/Principals must only approve absence for 'exceptional circumstances' and if a request is received in advance.

What can you do to help?

Plan family trips, holidays, or events outside of term time and where possible arrange appointments to avoid absence. Help your child to think and feel as positively as possible about school to reinforce the importance of learning and being with their friends. Talk openly about school and any worries they have, to build self-awareness and boost their confidence to know it is normal to be worried about things, but that we can help ourselves by sharing those worries with others.

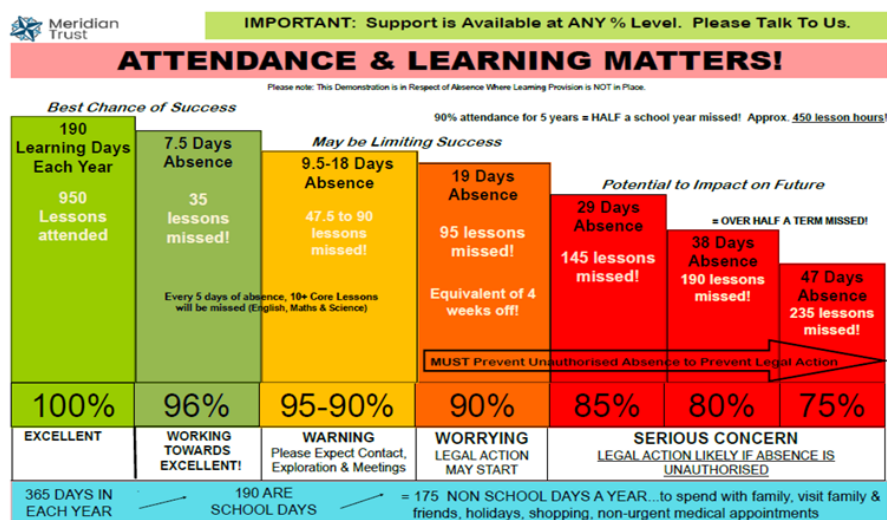
Where needed, please discuss any concerns that arise as soon as possible with a member of staff at your child's academy. You can also find helpful information on our trust website: [Attendance - Meridian Trust](#)

Yours faithfully



Sharon Templeman
 Meridian Trust Attendance Welfare Leader

Encl. Attendance Chart, Summary of Attendance STEPS Process, Actions Overview.



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**.



Actions Overview

We want to:

- Encourage all students to have a positive mindset about their education and attending school so they are ready and able to learn or access their education, feel safe, happy, and motivated.
- Have positive relationships to work together with you and anyone else who is involved in supporting your family to ensure your child accesses and attends their education.
- Recognise students' effort to maximise their attendance so they can do their best.
- Prevent unnecessary unauthorised absence which can lead to escalation towards legal actions.

We will do the above by:

- Having 'whole school' cultures across the Trust promoting the benefits of good attendance to access learning.
- Ensuring all academies have a designated senior person to lead attendance.
- Accurately recording registers so that the whereabouts of students are known.
 - Absence will only be authorised where genuine reasons or exceptional circumstance is demonstrated.
 - You may be requested to provide evidence to verify reasons or circumstances if absence is frequent or has a pattern.
- Following up on absence robustly to sensitively explore the root cause of the absence and understand 'how' the barrier may be a problem.
- Tracking/monitoring absence patterns and frequency to identify students who may need support to improve their attendance and/or recognise where effort has been made to maximise attendance.
- Using a 'stepped' process:
 - If attendance levels fall below 96% initial conversations and emails may take place (STEP 1).
 - If absences continue, letters to further raise your awareness may be used.
 - If deemed more effective, an informal discussion/meeting may be arranged to have open, honest, and supportive discussions to find solutions and offer support or make reasonable adjustments (STEP 2).
 - If further absence occurs, escalation to formal meetings and Parental Attendance Agreements (voluntary parent contracts) may happen to ensure you are aware of potential consequences (STEP 3).

- Discouraging all absence during term time thus preventing you from being liable for a fine or legal action from the Local Authority if it is refused and recorded as unauthorised.
 - Definition of Single Period Term Time Absence - an exceptional event within one consecutive period of absence, i.e., not multiple sporadic days of absence over a few weeks.
 - We will process requests consistently but on an individual case by case basis.
- Having an attendance policy available on our trust and academy websites.
- Using legal action as a last resort whilst ensuring we use it, and our safeguarding processes, where required to keep students safe.