

ATTENDANCE POLICY

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To be Reviewed By:	Director of Attendance/SLT

Core Principles

Good attendance and punctuality make effective teaching and learning possible, while irregular attendance disrupts these processes. If students are to take full advantage of what school offers them and become effective learners, gaining the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will equip them for life, good attendance and punctuality are essential. Valuable learning time is lost when students are absent or late. Research shows that students who attend school regularly achieve better results in public examinations than those who have longer or more frequent periods of absence from school. Good attendance is an achievement in its own right and is recognised as such by the academy. Merrill Academy's aim is to achieve good attendance by operating an attendance policy which enables staff, students, parents, the local community and outside agencies to work together in partnership. The academy will monitor attendance and ensure quick and early intervention where a problem is identified. The school recognises that poor attendance may be as a result of difficulties students are experiencing in the academy, or may be the result of circumstances beyond the academy's control, but whatever the circumstances, some students will need extra support in order to achieve and maintain good attendance. Ensuring regular attendance is the legal responsibility of parents and allowing a child to be absent from the academy without good reason is an offence in law that may result in prosecution by the Education Welfare Service. The academy has a legal responsibility to report poor attendance to the appropriate agencies in order to safeguard the welfare of all our students.

Aims of the Policy

- To improve the quality of academy life.
- To create a culture in which good attendance and punctuality are seen as the norm.
- To ensure attendance remains above the national average and reaches or exceeds the target the academy sets itself each year.
- To enable parents and students to understand the benefits of good attendance and to provide support and systems that allow all students to achieve this.
- To recognise that good attendance is an achievement in itself and to demonstrate to students, parents and staff that the academy values good attendance.
- To ensure every pupil has access to full time education to which they are entitled to.

School Attendance Targets

As with standards of attainment and other areas of academy life, there are academy targets to improve attendance and every student has an important part to play in meeting these targets. The minimum level of attendance expected for all Merrill Academy students is 92%. However, we believe we can do better than this and so we have set the following whole school targets:

Year	Target %	Achieved %
2015/16	95	92.13 (term 1-6 including yr 11 = 91.79)
2016/17	95	94.58 (term 1-6 including yr 11 = 93.59)
2017/18	95	93.30 (term 1-6 including yr 11 = 91.6)
2018/2019	95	

Promoting Regular Attendance

Promoting and securing regular academy attendance is the shared responsibility of parents, students and academy staff. At Merrill Academy, we will encourage good attendance by:

- providing a secure, caring and welcoming learning environment.
- responding promptly to any concerns a student or parent might raise.
- reporting to parents every half term if their child's attendance falls below the expected target rate.
- publishing and displaying attendance statistics around the academy site.
- mentors sharing attendance data each week with each student.
- celebrating good and improved attendance in assemblies.
- monitoring students' attendance, informing parents/carers of irregular attendance, arranging meetings with them where necessary to offer support and guidance; and referring the family to the Education Welfare Service if the irregular attendance continues and further action may need to be taken.

Authorised and Unauthorised Absence

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school (not by parents), as either AUTHORISED or UNAUTHORISED. For this reason, information about the reasons for any absence is always required in writing.

Authorised absences are mornings, afternoons or whole days away from the academy for a good reason such as genuine illness, medical/dental appointments which are unavoidable during the academy day, emergencies or other unavoidable causes.

Unauthorised absences are ones which the academy does not consider reasonable and for which no "leave" has been given. These include:

- ♣ Parents/carers keeping children away from the academy unnecessarily.
- ♣ Truancy before or during the academy 1 day.
- ♣ Absences which have never been properly explained.
- ♣ Children who arrive at the academy 30 minutes or more after the close of register without good reason.
- ♣ Shopping for academy uniform items (or for anything else).
- ♣ Taking longer than is necessary for medical appointments.
- ♣ Looking after other children or family members who are ill.
- ♣ Taking time off to celebrate birthdays or anniversaries.
- ♣ Day trips and holidays in term time which have not been approved by the academy.

Persistent Absenteeism (PA) 90% and below

Students become persistent absentees when they have missed 10% of the Academy time across the academic year for whatever reason. Attendance at or below 90% is considered extremely serious and all PA cases are automatically referred to the School Attendance and Welfare Officer who will closely monitor and contact parents. The persistent absence figure may be reached by students having time away from the academy for illness, holidays or for a combination of reasons. This means that even if your child has been ill and this absence has been authorised, they are still identified as a persistent absentee. It is recognised, however, that students could reach the persistent absentee threshold due to illness and we will always consider each case on an individual basis. In some cases medical evidence will be required.

The School's Attendance and Welfare Officer

The Attendance and Welfare Officer will work closely with parents and students to identify attendance concerns with the aim of resolving any problems at any early stage. If agreed strategies to improve a student's attendance fail and unauthorised absences persist, the academy will refer the case to the Local Authority's Education Welfare Service who have the power to use sanctions such as a Penalty Notice or prosecution in the Magistrates Court.

Parents or students may wish to contact the Attendance and Welfare Officer directly to ask for help. The Attendance and Welfare Officer at Merrill Academy is Mrs Flowers, telephone number 01332 576795. You may also contact Mr Mc Naught, Director of Attendance, ethos and Parental Engagement, at the academy for further advice and support.

Lateness

A warning bell is rung at 8.50am to signal the start of the school day and we expect your child to be at their first lesson by the second bell at 8.55am.

- Registers are taken at 8.55am and students who are not present in their lesson by that time will receive a late mark and a 45 minute detention at the end of the day.
- Students arriving at the school gates after 8.55am without a note or valid reason to explain their lateness are issued with a 45 minute late detention. If their lateness persists, the academy will contact parents to discuss the problem.

At 9.30am the registers are closed.

- In accordance with regulations, students who arrive after that time will receive a mark showing them to be on site, but this will not count as a 'present' mark, and it means they have an unauthorised absence for the whole morning session.

At 1.45 pm the afternoon registers are closed

- A student with several unexplained absences will be referred to the School Attendance and Welfare Officer who will discuss the academy's concerns with the parents.
- Parents are notified of detentions via a txt message

If a student has a persistent late record parents will be asked to meet with the Attendance and Welfare Officer to resolve the problem. If a parent has problems getting their child to the academy on time they can approach the academy at any time to discuss the situation and to seek help. Arriving late into the academy on a regular basis is not full time education and may result in further action being taken.

Leave of absence requests during term time

The Government is extremely concerned about the high levels of absences from schools that is attributed to parents taking their children on holiday in term time and have removed the ability of Head Teachers to authorise up to 10 days absence from the attendance regulations. Ofsted will closely monitor school attendance and will be inspecting school registers as part of their on-going drive to raise standards in all schools and academies.

If leave of absence is required for an explicit exceptional reason, parents/carers should contact the academy in writing. This should be completed and submitted to the academy at least four weeks prior to the period of the absence. In some circumstances, additional supporting information/evidence may be requested. Please note that requesting leave does not mean that it will be authorised. In the majority of cases leave of absence will not be authorised.

The following reasons for a request are not deemed to be exceptional circumstances:

- Cheap availability
- Large family/friendship groups
- Work commitments
- Time share agreements
- Assuming the reason would be authorised by the academy
- Excellent attendance and behaviour record
- Birthdays, anniversaries etc.
- Family weddings or visiting relatives.

All unauthorised holidays taken in term time are passed to Derby City Education Welfare Service who may issue a Penalty Notice. If there is evidence to suggest a student has been on holiday without notifying the academy then the same actions will apply.

- Fines apply per parent per child
- Payment is £120 if paid within 28 days – reduced to £60 if paid within 21 days.
- If not paid the matter will be placed before the court.

Children who miss academy days with no explanation

Children missing education are at significant risk of under achieving, being victims of abuse and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later in life.

The academy will investigate any unexplained absences and will:

- Contact parents by telephone on the first day of absence if there is no known reason for the student not being in school. A text will also be sent. A further call will be made by the mentor at the end of the day
- A further telephone call will be made on day two of the absence if there continues to be no contact, the mentor will also try again at the end of the day
- If there is no response by day three, the school's attendance and welfare officer will undertake a safe and well at the home address and will hand deliver a letter requesting reason for absence.
- If a child continues to be absent from school after day six and we have been unable to contact a family member and we have no reason for absence we will discuss further with the Local Authority.
- If a child returns to the academy with no explanation of absences we will continue to contact parents requesting reasons for absence.
- Parents will be expected to attend a meeting with the attendance and Welfare officer if their child has continuous absences with no explanation.
- Any student who misses education on a regular basis and the reasons given are not satisfactory will be regarded as being an unauthorised absence and referred to the Education Welfare Service who may instigate legal proceedings against the parents.

Our Expectations

At Merrill Academy, we believe that to secure good attendance and punctuality, we should work in partnership with students, staff, parents/carers and other relevant external agencies.

Students:

We expect students to:

- attend regularly and on time.
- hand in absence notes to the attendance office promptly and hand in/take home any communication regarding attendance.
- discuss with staff any issues that arise which may interfere with their ability to attend.
- be fully involved in strategies to improve and encourage their good attendance and punctuality.
- Take part in attendance interviews if required.

Parents/carers:

We expect that all parents/carers/persons who have day to day responsibility for the student to:

- be aware of their legal responsibilities with regard to attendance.
- ensure that the students in their care attend the academy regularly and punctually, and arrive prepared for the day.
- contact the academy as soon as possible on the first day of absence to let us know if their child is going to be absent.
- provide the academy with up to date contact information so that we have the correct telephone numbers and addresses at all times.
- send a note explaining why their child was absent on the first day their child returns to the academy. As well as the reason, the note should contain the dates of the absence. It should be signed by the parent/carer and make clear their relationship to the student. If a parent/carer does not wish to put the reason for absence in writing, they should come to the school (reporting to Reception) where a member of staff will speak to them about this. Alternatively parents are welcome to telephone Mr McNaught/Mrs flowers or the attendance office. We are required by law to have a written explanation of absence before we can authorise. If we do not receive a note from home then a letter will be sent out requesting reason for absence.
- notify the academy of any issues or concerns that may arise which may interfere with a student's attendance.

School Staff:

We expect that relevant academy staff will:

- provide a safe, positive, mutually respectful learning environment which makes students want to attend.
- keep regular and accurate attendance records for the students in their tutor group/teaching groups.
- monitor the attendance of every student individually.
- A text will be sent by 9.45am to parents if their child has not received a mark to request reason for absence.
- contact parents by telephone on the first day of a student's absence (where possible) if there is no known reason for the student not to be in the academy.
- A home visit will be undertaken if we are unable to contact parents or the contact numbers we have are unavailable.
- contact parents/carers to raise any attendance and/or punctuality concerns at an early stage to avoid escalation and encourage early interventions where appropriate.
- inform parents/carers in writing where a student's attendance is identified as being a cause for concern (usually when it falls below 90%).
- contact parents/carers in writing about any unexplained or unauthorised absences within 3 days of the absence, giving parents the opportunity to provide reasons for the absence which may then allow the academy to record the absence as authorised.
- visit parents/students at home when necessary.
- draw up and implement an individual action plan for specified targeted groups of students to encourage and support improved attendance.
- offer parents and students advice, strategies and support to improve attendance and punctuality.
- work effectively with the school nurse and other medical professionals to improve the attendance of those students with health related issues.
- recognise and reward good and improved attendance through:
 - Assemblies
 - Attendance Awareness Month
 - Attendance certificates
 - Attendance prize draws
 - Letters home
 - Regular attendance updates/displays
 - Review meetings with students and parents.

ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTATION

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>

The Education Act 1996

The education Act 2002

The Education (pupil registration) (England) Regulations 2006

The Education and Inspection Act 2006 (section 4 and 38)

The Education(pupil registration)(England)(Amendment) Regulations 2010

The Education(pupil registration)(England)(Amendment) Regulations 2011

The Education(pupil registration)(England)(Amendment) Regulations 2013

The Education(pupil registration)(England)(Amendment) Regulations 2016