

SUMMERHILL SCHOOL

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Attendance Policy for Day Pupils

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Introduction

Summerhill School recognises that good attendance is essential for day pupils to gain the greatest benefit from Summerhill's unique education system. The school also recognises the connections between attendance, emotional and intellectual development, safeguarding and wellbeing.

By law all children of compulsory school age must receive an appropriate full-time education (Education Act 1996). Parents have a legal duty to ensure their child attends school regularly at the school at which they are registered.

Summerhill School day pupils must attend regularly and be at school, on time, every day the school is open except in a small number of allowable circumstances such as being too ill to attend or being given permission for an absence in advance from the school.

Types of Absence

Every half-day absence from school has to be classified by the school (not by the parent), as either **AUTHORISED** or **UNAUTHORISED**. Information about the cause of any absence is always required. Each half-day is known as a "session".

Authorised absences are mornings or afternoons away from school for a justified reason like illness (although you may be asked to provide medical evidence for your child before this can be authorised), urgent medical or dental appointments which unavoidably fall in school time, emergencies, or other unavoidable cause.

Unauthorised absences are those which the school does not consider reasonable and for which no 'leave' has been given. Unauthorised absences are coded with an O code. This type of absence can lead to the school referring to the Local Authority for penalty notices and/or legal proceedings.

Some examples of **unauthorised absences** are given below:

- parents keeping children off school unnecessarily e.g. because they had a late night, or for non-infectious illness, or injury that would not affect their ability to be in school;
- absences which have never been adequately explained to the school;
- children who arrive at school too late to get a "U" mark on the attendance register to indicate they are in school for safeguarding purposes; however, this is counted as an absence for the session;
- shopping trips; day trips;



- family events; child or family birthdays;
- problems with the distance travelled to school;
- looking after other children/ family members, or children accompanying siblings, or parents to medical appointments;
- holidays taken during term time without leave - unauthorised absence, will lead to a penalty notice being triggered by the Local Authority;
- other leave of absence in term time which has not been agreed.

School Attendance and the Law

There is no entitlement in law for pupils to take time off during the term to go on holiday. The Supreme Court has also ruled that the definition of regular school attendance is "in accordance with the rules prescribed by the school".

At Summerhill, leave of absence shall not be granted in term time unless there are reasons considered to be **exceptional** by the principal, Zoë Readhead. **Only Zoë, (or in Zoë's absence, Will or Henry) may authorise such a request.** All applications for a leave of absence must be made in writing.

At Summerhill, **'exceptional circumstances' will be interpreted as:**

... being of unique and significant emotional, educational or spiritual value to the child which outweighs the loss of your child's contribution to the Summerhill community.

Whilst any child may occasionally have time off school because they are ill, sometimes they can be reluctant to attend school. Any problems with regular attendance are best sorted out between the school, the parents, and the child. If a child is reluctant to attend school, then we will work with that family to understand the problem and provide any necessary support. If appropriate, outside agencies can be contacted to help with this.

If a leave of absence is authorised, Summerhill will not provide work for the child to do during their absence.

Persistent Absenteeism (PA)

A pupil is defined by the Government as a '**persistent absentee**' (PA) when they miss 10% or more schooling across the school year for whatever reason; this can be authorised or unauthorised absences. Absence at this level will cause considerable damage to any child's education and we need a parent's fullest support and co-operation to tackle this.

We monitor all absence, and the reasons that are given. If a child is seen to have reached the PA mark or is at risk of moving towards that mark, we will contact the parent and continue to monitor. Further, appropriate action will be taken to raise attendance and ensure that it falls within acceptable limits.

Where ongoing medical issues prevent good attendance, a meeting will be held with health professionals, parents, and the school to determine next steps.



Absence Procedures

If a child is absent from school, the parent must follow the following procedures:

- Contact the school on the **first day of absence before 9am and on each subsequent day of absence, again before 9am**. The school has an answer phone available to leave a message if nobody is available to take your call. Alternatively, parents can drop into school personally and speak to the office staff.
- Ensure that your child returns to school as soon as possible.
- Provide medical evidence if your child's attendance falls below 90%, otherwise it will be marked as "unauthorised" absence and coded "O".

If your child is absent, the school will:

- Telephone, email or text you on the first day, and every subsequent day of absence if we have not heard from you;
- If we are unable to make contact with parents by telephone, we will telephone emergency contact numbers and send email;
- Consider liaison with the police if we cannot make contact and we do not know of your child's whereabouts;
- Contact parents if your child's attendance rate is of concern;
- If absences persist, invite you into school to discuss the situation with the principal, Zoë Readhead;
- Arrange a formal school attendance meeting if attendance deteriorates following the above actions;
- A referral will be made to the Local Authority if no contact has been made with parents by the 10th day of absence (or sooner if deemed appropriate), at which point your child will be considered to be 'missing from education'.

If absence continues, the school will:

- Write to you if your child's attendance is below 95%, or where punctuality is a concern;
- Invite you into school to discuss the situation with the principal, Zoë Readhead/ form a plan to address any barriers to attendance;
- Offer signposting support to other agencies or services if appropriate;
- Refer the matter to the Local Authority for relevant sanctions if attendance deteriorates following the above actions.

Local authority referrals

Parents are expected to contact the school at an early stage and to work with staff in resolving any problems together. If difficulties cannot be sorted out in this way, the school may refer the child to the Suffolk County Council Education Welfare Officer. Local Authority Officers work with schools, families, and other professionals to reduce persistent absence and improve overall attendance. If attendance does not improve, legal action may be taken.



Children missing in education

Where a child is not attending school, has moved without a forwarding address or school, or cannot be traced, or contact cannot be made with the parent, the school is required to inform the local authority that the child is missing.

A referral will be made to Local Authority if no contact has been made with parents by the 10th day of absence (or sooner if deemed appropriate), at which point your child will be considered to be "missing from education."

Lateness

Poor punctuality is not acceptable. If a child misses the start of the day, they may miss out on important play or lesson opportunities.

How we manage lateness

School starts for day pupils at 9.00 am. Your child must register with the school secretary/office between 8.45 am and 9.00 am. Your child will receive a late mark if they are not in by the school start time. Parents of children arriving after this time (i.e. after 9.00 am) are required to provide a reason for their child's lateness, which the school records.

The attendance register closes at 9.30 am. If your child arrives after that time, they will receive a mark that shows them to be on site, but this will **not** count as a present mark, and it will mean they have an unauthorised absence (U code). This means that parents face the possibility of a Penalty Notice if the problem persists. If your child has a persistent late record, you will be asked to meet with the principal, Zoë Readhead.

In addition, if a child is persistently late, it is very likely that the matter will be brought to the attention of the school meeting.

Please contact us at any time if you are having problems getting your child to school on time.

Understanding barriers to attendance

Some pupils face greater barriers to attendance than their peers. These can include pupils who suffer from long-term medical conditions, special educational needs, disabilities, or other vulnerabilities. High expectations of attendance remain however. We will work with families and pupils to support improved attendance whilst being mindful of the additional barriers.

If appropriate, reasonable adjustments can be made and additional support from outside agencies such as Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing support services, a Child and Family Support Worker etc. can be obtained.

Deletion from Roll – underage pupil

For a pupil leaving, parents are required to complete a 'Leavers' Form' which can be obtained from the school office. This provides the school with the following information: Child's name, class, current address, date of leaving, new home address, name of new school, address of new school. This information is essential to ensure that we know and safeguard the whereabouts of all of our pupils, even those who leave us. Pupils cannot be



deleted from the school roll without this information and will be classed as absent until we have confirmation they are safe and attending another school/suitable education.

It is crucial that parents keep school updated with current addresses and contact details for key family members in case of emergency.

Under Pupil Regulations 2006, all schools are **legally required** to notify their Local Authority of **every new entry** to the admission register **within five days** of the pupil being enrolled. Additional to this, **every deletion** from the school register must also be notified to the Local Authority, as soon as the ground for deletion has been met in relation to that pupil, and in any event no later than the time at which the pupil's name is deleted from the register. This duty does not apply when a pupil's name is removed from the admission register at a standard transition point – when the pupil has completed the final year of education normally provided by that school.

Safeguarding

Your child may be at risk if they do not attend school regularly. Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility.

Summary

The school has a legal duty to promote attendance. Equally, parents have a duty to make sure that their children attend school, on time, every day.

The school is committed to working with parents and pupils as the best way to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible.

This policy reflects the key principles of the latest DfE guidance entitled *Working together to improve school attendance (May 2022)*

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