

Attendance Policy



**This policy applies to the whole school
(Senior, Junior and EYFS)**

UPDATED BY	DATE OF ISSUE	NEXT REVIEW DATE
Senior Deputy Head, Pastoral	October 2023	July 2024

At South Hampstead we view student attendance as critical to academic and success, social integration and wellbeing. We ask parents to familiarise themselves with the GDST Statement on School Attendance and these policy guidelines, and to help us to promote the standards of attendance and punctuality which are essential for an orderly school environment where all pupils can get the maximum benefit from their education.

GDST Statement on School Attendance

Absence, whatever its cause, is detrimental to any student's academic, social and emotional development. Children with poor attendance tend to achieve less in both primary and secondary school, with a cumulative effect. Regular or persistent absence can also indicate a pupil welfare issue.

Parents have a legal duty to ensure their children of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend regularly. Parents can only allow their child to miss school if they are too ill to go in or they have advance permission from the school. The Education (Student Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 make it clear that Heads may only grant leave of absence *in exceptional circumstances*. As is required by law, the school will inform the local authority of any pupil who fails to attend regularly, or has been absent without the school's permission for a continuous period of 10 days or more. The local safeguarding partners will also be informed if absence amounts to a safeguarding concern.

In order to maximise our students' potential, the GDST is committed to ensuring students do not miss out on their education through poor attendance rates. We expect all GDST schools to at least meet the national attendance average, and school attendance rates are monitored accordingly. A member of SLT is expected to review and analyse attendance across the school as a whole on a regular basis, following up on trends or patterns of concern, and reporting to the School Governing Board/GDST as required.

Class teachers and tutors are expected to monitor and review the attendance record of the students for whom they are responsible. An individual attendance record of below 90% must be followed up by the school, as will noticeable patterns, or sudden or unexplained absence.

Key contacts

The senior leader with overall responsibility for attendance at the school is the Senior Deputy Head, Pastoral. For day-to-day attendance matters, parents should contact their child's form tutor. For more detailed support with attendance parents should contact the Assistant Head, Pastoral in the Junior School or the relevant Head of Year in the Senior School.

PUNCTUALITY

Students are expected to be punctual at all times. If a Junior School pupil is late, she must sign in at reception as soon as she arrives. If a Senior School student is late for registration, she must register with her form tutor if possible. Otherwise, she must sign at reception as soon as she arrives. If she fails to do this, the school will assume she is absent. Lateness without reasonable cause will be deemed to be unauthorised absence. Lateness after 9.30am will be deemed as an absence and will require a note of explanation from a parent.

(Pupils who have more than 3 late arrivals in a single half-term will be given a Head of Year detention. If those late arrivals continue, pupils will be given a detention with the Senior Deputy Head, Pastoral after school.)

Punctuality and specific learning needs

It can be harder for pupils with some specific learning needs to organise themselves and this can make them prone to being late to school. In line with guidance on supporting pupils with these needs, it is not helpful to remove this boundary as it is important that these pupils learn to work within institutional expectations and learn to arrive on time to things. With this in mind, pupils with specific learning needs will have the same sanctions attached to their lateness as other pupils if it is deemed within that pupil's current set of skills to tweak their behaviour enough to arrive at school on time. Conversations around their lateness, however, will be happen within the context of an understanding of the challenges that pupil faces and with suggested strategies for overcoming their punctuality challenges. There may be cases when it is necessary and important to relax the sanction, if a child is really struggling and hasn't yet established the executive functioning to control their morning routine sufficiently. In these cases, discussions will take place between the Head of Year and the SENCO and also with parents, to establish the most effective way of helping that pupil to develop the skills they will need in later life.

Punctuality and mental health

There may be circumstances in which a plan is put in place to allow a pupil to arrive later to school than usual. These cases will be rare as being in school, including form time, is so valuable to the overall school experience for the child. Should special allowances need to be made, these will happen in discussion with parents, mental health professionals and possibly the SENCO, where they are involved in that child's support.

LEAVES OF ABSENCE

Leaves of absence can only be authorised by the Head and may only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Parents should submit their request to the Head no later than three days prior to the date of absence. If an absence is authorised in advance parents will be notified and an absence note will not be required on return.

DAY-TO-DAY ABSENCE

Illness

Parents are requested to inform the school every day if their daughter is ill, unless a specified number of days has been prescribed by a doctor in advance. Some detail about the nature of the illness will be sought, in order to satisfy the school that the absence should be authorised.

Medical and Dental Appointments

Routine visits to the dentist, optician etc., should be arranged during school holidays or out of school hours. Authorisation for medical and dental appointments can be given in an emergency or other unavoidable circumstances.

Bereavement

It is helpful if we are informed of family bereavement so that we can offer students sympathetic support. Absence under such circumstances will, of course, be authorised.

Religious Observance

Absence can be authorised on a day, or days, exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which a student's parents belong.

Family/Domestic Circumstances

Looking after other children, minding the house, shopping within school hours or overcoming jetlag are not acceptable reasons for absence under the law.

Special Occasions

Exceptional occasions may be sanctioned through authorised absence. Such events might include a sibling's graduation or family wedding. Attending sports events or concerts are not sufficient cause for authorisation.

Study Leave

Study leave may be authorised during the official examination period for Years 11 and 13 only. A letter is always sent to parents before study leave commences. Parents are asked to note carefully the dates on which study leave commences.

Although most students prefer to study at home during examination periods, there are always study facilities available in school for those who wish to work in school. Authorisation for absence for studying will not be given for periods outside those indicated to parents.

Study leave is a privilege which may be withdrawn if a student seems unlikely to use the time profitably.

ACTION ON SCHOOL ABSENCE

It is the parents' responsibility to contact the school concerning the reason for a student's absence on each day of absence (unless a specified number of days is known) and to provide a reason for that absence. If the school is not notified of a student's absence a call will be made to parents. The school will remain in contact with parents on a regular basis until the student returns.

If an acceptable reason is not provided the absence will be investigated and recorded as unauthorised.

In the Senior School, if an absence occurs, it is the responsibility of the student to make up any lost work. If an absence is planned in advance, the student must approach individual members of staff for guidance. Their tutor can help them to organise this effort if the missed work is significant and some collation and prioritising is needed. In the Junior School, parents should liaise with the classroom teacher to find out if any work needs to be caught up on.

Persistent or severe absence:

Unauthorised absence of 10 consecutive days requires referral to the local authority.

In line with government guidance, absence of 10% or more, for which the cause is unclear, requires the school to investigate further and work with the local authority to put in targeted support with the family to remove any barriers in order to get the pupil back to full attendance. In cases where the pupil is absent more than they are present, this effort must be concerted as there will not only be loss of academic progress but social and development loss.

Where absence or a pattern of absence appears to be at risk of becoming problematic, the school will meet with the parents to discuss how to support the pupil and remove barriers to attendance where possible. This may include referrals to external services and other organisations. These actions will be regularly reviewed, and stepped up if there is no improvement to the situation. Where a whole family response is appropriate, this is likely to include a voluntary early help assessment. Ultimately if voluntary support is not effective the school will work with the local authority to put more formal measures in place. Persistent or severe absence is always treated as a safeguarding risk.

The School is committed to supporting pupils who may be missing school because of Emotionally Based School Avoidance. It may be necessary to mark such pupils with unauthorised absences, even in cases where the parents feel they are doing everything they can to get their daughter to school. This is in order to tap into local authority services, which may only come online when absence is marked as unauthorised. Where a pupil is missing school because of EBSA, the school will work closely with professionals supporting the child and the family as it takes a team effort to help the child find a way back into full-time education.

If a pupil is not attending school at all, the School will undertake reasonable checks to determine the reasons for a pupil's absence and to confirm their whereabouts and their safety. Reasonable checks will start with asking parents to provide information. Where complete absence is persistent, further information will be sought from external professionals (medical or therapeutic) for confirmation regarding the reason for the absence. At this stage, the school will seek to establish regular contact directly with the pupil, by email and / or via a video call. If it is not possible for this regular contact to take place, the school will seek to assure itself that the pupil is safe and well, through confirmed contact with external

professionals or home visits by local authority personnel. In absence of these confirmations, the school may conduct its own home visit.

Returning to school

Sometimes a student who has been absent for some time finds it difficult to return. In such circumstances the school will work with the student and parents to support a programme of phased reintegration.

Students with individual needs:

Whilst good attendance is an expectation for all pupils at the school, this may be more of a challenge for some students, including those with special educational needs or disabilities, or those suffering from long term medical conditions or mental health issues. The school will allow for these circumstances when working with such pupils and their parents, and will develop individualised support approaches that meet their specific needs where appropriate.